



PROTHEAN INSTITUTE
COMMENT | JUNLY 2026

What Would King Baldwin Do?

Why the faithful are nostalgic for a leadership.

Somewhere this month, a Catholic family watched a church burn on the news and waited for someone in authority to say something — anything — that would make them feel it mattered, that their dismay mattered. From their bishop or Pope, if anything came at all, they got a few lines about healing and dialogue. From their government they got silence. Multiply them by millions. The gap between what the faithful feel and what everyone charged with defending them is willing to say or do on their behalf is the real story here, and it is bigger than any single fire.

Across the West, churches are burning by the hundreds— and the people in the pews are watching everyone who should defend them look away.

The bishops offer dialogue; the politicians offer excuses or worse, some of them cheer. That abandonment, not bloodlust, is why a dying crusader king is suddenly everywhere. The nostalgia for Baldwin is not a longing for war. It is a longing for leadership the public can feel proud of.

The fires are neither rare nor small. Europe alone recorded more than two thousand anti-Christian attacks in a single year — churches vandalised, desecrated, burned.¹ The United States bishops have logged over four hundred attacks on Catholic churches since 2020;² in France, a religious building is lost roughly every two weeks;³ in Canada, dozens have burned to the ground, most of them arson.⁴ Across the West it runs into the

¹ Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe (OIDAC), Annual Report on 2024 (November 2025): 2,211 anti-Christian hate crimes recorded across Europe, including 94 arson attacks — nearly double the previous year.

² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, ‘Backgrounder: Attacks on Catholic Churches in the U.S.’, [usccb.org](https://www.usccb.org) — more than 400 incidents across 43 states since May 2020.

³ Observatoire du patrimoine religieux (Édouard de Lamaze), reported February 2025: a religious building lost in France roughly every two weeks to fire, sale or demolition, two-thirds of the fires of criminal origin.

⁴ CBC News, ‘At least 33 Canadian churches have burned to the ground since May 2021. So far, 24 are confirmed arsons’, January 2024.

thousands, year after year — and what the ordinary believer cannot find, anywhere, is a single leader who sounds angry on their behalf.

Because almost no one is being punished. Canada’s entire arson wave has produced two convictions and not one serious prison term,⁵ and the Prime Minister himself called the anger at Christianity “understandable” while a prominent activist leader encouraged it posting online “burn it all down.”⁶

This is a political choice. The same politics that casts Christianity as the villain of history is now the one excusing these attacks — and, in some cases, openly urging them — while the rest of us are asked to keep the tone civil and bipartisan. It is worth asking plainly what that civility has earned the Church, when progressive left now treats a burning church as a grievance it understands and that should be tolerated without retribution.

The faithful can see what this is: anti-Christian hatred, from an ideology that has made their faith the designated oppressor, and from a smaller number of men willing to kill over it⁷ — and they can watch both their shepherds and their statesmen decline to call it out, from fear of controversy. So the burning wounds them twice: once when the roof comes down, and again when the men sworn to protect them explain why nothing can be done.

This is why a twelfth-century king is suddenly on every feed. It is not bloodlust, whatever the critics say — it is passion and pride seeking a home. Baldwin IV rode out, very unwell, from Montgisard at sixteen, because he believed his people were worth defending and was prepared to sacrifice everything to do it. The faithful sharing his image are not all asking for a crusade. They are asking, in the language the internet gives them, for one leader who is visibly proud of them and whom they can be proud of in return — who would put himself between them and the fire, and make a church worth defending again. They are grieving a leadership they have not had for a generation.

So ask the question none of that leadership asks itself: who is inspired by their church leadership?

Who listens to a diocesan statement, or a minister’s press conference, feeling prouder, braver, safer, gladder to be Christian?

The managerial bishop counsels patience and presides over the quiet emptying of his pews; the politician offers thoughts an investigation and perhaps a task force. Both wonder where the young men went. They went because nothing was asked of them, and nothing was offered them to be proud of.

So what would a King Baldwin do today?

He would say out loud that these are his people and he will not stand for it.

He would call out the politicians who excuse it by name, rather than thank them for their partnership.

⁵ Per CBC (January 2024): of roughly 238 arson and vandalism incidents in 2021–23, nine produced charges; the wave yielded two convictions — a youth for the Kehewin Cree Nation fire, and a woman given four years for the Surrey Coptic church fire, which investigators ruled the product of mental illness and unrelated to the residential-school wave.

⁶ Justin Trudeau called the anger “fully understandable given the shameful history” (CBC / Associated Press, July 2021). Harsha Walia, then head of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, posted “Burn it all down” on 30 June 2021 and resigned on 16 July 2021.

⁷ Notably Fr. Jacques Hamel, murdered at his altar in Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray, Normandy, in July 2016 by attackers pledged to the Islamic State, and a worshipper shot dead during Mass at Santa Maria church, Istanbul, in January 2024.

He would treat the impunity as the emergency it is — use church funds for private investigators the state will not, get the arsonists named in indictments, imprisoned, put out of their jobs, and, where they are not citizens, deported.

He would throw the Church's full weight behind the representatives, senators, prosecutors and judges who enforce the law, and against the ones who look away.

He would stand in the burned-out nave and promise something taller and more beautiful in its place. And he would mobilise every angry, aimless young man watching his heritage burn — to build, to campaign, to protest — and make him feel, for the first time, that his faith has a spine and he is not alone.

People do not follow press releases and bipartisanship. They follow someone prepared to sacrifice comfort for the faithful and the survival of the church.

The right shepherd would make them feel seen, and proud, and impossible to despair into silence.

The nostalgia for Baldwin is not a longing for war.

It is a longing for leadership — and it is still unanswered.

About the Prothean Institute

The Prothean Institute is an independent research organisation applying Madisonian structural analysis to civilisational, institutional, and demographic questions. It is conservative on civilisational questions, libertarian on government overreach, and classically liberal on economics, with no party alignment.