

*Opinion*

## **James Talarico represents Christianity's past, not its future**

The Texas Democrat's support for transgender rights helps explain why liberal Christianity is dying.

*By Carl R. Trueman* March 13, 2026 at 7:15 a.m.\

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James Talarico's ability to quote the Bible in support of progressive causes has helped propel him to fame as a fresh young face of the Democratic Party. The Presbyterian seminarian has the strait-laced appearance of a small-town preacher. But as a member of the Texas House of Representatives he has argued in favor of biological males competing in women's sports by saying, "God is nonbinary."

However novel this may seem, it reflects one of the oldest habits of the liberal Protestant tradition to which Talarico belongs: championing progressive social causes just as they are losing favor with the public. Talarico is not a sign of where America is heading but where it has been.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Talarico's views on transgenderism. In 2024, Britain's only youth gender clinic was closed. A government report published that year found "remarkably weak" evidence for using treatments such as puberty blockers on children. In the United States, Donald Trump won the 2024 presidential election while campaigning against men competing in women's sports and has threatened to remove federal funding for schools that allow them to do so.

Talarico, however, is unmoved. He stands by a record of statements that includes a 2021 claim that "there are many more than two biological sexes, in fact there are six." This is a misreading of the great works of gender theory that stand behind progressive understandings of sexuality. Worse, it damages the Christian, specifically Presbyterian, religious tradition to which Talarico and I both belong.

Christianity makes certain claims about what it means to be human. We are created in God's image and made as man and woman, distinguished by the sexual characteristics and complementarity of our bodies. Our bodies are, in a deep sense, who we are. I am not a soul that dwells in a body as an astronaut exists in a spacesuit. I am a body-soul unity.

From this perspective, it makes no sense to say that someone is a woman trapped inside a man's body. Indeed, such a claim can be seen as reflecting a deep misogyny. It denies that a woman's actual, physical body and all it entails — from menstruation to pregnancy to breastfeeding — has anything necessary to do with being female. As the feminist thinker

Janice Raymond has written, transgenderism “not only erases our bodies but also our oppression.”

Talarico is articulate and compassionate. But his compassion is limited by his political outlook. He describes Jesus as a “radical feminist,” but rejects the insistence on embodiment shared by historical Christianity and many feminists. Instead, he presents Christianity as perfectly in accord with the respectable therapeutic beliefs of a certain segment of the American elite.

It’s all happened before. Over 30 years ago, the feminist critic Camille Paglia wrote “The Joy of Presbyterian Sex” — an unsparing critique of a report on human sexuality issued by Talarico’s denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA). Writing as a lapsed Catholic with pagan sympathies, she argued that Christians who use the Bible to support gay sex not only downplay the distinctiveness of Christianity, they deny the anarchic and transgressive potential of new sexualities. Given that the report’s liberal Presbyterian authors reject so much Christian morality, she pointedly asks them, “Why remain Christian at all?”

The same question could be asked of James Talarico. Historical Presbyterianism, a product of the Reformation, could be disruptive. It rejected the papacy. But it did so not because it wanted to abandon Christian teaching in favor of popular tastes. It instead sought to adhere to biblical teaching, regardless of current fashion. Liberal Presbyterianism lost that vision long ago.

Instead, liberal Protestants like Talarico have ended up affirming as good and true whatever polite tastes require and abandoning any aspect of Christian teaching that appears to stand in the way of progress. What Paglia called the joy of Presbyterian sex was bad enough. But the joy of Presbyterian transgenderism is even worse, with its confusion about what it means to be a woman.

As Paglia perceived, this liberal Protestant attitude ultimately results in an unsatisfying compromise. It requires downplaying the radical potential of Christianity and of sexual liberation. This is one reason why more liberal churches have declined, as more conservative forms of Christianity and less religious forms of progressivism have enjoyed relative strength.

James Talarico is right to insist that Christianity doesn’t necessarily align with the views of the GOP. But that is no less true when it comes to the Democratic Party. Indeed, his candidacy raises a question that can’t be escaped by Christians on the right or the left. Does their faith exist merely to support what their party already believes? Or does it call them to oppose any threat to what it means to be human, no matter where it comes from? A faith that is captive to either political party will eventually seem superfluous.