

Wholly Shit

Church reviews from a serious punk

Stephane

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Last September, I started going to church every Sunday. I go to a different one every time, often of wildly different denominations. I usually go with a friend or two and then write a church review for my blog. I'm not religious, and so extremely far from spiritual, but my goal isn't to prove that christianity is a load of bullshit. If that's your trip, ok, but that's just too easy, and ultimately boring.

I don't care about that, and anyway, lots of the most popular atheist writers, such as Christopher Hitchens, are apologists for imperialist aggression and Western cultural (racialized) supremacy (for example, Hitchens' support of colonialism in North America, or of the most recent war in Iraq).

Nor am I interested in selling a so-called rational ideology. What people think takes place beyond normalized forms of perception is their own affair; it's the effects these beliefs cause in the real world that concern me.

In this light, one could consider my experiment as a form of inquiry into the symbolic and mythical basis of euro-christian society. Given that, there is a need to approach this project with an appreciation for the weight that the church, and christian culture in general, has world-wide.

I've encountered lots of different communities over the course of this project. One thing that seems noteworthy is the value that many church-goers find in supporting each other, week after week, through some of the more difficult and isolating experiences of modern life—illness, bereavement, poverty, etc.

Obviously, this support varies greatly from one church to another, from one situation to another. Just like in any social scene, there are the ones at the top with privileges that those at the bottom do without.

It's no surprise that some have more access to support than others. Nonetheless, the social aspect of church-going is arguably the most important component for its adherents. Radical communities, more often than not, lack these regular opportunities to check in with one another such as church provides.

One very rewarding element of this church attendance project is the opportunity to visit semi-private spaces. Buildings full of art, interesting architecture, bizarre spectacles and encounters (there are hilarious awkward moments in every single religious service), food, all freely available for our small subset of urban explorers. A free show, often with high symbolic value and subtext (the prosperity gospel vs. social-justice types, etc.).

The ritual, beyond being an easy target for satirical decoding, is also a recurring theme for fans of freaky experimentation. Seeking to uncover truths, affinities, solidarities, or pleasures through it has been a source of inquiry for weirdo radicals time and again from the Weather Underground to the writings of Frere Dupont.

So far, I might have misled you as to the seriousness of my project. Mostly, I just go to churches, take notes, come home and write a review making fun of how silly I thought it was. But again, I'm misleading you. It's not that flippant.

I describe their ritual, quote them, give them a chance, and sometimes they genuinely impress me. But this makes my critiques all the more serious. When one seeks to criticize, to maximize impact, one must be two-pronged: accurately de-scribe their actions, soberly perhaps, and with due regard for their implications, as

well as demonstrate the pathetic pre-tense under which they operate. The world they have shaped is worth being apprehended scrupulously.

I've been through a classic cycle of religious disbelief. Born and raised Catholic, teenaged, atheistic reaction, hipster, agnostic nihilism, this is where I am now.

It's easy for an anarchist to stand aside and criticize from the outside looking in when there is actually very little looking going on; more of a haughty gaze from the moral high ground, scoffing at the superstitions of the masses.

There are very real reasons for people's beliefs in fucking crazy shit that doesn't make sense to me. Religion obviously operates out of a desire to control, but at the other end, one could just as easily say that people will stop following when there is no need for it.

To criticize, you must understand, and there's no better way for me than to hop on in and see it first hand.

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