

The Real Reason the Left Is Using Christians as the COVID-19 Scapegoat

In 64 AD, a fire ravaged Rome. Before it was finally extinguished, two-thirds of the city was in ashes. So was Emperor Nero's reputation.

Knowing that he was likely to be blamed, Nero looked for a scapegoat. He settled on a new and suspicious religious sect, the Christians. The Roman historian, Tacitus, wrote that in order to deflect blame from himself, Nero threw the Christians to the lions—literally.

When WWI ended badly for Germany and the Great Depression followed, someone had to be blamed. Hitler was hardly alone in choosing Germany's favorite scapegoat, the Jews. Many Germans believed the post-war hardships were the fault of "Jewish bankers who sold Germany down the river for their personal gain."

Likewise, following their defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, the French military needed a scapegoat. A spy must have sold military secrets to Germany. Sure. What else could explain a French loss? But who? Who better than a Jew? Captain Alfred Dreyfus, convicted by a military kangaroo court, was sent to Devil's Island.

Dreyfus was the perfect foil, in an era of rising anti-Semitism fueled, by the way, by a religiously biased French press eager to throw gas on the fire. In the Dreyfus affair the press became willing co-conspirators of the French military, willing, that is, to print "fake news" for a desired political outcome.

Now comes Katherine Stewart's opinion piece in the *New York*

Times (March 27, 2020) blaming evangelical Christians for what she perceives to be Trump's failed response to the coronavirus. In the midst of a frightening, worldwide pandemic, Ms. Stewart ruthlessly trots out Nero's scapegoat. When in doubt, if no Jews are handy, blame the Christians.

Under a headline that blames the religious right for "crippling" America's response is a photo of ministers, praying—yes, I said praying—for the president of the United States. The horror! At the height of a pandemic, her editorial blames, of all people, Christians. In the face of a crisis, fixing the blame on any religious scapegoat can get people hurt. Her column was a reprehensible example of scapegoating and frankly, she should be ashamed.

None of this is about defending or endorsing the Trump administration's coronavirus response. I'll leave that critique to others. This is, rather, about the dangerous—yes, dangerous—practice of scapegoating in a crisis. Pinning the blame on a religious or racial subset of society places a target on their backs, a target most inviting to those most controlled by hate.

Like all propagandists, Ms. Stewart weaves together loose and disconnected threads, and tosses in the occasional "hot button" just for good measure. At one point she even uses the dreaded "climate deniers" accusation. In passing it should be said that "climate denier" is a ludicrous phrase. No one denies there is a climate, but by using the phrase, she hopes to cast evangelical Christianity as a dark, monolithic cult of troglodytes. In Stewart's attempt to prove the shadowy influence of evangelical conspirators, her exhibit A is President Trump's reference to Easter rather than Spring. How dare he? Easter? That is surely a dog whistle to these evil evangelicals. Next thing you know he will mention Passover!

Evangelical churches and pastors are a reckless, uncaring lot, according to Ms. Stewart. Sneering as she points to a few

outliers, Stewart blithely ignores the fact that most churches, thousands of them, delivered groceries and prescriptions to the elderly and continued, at risk to themselves, to run food banks for the needy. Christian ministries rose to the challenge in a powerful testimony to the faith's commitment to simply do good when and where it's needed. Samaritan's Purse, for example, set up a hospital in Central Park, not, may I say, to the applause of the *New York Times*.

We know Christians did not light the great fire in Rome, but we have no record of what they did do. However, based on 2,000 years of Christian history, we can safely assume that Christians fought the fire, cared for the wounded and buried the dead. Surely Christians were not the only Romans to do so, but just as surely, they did their part. Why? Why do we do the good we do even when we are thus vilified? Why should we continue doing good at all?

We do it because it's the right thing to do. We do it because Christ commanded us to. Undaunted by the cost, utterly unfazed by anything the *New York Times* may say of us, we serve humanity at its point of need. Not to burnish our brand, but to live out our faith. John Wesley said it best: "Do all the good you can by all the means you can by all the ways you can in all the places you can in all the times you can to all the people you can as long as ever you can."

We must and we shall serve as Rome burns, but we must remember, even as we do so, the likes of the *New York Times* may still blame us for the fire.