

Good Wednesday afternoon, New South Family. Welcome to the 53<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Weekly Word – this for the weeks ending July 26, 2020.

-----**The Critical**-----

## Announcements

**1) Annual Conference Ordination Service:** This service is scheduled for Saturday, August 29, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30a at Wilmore. Bishop Keith Cowart will be with us. Also on the 29<sup>th</sup> at 8:45a, Adam Teacher will be with us for an update about his life and ministry. Please come to the Building C Great Hall, grab a doughnut and listen to what God is doing in places far away. So the schedule for the gathering:

Friday, August 28

6:30p NSC BOA meeting with Bishop Cowart – Superintendency

Saturday, August 29

8:45a Breakfast with Adam Teacher – Building C, Great Hall

10:00a Worship and Ordination Service – Building A, Sanctuary

**2) New Corona Virus Counsel** if where you live is anything like where I live, there is new news, once again, just about every day about the Covid threat and announcements by lawmakers about new regulations, restrictions, etc. Though we are in different states and cities with different recommendations and mandates, please remember that our position on this is to honor the law and presume the best of our lawmakers, even in things about which we disagree – to the point of defacing the gospel. There will very likely come a day in our world where Christians are asked to dishonor Christ – which we cannot do. But until that day, we seek to honor Christ by honoring the laws of our land.

**Church of the Week:** Please keep the Oakdale (KY) church, along with Pastor Mark Driskill, in your prayers in these days. Keep the school in your prayers as well, as they prepare for returning students.

## Conference / Superintendent's Calendar (all times eastern; in-person schedule subject to COVID restrictions)

August 9-11:	ABS (Area Bishop and Superintendents) Meeting – Indianapolis
August 13:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
August 21	BOA Zoom, 7:00p
August 25-28:	Starting Strong for new pastors - Indianapolis
August 28:	BOA meeting – Wilmore, 6:00p (Superintendent Search Team)
August 29	Breakfast meeting with Adam Teacher – Wilmore, 8:45a
August 29:	NSC Adjourned Sitting / Ordination – Wilmore, 10:00a
September 10:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
September 11-13:	NSC Family Camp – pending restrictions
September 23-25:	New Room Conference, Nashville, TN
October 6-8:	Global Overseer's Team, Indianapolis
October 16:	DL Meeting – Wilmore, 2:00p
October 16:	BOA Meeting – Wilmore, 6:00p
October 17:	MEG / MAC Meeting – Wilmore, 8:00a
November 12:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
December 10:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
March 19:	DL Meeting – Wilmore, 2:00p
March 19:	BOA Meeting – Wilmore, 6:00p
March 20:	MEG/MAC – Wilmore, 8:00a

And now...

## -----The Important-----

### Resources, Articles and Attachments

1) **The Latest Pastor's and Leader's Letter from the FMCusa** [can be found here.](#)

2) **Vacation** I hope you all have been able to get away for at least some time this summer – time to relax and reflect and maybe retool. My family and I will be going to Ohio (famous vacation destination to be sure – ha) later in August to spend some time with my mom over her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. This will be the first time in a while that all her children and their families will be together. I'd love to hear a sentence or two – to share with us all - about what the Lord has taught you over the summer – maybe over vacation, through this whole Covid thing, maybe through the racial tensions we've experienced as a nation. How is the Lord speaking to you? Let your encouragement encourage us all.

3) **A Couple Provocative Articles Attached / Below:** The first by R. R. Reno titled, "Cultural Nihilism," on the self-centeredness of our culture, and the second by Elizabeth Corey, writing on the "Acceptable Prejudice" of white men in the university settings.

4) **Toward Racial Reconciliation** The black pastors in our county here in Kentucky had been getting lots of phone calls, subsequent to the George Floyd killing – calls from white pastors offering their support and sympathy, but also offering to work toward making a difference in race relations in their neighborhoods. In light of that, the black pastors nearby got together first, to think and pray and plan, and then issued an invitation to any white pastors who were interested to meet together for a time of conversation and prayer

I went to that meeting gladly two Sundays ago, and participated in a very open, honest and helpful conversation. We meet again this coming Sunday – hopefully all 20 of us will return, and maybe more will come as well.

Our homework between these meetings was to take the initiative and get to know someone who does not share your skin color, since harmony is built on trust, which is built on relationship, which is created by time together. Toward doing my homework, Annette and I had a great lunch with the Radfords – pastor and wife of First Baptist Church – a predominantly black congregation. I was not surprised to find out that we have much more in common than we have differences.

Let me challenge you with that same homework that I was challenged with: toward racial harmony in our communities (and nation,) how about taking the initiative to get to know someone who does not share your skin color. The relationship that will hopefully come about might play a part in changing, and even saving, our nation.

### Job Openings

At this point, we have three churches who need pastors:

Greenville (TN)

Bowen (KY)

Harriman (TN)

Please keep this process in your prayers – that the Lord would provide shepherds for His flock.

Remember too that [if you click here](#), you will find job opening listings at FMC Human Resources.

## August Birthdays (\*that we know of)

Daryl Diddle, August 1

Stan Dyer, August 6

Ed Bryson, August 27

\*I would love to know the birthdays of all those related to the NSC who receive this communique – pastors, elders, delegates, special friends, etc. Please send month and day to Timothy at [newsouthconference@gmail.com](mailto:newsouthconference@gmail.com)

## This Week's Passage, Quote and Joke

**Passage:** My message this Sunday continues the study of Jude and focuses on verses 8 through 11 and Jude's description of the arrogance of abusive speech.

### Quote...well, more of a little lesson than a quotation, really:

"They say if you want to learn to play chess, then remove the queen from the board. Most people hide behind her, as she's the most powerful piece on the board. But there are other pieces we need to master the functionality of. When we do that, we really learn how to use all the pieces and what they're good for, then they can be used to support the power of the queen.

For most churches, the Sunday morning service is the Queen on their chess board; and what COVID-19 has revealed to us is what churches know how to play chess and which don't. The virus removed the queen, and for most churches, their chess playing is grinding to a halt. It reveals that we may want to play chess, but we only know how to use one piece.

This is an opportunity for us to learn to actually play chess, to be church...so don't rush the queen back onto the board. Let's play with the pieces we have available."

### Joke:



Blessings on your worship this weekend!

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# FIRST THINGS

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## CULTURAL NIHILISM

by  
R. R. Reno  
June 2019

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**T**he decline in life expectancy in the United States is a symptom of a failing culture. It is driven by deaths of despair: Suicide rates are up, as are drug overdoses and alcohol-related diseases. Those are hard, cruel facts. There are other signs of failure, more auspicious ones. We read about young voters who reject the status quo. On the left, they are embracing socialism. On the right, they are becoming more conservative on social issues. Surveys show support for LGBT causes rising or remaining steady in all cohorts—except for young self-identified Republicans, among whom it has declined. Left-leaning young adults think their Baby Boomer leaders have betrayed the core value of the left, which is economic solidarity. Right-leaning young adults think the same leadership class has betrayed the core value of the right, which is moral order. On both sides, there's a rebellious temperament abroad, one that is increasingly bitter about what it sees as the failures of the '68ers and the culture they midwived.

The young are right to rebel. Our body politic is badly diseased. Economic solidarity has broken down—but it can be repaired. Our shredded moral order poses a more intractable problem. In "[The Three Necessary Societies](#)" (June/July 2017), Russell Hittinger suggests the proper framework for thinking about what afflicts us. We are living amid the decline of the marital covenant, the dissolution of political community, and an aversion to religious life. Without these three necessary societies, an individual's life becomes a lonely struggle for financial security and social status.

W. Bradford Wilcox and Lyman Stone present doleful data about sexual relations and religion among younger Americans in a recent article for *The Atlantic*, "[The Happiness Recession](#)." The General Social Survey, the baseline government-sponsored social scientific study, shows that only 25 percent of those

between eighteen and thirty-four said in 2018 that they were “very happy,” the lowest level recorded. Stable sexual relationships between men and women are strongly correlated with happiness, and stability in intimate affairs is what eludes those formed by today’s toxic culture. Rates of marriage have fallen in that same group, from 59 percent in 1972 to 28 percent in 2018. Cohabitation is down as well, and at similar rates. Even casual sex and short-term relationships have declined. Of those eighteen to thirty-four, 14 percent of women and 22 percent of men report not having had sex in the previous year, both record highs.

Put simply: The male-female dance has become dysfunctional. Sexual liberation and feminism work for some, but not most. The last fifty years have been good for the highly educated and wealthy. Charles Murray’s research shows that the upper end of society has adjusted reasonably well to post-1960s changes in social norms. But it’s been hell for normal people—the median.

The same trend toward atomization and isolation holds for religious participation. Among the younger cohort, regular church attendance is down, from 38 percent in 1972 to 27 percent in 2018. The numbers saying they never attend—the Nones—have spiked. The Nones are not secular, if by that term we mean coldly materialistic. But today’s ersatz spiritualisms and the patchwork religions of yoga, natural foods, and progressive politics lack the poetic-intellectual coherence and depth of traditional religions. They don’t provide communal structures reinforced by rituals and moral disciplines. Just as healthy patterns for intimate life have been demolished by the post-1960s imperatives of liberation, so too have the templates and contexts for spiritual life.

Wilcox and Stone do not provide data on patriotism or civic involvement. But here, too, I predict declines among young Americans. Given the way they are now indoctrinated, I’m sure that fewer in that cohort would say that America is a great nation that has been a force for good in the world. Healthy forms of civic identity have been dismantled. White descendants of Confederate soldiers are told they come from an irredeemably evil background; black descendants of slaves are told their country is irredeemably racist. Males are told they have inherited unjust privileges; women are taught that the past is patriarchal. The rising generation has been stripped of the proper pride one should feel for one’s heritage and nation. By default they are defined by the cold, individualistic machine of market competition and the mad scramble for status on social media.

Our unhappiness has been a long time in the making. It has its sources in the middle decades of the twentieth century. For example, the initial effect of gay liberation was sexual excitement. It titillated the imaginations of the majority of straight people, and the permission granted to sodomy served as plenary permission for all manner of sexual experimentation. The LGBT agenda came to be championed at universities, among corporations, and in the media, and its cultural effects shifted significantly. As sexual perversion came to be affirmed as normal by authoritative institutions, normal sex took on the characteristics of perversion, which is why young people now approach it cautiously. Widespread use of hormonal contraceptives has had a similar effect. In the first stages of its use, the Pill opened up what felt like new erotic horizons. Decades later, sex has shrunk to the exchange of opportunities for pleasure. It's not just #MeToo; consensual sex has a bitter taste. This is one reason why young people are less sexually active than in previous generations.

The poisoning of patriotism and national solidarity comes about in different ways, as does the silencing of religious voices in education and public life. Yes, the virtuosi of critique flourish, landing jobs as literature professors and diversity officers. But here, too, the dominant cultural institutions systematically deprive ordinary Americans of the social sources of happiness. John Rawls was a Harvard professor, not a marginal activist. It was the United States Supreme Court that adopted dire strictures against religion in public life. Howard Zinn's hypercritical approach to American history was championed by the educational establishment throughout the nation. The same is true for contraception and sexual liberation: They were elite projects from the very beginning.

The unhappiness reported by Wilcox and Stone will not remain a private suffering. It will become a powerful political grievance. Our liberal establishment will frame the grievance as a protest against residual barriers to still greater sexual liberation, female empowerment, and social inclusion, all of which will be blamed on the oppressive structures of tradition that supposedly rule society with an iron fist. But in 2019 it is obvious that our cultural norms are not set by Mormon elders, evangelical pastors, or contemplative nuns. They are set by elite institutions dominated by the Davoisie, which uniformly trumpets its "progressive" values. People are not stupid, at least not over the long haul. At some point, perhaps soon, they will wake up to the fact that their unhappy lives are part of a failed post-1960s culture that's overseen by establishment authorities insulated from and indifferent to the damage they do.

## Architectural Nihilism

I approached the new Hudson Yards development from the south, walking along the High Line. Formerly an abandoned elevated railway track that had serviced the many warehouses and factories along the west side of Manhattan, the High Line is now a popular park and walkway. Huge glass facades rise ahead, forming an imposing terminus to the promenade. This group of buildings is part of the largest planned development in New York's history.

I had come to see what today's urban and architectural establishment has to offer citizens in the twenty-first century. What did I find? The culturally and metaphysically vacant spirit of our age. Our contemporary public vocabulary of buildings and civic design seeks only the goal T. S. Eliot identified four generations ago: to be distracted from distraction by distraction.

The newly built towers are part of a massive private development project atop a railway yard on the Hudson River side of midtown Manhattan. The railway yard and many other industrial sites were established more than a century ago, when the island was ringed with wharves. The neighborhoods close to the Hudson and East Rivers were filled with warehouses and factories. Upscale New York clung to Fifth Avenue, which runs up the center of Manhattan, far from the gritty river-facing neighborhoods.

In the 1950s and 1960s, a container port was built in New Jersey. Manhattan, once a manufacturing powerhouse, was de-industrialized. Crime and the general collapse of the 1970s and 1980s delayed development, but by the end of the twentieth century New York was turning its face to the water, which is natural, given the beauty of the waterways that surround Manhattan. The World Trade Center was an early Hudson-facing development. Battery Park City on the southern tip of Manhattan and a Trump-inspired residential development atop old rail yards uptown followed. The Hudson Yards project is the latest and biggest of them all.

The glass-faced office towers resemble those currently being built throughout the world. Some are among the tallest buildings in New York. Their huge scale is softened somewhat by setbacks or changes in the tilt of window slabs. One tower slowly shifts as it rises, from a strict rectangular shape to a more curved form. Other towers vary their glass façades as they rise, or feature horizontal steel bands at regular intervals,

suggesting stages in the structure—a base, middle, and top. For the most part, the skyscrapers at Hudson Yards range from inoffensive to appealing structures in the glass and steel style.

**H**udson Yards is more than a collection of buildings. New York real estate development is highly regulated, and a project of this size is as much a political achievement as a commercial one. The developers were therefore required to allocate a substantial portion to public space, a civic quid pro quo in return for the heavy lifting by city and state officials to assemble the building rights, waive height restrictions, and cut through the regulatory net.

The result is a large plaza framed by gigantic towers and open to the Hudson River. Like most of the development, the plaza sits on a platform thirty feet above street level. This allows for terraced plantings that over time will bring the warmth of living organisms into the otherwise minimalist modernist aesthetic. The plaza's center is dominated by a fifteen-story, bronze-tinted lattice of stairways forming a convex structure. Named "the vessel" by its designers, it has been dubbed by New Yorkers "the shawarma," after the carved spit of meat one sees in the front windows of Greek restaurants. The moniker fits.

The shawarma is pointless, perhaps deliberately so. The Spanish Steps in Rome are an elegant conveyance linking a palace-dominated piazza to a church-dominated one above. This is the classical form, not just for grand stairways, but for boulevards and promenades as well. The Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia conveys the eye from City Hall to an imposing classical temple set upon a hilltop, the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Not so the interconnecting stairs in the center of the Hudson Yards plaza, which lead to nothing. The shawarma is an architectural folly, a grandiose decorative gesture that serves no structural or didactic purpose—unless we're meant to learn the nihilistic lesson that we're going nowhere.

The public plaza has pedestrian approaches that evoke a circular drive. One can think of the shawarma, therefore, as the fountain or statue at the center of a driveway that conveys visitors to the entry to an important building. It is a confection to entertain the eye as the limousine brings guests to a palace's grand entrance. But the scheme of pedestrian flow at Hudson Yards does not move traffic toward a destination of importance. In what seems an afterthought, the pedestrian circulation plan deposits visitors at the entrance to a multi-story shopping mall. In this sleek emporium, the visitor can wander among the same luxury brands that one can find anywhere abroad, just as outside he can stroll amid office towers indistinguishable from those in Shanghai and Dubai.



T. S. Eliot prophesied well. The shawarma allows visitors to wander up and down its stairs to nowhere—a whimsical distraction. The apex of the design, the grand entrance toward which traffic flows, invites visitors to distract themselves with window-shopping. Perhaps this is the true architectural achievement: We're discouraged from noticing that there's no "there" there.

**I**t is a mistake to conclude that Hudson Yards "fails." The development is adjacent to the Javits Convention Center, a misbegotten structure that does not even rise to the standards of shopping malls in suburban Phoenix. By comparison, Hudson Yards shines. But comparative judgments are beside the point. The sad fact is that the mute glass walls, the frivolous, pointless shawarma, and the focus on luxury retail are inevitable in 2019. Hudson Yards says nothing, because our society is dominated by artistic, cultural, political, and business leaders who have nothing to say.

This was not the case when Rockefeller Center was built in the 1930s. It was also an ambitious development on a grand scale, and there, too, commercial interests are prominent. The main structures are office buildings, and retail space fronts the sidewalks. But the pedestrian malls and their luxury stores bring visitors to a public plaza, rather than vice versa as at Hudson Yards. The central plaza at Rockefeller Center features a folly, in this case an ice rink, the image of elegant leisure. But after enticing visitors into their capital of capitalism, the designers of Rockefeller Center, unlike those of Hudson Yards, have something to say.

Presiding over the ice rink is an art deco statue of Prometheus. The statue is interpreted by a quote from Aeschylus on the wall behind: "Prometheus, Teacher in Every Art, Brought the Fire That Hath Proved to Mortals a Means to Mighty Ends." The notion of "mighty ends" serves as the unifying motif for the artwork in public spaces throughout the development. It is most famously expressed in the murals in 30 Rockefeller Center, the muscular art deco office tower at the center. These murals were commissioned to recount the triumph of technology and industry—of which the ambitious buildings of Rockefeller Center stand as grand expressions.

The contrast is striking. Hudson Yards is mute. Its central plaza is dominated by useless stairs. The pedestrian design brings visitors to a banal temple of consumption, as much by default as by design. Rockefeller Center brings visitors to a public space that makes an assertion about the moral and political meaning of the cultural and technological foundations of its own construction. The technical capacity to

throw up gigantic buildings demonstrates man's mastery over nature, the public art says. This mastery, in turn, empowers us to take control over our destiny as a people. We need no longer be slaves to necessity. We can even be free from war and political oppression.

It's easy to criticize the progressive confidence of Rockefeller Center. I'm inclined to a tragic view that sees losses as well as gains. But as an instance of urban design, Rockefeller Center has a civic soul, framing its indisputable commercial purpose in terms of a spiritual, cultural, and political endeavor. A visitor gazes in awe at the skyscrapers of New York, wondering, "What could all this possibly mean?" Rockefeller Center proposes to answer his question. Hudson Yards seems unable to imagine any question other than, "How much does this cost?"

### **Freedom's Sacred Roots**

In *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom*, Robert Louis Wilken recounts the standard story of religious freedom. It begins with the Reformation and the division of Europe into rival Christian factions. The factions persecuted one another, setting off the so-called wars of religion. The West seemed trapped in a bloody conflict among dogmas. "But by the middle of the seventeenth century men with greater wisdom and less religious fervor came on the scene, and the fanaticism of religious believers gave way to the cool reason of the philosophers." The Enlightenment refounded the West on principles of natural right, reason, and tolerance—our modern way of life.

The story is largely false. Certainly the Reformation triggered religious conflicts, and the political recognition of religious freedom arose in the aftermath of those conflicts. But the influential early modern conceptions of religious liberty drew upon earlier theological sources.

As Wilken observes, pagan Rome understood the importance of religion in public life. "The ordinary and extraordinary events of communal life were set within a sacred and cosmic frame," and "no form of social life was wholly secular." This fusion of sacred and secular reflected a sound intuition: The divine rules over history; therefore, good governance seeks to bring the affairs of men into accord with the gods.

The rise of Christianity disrupted this ancient integralism. Christians would not offer worship to other gods, who are but dead idols. Christian dissent evoked from Roman authorities sometimes indulgence,

sometimes dismay, and sometimes outright persecution. The latter motivated early Christian figures such as Tertullian to explain why persecution is wrongheaded. Tertullian's main argument concerned the integrity of worship. "See that you do not end up fostering irreligion," he warned, "by taking away freedom of religion [*libertas religionis*] and forbid free choice with respect to divine matters, so that I am not allowed to worship what I wish, but am forced to worship what I do not wish. Not even a human being would like to be honored unwillingly."

Tertullian did not have our contemporary notion of a political right to religious liberty in mind. He was outlining a fundamentally theological idea, which would persist in the Christian West. True worship, he assumes, must accord with the desire of the God of Israel, who demands of his people the whole of their hearts, minds, and souls. The emphasis on inwardness was not unknown in antiquity. Socrates was a martyr to conscience, and Stoicism emphasized integrity of intention as the key to happiness. But these traditions prized an achieved inwardness, won by private mental discipline and available to only a few. Tertullian, by contrast, made a claim about every human being. Worship of the divine was a regular public activity in antiquity, and he argues that the very possibility of genuine piety (prized by all parties in the ancient world) depends upon *libertas religionis*, the freedom to worship in accord with one's deepest convictions.

Although the individualistic, man-before-God side of religious freedom remained a vital part of the Christian tradition, the ideal of corporate freedom predominated in the early Church. "The phrase 'freedom of religion' enters the vocabulary of the West with reference to the privileges of a community, not to the beliefs of individuals." Tertullian wished to defend the right of Christians to live and worship as Christians, which of course meant worshiping together in accord with the faith and discipline taught by the Church. This right was secured when Constantine introduced a new religious policy for the empire in 313, issuing the so-called Edict of Milan, which granted Christians full corporate liberty.

**A**s Wilken tells the theological story of religious liberty, the intrinsic tensions become evident. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel thrive only insofar as they are governed in accordance with God's law. The New Testament loosens the knot binding prophet and king, divine law and civil law, but it does not untie it. Jesus distinguishes between that which we owe to Caesar and that which we owe to God. But St. Paul insists that the power of the magistrate comes from God and that secular authorities rule

as his appointed agents. It was natural, therefore, that the Christianization of the Roman Empire would lead to sustained reflection about how to govern society faithfully in accord with God's will.

In the Middle Ages, the main emphasis fell on defending the liberty of the Church's bishops, whom secular kings wished to turn into proper vassals. But Christian thinkers continued to be concerned about individual freedom of conscience as well, an issue that arose with special urgency whenever coercive measures were taken to force Jews to renounce their faith and accept Christ.

The threat of compulsory religious adherence entered the forefront of theological debate during the Reformation. For many Christians, which dogmas to believe and how to order common worship became questions of profound existential urgency. Moreover, God's authority is an empty concept if it is not manifested in historical, social forms that guide and govern individuals. Faced with dissent, church authorities struggled to discern the limits of their power over individual believers. After all, there can be no community without common belief—which is to say, without orthodoxy—and no common worship without agreement as to proper forms and rituals. The same held for civil rulers, who assumed that civil government was charged with protecting belief and encouraging proper worship.

*Liberty in the Things of God* provides a valuable overview of this long, post-Reformation struggle to find the proper balance between freedom of conscience and the necessary institutional expressions of God's authority. John Calvin defended "spiritual freedom," not just from the coercive power of civil government, but from ecclesiastical legislation as well. The church, he writes, cannot "bind souls inwardly before God and . . . lay scruples on them, as if enjoining things necessary to salvation." But Calvin's position turned out to be unstable. It was either platitudinous—by definition, no outward power, ecclesiastical or civil, can bind souls inwardly—or unworkable, for no community, sacred or secular, can function if every individual has the right to opt out, as Calvin knew and acknowledged elsewhere in his theological writings.

Indeed, Wilken describes two Protestants formed by Calvinist theology, John Cotton and Roger Williams, clashing on these grounds. Cotton was a Puritan leader of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, responsible for the spiritual welfare of his community. Williams was a dissenter keen to defend the integrity of conscience and the purity of Christian faith. Cotton had access to civil powers, which allowed him to secure the banishment of the troublesome Williams. The latter, however, was in many ways the winner, for it was Williams's rigorous view of religious freedom that largely prevailed in America.

I'm grateful for our tradition of religious freedom in the United States, and Wilken's account of its theological sources clarified for me why my gratitude is not unequivocal. The strongest formulations of religious freedom were developed by dissenters such as Roger Williams and John Owen. Their outcries on behalf of the sanctity of conscience are admirable, but they fail to recognize the heavy burden of governance, which always entails moral and even theological judgments. (To assert that governance involves nothing of theological import is itself a theological judgment.) Thomas Jefferson famously said, "It does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." The sentiment of tolerance is to be applauded, but Jefferson is obviously wrong when it comes to the facts. What my neighbor says about God may not affect me, but it surely affects my children. And if that neighbor is my children's high school teacher, it may affect them a great deal. Only an Enlightenment figure like Jefferson, who regarded theological matters as superfluous, could imagine that the widespread expression of rebarbative religious beliefs would be of no public consequence. Indeed, precisely an intuition about the substantial consequences of belief is what lies behind the strict separation doctrine that dominates our legal regime today. Judges worry that prayer at events such as high school graduations will sway and seduce vulnerable young people. In this sense, they follow in the tradition of John Cotton, though they aim at an opposite outcome.

I strongly favor loosening the knot that binds secular authority and divine truth: Our magistrates should not imagine themselves prophets, whether of God or of history. But we must not pretend we can untie that knot altogether. As *Liberty in the Things of God* shows, our culture of freedom itself has profound theological roots. To sustain it we must govern with care and wisdom, nourishing those roots while respecting liberty of conscience as best we can.

## WHILE WE'RE AT IT

◆ Sir Roger Scruton was appointed head of a British architectural commission—an office for which he is well suited, given his thoughtful advocacy of buildings that are fit for human habitation. George Eaton of the *New Statesman* interviewed him and published an account that cherry-picked quotations in order to misrepresent Scruton as guilty of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, among other moral crimes. The feckless administration of Theresa May, tail between its legs, sacked him. Here is Sir Roger's sober assessment of the whole affair:

We in Britain are entering a dangerous social condition in which the direct expression of opinions that conflict—or merely seem to conflict—with a narrow set of orthodoxies is instantly punished by a band of self-appointed vigilantes. We are being cowed into abject conformity around a dubious set of official doctrines and told to adopt a world view that we cannot examine for fear of being publicly humiliated by the censors. This world view might lead to a new and liberated social order; or it might lead to the social and spiritual destruction of our country. How shall we know, if we are too afraid to discuss it?

◆ Ryszard Legutko had been invited to give a lecture at Middlebury College. He was an active member of Solidarity, teaches philosophy at the Jagiellonian University in Poland, serves as a member of the European Parliament, and is the author of *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies*, a thoughtful analysis of the paradoxical intolerance one finds in the hallowed precincts of progressive tolerance. But Legutko does not hold the “correct” views. An open letter circulated at Middlebury, objecting to the invitation of “a speaker who blatantly and proudly expounds homophobic, racist, xenophobic, misogynistic discourse.” The Middlebury academic administration caved. Legutko’s speech was cancelled.

The ridiculous affair not only provides support for the main thrust of *The Demon in Democracy*; it vindicates the details. One student claimed that “marginalized” fellow students would have their “academic freedom” violated by the mere presence of Legutko, because his thought crimes would make them feel, well, marginalized. By this reasoning, academic freedom requires rigorous ideological policing.

Legutko coins a Marxist-inspired term, “lumpen-intellectuals,” to denote those who appoint themselves “guardians of purity” and “ecstatically become involved in tracking disloyalty and fostering a new orthodoxy.” Middlebury and quite a few other tony colleges and universities seem to have their share of lumpen-intellectuals. And with the exception of the University of Chicago, elite institutions are administered by feckless empty suits who surrender whenever the lumpen-intellectuals swing into action.

◆ “Feckless” seems an indispensable word these days. It’s a gentleman’s way of avoiding terms that suggest the absence of the male member. It comes from “feck,” an archaic noun related to the Latin *facere*, the action of doing or making. A man of feck possesses the courage and resolve necessary for effective action in trying circumstances. Feck gives a man what my wife calls “testicular fortitude.” And that is what is lacking in so many of our mainstream institutions today.

◆ On July 15, 2019, a law will go into effect that requires Internet users in Great Britain to prove they are at least eighteen years old in order to view pornography. Pornographic websites are responsible for ensuring compliance. If they fail to do so, they will be blocked for all users in the U.K. Simple. Sensible. Straightforward. And politically popular in Britain. Why is not a single national politician in the United States proposing something along these lines? Fecklessness?

◆ The terrible fire at Notre-Dame anguished us all. Its significance received a variety of interpretations: the Blessed Virgin’s withdrawal of her protection from a secularized society, divine judgment on post-Christian Europe, a wake-up call for the Catholic faithful, and so forth. I lean toward more modest meanings. First, the collapsed spire destroyed the free-standing altar put in place after Vatican II to allow celebration of the Mass *versus populum*. The old altar was unharmed. Second, Fr. Jean-Marc Fournier dashed into the burning church to recover the sacred relics and save the consecrated Host in the tabernacle. A veteran Army chaplain who was formed for the priestly life by the Fraternity of St. Peter (a priestly society dedicated to the celebration of the Latin Mass), Fr. Fournier exhibited courage, decisiveness, and clarity of purpose—the qualities needed in today’s Catholic leaders.

◆ We are preparing our spring fundraising letter as I write. I hope you will respond generously when you receive it. We have every intention of facing the coming challenges with Fr. Fournier’s feck, and to do so we need you to join us.

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# FIRST THINGS

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## AN ACCEPTABLE PREJUDICE

by  
Elizabeth C. Corey  
June 2019

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Contemporary universities are doing their best to eradicate prejudice and bias. Yet one remaining prejudice—against white men—is not only tolerated but encouraged. While we are told that diversity of skin color and gender is an unmitigated good, people in faculty meetings and job searches joke about the undesirability of white men. They look forward to the time when all the “old white men” shall disappear from campus. Job performance? Publications? Pedagogical skill? These are now less important than a faculty that reflects the demographics of the school, or the general population, or . . . we’re not quite sure what. But everyone knows the first principle of academic life: Diversity is a moral imperative.

Faculty members are trained in Title IX regulations, intersectional sensitivity, and unconscious bias and microaggression avoidance. We are encouraged to speak out when we observe inappropriate words or actions, and to report such instances to teams of administrators. Yet the prejudice against white men goes unquestioned. Its victims never speak of it publicly. They only hope not to offend, and to be allowed to go about their business.

“This is as it should be!” say the presumed moral leaders of the university. Men have held privileged positions for too long. White men, in particular, need to sit down and shut up so that others can speak out and take institutional power. For more radical activists, a group of white men is itself a symbol of oppression. For the less strident, the hope is that a school or program might acquire a critical mass of women and minorities to balance out the white men, or perhaps to equalize the numbers of men and women. The unspoken and largely unexamined assumption is that students need to learn from people who



look like them. Women now make up the majority of college students; therefore, women should be their teachers.

The superiority of women as a group has become accepted wisdom over the past few years, and people across the political spectrum constantly and nervously monitor the diversity makeup of their organizations. They fear situations like the one that took place at Stanford's Hoover Institution in March of 2018, which led the organizer of a history conference to issue a mea culpa for the fact that his event had been "too white and too male."

But do men, and white men in particular, really constitute a homogeneous bloc? This idea is typical of the neo-Marxist world of the academy, and it has now thoroughly infiltrated the realms of business, government, and the arts. The notion that an individual, by virtue of his group identity, inherently possesses power or suffers oppression is a cornerstone of the theory of intersectionality. Invented by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality has overtaken the academic world in the last decade.

The theory of intersectionality holds that oppression and privilege do not attach to a single characteristic (race or gender, for instance) but occur in combination depending on the intersecting traits one possesses. A black woman, therefore, experiences greater and different oppression than does a white woman, who suffers from only a single disadvantage. In this framework, group identity always takes precedence over individual identity, and white men are the most privileged group. Structural oppression is taken as incontestable fact.

Yet anyone must admit that white men are as intellectually and morally diverse as any other group. Stanley Fish, Donald Trump, Paul Krugman, and Sean Hannity are all part of this demographic. So are the millions of middle- and working-class men who have no voice in the public conversation and little political power—single fathers who support their families, rural small-business owners, men who work in urban convenience stores. These people are positioned across a broad spectrum of privilege and disadvantage, wealth and poverty, achievement and failure.

**O**f course, progressives know this as well as anyone else. When they talk about white male privilege, they commit the same stereotyping that they claim women and minorities suffered in the past and still suffer. Their goal, however, is not to end stereotyping, but to stereotype a different group.

Progressives adopt the group privilege narrative for particular purposes: to seize the levers of the university and change its personnel. If white men are indeed a homogeneous, oppressive bloc, then they may be opposed en masse.

The problem is that though sorting people into groups is appropriate for studies of voting behavior and public health outcomes, it is far less helpful in evaluating the particular white male who happens to sit across the table in a job interview or occupy a seat in the classroom. Even the most ardent diversity advocates recognize this when it is convenient. I have often heard a woman say that white men are the problem—and then add (rather sheepishly) that her husband happens to be an exception.

The corollary of this derogation of men is the notion that women are morally superior. As Michael Moore put it in a provocative tweet, “No women ever invented an atomic bomb, built a smoke stack, initiated a Holocaust, melted the polar ice caps or organized a school shooting.” Notwithstanding the questionable historical accuracy of this comment, it conveys the new orthodoxy quite well, particularly as expressed by prominent progressives. Because women are statistically less violent and more emotionally sensitive, we ought to place them in positions of leadership. Doing so will counteract the toxic masculinity that saturates our culture.

But the objection is obvious here, too. Can we not see the tremendous diversity within the group “women”? Some women may be saints, but most of us are subject to the foibles of human beings generally: pride, envy, small-mindedness, gossip, and laziness, to name a few. And to the claim that women are victims of persistent and systemic oppression: Ironically, the most oppressed women lack the megaphone possessed by the feminist elites who supposedly advocate for them. Sometimes they do not even appreciate or agree with the ideas of their patrons and protectors.

Both these overgeneralizations exemplify the fallacy described by Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff in *The Coddling of the American Mind*. Haidt and Lukianoff call this kind of thinking “the untruth of us versus them”—life understood as a battle between good and evil people. In this context, men (especially white men) are manipulative and vicious; women are upstanding and virtuous. Complex human beings are categorized simplistically as friends or enemies.

When intersectionalists insist that the identity of teachers must match the identity of students, they really mean to highlight the degree of difference from white male identity that a person brings to campus. They value individuals for characteristics that are involuntary and, according to a traditional understanding of academic judgment, irrelevant. This trend is unintentionally patronizing. To say that women learn best from women, blacks from blacks, Hispanics from Hispanics, is to propose much the same educational segregation that Civil Rights integration was designed to overcome.

Nor is there much, if any, empirical evidence to substantiate the “mirroring effect”—the notion that students work harder and learn more when they see their own identity group represented at the podium. In truth, the “mirroring effect” is just one more anti-white male canard.

Unfortunately, these points will have little impact on intersectionalists. Their focus on identity is a religious conviction, not a reasoned position. And diversity is the first great commandment. But perhaps these religious adherents might be moved by an argument about the harm that this anti-white male prejudice inflicts on women.

On the intersectional view of justice, we should do good to friends and harm to enemies, promoting women and handicapping men. The unspoken assumption is that women seek and deserve this kind of advantage, for they understand it as payback for all the years of oppression they have endured. Some men, too, see themselves as allies and proclaim their willingness to forgo personal advantages in order to advance the cause.

But what if women don't see the world through the lens of oppression and privilege? It's worth pointing out (*pace* women's studies departments everywhere) that the entire recent narrative of women's oppression is contestable, especially from the point of view of many younger women who, far from being undervalued, are actively sought out in their fields.

Even if (as we're continually told on campus) women continue to suffer discrimination based on sex, it does not necessarily follow that women want to be *given* benefits and advantages. They might prefer to earn them. How many times have I heard the well-intentioned but patronizing phrase, “We need a woman for this job”? Those who employ it assume that they are doing good. But their patronage transforms women

into a special, needy class. A great many women want to be chosen not for their sex, but for their individual talents.

As a person who stands only one step removed from white men in the great intersectional matrix, I'm liable to be charged with coming to the aid of oppressors or failing to appreciate structural oppression. I expect criticisms like this one, from Rebecca Traister: "White women, who enjoy proximal power from their association with white men, have often served as the white patriarchy's most eager foot soldiers."

Perhaps not. Perhaps such women prefer to think for themselves about these issues. Maybe they decline Traister's assessment of power relations and the social world in general. Many politely refuse the charity and affirmative action that come with this new dominant view of the goodness of women and the villainy of white men.

We would rather stand or fall on our own than be artificially promoted to positions in which we constantly wonder: Was I chosen because I am a woman? Was he excluded because he is white? Though the promotion of women is sold to the public as a matter of justice, few want to talk about the profound injustice of social engineering that harms or advantages people based on their membership in groups they have not chosen and cannot change.

Judge us, then, as men and women, not by our race or gender, but as individuals. Judge us by our work, our minds, our characters, our kindness (or lack of it), our generosity, our energy, and our talents. Do not prejudice us. Do not tell us you need a representative or critical mass of people like us, or that you need to eliminate representatives of the group "white men." Both impulses are a kind of benevolent prejudice, operating on debatable assumptions about the betterment of society. Both have unintended and poisonous consequences that undermine the entire project of liberal education.

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