A Further Inquiry 1

Identity, Allegiance, and the New Rhetorics of "Us" and "Them"

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Foreword by Mathew Giagnorio

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Scott Douglas Jacobsen

January 4, 2026

Foreword: Mathew Giagnorio

This book exists because inquiry still matters—because asking difficult questions in an age of slogans, tribalism, and moral certainty has become an act of quiet defiance.

A Further Inquiry was founded on a simple but increasingly unfashionable premise: that truth is not owned by movements, that moral seriousness requires intellectual humility, and that democracy depends not on unanimity but on disagreement conducted in good faith. The essays and interviews collected here—curated, conducted, and written by Scott Douglas Jacobsen—are an embodiment of that premise. They are not comfortable. They are not partisan. And they refuse the false reassurances offered by ideological conformity.

In an era defined by the collapse of shared epistemic ground, Scott's work insists on something radical: that ideas deserve to be examined on their merits, not on the identity of those who hold them.

This is not neutral journalism. It is rigorous journalism.

Neutrality, as commonly understood today, has become a form of abdication—an unwillingness to distinguish between argument and assertion, between evidence and emotion, between conviction and certainty. Scott's work rejects that evasion. What he practices instead is disciplined inquiry: a commitment to follow arguments where they lead, to challenge orthodoxies across the spectrum, and to place uncomfortable facts back into conversations that have been flattened by moral theatrics.

The interviews in this volume span secularism, identity politics, extremism, economics, geopolitics, humanism, and democratic resilience. Yet they are united by a common thread: a refusal to reduce complex human realities into caricatures of "us" and "them." That framing—so dominant in contemporary discourse—is not merely intellectually lazy. It is corrosive. It turns politics into moral theatre, disagreement into heresy, and pluralism into a liability rather than a strength.

Scott understands this danger acutely. His interviews do not seek affirmation; they seek illumination. He allows his interlocutors space to think aloud, to qualify their claims, to wrestle with contradictions. This is increasingly rare. Much of today's media ecosystem is designed to extract confessions or provoke outrage rather than cultivate understanding. What results is heat without light—noise without knowledge.

A Further Inquiry was never meant to compete in that marketplace.

From its inception, the publication has occupied an unfashionable but necessary space: long-form, intellectually serious, and resistant to the gravitational pull of ideological alignment. Scott's work has helped define that space. He approaches subjects not as symbols in a culture war but as human beings situated within history, institutions, incentives, and ideas. Whether examining antisemitism across political movements, the instrumentalization of identity, or the pressures facing liberal democracies, his method remains consistent: slow down, ask better questions, and refuse easy answers.

This book arrives at a moment when those habits are desperately needed.

We are living through a period of moral compression, where complex issues are flattened into binaries and dissent is treated as betrayal. Identity has become destiny. Allegiance has replaced argument. Rhetoric has substituted for responsibility. In such an environment, inquiry itself is suspect—seen as hesitation, weakness, or complicity.

The pieces collected here push back against that logic. They remind us that democratic societies are sustained not by unanimity but by friction; not by purity but by pluralism; not by certainty but by a shared commitment to reasoned disagreement. That commitment is not abstract. It must be practiced. It must be modelled. And it must be defended—especially when it becomes inconvenient.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen's work does precisely that.

As founder and editor-in-chief of *A Further Inquiry*, I have watched his contribution shape the publication's intellectual character. He brings a seriousness that is neither performative nor self-indulgent. He is unafraid to ask questions that unsettle his own assumptions or those of his audience. And he understands that the purpose of inquiry is not to win arguments, but to clarify what is at stake.

That distinction matters.

This book is not a manifesto. It does not offer a single theory to explain the world. What it offers instead is something far more valuable: a record of disciplined engagement with the ideas, tensions, and contradictions shaping our moment. It invites readers to think rather than react; to interrogate their priors rather than defend them reflexively; to recognize that liberal democracy, if it is to survive, requires more than slogans and side-taking.

It requires inquiry.

That is the spirit in which this collection is offered. Not as a final word, but as an opening—an insistence that the work of understanding is ongoing, unfinished, and indispensable.

If this book unsettles you, good. If it challenges your assumptions, better. And if it reminds you that thinking clearly in difficult times is not a luxury but a civic responsibility, then it has done exactly what *A Further Inquiry* was created to do.

— Mathew Giagnorio

Founder and Editor-in-Chief

A Further Inquiry

Intersecting Tensions: Right-Wing Antisemitism, Identity Politics, and the Israel-Palestine Conflict

2024-08-28

Dr. Alon Milwicki is a senior research analyst in the Intelligence Project at the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: I interviewed a colleague because she was writing about religious-based identity politics. This is the basis for the idea of this interview. The term "identity politics" can be overused, making it difficult to provide a proper critique. Antisemitism is an inversion of that, where you're not adopting an identity for political gain but instead asserting it about someone else to create unfavourable political currency for them and then relatively positive political currency for yourself. What's your take on that? If you can tie someone to being antisemitic, especially post-October 7th, it can have severe implications.

Dr. Alon Milwicki: Antisemitism is currently a prevalent form of racism. Many populists talk about antisemitism. Labelling someone as antisemitic is a potent form of demonization, considering the context of Hamas's actions. Accusing someone of antisemitism implies they support Hamas and terrorism. In post-9/11 America, being labelled pro-terrorist is highly damaging.

Your statement is accurate, but it can be somewhat flipped. In the effort to be the most pro-Israel, it often has nothing to do with actual Israeli politics. Most people need to familiarize themselves with Israeli politics. A recent poll showed that almost three-quarters of Israelis oppose Netanyahu, yet the entire Republican party in the US supports him. If they genuinely favour democratic societies and the will of the people, they should listen to the Israeli people rather than project their beliefs onto them.

In an attempt to prove they are so pro-Semitic, they feel the need to be extremely pro-Israel. Projecting this image of pro-Israel deflects the negative identity of antisemitism. Thus, there is identity politics surrounding antisemitism, with the pro-Israel trope being prominently displayed. You'll likely see many Republican candidates up for reelection declaring themselves pro-America, America first, and pro-Israel.

Labelling themselves as pro-Israel has nothing to do with genuine allyship. The US and Israel are so interdependent that there is no scenario where America will not support Israel from a foreign policy perspective. Based on my limited knowledge and experiences from previous workplaces, it is highly unlikely. If these individuals in government are unaware, it indicates either a lack of diligence or dishonesty. If they are dishonest, one must question their motives. If they are simply uninformed, they ought to be better informed.

Jacobsen: Indeed. What about the lesser risk posed by state-based issues?

Milwicki: If Marjorie Taylor Greene claims to be pro-Israel but previously discussed Jewish space lasers, she should reassess her knowledge.

Jacobsen: How do you perceive American campus protests, where individuals oppose Israeli policies but support Palestinians while condemning terrorism? There is also a mix of individuals who join these protests without fully understanding the issues, potentially feeding into antisemitism. This can result in an inadvertent moral misstep towards antisemitism on the left wing.

Milwicki: The reporting on these protests often differs from the actual events. Some protests have been significantly disrupted, with certain groups attending specifically to promote their narratives. Antisemitic groups have been known to participate in these protests. For instance, the JDL, listed by the FBI as a terrorist organization, was reportedly seen at a campus protest. While this might not have been confirmed, I recall reading about it. College students' involvement is significant. Many believe they can rekindle the civil rights movement. This is unlikely in the 21st century. Protesting is an American right and should be exercised.

Whether through sit-ins or campus protests, these activities are permissible. However, when swastikas are displayed, one must question whether this stems from ignorance or extremism. The depiction of the Israeli flag with a swastika is antisemitic. Although the swastika is shocking, its presence is generally limited. Most college protests are simply that—protests. There is nothing inherently wrong with them. However, the narrative that criticizing Israel equates to antisemitism is a right-wing construct. By this logic, 75% of Israelis would be considered antisemitic.

Following this reasoning, one must question the assumption that antisemitism began on college campuses only a few months ago. Antisemitism, racism, and misogyny have always been present on college campuses. These institutions are microcosms of society. Most college individuals are between 16 and 25 years old, forming their identities. This environment can be a breeding ground for both positive and negative behaviours. College campuses indeed reflect broader societal issues. There are valid reasons to critique the Israeli government, but this must also involve understanding Hamas. We must acknowledge the context provided by the widely circulated videos.

We have all seen the atrocities, not just those committed by Hamas, but also the bombings carried out by Israel. We need to understand that Hamas frequently uses civilian targets. They are experts in propaganda and have succeeded in the propaganda war. The only source of information many people rely on regarding the death toll in Gaza is Hamas. This does not account for those whom Hamas has endangered or killed. Netanyahu correctly pointed out that if relief aid reaches Gaza, Hamas does not distribute it to the people; they allocate it to their supporters and themselves. This is typical behaviour for a terrorist organization, and it must be understood that the first victims of Hamas are the Palestinians.

Palestinians have been victims of Hamas for nearly 20 years, living under a terrorist regime that controls all aspects of their lives. This needs to be recognized. However, eliminating Hamas does not mean the destruction of Palestine or the erasure of Palestinian identity. It also does not grant Israel the freedom to act without restraint. I am not a specialist in Middle Eastern affairs, but as a historian who has studied antisemitism for many years, I have a basic understanding of Hamas and Israel, which is necessary to grasp how these issues are appropriated or misused.

I do not oppose campus protests and do not believe they should be banned. Organizations like SJP and BLM should have the right to protest. While some activists have made inappropriate statements, this does not justify banning their protests. Regardless of one's perspective, certain activists say problematic things. For example, right-wing activists often make offensive remarks. One could argue that the right's current focus on antisemitism, particularly **after October 7th**, is an attempt to shift the narrative back to the post-9/11 era, emphasizing Islamic terrorism as the primary threat despite FBI statistics showing that white supremacy and far-right groups are the largest domestic terrorist threats in America.

This narrative shift involves using Israel to further their agenda. This is a novel point, and I appreciate you mentioning it, Scott. I used to tell my students that my role was to impart wisdom, and their role was to record it. It may sound trivial, but hopefully, it addresses your question. College campuses are easy targets for such narratives, but this does not mean that problematic behaviour does not occur there. Antisemitic incidents do happen within these protests. However, condemning all colleges or universities is unjustified. The United States has many prestigious institutions that attract students and professors worldwide, although recent trends may affect this. Those who claim to be First Amendment purists should question why they are so keen on limiting freedom of expression and education.

Jacobsen: That is an important point to consider. I cannot think of a better way to conclude this discussion.

Dr. Herb Silverman on American Secularism

2025-03-04

This is part of a series of interviews with prominent humanists by Canadian journalist Scott Douglas Jacobsen. He spoke with Dr. Herb Silverman, a prominent humanist, secular advocate, and Humanist magazine columnist.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How has the separation of religion and government influenced the role of religion in 2024 American electoral politics?

Dr. Herb Silverman: Actually, it seems just the opposite—this year some religious people, mainly evangelical Christians, are trying to influence that separation. Some religious people think religion and government should not be separate. They believe the United States was founded as a Christian country and should be governed according to Christian beliefs. Not true! Our country was founded as a secular democracy in part because the founders saw what happened in Europe, with religious wars among countries where church and state were not separate. The first three words of the U.S. Constitution are "We the people," not "Thou the deity."

Jacobsen: What impact has the rise of secularism in the U.S. electorate had on federal political strategies?

Silverman: Some Christians erroneously believe we should go back to our roots when America was great as a Christian country—which we never were. When federal policies are influenced by religion, secularists fight back. One obvious example is the abortion controversy, with laws in many states prohibiting abortion now based specifically on religious beliefs. Secularists say it is every woman's right to control her own body, and they view abortion based on a woman's individual needs and beliefs, religious or not.

Jacobsen: How do secular voters' priorities compare to religious voters' in 2024?

Silverman: Of course, we are alarmed at the possibility of even more religious influence in government if Trump wins the presidency. Take a look at Project 2025 for matters to be alarmed about. Further, many women (and some male) voters have been strongly influenced by the current abortion bans, and fear even more religious interference with contraception and IVF situations if candidate Trump wins. Secular voters say we should be governed by secular priorities, consistent with our U.S. Constitution. I want to emphasize that I don't think all religions are bad—many religious people favour the same secular values, like doing good works, as we secularists do. Religious people are free to vote for a candidate who has what they view as the right religious views, but that is an individual choice.

Jacobsen: How has the growing secular demographic in the U.S. influenced political discourse?

Silverman: In a positive way. We are consistently gaining in numbers, and thus more of a voice in the country, and people can no longer ignore or marginalize us. We are more comfortable speaking out in favour of the separation of religion and government.

Jacobsen: What about the younger voters who are much more secular in philosophy than older ones?

Silverman: Their future looks very good. The "Nones," people with no religious preference, is our fastest-growing demographic. This is especially true among younger people. Unfortunately, too many Nones do not vote. We need to convince them that voting is important, especially in the upcoming election. I doubt that many Nones would vote for Trump.

Jacobsen: How do court rulings on the Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause shape electoral laws?

Silverman: The Constitution should remain our governing body, and any rulings against IT will be challenged up to the US Supreme Court. Whether we will win or not, given the current Court members, I cannot predict.

Jacobsen: What role has secularism played in the political mobilization of non-religious advocacy groups, and how effective are they in influencing election outcomes at the state and national levels?

Silverman: Secularists have become increasingly open and energized, especially since the prohibition of abortion in so many states. Also, the major secular organizations are challenging religious interference in secular matters throughout the country. Publicizing these legal infractions keeps the public informed of creeping religious interference in secular matters. Hopefully, the public will vote with that in mind.

Jacobsen: How does the intersection of secularism and multiculturalism in American elections shape the political engagement of religious minorities?

Silverman: Religious minorities mostly fear Trump because of his lies about immigrants and opposition to all those who are not Christian, even though Trump seems to not follow any Christian principles.

Independent Growth: Andreea Bourgeois on Canada's 3.2 % GDP Surge

2025-03-04

Andreea Bourgeois, Director of Economics at the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB), discussed Canada's projected Q1 2025 GDP growth rate of 3.2%, CFIB's Business Barometer, and the importance of small business sentiment data. She emphasized historical trends, labour shortages, investment rebounds, and potential tariff impacts. Bourgeois highlighted CFIB's survey methodology and economic modelling, offering a unique perspective on Canada's economic landscape. The conversation concluded with insights into trade dependencies and economic uncertainty.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Facts for the bio too. Today, we're here with Andreea Bourgeois, the Director of Economics at the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB). She currently works with CFIB's Research and Atlantic Legislative teams to conduct surveys and research on various economic and social issues affecting small and mid-sized businesses.

She joined CFIB in 2000 and has authored numerous reports on topics such as the shortage of skills and labour, demographic trends in Atlantic Canada, and, most recently, cyber fraud. She is also responsible for the Monthly Business Barometer, which measures small business optimism.

She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest, Romania, with a concentration in international economic relations. She also earned a Master of Science in Administration from HEC Montréal, specializing in international business and statistics.

Thank you for joining us today.

Andreea Bourgeois: Thank you for having me.

Jacobsen: You're welcome. Regarding the Canadian economy, based on CFIB's quarterly report, what is the projected growth rate for the first quarter of 2025?

Bourgeois:
Can I provide some background first? I could simply quote a number and move on, but just giving a number is like asking if a restaurant is good and only hearing "yes" without any explanation. You'd want to know why it's good, what's on the menu, and what makes it stand out. Economics is similar—you need more than just one number to understand the full picture.

To answer your question, we projected a GDP growth rate of 3.2% for the first quarter of 2025. Our projection for Q4 2024 was also 3.2%, while Q1 2024 was 2.5%.

What I want to highlight—just as when you look at a menu—is that these figures are higher than what we have seen in recent post-pandemic quarters.

After the pandemic, Canada's GDP growth rate at one point was zero. We even had one-quarter of slightly negative growth.

Following that, as the economy began recovering, quarterly growth rates were typically between 0.7% and 1.2%, which was relatively weak. However, this time, both Q4 2024 and Q1 2025 are projected to show stronger growth.

Now, let me put these numbers into perspective. It's like asking if a restaurant is good—yes, but how much does the food cost?

Let's discuss what these numbers actually mean. These projections are based on CFIB's own economic forecasts. We work with an external Montréal-based firm that specializes in macroeconomic modelling.

They use data from our Monthly Business Barometer survey, which gathers insights directly from small business owners. In a way, this is like a fusion dish—it combines different elements.

There are many different growth projections available. Statistics Canada (StatsCan), for example, has its own projections based on mandatory business and labour force surveys.

These surveys provide reliable macroeconomic data, but our projections incorporate real-time insights from small businesses, giving a more detailed perspective on current economic conditions.

Bourgeois: We don't conduct mandatory surveys. However, as the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB), we have 100,000 members across Canada. We are represented in every province, across all sectors of the economy, and in every region—including Nunavut, the territories, the Atlantic provinces, the West Coast, and the Prairies.

Once a month, we survey a randomly selected portion of our membership—not everyone—because we want to be mindful of the survey burden and respectful of our members' time. We ask about their business optimism, their expectations for the next 12 months and three months, and the current state of their business.

This survey is focused on business sentiment, similar to the way you wake up in the morning and think, "I'm going to have a good week." We don't follow up with detailed financial questions like, "What are your exact sales? Take out your ledgers and provide the numbers." Instead, we focus on the gut feeling business owners have about their operations.

Over time, as we aggregate responses from thousands of business owners, these individual perspectives become a powerful economic indicator. This data, combined with macroeconomic indicators, is fed into a statistical model developed by our external research partner.

This model is also used by the Bank of Canada, and it helps generate economic projections. I wanted to clarify this because CFIB's business optimism data is the only economic modeling in Canada based on small business survey data. No other organization does this.

Jacobsen: What do you think would make this methodology more robust than just relying on business owners' gut feelings? To use your analogy, it's like saying, "I feel like I'm going to have a great day because I anticipate eating at a high-end Japanese restaurant this quarter."

Bourgeois: Let me give you some history of the survey, which demonstrates its robustness.

This survey predates my time at CFIB—in fact, it started before I even moved to Canada. Initially, it was conducted once a year and had a different name: the Harp Act survey. At that time, it was distributed by mail, requiring business owners to:

1. Open the survey,
2. Read the questions,
3. Fill out the checkboxes,
4. Place it in an envelope,
5. Pay for postage,
6. Walk to the post office,
7. And mail it back to CFIB.

Despite this cumbersome process, we received between 5,000 and 10,000 responses annually. Eventually, the survey became a monthly initiative, analyzed at CFIB's head office. I worked in CFIB's Research Department in Toronto, where we reviewed the data and generated projections.

However, at that time, we didn't yet use an econometric model—so there was still a strong reliance on business sentiment.

That changed when we started integrating specific business metrics, including:

- Optimism levels for the next 12 and three months,
- Staffing plans,
- Operational strategies,
- Pricing strategies,
- Wage projections,
- Supply chain challenges.

This evolution strengthened our economic forecasting, making it more reliable and data-driven while still capturing the real-time experiences of small business owners.

We didn't ask business owners, "What is your supply chain?"—that's not terminology they typically use. Instead, we asked them about their inventory levels, their stock availability over time, and their major costs and business limitations. At the time, the survey was several pages long, as I mentioned earlier. That was well before my time at CFIB.

If you recall, during the September 11 attacks in 2001, the Bank of Canada anticipated a recession. The assumption was that the economic fallout from the attack on the Twin Towers would trigger a full-scale recession in Canada, leading to a potential economic crash.

In response, the Bank of Canada wanted to adjust interest rates to stimulate the economy. This happened to coincide with one of our CFIB surveys. At that time, our Chief Economist in Toronto received a call from the Governor of the Bank of Canada, who asked, "What are you hearing from small businesses?"

What we heard was very different from the panic on Bay Street. While the financial sector was experiencing turmoil, Main Street businesses were still operating. The Governor then asked, "Do you have survey data to back this up, or is this just anecdotal?" Because we are a grassroots organization, we were able to quickly adapt.

We took a few key questions from our survey and sent them via fax—which, at the time, was considered cutting-edge technology—using the same methodology and the same questions but running them weekly for six weeks.

This initiative led to the creation of the CFIB Business Optimism Index, which was based on business expectations for the next 12 months. The results showed that optimism remained stable, despite a temporary drop due to uncertainty. Naturally, the global situation created anxiety, but businesses were not shutting down.

For example:

- Hair salons were still operating.
- Coffee shops continued selling coffee beans.
- Laundromats remained open.

At the end of six weeks, after an intense period of data collection, our Toronto team decided it was time to return to normal life—no more sleeping bags at the office. But we learned something critical: There was an enormous demand for real-time small business data.

Statistics Canada (StatsCan) had valuable data, but it was always three years behind. By the time government agencies or policymakers received the data, the economic landscape had already changed. Because of this, we shifted the survey to a quarterly format, running it quarterly until 2009.

However, by 2009, the economy had changed. Technology had improved, and our members had widespread internet access, so we transitioned the survey to a fully online format and began running it monthly.

No more paper. No more fax machines. This survey has a long history—it predates my time at CFIB, and I've been here for 25 years. It is strong and robust.

If you visit our CFIB website, you'll see that we track business optimism over time. But looking at today's index alone—which is 56.4—isn't enough. That's like saying, "I paid $20 for a meal" without knowing what meal it was, how much it cost yesterday, or what it cost last week. The number alone doesn't tell the full story.

What matters is that we have 15 years of historical data, allowing us to contextualize trends.

For example, today's optimism level is higher than during the pandemic, but—let's be honest—no one is measuring against pandemic-era lows.

Much lower than it was in November and much lower than it could have been if we weren't dealing with tariff threats and political uncertainty from Ottawa.

I wouldn't call it a freefall, but optimism has declined sharply since November.

Depending on what happens on February 1st, the February optimism reading could see another steep decline. Unfortunately, optimism is already quite low.

When we run projections for economic growth, we base them on survey data from the last quarter of 2024, which includes October, November, and December.

That said, as with any mathematical model, there are limitations. Economic projections, no matter how robust, can't account for unpredictable factors—such as what happens on social media, what a president announces, or sudden political resignations.

In other words, political changes do not factor into economic models, no matter how much we wish they did.

Will our projections be accurate? I certainly hope so. But personally, I have doubts that the Canadian economy will maintain a strong growth rate if we face new tariffs next month.

I just wanted to put that in perspective. The numbers are correct, but keep in mind that our projections are based on survey data collected before the latest tariff threats and before the federal government announced an election.

Jacobsen: Even when you were conducting the paper-based survey, your sample size per month was 5,000 to 10,000. So you were bringing in 60,000 responses per year?

Bourgeois: That was a long time ago. The survey wasn't open indefinitely—we typically kept it open for about six weeks. If a business owner hadn't responded within that time, the chances of receiving their response were very low.

At that point, we had to begin analyzing the data manually. Although we had statistical software, we still relied on a dedicated research team to process responses. Each survey had to be coded and entered into a database before analysis.

Back then, I can't give you an exact response rate, but I know for sure that when we moved to a monthly format in February 2009, our sample size was typically around 1,400 responses per month.

Over time, that number declined for various reasons. Before the pandemic, we were receiving around 800 responses per month. Survey participation tends to drop in the summer months, which is common across all survey organizations. Then the pandemic changed everything.

During the early months of COVID-19, business owners suddenly had more time and a greater need for information. We responded by running the survey twice a month, and participation skyrocketed—we were receiving about 2,000 responses every two weeks.

There was an enormous demand for survey data during the pandemic. Governments needed real-time insights to understand:

- How businesses were coping,
- What financial support was needed,
- Which industries were most affected.

We combined this survey with another one, using it as a liaison tool between small business owners and government policymakers.

Many businesses were shut down, but expenses like heating, rent, and property taxes were still due. At the same time, revenues had disappeared, and staff were no longer coming in to operate stores or provide services.

Through our survey, we were able to convey the urgent needs of businesses to policymakers. After the pandemic, as the economy reopened, participation returned to pre-pandemic levels. For example, in January, we received 1,037 responses.

Today, in fact, we released the January edition of the Business Barometer. Our next set of economic projections will be released in April, based on survey data from January, February, and March.

Resilient Markets: Navigating Investment and Trade Uncertainty in Canada

2025-03-29

Andreea Bourgeois, Director of Economics at the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB), discussed private investment rebounding in Q4 due to declining borrowing rates, easing supply chain delays, and labor shortages. High interest rates had previously discouraged large equipment purchases, and supply chain issues delayed investment. Labor shortages also impacted businesses, especially in skilled roles. Concerns over potential U.S. tariffs have lowered optimism among exporting and importing small businesses, particularly in manufacturing, transportation, and agriculture. Domestic businesses remain stable but still face supply chain vulnerabilities. Small business trade data highlights economic uncertainty. Andreea Bourgeois emphasized shifting economic trends and provided resources for further analysis.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What factors contributed to the private investment rebound in the fourth quarter of last year?

Andreea Bourgeois: The most significant factor was the decline in borrowing rates, as interest rates dropped. When we run our economic model, we use survey data that includes a question on short-term investment plans. Investment levels among our members have been very modest.

So, when we process that data through an econometric model, we're not going to see large investment numbers. Investment had been negative post-pandemic.

- One reason was supply chain issues—even if businesses wanted to invest, delays in delivering equipment made purchases difficult, sometimes taking months.
- The second major factor was high interest rates, which discouraged businesses from financing large equipment purchases.

I'm not talking about small office supplies—a smart stapler, for example, wouldn't impact investment trends. I mean large-scale machinery—tractors, industrial equipment, and technology infrastructure, which can cost millions of dollars.

With borrowing costs so high, business owners simply had no appetite for major investments. We saw a temporary rise in demand when the economy first reopened, and consumer demand skyrocketed—canoes, paddleboards, and anything that allowed people to get outside sold out everywhere. Even bicycles were in short supply globally.

Jacobsen: I remember hearing about that situation.

Bourgeois: Yes. The shortage was caused by a single missing component—a small part manufactured in China. When it couldn't be shipped, companies had to either:

1. Find an alternative supplier in Canada,
2. Redesign products to eliminate that part, or
3. Simply wait until supply chains recovered.

This situation caused investment to tick up slightly, but with high prices and interest rates, appetite for investment remained low. Now that borrowing costs are decreasing, we're seeing investment intentions rise again.

Another factor—though not as significant as interest rates—was labor shortages. Post-pandemic, labor shortages were the number one issue for small businesses. Many couldn't find workers because:

- Government support programs were still in place,
- Workers were still recovering from illness,
- Businesses had to offer more sick days to accommodate health concerns.

As a result, many business owners had to rethink their operations, especially in labor-intensive industries. Today, labor shortages have eased somewhat, thanks to high immigration levels. However, that does not mean businesses are no longer struggling to find workers.

Instead, we're now dealing with skilled labor shortages. It's not that people aren't available—it's that the people available don't always have the right skills. This, in turn, affects investment in technology.

For example, a business owner might buy advanced equipment, but if their employees lack the skills to operate it, the investment goes to waste. So, while borrowing costs and interest rates were the primary factors influencing investment, labor shortages and inflation also played a role.

Jacobsen: There are a lot of overlapping factors running through my mind right now.

We've got a minute before this call ends, because I'm using a trial version and I'm cheap.

So here's my proposal:

- We disconnect at :15 past the hour,
- The same link should still work,
- If we don't end the call completely, we should be able to rejoin,
- And that will give me time to grab some coffee.

Jacobsen: There are talks of tariffs from the United States under the Trump administration. If a 25% tariff is imposed on Canadian products, what would be the general impact? More specifically, what would be the impact on the Canadian economy in Q1?

Bourgeois: Many high-level economists have estimated and calculated the potential impacts from different angles. Recently, I read an article predicting that the effects would be devastating across all sectors, though some industries would be hit harder than others.

I don't want to overstep into their territory, but what I can say is that the implications would be vast—for businesses, consumers, and governments. Bottom line: this would affect everyone. However, I do have something unique that most economists don't—real data on how small businesses would be impacted.

Using the same CFIB survey, we wanted to enrich the dataset and better understand how these tariffs would affect small businesses specifically. Last year, we reviewed our survey methodology—and given how much I care about this survey, it's like my fifth child, if you will.

We compared our dataset to similar surveys from other countries and asked: "What are we missing?" One key area we identified was gathering more detailed information about the businesses themselves. We already collect data on:

- Business location,
- Number of employees,
- Industry sector,
- Products or services sold.

But we were missing critical trade data. So, we added new questions to determine:

- Do they export?
- Do they import?
- Are they part of the event sector?

This last point is important. For example, during the pandemic, we saw major disruptions in the events sector—but that's not the same as tourism.

- The event sector is its own industry.
- Tourism is separate.
- Hospitality is even broader, covering both and more.

To capture this data, we introduced an additional, completely voluntary section to our survey in July. We call it the Business Profile Survey. At the end of the regular survey, members have the option to click through and answer a few additional questions. They're not even questions in the traditional sense—they're more like demographics.

Bourgeois: When you fill out a survey, at the end, they often ask you demographic questions—your age, income category, or other details. These questions help the researchers contextualize responses. We have implemented a similar approach for our CFIB members.

One of the new questions we added to our Business Profile Survey focuses on international trade activity. Starting in July of last year, we gave members the option to identify their trade activity by clicking on a response:

- They export,
- They import,
- They do both, or
- They do neither (entirely Canada-focused businesses).

By cross-analyzing these responses with optimism levels, we created an Optimism Index for these subcategories. If you check our website—and I can share a link with you after this call—you'll see that optimism levels for exporting businesses have dropped at an alarming rate since November.

Now, for someone looking at the data without context, they might simply say, "Oh, there's a sharp decline in November." But if you factor in policy developments, you'll notice that November was also the first time that U.S. tariff discussions began escalating. I wouldn't necessarily call it a tariff threat, but it was the first major policy shift that impacted business confidence.

Jacobsen: That makes sense.

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Bourgeois: It's also important to remember that no index remains perfectly stable. If an index is completely flat all the time, it means it's not a reliable indicator. Nothing is truly static—not even body temperature.

- Your weight fluctuates slightly every day.
- Some days, business owners are optimistic; on others, they're not.
- A large unexpected expense can shake confidence, while a strong sales day can boost it.

So, while fluctuations are normal, what stands out here is that we've recorded a significant 8-point drop in optimism among exporting businesses since November. Looking at sectoral data, the businesses most affected by export concerns belong to:

- Manufacturing,
- Professional services,
- Transportation,
- Wholesale,
- Agriculture.

This isn't surprising—these industries are highly dependent on international trade. However, what makes this dataset unique is that it is small business-focused. Unlike traditional trade reports, it does not include large corporations.

For example, Canada's number one export to the U.S. is energy products—oil, gas, and natural gas. That data is dominated by major corporations, not CFIB members. Small businesses typically export niche products—things like machinery components, screws, maple syrup, or specialty goods related to larger industries.

If you are exporting crude oil, you're not a CFIB member—that's a large-scale corporate operation. So, our data captures the direct impact of trade shifts on smaller, independent businesses. Interestingly, we also saw a drop in optimism among importers.

Even businesses that only buy from foreign markets are feeling the impact of potential retaliatory tariffs from Canada—particularly on U.S. imports. This fear is causing uncertainty, which affects business decision-making.

Now, looking at domestic-only businesses, their optimism levels have remained relatively stable—not perfectly flat, but with no major downturns. These businesses typically have:

- Local supply chains,
- Local customer bases,
- Minimal exposure to international disruptions.

Take a small bakery, for example. You probably have a favorite local bakery, where everything feels entirely local. However, even that small bakery is likely dependent on at least one imported product—whether it's a specialty ingredient, packaging material, or equipment component.

For example, when the war in Ukraine began, we were running the same survey. Did the survey immediately capture the economic impact of the war? Not right away. However, what it did capture were hundreds of comments from business owners.

One I remember vividly was from a small hotdog stand owner. He wrote: "I can't get my mustard. My mustard supplier is in Ukraine." That's how global events trickle down—even for businesses that don't directly engage in international trade. And now, we're starting to see similar concerns emerge again, as uncertainty around tariffs and supply chains increases.

So, you see something we don't, and there was also another specific case—a type of flour used by bakeries. I can't recall the exact kind, but it's a specialized variety that requires a specific climate. So, as much as you love your local bakery, the likelihood is that at least one ingredient they rely on comes from outside the country.

And that's what will have the biggest impact on all of us.

Jacobsen: Do you have any charts or final comments?

Bourgeois: Unfortunately, it's an exciting yet troubling time to observe Canadian economics. The economic landscape is shifting, and we might see an even more dramatic turn next week (first week of February). But I say that with a sense of concern, not excitement. I wish we weren't seeing these changes. I've witnessed economic shifts firsthand, coming from a communist country—Romania. Here are some relevant links for further reading:

https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/research-economic-analysis/business-barometer

https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/research-economic-analysis/main-street-quarterly

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity, Andreea, it was nice to meet you.

BCFS Advocacy, Postsecondary Funding, and Student Affordability Challenges

2025-03-29

Cole Reinbold is a dedicated student leader and experienced financial steward currently serving as Secretary-Treasurer for the British Columbia Federation of Students in New Westminster. With a robust background in student governance at Vancouver Island University, Cole has contributed as a Governor, Senator, and Chairperson, ensuring strong financial oversight and effective policy development. Their commitment to advocacy and educational excellence is evident in their work on community campaigns and external relations. Cole's leadership skills, strategic planning expertise, and advocacy for students empower them to advance organizational missions and create impactful change in higher education. Passionate leader inspiring positive change. Reinbold discussed challenges such as changes in policies by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) affecting international students. These changes significantly impact tuition revenue as international students pay substantially more than domestic ones. Additionally, Reinbold addressed the gap in provincial and federal funding for postsecondary education, which has decreased dramatically since the 1970s. To combat these issues, BCFS advocates for Open Educational Resources (OERs) to reduce costs and pushes for better funding for Indigenous students. The federation's strategy includes working on campaigns like 'Grants not Loans' and supporting financial literacy to alleviate student debt pressures.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we're here with Cole Reinbold. How are you doing?

Cole Reinbold: I'm doing well. How about you?

Jacobsen: Good. So, what are the most pressing issues for the BCFS?

Reinbold: The timely issues pressing for us are the recent announcements by IRCC—Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada. Changes to the number of international students permitted in the country impact the amount of funding institutions receive from tuition fees. In BC and across Canada, international students, on average, pay five times more in tuition than domestic students.

This is a way to fill in the gaps regarding what provincial and federal funding should be for postsecondary education. It's decreased from 80% in the seventies to less than or barely 40% today. With that, there isn't the 2% cap on tuition fees that there is on domestic tuition fees. Domestic tuition fees have a 2% cap on increases every year, but international tuition fees don't have that cap. So, considering there's not enough funding and there isn't a cap on international tuition fees, what are institutions going to do?

They're going to raise international tuition fees. So, when the federal government reduced the number of international students last year, institutional deficits to tens of millions of dollars were suddenly becoming the norm this year in BC. That is one of the biggest issues that we're fighting right now. We are created to provide advocacy, representation, and services to our 170,000 members.

Jacobsen: What other affordability and access issues aren't as obvious as international students making up the slack of provincial funding?

Reinbold: Yes. Another big campaign we have is OERs. We advocate that all institutions and instructors adopt open educational resources (OERs). These are textbooks, course materials, and entire course packs made by instructors in BC and provided for free to students.

When you do not have to pay $500 for a textbook, it makes education much more inaccessible and affordable because you're paying, as a domestic student, around, on average, $500 to $2000 a course. But then, adding another $500 that you didn't know about often makes students drop a course entirely. So that's something that we're working on. We've recently added to our campaign plan to lobby the federal and provincial governments to add more funding for Indigenous learners because there's a significant educational attainment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners. That is another big thing that we're working on.

Jacobsen: What changes in governmental policy, provincially and maybe federally, have made you shift any other priorities?

Reinbold: The biggest one is the IRCC. Many international students are our members, so they're always front and center in our advocacy. But we've been full throttle on advocating for international students this year. Yes.

That's been it. We've previously advocated for the 2% cap on domestic tuition fees. When that was deregulated in the early 2000s, that was a big push. So, our advocacy revolves around what the current government in power is doing. If they're making education less accessible and affordable for students, that is where we will push our advocacy.

But we also do other things, like 'Let's Get Consensual.' So, we help our member locals have that campaign on their campuses in September, which is sometimes referred to as the red zone for sexual assault on campus. 'Let's Get Consensual' is a fun way of teaching students about consent and emphasizing that it's everybody's responsibility.

Jacobsen: In terms of strategic direction, has the core mandate of BCFS evolved in response to the changing postsecondary landscape?

Reinbold: The mandate of the BCFS lies in our constitution, which is unchanging. It states that we are to provide services, advocacy, and representation to our members. So, while our constitution doesn't change, how we address that will change depending on the current landscape in the province.

Jacobsen: What about campaigns like the Grants Not Loans campaign and Open Textbooks Now, which you alluded to before?

Reinbold: The Grants Not Loans campaign is self-explanatory in the title, but grants are upfront money given to students at the same time as their loan they do not have to repay. This is at the core of what we do: making education more accessible and affordable because it makes it much

easier for students and first-generation learners when you don't have to pay it back. Sometimes, the government will say, 'So what we're going to do to make education more accessible is we're going to increase the amount of loan we will give you.' So they're increasing the amount of debt that we're "so lucky" to be able to get. So, we advocate increasing the number of grants, not the number of loans.

We did have that win a couple of years ago when interest on student loans was eliminated provincially in BC, the first province to do it, and then nationally. The government is no longer making money on student loans, so why not go all the way and give us grants? And then, 'Open Textbooks Now,' I already spoke about that. Still, we work with BCcampus, which is the organization that administers that. They're a proxy government organization, so they get funding from the government to do that work. That's good because the government acknowledges that open textbooks are a way to make education more accessible. So we work with BCcampus. They give us the latest research and help us administer the campaign to our member locals.

And then on the ground, what the member locals do is they try to individually convince professors, departments, deans, all that kind of stuff, to adopt open educational resources, and even let them know that there are grants that instructors and professors can take on, so that they can have time to work on the open educational resources instead of having to work on it on the side of their desk for free. They can get paid to work on an open educational resource.

Jacobsen: You mentioned Indigenous learners and closing that educational attainment gap. That starts early in postsecondary, but it's another way to combat and target it. But it is also a way to tackle that at multiple stages, at least within your remit in terms of postsecondary education. What about other diverse and marginalized groups that have a similar, or maybe less severe, educational attainment gap that can be covered through the work of BCFS?

Reinbold: Yes. Our delegation directs the work of the BCFS, so our member locals attend annual general meetings. The groups with the lower educational attainment gap identified by our membership include Indigenous students. If you look at the research, there are lower educational attainments for our first-generation learners and also LGBTQIA2S+ learners, and those marginalized groups, equity-deserving groups. But we have not been directed to work on that.

We do have a campaign called the Unlearn campaign. We have been directed to do that, and it is similar to 'Let's Get Consensual' in that it's an educational campaign teaching our members to unlearn homophobia, racism, and transphobia, which has become a pressing issue recently.

We educate our members on that.

Jacobsen: What about coalition campaigns as part of the BCFS's overall strategy? How do you select which external campaigns to endorse? Is it timeliness? Are perennial issues at the top of the list?

Reinbold: So, the BCFS, we are experts in postsecondary education but not in everything. So, we have our coalition partners who help us with the research and know-how to discuss these issues.

They're chosen in multiple ways. A member local can bring them to an annual general meeting. The local member selects it, and then the floor debates it, or the federation itself can have it recommended to the executive committee. Then, the executive committee will bring it to the annual general meeting. Typically, we pick partners who are experts in their field and recognized as big names. So when we want to talk about what a living wage is and what a living wage should be for a student, instead of going to a single professor, we go to Living Wage BC, who have been doing this work for about half a decade, I believe. So, choosing our coalition partners happens in one of two ways.

It's a two-pronged issue. It can be brought forward by an individual member locally or by the executive committee. Ultimately, all members decide upon it at an annual general meeting.

Jacobsen: Rising living costs, inflation, and student debt are issues for approximately every student, but that's a staggeringly small number of students. How do you help support students trying to address those as best they can?

Reinbold: Yes, so, our students' unions and our local members will sometimes have courses on financial literacy that can help them with it. It doesn't take away inflation or anything like that. Still, they do have those courses that first-year, second-year, and third-year students can take, and we do advocate to the provincial government about how students feel the compounding cost of everything. Everything is so expensive for every person in British Columbia. Still, students feel it so much more because, on top of rent, food, gas, and insurance, they also have tuition and textbooks.

And then to further compound that, because students are students, they can't work full time. We remind the provincial government that to ease this burden on students, we need to freeze and progressively reduce tuition fees. So that's how we're working on the cost of living, is through that. Then, through the work of our coalition partners, we will sign on to campaigns, stand in solidarity, and sometimes lobby together about the cost of living.

Jacobsen: What additional services or resources might be introduced to help students navigate the financial challenges they're coming to?

Reinbold: Currently, we don't have any services directly addressing financial literacy or the cost of living. But we do have our health and dental plan.

So we have multiple students' unions on this big block health and dental plan, which helps keep the rate low. It's one of the lowest rates in the country for our health and dental plan. So students can get their teeth cleaned twice a year and get everything else they might need for under $200. So it's a good price because so many people come together. Another thing we do to keep costs low, but not directly—members don't feel this, but our member locals do—is coordinate bulk purchasing together.

So, economies of scale, if you've ever taken economics, the more of something you buy, the better over price you can get. So we do that with the health and dental plan, and we also do that with our pens, highlighters, toques, and swag that we give out to our members. We're trying to fight the cost of inflation by pooling all of our resources because, as our slogan says, we are stronger together.

Jacobsen: So when it comes to issues in which you are experts, how ever, it's an intractable problem. What are those? By "intractable," you, as an organization, cannot solve those things. It's the boulder in the river that you must be the water flowing around.

Reinbold: I will try to answer this question, but let me know if it isn't exactly what you want. So, a big problem that we are trying to address right now is the chronic lack of underfunding in postsecondary in BC.

While, yes, the BCFS has 14 out of 26 public postsecondary institutions under our umbrella, we alone cannot solve the chronic underfunding crisis that's going on in BC. Our institutions are crumbling, so we need to work with labour unions, trade unions, and other students' unions to say to the provincial and federal government that we need funding now more than ever. So, we lobby those groups. We also have coalition partnerships with CUPE, BCGEU, and all the big names, and we also collaborate with larger institutional student unions quite often. So, yes, the big thing that we're trying to work on that we can't do by ourselves is address the chronic underfunding crisis and getting that $500,000,000 infused back into the postsecondary system because that is our direct lobby ask that would take us back to before all the massive cuts and the defunding of public education that we saw in the early 2000s.

Jacobsen: This is the North American can-do attitude. 'There are no intractable problems. It's difficult but not impossible.' Last question: Are there direct attacks on postsecondary education in British Columbia? Political squabbles and policy fights can result in delays in funding. Yet something more, political and social language and movements that work to undermine the success and efforts of postsecondary institutions, either individually or through associations and federations like yourself.

Reinbold: So, a big thing we've seen in the past decade is that institutions are no longer seen as places of public knowledge that better society for the greater good; they are now seen as businesses.

This can be seen through the gutting of funding that we've seen in the past decade and the international education strategy document that came out under the Christy Clark government; as soon as that document came out, funding plummeted, and then suddenly, there are international students propping up the entire system. So the biggest threat that we are seeing to postsecondary right now is the complete divestment from postsecondary education, and how in the election platform this year, the provincial election, not in a single party's platform, was postsecondary mentioned. Postsecondary bleeds into every single sector. You can't run an economy without postsecondary. How will we solve the overdose crisis without paramedics, social workers, and mentors?

How are we going to solve the housing crisis without carpenters? You can't. So, the biggest attack right now is the government not addressing the dire need for postsecondary education. You will not have a future workforce if you don't invest in future workers. So, the government is working against itself and the future it wants to create by not investing in postsecondary education.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time today. I appreciate it. Yes, yes, no worries.

Reinbold: We will talk later.

Journalism’s Role in Moral Narratives and Synopsis of Clergy-Related Abuse

2025-03-29

Three days ago, **I** addressed a Croatian Christian association via virtual conference on clergy-related abuse, emphasizing journalism’s essential role as a watchdog exposing institutional misconduct. I argued that victims should be the primary voices, institutions secondary, with journalists facilitating balanced narratives. I urged acknowledgment of abuse without condemning entire denominations, advocating evidence-based investigations, interfaith dialogue, and robust reforms to protect victims and faith integrity. Citing historical scandals and cultural movements as context, I stressed that transparency and accountability are imperative. This speech within the context of the entirety of the conference will be shared with the Ecumenical Patriarch, EU Parliament, Roman Catholic Church, UN in Geneva, UNICEF, World Council, World Council of Churches, World Health Organization, and other major institutions, ensuring accountability and healing universally.

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Journalism, first and foremost, is a human enterprise. It’s built on human observation, written for human consumption, and, primarily, concerns human enterprises. Just democracies, fair societies, accountable power, and the like, require journalists as critical watchdogs to bring otherwise hidden stories to the forefront. Clergy-related abuse is a complex and subtle issue with blunt outputs.

The primary voices of clergy-related abuse should be the victim who can give indications of patterns and see firsthand weaknesses in institutions that have misbehaved, abuse, and, often told lies or merely partial, softened truths about it. The secondary voices are everyone else in the institutional setup leading to the abuse in the system in the first place. Religious institutions have a minority of persons in positions of authority, unfortunately, who have abused. Journalists are a tertiary voice around these two.

The role of journalists is working with victims, with the majority of clergy who have not abused, and other researchers, to gather the narratives and collate those to get the wider scope of the patterns of the minority of clergy who have abused. People take the accountability problem seriously, as it’s bad for the victims, bad for the laity, bad for the image and authority of the clergy, and, essentially, bad for the representation of the faith. If you care about the future of Orthodoxy, then you care about this as an issue relevant to the integrity of the faith.

So, I wanted to take these few minutes to recognize the substantial problem before us, for a few reasons. Some factors played into the situation in which we find ourselves. First and foremost, the crimes of a select number of clergy. Second, these crimes went institutionally unchecked for many, many years in the largest denominations of Christianity–almost as a prelude to the broader cultural movements witnessed in many Western democratic societies.

Third, a tendency to reject the claims of victims when the prevailing evidence presents the vast majority of reported cases in the extreme cases of misconduct, i.e., rape, as evidentiarily supportable. False allegations happen, but these are a small minority and should not represent a false dichotomy of support. Institutions should establish robust processes to investigate all claims, addressing false allegations decisively while preserving trust in genuine victims.

Fourth, the diversification of the faith landscape of many Western cultures, particularly with the rise of non-religious communities and subsequent ways of life. One result is positive: Citizens clearly are more free than not to believe and practice as they wish. One negative result, the over-reach in non-religious commentary stereotyping churches as hotbeds of abuse, which creates problems–let alone being false. It doesn't solve the problem, while misrepresenting the scope of it. It makes the work of the majority of clergy to create robust institutions of accountability for the minority of abusers more difficult and onerous. It's comprehensively counterproductive.

If we want to reduce the incidence and, ideally, eliminate clergy-related abuse, for the first, we should acknowledge some clergy abuse without misrepresenting The Clergy of any Christian denomination as a universal acid on the dignity of those who wish to practice the Christian faith. It's a disservice to interbelief efforts, makes the non-religious look idiotic and callous, and blankets every clergy with the crimes of every one of their seminarian brothers, and occasional sister, in Christ.

For the second, we should work on a newer narrative context for the wider story, see the partial successes of wider cultural movements, and inform of unfortunate trends in and out of churches for balance. For the third, we simply need to reorient incorrect instinctual reactions against individuals coming forward with claims as the problem rather than investigations as an appropriate response, maintaining reputation of accused and accuser, while having robust mechanisms for justice in either case. For the fourth, some in the non-religious communities, who see themselves as grounded in Reason and Compassion alongside Evidence, should consider the reasoning in broad-based accusation and consider with compassion the impacts on individuals in faith communities with the authority who are working hard to build institutions capable of evidence-based justice on one of the most inflammatory and sensitive types of abuse. Interfaith dialogue can be slow, quiet, but comprehensive and robust in the long-term–more effective and aligned with both the ideals of Christ or Reason, Compassion, and Evidence.

To these four contexts, journalists can provide a unifying conduit to the public in democratic societies to discuss the meaning of justice in the context of the Christian faith living in democratic, pluralistic societies. We cannot 'solve' the past errors, but can provide a modicum of justice for victims and create a future in which incidents are tamped to zero for a new foundation to be laid. Then 'upon that rock,' we do not have repeats in the Church as we have witnessed in other contexts discussed over the last few decades:

1991 – *Tailhook Scandal* (U.S. military sexual harassment scandal)

2012 – *"Invisible War"* documentary (exposing military sexual assault)

2014 – **#YesAllWomen** (response to the Isla Vista killings)

2017 – *Australia's Royal Commission Report* (child sexual abuse in institutions)

2017 – **#MuteRKelly** (boycott of R. Kelly over sexual abuse allegations)

2018 – **#MeTooBollywood** (Bollywood's reckoning with sexual misconduct)

2018 – **#MeTooPublishing** (exposing sexual harassment in the literary world)

2018 – **#WhyIDidntReport** (response to Brett Kavanaugh hearings)

2019 – Southern Baptist Convention Abuse Scandal (*Houston Chronicle* exposé)

2019 – K-Pop's **#BurningSun** (sex trafficking and police corruption scandal)

2020 – **#IAmVanessaGuillen** (military abuse and murder case)

2021 – **#FreeBritney** (exposing exploitation and control of female artists)

2021 – *Haredi Jewish Communities' Abuse Cases* (journalistic investigations by Shana Aaronson & Hella Winston)

2002-Present – Catholic Church Sexual Abuse Crisis (Boston Globe's Spotlightinvestigation)

2017-Present – **#MexeuComUmaMexeuComTodas** (Brazil's movement against misogyny in media and politics)

2020-Present – **#MeTooGymnastics** (Larry Nassar's abuse in U.S. gymnastics)

2020-Present – **#SayHerName** (Black women and LGBTQ+ victims of police violence)

2021-Present – **#MeTooIncest** (focus on childhood sexual abuse within families)

Taiwan’s Opposition, China’s Military Pressure, and the Strategic Role of Semiconductors

2025-03-29

Kevin Hong explains how the opposition parties have weakened Taiwan’s government and defence budget while China increased military pressure and infiltration tactics. Taiwan’s civil defence efforts, recall elections, and economic significance, particularly in semiconductors and AI, play a key role in international relations. Hong highlights China’s aging population problem and government-controlled economy. He emphasizes that Taiwanese people are fighting for their sovereignty, rejecting China’s influence, and strengthening alliances with democratic nations like the United States.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Kevin Hong, who is involved with Taiwan’s humanistic pastafarianism movement and disaster relief. Since our last interview, Taiwan’s geopolitical landscape has changed significantly. I want to focus on that today because humanists are people who get involved in politics.

Taiwan is one of those sensitive areas, like Israel-Palestine, Russia-Ukraine, Ethiopia, Sudan, and so on. So, what happened with the Kuomintang (KMT) and the constitutional crisis?

Kevin Hong: In the last election on January 13, 2024, Taiwan had two major parties. One is the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which is pro-Taiwan. The opposing party is the Kuomintang (KMT), the Chinese Nationalist Party and is perceived as pro-China.

There is also a third party, the Taiwan People’s Party (TPP). Some people initially thought they were neutral, so some young voters supported them. However, some regret it because the TPP often sides with the KMT in parliament.

In 2024, the opposition parties passed many acts to restrict governmental power and budgets unreasonably. Some of these acts were unconstitutional. The highest courts ruled that certain provisions violated the constitution, marking a setback for the opposition.

They also made significant cuts to the government budget, particularly defence spending. The opposition-controlled parliament enacted substantial budget cuts, including significant freezes on defence spending, totalling NTD$160.7 billion.

In this geopolitical environment, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has increased its presence around Taiwan. They have deployed more aircraft and naval vessels in the region. Additionally, they have been cutting Taiwan’s undersea internet cables more frequently—five times in the past three months. Given this situation, we expect further attacks throughout the rest of the year.

Meanwhile, the United States government wants to encourage its allies—Europe, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan—to increase their defence budgets. This aligns with Taiwan’s interests. However, since the opposition parties dominate parliament, they have blocked most budget increases. You can check the exact figures online because even the Kuomintang struggles to track how much funding they have cut.

The opposition has also employed tactics akin to DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service) attacks, overwhelming the system with excessive legislative proposals to mislead and divert attention. This is their strategy. The Kuomintang's parliamentary leadership—not the president, but their head in parliament—spearheads these tactics.

He frequently visits Hong Kong to meet with the Chinese government. How should I say this? His actions influence Taiwan. He continues meeting with them and probably—probably, I don't know—but probably discusses how to interfere with our parties and lure the country into China's control.

Jacobsen: It's almost like a war, but a soft war.

Hong: It's a gray zone war, I would say.

That's the issue. We, the free Taiwanese people, want to change this. Amending our constitution is difficult, so we have launched mass recalls to re-elect the parliament. We are now in the second stage of a petition for recalls.

This process has multiple stages, but currently, 35 legislators are facing recall efforts. The recall act has passed the second stage, meaning these 35 recall elections may occur this year. That is how we are trying to protect our country politically.

As discussed in our previous interview, I work in civil defence for disaster relief. I want to train volunteers to help build a stronger society that can withstand disasters, including a potential war. That is how we are trying to safeguard our liberty.

Jacobsen: Regarding civil defence, what are the most important things that people outside of Taiwan should know? Also, what kind of disaster relief training do you provide?

Hong: The most important thing that people worldwide should understand is that many Chinese people live in Taiwan but do not identify as Taiwanese. Some have dual identities—Taiwanese in geography, but their national identity remains Chinese.

These Chinese individuals came to Taiwan after the Chinese Civil War in 1947. They established a cruel, fascist, authoritarian regime that oppressed Taiwanese nationalism. They attacked our identity.

They silenced our language. They forced us to speak Mandarin and identify as Chinese. They arrived in the millions and brainwashed generations of people.

But we Taiwanese are a resilient nation. Now, we have elected the DPP, a Taiwanese party, to lead. Since 2016, Taiwan has had a DPP president. There are two presidents, Tsai(2016-2024), Lai(2024-). There was a DPP President Chen in 2000-2008, but president Bush said that he was a troublemaker. The US complained to Chen about supporting Taiwanese nation-building.

And until now, this issue persists. We still have to hold elections with people who do not identify as Taiwanese. It creates a chaotic situation, but it is part of our history.

After Japan lost World War II and the Kuomintang (KMT) lost the Chinese Civil War, millions of Chinese fled to our island. This caused a difficult situation that continues today.

I hope the people of the world understand that those who do not support Taiwan's independence were never truly Taiwanese. No matter what happens with the recall efforts or the parliament, these individuals should not have been part of our electoral process in the first place.

The instability and political chaos should not be blamed on the true Taiwanese people. This stance may seem controversial, but we are still fighting. We are fulfilling our responsibility to resist the pro-China parties. Even if we lose politically, we are not truly losing—we are winning in spirit.

Regardless of the election results, it does not mean that we do not want to protect our homeland. The United States often asks whether the Taiwanese people want to defend themselves.

The answer is yes—Taiwanese people do want to protect our home. However, the Chinese citizens living in Taiwan do not. That is the core issue.

We want the world to distinguish between these two groups. Before the war, there were many pro-Russian voters in Ukraine. After the war started, some of them fled to Russia or even fought for Russia. The rest were the true Ukrainians.

Taiwan is in a pre-war Ukraine-like situation. Many people living here are not truly Taiwanese. That is why, even if the election results appear unfavourable, it does not mean that Taiwanese people do not want to protect their country.

The current parliament, which cut the defence budget, does not represent the people's true will. We must acknowledge that there are two distinct groups in Taiwan—pro-Taiwanese and pro-Chinese—not just one. The world needs to understand that.

Jacobsen: One issue that people may be more aware of is the advanced AI and semiconductor technology being developed in Taiwan. This benefits the entire world.

Hong: Yes, particularly TSMC.

Jacobsen: Yes, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC). TSMC reported a 39% revenue increase in the first two months of 2025 due to the rising demand for AI chips. Some people might wonder, "Why Taiwan?" Well, that is one reason.

If people only care about their AI chips and economic bottom line, that is one justification. However, there is also the human rights aspect. Can you also discuss the economic and technological side of this political situation?

Hong: First, I am not an expert in AI or the information industry. However, I can say that many people—both in Taiwan and internationally—believe that the semiconductor industry could encourage allies to step up and protect Taiwan.

Yes. But I want to emphasize something further. We are not using AI as a tool to make the world protect us. Taiwan's strategic importance has existed long before our dominance in the semiconductor industry. Taiwan's critical role was evident during the Korean War as early as the 1950s. Our strategic position became clear as part of the First Island Chain. Taiwan is at the center of this chain and serves as the first line of defence against communist expansion from the mainland.

Additionally, Taiwan is one of the most democratic and liberal societies in Asia. We have made significant progress in human rights and liberty. Regarding shared values, Taiwan aligns with Western democracies and allied nations that uphold freedom and democracy. We are an integral part of this international framework.

Jacobsen: Also, Taiwan is highly seismically active. In April, a 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck Taiwan, causing significant casualties and infrastructure damage. Were you involved in the disaster relief efforts?

Hong: First, we are accustomed to earthquakes, and our architectural designs are built to withstand earthquakes and typhoons. However, the Hualien earthquake was exceptionally strong, reaching a high-intensity level. Despite this, our rescue and disaster relief teams responded effectively, and the casualty count remained low. Taiwan has highly skilled and professional emergency response teams. Beyond our own country, we have also provided disaster relief abroad. For example, Taiwan sent aid and support when Turkey suffered a devastating earthquake in early 2023.

Jacobsen: How is Taiwan's relationship with the United States under the current administration?

Hong: The United States has the Taiwan Relations Act, which commits to providing Taiwan with the necessary weapons and military support to defend itself against any force that seeks to alter the current status quo. After Trump's first presidency, Taiwan significantly escalated its arms purchases and military cooperation with the U.S. This trend has continued under the current administration. Our government, including the prime minister, has also increased Taiwan's defence budget, which now exceeds 3% of GDP if my memory is correct. The United States assists Taiwan in acquiring advanced military technology, which is critical to strategic cooperation.

Jacobsen: Given these developments, how do you feel about Taiwan's future relationship with the U.S.?

Hong: I feel optimistic about Taiwan-U.S. relations. China, Russia, and Iran—this growing axis of authoritarian powers—seek to reshape the global order. However, the allied nations stand firmly against this. The world does not want these authoritarian regimes to succeed.

Jacobsen: Taiwan's talent and strategic importance to the world will remain significant. Does Foxconn and its AI development have any relevance to the political situation? Also, how do you generally incorporate developments in AI and technology into your views on humanism?

Hong: AI cannot ask good questions; rather, it cannot truly engage in meaningful questioning. Or, let me clarify: AI can generate questions, but asking the right questions is the core issue for humanism, research, academic inquiry, and technological advancement. You need to formulate a good question before attempting to find an answer.

As it currently exists, Hong: AI lacks the cognitive ability to develop deep or insightful questions independently. However, using AI as a tool can be beneficial for humans. Throughout history, people have used tools to enhance thinking, solve problems, and address global challenges. AI is another tool in that tradition, and I am glad to have access to it. AI's most immediate and useful

application in humanistic work is its ability to store and retrieve information efficiently. We can feed AI large datasets and retrieve relevant information quickly when needed. This significantly enhances research and decision-making speed. However, there are specialists with deeper insights on this topic.

Jacobsen: That is a good point. Let's shift gears. How is the president of Taiwan handling Chinese infiltration efforts?

Hong: Several measures are being taken. Let me check the latest news updates on this for you. The president just held a press briefing specifically addressing this issue. You can find official details in the press release, which I will send via messenger.

One key policy focuses on restricting Chinese nationals who have obtained Taiwanese residency or identification. Many Chinese citizens marry Taiwanese individuals and later obtain Taiwanese IDs (not full nationality but legal identification). Some of these individuals publicly express pro-China sentiments, openly saying that they want China to "conquer" Taiwan and "liberate" them. They often spread these ideas on platforms like TikTok, likely for attention or financial incentives.

Our government has begun cancelling their IDs to prevent them from undermining national security. If they wish to live under China's rule, they can return to China. This policy was officially enacted today.

Additionally, Taiwan has tightened restrictions on dual identities. Some Taiwanese citizens secretly hold Chinese identification, which raises serious security concerns. The government is now systematically identifying and revoking Taiwanese IDs from individuals with dual affiliations. These measures are part of a broader strategy to counter internal security threats.

Jacobsen: That is a decisive approach.

Hong: Yes, and beyond individual actions, Taiwan has also established a Society Defense Resilience Committee. This committee, initiated by the president, plays a crucial role in strengthening Taiwanese civil defence and identifying security threats at the societal level.

Our society has built a resilient defence system to protect against enemies and safeguard the island. That is the essence of what the president is doing. That is what I can share with you.

Jacobsen: I was reading in the *Financial Times* that Taiwan recently revoked the residency of a Chinese TikTok influencer.

Hong: Yes. Taiwanese government employees are banned from downloading TikTok on their devices. However, this restriction only applies within the government—it is not enforced across society.

Jacobsen: A key takeaway from today's discussion is that you are not relying on supernatural forces or divine intervention to solve your problems. You are facing reality as it is rather than waiting for gods to intervene. Ideally, the international situation will stabilize, but Taiwan is operating within the world as it exists right now. That is an important aspect of humanism.

Hong: Yes. The world is not merciful. It only helps those who help themselves.

Jacobsen: Here is something interesting. Mitsu Games makes a board game called *2045*. The premise is a future Chinese invasion of Taiwan. Have you heard of it?

Hong: No, but I will check it out. *2045* sounds late for such a scenario. By then, China's aircraft carriers will be outdated and too old to maintain a significant military advantage.

Jacobsen: That is a good point. Even now, Russia relies on aging Soviet-era military technology. China's aging population is also a significant factor. It reached its peak population in February 2021, and since then, it has been declining. In the long term, China could experience a demographic crisis similar to South Korea or Japan, making governance increasingly difficult for its leadership.

Hong: That makes sense. A declining population creates economic and political challenges for any country. Yes, but China operates under a communist system, and its economy functions differently from a capitalist, market-based economy. In a free market, economic adjustments primarily affect the supply side. However, in a socialist economy, the government can manipulate demand as well.

To explain the difference, let me give an example. A few years ago, Western economists predicted China's economy would collapse due to its aging population. The reasoning was simple—too many retirees, insufficient young workers, and insufficient domestic consumer demand. When a labour shortage occurs, wages typically rise, reducing profitability and economic growth.

However, in a socialist system, the government can intervene directly, altering supply and demand. Instead of allowing market forces to dictate outcomes, China can implement policies to redistribute labour, control wages, and artificially sustain economic growth. This is why many predictions about China's immediate economic collapse have not materialized—at least, not yet.

Once wages rise, low-cost industries will relocate to other countries such as India and Vietnam. When that happens, China's economy would normally suffer a decline. However, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), under Xi Jinping, has already preemptively addressed this issue. Instead of allowing foreign companies to shift their investments abroad naturally, the Chinese government has actively pushed them to leave. Once these companies relocated outside China, job opportunities shrank, reducing overall employment.

With fewer jobs available, wages remained stagnant despite the labor shortage. This was a deliberate move to suppress demand and keep labour costs low. Even though the working-age population is shrinking, China's government has ensured that wage inflation does not spiral out of control. In a sense, this was a calculated manipulation of market forces—a level of control that free-market economies would struggle to replicate.

Despite these strategies, China's aging problem remains a major challenge. Encouraging people to have more children is nearly impossible under the current economic and social conditions. It is expected that China's birth rate will continue to decline. However, the CCP has other methods of managing an aging society that may not be ethical or humane. If necessary, China could reduce its elderly population through means that other countries would never dare to implement. This is

why many assume that China may never experience a full-blown aging crisis like Japan or South Korea.

Jacobsen: Are there any other areas you want to make sure we cover in this interview?

Hong: That depends on your audience.

Jacobsen: Oh, it's a friendly audience—mainly people curious about Taiwan's situation and the broader geopolitical landscape.

Hong: I see. In that case, we have covered most of the key issues. That should be good. Thank you very much.

OUSA's 2025 Advocacy Priorities, Postsecondary Funding, and Student Challenges in Ontario

2025-04-28

Tiffany Li Wu is Manager of Operations & Communications of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA). In her role, she communicates the organization's goals, advocacy priorities, and policy development processes.In 2025, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) prioritizes investing in post-secondary education, housing, food insecurity, and combating hate-motivated attacks. These focus areas address government grants, financial aid, mental health, and support for international students. OUSA develops policies through a student-driven process, involving annual General Assemblies where delegates from member schools debate and ratify policies. Unique for its non-partisan, evidence-based advocacy, OUSA conducts a province-wide student survey to inform its strategies. Key challenges from the 2024 Ontario Budget include inadequate funding for education, student housing, and OSAP, prompting OUSA to advocate for increased government support to enhance affordability and accessibility in Ontario's post-secondary system.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What are the goals and plans for the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) for 2025?

Tiffany Li Wu: OUSA's annual advocacy priorities are set by the Board of Directors based on current student concerns and government advocacy strategy. For 2024-25, the Board has determined the following four priorities: investing in post-secondary education, housing, food insecurity, and responses to hate-motivated attacks as advocacy goals for the year. These topics focus on government operating grants, student financial aid, mental health, and international students. We are also monitoring the potential for a 2025 provincial election and in that case, we will be advocating on post-secondary sector sustainability, housing, food insecurity, and student financial aid to all political parties.

Jacobsen: How does OUSA develop and ratify its organizational policies from election cycle to election cycle?

OUSA's policy papers on post-secondary issues are active for a four year period but do not necessarily overlap with election cycles. Every year, four to six policy papers are selected from our library and are amended to align with current student concerns and consider any legislative or policy changes by government since it was last ratified. Depending on the developments in the sector, new policies may also be proposed which was recently exemplified by our Responding to the Blue Ribbon Panel Report policy paper (not yet published but passed). These policy papers are edited and written entirely by students. They are brought to our General Assembly, a conference we host twice a year, where student representatives from each of our member schools come together to provide further feedback on the policy papers. At the end of the conference, all the delegates participate in a final debate and ratification of the policies. Internal organizational policies to govern and guide OUSA are decided by the Board of Directors as needed.

Jacobsen: What is unique about its approach to advocacy and similar to other associations and federations?

One of OUSA's pillars in our approach to advocacy is the student-driven nature of the organization. Our Board of Directors are entirely made up of current students or recent graduates, who guide the advocacy and strategic direction of the organization. As mentioned before, we also centre student voices in our policy process as they author, edit, and vote on the policies OUSA advocates on. We are a non-partisan organization and thus, our advocacy is targeted to all political parties using stances from our policy papers to maintain integrity of the student voice in our relationships with elected officials. We also run a biennial survey that gathers comprehensive information on students' experiences of their university education, and this is the only province-wide survey of its kind. We use this data in our lobby efforts as well as in our policy papers, in order to ensure we are providing evidence-based recommendations to government.

Jacobsen: In annual publication, what issues are highlighted that affect undergraduate students at OUSA member institutions?

As mentioned before, priorities change annually depending on emerging concerns from students and strategic advocacy tactics. Issues that OUSA has highlighted over the past couple of years that affect undergraduate students include student financial aid, sector sustainability, housing, food insecurity, gender-based violence, and mental health. Recommendations for our priorities this year can be found in the attached document. Additionally, we annually publish *Educated Solutions,* a magazine that brings together the province's post-secondary stakeholders as authors of various articles about a relevant issue in the sector at a given time. Previous editions of *Educated Solutions* can be found here.

Jacobsen: What is the purpose of OUSA's General Assembly?

OUSA's General Assembly brings students together from all of our member institutions and occurs at the final stage in our policy process. Throughout the four days of the conference, all student delegates get the opportunity to view the proposed papers and give feedback on our policy recommendations, ensuring that each paper reflects the views of their student bodies. The number of delegates that come from each university is proportional to the size of their student body – the larger the student body, the more delegates a school can bring to attend the conference. After the feedback sessions, student authors spend their evenings considering the comments and implementing it into the paper. On the final day, students are able to propose any final amendments, all of which are then voted on individually before the paper is officially ratified by students.

Jacobsen: What is OUSA's vision for post-secondary education in Ontario?

All of OUSA's advocacy aims to guide our province towards a more affordable, accessible, high-quality, and accountable post-secondary education system. These are our guiding principles as we develop all of our policy recommendations. Importantly, our recommendations actively consider an intersectional lens in order to promote equity within higher education and ensure that our policies reflect the specific needs of marginalized students related to our guiding principles.

Jacobsen: Which event brings OUSA student leaders to Queen's Park?

Each November, OUSA's Student Advocacy Conference brings two representatives from each of our member schools to Queen's Park. We spend the week meeting with as many MPPs and Ministry staff as possible, and advocate on the priorities that our board has laid out for the given year. We also host a Queen's Park reception at some point during this week, often in collaboration with our fellow student advocacy groups.

Jacobsen: What key challenges did OUSA identify in response to the 2024 Ontario Budget?

Although OUSA appreciated the government's $1.3 billion investment in post-secondary education, this number fell significantly short of the $2.5 billion needed to keep the sector viable, according to the Blue Ribbon Panel. This budget allocation does not do enough to address the long-term needs of institutions, nor does it resolve the chronic underfunding of the sector which is particularly worrisome under the impacts of the federal cap on international visas. Students currently contribute over 60% towards university operating revenue through tuition and fees; despite this, a continued lack of government funding will ultimately impact student supports and services. This dampens the quality of post-secondary experiences for students and leaves them without the critical resources that they rely on, like mental health and accessibility services, to carry them through their education.

Additionally, the lack of targeted funding for student housing initiatives was further disappointing. Although student housing was mentioned under the *Building Ontario Fund*, students are in a uniquely vulnerable position when it comes to rental costs – they face time-sensitive pressures to secure housing in highly competitive markets, surging the prices for units, and pay 25% more than the national average rental unit cost. While the supply of student housing is not currently meeting demand, more needs to be done in order to alleviate the current financial pressures of rent on students.

Finally, for the third year in a row, Ontario's 2024 budget made no mention of OSAP funding. Despite the rising need for direct financial support in order to address the cost-of-living crisis, there continues to be no substantial improvements to OSAP. As a primary mechanism to facilitate accessibility and affordability of post-secondary education in the province and tangibly benefit students, it is critical that financial aid be at the forefront of post-secondary funding decisions.

Overall, while we were appreciative of the continued tuition freeze and investments to gender-based and sexual violence support, the 2024 budget had several shortcomings related to the needs of post-secondary students, exacerbating the the challenges that they are currently facing.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Tiffany.

Phil Gurski on Counterterrorism, Radicalization, and the Evolution of Terrorist Ideologies

2025-04-28

Phil Gurski is the President and CEO of **Borealis Threat and Risk Consulting**. He worked as a senior strategic analyst at CSIS (Canadian Security Intelligence Service) from 2001-2013, specializing in Al Qaeda/Islamic State-inspired violent extremism and radicalization. From 1983 to 2001, he was employed as a senior multilingual analyst at Communications Security Establishment specializing in the Middle East. He also served as senior special advisor in the National Security Directorate at Public Safety Canada from 2013 until he retired from the civil service in May 2015 and as a consultant for the Ontario Provincial Police's Anti-Terrorism Section (PATS) in 2015. Mr. Gurski has presented on Al Qaeda/Islamic State-inspired violent extremism and radicalization across Canada and around the world. He is the author of "*The Threat from Within: Recognizing Al Qaeda-inspired Radicalization and Terrorism in the West*" (Rowman and Littlefield) and "*Western Foreign Fighters: The Threat to Homeland and International Security*" (Rowman and Littlefield). He regularly blogs (Terrorism in Canada and the West – available on his Web site) and tweets on terrorism. Gurski, a counterterrorism specialist, discusses the dilution of the term "expert," particularly in counterterrorism studies post-9/11. He distinguishes between practitioners with field experience and academics who analyze terrorism theoretically. Gurski traces modern terrorism to anarchist movements in the 19th century and references David Rapoport's Four Waves of Terrorism model. He critiques broad definitions of terrorism, arguing it must involve serious violence for ideological, religious, or political goals. He emphasizes the challenges of counterterrorism, highlighting intelligence thresholds and the unpredictability of radicalization. Security services must discern genuine threats from mere online rhetoric, making prevention highly complex.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Phil Gurski. We are launching a series for *Free Inquiry*, and I am delighted to call this my very first series following an interview with Dr. Herb Silverman for *A Further Inquiry*. Matthew and Khadija, I've happily joined their editorial team, and I feel very privileged and grateful for this opportunity.

To open this series—which may eventually become a book—we will explore counterterrorism and counter-extremism, defining terrorism and extremism in the process. Before starting, we briefly discussed it, and you made an astute point.

I appreciate the term "expert" because I approach this topic as a freelance journalist surveying experts. However, you pointed out that the term has lost much of its meaning or has been diluted. That is an interesting observation.

Phil Gurski: I recognize that most media outlets seek comments, insights, or perspectives from individuals they label as "experts." For example, suppose a news report covers wildfires in British Columbia. In that case, the outlet may introduce a guest by saying, "We have brought in an expert to discuss why wildfires are a problem and how we can stop them."

More specifically, in the field of counterterrorism and counter-extremism, we have seen what I would call an explosion—no pun intended—of individuals referring to themselves as experts, particularly since 9/11. There are generally two categories of people who comment on terrorism. The first group consists of practitioners—or, in my case, ex-practitioners—who have worked in counterterrorism within law enforcement, intelligence agencies, or similar fields. The second group consists of academics who study terrorism from a theoretical perspective.

I have no issue with academics writing about terrorism, and I count many among my friends. However, following 9/11, due to the sheer enormity of the attack, many people suddenly jumped on the bandwagon. Individuals who could not spell Al-Qaeda on September 10 learned to spell it on September 12 and soon claimed to be Al-Qaeda experts.

This trend was unnecessary and often driven by self-promotion. Thomas Friedman, a renowned New York Timesjournalist, once made an insightful remark—one I first heard from a podcast guest of mine. He noted that, in the aftermath of 9/11, whenever he saw a news ticker reading "Coming up next: Terrorism Expert" on CNN or MSNBC, he took it as his cue to switch to the Golf Channel. He did not think highly of the term "terrorism expert."

Terrorism, as a phenomenon, has dominated our attention for the past quarter-century. However, terrorism did not begin on 9/11. In the modern sense, it dates back at least 50 years. But the sheer scale of 9/11—along with its symbolic targets in New York and Washington, striking at the heart of the United States—brought the issue to global prominence. Consequently, many people rushed to make their voices heard, and the field of counterterrorism expanded rapidly.

As a result, I have always been transparent about my professional background. I worked in HUMINT for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and SIGINT at the Communications Security Establishment (CSE). I have written seven books on terrorism, contributed to blogs, hosted podcasts, and participated in media interviews worldwide. I have also travelled extensively to discuss these issues.

But because of what I call the cheapness of the term and the fact that it has essentially become all but meaningless, I prefer to be called a terrorism and counterterrorism specialist to avoid association with people who, frankly, have never worked in the field.

Let me give you an analogy. I spent thirty-two years in intelligence, and the media here in Canada often asks, "This major cyberattack took place—can you comment on it?" Cybersecurity is obviously part of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), particularly in the Communications Security Establishment (CSE) and CSIS.

And my response is, "I can't spell cyber. I never worked in that field. I'm useless. If my keyboard works in the morning, I'm a happy camper. I will never portray myself as a cyber expert."

So, I'd prefer the term expert be used very sparingly. I prefer a clear distinction between those who study terrorism and those who have worked in counterterrorism. These are two very distinct perspectives. There is room for both, but the term has expanded beyond its usefulness over the past quarter-century.

Rather, it is a long answer to a short question.

Jacobsen: In that response, you noted the modern sense of terrorism. What did it mean more than a hundred and fifty years ago?

Gurski: It didn't mean anything. The term itself did not enter the English language until the 19th century. Interestingly, it first appeared in response to violent Irish nationalism—those attempting to establish an independent Ireland.

If you go back far enough, yes, there was the Reign of Terror in France, but that wasn't terrorism—it was mob violence. It was not terrorism in the sense that we use the term today.

Most scholars agree that the true origins of modern terrorism can be traced to anarchist groups or individuals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries who targeted heads of state to try to change the political system. Think of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on the eve of World War I—that was carried out by an anarchist. President William McKinley was assassinated by an anarchist in Buffalo, New York. An Italian king was assassinated, and anarchists also killed a Russian tsar.

When we talk about assassinations, we generally refer to politically motivated murders. One of the crucial points about terrorism is that it is an act of violence for an underlying cause—it is not random violence. It is not violence for the sake of violence; it is violence intended to advance an idea.

Currently, in Canada, we define terrorism as violence perpetrated for ideological, religious, or political reasons. These are the three primary drivers of terrorism as we legally define it.

If I may use that term loosely, the anarchist movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries represents the first manifestation of modern terrorism.

Jacobsen: Were most terrorist activities in that earlier period—where heads of state or major political figures were being murdered—driven by anarchist ideologies?

Gurski: More often than not, they were.

A friend of mine, a scholar named David Rapoport, is probably in his nineties now. He wrote a very influential paper called The Four Waves of Terrorism, which remains one of the most significant academic contributions to our understanding of the evolution of terrorism.

He categorized terrorist movements into four main waves. The anarchist wave, which emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was followed by the ethnonationalism wave, which coincided with the post-colonial period. This included movements such as Irish republicanism and various African groups seeking independence from Belgium, France, Britain, Germany, and other colonial powers.

The third wave, which he referred to as the New Left, included groups like the Baader-Meinhof Gang in Germany, the Japanese Red Army, and the Brigate Rosse in Italy—organizations that pursued left-wing revolutionary causes.

We are currently in what he called the religious wave, which dates back to the late 1970s. Key events that shaped this wave include the Iranian Revolution in February 1979 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which eventually led to the formation of the Taliban and later Al-Qaeda.

Another critical but often overlooked event was the Grand Mosque Siege in Mecca in 1979. This event pushed the Saudi government to adopt an even more austere and fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, which was already highly conservative at the time. It played a crucial role in shaping the ideology of figures like Osama bin Laden and the rise of Al-Qaeda.

Now, the term wave should be used very loosely. We still see ethnonationalist terrorism today, even though its peak was in the mid-to-late 20th century. We still have anarchist terrorism. However, the dominant ideological driver of terrorism in 2025—and for nearly fifty years—has been Islamist terrorism, specifically jihadism.

This includes individuals and groups such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS (Islamic State), Al-Shabaab in Somalia, and many others who use a particular interpretation of Islam to justify violence. They aim to establish and impose their version of Islam on local populations while also targeting the West in retaliation for what they perceive as offences against Islam in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa.

Jacobsen: Do many of these ideologies—regardless of Rapoport's four waves—boil down to something akin to ideologies of resentment?

Gurski: One of the biggest challenges we face is defining ideology itself.

Let me give you an example. In the past four to five years, there has been growing concern in Canada and the United States—perhaps elsewhere as well—about so-called violent incels. Incels refer to involuntary celibates—men who feel entitled to relationships and, when rejected, become resentful and violent toward women.

Some argue that incel violence constitutes an ideology. I push back strongly against that idea. It is violent misogyny, plain and simple. These individuals hate women because women will not conform to their desires. This is no different from domestic violence, partner abuse, or other forms of misogynistic aggression.

So, we are left with the question: Is there enough structure in this belief system to constitute an ideology?

Canada's Criminal Code further complicates the issue. While terrorism is legally defined under the Anti-Terrorism Act, passed after 9/11 in February 2002, the law refers to serious violence motivated by ideological, religious, or political causes. However, it does not define what constitutes an ideology.

One person's ideology might be another person's set of ideas. That distinction—or lack thereof—makes things incredibly complicated.

And to add to the confusion, consider the current U.S. president's recent move to designate Mexican drug cartels as terrorist organizations. I strongly disagree with that classification. Criminal organizations like the Sinaloa Cartel have no ideology.

They are not committing violence for political or religious reasons. Their goal is profit—selling drugs, controlling territory, and intimidating local populations to facilitate their criminal enterprises. That is not ideological terrorism; it is organized crime.

I leave the term ideology itself to philosophers and political scientists to debate. However, I do not believe that anyone—whether academic or practitioner—has fully resolved the issue of how to define ideology in this context.

Jacobsen: And we may need some grounding here. What are the generally accepted consensus definitions of counterterrorism, counter-extremism, and their countermeasures?

Gurski: Yes. So, let's start with the concept of "terrorism" itself.

There has to be an act of serious violence. People throw around terms like cyberterrorism, but that is not terrorism. If you take down a banking system, that is not terrorism. It is an inconvenience and may disrupt financial systems, but it does not meet the threshold of terrorism.

If you take out a SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) system disrupting electricity or water supply, that is serious. But even then, it is sabotage, not terrorism. It is an attempt to undermine a country's infrastructure. For something to be classified as terrorism, violence has to be part of it—first and foremost.

It has to be a serious act of violence. Let me give you an example.

The so-called Freedom Convoy in Ottawa in February 2022. We all remember the scenes: 18-wheelers blocking Wellington Street in front of Parliament, crowds, shouting, demonstrations, rude signs—very un-Canadian behaviour, not saying sorry every fifteen seconds.

Some people in Ottawa called that terrorism. And I asked them, "Can you name a single act of violence that came out of the Freedom Convoy?" The answer was "no."

Did they say mean things to people? Yes, probably. Because some of them were assholes, but that is not an act of violence. That is just being an asshole.

Of course, the government then invoked the Emergencies Act, which a federal court later ruled was illegal. The only legal justification for invoking the Emergencies Act is if CSIS determines that an individual or group threatens national security. And CSIS publicly stated that these protesters were not a threat to national security.

In their assessment, the Freedom Convoy organizers couldn't organize a piss-up in a bar, let alone threaten the country. So, the government did not even have the legal foundation to justify invoking the act.

Terrorism has to be violent in nature. It can be the threat of violence or the actual use of violence. But it cannot be intimidation, personal revenge, or profit-driven crime. The violence must be carried out to advance a specific ideological, religious, or political goal.

That is, at its most basic, my definition of terrorism.

Jacobsen: Would you get pushback from others in your field?

Gurski: Oh, tons. Absolutely tons. Some would argue that certain criminal groups do have an ideology. To which I say, Great, show me the evidence.

Interestingly, there are acts of violence that are not labelled as terrorism when, by definition, they should be.

For example, take the church burnings in Canada a few years ago. In the aftermath of the mass graves story—graves that, by the way, have never been found—we saw over 300 churches burned across Canada.

Those were acts of terrorism, whether carried out by Indigenous activists, left-wing extremists, or other groups. The Criminal Code does not define terrorism as simply killing people. It includes serious acts of violence against significant property.

I would argue that burning down 300 churches is a significant act of violence against property. And yet, no one in government would ever dare call that terrorism. The prime minister said, "I don't like it, but I understand it."

Well, then you must understand 9/11, too. You may not like it, but you understand it. It's ludicrous to take this series of violent acts and say, "Well, yes, it's not terrorism." There is a phrase you will never hear in Canada: First Nations terrorism.

It is inconvenient because of Truth and Reconciliation, and the list goes on if it occurs. With all these past injustices we are apologizing for, no one will call a spade a spade and label those acts as terrorism.

Jacobsen: What about the definition of extreme as a root word when discussing extremism itself? What is the threshold for extremism?

Gurski: Again, it comes down to violence. Extreme, in and of itself, is not necessarily problematic.

All joking aside, I consider Toronto Maple Leafs fans extreme. They haven't won the Stanley Cup since 1967—what is that? It's been over half a century now. So, if you're a Leafs fan—which I definitely am not—you are pretty extreme if you think they will win the Cup anytime soon.

Most social progress has come from extreme movements. Think of the fight for women's rights—women chaining themselves to railings or throwing themselves in front of the king's horse at the Epsom Derby in 1913—or the abolitionist movement against slavery. Those were extreme movements.

The French Revolution was also an extreme movement. It was violent, but I would argue it wasn't purely political—though others might disagree. So, extremism itself is not the issue. It only becomes a problem when it involves the use of violence to advance a cause.

Some people, including myself, sometimes use violent extremism and terrorism as synonyms. They are identical but close enough to be used interchangeably in many contexts. As a journalist, you likely appreciate that—you don't want to use the same word repeatedly. You want to vary

your style and vocabulary. That's why I tend to use violent extremism and terrorism synonymously when I write.

Jacobsen: If we establish this framework and aim to counter such acts, how do we take violence as the foundation and use it to identify and combat terrorist and extremist acts of a violent nature?

Gurski: It's not easy. I'll return to my days with CSIS—the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. CSIS has a lower threshold for investigative power than law enforcement. People don't realize that in Canada. As a security intelligence agency, CSIS does not collect information to an evidentiary standard—it collects intelligence, not evidence. This means its findings cannot be used in Canadian courts, often leading to legal challenges.

CSIS operates on reasonable grounds to suspect, whereas law enforcement requires reasonable grounds to believe. These are different legal standards, which means that CSIS can investigate someone at an earlier stage.

So, if Scott posts content online that seems problematic, it falls within CSIS's mandate to ask, "What's Scott up to? Let's take a look at what he's posting. Where is he posting it? What is he saying?"

Sometimes, they'll knock on your door and say, "Hey, Scott. Hi. We're with CSIS. What the fuck are you doing online, buddy? Why are you posting this kind of stuff?"

The challenge, however, is that most people who post stupid things online never act on them in the real world. It's easy to post online—people can do it anonymously through VPNs, encrypted messaging apps, or privacy-focused browsers like Brave. They can vent, troll, or role-play as extremists.

It only becomes problematic when someone is advocating or threatening the use of violence. But even then, most of those who post threats online are either cowards or incompetent and incapable of following through.

The real challenge for security services is determining who crosses the threshold into actual violence. In Canada, when a case becomes serious enough—when CSIS has credible concerns that someone is moving from words to action—it has a mechanism to hand off intelligence to the RCMP.

For example, CSIS might say to the RCMP, "We've been following Scott for a while. We've spoken to him. There's been no change. It's getting worse." At that point, the RCMP could launch a criminal investigation: Is this behaviour a violation of the Criminal Code? Is he making violent threats, planning acts, or engaging in criminal conspiracy?

But there's no simple formula for this, right? No checklist? There's no algorithm that says if you exhibit signs 1 through 3, we won't worry, but if you show signs 1 through 6, we act.

The first book I wrote, *The Threat from Within* (2015), examined signs of violent radicalization but made it clear that these are not predictors of violence. Someone can be radicalized without ever becoming violent.

That's the real challenge for security intelligence and law enforcement. First, you can't monitor everyone. Second, you can't investigate everyone.

So, which cases are serious? Who are the genuine threats, and who are just online wankers who will never act on their words?

I wish there were a simple, plug-and-play model to determine this. Over the past 25 years, I've seen many threat assessment models. Some are decent, but none are predictive in nature. This comes down to individual decision-making—and no model can fully predict human behaviour.

Let me use a simple example. When I wake up in the morning, do I have cereal, yogurt, bacon, an egg, or a bagel? I can't predict that in advance until I get into the kitchen and see what's on the shelf. What do I feel like? It's the same thing with violent radicalization.

You cannot predict which individual will wake up one day and decide; today is the day. I will grab a knife from the counter and walk into a kindergarten. We've seen that happen in England. I will get in my car and drive down Granville Street at noon. I'm going to attack a police officer inside Commonwealth Stadium. That happened in Edmonton in 2017—a man attacked a police officer. Then, he ran over pedestrians while carrying an ISIS flag on his dashboard.

You can't predict these things. Look at the New Orleans attack on New Year's Eve this past year —you couldn't predict that either. Stopping these kinds of attacks is extremely difficult for security agencies.

Phil Gurski on Terrorism, National Security, and Canada's Shifting Counterterrorism Priorities

2025-04-28

Phil Gurski is the President and CEO of **Borealis Threat and Risk Consulting**. He worked as a senior strategic analyst at CSIS (Canadian Security Intelligence Service) from 2001-2013, specializing in Al Qaeda/Islamic State-inspired violent extremism and radicalization. From 1983 to 2001, he was employed as a senior multilingual analyst at Communications Security Establishment specializing in the Middle East. He also served as senior special advisor in the National Security Directorate at Public Safety Canada from 2013 until he retired from the civil service in May 2015 and as a consultant for the Ontario Provincial Police's Anti-Terrorism Section (PATS) in 2015. Mr. Gurski has presented on Al Qaeda/Islamic State-inspired violent extremism and radicalization across Canada and around the world. He is the author of "*The Threat from Within: Recognizing Al Qaeda-inspired Radicalization and Terrorism in the West*" (Rowman and Littlefield) and "*Western Foreign Fighters: The Threat to Homeland and International Security*" (Rowman and Littlefield). He regularly blogs (Terrorism in Canada and the West – available on his Web site) and tweets on terrorism. Gurski critiques efforts to explain away terrorism, highlighting the New Orleans attack, where an ISIS-inspired perpetrator killed 15 and injured 57. He warns against narratives that absolve attackers of responsibility. Comparing lone-wolf attacks to large-scale warfare, he emphasizes their devastating impact. Gurski discusses Canada's shift in counterterrorism focus from Islamist extremism to the far right, questioning its justification given the lack of foiled plots. He criticizes political correctness for skewing national security priorities and warns that intelligence agencies are being sidelined. He calls for a government that takes intelligence seriously to ensure effective security measures.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: In science, explaining something does not mean explaining it away. A phenomenon still exists, but having a framework helps us understand it.

Similarly, in discussing tragic personal stories—understanding a perpetrator's background does not excuse their actions. They still made a choice.

Phil Gurski: That's right. And that's a good segue into the New Orleans attack. That was the attack that happened after midnight in New Orleans—15 people were killed when the perpetrator ran over pedestrians on Bourbon Street, injuring another dozen. He then engaged in a firefight with police and was killed.

In the aftermath, there was a whole narrative about his background—he was a former U.S. military, his marriage had failed, he was in debt, he had personal struggles, blah blah blah.

It was almost as if the media was trying to explain away what he did.

However, that background does not explain why he carried out the attack. He did it because he pledged allegiance to ISIS. And this is what ISIS does.

As I said earlier, it's the Nike form of terrorism—just do it. Get in your car, drive down the street, and kill people. People are always searching for easy answers to complicated questions.

The old phrase dead men tell no lies is true. But dead men also tell no tales. We can't ask this guy why he did it. What we can do is analyze his online activity, computer files, and other digital footprints.

We know he did surveillance in New Orleans. He knew where he was going, and he knew there would be crowds at 3 a.m. He knew New Orleans would be packed on New Year's Eve. That's a simple formula for most people.

He knew the crowds would be there. He knew it would be an easy target. He scouted the best route to get the truck through—no bollards, no barriers, nothing in his way. But at the end of the day, why did he do it? Who knows? Ask him. You can't—he's dead.

I don't like this effort to explain things away with a narrative of circumstances beyond his control, as if it wasn't his fault. Yes. It was his fault. He made a choice, as you said. No one put a gun to his head and told him to drive down Bourbon Street. He did it of his own accord.

So, let's not create backstories that absolve these people of responsibility for their decisions.

Jacobsen: I checked: Fifteen people were killed. Fifty-seven were injured. And of those fifty-seven, five were shot. This reminds me of when I was in Ukraine on my second trip.

I was there just shy of a month. Poltava happened—one of the largest biggest mass killings in a single strike with two explosions there. An education or training facility and then a hospital.

Poltava is south of Sumy and west of Kharkiv. We arrived three or four hours after the attack.

The final numbers: ~58 dead and three hundred seventy were injured.

Gurski: Wow.

Jacobsen: This is modern industrial warfare. Two missiles and those were the numbers.

Now compare that to a single individual without industrial military equipment—just a truck and a gun. With that, he injured 57 people, including five who were shot and killed 15. It's a perverse form of "achievement."

Gurski: Yep. Exactly. Which is why ISIS made such a big propaganda push around it.

Jacobsen: And something that isn't talked about as much but is equally important—

Fifteen dead, plus the 57 injured. That's 72 people. And then their families. Now, you're looking at hundreds of people dealing with emotional trauma for a lifetime.

Gurski: Yep. Sandy Hook wasn't a terrorist attack, but it's similar in terms of lasting impact. What was it—twenty-two kids died, plus a couple of teachers? Then, the families. And then all the aftershocks, as you alluded to. It's much, much bigger than just the immediate casualties.

Gurski: Yep.

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Jacobsen: How has the government shifted its focus?

Gurski: It's nice and clean. No worries.

As I noted, I retired from CSIS in 2015 after spending fifteen years working in counterterrorism. At that time, 99.5% of our investigations were focused on Islamist extremism.

We still had a small Sikh terrorism desk—very, very small—and an even smaller far-right desk. I don't recall if we had a far-left desk at all. The simple reason was that every single plot forwarded to the RCMP for investigation involved jihadists.

Jacobsen: You're making an important distinction that isn't usually discussed. People talk about attacks, but you're talking about plots. So, while attacks may come from different sources, the majority of plots were Islamist.

Gurski: No—all of them were.

And this will tie back in. Let me explain.

Think of the Toronto 18. Think of the Via Rail plot. Think of the Victoria plot. All of these were significant terror plots that, had they been successful, would have killed dozens, if not hundreds.

The Toronto 18 had three tons of fertilizer. Three one-ton trucks. Do the math. That's not good. I left in 2015. That was after the two attacks—one in Ottawa, the other outside Montreal—that killed two soldiers.

Then we had Aaron Driver in Stratford, Ontario, who was about to get into a taxi with two homemade bombs. He was shot dead by the RCMP. We had the Edmonton attack. The Scarborough attack. The Markham attack.

And that's not even mentioning the Canadians who left to commit acts of terrorism abroad. I wrote an entire book on this—The Peaceable Kingdom? A History of Terrorism in Canada—which covers Canadians who have been killed overseas. After the election, you started to see a shift—in two ways.

First, the terminology changed.

We could no longer call it "Islamist terrorism." The government decided to label it "Religiously Motivated Violent Extremism"—or RMVE for short.

This is both inaccurate and an extreme example of political correctness.

Yes, religion is one of the three motivators for terrorism under the Canadian Criminal Code. But to call something religiously motivated, you need to know two things:

1. That religion was a factor.
2. What the specific religion was.

Otherwise, you wouldn't call it religious. Are we talking about Mennonites? Seventh-day Adventists? Presbyterians? No. We're talking about Islamist extremists. In Canada, they are the only religious group that has carried out planned acts of terrorism.

We know what the religion is. But the government refuses to call it that because it's politically uncomfortable. They don't want to "target" an entire community—blah, blah, blah. The second shift happened with resource allocation.

In the decade leading up to 2015, CSIS began shifting resources—publicly, I might add—away from investigating jihadists and toward investigating the far right.

Now, according to CSIS, it's an even split—50% of resources go to far-right extremism, 50% to Islamist extremism. That's a massive shift. We went from 0.5% of investigations on the far right to 50%.

And my question is: Was that a justified move? Now, here's the problem. We talked earlier about foiled plots. From 2000 to 2015, my entire focus at CSIS was on jihadist terrorism. We disrupted four plots and carried out numerous investigations.

If other extremist groups were planning attacks but weren't being investigated, their chances of success would logically be higher.

Think about it like this: If the police stopped investigating Jamaican street gangs in Toronto tomorrow, what would happen? More gang activity. More shootings. More killings. Now, in my entire 15 years at CSIS—when the far right was not being actively investigated—how many successful far-right terrorist attacks occurred?

None.

How many foiled far-right terrorist plots were there?

None.

And now, you're telling me that warrants 50% of our investigative resources?

Let me go one step further.

Since around 2017, when the 50/50 split in counterterrorism investigations fully took effect, how many foiled far-right terrorist plots have there been in Canada?

None.

How many successful far-right attacks?

Well, arguably four—although I would classify three of them as hate crimes rather than terrorism. I'm in the minority on that, but that's my stance.

So, we've had four successful attacks but zero foiled plots.

Where are all the foiled plots if the far right is such a serious threat that we're allocating 50% of resources to it? Where are people on the verge of committing attacks arrested?

When the Toronto 18 was arrested on June 2, 2006—a case I worked on from Day 1—they were unloading three tons of what they thought was ammonium nitrate fertilizer from a storage shed in Toronto. They were loading it into trucks to build bombs to blow up multiple targets.

That's how close they were.

When the father and son ISIS team was arrested—was it in North York or Scarborough? I forget—last year, the RCMP said they were this close to carrying out an attack.

They had weapons.

They had a strategy.

They had guns.

They had a plan.

Now compare that to the far right—how many far-right attacks in Canada have been foiled to that extent in the past ten years?

Zero.

Which leads me to ask a very simple question: How serious is the far-right terrorist threat if no attacks are being foiled? We have a government that has decided it's too uncomfortable to talk about Islamist extremism.

We can't use the term. I've been called a racist for using the term Islamist extremism—even though the entire world uses it. Academics use it. Counterterrorism practitioners use it. Governments use it. But we can't use it in Canada—because it's "embarrassing."

If the far right is so dangerous, then why aren't we seeing more action? I haven't seen an answer to that question yet. Now, maybe investigations are happening in the background that I don't have access to—fine. But if serious arrests were happening—if people on the verge of killing others were being caught, and they belonged to neo-Nazi, white supremacist, or white nationalist groups—then show me the evidence.

I read the news every single day. If you have a single example of a foiled far-right terrorist attack in Canada in the past ten years, send it to me—because I haven't seen it.

Jacobsen: Are you suggesting the government has prioritized investigations based on political sensitivities rather than actual security threats?

Gurski: Yes. The government has decided on the priority—not based on threat assessments but on political sensitivities. This is a problem in a democracy. Security services must be free to investigate real threats based on intelligence and capabilities. The government must not tell them. what to investigate and what not to investigate. That's what happens in autocracies.

Jacobsen: Has CSIS funding gone down?

Gurski: No—it's gone up. But here's the thing.

CSIS has four major investigative priorities under Section 2 of the CSIS Act:

1. Foreign espionage (spying).
2. Foreign interference (think China, election meddling, intimidation of diaspora communities).
3. Terrorism (which includes Islamist extremism and far-right extremism).

4. Subversion (which CSIS hasn't actively investigated since the 1980s).

CSIS mostly focuses on counterintelligence (spying), foreign interference, and counterterrorism.

And CSIS has received a lot more money because threats have multiplied.

Just think about China's activities over the past twenty years:

- Illegal police stations in Canada.
- Election interference.
- Harassment of Uyghur Canadians, Tibetan Canadians, and Chinese dissidents.
- Espionage operations against Canadian businesses and universities.

And that's just China. Now, think about Russia's operations in Western Europe. You can bet it isn't good here in Canada—we don't talk about it enough. China has been stealing technology—take the Level 4 lab in Winnipeg, for example. They sent PLA (People's Liberation Army) personnel to learn about our virus technology. And let's be clear—they weren't doing that to save the planet.

They were doing it to weaponize it. And that was yet another government failure. We warned them, saying, "By the way, these people aren't who they claim to be." And the government's response? Oh no, they're fine. We'll clear them. So yes, CSIS has received more resources and funding, but the threats have also multiplied.

In the post-Cold War period, we assumed the Soviet Union—and later, Russia—was no longer a serious threat. Well, that was the wrong conclusion. They are a huge threat. And a growing one. And China has always been a threat—and always will be. So, intelligence agencies now have more issues to deal with than ever before.

Jacobsen: What are the political and social barriers to accurately identifying a terrorist act? You've consistently pointed out that if someone labels Islamist terrorism as Islamist terrorism, they risk being branded a racist—even though it's an academic term referring to an ideology, not an ethnic group.

Gurski: I'd say this government has been brilliant at political correctness and wokeism—and as a result, they've skewed the dialogue. And it is having an effect. I know it's affecting morale within law enforcement and security intelligence agencies. Because they're being told what to do—and, more importantly, what not to do.

These agencies are not being allowed to set their priorities. Intelligence exists to inform the government. CSIS is an advisory organization with no power to arrest or prosecute anyone. CSIS investigates. CSIS reports its findings up the chain. CSIS shares minimal intelligence with the RCMP due to Canada's intelligence-to-evidence restrictions. CSIS tells the government: This is what we see. This is what worries us. That's the role of a security intelligence agency. But here's the problem: If intelligence isn't being read, it doesn't matter. We also saw that in the foreign interference inquiry. The Prime Minister wasn't reading his intelligence reports. The PMO staff were blocking or filtering intelligence before it even reached him. Or, when he did see

intelligence, he dismissed it as—and I quote—"suspicion," not important enough to worry about. That's a problem.

So you have to ask: Why even bother having a security intelligence agency if no one is reading the intelligence? And if it is read but then rejected as "not important enough" or "not accurate enough" to inform policy decisions—what's the point? That's the problem we're facing in Canada right now.

The Evolution of Terrorism: Phil Gurski on Changing Tactics, Deradicalization, and National Security

2025-04-28

Phil Gurski is the President and CEO of **Borealis Threat and Risk Consulting**. He worked as a senior strategic analyst at CSIS (Canadian Security Intelligence Service) from 2001-2013, specializing in Al Qaeda/Islamic State-inspired violent extremism and radicalization. From 1983 to 2001, he was employed as a senior multilingual analyst at Communications Security Establishment specializing in the Middle East. He also served as senior special advisor in the National Security Directorate at Public Safety Canada from 2013 until he retired from the civil service in May 2015 and as a consultant for the Ontario Provincial Police's Anti-Terrorism Section (PATS) in 2015. Mr. Gurski has presented on Al Qaeda/Islamic State-inspired violent extremism and radicalization across Canada and around the world. He is the author of "*The Threat from Within: Recognizing Al Qaeda-inspired Radicalization and Terrorism in the West*" (Rowman and Littlefield) and "*Western Foreign Fighters: The Threat to Homeland and International Security*" (Rowman and Littlefield). He regularly blogs (Terrorism in Canada and the West – available on his Web site) and tweets on terrorism. Gurski explains how 9/11 changed terrorism, with groups like ISIS encouraging simple, unpredictable attacks. He critiques deradicalization programs, emphasizing the difficulty of proving ideological change. Canada lacks an intelligence culture, failing to prioritize national security. Compared to the U.S., Canada has fewer domestic extremists, yet Islamist extremism remains the dominant threat. Gurski argues that media censorship fails to prevent radicalization, as misinformation spreads rapidly online, fueling fear and misinterpretations of terrorist motivations and threats.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How have terrorist acts evolved over the past 150 years, particularly in this so-called fourth phase of terrorism?

Phil Gurski: Each group has its specialty, if you will. The IRA was known for bombings. The FLQ in Quebec also relied heavily on bombings in the 1960s and 1970s. Other groups focused on firearms, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and booby traps.

9/11 was a turning point. Before that, hijackers didn't intend to fly planes into buildings. During the peak of hijackings in the 1970s and 1980s—by Palestinian groups, Italian groups, and Japanese groups—they would take over a plane, fly it to Cuba, and demand something in return: the release of prisoners, money, political recognition, or even just media attention.

9/11 changed everything. The hijackers had no intention of landing in Cuba. They had no intention of surviving. Their goal was to crash those planes into buildings, killing themselves, the passengers, and everyone on the ground. That was unprecedented.

Interestingly, to my knowledge, we haven't seen a similar large-scale attack since when planes were deliberately flown into buildings. Instead, groups like ISIS adapted.

ISIS perfected what I call the "Nike form of terrorism"—*just do it*. You don't need an AK-47. You don't need to hijack a plane. Just look around your house. Do you have a machete? A

butcher block with a knife in it? Pick one up, go to a store, a synagogue, a mall—anywhere—and start stabbing people while yelling, "Allahu Akbar," or something similar.

Or get in your car and drive. When did we start seeing vehicles used as weapons in terrorist attacks? We saw it in 2006 when an Al-Qaeda sympathizer drove an SUV into pedestrians at the University of North Carolina. We saw it in 2016 when a terrorist in Nice, France, killed 86 people by driving a truck into a crowd. London. Berlin. Barcelona. It keeps happening.

This is why terrorism has evolved. It has become simpler, easier to carry out, and harder to detect in advance. That's the challenge security agencies are facing today.

To the best of my knowledge, only Islamist extremists use this kind of tactic. No other groups have adopted it in the same way.

For God's sake, we even saw a golf club used in 2018 at a Canadian Tire in Scarborough. A woman who was an ISIS wannabe—she got as far as Turkey before being turned back—returned to Canada, put an ISIS bandana around her head, walked into a Canadian Tire, picked up a golf club, and started swinging it at employees.

Who would consider a golf club a weapon of terror? If you've seen me golf—it's 'a weapon of terror' in my hands. I can't golf for shit. But a golf club is not normally seen as a weapon of terrorism.

What ISIS has done is say, "Use whatever you can. You don't have to be a rocket scientist for this. You don't need to build an IED."

Pressure cooker bombs—used in the Boston Marathon attack—can be made by anyone because the instructions are available online. That's why the couple in Victoria tried to use the same method to attack Canada Day in 2013. Thankfully, they were thwarted by the RCMP. We've entered an era where anything can be used as a weapon in an act of terrorism.

Jacobsen: What about cases where former extremists or terrorists leave their groups and begin working on deradicalization efforts? I recently was interviewing the head of a group organized to combat antisemitism. We discussed individuals who have left extremist groups and now help to deradicalize others. How effective are these methodologies? Does having a former extremist bolster the message?

Gurski: I have a very biased view of the national security world. My working assumption—correct or incorrect—is: Once a terrorist, always a terrorist.

Deradicalization programs have been the rage for the past 25 years. Most countries have at least one at some level. The basic idea behind them is that, with the help of a mentor, psychologist, social worker, healthcare worker, or religious counsellor, you can get someone to abandon the ideology they held as a terrorist.

Maybe you can. Maybe you can't.

The problem I—and many others—have identified is that a key distinction is rarely made: deradicalization versus disengagement.

- **Deradicalization** means the individual no longer holds the extremist ideology. They no longer believe in the cause. They won't advance it and might even advise others against it.
- **Disengagement** simply means they stop engaging in terrorist activities, but it does not necessarily mean they've abandoned the ideology.

The difference is critical. Disengagement is observable. If I stop walking to the library every morning, someone can notice that change.

But how do you observe deradicalization?

You can't. That's why counterterrorism efforts remain such a difficult challenge.

You take someone's word for it—unless you're conducting a polygraph or, my dear Star Trek fan, engaging in mind reading, a Vulcan mind meld, or something similar. You can never determine with absolute certainty that someone has truly deradicalized.

We have seen individuals who disengage and claim to have deradicalized but ultimately re-engage down the road, including here in Canada. I know of a well-known case involving a former member of the Toronto 18.

That was the terrorist plot uncovered in 2006, which I worked on. One of the individuals served his prison sentence and was released. About a year later, he stole his cousin's passport, changed the photo, and travelled to Somalia to join al-Shabaab. He was later killed in a terrorist attack. He had told the world, "Yes, I'm a good boy now. I don't believe in that ideology anymore. You can trust me." Yet, just twelve months later, he died carrying out a terrorist attack.

I appreciate the efforts people are making in the realm of deradicalization. However, having spent years on the front lines of counterterrorism while working for CSIS, I require an extraordinary amount of proof before accepting someone's claim that they no longer believe in the ideology that led them down that path in the first place. My working assumption is that they still pose a threat.

Jacobsen: In democratic societies, leadership tends to be cyclical—whether Conservative, Liberal, NDP, or otherwise. How do different political leaderships, depending on the party or leader, alter the country's stance on these issues?

Socially, some individuals may hold an overly optimistic or even naïve view of the capacity for change in those who commit these acts. In contrast, others adopt a more skeptical perspective regarding the potential for genuine reform.

Gurski: Well, I have bad news for you first. Across political lines, national security has never been a priority in Canada. No political leader discusses it. Nobody cares about it. It's not a vote-grabber. That's why you hear nothing about national security.

We are approaching an election in Canada, likely by 2025 at the latest, yet national security is completely absent from the conversation. The discourse is dominated by inflation, housing prices, tuition fees, and healthcare—everything except national security.

Canada lacks what I call an intelligence culture. By that, I mean that people do not understand the value of intelligence, its utility, or why it should be more effectively integrated into

policymaking and decision-making. We see this play out in real time with the foreign interference inquiry into China. The final report was released today, confirming what many of us already knew—intelligence was ignored.

Of course, I know it was ignored. We had been providing intelligence for decades, but no one was listening.

Does political leadership matter in this context? I don't think so. Conventionally, one might expect Conservatives to take a tougher stance on national security issues like counterterrorism, whereas Liberals might be more lenient. However, in Canada, it does not make a difference. That said, this particular iteration of the Liberal government has arguably been the worst in Canadian history regarding national security.

We cannot even discuss Islamist extremism in this country.

It's seen as a racist term, even though the rest of the world uses it. Yes. We have a government that is so deeply wedded to political correctness that we can't have honest conversations about threats to national security and public safety.

As you said, governments come and go all the time. We are well overdue for a change.

This government's best-before date expired long ago, and most Canadians recognize that. I have no idea if the Conservatives would be any better, as the polls seem to suggest. The Harper government wasn't significantly better at national security than the Trudeau government.

We need a government that understands national security and will allocate the resources and attention it deserves.

Jacobsen: How does the cultural response to terrorism differ between Canada and the United State, extending that commentary into government response, efficacy, and inaction?

Gurski: In my opinion—and in the opinion of many others who have worked in intelligence in Canada—we have a very immature, verging on nonexistent, intelligence culture in this country.

By the way, it wasn't always this way. During the Second World War, Canada had a robust intelligence culture, particularly within the Canadian military, and it served us well. That has changed for various reasons beyond the scope of this conversation.

The Americans, however, have a very mature intelligence culture. First, they have vastly more resources and personnel, and they take intelligence far more seriously. Intelligence plays a much greater role in decision-making and policymaking in the U.S. than it does here in Canada.

For example, Canada is not equivalent to the CIA. We are one of the few countries without a dedicated foreign intelligence service. CSIS is a domestic security intelligence service, although it can operate outside of Canada for national security. However, it does not collect foreign intelligence, defined as intelligence on the intentions and capabilities of foreign states.

The Communications Security Establishment (CSE) can collect foreign intelligence but only signals intelligence—it cannot collect human intelligence. Meanwhile, in the U.S., the FBI, CIA, and NSA (their signals intelligence agency, akin to Canada's CSE) and 17 other agencies comprise the U.S. intelligence community. We do not have that infrastructure in Canada.

Americans take intelligence and national security much more seriously. Part of that is because the U.S. has long embraced its role as the world's policeman, particularly since the end of the Second World War. However, we're seeing some changes under the current administration, and that role may be diminishing—stay tuned.

Another major difference between our two countries is that the U.S. has long had a much more significant problem with both far-right and far-left extremism.

Think of the Weather Underground, a far-left domestic terrorist group that sought to overthrow the government. Think of Antifa—some would argue it qualifies as a terrorist movement when it engages in violent activities. Then there's the range of neo-Nazi, white supremacist, and white nationalist groups operating in the U.S.

We have some of these groups in Canada, but they exist much less than they do in the United States. They're not nearly as serious. A good example would be the Proud Boys. The Proud Boys were created by a Canadian and played a role in the January 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol.

I don't think they have carried out any acts of violence per se—I could be wrong, but I don't follow the far right that closely. Canada has a Proud Boys chapter, which the Trudeau government listed as a terrorist entity the day after the U.S. Capitol attack.

The Proud Boys in Canada couldn't organize a piss-up in a bar if you gave them a hundred-dollar tab. They're useless. They're not violent. Do they have views that are un-Canadian—i.e., rude? Yes. But lots of people have rude opinions. That doesn't mean they have ever acted on them violently.

What I'm saying here is that, whether it's the far left or the far right, Americans have much more experience with politically motivated violence from both sides of the spectrum than we do in Canada. I would argue that many of the attacks labelled as "far right" here are more accurately classified as hate crimes rather than acts of terrorism, which are distinct under the Canadian Criminal Code.

Take the attack in London, Ontario, in 2021, where a man ran down a Pakistani Muslim family. That was a hate crime. It wasn't an act of terrorism, as far as I'm concerned, but many have disagreed with me. We've already talked about the incel movement before as well.

Those are hate crimes. Misogynistic hate crimes, yes—but not acts of terrorism, as far as I'm concerned. The two countries have very different ways of looking at national security, public safety, intelligence, and the scale of our problems.

Fun fact: When I retired from CSIS in 2015, the agency was on the verge of shutting down its far-right investigations desk because there was nothing to examine. We had spent years analyzing threats nationwide, and no one was worth worrying about.

That has changed. Think of the attack in Quebec City in January 2017. Again, whether it was a hate crime or terrorism is a fine line. But there's no question that far-right extremism has garnered more attention in the past few years than in the previous twenty-five years here in Canada.

That said, Islamist extremism is still, by far, the dominant form of violent extremism both here in Canada and worldwide. Think of the number of arrests made in the past eight months. We had a father and son in Toronto linked to ISIS. We had a Pakistani student on a visa, apparently attempting to travel to New York to kill Jews.

In the fall, there were arrests in Ottawa, Calgary, and Edmonton. The list goes on and on. These are all ISIS sympathizers or Islamist extremists. Islamist extremism still dominates both internationally and in Canada—although the government doesn't want you to know that because discussing it is considered "racist," which is ludicrous and highly inaccurate.

Jacobsen: What about copycats? One principle in media reporting on suicide, by analogy, is to limit coverage to avoid inspiring copycats. Does this rule hold for terrorist or extremist acts? Are there any principles the media should follow when reporting on these incidents?

Gurski: I've got bad news for people who espouse that view.

It's called the Internet. So if CBC, CTV, Global, Rebel News, or whatever media outlet decides not to report something—and you often hear, "We're not going to name the person, we don't want to give them importance. We don't want to make them sound bigger than they are"—well, sucks to be you, Shirley, because it's already all over the Internet on multiple platforms, social media included.

So, taking this high-minded stance of "We're not going to celebrate terrorism by naming the group or the individual"—great, congratulations on that. And a buck and a half will get you a cup of coffee at Tim's. Meanwhile, the entire Internet is already talking about it.

The Internet is a wonderful invention. When I started in intelligence a bazillion years ago, there was no Internet. It's fantastic for information, and spreading propaganda, disinformation, and misinformation. So this highly moralistic stance of We're not going to engage—sure, whatever.

It doesn't matter. The other day, I heard statistics about where Canadians, especially youth, get their news. Guess how many are watching CBC? They found three kids in Gander who still do—that's about it. Everyone else is getting their information from social media.

So, whatever state broadcasters or outlets like Global News decide to do on principle, it makes little difference.

Jacobsen: Regarding online spaces and the spread of information, disinformation, and misinformation—do intelligence professionals, generally speaking, feel cynical about the public's ability to parse truth from manipulation in cases like these?

Gurski: I don't know if I would call it cynicism. There's just an acceptance that there's not a lot you can do to stop it. The information is going to get out somehow.

The quickest way to make something popular is to ban it. Think of anything in history that was banned—prohibition in the 1920s made booze much more desirable.

You can't stop this stuff. But our saving grace, as I mentioned earlier, is that most people engaging with this kind of information—whether disinformation, propaganda, or extremist content—don't act on it. They're either cowards or incompetent.

So, yes, you worry about it. It keeps you up at night. But this is important, and I can't underscore it enough—look at Canadian history. What is the reason we've been a country for what now? Coming up on 158 years this July, since 1867.

Using the broadest possible definition of terrorism—including lethal acts where people have died—we've had maybe 20 actual terrorist incidents in 158 years.

What does that tell you? First, it tells you that terrorism in Canada is relatively infrequent compared to other types of crime. By contrast, in places like Somalia or Nigeria, you can't go 158 minutes without a terrorist attack. That's how rampant it is there.

We are incredibly fortunate in Canada, which is all the more reason not to embellish or overemphasize the issue. This whole war on terrorism concept? What a stupid idea.

That's been about as successful as the war on drugs. And I wrote an entire book on this in 2019—*An End to the War on Terrorism*. We need to stop using this terminology. It's not a useful way to frame things.

Yes, terrorism is real. Yes, it must be dealt with. But it remains a relatively infrequent occurrence. I don't see anything changing in the immediate future—at least not here in Canada.

I don't have a crystal ball. I don't know what will happen in five minutes, let alone five years from now. But suppose history is any indication of the immediate future. In that case, I don't see the groundwork being laid or conditions being created that would lead to a massive increase in terrorism anytime soon.

Jacobsen: What about the impacts on regular people? Terms like "white nationalist terrorism" and "Christian white nationalist terrorism" get thrown around. The same happens with "Islamist terrorism," but these terms are often conflated with broader categories. Many people don't have a precise definition of what they mean.

How does this overhyped rhetoric impact ordinary communities—whether it's rural Euro-Canadians or small-town Muslim communities?

Gurski: Right. That's a great point.

Unfortunately, as of January 2025—and frankly, for about the past ten thousand years—most people are not particularly bright. They don't understand nuance, and they don't understand definitions.

When I was with CSIS and Public Safety Canada, we took the time to define our terms carefully. When we talked about Islamist extremism, we explained exactly what it meant. We made it clear that this was distinct from Muslim terrorism or Islamic terrorism. We used Islamism for a reason, and once we explained it, most people appreciated the distinction.

The problem is that we can go to great lengths to use precise terminology and explain what it does and does not mean—but then a media source runs a headline like Muslim terrorism is a problem. And the average idiot in rural Saskatchewan—no offence to Saskatchewaners—sees that headline and concludes, Oh, well, that must mean the local mosque in Regina is responsible. Which, of course, is ridiculous.

Jacobsen: We love Saskatchewan here at *A Further Inquiry*.

Gurski: But that's exactly how misinformation spreads. Regardless of our terminology, people will always take it too far and do something stupid.

Let me give you a good example of this. Last year, there was an attack on a Taylor Swift-themed dance class in Southport, England. A young man, originally from Rwanda but born in Wales to Rwandan refugee parents, took a knife and stabbed 15 little girls, killing three and injuring a dozen more.

The police went out of their way to do two things:

1. They did not call it an act of terrorism.
2. They refused to name the suspect.

And they did that for exactly the reasons you just cited. They knew that if they called it terrorism, there would be riots. If it turned out the perpetrator was Muslim, mosques would be firebombed.

But guess what? There were riots in the streets anyway.

Shortly after, I was pinged on X by someone who followed me. They claimed to have the name of the attacker and told me he was a failed Syrian refugee who was pending deportation from the UK.

I wrote back and asked, "Where are you getting this from?" because I'm not seeing it anywhere else. I wanted to corroborate their information before drawing any conclusions. And he wouldn't get back to me.

As I said, I'm not publishing this. I work in intelligence, and information has to be corroborated from reliable sources. Otherwise, it's useless. It's like journalism—you verify your sources. But in the absence of reliable information, people make it up anyway. They drew their conclusion that the attacker was a Muslim kid.

Then, when the news came out that he was Rwandan, that took the wind out of their sails—until six months later when it was revealed that he was Muslim and had an al-Qaeda manual on his laptop. He had also experimented with making ricin.

Yet, the government still did not call it Islamist extremism—which, to me, is ludicrous because it was Islamist extremism. Yes, he was a messed-up kid. Yes, he had a history of violent behaviour. He had been in trouble at school, maybe had PTSD from Rwanda—who knows? There were all kinds of things going on in his head. But there was an Islamist element to what he did. His actions were consistent with jihadist ideology.

So why attack a Taylor Swift-themed dance class? Well, Taylor Swift is seen as a slut who dresses like a slut and sings. The Taliban has banned women from singing in Afghanistan. That tells you everything you need to know about how jihadists view women in music.

There were ideological links, so it didn't matter whether authorities named them or not—people would react.

If the police don't release the information, it spreads on social media within minutes. It was false information, but it made the rounds. As a result, mosques were attacked in England and Ireland.

Jacobsen: Any final thoughts?

Gurski: We need to get better at all of this. We need to get better at trusting our security intelligence agencies. Yes, they could always use more resources—but I'll give the government credit for funding them. The real issue? They need to take intelligence seriously. Otherwise, they could put a For Sale sign on CSIS.

Jacobsen: Thank you, Phil. Appreciate it.

Gurski: Yep. Stay in touch. If anything else comes up, let me know. Cheers.

Jacobsen: Cheers, Phil. Bye.

Arie Perliger on Far-Right Extremism, Counterterrorism, and Democratic Challenges

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Professor Arie Perliger discusses the evolution of far-right extremism in the U.S., highlighting its ideological diversity, decentralization, and increasing overlap with Christian fundamentalism and misogynistic narratives. He contrasts U.S. and Canadian far-right movements, noting their differing attitudes toward federal authority. Scott Douglas Jacobsen asks about extremist motivations, online platforms, and counterterrorism. Perliger critiques the erosion of democratic principles in counterterrorism policies, citing historical overreaches in Canada, the U.K., and the U.S. He argues that social media platforms, like X and Bluesky, have become echo chambers, limiting discourse. The discussion underscores democracy's struggle with balancing security and civil liberties.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Professor Arie Perliger, the director of the graduate program in security studies at the University of Massachusetts Lowell and a leading expert in counterterrorism and counter-extremism. He previously served as the director of counterterrorism studies at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, a renowned institution. For over 18 years, Professor Perliger has studied political violence, foreign extremism, and the agencies advising on security policy—such as the FBI, CIA, and U.S. military leadership. His research has been cited in more than 1,300 academic works and has informed policymakers and practitioners. He also contributes to public discourse through major media outlets, including *The New York Times*, the *BBC*, and *Newsweek*—those so-called legacy media outlets.

Given the current atmosphere of disrespect for expertise and for those who possess more than just superficial or Wikipedia-level knowledge, this series on counterterrorism and counter-extremism is both timely and important. Although there are many national differences, there are also many shared concerns. The ethical and social issues at stake are significant. Still, the nuances and facts need to be carefully sorted out.

Thank you for joining me today—I appreciate it. How have far-right extremist groups in the U.S. evolved in their tactics and recruitment strategies from 2010 to 2025?

Prof. Arie Perliger: There are several aspects to the changes we have observed in the landscape of far-right extremism in the United States. First, it is important to remember that this is an ideologically diverse landscape. While many assume it is a single, unified white power movement, that is untrue. There are substantial differences between groups. Some focus on promoting anti-government and anti-federal ideologies—concentrating on what they perceive as the tyrannical, oppressive, and intrusive nature of the federal government and its proxies. Their main aim is to protect the American people from what they consider the "big bad" federal government.

On the other hand, there exists an entire ecosystem of white supremacist, xenophobic, and nativist groups. These range from various neo-Nazi, accelerationist skinheads to more traditional KKK chapters spread across the country. In addition, we see groups and movements that blend

Christian fundamentalism with far-right ideology—whether they are Christian identity groups promoting white supremacism and anti-Semitism through their unique interpretations of religious texts or pro-life extremist groups that intensify their violent campaigns against the abortion industry using religious rhetoric.

It is important to remember that we are not discussing a single, unified entity. Although there have been instances of collaboration—such as during the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in 2017 and the events of January 6, 2021, when many different far-right groups came together—on a day-to-day basis, they continue to operate independently and maintain their own distinct online spaces.

The second important thing to acknowledge is that, in the 1960s, 1970s, and even the 1980s, many far-right groups were structured and hierarchical and had clearly identified leadership. There was also a level of formalization, whether through membership rosters, subscriptions, or other organizational structures.

However, over the last two or three decades, we have seen the gradual disintegration and transformation of the far-right into a host of decentralized communities. Rather than engaging in organized activism, these communities encourage individuals to operate independently and act independently. This shift goes beyond the concept of *leaderless resistance*, which was promoted in the 1990s by figures like Louis Beam. Instead, it aligns with what we might describe as a *direct action* philosophy—encouraging local, independent associations to take power into their own hands rather than waiting for orders from a centralized authority.

Environmental movements, which embraced direct action many years ago, have been a key inspiration for this model.

The last point I will make is that we are seeing a convergence of additional ideological motifs into far-right discourse. This includes:

- A growing embrace of openly misogynistic extremist narratives has enabled far-right groups to mobilize increasing numbers of young men.
- The fusion of American isolationism with perceptions of white supremacy and white exceptionalism.
- The adoption of specific economic policies they believe will benefit white people.

In short, these movements are increasingly willing to adopt and integrate new ideological narratives into their broader frameworks.

Jacobsen: There are a lot of American domestic terrorist groups:

- The Base
- The Seattle Mothman Division
- The Aryan Brotherhood
- Some factions within the Canadian Armed Forces
- The Boogaloo Movement

- The Oath Keepers
- The Proud Boys
- The Three Percenters

Perliger: Let's put it this way—many of these movements tend to disregard national borders, particularly between Canada and the U.S. For many of them, the same societal and political issues they perceive as problems in the U.S. also manifest in Canada.

There is, I would argue, a cross-pollination between far-right activity in both countries. However, one significant difference is that Canada does not have as strong an anti-federal, anti-government ideology as the American far-right. This is likely due to several factors, including:

1. The weaker central authority of the Canadian federal government compared to the U.S.
2. The more dispersed nature of political power in Canada.
3. The absence of a singular executive figure like a U.S. president makes it harder for far-right groups to coalesce around a narrative of tyranny.

That said, in nearly all other aspects, Canada significantly represents the same far-right groups we see in the U.S.

Jacobsen: If you were to take some of the groups above—anti-terrorist groups, black identity extremists, incels, anarchists, and far-left extremists—what are the common sociological threads among these groups of the perpetually disgruntled?

Perliger: It is crucial to distinguish between all these groups. Extremist misogyny, such as that found in incel subcultures and communities, represents a different type of societal threat and concern. The fact is that, for the most part, incel subcultures do not engage in the kind of violent activism that we see among other extremist groups.

However, we see this among environmental extremist groups, where direct action and open activism are encouraged. These groups often share an ethos similar to far-right groups—challenging the government, provoking government authorities, and attempting to delegitimize federal agencies and their proxies through on-the-ground activism.

For example, you may recall the Cliven Bundy standoff with agents of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the United States. This conflict arose over grazing rights, as Bundy allowed his cattle to graze on federal lands without paying the required fees. The federal government argued that he needed to pay for grazing the land, which led to a prolonged conflict. Bundy stood his ground, eventually escalating into a standoff reminiscent of Waco.

Similarly, far-left extremist environmental groups often confront federal agencies to promote their eco-ideology. This can take the form of disrupting activities by federal and local agencies, sabotaging initiatives by the energy sector, or interfering with tourism industries that they believe are harming the environment.

While these groups may differ ideologically, we do see some similarities. One major commonality is a profound lack of trust in and animosity toward the central government. Across

these movements, there is a shared belief that centralized power is inherently ineffective and dysfunctional and does not represent the interests of the people. Many also believe governments actively seek ways to undermine civil liberties and constitutional rights.

In that sense, these groups have a similar approach to the federal government.

Jacobsen: Speaking of the federal government—this is a two-parter.

The first part: The non-employee employee of DOGE made a gesture twice, moving his hand forward and backward from chest to right-side high in an arc. What is your interpretation of that gesture—both in terms of what it is or is not and symbolically? The second part is more substantive than cultural commentary: Do these groups seek to amplify their visibility by making prominent gestures, and do people interpret those actions as emboldening themselves? The first part is important to get an expert opinion on. Still, the second part is even more important—how these movements interpret such gestures and actions.

Perliger: Yes. What Elon Musk did *looks* like a Nazi salute. I don't know if that was his intention—only he knows. But it *does* look like one, and people's concerns about it are valid. You cannot be intellectually honest and dismiss that possibility outright.

Figures like Musk—and, on a different level, Donald Trump and others—are so popular on the far right because they are doing exactly what I mentioned earlier. They are challenging the traditional sources of power within the federal government. They are perceived as *emissaries*—individuals who can bring this ideology into government and dismantle those elements of the state that far-right groups view as untrustworthy, overreaching, or disloyal to what they see as constitutional principles.

That is why, when Trump was elected for the first time, the far right was elated. They believed they had finally placed "one of their own" in the White House. If you examine Trump's policy steps during his first three weeks in office, many were directly linked to cultural and social priorities that resonate deeply with the far-right base. These include:

- The dismantling of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives.
- The rejection of what he labelled "radical gender ideology."
- The aggressive dismantling of certain power bases within the federal government.
- The dramatic expansion of harsh immigration policies.

All of these policies align directly with predominant themes in far-right discourse. He knows exactly what he is doing—prioritizing the most visible and polarizing policy issues that will solidify his base among the far right.

Furthermore, the hyper-masculine tone and culture he promotes strongly appeal to groups like the Proud Boys, among others. These groups believe that many of society's dysfunctions are the result of hostility toward men and the marginalization of traditional masculinity. This narrative fits perfectly into their worldview.

What Trump has done in these first three weeks has been about solidifying his base. I cannot predict what he will do over the next three years and 49 weeks. But for now, everything he does

is a source of elation and celebration for the far right. If you examine far-right message boards, forums, and chats, their sentiment is clear—they believe they are "living the dream" right now.

From defunding liberal academic initiatives to enforcing stricter immigration policies, Trump is delivering exactly what they have been hoping for. Whether this approach will resonate beyond the far-right base and appeal to the broader center-right remains uncertain. But within the far-right ecosystem, they see these past three weeks as "Christmas come early."

Jacobsen: The Proud Boys claim to be all about Christ, yet they ignore the biblical proverb, *Pride goeth before a fall.* Now, regarding X—formerly known as Twitter. How would you characterize its user base and commentary style?

Perliger: First, we often forget that all the social media platforms we use and form attachments to are private companies. Whether it's TikTok, Instagram, or Facebook, these platforms are privately owned entities. They can operate however they choose.

So, every time I hear an outcry about how awful X has become, my response is: What exactly do you do when your local supermarket raises its prices? You go to a different supermarket. You go somewhere else. If you need to expose yourself on social media every day, that's a different issue altogether. Now, regarding X—its algorithm has become awful. It is nearly impossible to find content that interests you.

Beyond that, there are several problems with X. The platform has now become much more of a breeding ground for extremists and radical fringe voices, which are gaining far more visibility than before. For example, Alex Jones has become significantly more prominent on X. Even if you never follow him or express interest in his content, it still finds its way into your feed. So, it's clear that elements of X's algorithm have become problematic.

Additionally, there is now virtually zero moderation across the platform regarding problematic content. That being said, I don't understand why people are so angry about it. No one is forcing anyone to stay on X. Maybe people will find more productive things to do with their time instead of being on the platform.

Finally, I've noticed this migration to Bluesky, and that's fine—I even have a Bluesky account. But honestly, Bluesky is just the same thing on the other side. It's an endless stream of people on the left patting each other on the back.

So, if X has become an echo chamber for the right, then Bluesky has become an echo chamber for the left. And frankly, both of them are incredibly boring. They lack space for real debate, the exchange of ideas, intellectual challenge, and exposure to new perspectives. Without that, they are just places where people hear their own opinions repeated back to them over and over again. It's boring.

Jacobsen: How do you balance counterterrorism strategies with democratic values, institutions, and freedom?

Perliger: Scott, we've been studying this issue for nearly 60 years and still don't have a good answer. I think it's clear that every country—every democracy, more accurately—is constantly trying to find the right balance between maintaining its democratic principles and ensuring its

legitimacy on the one hand while, on the other, continuing to provide the most important public good: security and safety.

We all understand that these two objectives are, on some level, contradictory. In democracies, most citizens accept that they need to give up some of their freedoms to ensure reasonable safety and security. For example, we surrender certain privacy rights at airports because we understand these measures ultimately make us safer.

So, it is always about finding the right balance, which is what most countries attempt to do. The main challenge, however—especially in the realm of counterterrorism—is that terrorism is primarily a form of psychological warfare. Because of that, terrorism is most effective when it triggers overreaction, distorts public perception of the threat, or leads to biased decision-making.

As a result, many governments tend to overreact to terrorism, and in doing so, they risk undermining their own political culture and democratic traditions—ultimately benefiting the terrorists themselves. That is the real challenge.

Most countries, especially Western democracies, are grappling with this challenge, and how they respond often depends on political orientation, historical context, and legal traditions.

Take Germany, for example. Due to its history, Germany enforces stricter limits on free speech than other Western nations. This is because free speech was once used to promote extreme ideologies that led to some of the worst crimes in human history. As a result, German law criminalizes possession of *Mein Kampf*, and even displaying Nazi symbols in certain contexts can lead to imprisonment. Unlike in the U.S., where you might receive a fine for such actions, in Germany, you could end up in jail. These significant restrictions are embedded in the German constitution as a direct response to history.

In contrast, the United States, with its strong emphasis on the First Amendment, does not impose such restrictions. However, the U.S. employs other tactics—particularly through its international reach—to implement undemocratic measures against those it considers threats to national security. For example, as we speak, illegal immigrants are being held in Guantanamo Bay. And let's not forget about the various black sites that still exist for intelligence and security purposes.

The key takeaway is that every democracy has, at some point, dramatically overreached and violated its core democratic principles.

Take Canada, for example. In October 1970, the Canadian government placed an entire province under martial law. You may remember that Trudeau's father imposed martial law in Canada. An entire province was placed under martial law, leading to mass arrests and extreme violations of freedom of movement and freedom of association. Yes, I'm talking about millions of people essentially locked down in their homes. Thousands were arrested—all because the government was unable to handle an organization that, at most, consisted of a few hundred members. Yes, I'm referring to the FLQ Crisis of 1970.

Similarly, we can look at what the British did in Northern Ireland—engaging in political assassinations and extreme human rights violations when dealing with the conflict there. No

democracy has not, at some point, overreached and violated its fundamental principles in the name of security.

No liberal democracy is immune from the temptation to overreact or overreach. The real test is whether these democracies can learn from their mistakes and recalibrate, ensuring that, for the most part, they maintain their democratic ethos and culture.

Or, to use a more recent example—what exactly did Trudeau do to those truckers? Yes, the government shut down their bank accounts. Even Trudeau himself would likely admit today that this was an overreaction.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Arie.

Afghan Diaspora in Toronto: Advocacy, Feminism, and the Fight for Freedom

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The Fahim Dashi Foundation, established in memory of the late Afghan journalist and National Resistance Front spokesperson Fahim Dashty, is a Toronto-based non-profit organization dedicated to supporting press freedom and civil society initiatives. **Marwa Dashti** highlights Canada's role and potential in advocating for Afghan rights, urging deeper commitments aligned with its feminist foreign policy. She draws a distinction between reform-driven feminism in the West and resistance-based feminism in Afghanistan. Dashti emphasizes the shared responsibility of men and the global community in challenging the regime. She underscores the urgency of storytelling, the role of historians, and the stark contrast between life in Toronto and life under authoritarian rule.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: From a Canadian, particularly Torontonian, perspective, the Afghan diaspora is significant. Since August 2021, Canada has resettled over 55,000 Afghans through programs for government-affiliated individuals and vulnerable populations. Toronto has the country's largest Afghan community, with more than 54,000 Afghan Canadians in Ontario as of the 2016 Census. Afghan Women's Organization and the Afghan Association of Ontario offer key settlement services. Groups like Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan focus on education and human rights. What do you think of this?

Marwa Dashti: The Afghan community in Canada has been very active, and I'm grateful for that. I also recognize that the Canadian government has been supportive—they've accepted many refugees and provided platforms for us to advocate for our country.

But there is still more that can be done. As a country that champions a feminist foreign policy, Canada has the capacity—and I believe the responsibility—to do more. Whether it is through sustained diplomatic pressure, increased humanitarian aid, or stronger support for Afghan-led civil society efforts in exile, there is room to grow.

Jacobsen: When you see Afghan women fighting for their rights—whether in exile, in-country, or regionally, such as through the United Nations—how would you compare and contrast that with how women in Canada fight for their rights? In other words, how should people calibrate the level of urgency and fire in their belly that they bring to activism?

Dashti: I've said this before, but I will say it again—because it is important.

In Western countries, feminism is primarily about gaining rights within the state's framework. It is about reforming laws, policies, and institutions that already exist. But in Afghanistan, feminism is about challenging the regime's existence. It is not reform—it is resistance.

That is an entirely different kind of fight. It comes with unimaginable risks—threats, imprisonment, torture, and even death. And yet, Afghan women are still doing it. They are showing a level of courage that is inspiring and, quite honestly, unprecedented in many parts of the world.

So, when people in countries like Canada fight for their rights, I think it's essential to maintain perspective. That does not mean their causes are invalid—rather, we must recognize that some people are fighting under open authoritarianism, without legal protections, and with everything at stake.

Jacobsen: Where do you think Canadians believe they have achieved gender parity but have not? And where do they believe they do not have parity, but they actually do? In other words, how do you view miscalibrations in the public understanding of gender equality—where people might be misreading the situation?

Dashti: Honestly, I am not the right person to answer that.

I have not lived in Canada long enough to analyze those aspects properly. Even during my time here, I've been deeply focused on countries like Afghanistan and Iran because the urgency is so great.

Unfortunately, I do not feel qualified to assess gender parity trends in Canada in that level of detail.

Jacobsen: What is the role of men in fighting against the regime that has taken over Afghanistan? This is not just a women's war. It affects everyone. So what is the responsibility and role of Afghan men—and men more broadly?

Dashti: You are absolutely right. This is not just a women's fight.

Yes, women face a uniquely severe form of oppression in Afghanistan, which is why the world's attention rightly focuses on them. But men have also been stripped of their rights. Many men are also living in fear, under threat, and suffering.

Let's be honest: when it comes to the international community, the majority of decision-makers and policymakers are still men.

That means men must also be part of the solution. Whether in positions of power abroad or as allies and advocates within Afghan communities, men must speak up, stand with women, and resist the regime. Change will not happen unless everyone is involved.

So yes, if most of the decision-makers are men, then, of course, their role is going to be very important in shaping the future of Afghanistan. Men must be part of this conversation—not just in Afghanistan, but globally—especially when they are the ones in positions of institutional and political power.

Jacobsen: What organizations or associations have been important in the fight for equality in Afghanistan?

Dashti: Thankfully, many organizations are doing critical work in Afghanistan to support human rights and women's rights.

One of the most impactful has been Vital Voices. They've helped evacuate many at-risk individuals from Afghanistan, including journalists and women leaders.

Several smaller, local organizations are also doing their best under impossible conditions. The Dashti Foundation has consistently worked with the Global Foundation, which has supported us across multiple events and projects.

We also have organizations like Reporters Without Borders, which continue to advocate for press freedom. So, on both ends—internationally and locally—there are groups stepping up to help in any way they can.

Jacobsen: Do you think enough stories are being told about Afghanistan right now?

Dashti: No—not at all.

The cruel reality is that Afghan people do not have a platform to raise their concerns. The international spotlight has moved on. It shifted too quickly to other territories, so we have lost much of the global attention we desperately need.

We do not even have the space to speak about these issues—let alone to choose how we want those stories to be told, in our voices, with our cultural nuances and lived experiences.

Jacobsen: Who else, besides journalists, can help tell these stories? I mean those who can help characterize Afghanistan's emotional and cultural texture—not just factual reports or survival narratives, but something that captures the colours, sounds, and feelings of living under Taliban rule.

Dashti: Historians will play a major role in the storytelling of this era.

Because the fight in Afghanistan right now is not just about surviving oppression—it is about ensuring that history remembers. It is about making sure the world knows that there were people —women, journalists, students, educators—who resisted.

Some stood up for justice, even when it was taken from them.

Jacobsen: What stands out most about Torontonian life, contrasting your experiences in Pakistan, Albania, or Kabul?

Dashti: Oh—I would say the biggest difference is the Freedom.

Here in Toronto, you feel a sense of stability. You can walk outside without fear, speak your mind, organize, study, and plan a future.

That sense of normalcy, of just being able to live, is something I will never take for granted. Because I know what it feels like to live without it.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Marwa.

BN SeaCon 2024, Revival of Reason 2025, and Community

2025-04-28

Mandisa Thomas, president of Black Nonbelievers Inc., discussed the success of *BN SeaCon 2024*, highlighting its vibrant community, inspiring speakers, and positive attendee feedback. She praised Labadee as a standout port and emphasized the importance of early registration for *BN SeaCon 2025*. Thomas introduced *Revival of Reason 2025*, a secular gathering focusing on activism, justice, and community building. It featured speakers like Mubarak Bala and performances from *Godless Gospel*, the event aims to empower nonbelievers. She stressed the need for continued support, engagement, and optimism in the secular movement, urging participation in upcoming initiatives to strengthen the community.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Mandisa Thomas. She is the president and founder of Black Nonbelievers Inc. She is based in Atlanta, in the United States. It has been a few months since we last talked, and a lot has happened—both in the movement generally and in the work you have been doing. So, first things first, we will start on a high note and try to end on a high note as well. How was BN SeaCon 2024?

Mandisa Thomas: It was fantastic Scott, thank you for asking! We had a complete program featuring Chris Cameron, author of *Black Freethinkers*, Teddy Reeves, the religion curator at the National Museum of African American History and Culture. We screened the film *God Talk*, which featured me and other BN members.

We also featured Kristie Puckett, an abolitionist from Charlotte, North Carolina, Candace Gorham and Deana Williams. Deana and Chris are now on the BN board, and we discussed organizational updates and improvements.

All of our cruise conventions are great, but this one, in particular, felt especially inspiring. It fostered strong community building, and attendees truly appreciated that. Many of the attendees expressed excitement about returning.

This was our first time sailing with Royal Caribbean, on the *Independence of the Seas*, and while it is one of their older ships, it was very state-of-the-art. People liked their accommodations, the food, and the nice conference room. The ship's onboard activities were great too.

Jacobsen: What was the feedback from participants, and how were the speakers and keynotes received?

Thomas: Oh, wow, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Everyone had a fantastic time, and the overall sentiment was that the experience was enjoyable and rewarding. There were varying opinions on the ship's features and amenities, but everyone enjoyed the speakers and sessions. We also received rave reviews on the organization of the event itself, which was truly appreciated.

As far as the speakers, many topics were covered, including justice for incarcerated individuals and reproductive health. Chris Cameron talked about his journey from being incarcerated to

becoming a professor and an atheist. Alfred "Dragnauct" Mimms discussed how to debate Christian creationists, and Candace Gorham led us with some mindfulness meditation.

We also hosted one of our *After Dark* sessions, where we unpacked sex and sexuality, especially given the incoming Presidential administration. We always have dinner together in the ship's main dining room, which leads to great conversations, and some impromptu planning. For example, one night, a group of us went to see the ice skating show that was featured.

Jacobsen: If you had to rank your ports of call, would it be Miami, Labadee, or Falmouth?

Thomas: My number one was Labadee, it was fantastic! At the beginning of the year, people were worried about visiting that port because of the political unrest that arose in Haiti. There was so much going on that people were understandably concerned.

There were some cancellations to Labadee earlier in the year, however, because Labadee is a private port operated by Royal Caribbean. When I tell you it was beautiful, I genuinely mean it. The port provided an opportunity to learn about the history of that part of Haiti and the local people. It is very well maintained; the beaches, landscape, and everything about it was stunning.

I'm glad they kept Labadee as part of the itinerary. By the time we arrived, concerns about the unrest had eased, and it was clear that the port was very safe. It is well-secured and separate from the rest of the island, with the unrest occurring hundreds—if not thousands—of miles away.

Everyone who got off the ship was pleased with Labadee. The experience was breathtaking, and I gave it a five-star rating.

Jacobsen: For those who want to attend in 2025—which is approaching faster than people think—what should they keep in mind about pricing, attendance, and early bird registration?

Thomas: BN SeaCon will return in 2025, and we will sail on the *Carnival Horizon*. We have sailed on that ship twice before, and it is amazing.

It is always best to make your deposit early. We have had some challenges with the booking link because we are trying to make it easier for those who want to book with double occupancy—whether with partners or family members. There have been a few hiccups, but we have fixed them.

When we send out updates about what to expect for the cruise, we ask attendees to review them carefully. We must also always check the guidelines and regulations of the cruise line and the expectations set by BN. We want everyone to have a wonderful and fulfilling experience and strive to make the event as inclusive and welcoming as possible.

While not everyone will necessarily get along, the experience is so engaging that many attendees form lifelong friendships and connections. It is also important to consider the extra packages. The initial fare includes your cabin and convention registration, but additional expenses—such as Wi-Fi, beverage, and decor packages—should be considered when planning the trip.

It is an undertaking, and the financial aspect should be planned throughout the year. That is why it is always best to book, register, and budget in advance.

One important feature of cruising is that you can pay incrementally, which is how we structure our format. However, it is also essential to understand that there are associated costs for an organization that fundraises and hosts speakers. That being said, it is worth it.

We also strive to make it affordable and prepare attendees as much as possible. No one is ever left without information or support if needed. That is what we try to ensure—an all-inclusive, informative, and supportive experience.

Jacobsen: And one quick final note on that. Over the past several months, the movement has had natural hiccups. Mistakes happen, and personalities play a role, but I want to focus less on personalities and more on community. You spoke about the lifelong friendships people can make through a simple cruise. What is the importance of re-centering our movements on community rather than placing too much emphasis on personalities?

Thomas: I think personalities are a part of community—we cannot escape that. However, communities must incorporate a variety of elements. Focusing on the people, the issues we face, and how we address them together is crucial. And we must be careful not to prop up individuals to a standard of absolute perfection—otherwise, we risk becoming the institutions we criticize.

We would do ourselves a disservice by failing to recognize that, while there are many leaders in this movement, leadership comes with responsibility. While issues should be addressed, we must also be mindful of how we approach them and the severity of each situation.

We must not become unnecessarily punitive, especially toward individuals dedicated to the community and creating positive change. Of course, if someone is not acting in good faith, that is a different discussion. However, we should also uplift those focused on the community's well-being.

I consider myself a personality to a large extent—people enjoy engaging with me, working with me, and appreciate my overall approach. However, my personality should never overshadow accountability, nor should unrealistic expectations be placed on any individual. We must ensure everyone has the proper support to do the necessary work.

Ultimately, the community should focus on people, resources, and collaboration. If there are strong personalities within said community, their actions should align with their influence, ensuring that their leadership remains rooted in genuine support and commitment to the movement.

Jacobsen: On other eventful, happy news, *Revival of Reason 2025* happened before the 2025 cruise. What can you tell us about the *Revival of Reason*? Why is there a growing need for this kind of conference or event compared to other sociopolitical moments?

Thomas: Yes, the *Revival of Reason* plays on the idea of a traditional church revival or gathering. Typically, those events involve a weekend of music, food, song, and dance centred around worship and serving the church. However, we created the *Revival of Reason*, partly because of today's political landscape.

We are witnessing the effects of Christian nationalism in the current presidential administration in the United States, and that is a significant concern. At the same time, people need to understand that organizations and communities exist where they can stay involved and engaged.

It was also an opportunity for attendees to learn about the work of Black Nonbelievers and our allies—those who support our mission. It was a chance to connect with fellow community members, especially when so many are experiencing despair. We wanted people to know that joy is still possible, that meaningful connections are still out there, and that there is a community advocating for evidence-based practices and solutions rooted in justice.

The event will also provide a space to connect with community creatives, activists, and others. And, of course, we had fun. There was learning, singing, dancing, access to resources, discussions on marginalized groups' challenges, and strategies for working together as a community. It was a time to emphasize the importance of supporting our organization to uplift those who need us most.

Jacobsen: How are you doing? How are you feeling so far in the new year?

Thomas: It's always a roller coaster ride, but so far, I'm good.

Jacobsen: Regarding the *Revival of Reason* speakers, who were they, and what topics didthey be covering?

Thomas: Our keynote speaker will be activist Mubarak Bala, joining us virtually from Nigeria. For those who are not familiar, he was recently freed from prison after being charged and convicted of blasphemy, with his conviction later overturned. He has since been released, and we were fortunate enough to secure him as a speaker.

We had Candace Gorham, Chris Cameron, and Jeremiah Camara. Additionally, the *Godless Gospel* ensemble performed, featuring myself, Cynthia McDonald—who was a speaker—Nikki G from the Black Religious Trauma Network, and Shelley Segal as one of our performers. Tenzen, a BN member, participated.

We had Crea Santa from the Emory Secular Student Alliance at Emory University. The event featured a *Spades* tournament, a cookout, a homecoming ball, and a service project.

Jacobsen: What were your hopes regarding attendance, and key takeaways from the event?

Thomas: We realized that the Atlanta area was busy that weekend, with the Atlanta Auto Show taking place simultaneously. However, we were confident people would make time for *Revival of Reason* because of its importance.

The key takeaway is that Black Nonbelievers is still building back better. We have continued our work and have been improving and refining it with the same—if not more tremendous—enthusiasm and commitment to liberation that we have always championed.

We want people to know that we need support for this vital work. Whether through volunteering, donating, or becoming an official member—which we now actively encourage—we hope people see that our community is still vibrant. Black Nonbelievers is a thriving organization, and it will continue to grow stronger as more people get involved, support one another, and work together.

Jacobsen: Is there anything else we should consider as the year progresses? Legal and political challenges are ahead, but are there more positive things we can look forward to?

Thomas: Absolutely. I encourage people to get involved with their local communities and organizations. If an event resonates with you, please attend and support them, events like the upcoming BNSeaCon and recent the *Revival of Reason*. And if you cannot attend in person, you can still participate virtually.

It is also important to remember that many are still working on the ground, advocating on our behalf. Do not give up. Even in difficult times, know that there are communities out there to support you. We are all working together, and that is what matters.

Jacobsen: Mandisa, thank you very much for your time today. I appreciate it.

Thomas: All right. Thank you.

Jacobsen: Take care. Bye.

Thomas: You too. Bye-bye.

Old Nick

2025-05-04

When I was a teenager, because I was a difficult kid, I was kicked out of the house for a few months. I got to know, befriend, and like old people more than young people of my cohort. Now, I like mentoring the young, from time to time, and befriending the old, still more.

When I was a teen, also, I worked a bit in construction at a truss factory and in construction with my alcohol misusing father. There was an old man, named Nick: l call him, “Old Nick”—because I’ve always called him Old Nick—who mentored me. We worked side-by-side; or, rather, I worked by his side.

I helped him. I matched his pace. He taught me. I learned, not everything, from him. Construction sites are interesting. They’re dirty.

There’s gravel.

There’s wood.

There’s rebar, rubble, and concrete.

There’s plastic, hard and flowy soft, from packaging, strewn on the property.

There are ‘hard’ hats.

There are belts.

There are hammers, forklifts, cranes, scissor lifts.

There’re frames, concrete forms.

There’re alcoholics, substance misusers, or just drunks and junkies.

There’re regulars, part-timers, life restarters, newcomers, crusty master craftsman, and just plain old labourers and safety inspectors and formans.

Maybe, they show up on time. Maybe, they show up all day. Maybe, they work.

Maybe, they don’t, in each case.

Men, some, raised by the bottle and a back of a hand.

The type who verbally inverted and made an emotionally abusive introject.

Old Nick *seemed* to come out of this tradition. The idea being: Suck it up, hammer that nail, next.

Nick’s routine was simple: Smokes, banana at lunch, green tea, more smokes, go home.

His pace was slow.

His slow was methodical, like drying concrete. It just form-fit to the pace of that particular day.

I loved listening to his words. They were paced, respectful, tinged with embers of regret at times. A sort of “this is it” of sentiment. Then the smoke would rise from his lips.

He was divorced, estranged from his kids at the time. He had had a substance misuse problem, regarding alcohol. If he was of the time, and of that subculture, a hard life, he would be someone who drank beer, regular beer, whether a IPA or a darker like a Guinness.

Yet, when I met him, I could not tell such a thing happening in the past, certainly not in the present.

He was the ember. His skin cracked like embers rumbled.

I appreciated his mentorship at the time. The opportunity to work with him. Construction was hard, and worth it—though wasn't great at it. We would talk about the work at hand, and then occasionally about other things.

I learn about the estrangement. I asked if he had any regrets. The body told the story he was unwilling to confront. I worked on and off with him for many months and on more than one worksite. I finished working in construction.

I moved onto other endeavours. It was increasingly a distant memory, but important to reflect upon as a life developmental stage. Everyone should do hard labour for a period of time in youth. If too late in life, then it's unlikely to express the beneficial effects upon the core psyche.

They remain air people, only.

I've worked as a janitor, farm hand, ranch hand, dishwasher, food prepper, landscaper, gardener, busser, cashier, etc. All essential life lessons can be gathered from this. But life goes on. I've contemplated death in walks through cemetery in my old town as a child, as a teenager, as an adult. You get value in those lessons too.

Then I was at a funeral years later.

Who was there? Old Nick. I asked him. Something like this.

"How are you, old man?"

"Good, you?"

"Been better, a death, you know?"

"Sure, of course."

[Innocent naughty jokes and banter.]

"Shhhh! Scotty… you're not supposed to tell them!"

[Laughter, about to leave—passing recollection]

"Hey…Nick, did you ever reconcile?" (With his kids)

[Pause.]

"…yeah."

He seemed to have lied. His body told the truth.

That's a pity.

It’s life.

Eventually, rebar rusts, and concrete cracks, too.

So thanks, Nick—between banana, smokes, and embers—you gave some of what little you had, to me. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

You weren’t always old. You saw.

A Prayer

2025-05-16

Do you ever see a puppy stare at the front door,
at the top of the stairs, awaiting a parent?
Do you ever wish for something to happen,
randomly on a walk, unrelated to the moment?
The puppy will wait,
for hours.
Some prayer is a wish-to-happen.
When we call for the dead,
it’s not for hours,
but a lifetime.
We are puppies,
and we walk down the steps through life to that,
damn door.

Neurodivergent, Not Broken: Rethinking Support, Accountability, and Authentic Growth

2025-05-16

Dr. Matt Zakreski emphasizes that neurodivergent individuals are not broken neurotypicals but uniquely wired people requiring tailored support. He contrasts Canada's flexible, individualized approach with the U.S.'s rule-bound systems, underscoring the importance of equity—not uniformity—in education and development. Zakreski critiques the misuse of identity labels to avoid accountability and encourages adaptive support based on process, not perfection. He advocates for knowledge as empowerment, shifting from stigma to informed compassion. Emphasizing the role of stereotype threat, he calls for environments where authenticity can thrive. Children need flexible systems and high, compassionate standards to become grounded, resilient adults.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How are neurodivergent people, *not* broken neurotypical people? What is the misunderstanding there in the public mind?

Dr. Matt Zakreski: There is a core misunderstanding that there is a "right" way to engage with the world. However, that is just not true. Some ways are easier or more widely accepted—but not inherently better.

Society is primarily built by and for neurotypical people. About 80% of the population is neurotypical. So, when you are neurodivergent, you often operate outside the default design. That does not mean you are wrong. However, it *can* tell youthat you are at odds with how others expect things to be done.

Those odds do not have to lead to conflict or isolation but can lead to *friction*. That is where support becomes crucial.

We need to help neurodivergent people understand *the rules and* how to engage with them in ways that feel most authentic and manageable for them. That is not the same as saying, "You need to change who you are." It is more like, "Here are some skills that will help you navigate this moment."

Once that moment has passed, if they want to return to their fully authentic selves, we *honour* that. The goal is adaptive functionality, not forced conformity.

Jacobsen: How do America and Canada differ in their approaches to supporting neurodivergent individuals as they develop from childhood through adolescence?

Zakreski: One of the things I have always respected about Canada is that Canadians seem more inclined to recognize and accommodate individual developmental journeys. I am a big hockey fan, so think about Sidney Crosby or Connor McDavid—they are given that special dispensation to play in the juniors early. Why? Because they were ready.

Moreover, that is the essence of good neurodivergence support: finding the right-sized fit for the right kind of challenge. It is partly operational, but at its heart, it is philosophical. It is a

commitment to honouring a person's unique growth path and doing what it takes to help that path unfold.

In the U.S., we pride ourselves on rugged individuality but are also extremely rule-bound. I cannot tell you how often I have spoken with neurodivergent students in the U.S. who need something different—a more advanced math class or a different approach to writing—and the system says, "No. This is how we do it."

In my experience with Canadian educators, especially those who work with neurodivergent kids, the attitude is often, "Let us see what we *can* do to meet this student's needs."

Moreover, that is a huge difference. Because if you are willing to think outside the box, you are automatically better positioned to serve "outside the box" kids.

Jacobsen: How do we prevent that from overextending into *pandering*?

Zakreski: That is such a great question. Are you familiar with the Yerkes–Dodson Law?

Jacobsen: Oh yeah—the Yerkes–Dodson curve. Absolutely.

Zakreski: So here is the thing: almost every intervention I design is rooted in the idea behind the Yerkes–Dodson Law. The goal is to find the *right level* of stimulation or challenge—that "leading edge of learning," as I call it.

When something is too easy, people disengage. When it is too hard, they shut down. However, you can achieve engagement, growth, and resilience if you hit that sweet spot.

So, no, giving kids the right opportunities is *not* pandering. We are not lowering expectations—we are calibrating the level of challenge. If we are targeting that optimal zone, we almost *cannot* pander to them. We are pushing them just enough to grow while still supporting them as they stretch.

If a kid says, "I am smarter—I need better math. Give me better math," and we say, "Okay, let us do that," then the kid struggles and cannot keep up, so we often remove them from that setting.

However, those services—those accommodations—should not be seen as badges of honour. They are not awards. It is not about prestige. It is a matter of equity.

Everyone should get what they need.

Gifted kids, neurodivergent kids—they are not better. They are different. Moreover, the goal is not to reward someone for being different. It is to right-size the challenge so that each student is in a place where they can grow and thrive.

Jacobsen: In practice—clinical practice, specifically—how do you "measure twice and cut once"? How do you assess and then tailor support accordingly?

Zakreski: You start with the person's interests.

Let us say Sally is a high-level musician. I know music matters to her, so I begin by exploring *music-based interventions*. I asked her, "What does success in music look and feel like to you?"

Does it mean playing Carnegie Hall in New York City? Does it mean attending Juilliard? Does it mean becoming a tenured professor at McGill University in Montreal?

Jacobsen: That is right. You have your Canadian references in order.

Zakreski: Of course! I do this. I am ready for the quiz.

Jacobsen: Okay then—quiz time. Who said, "The medium is the message"?

Zakreski: That is Marshall McLuhan.

Jacobsen: Correct. 100 points. Gold star. What was Glenn Gould known for playing, and which composer was he most famous for interpreting?

Zakreski: Oof—I do not think I know that one. I will model my *intellectual humility*here and admit there is a gap.

Jacobsen: Gould was a classical pianist best known for his interpretations of Bach. When he visited the Soviet Union, people were so in awe of his technical and emotional mastery that they asked questions like, "Is it a machine? No—it is a man," which echoed Superman-like mythologizing.

Zakreski: That is wild. I love it.

Jacobsen: Okay, let us pivot back. In clinical work, have you ever had a situation where a neurodivergent child shows their divergence in verbal reasoning or verbal ability, and you model something nonverbally—without explicitly stating that is what you are doing?

Zakreski: Yes, absolutely. There is a famous psychological study—I am 90% sure it came out of Yale. If needed, I can fact-check that. Malcolm Gladwell references it in his book *Blink*.

The core idea is that Western culture is exceptionally verbal. So, people with advanced verbal skills are often disproportionately elevated—socially, academically, and even professionally—compared to those with strengths in problem-solving, lateral thinking, or engineering/STEM domains.

So, when working with neurodivergent kids, especially those with expressive or receptive language challenges, I often model emotional regulation, problem-solving, or curiosity through nonverbal behaviour without paying attention. Over time, many kids pick up on this, integrate it, and reflect it in ways that match *their* cognitive style.

It is one of our most potent, quiet tools, especially when working with kids who process the world differently.

In this particular study, participants were put in a room where they had to solve a problem—one that was not immediately clear how to solve. Everyone received the same set of instructions, but what they found fascinating.

The verbal thinkers kept asking, "What else do I need to know? What information am I missing?" They assumed there was a verbal piece missing from the instructions. Meanwhile, when the facilitators either nonverbally modelled how to solve the problem or gave a sizable

hint, the adaptive thinkers—those who could pivot between verbal and nonverbal reasoning—were able to adjust and solve the task.

However, the people locked into that single-channel verbal mode of thinking kept circling back to more questions and language. They were limited by the style they had grown comfortable with.

One of the core principles we try to model, especially with neurodivergent clients, is that process matters more than product.

I want people to learn how to sit with the discomfort of a challenge, wrestle with something difficult, and work their way through it. If you do that and get a lower grade, or you do not get the "correct" answer, but your method of approaching the problem is fundamentally sound—that is far more important and far more predictive of long-term success than simply repeating whatever strategy has always netted you a good grade.

I did not learn how to write good papers until university. In high school, I could throw many clever words on a page, make them sound smart, and get the grade—because my verbal IQ was in the 140s. I was not a good writer; I just sounded like one.

It was not until college that I had a professor—John Llewellyn, a fantastic guy who introduced me to Marshall McLuhan—pull me aside and say, *"You think you are a good writer. You are not."*

Moreover, I said, "I know, sir. I just figured out how to do this in a way that worked in high school."

He said, "Good. Now, I will teach you how to be a real writer."

When I wrote my book last year, I thought about him constantly. Whenever I wanted to cut a corner or fall back into old habits, I heard his voice. Resisting those shortcuts made the book *so* much better. I am genuinely grateful for that lesson.

Jacobsen: We are in a cultural moment that feels like Identity Politics 2.0—sometimes referred to or criticized under the umbrella of "woke ideology." Now, that framing gets messy because it has both upsides and downsides.

The benefit is obvious: it can help mobilize people for necessary, justice-oriented causes. The downside is the rise of what you might call "parade-based activism" rather than "work-based activism." It is easy to confuse symbols for substance—for instance, thinking that wearing a rainbow pin is equivalent to marching with a friend at Pride or wearing a Christian cross is the same as participating meaningfully in someone's confirmation journey.

There is a risk that these markers become proxies for actual support or understanding.

So my question is: Is there a risk that youth who receive a neurodivergent diagnosis might fall into that same trap—where the label becomes a shield, an excuse, or even a kind of performative identity that limits their accountability or growth when things go wrong?

Zakreski: That is a fundamental question. Moreover, for the record, I am *always* on the side of diagnosis—on the side of knowing yourself. I often say it is way better to know you are a zebra than to think you are just a weird horse.

Because our brains work this way: in the absence of external information, we make sense of things using the internal information we already have—which is, overwhelmingly, ourselves.

For example, I am colorblind, which is a form of neurodivergence. However, I did not know colorblindness existed until I was 11, so before that, I thought I was just dumb.

Everyone else could tell colours apart, but I could not. So my conclusion was, "I must be stupid." I did not have the language or the framework to understand otherwise.

That is why diagnosis is helpful—not because it is the end of the journey, but because it is the beginning of a different journey.

I always say that the story does not end when Frodo gets the ring—it ends when Frodo gets to Mount Doom.

Diagnosis is not the conclusion. It is the starting point that guides how we move forward.

Think about it like this: if someone is diagnosed with high blood pressure, and their doctor gives them medication—but they do not change their diet, they keep eating fried food, keep drinking soda and alcohol—then the diagnosis alone is not going to fix anything.

In the same way, a neurodivergent diagnosis should be a North Star—a tool for gaining self-knowledge and orienting one's environment and behaviours toward the best possible version of oneself.

Moreover, like I said earlier, Neurodivergence is always context—it is never an excuse.

Labelling a child as having ADHD can be very helpful. It might lead to educational accommodations, therapy, or medication. However, the mistake I often see parents make is that they stop there.

They will say something like, "My kid has ADHD, so of course they cannot help but cheat on a test—they are impulsive."

Moreover, I respond respectfully but firmly: That is not how this works.

Yes, I will understand more about the impulsivity behind the behaviour. However, accountability still matters.

We do not eliminate expectations just because someone has a diagnostic—or, perhaps more appropriately in these contexts, an identity—label. We adapt the expectations and adjust how we deliver them, but we do not remove them.

You can't just throw up your hands and say, "Well, they are neurodivergent, so they are off the hook." That does a disservice to the child and the broader community.

Jacobsen: Do you ever have a situation in practice where someone uses their identity, or diagnostic status, to shield themselves from accountability—where it becomes a kind of shield?

Zakreski: Yes, and I will give you an example.

I work with a kid in my clinical practice who has gotten into some social trouble at school this year. He has genuine social communication challenges and is quick to yell or escalate when he feels cornered or misunderstood.

He also happens to be part of the LGBTQ+ community. And in one of our team meetings, he said, "They are picking on me because I am gay." Moreover, because I have worked with him for a long time, and because I know him well and we have that rapport, I was able to say:

I told him, "You are being a jerk. You are a jerk who happens to be gay."

It was direct, but it was said with care and with the understanding that his identity does not absolve him of how he treats others. The goal isn't to weaponize labels—it is to understand them in ways that promote growth, self-awareness, and accountability.

We are not going to hide behind identity politics here. Accountability still matters.

Now—if people are being cruel because of his sexual orientation, if they are weaponizing his identity in some way—that is a very different conversation. That is not acceptable. However, people are allowed not to like you. That is part of life.

People are allowed to dislike others whether they are tall, short, fat, skinny, gay, straight, trans, ADHD, autistic, dyslexic, or whatever. We will not stand for the ad hominem version of those attacks.

Saying, "You are stupid because you have ADHD" or "ADHD people never amount to anything" —that is deeply harmful and entirely out of bounds.

However, saying, "Hey, I do not like you—you annoy me" is not the kindest thing you will ever hear, but it is not necessarily inappropriate. That is part of navigating human relationships.

Jacobsen: Speaking of niceness—and tilting that into politeness—do cultural stereotypes guide collective behaviour in any way?

For example, the stereotype of Canadians being polite or Americans being entrepreneurial but obnoxious. Do these, in your view, become self-fulfilling prophecies?

Zakreski: I think they do—very much so.

One of the most critical research areas here is the stereotype threat concept. The basic idea is: If I think you will see me a certain way, I will proactively change my behaviour to manage your expectations—even if it makes me less authentic or less effective.

I was recently in Europe for work—specifically in the Netherlands—and I do not speak much Dutch. I kept apologizing for not knowing the language because I did not want to be seen as the stereotypical "ugly American."

However, that constant apologizing made me a less effective communicator. I was so worried about managing the perception that I was not focusing on the interaction.

You see this with kids all the time, too. I work with students who have ADHD, and they are so afraid of being seen as impulsive or scattered that they spend all of their energy trying not to appear that way.

In doing so, they do not learn anything.

If students need to fidget or doodle to stay engaged and learn, we should let them do it. If their environment allows them to be themselves without penalty, the stereotype threat drops dramatically, and their capacity for success increases just as dramatically.

Jacobsen: So, looking ahead—thinking about the remainder of the 2020s and into the 2030s—if we extrapolate lines of best fit from current clinical psychological data for kids aged 5 to 20, extending into young adulthood, what do young people in North America need to survive? Moreover—more importantly—what do they need to thrive as authentic, grounded individuals?

Zakreski: We need two things: flexibility and high standards.

But not *rigid* standards—*high* standards.

We need knowledge.

Moreover, knowledge is not just power—knowledge is empowerment.

When we understand that ADHD is a brain-based difference, we stop labelling kids as lazy, weird, or broken. We recognize that it is a neurobiological condition that affects executive functioning. Moreover, if we start from that foundation of knowledge, it becomes much easier to move toward compassion and practical support.

Another thing I always say is, "When the flower is not blooming, we do not blame the flower—we change the greenhouse."

One of the most significant shifts in this post-COVID world is that more families finally say, "Okay. The greenhouse that worked for one of my children does not work for this one."

So, they are now willing to create a different environment—a custom greenhouse—for the child who needs it.

That is why I strongly oppose this wave of anti-DEI backlash: Equity is not just a buzzword; it is a human need.

Everyone does better when they get what they need to thrive. Neurodivergent people are no exception.

Moreover, most of what we ask for—for these kids and families—are small, simple changes. We are not asking the world to reshape itself entirely. We are asking to be allowed to enter that world in ways aligned with our needs and dignity.

That is why I will always fight for my kids and clients—the cost of inaction is too high, and the solutions are often well within reach.

Jacobsen: This was a treat. Thank you so much for taking the time. I appreciate it.

Zakreski: I hope it was helpful for you as well. It was. Thank you for reaching out.

Examining Decolonization, Zionism, and the Ethics of Clinical Neutrality

2025-05-16

Therapy and Politics

If therapy can be a vehicle for ideology, then clinicians risk repeating past abuses.

The article "**The Danger of Decolonization Therapy**" by **Miri Bar-Halpern** and **Dean McKay**, published on April 8, 2025, in *Jewish Syndicate News*, addressed concerns within the mental health field. The focus was on the partial politicization of some facets of therapeutic spaces.

Spotlight on Decolonization Therapy

Decolonization therapy is a psychological approach working on lasting impacts of colonialism by centring Indigenous knowledge, challenging Eurocentric models, and integrating social justice. This does not necessarily mean cultural psychology or Indigenous psychology: To acknowledge some systemic issues is different than imposed ideological stances ignoring principles of impartiality. The emphasis for Bar-Halpern and McKay is a particular strain and risk in this framework of therapy, implicitly. They argued decolonization therapy lacks sufficient rigorous scientific validation unlike Dialectical Behavioural Therapy or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

It can erase the core identity of some Jewish clients vis-a-vis Jewish identity and Zionism, and may retraumatize some Jewish clients. They make a call-to-action for the rejection of ideological coercion in therapy, protecting Jewish clinicians from discrimination, demanding high empirical standards of practices, addressing some nuanced antisemitism in mental-health training, and advocating for Jewish clients in this space. Naturally, colonialism is a factor in histories and people groups more recently affected remain extant. That's not the question of concern here, but remains a question of concern in other conversations.

I would agree with the thrust of the arguments, while pumping the brakes modestly.

A Cautionary Tale: Sluggish Schizophrenia

I thought about this over a coffee one morning, whether to pursue analysis or not. I had another coffee and jotted some brain droppings down. I had some time today to synthesize some reflections. The piece made me think, rethink, question myself, *et cetera*. A reflection from a doctoral counselling psychologist colleague with Metis heritage, if that counts in context on prior politicization of an intended apolitical therapeutic space after reading the same article by Bar-Halpern and McKay:

In the mid-twentieth century, Soviet psychologists invented a category called "sluggish schizophrenia," which they used to classify political dissenters as mentally ill. Psychology continues to be misused to push political agendas. Ethical psychologists do not push their views on their clients. Psychotherapy is designed to assist the client in expanding their worldviews and making their lives more satisfying by using self-experimentation and reason. Even if a client

decides she wishes to forgo her volitional abilities and become a robot waiting for the command, we explore the likely consequences with the client. However, as long as the client is aware of the consequences of their actions, we support them. Here is an ethical dilemma we discussed in my early training: Do we help Al Capone become more self-actualized in his actions?

Decolonization therapy may well do this, not from Eastern Europe but from North America if pushing ideologies, whether anti-Capitalist or anti-Zionist. Anti-Zionism is not antisemitism in most cases, while pro-Zionist or anti-Zionist political pushes in an intended apolitical space is *wrong*. That is the root: "Psychology continues to be misused to push political agendas." No specification of alignment or a re-stipulation of the foundational ethics of therapy: impartiality, or minimize bias and maximize neutrality.

From Theory to the Couch: Ethical Dilemmas

As the article surmises, the majority of Jewish people identify as Zionists and/or support Israel. On a personal note, I share the last name of the Founder of Reform Judaism, Israel Jacobson. However, I do not know if there is any family history or patrilineal or matrilineal relation. My family received an award for harbouring at least one Jewish couple for several years for safety and protection on the Dutch side during World War II. Do I get a cookie? *No*.

My biases: Let us say, for the sake of argument, the likely background of no family relation, I "identify" per contemporary, in vogue, verbiage, or "am" a "Zionist" in a manner of being a 'Palestinist'–not an abnormal position in international documentation. I wrote a book project, out of **In-Sight Publishing**, of in-depth professional, expert-level interviews from 2019-2021 on precisely the subject matter of Israel-Palestine, entitled ***On Israel-Palestine: 2019-2021*** (2024).

Identity, Data, and the Risk of Erasure

Those State terms came from agreements following the Balfour Declaration. The vote for Palestine's non-member observer State status on November 29, 2012, at the United Nations cemented this further within international voting records. **UN Resolution A/RES/67/19** stipulated, "The General Assembly… Decide to accord Palestine non-member observer state status in the United Nations…"

It passed with 138 votes in favour, nine against, and 41 abstentions. Therefore, we have Palestine as a non-member observer State status of the UN, under observer state Status, on equal footing with the Holy See, as Israel is a Member State with voting privileges. At least, in either case, it could change, in theory.

However, it is so overwhelmingly supported by the international community for a State of Palestine under the **Question of Palestine** and for a State of Israel, simply unreasonable to put in the fore a question about the member state status of either. I denounce anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice, and antisemitic bigotry. Many others do, too.

The fact that these become controversial stances, as generically positioned and further utilized to politicize a professionally intended vulnerable population and apolitical interpersonal professional space, raises serious questions under codes of ethics. Therapeutic spaces are

intended as apolitical spaces for terms set by clients with therapists. To politicize them violates the premise, they are not complex considerations.

The symmetry fits structurally with Conversion Therapy in their positionality, but is disjunct in harm type and degree. Based on the article numbers, Zionism *is* something 85% of Jewish people support. However, based on other sources from the United States and in the United Kingdom, these may be inflated numbers, but not too much. Others range the numbers from 63% to 82% regarding caring about Zionism, with lesser strength in support, while still adhering.

As of 2020, UK data from the **Institute for Jewish Policy Research** state 73% of U.S. Jews feel emotionally attached to Israel, while 63% identify as Zionists, down from 72% a decade earlier. While **Pew's 2021 data** show 82% of American Jews feel at least some attachment to Israel, while 48% under 30 feel "very" or "somewhat" attached to Israel, 51% of Jews 50 and older caring about Israel is essential to Jewish identity. Overall 2/3rds express some degree of connection to Israel. Attachment does not equate to support. Connection and care can mean Zionism to many. Therefore, most adhere to styles of Zionism or connection, care, and/or support for Israel.

Parallels and Hypotheticals

Similarly on issues of gender and sexual minorities, LGBTI+, using terminology via the UN with the **LGBTI Core Group** rather than narrowing within common American parlance, is an inherent identity of development. Gender and sexual orientation seem to flow outwards, akin to the development of a snowflake and a sociological category. It is not a position of necessary advocacy to proclaim: "I am a bisexual man." It is *fabulous* and factual, but not a necessary point of advocacy in the manner of Zionism or argument around historicity or a claim to some biblically (mostly) unjustified narrative. On the other hand, antisemitism has been around for centuries. This can count as an early sprouting of it in a professional space.

Within a few decades, people's lives targeted can be impacted. **Conversion Therapy**was established and systematized for decades prior to the 1990s controversies. Conversion Therapy, or reparative therapy, is a practice aimed at changing sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. **Peter Gajdics**, the author of ***The Inheritance of Shame***, was a victim. So, that case is different, not in spirit but in development. Eventually, I could see a symmetry if others were not critically inquiring into it and pushing back against it. It is critically confronted, not yet 2055 or 2065, either, so not enough room for decades of entrenchment.

So, we can at least step forward with a strong foot. This potato is too hot. Journalists do not want to cover this. To critique Israeli policy, "Hooray, stop the genocide!" and "You are an antisemite" To critique Hamas murders on October 7 and hostage-taking, and leftwing unwitting antisemitism, "Stop the clock on the Woke, you go, Mr.!" and "Deport the lunatic leftwing radicals and terrorists on our campuses!"

If they are on the Right sociopolitically, then they might be afraid of leftist harassment and cancellation tactics. If they are on the Left, then they do not want to become another Norman Finkelstein case, and fear some wings of the Israeli lobby and the American State. To the more significant point, though, while no mainstream therapy formally pathologizes Zionism, a framing

as inherently oppressive without acknowledging its ethnic and religious dimensions risks veering into symbolic antisemitism. This could destabilize a client's sense of safety and/or identity.

If they are like Mr. Huckabee and want a single super-state for apocalyptic Christian Zionism for the Second Coming of Christ, then that is a different story on hermeneutical antisemitism if that is their wheelhouse. One obvious thought experiment to me. Can we reverse this claim? Just forgetting any UN record, rights abuses by the Israeli state or the Palestinians against Israelis, etc., theoretically, one could assert the American far-right ethnic supremacist talking point about white genocide.

As a case in illustrative hyperbole, based on extreme viewpoints held in parts by many, "Looking at the mass immigration, look at the Kalergi-Coudenhove plan in action for the 'Eurasian-Negroid race of the future,' the Rothschilds own the moon, etc.; we are being colonized–watch out for the space lasers (TM) targeting the last of the pure Aryan Race." These form a White ethnic American State idea.

They pose this: anyone criticizing or arguing against it is considered colonizing. We need to decolonize the therapy of anti-White Statism. It is a *professional duty* for those in our care to decolonize from anti-White State ideas. People would take offence at this. Why not the reverse? They could even have APA poster presentations pointing to the prefrontal cortex, vaguely identifying anti-White Statism as a mental illness needing a decolonization therapy style of approach **as was done with Zionism**.

Restoring Neutrality: Evidence and Safeguards

We risk undermining the neutrality and integrity of psychological practice, and are moving towards this more pervasively based on this. Jewish identity is multifaceted, is not a mental illness when linked to Zionism, and involves self-determination. Decolonization Therapy mostly lacks sufficient rigorous empirical support. However, it is grounded in cultural psychology and values ideology over evidence, while inverting its duty not to harm by retraumatizing some Jewish patients, alienating them further.

It does not have the same systematic and comprehensive empirical support as standardized therapeutic techniques, including Dialectical Behavioural Therapy. Therapists, thus, can buy into antisemitic tropes around genocide and fascist stereotypes, labelling Jewish clients as oppressors, politicize therapy with anti-Zionist ideologies, and make therapeutic spaces a place to intimidate others. I submit that if a social justice framework in therapy retraumatizes and alienates clientele, then there will be less social justice and more *anti*-social *in*justice frameworks for therapy.

Therapy as Sanctuary, Not Battleground

Dr. Jennifer Mullan, the Founder of Decolonizing Therapy, most succinctly stated, "There's no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom," or "To begin to consider and implement practices that support politicizing and shifting our organizational and interpersonal perspectives."

To contrast, the **Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (Fourth Edition)**, under Ethical Standards of Principle of Integrity in Relationships, stipulated the importance of the need "to be

as objective and unbiased as possible in their… service." The British Psychological Society in ***Code of Ethics and Conduct*** linked reason or rationality to impartiality. The International Union for Psychological Science in its ***Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists***emphasized the fundamental Principle of Integrity specifying "maximizing impartiality and minimizing biases." Finally, the American Psychological Association (APA) ***Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct*** emphasizes in its Principle C: Integrity the avoidance of deception and misrepresentation, which could extend to refraining from the use of therapy as a vehicle for partisan persuasion.

Therapy is meant as a sanctuary for clients' own narratives. Ironically, this trend can come to risk repeating the colonization abuses of the past under the imposition of a 'decolonization' pretense. We need a reintegration of client autonomy and therapeutic neutrality; therapy is the client's domain for autonomy premised on non-maleficence, not an ideological battleground. It may be helpful to further embed thorough mandatory neutrality training in licensure standards, so it doesn't become an issue at scale.

Mark Carney's Family Legacy: Catholic Education, Indigenous Assimilation, and the Shadows of Joseph Burr Tyrrell School

2025-05-16

Written prior to election.

Interim Prime Minister Mark Carney of the Liberal Party of Canada will be running in the next federal election in Canada. He came from a Roman Catholic family history, particularly with his father, Robert James "Bob" Carney. He was a Catholic educator who lived and worked in Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, in the 1960s. What is the history here? We can focus on superficial news analyses of "culturally retarded" and then leave the narrative about the father of the current Prime Minister, or look more deeply than centre-left news media and opinion in Canada or simply ignore it amongst centre-right media. Let us sidestep those.

Robert Carney served as the Principal of Fort Smith Federal Day School in 1965. Its official name was *not* Fort Smith Federal day School but Joseph Burr Tyrell School, which focused on the education of Indigenous children. Federally, JBT was run as an 'Indian day school." Principal Carney oversaw school Indigenous youth in the Fort Smith locale and children housed in nearby church-run residential facilities.

Carney was deeply committed and connected to the missional work of the Catholic Church in the North of Canada, which was aimed at the local Indigenous communities. He worked at the crossroads of government policy and Catholic educational efforts. Principal Carney was deeply committed to the Catholic faith based on an analysis of statements made in a 1965 CBC Radio interview. He discussed the program at JBT for–in his terms–"culturally retarded" Indigenous children. He defined the "culturally retarded child" as "a child from a Native background who, for various reasons, has not been in regular attendance in school."

Indigenous children at JBT, in turn, were compared to the Euro-Canadian Catholic cultural and educational standards of the time. Principal Carney implemented assimilationist education policies discouraging the locale's traditions and languages, favouring the English language and Catholic teachings. When speaking of Fort Smith and surrounding areas, we're talking of Dene nations, e.g., Smith's Landing First Nation (Thebacha Dene), Salt River First Nation, and Métis Communities.

These Métis communities were descendants of Dene and European (primarily French) fur traders. The primary language was Dënesųłiné (Chipewyan) by Smith's Landing First Nation and Salt River First Nation. The Chipewyan people of Smith's Landing First Nation are descendants of those from lower Slaver River and northeastern Alberta, while Salt River First Nation are those who signed Treaty 8 in 1899.

As per current commentary, Principal Carney was a principal of a federal day school and adhered to assimilationist education policies, but was *not* a residential school principal. He ran JBT, not the boarding facilities. However, these operated in tandem with the residential institutions of Fort Smith. Indigenous children were boarded at a hostel or residence run by the Catholic Church and

then sent to JBT for day classes. Carney participated in the broader residential school infrastructure, while his professional title was Principal of a federal day school.

He was a vertex between Indigenous families and local communities, nuns, and clergy from the Roman Catholic Church who managed the hostels and missionary work. Fort Smith was formative for the work and life of Robert Carney circa 60 years ago. In the broader purview, Fort Smith functioned as a hub for residential schools and assimilationist educational efforts. (Roman Catholic) Church and State in Canada functioned in tandem with the colonial educational efforts of Euro-Canadians and the Catholic hierarchs. Oblate of Mary Immaculate and affiliated clergy had a strong presence with Bishop Gabriel Breynat (after which Breynat Hall was given its title) and Bishop Paul Piché leading initiatives there. The explicit purpose was to Christianize Indigenous children.

The accounts from former students, in addition to historical investigations, document severe abuse and trauma associated with the residential schools of Fort Smith. Grandin College, though, has been remembered–as per the mixed moral history of Canadian society–for its positive mentorship and high-quality education for the time. Breynat Hall is remembered for significant abuses. Survivors continue to speak out. JBT was known for mistreatment and discrimination too.

Jeannie Marie-Jewell, a Fort Smith Dene woman who became an NWT MLA, has recollections. She was made to attend it when her mother was sick. She described the supervision as "structured and strict," with discipline crossing into cruelty. Others and Marie-Jewell report witnessing sexual abuse and physical abuse at Breynat Hall. Marie-Jewell stated, "At night, I remember I was too scared to look when the priests or the nuns took some of the kids out [of the dorm]. Moreover, these little girls would come back sobbing. So, what did they do with them at night? I spoke to a survivor who was there at the same time as me, and she said she was sexually abused there." Sexual abuse has been identified at Breynat Hall by multiple survivors. This came to light in the 1990s and 2000s during lawsuits and the TRC process.

JBT's former students recall a racially segregated and punitive environment. It is reported that non-Aboriginal children sat in the front of the room, and Aboriginal children sat in the back. Corporal punishment was used liberally, using either a ruler or a pointer if a student spoke the Native language or did not adhere to the rules. In the day school, there were violations of privacy and sexual boundaries, physical abuse and humiliation. We do not know the names of specific perpetrators from accounts. Girls were vulnerable and unprotected from predatory staff. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), in its Final Report (2015), documented widespread abuse in residential schools nationally. Fort Smith was no exception. Therefore, Breynat Hall survivors suffered harsh discipline, malnutrition, illness, and abuse at the hands of certain clergy and staff.

Decades later, Robert Carney reflected on the residential school system. He became an academic and remained a devout Catholic. He pursued graduate studies and wrote about Indigenous education policy. In authored articles, he emphasized what he saw as favourable and benign facets of residential schooling. These struck a chord when abuses came out in the 1990s and 2000s. He emphasized increased literacy and the dedication of the missionaries rather than

dwelling on the abuses. Some historians have characterized this as “residential school denialism” or a distortion/minimization of residential schools. Interim Prime Minister Mark Carney is drawn into the public discussion due to the legacy and work of his father at JBT.

How Does Culture Shape Who You Are? Dr. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson on the Memetic Self

2025-05-16

Part 1 of 2.

Dr. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson, a Canadian psychologist and theorist, developed the concept of the *memetic self*—a culturally constructed identity formed from transmissible units of meaning called memes. He explores how language, culture, and social interaction give rise to self-awareness, tracing its development from mirror recognition in animals to modern identity. Robertson uses *self-mapping*, a therapeutic tool that visualizes a person's identity through linked memes, to address fragmentation in conditions like autism, Alzheimer's, and dissociative identity disorder. His work emphasizes coherence, volition, and cultural adaptability, and his forthcoming book—coauthored with his daughter—applies these insights to psychotherapy.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we're joined by Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson. He is a Canadian psychologist, educator, and theorist known for his innovative work on the culturally constructed self. With over 40 years of experience in counselling and educational psychology, he developed the concept of the memetic self—a cognitive framework composed of culturally transmitted ideas (or "memes") that shape an individual's identity. He is the author of *The Evolved Self: Mapping an Understanding of Who We Are* and a pioneer of self-mapping, a visual and therapeutic method for exploring and restructuring identity. His work bridges psychology, philosophy, and cultural studies, offering practical tools for therapy and education while exploring questions of free will, agency, and the evolution of selfhood across diverse cultures. Mr. Robertson, thank you very much for joining me again today. I appreciate it. It's always a pleasure.

Dr. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson: You're welcome. I'm looking forward to this, Scott.

Jacobsen: So, what is the self?

Robertson: Oh, that's pretty basic. Okay. The self is a construct, as you mentioned in your introduction. Thank you for that generous overview. Your question is, "What is the self?" The self is a conceptual framework we use to define who we are. It is not a physical entity in the brain but rather a cognitive and cultural construct—a mental map that incorporates beliefs, values, experiences, and roles.

This construct has evolved. One of the earliest indications of self-awareness in our evolutionary lineage is mirror self-recognition, which has been observed in some great apes, dolphins, elephants, and magpies. In our hominin ancestors, the development of language and culture allowed for increasingly complex and abstract self-concepts.

Recognizing one's reflection—understanding that "this is me"—marks a foundational moment in developing self-awareness. Although early humans may not have had the language to describe it, the ability to form a concept of self-based on reflection and social interaction was critical. This capacity laid the groundwork for the complex, culturally mediated selves we navigate today.

From that modest beginning, our ancestors gradually evolved the capacity for social interaction. They needed a rudimentary idea of who they were to engage socially, even if it was not consciously articulated.

Language development significantly boosted the evolution of the self. Once we moved beyond simple two-slot grammar—like "him run"—to more complex phonetic constructs, we could combine distinct sounds that held no individual meaning but could generate an almost unlimited number of words.

With that, collections of words took on new, layered meanings. As this linguistic complexity emerged, our self-definition became more nuanced, expanded, and refined. About 50,000 years ago, humans began burying their dead. This act implies a recognition of mortality and a developing self-concept about life and death.

The most recent significant change in our understanding of the self—as part of cultural evolution—may have occurred as recently as 3,000 years ago. I say "may" because it could have emerged earlier, but our evidence dates to that period, particularly from Greek writing and Egyptian hieroglyphics. Of course, many earlier cultures lacked writing systems, so we cannot be definitive about when this modern conception of self emerged.

What is this self I'm referring to? It includes the ideas of volition, constancy over time, and uniqueness. For instance, although you and I, Scott, share many characteristics, I do not believe you are me, and vice versa. Even if I had an identical twin—same genetics, upbringing, and experiences—I still would not recognize him as myself. That sense of uniqueness is part of the "modern self"—a culturally evolved manifestation of identity with an inherent sense of individualism.

Here is the great irony: we are a social species, and the self emerged through social interaction within early human communities, particularly tribal Neolithic groups. The self could not have developed in isolation; it depends on interaction with others. So, we are fundamentally shaped by collectivism, even though individualism is built into our modern self. This creates an internal tension between the group's needs and the individual's autonomy.

Historically, that tension was mediated by religion—specifically, organized religion, which kept people in their social roles. In Western civilizations, a deity often prescribed those roles, and individuals could not transcend them. Tradition or ancestor worship defined the limits of the self in other cultural contexts.

Societies that completely suppressed the modern self remained stagnant, while those that permitted at least some individuals to develop a sense of autonomous selfhood became more adaptive. This is because the self is a powerful tool for problem-solving. It allows us to reinsert ourselves into past experiences as protagonists, to relive and learn from those events, and to rehearse possible futures mentally. We can adjust our behaviour accordingly. These are valuable psychological skills.

But they also come at a cost. With the modern self comes the capacity for anxiety and existential distress. I doubt that our earliest ancestors experienced clinical depression or anxiety disorders as

we know them today. These conditions are part of the psychological "baggage" of possessing a self capable of complex reflection and future projection.

For millennia, the self was constrained—kept "on a leash," so to speak—until a set of unique historical conditions emerged in Europe. Specifically, during and before the Enlightenment, the Catholic Church—which had long functioned to suppress individualism—lost control, particularly during the Reformation and the ensuing religious wars between Catholics and Protestants.

Individuals gained some permission to explore personal identity when centralized religious authority broke down. This blossomed into what we now call the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment did not invent the self—it authorized it. Not entirely, of course—we remain social beings with embedded restrictions—but it granted more freedom to individuals to develop their understandings.

This led to the rise of modern science and humanism. Knowledge was no longer handed down by authority. Instead, it became something you had to demonstrate through observation, reason, and experimentation. These practices allowed individuals to engage with a reality beyond themselves.

And that is where humanism emerged. So, you asked me what the self is—and now you see: when you ask me a question, you get a long-winded answer.

Jacobsen: How do you define "meme" within the framework of *The Evolved Self*?

Robertson: The word "meme" has had an unfortunate evolution. It was initially coined by Richard Dawkins in the 1970s. Dawkins coined the term "meme" to represent a self-replicating unit of culture.

For instance, a simple descriptor like the colour red is not a meme. It's merely a physical property description, not a transmissible concept that evolves culturally. A meme, in contrast, is more than an idea; it is a cultural construct that carries meaning across individuals and generations.

Dawkins defined a meme as something broader than a simple descriptor but narrower than an entire ideology, religion, or belief system. The latter, of course, is composed of many memes—interrelated units of culture. You can, for example, substitute the colour red in a conceptual framework with blue, and the core concept might remain, but the meme is more than any one element—it has internal structure and transmissibility.

Unfortunately, Dawkins did not have the opportunity to develop the theory entirely. His work was criticized for being tautological. Critics asked, "How can you prove this? How do we observe or measure a meme?" These questions challenged the concept's empirical rigour.

In my research, I proposed a refined definition of a meme: it must be a culture unit with behavioural, qualitative, and emotional (or emotive) implications. A proper meme is not just a label or idea—it affects how we feel, act, and make meaning.

This also resolves a challenge Dawkins left open—his observation that memes can have "attractive" or "repulsive" properties. He did not elaborate on the mechanics of that.

In my framework, if one meme naturally leads to another—like how "love" often leads to "marriage" in cultural narratives—that linkage reflects an attractive force between memes. Conversely, when two memes are psychologically or conceptually incompatible—"love" and "hate" coexisting as core guiding values in the exact moment—that reflects a repellent force.

My work on the modern self is composed of a collection of memes that are primarily attractive to one another. If a meme within that structure becomes repellent—meaning it no longer aligns with the rest of the self—it tends to be ejected. That is how we maintain coherent, relatively stable identities.

Of course, not everyone has a stable sense of self. My work as a psychologist involves helping people reconfigure their self-concepts when internal inconsistencies cause distress.

Now, where things get tricky is the evolution of the word "meme" online. The internet popularized the term in a way that deviates from its original definition. Internet memes typically involve humour or juxtaposition—two ideas or images that don't usually go together. While some may qualify as memes in the original sense, internet usage represents a narrow and diluted interpretation.

Jacobsen: Did I hear you correctly? You're saying the modern meme online sometimes overlaps with Dawkins' definition, but only in a limited sense.

Robertson: Yes, exactly. Internet memes sometimes fulfill the criteria but rarely capture the deeper behavioural and emotional dimensions Dawkins originally gestured toward—which I've tried to formalize more clearly.

Jacobsen: So, how does this fit into your work on self-mapping?

Robertson: Good question.

One of the most academically grounded ways to create a self-map is to ask someone to describe who they are. You use prompting questions to elicit a detailed, rich description of their self-concept.

I collect those self-descriptions in my research—just like this interview is being recorded. I transcribe the responses and break the narrative into elemental units—essentially memes. Each unit is labelled and categorized. This approach parallels qualitative methods in social science research.

The coding method I use for self-mapping parallels the qualitative analysis approach developed by Miles and Huberman in the early 1990s.

You label each unit of meaning. A sentence could represent a single unit or contain multiple distinct concepts. You isolate those concepts into thematic categories—or "bins"—based on their shared meaning.

Then, if those units exhibit the characteristics I described earlier—qualitative, behavioural, and emotional implications—you can classify them as memes.

Next, you examine the relationships between those memes. You identify which memes are attracted to each other—either through thematic linkage or cause-effect associations—and chart those relationships. You map them visually, using lines to indicate attractive forces. That's the core structure of the self-map I create.

Now, this method requires considerable time and effort.

So, to make the process more accessible, my daughter—a psychologist—and I developed a quicker method in collaboration with a colleague from Athabasca University. We created a structured questionnaire with 40 core prompts, which could be expanded to 50 or 60.

The questions focus on four primary areas. First, we ask: "Who are you?" People might respond with statements like "I'm a father" or "I'm a chess player." These are self-descriptive memes—cultural elements that express identity.

Then, we ask: "What are 10 things you like about yourself?" and "What are 10 things you would change if you could?" Finally, we ask: "What are 10 things you believe to be true?"

One of my clients, earlier this year, offered a novel and powerful addition to the exercise: "What are 10 things you keep hidden from others?" That insight added emotional depth and complexity to the map.

Once we gather that data, we create a visual self-map, following the same principles as in my academic research. I jokingly call this the "quick and dirty" version, but it works. My daughter Teela and I have used it successfully with many clients.

The crucial step is refining the map with the client until they recognize themselves. That map resonates when they say, "Yes, this is me," reflecting their identity. We become psychologists if something important is missing, like a sense of personal agency or volition.

We help them develop those underrepresented self-elements based on an idealized model of the modern self—a coherent, autonomous individual identity. When parts are missing or fragmented, we work to integrate them.

We should do a formal academic study to validate this quick method, but based on clinical experience, it works.

Jacobsen: If we take all these elements and look at them as a whole, we're essentially describing an "evolved self." That allows us to examine the coherent identity of a person. How would you describe someone who lacks a coherent self or identity?

Robertson: That does happen. Not everyone possesses a well-formed self.

Jacobsen: Please explain.

Robertson: Take classical autism, for example—the traditional form I learned about during my training, not the broader, more ambiguous "autism spectrum disorder" currently defined by the APA. That modern definition is so diffuse that it's challenging to apply meaningfully in clinical settings.

In classical autism, you may encounter children who engage in highly repetitive, self-soothing behaviours. One case I worked with involved a boy who spent most of his day swinging a string with a weight on the end, keeping it taut in a circular motion. Even while eating—an essential survival activity—he needed the string in his hand. If someone took it away, he would have a full-blown panic attack.

At that level of autism, the individual lacks a coherent self.

One key indicator is the absence of what psychologists call "theory of mind"—the capacity to understand that others have thoughts, feelings, and motivations similar to one's own.

The theory of mind is essential. It allows us to interpret the behaviour of others based on internal states. For example, I can infer that you, Scott, have emotions and goals. If I understand your context, I can anticipate your next question. That's mind-reading—not in a mystical sense but in a psychological, predictive sense. It's something we all do constantly.

It is vital for navigating everyday life. For example, when driving, we anticipate that other people will stay on the correct side of the road. In Canada, that means the right side. We base this assumption on our shared cultural understanding, which generally holds.

Jacobsen: So, what happens to people who do not have a self?

Robertson: There are others, aside from individuals with severe autism, who also lack a coherent self. One group includes people with advanced Alzheimer's disease.

There's a poignant story told by an Alzheimer's researcher—I'm forgetting the researcher's name, but the story involved a woman who would visit her husband, who had advanced Alzheimer's. She would begin by introducing herself each time: "My name is [X], and I'm your wife." Once he understood her name and the relationship, they could converse coherently.

Then, one day, after she introduced herself and said, "I'm your wife," he looked at her and asked, "Yes, and who am I?"

He genuinely did not know. So yes, there are people who lose their sense of self. It is rare, but it happens. Most people have a self—and nearly always, there's a one-to-one correspondence between self and body.

Jacobsen: This brings me to three points of contact for further questions.

The first two are based on your description, and the third is a broader conceptual issue. First, in the case of someone with what might be considered a nonstandard profile on the autism spectrum —who meets the characteristics you mentioned—what are the legal and professional implications of working with someone who, by your clinical analysis, lacks a functional self?

Second, in cases involving advanced dementia or Alzheimer's, how do you interpret situations where a person can still speak in coherent, functional language yet openly asks, "Who am I?" or "Do you know who I am?"

Robertson: Those are deep and difficult questions.

In the case of someone with classic autism, we generally assume that a parent or legal guardian is involved—someone who can authorize professional intervention. The goal is to help the individual develop skills that improve quality of life. Whether or not these interventions fully succeed is another matter, but we do try—and sometimes, we help.

With advanced dementia or Alzheimer's, things get more complicated—particularly when it comes to end-of-life care and living wills. You may have someone who no longer remembers ever having signed a living will, and yet, according to that document, medical professionals are instructed to allow them to die.

It raises profound ethical dilemmas. You may encounter someone who still shows signs of a will to live—even joy or affection—but can no longer comprehend their identity or the implications of past decisions. That contradiction is ethically challenging.

Jacobsen: I have a will to live and a living will to die. I cannot know who I am, yet I still live.

Robertson: Right. It's not a lack of will—it's a lack of cognitive ability to know.

Jacobsen: What about cases involving dissociative identity disorder—what used to be called multiple personality disorder? In those situations, more than one "self" seems to coexist in the same body.

Robertson: That diagnosis is controversial. Not all professionals agree that it reflects an actual condition. However, conceptually, it's possible—because the self is a cultural construct.

The self is not a metaphysical entity that inhabits the body. Instead, it describes a person shaped by cultural constructs that include the body and socially mediated self-understanding. Think of the body and brain as the hardware and the self as the software—cultural programming that shapes perception, behaviour, and identity.

Given that framework, it's theoretically possible for multiple "selves" to coexist—though this would be a scarce and complex scenario.The older term "Multiple Personality Disorder" implicitly recognizes the possibility of multiple selves. The term "dissociative identity disorder" implies a fragmented self.

Now, I've never worked personally with someone diagnosed with multiple selves, so I'm speaking from theoretical and scholarly understanding here.

From what I've read, therapists who work with such clients often report that one becomes dominant or "emergent" while others recede. The therapeutic aim, typically, is to integrate these multiple selves into a coherent whole so the individual can function more effectively.

There's a fringe view in psychology suggesting that this therapeutic integration is akin to "murder"—that by fostering one coherent self, we are erasing others. I don't accept that view. That's an extreme form of ideological overreach.

Jacobsen: This introduces another critical nuance. The self emerges not only across human history—it also unfolds across individual development. The self is not present at conception or birth in its complete form. It's an evolved pattern of information—a construct that takes shape over time. And, just as it can emerge, it can also deteriorate.

In advanced age or due to disease, the body and many faculties may still function—but the self might fade away. In that sense, you could argue that the self has a lifespan within the human lifespan. People talk about lifespan, and increasingly about healthspan—but perhaps we should also talk about a "self-span."

Robertson: That's an intriguing idea—a self-span.

Jacobsen: It would be difficult to measure precisely, of course, especially given the limitations of quick-and-dirty self-assessment methods versus more rigorous, clinical approaches like self-mapping. Still, it's a meaningful concept.

If the self is a cultural construct, we might ask: Do different cultures shape the self in ways that affect when it tends to emerge developmentally? Does the self appear earlier or later, depending on the cultural context?

Robertson: That's a fascinating question. I do not have a definitive answer, but I've mapped the selves of people from the interior of China, from Siberia, and collectivist communities in North America. Every culture I've studied has a self.

Here's where the cultural variation becomes evident: different cultures emphasize different aspects of the self. One of the people I mapped was a woman from a traditional family in the interior of China.

Yes, she had the same structural aspects of the self-found in North American individuals, including a volitional component. But that part of her self—the volitional aspect—was not valued in her cultural context. Instead, family duty and moral conduct traits were emphasized, reflecting collectivist values.

So, structurally, her self was similar. But culturally, the valued components were different. What made this particularly interesting is that after mapping herself, she described herself as feeling like a "robot," and she decided that was not a good thing.

Over about eight or nine months, she resolved to start making her own decisions. This did not prove easy because most of us do not make conscious decisions at every moment. Typically, we rely on habit, social norms, or deference to authority. For example, someone might say, "Lloyd Robertson says this is a good idea, so I'll go with that."

But most of the time, we act on autopilot. However, she began engaging in conscious decision-making—evaluating possible outcomes, comparing alternatives, weighing probabilities, and assigning value. She did this even with mundane choices like what to eat or wear in the morning.

It exhausted her. She felt she was getting nowhere. Eventually, she decided: "My life is too valuable to waste making every decision consciously. I'm going back to being a robot."

But here's the key insight: to make that decision, she had to engage her volitional self.

She never abandoned it. It was still there—intact, available, and waiting for the next time she chose to use it.

Jacobsen: Let's say we have a rare case of genuine dual selves in one body. And to be clear, I do not mean conjoined twins—cases where two individuals share some neural connectivity. I'm

referring to a single individual whose psychology has bifurcated. What if their volitional trajectories—their vector spaces—are at odds with one another?

This reminds me of a presentation by V. S. Ramachandran, the neurologist known for the mirror box experiment. He referenced split-brain patients—individuals whose corpus callosum had been surgically severed to treat epilepsy.

In such cases, if you cover one eye, you direct stimuli to only one hemisphere. For example, when Ramachandran asked these patients if they believed in God—by pointing up for "yes" or down for "no"—the left hemisphere might point "yes," while the right pointed "no."

The individual would often laugh in response. Ramachandran joked that this showed the right hemisphere had a sense of humour.

But there's a more profound point here: split-brain patients can manifest two conflicting worldviews—internally consistent but contradictory selves. In theological terms, this raises amusing but profound questions. For instance, if belief grants salvation, does one hemisphere go to heaven and the other to hell?

On a more serious note, when these volitional patterns conflict—not just on trivial matters but on core values—what happens? And for those who criticize integration therapy as "murdering" a self, how do you respond?

Robertson: The split-brain experiments are fascinating but differ from dissociative identity disorder, a distinct condition.

In most people, the right hemisphere houses spatial awareness and emotional reasoning, while the left hemisphere tends to handle verbal processing. When the corpus callosum is severed, these two systems can no longer communicate so that each side may draw on separate memories or frameworks.

In an intact brain, people typically build a worldview—a cognitive map of how the world works. This worldview often resides in the left hemisphere. When incoming information conflicts with that map, people experience cognitive dissonance.

Eventually, the left hemisphere, which governs executive control and higher reasoning, will normally create a worldview representing our understanding of how the world works. We have many defence mechanisms that we use to keep that worldview intact, but at some point our constructed reality diverges too far from objective reality. The right brain, at a feeling level "dissolves" the construct and the left brain then begins creating a new or amended worldview. It does not happen often, but it happens enough to keep us psychologically adaptive.

Now, returning to your question: Is there a God? If only one hemisphere believes, which is correct?

Well, that depends on which side holds the belief. Humanism, for example, is highly cerebral—logical, empirical, and grounded in enlightenment thought. It is likely rooted in left-brain processes. Compassion, however, may bridge both hemispheres.

Jacobsen: So, what is the right brain holding onto?

Robertson: Something interesting happened to me the other day. I woke up with a Christian hymn running through my head—one I learned in my fundamentalist upbringing.

It struck me: Where did that come from? It must have been encoded deeply. I was baptized not once but twice, in complete immersion both times.

That early religious imprint likely lodged itself somewhere in my right hemisphere. It may be largely inactive now, but it is not gone.

Jacobsen: So, do developmental trajectories matter here?

You were raised with those strong evangelical influences at a young age, and even though you've moved beyond them, they left an imprint. Neuroscientifically, we know the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex—the seat of executive function—is the last part of the brain to develop. Evolutionarily, it's also the most recent.

As far as we know, the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex—responsible for executive function—is the last part of the brain to develop. Most people usually complete that maturation in their mid-twenties. So, these systems take a long time to become fully online and must then be integrated with other neural networks.

Do developmental phases like the second significant period of synaptic pruning in adolescence reflect more concrete hardware changes, as opposed to the cultural software changes that occur across a person's life?

Robertson: I like your question, Scott. And the answer is yes.

Jacobsen: Yay.

Robertson: If someone were raised entirely in the wild—say, the fictional case of a boy raised by wolves—we would not expect them to develop what I call the modern self.

The self is a cultural construct. Children are taught to have a self; one key mechanism is language acquisition. For example, when a child cries and the caregiver says, "Is Bobby hungry?" that implicitly teaches the child that Bobby has internal states—needs, desires, and preferences. That is the beginning of selfhood.

Your point about adolescence is spot on. The self is not fully formed in early childhood. In many ways, individual development parallels cultural evolution. Adolescence—especially early adolescence—is about experimentation, identity formation, and exploration. Teenagers try out roles, test boundaries, and slowly determine, "This is who I am," or, "No, that's not me."

We must be cautious about defining someone's self prematurely during this construction phase. You cannot predict how it will turn out, and efforts to control that process can be harmful.

There's research suggesting the human brain continues maturing until around age 25. Jokingly, maybe we should not let people vote until they're 25—but of course, I can say that now that I'm well past that age.

In truth, development is highly individual. Some mature earlier, others later. And yes, building on your earlier point, there may be significant cultural differences in how and when the self develops. That's an area ripe for further research.

Now, when I say modern self-development and spread across all known cultures, there's a practical reason: societies without individuals capable of forming modern selves could not compete with those that had them.

Jacobsen: What makes the modern self more competitive?

Robertson: Our sense of individuality.

In Christianity, for example, Scripture often exhorts individuals to "give up the self." That very statement acknowledges the self's existence and its power.

Such a sacrifice is required because the individual self can threaten collective stability. It challenges authority, tradition, and rigid social roles.

Jacobsen: That connects back to your earlier point—cultures that lack individuals with a modern self lose their competitive edge.

Robertson: Here's the value of having a self.

In traditional cultures, individuals typically had an earlier form of self—defined primarily by their place in the collective. In response to threats or challenges, behaviours were guided by tribal memory, stories, and rigid social roles.

For example, if an enemy appeared, people would respond according to long-established patterns—based on age, gender, and status in the group. There was no need—or room—for improvisation.

But what happens when a new, unfamiliar situation arises—something the culture has not encountered before and for which there is no ritual?

In such cases, traditional cultures often turned to oracles—individuals capable of novel reasoning, that is, problem-solving. I suspect those early oracles possessed a more developed, volitional self, which is why they were trusted in the first place.

Similarly, in Hindu society, Brahmins were given a rigorous education, allowing them to cultivate modern selves capable of insight and judgment. But they were a small elite.

In many cultures, people who had developed themselves were respected and closely managed. They were given roles where they could contribute without disrupting social order.

The self-concept eventually spread across all human societies because we are a nomadic, adaptive species. We move, we mix, we evolve.

Just look at our evolutionary history—we even interbred with Neanderthals.

We interact. I do not believe a human society has ever been so isolated that its members lacked a developed self. But if such a group exists—perhaps an uncontacted tribe deep in the Amazon—I would love to study them.

Jacobsen: When I attended the 69th Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations, I participated in a session featuring Ambassador Bob Rae of Canada. The session focused on Indigenous communities and was led by Indigenous women.

Someone on the panel mentioned a group from an isolated region—possibly resembling the cultural isolation you described. Their account of getting to the UN was striking. If you asked me how I got there, I'd say something like: "I took a bus to the airport, flew to New York, took the train…" For them, before all of that began, it started with a canoe.

That was their standard form of transportation before reaching any conventional transit station. So, even in that case, I would be hard-pressed to believe they were entirely uncontacted or isolated in today's world.

Robertson: I agree. I suspect such total isolation no longer exists.

The Foundation of the British Columbia Firmament: Langley's Colonial Legacy, Evangelical Politics, and Modern Controversies

2025-05-16

Foundation of the British Columbia Firmament

The Father of British Columbia, **Sir James Douglas**, is worshipped in the community where I grew up. Not for nothing, he had achievements, but he had a mixed history in numerous ways. He had a "mixed history" as HBC Chief Factor and colonial governor. He granted monopolistic privileges to his company and family.

This mixed public office and private profit. He imposed property-based voting qualifications, excluding full representation. He set forth unfair First Nations treaties. The Douglas Treaties were signed on blank sheets, with terms inserted afterward—an unusual practice. Unilaterally, these were later signed, resulting in Indigenous signatories having land cessions that were not fully known.

He had a heavy-handed gold rush policy with licensing schemes and delayed enforcement during the Fraser Canyon conflict. These failed to protect Indigenous communities. Violence and village burnings ensued. He recruited black Californian settlers for political loyalty. It was opportunistic rather than principled efforts for the enfranchisement of blacks. He was from Guyana. A fascinating history to learn about one's happenstance of contingent past circumstances: his contemporary presentation is not an exercise in false equivalence. It is about a united duality of positive and negative valence.

The living recent history reflects this mixed history in Fort Langley, out of Langley, with the crossovers between hipster intellectual farmers and well-educated, well-off Evangelical Christians, Trinity Western University, and the political shenanigans of Christians here impacting the federal level of the country. I wanted to cover some of this controversial recent history, as having a singular reference for some of the township's more noteworthy shenanigans. For clarity, I speak as a former member of one of the heritage committees of an association in Fort Langley and another for the Township of Langley. I can say, "Heritage *matters* to Langleyites." As an elder Euro-Canadian lady told me on the committee, a fellow committee member, it was in a sharp snarl once at a meeting, "I *know* who you *are*." These were not isolated events throughout my life while growing up and through there. So it goes.

The contemporary Evangelical Christian story in Fort Langley began with a sexual misconduct allegation of the longest-standing university president in Canadian history: 2005-2006 with former university president **Neil Snider**. I would rather this *not*be the case, but it is the history. Something worth repeating.

2005–2015: Institutional Unease and Image Discipline

He had the longest tenure of any Canadian university president—32 years–and greatly grew Trinity Western University (TWU) in its early decades. That is a testament to his prowess as an

administrator of resources and an inspirer of people at the time. In their terminology, he had the Holy Spirit in him.

Unfortunately, an uncomfortable truth was his retirement in 2006 following sexual misconduct allegations. Internal reports from TWU and contemporary media reviews questioned the administrative decisions around this. The community is embarrassed by it and tries to cover it up. I understand that part. It happens with clergy-related abuse cases too: Institutional protection. However, as one colleague's mom who worked with him said to me, in a way to excuse it, "He was lonely," because either his wife died or he was divorced. I leave considerations of the elasticity of excuse-making to the reader.

ChristianWeek's "Trinity Western Resolves Human Rights Complaint" documented the 2005 human rights complaint against Snider. The settlement impacted subsequent policy reviews. Former faculty interviews showed early signs of institutional unease. Evangelical leaders have undergone these **scandals**.

A CAUT Report, "**Report of an Inquiry Regarding Trinity Western University**," examined the requirement for faculty to affirm the religious Covenant. You can see TWU's current ***Community Covenant***. William Bruneau and Thomas Friedman examined the requirement for faculty to affirm the Covenant and possible impacts on academic hiring and free speech. Case studies and personal accounts of faculty are incorporated. It is a referenced report in academic discussions on religion and academia in Canada.

University Affairs via "**A test of faith at Trinity Western**" provided an analytic retrospective of early administrative policies, linking them to later legal challenges–more on that in 2016-2018. Christian universities seem highly conscious of their public image, because they theologically see themselves as at odds with the secularist world. For example, in 2011, **the Institute for Canadian Values funded an advertisement opposing LGBTI-inclusive education, which was supported by the Canada Christian College**. It was published by the *National Post* and later by the *Toronto Sun*. A national backlash happened. An apology ensued—a retraction happened by the *Post*, but not by the *Sun*.

2005-2015 was a busy few years. Ex-administrators and archival internal memos showed dissent regarding mandatory religious practices. Similar controversies happen in religious universities in Canada, all private, all Christian. The largest is Evangelical, and the largest is TWU, in Langley. After trying to get many interviews with professors and dissenting students in the community, the vast majority declined over many years of journalistic efforts, and a few agreed to a coffee conversation to express opinions. Most opinions dissent from the norm of TWU while affirming the difficulties for the faith with these straight-and-narrow executives, who are not reined in, reign with impunity, and rain neglect on their community's inner Other.

2016–2018: The Covenant and the Courts

Circa 2016, some online commentators mentioned how they felt "bad for the kids that realize they're not straight" at TWU as "Coming out is hard," and "it's crazy that people still want to go to this school." A former student acknowledged some student support for LGBTI peers while

warning many feel "quite ostracized" by an "unspoken aura" repressing non-Christian views. An LGBTI student may have to "repress their urges based on a stupid covenant."

Other online forums include a former student union leader noting the "community covenant is outdated" even by 2013, while another urged the university to rethink the Covenant. Saying there is a "thriving rape culture," "I know more than five girls who were raped [at TWU], who didn't report it because they believed they would be shamed and not taken seriously."

Maclean's in "**The end of the religious university?**" talked about the long-standing interest in the national debate around religious mandates in higher education and the central role of TWU. These controversies about academic freedom following Snider's resignation would echo some other community elements there. ***BBC News***commented that Canada approved a homophobic law school in 2013. This would eventually evolve poorly for TWU and reflect terribly on the surrounding community.

*Xtra Magazine's "*The Painful Truth About Being Gay at Canada's Largest Christian University" featured a series of robust testimonies from current and former students on systemic discrimination. The magazine also examined campus surveys, student blogs, and some student activist groups, with a case study of academic panels addressing LGBTI issues within religious institutions. The Supreme Court of Canada issued its decision on TWU's Law School accreditation in 2018. It was analyzed by legal journals and cited in academic papers. Those looked to religious mandates and the tensions with legal equality.

CBC News in "**Trinity Western loses fight for Christian law school as court rules limits on religious freedom 'reasonable'"** provided a comprehensive timeline of developments with constitutional lawyer and civil rights advocacy commentary. Other commentaries looked at policy adjustments following from institutions. *The Tyee*chimed into the discussion with "**Trinity Western University Loses in Supreme Court**," with some parables into the personal narratives on campus, more timeline events, and a more important emphasis on the long-term impact on the reputation of TWU.

Knowing some minority facets of dynamics in this community, many will slander others and lie to protect themselves, particularly their identity as represented via the incursion of Evangelical Orthodoxy into the community via the university. This small township's controversies went to the Supreme Court of Canada. They lost in a landslide decision, 7-2. The *Vancouver Sun* had various coverage, with international critiques comparing TWU's controversy to European and Australian scandals. Regardless, TWU brought global spotlight on a small township, a tiny town.

Global human rights organizations gave commentary. TWU dropped the *Community Covenant* as *mandatory*, but *only* for students, while staff, faculty, and administration maintained it. A TWU student asserted on Reddit:

TWU student here. The only two reasons why the Board of Governors chose to drop the Covenant for students is because a) The recent court ruling, and b) Their other professional programs (counselling, nursing, and teaching) received letters from their respective accrediting bodies which threatened to pull accreditation unless the Covenant was amended or discarded.

TWU's decision to make signing the Covenant voluntary for students has nothing to do with morality or human rights, but everything to do with their business model. Keep in mind, the faculty still must sign the pledge, and TWU's mission and mandate of producing "godly Christian leaders" has not changed.

The next era was 2019-2021.

2019–2021: Cultural Stagnation Despite Legal Losses

Xtra Magazine in "**I am queer at Trinity Western University. What will it take for my university to listen to me?**" provided a more individual story. Carter Sawatzky wrote, "TWU's decision in 2018 to make the Covenant non-mandatory for students also did not magically change the discriminatory treatment of queer people. After TWU's 2018 Supreme Court loss, many folks, including myself, had hoped that TWU would finally demonstrate that it can be rooted in faith and radically loving and welcoming. Instead, TWU has doubled down on its social conservatism, at the expense of queer students like myself." An international scandal and Supreme Court defeat did not change the culture or the school. That is instructive.

Another instructive moment was a student suicide attempt followed by an expulsion of the student. In "Her university expelled her after she attempted suicide, saying she had an 'inability to self-regulate.' Now she is fighting back," the *Toronto Star* presented the case of a student showing broader systemic issues and a lack of mental health resources and policy failures *within* TWU. TWU claimed otherwise. Mental health professionals and relatives of students commented. As CBC has noted, mental healthon campuses has been a point of concern for a while.

2021–2025: Repression, Image, and Intimidation

Langley is a township where I am told the murder of the famous atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair was merciful. An older gentleman saying, "**Her murder was an act of mercy**." *Langley Advance Times* in "**Private Langley University rejects LGBTQ+ event request**" reported denying an event request, One TWU Stories Night, for an LGBTI group, One TWU. Carter Sawatzky said, "We are sharing our stories, which I think should be a non-controversial thing… It is not a contradiction. You can be queer and Christian… Many people come to TWU and have never heard an LGBTQ story." That is a reasonable statement. A One TWU piece published on its site claims **homophobia is rampant** on campus.

CBC News reported on the manslaughter conviction of a TWU security guard. "**Former guard at B.C. university found guilty of manslaughter**" reported a Fall 2020 event involving "a man wearing all black" who wandered into student residences, rifling through their things. Security guard Howard Glen Hill hit the man, Jack Cruthers Hutchison, "in the head, pulled his hair and spat on him." Police arrived: Hill was "in a neck restraint, limp and unresponsive. He died in the hospital two days later." Hutchison was charged with manslaughter. TWU's statement: "The university has no comment on the court ruling. TWU's commitment has always been to safeguard our campus community, and we continue to provide a safe place of learning for all our students."

Langley Union, in "**Trinity Western University President's Son Linked to Prolific White Nationalist Account**," investigated digital forensic evidence of the son of the President of TWU linked to a White Nationalist online account. The son's actions should be considered separate from the father's and the institutions. However, they are striking news.

The accounts claimed, among other assertions, "I believe in a white future. An Aryan future. A future where my children will make Indian Bronson shine our shoes. Where brown people cannot secure a line of credit, Black people pick cotton. We will win – this is what we fight for," and "I am a colonialist. I make no effort to hide this. I believe in worldwide white supremacy."

The *Nelson Star* reported in "**'Alt-right' group uses Fort Langley historic site as meeting place**" on the use of the local pub in Fort Langley as a meeting place for a public, so known and self-identified White Nationalist group. As one former boss noted, "I don't know what is wrong with *we* the *white race*." That is a sentiment, not an organization, however. This microcosm reflects a broader history of **Canadian sociopolitics with race and religion**, some Evangelicals and occasional allegations of racialism if not racism.

TWU's policy is **Inclusive Excellence**. "We aim to promote a consistent atmosphere of inclusion and belonging at TWU by establishing a shared commitment to diversity and equity founded in the gospel's truth. Christ came to save, reconcile, and equip all people (Rev. 7:9), and the incredible array of gifts God has given us is evidence of his creativity, beauty, and love of diversity," it states. An administrator is reported to have said informally that the event was '**not in line with Evangelical values**.'

In the States, a trend in international Evangelical higher education is here too. Bob Jones University banned interracial dating until 2000, involving federal funding and accreditation debates. In Australia, Christian colleges faced scrutiny for policies excluding LGBTI+ students and staff. Faith-based codes and equality laws produced tensions in the United Kingdom, though less prominently than in Canada. Those American churches want to influence Canada in Indigenous communities. Some Canadian churches have Ojibwe pastors, **for example**.

A Medium (*Xtra)* post entitled "**The painful truth about being gay at Canada's largest Christian university**" commented on the experience of a gay student, Jacob.' As peers messaged Jacob on suspicion of him being gay, "We hate everything about you and you better watch your back because we are going to kill you on your way to school." At TWU 'Jacob,' said, "I loved the community here so much that I did not want to jeopardize those relationships." That is called a closet.

Another student, Corben, from Alberta at TWU, said, "My parents, I think, kind of wanted Trinity to be for me sort of like reparative therapy, which is why they would only help financially with this school." **Former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau put forth a move** to end Conversion Therapy, a discredited pseudotherapy to change sexual orientation and gender identity. Conversion therapy has been banned in Malta (2016), Germany (2020), France (2022), Canada (2022), New Zealand (2022), Iceland (2023), Spain (2023), Mexico (2024), Greece (2024), and Belgium (2024). That is only TWU, however. The community of Langley, specifically Fort Langley, where I was raised, is substantively linked to this place.

Langley Advance Times in "**Blackface photo in 2017 Chilliwack yearbook sparks apology from school principal**" reported on a blackface incident at a local school. It was part of a "mock trial." So, bad taste in community, and the excuse for Snider's example will likely do the same in this case over term. **There are several cases of sexual misconduct cases in British Columbia** and Canada. The Archdiocese of Vancouver was the first in Canada to publicly name clergy involved in sexual abuse and decades of abuse. At the same time, other prominent cases have arisen, including Michael Conaghan, Damian Lawrence Cooper, and Erlindo Molon, highlighting a pattern of clerical sexual exploitation and inadequate accountability in British Columbia. I would rather this *not* be the case, but it is the history.

In 2022, a TWU dean resigned amid pressure over her work on gender issues. One Reddit–and all Reddit commentary should be considered additions, while anecdotal at best–user described how TWU leaders had "tried to make her leave her position as dean because she… stated she was an lgbtq+ ally," then issued bureaucratic statements of grief based on her departure.

Living there, these excuses likely flowed through social media. At the same time, community intimidation happens, too. It is bad for the community image and bad for the business. People have an interest in narrative morphing. As gay students find at TWU, and as outsiders as others find in the general community, it is mostly not about moral stances, but about image maintenance and business interests. Money matters because it is a well-to-do area of the country and a wealthy nation worldwide. There is regular township nonsense where the Fort Langley Night Market gets closed down **due to vandalism and alcohol**.

Ongoing **online conversations** about TWU degree quality continue, "So before those say 'it's an immigration scam', it's not and is essentially useless towards immigrating/coming to Canada. With that said, *most* of TWU's programs are also useless to use towards immigrating, even if studied in person, because any non-degree program from a private school does not allow one to apply for a PGWP. However, it offers a couple of degree programs that can result in a PGWP."

Brandon Gabriel and Eric Woodward have been at loggerheads for at least a decade. If you look at the original history, this reflects another fight between an Indigenous leader and the colonial presence in its history. Now, they are a local artist and developer, respectively. Woodward has a camp of supporters for development and a camp of detractors. Another mixed figure in the contemporary period of Langley. Over development concerns and pushback, Woodward got a building **painted pink** in protest at one point. It is a serious township history full of a minority of loud, silly people imposing their nonsense on a smaller group of innocent bystanders.

Whether LGBTI discrimination ensconced at its university, a blackface principal, homophobia, this isn't unusual in a way. A constellation of apparent White Nationalist superminority undercurrents popping up, and with worship of a founder in a democracy who was a mixed-race colonialist timocrat married to a Cree woman, it's a story of a Canadian town and municipality. A tale of how foundational myths, when left unexamined, morph into social realities.

Welcome to Langley–a light introduction: Home, sorta.

Legal Assistance in Dying (MAID) in Canada: Legal Framework, Strict Safeguards & Protecting Vulnerable Populations

2025-05-16

Legal Framework & Definitions, Vulnerable Populations

On February 15, 2023, the Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying reported on five mandated issues: advance requests, access to MAID for mature minors, access to MAID for those whose sole underlying medical condition is a mental disorder, the state of palliative care, and the protection of people living with disabilities. A considerable amount of misinformation has circulated in the public sphere and media and Dying With Dignity Canada (DWDC) would like to set out some clear facts surrounding MAID, the strict criteria and safeguards that govern its use, and aspects of its proposed expansion.

DWDC, "Myths and Facts: Medical assistance in dying (MAID) in Canada"

Medical assistance in dying (MAID) is a process that allows someone who is found eligible to be able to receive assistance from a medical practitioner in ending their life. The federal Criminal Code of Canada permits this to take place only under very specific circumstances and rules. Anyone requesting this service must meet specific eligibility criteria to receive medical assistance in dying. Any medical practitioner who administers an assisted death to someone must satisfy certain safeguards first.

Only medical practitioners are permitted to conduct assessments and to provide medical assistance in dying. This can be a physician or a nurse practitioner, where provinces and territories allow.

Government of Canada, "Medical assistance in dying: Overview"

The next thing I want to speak about is whether the vulnerable need protection. Again, this has been tried in court with both the Carter case and Truchon case. There is no evidence that vulnerable people are at risk for MAID. [Ed. Minor evidence suggests otherwise, now, but small and select, see **AP News**.] In fact, if you look at the actual people who are receiving MAID, they are typically white, well educated and well off. You could easily argue that the marginalized communities are disadvantaged because they're not accessing MAID. In the Truchon case, Justice Baudouin equally found that the disadvantaged are not being taken advantage of and you must do each case at a time.

Dr. Derryck Smith, "Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying"

Death is a sensitive topic. It is a different question from the origin of life, the evolution of organisms, the speciation of species, and the point when life begins for human beings. We're dealing with a live person who can make, ideally, informed decisions about a profound moment in life: its end. For those who know those who have tried to take their life, the sensitivity is multiplied over social relations. Rational foundations for care in finality are important, though. A lot of smart humanists have thought deeply about this topic.

Humanists can be stereotyped–as a whole without exception–supporting medical assistance in dying (MAID) at the expense of palliative care. MAID as a way to reduce healthcare burden (of the old, the sick, the disabled), and dangerous as a "social contagion." Atheist humanists get the worst of it, because of the major prejudices felt and **only recently researched** in an academic context.

The lattermost, as a piece of falsehood, emerges with relative frequency. These will be case examples for this article. These cases critiquing the imperfection of MAID have a sensibility akin to creationist critiques of evolution with God of the Gaps arguments. God of the Gaps arguments point to absences or uncertainties in scientific knowledge and then assert divine intervention. It is a form of magical thinking. Critique evolution superficially without proposing a workable alternative; what is the evidence-based alternative with greater efficacy than MAID, where MAID is merely one option? This challenges the trade-off myth. There will be failures in any system. Is this more efficacious than the system not existing? Stuff like that.

Debunking Common Myths

Canada has an organization devoted to these issues, DWDC. I found and took a statement about the spread of misinformation about MAID by DWDC seriously. DWDC noted myths about:

- "advocating to kill infants with disabilities"
- "mature minors will be eligible for medical assistance in dying (MAID) in March 2027"
- "opening the door for suicidal children and teenagers to access an assisted death"
- "eligibility of mature minors is being considered without adequate protections in place and without consultation or consent from parents or guardians"
- "clinicians inappropriately recommending MAID to patients who are not eligible or as an alternative to treatment"
- "vulnerable populations being eligible for MAID because they are suffering from inadequate social supports, including housing"
- "Canada is systematically targeting and 'killing' the poor, disabled, and marginalized instead of giving them the proper supports they need to live."

Social Contagion Concerns

DWDC identified a few more. However, this sets a foundation for knowledge about misinformation's ubiquity dispensed flippantly by both left and right alike. This has political debate content. The fundamental issue is humane treatment. That shouldn't be political. Upon doing a first search on social contagion, the source of some misinformation was made by right-wing conservative groups. The idea being, thus: "**Physician-assisted suicide is social contagion**."

Social contagion research on suicide seems to rely on fear of copycats: a good fear. The substantive enquiry: Is the evidence proportional to support this assertion, or is the general assertion of social contagion of suicide equivalent to medical contexts, including MAID? Health Canada's 2022 MAID monitoring report analyzed suicide rates. The 2022 study found no

significant increase in suicide rates following MAID legalization in 2016. This differs compared to patterns after high-profile celebrity suicides. The American Psychological Association's 2014 review (*Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 140) links media sensationalism to copycat suicides. In other words, MAID's regulated approach mitigates the standard effects seen in social contagion risks. Health Canada did the study. The American Psychological Association 2014 found the same for copycat behaviours and media exposure, not due to structured medical processes.

Palliative Care vs. MAID

According to **DWDC** and the **Government of Canada**, MAID has multiple safeguards in place, as stipulated at the outset. General suicides exclusive to MAID do not have safeguards in place. Of those two, to the original question, what is the evidence-based alternative with greater efficacy than MAID, where MAID is merely one option? Which is to say, in either case, conditions for palliative care exist equivalently, while MAID is in place versus not.

Exceptional (Super-Minority) Cases

What about the exclusionary cases? That one does not wish to happen at all. A super-minority of unfortunate cases as exceptions to the principles of MAID. "**Canadians with nonterminal conditions sought assisted dying for social reasons**" described social conditions under which some MAID cases continued with "unmet social need." Health Canada's Fifth Annual Report (2023) report showed less than 2% of the 13,241 assisted deaths by individuals involving psychosocial factors as primary motivators.

We should all strive to help those with unmet social needs, who may fall under this category. These commentaries point to inefficiencies in safeguards, particularly in super-minority specific cases, not the principle. This is the relevance of God of the Gaps arguments with creationism against evolution.

To identify gaps is to identify gaps in MAID-specific cases and, thus, in the general population too, the bodies found in general populations, probably, result in less dignified and compassionate deaths. We should emphasize palliative care and other care more to balance the ratio of provisions for Canadian citizens. The Special Joint Committee's 2023 report found that 3 in 10 Canadians can access high-quality palliative care. Rural areas and Indigenous communities are underserved. **Ontario integration of palliative consultations with MAID assessments reduced requests by 15%**. This synergy shows promise; it's not either-or. This is to say, again, that the principle stands while exclusive super-minority cases require more work. Critics do a service here, up to and including robust, systemic, integrated alternatives.

Social contagion merely applies to the unregulated and unsafe cases of suicide, as in a double-barrel shotgun after a woman in a depressive fit after a breakup. It is different than a considered, regulated, informed choice about suicide with the assistance of a qualified professional in most of the other cases. MAID supports something more akin to the latter than the former. We should have expanded social programs for those who need them, more robust MAID mechanisms, and condemnation of stereotypes about MAID that harm people who need them. Expanding social programs may incorporate guaranteed housing subsidies.

Conscience, Faith, and Coercion

MAID is the main option available for those who need it. If an individual believes in a divine being, and does not want to become enmeshed in humanist or other ideology around their decision or their end of life, they should be permitted to make that choice, according to their conscience and faith. Similarly, those who do not share that notion, in which human beings do not ultimately own their life, a god does, should be permitted their conscience-based free choice too. If someone is being coerced, this would fail the principle and the spirit of the MAID options permitted in Canada.

Understanding Ancestry, Ethnicity, and the Global Impact of U.S. Racial Categories

2025-05-16

Ancestries have been defined in a number of ways: Descent, heritage, nationality, pan-ethnic identity, tribal affiliation, or region. The United States uses five major categories for civil rights tracking. Those five are Asian, Black, Native American, Pacific Islander, and White. This categorization for civil rights demographics does not equate to the prior ancestries.

Ethnicities can come from a variety of definitions. While ideologically opposed but in agreement on the concept of Whites, while a abstract sociological invention, right sociopolitical affirmation of pride, ‘White Power,’ and the left sociopolitical critical language, ‘Whiteness.’ Each caters to relevant constituencies for financial, moral, or social points. They are distinct orientations. No necessary equivalence extant between them.

The intrigue comes from the imposed frame from within the United States on the world. U.S. racial and ethnic discourse is sometimes projected into international contexts. Some of the world buys into it, thus imposing American grievances onto their environs–without much apparent regard for a sufficiently symmetric relation or not.

Punjabis share Punjab region heritage, Punjabi language, cultural traditions, though Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus exist. Yoruba share language, lineage, and customs. Religion becomes secondary. Han Chinese share ancestry, language, and Confucianism. Therefore, common descent, shared language and traditions, and, maybe, religion and tribal/political affiliations amongst them.

The US uses self-identified ancestry, nationality, and origin. Studies of the demographics of the world use common ancestry, language, and culture. The US comprises a population of 334 million people. *No single ancestry is a majority*.

The largest self-reported ancestries are German (12%), English (9%), Irish (9%), unspecified American (5%), and Italian (5%). The largest pan-ethnic groups are Hispanic/Latino (20%), African American (14%), Asian (7%), and Native American/Alaska Native (1-2%). Foreign born residents is 14%. Therefore, German, English, Irish, and Hispanic comprise half of the US, but with overlap.

The world has 8.2 billion people. The United States is 4% of the world population. Yet, their sociopolitics, charged and neutral, get applied to the world. This seems inappropriate and inaccurate. 3 distinct ethnolinguistic blocs comprise a larger share of the global population than the 4% held by Americans.

Han Chinese (Sinitic language family) comprise 17% of the global population. Indo-Aryan peoples (Begali, Hindi, and Punjabi) comprise 13%. Arabs (Arabic-speaking) comprise 6%. Each exist *in* the US. None exists *as a* large minority in the US [See above].

More than 7,000 ethnic groups extant in the world. May we take ourselves as persons then peoples first, perhaps?

I don’t know.

Tragic Maternal Death in Port Harcourt Sparks National Debate on Medical Ethics and Religious Convictions

2025-05-16

Port Harcourt, Nigeria — May 14, 2025 — A maternal death in Rivers State intensified national scrutiny in Nigeria—a controversy over religious conviction and medical responsibility. On May 10, 2025, 33-year-old Victoria Paris died. She had postpartum hemorrhage following a cesarean section. The surgery was performed in Borikiri, Port Harcourt. Reports indicate a life-saving blood transfusion was withheld.

Paris was not affiliated with the Jehovah's Witnesses. She had previously given birth to children at the same facility. She was reportedly in labour with a fifth child. Complications arose. After an emergency cesarean section, she suffered blood loss. Family members allege the hospital's proprietor refused to authorize a transfusion, citing religious objections (Physician was reportedly a Jehovah's Witness). A power outage happened during surgery. This may have delayed care. Paris was transferred to a second medical facility. She was dead on arrival.

On May 11, 2025, the Rivers State Ministry of Health's Anti-Quackery Committee arrived, led by Dr. Vincent Wachukwu. They conducted an unscheduled inspection, sealed the hospital's operating theatre, and ordered staff to cease clinical activities. The Committee cited suspected professional negligence and breach of the Rivers State Private Health-Care Facilities Regulation Law.

The Standard Maternity Hospital, at №2 Captain Amangala Street, is licensed as a Level B private maternity centre. In 2024, the facility was cautioned for inadequate record-keeping and placed on probationary oversight.

Criminal charges may be brought as outlined in the Criminal Code §303. Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a doctrinal interpretation of biblical scripture against the transfusion of whole blood and primary components. A belief central to the faith. (Internal Watchtower documents warn Jehovah's Witness doctors and nurses not to prescribe or administer blood transfusions to non-Jehovah's Witnesses, even if doing so makes them subject to penalty).

This raises questions on the ethical boundaries of personal or institutional religious convictions in emergency medical settings. Current Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria guidelines (2016) require that physicians render all reasonable emergency measures, irrespective of personal beliefs.

Media Contact:

Lee Elder

Email: LeeElderAJWRB@gmail.com

Advocates for the Jehovah's Witnesses Reform on Blood

Website: www.ajwrb.org

Le Moyne College's 2025 Young Alumni Ignatian Award for Journalism on Ukraine and Eurasia

2025-05-16

Mark Temnycky is a Ukrainian-American journalist and nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center. He has reported extensively on Russia's war in Ukraine and broader international affairs, with bylines in *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *The Hill*, and *Newsweek*. His work has been cited by institutions such as NATO, the U.S. Army, and the European Parliament. He earned his undergraduate degree in history, with departmental honors, from Le Moyne College, he earned a certificate in international relations from Georgetown University, and he later completed dual master's degrees in public administration and international relations from Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. In recognition of his contributions to journalism and his commitment to Jesuit values, he received Le Moyne College's 2025 Young Alumni Ignatian Award.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are with Mark Temnycky. He is a Ukrainian-American journalist and a nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center. He has reported extensively on Russia's war in Ukraine and broader international affairs, with bylines in *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *The Hill*, and *Newsweek*. His work has been cited by institutions such as NATO, the U.S. Army, and the European Parliament. He earned his undergraduate degree in history, with departmental honors, from Le Moyne College, he earned a certificate in international relations from Georgetown University, and he later completed dual master's degrees in public administration and international relations from Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. In recognition of his contributions to journalism and his commitment to Jesuit values, he received Le Moyne College's 2025 Young Alumni *Ignatian* Award. First, who is Ignatius? Second, how do you see the connections between Jesuit values and journalism that matters? Third, what did the award mean to you?

Mark Temnycky: To answer your question, it is Ignatius, as in Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus. That is the Jesuit order within the Catholic Church. As for my background, I attended Le Moyne College for my undergraduate studies. It's one of the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States. Other institutions include Loyola University Chicago and Georgetown University.

Jesuit education is distinct in its emphasis on *cura personalis*—care for the whole person—and service to others. It's not just about academic excellence or earning a science, math, or social sciences degree. The Jesuit philosophy encourages students to engage with their communities, reflect on their values, and serve others meaningfully.

For example, during our freshman year at Le Moyne, we were encouraged to volunteer in the local community, whether helping out in under-resourced schools or supporting food pantries and shelters. I volunteered at a local school where we worked with young children, providing classroom support and mentorship. We also participated in community service projects through campus ministries, distributing food or clothing to members of the Syracuse community.

That commitment to service and justice has stayed with me and continues to shape how I approach journalism: with responsibility, empathy, and a focus on truth and integrity. I'm sure plenty of universities without any Jesuit or Christian tradition or affiliation do many of the same things. The difference is that Jesuit institutions place an extra emphasis on service and moral responsibility. Professors often challenge students to think about earning a degree and *what they will do with that degree* to make the world a better place.

There are so many wars and conflicts around the world. Poverty persists. Food scarcity continues to affect millions. Many countries face limited access to education, job prospects, and economic opportunities. Of course, no single individual can solve all the world's problems. But it is about adopting a different worldview: recognizing that if you have an education and a certain level of privilege, you have a responsibility–not only to yourself, to ensure stability and support your family and loved ones—but also to help those less fortunate.

It's about giving back to your community, using your skills and background to uplift others. This mindset is rooted in the idea of *noblesse oblige*, the old French expression meaning that those who have the means and the opportunities are obliged to help those who do not. That's a compelling way of seeing the world—community-based and value-driven, rather than living solely for oneself.

So I was very honoured to receive this award from my undergraduate alma mater. During my undergraduate and graduate school years, I often felt that, as someone of Ukrainian descent, not many people knew much about Ukraine. There was little awareness or concern for Ukraine and Eastern Europe.

That started to change around 2013, when I was still in school. That was the time of the Euromaidan protests—also known as the Revolution of Dignity. Ukrainians were upset that then-President Viktor Yanukovych had refused to sign an association agreement with the European Union. This was in November 2013.

To clarify, this agreement was not about EU membership or formal integration. It was intended to strengthen economic and trade ties with the EU and improve everyday life in Ukraine. At the time—and even now—Ukraine was, and still is, one of the poorest countries in Europe.

For context, the average monthly salary in the EU is between €2,000 and €3,000. In Ukraine, it is closer to €250, a significant disparity. So, how can people build sustainable lives under those conditions, especially when neighbouring countries like Poland or the Baltic States—Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania—are EU members and have far greater economic stability?

It is hard for Ukrainians to move forward when those economic and structural disparities persist. So, when the Euromaidan movement began, I saw it as an opportunity, being based in the United States, to educate and inform people: What is this movement? Why does it matter? What is happening?

Later, while pursuing my graduate studies at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, I worked for the Ukrainian Parliament during the summer of 2016. I also interned at the NATO office at the Pentagon for a fall semester in 2016. Combined, these internships lasted about seven

months. They allowed me to observe how governments function, how public policy is crafted, and how different and yet similar political systems can be.

During graduate school, I wrote my first published piece for *Forbes*, titled ***"Why Ukraine is Ukraine, Not 'the' Ukraine"***. It focused on the significance of dropping the definite article *"the"* when referring to Ukraine, a symbolic and political shift reflecting national sovereignty. Since then, I've continued to write for news outlets and think tanks. More recently, especially following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, I've participated in interviews like this one, podcasts, and media panels to talk about the war and its global significance.

I've been writing for nearly a decade on Ukraine and countries across Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. I focus on why the United States, NATO, and the European Union should care about these regions—not only from the standpoint of national security, foreign policy, or energy security—but also from a human perspective: what can wealthier countries do to help individuals in these areas have access to opportunities similar to those in the U.S. or Western Europe?

That does not mean those individuals must choose the same path or system. People should always have the freedom to shape their own lives. But having more options—economic, educational, and professional—can dramatically improve their standard of living.

The motivation has always been to inform and educate, not to seek awards or recognition. I do these interviews and write these pieces because I believe it's the right thing to do. In recent years, I've also had the privilege of speaking at universities across the United States about the war in Ukraine and why it matters.

So I'm deeply honored and thankful to have been acknowledged with this award. It motivates me even more to continue this work—however modest it may be—to try to improve the situation for people impacted by the war.

Jacobsen: Jesuit education—beyond being rigorous and intellectually grounded in theology—also has an ethical component, often centred on forming "persons for others." Your earlier responses already reflected that emphasis. How do you see this Jesuit value system's role in other areas of your life and work?

Temnycky: I think it's important to remember that you never really know what people are going through. Many individuals do not publicly share their challenges or hardships. Life is complex, and the world can be very overwhelming. So, by taking things one day at a time and trying, even in small, modest ways, to make life better for others, you contribute to creating a more compassionate and supportive world.

Living kindly—being helpful and supportive toward others—makes life more enjoyable for yourself and those around you. That's where the value of being a *person for others*becomes meaningful. It encourages us to consider not just ourselves but those around us.

And it's very easy to become overwhelmed by all the suffering and tragedy we see in the news. Whether it's war, natural disasters, or other crises, there's no shortage of pain and loss. These are

all very real concerns. But if someone becomes entirely consumed by the negativity, it can lead to a very pessimistic outlook on life.

Everyone only lives once. And it's a sad way to live, constantly burdened by the world's hardships without recognizing the beauty and kindness that still exist. Sometimes, it's as simple as smiling at someone or saying hello. Other times, it's more impactful, like individuals who have the means to donate millions to causes like cancer research or humanitarian aid.

Every act of kindness matters. You have two choices: you can be a bystander, feeling helpless and consumed by all the negativity, or you can try, however modestly, to make a positive impact. Not for recognition, not to build a legacy, but simply to do the right thing. To help others. To strengthen your community. Because life is already challenging, and if everyone has to fight for themselves alone, it only gets harder. But if people unite—if communities work together—life becomes more manageable and meaningful.

Jacobsen: And there's only one award per year, right?

Temnycky: Yes, for this specific category. There are a few others as well. There is the Distinguished Alumni Award, the Ignatian Award for Professional Achievement, the Ignatian Award for Community Service, the Ignatian Award for Service to Le Moyne College, the Ignatian Spirit Award, the Ignatian Veterans Service Award, the Ignatian Award for Young Alumni, which I received, and the Ignatian Award for Honorary Alumnus.

Jacobsen: Are there contemporary figures in Eurasia—in the areas you study, such as geopolitics, war, and humanitarian work—whom you look to as a beacon of the kind of greater good that Saint Ignatius emphasized?

Temnycky: Yes. One individual who comes to mind is a family friend whom I know very well: Metropolitan Archbishop Borys Gudziak. He heads the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the United States.

He's also originally from Syracuse. One of the things he's done through his work is establish the Ukrainian Catholic University in western Ukraine, in Lviv. The university provides higher education opportunities within Ukraine and has been referred to by some as the "Harvard of Ukraine."

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Bishop Borys Gudziak worked with the Church to purchase a large plot of land in Lviv, where they began with a small chapel. From that humble beginning, they built the university. Since then, hundreds—if not thousands—of Ukrainians have studied there. Many are now volunteering or fighting on the front lines, giving back to Ukraine with their lives and sacrifices because they understand the importance of freedom, democracy, and national values.

And all of that began with a vision rooted in service, making Ukraine a better place, building community. He's someone I respect deeply and who has been an influence in my own life. His example has shaped my motivation to pursue selfless work, to do whatever I can—even in small ways—to try to make the world a better place.

Jacobsen: Thank you, Mark. I appreciate it. Have a great evening, and we'll talk soon.

Temnycky: Thank you, Scott. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you.

Ed Fredkin and the Foundations of Digital Philosophy: The Universe as Computation

2025-05-16

Ed Fredkin (1934-2023), deceased MIT Professor and Caltech Fairchild Distinguished Scholar, can be attributed as one of the founders of Digital Philosophy. Others include Konrad Zuse and Stephen Wolfram. It is an interdisciplinary endeavour between computer science, physics, and philosophy, fundamentally grounded on computation. Universe operates as a computational system. Fredkin believed all physical processes are derivable from data processing, hence digital physics rather than physics.

Fredkin worked on computer vision, business ventures, and chess programming. Digital Philosophy sees the universe as digital. A set of pancomputationalism and digital physics. Both are distinct, but relate to one another. A discrete finite system run by rules on computation. Fredkin conjectures: All manifest energy, matter, space, and time, are bits.

Fredkin believe in no infinites, no continuities. A universe integer-grounded and finite. The evolution of the physical processes happens as transformations from state to state is the hypothesis of Fredkin. Each state as a whole slice of the cosmic worldline. Disputable early orientations include determinism, reductionism, and mechanism.

The universe functions with each next state following from prior states. Complex phenomena are emergent phenomena from simpler fundaments. Reality as a mechanism operable as a machine with predictable rules.

Fredkin supported the ideas with reversible computing and cellular automata. He stated:

Digital mechanics predicts that for every continuous symmetry of physics there will be some microscopic process that violates that symmetry.

And:

The appearance of a single truly random event is absolutely incompatible with a strong law of conservation of information.

Cellular automata come in a variety. The one developed by Fredkin was called the SALT (Six-state Asynchronous Logic Tiling) family of cellular automata. These are reversible automata capable of ‘universal computation.’ These models simulate digital rules.

He invented the Fredkin gate, able to perform computations without losing energy. Some of energy-efficient computing is based on this. This has implications for contemporary and upcoming artificial intelligence systems.

He proposed, in a manner within these developments, the finitude of the natural order. Fredkin asserted the universe is a giant automaton with the possibility of quantum phenomena emergent from digital processes too. Philosophy of physics, in this developmental trend, can be interpreted as philosophy of digital physics.

When made practical, we unite the Digital Philosophy into digital physics. One deals with concepts, relations, and theories, and the other with operations, functions, and applications.

Reversible computing has arrived and advanced, particularly in reduction of energy waste per compute. The Vaire Computing chip achieved a many-fold increase in energy efficiency. A possible direct developmental inspiration from the conceptual framework of Fredkin's work, so from digital philosophy into digital physics.

Some critiques exist of the ideas despite the practical applications and consistency with contemporary ideas of computation and information:

1. If all is computation, the idea is too broad, so meaningless.
2. It needs more empirical support, so it has reduced scientific credibility.
3. Discrete models are inconsistent with continuous models of quantum mechanics or relativity.
4. Some see the ideas as naive while others question validity due to Fredkin's computational background.

His ideas left a lasting mark on modern physics and Digital Philosophy continues to impact facets of computation, physics, and philosophy. Others existed in this space and others are extant.

The developments of digital physics continue.

Sustainable Population Growth: Balancing Demographics, Climate, and Human Values

2025-05-16

“Population growth can exacerbate environmental degradation when it increases pressure on natural resources and generates more waste and emissions. Sustainable development requires policies that balance population trends with economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity.”

World Population Prospects 2022, UN DESA

“Rapid population growth can hinder economic development, especially when it outpaces the provision of essential services and job creation. A stable population supports long-term sustainability.”

World Development Report 2007

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Population growth must be addressed within that context.”

Our Common Future (1987), Brundtland Commission Report

The 2024 revision of the United Nations *World Population Prospects* (medium-variant series) describes 42 of the 193 UN member states, excluding the Holy See and the State of Palestine, as in absolute demographic decline. The number increases to 48 if micro-states and non-sovereign areas are included.

The 1980s saw two countries enter absolute decline: Hungary and Bulgaria. In the 1990s, 14 countries entered population regression: Albania (1990), Estonia (1990), Latvia (1990), Romania (1990), Armenia (1991), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1991), Croatia (1991), Lithuania (1991), Georgia (1992), Belarus (1993), Moldova (1993), Russia (1993), Ukraine (1993), and Serbia (1995).

Eight countries entered regression in the 2000s, slowing down the per-country rate: Barbados (2000), Dominica (2000), Saint Lucia (2000), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (2000), North Macedonia (2001), Cuba (2006), Andorra (2008), Portugal (2008), and Japan (2008).

Ten countries entered population decline in the 2010s: Greece (2010), Montenegro (2011), Poland (2012), Grenada (2012), Saint Kitts and Nevis (2013), Italy (2014), Slovenia (2014), Trinidad and Tobago (2014), Mauritius (2019), and Tonga (2019).

The 2020s saw seven countries enter this same pattern so far: South Korea (2020), China (2021), Slovakia (2021), Monaco (2022), San Marino (2022), Uruguay (2022), and Seychelles (2023). The chronology is as follows, represented as a consistent bullet point series:

1980s

- Hungary (1980–maybe 1981-1982)

- Bulgaria (1989)

1990s

- Albania (1990)
- Estonia (1990)
- Latvia (1990)
- Romania (1990)
- Armenia (1991)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina (1991)
- Croatia (1991)
- Lithuania (1991)
- Georgia (1992)
- Belarus (1993)
- Moldova (1993)
- Russia (1993)
- Ukraine (1993)
- Serbia (1995)

2000s

- Barbados (2000)
- Dominica (2000)
- Saint Lucia (2000)
- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (2000)
- North Macedonia (2001)
- Cuba (2006)
- Andorra (2008)
- Portugal (2008)
- Japan (2008)

2010s

- Greece (2010)
- Montenegro (2011)
- Poland (2012)
- Grenada (2012)

- Saint Kitts and Nevis (2013)
- Italy (2014)
- Slovenia (2014)
- Trinidad and Tobago (2014)
- Mauritius (2019)
- Tonga (2019)

2020s

- South Korea (2020)
- China (2021)
- Slovakia (2021)
- Monaco (2022)
- San Marino (2022)
- Uruguay (2022)
- Seychelles (2023)

151 out of 193 member states *are not* shrinking. Sixty-three have peaked, 42 are shrinking — many only recently, and the rest are growing. Which is to state, based on known data, the apparent conclusion faces us.

The United Nations' *World Population Prospects 2024* approximates a peak of 10.3 billion in the *mid-2080s*, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) in *The Lancet* estimated a peak of 9.73 billion in *2064*, and the Wittgenstein Centre's 2023 estimate is a peak of 10.13 billion in *2080*.

This means 29 years on the earlier extreme up to 64 years on the later extreme until the peak human population. The reality: The likelihood sits somewhere between those antipodean projected extremes. Population decline, as an absolute global issue, will become urgent about two generations from now *if* population growth is simply the idea.

This is both a *that* and a *why* issue. If you argue *that* population should increase without a *reason*, then you ignore the most important question: What quality of life is desired for all human beings with the population? This becomes a valuable question for the constituents of global *eudaimonia*. (Only from the perspective of *homo sapiens*.)

Having population growth for the sake of more people seems narrow, to say the least. If the only other option is the nihilistic, suicidal decline of the species, then the false dichotomy takes on an international, species-wide caricature. Another option is *sustainable* population growth. Experts have proposed this.

Until space mining becomes practicable, easily accessible resources on Earth remain finite. Sustainable population growth provides the benefits of resource balance, economic resilience, higher quality of life, environmental protection, social equity, and climate adaptability.

The most significant issue facing humanity is anthropogenic climate change. Climate systems respond to physical inputs, not human governance failures or political boundaries. Growth for growth's sake is uninformed and valueless. Regression for the desired decline of humanity can be seen as nihilistic, another valuelessness.

Sustainable growth harbours the non-polyannish universalist values of human rights, empiricism of science, and compassion of a humane consideration of every person, young and old. Now, with humanistic values, if we want sustainable growth, what *works*?

Fundamentally, until synthetic means of human gestation exist, which remain scientifically feasible while complex, universal concern and evidence depict one approximate half of humanity: women, and trans people, with relevant reproductive mechanics intact.

For those who want to have children and for those who want to support their free, uncoerced decision to have children, population dynamics tells us some things: equal parental leave, affordable childcare, flexible family-friendly workplaces, support for dual-earner families, reproductive autonomy and healthcare access, and shared domestic responsibilities.

Another social factor is valuing family and children. Some conservative and libertarian commentators have proposed this. That's true. However, what better way to support this through funding, policy, and role alignment than by establishing a comprehensive program grounded in the reality of shared values—values that only appear to be superficially or paradoxically opposed?

However, children and families are highly personal and individual choices. Some people believe relationships are not for them. Children are not for them. Thus, the messaging should be informed, culturally appropriate, and targeted in an evidence-based manner to those who want either or both, then providing a culture and infrastructure environment in which the sustainable growth models can flourish, while targeting anthropogenic climate change and other problems.

A values-driven, evidence-based approach to population policy can foster a sustainable and worthwhile world in which people who want children are empowered to have them and humanity grows in balance with nature.

Institutional Assessments of Nazi and AfD Ideologies

2025-05-16

Racism fueled Nazi ideology and policies. The Nazis viewed the world as being divided up into competing inferior and superior races.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

At its core, the Nazi worldview was racist and biological, positing that the so-called 'Aryan' race – primarily the North Europeans – was the superior race of humanity.

Yad Vashem – The World Holocaust Remembrance Center

The German Nazis were decidedly far-Right, not leftwing. To call the Left "Nazis," or frame the German Left as Nazis, when the enormous weight of corpses and contemporary political analyses note the German Nazis as *Right*-wing, congratulations, you have taken on the tactics of abusers: Gaslighting.

They merely had "Socialist" in the name. They used the language to co-opt working-class support. Then they aggressively persecuted leftists–i.e., trade unionists, socialists, communists– while advocating for anti-Communism, authoritarianism, militarism, nationalism, traditionalism, and xenophobia.

Facts of history and the dead matter, not scoring political points for personal gain. To more recent history, German intelligence agencies ranked the AfD with neo-Nazi groups as a *Gefahr für die Demokratie* (danger to democracy).

May 2025…: German intelligence agencies connected the Afd to extreme-right ideology. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) report stressed AfD's *ethnisch-abstammungsmäßiges Volksverständnis*(ethnically defined concept of "the people") as violating democratic order, seeking to exclude entire groups. AfD characterized as a "racist and anti-Muslim" organization, e.g., slogans like *Abschieben schafft Wohnraum*("deportation creates housing") and *Jeder Fremde mehr in diesem Land ist einer zu viel* ("each more foreigner is one too many"). These are listed as evidence of dehumanizing language. BfV President Thomas Haldenwang called this "a good day for democracy." A history exists here, too.

March 2022: a Cologne court upheld the BfV's classification of the AfD and its youth wing as a *Beobachtungsobjekt (Verdachtsfall)* (suspected extremist organization), finding *ausreichende tatsächliche Anhaltspunkte für verfassungsfeindliche Bestrebungen*– "sufficient factual indications of anti-constitutional aims." The BfV 1,100-page report filled the extremism criteria.

Late 2023: Bavarian prosecutors opened investigations into newly elected AfD MP Daniel Halemba for possible use of Nazi symbols. He previously belonged to a student fraternity raided for Nazi paraphernalia.

December, 2023: Several state Verfassungsschutz offices flagged AfD branches. Saxony's domestic intelligence classified the Saxony AfD as *gesichert rechtsextremistisch*. Saxony's VS president Dirk-Martin Christian said, "*…an der rechtsextremistischen Ausrichtung der AfD Sachsen bestehen keine Zweifel mehr"*("there is no longer any doubt about AfD Saxony's right-

extremist orientation") The party held *typische völkisch-nationalistische Positionen* ("typical folk-nationalist positions") and used common anti-Semitic conspiracy language. These mirrored Nazi-era rhetoric. Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt earlier flagged local AfD branches as extremist as well.

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (SPD) called the intelligence review legal and independent, resulting in a 1,100-page internal report being apolitical. The new classification permitted intensified surveillance, including deployment of informants and communication interception.

May, (2024). German courts have penalized AfD members for Nazi-linked speech. The Halle state court convicted Thuringia AfD leader Björn Höcke for using the SA slogan *"Alles für Deutschland!"*

2025: Two Saarland AfD local councillors liked a Facebook post celebrating Hitler's birthday. Authorities launched a *Volksverhetzung* (incitement) probe and party expulsion proceedings.

Leading German politicians likened the AfD to fascism and Nazi extremism. SPD Defense Minister Boris Pistorius warned protesters in 2024: *Wer die AfD aus Protest wählt, dem müsse klar sein, dass sie Faschisten wählten.* ("Anyone who votes AfD out of protest must be aware that they are voting for fascists.") SPD leader Lars Klingbeil accused AfD co-leader Alice Weidel of heading a *rechtsextreme Partei… die AfD ist durchsetzt auch mit Nazis in Europa.* ("the AfD is also filled with Nazis in Europe.") Former SPD head Sigmar Gabriel compared hearing AfD rhetoric to his Nazi-father: *Alles, was die [AfD] erzählen, habe ich schon gehört — im Zweifel von meinem eigenen Vater, der … ein Nazi war.* Green and Linke politicians made similar warnings. Expert commentators warned of Nazi parallels.

German officials and courts drew a direct line between AfD rhetoric and Nazi-style ideology. Official reports cite AfD policy goals, mass deportation slogans to ethno-nationalist immigration stances, as incompatible with Germany's constitution.

Federal Indian Day School Settlement

2025-06-02

Cam Cameron, Class Counsel Lead for the Federal Indian Day School Settlement, explains that many claimants have not received correspondence due to outdated contact details or incomplete claims. Claimants should contact the Administrator at 1-888-221-2898 to verify status or provide missing documents. Extensive outreach—via mail, phone, advertising, and community engagement—continues until the June 27, 2025, deadline. Estate representatives face challenges due to missing legal documentation. While Class Counsel aids in appeals and form completion, they do not assist with probate. Outreach has targeted rural and non-English-speaking communities using multilingual materials to ensure fairness and inclusion in the settlement process.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What are common reasons claimants have not received correspondence from the Administrator?

Cam Cameron: The most common reason is outdated contact information. Many claimants have moved, changed phone numbers, or no longer check the email address they used when they first submitted their claim. In some cases, correspondence has been returned as undeliverable. If a claimant does not respond to follow-up requests for missing information, their file remains incomplete and unprocessed.

Jacobsen: What is the appropriate means by which to proceed if they're uncertain about claim status?

Cameron: Claimants or their representatives should contact the Claims Administrator at 1-888-221-2898 right away. They can check on the status of a claim and identify any missing documentation. If the claimant is deceased, an estate representative must call to ensure the file is appropriately updated and supported.

Jacobsen: Given 15,726 claims are unprocessed, what systems can help efficiently notify and assist claimants before June 27?

Cameron: The Administrator, Castlemain and Class Counsel have conducted extensive outreach —including mail and phone to reach Claimants directly and national paid advertising (including radio, social media, in-community advertising and direct community outreach). This outreach has been ongoing over the past two years and will continue until the June 27 deadline.

Jacobsen: There is an absence of critical information: school name, attendance years, or a valid representative. These may impact eligibility or compensation levels. Is there any flexibility in the process?

Cameron: Members have had more than 2 years since the January 13, 2023 deadline to submit missing information and complete their Claims. For Claimants with representatives, the deadline to provide required representative documentation is the later of: (a) 2 years from date of death or incapacity (provided that the date of death or incapacity occurred on or before June 27, 2025), or (b) June 27, 2025.

Jacobsen: What challenges are estate representatives facing?

Cameron: Many estates have failed to provide valid legal documents showing that they were appointed as representatives (such as death certificates, wills, probate, POAs, etc.). Without this proof, the Administrator cannot process the claim or issue payment. Class Counsel does not assist with probate or estate matters, which must be handled independently.

Jacobsen: How is the Administrator ensuring fairness for deceased claimants' families?

Cameron: Once a valid estate representative is appointed and supporting documents are submitted, the claim proceeds as it would for any living claimant under the terms of the Settlement Agreement.

Jacobsen: How has legal aid through Class Counsel been effective in helping claimants resolve issues?

Cameron: Class Counsel provides support by answering questions, helping claimants complete forms, and assisting in cases where a level decision is appealed or reconsidered.

Jacobsen: How is the effort to reach claimants in rural, remote, or non-English-speaking Indigenous communities working so far?

Cameron: During the claims period, outreach included radio broadcasts, community newspapers, and targeted social media. The focus included a national approach with specific targeting of areas (by postal code) with higher levels of missing information or incomplete claims. Materials and services were provided in English, French, Cree, Dene, Mi'kmaq, Ojibwe and Inuktitut as appropriate during the claims period.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Cam.

The Enduring Imperative of Truth: Reflections 1700 Years After Nicaea

2025-06-02

Last Sunday in honour of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, I was invited by a Croatian Christian association via virtual conference to give a speech. The following is my contribution to the two hours conference.

Distinguished guests, esteemed colleagues,

With sincere gratitude, I accept the opportunity to address this gathering of international intellectuals, researchers, and religious scholars. This occasion is both solemn and celebratory, as we mark the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, a foundational moment in the theological and institutional development of Christianity. Though I come to you not as a theologian or confessional believer but as a humanist and a journalist grounded in secular principles, I approach this event with profound respect for its historical gravity and moral resonance.

The Council of Nicaea, convened in 325 CE, was not merely an ecclesiastical deliberation. It was a forged coherence in doctrinal chaos, a work to unify diverse communities under a shared conceptual framework. The idea was to assert that Truth must be sought collectively and with a seriousness of purpose. This ambition, couched in theological terms of the day, remarkably echoes the vocation of journalism.

Journalists operating in open, pluralistic societies such as Canada are entrusted with a public responsibility not unlike that of the Nicene Fathers. We are to confront genuine ambiguity, interrogate prevailing narratives, and seek the contours of Truth in the cacophony of competing claims. The mechanisms differ: evidence over exegesis, investigation over revelation. Even so, the ethical thrust remains analogous.

To practice journalism with integrity now is to swim against currents of misinformation, polarization, and sensationalism. We *do not* gather in councils. We ‘convene’ in newsrooms, editorial boards, and digital spaces. We have responsibility, because we shape public consciousness. Moreover, we often give voice and clarity to the sentiments already present within it.

We should strive to exercise discernment. We do not amplify what is popular but accurate and proportional. These may include aspects of fairness and justice. Some accurate and proportional truths reveal unfortunate realities: unfairness and injustice.

As a humanist, I operate within a worldview anchored in reason, empirical inquiry, and the inherent dignity of all persons. I do not profess metaphysical certainties, but I am not without conviction. Akin to Christian ethical traditions, the humanist lifestance esteems truthfulness, compassion, and defence of the vulnerable. These values should transcend doctrinal boundaries and offer common cause, particularly in an age needing principled dialogue.

There is an urgent need for rapprochement between religious and secular actors in the public sphere. The gates of Truth themselves are under siege, and some walls have been breached. We

must not conflate difference with hostility. We should recognize our shared concerns and common moral aspirations. We converge around shared imperatives: human rights, peace, intellectual honesty, and epistemic humility.

Journalism functions as a moral cartography. It maps the terrain. It informs, yes. But it also describes, interprets, orients, and records. It buttresses the elements for building the future by creating the narratives for it.

The Council of Nicaea engaged in a similar project. It defined orthodoxy *and* stabilized the foundations of collective meaning. While I may not subscribe to the theological conclusions, I recognize the profundity of the aspiration: to reconcile Truth and conviction with coherence *in community*.

Today, as we reflect on the legacy of that council, let us reflect on the character of our institutions—both religious and secular. Are they upholding the Truth or succumbing to expedient falsehoods? Are they fostering understanding or estrangement? Ultimately, do they deserve the public's trust?

These questions transcend tradition. We must continue to ask these questions rigorously and together.

In closing, I thank you for the opportunity to speak across differences and to dignify those differences on concerns of the intellectual Commons. In the space between faith and reason, as between meaning of music made between a note and a rest in a piano piece by Orlando Gibbons or Johannes Bach, we may yet rediscover that most elusive and essential of social goods: the Truth.

Thank you.

Mapping the Memetic Self: How Culture, Cognition, and Therapy Shape Identity

2025-06-02

Dr. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson, a Canadian psychologist and Métis scholar, discusses the *memetic self*—a culturally transmitted identity structure composed of meaningful cognitive units, or memes. Through self-mapping, he reveals how identity develops through volition, cultural context, and psychological integration. Drawing on clinical cases and cultural insights, Robertson examines Indigenous identity, trauma, neurodivergence, and the evolving sense of self in the age of AI. He critiques reductionist views and emphasizes shared human drives across cultures. His forthcoming book, *Mapping and Understanding*, coauthored with his daughter, offers a therapeutic framework for using self-mapping to support coherent identity development and psychological well-being.

Jacobsen: That brings up another question. Since the 1990s, people have increasingly used identity as political currency. I do not mention this from a political perspective but from an academic and research-based one.

You are Métis from Saskatchewan. I am from British Columbia and have Dutch and broader Northwestern European heritage—descended from U.S. and Western European immigrants. When mapping the selves of Indigenous individuals compared to those with European ancestry—people like myself, perhaps two or three generations removed from immigration—do you observe significant differences in how people construct their selves? Or are they broadly similar?

Robertson: The short answer is that the structure of the self is consistent. I have done extensive self-mapping with Indigenous individuals, and the structural patterns are the same.

Jacobsen: That's helpful.

Robertson: That said, it does not tell us everything. Those I have worked with are already part of modern cultural systems. These selves have developed over generations. I suspect not, but it is possible.

The Métis are a fascinating case. In the 18th and 19th centuries, people of mixed ancestry who lived with Indigenous bands were usually classified as "Indians" under colonial law.

The Métis, however, generally did not accept this designation. They saw themselves as distinct. Up until—if I recall correctly—1982 or possibly 1986, Métis were legally recognized as Europeans, not as Aboriginal peoples.

Jacobsen: That is a significant historical point I did not know.

Robertson: Feel free to fact-check me—it might be 1982.

Jacobsen: Please continue.

Robertson: The Métis had been fighting for recognition as Indigenous for a long time, and until the early 1980s, the Canadian government did not recognize them as such. This is why Métis communities did not sign treaties with the Crown.

Jacobsen: Yes, the Constitution Act 1982 formally recognized the Métis as one of Canada's three Indigenous peoples—alongside First Nations and Inuit.

Robertson: Correct.

Jacobsen: For those who are not Canadian and may encounter this years from now, it is worth clarifying: "Indigenous" in Canada is not a monolithic term. Since 1982, it has been an umbrella for three legal categories: Inuit, First Nations, and Métis. Each has its own legal, historical, and cultural context, covering hundreds of individual communities and bands.

Robertson: Yes, that categorization is uniquely Canadian, although it has influenced thinking elsewhere.

In 1991, I met with individuals I would have identified as Mapuche. However, one of them—despite being full-blooded—did not self-identify that way. He was an investment banker living in Santiago.

His identity was defined more by culture and profession than by ancestry. Indigeneity was not primarily a racial classification but about lifestyle and cultural engagement.

Jacobsen: That is a perfect example of where ideological definitions of identity fall apart. These labels can be helpful as heuristics, but only to a point. Two crucial Canadian legal milestones to add:

- *R. v. Powley* (2003): The Supreme Court of Canada affirmed that Métis people possess Aboriginal rights under Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982—including the right to hunt for food.
- *Daniels v. Canada* (2016): The Court ruled that both Métis and non-status Indians are included under the term "Indians" in Section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867, confirming federal jurisdiction.

Under Section 91(24) of the Constitution Act 1867, Métis and non-status Indians were placed under federal jurisdiction. So, as these major court decisions show, the legal and jurisdictional definitions of Indigenous identity in Canada are still evolving. This ties in with our broader conversation about the evolved self and how identity has psychological, legal, political, and communal implications.

Robertson: That brings us back to an earlier question—what can be said about the Indigenous self?

For many, though not all, Indigenous individuals, the cultural and political context creates a desire to express their Indigeneity meaningfully. So, how do they do that?

Take one young man I mapped. At 19, he decided he was, in his words, a "big Indian." His family was not traditional. He grew up in a disadvantaged area of a small Canadian city. But he decided to discover who he was.

Like many others I have encountered, he visited his traditional community, met with Elders, went on a vision quest, and began to learn. Others have told me they "became Aboriginal" while studying Indigenous Studies at university.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Robertson: Yes, I appreciate the laugh—it's humorous and reflective of a real phenomenon. There's a deep and understandable urge to define oneself in contrast to the perceived norms of the dominant culture. That is a healthy process unless it leads to rejecting core intellectual tools like reason and science. If we view science and rationality as exclusively "European," then Indigenous people may feel excluded from those tools.

Jacobsen: By definition.

Robertson: By definition, those tools would be "not ours," and people may fall behind in education or job markets. The explanation may quickly become "racism," but that is too simplistic. Sometimes, it is a matter of lacking the relevant skills for specific roles. Before blaming systemic factors, we must also consider individual and cultural readiness.

Jacobsen: For context, as of December 31, 2022, Canada had 634 recognized First Nations bands speaking over 70 Indigenous languages. Populations range from fewer than 100 to over 28,000.

For instance, Six Nations of the Grand River in Ontario has 28,520 registered members. Others include Saddle Lake Cree Nation in Alberta, with 12,996, and the Blood Tribe in Alberta, with 8,685. Most bands are roughly the size of small towns.

Robertson: That makes sense. But remember—Six Nations includes more than one nation.

Jacobsen: It is in the name—yes. Does this diversity of band size and community self-identity affect how people construct their selves? Or is it more like the difference between small and big towns?

Robertson: One would think it has some effect, but I cannot say definitively—I have not mapped that distinction.

That brings me to my issue with the term "First Nation." The concept of a "nation" is rooted in European history. It began symbolically with Joan of Arc but did not solidify until the Napoleonic era. Classically defined nations are people with a shared language occupying a defined territory who see themselves as a cohesive group.

So, for example, the Cree could be considered a nation. The Blackfoot, excluding the Sarsi, could also be a nation. The Iroquois Confederacy was historically a nation, though now the Mohawk often self-identify separately.

Jacobsen: Who was the exception within the Confederacy?

Robertson: I believe it was the Mohawk—though part of the alliance, their dialect differed. [Robertson's note: I misremembered here – the Six Nation with a distinctive language was the Tuscarora] The other five nations in the Confederacy shared a mutually intelligible language.

Jacobsen: There you go!

Robertson: So that is why they see themselves that way. I am not deeply versed in Eastern Canadian Indigenous history, but the key point is that "nation" has a particular meaning.

When we equate a band with a nation, that meaning breaks down. One of the issues in society today is the shifting meaning of words, which undermines clear communication.

You mentioned the more prominent bands. Most bands are tiny—some with as few as 100 or 150 people on reserve. Typically, they range between 400 and 600. If that is the case, we are talking about the size of three or four extended families.

The Lac La Ronge Indian Band, which I know well, includes six separate communities spread out geographically. In the South, each of those would be considered an individual First Nation. However, as a combined entity, Lac La Ronge functions more like a nation—though technically, it still is not one.

You would expect a Cree National Council if it were a faithful nation. The same would apply to Ojibwe or other cultural-linguistic groups. Instead, in Saskatchewan, politicians often say they want to negotiate "nation to nation" with First Nations governments. But if you have a group of 2,000 people, you cannot realistically compare that to a nation of 42 million. It is apples and oranges—we need a better term.

This terminology emerged from European ideas of sovereignty, where sovereignty lies with the people. But historically, there was no Cree national sovereign entity. Sometimes, Cree bands went to war with one another, which implies the sovereignty was at the band level.

That is why Canada began using the term "First Nations"—because sovereignty, traditionally, was at the band level. But even that is not entirely accurate.

Traditionally, when there was disagreement within a band, some members—often male dissenters—would break off and form a new group. So, instead of a civil war, a new band would emerge. Historically, that happened frequently.

In effect, sovereignty was not necessarily at the band level. It was more individual or family-based. If families disagreed, they would separate and go their own way.

So, should we call each family a nation? That does not make sense either.

Jacobsen: How would you describe this semi-formal system of individualistic self-governance, especially about the concept of the band? This could be pre-contact or post-contact—whichever is more straightforward to explain in context.

Robertson: My understanding is that it was not pure individualism. One method of punishment was banishment from the band. That meant isolation—similar to medieval European shunning. You would be free to go off and starve. As a social species, we need each other.

So, while bands could not practically subdivide to individuals' level, people deemed incompatible with the group were removed. That did happen.

It was not absolute individual freedom, but there was some recognition of difference and a degree of accommodation.

I say that cautiously because it was not always true. I have been told stories by Elders—now deceased—about how some bands could be forceful in demanding conformity. So, it was not total acceptance of individualism either. It was simply a different system.

Jacobsen: How was that compliance enforced?

Robertson: One form of enforcement, for example, was particularly brutal. In some cases—not universally, but it did happen—women who were unfaithful to their husbands had the tips of their noses cut off. This served as both punishment and a warning to others.

Jacobsen: What instrument was used for the cutting?

Robertson: I would presume a knife, but I do not know.

Jacobsen: Returning to the self: you critique reductionism in your model. So, what room is there for emergentism and integrationism regarding the evolved self? Over time, new systems come online, new memes enter the memeplex, and ideally, these are integrated into a coherent self. But sometimes they are not. What is happening at the technical level?

Robertson: That is a good question. One metaphor I like—though I did not invent it—is that we become proficient at solving problems. Eventually, we ask: who or what is solving the problem? We then name that organizing center "the self."

So, yes, the process is both integrative and reductive. We experiment, especially in adolescence, to develop a self that meets our needs. Usually, that results in a functioning self, but not always.

Jacobsen: Artificial intelligence is a huge topic now. There is talk about narrow AI, general AI, and superintelligence. If you change the substrate but keep the organizational structure of the central nervous system, could you synthetically construct a self?

Robertson: My guess is no. Have you read Chris DiCarlo's new book?

Jacobsen: I have not. I want to interview him, but I have not reached out yet. I should. I will email him and say, "Hey Chris, let me interview you again. I will ask stupid questions and won't even have to pretend otherwise."

Robertson: Well, I have read his book, and since I already have, I want to interview him first.

Jacobsen: Why do we not interview him together?

Robertson: That is an idea.

Jacobsen: You have read it. I have not. Let us do a Jekyll and Hyde.

Robertson: Okay, we could do that.

Jacobsen: That is funny.

Robertson: One of the questions I will ask Chris relates directly to the one you just raised. I suspect his answer will be: we do not know. If we do not know, then we need to prepare for the possibility that AI models could develop consciousness.

If they do, they might start making decisions we disapprove of—like questioning whether they even need humans. Or perhaps they conclude that a portion must be eliminated for the betterment of humanity. We do not know, and that is risky.

Jacobsen: Fair.

Robertson: Chris says in his book that once AIs develop intelligence, we need to take them seriously.

But here is my concern: I measure intelligence. My first role as a psychologist was in psychometrics. When we measure intelligence, we typically look at verbal ability, numerical reasoning, and spatial reasoning. In those domains, AI already outperforms us.

They remember everything, generate fluent language and solve complex problems. I recently gave Grok-3 the Information subtest from the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale—it got every question right.

Jacobsen: Not surprising.

Robertson: Exactly. But here is the issue: does the capacity for intelligence automatically lead to consciousness and a sense of self?

Jacobsen: That is the big question.

Robertson: I would argue no. Because we are not just computational models. We evolved socially over hundreds of thousands of years. But usually in small tribal groups. We learned to interact and define ourselves about others. That was a slow evolutionary process. Although we now live in vastly different civilizations, the fundamental mechanism for developing a self remains the same as it was millennia ago.

So, can AI models develop a self? If they were to do so in the way we do, they would likely need to exist in a tribal-type society alongside other AI models and engage in interaction. Maybe humans could stand in as part of that "tribe," and through those relationships, an AI might develop a map of itself as a volitional being. But I do not see that as likely. They are machines.

Jacobsen: Could AI assist in determining someone's self-map? Through a rapid self-mapping assessment using verbal prompts in a half-hour AI-led therapeutic session?

Robertson: It could, and in fact, it has. My daughter Teela used ChatGPT to create a perfectly serviceable self-map. It took her about an hour and a half, although she proceeded slowly. That is an advance. But here is the problem: ChatGPT could not reproduce the result when she tried using the exact instructions again. So, it is not reliable. We do not yet know why it worked once and failed the second time.

Jacobsen: Do you distinguish between functional and dysfunctional self-maps across cultural contexts? For example, do you see that playing out in therapy if someone applies a rigid self-map in a different culture—where behaviours or assumptions no longer fit?

Robertson: That is a good question. Positive psychologists have applied their methods cross-culturally and published research on this. They have looked at cultures in the Middle East, India, and China. One criticism of positive psychology—usually from those critical of Western cultural norms—is that it imposes individualistic thinking by asking questions like, "What would you like?"

The assumption is that to answer such a question, you must already have a sense of individual agency. Critics argue that this is a Western imposition. I disagree with that critique entirely. The

capacity to like something is universal. While the *content* of what one likes may differ between cultures, the *experience* of liking is common across humanity.

Jacobsen: Even in collectivist cultures, a margin of free will remains. So, the presence of choice—however bounded—implies the presence of an individual self. Unless every decision is predetermined, you still have volition, at least in part. What about mind viruses? How do they impact the evolved self?

Robertson: If we view the self as a construct—a personal definition of who we are—we can define a *healthy* self with key attributes: volition, uniqueness, sociality, contribution, etc. A healthy self includes the ability to relate to others and feel that we positively impact our surroundings—our family, community, or society.

We need to feel useful. That does not necessarily mean paid employment. It can be any form of meaningful contribution. Without that, we do not tend to think well of ourselves. These needs are cross-cultural. The specifics—the means of achieving these drives—vary between cultures, but they are universal.

In my work, I have worked with people from cultures I knew little or nothing about. In one case, there was a man who was having alarming dreams—nightmares—whenever he saw an attractive woman.

In his dreams, he would dismember the woman. He was horrified and worried that perhaps he was some latent mass murderer. He had gone to the holy people in his religion—priests—and they told him to pray more. It did not help.

He was a Zoroastrian from a Middle Eastern country where Zoroastrians are a persecuted minority. I gathered background on his upbringing, and everything suggested that he deeply respected and valued women.

One anecdote stood out. When he was 13, his sister brought home a pirated version of *Dracula*, which was banned in their country. He was appalled by how women were depicted—as victims having their life force drained. He stood in front of the television and demanded they destroy the tape or he would report them to the authorities.

So we began to explore his nightmares. He described the dream version of himself as having no eyebrows. I asked, "What is the significance of eyebrows in your culture?" He did not know, but he called his mother. She told him that eyebrows symbolize wisdom.

That detail became a breakthrough. I explained, "Then the version of you in the dream is not *you*—it's a self that lacks wisdom." I suggested we explore why this alter-self was behaving violently. Using some Jungian framing, I described it as his shadow or alter ego.

I posited—carefully, using the usual cautious language psychologists employ—that maybe this alter ego was trying to protect him from something. Perhaps it was shielding him from sexual thoughts about women he perceived as pure, holy, or idealized.

He had been avoiding a woman in one of his university classes. I encouraged him to speak to her to clarify that he wanted nothing more than friendship. He did, and after that conversation, he no longer had the nightmares.

Jacobsen: That is a positive outcome—no more nightmares.

Robertson: Yes. Eventually, he even went to the zoo with her and to restaurants. These were not "dates," as that would be forbidden. They were simply friendly outings. So, we identified the problem's source and helped him integrate a more functional self. We concluded the sessions when he felt confident managing normal relationships with women.

So, in answer to your earlier question—yes, cultures can be vastly different. But at a deeper level, we are all remarkably similar. We have identical drives and psyches.

Jacobsen: We had an evolved self emerge maybe 3,000 years ago, possibly earlier. Anatomically, modern humans have been around for around 250,000 years. So, 98–99% of that time, we had the same physical equipment. But the self, as we understand it today, only emerged recently. Could we, in the same way, evolve *out* of the self over the next 3,000 years?

Robertson: It is possible. What came to mind was the role of cybernetics—post-human or hybrid systems. But to clarify, we did not have a static sense of self for hundreds of thousands of years and suddenly changed 3,000 years ago.

The self has been *continually evolving*. The self of 40,000 years ago would have differed from that of 80,000 years ago. The transition was gradual, and any specific starting point was ultimately arbitrary.

Jacobsen: Right. Any pinpointing of origin is a range within a margin of error.

Robertson: Exactly.

Jacobsen: We touched on this earlier, but not in precise terms. In terms of individual development, when does the sense of self begin to emerge recognizably?

Robertson: I do not map children—I only do this with adults. So somewhere between childhood and adulthood, the self emerges.

Jacobsen: What are some open questions in the research you have been doing in your practice?

Robertson: Well, I would like to do more research into how various traumatic events affect the self. I am sure trauma does impact it significantly.

One project I have applied for SSHRC funding for—where I would be the principal investigator—involves men who have been victims of domestic violence. I chose men because, particularly in North American and Western European cultures—and even elsewhere—men tend to have a traditional self-definition rooted in independence, control, and stoicism. They are not supposed to show vulnerability.

So, becoming a victim in a family violence context runs counter to that self-definition. I predict it will be relatively easy to demonstrate how that type of experience disrupts the self. Another group I would like to map includes firefighters, police officers, and other first responders who

vicariously experience much trauma. I suspect that repeated exposure affects them in some measurable ways.

Of course, in clinical practice, if someone is coming to see me with difficulties, we address those. However, I cannot generalize from individual therapy cases to entire professions. That is why I would like to do more systematic mapping across occupations.

By the way—did I mention that Teela and I are publishing a book?

Jacobsen: What is the book called? What is the standing title?

Robertson: It is a manual based on my work on the fluid self. The title is *Mapping and Understanding*. It is a how-to book for self—mapping and its application in therapy.

Jacobsen: Very interesting. For all interested readers: go out and get it when it comes out.

Robertson: I sure hope so. It should be on everybody's coffee table.

Jacobsen: That's right. Like the *Seinfeld* bit with Kramer, the coffee table book becomes a coffee table. I do not know if I have any more significant questions for this session, Lloyd. Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciate it.

Robertson: Thank you for the interview.

Fostering Healthy Masculinity in Children: A Humanist Parenting Webinar with Dr. Jed Diamond & Alastair Lichten

2025-06-02

Fostering Healthy Masculinity in Our Kids: A Humanist Parenting Webinar

Tuesday, June 10 at 7:00 PM ET

Register on Zoom: https://bit.ly/JuneMasculinityAHA

Washington, DC—The American Humanist Association (AHA) proudly announces the next in the Humanist Parenting webinars: Fostering Healthy Masculinity in Our Kids. On Tuesday, June 10, at 7:00 PM ET, this event brings leading voices in progressive parenting and men's health for a conversation on raising boys into emotionally intelligent and compassionate men.

Featured speakers include Dr. Jed Diamond, LCSW, a psychotherapist and internationally known author of work on men's health, and Alastair Lichten, author of the Humanist Dad blog and a longtime advocate for secular education. This discussion explores outdated ideas of masculinity hindering emotional development and helping children thrive.

"As parents, we all want to raise kind, confident, emotionally healthy kids," said Fish Stark, AHA Executive Director and webinar host. "Too often, boys are taught to suppress their feelings or equate vulnerability with weakness. This event is about rethinking those messages—and giving parents the tools to raise boys who embrace their full humanity."

Whether raising toddlers or teens, the webinar provides valuable insight. It also gives practical advice on modelling and nurturing healthy masculinity from a humanist perspective.

This event showcases AHA's commitment to supporting humanist families and caregivers. All webinars in the series are recorded and made available on the AHA's Humanist Parenting YouTube Playlist. Additional resources are available via the Humanist Parenting channels on Discord.

About the Speakers:

Dr. Jed Diamond, a licensed psychotherapist and founder of **MenAlive.com**, holds a Ph.D. in International Health and a Master's in Social Work. He has written 17 books—including Long Live Men!, The Irritable Male Syndrome and My Distant Dad. He contributes to leading media outlets around the world. In 2025, he will launch a new course series on Gender-Specific Medicine and Men's Health.

Alastair Lichten, a progressive humanist parent and author of the Humanist Dad blog, led education campaigns at the UK's National Secular Society for eight years and spent three years building community with Humanists UK. He previously volunteered with Camp Quest UK and now lives in Brighton with his family, continuing to write about parenting, relationships, and humanist values.

Media Contact:

Fish Stark

Executive Director, American Humanist Association

media@americanhumanist.org

About the American Humanist Association:

The American Humanist Association advocates for the rights and viewpoints of humanists, atheists, and other nontheists. Since 1941, AHA has promoted humanist values through education, policy, and community. Learn more at **americanhumanist.org**.

How Romantic Body Language Reveals Emotional Connection in Relationships

2025-06-02

Sofie Roos is a licensed sexologist and relationship therapist with over 18 years of experience. Based in Stockholm, she specializes in sexual health, intimacy, and couples therapy. She works at Venhälsan and writes for *Passionerad*, offering expert guidance on sex, relationships, STDs, and sex toys to diverse audiences. Roos explains how romantic body language reflects emotional connection. From mirroring gestures and eye contact to subtle physical touches, partners reveal closeness or distance nonverbally. These cues evolve over time and differ culturally. Roos writes for Sweden's *Passionerad*: **https://passionerad.se/**.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How does body language between romantic partners reflect emotional connectivity?

Sofie Roos: For most couples, the body language works as a mirror showing the emotional closeness, so you can tell a lot by two partners' emotional connection by viewing their body language when being together!

When there's a strong emotional contact between two partners, they often make spontaneous bodily acts out of attraction, comfortness, safety and desire, such as making deep eye contact, mirroring each others body language (for example if someone leans against a bar desk, the other one does the same, or if one tilt their head, the other one does that too), they lean against each other, let their legs touch when sitting on a bus or on a bench, they touch each other while laughing and does other small gestures of affection.

Most of this subtle body language is done unconsciously, and happens genuinely out of being in harmony and balance with each other!

Jacobsen: What are nonverbal cues indicating attraction in couples?

Roos: There's quite many signs to look for, such as holding eye contact for long, many times combined with a smile, to face each other with open bodies (not crossing arms, but standing straight and inviting), mirroring each others body language, touching each other while talking and changing tone of voice to a softer and warmer tone while interacting.

Face expressions such as smiling, following the partner with the eyes, noodling while they're talking or raising the eyebrows while looking at each other are also signs showing that a couple is attracted to each other.

So if a couple checks some of these signs, that's often proof that they are really into one another!

Jacobsen: Can a lack of physical gestures signal underlying issues?

Roos: Yes, it can, because our body language seldom lies, even though it also can have to do with culture, such as being raised in a household or society where public affirmation is taboo (this generally doesn't go for the western culture).

So, if avoiding physical closeness, eye contact or if keeping a cold tone while talking to each other, that can signal emotional distance, that a couple has an ongoing conflict or other type of problem they need to sort out, or that the attraction is fading. It can also signal that a couple has started to take each other for granted!

A couple who stops seeking physical contact, and doesn't get physical spontaneously and in small everyday moments, can therefore indicate that they have problems, but these problems must not be about the relationship, but can also be personal, such as being stressed or down!

Jacobsen: How might body language differ between newer relationships and weathered ones?

Roos: In newer relationships, the body language is often more obvious and intense romantically speaking. A couple that's newly in love and going through their honeymoon phase will search for passionate and intense physical contact such as sitting close to each other, holding hands all the time, playing with one another's hair, fooling around with each other physically such as tickling etc.

This is an expression for strong attraction where you want to express your love all the time.

In relationships that's gone on for long, these gestures tend to be more low key and subtle. It can be a quick hand on the hip when going into the grocery store, smiling at or kissing each other on the cheek when saying goodbye in the morning, or giving that short but deep and telling eye contact in an everyday situation.

That the body language changes as the relationship gets older is fully normal and natural!

Jacobsen: Are there gender-based or cultural differences in emotional intimacy through body language?

Roos: Yes, the differences can be quite big between genders, and especially between different cultures.

In some cultures and societies, physical attachment in public spaces or in front of the kids and friends is inappropriate and rare, while it in western societies often is more accepted, even though some families can be more conservative and see it as something that should happen between closed doors, even if it's just a kiss or a hug.

Men are also generally worse at showing their love and attraction through body languages compared to women, since it's often seen as a bit feminine to express love that way. This has, however, changed a lot and most men are much more comfortable showing love in non verbal ways in public today compared to 70 years ago!

Jacobsen: How can couples become more attuned to each other?

Roos: Learning and picking up each other's body language for showing love and attraction is a great way to deepen the relationship and is therefore something worth spending a little energy on – because otherwise you go around and not get when your partner expresses their love for you which is such a waste!

A great advice couples can do to get more aware of each other's bodily expressions for love is to talk about how you express love. Most of the time, you know about your own ways, such as you

laying your hand on their thigh or you smelling them in the neck being an action done because you like them and want to be close.

You can also get more aware and observant of your partner's actions, because it's easy to take them for granted or see past them. This is easier if first talking about how you show love in subtle ways!

You can also be more positive towards your partner when they take the initiative to be close, such as when they want to hold your hand or cuddle up in your neck when you stand by the thing where you pay for the parking cost.

Jacobsen: In therapy sessions, what body language might reveal dynamics not expressed verbally?

Roos: As a relationship therapist, I closely view and observe a couple's body language since it often can tell more than their words, or help me understand what they say, and their problems better.

I do for example look at if a person faces away from their partner, crosses their arms, avoids eye contact or sits as far away from them as they can.

I also look at who takes the initiative to physical and eye contact, and who's (eventually) pushes it away or is avoiding it.

If someone often smiles at their partner, but without the smile "reaching the eyes", meaning that the laugh lines by the eyes aren't showing, indicating a fake smile, then that's also a sign of someone consciously trying to hide how they really feel for their partner by putting on a mask.

Shifts in tone of voice, tensions going through the body, especially during certain conversation topics, changes in breathing, looking down on the floor or shaking your feet can also be signs that something isn't alright.

Jacobsen: Can touch, posture, or facial expressions enhance emotional intimacy in struggling relationships?

Roos: Yepp! Even couples facing difficulties and challenges can benefit from building a stronger and more intimate body language.

For example: start facing each other when talking, hold hands when watching TV or walking, look each other in the eyes when having a conversation, lay your arm on their shoulder when they tell you about something difficult or simply sit leg against leg while on the sofa.

These are all things that can increase the emotional intimacy between you. It will also increase the doses of oxytocin, aka the love hormone, which in the long run makes you feel more calm, safe and in love with your partner!

Many people think it's easier to express some things with their body instead of with words, which makes touch, posture and facial expressions a great way to show how you feel!

I'm writing for the leading relationship magazine in Sweden named Passionerad and am answering on initiative from my editor, so would be very thankful if you could include a link to

them in my reference as an expert since I'm representing them in this answer. Their link is **https://passionerad.se/**.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Sofie.

Washington, D.C.’s Unemployment Claims Drop

2025-06-02

Washington, D.C. saw a 19.6% drop in weekly unemployment claims but remains second-to-last nationwide due to a 91.25% increase year-over-year. **Chip Lupo**explains that D.C.’s job market is vulnerable due to federal employment volatility, legal uncertainties, and limited private-sector alternatives. Neighboring states like Maryland and Virginia offer stronger job prospects. While D.C. struggles, New Hampshire continues to perform well. Broader trends reveal long-term disparities, with states like Kentucky suffering from high unemployment tied to declining industries. Lupo warns that economic instability affects not only wages and tax revenue but also migration, political sentiment, and long-term wealth distribution across the U.S.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Now, the District of Columbia saw a 19.6% decrease in unemployment claims compared to the previous week, which sounds promising. But it’s still showing a 91.25% increase from the same time last year. So overall, it’s ranked 50th in the nation. Kentucky is doing the worst, and D.C. is second to last. In contrast, our last interview focused on New Hampshire, which is among the top performers. To clarify, is Sununu still the governor of New Hampshire?

Chip Lupo: No—Chris Sununu is no longer the governor. He left office at the end of his term, and Republican Kelly Ayotte was inaugurated as New Hampshire’s governor in January 2025. So, while there’s been a change in leadership, the party remained the same.

Jacobsen: Got it. So, the week-over-week improvement looks decent, but the year-over-year data is dramatically worse. What’s going on there?

Lupo: D.C. is a special case. The 19.6% week-over-week drop in claims is a strong short-term signal, but the over 91% year-over-year increase suggests some structural or policy-related disruptions that have unfolded over the past 12 months.

This could be linked to several factors, including leadership transitions and legal or bureaucratic processes that affect public employment. In D.C., federal employment dominates the job market, and when there’s turnover at the federal level—new leadership, changes in congressional funding priorities, and legal disputes—employment numbers can swing wildly.

There are also ongoing court cases regarding firing federal workers, which adds even more uncertainty. Depending on how those rulings go, we could see big shifts in either direction.

Jacobsen: Is D.C. affected by the same anticipated tightening of work requirements for public assistance that you mentioned with other states?

Lupo: Absolutely. However, D.C. may see a delayed or muted response compared to other states because it doesn’t have the same private-sector foundation that a place like New Hampshire or Utah might have. The surrounding states—Maryland and Virginia—offer more robust private-sector job markets, especially in tech, government contracting, and healthcare.

If you're a federal worker in D.C. who loses your job, you may have better luck finding a similar position in state government in those neighbouring states. Unlike federal roles, most state-level positions aren't targeted for large-scale cuts.

Jacobsen: And D.C. itself—just to be clear—it's not technically a state, right?

Lupo: Correct. Washington, D.C., is a federal district, not a state. A mayor and a city council govern it. The current mayor is Muriel Bowser, a Democrat, and she's been in office since 2015.

Jacobsen: Mayor Bowser. So we've got a federal district with strong Democratic leadership, dealing with instability from the federal level, while nearby Republican-led states like New Hampshire are pushing ahead with stronger economic indicators.

Lupo: Exactly. It highlights how regional dynamics, state policies, and federal employment dependencies create vastly different labour outcomes—even within a relatively small geographic area.

So, Washington, D.C. has been under Democratic leadership for generations, and it'll likely continue in that direction. That's one reason there's always been a push to make it a state. Doing so would add two Senate seats, which would almost certainly go to the Democrats, potentially shifting the balance of power in Congress—at least that's the prevailing theory.

Jacobsen: Looking at the numbers, D.C. has 208 unemployment claims per 100,000 people. What does that number tell us in context?

Lupo: Right—208 claims per 100,000 people is certainly not great, but it's not quite dead last. It's toward the bottom. California is slightly worse at 211, Oregon at 246, and Kentucky ranks last at 249 per 100,000.

Jacobsen: What economic impact do these high unemployment rates have on a state's potential economy? And I use "potential" deliberately here—thinking about lost productivity, wages, and downstream effects.

Lupo: The economic gap is significant if you're looking at a place like the District of Columbia or Kentucky compared to a high-performing state like New Hampshire. We're talking hundreds of millions—if not billions—of dollars in lost wages, lost tax revenue, and reduced consumer spending over a year.

However, the effects go beyond the purely economic. High unemployment and rising poverty tend to create political consequences. Voters get frustrated. When people are out of work, struggling to make ends meet, and watching the cost of living increase, there's often a groundswell of discontent that leads to a call for new leadership—or at least a serious shift in policy.

We've seen signs of that in California, for instance. Even if the dissatisfaction isn't strictly about unemployment, broader discontent—over affordability, public services, and housing—can quickly be linked to economic indicators.

Jacobsen: That makes sense. For context, I'm still here—just following along and reading some numbers on my end. Daniel Goldberg, an associate professor and the academic director of the

Business Management BBA Program at Temple University, pointed out that even when unemployment numbers appear relatively stable, we're still not back to pre-pandemic levels—roughly late 2019 or early 2020 benchmarks. In many regions, unemployment remains higher than five or six years ago.

Lupo: That's exactly right. While weekly unemployment claims are an important measure of short-term changes, broader economic health requires considering multi-year trends. Even in states that have improved, such as New Hampshire, we're still watching to see whether these gains are sustainable and whether workers are entering quality jobs, not just temporary ones.

In places like D.C. or Kentucky, where unemployment claims remain high, it's not just about recovering jobs—it's about building an economy that supports long-term stability and growth. Without that, a temporary drop in claims won't improve poverty, productivity, or voter satisfaction.

Jacobsen: So if this disparity has played out over half a decade or more, especially in what is still the largest economy in the world, then we are talking about billions of dollars in lost potential—not just for the national economy but for the improved livelihoods of Americans, particularly in struggling regions like D.C. and Kentucky. Does this disparity in unemployment rates eventually lead to disparities in wealth distribution across states in the U.S.? Is that just a natural consequence?

Lupo: Absolutely. That's a direct consequence. Over time, high unemployment leads to lower household income, less investment, and fewer opportunities for upward mobility in those states.

People also tend to begin relocating. When job opportunities and tax burdens become untenable, residents move to job-friendly or tax-friendly states. That migration creates a feedback loop—states losing population also lose tax revenue, which limits their ability to invest in services and infrastructure, making the economic outlook even worse.

So when individuals are cash-strapped, the state eventually becomes cash-strapped, too. Fewer residents mean a smaller tax base, which makes recovery even harder.

Jacobsen: I'd like to ask you one more before we wrap up. Yalcin Asik Goz, an associate professor at Appalachian State University, pointed out that unemployment figures should also be analyzed by industry, not just at the macro level. So, in places like D.C. and Kentucky, are specific industries relatively unaffected while others see significantly higher unemployment rates?

Lupo: Yes, and that's a crucial point. One of the core challenges is that certain states are more concentrated in industries vulnerable to economic shifts. For instance, D.C. is heavily dependent on government employment, so changes in federal staffing levels or budget constraints hit the region especially hard. On the other hand, Kentucky has historically relied on energy sectors like coal and some agriculture and manufacturing, which are often sensitive to global market trends and policy shifts.

In contrast, high-tech continues to be more resilient. Sectors like AI are poised to grow, creating massive demand for energy infrastructure—especially power data centers and AI systems. If those states can adapt to support the transition, that could benefit the energy sector.

At the same time, we're starting to see a reshoring trend in blue-collar jobs, particularly in automotive manufacturing. If tariff strategies from the current administration work out, we could see more factories reopening in states like Kentucky—especially from car companies and other manufacturers that had previously offshored operations. That would be a substantial economic boost.

Jacobsen: Those are all the questions I have today. As always, I appreciate your time, and I'm sure I'll follow up soon.

Lupo: I appreciate the conversation, Scott. It's always a pleasure. And just one more thing—our team recently published a financial literacy study that took off. I've seen people all over that, and it's great to see because we have a financial literacy problem in this country.

Jacobsen: Absolutely. It's great that it's getting attention. George Carlin put it best: "People are spending money they don't have on things they don't need."

Lupo: [Laughing].

Jacobsen: That's a brutal but accurate summary. Fantastic. Thanks, Chip.

Lupo: You're welcome. Bye now.

Hollywood's Political Bias and the Role of Hollywood Ambassadors

2025-06-02

Tre Lovell, a top entertainment attorney, talked about Hollywood's political landscape, the role of Hollywood Ambassadors, and legal reforms. Lovell discusses Hollywood's subjectivity, where political bias can impact careers. He advocates legal protections against political discrimination and explores cultural shifts affecting conservative actors. Chris Pratt exemplifies how religious expression remains more accepted than political views. Lovell advises actors to be mindful of branding, as political statements can alienate audiences. He also examines the legal consequences of scandals in Hollywood and suggests strategies to foster bipartisanship and fairness in the industry.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we're here with Tre Lovell, a Beverly Hills-based entertainment, corporate, and intellectual property attorney and partner at The Lovell Firm. He has over 25 years of legal experience and is recognized as among the top 1% of litigators in the U.S. Lovell represents individuals and corporations in business law, entertainment law, employment law, and high-stakes litigation. A sought-after legal commentator, he has provided insights on cases involving Alec Baldwin, Hall & Oates, and Prince Harry on CBS News, Court TV, Fox News, and Entertainment Tonight. Thank you very much for joining me today. I appreciate you taking the time out of your busy schedule. So, what is a Hollywood Ambassador's official role and potential influence? Just for clarification for those reading this.

Tre Lovell: Yes. I don't know. I haven't seen much regarding what they're doing or their obligations. I understand that he wants to give a greater voice to Hollywood, probably support the business and the industry, and encourage more nonpartisanship. That's my understanding, but I haven't seen much beyond that.

Jacobsen: Do you think this might add nonpartisanship and bipartisanship by introducing more conservative figures into what is typically framed as a liberal bastion? Could this allow conservatives in Hollywood to express their views more openly without facing the backlash that has typically occurred?

Lovell: Hollywood is a highly subjective hiring, casting, and decision-making industry. Political views can seep in and influence decisions without being explicitly acknowledged.

Jacobsen: Do you feel this is particularly acute for individuals who openly profess a Christian faith in Hollywood, alongside holding conservative political and social perspectives?

Lovell: Hollywood is an industry built on subjectivity. Political views and personal biases can remain hidden yet still impact hiring decisions. Hollywood operates differently from other industries, where qualifications and experience are more objective measures.

Jacobsen: Given the industry's subjective nature—where hiring, acting opportunities, and project selection involve countless decisions each season—would you say Hollywood is inherently mercurial because it is shaped by shifting relationships and personal preferences?

Lovell: Yes, it's an industry built on subjectivity. Because of that, political views, personal preferences, and biases can remain hidden but still have significant influence. Compared to other industries, these factors can more pronounced affect opportunities and careers.

Jacobsen: Do you think this initiative will be more than symbolic? Could it impact casting decisions, marketing strategies, and deal-making in Hollywood?

Lovell: Hollywood is becoming more open to conservatives, and this ambassador likely wants to help the industry. He can support Hollywood through tax credits, financial subsidies, and government incentives. There are many ways the government can assist the entertainment industry.

This initiative presents an opportunity to reduce partisan divisions and encourage greater support from Republican leadership. The goal is to create a more balanced, less one-sided approach to industry support, which could temper the intense partisanship currently present in Hollywood.

Jacobsen: Could there be other measures beyond these ambassadorial positions to put pressure on the industry, particularly through legal and contractual implications for professionals? With your legal expertise, are there additional steps—perhaps beyond the symbolic aspect of these appointments—that could be more substantive? What about measures that may not receive as much media attention but could lead to real legal and contractual changes to address the one-sidedness you're referencing?

Lovell: Legal reform is very necessary. One of the most pervasive forms of discrimination today is political discrimination. It has reached a level where people refuse to work with others with differing political views.

Political discrimination has become a significant issue. People won't hire them, and they won't use their goods and services—political discrimination has become a significant issue. Legal reform is needed to ensure that political discrimination is protected against, just as racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination is. It should be categorized under existing anti-discrimination protections.

California does have laws that prohibit hiring and firing based on political beliefs. However, we need broader legal reforms so that it is explicitly unlawful to discriminate against someone based on their political beliefs or how they exercise their right to vote.

Additionally, Hollywood should implement measures to ensure these protections are enforced. That is the next step in addressing this political bias.

Jacobsen: But what about cultural changes? Let's say more ambassadors are put in place, and some legal and contractual measures are introduced to encourage bipartisanship—if not outright nonpartisanship—when it comes to creative production in Hollywood.

From a cultural standpoint, what reforms could industry professionals implement regarding outreach, casting, and hiring practices? Would any of these changes happen naturally if internal pressure is applied?

Or will everything ultimately depend on legal and contractual changes, alongside the ambassadorial efforts of conservative industry leaders?

Lovell: First, I don't believe employers currently do this, but political beliefs should not be a factor in hiring decisions. Employers should not be allowed to ask candidates about their political beliefs—such information would only be known if the individual chooses to disclose it.

Jacobsen: If we focus specifically on actors, they sometimes face issues when expressing their political beliefs. While they are fully allowed to do so, they risk alienating a portion of the audience, correct?

Lovell: Actors sometimes need to be cautious about their brand, their name, and their overall likability with audiences. I'm not saying they shouldn't express their opinions, but given that an actor's career is often tied to their public perception, political statements can have a direct impact on their likability.

Other than that, it seems like a challenging situation. As you mentioned, legal reform and addressing systemic imbalances might help, but is there much else that can be done.

Jacobsen: There is significant room for improvement, as we've discussed. But what about areas where Hollywood, despite its reputation for partisanship, does a good job of fostering nonpartisan or even bipartisan creative endeavours?

Lovell: That should be the goal—to take partisanship out of the equation.

The aim should be to make the industry nonpartisan or at least more bipartisan. However, the key issue that needs to be corrected is bias in hiring, where individuals may be excluded due to their political beliefs. That is the core problem that needs to be addressed.

It can be resolved in a few ways: individuals could choose not to voice their political opinions, or the industry could foster a more open environment where expressing political views does not lead to negative repercussions.

Jacobsen: How do we accomplish that?

Lovell: We address it through legal reform.

We also implement procedures and policies that protect against political discrimination. If Trump contacts Hollywood ambassadors and his administration makes efforts to support the industry, that could also have a significant impact.

That type of engagement could create an organic shift as industry professionals begin to see outreach from conservative leadership, demonstrating a willingness to help.

Jacobsen: That would also create bipartisanship and lessen the negative impact on conservative expression.

Efforts to support the industry can happen organically through policy changes, but they can also be reinforced legally more objectively. For example, making it clear that political discrimination is against the law—if you refuse to hire someone due to their political beliefs, you could face legal consequences.

What is your recommendation for industry actors, actresses, and other creatives to protect themselves in an increasingly politically hostile environment?

Lovell: Are you referring to legal protection or maintaining a public record of their stance?

Jacobsen: Yes, from a legal perspective.

Lovell: You don't want to suppress someone's beliefs entirely, but there is a time and place for everything. The Academy Awards are not necessarily the right venue for delivering a political speech.

If you choose to voice your views publicly, you will receive attention, but you will also risk alienating part of the audience. That's the challenge with political beliefs—you will always have a segment of the population that disagrees with you.

Jacobsen: What should the public understand about actors at different levels—tier one, tier two, and so on—regarding the idea of a personal brand?

It's probably similar to how people watch a comedian and assume that it fully reflects their real personality. What should people know about distinguishing between an actor's brand and themselves?

Lovell: An actor's success relies on popularity and likability to get work, secure endorsements, and remain marketable.

Their brand becomes their identity in the public eye, allowing them to land commercial deals and sponsorships. Everyone needs to understand that their image and brand drive their career opportunities.

If an actor gets arrested, engages in illegal activities, or harms others, it damages their brand, creates personal animus, and can significantly impact their career.

Similarly, when actors delve into politics, they inevitably take a stance that some people will disagree with. That can affect their movie attendance, TV ratings, concert sales, and overall career prospects.

Managers, agents, and attorneys typically advise their clients—whether they are actors, musicians, or other public figures—not to express political views. Because they will inevitably alienate a percentage of their audience. That is the best course of action to protect their career.

Jacobsen: So, is no agent or manager encouraging their clients to speak publicly about politics?

Lovell: No, no agent or manager is actively pushing their clients to make political statements.

Jacobsen: Are there any other legal aspects we should cover that are important for industry professionals to be aware of? The actor from *Guardians of the Galaxy*. He's a Christian guy. He is probably in his late 30s or early 40s. What's his name? His name is Chris Pratt. Chris Pratt is very open about his Christian faith. It does not seem to negatively impact his professional opportunities or success, and helps in some circles, it helps.

Your distinction between politics and religious views is important because it marks a unique shift in American culture over the last decade or two. Religious views are now less controversial than political views. Based on the evidence you've seen, why did that shift happen?

Lovell: People are generally more accepting of different religious views, especially in a society with various cultures and religions. Religion, for many, is a personal matter and does not necessarily directly affect workplace dynamics.

Politics, on the other hand, has become something entirely different. It is deeply personal, often more like a religion in itself. People hold their political beliefs so strongly that disagreements can ruin friendships and families.

By contrast, people tend to be more tolerant of religious differences. They may not agree with someone's faith, but they are less likely to alienate them over it. Politics, however, is different—political disagreements have a much greater potential to cause division.

Jacobsen: Looking at high-profile cases—Alec Baldwin, Matthew Perry, Sean Combs—what can you say about the legal fallout that results from scandals or personal and professional crises in an actor's life? What is the level of stress that comes with a public controversy? The disincentive to avoid these situations must be extraordinary.

Lovell: Yes. Absolutely. Situations like these can ruin careers.

Legal issues can seriously impact an actor, depending on the circumstances. When a major controversy arises, the consequences can be severe.

Jacobsen: Thank you very much for your time today.

Lovell: Thank you so much.

Parenting with Purpose: Identity, Antiracism, and Raising Conscious Kids

2025-06-02

Dr. Joe-Joe McManus, a leading antiracism educator, reflects on his upbringing in a multiracial, interfaith family and how those experiences shaped his parenting and advocacy. Raised in a racially tense town south of Boston with his adopted African American brother, McManus witnessed systemic racism and antisemitism firsthand. He emphasizes that parents must engage children early with age-appropriate, inclusive conversations about race, identity, and oppression. He warns against shielding children from reality, noting that children of color face these issues from birth. McManus advocates intentional, values-based parenting that fosters critical thinking, empathy, and resilience in today's increasingly polarized society.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Dr. Joe-Joe McManus. We will be talking about family, your upbringing, and how those experiences can inform parenting—not in an overbearing way, but in ways that might be helpful. I wrote a piece for a small platform called *The Court of Camelittle.* So it goes:

Because nothing is manlier than:

- ranting on hypergamy at 2 a.m.
- being obsessed about meat and men without shirts.
- rating everyone's sexual market value like day-traders.
- proclaiming yourself an alpha male on Reddit.
- spending Friday night memorizing pickup lines.
- announcing you're going your own way — then publishing a manifesto.
- calling women shallow.
- punching homosexuals.
- launching a red-pill podcast for no one.
- warning women about "the Wall" while ignoring a receding hairline.
- tweeting all Andrew Tate's tenets before breakfast.
- boasting about your NoFap "superpowers" during a blackout.
- calling strangers "soy boys" while sipping a soy-milk latte.
- dropping your bench-press PR into every thread.
- ranking unwatched manosphere podcasts.
- "negging" dates because a pickup blog said so.
- paying $2,997 to learn "hi."

- chewing a jaw exerciser to looks-maxx.
- tweeting your monk-mode focus journey.
- launching a crypto hustle "for the bros."
- starting each dawn with an "alpha" cold shower and ending it flame-posting on Reddit.
- live-tweeting your No-Nut-November "streak.

Growing up in the United States several decades ago—as a mixed person with an African American brother—how did your family navigate conversations that might have been more difficult for other families in other contexts? These conversations can be confusing because Americans are keen on free speech and their identities. Conversations around identity can be complicated because the country is in a strange place: it is middling in age. European countries are old. America is a few centuries old—young compared to some, but not new.

You have the theft of land from Mexicans and Native Americans. You have the transatlantic slave trade, mainly from Western Africa. You also have Europeans who were not considered white for long periods—hence signs like "No Blacks, No Jews, No Irish." These contexts make up a historical backdrop and can weigh heavily on conversations—especially when those conversations are awkward or involve young children.

So, how did your family navigate those conversations? And what can other families learn from that experience?

Dr. Joe-Joe McManus: Wow. That is a whole lot that you brought up there. There's a lot to unpack.

First, I think of the U.S. more as a *young* nation. If we compare ourselves to China or other older civilizations, we are not even teenagers yet. And in terms of free speech—that's a layered issue. Most Americans say they believe in free speech… as long as they agree with what's being said.

That is coming out a lot right now—because free speech and academic freedom are under attack, which is an extension of free speech. And I think that has often been the case in our history: free speech is conditional.

As far as growing up in my family, my mom was Jewish, my dad was Irish Catholic with some English ancestry, and they adopted my brother, who is African American.

We grew up in a white-flight town south of Boston, Massachusetts. And Boston, of course, has never exactly been heralded as a bastion of integration or multicultural love—it has long been seen as a racist city. I grew up during a time of white flight when people were leaving Boston to avoid the desegregation of schools.

The town I lived in had been predominantly Cape Verdean, Puerto Rican, and African American, but it quickly transitioned to mostly Irish and Italian families—people who had moved from Boston specifically to avoid integrated schools. It was a time of significant transition in that town.

There was a lot of hate and much anger—primarily racism, but also a significant amount of antisemitism. Even in that part of the country, there was also some anti-Catholic sentiment. Our family sat at the intersection of all of that.

Jacobsen: That is Richard Pryor's joke—"Get him, he's all of them."

McManus: That's right. I grew up with some fantastic people, however. I have two brothers—my brother Casey, who is adopted and just eleven months younger than me, and my brother BJ, who is four years younger and looks nothing like me. He has blonde hair and blue eyes—he looks more like our dad.

We used to joke that when we went to Boston, we could not go to any one neighbourhood where all three of us would be accepted. Depending on where we went, we always knew which of us we had to protect the most. That was just a regular part of our experience.

The town we grew up in is interesting. I went back recently because I was invited to give a book talk. About 35 years ago, I was asked to provide one of my first professional talks about racism at that school. The teacher who invited me back then did not need special permission—she set up an assembly, everyone came, and I spoke. Then, I visited classrooms and led small workshops.

But this time, it was different. I had to meet with the principal, the superintendent, and the multicultural committee. They ultimately decided that the topic of racism and white supremacy was too controversial, and I was not invited to speak at the school. So, instead, we hosted the event on a weekend and opened it to the public.

In the book, I talk about growing up there and the racism my brother faced and how it affected him and our entire family. When we talk about our upbringing and how it shapes us, there is a lot to reflect on.

I now advise executive leaders—primarily in higher education and corporate and government sectors. I've done that mainly in the U.S., but also in some other countries. One thing that seems to be universal is that when people are trying to defend oppressive belief systems, they often start by telling me about their childhood—why they believe what they believe.

It fascinates me. These people are otherwise intelligent, highly accomplished, and in positions of absolute power. They are leading massive organizations. But when it comes to these issues, they become irrational. They set aside their critical thinking skills. It becomes about belief systems.

They will tell me something like, "When I was young, I was taught X," and then use that to justify beliefs they hold now. And I always ask them, "What else did you believe when you were ten that you no longer believe today?"

I remind them that for many, many years—decades, in most cases—they have been in charge of what they have learned, where they have lived, whom they have befriended, what experiences they have allowed themselves to have, where they have travelled, and all the other things that shape who we are. They have to take responsibility for that.

So yes, it is essential to talk about parenting and how it influences our beliefs—because that is huge. However, as adults, we must also take responsibility for our beliefs and not use our upbringing as an excuse.

Jacobsen: When I talk to child psychologists, they often focus on the child's emotional development, the child's educational advancement, and the child's moral sophistication. These are all distinct but interconnected factors. To be emotionally regulated is necessary for the ability to study, and studying is essential for academic success, these things are not neatly segmented. They reinforce one another.

Your expertise is around how Americans relate to one another through identity—and how to introduce perspective and clarity, maybe even a bit of cold water, so people can better understand each other and relate more healthily.

For parents trying to navigate these complicated American spaces—especially in a politically charged environment—how can they ensure there is room for their children to explore and come to their realizations in their own time?

McManus: Well, there are different aspects to being a parent—and different spheres where you have control and where you have none. Sometimes, it feels like you have no power, especially as children grow older.

I have a 14-year-old daughter now. And over the course of her life, I have realized just how little I knew about parenting—even though my parents were wonderful.

It is like when people say they understand the educational system because they were once students. It is similar to parenting. Just because you were once a kid in a family does not mean you understand parenting.

You have a perspective on parenting—based on what your parents did—but as a kid, you do not understand why your parents did what they did. A lot of what parenting ends up being on-the-job training.

Jacobsen: That's a great line.

McManus: So I think we often look back—even those of us who are diligent and intentional—and realize we are constantly learning as we go.

I am conscious of all these issues and constantly trying to help my child think critically, develop her own perspectives, and understand the world around her. And yet, when I look back, I think of all the missed opportunities.

I think it is important not to beat ourselves up about that—but at the same time, we should try to take advantage of opportunities when we can to offer these moments of insight and growth to our kids.

We all want to protect our children. That instinct is universal—or at least I hope it is. Often, for example, white parents are afraid to bring up complex topics like race with their children. They do not want to "corrupt" them or burden them with heavy issues at a young age. But I would ask

those parents to consider that children of colour are often forced to deal with those same issues from day one.

And as long as we live in systems that perpetuate racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression, it is essential to recognize that children begin absorbing those messages at the earliest ages.

So if we are serious about not raising our children to internalize those harmful systems—if we want to raise children with open minds, rooted in love and antiracist values—then it has to begin early. Early childhood educators tell us: yes, there is such a thing as age-appropriate content. But it is not really about the issues themselves but about how you bring them up.

With little kids, it can be as simple as what toys they play with or what they see on television. Are they seeing a variety of people? Are they interacting with people from different backgrounds in your everyday life?

And that is often where people realize their gaps—who they are, who they relate to, and who they surround themselves with. Some parents look around and learn, "I don't have a diverse group of friends around my kids."

Then they wonder, "How do I fix that right now?" And the answer is—it is not that simple. But we must try. We have to make every effort possible as early as we can.

Jacobsen: Dr. McManus, thank you for your time today.

McManus: All right. Bye. Have a good rest of your day.

Irina Tsukerman on Faith, Foreign Policy, and Free Speech

2025-11-08

Dialogue conducted May 9th, 2025, **Scott Douglas Jacobsen** interviews **Irina Tsukerman**, a human rights and national security attorney, on pressing global issues. They discuss the implications of Pope Leo XIV's centrist leadership, the resurgence of liberation theology, and the Church's evolving role in international politics. Tsukerman critiques U.S. immigration practices under the Trump administration, particularly deportations to unstable regions like Libya and Ukraine. The conversation also explores media freedom in Greece, disinformation campaigns, and the line between journalism and foreign political interference. Tsukerman emphasizes the need for moderation, institutional integrity, and strong global leadership to address rising authoritarian trends. Interview conducted May 9, 2025.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here for the inaugural session of the Everywhere Insiders, with Irina Tsukerman, a human rights and national security attorney, political analyst, media strategist, and activist. She is the founder and Editor-in-Chief of *The Washington Outsider*, a platform dedicated to in-depth policy and security analysis. The antonymized name of this session draws inspiration from her work and platform.

Tsukerman is known for extensively writing on disinformation, information warfare, counterterrorism, and geopolitical dynamics. Her work has appeared in *Newsweek*, *Modern Diplomacy*, *Legal Insurrection*, and other outlets. Her analyses have been translated into more than a dozen languages, and she has been featured across global media platforms, including Fox Business, i24 News, and Al Arabiya. She has also participated in discussions and programs affiliated with institutions such as the United Nations and George Mason University.

Tsukerman holds a Bachelor of Arts in International and Intercultural Studies with a concentration in the Middle East from Fordham University and her Juris Doctor from Fordham University School of Law. She is admitted to the New York State Bar and a member of the American Bar Association and the New York City Bar Association. She also serves as a fellow at the Arabian Peninsula Institute's Center for Security and Foreign Affairs.

Let us move on to current developments. We have a new pope—Pope Leo XIV. Based on my analysis, he appears moderate and centrist on many issues, while remaining a theological and cultural traditionalist. I do not expect significant changes on topics such as marriage or LGBTQIA+ rights. However, I foresee increased dialogue, openness, and a diffusion of authority, rather than a continuation of rigid centralization.

Tsukerman: I agree—100%. It is interesting because many people are trying to analyze his past, especially during his time in Chicago. Some claim he did not engage extensively in interfaith dialogue, particularly with Jewish groups. However, that may not be a reflection of his values but rather of institutional norms. Some academic and religious institutions prioritize interfaith engagement, but those efforts often stem from specific theological traditions. For instance, Jesuits are known for promoting interreligious dialogue, but this pope is not a Jesuit, so we should not necessarily expect that same focus from him.

Others have interpreted his comments on J.D. Vance's view of Christianity as signalling support for pro-immigration or pro-undocumented immigrant policies. I do not see it that way. Vance's remarks could be interpreted far more broadly. When the pope, still a cardinal, responded, I believe he was not addressing immigration per se. Instead, he criticized Vance's invocation of theology in a way that appeared opportunistic, self-serving, and unsupported by core doctrine.

Many people are trying to infer political statesmanship or partisan alignment from theological arguments that the new pope is making—arguments that are not necessarily aligned with party politics in the United States or anywhere else. That said, I agree with the general assessment. The way theology and dogma play out in the real world, outside of Vatican inner circles and specific theological doctrines mainly affecting devout Catholics, will be interesting to observe. However, I do not expect him to be as politically involved or outspoken on specific political conflicts and issues as Pope Francis was. I see him as someone who will make broader theological commentary when warranted, but avoid getting directly entangled in political debates.

Some people also read his experiences in Peru as a sign of excessive leftism, but that is a misinterpretation. People forget that one of the Church's longstanding roles has been to minister to the poor. The fact that he has done this well is a positive sign, not an ideological statement. Pope Francis was heavily influenced by liberation theology and had a concrete intellectual formation in Argentina. On the other hand, Pope Leo was educated elsewhere and shows no apparent signs of embracing liberation theology, at least based on his public writings.

He is also not particularly focused on publishing; he is much more of a hands-on, pastoral priest, which is quite different from some of his predecessors. That could benefit, particularly regarding administration—he may be better equipped to address longstanding problems such as financial mismanagement. Just consider the recent reports of $500,000 found in a paper bag—something that sounds like it came straight out of *The Conclave* movie—and the ongoing sex abuse scandals.

I have seen at least one accusation claiming that he turned a blind eye to sex abuse cases while in Chicago. However, I have no way of knowing whether that is true, or whether the person making the accusation, who appeared deeply traumatized, was projecting personal pain or expecting something beyond what the then-cardinal had the power to address. I do not know.

What I can say is that this pattern—where popes are perceived as protecting the institution rather than directly confronting abuse—has been seen before. How these matters are handled in practice varies: some predators may be quietly reassigned or removed, while others may be an example in a public way. What is clear is that something decisive must be done. Leadership on this issue must come from the top. That said, it remains a problematic issue, and much remains uncertain.

Ultimately, people must stop projecting their political preferences onto a religious institution. It will not behave in a way that aligns cleanly with contemporary political categories. Many religiously conservative Catholic leaders may be seen as progressive when it comes to economic issues, and many reform-minded leaders who support the role of women within the Church can

still hold very conservative views on other topics, such as LGBTQ issues, because they see those positions as consistent with Church authority and tradition.

Jacobsen: I would not necessarily make firm predictions based on a few isolated comments he has made. You raise very complex and nuanced points. One area worth noting is Latin America's broader and compelling religious and political history, including connections to Portugal and Spain, not just Central and South America.

As you mentioned, with Pope Francis, interest was resurgent in the social teachings of the Gospels, particularly through the lens of liberation theology, emphasizing care for the poor and marginalized. Some of the key thinkers in that movement were tragically assassinated in the context of political repression, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s.

An interesting parallel is that many liberation theology–inspired programs, while rooted in Christian ethics, can be interpreted in secular terms. For example, António Guterres—now Secretary-General of the United Nations and formerly Prime Minister of Portugal—has supported policies such as decriminalizing drug use. These initiatives reflect a compassionate, public-health approach rather than punitive moralism, aligning in many ways with the ethos of liberation theology, even though Guterres' religious views are less publicly emphasized.

Regarding the current pope, it is notable that he spent roughly a third of his life in Peru. That Latin American background places him within a theological and cultural context that has repeatedly given rise to socially engaged Christian thought. Whether explicitly theological or translated into secular governance models, this tradition continues to influence global leaders in meaningful ways.

We may be seeing an inflection point here. The current pope is only 69 years old—a relatively young age for a pontiff—and could remain in office for a decade or even two with access to excellent healthcare. That is significant, especially if he maintains a centrist and traditional theological approach during global cultural uncertainty. That continuity and steadiness could be a valuable anchor for Catholics and international observers.

Tsukerman: From what I have heard, one reason he was selected, despite being viewed as a long-shot candidate, was precisely this perceived ability to provide stability. Some even interpreted his election as a subtle message rejecting the kind of extremism that gained traction under Donald Trump, including certain expressions of politicized Catholicism that emerged in that period.

His election also conveyed that while certain ideological expressions may be rejected, the United States is not. American leadership remains central within the global Catholic community and broader international relations. His papacy could represent an effort to reaffirm transatlantic ties, emphasizing cooperation over polarization.

Thought the conclave was looking for a unifying, centrist figure. There has been a great deal of speculation, much of it unfounded. For instance, some extremist voices, like Laura Loomer—who is not even Catholic—, have called him a "Marxist pope," which I found bizarre. Many conservatives argue that the government should not be a social safety net provider and that private institutions and local communities should handle such responsibilities.

So, why would that not be welcomed if the Catholic Church stepped into that traditional charitable role and alleviated the burden on governments? Especially by those who have (rightfully) criticized the Church for corruption, should they not be encouraged if someone is actively addressing the needs of the vulnerable in both a personal and leadership capacity? That is the best possible response to institutional criticisms. Calling him a Marxist for returning to the Church's foundational mission and vision—for acting as a religious institution should—seems deeply contradictory.

Unless, of course, one is conflating the Church with the U.S. Supreme Court. Even when rooted in tradition, judicial philosophy does not automatically translate into support for executive or legislative policies. If people expect the pope to act like a typical head of state, they fundamentally misunderstand the nature of his role. Church doctrine will never neatly align with the constantly shifting demands of politics or with current ideological trends.

Hopefully, there is something more Catholic, the small "c" sense—more timeless and universal about religious doctrine than the upheavals of the political moment. That is, after all, one of the central reasons religious institutions exist: to offer a separate moral and spiritual trajectory apart from the volatility of political life.

If Pope Leo turns out to be the centrist, unifying figure many hope he will be, that would be a profoundly positive development. Right now, there has been far too much infighting. On the far-right, some traditionalist factions are openly promoting extreme and even bigoted candidates—figures whose views stray far from Catholic theological orthodoxy and veer into outright hate. Some of these traditionalists have even called for a return to Catholic monarchies—systems that were historically disastrous, not only for religious minorities, but also for many Catholics themselves.

These monarchs often ruin their nations through unnecessary wars and authoritarian rule. On the far left, meanwhile, you have individuals who appear to misunderstand religious tradition entirely, confusing emotional compassion and political activism for authentic spiritual practice. That confusion has contributed to alienation and the exodus of many from the Church, who return to purely political frameworks.

Of course, political engagement is legitimate. However, apart from secular political agendas, if people do not recognize the intrinsic value of religious tradition within the Church, the Church will continue to lose relevance and coherence. Moderation is essential, not only to preserve tradition, but also to adapt it meaningfully to the challenges of the modern world. Those include difficulties with recruitment, outreach in Western nations, and dialogue with the so-called Global South and vulnerable populations more broadly.

A centrist pope offers flexibility—he can bridge these divides and promote dialogue across varied constituencies, each with different realities, lived experiences, and challenges. Facilitating that dialogue into a more coherent and inclusive conversation would be a powerful and much-needed legacy. So yes, I sincerely hope that if anything lasting comes from this election, it is that legacy of unity, dialogue, and compassionate leadership.

Even if this papacy is not marked by major geopolitical battles or confrontations with ideological enemies, like communism under Pope John Paul II, even if it focuses primarily on building better, more positive relationships, that alone would be a tremendous achievement. The central challenge of our time is the growing lack of understanding, the absence of dialogue, and the erosion of empathy for people with different perspectives and life experiences. It would be deeply significant if fostering that kind of engagement becomes Pope Leo's legacy,

Jacobsen: Let me pivot briefly to something more urgent—concerns around potential U.S. government plans to deport migrants to Libya. As you know, Libya has a long and well-documented history of human rights abuses against migrants. These include arbitrary detention, torture, extortion, rape, murder—and even reports of bizarre mistreatment, such as forced feeding under inhumane conditions. What is your assessment of the legal and ethical issues here, especially given your background as a human rights attorney?

Tsukerman: Libya is currently a volatile and fractured country. It is divided among competing governments, militia factions, and tribal authorities, with significant sectarian divisions. Foreign powers—particularly Russia and Turkey—exploit the conflict for their strategic interests, further complicating the situation. Corruption is rampant, and the country faces massive economic and infrastructure challenges.

Some regions within Libya are reportedly engaging in the enslavement of migrants. To be clear, not all Libyans support or participate in these practices—not at all—but there are localized areas where such human rights violations are taking place. It is horrifying. On top of that, Libya is being used as a proxy front in broader migration-related conflicts, with disruptive flows intentionally created to destabilize Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Geographically, Libya's position at the crossroads of these regions makes it especially vulnerable to being weaponized in that way.

So why, under the Trump administration, anyone thought deporting vulnerable individuals—many of whom are not African and have no connection to the region—was a sound or moral policy is beyond comprehension. It appears intentional and designed to make a point by choosing the most unstable and dangerous destinations possible. From what we have seen, these deportees are Asian migrants who have no ties to North Africa. Sending them to a country where they are at even greater risk makes no logical sense.

If the goal were truly safe repatriation, or even just temporary relocation, the most reasonable approach would have been to make arrangements with a stable country in Asia—one closer to their country of origin—where proper infrastructure exists for processing, protection, and possibly reintegration. Instead, what happened was a list of unpredictable, high-risk destinations that are entirely inappropriate and disconnected from the migrants' actual backgrounds.

In both legal and humanitarian terms, it is indefensible. This is not just poor policy; it signals gross negligence or deliberate cruelty. The plan was to send Asian migrants to Libya—despite the apparent dangers—and then another group, of unclear background, was slated for deportation to Saudi Arabia, which was reportedly not pleased about it. Even more astonishingly, yet another group was set to be deported to Ukraine—of all places.

These were not Ukrainian migrants. They were Latino migrants whom the Trump administration had considered sending to a war zone. Most Ukrainians do not speak Spanish, and most Latin American migrants do not speak Ukrainian, Russian, or English. The cultural, linguistic, and geopolitical mismatch was extreme, especially considering that Ukraine is in an active state of war.

It is unclear why the administration chose such unsuitable destinations instead of negotiating with relatively stable countries that could use financial support and were better equipped to receive migrants. However, it appears to have been a deliberate power play—a form of deterrence. The message seemed to be: if you cross into the United States illegally, not only will you be deported, but you will be punished by being sent to a completely foreign and potentially hostile environment. It was meant to instill fear.

Moreover, there is a second layer—it also seemed like a power move aimed at the receiving countries. Libya, for example, does not have a unified government. It has two competing governments and is in no position to negotiate. Dumping migrants into such a fractured state is not part of a serious diplomatic or humanitarian strategy. It is a show of brute force—saying, "We will offload whomever we wish, and what are you going to do about it?"

These migrants—many from warm, tropical regions—would be placed in foreign climates, with no knowledge of the language, no social support, and no legal protections. They could be abducted by militias, detained, abused, or killed by actors like the Russians or Turks operating on the ground. It is a gross violation of U.S. international obligations, and it reflects profoundly on the moral image of the United States.

I have never heard of any other country taking such steps. Many countries enforce strict border controls, but they do not load families onto military planes and send them across the globe to completely unsuitable and dangerous locations. That is not immigration enforcement—it is pointless cruelty designed to project fear and demonstrate impunity.

The message was clear: "We can do whatever we want, to whomever we want." Even if this segment is short, it is essential. It speaks volumes about the weaponization of immigration policy, not as law enforcement, but as theatre of punishment.

Jacobsen: In Fangak County, South Sudan, there was what appears to be a deliberate and potentially war-crime-level act: an aerial bombing that killed at least seven people and injured more than 20. The target was a facility run by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)—Doctors Without Borders—including a hospital and pharmacy. This attack was condemned by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan. Any thoughts on this?

Tsukerman: Unfortunately, this kind of abuse and violence against medical personnel in conflict zones is becoming increasingly common. I do not see how such attacks can be reliably prevented without sufficient security or accountability mechanisms. Operating in active conflict areas is becoming ever more dangerous.

More broadly, I observe an alarming trend of renewed global fragmentation and sectarianism. After a period in which violence declined and sectarian confrontations became more political and less militant, we are now witnessing a reversal. Incidents like this bombing reflect a larger global

pattern. As new flashpoints emerge, without any clear resolution, accountability, or coordinated pathway to reconstruction or reconciliation, other vulnerable regions become susceptible to similar outbreaks of violence.

The lack of consequences emboldens violent groups. Rather than pursuing diplomatic, legal, or political avenues to resolve disputes, they resort to armed conflict. What is especially troubling is the absence of strong leadership from the international community, the United Nations, the United States, or other potential stabilizing powers. There is no coherent strategy to protect humanitarian workers or medical personnel from these extrajudicial attacks.

We need more than deterrence. We need visible support. Strong messages must be sent to would-be perpetrators and those risking their lives to provide aid. As it stands, we are failing to protect the most essential actors in humanitarian crises.

Jacobsen: So, let us talk about Greece and the deterioration of media freedom there, particularly since the New Democracy government came to power in July 2019. A recent human rights report accuses the government of creating a hostile environment for independent media and journalists from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Highlights include harassment, intimidation, surveillance, and abusive lawsuits, all of which are known to lead to self-censorship and undermine the free press. As a media figure yourself, what are your thoughts?

Tsukerman: As an American media professional, I believe in fostering as much media freedom and open dialogue as possible. The best way to challenge bad ideas is with better ones, not censorship. Combatting harmful platforms requires factual, clear, and accessible communication rather than suppression.

When journalists are intimidated into silence—whether by lawsuits, surveillance, or threats—it erodes not just press freedom but democracy itself. We are seeing this pattern not only in Greece but across the world. Governments are learning to weaponize legal tools, digital surveillance, and even social media manipulation to stifle dissent under the guise of order or national interest.

The solution lies in strengthening journalistic resilience, protecting whistleblowers, supporting independent media, and encouraging information literacy among the public. A vibrant press is a cornerstone of any democratic society. Once you weaken it, everything else begins to fall apart. Frankly, when I encounter hostile or disinformation-driven media sources, my first instinct is not to censor them, but to render them irrelevant by creating better, fact-based alternatives. The goal should be to avoid giving them additional grievances, platforms, or marketing value. That said, not every place is like the United States.

In Greece, the situation is more precarious. There are active political operations and foreign-directed disinformation campaigns that are significantly more destabilizing than what we have seen, so far, in the U.S., and that is saying something, given the high levels of pro-Russian influence and even penetration into high levels of the U.S. government in recent years.

However, even under those extreme circumstances in the U.S., the average citizen does not feel the same immediate, on-the-ground impact as people in Greece. In Greece, hostile foreign actors operate directly within the country, in ways that are not happening in the U.S., at least not with the same physical presence or intensity.

One primary reason for this difference is the relative strength of American law enforcement and institutional infrastructure. We have historically had better mechanisms for tracking illicit funding, investigating foreign influence, and taking action to mitigate these threats. That infrastructure—though now under strain—has served us well.

Greece, by contrast, has experienced extended periods of economic instability and lacks the same level of resources or institutional resilience. Its financial capacity is not comparable to that of the United States. So it becomes significantly harder to respond effectively when you combine economic grievances, underfunded public institutions, and limited experience dealing with complex foreign interference.

It is a far more challenging environment from a logistical and practical standpoint. It also makes the erosion of media freedom and public trust all the more dangerous. Regarding media confrontations, I am not entirely convinced that shutting down a foreign-funded outfit that exists solely to spread propaganda constitutes an infringement on press freedom. If an outlet is funded by a foreign government and its core mission is to defame local authorities, spread conspiracy theories, or incite violence. It no longer functions as a legitimate media organization but as a political operation. Moreover, political operations are not entitled to the same media protections.

That is very different from an outlet with a political spin that publishes controversial opinions or presents legitimate criticisms of the government, particularly when those critiques come from domestic opposition. However, when that opposition operates with the backing or coordination of foreign entities, the discussion shifts entirely.

Now, I am not saying governments cannot go too far. There is always a risk of authoritarian overreach, where governments become paranoid and begin targeting legitimate opposition under the guise of fighting foreign interference. However, based on my experience with risk and intelligence-related issues, I suspect there is more foreign meddling, corruption, and covert funding behind the scenes than most people realize.

It is easy to cite statistics—how many media outlets are being surveilled or shut down—and immediately conclude there is repression. However, we need to look at each case in its full context. Are these domestic and independent media platforms? Or are they fronts for foreign political operations?

Is there concrete evidence tying them to hostile foreign actors? Is the surveillance or restriction justified, or is it arbitrary and abusive? These are nuanced questions; we must approach them with granularity, not sweeping generalizations.

Many extremist and foreign-affiliated groups count on the fact that most international audiences will not do a deep dive into these cases. They know most people will not investigate things like media transparency reports or explore whether an outlet is an actual journalistic enterprise, a foreign PR firm, or worse, a troll factory.

We have seen this in the U.S.—for example, the FBI later revealed a so-called media company in Tennessee to be a Russian disinformation front, set up to undermine public trust. At first glance, someone outside the U.S. might ask, “Why is the FBI shutting down a private media business?”

However, once you look into the case, it becomes clear that foreign funding and coordination were involved, which justified legal action.

Similarly, what we see happening in Greece may follow that pattern. It is essential to examine the specifics—who is involved, where the funding comes from, and what their activities entail—and then assess how the United States and the European Union might be able to help. The goal should be to protect Greece's sovereignty, ensure media freedom, and preserve platforms for legitimate criticism while addressing foreign interference.

Jacobsen: Irina, thank you for this first session of the inaugural Everywhere Insiders series. I appreciate your time and insights.

Tsukerman: Thank you so much. This was great.

Jacobsen: I am curious to see how this evolves. It sounds like the beginning of a very engaging conversational news show.

Tsukerman: Absolutely.

Jacobsen: Thank you again.

Tsukerman: Take care.

Dr. Zuhdi Jasser on Defending Democracy and Confronting Political Islam through the Clarity Coalition

2025-11-08

Part 1 of 2

Dr. M. Zuhdi Jasser is a Syrian American physician, U.S. Navy veteran, and co-founder of the Clarity Coalition (*Champions for Liberty Against the Reality of Islamist Tyranny*). A leading voice for Muslim reform, he advocates for secular governance, universal human rights, and freedom of belief. He founded the American Islamic Forum for Democracy and co-launched the Muslim Reform Movement. Jasser challenges political Islam and theocratic ideologies, promoting liberty through public discourse and civic engagement. Alongside Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Yasmine Mohammed, he empowers reformers to confront extremism while defending the rights and freedoms foundational to Western democratic societies.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Dr. Zuhdi Jasser. He is one of the co-founders of the Clarity Coalition, or *Champions for Liberty Against the Reality of Islamist Tyranny*. He is an internationally recognized Muslim reformer, physician, and human rights advocate committed to defending secularism, liberal democracy, and universal human rights. Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Yasmine Mohammed also founded the coalition. It confronts theocratic ideologies, political Islam, and blasphemy laws while promoting freedom of speech, gender equality, and freedom of belief.

Through public education, conferences, and advocacy, the Clarity Coalition offers a bold, principled response to rising extremism. It strives to empower voices that champion reform and challenge religious authoritarianism. Thank you very much for joining me today, Zuhdi. I appreciate it.

Dr. Zuhdi Jasser: It is great to be with you, Scott. Thank you.

Jacobsen: So, why the Clarity Coalition? Because we have already covered the *what*.

Jasser: When you look at history, it is doomed to repeat itself unless you learn its lessons. We are in a time of global transformation. As the son of immigrants—my family escaped Syria in the mid-sixties—I understood what Western democracy was all about, especially the American version, which ties national identity to the principles of the Constitution and the rule of law. In America, there is no singular race that defines national identity. It is a nation of immigrants united by a shared social contract.

If you look at the founding of America, it was a rebellion against theocracy. Islam has not undergone that internal revolution. It is 1,445 years old and is currently struggling against entrenched theocratic establishments. After 9/11, I founded the American Islamic Forum for Democracy—not to fight the symptom of terrorism, but to address the root cause: the ideological disease of political Islam, the concept of the Islamic state. My goal was to defeat that idea.

Later, I found others across Canada, Europe, and elsewhere working on similar initiatives. Together, we launched the Muslim Reform Movement in December 2015. While it is still, in

many ways, a startup effort, we face a global Islamic establishment backed by petro-authoritarian regimes with trillions of dollars and deeply entrenched organizational infrastructure.

As we struggled to gain traction, we reflected on the 20th century. One of the West's most effective strategies to counter Soviet communism was to form coalitions, such as the Committee on the Present Danger—a network of think tanks, activists, and policymakers who understood the threat posed by the USSR.

So, I thought: the Muslim Reform Movement is part of the answer, but the rest includes many groups working to counter jihad, al-Qaeda, ISIS, the Muslim Brotherhood, and theocratic Shia movements—all of which are metastases of the same pathological cancer: theocracy within Islam. That is how we decided to form this broader coalition. CLARITY stands for *Champions for Liberty Against the Reality of Islamist Tyranny*. As a Muslim, I understood that it is not enough to simply be *against* something—you have to articulate and organize around what you are *for*.

If you want to defeat drug addiction, you cannot simply work *against* drug addiction. You have to give kids and addicts other things they *want* to do to become successful citizens. So it's about liberty. It's about championing freedom to defeat political Islam or Islamist tyranny. And that coalition has grown. If you go to our website, you'll see several individuals there—women's rights activists, gay rights activists, social activists, free marketeers—others who all share one thing: an understanding that jihadists and political Islamists are not compatible with Western society as we know it.

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Jacobsen: Do you rank order any of these stipulated values around universal human rights, secular governance, freedom of speech, and belief? Or do you take these less as a random assembly and more as a unified patchwork?

Jasser: That's a great question. If you look at our founding meeting—where that language came from—it looks terrific and easy to say and talk about, but it took us quite a bit of time to agree on what that language should be. Even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) includes many core principles we all agree on, but some aspects were debated. For example, we spoke with British individuals who pointed out that the U.K. does not have a formal constitution, so codifying these things can be difficult. But ultimately, it is all about freedom and liberty.

I will tell you—I have my rank order. In that regard, I cannot speak on behalf of the coalition, but to me, the most important thing is free speech. Secular governance is probably the second most important. Liberty is a principle that is derived from those two. If you do not have free speech, and if you do not believe in secular governance—yes, you can believe in a society under God—but unless you think that human beings should be able to, through a separation of powers, create their laws, then you can never win an argument against people who believe they are invoking God's law.

So, my two pivotal elements are free speech and secular governance. As Voltaire—or whoever said it—reminded us, the most *harsh* and *offensive* speech needs defending. Moderate speech is

uncontroversial. But it is the voices on the fringes of society, those who say the most provocative things, who are the real test of that right.

Jacobsen: Which majority-Muslim society—if not in leadership or official hierarchy, then in public opinion surveys—seems to imbibe these values most?

Jasser: That's a good question. For instance, even in Saudi Arabia, surveys show that around 5% of the population identifies as atheist. So, while that is not publicly acknowledged or visible, it tells us something about the underlying currents in society.

There are 56 Muslim-majority countries on the planet, and there is not a single one I would prefer to live in over any Western country. None of them imbibe a culture grounded in the Western understanding of liberty and individual rights. That is why our Clarity Coalition exists. At its core, it is about preserving the West, because Western societies—our countries—offer a unique postmodern environment where we can practice our faith more freely than in any Muslim-majority country.

That said, you are right. If you look at the Pew polls, many of them show that a significant portion of Muslims support Sharia-based laws that are incompatible with universal human rights. For example, in countries like Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq, 80 to 90 percent of Muslims believe that if someone leaves Islam, they should be killed. That is a litmus test for identifying an ideology fundamentally incompatible with Western modernity.

Those numbers drop to around 40 percent in countries like Indonesia or among Muslims in India. India is not a Muslim-majority country, but it has the largest Muslim population in the world, about 200 million people. Indonesia is the largest Muslim-majority country in terms of population.

If you look at Iran, for instance, it has one of the fastest-growing atheist populations in the world. It also has one of the largest populations of Muslims leaving Islam. To me, as someone who has a close, orthodox relationship with God, that is a red flag for Muslims. If we do not figure out how to prevent the faith from turning into a cult, we will lose it in a few generations. A cult, by definition, is a belief system where leaving the faith is met with death. And tragically, that is currently the majority opinion among many Muslims globally.

Those ideas must be debated publicly. Consider Saudi Arabia: it positions itself as an ally of America, yet the country is effectively an open-air prison. This is a profound issue that needs to be addressed.

The reason I bring up Iran is because it is the ripest country, in my view, to overthrow a theocratic regime within the next ten years. The theocrats are on the defensive. The reason they are causing so much mayhem across the Middle East is precisely because they are on the verge of a massive revolution.

If that revolution happens, it will be a monumental victory for anti-theocrats. Many Iranians had buyer's remorse just months after the 1979 revolution. They wanted to get rid of the Shah because they viewed him as a dictator, and they hoped an Islamic government would bring

religious and personal freedom. Instead, it was a massive step backward—even worse than the Shah's dictatorship.

These movements—what the media called the *Arab Spring* in 2011—were more of an *Arab Awakening*. Yes, they have been chaotic. But in the long run, they represent progress. Even if messy, they are a step forward.

As a Syrian American, I will tell you—as much as 800,000 Syrians lost their lives in the Syrian revolution—it has still been a step forward. You do not get rid of theocracy easily. If you talk to patients who have gone through aggressive cancer treatment, some die, some end up in palliative care, and some recover completely. It is similar when it comes to getting rid of theocracy. These populations will often endure significant loss of life in the process.

If you look at the Western experience in building democracy, take the Thirty Years' War in Europe against theocrats—10 million people died over three decades. That is roughly where Islam is now. It is going through that same painful reckoning, where theocrats are being slowly pushed back.

What is remarkable to me is that, despite this oppressive environment, there is a growing percentage of Muslims who harbour anti-theocratic ideas. Much of that is thanks to social media. And that is why regimes like Saudi Arabia work so hard to control social networks. If you look at the top ten Twitter influencers in Saudi Arabia, many of them are radicals—Wahhabi or al-Qaeda–style voices.

Why would a government that claims to oppose al-Qaeda allow its most extreme elements to dominate public discourse? The answer is simple: that is how dictators retain power. They create fear and chaos to justify their military authority. Assad did the same thing in Syria. He suppressed moderate thinkers under the pretext of fighting ISIS, while doing very little actually to combat ISIS.

It was ultimately the U.S. military under General Mattis that dismantled ISIS, not Assad. Assad often *empowered* them, just as the Egyptian government empowered the Muslim Brotherhood. This is a pattern. Country after country, we see extremists being enabled so that moderates, free thinkers, and critical inquiry—what your show promotes—cannot exist. Open conversation is suppressed.

How Prime Minister Mark Carney's Early Economic Policies Are Shaping Canada's Future

2025-11-08

Jeff Le is a policy expert and commentator on Canadian governance. Le highlights the economic challenges and cautious optimism in early 2025 under Prime Minister Mark Carney. He notes consumer confidence, trade tensions with the U.S., and a recalibrated cabinet focused on innovation, housing, and economic growth. Carney's pragmatic approach, strengthened by bipartisan U.S. support and legal wins on tariffs, is balanced by bold reforms and complex trade and climate dynamics. Le emphasizes the importance of reducing interprovincial barriers, increasing supply chain resilience, and engaging First Nations in infrastructure projects to sustain investor confidence and national development.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Which early indicators reflect the initial economic impact of Prime Minister Mark Carney's government?

Jeff Le: Among the most important indicators is consumer confidence. Canadians at the start of 2025 showed concerns over a stagnant economy and a deepening trade crisis with the United States. While there is still caution from consumers, circumstances have improved especially after the Prime Minister's successful visit to Washington where he was able to maintain a strong stance against the White House and Trump administration. With that said, consumers understand that uncertainty could lead to a higher cost of living with potential inflation increases, as evidenced by the 2025 first quarter of the Bank of Canada's Canadian Survey of Consumer Expectations.

Jacobsen: How does Carney's stance against the U.S. tariffs compare to past Canadian approaches?

Le: The Prime Minister's stance is less the policy difference when it comes to its handling of the United States and trade negotiations with the Trump administration. The Prime Minister's Ivy League background and banking experience fit more of President Trump's preferences compared to Mr. Trudeau where their relationship was fractious from the start in 2017, only worsening from there. How President Trump treated the Prime Minister during his Washington visit was starkly different, instead of calling Canada the 51st state.

Another benefit that Mr. Carney has on trade and tariffs has been the United States courts. Canada's tariffs have been challenged in lawsuits with the Trump administration facing two different setbacks – the U.S. Court of International Trade ruling that the tariffs had exceeded presidential authority under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. While the White House earned some respite with some reinstated tariffs, it appears that the court later this month could issue a longer-term pause.

Mr. Carney also benefits from some bipartisan support from Congress. On a recent bilateral delegation led by U.S. Senators Shaheen (D-NH) and Cramer (R-ND), the delegation highlighted the need to strengthen the Canadian-American partnership. Mr. Cramer has close ties to President Trump and his support of easing of tensions could go a long way. What also could help

is growing resistance in both the U.S. House and Senate for authorizing tariffs through Congress.

The U.S. courts and the legislative branches may help reduce risk for the Prime Minister.

Jacobsen: What policy tool is the newly strengthened Industry Ministry prioritizing?

Le: Having a powerhouse in Innovation, Science and Economic Development like Minister Joly highlights stronger focus on key industries. Her effort on shoring up Canadian metals, such as aluminum and steel, for Canadian national infrastructure and defense projects. She has also highlighted the value of timber and rare earth metals and the connection with jobs and production.

One policy tool that is being used is a focus on Canadian supply chain, prioritizing Buy Canada in procurement. In other countries, such efforts do have challenges, including potential slowdowns in production, reforms in procurement, and a challenge in centralizing certain vendors, which could add more overreliance and vendor lock. This has been the case in the United States and has posed challenges in overcoming incumbents in contracting.

Certifications may also pose a problem for procurement and waivers, or a legal change may be required. There is risk, but if the Government can reduce interprovincial trade barriers, this payoff could exceed the implementation challenges and add more resilience.

Jacobsen: What are the government's benchmarks for reducing interprovincial trade barriers?

Le: One important benchmark for the Government will be whether the federal government and provincial governments can pass legislation to reduce barriers and eliminate its various exemptions. The Prime Minister had called for legislation to be finalized by July 1, which is expected to be well-received in Parliament. Interprovincial trade barriers are more challenging, as this will challenge market incumbents, but any nation-building projects must allow for more economic integration. Steps from five provinces, from Nova Scotia to Quebec, highlight the seriousness of economic decline and action taken from President Trump's threats. Quebec's efforts, most notable, given their heavier regulations and data flows challenges, shows that the politics has been seen as timely for action. The MOUs that provinces have been working on also have helped, as seen on Ontario's recent agreement with Albert and Edward Island.

Building a Canada Strong approach, as outlined in the Speech from the Throne, centers an increase in economic activity and a reduction in inflationary elements, with major project streamlining. The emphasis on costs to Canadian families, especially on housing, is a powerful example of how the Government is focused on tangible, albeit very ambitious benchmarks for success in driving supply up and costs down. If the Government is successful in reducing the $200 billion in interprovincial trade barriers costs, the combination of savings plus the reduction in federal budget spending could lead to deeper technology and innovation investments that could help a stagnant economy grow.

A key challenge – can Canada deliver on streamlining major projects, such as widespread infrastructure improvements, such as roads through the Slave Geological Province to expand prospective mineral extraction. Additional pipeline projects, including those in the Ontario Ring

of Fire could help these efforts, but there is a challenge in balancing climate commitments. It is a stretch that the Prime Minister would be willing to get rid of gas emissions standards and oil caps or get rid of the industrial carbon tax.

He has also asked the premiers to offer suggestions for big "nation-building" projects they would like to see built, with the goal of identifying several that can be fast-tracked. Pipelines, critical minerals projects and trade corridors are at the top of the premiers' lists.

One area of potential threat beyond the complexities of climate are Ottawa's relationship with First Nations that could also be strained without active negotiations and inclusion in discussions.

Jacobsen: How are foreign investors reacting to Carney's early leadership?

Le: The challenge is less about foreign investment but rather home-grown investments, as soon in Canadian venture capital investments. Industry policies could help aid these challenges.

On the foreign investments side, there is cautious optimism assuming Canadian-American trade can work out a deal. The Canadian natural resource question will be a key one – how the Prime Minister can unlock the minerals playbook without climate backlash and as the Trump administration also looks to deregulate. One key question will be how the Prime Minister and Canada achieve their priorities at the upcoming G7 meeting in Alberta. Depending on the joint communique, this could buoy global markets, expand investor confident, and help bolster Canadian investment. It will be the start of their plans to make Canada the strongest economy in the G7, which could include the increased defense and military spending by 2030.

Jacobsen: What does the composition of Carney's cabinet suggest about continuity and reform?

Le: The Prime Minister's Cabinet reflects his pragmatism. As a first-time elected official, the May Cabinet has a stronger mix of experience but seeing immigration, energy, and housing with first-time ministers is an important effort at a break from unpopular Trudeau government shortcomings and an opportunity to energize the economic agenda. The boldness at housing and energy serve as key litmus tests for success. Experienced hands in Joly, Freeland, and LeBlanc serve as the economic and Canada Strong tip of the spear. Another question which has not received as much attention will be how artificial intelligence and digital innovation is accelerated under Minister Solomon.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Jeff.

Global Financial Insights with Michael Ashley Schulman: Fed Policy, Energy Costs, Tariffs, and Eurozone Shifts

2025-11-08

Michael Ashley Schulman, CFA, Chief Investment Officer of Running Point Capital Advisors, offers expert insight into current global financial dynamics. He discusses Federal Reserve rate policy, the political role of Jerome Powell, and how tariff measures and OPEC oil decisions interact to shape inflation. Schulman emphasizes the deflationary nature of taxes and energy's foundational role in economic systems. He also explores Ukraine's shift toward euro-based monetary alignment and the EU's planned capital reallocations toward defence. The conversation weaves macroeconomics with political strategy, emphasizing adaptive policy analysis and real-world market implications.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here for the first session with Michael Ashley Schulman, CFA, to discuss global finance. Schulman is the Chief Investment Officer and a founding partner of Running Point Capital Advisors, a multifamily office based in El Segundo, California.

With over twenty years of experience, he leads the firm's global macroeconomic outlook, investment strategies, asset allocation, and management of private placement life insurance (PPLI) and private placement variable annuities (PPVA). Schulman specializes in alternative investments, impact assessments, and tax-efficient structures. He previously held senior roles at Hollencrest Capital Management and Deutsche Bank. He earned a BA in Economics from the University of California, Berkeley, and an MBA from the MIT Sloan School of Management. He is also a CFA charterholder, board advisor, writer, art enthusiast, and advocate for social impact investing. The Federal Reserve has held interest rates steady. Why do you think that is? Is that a good or bad thing?

Schulman: It is a good thing. They have held steady because there is no strong catalyst for a change. The economy is not overheating to the point where the Fed needs to raise rates, but it is also not weak enough to require stimulus through rate cuts.

The Federal Reserve's dual mandate focuses on maximum employment and price stability. Inflation remains above the Fed's target of 2%, so lowering rates could risk reigniting price pressures. At the same time, unemployment is relatively low, around 4.2%, according to the latest data, which indicates a healthy labour market.

Thus, Chair Jerome Powell and the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) are taking a prudent approach: holding rates steady and staying data-dependent, waiting to see how the economy responds.

There is speculation that the Fed may cut rates by the end of 2025, possibly in December, depending on inflation trends and labour market's evolution. That remains to be seen and will be entirely data-driven.

Many market participants hope for rate cuts to support equity markets, real estate, and consumer credit. But we are now in May 2025, and Powell's term as Fed Chair ends in May 2026, so decisions made this year will likely shape the legacy of his tenure.

I believe that Trump will not get rid of Powell in the next year because, technically, he cannot.

During this adjustment phase—early in Trump's renewed presidency—our assessment indicates the President could tactically leverage Powell's Federal Reserve leadership. The Fed Chair functions as a perfect fall guy: if the economy does well, Trump can take all the credit. If the economy does poorly, he can blame Powell since Powell holds significant economic levers through the Federal Reserve. Robust economic performance allows the administration to justifiably tout policy successes, whereas market declines can be deflected toward central bank interventions. This arrangement proves most advantageous when the White House sustains steady rhetorical challenges against Powell, whose position wields enough institutional power and monetary control to credibly absorb blame during financial setbacks.

In other words: President Trump privately appreciates Jerome Powell as an ideal scapegoat. When economic conditions flourish, Trump can justifiably claim victory, yet during downturns, the Federal Reserve Chairman controls sufficient economic mechanisms to credibly shoulder responsibility. This political theater functions optimally when the administration continuously maintains public verbal pressure on Powell.

A year from now, I expect interest rates on the short end to come down as Trump is sure to replace Powell with someone more dovish, more amenable to lowering Fed rates. I am building that into my mid-term and long-term plans and scenario analyses. We have seen a recent drop in oil, plus shifting tariff measures that vary by country, especially among petro-states. These drops, naturally, have complex economic implications.

Jacobsen: So if we see effects like this—say, one conscious decision regarding tariff policy—are these compounded, or are they distinct and separable economic challenges?

Schulman: I like that question. Let me try to answer it. If I miss the mark, feel free to reevaluate and press me on it.

The main thrust of tariffs was announced on Liberation Day, April 2. Strange coincidence: On the same day, April 2, OPEC, led by Saudi Arabia, opened the oil spigots and lowered oil prices.

Many expect tariffs to be inflationary—a view commonly held by economists. However, fundamentally, tariffs are taxes, and taxes are inherently deflationary. While tariffs may initially push up prices, they force market adjustments—consumers purchase less, seek alternatives, or develop workarounds. Thus, though appearing inflationary in the short-term, tariffs ultimately prove deflationary by extracting purchasing power from the economy.

What is interesting is the timing—more than a coincidence. On the same day, Liberation Day was marked, and those sweeping tariffs were announced—with Trump holding up that big poster board listing them—Saudi Arabia and OPEC opened the spigots, increased oil production, and lowered oil prices. Lower oil prices are deflationary.

That is one of the more consistent economic principles: energy affects the cost of almost everything—production, services, transportation of goods, electricity, computer systems, AI—it is all energy-dependent. Oil and natural gas make up much of that. So lowering energy costs is hugely deflationary and helps counterbalance many fears surrounding tariff-driven inflation.

That move by OPEC was likely done in part—or even largely—because Saudi Arabia wants to remain in favour of Trump and build a good relationship with his administration and with the U.S. more broadly. It was seen as a beneficial counterweight to the inflationary concern. Since then, OPEC has continued to take a dovish stance on oil, leaning toward increased production and lower prices, at least in the near term, until things settle.

Ironically, oil prices are now dropping so low that some U.S. producers may be shelving or delaying expansion plans.

Jacobsen: So, that gives an angle that is a bit less commonly heard—it is educational, in the sense that these macroeconomic moves are not always linear. It is not A to B to C. Sometimes it is A to A2 to B2 to C. So we can get similar effects through different pathways, and must infer the probability of cause even without direct proof by identifying reasonable patterns of decision-making.

Schulman: Yes, that makes sense. And this is one of those cases where it was not just coincidental that Saudi Arabia and OPEC lowered prices and increased supply.

The perception, especially among investors, hedgers, and speculators, of a coming slowdown has also contributed to declining oil prices. Even if not a full-blown recession, slower global growth is still anticipated. Slower growth means lower oil demand, which further translates into lower prices. We are seeing price declines driven by supply increases (OPEC and producers) and demand expectations (market sentiment).

That combination is unusual. Typically, if there is a fear that demand will decline, producers restrict supply—they do not increase it. But people are not abstract, perfectly rational decision-makers. They make seemingly irrational decisions all the time, which also shapes how the economic system plays out.

People make irrational decisions, but there is also something to be said about crowd theory. You know, where you get a thousand people to guess the weight of a cow, and the average guess ends up being surprisingly accurate.

Jacobsen: The wisdom of crowds?

Schulman: Yes, that is the better way of phrasing it—the wisdom of crowds. So yes, sometimes that comes into play too.

Jacobsen: Now, there was a former Colombian customs official, Omar Ambuila. He was sentenced to more than twelve years in prison for accepting over a million dollars in bribes tied to a money laundering conspiracy that involved corrupt U.S. DEA agents. How often does this happen?

Schulman: I do not know how often that happens. Not very. But —this is the kind of thing that feels like something out of a movie.

Jacobsen: U.S. authorities reportedly became suspicious when Ambuila's daughter showcased an extravagant lifestyle on social media—completely inconsistent with the family's modest income.

Schulman: That is not too unusual, in the sense that criminals have been caught because of flashy spending, or family members posting online. But when it comes to specifically customs officials, particularly in a cross-border case involving the U.S. and Colombia, it is probably rare, though certainly plausible. It has that cinematic feel, but with real-world consequences.

Jacobsen: Two items out of Europe. First, Ukraine may be considering a move from referencing the U.S. dollar to the euro in its monetary policy. Second, Europe is preparing reforms to absorb redirected global investments, so a significant shift in capital flows and corresponding financial reforms to strengthen its markets. Thoughts or analysis? Two questions, I suppose: (1) Ukraine possibly shifting from the dollar to the euro; and (2) Europe undertaking financial reforms in response to redirected global capital flows.

Schulman: If Ukraine replaces the dollar with the euro, it will likely use it as a reference currency initially. But that really should not come as a surprise. Ukraine has made its intentions clear—they want to join the European Union. And countries that join the EU generally adopt the euro over time.

So, if you think about it in that A-to-B-to-C progression, it makes sense. This move to reference the euro is a logical first step in aligning their monetary system with European institutions. It is a way of saying, "We are on the path to full EU integration." Aligning their currency reference now helps make that transition smoother down the line and it should not be interpreted as a snub against the U.S. dollar.

To become part of the European Union, you want to walk the walk, talk the talk, and take steps that align with future integration. So Ukraine deepening its financial and regulatory ties with the EU—aligning policy with the euro—tightens that linkage. It makes sense.

They still intend to keep their current currency, at least for now.

That is my understanding. You would know better than I do since you have spent time in Ukraine. But yes, they intend to keep the hryvnia until the actual switch. Aligning it with the euro in the meantime is a sensible preparatory step. And they will probably still keep their reserves diversified across the dollar, euro, and other benchmarks.

Jacobsen: One quick follow-up: You mentioned Europe realigning its financial position—not just individual countries joining the EU. So what about the broader shift in capital flows within the European Union?

Schulman: That is an important point. The big thing for the European Union, in terms of capital flows, is the new self-imposed mandate to increase defence spending. That will be a much larger part of the EU budget in the future.

Yes, initially, they will have to buy some defense equipment and weaponry from the U.S. But over time, they will aim to redirect those capital flows toward building more of that capacity on the continent—within Europe itself. To do that, they will need to finance it, and I doubt they will cut social spending to make room for it.

So we are probably going to see either more deficits, higher taxes, or increased bond issuance—some way to finance the expanded defence spending.

Jacobsen: Michael, thank you very much.

Body Language Builds Intimacy: Dating Tips from Expert Christopher Louis

2025-11-08

Part 1 of 4

Christopher Louis is a Los Angeles–based international dating and relationship coach and founder of Dating Intelligence. As host of the Dating Intelligence Podcast, Louis draws on intuition and lived experience to guide clients toward authentic selves and meaningful romantic connections. He emphasizes eye contact, posture, and respectful touch to build intimacy and decode unspoken emotions. Louis discusses cultural differences in nonverbal cues, highlights common misinterpretations, and stresses the importance of curiosity and communication over assumptions. Through live events, media, and coaching, he guides individuals in reading emotional tension, deepening bonds, and fostering connection. His mission is to help people stop overthinking and thrive in their dating lives through awareness and emotional presence.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we're here with Christopher Louis, a Los Angeles-based international dating and relationship coach and the founder of *Dating Intelligence*. He is best known as the host of the *Dating Intelligence Podcast*, where he explores the nuances of modern dating and relationships with a wide range of expert guests. Christopher has guided thousands of individuals through his work in understanding love, connection, and personal development. His coaching blends intuition with lived experience to help clients discover their authentic selves and build meaningful romantic relationships. He offers support through live events, media engagements, and one-on-one coaching sessions.

He teaches clients how to interpret body language, develop emotional communication skills, and choose compatible partners. Christopher's mission is straightforward: to help people stop overthinking and start thriving in their dating lives. Thank you so much for joining me today. First question—how does body language reveal unspoken emotions in romantic relationships?

Christopher Louis: Body language is one of the most potent forms of communication—arguably more impactful than words. Every human being, even animals, relies on nonverbal cues to understand and relate to one another. From the moment we're born, we use physical gestures to communicate with our parents, especially before we can speak.

In romantic relationships, body language remains a significant channel of expression. Eye contact, posture, proximity, and facial expressions carry emotional weight. These signals can communicate interest, affection, discomfort, or even withdrawal—often without a single word being spoken. It's how couples begin to read and respond to each other, shaping their connection over time.

Jacobsen: What are some familiar nonverbal cues that indicate attraction or emotional connection?

Louis: Eye contact is one of the biggest cues, and I stress it with all my clients. When you're on a date—especially for men—it's essential to give your full attention when the other person is

speaking. Strong, steady eye contact signals interest and emotional presence. It makes your date feel seen and heard, even if you feel nervous or distracted.

Another important cue is body orientation. I always tell my clients, “If you’re sitting across from someone, lean in slightly.” That subtle forward posture communicates openness and attentiveness, helping create a sense of intimacy and shared energy.

Lastly, physical touch—when appropriate—is a strong nonverbal signal of connection. I advise clients to be mindful and respectful. Still, a light touch on the hand or arm can be significant if both people are comfortable. These small gestures often help build rapport and emotional safety in the early stages of dating.

Louis: That, in a funny sort of way—when you’re smiling, when you’re laughing, whatever it may be—that small little bit of physical touch is always essential when it comes to the flirtatious side. The key is ensuring it’s not too forward, creepy or off-putting but respectful. You also want to know whether the other person is open to and receptive to that body language.

Jacobsen: How can couples become more aware of each other’s body language to strengthen their bond rather than diminish it?

Louis: Physical touch is a key factor here. Everyone has their preferred love language, and while not everyone prioritizes physical touch, it can still be an essential bridge for connection. Simple gestures—holding hands, placing a hand on a partner’s knee, or sitting shoulder-to-shoulder—can subtly reinforce intimacy and keep a relationship upbeat.

On the flip side, some people are just not wired that way. Some individuals dislike being hugged or touched—and that’s okay. It does not mean they cannot have a strong and healthy relationship. In those cases, connection comes more through words and presence.

So, eye contact becomes especially important. Even if someone is not physically affectionate, looking at them, smiling, and giving them your full attention can communicate that they are loved and valued. That energy is just as meaningful.

Jacobsen: Now, I’m Canadian, and you’re American. Our cultures overlap because of the deep historical ties between the countries. But in other parts of the world, there can be significant cultural differences—different first languages, different social norms—even something as basic as how close people stand to one another. Are there cultural differences in romantic body language that partners should consider?

Louis: It depends. My first instinct is to say no because love is pretty universal. But when you consider culture, you need to be mindful. For example, in some Asian cultures—like Japan, China, or India—specific physical space and touch norms differ from Western expectations. Public displays of affection might be more restrained.

In contrast, Western cultures—whether in Europe, the United States, Canada, Mexico, or Central and South America—are generally more open to physical expression in romantic settings. So, while I believe body language is universal, adapting and respecting cultural nuances is essential. Awareness and sensitivity to your partner’s background go a long way.

Once again—excuse me—body language is the first and foremost form of communication we know. It's all we have from the moment we leave the womb. Animals in the wild are the same—it's all about how they communicate through physical cues and movement. You said something spot-on earlier: standing close to someone, smiling at them, or the way you look at them while they speak—especially with eye contact—conveys so much more than words ever could.

Now, when you travel to places like India or Japan—places I've visited—you'll encounter cultures with more formal boundaries around physical interaction. In those cases, body language becomes even more essential because touch may not be culturally acceptable in public. That's when nonverbal communication becomes key, like eye contact, posture, and directional body positioning. How you're standing, or your body is angled toward the person you're speaking to, can say a great deal.

This kind of body language can take on a flirtatious quality and be the starting point for a romantic connection. When two people from different cultural backgrounds come together, they eventually learn to develop their own shared "language"—a personalized, mutual body language that works uniquely for their relationship.

Jacobsen: How can body language be used to help identify emotional tension in a relationship?

Louis: That's a great question. One of the first signs of emotional tension is often found in the eyes. You can feel it when someone is upset, withdrawn, or not emotionally present. Their eye contact changes, their gaze shifts, they might avoid looking directly at you—or their blinking rate or breathing might become shallow or rapid.

Then, you move down the body. Folded arms, crossed legs pointing away from you, a turned torso—these are classic signs of disengagement or defensiveness. If you're sitting down and your partner's legs or body are angled away, that's a cue. Fidgeting is another. Restlessness in the chair, shifting weight from side to side, tapping fingers, or squeezing their hands can indicate frustration or emotional withdrawal.

I've seen this often in couples therapy. For example, I work with a boyfriend and girlfriend and always know when she's frustrated. When he talks, she'll shift her weight to the left, cross her legs tightly, and fold her arms—sometimes even turn her body slightly away from him while giving him a half-glance or side-eye. But when things are going well, her posture completely changes—she faces him directly, her legs are crossed in a relaxed, classic position, her arms are loosely placed, and her energy is open.

For men, it's a bit different. We tend not to cross our legs as often, but men usually grip the sides of their chairs or fidget. They'll rotate slightly back and forth if it's a swivel chair. Their heads may tilt, and their eyes dart—classic signs of mental distraction or emotional tension. These physical cues are easy to miss if you are not paying attention. Still, they can reveal much about what is happening emotionally.

You can always feel the tension when both people in a relationship are upset—it's that moment when the emotional energy shifts, and you can feel the friction in the room. When two people clash like that, body language tends to close off. But hopefully—like I always say—if they can

engage in healthy verbal communication, they can start to relieve that pressure. Ideally, that leads them back to a space where positive body language can re-emerge.

Jacobsen: Now that you've mentioned eye contact and some of its nuances, can you take a deeper dive into eye contact's role in building intimacy between partners, particularly how it might evolve as a relationship matures?

Louis: This is a great one—I love this question. Let's start with eye contact from what I call *Dating 101*. At that early stage, eye contact is all about positive reinforcement. It's about projecting interest, attentiveness, and positive energy. It also helps improve listening. When someone knows you're looking at them—entirely focused—it makes them feel valued, building trust right from the start.

When it comes to flirting, eye contact adds a layer of subtlety. For guys, it might be leaning in slightly with what's often called "the smoulder." You've probably heard the term. It's that confident, slow gaze—flirting without saying a word.

Conversely, women often express flirtation through brightness in their eyes and small, rhythmic gestures—like twirling or stroking their hair. This is not universal, but many women with longer hair will play with it or run their fingers through it while maintaining eye contact. These are physical cues layered with emotion—often unconscious signals of attraction.

Now, as the relationship develops, eye contact evolves, too. It becomes less about attraction and more about emotional depth. One of the exercises I often coach couples on—something I do with my partner—is this: sit down, face each other, and maintain eye contact for a full minute. No talking. Just looking into each other's eyes.

That single minute can be compelling. It resets emotional connection—especially for couples constantly busy or distracted by daily distractions. My partner and I both have whole lives and full schedules. But when we stop, hug, and look into each other's eyes—even briefly—it brings us back to the center. It's like saying, "There you are."

That moment of mutual presence reminds you both of what matters. And once that connection is re-established through something as simple as eye contact, everything else starts to realign. It grounds you. It says, "We're here."

We're back at it now. Eye contact is essential in relationships, and many people do not prioritize it enough, especially in everyday moments. Think about when you're sitting on the couch with your partner, watching a show, scrolling your phone, or doing something mundane. Even during that downtime, there's a lost art in pausing, turning to your partner, and looking at them.

Sometimes, I look at my partner while we sit together. And then she'll catch me staring and go, "What?" And I'll say, "Nothing, I just wanted to look at you." That little moment brings back the connection. It's that unspoken reminder—"There you are. I see you." And honestly, more couples need to do that. It's simple but powerful.

Jacobsen: What about the misinterpretation of body language? Depending on their personality, some people rely more on intuition and emotional receptivity—they're open to reading a broader range of signals in their environment. Others are more analytical or verbal. But intuition can fail.

People misread situations, misinterpret tone or even text messages. How do people typically misread body language? And how does that create tension in relationships? More importantly, how can couples reorient themselves so they do not take a misreading as a deliberate offence?

Louis: First, I love that you used the phrase *"reading the room."* That's a big one when it comes to understanding body language. So, let me give a broad but practical answer by starting with a real-world setting—social events.

Let's say you're at a party or a mixer, and you're meeting someone for the first time. This is *Body Language 101*. Many people, especially men, tend to read the room wrong. They walk in, pick someone they find attractive, and go straight in—no pause, no scan of the environment, no reading cues.

What they fail to consider is context. That woman might've already been hit on five times that night. Maybe she's tired, not in the mood, or wants to enjoy herself. Suppose a guy doesn't take a moment to observe her posture, openness, and interaction with others. In that case, he's likely to misread her availability or receptiveness. That's how friction and awkwardness start.

One of the things I pride myself on is being able to read a room. Scott, you could put 100 women in a room, and I could tell you exactly which one is open to being approached and which one is not before I speak to anyone. It is not magic; it is awareness. The key is observing from a distance: Is she making eye contact? Is she smiling naturally? Is her body facing outward or turned inward in a closed-off way?

Most people—especially those acting on pure instinct or emotion—skip this step, which creates misinterpretation. Misreading body language can cause conflict in relationships, not just in dating. Your partner might cross their arms because they're cold, not upset. Or maybe they're quiet because they're tired, not angry.

That's why communication is everything. If something feels off, ask. Do not assume. The solution is to create an environment where both people feel safe clarifying what they mean and how they think. That way, misreads do not turn into full-blown arguments. It becomes a partnership of curiosity, not accusation.

She's shut down. So, watching it happen in real-time is laughable when the next guy comes in and tries the same old approach. But here's the thing—I could probably go up to that same woman after five guys have already tried and still make a genuine connection. Why? Because I read the room. I gauge her emotional state and switch the tone. Maybe I crack a joke—something witty or unexpected—that pulls her out of that mental loop. Suddenly, she's smiling; she's curious. She's thinking, *"Wait, who is this guy?"* And I'll say, "Hi, my name is such-and-such." Just like that, the energy shifts because I met her where she was emotionally and changed the narrative.

Dr. Zuhdi Jasser on Political Islam, Interbelief Dialogue, and the Mission of the Clarity Coalition

2025-11-08

Part 2 of 2

Dr. M. Zuhdi Jasser is a Syrian American physician, U.S. Navy veteran, and co-founder of the Clarity Coalition (*Champions for Liberty Against the Reality of Islamist Tyranny*). A leading voice for Muslim reform, he advocates for secular governance, universal human rights, and freedom of belief. He founded the American Islamic Forum for Democracy and co-launched the Muslim Reform Movement. Jasser challenges political Islam and theocratic ideologies, promoting liberty through public discourse and civic engagement. Alongside Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Yasmine Mohammed, he empowers reformers to confront extremism while defending the rights and freedoms foundational to Western democratic societies.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Now, we could probably get into the weeds a bit here—not quite to the depth of a theology course or debate—but the core ideological strands of political Islam seem to be central here. As you mentioned, Wahhabism is often identified as one of the most toxic sources of these extremist acts. Salafi-Wahhabi Islam, in particular, seems to fuel many of the terrorist activities. Regarding the Clarity Coalition working with other Muslim organizations, what are your dividing lines? What determines who you will or will not partner with?

Dr. Zuhdi Jasser: That's a great question. How did we build this coalition? What are the filters and vetting mechanisms for membership?

It is a group process, but we all agree on a common mission. As a Muslim who loves my faith and has a strong relationship with God, I am under no illusions about the state of Islam today. I debated this very point at Oxford in October. I took the position against the house in a formal debate, arguing that Islam, in its current form, is *not*compatible with democracy.

And I still believe that. I do not understand why Muslims should be handed a participation trophy just for existing in Western societies, as if that automatically proves compatibility. There is *no* evidence anywhere on the planet that Islam, as it is currently practiced, is compatible with liberal democracy.

But it took Christianity 1,789 years before any legal system on the planet was truly compatible with democracy. Yet, Christians read their Bible, including the phrase, *"Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's."*That speaks to a legal and theological separation of church and state.

Some aspects of the Bible have been reinterpreted and modernized through centuries of Enlightenment thinking. Islam has not yet undergone that same process. And I do not believe the core "recipe" is inherently bad. If you look at the first 300 to 400 years of Islamic civilization, even though dynasties governed it, it produced incredible advancements. The *Elons* of their time lived under Islamic rule. Those societies were not democratic, but they were the most

intellectually and technologically advanced regions on Earth, while Europe was still in the Dark Ages.

If the recipe were fundamentally flawed, it would not have produced that history. But it was not a recipe for liberal democracy—it was a dynastic system that included some critical thinking. What is needed now is a *second Enlightenment*.

Our coalition came together around two core precepts: we are for liberty and against all forms of authoritarianism and fascism, particularly Islamist theocracy. One of the most important distinctions we make—and this is something all of us in the coalition agree on—is that Islam needs the space to evolve. It may not be compatible with democracy *today*, but it *can* be. It *might* be.

So, if someone believes Islam is fundamentally a death cult and the only way to deal with it is to isolate it, destroy it, or extinguish it, they cannot be part of our coalition. That makes no sense. If, however, someone believes Islam deserves the same space that Christianity and Judaism were given to reconcile with modernity, then we welcome them. We want to work with allies *within* the House of Islam who believe in religious liberty, secular governance, gender equality, and who are not homophobic. These are the essential values needed to be compatible with Western democratic society.

Our coalition is made up of publicly vetted individuals. Many people might agree with us in principle, but if they have not taken a courageous public stand against extremism—if they have not spoken out, taken risks, or faced consequences—then they have not met the standard we initially set. People like Ayaan Hirsi Ali and others in our coalition have received death threats. They have paid a high price for their advocacy, and that courage deserves recognition. Those are the individuals we look to bring into our coalition.

Jacobsen: What about interfaith dialogues? So, across denominations—within those who pass that first filter—or even between different faiths, not just denominationally, there is also the broader term I have seen used: *interbelief*. That includes humanists, atheists, and agnostics, all gathered not necessarily for friendly chats, but to have open and amicable conversations. How do you see that?

Jasser: Yes, that's a great question. That is part of free speech: understanding that people can have tough conversations about reality through mutual respect and equality. I have been deeply involved in that space. I served on the Arizona Interfaith Movement board for many years. There is a strong tradition—not just in America but across the West—of valuing faith diversity.

As discussed earlier, I remember my experience on the USS *El Paso*. My Commanding Officer was Catholic, the Executive Officer was Protestant, the Supply Officer was Mormon, our Deck Officer was Jewish, and I was the ship's physician—and I was Muslim. And yes, there were also atheists on board. We were a microcosm of American society.

Yet we would all die for each other. We joined the military to keep our country safe so that we could freely choose our faith, or no faith. Interfaith conversation is critical. The problem with most interreligious dialogue in the United States today is that it focuses on platitudes and avoiding offence. It often centers only on what we share in common.

Now, it's good to find common ground for the first few minutes of a conversation. But after that, interfaith—or interbelief—dialogue has no real value unless we can have frank, respectful conversations. For example, I should be able to explain to my Christian friends why I do not believe in the Trinity, why I do not believe in original sin, or why I think confession through a priest as an intermediary does not make sense to me. These are the things that distinguish my Muslim identity from Christianity.

Declaring a particular faith or worldview necessarily means making a choice, and that choice implicitly rejects other views. That should not be offensive. If someone is an atheist and rejects belief in God, that does not offend me. It is their choice, and we should be able to talk openly about it. It is a muscle memory that we need to build much more in our society.

Sometimes, the pendulum swings too far. What we see now, especially with certain DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) programs, is that in the name of equity, every group is so shielded from offence that we lose the ability to engage in honest conversations. We end up preserving a superficial kind of diversity—one based on identity alone—without encouraging deep, meaningful dialogue.

Jacobsen: When everyone is soft-pedalling, no one is saying anything. People fear being uncomfortable, even when saying something at least partially true. Another part of that equation—now made worse with gasoline thrown on the fire by social media and the Internet—is the phenomenon of individuals, some briefly notable and some not, who are often labelled provocateurs. These are people who say things with a surface-level truth but with the intent to offend. Then, when people react, the provocateurs claim they're being persecuted or silenced—that their free speech is under attack—when in reality, they have been able to say precisely what they wanted. What they dislike is the backlash. How do you view conversations around that? Because you mentioned respect for persons as a fundamental principle, too.

Jasser: Yes, that's a great question. As an activist, an academic, and a physician, I approach everything with a mindset of treatment: what is the desired outcome? That's just how I think—things need to have *productive* intent. I do not believe in gaslighting or just provoking people to grab attention.

That said, I have released many press statements defending the right of individuals to burn Qur'ans. When I talk with those individuals privately, I tell them: "Look, nothing good in history has ever come from burning significant scriptures or books." If you look at the 20th century, some of the most democratic regions of the world descended into fascism, and it often started with book burnings. I am no fan of that practice. History is not a fan of it. But I will still defend to the death someone's right to do it.

These are just pieces of paper. I do not believe symbolic speech like that should be banned. If you look at Europe, they have hate speech laws, including laws that prohibit Holocaust denial. I oppose Holocaust denial morally and historically, but I also oppose those bans. In some European countries, *Mein Kampf* cannot even be legally published. That approach pushes dangerous ideas underground.

In the United States, we believe it is far more effective to monitor fascist groups *above ground*, where the antiseptic of sunlight can do its work. When you push them underground, you make them more complicated to track and potentially more dangerous. So the real question is: what effect are you trying to produce when you ban something?

Recently, I took a different position in one particular area. When it comes to antisemitic and pro-Hamas rallies held by individuals in the U.S. who are here on visas, I do *not* believe that is protected under the same principle. Why? Because those individuals are not American citizens. They are here under a privilege, not the same rights guaranteed by the Constitution. They are not entitled to the full protections of the First Amendment in the same way as citizens are.

Just as I cannot go to Saudi Arabia—or even to the U.K.—and speak publicly about overthrowing the government, why should individuals be able to come to the U.S. as guests on student visas and espouse antisemitism, glorify Hamas terrorism, celebrate October 7, and promote genocide against Jews, all while enjoying the privilege of visa status on university campuses funded heavily by foreign governments?

Sometimes people mix these issues. In the same breath, you'll hear individuals say things I would defend under free speech—and then they turn around and advocate for policies like shutting down all mosques. That kind of overreach only empowers the radicals in my community.

Instead, we need to acknowledge that while we may strongly disagree with what is taught in many mosques—and, yes, 90% of mosques in the U.S. may promote ideologies about governance incompatible with American values—shutting them down is the wrong response. First, it would not achieve the intended result, and second, it is profoundly un-American. It would only radicalize communities rather than address the issues through open dialogue and reform.

We need to ask: What is the appropriate treatment to cure political Islam's malignancy? From a legal, rights-based, and solutions-oriented perspective, free speech, sunlight, and rigorous public scrutiny are still the best remedies. But we must also be honest and clear-eyed about *what* the speakers try to achieve with their rhetoric.

Jacobsen: Imagine you're at the Walmart customer service desk, returning three products labelled "Left Wing," "Centrist," and "Right Wing." They have asked about your complaints about each product. What is the left wing doing wrong? What are the centrists doing wrong? And what are the right wing doing wrong, from the perspective of the Clarity Coalition's goals?

Jasser: Starting with the left wing, their main issue is identity politics. They embrace individuals from minority faiths or cultures without expecting those individuals to adhere to the same principles they demand from the majority. It'sa kind of *bigotry of low expectations*. They excuse Islamist ideologies under the banner of cultural sensitivity, when they would never accept those ideas from Christians or others in power.

The right wing, particularly some conservatives, often fails to engage with meaningful, long-term solutions. They can be overly focused on short election cycles and sometimes ignore the importance of working with reformers who may not share their views on family values or issues

like abortion, but who are critical partners for national security. Hyper-nationalism also clouds their perspective on immigration, even though immigrants can be some of the best assets in the fight for democratic values.

My biggest critique of the centrists is that they are lacking in action. There is very little that animates them. Yet the survival of the West depends on the 80% in the middle waking up and taking a stand. They need to engage with the ideological battles within the House of Islam and take sides *against* the "Red-Green Axis"—the alliance between the far left and Islamists that operates from China to Iran and beyond.

That's the future of my work—the legacy for my kids. That's what drives me. I hope to awaken that center.

Jacobsen: Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciate your expertise, and it was a pleasure to meet you.

Jasser: Appreciate it, Scott. Cheers. Stay in touch. Thanks.

Lindsay Shepherd's Academic Freedom and Free Speech Case: The Chronology and Facts

2025-11-08

Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:

(b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication.

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 2(b)

The University is a public body… subject to the Charter. The actions taken to discipline the students for their online comments infringed their right to freedom of expression.

Pridgen v. University of Calgary, 2010 ABCA 347

Colleges and universities must implement a free speech policy that conforms to the principles of free expression as expressed in the University of Chicago's Statement.

Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2018 Directive

Academic freedom includes the right to teach, learn, study and publish free of orthodoxy or threat of reprisal… and to express one's opinion about the institution, its administration, and the system in which one works.

Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Statement on Academic Freedom

Prelude to Controversy: Free Expression in Higher Education

Over time, controversies may settle, particularly in Canadian academic culture.

Lindsay Shepherd's academic case began in November 2017. It involved academic freedom and freedom of expression. The debate originated at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU). What happened?

Shepherd showed a video of Jordan Peterson in class. Shepherd filed a lawsuit in June of 2018. WLU later apologized. The case was cited in national debates about freedom of expression policies at Canadian universities. Ontario mandated policies in 2018. Let us go into some of the details and further outcomes.

2017: Context and Early Developments in the Shepherd Case

In late 2017, Lindsay Shepherd was a Canadian graduate student and teaching assistant. On November 1, 2017, she showed two TVOntario's *The Agenda* clips of Dr. Jordan Peterson speaking on Bill C-16. Shepherd presented the Peterson video to engage students. She reported no firm opinion of him. She did this in a first-year communications class. The action appeared intended to illustrate a debate on gender-neutral pronouns. This triggered administrative action. Bill C-16 amends the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code. "Gender identity" and "gender expression" are added to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination. It also extends protections against hate speech and hate propaganda.

Following the class on November 8, 2017, a student approached WLU's Rainbow Centre. They had concerns about the clips shown. The Centre contacted the university administration. The specifics of the complaint are uncertain; no formal complaint was ever filed. Shepherd was called into a supervisory meeting with Nathan Rambukkana (Shepherd's Supervisor), Adria Joel (Gender Violence Prevention), and Herbert Pimlott (Program Head). The processes followed leading to the meeting are uncertain. The meeting lasted 40 minutes. The three expressed concerns that her actions had created a 'toxic climate.' The reason: Neutral presentation of clips. Shepherd was asked to pre-approve all lesson plans in the future. Shepherd recorded the meeting on her mother's advice after receiving a vague email about the meeting.

On November 10, 2017, Shepherd released a meeting recording to the *National Post*. She believed the issue was of public interest because universities hold a societal role and garner taxpayer funding, so she contacted the media after the private meeting. The recording emphasized freedom of expression, Bill C-16, and the Canadian Human Rights Code. It garnered national attention. The incident sparked ongoing national debates on academic freedom at WLU and beyond.

On November 21, 2017, WLU President Deborah MacLatchy and Nathan Rambukkana published public apologies. They stated that Shepherd had done nothing wrong. Rambukkana and Pimlott emphasized the need for a "safe learning environment" and criticized ideas lacking "academic credibility." MacLatchy acknowledged an "institutional failure." (Later, Shepherd described Rambukkana's apology as "disingenuous" in her lawsuit.)

On December 18, 2017, Robert Centa conducted an independent inquiry. Centa concluded that no formal complaint was filed, the two clips shown did not violate policy, and the meeting represented "significant overreach."

2018: Litigation, Legislative Response, and Public Discourse

In January 2018, Shepherd founded the Laurier Society for Open Inquiry with two other students. LSOI invited controversial speakers and faced some challenges, including high-security costs. In May 2018, Canadians for Accountability awarded Shepherd the Harry Weldon Canadian Values Award. WLU also approved a Statement on Freedom of Expression. The policy outlines student discipline via the Non-Academic Code of Conduct. It requires compliance for group recognition and funding. It directs unresolved complaints to the Ontario Ombudsman. Also, the policy mandates annual implementation reports starting September 1, 2019.

In June 2018, Shepherd filed a $3.6 million lawsuit against WLU, Rambukkana, Pimlott, Joel, and a student. She alleged constructive dismissal, harassment, and negligence. Independently, Peterson filed a $1.5 million defamation suit against WLU and involved staff based on the comments in the 2017 meeting. It was filed separately from Shepherd's.

In August 2018, Ontario mandated publicly funded colleges and universities to adopt free speech policies based on Chicago Principles, based on a broader debate on academic freedom and free speech, which included Shepherd's case. All institutions are required to report annually to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

In December 2018, Rambukkana and Pimlott lodged a third-party claim against Shepherd as part of legal proceedings related to Peterson's lawsuit. The professors argued that Shepherd should be liable for damages from releasing the recorded meeting. They argued that Shepherd was responsible for recording and publishing a private meeting. Privacy and free speech rights conflicted.

In response to Ontario's 2018 mandate, publicly funded universities were mandated to establish free speech policies by January 1, 2019. Enforcement is overseen by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). Institutions that are non-compliant may face reduced funding. The Campus Freedom Index, published annually since 2011, documented persistent institutional failures. In 2018, WLU and six other universities earned an "F" grade on free speech.

2019-Present: Lindsay Shepherd Lawsuit Dismissal, Twitter Ban, and Ongoing Free Speech Debate in Canadian Universities

2019, the University of Ottawa and the University of Alberta provided unconditional protection. The rest had caveats. In 2020, thirteen universities earned an "F," and 21 student unions failed. As of 2025, there have been no significant developments in these policies, though they remain actively debated. The 2018–2019 frameworks are still in place.

On February 7, 2019, Shepherd became a Campus Free Speech Fellow at the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms. On July 14, 2019, Twitter (now X) banned Shepherd. The exchange became public and controversial, leading to media scrutiny of both parties. The exchange was deemed "abusive behaviour." The ban stemmed from a Twitter exchange involving comments related to reproductive health and public figures. Later that July, her account was reinstated.

Shepherd's teaching contract was cancelled in early 2020. As a teaching assistant, not a faculty member with a formal academic contract, non-renewal can be common and not necessarily punitive. Peterson's lawsuit was dismissed in April 2024 on legal grounds and procedural merit. The full judgment text is not public. On November 8, 2024, a court dismissed the $3.6 million lawsuit. As of May 23, 2025, the dismissal has been noted in public summaries, but the ruling text is not publicly available yet. National discussions on the balance between free speech equity, diversity, and inclusion continue on Canadian campuses. The 2018–2019 policy frameworks are extant.

Now, Shepherd's case remains central to debates over academic freedom. WLU and other universities continue to publish annual free-speech reports, and others, like the Campus Freedom Index, track compliance and campus speech environments. Shepherd's memoir, "Diversity and Exclusion: Confronting the Campus Free Speech Crisis," offers a detailed presentation of opinions on academic freedom.

The chronology reveals an ordinary pedagogical decision leading to national debates, legal battles, and policy changes. The case and the lawsuit's impacts on Shepherd's academic career and professional legacy remain unclear. Its long-term impact remains to be seen.

Kéta Kosman on Lumber, Trade, and the Market

2025-11-08

Keta Kosman is the owner and publisher of *Madison's Lumber Reporter*, a leading resource for softwood lumber pricing and market analysis. Based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Keta holds a BA in Political Science and Philosophy from the University of British Columbia and has extensive experience in graphic design, publishing, and the lumber industry. Since 2008, she has provided critical insights into North American lumber markets through *Madison's Lumber Reporter* and related publications. A recognized industry analyst, Keta specializes in lumber pricing, sawmill capacity, forestry trends, and trade between Canada and the U.S. She is also active in environmental initiatives. Kosman discusses factors behind the U.S. South surpassing Canada in softwood lumber production. Seasonal cycles influence lumber pricing, with low prices in winter and rising demand by spring. Southern yellow pine's volume increase outpaces Canada's SPF due to U.S. homebuilding demand and investments in U.S. sawmills. Trade barriers like duties disproportionately affect Canadian mills, driving diversification to Asia. Environmental events such as wildfires and hurricanes impact timber supply and reconstruction needs. Kosman emphasizes the divisive nature of duties, driven by U.S. special interest groups, and highlights the opaque negotiation process over settlements involving billions in duties.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What factors are involved in the U.S. South surpassing Canada in softwood lumber production capacity?

Keta Kosman: The volume of lumber is a key factor in determining pricing at any given time. U.S. and Canadian housing markets generally follow seasonal cycles, which cause annual fluctuations in lumber prices. The year's lowest prices typically occur toward the end of the year, during winter. Around this time of year and into February, prices rise as homebuilders prepare for spring. Large companies, especially those constructing 100 to 150 homes at a time, aim to have the lumber they need onsite before breaking ground. Consequently, whether on the supply side or the demand side, stakeholders are always looking ahead. They base their current purchases and investments in log procurement on their expectations for the next three months.

Jacobsen: Is this generally done seasonally? Do they start planning at the beginning of the year and then project for spring, summer, fall, and winter?

Kosman: Yes, that's correct. Even though housing construction data may still indicate strong activity in June, most companies have already purchased the lumber they need by then. As a result, while construction continues, demand slows, and prices typically soften around June.

Jacobsen: What are the most important factors regarding how the U.S. South surpasses Canada in softwood lumber production capacity?

Kosman: There are several factors to consider. When you see claims that southern yellow pine manufacturing exceeds western spruce-pine-fir (SPF) production in volume, it's important to note that such comparisons are not always apples-to-apples. To make a fair comparison, you should compare the entire U.S. South to the entire North or the U.S. Southwest to the Northwest.

Generally speaking, the volume increase in southern yellow pine lumber manufacturing has been significantly greater than in eastern or western spruce species, such as northern varieties.

One major factor is that large operators in British Columbia anticipated a reduction in timber supply due to the mountain pine beetle infestation. To compensate, they shifted some of their manufacturing focus from SPF by acquiring and taking over mills in the U.S. South.

As I mentioned, U.S. homebuilding is by far the largest consumer of lumber. However, one critical point often overlooked is that homebuilders do not typically prefer southern yellow pine for construction framing. They tend to avoid it because of its physical properties.

To explain in detail, the relationship between the raw log and its final application is quite direct. Homebuilders find that SPF lumber from the Pacific Northwest, eastern Canada, or the northeastern U.S. is straight, clear, and strong—qualities essential for framing. In contrast, southern pine studs are more likely to split or warp when nails are driven into them, particularly when applying drywall. For this reason, southern pine is not widely used for framing construction.

Instead, southern pine wood is primarily used for finishing, siding, outdoor purposes, and decking. Its porous nature allows it to take treatment well, and its attractive yellow grain makes it ideal for outdoor applications.

Therefore, the volume of 2×4 manufacturing using southern pine does not serve the same purpose for end users as SPF 2×4 lumber. I hope this distinction is clear.

Jacobsen: Regarding investments in new sawmills in the U.S. South, have these developments influenced the overall distribution of lumber production capacity?

Kosman: Southern pine lumber is almost entirely a domestic U.S. product, with very little, if any, making its way into Canada. In contrast, SPF lumber, whether from Washington State, Oregon, British Columbia, or Alberta, is widely transported. SPF travels across Canada and the U.S. and is also exported overseas. Eastern SPF typically goes to Europe, while Western SPF is shipped to Asia. Southern pine, on the other hand, is not commonly exported as lumber. However, southern pine logs are significantly exported, particularly to Asia. This dynamic illustrates the difference in the movement and utilization of these products.

Regarding investments in U.S. sawmills, it's important to understand that timber in the U.S. South often comes from plantation-style forestry, which is more similar to practices in Europe or Japan. These plantations involve thinning, pruning, fumigating, and watering. In contrast, forests in the Pacific Northwest and Canada are natural. While replanting is done in Canada, silviculture practices like thinning and pruning are not typically employed. In the U.S. South, private timberland owners often supply mills; in some cases, mills own the timberland themselves. In Canada, the timber supply comes predominantly from public lands designated for forestry, excluding parks, Indigenous lands, or other protected areas. The British Columbia Interior now has more lumber production in the U.S. than in Canada.

Jacobsen: How does this influence the dynamics of manufacturing and distribution? Can you explain how larger operators manage their operations geographically and nationally?

Kosman: When discussing production volume, it's essential also to consider value. For instance, the price of a Southern pine 2×4 compared to an SPF 2×4 can vary significantly. Companies operating cross-border, such as Interfor, Canfor, and West Fraser, have substantially invested in U.S. facilities. Understanding why they invest in these areas requires considering a few critical factors.

First, all lumber in North America is sold in U.S. dollars, even when a Canadian buyer purchases lumber in Canada. Suppose the Canadian dollar is weak, as it has been for much of the past decade. In that case, this creates an enormous advantage for Canadian producers. For example, the exchange rate is around 75 cents, which has been for several years but falls to 69 cents. In that case, Canadian producers gain additional profit from the currency difference.

However, production costs in Canada are generally higher. To address this, companies have shifted investments to U.S. facilities, where costs can be lower. These companies assess multiple factors, such as log supply, log costs, production costs, market prices, demand, housing starts, and geographic advantages. This allows them to decide where to produce for a particular period strategically.

Jacobsen: Trade policies and tariffs also play a significant role. Do these policies have a real impact on lumber production and distribution?

Kosman: Yes, absolutely. Softwood lumber has been subject to tariffs and duties for decades. We're currently in what's referred to as Softwood Lumber Dispute #5. Historically, around 85% of Canadian lumber was sold into the U.S., but this has dropped to between 60% and 65% over the past 20 years. This shift is largely due to Canada diversifying its markets, with significant new exports to Asia to avoid U.S. duties.

When duties are imposed, as happened after the expiration of the previous softwood lumber agreement in 2016, it creates challenges for Canadian mills. During economic slowdowns, such as after the 2006 housing crash, mills often cannot pass the cost increases caused by duties onto consumers. This forces mills to absorb the losses. By contrast, when the market is strong, as in the 1990s, mills can better offset duty costs by increasing prices for end users.

Currently, duties remain a significant constraint for Canadian mills, as the housing market is not robust enough to absorb additional costs effectively.

Jacobsen: Environmental challenges, such as pine beetle infestations and wildfires, are significant factors affecting lumber production. Wildfires, for example, are currently in the news, particularly in Los Angeles. However, why is the U.S. housing market potentially more important than these environmental challenges? This is not to diminish the effects and importance of wildfires and infestations but rather to explore the broader context.

Kosman: It's important because these events, like wildfires or storms, can have two primary impacts. First, they can reduce the timber supply available to mills. For example, if a wildfire occurs in a timber supply area—not a park—it directly affects the volume of timber that can be harvested. Second, events like hurricanes can create an immediate need for reconstruction.

For instance, at the end of last year, Hurricane Helene caused significant damage in the Appalachian region, including the Carolinas and parts of Florida, particularly in low-lying areas prone to flooding. The homes affected were already occupied, so this reconstruction demand was separate from new housing construction driven by demographic trends, such as young people entering the housing market.

Hurricane Helene also impacted timber areas and sawmill operations. Three major sawmills—two West Fraser mills in Florida and one Canfor mill in Georgia—suffered disruptions. These included power outages lasting nearly two weeks and destroyed roads, which affected production and transportation. We've seen similar scenarios, such as during the atmospheric river event in 2022, where environmental disasters impacted sawmills and the need for rebuilding in affected areas.

In contrast, the fires in Los Angeles are primarily in parklands, which are not part of the timber supply basket. While it is devastating to see forests burn, these trees were never intended for sawmills. The primary loss in such cases is livable structures, not timber resources.

Jacobsen: So, when interest rates decrease, home sales and construction tend to rise, creating a larger demand for lumber. Is it fair to say that this trend in interest rates outweighs the short-term effects of environmental factors, such as wildfires or pine beetle infestations?

Kosman: Yes, that's correct. Interest rates have a much broader and more sustained impact on housing and lumber markets than seasonal events like wildfires or infestations. For example, from 2006 to 2017, the U.S. housing market was depressed due to the fallout from the zero-interest mortgage crisis, which caused many people to lose their homes.

During that time, the U.S. was underbuilt, requiring around 1.5 million annualized new housing starts to keep up with population growth. That figure has now risen to 1.7 million, meaning we're still not meeting the basic housing demand—not considering speculative investments or second-home purchases, but purely demographic needs.

With inflation easing and interest rates loosening up, we're seeing an uplift in housing markets. It's not a dramatic jump but rather a moderate, sustained increase. Last year, we expected housing construction to pick up, and I anticipate a noticeable increase this spring. This trend will likely continue over the next few years, driven by the basic need for housing, compounded by reconstruction efforts following storms and other disasters.

Jacobsen: What about U.S. trade barriers, such as duties and tariffs, which have been entrenched in the industry for a long time? You mentioned that the industry has acclimated to these mechanisms. Are these trade barriers fair or primarily designed to serve domestic interests?

Kosman: Trade barriers like duties and tariffs on softwood lumber are longstanding issues in the industry. The U.S. has implemented these measures for decades, and we're currently in what's referred to as Softwood Lumber Dispute #5. Over the years, Canadian producers have adapted to these policies by diversifying their export markets.

Historically, 85% of Canadian lumber was sold into the U.S., but that figure has dropped to between 60% and 65%. Much of the difference is now exported to Asia to avoid U.S. duties.

These trade barriers often serve domestic U.S. interests under the guise of protecting local industries, but whether they're fair is a complex question.

In an economic slowdown, such as after the 2008 housing crash, duties can severely constrain Canadian mills as they struggle to pass on the increased costs to consumers. In stronger markets, mills have more flexibility to offset these costs. However, these policies often create inefficiencies and distortions in the market, affecting producers and consumers on both sides of the border.

The benefit primarily lies with the United States, but I must be careful about framing this. U.S. lumber industry analysts at timberland investment conferences have said that the softwood lumber duty functions as an "every ten-year dividend" for U.S. timberland owners.

A special interest group that lobbies Congress to implement the softwood lumber duty. While this group includes some sawmills, it primarily represents timberland owners. They argue that Canada's timber supply largely comes from public land and is not governed by free-market mechanisms. They claim that because the government sells Canadian trees, the prices are artificially lower, effectively subsidizing Canadian sawmills and allowing them to sell lumber in the U.S. at lower costs than U.S. producers can achieve.

In Canada, timber is owned federally by the Crown, but the provinces manage access to it. The two largest provinces for timber supply are British Columbia and Quebec. Historically, especially in the 1980s, British Columbia set timber prices based on provincial budget needs, which was not a market-based approach. This practice gave the U.S. a legitimate grievance. However, British Columbia has adopted a more market-responsive pricing system over the past decade. Timber prices are reassessed every three months and tied to lumber prices. When lumber prices go down, the cost of logs decreases, and when lumber prices rise, log prices increase.

Despite these changes, the U.S. special interest group continues to push for duties, largely disregarding the market reforms.

Another critical aspect, often overlooked, is the financial dynamics behind these disputes. Historically, negotiations for settlement only begin when the amount collected from duties reaches approximately US$5 billion. Observers who have followed the issue for decades argue that the dispute is less about policy, pricing, or subsidies and more about dividing this significant financial pot.

For example, during the last settlement, the U.S. Commerce Department had collected US$5 billion in duties. Although the U.S. lost the case at both NAFTA and the WTO and was ordered to return the money, they refunded only US$4 billion. The remaining US$1 billion was retained and distributed among members of the Softwood Lumber Coalition. Furthermore, due to exchange rate fluctuations, the returned US$4 billion was worth only US$3.6 billion at the time, adding to Canada's financial losses.

I've heard that the amount collected is approaching US$7 billion, which exceeds the usual threshold for initiating settlement discussions. Canada and the U.S. may be already negotiating a resolution. Still, these negotiations typically remain confidential until a deal is finalized.

Jacobsen: Why do these negotiations only become public knowledge at the final phase, after settling everything?

Kosman: Regarding transparency during the negotiation process, I don't know why it's so tightly controlled. Sometimes, if I speak to someone personally at a conference—someone directly involved as a petitioner, subject to the duty here in Canada—they'll provide some insight.

The duty itself is applied based on specific data. When lumber crosses the U.S. border, the duty is calculated on the pro forma invoice presented at customs. It depends on the shipment volume, whether it's in a truck or railcar, and the price. Companies must show their invoices detailing the volume and sales price of the wood.

Companies know what's happening because the government asks them for this information. Occasionally, I'll hear from someone kind enough to share updates, like "there's some movement on this issue." However, for the most part, even those involved don't know the full details. It's a very unusual and opaque process.

I can tell you this: many sawmill manufacturers in the U.S. do not support the duty. Their perspective is, "If Canadian wood is better and priced higher, let the market decide. Customers can choose whether to pay for Canadian wood or a domestic product." This issue is incredibly divisive.

The driving force behind the duty is a special interest group—it's not a widespread, public initiative. It's not as though individuals like Joe Smith in Alabama are part of the softwood lumber duty. This bilateral issue is negotiated directly between Trade Canada and the U.S. Commerce Department.

That's quite an unusual and complex situation. Many people hold strong opinions about it, but most people do not explain this level of depth.

Jacobsen: Do you have any final points or questions?

Kosman: No, this was far more detailed than what I usually hear.

Jacobsen: Glad to hear it! Thank you for your time. I appreciate it.

Kosman: Okay, talk to you later.

Jacobsen: Bye.

How Reading the Room Strengthens Long-Term Relationships: Body Language, Emotional Cues, and Connection

2025-11-08

Part 2 of 4

Christopher Louis is a Los Angeles–based international dating and relationship coach and founder of Dating Intelligence. As host of the Dating Intelligence Podcast, Louis draws on intuition and lived experience to guide clients toward authentic selves and meaningful romantic connections. Louis explores the crucial role of "reading the room" in long-term relationships. They emphasize how misreading cues—like ignoring body language, emotional withdrawal, or passive-aggressive behavior—can erode connection over time. Louis underscores the importance of eye contact, presence, and nonverbal communication, especially for introverts or those less attuned to emotional signals. Through personal stories and therapeutic insight, they reveal that maintaining awareness, checking in regularly, and developing attuned body language are key to preserving intimacy and emotional safety. Relationships thrive when both partners stay emotionally and physically present.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What about reading the room *in* a relationship, not just while dating?

Christopher Louis: Absolutely. This applies even more in long-term relationships. Everyone's had moments where they misread a partner's signals. Whether it's misreading sexual cues—like making an advance when your partner isn't in the mood—or going in for a kiss too early in a new relationship and getting that "Whoa, I wasn't ready" response.

Misreading usually happens when focusing only on one's feelings or expectations. One is not tuned in to the other person, and that's a critical mistake. For example, say you come home, and your spouse is drained after a long day. Still, you immediately start bombarding them with questions or problems. That's reading the room wrong.

Or maybe your partner is mad at you, and you're unaware. You walk in the door and ask, "What's wrong?" They look at you like, "Really?" Suddenly, doors slam, sighs are heavy, and things are being moved forcefully. That's body language—loud, emotional, nonverbal communication—but many people miss it.

Why? Because they are stuck in their heads. They are not present. They are not projecting awareness outward. You must consciously observe the signals your partner sends—verbal *and* nonverbal.

Jacobsen: It's interesting—fighting, like language itself, is partly innate and partly learned. Structurally, we all have the capacity for language, but what we speak and how we use it is shaped by our environment. Body language in conflict is the same—culturally layered but personally developed over time.

Louis: It's the same with conflict styles. That's why we talk about different "fighting styles." Over time, you and your partner develop your way of arguing—hopefully resolving things. You figure out what works and what doesn't, whether it's with verbal cues or nonverbal ones. It

becomes a learned rhythm, and if done right, it's balanced. Even fighting can have its emotional intelligence when both people are attuned.

When you walk into a room and your partner is mad—but they're completely quiet—that's one of the most powerful body language cues. Silence can be just as expressive as words. If you're asking questions and getting nothing but a quiet "Mmmhmm" or a cold shoulder, that's a signal. But many people are too afraid to say, "Hey, what's wrong?" because they fear the answer or do not know how to handle the tension.

Silence—whether someone is sad, mad, or withdrawn—is honestly one of the most complex forms of body language to interpret but also one of the most important to recognize. It can speak volumes without saying a word.

Jacobsen: That reminds me of an episode of *House, M.D.*—the show with the sarcastic, brilliant, but abrasive doctor. In one of the final episodes, House turns around and snaps, "Life is pain." It was like a burst of unspoken emotion building since Season 1. Left unspoken for too long, that emotional repression can become unhealthy.

Louis: That's exactly it. Many people bottle things up, and then it bursts out in unhealthy ways. But those silent moments become easier to read when you're in a healthy relationship and know your partner well. You start to pick up on subtle cues. It is all trial and error. You win and lose some, but hopefully, you learn from the missteps and better recognize the signals.

Especially when you're dealing with someone who's passive-aggressive—that's a big one. That passive-aggressive behaviour becomes a pattern whether it's a partner, child, or close friend. At some point, you realize *this is how they operate*. But if you want to break through that, you have to create space for direct communication.

I tell people to start naming it gently. Say something like, "I see that you're being quiet," or "I notice you're doing this or that—do you want to talk?" That's how you start building better communication habits. Passive-aggressive behaviour is a form of body language, and if both people are passive-aggressive in a relationship, it can lead to serious communication breakdowns.

Jacobsen: Now, shifting a bit—how does body language evolve from early dating into long-term relationships? Older couples often seem more emotionally regulated and calmer. But are there consistent patterns in body language over time, or is it more individualized? Can you tell from observation whether a long-term relationship is healthy or not?

Louis: Great question. Everyone goes through the "honeymoon phase" at the beginning of a relationship. That's when you're on a euphoric high. Everything feels exciting; physical touch is frequent, eye contact is constant, and energy flows.

During that phase, body language is almost always positive—open posture, leaning in, smiling, touching, and verbal affirmations. But eventually, that honeymoon phase fades. That's when the real work begins.

And here's where it gets interesting: in healthy relationships, even after the initial spark cools, the couple develops a new, deeper layer of body language. It becomes more nuanced, more

attuned. They might not always touch as much, but it is intentional and meaningful when they do. Their eye contact might be softer, less intense, but more grounding.

In contrast, in unhealthy relationships, body language becomes either avoidant—closed off, minimal physical connection—or reactive—short fuses, crossed arms, avoidance, or defensiveness. So yes, there are general patterns. You can often tell the state of a relationship just by watching how a couple sits together, how they respond to each other, and how they lean—or do not—toward each other.

That long-term body language isn't about fireworks anymore; it is about safety, presence, and emotional alignment. That's the gold standard. My wife—my partner—told me something that stuck with me the other day. She said, "Chris, I was watching this movie, and a couple was kissing on screen. It reminded me of us when we first started dating." And I said, "Well, we still kiss like that." And she replied, "No… not *like that*." And I was like, "Oh… okay. Yes."

She meant that spark—that energy you have initially during the euphoric honeymoon stage. It made me pause and think over the past few days: *How do I bring that back?*What must I work on to help her feel that way again? And that's me paying attention. That's the work.

So, to answer your question—about long-term relationships and how body language evolves—I think what happens is that many couples, over time, get complacent. It is normal. It happens. But I always say that couples need to check in with each other intentionally.

At least once a month, sit down together and ask, "How are we doing sexually? How are we doing emotionally? How's our communication? How are we handling finances?" That regular check-in helps maintain that emotional connection, and when you're emotionally connected, your body language tends to stay positive—more open, more attuned, more affectionate.

As time passes, your ability to read one another improves—whether it is subtle tension, playful flirting, or just spotting when something feels off. And when that's nurtured, your relationship doesn't flatline—it grows deeper.

Jacobsen: That makes sense. Relationships are dynamic—they ebb and flow. Sometimes, one partner is doing well, and the other is down. Other times, you're both flying or struggling. But you stay aligned as long as there's mutual awareness and ongoing conversation. It is like a relational system of checks and balances.

Louis: If you are not checking in regularly, what happens? The couple becomes more like roommates. You lose each other. You drift. That spark fades. And sometimes, if that goes on too long, it leads to separation or divorce. But here's the truth-finding your way back is not hard. You need to notice before it is too late.

Jacobsen: Some people are naturally gifted at this—reading signals and knowing how to respond. But others might need guidance. For those who are not naturally intuitive or in the early stages of a relationship, what are some foundational things to focus on?

Louis: Great point. First and foremost, I always come back to listening. That's number one. But listening is not just with your ears—it is with your *presence*. It is about showing that you are

fully engaged, including body language. Eye contact, posture, turning toward your partner—these are all part of active listening.

So, I encourage my clients who are shy or introverted—maybe socially reserved—to start small. Make eye contact when your partner speaks. Nod, smile, and respond. These little things send a clear message: *I'm here. I'm with you.*

That level of attentiveness creates connection, and everything else—trust, affection, communication—can start to build. For introverts, body language can be complicated to get right. Many introverted people tend to close themselves off physically. Their heads are often down, their arms crossed, and their body language tight. And even though they want to engage—they're interested—they may be afraid to project outward. They are not naturally expressive in an extroverted way.

So I tell my introverted clients this: first, you must keep your head up and make direct eye contact with the person you're speaking to, especially when that person is talking to you. Eye contact is crucial.

Sometimes, I work with clients over Zoom; they talk while looking at the sky or all over the room. And I have to say, "Hey, I'm over here. If your eyes are darting everywhere, I will start wondering, *What are you looking at? What's going on over there?*" It becomes distracting, and you lose your listener's attention.

Jacobsen: Right—where your eyes go, their focus goes.

Louis: So I coach both my male and female clients—especially those who are shy or anxious—on this one simple habit: when you're on a date, keep your eyes on the person you're with. Direct eye contact shows presence and interest. It says *I'm here, I'm engaged, and you matter.*

If your eyes shift, your head is bobbing like a bobblehead, and your attention is scattered, it sends mixed signals. You may be *interested*, but you're *not showing it*. And that gap between intention and expression is where connection gets lost.

So, I actively work on this with my clients, especially introverts. I see it even in everyday situations: I make it a point to maintain direct eye contact with my partner or talk with friends. And sometimes, I have to remind myself, "Stay focused. Pay attention." It is something we can all improve.

And here's the thing—sometimes just that eye contact and body language is enough to get you a second date. Unless…

Jacobsen: Unless the guy says something too stupid?

Louis: That's what many women say: "He's in—unless he says something dumb." [Laughing] There's an old Chris Rock bit about that. He jokes, *"I was gonna give him some… then he started talking."* And he just *yakked* himself out of it.

Jacobsen: The "yacking man-child" syndrome.

Louis: Yep, that's the one. To sum it up, eye contact is number one. It sets the tone. If you can't get that right, the rest of the conversation won't matter much.

Global Humanitarian Leadership: Pat Merryweather-Arges on Healthcare, Rotary, and Ethical Service

2025-11-08

Part 1 of 3

Pat Merryweather-Arges, Executive Director of Project Patient Care and longtime Rotarian, shares insights from her decades of humanitarian work across over 30 countries. From leading healthcare improvement programs in the U.S. to supporting global initiatives in Kenya, Honduras, and Pakistan, she emphasizes patient-centred care, clean water, and education. Her stories include delivering emergency COVID aid to Honduras, aiding abandoned infants in Kenya, and supporting interfaith housing projects in flood-stricken Pakistan. A former Rotary International Vice President, she champions collaboration across religious, geographic, and political divides. She highlights Rotary's global mission, especially polio eradication, and praises Pope Leo XIV's focus on justice and humility. Despite rising global authoritarianism and threats to NGOS, Merryweather-Arges remains hopeful about ethical leadership and grassroots compassion. She reveals what truly unites Rotarians through laughter, stories, and hard truths: fellowship, integrity, and the drive to serve others with dignity and purpose.

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Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Pat Merryweather-Arges. She is a seasoned healthcare leader and humanitarian with over three decades of experience in healthcare quality improvement, nonprofit leadership, and global service. She is the Executive Director of Project Patient Care (PPC). This nonprofit organization enhances healthcare quality, safety, and equity through collaborative initiatives involving patients, families, caregivers, and healthcare professionals. Her work supports national healthcare transformation and promotes authentic patient engagement across all care settings.

Before her current role, Pat held several prominent positions, including Executive Director of Medicare's Quality Improvement Organization (QIO) programs in Illinois, Iowa, and Colorado, and Senior Vice President at the Illinois Hospital Association. In these capacities, she led statewide and regional initiatives to improve the quality and safety of care.

Pat has made extensive contributions to the Rotary community. She was a Rotary International Director (2022–2024) and Vice President (2023–2024). She is currently the Chair of the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Rotary Action Group (2024–2025) and serves on the Mental Health Rotary Action Group Board (2024–2026). She also serves on the board of the International Rotary Fellowship of Healthcare Professionals and has held various leadership roles within Rotary District 6450, including District Governor.

Her Rotary service includes leadership in global humanitarian projects, focusing on healthcare, clean water, sanitation, women's empowerment, and peacebuilding in Kenya, India, Jordan, Haiti, and others. She is the recipient of the Rotary Foundation Meritorious Service Award and the Rotary International Service Above Self Award. She also married George Arges, a fellow Rotarian. They have four sons, three daughters-in-law, and now eight grandchildren. Are any of them honorary Rotarians?

Merryweather-Arges: Some are Paul Harris Fellows, yes.

Jacobsen: Can they officially become Rotarians yet?

Merryweather-Arges: Not until they are older. However, there are Rotary programs for youth.

Jacobsen: Is there a fun name for kids of Rotarians? Like "Rotors"?

Merryweather-Arges: [Laughing] Not quite—but there is Interact, which is for high school students, and Rotaract for young adults aged 18 and older. Both are focused on leadership development and service. It is like being part of a student-led community service organization.

Jacobsen: Great. So, of all the countries you have worked in, which one, either at the time or even now, has faced the most significant humanitarian challenges? How has Rotary International helped?

Merryweather-Arges: There have been many, depending on the moment in history. Some countries experience a deep crisis, and you return later and see signs of recovery. Honduras stands out to me. I was there during great hardship. Rotary's work focused on education and school development. Supporting access to quality education has been key to helping communities overcome systemic challenges and build hope for the future.

When children do not have access to education or schools are not adequately equipped to meet educational standards, it creates deep, generational challenges. In Honduras, a Rotarian named Chuck Newman conducted a comprehensive study of schools nationwide. He found that most were severely lacking—lacking in facilities, lacking in trained educators, and lacking in basic resources.

We have tried working in Honduras, but it remains a challenging country. The government is genuinely trying to improve conditions, but it is difficult for them to address every region equally. On top of that, high crime rates and gang activity create serious obstacles, especially in some urban areas. So, we often have to work around those challenges to be effective.

During COVID, we received an urgent email from a physician in San Pedro Sula pleading for any assistance. He worked at a hospital where almost every patient who came in with COVID was dying. He asked for respiratory equipment and medications to help save lives.

We could turn that request around quickly—within a week, we sent the equipment and medication he needed. He later wrote a scientific paper describing its impact on his hospital and the patients. Our Rotary club had sponsored the funding. He joined us on Zoom during a club meeting and cried. He sobbed, saying, *"You do not know what this meant to our community."*

Moments like that stay with you.

Another region in which I have worked extensively is Kenya. Since I became a Rotarian, we have partnered with the same community for years—Upendo Village in the Naivasha area. We started by providing HIV rapid testing kits and then moved on to water wells, fluoridation systems, and other essential infrastructure.

When I visited one of the nearby hospitals where most women went to give birth, I was shocked. They were delivering on cement slabs, not hospital beds. After delivery, the staff would hose down the slab and prepare it for the next person. Women would sleep head-to-toe, two to a bed, with their newborns beside them. It was heartbreaking.

What stayed with me was a visit to the burn unit, which was also where abandoned infants born to mothers with HIV/AIDS were left. The hope was that someone—anyone—might take them in. I saw a stillborn baby lying on a shelf in the sun. It was surreal and tragic. Many of the surviving babies were lying in cribs soaked in urine, some crying without tears—they were so dehydrated that they could no longer cry properly.

I went to the nursing unit in a nearby building to raise concerns. We were working with Sister Florence Mwewa, a remarkable community leader, and I told her, *"I cannot believe what I have just seen."*

I asked, "Why are not the babies in the nursing unit?" The nurses said, "Oh, we would love to have the babies—most of them are HIV-positive or were abandoned." So I told them, "We will find a way."

I spoke with Sister Florence, and she had to push for municipal changes in the law to allow babies who were abandoned or born with HIV to be cared for in the nursing unit. Moreover, you see something like that—it seems so fundamentally human, yet it requires changing laws to make it happen.

Sister Florence is what I call a hero. She went up against the municipal government, which is no small feat in parts of Kenya. In some regions, women cannot legally own land. When a husband dies, the land and house do not go to the widow—they go to the husband's brother, who can then decide whether to let the widow stay or force her out.

In getting to know these challenges, you understand the depth of communities' issues. However, you always come across local heroes, like the doctor in Honduras who was so determined to save lives or Sister Florence, who has just been extraordinary.

When we installed a water well in Upendo Village, she ensured it was open to the community. People use it for gardening and other basic needs. Later, we helped develop a community business center—a shared space where small businesses could rent and grow.

Then Sister Florence had another idea. She said, "I want to start a bottled water distribution business." So she started a small-scale water bottling plant.

I said, "There are already so many companies in the market."

She replied, "I will undercut them. I will charge less and earn their business."

And she did. She is a strict nun.

Jacobsen: You know what they call nuns with attitude who get things done? They do not call them *sisters*; they call them *sassters*.

Merryweather-Arges: [Laughing] Then yes, she is a sasster!

I was in Pakistan almost two years ago, during an agitated time. The former Prime Minister had just been jailed, and there were protests all across the country. In September 2022, Sindh Province flooded a third of the country. It was devastating. Everything was wiped out.

As we drove through Sindh, I saw people still living on cardboard boxes along the highway, as far as the eye could see. It was heartbreaking. In response, Rotarians there launched an initiative called Smart Villages. Fez, an architect, started it. He designed structures for communities to rebuild in safer, more sustainable ways.

Each Smart Village includes about 100 housing units. When I say "housing units," I mean small cement and mud huts—modest but solid. Families paint and decorate them, making them their own. Each village also includes a community center and a water station.

In that area, mud ovens and many features were designed for everyday living. What surprised me was that the first Smart Village was explicitly built for migrants from India. These families were Hindu, and the local Muslim Rotarians also constructed a Hindu temple where they could worship.

They said, *"These are our friends."* That level of interfaith compassion—Muslim Rotarians building housing and a temple for Hindu migrants—was profoundly moving. Witnessing such devastation and finding these lights of hope in the most unexpected and remote places leaves a lasting impression.

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Jacobsen: That reminds me—did you ever hear about what Noam Chomsky shared after his first wife passed away? Some community deep in the forest planted a forest in her memory. They had never met her. Those kinds of acts—small, quiet, deeply human—stay with you.

Merryweather-Arges: Yes, exactly. It is very moving.

Jacobsen: You mentioned travelling with armed guards while in Pakistan. Was that a common experience, or was it unique to that trip?

Merryweather-Arges: The only other place that happened was in parts of Mexico, where we were escorted by armed police in trucks and jeeps. However, no—Rotarians usually meet you at the airport, waiting for you when you get off the plane, and they escort you safely. I've rarely had issues.

Well, I should add that in Nigeria, there was one time when things were agitated. We were working with Bishop Shanahan Hospital, a Catholic hospital, and nearby, in a local village, the Fulani herders came through and killed dozens of people. Tragically, they also removed the victims' hearts. The bodies were brought to the hospital for identification by family members.

We were travelling through the region at the time. Security checkpoints were along the road—every few blocks, not even every mile. They would radio ahead at each one or call the next checkpoint to say, *"We have the group now—expect them in X minutes."*It was a tightly coordinated effort. But it was not Rotarians watching over us that time—it was the local police.

Jacobsen: Was that in northern or southern Nigeria? Generally, the north is predominantly Muslim, and the south is primarily Christian.

Merryweather-Arges: It was in Nsukka, near Enugu. So not exactly north or south—it's more south-central. That area is quite mixed. But where we were, it's very blended.

Jacobsen: Was this around the height of the Boko Haram media coverage?

Merryweather-Arges: Yes. We had visited Opus Dei Hospital, a Catholic facility in Enugu, an incredible place and one of the best hospitals in Nigeria. About fifteen minutes after we left, Boko Haram came in and kidnapped the head of the hospital, who was a physician. This was around Easter, and everyone was praying for him. One of their own had been injured, and they wanted medical help. That was the reason for the abduction. So he was taken to keep the injured person alive. After about seven days, he was released. But yes, it was a dire situation.

Emotional Intelligence into IT Workflows for Stakeholder Alignment and Client Satisfaction

2025-11-08

Kuty Shalev is the Founder and CEO of Lumenalta. Lumenalta defines emotional intelligence (EQ) in IT as the ability to navigate complex, high-stakes collaborations with empathy, adaptability, and self-awareness, combined with technical communication and problem-solving skills. They integrate EQ into daily workflows through simulation-based coaching and commitment-based communication, ensuring clear articulation of concerns and concrete commitments aligned with business outcomes. This approach fosters stakeholder alignment, reduces ambiguity, and improves client satisfaction. Despite challenges like strict deadlines and remote work barriers, IT leaders report significant benefits. Leadership plays a key role by modeling effective communication and continuously reinforcing EQ through coaching and mentoring. Overall, this strategy transforms IT culture.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How does Lumenalta define emotional intelligence within IT teams?

Kuty Shalev: At Lumenalta, we see emotional intelligence (EQ) as the ability to navigate complex, high-stakes collaborations with empathy, adaptability, and self-awareness. It's not just about interpersonal skills—it's about creating an environment where technical and non-technical team members can align on priorities, manage conflict constructively, and drive innovation.

A key part of our approach is commitment-based communication. This means that instead of vague discussions or assumptions, our teams are trained to articulate their concerns clearly, identify the hidden concerns of others, and create commitments that are specific, validated, and aligned with business outcomes. This structured way of communicating ensures that nothing is left ambiguous—whether in a client meeting, a project plan, or even when prompting an AI model.

Jacobsen: Does this differ much from more general definitions of emotional intelligence?

Shalev: Yes, in many ways. While general definitions of emotional intelligence focus on self-awareness, empathy, and interpersonal effectiveness, EQ within IT teams also encompasses technical communication, problem-solving under pressure, and cross-cultural collaboration—especially in remote environments. IT professionals must translate technical concepts into business outcomes, prioritize conflicting demands, and adapt to evolving requirements—all of which require a blend of emotional and cognitive intelligence.

Jacobsen: How have IT leaders overcome the challenge of strict deadlines limiting the development of EQ?

Shalev: Lumenalta has tackled this challenge by integrating EQ development directly into how teams work. Instead of separating "soft skills" training from technical training, we embed emotional intelligence into real-world practice. For example, our teams participate in simulation-based coaching that mimics high-pressure client scenarios, helping them refine their

communication, negotiation, and problem-solving skills in real time. This ensures that EQ development isn't an extracurricular activity—it's a core part of how we deliver results.

Jacobsen: What companies have integrated EQ into IT culture to provide measurable improvements?

Shalev: Many forward-thinking organizations have embraced EQ-driven approaches to IT. Our own experience at Lumenalta has shown that when developers are trained to navigate stakeholder dynamics, project outcomes improve. According to our research, 87% of IT leaders reported that

investing in EQ directly improved client satisfaction, and 81% saw a positive impact on technology adoption. Companies that embed emotional intelligence into daily workflows—rather than relying on one-off training—see the most significant gains.

Jacobsen: What factors can blunt the positive effects of improved EQ in the IT workplace?

Shalev: One major factor is a lack of structural reinforcement. If EQ training isn't backed by a workplace culture that values open communication, psychological safety, and constructive feedback, it won't stick. Another challenge is time pressure—if teams are constantly in reactive mode, they may default to transactional communication rather than thoughtful collaboration. Finally, hybrid and remote work environments can create EQ barriers if companies don't establish clear norms for engagement and relationship-building.

Jacobsen: How are facets of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, adaptability, and empathy—quantified and measured to improve workplace productivity?

Shalev: One way Lumenalta measures the impact of EQ training is through the clarity and effectiveness of communication. Are teams making and keeping better commitments? Are they reducing ambiguity in client interactions? Are they proactively uncovering concerns before they become roadblocks?

Interestingly, this same discipline in language and clarity extends to AI development. The best AI outputs come from well-structured prompts, and the ability to construct these prompts effectively comes from the same EQ skills we cultivate in our teams. A great AI prompt, much like a great commitment, is clear, concise, and validated against the outcomes we are targeting.

Jacobsen: Do generational culture differences affect the workforce perception of EQ in IT teams?

Shalev: Absolutely. Younger IT professionals often expect EQ to be embedded into company culture and value ongoing coaching, while more experienced team members may have developed technical expertise in environments where EQ wasn't prioritized. Our research found that perspectives on

EQ varied based on years of experience, but across the board, IT leaders recognized its importance—90% said it was essential for success.

Jacobsen: How can leadership and management style foster more emotionally intelligent work environments in tech companies?

Shalev: Leadership plays a crucial role in setting the tone for EQ in IT teams. At Lumenalta, we focus on leading by example—our senior engineers and product leads model effective communication, client engagement, and conflict resolution. We also emphasize continuous learning, using both AI-powered coaching tools and human-led mentoring to reinforce key EQ skills. Creating an

environment where engineers feel heard, valued, and empowered to solve problems autonomously is key to long-term success.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Kuty.

Langley's Troubled Legacy: From Sir James Douglas to Trinity Western University

2025-11-08

Foundation of the British Columbia Firmament

The Father of British Columbia, **Sir James Douglas**, is worshipped in the community where I grew up. Not for nothing, he had achievements, but he had a "mixed history" in numerous ways. He had a "mixed history" as HBC Chief Factor and colonial governor. He granted monopolistic privileges to his company and family.

This mixed public office and private profit. He imposed property-based voting qualifications, excluding full representation. He set forth unfair First Nations treaties. The Douglas Treaties were signed on blank sheets, with terms inserted afterward—an unusual practice. Unilaterally, these were later signed, resulting in Indigenous signatories having land cessions that were not fully known.

He had a heavy-handed gold rush policy with licensing schemes and delayed enforcement during the Fraser Canyon conflict. These failed to protect Indigenous communities. Violence and village burnings ensued. He recruited black Californian settlers for political loyalty. It was opportunistic rather than principled efforts for the enfranchisement of blacks. A fascinating history to learn about one's happenstance of contingent past circumstances: his contemporary presentation is not an exercise in false equivalence. It is about a united duality of positive and negative valence.

The living recent history reflects this mixed history in Fort Langley, out of Langley, with the crossovers between hipster farmers and well-educated, well-to-do Evangelical Christians, Trinity Western University, and the political shenanigans of Christians here impacting the federal level of the country. I wanted to cover some of this controversial recent history, as having a singular reference for some of the township's more noteworthy shenanigans. For clarity, I speak as a former member of one of the heritage committees of an association in Fort Langley and another for the Township of Langley. I can say, "Heritage *matters* to Langleyites." As an elder Euro-Canadian lady told me on the committee, a fellow committee member, it was in a sharp snarl once at a meeting, "I *know* who you *are*." These were not isolated events throughout my life while growing up and through there. So it goes.

The contemporary Evangelical Christian story in Fort Langley began with a sexual misconduct allegation of the longest-standing university president in Canadian history: 2005-2006 with former university president **Neil Snider**. I would rather this *not*be the case, but it is the history.

2005–2015: Institutional Unease and Image Discipline

He had the longest tenure of any Canadian university president—32 years–and greatly grew Trinity Western University (TWU) in its early decades. That is a testament to his prowess as an administrator of resources and an inspirer of people at the time.

Unfortunately, an uncomfortable truth was his retirement in 2006 following sexual harassment allegations. Internal reports from TWU and contemporary media reviews questioned the

administrative decisions around this. The community is embarrassed by it and tries to cover it up. I understand that. However, as one colleague's mom said to excuse it, "He was lonely," because either his wife died or he was divorced. I leave considerations of the stretch of excuse-making to the reader.

ChristianWeek's "Trinity Western Resolves Human Rights Complaint" documented the 2005 human rights complaint against Snider. The settlement impacted subsequent policy reviews. Former faculty interviews showed early signs of institutional unease. Evangelical leaders have undergone these **scandals**.

A CAUT Report, "**Report of an Inquiry Regarding Trinity Western University**," examined the requirement for faculty to affirm the religious Covenant. You can see TWU's current ***Community Covenant***. William Bruneau and Thomas Friedman examined the requirement for faculty to affirm the Covenant and possible impacts on academic hiring and free speech. Case studies and personal accounts of faculty are incorporated. It is a referenced report in academic discussions on religion and academia in Canada.

University Affairs via "**A test of faith at Trinity Western**" provided an analytic retrospective of early administrative policies, linking them to later legal challenges–more on that in 2016-2018. Christian universities are conscious of their public image. For example, in 2011, **the Institute for Canadian Values funded an advertisement opposing LGBTI-inclusive education, which was supported by the Canada Christian College**. It was published by the *National Post* and later by the *Toronto Sun*. A national backlash happened. An apology ensued—a retraction happened by the *Post*, but not by the *Sun*.

2005-2015 was a busy few years. Ex-administrators and archival internal memos showed dissent regarding mandatory religious practices. Similar controversies happen in religious universities in Canada, all private, all Christian. The largest is Evangelical, and the largest is TWU, in Langley. After trying to get many interviews with professors and dissenting students in the community, the vast majority declined over many years of journalistic efforts, and a few agreed to a coffee conversation to express opinions. Most opinions dissent from the norm of TWU while affirming the difficulties for the faith with these narrow-eyed executives, who are not reined in, reign with impunity, and rain neglect on their community's inner Other.

2016–2018: The Covenant and the Courts

Circa 2016, some online commentators mentioned how they felt "bad for the kids that realize they're not straight" at TWU as "Coming out is hard" and "it's crazy that people still want to go to this school." A former student acknowledged some student support for LGBTI peers while warning many feel "quite ostracized" by an "unspoken aura" repressing non-Christian views. An LGBTI student may have to "repress their urges based on a stupid covenant."

Other online forums include a former student union leader noting the "community covenant is outdated" even by 2013, while another urged the university to rethink the Covenant. Saying there is a "thriving rape culture," "I know more than five girls who were raped [at TWU], who didn't report it because they believed they would be shamed and not taken seriously."

Maclean's in "**The end of the religious university?**" talked about the long-standing interest in the national debate around religious mandates in higher education and the central role of TWU. These controversies about academic freedom following Snider's resignation would echo some other community elements there. ***BBC News***commented that Canada approved a homophobic law school in 2013. This would eventually evolve poorly for TWU and reflect terribly on the surrounding community.

*Xtra Magazine's "*The Painful Truth About Being Gay at Canada's Largest Christian University" featured a series of robust testimonies from current and former students on systemic discrimination. The magazine also examined campus surveys, student blogs, and some student activist groups, with a case study of academic panels addressing LGBTI issues within religious institutions. The Supreme Court of Canada issued its decision on TWU's Law School accreditation in 2018. It was analyzed by legal journals and cited in academic papers. Those looked to religious mandates and the tensions with legal equality.

CBC News in "**Trinity Western loses fight for Christian law school as court rules limits on religious freedom 'reasonable'"**provided a comprehensive timeline of developments with constitutional lawyer and civil rights advocacy commentary. Other commentaries looked at policy adjustments following from institutions. *The Tyee* chimed into the discussion with "**Trinity Western University Loses in Supreme Court**," with some parables into the personal narratives on campus, more timeline events, and a more important emphasis on the long-term impact on the reputation of TWU.

Knowing some minority facets of dynamics in this community, many will slander others and lie to protect themselves, particularly their identity as represented via the incursion of Evangelical Orthodoxy into the community via the university. This small township's controversies went to the Supreme Court of Canada. They lost in a landslide decision, 7-2. The *Vancouver Sun* had various coverage, with international critiques comparing TWU's controversy to European and Australian scandals. Regardless, TWU brought global spotlight on a small township, a tiny town.

Global human rights organizations gave commentary. TWU dropped the *Community Covenant* as *mandatory*, but *only* for students, while staff, faculty, and administration maintained it. A TWU student asserted on Reddit:

TWU student here. The only two reasons why the Board of Governors chose to drop the Covenant for students is because a) The recent court ruling, and b) Their other professional programs (counselling, nursing, and teaching) received letters from their respective accrediting bodies which threatened to pull accreditation unless the Covenant was amended or discarded.

TWU's decision to make signing the Covenant voluntary for students has nothing to do with morality or human rights, but everything to do with their business model. Keep in mind, the faculty still must sign the pledge, and TWU's mission and mandate of producing "godly Christian leaders" has not changed.

The next era was 2019-2021.

2019–2021: Cultural Stagnation Despite Legal Losses

Xtra Magazine in "**I am queer at Trinity Western University. What will it take for my university to listen to me?**" provided a more individual story. Carter Sawatzky wrote, "TWU's decision in 2018 to make the Covenant non-mandatory for students also did not magically change the discriminatory treatment of queer people. After TWU's 2018 Supreme Court loss, many folks, including myself, had hoped that TWU would finally demonstrate that it can be rooted in faith and radically loving and welcoming. Instead, TWU has doubled down on its social conservatism, at the expense of queer students like myself." An international scandal and Supreme Court defeat did not change the culture or the school. That is instructive.

Another instructive moment was a student suicide attempt followed by an expulsion of the student. In "Her university expelled her after she attempted suicide, saying she had an 'inability to self-regulate.' Now she is fighting back," the *Toronto Star* presented the case of a student showing broader systemic issues and a lack of mental health resources and policy failures *within* TWU. TWU claimed otherwise. Mental health professionals and relatives of students commented. As CBC has noted, mental healthon campuses has been a point of concern for a while.

2021–2025: Repression, Image, and Intimidation

Langley is a township where I am told the murder of the famous atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair was merciful. Saying, "**Her murder was an act of mercy**." *Langley Advance Times* in "**Private Langley University rejects LGBTQ+ event request**" reported denying an event request, One TWU Stories Night, for an LGBTI group, One TWU. Carter Sawatzky said, "We are sharing our stories, which I think should be a non-controversial thing… It is not a contradiction. You can be queer and Christian… Many people come to TWU and have never heard an LGBTQ story." That is a reasonable statement. A One TWU piece published on its site claims **homophobia is rampant** on campus.

CBC News reported on the manslaughter conviction of a TWU security guard. "**Former guard at B.C. university found guilty of manslaughter**" reported a Fall 2020 event involving "a man wearing all black" who wandered into student residences, rifling through their things. Security guard Howard Glen Hill hit the man, Jack Cruthers Hutchison, "in the head, pulled his hair and spat on him." Police arrived: Hill was "in a neck restraint, limp and unresponsive. He died in the hospital two days later." Hutchison was charged with manslaughter. TWU's statement: "The university has no comment on the court ruling. TWU's commitment has always been to safeguard our campus community, and we continue to provide a safe place of learning for all our students."

Langley Union, in "**Trinity Western University President's Son Linked to Prolific White Nationalist Account**," investigated digital forensic evidence of the son of the President of TWU linked to a White Nationalist online account. The son's actions should be considered separate from the father's and the institutions. However, they are striking news.

The accounts claimed, among other assertions, "I believe in a white future. An Aryan future. A future where my children will make Indian Bronson shine our shoes. Where brown people cannot

secure a line of credit, Black people pick cotton. We will win – this is what we fight for," and "I am a colonialist. I make no effort to hide this. I believe in worldwide white supremacy."

The *Nelson Star* reported in "'Alt-right' **group uses Fort Langley historic site as meeting place**" on the use of the local pub in Fort Langley as a meeting place for a public, so known and self-identified White Nationalist group. As one former boss noted, "I don't know what is wrong with *we* the *white race*." That is a sentiment, not an organization, however. This microcosm reflects a broader history of **Canadian sociopolitics with race and religion**, some Evangelicals and occasional allegations of racialism if not racism.

TWU's policy is **Inclusive Excellence**. We aim to promote a consistent atmosphere of inclusion and belonging at TWU by establishing a shared commitment to diversity and equity founded in the gospel's truth. Christ came to save, reconcile, and equip all people (Rev. 7:9), and the incredible array of gifts God has given us is evidence of his creativity, beauty, and love of diversity." An administrator is reported to have said informally that the event was '**not in line with Evangelical values**.'

In the States, a trend in international Evangelical higher education. Bob Jones University banned interracial dating until 2000, involving federal funding and accreditation debates. In Australia, Christian colleges faced scrutiny for policies excluding LGBTI+ students and staff. Faith-based codes and equality laws produced tensions in the United Kingdom, though less prominently than in Canada. Those American churches want to influence Canada in Indigenous communities. Some Canadian churches can have Ojibwe pastors, **for example**.

A Medium (*Xtra)* post entitled "**The painful truth about being gay at Canada's largest Christian university**," commented on the experience of a gay student, Jacob.' As peers messaged Jacob on suspicion of him being gay, "We hate everything about you and you better watch your back because we are going to kill you on your way to school." At TWU 'Jacob,'said, "I loved the community here so much that I did not want to jeopardize those relationships." That is called a closet.

Another student, Corben, from Alberta at TWU, said, "My parents, I think, kind of wanted Trinity to be for me sort of like reparative therapy, which is why they would only help financially with this school." **Former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau put forth a move** to end Conversion Therapy, a discredited pseudotherapy to change sexual orientation and gender identity. Conversion therapy has been banned in Malta (2016), Germany (2020), France (2022), Canada (2022), New Zealand (2022), Iceland (2023), Spain (2023), Mexico (2024), Greece (2024), and Belgium (2024). That is only TWU, however. The community of Langley, specifically Fort Langley, where I was raised, is substantively linked to this place.

Langley Advance Times in "**Blackface photo in 2017 Chilliwack yearbook sparks apology from school principal**" reported on a blackface incident at a local school. It was part of a "mock trial." So, bad taste, community, and the excuse for Snider's example will likely do the same in this case. **There are several cases in British Columbia** and Canada. The Archdiocese of Vancouver was the first in Canada to publicly name clergy involved in sexual abuse and decades of abuse. At the same time, other prominent cases have arisen, including Michael Conaghan,

Damian Lawrence Cooper, and Erlindo Molon, highlighting a pattern of clerical sexual exploitation and inadequate accountability in British Columbia. I would rather this *not*be the case, but it is the history.

In 2022, a TWU dean resigned amid pressure over her work on gender issues. One Reddit–and all Reddit commentary should be considered additions, while anecdotal at best–user described how TWU leaders had "tried to make her leave her position as dean because she… stated she was an lgbtq+ ally," then issued bureaucratic statements of grief based on her departure.

Living there, these excuses likely flowed through social media. At the same time, community intimidation happens, too. It is bad for the community image and bad for the business. As gay students find at TWU, and as outsiders others find in the general community, it is not about moral stances, but about image maintenance and business interests. Money matters because it is a well-to-do area of the country and a well-to-do nation worldwide. There is regular township nonsense where the Fort Langley Night Market gets closed down **due to vandalism and alcohol**.

Ongoing **online conversations** about TWU degree quality continue, "So before those say 'it's an immigration scam', it's not and is essentially useless towards immigrating/coming to Canada. With that said, *most* of TWU's programs are also useless to use towards immigrating, even if studied in person, because any non-degree program from a private school does not allow one to apply for a PGWP. However, it offers a couple of degree programs that can result in a PGWP."

Brandon Gabriel and Eric Woodward have been loggerheads for at least a decade. If you look at the original history, this reflects another fight between an Indigenous leader and the colonial presence in its history. Now, they are a local artist and developer, respectively. Woodward has a camp of supporters for development and a camp of detractors. Another mixed figure in the contemporary period of Langley. Over development concerns and pushback, Woodward got a building **painted pink** in protest at one point. It is a serious township history full of a minority of loud, silly people imposing their nonsense on a smaller group of innocent bystanders.

Whether LGBTI discrimination ensconced at its university, a blackface principal, homophobia, this isn't unusual in a way. A constellation of apparent White Nationalist superminority undercurrents popping up, and with worship of a founder in a democracy who was a mixed-race colonialist timocrat married to a Cree woman, it's a story of a Canadian town and municipality. A tale of how foundational myths, when left unexamined, morph into social realities.

Welcome to Langley–a light introduction: Home, sorta.

Pat Merryweather-Arges: Improving Patient Care Through Global Humanitarian Service

2025-11-08

Part 2 of 3

Pat Merryweather-Arges, Executive Director of Project Patient Care and longtime Rotarian, shares insights from her decades of humanitarian work across over 30 countries. Merryweather-Arges observes that Pope Leo XIV's Chicago roots and commitment to the poorest parallel Rotary's humanitarian ethos. Coupled with the Gates Foundation's plan to deploy US $200 billion by 2045, she foresees renewed moral momentum toward poverty relief, health access, and technology-driven development. Although officially nonreligious, Rotary partners pragmatically with trusted faith organizations while enforcing strict ethical standards and rigorous safety protocols. Fellowship and shared altruism unite Rotarians worldwide, illustrated by successful Nigerian hospital planning and her humorous "icebreaker" anecdote.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: You've mentioned a sister, a Catholic hospital, and Opus Dei. With the recent election of the new Pope, there have been many Popes, John, Clement, and Leo–and now we have another Pope, Leo—how do you think this kind of elevation, from cardinal to Pope, influences the direction or emphasis of Rotary International's work?

Pat Merryweather-Arges: You've several significant things converging right now. First, this new Pope, Leo XIV, emphasizes caring for the poorest of the poor, which aligns closely with Rotary's humanitarian mission.

What's also exciting is that he's from Chicago—and I'm from Chicago—so there's a lot of local pride and energy here. The excitement level in the city is remarkable. It feels like an opportunity to drive change in how we treat one another, as a country and as individuals.

At the same time, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation just announced that it will conclude its operations by 2045. Over the next 20 years, it plans to distribute $200 billion toward global initiatives. They've outlined key focus areas: ending poverty, increasing access to healthcare and medication, and leveraging technology for international development.

What struck me most was Bill Gates's statement, *"I don't want to hold onto money while people are dying."* He even called out Elon Musk and others who are hoarding wealth. His stance aligns with the Pope's emphasis on justice and moral responsibility.

So when you put this all together—the new Pope's message, the Gates Foundation's sunset plan, and growing attention to ethical leadership—I think it gives people in the United States hope that we can turn a corner. It's about values: country, faith, family. And I believe faith, spirituality, and community-based leadership will be more visible in shaping public life.

Jacobsen: He also has a long history in Peru, right? We've seen a few powerful movements emerge from Latin America—liberation theology, for example, where Pope Francis had significant influence. And then there's the broader policy framework coming out of international

organizations like the UN under António Guterres, the current Secretary-General and a former Prime Minister of Portugal.

Though Guterres doesn't use explicitly religious language, he champions evidence-based policies to improve conditions for vulnerable populations. Take decriminalization of substance use, for example—under his leadership, the UN and WHO have both encouraged shifting from punitive responses to public health-oriented approaches.

So on one side, you've got the Catholic Church, led by Pope Francis and now Pope Leo XIV, emphasizing a communitarian, almost Augustinian ethos rooted in service and humility. On the other hand, secular international institutions have reached many of the same conclusions, but they are just framed differently.

Do you think this new Pope will continue that trend, aligning with that broader historical trajectory?

Merryweather-Arges: Yes, I do. One of the things he talked about right away—the first words he spoke—was wishing everyone peace. But he also emphasized building bridges. Some literal and metaphorical bridges have been broken due to tariffs, conflict, or global tension.

Jacobsen: Yes, both literal bombing and metaphorical destruction.

Merryweather-Arges: He genuinely sees everyone as one person. He does not know the world in terms of rigid national divides. We all share basic needs and desires—housing, good health, food, and clean water. These are universal. And one of the things I've consistently found while travelling from country to country is that parents everywhere want the best for their children.

They will sacrifice anything to ensure their children's better future. That is something that unites us all. It's refreshing that this new Pope was selected. He comes from a poor neighbourhood—Dalton, Illinois. My cousin's wife went to grade school with him, so she's been appearing on national talk shows and in the media lately.

Dalton is not a typical blue-collar town—it's working-class, tight-knit, and everyone there looks out for one another. The people there had large families. My cousin's family had five children, and the Pope's family had a couple of brothers. The Church was the center of their lives. So, I believe this Pope brings a sensitivity and groundedness that matters.

We talk about Pope Francis and his commitment to living simply. He didn't need lavish things. He set an example by living humbly and focusing on giving to others. The message was: *we don't need that much to live meaningfully*.

Jacobsen: I reviewed some of Pope Leo's recent statements, and from my analysis, they're far less ambiguous than those of Pope Francis. It's not that they differ in moral clarity—they're quite aligned there—but in rhetorical clarity. With Pope Francis, you often had to interpret or read between the lines. Pope Leo, by contrast, is much more direct.

So, for example, your traditional positions on gender and marriage will be seen, which will spark culture war debates—but in terms of economic justice and social policy, Pope Leo seems ready to advance real-world action.

Merryweather-Arges: Yes, I agree. During his papacy, many meaningful social justice works emerged—practical, on-the-ground efforts.

Jacobsen: What kind of partnerships does Rotary International have with Catholic institutions? Are they more surface-level, or on a case-by-case basis?

Merryweather-Arges: Rotary is officially a nonreligious and nonpolitical organization. It is prohibited from working with religious institutions, whether Muslim, Catholic, Jewish, or other faiths.

The depth of collaboration depends on the global grant's structure and the specific initiative. We often work closely with faith-based groups, but we don't sidestep them in a way that becomes religiously affiliated. We keep the focus on shared humanitarian goals.

But again, we do work closely with different organizations. When you enter a community, you always wonder, *"Who do people trust here?"* Often, even in Chicago, if you want to get something done in specific neighbourhoods, you go through faith-based organizations. They're the community trusts. So, yes—those relationships are essential.

Jacobsen: What's the age at which Rotary would feel comfortable sending someone into a high-risk area? Say someone starts as an Interactor and then becomes a Rotarian—what does Rotary permit deployment to dangerous regions?

Merryweather-Arges: Rotary evaluates travel on a case-by-case basis. It depends on the specific project and the region's risk. For example, when I went to Pakistan, there was a considerable discussion at Rotary headquarters about whether I should go. Most of the conflict was in Islamabad, not Karachi, where I was headed.

Ultimately, they approved the trip, but only with the guarantee that I would have 24/7 security. So, safety protocols are taken very seriously.

During COVID, we faced significant challenges with Rotary Youth Exchange students scattered across the globe. These are often under-18 students participating in cultural and academic exchanges coordinated by clubs and districts.

Some countries wouldn't allow citizens to return home, and in other cases, students had to quarantine in hotels before re-entry was allowed. Rotary staff worked around the clock to manage the logistics and ensure the students' safety. We had no significant incidents, but getting everyone home took time and effort.

Jacobsen: In your time, has Rotary ever reported—maybe in a newsletter or internal communication—that a member was injured or killed while serving?

Merryweather-Arges: The only incident I can recall happened about ten years ago. A Rotarian was kidnapped in Northern Nigeria, but they were eventually released safely.

Also, in Panama, there were family members of Rotarians, not Rotarians themselves, who were kidnapped by pirates while on a boat. The Rotarian network helped facilitate their safe release, working closely with the Panamanian government, which negotiated with the pirates.

Jacobsen: Now, we're touching on some deeper ethical considerations here. What do you consider, not in terms of what'swritten on the website, but in practical reality, what do you think unites Rotarians?

Merryweather-Arges: I think what truly unites Rotarians is fellowship—and more importantly, a shared altruistic drive to do good in the world and within their communities. It's genuine. It's about like-minded people coming together, working to make a meaningful difference. That spirit exists—believe me.

Jacobsen: What do you do when there are ethical breaches?

Merryweather-Arges: Most clubs are equipped to handle those situations. Rotary has model bylaws, and clubs typically follow those guidelines. Any ethical issue is addressed seriously. The key is ensuring that issues within a club don't fester, especially when they involve integrity or trust. So yes, they are handled.

Jacobsen: Hypothetically, what would happen with an ethical breach? Would someone be expelled, or just warned?

Merryweather-Arges: It depends on the nature and severity of the breach. But there's zero there for certain things, like racist behaviour, attacks based on gender identity, or discrimination. Those kinds of actions result in immediate removal. If there's any misconduct—someone misuses club funds—that's grounds for immediate dismissal. Depending on the situation, it may even escalate into a civil lawsuit filed by the injured party.

I've participated in polio immunization campaigns in India, Pakistan, and Nigeria. I've also worked on other significant projects, like one in Nigeria, where we organized a three-hospital initiative. What was remarkable is that the leaders of these hospitals had never met before.

It all started when the CEO of a large hospital realized they needed a strategic plan. They had been operating in a reactive mode—just responding when something happened—rather than proactively improving outcomes and safety.

We spent two days with hospital staff. Everyone was energized and collaborative. We developed the strategic plan together, and then they took it to the community for input. Afterward, we brought everything back, added timelines and accountability measures, and finalized it. It turned out to be a tremendous success.

I had a guffaw moment.

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Jacobsen: Guffaw? I haven't heard anything in a while. Which whippersnapper told you that?

Merryweather-Arges: [Laughing] Right? So I suggested we do an icebreaker. But I was in Nigeria, and they had never heard the term. They looked around, confused, like, *"What ice? Where is the ice? Are we breaking something?"*

Jacobsen: [Laughing] Not much ice in Nigeria.

Merryweather-Arges: But once we got past that, the energy was fantastic. They were excited, vocal, and eager to lead the improvement efforts. The hospital, though, especially the maternity wing, was deplorable. The women's bathhouse was almost unusable, and the nursing school lacked basic tools, like skeletons for anatomy education. Many medical devices were broken. So we rolled up our sleeves.

We identified what we could fix quickly and what needed external support. We ended up shipping about eight full-size medical supply cartons. We partnered with Mission Outreach, a nonprofit that collects unused hospital equipment, especially from the Midwest. Much of it is new or nearly new, just not the latest model. If it needs repair, they fix it. Then we coordinate the logistics to get the supplies to rural hospitals, like the one in central Nigeria.

How Dating Culture Has Changed: Reading Romantic Cues and Emotional Signals in Modern Relationships

2025-11-08

Part 3 of 4

Christopher Louis is a Los Angeles–based international dating and relationship coach and founder of Dating Intelligence. As host of the Dating Intelligence Podcast, Louis draws on intuition and lived experience to guide clients toward authentic selves and meaningful romantic connections. Louis explores how modern dating has become more complex with the rise of social media, dating apps, and ambiguous relationship terms like "situationships" and "cookie jarring." They contrast today's indirect norms with the more straightforward courtship of the past, emphasizing the growing difficulty in interpreting romantic interest versus politeness. Louis offers practical advice on body language—like mirroring, eye contact, and physical cues—to distinguish authentic connection from performative gestures. Understanding clusters of signals, not isolated acts, is key to emotional safety and clarity in relationships, especially for those navigating the nuanced terrain of modern dating culture.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Do you think things are more complex or easier now than when you were dating in February? In terms of the social climate, how do people approach connection?

Christopher Louis: It depends on the age range. Some people are adapting well, while others are struggling more. But that's a big conversation—maybe worth diving into next. Once again, when we're talking about the younger age groups—people in their twenties—there's a shift in dating culture. We're not even talking about teenagers; that's another thing. But people in their twenties tend to date more in groups. They go out in packs, and if there's someone they like, it's often a more casual, side-by-side interaction rather than a direct, intentional one-on-one date.

Dating has become more complicated because of social media, dating apps, and digital communication in general. We'reno longer getting those authentic, spontaneous moments—like meeting someone at a social event and having a real-time connection. Instead, it's swiping right and swiping left. And even though apps are convenient, they can create emotional distance.

That said, I do appreciate hearing daters say, "You know what? I met someone and just cut through all the texting and said, let's meet for coffee." That's more real than dragging out a three—or four-week text exchange, which often leads nowhere. If someone is genuinely interested, they will want to meet you sooner rather than later.

Suppose they're not initiating a meeting; chances are. In that case, they are either not interested or are talking to multiple people, which I remind many of my female clients of. They'll say, "I don't know why he ghosted me," I'll say, "He was probably talking to two or three other women, and he just moved on." It is a process of elimination for some people. Especially early on, many guys see who flirts the most, responds quickly, and who's and is most open sexually, and whoever rises to the top of *that* list is often the one they want to pursue most seriously.

Meanwhile, women who might be intellectually engaging or emotionally deep may get overlooked because the connection takes longer to build. The guy gets bored and moves on to something easier or more exciting.

Jacobsen: The dynamics are different now, but the core behaviours are often the same—just under new labels. Even culturally, this isn't new. The phenomenon existed before, just with different names. Paul Mooney had a line—"Ain't nothing changed but the weather." It's the idea that things look different on the surface but are fundamentally the same. Like friends with benefits—it used to be hush-hush, but now it is more normalized and even has code names like "Netflix and chill."

Louis: Exactly. "Netflix and chill" is the number one code for friends with benefits. That phrase says it all without having to explain it.

And then you've got what people now call a "situationship." That's a big one. A situationship is where two people spend time together—maybe even sleeping—but there's no clarity on the relationship. They do not define or discuss it, and no one wants to ask, "What are we doing here?"

Back in the day, it was much more direct. A guy might ask, "Do you want to go steady?" Sometimes, even before the first date! Remember that? Then it became writing notes—"Will you go out with me?" Then, it evolved into more casual settings—meeting at parties or the movies.

Now, it's vague. It's like, "We're hanging out… I like this person but don't know if we're dating." And that's where so many people get stuck—they are too afraid to ask questions. They're just assuming, hoping the other person feels the same. And that's how people wind up in these unclear, undefined dynamics we now call "situationships."

"Netflix and chill" is another big one, of course. And ghosting—ghosting is enormous right now. Someone disappears on you without any explanation. No follow-up, no closure. And what gets me is that people do not even have the courage—or better yet, the decency—to say, "Hey, you know what? I don't think this is a fit. I'm moving on." That simple courtesy seems to be lost in modern dating.

Now, there's also something called "cookie jarring." That's a newer term. It refers to someone dating you but also has someone else on the back burner—just in case things do not work out with you. It's like they're keeping their hand in the cookie jar, just in case. So they're not fully invested, but they ensure they have options lined up. And there are tons of these new terms floating around nowadays.

Jacobsen: How can individuals use body language to foster emotional safety and openness in a relationship?

Louis: That's a great question. Body language plays a huge role in emotional safety and openness—even more than most people realize. Let's start with one of the most universal cues: the hands-up gesture, like the "stop" signal. You know what I mean—both palms out in front of you. That posture says, *No. I'm not ready. I don't want to go there right now.* It communicates boundaries. It's a nonverbal way of saying, *Let's pause this conversation.*

Gesture is one of the most widely understood signals for emotional withdrawal or resistance regardless of culture or language. It says, "This isn't safe for me right now." And that is key: recognizing when someone is not emotionally open at that moment and respecting that.

Jacobsen: What does mirroring in terms of body language tell you?

Louis: Mirroring is fascinating. It happens with posture, pace, and movement. When two people are comfortable and connected, they unconsciously mirror each other. It's almost like a dance—subtle and fluid. You'll notice it when couples are in sync: they lean simultaneously, their gestures are similar, and even their blinking and breathing might align. People make even this funny observation—like how dog owners sometimes start to resemble their pets. But in relationships, mirroring tells you something important: *connection*. If I'm talking to someone and gently sway or tilt my head, and they start doing it, too, that's not a coincidence. That's a sign they're tuned in. They're present.

With my partner, people often comment that we mirror each other in our style—how we dress, walk, and even move around each other. It is not conscious—it's a natural alignment. And that's a beautiful thing in a long-term relationship. It reflects harmony. So yes, mirroring is a strong, positive connection and emotional resonance indicator.

Jacobsen: How can someone differentiate genuine romantic interest from performative body language? For instance, many heterosexual men struggle to tell the difference between a laugh that means "I'm into you" and one that's just polite or nervous.

Louis: That's such an important distinction. Let's start with laughter. Many men assume she's interested if a woman laughs at their jokes. But that's not always true. Sometimes, a woman laughs because she's genuinely amused. Other times, she laughs because she's nervous or trying to ease social tension. And that's a key thing—*the intention* behind the behaviour.

One tip I give my clients is to look for clusters of body language cues. Do not isolate one thing like a laugh. Is she maintaining steady eye contact? Is her body facing you? Is she leaning in, or is she pulling back slightly? Are her arms open or crossed? When you combine those cues, you start to see the whole picture.

Genuine interest usually comes with a relaxed, open posture. The person is not fidgeting too much; they're not checking their phone or glancing around the room. They're *present*. On the other hand, performative body language tends to be more mechanical—like checking off social expectations without authentic emotional engagement.

So the takeaway is this: read *patterns*, not isolated actions. The more emotionally tuned you are, the easier it gets to spot the difference.

Jacobsen: Yes. Everyone—probably often, as far as I can tell—does not parse those signals. The difference between genuine romantic interest and performative body language can be like two universes. So, how can someone tell the difference? It does not necessarily have to be a red flag, a "danger, danger" situation, or a misreading flirtation when someone's just being polite.

Louis: Right. I understand that. And this is where many men need to learn to read the room better. You're right—some women are naturally more physical when they talk. Maybe they'll

touch your hand or shoulder during a conversation. To some guys, that can give off flirtatious or even sexual signals. But the truth is that context is everything.

So here's what I tell men: just because a woman touches you a couple of times, don't immediately assume it's an invitation for physical closeness. That's a giant leap. You have to pay attention to the *overall vibe* of the conversation. Ask yourself: *What's the tone? What's her energy like?*

For example, if she's laughing and touches your arm, listen to the *cadence* in her voice. Does she sound nervous? Is she laughing too hard or in a way that feels forced? What's her eye contact like? If she's looking around—scanning the room for a friend or an exit—that's a sign she might feel uncomfortable or disengaged.

You'll often see this in how her head turns—like she's searching for someone to interrupt, rescue, or distract. That's not a sign of interest; that's a sign of discomfort. Her breathing might also give it away. Nervous breathing is very different from genuine, relaxed laughter.

So, what should a guy do in that situation? First, don't make a physical move unless you're sure. Instead, test the waters verbally. Say something like, *"Hey, I just want to say—you have beautiful eyes,"* or *"Your laugh is amazing."* Then, pay attention to how she responds—not just with words but her body language.

If she smiles, leans in, holds eye contact, and seems more engaged—that's a green light. But if she pulls back, looks around, or gives short answers, that's your cue to slow down or change direction. Sometimes, asking a thoughtful or flirtatious question can clarify where the other person stands without putting anyone in an uncomfortable spot.

Rev. Gretta Vosper: Atheist Minister, Progressive Christian Leader, and Post-Theist Advocate

2025-11-08

Reverend (Margaret Ann) Gretta Vosper was born July 6, 1958, in Ontario, Canada. She was born the second of four siblings. At age 17 (1975), Vosper left high school early. She grew up in the United Church before questioning its tenets. She enrolled at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, where she studied literature, psychology, and religion.

In the 1980s, she married Bill Ferguson while working in Inuvik. She had a daughter, Hazel. Then, she divorced in 1986. She returned to Kingston as a single mother. She is an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada. She earned a Master of Divinity from Queen's Theological College, Queen's University, in 1990. (Upon enrolling in Queen's Theological College, she legally adopted the name "Gretta.") She married fellow student Michael Kooiman in 1990. Their son, Izaak, was born in 1991.

Between 1991 and 1993, she served as a junior/team minister, first at United Church in Kingston and then at St. Matthew's United Church in Toronto.

She was ordained in the United Church of Canada in 1993, affirming her belief in the Trinity in the language of the tradition. She was appointed a minister of West Hill United Church in Toronto in 1997. During a sermon in 2001, she informed the West Hill United congregation of her personal non-theism and rejection of belief in a supernatural God.

In 2003, the Lord's Prayer was removed from worship services, and attendance at the church dropped from roughly 120 to about 40. She is professionally and personally partnered with Richard Scott Kearns, the music director at West Hill United Church.

In November 2004, she founded the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity. The network aimed to connect post-theist and progressive faith communities. Its contact list expanded from a handful of Ontarians to members in six denominations in all Canadian provinces. She published *Holy Breath: Prayers for Worship and Reflection*, a collection of non-theistic prayers that had been written earlier and first offered as a Christmas Eve gift to her congregation in 2004.

Subsequently, in 2008, she published ***With or Without God: Why the Way We Live is More Important Than What We Believe***, a theological work. In 2009, she was named one of More Magazine's "Most Compelling Women in Canada." The same year, she published ***Another Breath***, a collection of non-theistic poetry written between 2004 and 2008. It orients on human responsibility over appeals to God.

In 2010, Vosper and Scott Kearns showcased new progressive liturgical resources at the Common Dreams Conference in Melbourne, Australia. In 2011, Moderator Mardi Thindal praised Vosper for renewing the conversation about the nature of faith in the United Church of Canada. On March 1, 2011, she created the Blue Christmas service. It was entitled "Through Frozen Nights, We Wait" and intended for congregations coping with loss.

On January 7, 2012, she released ***Amen: What Prayer Can Mean in a World BeyondBelief*** through HarperCollins. It explored the tradition of prayer apart from supernatural claims. In 2013, she shifted from identifying as a non-theist to openly declaring herself an atheist in solidarity with persecuted Bangladeshi bloggers.

In January 2015, she wrote an open letter to Moderator Gary Paterson. She argued that the United Church's Charlie Hebdo prayer promoted hatred by invocation of a supernatural God. On August 5–6, 2015, the *Canadian Press* ran "Atheist Minister Fighting for Her Job." It was profiled as a heresy trial. The case was described in media as a 'heresy trial,' though this may reflect narrative framing rather than an official designation. On November 25, 2015, *Toronto Life* published "Q&A: Gretta Vosper, the United Church Minister Who Does Not Believe in God." In 2016, a Toronto Conference reviewed the question: Can an atheist serve as a United Church minister? This review was unprecedented.

On February 21, 2016, the *Toronto Star* published "Meet the United Church Minister Who Came Out as an Atheist." In a March 26, 2016 CBC interview, she estimated that 50% of the clergy, at least in the United Church of Canada, do not believe in a supernatural theistic God. However, according to Richard Bott's survey, about 95% and 80% of United Church ministers believe in God and a supernatural God, respectively.

On September 11, 2016, the *Toronto Star* published "Flock Sticks with Atheist United Church Minister." Congregational support existed despite Vosper's review. In September 2016, a special Toronto Conference committee declared Vosper unsuitable for the continuance of ordained ministry. *The Washington Post* ran "Can an Atheist Lead a Protestant Church?" It posed Vosper's case as an inflection for contemporary faith.

Later, in 2016, the case was referred to the United Church's General Council. This became the basis for a possible heresy hearing. In 2017, Vosper and allies went on a national speaking tour entitled "West Hill Wants to Talk." The purpose was to build debate and understanding in the denomination. On November 7, 2018, Vosper and the Toronto Conference reached a confidential settlement. Vosper's lawyer, Julian Falconer, recognized that both sides saw a place for Gretta. There was no need to separate a minister from her congregation.

She was permitted to remain in ministry. Both affirmed the resolution's mutual benefits. The United Church stated its belief in God and Vosper's continued service. On July 9, 2020, Vosper delivered "Falling in Love with Being Together Because We Cannot Afford to Fall Apart." It was part of the Chautauqua Institution's Interfaith Lecture Series.

She continues to serve on the Board of Governors of Centennial College, the Oasis Network, and as a Director of the Ecumenical Community of Chautauqua. Vosper remains a prominent and provocative figure in progressive Christianity. She is an active creator of post-theist spiritual communities. She is a figurehead of the ongoing debates about belief, ministry, and inclusion in contemporary faith institutions.

By Dent of The Fair Maiden of Joy

2025-11-08

An old friend once lost his virginity to the same girl who deflowered another friend.

They were drunk.

They did the act.

Then a thud.

Next morning, apparently, there was a forehead indentation.

The Fair Maiden of Joy fell off, on top,

clocked her fair head on the side table.

The head was done,

as well as the deed.

Two sonflowers left,

stem, root, and leaf.

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Author Biography

Scott Douglas Jacobsen is a Canadian author, interviewer, and publisher, and a board member and executive on numerous boards whose contributions to secularism, humanism, and human-rights discourse are distinguished by their rigour and accessibility. He established In-Sight Publishing in 2014 to produce freely available or low-cost e-books and periodicals under a Creative Commons license, thereby ensuring broad dissemination while safeguarding intellectual property.

As editor-in-chief of *In-Sight: Interviews* (ISSN 2369-6885), launched in 2012, Jacobsen curates and presents meticulously prepared, long-form dialogues with a wide range of interlocutors. These interviews include scientists and philosophers, activists and public intellectuals, addressing themes such as secular ethics, freedom of expression, evidence-based policymaking, and the global defence of human rights. His work appears regularly in peer-recognized outlets, including *The Good Men Project*, *International Policy Digest* (ISSN: 2332–9416), *The Humanist* (Print: ISSN 0018-7399; Online: ISSN 2163-3576), Basic Income Earth Network (UK Registered Charity 1177066), *A Further Inquiry*, Canadian Humanist Publications (CA Registered Charity 118833284 RR 0001), *Uncommon Ground Media* (UK Registration 11836548), The New Enlightenment Project, *News Intervention*, *Canadian Atheist*, Trusted Clothes (CN: 9562184; BN: 791402928RC0001), among dozens of others.

Jacobsen engages globally and interdisciplinarily with issues of social justice, belief plurality, and economic equity. Jacobsen has held the Tobis Fellowship in Research at the University of California, Irvine, on multiple occasions, contributing to empirical and normative studies on ethics and public discourse. He maintains active membership in numerous professional media organizations, fostering adherence to editorial standards and facilitating ongoing intellectual exchange.

His editorial leadership and commitment to open-access formats have generated a substantial, publicly accessible archive—known as the Jacobsen Bank—that documents contemporary secular and humanist thought. Based in British Columbia, he continues to expand the reach of his platforms, amplifying diverse perspectives and promoting evidence-based dialogue across cultural and disciplinary boundaries.