

# HOW TO BE A COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY

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belongs to those who will fight for love, self-sacrifice, and the children of the next generation.

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We are rapidly approaching a time when nobody living will remember what life was like before the sexual revolution. With the exception of scattered communities that have fought, with varying levels of success, to preserve their ways of life, traditional Christian culture as a civilizational phenomenon is dead in the West. Church attendance has collapsed across Europe and, especially over the past two decades, in the United States as well. The institution of marriage has been broken, redefined, and, finally, largely abandoned. The young are now growing up in a world almost totally devoid of the certainties that belonged to their ancestors for time immemorial.

The late Polish philosopher and former Stalinist Zygmunt Bauman described our time as one of “liquid modernity.” Bauman used this term to describe the conditions of our era, which he saw as one of constant mobility and change in all things: relationships, global economics, personal identities. Everything has been privatized, and with the overnight coming-of-age of the transgender movement, the personal has become perpetually political. A young man can become a woman or vice versa; he can become “non-binary”; he can even become “trans-racial.” What he cannot do, however, is to return to the world of his grandparents, filled as it was with restrictive orthodoxies and rock-solid certainties.

Instead, young people today inhabit a world in which everything is up for grabs, but nothing is solid enough to hang on to. It may seem like freedom, but, as Bauman observed, there is a crushing responsibility in having to figure everything out from scratch. Your identity, family, religion, even your sex—everything can be changed at your whim (or so we are told). It is a bewildering tyranny of choices producing profoundly unhappy people. You can have anything you want, but nobody will tell you what you need.

Mary Eberstadt describes this well in her book *Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics*. Identity politics, she argues, is not just some new political tribalism. In fact, even the word 'tribalism' indicates that one has a family—and today's tribalism is largely driven by the fact that people *do not have families*. Shrinking families, fatherlessness, abortion, and other new "norms" have resulted in what she calls "the Great Scattering," and today's identity politics are one consequence of all this. Eberstadt points out that we have never seen this level of social disruption in the history of civilization apart from times of warfare or natural disaster.

Denied the human ecosystems that their ancestors inhabited for centuries, Eberstadt writes, young people are instead seeking out new identities, joining their comrades in this "preeminent emotional howl of our time": *Who am I?* ("Identity politics," she adds bluntly, "is the screaming bastard child of the birth control pill.")

Add to this the unprecedented phenomenon Eberstadt refers to as gasoline on the fires of our crumbling cultures: social media. The utopian fantasies of networks that would unite us are long dead, and social media has instead become a great leveler of culture. Never in human history has there been a time when children and adolescents could separate themselves so totally from the oversight and influence of adults, including older family members. The young now seek the approval of their peers and have created networks impervious to their parents, producing new cultures that are totally disconnected from any tradition and exacerbating the fluidity of liquid modernity. In connecting us to everyone, social media has often disconnected people from their own histories, traditions, and even faiths.

And so, the question arises: What does a young conservative do in this great era of endings? We are cursed with having a multitude of options, but very few good ones, and it often seems like there is little to be conserved and that we are only reminded of what is left when we see the progressive beasts fix their eyes upon the next target.

One of the great privileges I have had in being a writer is being able to discuss this strange historical moment, poised as we are on the cusp of the unknowns of the post-

Christian age, with many of the great conservative minds of our day. Several years before he passed away, Sir Roger Scruton described to me his sense of disgust while watching the 1968 Paris riots and his conviction that he wanted to stand with the builders and not the iconoclasts. It is safe to say that, for the most part, the iconoclasts have won—although Scruton’s lifelong dedication to defending, in speech and in print, the beauties of an abandoned civilization are a wonderful example of resistance.

The work of conserving and rebuilding is different in every nation and in every culture, but Scruton has boiled it down to its essence: it is about standing against those who would destroy an inheritance that is owed to the generations following and upholding the pact between the living and the dead.

While working on an essay on pro-life marches around the world recently, I was struck by the fact that the roles have been reversed. For decades, the sexual revolutionaries have marched and howled and demanded and got everything they could have hoped for, and more. Now, they are the establishment, and they are the ones defending the “smelly little orthodoxies” (as Orwell would have put it) of our day. Conservatives once had the disadvantage of being forced to defend against rebels with catchy rock n’ roll anthems bearing all the intoxicating allure of revolutionary slogans and the fleeting ecstasy of smashing things and defying authority. Now, the institutions are theirs—and it is our turn to rebel. We don’t need new songs, either. We already have all the best music.

I have felt this in my years in the pro-life movement, working alongside young people who are passionate about saving lives and speaking truth. Most pro-lifers are fueled by compassion, conviction, and anger at injustice. However, there are some of us who also derive satisfaction in refusing to cede the field of battle to the enemy—to be rebels on the side of good. There is often a surge of adrenaline as the masked protestors with their tired revolutionary chants and decades-old slogans come marching our way at pro-life rallies. They believe they have won, but as long as there are those who speak the truth, they can never enjoy their hollow victories. It has been the privilege of a lifetime to work alongside some of the best men and women around the world in this cause and join them in the backlash to the sexual revolution.

Students from the University of Notre Dame at the March for Life in Washington, D.C.  
PHOTO: MISS.MONICA.ELIZABETH, LICENSED UNDER CC BY-SA 3.0.

A couple of years ago, I asked the conservative scholar Patrick Deneen, author of the seminal 2018 book *Why Liberalism Failed*, how he thought young people should respond to this age of collapse. I was surprised to hear that he was quite hopeful. All around us, he said, we see evidence that the progressive project is unsustainable, and with the chaos comes a calling, especially for the young.

“I think that a time of convulsion is a time that is extremely discomfiting, anxiety-producing, and difficult—one doesn’t necessarily wish to live through those times,” he told me.

*On the other hand, as a young person I would think that it is also a time of extraordinary opportunity—to be a very important thinker or actor in ways that certainly weren’t true in my generation when everything seemed to be largely settled and normal politics applied. I issue an invitation to them: You could be the next John Locke, St. Augustine, or Ronald Reagan. This is a time that issues a call for greatness. I would think that as a young person of a particular type, it would be a time of inspiration and aspiration.*

What is it that people facing the uncertainty of liquid modernity and civilizational convulsions need? It is not hope. Hope is far too passive, and hope depends too much on circumstances outside of our control.

It is *defiance*, a full-throated, uncompromising rebellion against the sick world the revolutionaries have built and the woke totalitarianism metastasizing around us. The intoxicating lure of rebellion now belongs to those who wish to defend everything that is good, true, and beautiful. We must rebel against the post-modern world. It is time to rebel against the sexual chaos and mass rupturing of human bonds. We are called to rebel against the destruction of our heritage in our name; we must defy all of it. A great and

resounding *norising* from a thousand throats is not just a chorus; it is a battle cry.

Can anything be more exhilarating than fighting for civilization itself? Last stands and lost causes come with their pain and grief and dark moments of the soul, but what a bridgehead to stand on—and what magnificent men and women we have to conduct battle with. As C. S. Lewis once noted: “Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another, ‘What! You too? I thought I was the only one.’” You are not. There are many of us.

The future does not belong to the champions of sterile sex and dumpsters filled with dead babies. Rather, it belongs to those who will fight for love, self-sacrifice, and the children of the next generation. Like the Irish monks on Skellig Michael, we may face the raw power of lashing storms—but we possess the flame, and we must hold it high. If there was ever a time to be a counter-revolutionary, it is now.

We can rebuild and start anew. Go to church. Explore the Scriptures. Read the classics. Sing in a choir. Visit your grandparents. Join the pro-life movement. Study history. Settle down. Start a family. This will take a while.