Journal *of* Christian Legal Thought

VOL. 8, NO. 2 (2018)

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PUBLISHED BY

The Institute for Christian Legal Studies (ICLS), a Cooperative Ministry of Regent University School of Law and Christian Legal Society.

The Mission of ICLS is to train and encourage Christian law students, law professors, pre-law advisors, and practicing lawyers to seek and study Biblical truth, including the natural law tradition, as it relates to law and legal institutions, and to encourage them in their spiritual formation and growth, their compassionate outreach to the poor and needy, and the integration of Christian faith and practice with their study, teaching, and practice of law.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The mission of the *Journal of Christian Legal Thought* is to equip and encourage legal professionals to seek and study biblical truth as it relates to law, the practice of law, and legal institutions.

Theological reflection on the law, a lawyer's work, and legal institutions is central to a lawyer's calling; therefore, all Christian lawyers and law students have an obligation to consider the nature and purpose of human law, its sources and development, and its relationship to the revealed will of God, as well as the practical implications of the Christian faith for their daily work. The Journal exists to help practicing lawyers, law students, judges, and legal scholars engage in this theological and practical reflection, both as a professional community and as individuals.

The Journal seeks, first, to provide practitioners and students a vehicle through which to engage Christian legal scholarship that will enhance this reflection as it relates to their daily work, and, second, to provide legal scholars a peer-reviewed medium through which to explore the law in light of Scripture, under the broad influence of the doctrines and creeds of the Christian faith, and on the shoulders of the communion of saints across the ages.

Given the depth and sophistication of so much of the best Christian legal scholarship today, the Journal recognizes that sometimes these two purposes will be at odds. While the *Journal of Christian Legal Thought* will maintain a relatively consistent point of contact with the concerns of practitioners, it will also seek to engage intra-scholarly debates, welcome inter-disciplinary scholarship, and encourage innovative scholarly theological debate. The Journal seeks to be a forum where complex issues may be discussed and debated.

EDITORIAL POLICY

The Journal seeks original scholarly articles addressing the integration of the Christian faith and legal study or practice, broadly understood, including the influence of Christianity on law, the relationship between law and Christianity, and the role of faith in the lawyer's work. Articles should reflect a Christian perspective and consider Scripture an authoritative source of revealed truth. Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox perspectives are welcome as within the broad stream of Christianity.

However, articles and essays do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute for Christian Legal Studies, Christian Legal Society, Regent University School of Law, or other sponsoring institutions or individuals.

To submit articles or suggestions for the Journal, send a query or suggestion to Mike Schutt at mschutt@clsnet.org.

PUTTING FIRST THINGS FIRST

The Gospel and Social Justice (In That Order)

THADDEUS J. WILLIAMS
Law & Virtue Guest Editor

In an essay entitled "First and Second Things," C.S. Lewis puts words to a principle that explains everything from why some people are obnoxious, miserable, and anxious to why some churches end up culturally irrelevant. The very same principle explains how much of what goes under the moniker of "social justice," which is currently sweeping through the legal and political world, can ironically result in injustice. A principle with that kind of explanatory range should not be taken lightly. Here it is in Lewis' words:

> Every preference of a small good to a great, or partial good to a total good, involves the loss of the small or partial good for which the sacrifice is made.... You can't get second things by putting them first. You get second things only by putting first things first.[1]

The man who makes his "first thing" getting everyone to like him becomes obnoxious because he is too preoccupied with himself to genuinely care about anyone else. The woman who puts her own happiness first ends up chronically dissatisfied with her life. The poor soul whose first priority is staving off another anxiety attack will be constantly on edge. The church that makes being relevant to culture its first mission, either by conscious design or by the slow descent of good intentions gone wrong, will become utterly irrelevant to culture. Why? Because likeability, happiness, peace of mind, and relevance are not first things. They are second things, byproducts, not goals. Make any second thing a first thing and you not only lose the real first thing; you lose the second thing too. Let us call this "Lewis' First Things Principle."

If the obnoxious man genuinely cared about the people around him more than his own likeability, he would end up more liked. If the sad woman put loving God and loving people well ahead of her own happiness, she would likely end up exponentially more satisfied with life. If our poor soul exerted zero energy on not being anxious, pouring that energy instead into exercising hard at the gym, getting into and enjoying God's creation, caring deeply about the people God has put in his life, preaching the gospel to himself often, then his anxiety spikes would be less frequent and less catastrophic. If that irrelevant church made revering God and faithfully preaching His Word its primary mission, then it would become exponentially more relevant than it ever could through pandering to the perceived felt-needs and consumer demands of the culture.

What, then, does Lewis' First Things Principle have to do with the quest for social justice that has become a defining mark of so much of the legal and political world of the 21st-century West? Here is my thesis: If we make social justice the first thing, our primary mission, then we will not only lose the real first thing—the gospel—we will end up losing social justice too.

"OF FIRST IMPORTANCE"

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul states one of the earliest creeds of the first-century church:

> Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you.... For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...[2]

"The gospel" (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) according to Paul, is ἐν πρώτοις, which could be rendered "of first importance," "most important," or "chief significance." In Lewis's categories, the gospel is "the first thing." What exactly is this gospel Paul elevates above all else? According to the ancient creed, it is the good news of salvation through the sin-atoning death and bodily resurrection of Jesus. That is Scripture's first thing, and it should be ours too.

Does this prioritization of the gospel render justice irrelevant? Let us be clear. God does not *suggest*, He *commands* that we "Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has

[1] C.S. LEWIS, *First and Second Things*, in GOD IN THE DOCK: ESSAYS ON THEOLOGY AND ETHICS 280.
[2] 1 Corinthians 15:1, 3-4.

been robbed" (Jer. 22:3). Jesus launched his public ministry with the stated mission to "proclaim good news to the poor.... liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18, quoting Isa. 61:1, 2). "Seek justice" (Isa. 1:17) is a clarion call of Scripture, and those who box their ears to that call are simply not living by the Book. Justice is not the first thing. The gospel is. But that does not render justice an irrelevant or non-essential component of the Christian faith.

The Bible also commands, not suggests, that we tell the truth, that we should give generously, that we should love our neighbor, and so on. None of those commands are optional for the believer. Yet, at the same time, none of those commands is the gospel. We should not confuse any of those commands with the first thing, or we will end up losing not only the gospel, but also find ourselves adhering to those commands in a way that obliterates their essence. Without the gospel first, we become graceless in our truth telling, cheerless in our giving, and our neighborly love will turn into self-righteous showmanship. Likewise, when the gospel is not our first thing, social justice becomes something else entirely, as I will argue below.

"But," comes the reply, "you are creating a false dichotomy between the gospel and justice, making two things out of one in order to downplay the church's essential role in fighting 21st-century injustices. You said it yourself: seeking justice is not optional for believers. Social justice is, therefore, a gospel issue." That is an important objection that can be heard with increasing frequency in contemporary evangelicalism, typically framed in the language of social justice as "a gospel issue."[3] It is an objection that cannot be ignored if my claim that the gospel is the first thing can be taken seriously. The gospel cannot be the *first* thing, while justice a *second* thing, if they are, in fact, the *same* thing. I offer four points in response.

1. SOCIAL JUSTICE A OR SOCIAL JUSTICE B?

First, we must deal with the notoriously vague term "social justice." As Old Testament theologian John Goldingay notes,

> The notion of social justice is a hazy one. It resembles words such as community, intimacy, and relational, warm words whose meaning may seem self-evident and which we assume are obviously biblical categories, when actually they are rather undefined and culture relative.... The meaning of the phrase social justice has become opaque over the years as it has become a buzz expression.[4]

The term could be used to describe what our ancient brothers and sisters did to rescue and adopt those precious little image-bearers who had been discarded like trash at the literal human dumps outside many Roman cities. The same two words could describe William Wilberforce and the Clapham sect's efforts to topple slavery in the UK, along with Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and others in the US. "Social justice" could describe Bonheoffer and the Confessing Church's efforts to subvert the Third Reich. It could also describe Abraham Kuyper's vision, not of an individualistic pietism, but a robust Christianity that seeks to express the Lordship of Jesus over "every square inch" of life and society.

Nowadays, the same combination of two words could even describe Christian efforts to abolish human trafficking, work with the inner city poor, invest in microloans to help the destitute in the developing world, build hospitals and orphanages, upend racism, and so much more. Let us call this broad swath of biblically compatible justice-seeking "Social Justice A."

For many of us, the identical configuration of 13 letters—"social justice"—is packed with altogether non-Christian and often explicitly anti-Christian meanings. Over the last couple decades and especially in the last few years, "social justice" has taken on an extremely charged ideological and political meaning. "Social justice" became a waving banner over movements like Antifa, which sees physical violence against those who think differently as "both ethically justifiable and strategically effective," and celebrates its under-reported "righteous beatings." "Social justice" is the banner waved by a disproportionate ratio of professors in humanities and social science departments around the nation where the neo-Marxist oppressor vs. oppressed narrative of Gramsci, Marcuse, and the Frankfurt School, the deconstructionism and everything-is-always-about-power worldview of postmodernists like Foucault and Derrida, and the Gender and Queer Theory of Judith Butler have been injected into the very definition of the term. This ideological definition of "social justice" has been

[3] For a parallel analysis of the claim that social justice is a gospel issue see D.A. Carson, *What are Gospel Issues?* Themelios, Vol. 39, Issue 2 (July 2014). See also Kevin DeYoung's helpful articles *A Modest Proposal,* www.thegospelcoalition.org (January 12, 2010) and *Is Social Justice a Gospel Issue?,* www.thegospelcoalition.org (September 11, 2018).

[4] John Goldingay, Old Testament Theology: Israel's Life 500 (2016).

enshrined in the minds of many students and graduates shaping our culture not as *a* way but as *the* way to think about justice.

"Social justice" is also the banner over movements with a mission to "disrupt the western-prescribed nuclear family structure," movements seeking to advance the multi-billion dollar abortion industry, movements on college campuses that have resorted to death threats and violence to silence opposing voices, movements that fire CEOs, boycott chicken sandwiches, and seek through force of law to shut down bakeries, crisis pregnancy centers, the Little Sisters of the Poor, and Christian universities who will not bow to their orthodoxy.

In other words, if we paint Christians who sound the call for biblical discernment about "social justice" as a bunch of culturally tone-deaf curmudgeons, then it is we who are tone deaf to the current cultural moment. We are naïve to the meanings that have been baked into American minds with the word combo of "social" and "justice." Let us call this second kind of justice-seeking "Social Justice B."[5]

2. INDICATIVES OR IMPERATIVES?

My main argument, again, is that the gospel is the first thing and social justice is not, and that, if we get the ordering wrong, we will lose both. The main counterargument is that I have split hairs, drawn a distinction without a difference since social justice is, we are told, "a gospel issue." Most readers, I would hope, recognize that Social Justice B is not compatible with the gospel. The good news is not "Thou shalt forcibly silence thy political opponents, pit identity groups against one another in tribal warfare, or disrupt the western-prescribed nuclear family." Let us, therefore, read the claim that "social justice is a gospel issue" as a Social Justice A claim. On this interpretation, if we are not working toward the kind of the biblically compatible justice pursued historically by Wilberforce, Douglass, and others, if we are not confronting systems of injustice in our day, then we are left with an incomplete gospel.[6]

There is more than one way to read that charge. One read places "gospel" and "social justice" in a very specific kind of relationship, what philosophers call "the identity relation" in which A *is* B. The classic example in the literature is "Hesperus is Phosphorus."[7] Hesperus (a traditional proper name for the evening star) is Phosphorus (the traditional proper name for the morning star). It was once believed that the evening star and the morning star were two separate entities, until empirical research found that they are, in fact, one entity—the planet Venus. Hesperus and Phosphorus, therefore, stand in an *a posteriori* identity relation. From this perspective, it is upon reading the Bible that we discover: the gospel is social justice and social justice is the gospel. They stand in an identity relation to one another.

This understanding—once a rally cry within much of 20th-century liberal Protestantism and various strands of liberation theology—has made resurgence within 21st-century evangelicalism. Consider the common evangelical appeal, "Preach the gospel always. If necessary use words" (an aphorism often falsely credited to Francis of Assisi). Not only does this appeal clearly contradict the Bible's own definition of evangelism, in which verbal communication of the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection is always necessary.[8] It also makes our own actions on behalf of others *essential* and the announcement of Jesus' death and resurrection *accidental* to the gospel.

A second read, less extreme but equally on the rise, says that the gospel and social justice do not exist in an identity relation but, rather, in a part-whole relation. Social justice is not *identical to* but is certainly *part of* the gospel. To edit it out is to settle for a truncated gospel. D.A. Carson clarifies this perspective:

> The statement "X is a gospel issue" is simultaneously (a) a truth claim and (b) a polemical assertion attempting to establish relative importance… What is presupposed in the statement, of course, is that the gospel has a very high level of importance, perhaps supreme importance, such that if X is a gospel issue, it too is similarly elevated in importance. It follows, then, that to abandon X, when X is a gospel

[5] For a wide range of readings advancing Social Justice B see Race, Class, and Gender: an Anthology, 9th Edition, eds. Margaret Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins (2015).

[6] For a helpful exegetical analysis of the Scriptures commonly cited to defend social justice as a gospel issue see Ardel Caneday, Let's Get Biblical: Moving From Scripture to Theology Concerning Racial Reconciliation in Fidelity: Ethics in Unethical Times, 201-235 (2010).

[7] See Saul Kripke, Naming and Necessity, 20, 28-29, 57-58, 78-79 (1999).

[8] See Romans 10:14-15 cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-4, and Acts 2:14-40. As Duane Litfin clarifies, "It's simply impossible to preach the Gospel without words. The Gospel is inherently verbal, and preaching the Gospel is inherently verbal behavior." See *Works and Words: You Can't Preach the Gospel with Deeds*, Christianity Today (May 2012).

issue, is somehow to diminish or threaten the gospel.[9]

Whichever read we take on the relationship between the gospel and social justice—whether in an identity relation or part-whole relation—there is a good reason to reject both, without rejecting the biblical call to justice. It is this. The gospel means good news. News, good or bad, always takes the indicative form. It announces something that has happened. "For the first time in history, obesity is a bigger problem on earth than starvation." "The Red Sox won the World Series." "Scientists have made a new breakthrough in cancer treatment." That is all news. These are all indicative statements, statements that indicate was is now objectively true of the world. Imagine, by contrast, that I tell my four-year-old daughter, "Eat your broccoli." That is not news (and especially not good news from her perspective). Such a command is not an indicative statement. It is an imperative statement, something you *must* do, not something that *has been done*. Good news must take indicative form, *e.g.*, "Harlow, your broccoli has already been eaten!" or "Mommy bought ice cream for dessert!"

Whichever read we take on the relationship between the gospel and social justice—whether in an identity relation or part-whole relation—there is a good reason to reject both, without rejecting the biblical call to justice.

The difference between indicatives, which are descriptive, and imperatives, which are prescriptive, is not matter of semantic nitpicking.[10] The "gospel once for all entrusted to the saints," the best news in human history, the news upon which eternities depend, hangs on this distinction. When Paul wrote to the church in Galatia he was deeply concerned that the good news—the gospel—was being twisted into bad news, an anti-gospel. Why? Because instead of the good news that we are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone for God's glory alone, the Galatians were being duped into a false gospel that the good news must include obedience to certain imperatives, namely, to get circumcised and observe the dietary restrictions of Judaism. A gospel with additional requirements, with imperatives that must be performed, is no longer good news. For those who know themselves well, if the gospel is not about Christ's finished saving work alone, but about any commandment we must keep, then the good news turns out to be very bad news. If my salvation was 99% God's doing and 1% my own doing, I would find a way, in my fallenness and depravity, to mess up that 1% and be damned.

Returning to the increasingly popular claim that Social Justice A is either identical to or part of the gospel, consider the 27 million victims of modern day slavery. The good news now entails the imperative, "Work toward the liberation of human trafficking victims." On this scheme, you are saved by God's grace through Christ *plus* your efforts to end modern slavery. Herein lies the existential conundrum: How could we ever know if we had done enough to end this vile and dehumanizing practice in order to be saved? There is a qualitative difference between fighting the injustice of slavery to *become* saved versus fighting the injustice of slavery *because* you are saved. If we confuse the gospel—the indicative announcement of the salvation accomplished on our behalf through the death and resurrection of Jesus—with the imperative to help those victimized by human trafficking, then the good news is no longer good news. We find ourselves right back in the hopeless plight of works-righteousness.

In first century Galatia, the Judaizers added the imperative—"Get circumcised"—to the gospel, incurring Paul's condemnation, "If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:9). This problem is compounded exponentially in our day. If Social Justice A is identical to or part of the gospel, then we do not add a circumcision command or a handful of dietary restrictions to the gospel. We add a theoretically infinite set of imperatives. Counteract sex slavery in Thailand. Fight cocoa bean farm trafficking on the Ivory Coast. Abolish the carpet looms of India. The list of real 21st-century injustices

[9] Supra note 3.

[10] The original impetus for the argument I unfold above was an excellent piece by apologist Neil Shenvi entitled *A Crucial Question about Social Justice,* https://shenviapologetics.wordpress.com/a-crucial-question-about-social-justice/ retrieved November 6, 2018.

stretches on and on.[11] I am not arguing that Christians should be apathetic about such injustices. On the contrary, we should care passionately about the dehumanization of God's precious image-bearers and work toward a more just world. I am arguing that making the imperative to work against such injustices either identical to or part of the gospel, is to lose the gospel, and, given Lewis' First Thing Principle, to lose the gospel is to also lose justice for the oppressed around the world.

3. *IN* OR *FROM* THE GOSPEL?

We have seen that putting social justice and the gospel in either an identity or part-whole relation blurs important distinctions between how the term "social justice" is deployed in our day and confuses the gospel-indicative with the justice-imperative. But perhaps we may find a third read of the claim that social justice is a gospel issue. On this read Social Justice A is not identical to or part of the gospel, rather, it is an *existential implication* of the gospel. Rather than saying "social justice *is* the gospel," or "social justice is *in* the gospel," we could (and I believe we should) say "social justice is *from* the gospel."

To clarify these distinctions, consider the flow of Acts 2. Verses 14-40 record Peter's proclamation of the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection to the temple crowds on Pentecost. Three thousand are saved. Read Peter's gospel proclamation and you will find no imperative to do social justice. Nowhere does Peter expose systemic injustice and call the crowds to action. Historian Margaret Killingray points out that when Peter is preaching "Only around two-percent of the population of a Roman town would be genuinely comfortably off. The vast majority would be destitute poor."[12] Some historians estimate that upwards of two-thirds of the Roman Empire was enslaved in the first century. There was certainly no shortage of social injustice when Peter delivers his Pentecost sermon. If we believe that social justice is the gospel or part of the gospel, then we must conclude that Peter either (a) did not preach the gospel that day, making it a mystery how 3000 were saved, or (b) he preached a truncated gospel. The text itself makes it clear that the whole gospel was preached, and preached with astounding saving results that day.

Observe what followed *from* that gospel proclamation. By the end of Acts 2 we find the newly expanded community of believers "selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need" (v. 45). This action on behalf of the poor was not *in* the gospel, it was *from* the gospel, an existential implication of the first thing—the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection.

This pattern repeats throughout church history. When Romans tossed their so-called "blemished" babies away like garbage—often simply because they were female—our ancient brothers and sisters went to those human dumps, rescued, and raised society's unwanted as their own cherished sons and daughters. They knew the gospel that God had rescued and adopted them, so, as an existential implication of that good news, they did the same until the human dumps were no more. When a plague ravaged the Roman Empire, most people ran for the hills away from the sick and dying. It was countercultural Christians, believing the good news that God had taken their sin-plague upon Himself on the cross, ran to the bedsides of the plagued to treat them with dignity, often getting sick and dying right along with them. Their radical altruism was an existential implication of the gospel. Likewise, the efforts of Wilberforce, John Newton, and the Clapham sects to abolish the British slave trade were not the gospel; they were the existential implication of the good news that God has redeemed us through the cross and empty tomb of Jesus.

4. TEN MARKS WE HAVE LOST THE FIRST THING

We have seen that the proper way to affirm that social justice as "a gospel issue" is to say that Social Justice A is an existential implication of the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus. In Lewis' categories, the gospel is "the first thing," social justice is not. But this talk of first and second things can become all too abstract. How, concretely, can we tell whether we have replaced the gospel with social justice as our first thing? The litmus test is when the second thing—social justice—starts to morph into something antithetical to a biblical worldview and thereby ceases to be justice. I briefly sketch ten examples.

[11] This problem is even worse for those who would identify or include Social Justice B with the gospel. Given the doctrine that inequality equals injustice, there is literally an infinite amount of "injustices" to exert our energies to oppose. The lack of Asian representation in Hollywood, the lack of female representation in the STEM field, the lack of gay representation in politics, the lack of [fill in the blank]. This view of social justice, the view that envisions any inequality as an injustice, leads to a definition of social justice that quickly becomes exhausting. In a Christian context, instead of circumcision and dietary restrictions being added to the gospel, one is now saddled with literally an infinite set of "social justice" actions that must be acted upon.

[12] Margaret Killingray, *The Bible, Slavery, and Onesimus*, Anvil, vol. 24 no. 2:85-96, 89 (2007).

1. *If by "social justice" we mean an ideology that inspires in its followers a quickness to take offense, then we have lost justice.* A Christian worldview champions a love that "is not easily offended."
2. *If by "social justice" we mean an ideology that inspires self-righteousness, i.e., I am not a bigot because I hold these particular political views or am a member of this or that identity group, then we have lost justice.* A Christian worldview confronts us with the humbling reality that our self-righteousness is like filthy rags and Christ is the only ground for our righteous standing.
3. *If by "social justice" we mean an ideology that blames all evil on external systems of oppression, then we have lost justice.* A biblical worldview sees evil not only in "systems," where we ought to seek justice, but also within the twisted hearts of those who make those systems unjust. All the external activism in the world will not bring about any lasting justice if we downplay our need for the regenerating, love-infusing work of God through the gospel.
4. *If by "social justice" we mean an ideology that deconstructs relationships in terms of "power-differentials" that must be abolished in the name of "equality," then we have lost justice.* A Christian worldview opposes the sinful abuse of power, including the evil of "those who frame injustice by statute" (Ps. 94:20). It also sees many power hierarchies (*e.g.*, the Creator-creature, parent-child, rabbi-disciple, elders-congregation, teacher-student, and more), as part of God's good design for human flourishing, character formation, and discipleship.
5. *If by "social justice" we mean an ideology that interprets all truth, reason, and logic as mere constructs of the oppressive class, if it encourages us to dismiss someone's viewpoint on the basis of their skin tone or gender, then we have lost justice.* A Christian worldview calls us in its Greatest Commandment to love God with our whole minds. This includes evaluating ideas based on their biblical fidelity and truth-value rather than the group identity of those articulating it. It also includes acknowledging real oppression and listening well, while refusing to interpret all of God's world as a mere power play of oppressors versus the oppressed.
6. *If by "social justice" we mean an ideology that breaks people into group identities, generating a spirit of mutual suspicion, hostility, fear, labeling, and preoccupation with one's subjective feelings, then we have lost justice.* A Christian worldview offers us the fruit of the Spirit like joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. The Bible teaches that Jesus destroyed the wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile to make for Himself "one man," uniting people

from every tongue tribe, and nation and making them ambassadors of reconciliation. Family and reconciliation, not inter-group warfare, is the Bible's model for Christian living.

7. *If by "social justice" we mean an ideology that teaches that the human telos (i.e., our ultimate purpose and meaning) is defined by the creature, and that anyone who challenges our self-defined telos is an oppressor, then we have lost justice.* A biblical worldview teaches that our *telos* is defined by the Creator and the sinful refusal to live within that God-defined *telos* brings oppression to ourselves and those around us. Real authenticity and freedom do not come from defining yourself and "following your heart," but from letting God define you and following His heart.
8. *If by "social justice" we mean an ideology that credits guilt on the basis of one's skin tone, condemning people based on their group identity, then we have lost justice.* A Christian worldview assesses everyone of every ethnicity as guilty based on our group identity "in Adam." This guilt can be erased not by oppressed group affiliation but only by finding our new and deepest group identity in Jesus, "the second Adam." Rather than condemning people for ethnic or gender group identity, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."
9. *If by "social justice" we mean an ideology that sees "heteronormative" sexual and gender distinctions as oppressive and seeks to liberate all forms of sexual behavior and gender expression from such "cisgender constructs," then we have lost justice.* A Christian worldview envisions the male-female differences relationship as "very good"—distinctions that cannot be erased without losing something precious—and highlights the male-female sexual union within the covenant of marriage as the only proper and life-giving context for human sexual expression.
10. *If by "social justice" we mean an ideology that celebrates abortion as an expression of female liberation from patriarchal oppression, then we have lost justice.* A Christian worldview ascribes full humanity and worth to precious, unborn image-bearers of God, and calls us to love and protect those women and their offspring who are exploited or terminated by the abortion industry.

In sum, when we put social justice ahead of the gospel as our first thing, Social Justice A slowly morphs into Social Justice B. I have offered ten diagnostics to help determine whether that tragic exchange has occurred. Of course, this list is not exhaustive. I have blind spots, and I suspect that there are a hundred more points where a Christian worldview offers something more redemptive, humanizing, and God-glorifying than what is often called "social justice" but will only bring more oppression to the 21st century. I hope others will add to my meager list of ten.[13]

A Christian worldview calls us in its Greatest Commandment to love God with our whole minds. … Our Messiah does not seek justice at the level of headlines and hearsay. He calls us to true justice, not knee-jerk activism.

This issue of the *Journal* was envisioned and compiled in that spirit. P. Andrew Sandlin offers "A Primer on Cultural Marxism," explaining the ideological roots of what I have called Social Justice B. In "Victimhood is not a Virtue," Brian Mattson exposes the ways in which biblical virtues are more compelling and rich than the perpetual victimhood that defines Social Justice B. In "Who Do You Say That I Am?" Jeffery Ventrella turns to one of the biggest dividing lines between Social Justice A and Social Justice B—namely, the preferred pronoun controversy—offering a sevenfold case for telling the truth about human sexuality. With "Justice and Futility" Joseph Boot offers an ancient challenge from Ecclesiastes against the political utopianism that is a defining hallmark of Social Justice B. Hunter Baker builds a positive case for "Christian Statesmanship," informed by the doctrine of the *imago Dei* as a constructive alternative to the polarization endemic to Social Justice B.

Before diving into these pieces I leave you with one closing thought. One of the marks of Jesus, according to the prophet Isaiah, is that, "He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,

[13] Excellent books that do just that include Ronald Nash, Social Justice and the Christian Church (2002) and Cal Beisner, Social Justice: How Good Intentions Undermine Justice and the Gospel (2013).

and decide with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isa. 11:3-4). Our Messiah does not seek justice at the level of headlines and hearsay. He calls us to true justice, not knee-jerk activism. The Bible does not merely command us to execute justice, but to "*truly* execute justice." (Jer. 7:5). The God who commands us to seek justice is the same God who commands us to "test everything" and "hold fast to what is good" (1 Thes. 5:23). If we really care about the oppressed and, more foundationally, the God who cares about the oppressed, then we must carefully distinguish between true justice and what often masquerades as "social justice" in the 21st century. Otherwise, we will not only lose the gospel—the first thing—we will also end up unwittingly hurting those the Bible calls us to help.

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A PRIMER ON CULTURAL MARXISM

P. Andrew Sandlin

Cultural Marxism is the preeminent social vision of our time. It occupies this dominance not because the majority of citizens holds it, but because an influential minority does. I refer to our culturally Leftist elites. Their success in spreading and defending this vision has been nothing short of staggering. Each of you knows this vision, even if you don't know that you know it. It is the child of Classical (or economic) Marxism, based on the writings of nineteenth-century philosopher and economist Karl Marx. Marxism was the philosophy of all communist societies of the 20th century, chief of which were the Soviet Union, now defunct, and the People's Republic China, which is much less Marxist than it once was. But Marxism had a momentous impact on the 20th century. Probably, in the daily lives of people, it had a greater impact than any other philosophy. Knowing the basics of Classical Marxism is necessary for understanding the Cultural Marxism that is currently sweeping through the Western consciousness.

CLASSICAL MARXISM

When we think of Marxism and communism, we immediately think of socialism. In communist societies the state owns and regulates the entire economy. The state distributes jobs, products, services, and privileges. There is no such thing as legally-recognized private property. You do not own anything; the state owns it. The state, in effect, owns you. The socialist abolition of private property is not the main feature of Marxist thought; it is an inevitable result of that thought.

The thinking behind Marxism, and its unique contribution to Western philosophy, is best known by the expression "dialectical materialism."[1] Considering the component words in reverse is likely the best way to understand Marxism:

Philosophical materialism

By philosophical materialism, I don't mean practical materialism. When we speak of materialism today, we usually mean a way of life that values the purchase and enjoyment of material things above all else. If somebody lives for nothing more than buying more "stuff," we call him a materialist. That is not philosophical materialism. A philosophical materialist is someone who believes that matter in motion is all that exists in the universe. There is only the physical, not the *meta*physical, that is, realities beyond our sensory experience. There is no God or gods. There is no Satan or demons. Man himself is just a highly evolved collection of chemicals, a lump of blood and bone. There is no human soul or spirit. In that sense, man is no qualitatively different from a rock or tree. He does have a mind. He can think, but his thinking is the result of the matter in his brain. Everything, in the final reductive analysis, is material.

Since man and everything else are material, the fundamental issues of life are material. For man, this means food, clothing, shelter, health, transportation, and so forth. Jesus told us that if we seek first the kingdom of God, he will add material provision to us. For Marxists, by contrast, there is no kingdom of God; we must seek material provision above all things—and, in fact, we do. These are the most important concerns for individuals, and actually, in the end, the *only* concerns.

On this account, Marx inverted the traditional emphasis on ideas. Most philosophers, going all the way back to the ancient Greeks, believed that ideas shape the world. Philosophers, of course, are thinkers, so it should not surprise us that they privilege ideas. People develop certain thoughts, and then put those thoughts into action to shape the societies they live in. Marx believed, in contrast, that the physical world shapes man's ideas, not the other way around. For example, the reason people are capitalists is because they are trying to justify the

1 J. V. Stalin, Dialectical and Historical Materialism, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1938/09.htm, accessed July 13, 2018. See also Robert L. Heilbroner, Marxism, For and Against (1980).

social arrangement that benefits their private ownership of property. Marx does not believe that people always consciously do this. Bankers, executives, politicians, and business owners do not necessarily intend to create a social arrangement that keeps them in power. It is simply the way that the society has developed that makes them think the thoughts and act the way they do. The same material conditions also make every society what it is. Societies, like individuals, are the product of their material conditions and their interactions with those conditions and the relationships of individuals created by those material conditions.

The material world, Marx believed, is the fundamental structure of reality, and everything else—religion, the arts, economics, and politics—are the *super*structure built on top of the materialistic structure. Everything is what it is because of the underlying material forces of the world. Marxists wanted to say that the physical shapes the metaphysical. We have views about God, history, the arts, and economics because our material conditions have caused us to think that way.

It follows from this materialistic view of the world that if you want to change the thoughts of individuals or society, you have to change the material conditions. But can or should you change men's thoughts? For Marx the answer is "yes." Though the material world operates according to irresistible laws, if we understand those laws, we can more quickly bring our thinking into conformity to them, and the quicker the laws will work. This leads to the second word, "dialectical."

Dialectics

By dialectics, Marxists refer to the conflict within everything in the universe, which is different from how both Plato and Hegel used the word. Most of the time when we think of conflict, we assume it comes from the external world: men fight with one another, nations war on each other, the weather makes life hard for us, or else we ourselves change things by imposing some external force, or they change by the action of one on another. We mine salt from the ground. We make houses from trees. Bees pollinate flowers. Avalanches bury rocks, and so on. Every person, society, and thing has in him- or her- or itself a conflict, a contradiction, which is only overcome by dramatic change. The most important changes in the world come from the inside of things, not the outside.

For this reason, nothing is static. Everything is in flux, or motion. This also means that we can never see things accurately in and of themselves. Everything is always changing into something else. The ancient philosopher Heraclitus supposedly said, "You can never step twice into the same river." He did not mean that your location or foot would change. He meant that since the river is always changing, you cannot repeat that indentical action of the past. To change the metaphor, reality is like a movie, not a snapshot. You can never stop the motion. You can only see what someone or something is becoming. This is how we must view all of reality. Being is always becoming.

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This becoming, or change, as I said, comes about by conflict. This is especially true in a society. This is why Marxists relish conflict in a society. They are constantly rooting out "counter-revolutionary" ideas and people. Why? Because without conflict, you cannot achieve material progress. Progress does not come by cooperation, but by conflict. Consider the free market. It is based on cooperation. The only competition is the competition to serve people better. According to Marxism, this cannot produce anything better. Through conflict, markets must be changed into another kind of economic arrangement.

This conflict generates a higher order, a higher human being, and a higher society. This idea might sound familiar. You may have heard of Darwin's idea of the "survival of the fittest." Plants and animals are constantly in competition, and the best, the smartest, and the strongest survive and create higher forms of being. This is how evolution allegedly occurs. *Marxist dialectics is Darwinian evolution applied to human society*. Just as animals evolve into higher beings by conflict, so societies evolve into superior societies by conflict.

Since everything is in evolutionary flux, everything is becoming something else, and every society is becoming something else. This includes truth and ethics. Therefore, Marxists do not believe in unchangeable ethics, natural law, or eternal truth. Everything is in the process of transition. (Of course, I mentioned earlier that he believed nature itself operates according to the iron law of development, but it seems he believed that this law was exempt from itself!)

The actual iron law of nature *is* dialectical materialism. This means that all Marxists must be "progressives." Nature is in conflict with itself. Men are in conflict with one another. Societies are in conflict with one another. Even man is in conflict within himself. This is a good thing on Marxism, because this conflict creates

something new and better. That "new and better" is the socialist paradise of the future.

Dialectical materialism

What happens when we combine dialectics with materialism? If the universe is nothing but matter in the motion; and if reality is nothing more than matter and material conditions; and if all reality develops into a higher order by conflict, then individuals and society are in conflict toward better material conditions. This is Marxism's law of history—man is constantly on the march for greater and greater freedom from constraining material conditions. This is how Marx interpreted history, from primitive man in tribes and caves, huddled around fires, all the way up to advanced industrial society. The higher society comes from the inner conflict of the previous ones, and they push toward liberation from material needs. Apparently, the final society will be socialism, because it will create the perfect equality of material conditions. Everyone will have every material need met, and no one will exploit anyone else. This is inevitable. The laws of history are relentlessly pressing toward socialism. Anyone who opposes the Marxists is "on the wrong side of history."

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For Marxism, the great (1) problem is equalizing material provision, the great (2) solution is socialism, and the irresistible (3) mechanism for getting there is dialectical materialism. Marxist philosophy is riddled with blunders—as attested by the staggering body counts of the 20th century—but I must move forward to address the chief vision guiding our society today, which is Marxism 2.0.

CULTURAL MARXISM

Marxism 2.0 is called "Cultural Marxism," and identified with "the New Left."[2] It has become the reigning vision of the vast majority of cultural leaders in the West in the twenty-first century.[3] Cultural Marxism, in contrast with Classical Marxism, was custom designed to appeal to and succeed in Western societies. The innovators knew that Classical Marxism would likely not win in the West. For one thing, the newer Marxists doubted that the working class would rise up in violent revolution as they did in Russia in 1917. Western workers were mostly satisfied with life most of the time. To win in the West, you needed a Marxism suited to the West, one that took into account Western ways of thinking. Freedom, liberty, and equality—watchwords of the modern West—were ideas they could exploit to win the day. They would engage in the "long march through the institutions."[4] They would reinvent the meaning of liberty, freedom, and equality to seduce Westerners and gradually capture their culture.

Here, then, is a provisional definition of Cultural Marxism. Sidney Hook defines it as…

> … a philosophy of human liberation. It seeks to overcome human alienation, to emancipate man from repressive social institutions, especially economic institutions that frustrate his true nature, and to bring him into harmony with himself, his fellow men, and the world around him so that he can overcome his estrangements and express his true essence through creative freedom.[5]

Human Liberation

"[A] philosophy of human liberation," says Hook. Remember that phrase. Recall that for Classical Marxists, man's big problem is material provision, and equalizing it so everyone can have what he or she needs. For Cultural Marxists, humanity's main problem is not economic. It is that society's ideas and institutions prevent us from fulfilling the Good Life. What is the Good Life? It is not just material provision: having food, shelter, and clothing. It is being able to be exactly what we want to be, to live exactly as we want to live. Maximum autonomy is the *summum bonum*. Every individual should be an artist, but in a very basic and profound sense. Every person should be able to paint his own life, his own meaning, his own reality. The world should be the canvas on which the person paints himself. This is called the Romantic view of man, man painting his own identity and reality.

Unfortunately, social forces conspire to restrict our limitless autonomy. Traditional institutions like family, church, and business command our allegiance. In the

2 Roger Scruton, Fools, Frauds and Firebrands, Thinkers of the New Left (2016).

3 See William R. Schroeder, Continental Philosophy: A Critical Approach 76-92 (2005).

4 This phrase is wrongly attributed to Gramsci, but rightly describes the strategy of Cultural Marxism.

5 Sidney Hook, *Marxism*, in Dictionary of the History of Ideas, Philip P. Wiener, ed., 157 (1973).

traditional order, husbands lead families, parents direct children, pastors disciple church members, employers make demands of employees. This means that they crimp our autonomy. These *institutions* crimp our autonomy; therefore, we live artificial, unreal, and unhappy lives to conform to these cultural institutions and their oppressive expectations. We are alienated from our "true selves." Marxists of all stripes have always been very concerned about liberating the true, real self from the cultural environment suppressing it. To Classical Marxists, that hostile environment was capitalism. To Cultural Marxists, that environment is traditional (Christian) society and its institutions. The goal is liberating the real self from the tyranny of these institutions. That self might be atheistic, exhibitionist, homosexual, transgendered, bestial, or solitary. Whatever form it takes, the autonomous self meets resistance in traditional Western culture, shaped by Christianity. To be truly free, therefore, Western culture must be marginalized or crushed.

An extended metaphor might help. Imagine thousands of tiny seeds, full of flourishing, fruitful potential, but they can never fulfill that potential because they are submerged beneath hard, frozen, nearly impenetrable soil. Imagine further a sympathetic farmer who comes with a massive plow and cracks the soil, waters it, and fertilizes it so that the seeds can finally sprout upward. The seeds in this metaphor are humans as we enter the world. Then we are stifled by the frozen soil, which will not allow us to unleash the potential of our real selves. That soil is our society, especially the chief cultural institutions like the family and church. We should be free to sprout and grow upward and exhibit to the world all of our autonomous beauty. What we need is a plow to break up this hard soil.

In our metaphor, that plow is the state. This is why Cultural Marxists are statists. It is not because they simply love power. They want state power so they can destroy traditional authority—especially Christianity—which justifies and produces that authority. What has been called "liberty" in the West is the absence of political coercion: within the framework of basic law, you are free from state interference. For Cultural Marxists, by contrast, we need state interference to break up the authority of the family and church because they take away our liberty to be our true selves. We need not political liberty but autonomous liberation. Therefore, the state must pulverize every barrier to our "true selves."

Class Consciousness

How do Cultural Marxists instigate this crusade for human liberation? How specifically do they get the state involved? Mainly by dividing people into different classes and instigating conflict, claiming that oppressed classes must fight for equality. This was once called "class consciousness." In Marx's day, the oppressors were the bourgeoisie (elites, business owners) while the oppressed were the proletariat (employees, "wage slaves"), who demanded equality. By equality, the cultural Marxists do not mean equality of condition—that is, they don't mean everybody must play by the same rules. Rather, they believe in equality of results—the rules must be bent to make everybody achieve the same outcomes. It is akin to giving a losing baseball team five strikes for every batter and a four-run head start at the beginning of the game so that every game ends in a tie and everyone goes home with a trophy.

Today, class consciousness has morphed into "identity politics." Under Cultural Marxism, the conflicting classes have been expanded from the bourgeoisie and the proletariat to include men versus women, whites and Asians versus blacks and/or Hispanics, children versus parents, millennials versus the middle aged, wealthy versus poor, "middle class" cosmopolitans versus nationalists, and other binary categories. Cultural Marxists portray one pole of the binary (women, homosexuals, millennials, blacks) as oppressed. Then they demand that the state liberate these groups from their oppressors. Oppression here almost never means literal enslavement, abuse, or assault. Rather, it means disrespect, disapproval, or social inequality. If, for example, homosexuals are not as respected as heterosexuals, then they are oppressed and deserve state-coerced liberation and acceptance. This is where recent campus speech codes come from. The newly defined oppressed (millennials) are entitled not to be offended by words from the oppressing class (older whites, teachers, men).

Liberation becomes liberty from the institutions that our society grants the liberty to enslave us. Over time, this human liberation sees even nature itself as an oppressor. Like the Gnostics of old, creation is evil and a barrier to the good life. Male or female body parts are oppressive. "Sex-reassignment surgery" must become "gender-affirmation surgery." You may have read about the man who became a "woman," who now is modifying his body to become a dragon. This is an extreme case but not an inconsistent one. It is simply the latest example of liberation, and, unless this grand Marxist march is stopped, we should not expect the dragonized man to be the most extreme example of human liberation in the future.

Progress by Conflict

It is this class conflict that produces cultural progress. Classical Marxists, as we have seen, believed that life is everywhere filled with opposing forces, and the collision of these forces brings a higher, better reality. The

Cultural Marxists simply extend this vision to encompass more than material conditions. Today's Cultural Marxists prefer to be known as "progressives," and the progress they want is human liberation (*i.e.*, liberty redefined as autonomy). Conflict, therefore, is a good thing, and the elites should foster social conflict. If you want a better society, then the proliferation of conflict becomes essential. The objective of launching rallies and Twitter campaigns to challenge the "hegemony" (a favorite word of Antonio Gramsci, perhaps the first Cultural Marxist) of men, parents, whites, straights, and Asians, is to create a conflict that ends in the liberation of the oppressed classes and, therefore, a better world.

The courts have found that speech codes violate freedom of speech because their "harassment" proscriptions are overbroad and unacceptably increase the risk of viewpoint discrimination.

Cultural Marxists, however, are not raw statists. They do not see politics as an end in itself. Their ultimate goal is to capture the culture, not the state. The state only enforces what the culture should dictate. If almost everybody buys into the culture, you do not need political coercion. Though he didn't invent this language, Gramsci was one of the first to grasp that politics is downstream from culture.[6]

For Cultural Marxists, you overthrow the unjust order by capturing culture and its institutions: art, music, education, science, literature, religion, technology, and entertainment. You do not impose the just order; you create it. Even the choice of grammar is a political act. When you note that the word "gender" has replaced "sex" in common discourse as a result of Leftist feminism,[7] you are seeing the victory for Cultural Marxism.

Leveling of hierarchies

The fundamental cultural change that is needed, according to Cultural Marxists, is the leveling of hierarchies. Everything and everyone must be equal. In Classical Marxism, the oppressed were the impoverished proletariat. In Cultural Marxism, the oppressed are the socially marginalized: foreigners, women, children, homosexuals, convicts, the mentally insane, the physically handicapped. No person should be permitted to be better than another—and no person should be permitted esteem higher than another. Classes in society, the wealthy above the poor, the freeman above the prisoner, the healthy above the unhealthy, aristocrats above the commoners, men above women, intellectuals above the less mentally gifted—any class or group that has been excluded from honor and esteem and leadership must be included. Classical Marxists thereby become the self-appointed champions of the marginalized and outcast. They believe that the marginalized, led by intellectuals who tap into their plight, should gradually reshape the culture such that they become the insiders. They must rip down the hierarchies that oppress them.

The notion that the world is what it is because God created it that way—that men are men and women are women, for example, because of creational law—is an illusion serving the interests of the privileged classes. There is no God to whom to appeal. Present differences that privilege some and de-privilege others are simply matters of human will. Just as these present differences were created by the human will, so they can, should, and must be abolished by the human will. It is the triumph of the enlightened will over traditional society. The de-privileged are to be liberated from their marginalized existence.

We now have a clearer picture of where the great liberation movements of the 20th century originate—feminist liberation, racial liberation, workers' liberation, gay liberation, children's liberation. They owe their ideological roots to Classical Marxism. Of course, some liberation—for example, blacks from the evils of slavery—was deeply biblical and necessary. But Cultural Marxism is not interested in merely redressing specific historic evils, as we should, but in reengineering society.

The "periphery-centered society"

It is more than liberation that Classical Marxists want. They advocate turning the tables culturally. Gramsci advocated the "periphery-centered society."[8] Those who were formerly privileged must be de-privileged. The upper crust must feel the pain of the marginalization and misery of the formerly oppressed. The oppressed must rule over their oppressors. When today we observe vocal homosexuals becoming prominent CEO's, while simultaneously Christians are fined for standing for

[6] It was apparently invented by Don Eberly. See William B. Wichterman, *The Culture: 'Upstream' from Politics*, in Building a Healthy Culture, Don Eberly, ed., 77 (2001).

[7] Gabriele Kuby, The Global Sexual Revolution 44 (2015).

[8] Dante Germino, Antonio Gramsci: Architect of a New Politics 179 (1990).

biblical sexual ethics, when we see children increasingly dictate the family choices, when we encounter college professors forced to attend sensitivity training classes for offending the sensibilities of millennial students, we see on graphic display the spirit of Gramsci.

The chief hierarchical structure that must be leveled, however, is Christianity. Christian culture has pervaded the West. It privileged God's truth and de-privileged all competing religions and views. The Cultural Marxist program necessitates the replacement of Christendom with the new radically secular order, in Gramsci's words, "a complete secularization of all of life and of customary relationships."[9]

This project means it will be necessary to redefine common sense and even normality. What is considered normal today must be considered abnormal tomorrow. If common sense tells us that men are different from women, such common sense must become uncommon. If it is normal to be heterosexual and abnormal to be homosexual, normality must change. Homosexuality must be normalized and heterosexuality de-normalized.

THE PERVASIVENESS OF CULTURAL MARXISM

What I have described is Cultural Marxism with a vengeance. This has become *our* culture. Moreover, their view has spread to the younger elites all over the West, particularly in the humanities departments of Western universities. It has been wildly successful and culturally ubiquitous. Allow me to list some ways that Cultural Marxism has become the air we breath in the West:

Feminism

Think first of feminism. Radical feminism began in the 1960's. Of course, feminism had been around much earlier. The idea that women should be treated fairly has a long, honorable, and deeply Christian pedigree. But political and legal equality were not what the new feminists were after. What they were after was an entirely new view of what it means to be a man and woman. They came to believe that sex itself is an oppressive social construct.

Radical feminists invented a new word usage to abolish this construct. That word is "gender." You can have two sexes, but you can create six or eight or ten genders. They hated the idea that maleness and femaleness are rooted in nature—the way the Creator designed His creatures. The radicals wanted to say that the just society, or the autonomous individual, creates "male" and "female." The fact that men and women are biologically different is incidental from this perspective. Ironically, this will mean the destruction of women. If biological difference is incidental, if gender is a mere human construct, then womanhood is no safer than manhood.[10] In the end, radical feminism abolishes the feminine.

Homosexuality

Second, think about homosexuality. As late as the early 1970's, homosexuality was considered a mental disorder. To even articulate such a perspective today would be unthinkable, and in some places illegal. The vision of the Cultural Marxists has won. Homosexuality is considered no different than left-handedness.

Today so-called same-sex "marriage" is legal all over the West. Set aside the morality of this practice for a moment. Simply consider the fact that no civilization *in the history of world* has permitted such a practice—even those societies in which homosexuality was rampant, like ancient Rome. They never would have permitted homosexuals to marry. The Cultural Marxists did not accomplish this feat only by forcing a resistant populace, although they did this by using the courts and state coercion. In other cases, same-sex "marriage" was accomplished by its normativity on TV and in the movies, very democratically. This was not only an example of political tyranny. It was also an example of cultural tyranny. Cultural Marxists have increasingly convinced society that homosexuality is not an alternative lifestyle, but rather a fully legitimate lifestyle, one among many, no one more valid than another.

Law

Third, think about law. The philosophy of law has been degenerating in the West since at least the late 19th century, but Cultural Marxism radicalized this process. The whole idea of the rule of law is that law is transcendent. Law is impersonal, unbiased, and blind. It should not fluctuate from case to case. This historic view of law demands hierarchy—absolute right and wrong, or least absolute legality and illegality.

For Cultural Marxists, by contrast, the goal of law is to produce favorable outcomes. Law should be used to fulfill a social agenda. This is the origin of sexual, economic, and racial quotas. The older view is that law must always be sex-blind, color-blind, and income-blind. Neither rich nor poor people, white nor black

[9] Id. at 260.

[10] Gabriele Kuby, The Global Sexual Revolution, 46.

people, men nor women, should be permitted to steal. Nor should the law give them preferential treatment in hiring practices and admissions policies. This is equality before the law. This is the biblical perspective on justice (Ex. 12:49; Lev. 19:15). But Cultural Marxists see this system as privileging certain people; therefore, they prefer a legal system that creates equal *outcomes* over a legal system that treats people equally.

Crime, criminals and the justice system

Fourth, think of crime, criminals and the criminal justice system. Postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault tried to convince people that those whom society terms "criminals" are simply those who do not fit into the acceptable and arbitrary codes of society. There is nothing absolutely criminal about crime. Cultural Marxists have accomplished the feat of making society guilty of crime and redefining the criminal as the victim.

Thieves steal because a society is economically unjust. Teenagers riot in London and Philadelphia because society does not give them the lifestyles they are entitled to. Somali pirates kidnap because the West has failed to lift their society out of poverty. Crime is caused by culture; therefore, the elites need to reengineer culture.

Multiculturalism

Finally, think about multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is simply the global application of Cultural Marxism. If we can overturn cultural hierarchies in a single society, if no single way of life or morality in a single society should be privileged, then why then should any culture in the world be privileged over another? Who can say that the West is superior to central Africa? Who can say that 20th-century Britain is superior to Native American culture? Who can say that Christian culture is superior to Islamic culture?

In this way, achievements that we have valued in the history of Western culture, shaped, as it was, by Christianity—thrift, hard work, chivalry, abstract reason, classical music—all become symbols of Western arrogance and "cultural imperialism." Why is a life of hard work and productivity to be preferred to a life of lounging and begging? Why are academic specialties like logic and mathematics preferable to basket-weaving and "gender sensitivity"? Isn't a primitive sub-Saharan dance just as aesthetically valuable as a Bach or Beethoven composition? Isn't a simple New Guinea free verse just as beautiful as Shakespeare? Why should *our* culture be privileged? By what standard can we label some cultures superior and others inferior?

This leveling of all hierarchies has been the wildly successful program of Cultural Marxists. That message has become an *invisible ideology*. The assumptions of Cultural Marxism have seeped deep into the consciousness of the majority of people in the West.

CONCLUSION

I offer one concluding point. The Cultural Marxists were led by thinkers. The Christian counterrevolution also needs a strong core of thinkers to combat the false, pervasive ideas of contemporary culture. Ideas have consequences, but only *people* communicate ideas. We Christian culturalists need what has been called an adversarial intelligentsia.[11] We need godly, courageous adversaries with nimble minds to refute the massive ideas eroding our culture. Ideas are important to everybody, but some Christians are gifted and called to be the adversarial intelligentsia for the broader culture. One day we will "lay our burden down," but a new generation of Christians must pick it up and carry it on. We must labor by the Spirit's power and the inspired Word of God to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and... take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Humanly speaking, the future rests to a large degree on devout Christian thinkers and those who will carry our torch. Professing and practicing Biblical Faith, in all of its glorious and gracious hierarchies, is the victorious alternative to Cultural Marxism. And in the end, it—and it alone by the grace and sovereignty of God—will win.

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[11] John Fonte, *Antonio Gramsci and the Transformation of Institutions*, in Building a Healthy Culture, Don Eberly, ed., 211 (2001).

VICTIMHOOD IS NOT A VIRTUE

Brian G. Mattson

Every Mother's Day it seems my Facebook feed is filled with links to blog posts warning about the dangers of celebrating mothers in church services. If you wonder what could possibly be wrong with recognizing, celebrating, and thanking God for motherhood, you are not alone. According to the authors of such articles, our bewilderment means that we are blind to (and guilty of) a kind of hidden "privilege." Publicly praising motherhood is insensitive to women who are unable to bear children, as well as those who choose not to have children. Celebrating Mother's Day amounts to "shaming" and "triggering" a class of women in the church. Highlight one kind of person and everybody else is automatically rendered a second-class citizen.

This is not a fluke phenomenon that springs up the second Sunday of each May. The Mother's Day backlash is but one case of deeper year round phenomenon with recognizable features: 1) divide people into groups; 2) identify which group is a minority; 3) engage in the zero-sum thinking that whatever benefits one group necessarily comes at the expense of another group (*e.g.*, praising one means *shaming* another; including one means *excluding* another); 4) weaponize the perceived insult to garner reparations of some kind, even if it is something as simple as a self-flagellating apology. This all has the veneer of sensitivity and compassion. It seems very spiritual to unmask this kind of "hidden" or "structural" oppression. It is, we are told, virtuous. It is nothing of the kind.

In late March of 2018 Christian artist, novelist, and songwriter Andrew Peterson released a music video for a new worship song entitled, "Is He Worthy?" The song was an instant sensation, for good reason. It is a musical and lyrical masterpiece, a deeply moving antiphonal congregational song based on Revelation 5. The music video is a technical masterpiece equal to its subject matter. Using a single hand-held camera and single shot (no cuts!), the scene swoops through a magnificent chapel sanctuary, capturing Peterson at his piano, and then, little by little, he is joined by a choir, then a string quartet, and finally a congregation, all singing a glorious refrain to the Lamb who was slain. I hope we sing this one in heaven.

Two days later, Peterson posted a public apology. He had received emails and public comments from people who were "grieved." A commenter wrote, "Man, that's a lot of white people in one video!" Others wrote that they would not or could not share the video with friends of color because "it would cause them pain." Peterson had been insufficiently attentive, you see, to the ethnic makeup of the choir and congregation. While it is an irony to have the camera panning past faces of one hue while singing about "every people, tribe, tongue, and nation," it had a perfectly innocent explanation, the kind owed the benefit of the doubt by anyone blessed with both an imagination and modicum of grace. They issued a public casting call, and filmed—shockingly—the people that showed up.

Nevertheless, Peterson expressed remorse and delivered his heartfelt apology, asking "the forgiveness of the friends and listeners to whom this video brought any measure of grief." He prays and hopes that God will use his mistake to "lead the church to good conversations, better understanding, humility and love and forgiveness between everyone affected by it." The aggrieved were satisfied, and Twitter quickly went into overdrive, praising Peterson for his magnanimity, sensitivity, and humility. I do not question any of those characteristics, for it was obvious long before this episode that he is an uncommonly gracious man who possesses those virtues in abundance. I do, however, have doubts that Mr. Peterson would agree with me that what unfolded here was not, despite appearances, a triumph of righteousness. It was an instance of evangelicalism's own "outrage mob," wielding a weaponized victimhood that represents an ethic at qualitative odds with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

First, we dare not neglect to mention the sheer immaturity involved. The rhetoric borders on the obscene. *Grief? Hurt? Pain? Tears?* From watching a song performed by people who have a different skin color? In the annals of Christian martyrdom, this must represent the lowest all-time bar for victimhood. In my own experience, it has never occurred to me to feel victimized by watching all-black gospel choirs, but I am sure some will discount that as an artifact of my white privilege.

In her longstanding war with militant feminism, Christina Hoff Sommers coined the term "Fainting Couch Feminism" to describe women who react beyond all rational proportion at some perceived (more often invented) injustice. The evangelical world has a fainting couch of its own. Actually, it is the *same* fainting couch, constructed of the exact same materials: mix identity politics with a sense of entitlement and lack of all proportion, then weaponize any and all grievances to extract reparations with the aim of achieving "equality" for the oppressed and downtrodden. It does not matter whether oppressed means "not legally allowed to vote" or "I forgot to show up to sing for Andrew Peterson's music video." The pearl-clutching rhetoric must be the same, for macro and micro-aggressions alike: grief, hurt, pain, anguish, and tears.

Conflict and discord is the way of the Dragon, and it cannot lead to the virtues of the Lamb.

This playbook is recognizable. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, deeply influenced by G.W.F. Hegel, believed that human progress is achieved by exploiting and maximizing the "antitheses" of existence—the subtle, hidden oppressions that characterize society (for them, these oppressions were purely economic). Conflict between oppressors and the oppressed—especially armed conflict, as it happens—is what opens the way for a resolution of these "antitheses," the establishment of a new, more equitable, state of affairs. Provoke a conflict, let it rage and burn, and a new, better state of affairs will rise like a Phoenix from the ashes. Marx and Engels dubbed this "dialectical materialism."

It appears to me that much evangelicalism is bewitched by what we might call "dialectical *spiritualism*." It does not necessarily have economic inequities in view, but the animating idea is the same: find some hidden inequity, provoke a conflict, let it burn, and a new consciousness will rise from the ashes. Notice what Peterson hoped for as a result of his dustup: that God would "lead the church to good conversations, better understanding, humility and love and forgiveness between everyone affected by it." Make no mistake: true "humility, love, and forgiveness" are not achieved by means of worldly conflict. Conflict and discord is the way of the Dragon, and it cannot lead to the virtues of the Lamb. Do you think the social justice warriors who attacked Andrew Peterson are somehow *more* humble, *more* loving, or *more* forgiving as a result of this affair?

Since I have brought it up, what are the virtues of the Lamb in contrast to the way of the Dragon. Here are a few salient texts:

> A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense. (Prov. 19:11)

> But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. (Matt. 5:44)

> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.... Do not repay anyone evil for evil [....] If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:14, 17-21)

> The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? (1 Cor. 6:7)

> If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind. (1 Tim. 6:3-5a)

> Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Pet. 4:8)

Does this really need to be said? Sadly so. Unity between Jew and Greek, slave or free, male or female, rich or poor does not come from provoking controversy and conflict between the two, hoping that the resulting carnage will generate greater humility, love, and forgiveness. Unity is possible, rather, because God has torn down "the wall of hostility" and made "one new man" in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2). There is rock-solid biblical ground here: if you are a person who watches a Christ-exalting music video performed by people of a different

race, and rather than *joining your voice with the choir* you are filled with grievance and hostility, then it is not the gospel of Jesus Christ you are advancing. Victimhood is not a virtue, and God has not called you or me to be the micro-aggression police. *We have replaced, "bless those who persecute you" with "publicly call out and shame those who trigger you."*

Finally, I wish to observe that this seemingly new concept called "wokeness" in our present day is not new at all. Being "woke," as the term is presently used, suggests that one has been awakened and enlightened to otherwise *hidden* realities—or, rather, hidden injustices. To be "woke" is to be *in the know*, to see and identify victims, even where and when the "victims" themselves cannot. Of course, one must take up the cause in their place. "Wokeness" is nothing less than self-anointing or self-authorizing Pharisaism whereby one is called to bring every hidden sin to account. It is as if the Holy Spirit has deputized these warriors to substitute as Lord of the conscience.

This is *gnosticism*, at bottom. The "woke" are the new *gnostikoi,* the "knowing ones," and the connection between the macro and the micro here is stronger than you might think. Eric Voegelin famously argued that Marxism and other mass delusions were a reprise of ancient gnosticism. The spiritual "elite," those "in the know," were practitioners of secret knowledge. It was through their efforts of exposing and provoking conflicts that the world would progress to experience happiness, peace, and prosperity. It is no different with *cultural* Marxism. Dialectical materialism and dialectical spiritualism have the same *modus operandi*, and require the same cadre of elite practitioners. The Marxist version said that only by provoking conflict will the "world-system" progress and mature toward unity and enlightenment. The evangelical version says that only by provoking conflict will the *church* progress and mature toward unity and enlightenment.

It has always sounded, even in its old Hegelian form, so spiritual, so noble, and so virtuous. But victimhood is not a virtue, and "wokeness" is simply worldliness. We must follow the way of the Lamb. Only then can we put aside our hostile grievances and actually join our voices with Andrew Peterson to sing the praises of the one who gave his life for every people, tribe, tongue, and nation.

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WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

"Preferred Personal Pronouns," Ethics, Language, and the Gospel

Jeffery J. Ventrella

The pressure rises on campus, in the public square, and in the church: Use someone's "gender affirming" pronoun or be deemed "offensive," at best, or a bigot, at worst. In the Christian milieu, this is often seen as providing "passport" to affirm the trans-challenged individual or else risk permanently severing a hypothetically subsequent "gospel conversation." The unspoken assumption is, "If you uptight Christians would only have the decency to use the preferred pronoun, then the gates of heaven would fly open without impediment." How should we navigate this quite real and increasingly pervasive situation? Is the issue of pronoun usage merely a matter of niceness and interpersonal courtesy?

LABELS AND OBJECTIVE REALITY

Let us begin with a thought experiment: Imagine a man who verbally identifies his car as "water." If he parks his "water" in his garage and closes the door, then what happens upon re-opening the door? Will he be greeted by a puddle? No. Ascribing the moniker "water" to a car does not mean that it becomes objectively liquid. We must not confuse the linguistic label with the actual entity.

In the same way, there is an objective label-independent reality with regard to human sex and reproduction—just as there is for all mammals and other higher species. Every cell in your body, every neuron in your brain, is either male in its genetic makeup (XY) or female (XX). Your body can produce eggs, or it can produce sperm. Neither words, hormones, nor scalpels can change these and many other objective and sex-linked facts about you. You did not autonomously choose these facts. They were handed to you at the first instant that you became you, *i.e.*, at the instant of conception.

Tom Wright explains the central theological flaw committed by confusing a chosen label with actual reality:

> We are not, after all, defined by whatever longings and aspirations come out of our hearts, despite the remarkable rhetoric of our times. In the area of human well-being, that is the road to radical instability; in the area of theological beliefs, it leads to Gnosticism (where you try to discern the hidden divine spark within yourself and then be true to it).[1]

Labeling things whatever one desires, then assuming that reality follows suit, is not a Christian exercise; it is a Gnostic and hence, pagan exercise leading to instability and a significant hindrance to human flourishing. In short, there is far more to personal pronoun usage than courtesy and niceness.

LANGUAGE AND LOVE

Let's also consider language and its role and use in general. Language stems from the eternal Word,[2] who is Truth,[3] and who cannot lie.[4] Accordingly, language when used by humans—those created in the image and likeness of this God—should be used for conveying truth. Yet, what about engaging with unbelieving suffering souls struggling with (or embracing) "gender dysphoria"? Shouldn't using their "preferred personal pronoun" be seen as a tangible act of loving one's neighbor? Do we risk offending or shutting down important gospel conversation by tying the pronoun to the person's objective sex?

We must first be clear about what loving one's neighbor entails biblically. James K.A. Smith offers keen insight:

> If we truly love our neighbors, we will bear witness to the fullness to which they are called. If we truly desire their welfare, we should proclaim the thickness of moral obligations that God commands as the gifts to channel us into

1 N.T. Wright, The Day the Revolution Began 398 (2016).

2 John 1:1.

3 John 14:6.

4 Numbers 23:19; for a comprehensive approach see Vern Poythress, In the Beginning was the Word: Language, A God-Centered Approach (2009).

> flourishing, and labor in hope that these might become the laws of the land, though with appropriate levels of expectation.[5]

Contrary to today's social *zeitgeist*, it is actually unloving to reinforce notions that detract from a person's flourishing or compromise the moral duty to which God calls them. We do precious image-bearers of God no favors by mistakenly equating niceness for actual reality-based kindness and love.

We must also keep in mind that the biblical imperative to love our neighbors is penultimate, not ultimate. It is the *second* great commandment. The first great commandment also necessarily bears on this question and that commandment demands that we first love God with our entire being, including our mind.[6] This means, among other things, that a God-defined thing must control a self-labeled thing. As creatures, our role is to discern, not determine[7] the Creator's description/interpretation of reality, and that includes the Creator's description of ethical reality. Misnaming reality for the sake of subjective personal preference fails is an insufficient justification for misnaming, and ultimately harms the very people we are commanded to love.[8]

A SEVENFOLD CASE FOR TELLING THE TRUTH

How do these insights relate to our interactions with a "gender confused" neighbor who insists that you use a pronoun that defies the objective reality of his or her sex? First, personal pronouns refer to real persons and, thus, reference creational norms associated with those real persons, that is, the metaphysical reality of the person standing before you. Names, in contrast to pronouns, are labels that do not necessarily apply to metaphysical reality or human essence. In other words, at bottom, there are men and women, but not necessarily Bob or Toby or Sam. A woman who assumes her husband's surname as is customary in some cultures does not cease to be a woman, nor does her metaphysical status change when her name changes.

A single name, because it is a label, not a metaphysical reality, can refer to both sexes, whether male or female[9] and a person can possess multiple ones.[10] Names are thus assigned; sex simply is. No one is born with a name; they are born, however, with a determined and immutable sex. Personal pronouns necessarily refer to sex,[11] unlike names, which may or may not do so.

Second, God created mankind with a set metaphysical, complementary binaries called "male and female."[12] This is what mankind *is* in reality, and no existential desire, personal preference, cosmetic camouflage, hormonal infusion, or tissue-destroying surgery alters or can alter that reality. Such techniques can only distort but do not redefine reality. On the surface, sex can be superficially obfuscated; it cannot be obliterated.

Third, Jesus teaches that the process of becoming holy—sanctified—flows from applying word-based truth.[13] To employ a reality-denying pronoun—calling a male "her" or "she," for example—is to obstruct the means by which a confused and hurting people can realize their deeper human *telos*, that is, holiness. We, in effect, withhold medicine from an ailing patient, fearing that the stick of the needle might be deemed "not nice" or "offensive."

Fourth, the ninth commandment bans bearing false witness. This commandment proscribes a variety of linguistic and behavioral abuses, all rooted in protecting reality or truth telling, since it is only within the scope of reality and truth that people flourish. The Reformed theological tradition put it this way in relevant part:

> The sins forbidden in the ninth commandment are, all prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbours, . . . outfacing and overbearing the truth… concealing the truth… perverting [the truth] to a wrong meaning… to the prejudice of truth or justice; speaking untruth, lying… [14]

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5 JAMES K. A. SMITH, AWAITING THE KING: REFORMING PUBLIC THEOLOGY 163 (2017).

6 Matthew 22:34-40.

7 See also Hebrews 5:14.

8 Moreover, affirming someone's error in this regard contributes to their culpable suppression of truth. See Romans 1:18-32.

9 Recall that King David's wife, Saul's daughter, was named "Michal" (1 Samuel 18). Other contemporary examples include Pat, Shannon, Leslie, Fran, Robin, and Ashley.

10 Think of the "alternative" names of Daniel and his friends in Babylonian captivity. They had multiple names, but only one sex.

11 Gender ideology advocates recognize this truth, which is why they adamantly insist that others use preferred personal pronouns.

12 Genesis 2, affirmed by Christ in Matthew 19—"from the beginning."

13 John 17:17.

14 WESTMINSTER LARGER CATECHISM, ANSWER TO QUESTION 145: *What sins are forbidden in the ninth commandment?*

The law of God forbids occluding the truth in all its forms, including calling a man a woman. As Paul said, "Let God be true, though every one a liar. As it is written, 'That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.'"[15]

Fifth, though people often claim unfairness or offense, note the manipulative asymmetry of their objection. They seek to impose upon and overbear the conscience of all others. They insist that others pretend they are a different sex and that others must, thereby, become complicit in their confusion. Those who refuse to employ the wrong pronoun, by contrast, do not insist that others use proper reality-based pronouns. Rather, those people are simply standing on reality and conscience and aligning their vocabulary with those choices, a position perfectly consistent with human flourishing, liberty, and a Christian ethic.

In decoupling gender from biology and denying any given or "natural" meaning to male and female sexuality, gender ideology directly repudiates reality.

Sixth, note that proper sexuality always relates to marriage[16] as composed of one man and one woman. This reality frames and informs the entire biblical narrative: It is the creational norm. It marks Jesus' first public miracle. Marriage by creational norm and divine declaration is inherently and indispensably sexually binary. A misused pronoun in principle undermines this foundational pre-political society by rendering both history and metaphysics as mere contingencies—biology becomes bigotry.[17]

Seventh, proper pronoun usage is necessarily connected to how we understand the core components of a biblical worldview. Paul teaches that human marriage is an analogue to the marriage of Christ, the [male] Bridegroom to the [female] Bride. For this analogy to work, "male" and "female" must be immutable metaphysical realities, not merely social constructs as demanded by gender ideology or personal preference. The pronouns "his" and "her" and "he" and "she" attach to transcendent realities. They refer to the immutable norms of Creation and Consummation in which male/female capture an essential and eternal distinction, a beautiful distinction to be celebrated rather than erased. This is why gender ideology undermines reality and seeks to undermine the foundations of the Christian faith. Archbishop Chaput explains:

> In decoupling gender from biology and denying any given or "natural" meaning to male and female sexuality, gender ideology directly repudiates reality. People don't need to be "religious" to notice that men and women are different. The evidence is obvious. And, the only way to ignore it is through a kind of intellectual self-hypnosis. Gender ideology rejects any human experience of knowledge that conflicts with its own flawed premises; it's the imperialism of bad science on steroids. For Christians, it also attacks the heart of our faith: the Creation ("male and female he created them"); the Incarnation—God taking the flesh of a man; and the Redemption—God dying on the cross and then rising in glorified bodily form.[18]

This then is the quintessential question: *Who do we say people are*? They are who God, the Creator and Redeemer, says they are: fearfully and wonderfully made, dignified and worthy, reflecting His very likeness and image as male and female—he and she; him and her; Bride and Groom—all to God's glory. Telling that truth with kindness and boldness is how we best love our neighbors in the 21st century.

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[15] Romans 3:4.

[16] P. Andrew Sandlin, The Christian Sexual Worldview: God's Order in an Age of Sexual Chaos (2015).

[17] And, redefining "maleness" and "femaleness" as nothing more than preference means "parent," "mother," "father," and "family" become not extant natural pre-political institutions, but mere fluid labels that become legitimate only through the State's fiat. Power, rather than nature, thus determines status. See Nancy Pearcey, Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality 212-213 (2018).

[18] Charles J. Chaput, Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World 93 (2017).

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JUSTICE AND FUTILITY

Ecclesiastes and the Autonomous Pursuit of a Better World

Joseph Boot

God's Word is the revelation of his character and creational purposes. The scriptures republish God's creation Word and tell us of his redemptive purposes for the fallen cosmos. It should not be a matter of hesitation to place our faith and confidence in this revelation and to assert its total authority. Indeed, the only alternative to grounding our faith in the transcendent wisdom of God as it speaks to our heart, the religious root of our being, is trusting the immanent, self-contained, presumptuous and fallible wisdom of sinful man. This would be a distortion of the faith function—a religious trust in the creature rather than the Creator.

ECCLESIASTES: COVENENTAL WISDOM AND HUMANISTIC FUTILITY

The book of Ecclesiastes is one portion of God's word-revelation that speaks powerfully and with timeless relevance to the human condition in the midst of its choice between these two kinds of wisdom. It is not, as some have thought, a random collection of thoughts and reflections on life by a fallible philosopher simply cogitating on his experiences. The Bible is in fact the Word of God, and it comes to us through the greatest Jewish king in the history of the older covenant people. In it, Solomon speaks as a covenant-keeping man who knows and expounds God's law-Word (Proverbs) and who was well acquainted with the "wisdom" of the ancient peoples.

The Teacher in Ecclesiastes broadly portrays the core difference between Solomonic (covenantal) wisdom and the wisdom of humanistic man in apostasy from God. At the centre of that radical antithesis is the question of who governs time and what takes place in history. Who will be sovereign over history and creation (*i.e.,* the unfolding of nature and its processes from a humanist perspective)? In other words, Ecclesiastes is not simply highlighting discernable differences in the personal attitudes to life, work and piety between the covenant keeper and covenant breaker; what is being pointed out are the differences between two opposing civilizational programs—the one that Solomon represented, which up to that point was the greatest the world had seen, and the humanistic dream of a paradise on earth instantiated by man's autonomous consciousness and wisdom.

The Teacher argues in Ecclesiastes that autonomous man's self-declared wisdom is in fact powerless to accomplish its aim in the face of man's fallen, ruined condition and God's curse on man's work and world. In short, the world is bent and crooked. No amount of human wisdom can straighten it out. As long as man hardens his heart, refusing to face the problem of sin and alienation from God, all his goals will be frustrated. *There is only futility and meaninglessness for those who refuse to reckon with God and his covenant-Word.* That is the Teacher's Spirit-inspired inspired thesis.

Of course, Christians also inhabit a broken and ruined world, and, as fallen creatures, are touched by many of the pangs of which the Teacher speaks in Ecclesiastes. In a very real sense, Christians inhabit two worlds. We are being made new; we have the deposit of the new creation. Nevertheless, the old nature lingers, and its desires battle daily against the new nature. Yes, we are being made whole, but our bodies are corrupted and groan toward full redemption (Rom. 8). This means that we can relate to and empathize with the plight of humanistic man because "such were some of you" (1 Cor. 6:11). And yet, because God governs the times and seasons and is reconciling all things to Himself, He alone is able to make our lives and work succeed and, thus, signal the coming total deliverance from creation's bondage to futility.

WISDOM AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

In Ecclesiastes 3, the Teacher moves us to consider the kind of social order that man "under the sun" seeks to realise but which, because of his innate crookedness, turns to disorder. Because of the perversion of his nature, where God's word is rejected, autonomous man's justice is not justice. His "social order" turns to oppression and chaos.

As Solomon looked around him in the context of a vast knowledge and experience of the surrounding empires, what he saw was man's aspirations for a perfect community or ideal society being frustrated on all

sides. The perennial hope of humanistic man, his dream to create a just order without the living God only ends, says the Teacher, in oppression, injustice, and a sense of futility. As the Teacher says in 5:7, "for when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity."

Beginning in 3:16, we have his first reflections on the problem of a man-centered concept of the just society—the city of man. That project began when man thought he could be his own god, his own functional deity, defining good and evil, justice and injustice for himself, endeavouring to construct life and culture apart from God. Solomon renders his verdict on the humanistic project: "I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness." He does not analyse those societies for us, or comment on the cause of Egyptian or Babylonian injustice. He does not offer a socio-economic critique. He simply states that wherever one looks within the halls of power under the sun, man apart from God cannot realise the society he wants to attain. In humanistic kingdoms, there is no justice where there should be justice.

Moreover, because no solution outside of God and his covenant is possible, the Teacher does not offer any advice based in theories of "natural law" for the sinner to order society in a "neutral" way. Rather he reflects, "I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked" (v. 17). For Solomon, it is God who governs history and judges all men; his law and justice will prevail over man's ideologies and social utopias. This is how the believer is to think about the problem of justice: God is the judge and he judges in terms of his divine standard of righteousness. This encourages his covenant-keeping readers not to depart from God's Word. But there is more to this text. The Teacher helps us to understand why God permits injustice and man's works of oppression in history. This is done in order to make his righteous judgment visible, to clarify the supremacy of divine justice over humanistic justice.

Injustice is only overcome by divine justice, so people see by their frustration and the futility of their ideological projects, their inability to realize their utopian dreams on their own terms. They come to know by bitter experience that their autonomous justice projects unleash injustice, while God's justice is wholly just. Again, this should build confidence in God's covenantal work in history for the believing reader. History is the theatre of man's testing, so the Teacher says, "I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts" (v. 18).

God is not here making a qualitative comparison between the attributes of man and beast; one is God's image-bearer and the other is not. Rather, by the testing of man's idolatrous wisdom in history—that is, in the theatre of God's righteous judgment—man is shown that he has no advantage over the animals who neither build civilizations nor reflect on and pursue justice and shalom. Indeed, because of the curse, fallen man, like all animals, is destined to die (v. 19). The frustration of death is that it ends man's planning, his empire building, his dreams for a better future, and the just order he has sought to establish. In this sense, what advantage has he over the animal kingdom? Death is a trump-card man cannot overcome in seeking to make a name for himself by establish his order, by his autonomous wisdom. This is true of individuals, not just civilizations, of course. Zack Eswine is insightful on this point:

> When we were young, we dreamt of a house to buy, a yard to create with, pieces of furniture to possess, and a bank account to use for our gain. When we are old, a time comes to sell everything that once represented our dreams of a future. We have to move to an assisted living facility, or in with our kids while someone else uses the drapes we left on the windows we used to wash and enjoy. A young woman fills a hope chest with treasures over which she dreams, and intends to bring into her future with her man. An elderly woman has long since buried her lovely man and now has to sell or give her hope chest away. "As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand" (Eccl. 5:15).[1]

Both those deemed wise and the fool will die. Neither the wisdom nor the folly of human beings can put this world right again; only a righteousness from heaven can do that. How far we have come from Eden—nothing lasts. Everything passes into memory. And finally Death stomps on it all.

FUTILE REVOLUTIONS AND DIVINE JUSTICE

From Plato to Thomas Moore and Karl Marx, man's attempts at building his just and permanent order by his own resources have never prospered. His order, however conceived, inevitably devolves into oppression (See Eccl. 4:1-3). This is a remarkable, if sobering,

[1] Zack Eswine. Recovering Eden: The Gospel According to Ecclesiastes (2014).

observation that remains relevant through the centuries. Oppression! This has always been, and remains, the cry of the revolutionary. Yet the revolution almost always proves as oppressive, if not more so, than the previous order. As Kelley notes, "History consistently records that whenever man posits his notions of justice and the good society there the reality turns out to be a struggle for political power by those strong enough to impose their will on others."

We know that philosophers have written their treatises for the ideal order, over and over, trying to overcome the problem of tyranny, but have never succeeded in eradicating the basic reality of oppression. Was anyone surprised when Plato thought that the philosophers were best suited to comprise the new ruling class necessary to realise justice?

This has led to increasing despair in human history, and yet there is never any shortage of new revolutionaries claiming to have realized what all previous generations failed to see—that if only we were all liberated from this new oppression through this new social project, then paradise will become a global reality. There is a widely held notion today that all truth claims and big narratives about the world (including God's word) are themselves forms of oppression and violence. The natural outworking of this doctrine, in the name of "justice," is to unmask the underlying power-motive behind all competing truth claims in order to demonstrate the true justice of the critical, revolutionary position. However, on this basis, "justice" is an ideal only, one that can never be realized. It is ever on the horizon, but never reached. So the world becomes a series of endless revolutions and the ceaseless overturning of power in hopeless futility. "*Under the sun*," then, as man sees it, "on the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them" (Eccl. 4:1). Because the humanist acknowledges no God who is finally bringing all things into judgment, he has little motive to act justly, for in his autonomy and apostasy, he does not truly understand what justice is. He has no transcendent reference point.

In our time, many humanists believe that modern versions of democracy have answered the problem of injustice (hence their attempts to export egalitarian democracy everywhere). The outcome of this thinking, unhinged from the Word of God, has often been shown to be the tyranny of the majority represented by a cultural elite determined to be "on the right side of history"—that is, a terrifying kind of smiling and self-righteous oppression backed by powerful technological statecraft. The idea that "more" democracy is equal to more justice is a dangerous delusion. Majority opinion is rarely God's opinion. The reality is that outside of the covenant of God, there is no solution to this problem; it is, in the final analysis, hopeless. The Teacher reflects soberly on this in Ecclesiastes 4:2-3:

> So I admired the dead, who have already died, more than the living, who are still alive. But better than either of them is the one who has not yet existed, who has not seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.

The deep-seated moral crookedness of the human heart means that the problem of wisdom, truth, and justice for the social order (as indeed for the individual) cannot be solved by human effort to forcibly rearrange society. The Christian, in the face of the dual modern responses of nihilism and despair or utopian egalitarian delusions, is tempted to both pietism and retreatism—escaping the world inwardly or outwardly. But that is not what wisdom calls us to. The hopeless condition of fallen man under the sun is precisely why it takes godly men and women, called to serve God and have dominion in Christ, to pray and work in faith for justice and righteousness—the kingdom of God.

Only the regenerate person has a truly new orienting principle at work in them, recognising work as prophetic and priestly service to God and their fellow man, in the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. Only the believer sees that unless we submit to God's transcendent law-Word and government—the truth to which all are subject—then all that is left to man is tyranny, whether of the 1% or the 51%. Therefore, we strive to bring every thought, activity, and institution into subjection to Christ who alone reveals true righteousness and justice. Our failure to do so is to abandon of the world to futility, oppression, and evil.

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CHRISTIAN STATESMANSHIP

From Polarization to a Politics of Image-Bearers

HUNTER BAKER

I recently walked through a park in Jackson, Tennessee called Liberty Garden and Arboretum. It was built as a living memorial after the devastating attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. The events of that day are still vivid. I recall the smashed appearance of the Pentagon as I drove by it while struggling to follow a GPS in my rental car on a professional trip to Washington, D.C. I remember the strange sense of danger that lingered as I sat with a small group in the House of Representatives on that same trip. Would some crisis erupt as we listened to speeches and made our notes?

1. GRATITUDE AS THE BEST VERSION OF PATRIOTISM

One of the interesting things about people is the way they tend to unite in the wake of tragedy. I remember living through Hurricane Ike in Houston, Texas about a decade ago. When the dawn finally arrived, the wreck of our neighborhood was evident. The homes still stood, but roof shingles were scattered everywhere. Large trees had been sheared and shredded. Some roads were blocked. Fences laid flat or hung at odd angles. We lost power that would not flow for several days. Counterintuitively, it was this negative event that brought us together with neighbors to share a meal. We got together with rapidly thawing meat from our refrigerators and freezers to cook on a gas grill. One fellow from down the street seemed to come alive in the face of adversity. He clearly gained a sense of purpose from the need to respond to events. It as if he became the mayor of our block.

The period immediately following September 11, 2001 was similar. Americans banded together and felt a sense of solidarity. I went to Pensacola to gather with my mother and sister for a short vacation. As I passed Seville Square, I saw the set-up for a patriotic rally. It looked like a good-hearted affair aimed at celebrating the things we love about our country, liberty prominent among them. It surprised me. We have our holidays, sure, but this was more spontaneous. Social scientists noted a surge in attendance at American churches during the same period.

The changes proved to be temporary. Tragedy and loss remind us of what we treasure together, but such recoveries tend to be brief. I fear that we spend far more of our time forgetting the things we love than being grateful for them and taking care to protect them.

Despite the brevity of the reign of those moments of solidarity, I have the Liberty Garden Park in Jackson, Tennessee as a memorial of gratitude. Accordingly, it can be examined and considered. I took time to look over the various monuments in the park. Though most people simply take laps around its walking trail, great care went into the selection of documents and persons to represent what is good and worthy of preservation in the United States. What did I see there? What memorials do we choose? What are we grateful for?

As I passed through the collection of memorials, I saw *The Mayflower Compact*, the *Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Paine's revolutionary tract *Common Sense*, the preamble to the U.S. Constitution, Washington's first inaugural address, Jefferson's first inaugural, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, his second inaugural, the 13th and 19th Amendments to the Constitution,[1] works from Susan B. Anthony and Martin Luther King, Jr. (including his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech), Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech,[2] documents commemorating victory in World War II, and more. I am merely scratching the surface of this rich remembrance.

How great is this inheritance? Consider Washington's courage, humility, and restraint ("the first, the last, the best, the Cincinnatus of the West!"),[3] Jefferson's brilliance, Lincoln's endurance and ambition, the constitutional amendments that sought to more fully vindicate America's ideals, Susan B. Anthony's long crusade, King's prophetic appeal for America to live up to its promise, and triumph in wars during the bloodiest century of mankind's existence. Glory, disappointment,

[1] The Thirteenth Amendment banned involuntary servitude. The Nineteenth Amendment extended suffrage to women.

[2] Those freedoms were freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from fear, and freedom from want.

[3] LORD BYRON, POETRY OF BYRON, CHOSEN AND ARRANGED BY MATTHEW ARNOLD (1881).

tragedies, and exceptional achievement: all of these are part of our story.

Perhaps the greatest of the victories goes unheralded in the park and is largely bypassed in our history. Today, we see nations such as North Korea and Venezuela starving their citizens in collectivist failure. Victory in the Cold War made sure that billions of others preserved or were able to obtain their liberty. In that sense, the American cause has been, as Thomas Paine argued long ago, the cause of humankind.[4] When the world entered into a long twilight struggle between communism and freedom after a global war that left formerly mighty nations exhausted, the young, sometimes savage, often heroic nation we live in hung tough and stood strong.

The constitution of our nation—a young country compared to so many others who had their great empires—stands now as the longest running document of its kind in the world. In the tradition of political thought, we talk about positive and negative liberty. Positive liberty refers to the ability to actively participate in one's government: to run for office, to serve on juries, to affect public policy. Negative liberty has to do with living a life free from arbitrary interference and restriction.[5] We are blessed to live in a country that offers both types of liberty in large measure.

Everything I have stated to this point has been for a purpose. I have worked to describe our inheritance as Americans with the aim of demonstrating that we have something worth preserving *together*. We share something that is truly *good* in our country. And we recognize our blessings in the moments of clarity that crisis can bring.

2. THE NATURE OF THE CURRENT CRISIS

The memorial at Liberty Garden is dedicated to those who gave their lives "to preserve us as a free nation." We have been preserved in our freedom, but the American founders were only too well aware that a *free* people must also be a *virtuous* people. Freedom without virtue ultimately leads to chaos, disorder, enmity, and the nightmare of a populace where everyone has rights and no one has responsibilities. If we want to maintain self-government as a society, then we must govern *ourselves*, our passions, our reactions to disappointments, and even our sense of triumph.

Study after study shows that polarization and division are growing both in our government and in our society. I am involved with a civic organization called Better Angels. They sum up the situation well, noting the existence of three concerning divisions:

- A large and growing *partisan* divide: Americans increasingly believe that those with whom they disagree politically are not only misguided, but are also bad people, members of an essentially alien out-group.
- A large and growing *class* divide: the approximately 30 percent of Americans with four-year college degrees are mostly thriving, while the other 70 percent are falling further and further behind on nearly every measure.
- A large and growing *governin*g divide: huge numbers of Americans no longer believe that their elected leaders, including those from their own party, are honest or can be trusted even to try to do the right thing.[6]

What are the causes of these growing rifts? The answer has to do with technology, culture, the special nature of government, and human nature.

We live in a time of unprecedented technological and cultural change. In our country today, almost every human being has the ability to establish contact with almost every other human being. The great majority of us have access to more information than was once available in the world's greatest libraries. Fantastical science fiction dreams have become daily reality.

Contrary to what visionaries of the future might have previously thought, this period of greater technological connection seems not to have harmonized our thoughts and led to a new age of enlightenment and good global good will. Instead, we are distressed to find that people we like reasonably well in the "real world" have irritating political opinions in the virtual one. It is like dreaming of how wonderful it would be to have the power of telepathy so one could read the minds of others, then gaining the ability only to be repulsed by what one learns. Why do we feel this way?

A big part of the answer to that question has to do with the way we are constructed mentally. Our knowledge about the world is hard won. We try to comprehend reality that is massively complex. Once we settle on an approach about something like politics, we do not want to continuously revisit and revise it. Instead,

[4] Paine made that argument in his widely reproduced and reprinted 1776 tract Common Sense.

[5] For a valuable exposition of the two types of liberty, rendered in his prose as "ancient" and "modern" liberty, see Benjamin Constant, The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with the Moderns (1819).

[6] https://www.better-angels.org/the-disunion-crisis.

we want to settle on our principles and move forward. Imagine if something as fundamental as gravity had to be reconsidered each day and that you were not sure whether you would walk with confidence or float away upon leaving your front door. Our approaches to living together seem to be that unstable at times. Consider the wholesale revision our society has undergone with regard to marriage. An understanding that appeared to be solid throughout millennia of human history turned out to be far less well-established than anyone born more than 70 years ago would likely have believed.

Or consider changes that have occurred in various places and times with regard to private property. If you lived in particular countries during the 20th century, you may have suddenly discovered that individuals could no longer own their businesses or homes. Instead, the state asserted the ownership of all property in the name of the people. People who understood reality one way walked outside and found themselves parallel to the ground. Gravity itself had shifted.

The laws of politics have their impact on human lives just as the laws of physics do, but we seem to have more control over the political laws.

Given the examples above, perhaps you can understand why many of us pay so much attention to politics. We are invested in this dispute over the rules about how we are going to live together in reality. We understand that the stakes are quite high. If you do not think so, then ask someone who currently lives in Venezuela where citizens of what is possibly the most oil-rich country in the world are losing about 20 pounds a year because of a lack of food. Ask a Christian who runs a bakery and makes wedding cakes in certain parts of the United States. It matters. The laws of politics have their impact on human lives just as the laws of physics do, but we seem to have more control over the political laws. This represents a terrifying temptation.[7]

Because we crave stability in our understanding of the world, we welcome confirmation of what we believe. I have experienced it personally. When I watch political commentary, the analysts who agree with me cause me to feel cool, refreshed, and approving. Those who disagree bring about feelings of frustration, a flushed face, and annoyance. Years ago, I remember my irritation at watching Ed Schultz's MSNBC show, which seemed to be about demons breaking through the crust of the earth and the demons were the Republicans. With one group, all is right in the world. We understand things the same way and have similar ideas about how we should then orient ourselves in the world. With the other, discord reigns. We disagree with regard to both diagnosis and treatment.

Given our innate enjoyment of having our own opinions confirmed, politics is increasingly covered as though it were some kind of game or sport. We look at people on the other side of political controversies as though they were bulldogs, tigers, gamecocks, and tarheels who must be vanquished over the course of a Saturday afternoon.

Or perhaps we are coming to think of politics the way we do films and television dramas with casts of heroes and villains. If you are conservative, then Nancy Pelosi is a villain. Barack Obama is a villain. If you are liberal, then Donald Trump, Mike Pence, and Paul Ryan are monsters who must be slain. Depending on whether Rachel Maddow or Sean Hannity is writing the script, the characters will be defined a certain way and the audience response will be carefully calibrated to produce outrage and ratings.

In the old world of three major networks, national magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*, along with big city newspapers, the appeal of broadcast and publishing had to be broad by way of neccessity. With the advent of cable and satellite television, 24-hour news networks, the internet, blogs, and social media, the entire landscape has changed. Instead of making a broad appeal, channels, publications, and websites have segmented into narrower and narrower offerings. The positive side is that one is not forced to submit to a monolithic, left-of-center news media such as the one that dominated the previous era. The negative side is that it is increasingly possible to gorge oneself on a continuous diet of confirmation of personal biases. We might imagine a hamster repetitively hitting a lever that releases pellets.

The nature of freedom is such that it opens the door to accompanying abuses. We can create self-constructed worlds in which wishing seems to make reality conform

[7] Some argue that there really are laws underlying politics that are just as real as the laws of the physical world and that we are not free to manipulate them however we would like. When you hear people talking about "natural law" morality, for example, that is what they mean. On that perspective, I strongly recommend C.S. LEWIS, THE ABOLITION OF MAN (1943).

to desire. We need not throw away our precious liberty, but we must be aware of the pitfalls.

It is also important to reflect on the special nature of politics and government. In particular, we should ask one critical question: What makes government different from every other human activity? The answer is instructive. Government is the institution in society that has a legal monopoly on the coercive use of violence. And that is okay. This violence is part of God's mandate for government. But we would do well to keep in mind that behind every act of government lies the gun, the prison cell, the trial, confiscation, and possibly even execution. The use of this awesome social power must be weighed carefully. Though its purpose is good, we have all too many examples of the danger and harm that often follows in its wake.

No responsible person encourages games with combustible material.

Because this threat is real and the stakes are high, we must govern our political passions. To the extent that we allow our feelings about politics to resemble the ones we have about something like college football or the latest action spectacular at the theater, we make a dangerous and unwise mistake. To the extent that our political leaders play along with that perilous dynamic, they betray our trust and lead us astray. No responsible person encourages games with combustible material.

3. STATESMANSHIP AS A HIGHER STANDARD

What, then, is the answer? How can we overcome the disintegrating, tribalistic dynamics currently making our politics more divisive, more childish, and less constructive? We need leadership that goes beyond this thing we call "politics," which some darkly and humorously characterize as "show business for ugly people." What we need is *statesmanship*.

What is statesmanship? What is a statesman? (When I use that word, I intend it to be taken inclusive of men and women.) The old joke is that a statesman is a politician who has been dead for a certain number of years. In other words, a statesman is a politician who has been out of sight and mind long enough that we mostly cannot remember why many of us were so angry at him or her. But what is a statesman, really? I will attempt an answer.

There is a particularly arresting passage written by the Roman proconsul Cicero in his book *On the Commonwealth*. Like many ancient texts, this one takes the form of a dialogue between friends. Cicero wrote the section I will describe in the voice of Scipio Africanus, a general and grandson of a great man by the same name. My translation titles this portion of the text, "Scipio's Dream," but I have seen a medieval version that uses the evocative language, "The Statesman's Ecstasy."[8]

In this arresting vision, Scipio somehow travels to a location beyond our planet from which he can experience the cosmos in a way normally unavailable to human beings. He can see the earth and how small we are as part of the whole. The great general finds himself transported by the music of the heavenly spheres. Scipio learns that the work of the statesman is derivative of the work of God, who favors and blesses it. The statesman's task is to cultivate justice and piety. He should be disposed to act for the good of everyone.[9]

This is not an easy task. We have forgotten God. We cannot hear the music of the spheres as Scipio could. We are like the people who live near a great waterfall. After enough time passes, they no longer hear its mighty roar. They have blocked it out.[10] I would argue that in the crude nature of 21st-century Western politics, we manifest this metaphysical deafness. Perhaps that is the reason for our shouting and grotesque, exaggerated gestures.

In a companion work, *On the Laws*, Cicero considered the bonds that unite human beings. We have been endowed by God with reason and judgment. The existence of our reason demonstrates the special bond we have with God. As the community that shares reason, we are all members of the same state. Indeed, we are part of the same family fathered by God, Cicero argues.[11]

Statesmanship is an appropriate response to the knowledge that we are created by God and all of us in the human family share in his image. Cicero characterized the work of the statesman well when he wrote:

> Among lyres and flutes or singing voices, a certain harmony must be maintained out of the different sounds. Trained ears cannot bear false or discordant notes. This harmony, full

[8] Cicero, On the Commonwealth, Book VI.

[9] Id.

[10] Id.

[11] Cicero, On the Laws, Book I.

> of concord and agreement, is produced from the regulation of the most dissimilar voices. In the same way, the city, having been regulated by reason, harmonizes through a consensus of the various elements from the upper, lower, and middle classes, just like musical notes. What musicians call "harmony" in music, is "concord" in a city . . .[12]

Just as musical notes agree in harmony, so too do the minds and voices of citizens arrive at the agreement of concord.

The statesman is not satisfied with the booms, bangs, and crashes of power brought on by the reckless behavior of the demagogue in the political community. He disdains such selfishness, irresponsibility, and disregard for the whole. The work of the statesman is to discern how to draw forth harmony and concord. Thus, will the city be regulated by reason instead of by the manipulation and emotion fostered by a demagogue.

Abraham Kuyper—the former pastor, theologian, professor, newspaper editor, party founder, and prime minister of the Netherlands—serves as something of a model for my idea of the Christian statesman. He recognized that antagonism between classes was not something to be encouraged, but countered. He wanted to foster peace between the different groups in society instead of developing some what we now know as "identity politics."[13] He emphasized the one blood nature of human beings as they proceed from God's original creation.[14]

Plato wrote that philosophical statesmanship is more important than skill in oratory or war.[15] It is about the wisdom of knowing how to decide what to do and when. It is the highest art that balances moderation and courage. Plato's insight is reminiscent of the biblical reference to the men of Issachar in 1 Chronicles 12:32 who "understood the times and knew what Israel should do."

There is a highly practical aspect of statesmanship to highlight as well. Thomas Aquinas wrote that the good practitioner of the law would recognize that it is unwise to attempt to prohibit all vice. The reason is not that we are morally indifferent to such matters, but rather that if we apply law too harshly, then we risk creating a larger rebellion against it.[16] It is important to be realistic about the possibilities and be glad for opportunities to make incremental progress as opposed to bringing about sweeping revolutions. In short, the statesman does not overplay his hand.

The statesman, then, is a person who governs for harmony and agreement, who fosters a politics of reason more than explosive emotion, who recognizes the fundamental dignity of all persons under God, and who does not overreach.

These thoughts are consonant with the Christian faith, but we must delve deeper to further develop the insight. Augustine began *The City of God* observing that peace is the best thing to be had in our mortal lives. It is simply good to live together in a harmonious way. For Augustine, this poses a major problem for human beings, given our radical sinfulness. We are self-interested when it comes to the way we define peace. In a similar vein, Aristotle noted that we are notoriously bad judges when it comes to ourselves and what we deserve.[17] We all want peace, but on what terms? What we typically mean when we talk about peace is the peace we would impose on others. Pride, Augustine wrote, hates an equality with partners under God. Pride seeks to dominate in the name of "peace." This counterfeit peace is not worthy of the name. True peace between human beings is an ordered concord with a real sense of justice between the parties involved.[18]

Peace has to do with the tranquility that comes from having a just order. When Martin Luther King, Jr. emphasized that one cannot have peace or valid law without justice, he was likely referencing Augustine, whose work he knew.[19] Slavery, domination, and disrespect come from sin. How, then, can we be just to one another?

I would argue that for the Christian statesman, justice can emerge from the humility we should have as sinful, self-oriented creatures who tend to view the world through their own preferred prisms. A sense of combat, moral superiority, and an apparent monopoly on intelligence increasingly serve as frames for our politics. We think in terms of victory and defeat, heroes and villains, and blithering idiots and geniuses. Peruse social media and you will frequently see references to how someone "schooled," "crushed" or "destroyed" a pathetically weak

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12 Cicero, On the Commonwealth, Book II.

13 Abraham Kuyper, Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto, Harry van Dyke, tr., (2015).

14 Abraham Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism 31-40 (1931).

15 Plato, Republic, Books III-V.

16 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Question 96, Article 2.

17 Aristotle, Politics, Book III, Section IX.

18 Augustine, The City of God, Book XIX, Chapter 12.

19 Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (1963).

opponent, and how science "proves" that conservatives or liberals are pathological in their mental imbalance. These approaches may entertain us, inflate our egos, and confirm our opinion that those who disagree with us are bad people. But, does this way of interpreting our political landscape do justice to those with whom we disagree? Are we humble enough about our own sinfulness and limitedness? Are we honoring the *imago dei* in our brothers and sisters in the human family, our fellow partakers in the gift of reason?

Given the way we are conditioned to think about politics today, some may hear me and think, "He is indicting Donald Trump!" or "He is attacking the liberal snowflakes!" Neither of those conclusions are broad enough. What I am really doing is levelling a critique against the entire political culture we have developed. (I do not exempt myself from my own analysis). Follow me on social media and you will see. Despite my self-imposed discipline, I get caught up in the furor like most people on occasion.)

What does it look like for us to pursue this ideal of Christian statesmanship I am proposing? We need not wait for the statesman to present himself or herself to us. As Americans, we each contribute to the sovereignty of the United States government. We have a share. That share is evidenced by our ability to vote, participate in public service, run for office, assemble, petition, speak, and write. We are not mere subjects of some throne, largely passive in the face of our government. Instead, we are citizens with the right to actively engage. We should be accountable for how we employ that capacity in the same way we believe we are accountable to God for how we use our health, strength, gifts, and money. While the great majority are not be in a position to function as captains of the state, we have a tremendous ability to help shape the political culture and the policies that proceed from it. This means we can relish political warfare or put our influence behind a more constructive approach that is more peaceful and which honors our fellow citizens and does justice by them instead of demonizing them and their beliefs.

In other words, we must develop a strong sense of philosophical charity. Our chances of relating well to each other and having real conversations will be improved if we learn to see those who disagree with us as people who are also trying to pursue what is good. I think this is part of what James Davison Hunter meant in his book *To Change the World* when he encouraged Christians to pursue shalom.[20] We should make a countercultural attempt to reassure each other of our good faith.

In addition, we should renew our sense of what it means to be virtuous in the use of our freedom. The difference between liberty and license has to do with the way we use our freedom. License is freedom used irresponsibly. With a right use of our freedom, we become citizen-statesmen. Citizen-statesmanship means informing yourself carefully about news, current controversies, and public policy. Instead of relying on the sugar high of blustering talk show hosts and panels created to generate conflict, find reliable sources that strive to report as unemotionally and informatively as possible. That sounds like a lot of work, doesn't it? It is. If you don't have time for it, then I would echo my friend John Mark Reynolds' suggestion, which is to find someone you trust who does those things and let their efforts be a ministry to you.

Citizen-statesmanship means taking care in the way you express yourself with regard to politics. We should not share links or stories simply because they affirm our point of view or make the other side look bad, but because they are objectively true. We must take the time to consider whether they are accurate, fair, and factual. We should ask ourselves whether we would like to see our own views unfairly maligned. We should cherish and share those things that are calm, wise, and measured. We should make sure that when we speak or share something that we are contributing ideas and information that are accurate and edifying. The alternative is simply to add to the pollution by throwing another piece of trash into the social media stream that generates more anger and irrationality. We should diplomatically hold friends and relatives to account in the same way you might do so with regard to other moral and spiritual matters.

I have come to believe that by choosing the higher practice of politics (which I am calling "statesmanship") over the lower, more base form of polarizing politics, we can heal some of the breaches between people and diminish hatreds that have been cultivated. I mentioned earlier that I have worked with a group called Better Angels. Their typical strategy is to bring together equal numbers of "red" and "blue" voters, say 8-10 of each, for several hours of discussion over two days. Before they begin, interviews reveal the tendency of conservatives and liberals to condemn each other as people. The amazing thing that happens with the help of a facilitator, who teaches both sides how to communicate with each other in non-inflammatory ways, is that they end the weekend

[20] James Davison Hunter, To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World 281 (2010).

thinking differently about the individuals across the table. A woman who said she could not see the benefit of knowing conservatives who are probably racists admitted that she ended up liking the people she met. A man who doubted any goodwill on the part of liberals expressed his new appreciation for them, even if he did not agree with their views.

It seems likely that the folks who have had this experience will, at a minimum, treat each other more fairly and more charitably discuss politics in the future. While they may not have the words to describe exactly what has happened, they have been reminded of their shared family heritage as image bearers.

A commitment to statesmanship does not mean that we surrender our convictions. It means that we commit to the practices of respect, arguing fairly and in good faith, and trying our best to find common solutions where there are opportunities to do so. We should reward the politicians who show an interest in following these principles as well. We should applaud candidates and officeholders who act as statesmen rather than partisans. It is the right thing to do and an important way to do justice by our fellow citizens. Our chances of being constructive rather than complicit in a continual, destructive cycle of negation will go up considerably.

It is sometimes said that we must tell our fellow citizens what we are for, rather than emphasizing what we are against. The ideal of Christian statesmanship goes further. I propose that we make it clear *who* we are *for*. We are *for everyone* and not just for the 50 percent + 1 required to gain and hold power. Even when we disagree with you, your political perspectives, and policies, we are *for you*. You are our brothers and sisters under the fatherhood of our shared Creator. You are not demons to be cast from our society.

I conclude with an important question that may arise in some minds: Don't we need to gain power so as to implement ideas that we believe are important? If we conduct ourselves as statesmen we will gain better, more worthwhile victories and we will govern more wisely as well. In so doing, we will give glory and honor to our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is good news that someday every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.[21] That does not depend on us being politically ruthless enough to win. Our call is to be faithful. The victory will be His.

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[21] Philippians 2:10-11.

Generous support for
The Journal of Christian Legal Thought
is provided by

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The *Journal of Christian Legal Thought* is a publication of the Institute for Christian Legal Studies, a cooperative ministry of Christian Legal Society and Regent University School of Law.