

# Morice-Brubaker takes on Douthat

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

July 17, 2012

Ross Douthat's gotten a lot of pushback for [using his soapbox](#) to complain that liberal Christianity lacks "a religious reason for its own existence." And with good reason—it'd be nice if the national paper of record's faithiest columnist could at least spin a fresher argument against us mainliners.

[My favorite response so far](#) comes from the always entertaining Sarah Morice-Brubaker:

Douthat claims that “the leaders of the Episcopal Church and similar bodies often don’t seem to be offering anything you can’t already get from a purely secular liberalism. Which suggests that perhaps they should pause amid their frantic renovations and consider not just what they would change about historic Christianity, but what they would defend and offer uncompromisingly to the world.”

Aha. So there’s “defending something uncompromisingly to the world” on the one hand, and “changing historic Christianity to offer just secular liberalism” on the other? Nope, sorry. That framing won’t do. It’s a set-up, and I think we need to [call shenanigans](#).

Witness! (Ahem.) “From what we know of him, Jesus resisted the self-important piety of the powerful, and stood instead with the ones they were oppressing, and in so doing revealed how God is. Therefore, I think following Jesus means doing the same in the very different context in which I live, and specifically resisting the institutional sexism and institutional homophobia which have informed so much of Christian piety. This will mean that I can’t spin romantic and rosy tales about What The Church Has Always Taught. It may not be popular. But I believe it to be true.”

**This is a theological claim.** . . . Douthat disagrees with it, presumably, but disagreement isn’t really the issue here. That claim does not simply factor out to

secular liberalism without remainder. If he thinks it does, he needs to make that case. He needs to explain why his argument isn't a circular one wherein "Real Christian convictions are A, B, and C, but liberal Christians say D, and therefore liberal Christians don't have real Christian convictions."

And this all comes after her slick Sweet Valley High analogy. You really should [read it all](#).