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The Narrow Way

Paper 5 of the Civilisational Architecture series.

How a Tradition Regrows an Energetic Core, and Why the
Obvious Way Is the Wrong One

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Western Christianity has not lost its belief so much as its energetic core: the demanding, forceful, self-defending fraction that every living tradition carries and transmits across generations. This paper sets out how such a core dissolves, how it is regrown, and why the obvious route to regrowing it is the dangerous one.

Drawing on the established radicalization literature, it shows that the structures which most successfully crystallise energetic cores in the modern West — the radical mosque, the militant political movement, the apocalyptic environmental cell — run an identical mechanism on different content. The variable separating renewal from catastrophe is not the machine but the cornerstone it is built on: an enemy, or an ideal.

It then demonstrates, against the contemporary Orthodox convert surge, that an energetic core can be built on the idealistic-cornerstone; uses Rotary and Freemasonry to isolate costly demand as the second necessary variable; and specifies the structural features a tradition must install to regrow its core safely — stopping at structure, not at any denomination's manual.

1. The Loss We Already Feel



A particular nostalgia has become unmistakable across the Western right. The Crusader and the Templar; King Baldwin the Leper, ruined by disease and victorious at Montgisard; the iconography of a Christendom that was disciplined, confident, and willing to defend itself.

It circulates as meme and as mood, and it is spreading because it names something the audience for this paper already feels in advance of being told: that the faith which built the West has gone quiet, soft, and strangely unwilling to act on its own behalf.

That instinct is sound. What is being mourned is real — not the loss of belief, which has merely thinned, but the loss of an energetic core: the demanding, forceful, self-defending fraction that every living tradition carries and that the West has let dissolve. And the force the instinct reaches for is not the error. A tradition that will not exert pressure — that will not demand its laws be enforced fairly, will not protest, will not produce the occasional martyr willing to be oppressed under an unjust law and not recant — is not a faith but a relic. The audience for this paper is right to want no part of it.

The error, where there is one, is narrower and easier to miss. It lies not in the force but in what the force is built around. A core whose identity is the enemy must manufacture enemies to survive, and radicalises without limit, because the enemy is inexhaustible. A core whose identity is the thing it defends — the faith, the family, the inheritance — exerts the same force and more, but the force has a floor, because it is governed by what it protects. Both fight. Only one can stop. Baldwin rode out at Montgisard not because the fight was his identity but because the kingdom and the faith behind him were. The force was real, extreme, and bounded by what it served. This paper is about building the core that fights hard and can stop when it achieves its goals.

The rules that turned

Consider the most familiar instruction in the Western moral vocabulary: love your neighbour. It was load-bearing for the better part of two millennia. It is worth being precise about why: the reason it worked is the reason it now fails. The instruction was never undifferentiated. It was ordered — concentric, the near before the far, the household before the stranger, what the tradition called the *ordo amoris*, the order of love. “Neighbour” meant, in the first instance, the member of one’s own community and reciprocity network. The parable of the Good Samaritan stretched the category outward, but the stretch was a deliberate widening made safe by a cohesive Christendom holding firm around it. The rule presupposed a substrate: a high-trust in-group dense enough that loving the neighbour reinforced the bonds that made the group cohere.

Strip away the ordering and detach the rule from its substrate, and the same words invert their effect. “Love your neighbour,” flattened into love everyone identically and the distant stranger most of all, becomes the mechanism of a civilisation’s self-erasure — the suicidal empathy, a term coined by Gad Saad¹ “Love your neighbour,” flattened into love everyone identically — and the distant stranger most of all — becomes the mechanism of a civilisation’s self-erasure. Gad Saad¹ calls it suicidal empathy: an instinct firing on targets it was never calibrated for, the in-group dissolving the very boundary that let it cohere. And it is harvested by the Empathy Predators, who have learned to manufacture and feed it². The rule did not change. Its condition did. A code written for a cohesive people, applied by a people who have abolished their own cohesion, runs in reverse. This is the pattern the paper and “Thus Spake Ilos”³ trace repeatedly: the rules that built the West were calibrated to conditions, and when the conditions were demolished the rules did not merely stop working — several of them turned, and now operate against the thing they were built to preserve.

The dissolved core

Every living tradition has the same two-tier structure: a wide, diffuse base of ordinary adherents, and a small, energetic, demanding core that carries the practice at full intensity, bears the costly signals, and transmits the code forward. The base supplies legitimacy and numbers; the core supplies vigour. A tradition can survive a soft base. What it cannot survive is the loss of its core, because the core is the organ of transmission — and this is exactly what has happened to Western Christianity within living memory. The energetic core out of them — the orders, the missionaries, the movements that demanded everything and grew because they did — has largely dissolved. The result is a tradition that is broad and inert: present everywhere, load-bearing nowhere.

The dissolution was not an accident of secularism acting from outside. It was the predictable consequence of accommodation from within — the softening of demands to meet the surrounding culture, which is precisely the move that dissolves the costly-signal membrane a core requires to form. The traditions that kept their demands kept their cores: Orthodox Jewry, the Latter-day Saints, the Amish, and the demanding

¹ Gad Saad, *The Parasitic Mind: How Infectious Ideas Are Killing Common Sense* (Regnery, 2020); the coinage of ‘suicidal empathy’ is his.

² Prothean Institute, ‘The Empathy Predators’ (Comment, forthcoming): a reframing of Saad’s parasite model in which the elite is the predator breeding empathy-as-parasite in the public, not an infected host.

³ Prothean Institute, ‘Thus Spake Ilos’, *Civilisational Architecture* series, Paper 2.

strands of Islam are the living proof, each holding an energetic, reproducing core precisely where it refused to lower the price of membership. The traditions that lowered them lost the men who would have carried them. Western Christianity chose the wide, easy gate of accommodation, and the inertia it now laments is the inevitable consequence.

The demand for a resurgent core is real, the cohort that would fill it is real, and the energy is recoverable. But the only currently functioning models of core-crystallisation in the contemporary West are built on a cornerstone Christianity cannot use: the radical mosque, the militant political movement, the apocalyptic environmental activist cell, each of which converts a diffuse base into a disciplined, energetic core by locating meaning in an enemy. They work. That is the uncomfortable fact this paper recognises rather than evades: they demonstrate, in the present environment, that core-crystallisation is still achievable — and each does it on the enemy cornerstone that produces a core that cannot stop.

The argument of this paper is that there is another cornerstone; that a core built upon it is as energetic and far more durable; and that it is not hypothetical, but already crystallising, in this century, inside Christianity itself. Naming the two cornerstones, showing why they produce opposite outcomes from identical machinery, and specifying what a tradition must install to grow its core on the right one, is the task that follows.

The Two Instruments

This paper does not re-argue the framework it stands on. It uses two results from earlier in the series as established instruments, and the reader is assumed to have read both papers in full; what follows states only what each supplies here.

From *Thus Spake Ilos* (Paper 2): religious traditions face Darwinian selection on the social fitness their behavioural codes produce, not on the truth of their metaphysical claims — truth and fitness are orthogonal. The traditions that survive are those whose codes generate trust, family formation, and intergenerational transmission; the traditions that decline are those that soften their demands to accommodate the surrounding culture, because the unconditional, non-negotiable code is precisely what resists the case-by-case renegotiation that self-interested actors always attempt. That paper is a static theory: it specifies the properties of a tradition that survives. This one is its dynamic extension — how an energetic core dissolves when those properties decay, and how it is regrown. The instrument borrowed is the selection logic: a core forms and holds only behind a membrane of genuine, costly, non-negotiable demand, and dissolves when that demand is lowered.

From *The Cage We Built* (Paper 4): the modern developed environment supplies the outcomes of instinct expression — security, status, provision, belonging — while closing the pathways through which those outcomes were historically earned, and the organism deprived of the pathway loses the architecture of its own flourishing. The characteristic product is a cohort of dejected, withdrawn, meaning-starved young people in whom the evolved drives are intact but have nowhere to go. The instrument this paper borrows is twofold. First, that meaning-starved cohort is the recruitment pool every crystallising core draws from — the raw human material out of which a core forms. Second, what converts a member of that cohort into a flourishing adult, rather than leaving him available to whoever first offers him meaning, is

responsibility for a dependent: a sustained, non-optional obligation to something outside himself. Hold the two together and the paper's question sharpens — not whether a core will form, since the material is everywhere and cores are forming already, but which of the two cornerstones it forms upon.

2. The Machine

The previous section asserted that an energetic core crystallises out of a diffuse base. This section specifies how. The mechanism is the whole of the paper's analytical claim, and once it is stated plainly a striking fact follows: the mechanism is indifferent to the content of the tradition it runs inside. The same architecture that produces a missionary order produces a terrorist cell. What differs is not the machine but the cornerstone it is built on — and that difference, not the machine, is what separates renewal from catastrophe.

Begin with the raw material. The modern environment's characteristic product is a cohort in whom the evolved drives — for belonging, for status earned through contribution, for a project larger than the self, for responsibility that is demanded rather than chosen — are fully intact, but for whom the environment has closed every pathway to expressing them. The drives do not disappear when the pathway closes. They accumulate as a kind of pressure, felt as purposelessness, loneliness, a sense that nothing is asked and therefore nothing done matters. This cohort is large and growing. It is not the deviant fringe. It is the modal young person of a developed society. This significance-starved cohort is the pool a core recruits from in bulk, but it is not the whole of a core. A second and smaller type seeds and leads it: the person already flourishing — already possessed of belonging, responsibility, and meaning — who exerts himself not to escape a void but to defend something he loves. Baldwin was neither lonely nor purposeless. Nor is the founder who builds an institution unpaid and late into the night because an inheritance he values is under threat. The starved supply a core its numbers; the already-committed, acting from the responsibility-cornerstone rather than from need, supply its founders and its spine. A full account of recruitment requires both.

A core forms when a structure offers this cohort what the surrounding environment has withdrawn. The structure is recognisable across every instance: a membrane of genuine, costly demand that screens entrants and signals commitment; in-person belonging at the scale the human animal is built for; a hierarchy that confers earned status; obligation that is non-optional; and a project that frames the member's exertion as service to something that matters. Where these are present, the accumulated pressure finds a pathway. The member exerts himself, discharges the drive, and experiences the relief and meaning the open environment never gave him — and that experience is intense, bonding, and self-propagating. He brings others. The structure grows. The energetic fraction of the surrounding base migrates into it. This is crystallisation: the conversion of a diffuse, low-commitment base into a dense, high-commitment core, by the supplying of pathways the wider world has closed.

The mechanism described is content-free. Nothing in it specifies what the project is, what the worldview holds, or who, if anyone, is the enemy. The membrane can be a conversion process, a course of indoctrination, or an initiation rite; the hierarchy can be clerical, paramilitary, or activist; the project can be the salvation of souls, the liberation of the oppressed, or the rescue of the planet. The machine runs identically

on all of them, which is why core-crystallisation appears across traditions that share no premise, no god, and no goal. It is not a religious phenomenon, a political one, or a pathological one. It is a human one — the predictable response of the deprived organism to a structure that ends the deprivation.

This is the uncomfortable fact the paper builds on rather than around. The structures currently running this machine most visibly and most successfully in the developed West are not the churches. They are the radical mosque, the militant political movement, and the apocalyptic environmental activist cell. They work — they take the dejected and the purposeless and convert them into disciplined, committed, energetic adherents, and they grow by doing so. Any account of religious renewal that cannot look at them clearly, and admit that they have solved the problem the churches have not, is not serious. They have the core. The question is what they built it on.

The machine runs on a cornerstone — the thing in which the member's meaning and identity are ultimately located, the answer to what this is all for. Two cornerstones are available, and they produce cores that are equally energetic and entirely different in their trajectory.

The first locates meaning in the enemy. The core coheres against a threat: the infidel, the fascist, the system destroying the world. Cohesion is a function of opposition, and the structure's energy is the energy of the fight. This cornerstone is the easier of the two to build on — an enemy is a more immediate and more galvanising organising principle than an ideal. It is the one all the visible cases are built on. Its defect is structural. A core whose identity is the enemy must have an enemy to exist. When none is at hand, it must manufacture one, and it radicalises without limit — the supply of enemies is inexhaustible, and the alternative to finding one is dissolution. It cannot stop, because stopping is death.

The second locates meaning in an ideal to defend — the faith, the family, the inheritance, the people. Cohesion is a function of shared love, and the structure's force, when it comes, is exerted in defence of that ideal rather than constituted by opposition to an enemy. This cornerstone is harder to build on and produces a core every bit as forceful, but its force has a floor: it is governed by what it protects, and when the thing protected is secure, the force rests. It can stop, because its existence does not depend on the fight. This capacity to rest is also the cornerstone's characteristic danger. A core that may stand down will, if the secure peace lasts long enough, forget how to stand up — the energetic capacity atrophies for want of anything to defend, so that when the threat returns the muscle to meet it has wasted. This is not hypothetical: it is the precise condition of Western Christianity, which rested through generations of security until it had forgotten how to be energetic, and met the return of real threats slack and unpractised.

Both are real cores. Both are energetic. Both will exert force, suffer for the cause, and grow. The entire difference — between a tradition's renewal and a tradition's capture by its own worst instincts — lies in which cornerstone bears the load. The sections that follow demonstrate the machine first, across cases whose only common feature is the threat-cornerstone and whose contents could not be more different, and then turn to the case that proves the second cornerstone is not hypothetical.

3. The Machine Running: Cases on One Cornerstone

3.1 The Radical Mosque

The clearest instance is also the most studied. That is fortunate: it means the mechanism can be established here on independent evidence before being traced through cases where the research is thinner. The object of analysis is the radical mosque — the specific site at which a small, energetic, violent core forms out of the broad base of ordinary believers. That base-and-core structure is the first confirmation of the two-tier model: the core does not represent the base, it crystallises from it, drawing off the base's most significance-starved fraction.

The most empirically grounded account of how that crystallisation works is Arie Kruglanski's "3N" model, developed across more than a decade of work with security agencies and former combatants, and it is worth stating in full because it is the same machine this paper has described and arrived at independently. The model holds that radicalization requires three ingredients: a *Need*, a *Network*, and a *Narrative*. The Need is the quest for personal significance — the drive toward mattering that, when activated by a loss of significance, becomes a major motivational force pushing individuals toward violent extremism.⁴ The Network is the group that socialises the individual and rewards his commitment. The Narrative is the ideology that identifies a route to significance and licenses what is done in its name.

Map these onto the apparatus of Section 2 and they are identical. The Need is the Cage cohort — the significance-starved young man or woman whose drive to matter has no pathway. The Network is the structure: the in-person community, the hierarchy, the costly membrane of commitment, the belonging. The Narrative is the cornerstone — the answer to what the significance is for.

The Need does not have to be manufactured, and this is the radical structure's decisive advantage. The modern developed environment is itself a significance-destroying machine. It supplies the outcomes of mattering — provision, security, a nominal place — while closing every pathway by which mattering was historically earned, and it does this at scale, to an entire generation. The result is a continuous mass surplus of young men in whom the drive to matter is intact and unmet. The radical structure does not create this hunger; it harvests it. Its recruiting power lies not in the persuasiveness of its creed but in a brute structural fact: it is the only thing in the young man's environment offering a pathway for a need the surrounding society generates in volume and answers nowhere. The mosque does not have to win an argument. It has only to be present where everything else is absent.

The model's most important finding concerns the relationship between the three ingredients. The need for significance is universal — a need that exists in all individuals regardless of whether they are extremist, and one that joining a group does not by itself direct toward violence.⁵ Significance-hunger alone radicalizes no one. It is converted into violent extremism only when a Network socialises it under a Narrative that locates significance in the defeat of an enemy. In the model's own structure, the relationship between the need for significance and violent extremism

⁴Kruglanski, Gelfand, Bélanger, Sheveland, Hetiarachchi & Gunaratna, 'The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism', *Political Psychology* 35 (2014), 69–93.

⁵Milla et al., 'Mechanisms of the 3N Model on Radicalization' (2022): need for significance is universal and does not by itself predict violent extremism.

is mediated by group identity and violent ideology.⁶ This is the fork of Section 2, confirmed from inside the radicalization literature: the same need, the same machine, the outcome determined by the cornerstone the narrative installs. The need is not the problem. The cornerstone is.

The radical mosque runs the complete machine on the threat-cornerstone. The Need is supplied by the environment in surplus. The Network is the demanding, in-person community the dislocated young man finds nowhere else, behind a costly membrane — the visible piety, the separation from the wider society, the willingness to be marked as different — that screens for commitment and signals it. And the Narrative locates the structure's entire meaning in the unbelieving order that must be opposed: cohesion against a threat, significance through the fight, the enemy as the foundation rather than the obstacle. For some men the research is explicit that this becomes the only available means through which hyper-masculine traits can be expressed⁷ — instinct without a pathway, finding the one pathway on offer. This is the cornerstone that cannot stop, and the trajectory follows: because the enemy is the foundation, the enemy must be sustained; because significance is won through opposition, opposition must escalate to keep yielding it; and the structure radicalizes without a floor.

That is the first case: a significance-starved intake, a demanding network, a costly membrane, an enemy-cornerstone narrative, and a disciplined violent core crystallising out of a base. The next case holds every one of those components fixed and changes only the content — the god, the enemy, the project — to show that the machine, not the creed, produces the result.

3.2 The Militant Left

If the machine were a feature of religion, it would not run outside religion. It does. The same 3N model that explains the radical mosque was built from the start to span the ideological field: its authors developed and tested it against far-right and far-left movements and radical Islam alike,⁸ treating the divergent creeds as different contents poured into one mechanism. The content-independence this paper claims is therefore not a Prothean assertion laid over the radicalization literature; it is the structure of that literature's own leading model. The Need and the Network are held constant. Only the Narrative — the cornerstone — changes.

The clearest contemporary instance on the left is the militant anti-fascist movement. A structural caveat is required for accuracy: it is not a single organisation. Research finds it a decentralised movement with low coordination that does not meet the criteria for an organisation⁹ — an array of autonomous local cells and affinity groups rather than a hierarchy with a head. This matters, and it strengthens rather than weakens the claim: the machine does not require a central command to run. It runs in the cell.

⁶Milla et al. (2022): the relationship between need for significance and violent extremism is serially mediated by group identity and violent ideology.

⁷Lloyd & Dean (2015), as cited in the radicalization literature: for some individuals violent extremism is the only means through which masculine traits can be expressed.

⁸'Radicalization Leading to Violence: A Test of the 3N Model' (2019): the model is developed and tested across far-right, far-left, and radical-Islamic movements.

⁹Gina Scott Ligon / NCITE, University of Nebraska Omaha, reported in American Psychological Association, 'Deradicalizing domestic extremists' (July 2021): Antifa is a decentralised movement that does not meet the criteria for an organisation.

Trace the components. The Need is identical to the mosque case — the significance-starved young person, the drive to matter with no sanctioned pathway; the literature names the same vulnerability, the social alienation that prompts individuals to seek solace in radical groups promising camaraderie and purpose.¹⁰ The Network is the affinity group and the black bloc — in-person, bonded, demanding. The costly membrane takes a different outward form but performs the identical function: the mask, the uniform of anonymity, the shared legal jeopardy of direct action — and the militant edge of either reaches for the same currency of risk, often regardless of how devout its members actually are. To join the bloc is to accept real risk, and that acceptance is the costly signal that screens for commitment and welds the cell. The one component that takes a different shape is the hierarchy: where the mosque confers status through a formal religious structure, the leaderless cell confers it informally, through demonstrated willingness to act. The status is no less real for being informal.

The Narrative is where the case becomes instructive, because here the threat-cornerstone appears in its most revealing form. The movement's stated identity is anti-fascism — it is defined, in its name, by what it opposes. But genuine fascists are far too rare and politically powerless to be the real object of a mass militant movement, and the movement's demonstrated targets confirm it: the overwhelming weight of its action has fallen not on fascists but on mainstream conservatives, civic order, and the institutions and symbols of the existing settlement. The operative cornerstone is not opposition to fascism. It is opposition to the conservative order, with "fascist" serving as the elastic label that licenses the attack and supplies, on demand, an enemy the real world does not provide in sufficient quantity. This is the threat-cornerstone stripped to its mechanism: a cohesion that needs an enemy so completely that it manufactures one where none genuinely exists. Where the radical mosque at least opposes an order that genuinely exists and genuinely is not its own, the militant left must first invent the fascist it requires. The enemy is not found. It is conjured, because the structure cannot cohere without one.

The literature confirms the underlying mechanism: under significance-quest theory, the activation of significance-loss generates collectivistic goals to restore it, motivating defence on behalf of the group, with the turn to violence depending on the group's ideology¹¹ — the cornerstone, again, as the determining variable. Two cases now, sharing nothing except radicalisation itself — a jihadi cell and an anti-fascist bloc — running the identical machine. The machine is confirmed content-free not by assertion but by repetition. The third case changes the content one final time, and adds the evidence that severs this account decisively from the conventional one.

3.3 The Apocalyptic Climate Cell

The third case changes the content to its most respectable form and, in doing so, supplies the evidence that severs this analysis from the conventional one. The militant climate movement — Extinction Rebellion and its more confrontational offshoots, Just Stop Oil, Insulate Britain — runs the identical machine. It is, like the militant left,

¹⁰'Radicalization Leading to Violence: A Test of the 3N Model' (2019): social alienation as a vulnerability prompting individuals to seek camaraderie and purpose in radical groups.

¹¹'From Oppression to Violence', PMC (significance-quest theory): significance-loss generates collectivistic goals, with the turn to violence depending on group ideology.

non-hierarchical and without formal leadership, sharing common resources across autonomous actors;¹² again the machine runs in the cell, not a central command.

The Network and the costly membrane appear here in their most explicit form anywhere in the cases. Just Stop Oil requires recruits to sign a “contract” committing them in advance to arrest — a formal, written pledge to accept legal jeopardy for the cause. The movement has produced more than 1,700 arrests since its founding, with members serving prison sentences.¹³ Analysts note the structure’s cult-like requests that members not withdraw from action, set against an impending horror said to be about to befall the world¹⁴ — the membrane and the narrative working in tandem, the signed commitment locking the member in, the apocalypse supplying the reason.

The Narrative is the threat-cornerstone in its third distinct form. The mosque’s enemy is real — a secular order genuinely exists and genuinely is not Islamic. The militant left’s enemy is conjured, relabelled into existence because real fascists are too rare to sustain a movement. The climate cell’s enemy is deferred: a catastrophe perpetually imminent and never arriving, which guarantees its inexhaustibility by a third route. The apocalypse cannot be averted (that would end the movement) and cannot arrive (that would end the world), so it must remain eternally about-to-happen — the enemy as a horizon that recedes as it is approached. Each cornerstone secures the same structural necessity by a different mechanism: the enemy that is found, the enemy that is conjured, the enemy that is deferred. None can resolve, because resolution is dissolution. All cannot stop.

Now the discriminator, which is the reason this case is included. The conventional account of radicalization holds that it tracks marginalisation — that the radicalised are the excluded, the deprived, the dispossessed, seeking compensation for a real injury. The militant climate movement refutes this directly, because its adherents are conspicuously the opposite. The observed profile is educated, professional, and comfortable — the movement is widely characterised as drawn from the upper-middle class, and as struggling to attract a more diverse range of activists.¹⁵ Its leading figures are academics and the credentialed: a co-founder who entered a doctoral programme at fifty to study civil disobedience; organisers who are university lecturers; recruits drawn heavily from elite universities. These are not the marginalised. They are the maximally provided-for, and the alienation theory cannot explain why they, of all people, reach for the machine.

The Cage account explains them directly, and this is where the paper’s framework diverges from the literature it has otherwise leaned on. Significance-hunger, the radicalization research holds, is triggered by significance loss — and that literature tends to read loss as deprivation: humiliation, exclusion, injury. But *The Cage We Built* identified a second and larger source, invisible to the deprivation reading: significance is destroyed not only by taking provision away but by supplying it without the pathway through which it is earned. The comfortable, credentialed young person

¹²‘Just Stop Oil: Everything you need to know’, Big Issue, August 2023: the group describes itself as non-hierarchical and without formal leadership.

¹³‘Just Stop Oil: the climate change activists...’, Time Out (2022): more than 1,700 arrests since founding, with members imprisoned.

¹⁴Policy Exchange, ‘The “Just Stop Oil” protests’ (November 2022): the arrest ‘contract’ and cult-like requests against an impending horror.

¹⁵‘Has Extinction Rebellion really quit?’, Big Issue, January 2023: the movement characterised as upper-middle class and struggling to attract a more diverse range of activists.

who has never been genuinely needed, never carried a non-optional burden, never had anything demanded of him that he could fail at, suffers significance-loss as acute as the excluded — and has fewer legitimate pathways to resolve it, because his comfort removes the ordinary struggles through which significance is normally won. He is not compensating for injury. He is reaching for a stake. The movement gives him one: a planet to save, an arrest to suffer, a horror to stand against.

The leader who said it most plainly was describing himself at fifty, calling the prospect of mass arrest exhilarating — that it was *“exciting to be naughty,”*¹⁶ like being a child again. That is not the language of the oppressed seeking justice. It is the language of the provided-for and immature adolescent mind from *The Threshold* seeking aliveness — instinct without a pathway, finding the one pathway on offer, in the actor’s own words. The radicalised climate activist is not a poor man driven to extremity. He is a comfortable man starved of significance by his own comfort, and the machine is the structure that ends the starvation. Three cases, three contents, one machine — and in the third, the evidence that the intake is not deprivation but the closing of the pathway, exactly as the framework predicts and the rival account cannot accommodate.

3.4 Black Lives Matter and the Second Failure Mode

The first three cases share a trajectory: the threat-cornerstone produces a core that cannot stop, escalating because its enemy is structurally necessary. Black Lives Matter ran the same machine but exposed a second and distinct failure mode — not radicalization, but capture — and it is included because the prescription must guard against both.

The machine is recognisable. The Need is the significance-starved cohort. The Network, like the militant left and the climate cells, is a decentralised array of autonomous chapters and a grassroots tier rather than a single command. The cornerstone is the threat in its most inexhaustible form yet: systemic racism — an enemy defined as structural, pervasive, and present even where invisible, which guarantees by construction that it can never be declared defeated. The mosque’s enemy is found, the militant left’s is conjured, the climate cell’s is deferred; systemic racism is omnipresent-by-definition, the purest guarantee of an enemy that never resolves.

But BLM differed in one structural respect that produced the new failure mode. The other three maintain a costly membrane — piety, the mask and arrest, the signed contract — which screens the committed core from the uncommitted base. BLM’s cornerstone was maximally respectable: opposition to racism is the one position in the contemporary West that costs nothing to profess and penalises dissent severely. So allegiance could be signalled at zero cost — the black square, the corporate statement, the donation — and the result was a base of unprecedented scale with no membrane screening it. This is the two-tier structure at civilisational scale: a small energetic core, and an enormous feel-good base discharging guilt through costless signalling. After the killing of George Floyd, the foundation raised roughly \$90 million

¹⁶Roger Hallam, quoted in *The Mail on Sunday* (February 2022).

in donations in 2020¹⁷ — a sum that exists only because the membrane was absent and the base was therefore boundless.

A vast, uncommitted donation pool with no accountability structure, placed in the hands of a small leadership, is the richest and softest target in the activist ecosystem — and structures like this do not merely permit capture, they select for the actors most willing to perform it. The structural point stands: a movement built on a maximally respectable cornerstone generates a costless mass base, a costless mass base generates boundless guilt-money, and boundless guilt-money with no membrane to screen the base and no accountability to govern the apex is a field the empathy-predator will reliably find and farm. The predator is culpable. The structure is what laid the table.

The record is consistent with the prediction. The foundation secretly purchased a seven-bedroom home for nearly \$5.8 million;¹⁸ funds flowed to consultancy arrangements for associated individuals and their families; further millions went to property. A co-founder stepped down amid the finance controversy; by the year ending June 2022 contributions had collapsed by roughly \$67 million, from \$77 million to \$9.3 million;¹⁹ the grassroots chapters turned on the national foundation, and litigation followed over millions in funds that had seemingly disappeared.²⁰ The structure built to channel the energy of a movement instead channelled its treasure to the people at its apex, and then withered once the harvest was complete.

This is the look-good elite harvesting the feel-good base — the empathy-predator mechanism caught with a paper trail. The threat-cornerstone generated guilt in a costless base; guilt at scale is monetisable; and a structure with no membrane and no accountability converted the guilt into private enrichment. The most telling confirmation is the response of the people in whose name the money was raised: the mother of one of the movement's own emblematic victims publicly called the organisation a fraud,²¹ naming the gap between the base's grief and the apex's gain. The core was not radicalized into violence. It was hollowed by capture.

The two failure modes are now both on the table. The threat-cornerstone, in its first three forms, produces the core that escalates — the enemy as foundation, radicalization without a floor. In its most respectable form, with the membrane removed, it produces the core that is harvested — the feel-good base milked by the look-good apex. A tradition seeking to regrow an energetic core has not solved its problem by avoiding violence alone. It must build a structure that cannot escalate and cannot be captured — a more demanding specification than the nostalgia for vigour imagines, and the reason the cornerstone the next section turns to must do double work.

¹⁷BLM Global Network Foundation, reported by Associated Press / Newsweek: roughly \$90 million raised in 2020.

¹⁸Capital B News / New York Magazine (April 2022): the foundation's purchase of a seven-bedroom home for nearly \$5.8 million.

¹⁹Washington Free Beacon / Fox News (May 2023): contributions fell from \$77 million to \$9.3 million for the year ending June 2022.

²⁰Washington Free Beacon (2024): litigation with the Tides Foundation over funds, including roughly \$9 million unaccounted for.

²¹Breonna Taylor's mother, reported by Associated Press: she described the organisation as a fraud.

4. The Safe Cornerstone: One Instance That Works, Two That Show Why

Every case so far runs on the threat-cornerstone. To prove the paper's central claim — that an energetic core can be built on the responsibility-cornerstone instead — requires at least one instance where it is happening. This section supplies it, and then uses two further instances of the same safe cornerstone to isolate the variable that determines whether such a core forms at all. The three are held together by a single controlled feature: all run on the safe cornerstone, none on an enemy. What differs is the level of demand — and the outcomes track that difference alone.

4.1 Orthodoxy: the core crystallising now

The clearest contemporary instance of an energetic core forming on the responsibility-cornerstone is the convert surge in American Eastern Orthodoxy. The claim must be stated precisely, because the online narrative overstates it and the precise version is the one that does the work. Orthodoxy in America is not demonstrably growing in aggregate: it is a small tradition: its total adherents declined from roughly 817,000 to 676,000 across 2010 to 2020,²² and the most careful recent analysis finds no clear evidence that Orthodoxy is growing or shrinking as a share of the US population.²³ The proof-of-concept does not rest on aggregate growth, and does not need to.

What is happening — attested not by enthusiasts but by the Church's own hierarchy across jurisdictions — is the crystallisation of an energetic core, regardless of what the aggregate base is doing. The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops describes the influx as a flood: catechumens in every parish visited, numbering more than a hundred in some, bringing energy, zeal, and often deep theological literacy,²⁴ straining clergy past capacity. Convert-friendly parishes that once received a dozen newcomers now receive fifty to a hundred and fifty, with catechumenate classes larger than entire mainline congregations.²⁵ The converts skew young and, in the first wave especially, male — the majority of converts since 2013 are under forty²⁶ — and the second wave is led by young families with multiple children. This is precisely the two-tier model: an energetic core crystallising out of, and to some extent independent of, a flat or declining base. The aggregate stasis does not weaken the finding. It sharpens it: it shows core-formation is a distinct process from base-level growth — which is the whole architecture of the argument.

The mechanism is the same machine, on the other cornerstone. The Need is identical to every prior case: the converts are disproportionately the significance-starved — former atheists, men who arrived after hitting rock bottom, disillusioned with what they perceived as the feminisation of Protestant churches, found through online

²²Ryan Burge, *The American Religious Landscape* (Oxford UP, forthcoming), cited in *The Gospel Coalition* (January 2025): US Orthodox adherents declined from 817,000 to 676,000, 2010–2020.

²³Orthodox Studies Institute / Pew & CES analysis (2025): no clear evidence of growth or shrinkage as a share of the US population.

²⁴Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States, 'On Converts to Orthodoxy' (November 2025).

²⁵Religion Unplugged, 'The Flood of Converts Reshaping American Orthodoxy' (November 2025).

²⁶Orthodox Studies Institute, 'Converts to Orthodoxy: Statistics and Trends' (July 2024): the majority of converts since 2013 are under 40.

influencers such as the Wilsons, podcasts and YouTube.²⁷ Same intake pool as the radical mosque. The decisive difference is the cornerstone and the membrane. The converts are drawn by the demand, not despite it: they report being attracted precisely because Orthodoxy pushes them physically and mentally and offers historical continuity and authenticity rather than accommodation. And the costly membrane is severe and unfakeable — the long catechumenate, the rigorous fasting, the hours-long standing liturgy, the whole apparatus that cannot be performed casually or entered overnight. The cornerstone is responsibility — to the tradition, to the family the second wave is forming, to a structure that outranks and demands subordination of the convert. No enemy is required for cohesion. The core is forming, it is energetic, and it is built on an ideal and love rather than an opponent. The safe cornerstone crystallises an energetic core. That is the existence proof, and it is sufficient.

4.2 Rotary and Freemasonry: the same cornerstone, decaying

The two instances that follow share Orthodoxy's safe cornerstone and produce the opposite outcome — and the difference between them isolates the second necessary variable.

Rotary runs on the responsibility-cornerstone in its civic form: service, fellowship, obligation to the community, no enemy anywhere in its structure. By the paper's account it should be healthy. It is not; it is ageing and declining across the developed world. The reason is visible the moment it is set beside Orthodoxy: Rotary's membrane is low-demand. It asks for meeting attendance, dues, and goodwill — real, but not costly, not screening, not transformative, not the kind of demand that crystallises a core. Safe cornerstone, low demand, no core, slow decline. The cornerstone alone was never sufficient. Nor is demand all that Rotary lacks: it confers little hierarchy and less prestige — no rank worth climbing to, no standing the wider world recognises — so a recruit feels neither the pull of a costly threshold nor the pull of an honour above him.

Freemasonry is the more instructive of the two, because it is not a static low-demand case but a trajectory — and the trajectory is this paper's entire thesis run to completion in miniature. Masonry once possessed a genuinely demanding membrane: the graded initiations, the memory work, the real obligations, the live metaphysical content behind the degrees. It had, in its time, an energetic core. Over the twentieth century it shed that demand to become a respectable, sociable, accommodating fraternal body — and its membership has since fallen through a long, steep, multi-decade decline toward irrelevance. This is not a contrast case sitting beside the Western-Christianity story. It is the Western-Christianity story, on a shorter clock, with the ending already visible: a structure that had a demanding core, lowered its demands to become respectable, watched the core dissolve, and is now ageing into nothing. Freemasonry is the prognosis. Part of what it shed was not only demand but stakes. A fraternity built on mutual aid and civic charity had a live mission while war was everywhere and the state did little to relieve it. As the welfare state absorbed that function, the ideal lost its urgency — and a cornerstone with nothing pressing left to defend slackens even before its demands fall.

²⁷The Telegraph (January 2025): young single men converting to Orthodoxy, citing disillusionment with the perceived feminisation of Protestant churches.

4.3 The variable isolated

Hold the three together. The cornerstone is constant — all safe, none built on an enemy. The outcome varies from energetic growth (Orthodoxy) through quiet decline (Rotary) to terminal decay (Freemasonry), and it tracks one variable: the level of costly, non-negotiable demand the structure imposes. Alongside it move the stakes of the ideal the structure defends and the standing it confers — the three rise and fall together. Read in sequence they form a time-series of demand-withdrawal — demand intact and the core alive (Orthodoxy); demand eroding and the core dissolving (Western Christianity, the patient); demand gone and the institution following its dead core into irrelevance (Freemasonry, the prognosis). The safe cornerstone is necessary — it is what prevents the escalation and capture of Section 3 — but it is not sufficient. Without the costly membrane, the safe cornerstone produces a Rotary: pleasant, harmless, and dying. The prescription must therefore install two things, not one: the responsibility-cornerstone, and the demanding membrane that the cornerstone alone will not supply. A tradition that takes only the first lesson — be benevolent, serve, name no enemy — and neglects the second will not regrow its core. It will become a Rotary club with vestments, and follow the Masons down.

5. The Clergy and the Lost Core

The diagnosis to this point has been general: what an energetic core is, how it crystallises, and that it can be built on the safe cornerstone. It has not yet asked the question a Western reader feels most acutely — not how a core is built, but how the one the West already had came to be lost. The answer is not secularism, which is a pressure from outside that demanding traditions withstand and accommodating ones do not. The answer is internal, and it is specific. The clergy, the organ through which a tradition transmits itself, shifted its cornerstone from the faith to the institution that houses it — from faithfulness to respectability. A transmission organ keystoneed to respectability folds at every point where the faithful thing and the respectable thing diverge.

The fold is not, in the main, cowardice, and treating it as cowardice misreads it in exactly the way this series warns against. A clergy keystoneed to respectability is a body of actors whose incentives are aligned to the surrounding consensus they actually serve rather than to the faith they nominally serve. The seminary that forms them, the hierarchy that advances them, the press that can praise or shame them, all reward the man who is not difficult, not embarrassing, not out of step — and penalise the one who is. Under that incentive structure the respectable choice is the rational choice, and the faithful choice, where it diverges, is the costly one.

This is the Madisonian point turned on the Church itself: the behaviour is produced by the structure, not by the deficient character of the men, and it will not be corrected by exhorting clergy to be braver. It is corrected, if at all, by restoring the cornerstone the structure rewards.

5.1 The natural experiment: the churches that closed

The pandemic of 2020 was a test no one designed and the clergy could not refuse, and it revealed the cornerstone under load the way a sudden weight reveals which beams are bearing. Churches across the West closed on government instruction — many faster and more completely than the law required, many remaining shut or

restricted long after secular venues had reopened. There were clergy who would not enter the homes of the dying, would not administer the last rites, would not bury the dead with the rites they were owed. And this was the precise moment the one function no secular institution performs — we are the people who do not abandon you at death — was being directly demanded of them.

The contrast with the tradition's own founding behaviour is exact and damning. The early Church grew through the plagues of the Roman world because Christians stayed in the infected cities and nursed the sick when others fled, and the watching population drew the obvious conclusion about a people who did not fear death as they did.²⁸ That disciplined, costly presence under mortal risk was the signal that built the Church. The clergy of 2020 ran the same mechanism in reverse: they withdrew first, and broadcast that they had withdrawn. Whatever the public-health case for the decision — as a signal to the faithful it was the precise inverse of the one the tradition was founded on. The instruction came from the state, and the state leaned on the law to compel it — but compulsion is precisely the test the tradition exists to meet. The failure was not that the law was passed. It was that the churches fell silent rather than contest it, and that almost no clergy were willing to do the one thing an energetic core does under an unjust law: break it openly and accept the penalty. That willingness is the martyr-signal the early Church ran on, and it was almost wholly absent. Hindsight sharpens the point: much of what was demanded has since been widely conceded as overreach, weakly grounded in the evidence. The clergy who complied did not even purchase, with their silence, a restriction that proved sound.

The outcomes track the cornerstone. The most careful non-partisan research, the Hartford Institute's study of several thousand congregations, found that those which maintained in-person worship and adapted it recovered their participation more strongly than those which suspended it entirely. The congregations that closed hardest fared worst.²⁹ The denominational pattern points the same way: the demanding, low-church bodies most disposed to stay open reported far higher rates of growth than the accommodating mainline that complied — by one survey, a third of Pentecostal and over a quarter of Baptist pastors reported growth against single figures among Methodists.³⁰ A critic will object that the demanding traditions both resisted and retained, so resistance proves nothing the demand did not already explain. But the objection is the thesis, not a rival to it: the demand, the resistance, and the retention are one chain, all of them downstream of a clergy keystone to the faith rather than to the respectable consensus. The pandemic did not create the difference between the two kinds of clergy. It revealed it, under a load heavy enough that the bearing beams and the decorative ones could no longer be told apart by appearance alone.

It revealed it at the level of the individual believer too, because the committed did not merely disapprove of the churches that abandoned them; some of them left. The most committed members of a shuttered parish, denied the sacraments by their own

²⁸ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton University Press, 1996), ch. 4: Christian care for the sick during the second- and third-century plagues as a driver of differential survival and conversion.

²⁹ Scott Thumma, *Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations (EPIC)*, Hartford Institute for Religion Research; 2025 survey of several thousand congregations finding that those which maintained in-person worship recovered participation more strongly than those which suspended it entirely.

³⁰ Lifeway Research, "Churches Are Open but Still Recovering from Pandemic Attendance Losses" (8 November 2022), survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors: 33% of Pentecostal and 28% of Baptist pastors reported growth since January 2020, against 14% Presbyterian/Reformed, 13% Lutheran, and 8% Methodist.

clergy, migrated to the congregations that had stayed open — the costly core flowing from the institutions that folded to the ones that held, exactly the two-tier crystallisation this paper has described, caught in motion. The lesson is not that staying open caused growth in isolation. It is that the clergy who stayed open were the clergy keystone to the faith, and an energetic core forms behind that kind of clergy and dissolves behind the other.

5.2 The failure at the apex: Nigeria

The same failure appears at the apex, and it is more telling there, because if the cornerstone has shifted at the head it has shifted everywhere within the organisation. The case must be stated accurately, because the inaccurate version is both false and weaker. When militants slaughtered more than two hundred Christians at Yelwata in Benue State in June 2025 — most of them displaced people sheltering at a Catholic mission — the Pope named it a “terrible massacre.” He appealed specifically for the rural Christian communities of the Middle Belt, in his own words the relentless victims of the violence.³¹

The failure is worse, and it is twofold. First, the institutional reflex is to frame an overwhelmingly one-directional slaughter in the symmetrical language of comity — the killing of “Christians and Muslims alike.” But the toll is not symmetrical. Nigeria alone accounts for roughly 72% of the Christians killed for their faith worldwide, with a single state recording more than a thousand dead in one year.³² The both-sides framing is the respectability-cornerstone speaking: it purchases diplomatic and interreligious comity at the price of naming plainly what is being done to the faithful. Second, and more fundamental, words are not defence. A statement, however strongly worded and however sincere, deflects no torch and turns back no machete; the killing continued after the condemnation as before it, and the material defence of the faithful — the thing an institution keystone to its people rather than its standing would have moved heaven to provide — was withheld where it was owed.

The base felt the gap, and said so in the one way it could. In March 2026 the bishops of Nigeria travelled to Rome to press their own hierarchy to name the persecution clearly and to counter, as they put it, the false narratives that obscured it, telling the Pope directly that their people were dying.³³ When the shepherds of the slaughtered must cross a continent to make certain their flock is named, the transmission organ has signalled, to everyone watching, where its cornerstone sits. That signal is received. A laity that watches its hierarchy choose comity over the defence of the murdered learns, without being told, that the faith is a thing the institution will trade when the price of holding it rises — and an energetic core cannot crystallise behind an institution the faithful have learned to read that way.

5.3 The king and the communiqué

³¹ Pope Leo XIV, Angelus address, 15 June 2025, on the “terrible massacre” at Yelwata, Benue State, in which more than two hundred were killed, most of them displaced persons sheltered at a Catholic mission; Vatican News, June 2025.

³² Open Doors, World Watch List 2026: of 4,849 Christians killed worldwide for their faith in the reporting year, 3,490 — roughly 72% — were Nigerian, with Benue State alone recording 1,310.

³³ Nigerian bishops, ad limina visit to Pope Leo XIV, March 2026; Archbishop Adewale Martins of Lagos reported that the issue of violence against Christians “came up very strongly with the pope”, the bishops travelling to counter official “false narratives” about the killings. National Catholic Register / CNA, March 2026.

The distance the fold has travelled can be measured with a single figure, and it returns to the king this paper opened with. Picture Baldwin — sixteen years old, leprous, his body failing — declining to ride out, and issuing instead, from his castle, a strongly worded statement deploring the violence against his settlers and pilgrims while the enemy put them to the sword. The image is grotesque precisely because we know what he actually did: dying, he got onto a horse. It is also, exactly, the posture of the institution that now carries his faith — it names the slaughter of its people, deplores it in the strongest terms, and does nothing that defends a single one of the slaughtered. Baldwin did not have the option of the communiqué, and would not have reached for it if he had. The distance between the king and the communiqué is the distance between a church with an energetic core and a church without one. The chapters before this one explained how that core is built. This one has named what dismantled it: not the enemy at the gate, but the keeper of the gate deciding that his standing among the besiegers mattered more than the people behind the wall.

It is worth being concrete about what the ride would have meant, because the gap between the communiqué and the ride is not the gap between a statement and a war — between issuing a condemnation and raising a crusade. It is the wide territory in between, all of it declined.

An apex keystone to the faithful rather than to its own standing had options well short of an army of its own and well beyond a press release. The Pope could have gone to Benue in person — said the Mass over the graves at Yelwata, stood in the camp of the displaced who had sheltered at the mission when it was attacked — putting the weight and the safety of the office where the killing was. It could have named the slaughter plainly, Christians killed for being Christians, and refused the both-sides framing the survivors experienced as a second injury. And it could have spent the full weight and treasury of the office, in concert with the Nigerian government, to put real protection on the ground where words had put none. It could have pressed for army garrisons in the Middle Belt villages that have none, and helped to fund them. It could have backed — with money, legitimacy, and organisation — the state-sanctioned local self-defence forces that are already how these communities survive where the army does not reach: the walls, the watch, the early warning, the hardened refuge at every exposed mission. The global Church could send its people as well: international volunteers, some with real military experience, going to help those forces coordinate, train, hold discipline, and, where needed, lead — the wider body of the faith travelling toward the danger its members are under rather than away from it. That is the costliest signal of all, and the oldest; it is what the early Church did when it stayed in the plague cities, and it is the exact opposite of a communiqué. In a region where the state's writ is thin, the Church's distinctive contribution is the one a weak government cannot supply. Not an army under its own flag, but the men, the legitimacy, and the discipline that keep such forces defensive, accountable, and tied to lawful command — the difference between a protected community and a sectarian war. Those two conditions — that the force stay oriented to defence rather than conquest, and that it operate inside the framework agreed with the legitimate local authority — are not incidental restraints on this posture; they are precisely what make it the responsibility-cornerstone and not the threat one. This is real crusader energy — committed, forceful, willing to go and to risk — and it remains safe only so long as those two conditions hold; the day it reaches for conquest or slips lawful command it has made the fight its purpose and

become the very thing this paper exists to firewall against, now wearing a cross. None of this is a conquest; all of it is costly, and that is the point. Each is the institution spending its standing, its comfort, and its safety on its people — which is precisely what the communiqué is built to avoid.

That is the real measure of the figure. Baldwin's ride was not remarkable because it was violent; it was remarkable because it was costly — a dying man spent the last of his body on the people behind his wall. The modern apex was asked for nothing so extreme, only for some fraction of the same disposition: presence where it was dangerous, plain speech where it was impolitic, the expenditure of standing where standing was the only currency that would help. It produced a statement instead, because a statement spends nothing — and a transmission organ that will spend nothing on its people, when spending is what the moment demands, has told the faithful exactly where its cornerstone sits.

5.4 The Constructive Inversion: A Service Tier the Clergy Can Sanction

The diagnosis above has a constructive inverse. If the clergy lost the core by shifting its cornerstone from the faith to the institution that houses it, then one route back is for the clergy to take up again a function it once owned and has let fall away: the sanctification of service. Every tradition that carried an energetic core also carried an order through which the demanding, forceful, self-defending young could spend that energy in the tradition's name. The crusader and the Templar of this paper's opening were not romantic exceptions; they were the visible peak of an ordinary arrangement, in which the Church gave the sacrificial drive of young men a form, a discipline, and a status.

That arrangement has no modern equivalent, and the drive it absorbed has nowhere to go. The young man built to defend something is told there is nothing to defend and no honourable way to defend it. The battlefield, meanwhile, has moved: the contest that decides whether the tradition survives is now fought inside institutions — schools, bureaucracies, the organs of culture. It is being lost by default, because the cohort most disposed to fight it has been taught to build private lives instead. A tradition that wants its core back must give that cohort a front to serve on.

The form is a recognised tier of service: a defined period — two to four years, or a sustained part-time commitment — given to the institutions on which the society depends, undertaken as a vocation the Church names, blesses, and honours. It fits the apparatus this paper has already built. The service is a costly membrane in the sense of 6.3: real, non-fakeable, screening cost, paid forward rather than merely professed. And it is a rung on the ladder of 6.4 — a station of earned status below the summit, never the summit itself. The clergy's distinctive contribution is the one secular institutions cannot supply: it can make the vocation honoured, and honour is what recruits, where salary and exhortation do not.

Everything turns on the cornerstone, and here the danger is acute enough to state plainly. Service entered to defend the thing loved — the faith, the family, the inheritance, the people who will outlive the one who serves — is the responsibility-cornerstone, and it is safe. Service entered to fight the enemy who has taken the institutions is the threat-cornerstone, and it is the failure mode this entire paper exists to prevent. The two look identical at the outset and diverge into renewal or catastrophe. The clergy's task is not to raise the energy — the environment supplies

that in surplus — but to fix the cornerstone, again and again, so that the one who serves is building and not merely fighting. A clergy that blesses the front but neglects the cornerstone will have manufactured precisely the radicalised core the safe cornerstone was meant to foreclose.

Two guards follow. The first is against reverse-capture: an institution holds the one sent into it for years, and institutions assimilate. A tier that returns its servants to the faith spiritually thinned, or quietly converted to the cornerstone of the place they entered, has fed its core to the thing it meant to contest. The tier must be built with the formation, fellowship, and return that hold the cornerstone through the tour. The second is against the appearance, and the reality, of a political operation. The moment the service is understood as the Church placing its partisans to capture the state, it forfeits the positive content that makes the tradition safe and becomes one more faction wearing a cross. The service is to the society and to the things the tradition has always loved; it is not to a party. That distinction is not presentational. It is the whole of the difference between a tradition defending a civilisation and a sect colonising a bureaucracy.

This is the clergy-facing aspect of a proposal developed more fully elsewhere; its secular form, and the Madisonian objections it must still answer — chiefly that a short tour is weak against a capture won by permanent careers — are treated in the companion material. What belongs here is only the part the clergy alone can do: name the service a vocation, set its cornerstone, and confer on it the honour that turns a duty into a calling.

6. The Prescription: Building a Core Without Killing the Base

The diagnosis is complete. A tradition regrows an energetic core by running the same machine every successful structure runs — significance-starved intake, demanding network, costly membrane — on the responsibility-cornerstone rather than the threat-cornerstone, behind a membrane costly enough to crystallise a core rather than dissolve into a Rotary. The prescription specifies the structural features that install this. It does not tell any particular tradition how to install them within its own polity; the features are general, the implementations are each tradition's own. And it stops at structure. It is not a manual.

6.1 The framing feature: graduated tiers, permeable and aspirational

The central tension of the whole analysis is that high demand crystallises a core and sheds a base, while low demand dissolves the core and the base erodes after it, following the core down on a lag. There is no stable low-demand equilibrium — only a slower decline of both. Lowering the demand does not preserve the base at the cost of the core. It merely changes the order and the speed of the loss, and makes the funeral quieter and later. Imposed on the entire body, the costly membrane empties the pews: a modern accommodating church that abruptly demanded martyr-intensity of every member would not regrow — it would vanish within a year. Stated flatly, this looks like a contradiction, and the perceived contradiction is the main reason renewal is thought impossible.

It is not a contradiction, because demand was never meant to be uniform. Every durable tradition in history resolved it the same way: not one level of commitment

imposed on all, but a ladder of graduated tiers — a costly, high-demand, high-honour core at the top, a wide base permitted to be quieter, prouder, and more passionate without standing on the front line, and intermediate rungs between. The monastic orders sat above the laity. The tertiaries and oblates were the laypeople affiliated at lower intensity, the institutional bridge between the two. The demanding screened order — the Jesuits the clearest case — operated inside the broad body of ordinary believers. The tradition never asked the baker to live like the monk. It asked him to be a faithful baker, placed the monk visibly above him, and kept the path between them open.

This ladder does three things at once, and they are precisely the three the prescription needs.

1. It lets the core impose a membrane costly enough to crystallise without that cost touching the base;
2. It retains the base, who remain at their own sustainable level; and most importantly
3. It makes the base a recruiting ground, because the energetic fraction of the base, seeing the core, is pulled upward.

This is the conversion engine, and it runs on a specific and observable force: the committed core is visibly more disciplined, more purposeful, more attractive, and more successful than the ambient culture, and that visible superiority is what draws the next climber. The base is not held by lowered demand. It is held in place and slowly drawn upward by the prestige of the rung above it.

Two features of the ladder are load-bearing and easily lost. First, the membrane between tiers must be permeable and aspirational — the base must always see the ascent as open to them and earned by anyone willing to pay, never as a closed club gated by clique or birth. The moment the core becomes a sealed elite, the recruitment gradient dies and the structure splits into two bodies that resent each other. This is a second thing Freemasonry got wrong — its degrees hardened into a closed internal hierarchy rather than an open ladder pulling the wider world up — and it is the specific failure mode this architecture must guard against. Second, the honour must be real and visible. The higher rungs must carry genuine privilege, recognition, and status, or there is nothing to climb toward. A ladder with no prestige at the top is not a ladder; it is a flat membership with extra chores.

Everything that follows is installed within this tiered structure, applied at full intensity in the core and at graduated intensity down the rungs.

6.2 Job one: install the responsibility-cornerstone

The cornerstone is the variable that separates renewal from catastrophe, and it must be installed deliberately, because the threat-cornerstone is the default the significance-quest reaches for unaided. The idealistic-cornerstone locates the structure's meaning in what it loves and is responsible for — the faith, the family, the inheritance, the people — rather than in the enemy it opposes.

Here the paper must confront its own hardest objection rather than smooth it over. In the present moment, the two cornerstones look nearly indistinguishable, because

the things the responsibility-cornerstone loves are under real and active threat. A man defending his faith from genuine attack and a man whose identity is the fight are, at the barricade, doing the same thing. The distinction does not disappear under this objection, but it does become invisible in the presence of the enemy — and it is recovered only by asking what remains when the enemy is gone. The responsibility-cornerstone man, the threat removed, goes home and raises his children; the love was primary and the fight instrumental. The threat-cornerstone man, the threat removed, is annihilated, and so must find or manufacture a new enemy; the fight was primary and the love was always pretext. They are indistinguishable at the wall and opposite the day the wall comes down. The test of a cornerstone is therefore not whether it fights — both fight — but what it does when it wins. In practice no real movement is pure: any energetic core will hold both kinds of person — the one defending what he loves and the one who has found in the fight a reason to exist — and no screening removes the second entirely. The question is therefore not purity but ballast. A structure survives the threat-cornerstone minority it inevitably carries so long as its leadership and a substantial part of its mainstream remain anchored in the safe one, for then the enemy-seekers are governed by a body that can still stand down rather than governing it. Capture is the moment that balance tips — when the fight's partisans hold the apex or the mainstream, and the structure loses the power to stop.

The Christian tradition has positive content that predates the present threat and will outlast it: a God, a neighbour, a two-thousand-year inheritance of saints, scholarship, art, law, and achievement that exists whether or not an enemy stands at the gate. It can say what it is for without reference to what it is against — which is the precise tell, from the militant-left case, that separates a love from an opposition.

Installing that cornerstone, then, is partly a matter of connection to the deep past. A people severed from their own lineage have only the present fight to belong to; a people rooted in the long achievement of their tradition belong to something that the enemy's absence only makes more valuable. This is not morale-building. It is the mechanism that supplies the cornerstone its positive content and the significance-starved convert his rootedness — the reason the Orthodox inquirers cite the Church the apostles founded rather than a denomination begun last Tuesday. Depth in time is both the cornerstone's safety and the intake's draw.

6.3 Job two: the costly membrane, including the cost of redemption

The membrane is what crystallises the core and what Rotary lacked: real, non-fakeable, screening cost at entry to the core. It must impose demand high enough to hurt, because the hurt is the signal, and a membrane that costs nothing screens nothing and crystallises nothing. Orthodoxy's catechumenate, fasting, and hours-long liturgy are one tradition's version; each tradition has its own. The base sits behind a lower, permeable threshold; the core sits behind a severe one. The severity is the feature, not a side effect to be minimised.

But the cost is not only forward-looking. It is also backward-looking, and this is the half most often breached. For those entering from a life at odds with the tradition, redemption itself must cost something: confession, restitution where restitution is possible, a visible turning that hurts. Every serious tradition demanded this — the thief returned what he had taken, metanoia meant a reversal and not a relabelling —

because conversion that demands nothing of the past is the membrane breached at the moment of entry. The failure is easy to observe in its contemporary form: the public profession of faith, the immediate and unconditional welcome, the old life quietly continued and its proceeds retained, the absence of any demonstrated remorse or restitution. This is conversion as costless signal — the same defect as the membraneless base of the capture case, admitting people at zero cost so that the entry signals nothing and screens no one. A tradition that welcomes the convert without the cost of redemption has not lowered a barrier to mercy; it has removed the membrane. Mercy and cost are not opposed here: the cost is the mercy taken seriously — the difference between a turning that remakes a life and a label that excuses one.

6.4 Job three: firewall escalation — the ladder, and the summit above the fight

The threat-cornerstone core radicalises because the significance-quest, once activated, must discharge, and the enemy is the nearest outlet. The firewall is structural, not exhortation — restraint is a property of actors, and the Madisonian standard does not rely on it. The firewall is the tiered ladder, which gives the quest somewhere to climb. But the present threat means the firewall cannot be “no enemy” — there is an enemy, and the man may rightly fight it. The firewall is subtler and more important: the enemy must not be the summit. The fight is a legitimate rung, perhaps a necessary one in a threatened age, but a structure whose highest honour goes to the fiercest fighter has made confrontation the peak of its status hierarchy, and has thereby rebuilt the threat-cornerstone with extra steps. There must be a higher place than the fight, and the structure must visibly honour it above the fight, or the energetic young man climbs only as far as the enemy and stops there.

The higher place is generative continuity: family, children, grandchildren, the legacy a man builds and transmits to those who outlive him. It is the one summit whose value rises in the enemy’s absence rather than evaporating with it, which is exactly why it is safe. Tolkien, who understood this in his bones, built the demonstration into his ending. Two hobbits carry the burden to the mountain; only one goes home. Sam returns to Rosie, to Bag End, to the garden and the children, and the saga’s last words are his. Frodo cannot return, and ultimately sails into the West, because for Frodo the burden had become the whole of him and there was nothing on the far side of it. The difference is not only that Sam fought for something — a place, a love, a life waiting — while Frodo, in the end, was only fighting. It is also that Sam was never in the cage and Frodo always was: comfortable, provided-for, idle, unmarried, childless, a man with no demand placed on him until the one demand consumed him. What sustains the fighter is something worth fighting for; the structure of a safe tradition is the one that places that something, the home and the lineage behind the fight, visibly above the fighting itself.

This is also the ordered love of the opening, recovered and applied. The responsibility-cornerstone is not “love everyone equally”; it is love ordered — the family at the centre, the near neighbour next, the stranger last. The *ordo amoris* and the summit of the ladder are the same structure: love is concentric, its centre is the family and the lineage, and the undifferentiated universal version is the corruption that Section 1 traced. The firewall against escalation and the firewall against self-erasure are, at the summit, one feature: a love rightly ordered, with the household and the inheritance at the top, above both the stranger and the enemy.

6.5 Job four: firewall capture — the membrane and the accountable apex

Section 3's second failure mode was capture: the membraneless structure with a costless base, its guilt-money harvested upward by an unaccountable apex. The tiered membrane closes half of this by construction — a base behind even a modest threshold is not the boundless, costless donation pool the look-good elite farms, because participation costs something and the participant is therefore committed rather than merely guilt-signalling. The other half requires an accountable apex: the honour and authority that flow to the core must be governed by a structure that can refuse and remove, so that status is earned and held conditionally rather than captured. The empathy-predator hunts undefended fields; the tiered, accountable structure is not one. The defence against capture is not the virtue of the leaders. It is a membrane that denies the predator his costless base and an accountability organ that denies him the unchecked apex.

6.6 What the prescription does not specify

The features above are structural and general: graduated permeable tiers, the responsibility-cornerstone, the costly membrane and the cost of redemption, the status ladder with the summit above the fight, the accountable apex. How a given tradition installs them within its own doctrine, polity, and history is that tradition's work, not this paper's. Orthodoxy is installing them one way, largely by recovering what it never fully shed. A Western tradition that had shed them would install them by recovery and reform of its own. The paper specifies the structure that regrows a core safely. It does not, and should not, write the manual for any particular church — because the structure is universal and the implementation is irreducibly local, and a paper that crossed that line would be prescribing the thing it has spent its length explaining cannot be prescribed from outside. A final note on placement: The Narrow Way is Paper 5 of the six-paper Civilisational Architecture series — four diagnostic papers and two prescriptive capstones — and its companion capstone, Paper 6, The Invisible Way, develops the parallel secular-state route to the same end.

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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. The Civilisational Architecture series develops a structural account of civilisational coherence, decline, and renewal.