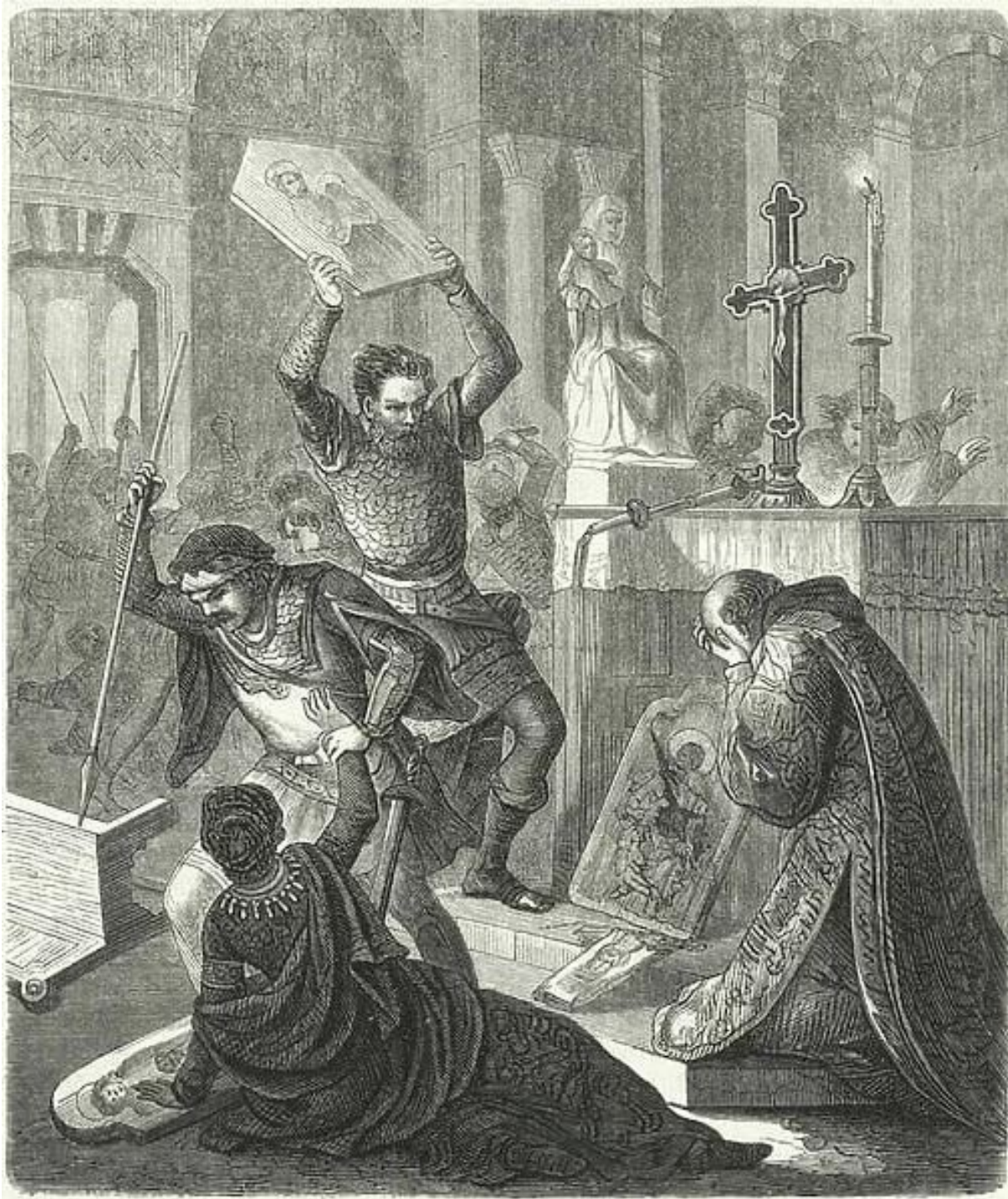


Revolution of the Iconoclasts

by [Larry McCloskey](#) (July 2023)



Iconoclasts destroy religious images in the Byzantine Empire, Illustration from The Illustrated History of the World (Ward Lock, 1880)

Decades ago, my dear old mom would say I reminded her of Michael J. Fox. I wasn't too clear about the comparison because I'd never watched *Family Ties*, the popular sitcom that had Michael J. Fox reminding mom of me. But recently, I did watch the Michael J. Fox documentary, *Still* that occasioned my wife to comment, "he's never still, just like you." I'm still upset, and wonder why it wasn't called, "Never Still."

A comparison between Michael J. Fox and mom might have been more accurate. First mom, and then a few years later Michael was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. My mom lasted about 15 years, dying in 2000, while *Still* documents Michael still battling while not yet still, a 30 year old diagnosis. While Michael's mobility is affected and his constant tremor ensures he is never still, his cognitive ability seems intact. Mom's physical symptoms were less severe, but she acquired dementia that worsened over time. Despite its terrifying reality, despite its ugly striping away of self, she retained her essential, astonishing good nature. Dropping by her house, where seven of us grew up, she would calmly ask if there were people in the living room, after making me a cup of tea. I would get up and inspect the living room, while she shyly followed. Together, we stood in the empty living room, me trying to gently reassure her that the room was unoccupied as an unfathomable smile creased her face. "Guess I'm getting silly." And she would laugh, not withdrawn or desperate, but fully amused by her silly predicament. And I wondered, how can she make a heartfelt, self-effacing jest while facing the inexplicable loss of self?

She had courage, guts and a determination to not burden us and to make light of silly predicaments that were conspiring to take her away. I wonder still, and in truth don't know how one pulls off a life well-lived on the precipice of death, while laughing and holding the grime reapers steady stare. Trite might be the closest I can come to understanding; that is, though she lost the context of character, she never lost,

seemed to grow in its vital content. In old age, for better or worse, we are said to become more ourselves. Dementia erodes the fibres of memory and connection, making us unrecognizable to loved ones, to ourself. But not my profoundly silly old mom.

If I'd asked how she did it, she would have likely smiled without responding, knowing I know the answer. Her's was that simple and unfashionable time worn formula, the trifecta of God, family and friends. She conformed to the dictates of truth and humility, and didn't have a revolutionary bone in her body. The illusion of originality is rampant today.

Which sadly and by way of contrast, reminds me of the present time. A revolution is well underway. The word revolution is a strong, deliberate word. Webster's Dictionary defines revolution as "a sudden, radical, or complete change," or "a change of paradigm." The paradigm that requires complete change is anything that anchored us in the recent past—religion, cultural norms, political convention, civilization. "A person who attacks settled beliefs," cultural and religious norms is an iconoclast. These terms accurately reflect our cultural morass. The dissolution of history, a determination to strip us of the context of civilization, are the sad exhibits of a ubiquitous proof. The new normal is neither new nor normal.

In the mid-seventies, I remember marvelling at the sculptured Carrara marble of Michelangelo's Pieta near the entrance of St. Peter's Basilica. I couldn't reconcile the seeming gravitational pull of Christ's body, it's palpable dead weight as it lay across the arms and lap of his living, grieving mother. It was and is the greatest depiction of death and life in sculpture, all time, by any artist. My viewing and longing was a couple of years after the world's most iconic sculpture had been attacked and damaged by an iconoclast wielding a hammer. At least I assumed at the time, and remained in a state of ignorance for many years, that the perpetrator must

have been a religious iconoclast.

But, the man who sought to destroy Pieta was not motivated by opposition to religious orthodoxy or hatred of Catholicism. Once Laszlo Toth was arrested he claimed, "I am Jesus Christ." Laszlo had been living in a hostel wanting to meet with the Pope and ask why Fatima's secrets were not being revealed. He was referring to the miracle of Fatima, where it is reputed that the Virgin Mother appeared to three young peasant children on May 13, 1917. There were five other apparitions with Mary revealing secrets to the children that had not been fully acknowledged by the Catholic Church. One of the children who witnessed the apparition subsequently became a nun and was forbidden to reveal secrets of the "woman who came from the sky." Laszlo believed that the Pope consigned the child, later nun, to a life of silence, and he was determined to convince the Pope to allow the secrets of the Virgin Mary to be revealed. Interestingly, Laszlo was never charged for attempting to destroy Pieta. Rather he was shut away in a Psychiatric facility and given 12 electroshocks before being deported back to Australia.

So, dear Laszlo was not an iconoclast, rather his iconoclast-like act was motivated by his belief that the Pope was an iconoclast for not allowing the vision of the Virgin to become known to the Catholic world. He was, in deluded fashion, fighting for orthodoxy using unorthodox means. If nothing else, he actually believed what he did related to what needed to get done.

Not so today. Much of politics in the West (with palpable influence from the World Economic Forum) is directed towards divesting of the past in order to collectively become happier for owning (and knowing) nothing. The 20th century is testament to failure of the socialist ideal so the new playbook calls for the elimination of history, that wee encumbrance to realizing the socialist dream.

The madness of Canada's coalition government's actions and inaction is trending towards becoming an exemplar of the iconoclastic revolution. That is, the Liberals, and their enabling revolutionary party partner, the NDP, attack conventional beliefs—the very definition of iconoclasm—with an all encompassing ideological fervour that can only be described as revolutionary. Case in point from just the last week—take any week for more of the same—and we have on display officials elected to uphold majority values acting like oppositional, petulant children in pursuit of great faux causes intended to impress and shame. Simply acting as able stewards of the country's existing programs, resources, safety and prosperity is beneath true revolutionists.

Our Prime Minister either dithers—being an avoidant sod—so as to make unpleasant things go away, or else acts—being a creature lacking emotional regulation—without any evidence that action is required.

There isn't a Canadian alive—except for a few narrow, temporary parliamentary elites—who doubts that a full public inquiry into Chinese political interference is warranted and long overdue. After habitual deflection, denial, and accusation of racism in the face of security reports by the relevant agencies proving disturbing interference, Trudeau finally appointed his friend David Johnson as special rapporteur. Johnson predictably whitewashed the whole affair until public pressure forced him to resign. Trudeau still avoids, hoping to obfuscate just long enough to get to the summer recess of the House of Commons. As the world convulses with awareness of China's strategic and highly successful dance towards world hegemony, our naked Emperor rides a naked horse, humming a merry tune and vaguely wishing he'd worn a kitschy pair of socks to accent his outfit. Nero playing the fiddle as Rome burns seems apt comparison if, as seems unlikely, history still holds sway.

Our American friends may have noticed poor air quality from

wildfires burning across Canada recently. For some, the wildfires made it hard to breathe, for others statements made about the wildfires made it hard to keep from hyperventilating.

Never waste a good crisis is a well-trodden saying that our political betters put into practise at every turn. All the usual suspects from the Greens and NDP parroted the PM who tweeted, "We're seeing more and more of these fires because of climate change." Never mind that police are investigating many of the fires in several provinces for arson, with eco-terrorist possibilities. Are the wildfires the result of climate change, and since the Prime Minister says they are (ignoring for the moment that he cries climate wolf about the setting of the sun and the chance of rain tomorrow), what is his authority for saying so? Surely, the holder of highest office would not say anything with huge political implications without foreknowledge of its veracity. Ok, I'll stop with the facetious tone. The Prime Minister has no regulation—emotional or otherwise—and says whatever occurs to him whenever he wants, and our compliant, somnolent media lets him get way with lies, big and small (and yes idle speculation in the absence of easily obtainable facts in the direction of his government's highly charged and highly controversial agenda, qualifies as a lie).

We don't know all the answers about climate change. The science about climate change is not settled, and in fact the scientific method requires that science is never settled, in order that scientific enquiry never stop. That doesn't mean we refute the laws of gravity, but it does mean we do not close discussion about issues as they percolate in the public consciousness. Still, not fully knowing the answer doesn't mean we can't offer a few facts, which when our PM makes his many accusatory claims, he never does.

According to the Wildland Fire Information System, wildfires in Canada have been getting less frequent for the past 30

years. So, if wildfires are becoming less frequent according to existing facts, does this mean climate change is contributing to their lessening? Matching Trudeau's statement to his logic might well elicit a positive correlation, though a non-correlation or still unsettled question seems more likely.

What could be less susceptible to iconoclastic disparagement than a parents' interest in the education of their child? There is an emerging dispute in Canada between parents and school boards on the issues of sexual instruction and parental disclosure. Whatever one thinks about school boards taking an activist role on matters of sexuality, it is highly controversial to adopt a policy that excludes parents from knowing what is being taught, and how their children identify themselves to the world. The issue has come to a head with legislation in the province of New Brunswick that would require schools to obtain consent from parents for children under the age of 16 who wish to change their names or pronouns. To be clear, the legislation is not transphobic, does not oppose name or pronoun change, and is solely directed towards informing parents for whatever outcome transpires with all parties informed.

But it is not the issue as commonly understood, it is not the facts as presented, it is not the parental concern that matters. Our iconoclastic revolutionary PM never fails to seize an opportunity to infuse chaos into custom, with ideological intent. About the New Brunswick legislation for which discussion seems reasonable, Trudeau stated the following: "We're seeing that angry, hateful rhetoric rise on our continent, particularly targeting transpeople. Far-right political actors are trying to outdo themselves with the types of cruelty and isolation they can inflict on those already vulnerable people."

Isn't the whole point of informing parents precisely because their underage children are vulnerable? Are we to assume that

parents do not have their vulnerable children's' best interests at heart? Would activist parents be informed, whereas parents without an a priori political view would not? The difference regarding which parents might be informed is at the heart of the matter. Behind every social issue and cultural cancellation today are ideological motives that are barely related to the social justice activist howl that steals headlines. One simply cannot fathom the absurdity of today's issues without understanding that the seismic shift underlying our many contemporary cultural contortions is revolution.

Inventing a revolutionary omelette requires breaking a few apolitical eggs. Little did I know standing, admiring, awestruck in front of Pieta in the mid-seventies that Laszlo Tott's destructive act would seem almost innocent and guileless compared to today. Since Trudeau's political ascendancy in 2015, everything from redesigned passports to flags at half mast, from celebrations of Canada Day to the continued existence of statues and historic monuments, is under siege and subject to review, correction and cancellation at a moment's notice. Historical figures—MacDonald and Ryerson recent examples—are disparaged and convicted without historical content based on the progressive modern lens. Unfettered heresy offered as 'facts' are married to progressive ideology for the cancellation of history according to the new pure narrative de jour. And not having a history for which there is general agreement and solace against chaos, people become untethered, unmoored, susceptible to alternative narratives, which our progressive, vacuous superiors just happen to have.

And the irony of ironies is that the purveyors of change without purpose, the holders of public office in Canada, and the leaders of this new iconoclastic revolution are protesting, raging against 'the man' (or personhood in modern parlance) which as holders of highest office, are themselves.

As statues come down and history is rewritten or erased (from

books, from schools, from collective consciousness), it is worth considering the effect over time. Again, last week an article discusses the importance of the new Toronto Holocaust Museum. Even as anti-Semitic incidents have increased in recent years, knowledge of the Holocaust has decreased, particularly among young people. This is troubling since the Holocaust Museum seeks to emulate Elie Wiesel's sense of responsibility that the survivor, "has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory."

The question is, in Trudeau's post-nationalist nation (his progressive/apocalyptic vision of Canada) does collective memory continue to exist, or are we simply a collection of indivisible and political identity groups vying for our own narrative and competing for our own tribal truth?

Of course, the uber progressive view of inclusiveness excludes any collective, meaningful narrative that binds people together who do not share similar exteriors or stories. The story of our country is becoming a collection of disparate stories in a vast collection of stories that have no cohesive theme. As such, post-nationalism equals chaos.

In the mid-sixties, I had one of the most profound experiences of my life watching a silent television screen. In fact, it was when the narrator's voice cut out that I was drawn to the visual image. A bulldozer brutally manoeuvred hundreds of skeletal remains into a mass grave at newly liberated Auschwitz concentration camp. My ten year old sensibility either understood or soon came to understand two things: these human remains were consigned to inhumanity by others of nominal difference; innocence is no protection against tyranny. My revelation of the obvious was exactly what Elie Wiesel and the Holocaust Museum endeavour to achieve, though in our post-nation nation the obvious may becoming impossible.

In conceiving this opinion piece, I had been working towards

the term collective amnesia, but it's worse than that. We can't remember what we don't know, we can't find truth if we have been led to believe that our subjective feelings are both true and sacrosanct, and we won't achieve connection out of difference if history is reduced to the narrative of oppression. Beneath difference and progressive orthodoxy is the content of character, only revealed in consideration of the context of people's complicated lives.

Michael J. Fox didn't go to my mom's church; my mom wasn't a big Hollywood sitcom success (though I do appreciate her thinking I could have been). Objectively, my mom and Michael didn't have much in common except for a rather thin resume anchored in disease. And yet in disease, in hardship and heartache, character is revealed and a bond is shared—even if they don't know it. My mom fought to dispel the uninvited guests in her living room that she never did understand as dementia; Michael J. likely has that battle on the horizon which he will battle with unlikely Hollywood courage. Tragic as their Queen of Spades may be, at least they didn't and won't suffer from the societal dementia that spews from our politicians, pervades our institutions, and haunts our dreams.

The essential thing is this: we have divided the world into two camps: oppressed and oppressors, left and right, up and down, and grievance is the dominant theme that will undo us unless we begin to see what was once regarded as a self-evident truth—we have more in common than not. Full stop. We are not seeing what we have in common because we have stopped looking, and difference is always easier to find even if the content of character has more substance, heft, the stuff that matters.

In the debate over whether Rome fell because of the Visigoths et. al., or from within, it is generally agreed that internal corruption was the culprit. Same for today. In the safest and most affluent time in the history of humankind, the West is undoing commonality, common sense and compassion for a skewed

perception of shame, lacking, and scarcity. Maybe civilization—many thousands of years in the works—will dissipate in a historical heartbeat because believing nothing, we believe we will be happier. Civilization's end is neither necessary nor inevitable, but may come to pass simply because as Hamlet almost says, demented “thinking makes it so.”

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Larry McCloskey has had eight books published, six young adult as well as two recent non-fiction books. *Lament for Spilt Porter* and *Inarticulate Speech of the Heart* (2018 & 2020 respectively) won national Word Guild awards. *Inarticulate* won best Canadian manuscript in 2020 and recently won a second Word Guild Award as a published work. He recently retired as Director of the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities, Carleton University. Since then, he has written a satirical novel entitled *The University of Lost Causes*, and has qualified as a Social Work Psychotherapist. He lives in Canada with his three daughters, two dogs, and last, but far from least, one wife.

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