

MAX PARADOX

THE ABSURDITIES OF RELIGION

Everybody Rituals, Modern Faith, and the
Things We Treat as Sacred Without Noticing



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INTRODUCTION

Religion is everywhere when you're looking for it.

It's on the bumper sticker and in the hashtag.

It's the incense of burnt toast in the kitchen and the incense of burnt incense in a temple.

It is as omnipresent as background music in a supermarket and just as easy to ignore.

When I was a child, I thought religion was a dramatic thing.

Men in robes, women in veils, angels with trumpets, and saints with halos.

It looked like the stained glass windows in the old church my grandmother took me to on Sundays.

The windows glowed.

I never understood what they meant, but I liked the colors.

Now I am older, and I keep seeing religion in the least stained-glass places.

It shows up in fast food chains offering fish sandwiches on Fridays.

It shows up in motivational quotes about trusting the universe printed on reusable grocery bags.

It pops up in the way people feel guilty for wanting a second croissant.

It whispers when someone says they're blessed after finding a parking spot.

Somewhere between sacraments and sweaters on sale, the sacred and the ordinary started sharing closet space.

I am not making an argument about it.

I'm not even sure how to explain it.

I just notice things.

My noticing has become a book.

This is not a sermon or a manifesto.

It is not a warning, and it is certainly not a prayer.

It is a collection of those moments when the absurdities of religion cross paths with daily life.

Not the grand scandals, but the small eccentricities.

Not the dogmas, but the dog-eared prayer cards tucked between recipes for banana bread.

If you are looking for an explanation, you won't find it here.

If you want me to condemn or to convert, you will be disappointed.

I'm just standing in the corner at the church bazaar, sipping on lukewarm coffee, watching people bidding on holy water bottles next to bundt cakes, and thinking, well, isn't that something.

The absurdities come in different sizes.

There are the politely absurd, like the person who says grace before eating a pre-packaged salad from a vending machine.

There are the quietly absurd, like the silent prayer for a good Wi-Fi signal in the confessional turned coworking space.

There are the flamboyantly absurd, like the marathon runner carrying a life-sized statue of the Virgin Mary on his back for charity.

I try to pay attention to these moments.

Sometimes, I jot them down on a napkin.

Sometimes, I think about them in the checkout line.

Sometimes, they make me chuckle; sometimes, they leave me uneasy.

Mostly, they just make me feel like I'm living in a comedy that didn't rehearse.

This book is full of short chapters because that's how these observations appear.

In fragments and flashes.

In bus rides and waiting rooms.

Between sips of coffee and half-heard sermons.

Each chapter is its own set of scenes, its own little stained glass pane made of moments you might recognize.

I use bullet points because sometimes thoughts stack better than they line up.

You'll see them.

They are not formal lists; they are the beats of an inner monologue that refuses to stay in neat paragraphs.

Religion is often described with heavy words: faith, doctrine, morality.

Those words do not appear here very often.

I'm more interested in the lighter artifacts: bumper stickers, keychains, leftover communion wafers taken home in plastic containers.

I am interested in the way people cross themselves before crossing a street, then jaywalk anyway.

I notice when someone whispers "Jesus Christ" not as a prayer but as a reaction to spilling coffee on a white shirt.

You might think I'm making fun.

Sometimes I am.

But I have learned that there is affection in humor, and there is truth in absurdity.

We live in rituals we barely understand.

We chant slogans we do not believe.

We use sacred words as passwords.

If this book leaves you unsettled, I understand.

If it leaves you amused, I understand that, too.

If it leaves you with more questions than answers, welcome to the club.

The only thing I can promise is that there are no conclusions here.

No solutions.

Just observations.

Just recognition.

CHAPTER 1 - The Holy Parking Space

There is a particular kind of prayer uttered in a shopping mall parking lot.

The car circles, and the driver whispers, "Please, God, just one spot."

These prayers are less about salvation and more about convenience.

They are small bargains made with the divine while the radio hums an ad for discounted mattresses.

People talk about miracles like sunbeams through storm clouds.

But I have seen a grown man cry tears of joy when a minivan pulls out just as he turns the corner.

He raises his eyes to the sky.

His children in the back seat cheer.

This is modern grace.

If you stand by a crowded parking lot on a Saturday morning, you can see the liturgy unfold.

The car slows down.

The driver's knuckles tighten.

The mumbling begins.

- The whispered promise to attend church more often if the spot is close to the entrance
- The vow to stop swearing if the spot is in the shade
- The mental negotiation about whether taking someone else's spot is a sin if they were on their phone and you were paying attention

There is no collection plate, but there is sacrifice.

People will park three miles away and walk in the rain rather than pay for valet.

They will confess to complete strangers about how many laps they made around the lot.

They will chant "Turn signal, turn signal" like monks chanting psalms.

Outside of the mall, the city paints little white lines on asphalt and calls them sacred boundaries.

To cross into someone else's spot is an act of heresy.

To leave your car too close to the line is to invite excommunication.

And yet, in times of desperation, the faithful cheat.

They angle their sedans into compact spots meant for smart cars and hope for absolution.

Some places have statues of saints in their parking lots.
A Saint Christopher tucked beside the payment machine.
A Blessed Virgin overlooking the handicapped spaces.
People don't pray to these figures; they pray around them.
It's like having a lifeguard at a beach where no one swims.

There is a man who always leaves a rosary hanging from his
rearview mirror.

He says it brings him luck.

He also has a collection of parking passes on his dashboard.
His car looks like a mobile shrine.

He doesn't go to church anymore, but he calls Saint Anthony
whenever he loses his keys.

He swears Anthony helps him find a parking space, too.

I wonder if there is a saint for lost patience.

In some cities, parking is so scarce that people hire valets for
their souls.

They download apps to reserve spaces.

They join loyalty programs and collect points toward
redemption.

The prayers now include discount codes.

- "Dear God, if you give me this spot, I promise to pay it
forward by not yelling at anyone today."