

## ***Saints for a New Situation***

“Everywhere in church circles today you hear a lament: Our churches are emptying, and the church is becoming ever more marginalized.

There are many reasons for this, but I’d like to single out one issue: affluence. Jesus told us that it’s difficult (impossible, he says) for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. No doubt, that’s a huge part of our present struggle. We’re good at being Christians when we’re poor, less educated, and on the margins of mainstream society. We’ve had centuries of practice at this. What we haven’t had any practice at, and aren’t any good at, is how to be Christians when we’re affluent, sophisticated, and constitute the cultural mainstream.

So, I’m suggesting that what we need today is not so much a new pastoral approach as a new kind of saint, an individual man or woman who can model for us practically what it means to live out the Gospel in a context of affluence and secularity.

One of the lessons of history is that often genuine religious renewal, the type that actually reshapes the religious imagination, does not come from think-tanks, conferences, and church synods, but from graced individuals – saints, wild men and women who, like Saint Augustine, Saint Francis, Saint Clare, Saint Dominic, Saint Ignatius, or other such religious figures can reshape our religious imagination. They show us that the new lies elsewhere, that what needs fixing in the church will not be mended simply by patching the old. What’s needed is a new religious and ecclesial imagination.

We’ve been at this spot before in history and have always found our way forward. Every time the world believes it has buried Christ, the stone rolls back from the tomb; every time the cultural ethos declares that the churches are on an irrevocable downward slide, the Spirit intervenes and there’s soon an about face.

Christ promised we will not be orphaned, and that promise is sure. God is still with us and our age will produce its own prophets and saints. What’s asked of us in the moment is biblical patience, to wait on God. Christianity may look tired, tried, and spent to a culture within which affluence and sophistication are its current gods. We’re already beginning to see a number of people who have found ways to become post-affluent and post-sophisticated. These will be the new religious leaders who will teach us, and our children, how to live as Christians in this new situation.”

*Used with permission of the author, Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser. He can be contacted through his website, [www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com). Follow on Facebook [www.facebook.com/ronrolheiser](http://www.facebook.com/ronrolheiser).*