

A TOXIC NEW RELIGION



Understanding the Postmodern,
Neo-Marxist Faith that Seeks to
Destroy the Judeo-Christian Culture
of the West

By Scott D. Allen and Darrow L. Miller
with Stan Guthrie

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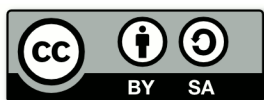
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Introduction

The details were horrific. The night of January 29, 2019, was one of Chicago's coldest in decades. Actor Jussie Smollett, a star on the popular *Empire* television series, said he had just picked up a submarine sandwich when he was confronted on the street by two black men. Here's a summary of what Smollett said in a softball interview with Robin Roberts on ABC's *Good Morning America*:

Smollett told *GMA* that the alleged attack began with a nasty comment from one person who accosted him on the street. He heard someone yell, "*Empire*" and then "f***** *Empire* n*****." He replied, he now says, "What the f*** did you just say to me?" The man added, "This MAGA country, n*****," then punched him in the face. He

says he fought with the attacker, and as the two “tussled” he became aware that a second assailant was present, kicking his back.

After all of this, the two assailants simply ran away, and a shaken Smollett realized that there was a rope around his neck.¹

Only this is not what the actor, who is African American and openly homosexual, initially told Chicago police; instead, he reported that the two men appeared simultaneously and both abused him verbally before attacking him physically. There is no mention in the police report of Smollett replying to them or fighting back. And of course the very idea that he would be targeted in liberal Chicago by two *black* men saying, “This is MAGA country,” is odd, to say the least.

Yet despite these red flags, political and media figures across the nation were quick to rally to Smollett’s defense, and those who questioned his dramatic narrative were tagged as racist or “homophobic.” Of *course* Smollett was telling the truth, they said. What happened to him, they said, was a telling example of what happens in Donald Trump’s America.

But as the days turned into weeks, the problems with Smollett’s account only multiplied. Soon there were too many discrepancies for the progressive media to ignore, and inside of a month, the whole thing collapsed like a house of cards. Smollett, it turned out, had set up the whole narrative and filed a false police report in order to advance his acting career. Chicago police charged him with disorderly conduct, a Class 4 felony that carries a possible one- to three-

year prison sentence.² A grand jury then returned a 16-count indictment against the actor.³

Ultimately Smollett didn't get away with his false narrative, but he may have been the exception. Stories that seem to confirm people's preconceived notions can originate not only in the world of pop culture. They can also emerge—quite dangerously—from the highest levels of government.

The New York Times Magazine ran a profile of Ben Rhodes titled “The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama’s Foreign Policy Guru.”⁴ At the time, Rhodes was a 38-year-old senior foreign policy adviser to President Obama. Yet, shockingly, he had almost no experience in foreign policy or foreign affairs. His undergraduate studies were in literature and fine arts, but, as it turns out, this was exactly the kind of skillset the president wanted. He tasked Rhodes with crafting a narrative intended to sell the administration’s Iran policy and, ultimately, the nuclear weapons deal. And that is exactly what Rhodes did.

In the article, Rhodes boasts about creating a distorted narrative, confident that it could be sold to a compliant and, in his own words, “know-nothing” media. He was able to create what he called “an echo chamber” in which the new narrative would become established as elite conventional wisdom and thereby lay the groundwork for the passage of the Iran nuclear deal—which eventually is what happened.

Here is how the article’s author, David Samuels, describes Rhodes:

He is adept at constructing overarching plotlines with heroes and villains, their conflicts and motivations supported by flurries of

carefully chosen adjectives, quotations and leaks from named and unnamed senior officials. He is the master shaper and retailer of Obama's foreign-policy narratives.

This was not just one man's view of Rhodes. Lee Smith of *The Weekly Standard* summed up the senior foreign policy adviser's contributions this way:

For the last seven years the American public has been living through a postmodern narrative crafted by an extremely gifted and unspeakably cynical political operative whose job is to wage digital information campaigns designed to dismantle a several-decade old security architecture while lying about the nature of the Iranian regime.⁵

Rhodes' condescending attitude about creating such narratives to distort and manipulate with the intent of achieving the president's goal is jarring. He seemed to have no moral qualms about it, even though he was dealing with what could very well have been a life-and-death issue for millions of people.

Such narratives do not merely present themselves as morally neutral "stories." They are intentional distortions of the truth, making them dangerous and destructive. They almost always lead to the perversion of justice and an inversion of morality. Evil becomes good, and good becomes evil. There is a degree of malevolence behind such narratives and those who create them.

These narratives are not a new phenomenon; in earlier times, they were described as "propaganda." But today they have become pervasive—so pervasive, in fact, that it has become very hard to discover the truth about any

given topic. We now find ourselves in a culture that had jettisoned truth for narrative, relativism for reality. We live in a world that is following a toxic new religion based on postmodern neo-Marxism.

This small book grew out of a series of articles that we (Darrow and Scott) wrote for Darrow's blog *Darrow Miller and Friends* and *World Magazine* between 2016 and 2018. We were trying to get our heads around the alarming changes we were observing in our culture broadly, as well as within the evangelical church, on the subjects of social justice, sexuality, race, and gender. Over time, we concluded, along with many others, that what we were observing was nothing less than the emergence of an entirely new religion.

For millennia, Christianity was the dominant religion in the West. As such, it provided the moral and metaphysical framework within which people understood reality, identity, and purpose. But as the West has continued to secularize, a new generation has emerged into an unsustainable religious vacuum. It's unsustainable because people need *meaning* no less than they need food and water. Secularism has failed to provide any meaning beyond a hopeless hedonism. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow, we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32).

For most, this isn't enough. To be human is to long for meaning in life—a purpose big enough to live for and even to die for. With Christianity no longer a viable option for many, what will fill this hole in the soul? Some tragically turned to radical Islam. Many young men from Europe and America journeyed to Syria to join ISIS because of its call to live and die for something bigger than their own appetites. But many more embraced a belief system that

has been incubating in Western universities since the 1950s, alternatively known as critical theory or ideological social justice. This is more than just an academic philosophy; it is nothing less than a fully formed religious belief system rooted in postmodern and neo-Marxist assumptions.

Ideas have consequences. The core beliefs of the Biblical worldview helped shape the West into a relatively free, prosperous civilization. The core beliefs of this toxic new religion are giving rise to a culture marked by hatred, division, and the crumbling of older norms, standards, and institutions. In this book we'll look at how this happened, the frightening consequences, and what we who still believe in the truth can do.

I. ITS BEGINNINGS

1: What's Wrong with a Story?

What impressions come to mind when you think about the Puritan colonists who settled in New England? How would you describe them?

As a child, Scott's thoughts about the New England colonists were shaped almost exclusively by Thanksgiving holiday traditions. He knew they traveled to America aboard the Mayflower. They wore tall black hats and buckled leather shoes, and one time they held a big feast with native inhabitants to give thanks to God for a bountiful harvest.

By the time Scott had finished college, however, his view of them had become almost entirely negative. What changed? He recalls at least three primary sources of his education on the topic: the infamous Salem witch trials, the terrifying sermon from Jonathan Edwards titled "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," and Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous novel *The Scarlet Letter*.

It's no wonder that by the time Scott finished college he had the same basic view of these "WASPS" (white Anglo-Saxon Protestants) as most of his teachers and friends. These colonists were now oppressive religious fanatics. In other words, they were "puritanical," a derogatory slur still used to describe certain people.

But several years later, he started to read books he hadn't been exposed to in school: *Of Plymouth Plantation* by William Bradford, one of Plymouth Colony's first governors, a man of courage, perseverance, wisdom, and willingness to sacrifice for the good of others (Native Americans included); *William Bradford: Plymouth's Faithful Pilgrim* by Gary Schmidt of Calvin College; "A Model of Christian Charity," John Winthrop's famous sermon; *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* by the renowned historian George M. Marsden; *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd* by Jonathan Edwards, in which he records the history of a heroic young missionary who gave his life to share Christ with the Delaware Indians; as well as books about William Penn and the Quaker settlement of Pennsylvania.

Then came Scott's studies of the Puritan movement in England, through works such as Paul Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, histories of John Wesley and George Whitfield, and J.I. Packer's *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*. Over time, Scott's negative impression of America's Christian colonists was transformed. Certainly, they were flawed people, but compared to most of us they were spiritual giants. Scott came to see that so much of what is good, true, and beautiful in America can be traced directly

back to these people, their distinctly biblical worldview, and the institutions and culture they established.

As he looks back on his formal schooling, Scott now realizes that he wasn't so much taught *history* as he was dictated a particular *narrative*. His schooling regarding colonial New England's history provides a good example of how such narratives function.

First, a narrative has defined characters and an unambiguous distinction between good and evil, oppressor and oppressed. In this example, the evil oppressors are the Puritans; the oppressed victims are the Native Americans. The heroes are modern-era academics and historians who are setting the record straight in their enlightened criticism of America's colonial era.

Second, a narrative generally involves a distortion of the facts. It is based on a *degree* of truth. Yes, the Salem witch trials tragically happened. Yes, we have heartbreaking examples of Puritan colonists inhumanely treating Native Americans. Yes, the Puritans could fall into the snare of Pharisaical self-righteousness. But does all this constitute the whole picture? Not at all.

In fact, the picture that the narrative paints leaves out so much information that it becomes intentionally deceptive. We hear only those facts that support the narrative. Those that challenge it are ignored. Thus, Scott was never exposed to a book as basic to understanding the period as *Of Plymouth Plantation*. He was assigned to read only one sermon by Jonathan Edwards (the one that most closely aligned with the narrative). He was never exposed to the remarkable social and cultural transformation that resulted from the First Great Awakening. Scott knew very little of this history and virtually

nothing about its central figures, John Wesley and George Whitfield—and his college major was *history!*

The powerful and influential College Board's newly issued curriculum for its Advanced Placement European History reflects this same highly distorted teaching of history. The editors of The National Association of Scholars described this new standardized high school curriculum this way: "Much of the European past goes missing. ... Columbus is absent, and Churchill is reduced to a single prompt. The College Board tells the story of European history as the triumph of secular progressivism, and shunts to the margins the continent's centuries-long rise to political freedom and prosperity."⁶

A few years ago, people didn't use the word "narrative" as we do today. Rather, they used the word "propaganda"—willfully misleading people to further a particular agenda. The idea brings to mind the Nazi regime, particularly the infamous propaganda films of Leni Riefenstahl. "Propaganda" is a morally weighted term; it is viewed negatively. The concept of "narrative," however, is less so. There seems to be a growing sense that "everyone" uses narrative to advance their views. This "everyone does it" climate makes it possible for even a highly distorted narrative like the one Ben Rhodes crafted to be employed without moral regrets.

Let's start by examining a few important characteristics of narrative.

First, narratives are *stories*. They tend to be compelling, easy-to-grasp morality tales. They lean toward bold, simple plotlines. Good and evil are clearly defined. There are carefully crafted characters: heroes, villains, victims.

Second, narratives are tools used to accomplish political, social, or cultural objectives. They are employed to exert influence and shape policy and culture. Name any major issue of the day—global warming, LGBT rights, race, a particular foreign policy—and for each one narratives have been carefully crafted, promoted, and protected in order to advance a particular agenda. Such narratives are *pervasive*. They are part of the air we breathe.

Third, narratives work through *distortion*. While portrayed as true, they convey a highly distorted and ultimately false picture. Distortion works by focusing on a particular aspect of truth, fact, or evidence while purposefully ignoring or suppressing other related facts and evidence that are necessary to see the bigger picture. Building narratives around an element of truth has the benefit of giving them a certain surface plausibility. This makes them easier to market.

Finally, narratives work by leveraging our emotions. They appeal to our heart and not our head, to our innate sense of justice, of right and wrong. We *want* them to be true, even if facts and evidence call them into question. This is what makes them so powerful and so dangerous.

Narratives are finding receptive hearts and minds open to the political and cultural objectives of those who spread them. More and more people are gravitating toward their simple plotlines, plausible distortions, and emotional appeals. Concepts such as *truth* and *facts*, meanwhile, are dismissed as relative or as mere tools of groups seeking to maintain their advantages.

How did our cultural climate shift so radically from fact to narrative? We believe that our changing cultural ecosystem has given narratives just the right soil in which to flourish. This soil is called *postmodernism*.

What is postmodernism? It has a particular history that goes back to thinkers such as Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). According to worldview scholar Nancy Pearcey, Kant's "innovation was to suggest that the mind does not merely *reflect* the structure of the world; instead it actively *imposes* structure and order onto the world. For Kant, reality as we know it is largely a construction of the human mind."⁷

Postmodernism thus is the rejection of a truth or reality *beyond* the individual mind. There is no truth "out there." There is no God and no transcendent source of meaning, purpose, or morality. There is no single "*metanarrative*," only countless "narratives." Truth is not discovered; it is created.

With God out of the picture, each individual essentially becomes a little deity—a sovereign maker of meaning. Postmodernists no longer ask "Is it true?" or "Does it align with reality?" but rather "Does it work?" or "How does it make me feel?" American economist and social theorist Jeremy Rifkin captured the zeitgeist of our postmodern cultural moment with this summary:

We no longer feel ourselves to be guests in someone else's home and therefore obliged to make our behavior conform with a set of preexisting cosmic rules. It is our creation now. We make the rules. We establish the parameters of reality. We create the world, and

because we do, we no longer feel beholden to outside forces. We no longer have to justify our behavior, for we are now the architects of the universe. We are responsible for nothing outside ourselves, for we are the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.⁸

All of this, of course, constitutes a lie, and the fact that this lie is so deeply embedded in culture will have tragic consequences. Regardless of what anyone *thinks*, God *exists*. He is the eternal, personal Creator of all things. He alone defines reality. He alone defines what is good, true, and beautiful. As we will see, the biblical word for suppressing the truth and living in a world of illusion is *foolishness*, and it has destructive and frightening ramifications for society.

What happens when people no longer seek the truth but instead believe they are sovereign creators of reality? What social goods are lost when people no longer believe in external reality, in a real world beyond their own minds? The sobering answers will come in our next chapter.

2: The Assault on Western Civilization Begins

The history of Western civilization can be thought of as a river fed by three main ideological streams: Greek, Roman, and Judeo-Christian. These streams merged in the waning days of the Roman Empire to give rise to what we think of today as Western civilization. With the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, the Judeo-Christian stream became dominant and remained that way through much of the Middle Ages.

During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church adopted much of the old Roman political order, with the pope replacing Caesar as a not only religious but also political authority. The Roman church hierarchy claimed the

sole authority to interpret the Scriptures, which were not accessible to lay Christians.

The German monk Martin Luther (1483 to 1546) brought about not only an ecclesiastical reformation but also a political revolution by opening up the Bible, translating it into the common language, and elevating it to a position of sole authority over every sphere of society—including the church. It was a revolution that continues to produce ripples and aftershocks even in our day.

However, this more-or-less unified river divided into two smaller streams in the 18th century—a science stream and a faith stream. Historians refer to this period as the Age of Enlightenment, a time when modern science began to blossom, leading to significant cultural upheaval.

The irony of this split lay in the fact that the scientific method was actually an outgrowth of Judeo-Christian doctrines about the nature of God, creation, and humanity. This worldview says that:

- A personal, rational, and purposeful Creator God exists.
- He created an orderly and beautiful universe that functions according to laws He imposed.
- He made man (male and female) in His image as a free, personal, rational, and creative (yet fallen) being.
- Man has a mandate from God to rule over creation and cause it to flourish—to unlock its mysteries and innovate for the good of others.

What we understand today as modern science would not have come about apart from these basic worldview assumptions.

As the scientific enterprise progressed with increasing speed, great mysteries of the natural world began to be revealed, one by one. However, an ancient pride began to grow in the heart of many Enlightenment thought leaders: “Through science and human reason alone we can know everything! We no longer need to appeal to a supernatural realm—to God, angels, or demons—to explain the workings of the universe, as people did in the ‘Dark Ages.’ Now, we are enlightened! We are like God ourselves, knowing all things!”

At the same time, Christendom was facing its own internal crisis in the years preceding the Enlightenment. The Reformation, sparked by deep corruption in the Roman Catholic Church, became a battle over how people relate to God and how the church relates to the state, a battle that spread far and wide through innovations such as the printing press. The resulting cultural upheaval remade many of the institutions of Europe and caused many people to become disillusioned with Christianity, some groups eventually abandoning it altogether.

As time went on, Western civilization began to divide philosophically into two, a divide that continues into the present. One part is defined by atheism, a rejection of the Judeo-Christian contribution to Western civilization. The other is defined by a commitment to conserve the Judeo-Christian roots of Western culture. While the reality isn’t quite this simple

(many prominent Western intellectuals stand somewhere between these two streams), these streams started becoming quite distinct.

The atheistic side gained significant momentum in the 19th century, fueled by the explanatory power of the theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin (1809-1882). Paradoxically, it was this atheistic portion of culture that strategically associated itself with science and reason, disparaging those who upheld Judeo-Christian theism as irrational supernaturalists—believers in ghosts and fairies. Tragically, this powerful narrative continues to hold sway among many thought leaders.

Yet, as we have pointed out, science was itself the fruit of Judeo-Christian beliefs. A wholly materialistic worldview—a universe merely of matter in motion—could never produce anything like the scientific method. Materialism provides no basis for expecting an orderly universe or the existence of natural laws, or for understanding why humans transcend nature in their ability to observe, reason, discover, create, and predict natural phenomena.

You can see the influence of these two competing streams clearly in the most consequential revolutions of the 1700s: the American, and the French.

The American revolutionaries of 1776, whether Christians (such as George Washington and John Adams) or Deists (such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson), greatly valued religious belief and morality. “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity,” George Washington said in his Farewell Address of 1796, “religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should

labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness—these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens.”⁹

In addition, a substantial number of them spoke openly and eloquently about how the doctrines of the Christian faith in particular were necessary for the American experiment in ordered liberty and self-government. As John Adams, the second president of the United States, affirmed, “The general principles, on which the Fathers achieved independence, were the only Principles in which that beautiful Assembly of young Gentlemen could Unite, and these Principles only could be intended by them in their address, or by me in my answer. And what were these general Principles? I answer, the general Principles of Christianity, in which all these Sects were United: And the general Principles of English and American Liberty.”¹⁰

America’s Founding Fathers, to be clear, also held that belief in God must never be compelled or coerced by the state; it must be chosen freely. This too rests on ancient Christian doctrines involving the nature of God and His relationship with human beings, as well as on lessons learned from the bloody history of Europe’s religious wars. This conviction gave rise not only to religious liberty but also to all the other freedoms we take for granted. Apart from Judeo-Christian belief, we have no ground for individual human freedom or human rights. We are left with a system where the strong rule the weak, and might makes right.

That is what the French revolutionaries of 1789 ultimately discovered. Unlike the American Revolution, the French Revolution was the product of the atheistic stream of Western thought. Its leaders largely rejected God. They

wanted to overthrow not only the monarchy but also the established church leadership. They wanted to form a man-centered, humanistic society based on “the goddess of reason.”

In the next chapter we’ll focus on how the atheistic outlook has shaped Western culture up to the present.

II. THE CONTAGION SPREADS

3: The Birth of the Modern

The modern, secular worldview has many prophets who contributed to, or were products of, Western culture's atheistic outlook. In the last chapter, we looked at how Western culture divided into two main parts—a Judeo-Christian outlook and an atheistic outlook. In this one, we will observe how the atheistic side subdivided into two streams—one characterized as “modern,” and the other as “postmodern.” We'll take a brief look first at the modern.

The modern stream goes back to British empiricists such as David Hume (1711-1776) and Darwin, and it gave rise to philosophical naturalism or materialism. This stream defines reality as purely physical. Science, in this view, is the only avenue to knowledge. This is the worldview of big-name atheists such as Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins.

During a family reunion in Cape Cod some 20 years ago, Scott visited his wife's extended family for the first time. Many of her cousins were accomplished scholars, having attended private boarding schools in Massachusetts and Ivy League universities. As an evangelical Christian from Oregon with a far more conventional education pedigree, Scott was clearly outside their normal social circles, and they were intrigued.

One relaxing afternoon on the deck while all were enjoying pleasant conversation, one of the cousins who hadn't met many Christians asked Scott several personal questions:

- How do Christians justify their faith in God when science has long proven that all forms of life (including human life) are the result of a completely natural and unguided process of evolution?
- How can Christians possibly take their faith seriously in the face of indisputable scientific facts?
- Do they simply ignore such facts and pretend they don't exist?

The questioner wasn't trying to mock or insult Scott—he sincerely wanted to know. He was a believer in the ubiquitous “science vs. religion” narrative that has captured so many in our culture.

For example, *New York Times* writer Nicholas Kristof admits that universities overwhelmingly discriminate against evangelical Christians when it comes to faculty hiring because they want uniformity of thought behind their preferred secular narratives. “Universities are the bedrock of progressive

values,” Kristof says, “but the one kind of diversity that universities disregard is ideological and religious. We’re fine with people who don’t look like us, as long as they think like us.”¹¹

The heroes in this narrative, of course, are the secular-minded offspring of the Enlightenment who understand reality based on science and reason alone. “Every account of a higher power that I’ve seen described, of all religions that I’ve seen, include many statements with regard to the benevolence of that power,” says one of the more famous advocates for this position, Neil deGrasse Tyson. “When I look at the universe and all the ways the universe wants to kill us, I find it hard to reconcile that with statements of beneficence.”¹² The most important scientific “fact” to them is evolution, for it disproved once and for all the existence of God and made it possible, in the words of Richard Dawkins, to be an “intellectually fulfilled atheist.”¹³

The villains are religious believers who deny the truth as revealed by science. They are superstitious throwbacks to the Dark Ages. They are anti-reason and anti-science and prefer to live in a world of fantasy by denying evolution. It is easy for people who subscribe to this narrative to argue that conservative Christians should not be allowed to hold positions in academia. After all, “You don’t diversify with idiots.” As Tyson also said, “I want to put on the table, not why 85 percent of the members of the National Academy of Sciences reject God, I want to know why 15 percent of the National Academy don’t.”¹⁴

This narrative has a long history—going back at least to the 17th century and the European Enlightenment. It was created largely to discredit

Christianity and help establish an emerging secular worldview. During the violently anti-Christian French Revolution, the radicals famously established a “Cult of Reason” while desecrating the magnificent cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. These radicals portrayed the Middle Ages as superstitious “Dark Ages” before science and reason illuminated the mind.

Darwin became the great high priest of this new secular religion. His theory of evolution essentially overthrew the need for a Creator God and established an entirely naturalistic account of how life arose and evolved into the diversity that exists today. According to the narrative, the cultural high ground was finally won by science and reason—particularly by the “fact” of Darwinian evolution—against a defeated and discredited Christendom.

This narrative has taken deep root in the imaginations of many millions in the West and indeed all over the world. For many, it describes *reality*. Like all narratives, it contains an element of truth, which helps to account for its power.

It is true, as the narrative says, that a great weariness over religious warfare between Catholics and Protestants arose during the late Middle Ages. Both sides had become seemingly more interested in retaining political power than in standing for the truth. Likewise, Darwin’s theory gained a certain plausibility because of the indisputable evidence for adaptations within species. The famous Galapagos finches do, in fact, possess beaks that become longer or shorter depending on climate and food availability.

But the narrative is also highly distorted. It paints Christianity as anti-science, when in fact deeply committed Christians such as Bacon, Newton,

Copernicus, and many others founded modern science. As we have already noted, the scientific method grew from the soil of a biblical worldview. It would never have emerged from a secular worldview. Science depends on several things that only a biblical worldview provides, such as an orderly (as opposed to a random or chaotic) universe that functions according to defined laws that can be described mathematically.

It takes a great deal of faith to look at the intricacy and highly engineered inner workings of a cell, or an eye, or a galaxy and believe that it all happened by chance in a purposeless universe that has no “ends” in mind. Christianity also explains how humans can use reason to inquire into creation. We are, after all, made in God’s image, with creativity, a mind, and the ability to reason and discover. Secularism provides no real basis for human reason or even a human mind.

Is evolution a proven “fact” of science? The theory posits that all life evolved from earlier life forms over millions of years through a completely natural, unguided process of mutation and selection. A random birth defect (a mutation) in an organism’s DNA turns out to provide an advantage to the survival of that life form, so it is “selected” and retained. Over time, entire new species are formed through this process. Thus, humans used to be apes, and horses used to be fish, and fish used to be bacteria.

That’s a big claim. But is it a scientifically proven *fact*? While there is ample evidence of changes and adaptations within a species (microevolution), there is virtually *no* scientific evidence to support change from one species to another (macroevolution). You won’t find credible evidence in the fossil

record.¹⁵ You won't find proof emerging from experimentation in the lab.¹⁶ So how can scientists continue to call the grand claims of evolution to be scientific *fact*?

Proponents respond that macroevolution *has* to be true (an interesting word choice!) because it is the only way to scientifically account for existing life forms without introducing a supernatural Creator. This is necessary because of the presupposition that only science has the ability to reveal what is factual and therefore real.

Richard Lewontin, an evolutionary biologist from Harvard, sums up the new dogmatism:

Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism.

It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-

intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.¹⁷

Of course, people who speak this way are not speaking scientifically. They are making a metaphysical claim—that the only things that ultimately exist are matter and energy, and that the only way to understand truth is through the scientific method. This is religion masquerading as science. It is *scientism*—a secular religious faith, a pillar of the toxic new religion. As Rod Dreher says, “Scientism is the ideologically charged fallacious belief that science is the only legitimate way of knowledge.”¹⁸

There is no war between *science* and Christianity, but there *is* a conflict between Christianity and *scientism*—a conflict between two opposing metaphysical truth claims. If you are a believer in scientism, the big claim of evolution *must* be true, even if there is no scientific evidence to support it. This is why Dawkins can say, “Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose,”¹⁹ and then argue why they are not.

The war between science and religion is largely a false narrative. It depends on a deception—the deliberate concealment of the all-important distinction between macroevolution and microevolution. According to the narrative, your position on macroevolution—for or against—defines whether you are for or against “science.” Here the term “evolution” is used without distinguishing between simple change *within* a given species over time and a

wholly secular account for how all life began and formed, with radical and continuous changes *between* species from one kind to another.

On this narrative rests the entire edifice of the secular religious faith dominating the West and much of the world. Because so much is at stake, those who oppose it are attacked, vilified, and marginalized. Distinguished scientists who challenge the narrative on scientific grounds are fired, denied tenure, or not allowed to have their findings published in scientific journals.²⁰

You know you've encountered a narrative when those who hold it react to honest questions with indignation and an impulse toward repression and marginalization. That's what has happened with secular proponents of the "science vs. religion" narrative. Sincere truth-seekers don't respond this way, whether they are university experts or members of one's extended family.²¹

4: The Birth of the Postmodern

We have been talking about the twists and turns Western civilization has taken since the days of Christ and the Roman Empire. It began as a melding of Greek thought, Roman law, and Judeo-Christian ethics and worldview. Then came the Enlightenment, which successfully packaged itself as a scientific alternative to the prevailing Christian worldview. This so-called “modern” stream became atheistic in its orientation, seeing mankind as advanced animals evolved from the primordial slime.

Many people, however, could not live with the implications of such a purposeless worldview.

The other stream in the atheist branch of the river of Western civilization was, in a sense, a reaction to the naturalist, “modern” stream. It said, by contrast, that reality is grounded in the mind. The continental philosophers

Rene Descartes (1596-1650), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and, significantly, Georg Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) drew ideological assumptions from the artistic and intellectual schools of thought known as Idealism and Romanticism. These consequential philosophers and schools of thought profoundly shaped the thinking of two pivotal historical figures.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was the Prussian-born philosopher, economist, and political theorist who, along with Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), was most responsible for laying the intellectual groundwork for totalitarian communism. Marx, not surprisingly, was an avowed atheist, arguing that religion is merely an illusion. Marx once said, “The first requisite of the happiness of the people is the abolition of religion.”²²

As a replacement for religion, Marx developed an elaborate and powerful social and economic theory known as dialectical materialism, or simply “Marxism.” It functioned as an all-encompassing worldview. Many came to see it as a kind of secular religion.

Marxism is primarily focused on power, oppression, class, and economics. For Marx, economics is the key driver of history. “Evil” in Marx’s worldview comes from capitalism and the ownership of private property. The property-owning class (or “bourgeoisie”) was, in Marx’s view, selfish, greedy, powerful, and oppressive. Capitalism was its tool to amass wealth and power at the expense of the subjugated working class (the “proletariat”).

For Marx, Christianity was used by the powerful and wealthy to subdue the working class. Marx famously described religion as “the opium of the

people,”²³ a crafty means of imposing control, keeping the lower class in a kind of contented stupor by means of a false millennial hope.

Marx obviously was a revolutionary. He advocated the overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat to set the stage for a kind of societal perfection—a utopian vision of a classless society of radical equality, where wealth and power are distributed equally and where everyone’s needs are perfectly met by an all-powerful State.

With God out of the picture, Marx was free to define “good” as whatever contributed to his utopian vision. The ends justified the means. Over time, the means became horrifyingly bloody and inhumane. Millions of so-called “capitalists” and property owners were stripped of their property and hounded into prison camps and death camps, their goods forcibly “redistributed” by the all-powerful State.

At Marx’s funeral, Marx’s collaborator and friend, Engels, delivered a eulogy that provides helpful clarity on what drove Marx:

Marx was before all else a revolutionist. His real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being, to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat, which he was the first to make conscious of its own position and its needs, conscious of the conditions of its emancipation. Fighting was his element. And he fought with a passion, tenacity and a success such as few could rival.²⁴

Almost everyone knows Marx. Very few, however, have heard of the other pivotal historical figure. Yet, even more than Marx's, this man's ideas have shaped the West by laying the ideological foundation for the toxic new religion.

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was a Marxist and atheist born in Sardinia. As a young man, he became an active member of the Italian Communist Party and began a journalistic career that made him among the most feared critics in Italy. The outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 stirred his revolutionary ardor. Gramsci identified himself closely with the methods and aims of the Russian revolutionary leadership.

Samuel Gregg, research director at the Acton Institute, says that Gramsci “viewed art, literature, education, and all its other elements through the ... lens of a class struggle. But he realized that these things didn't just respond to political and economic power; they also produced it. So [for the revolution to prevail] ... it must seize these things first, get control of the ‘cultural means of production.’”²⁵

Gramsci insisted that Marxists had underestimated the importance of culture-forming institutions such as the media, universities, and churches in deciding whether the Left or the Right would gain control (or to use his favorite word, “hegemony”).

Gramsci thought that all these cultural institutions weren't neutral, but in fact were serving as a vast propaganda machine on behalf of

capitalism. Until the left came to dominate them, they would never be able to convince enough people to support their revolution.²⁶

Perhaps you've heard of the "left's long march through the institutions."

This is where it began.

Gregg continues:

To seize society's "cultural heights" such leftists must spread what the French Reformed theologian Paul Ricœur called "the hermeneutics of suspicion." Put simply, this means that nothing is as it seems. Seemingly benign ideas (such as "justice" and "due process") must be exposed as cynical bourgeois ploys that serve to disguise systematic injustices.

Rule of law, for instance, is no longer understood as embodying a commitment to equality before the law and non-arbitrary behavior. Instead, it is "unmasked" as a tool for denying justice to various minorities....

Today, entire humanities and social science departments (not to mention journalism schools) in Western European, North American and Latin American universities are slaves to the search for hidden oppressors.²⁷

"Critical theory" is the academic discipline that now dominates the humanities, replacing the older "history of Western Civilization." Its purpose

is to expose or unmask subtle yet pervasive racism, sexism, and “homophobia” embedded in systems and structures within the broader culture.

In traditional Marxism, the capitalists created and sustained these oppressive power structures. Gramsci’s genius was to realize that Marx’s economic critique didn’t go far enough. Capitalism didn’t appear out of nowhere. It was developed and sustained by a particular culture or civilization. To effectively tear down capitalism, one needed to tear down the cultural foundations on which it was built and which continue to support it.

For Gramsci, that culture was largely the Judeo-Christian stream of Western civilization, particularly the most basic unit of that civilization: the family. In effect, Gramsci expanded the category of oppressors from capitalists and property owners to “the patriarchy” who oppress wives and children. In turn, the economically defined bourgeoisie were replaced by another class: white, heterosexual, Christian or Jewish males.

Those who function within this ideological ecosystem today are Antonio Gramsci’s intellectual heirs, whether they are aware of it or not. Note the irony—both Gramsci and his ideological mentor Karl Marx are, of course, dead white men. If you happen to be a white male, you are *woke* if you confess your inherent evil by being part of this oppressive group and admit your white privilege and unconscious racism, sexism, etc.

Gregg reports that for Gramsci’s followers, “The American Revolution is not a principled defense of ancient liberties against burgeoning tyranny; instead it’s an effort by wealthy white Colonials to maintain their privileges.”²⁸

Indeed, it was vital for Gramsci and his intellectual progeny to be critical of U.S. history, shaped as it was by capitalism and the stream of Western civilization that adhered to Judeo-Christian belief. The influential historian Howard Zinn (1922-2010), who has done more than almost anyone else to shape how today's American students understand our history, was a disciple of Gramsci.²⁹

Gramsci's philosophy produces a sneering disregard for truth. In an open letter to outgoing Pomona College President David Oxtoby, three self-identified black student activists wrote:

Historically, white supremacy has venerated the idea of objectivity, and wielded a dichotomy of "subjectivity vs. objectivity" as a means of silencing oppressed peoples. ... The idea that there is a single truth—"the Truth"—is a construct of the Euro-West that is deeply rooted in the Enlightenment, which was a movement that also described Black and Brown people as both subhuman and impervious to pain. This construction is a myth and white supremacy, imperialism, colonization, capitalism, and the United States of America are all of its progeny. The idea that the truth is an entity for which we must search, in matters that endanger our abilities to exist in open spaces, is an attempt to silence oppressed peoples.³⁰

This is Marxism for the masses. Gregg continues:

The most insidious aspect of this mentality is that its logic, on its terms, can't be refuted. If you question, for instance, the hermeneutics of suspicion, then you must be part of the ruling class's apparatus of control, whether you realize it or not. At worst, you are evil. At best, you are a dupe. ...

The worst part of Gramsci's legacy is that it has effectively transcended its Marxist origins. His outlook is now ... taken for granted by millions of teachers, writers, even churchmen, who have no idea that they are committed to [his brand of] Marxism. So while the socialist paradises constructed by Lenin, Stalin and likeminded people imploded over 25 years ago, the Gramscian mindset is alive and flourishing at your local university and in more than a few liberal churches and synagogues.³¹

Additionally, it is flourishing in big business, law, entertainment, government, and almost every other sphere of society. Gregg concludes: "The vast structures of cynicism which Gramsci's ideas have built, which honeycomb Western society today, will prove much tougher to dismantle than the crude cement blocks of the old Berlin Wall."³²

Besides Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci, many other postmodern thinkers have made their mark on Western civilization. But these two rise above the rest. We can see their deep influence in the toxic new religion's...

- obsession with power, oppression, and victimization. The world is divided between oppressors and victims; nothing exists outside these two categories. The beating heart of this ideology is grievance and victimization.
- fixation on class, race, gender, or sexual orientation as paramount in defining one's personal identity.
- hostility toward Judeo-Christian belief, particularly in its beliefs about family and sexuality.
- hostility toward capitalism, which is equated with greed, imperialism, and oppression.
- driving passion for the forced redistribution of wealth by an ever larger, more powerful state.
- antipathy toward the natural family, specifically the authority of parents over children and the authority of the husband and father in the home.
- rejection of absolute truth or absolute morality, combined with an "ends justifies the means" approach to getting what it wants.

As we have noted, ideas have consequences. The French Revolution devolved into bloodshed and tyranny. It established the pattern for the equally bloody Russian Revolution, which itself devolved into the atheistic and tyrannical communist systems in the former U.S.S.R., Maoist China, and Pol Pot's Cambodia. The American Revolution, on the other hand, produced a

nation, that, while far from perfect, became uniquely free and prosperous, providing a model for freedom and self-government around the world.

A simple lesson can be drawn from this. When the Judeo-Christian roots of Western civilization are rejected, the result *inevitably* will be a loss of human freedom, along with increased tyranny and bloodshed. This is a lesson we urgently need to heed in our time. No model of human life is sustainable that diminishes, ignores, or seeks to split the physical and spiritual integrity of human beings.

But today, because of modernism and postmodernism, the West divides human beings into two separated, unrelated parts. Both postmoderns and moderns dichotomize human life into the physical and spiritual, but they do so in diametrically opposed ways. Each claims that its preferred half defines all human reality. Each discards the other half, impoverishing both the individual and the society.

- Naturalism or philosophical materialism, the religion of moderns, defines humans in *physical* terms. Man is reduced to a machine or an animal, a body without a soul or spirit.
- Postmodernism defines us in *spiritual* terms. Postmoderns deny the reality of the body. Man is a radically autonomous definer of reality. What is important is the mind. Reality is defined in the human mind and nowhere else.

In either case, the God-deniers are dichotomists, reducing the human being to either a physical body or a mind. This is what happens when God is pushed out of society. *The death of God leads irrevocably to the death of man*, either in terms of devaluing his spiritual nature (in the case of materialism/naturalism) or in the devaluing of his body (in the case of postmodernism).

First, the death of God leads to the death of man as the *imago Dei*. It leads to the end of the concept of the integrated human being. If God is dead, then man is dead!

Second, if God is dead, then man must die! Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French ethnologist and structural anthropologist, captured this lamentable loss of respect for human life in his 1962 book, *The Savage Mind* (published in English in 1966): “I believe the ultimate goal of the human sciences to be not to constitute, but to dissolve man.”³³

A society that abandons its belief in the nature of human beings as revealed in Scripture will inevitably move toward the murder, suicide, and annihilation of human beings. As we are seeing today, it leads to the death of millions in multiple ways.

- Abortion (killing the unborn baby)
- Infanticide (killing the born child)
- “Mercy killing” (killing the infirm)
- “Death with dignity” (killing the elderly)
- Homicide (killing another human)

- Suicide (killing the self)
- Gendercide (killing females)

Philosopher John N. Gray summarizes this anti-human attitude in *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals*:

Homo sapiens [sic] is only one of very many species, and not obviously worth preserving. ... Long after the last traces of the human animal have disappeared, many of the species it is bent on destroying will still be around. ... The Earth will forget mankind. The play of life will go on.³⁴

Along with the moderns, these new barbarians have no foundation to safeguard human rights—after all, man is dead! Only Judeo-Christian theism led to the concept of universal human rights.

C.S. Lewis, the great British novelist, medievalist scholar, Christian apologist, and lecturer at both Oxford and Cambridge universities, wrote prophetically about the coming death of man in his 1944 classic, *The Abolition of Man*.

For the power of Man to make himself what he pleases means ... the power of some men to make other men what *they* please. ... The process which, if not checked, will abolish Man goes on apace among Communists and Democrats no less than among Fascists. The methods may (at first) differ in brutality. But many a mild-eyed scientist in pince-nez, many a popular dramatist, many an amateur

philosopher in our midst, means in the long run just the same as the Nazi rulers of Germany: “Traditional values are to be debunked” and mankind to be cut out into some fresh shape at the will (which must, by hypothesis, be an arbitrary will) of some few lucky people in one lucky generation which has learned how to do it.³⁵

Lewis recognized, before most of us, that the death of truth leads to the rise of power. Now all that is left is the power of the elite to make other men what they want.

We saw this when Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy recognized “the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”³⁶ Now that God is dead, man is free to define the terms of his own existence, including establishing a sexual myth to abolish the reality of biology and genetics. In so doing, we now have the ability to abolish ourselves and our nature. Lewis calls this the creation of “men without chests.”

In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.³⁷

This is the absurdity of modern and postmodern men. We have proclaimed God to be dead and then wonder why we annihilate our own existence as the only beings in the universe created in His image.

5. The Rejection of Truth and Morality

At the 75th Golden Globe Awards in 2018, Oprah Winfrey received the lifetime achievement award. During her widely praised acceptance speech, she commended women who were standing up to Harvey Weinstein and other Hollywood sexual predators.

I want to say that I value the press more than ever before as we try to navigate these complicated times, which brings me to this: What I know for sure is that speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have. ...

For too long, women have not been heard or believed if they dared to speak their truth to the power of those men, but their time is up. Their time is up!³⁸

Winfrey did not say that women were speaking *the* truth, because in the postmodern world, there is no absolute truth, only narrative. Only “your truth” or “my truth.” Yet this is not how the world really works.

As a child Darrow had a Jack-in-the-box. Darrow liked to push the Jack-in-the-box down, close the lid, and turn the crank to watch him pop up again. Jack was spring-loaded and did not go down easily. Darrow had to push the Jack down and quickly close the lid for the device to work.

Truth is like the Jack-in-the-box. It is “spring-loaded.” It wants to be out of the box. It naturally comes out of the box. Truth is not static or inert. It is dynamic, forceful. It pops up all over. A person cannot simply ignore the truth. If you do not want to engage with truth, you must actively and continuously suppress it.

Let’s consider the word *truth*. This is the English equivalent of the Greek word *alētheia*, i.e., that which is in accord with what really happens, or facts that correspond to a reality, whether historical (in the time/space continuum), or an eternal reality not limited to historical fact.

Truth corresponds to what is real. It has universal character and meaning. Modern and postmodern relativism speaks of “my truth,” but that is a fallacy. Truth is not based on an inner feeling, nor grounded in human emotions. Nor is truth merely pragmatic, as in, “I tried Christianity but it didn’t work for me.”

No, this concept of truth corresponds with reality. It is *objective* truth—or as the great Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer used to say, “Truth with a capital T, true Truth.”

This remarkable word not only tells what it is; it also implies what it is not. The word attaches a negative participle to *lanthano*, which means “to be hidden.” For the Greeks, truth was hidden; it was out there *somewhere*. It was mysterious. But Christ, “full of grace and truth,” brought us *aletheia*, the revealing of what had been hidden.

This perspicuity of truth is established in Romans 1:19-20:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Yet in today’s postmodern culture, truth is increasingly hidden. In the postmodern realm there is no truth, only one’s point of view. So Oprah was saying she was happy that women were finally sharing their *viewpoint* with men in power.

But on what basis would she or anyone else ever say these men were *wrong*? Hollywood not only denies moral absolutes. It also promotes immoral behavior and evil through its movies and lifestyles. You may say that you did not like what they did. But you could never condemn them, for in Hollywood

and in postmodernism there is no moral framework by which to judge another person's actions or behavior. You do you and I do me!

So what Oprah spoke were nice sentiments to touch sentimental people. This is what is left when objective truth and moral absolutes are rejected. All that is left is “my opinion” or “my values.” That, in a nutshell, is postmodernism.

An influential advocate for this approach, the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) declared that the modern and premodern worlds were dead: “All my analyses are against the idea of universal necessities in human existence. It is meaningless to speak in the name of—or against—Reason, Truth, or Knowledge.”³⁹ Foucault understood that there is no purpose in human life. The basic mental infrastructure required for human existence—reason, truth and knowledge—are passé.

Stephen Hicks, writing in *Explaining Postmodernism*, captures the stark reality of the “new” school of thought as denying both reality and reason. This new school mimics the old pagan animism or ancient Hinduism.

Metaphysically, postmodernism is anti-realist, holding that it is impossible to speak meaningfully about an independently existing reality. Postmodernism substitutes instead a social-linguistic, constructionist account of reality. *Epistemologically*, having rejected the notion of an independently existing reality, postmodernism denies that reason or any other method is a means of acquiring objective knowledge of that reality.⁴⁰

There is nothing to guide or constrain our thoughts and feelings. We can do or say whatever we feel like. Our *feelings* determine what is real and true. This is Oprah's "my truth, your truth" stance. In the postmodern world, subjective "truth" replaces objective truth.

We see this manifested too often in the church when Christians privatize their faith. Christ is nothing more than a personal Savior, a private possession in one's heart. His transcendent reign over heaven and earth is obscured, cloaked by a private communion "none other has ever known." Christ's reign and His truth are removed from the marketplace, the public square, the university, and the arena.

The new religion is underpinned by a set of unquestioned worldview assumptions, or "givens," that frame everything else. Four major assumptions emerge as particularly foundational. They are the four core doctrines of the new religion. Understanding them is a prerequisite for understanding the values, beliefs, and actions of its adherents.

Group Identity

A biblical worldview uniquely affirms both the individual and the group. We see the significance of individuals throughout the Scriptures. God's call to Abram in Genesis 12 is just one example. God holds each of us accountable for our beliefs and actions (see Matthew 25:31-46 and Hebrews 4:13). Each of us has unique gifts, talents, and callings. As image-bearers of God, our

choices influence the course of history. The Bible imbues every individual with incredible value, dignity, and potential.

At the same time, the Bible affirms that we are made for relationship. We are part of communities, including families, ethnic groups, and churches. These profoundly shape who we are. We are acculturated into these communities by shared language, values, habits, and history.

Yet while we are shaped by our communities, we are not completely defined by them. As image-bearers of God, we have free will. We can make choices that shape history. We can step outside our communities, examine them critically, and make choices that run counter to their established norms.

In fact, as Christians, we are *required* to do this. We are called to manifest the culture of God's kingdom and to think with "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). We are called "to take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5) and to "be transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Romans 12:2). In short, we are called to think and act differently—not in accord with the accepted norms, attitudes, and behaviors of our surrounding culture, but in accordance with reality as affirmed in God's Word.

The new religious orthodoxy has a very different perspective. In short, it affirms only group identity. Individual beliefs and actions don't matter. In her book *Finding Truth*, Nancy Pearcey critiques this reductionist belief:

It reduces individuals to puppets of social forces ... it implies that individuals are powerless to rise above the communities to which they belong. It ... dissolves individual identity into group identity.⁴¹

Philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd referred to “the ideology of community.”⁴² The Harvard *Crimson* student newspaper put it unapologetically: “Everything is about race.”⁴³ Martin Luther King’s dream of all God’s children being together and each of us being judged not by the color of our skin but by the content of our character is effectively dead. You’ve probably heard people say, “It’s a black [or female, or whatever] thing—you wouldn’t understand.” That’s an honest summary of this core doctrine.

While the biblical worldview affirms a human nature and a human identity that transcend race, gender, and culture, the new religion provides no such foundation. In this view, all of our choices and behaviors are determined by our community—our identity group. There is no basis for personal freedom, personal responsibility, or personal accountability.

We see this doctrine in the confrontation between Yale students and Nicholas Christakis, a Greek-American sociologist and physician. Christakis, whether he knows it or not, is speaking from a biblical perspective when he says that all people have in common a *human* nature, a *human* experience, and a *human* dignity. For him, “*all* lives matter.” Christakis says, “So I have a vision of us, as people, as human beings that actually privileges our common humanity ... that is interested not in what is different among us, but what is the same.”

But in response, a tall, black student moves toward Christakis, gets right in his face, and says: “Look me right in the eye. Look at me! *Your experience will never connect to mine.*”⁴⁴

This is a clash of worldviews. The African-American student believes that because race defines identity, the experience of Christakis—a white person—“will never connect” to his. If that assumption is true, Christakis’ question begs an answer: “Then what is the reason you asked to be heard?” Is discussion even possible? What kind of society is possible when the gulf between worldviews is so wide?

Is our ever-increasing social fragmentation, racial tension, and even hostility all that surprising? Can there be any basis for unity—for America’s founding creed, *E pluribus unum* (Out of many, one)—if the new religion fully replaces the Judeo-Christian assumptions at the core of culture?

Troubling signs are all around us. On some college campuses, black students and other identity groups are self-segregating, running from King’s dream as quickly as their legs—and compliant university administrations—will take them. American history is rarely taught as a single discipline. Instead, young people are learning American histories—“black history,” “female history,” “gay and lesbian history,” and so on. We no longer try to teach a shared history. Any attempt to do so is labeled an act of cultural imperialism.

This is profoundly dehumanizing. Nancy Pearcey gets it right: “Materialism reduces humans to products of *physical* forces. Postmodernism reduces them to products of *social* forces. Whenever a [religious ideology] absolutizes something less than God—no matter what it is—the result is reductionism, and a lower view of the human person.”⁴⁵

Cultural Relativism

The next core doctrine builds on the first. Postmodernism denies the existence of transcendent objective truth or morality. Therefore each identity group defines its own reality and morality, not subject to critique by outsiders. This is known as cultural relativism, or multiculturalism.

If a particular Muslim group practices female genital mutilation or honor killing, multiculturalism forbids any value judgment from outside of that culture. After all, it is *their* culture; it is *their* reality. Who are we to judge? Somali-born Ayaan Hirsi Ali says, “At many American universities today, any critical examination pertaining to Islam, including Shariah and the treatment of women in Islam, is declared to be out of the realm of scrutiny.”⁴⁶

If a racial or ethnic group suffers from higher rates of poverty, unemployment, drug addiction, or divorce, multiculturalism forbids blaming the beliefs or actions group members. Rather, the blame must, by default, lie in larger historical, social, or structural “forces.” This is why the new religion is seemingly obsessed with “systemic or structural” oppression or racism. To attribute negative outcomes to the beliefs or actions of those within the community is “blaming the victim,” *the* cardinal sin in the new religious orthodoxy.

There is one major exception to this nonjudgmental approach. The Judeo-Christian belief system receives a harsh critique, usually in the form of attacks against “Western civilization.” American history and culture, rooted in Judeo-Christian beliefs, are viewed as uniquely oppressive.

The first two “doctrines” of the new religious orthodoxy are rooted in postmodernism. The remaining two are rooted in neo-Marxist ideology.

Western Civilization is Uniquely Oppressive

To see the world through the lens of Marxism, either in its old or new form, is to see the world exclusively in terms of power relationships—a merciless, zero-sum world of domination, subjugation, and oppression. It brings to mind this quote from C.S. Lewis’s *Screwtape Letters*:

We must picture hell as a state where everyone is perpetually concerned about his own dignity and advancement, where everyone has a grievance, and where everyone lives with the deadly serious passions of envy, self-importance, and resentment.⁴⁷

In its original form, Marxism was framed in economic terms. The oppressors were bourgeois property owners and capitalists, and the oppressed were the subjugated “workers of the world.” The newer form of Marxism thriving today on university campuses worldwide identifies Western civilization, rooted in a Judeo-Christian belief system, as the ultimate source of oppression. After all, it was this particular culture that gave rise to the capitalist economic system viewed by Marxists new and old as rapacious and destructive.

Western civilization (including the history and culture of the United States) is held by adherents of the new religion to be uniquely oppressive,

imperialistic, colonial, racist, sexist, classist, and patriarchal. It has created, in the words of a student activist at Claremont Pomona University, “interlocking systems of domination that produce the lethal conditions under which oppressed peoples are forced to live.”⁴⁸

If you happen to be a white, Christian (or Jewish), “cisgender,” heterosexual male, and you have anything positive to say about the contributions of Western civilization to human flourishing, expect to be labeled a “white supremacist.” You are imbued with a deep-seated cultural superiority and subconscious racism, sexism, and host of “phobias.” You have “privileges” that people of “marginalized identities” do not share, and you continue to enjoy these privileges at their expense.

Women, Muslims, “people of color,” LGBTQ+ identity groups—all are victimized in a multitude of ways by the stealthy and diabolically oppressive systems and structures imposed by Western civilization. And while all nonwhite groups are oppressed, they are not oppressed equally.

“Intersectionality” is the new word coined to describe the complex matrix of oppression. A white woman is oppressed (because she is a woman), but she is not as oppressed as a black woman. A black woman who is also a lesbian is more oppressed still. According to The Hudson Institute’s Heather Mac Donald, “individuals who can check off multiple victim boxes experience exponentially higher and more complex levels of life-threatening oppression than lower-status single-category victims.”⁴⁹

Peter J. Leithart notes, “Group membership is marked by race, sex and sexual orientation, religion, and immigrant status, but the organizing principle

of the system is victimhood. Favored groups are victims; unfavored groups are victimizers. The victimocracy reorders society to avenge designated victims.”⁵⁰

Justice as Equality of Outcome

A primary objective of the new religious orthodoxy is to unmask the many oppressive structures that pervade Western civilization. Adherents do this by exposing inequalities and fighting for “social justice.” There are plenty of examples.

Exhibit A: Laws and regulations that excluded gays and lesbians from the institution of marriage resulted in unequal and discriminatory treatment. Social justice demands that these laws, rooted in Judeo-Christian beliefs about the exclusivity of marriage as one male and one female, be overturned. This notion of marriage was judged to be hateful, homophobic, and bigoted. It needed to be torn down—a dream realized in 2015 when the Supreme Court, by judicial fiat, made homosexual “marriage” legal in all 50 states, thus redefining the institution.

Exhibit B: Norms and civic ordinances that exclude transgendered people from using the bathrooms and locker facilities *of their choice* are discriminatory. Equality demands that all people, regardless of gender, be able to use the restroom facilities and locker rooms (and eventually to play on the sports teams) of their choosing. After all, the notion of a simple gender binary male-female reality is oppressive, a legacy of Western, Judeo-Christian beliefs that were structurally imposed on everyone.

Os Guinness says that the new religion is animated by a desire to be “liberated from God.”⁵¹ The ideological roots of the new religion, whether postmodern or Marxist, are ultimately atheistic. The attack on Western civilization is really an indirect way of attacking Judeo-Christian beliefs, which ultimately is a kind of rage and rebellion against God and His created order. In this sense, it isn’t new at all. It goes all the way back to Genesis 3 and the fallen heart’s desire to overthrow God and assume ultimate authority for ourselves.

III. A POWER STRUGGLE

6. The Road to Power

The toxic new religion we have been exploring is aggressively expansionist. While its origins lie in the West, it isn't content to stay there. Like Islam and Christianity, it has a global vision, a missionary zeal, and a compelling vision of the future.

Islam's goal is the submission of all peoples and nations under Sharia, or Islamic law. Islam literally means "submission" to Allah and his law. The vision of Christianity is the fulfillment of the Great Commission, the return of Christ the King, and the consummation of His kingdom in a renewed heaven and earth.

The new religion, however, seems to be driven more by what it is *against*—the Judeo-Christian beliefs at the root of Western civilization—than by a clear vision of what it is *for*. Adherents seem to believe that once the

Judeo-Christian foundations of Western Civilization are destroyed, whatever comes next will be better.

Yet two aspects of the religion's anticipated future seem to be emerging. The first is a world of radical social equality, but it is no different than the vision that has fired true believers in Marxism from its beginnings. Have not 100 million deaths⁵² at the hands of Mao, Stalin, Pol Pot, and others taught us anything? The word "equality" has taken on an almost sacred connotation. C.S. Lewis describes this kind of vision in *The Screwtape Letters*:

Allow no preeminence among your subjects. Let no man live who is wiser or better or more famous or even handsomer than the mass. Cut them all down to a level: all slaves, all ciphers, and all nobodies. All equals.⁵³

But an even more fundamental dream drives the new religion: a world of complete, unfettered sexual license. For its true believers, the most oppressive legacy of Western civilization is its Judeo-Christian sexual ethic, including the binary nature of male and female and the natural family. They believe that true freedom and happiness will come only when these "oppressive" ideas are completely discredited. The new religion and the sexual revolution are deeply intertwined, giving the new religion an uncanny resemblance to ancient paganism.

Nietzsche railed against what he described as a weak, servile Christian morality. Indeed, the tactics employed by adherents of the new religion are devoid of any trace of a Judeo-Christian ethic. Here you will find no toleration,

no grace, no forgiveness. Here there is no commitment to honesty or truth-telling, no “first get the log out of your own eye” introspection. Frighteningly, the new religion achieves its aims through raw power, intimidation, coercion, threats, and violence. The ends justify the means. No tactic, however vicious, is off the table.

We see this violent turn in the resurgent Antifa movement, a group that traces its roots back to the Communist Party of Germany in the 1930s. One way Antifa groups oppose right-wing groups is by posting embarrassing information about their opponents on the internet. “Antifa groups also use more traditional forms of community organizing like rallies and protest marches,” BBC Radio 4 says. “The most extreme factions will carry weapons like pepper spray, knives, bricks and chains—and they don’t rule out violence.”⁵⁴

Indeed. In 2018 the city of Portland, Oregon, faced a series of violent Antifa tactics. In addition, Antifa protests have led to rock- and bottle-throwing at police officers in the nation’s capital and mob action at the University of California—Berkeley. Such violent activism can spread quickly in the cultural dry grass of American universities.

Heather Mac Donald was physically blocked from speaking at Claremont College in California for her supposed “fascist” views. At Pomona College, a likeminded group of students took up the cause, calling Mac Donald “a fascist, a white supremacist, a warhawk, a transphobe, a queerphobe, a classist, and ignorant of interlocking systems of domination that produce the lethal conditions under which oppressed peoples are forced to live.”⁵⁵

Traditionally, violence involves physical attack or abuse. But today, Antifa defines violence as any speech or language that a member of a self-described victim group takes as hurtful or offensive. Paradoxically, this new definition has become a justification for acting out violently.

Sometimes, the coercion is at the hands of government. In the case of the new definition of marriage, governments both at the state and federal levels are eviscerating the Constitution's protections of freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom of religion.

For the first time, the government is taking the side of one religion over another—the side of the new religious orthodoxy over historic Christianity. This is seen in the numerous, well-documented attempts to punish Christian bakers and florists who decline to participate in the marriages of homosexuals. Religious liberty has been a central feature of American identity from the very beginning. Will it survive and be passed on to the next generation?

The attacks against historic Christianity come in a variety of forms. For example, textbook publishers are prime movers of the anti-Christianity narrative. Pope Francis, speaking to the bishops of Poland, addressed the issue of transgender sexuality with these indicting words: "We are living a moment of annihilation of man as image of God."⁵⁶ In his address, Francis quoted Pope (emeritus) Benedict as saying that the current era is "the epoch of sin against God the Creator." Francis added, "Today, in schools they are teaching this to children—to children!—that everyone can choose their gender."

Without specifying, Francis blamed textbooks supplied by "persons and institutions who donate money." The pope blamed what he called "ideological

colonizing” backed by “very influential countries” that he didn’t identify, adding “This is terrible.”

Stephen Langa, executive director of a Ugandan family ministry, calls it “sexual colonialism.”⁵⁷ Langa states:

Initially we observed very few incidents of homosexuality/lesbianism among students. Then, beginning about five years ago, we noticed an increase, but did not know what was driving the vice. About three years ago information came to light that well-organized pro-homosexual organizations were recruiting Ugandan children into homosexual behaviors by enticing them with financial favors. These groups were trained and funded by international organizations and some Western governments. Some of the groups receiving funding were engaged in gay activism and began to demand recognition and the right to openly engage in homosexuality. UNICEF published a handbook promoting homosexuality among teens, “Teenager Toolkit,” and circulated it in 30 school districts of Uganda, in complete disregard for the laws of Uganda and the cultural practices which prohibit homosexual behavior.

When all this came to light, Ugandans were shocked and enraged. A national outcry ensued. Parents quickly swung into action and led a nationwide campaign, collected signatures, and submitted a petition to the Parliament of Uganda on April 23, 2009, demanding

that the government take immediate action to protect the children and nation of Uganda from onslaught by activist homosexuals.⁵⁸

You can hear the righteous anger in Stephen's voice at the arrogance of the West pushing its sexual agenda on the rest of the world. These men and their colleagues have a right to push back against sexual colonialism, which is part of the onslaught caused by the death of man as the image of God.

The West's rejection of God *invariably* leads to the death of man as the image of God. What we witness every day in the march of the LGBT community, backed by political and economic forces, is nothing less than the death of man. For example, the United States is pouring vast amounts of aid into poor countries—but with strings attached. Norimitsu Onishi, Southern Africa Bureau Chief for *The New York Times*, stated in 2015:

Four years ago, the American government embarked on an ambitious campaign to expand civil rights for gay people overseas by marshaling its diplomats, directing its foreign aid and deploying President Obama to speak before hostile audiences.

Since 2012, United States officials said, the American government has spent more than \$41 million specifically to promote gay rights globally, along with a portion of \$700 million earmarked for marginalized groups to support gay communities and causes. More than half of the \$700 million, and \$6.6 million of the \$41 million, was spent on sub-Saharan Africa—just one indication of the continent's importance to the new policy.⁵⁹

Political correctness provides ideological cover for this ideological colonizing. It often operates under the guise of encouraging respectful public discourse and greater sensitivity in matters involving minorities or other oppressed groups. However, it is actually a rigidly enforced speech-and-behavior code. “Hate speech” describes anything that violates the code.

The consequences for violating the code are becoming increasingly stiff. Violators can expect public shaming, censure, and forced re-education (in the form of diversity or sensitivity training). At the more extreme end are fines, the loss of career, and a ruined reputation.

Adherents of the new religion use PC to essentially enforce adherence to the four core doctrines. Rather than argue or defend their core beliefs, PC enables them to claim that these are “settled matters” and disputing them is “beyond the pale” of acceptable public discussion. An attempt to even discuss them respectfully amounts to hatred, racism, bigotry, homophobia, Islamophobia, and so on.

They also use hyperbolic claims of emotional duress and gratuitous outbursts of anger, pain, and outrage, usually combined with excessive foul language, to silence opposing views. For proponents of the new religion, “hurt feelings,” feeling disrespected, or being offended are now grounds to punish, penalize, and defeat opponents without ever having to debate them.

Robert Tracinski calls this tactic an “appeal to emotion,” one “specifically designed to make rational analysis of the issues look not just inappropriate, but positively immoral.” He notes that “the purpose ... is to make logical analysis seem insensitive ... to [oppressed groups].”⁶⁰

How did we get here? Postmodern relativism denies the existence of a real world “out there” that we must conform to. There is no God, no transcendent morality, no good or evil. Rather, reality is socially constructed. Without objective, transcendent truth, reason and logic are undermined. We are left with feelings in the driver’s seat. And while emotions are good and important, they can be downright dangerous when decoupled from reason, which is exactly what the new religion does.

Leading-edge thinkers of the new religion—such as John Corvino, a professor of philosophy at Wayne State University—are laying the groundwork for a new legal standard that he describes as “dignitary harm.” This would replace “material harm” (physical injury, stolen or damaged property, etc.) as a new legal standard for prosecution and punishment by the state. Corvino defines “dignity harm” as “causing people *to feel* inferior, intentionally or not” (italics added).⁶¹ If this standard prevails, the state could fine or even jail people on the grounds of claims of “hurt feelings.”

Albert Mohler describes the threat this poses to the American system of government:

If making someone feel morally inferior, intentional or not constitutes [legal] harm ... that means the end of ... any religion based on a claim to revelation. Taken to its logical conclusion, it means the end of all moral judgment.... This idea of dignitary harm may be the biggest single threat to religious liberty ... in our immediate future.⁶²

If “hurting someone’s feelings, intentionally or not” becomes a legal standard for prosecution and punishment, this toxic new religion will effectively become the established religion, to the exclusion of every other faith.

7. Victims Rule

Shelby Steele is a best-selling author and scholar at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. Steele's parents were active in the civil rights movement. His father was a truck driver, and his mother was a social worker. One was white and the other was black.

Steele has written notable volumes such as *The Content of Our Character* and *White Guilt* to explore how some believers in the toxic new religion use victimhood to acquire moral standing and, eventually, political power. Steele says that because of the historical racism present for 400 years of America's history, blacks have acquired a certain moral power that they exercise over whites. It involves "white guilt."

"So white guilt is not a guilt of conscience; it's not something that you get up in the morning and say, my God, I feel guilty about what happened to black

Americans,” Steele told Ed Gordon of National Public Radio. “Rather it is the fact that in relation to black Americans you lack moral authority. You are, in fact, stigmatized as a racist, because, after all, you have ... acknowledged that your nation practiced racism explicitly for four centuries. And, now, since the ‘60s, white Americans have been grappling with the stigma, trying prove that they are not racist, to prove the negative.”⁶³

In trying to prove this negative, whites have ceded moral authority to gain absolution from the sins of their forebears. According to the tenets of the toxic new religion, victimization accrues power. Here’s how it works:

First, the religion sees reality entirely within the Marxist framework of oppressor and oppressed. Further, the principal oppressors are white Christian or Jewish heterosexual males. They are uniquely oppressive “white supremacists” who have abused their cultural power and privilege at the expense of every other group.

These are givens. Try arguing these points with adherents; they will be incredulous, as if you were asserting a flat earth. To them, these are simply “self-evident” realities. If you are not white, male, Christian/Jewish, and heterosexual, you are, by definition, a victim, and victimization accrues power. The more victim categories you can accrue, the higher your “intersectionality” score. Ben Shapiro explains how this works:

[The toxic new religion] ranks the value of a view not based on the logic or merit of the view but on the level of victimization in American society experienced by the person espousing the view. An LGBT black woman is automatically considered more correct than

a straight white male, before any speech exits either of their mouths.⁶⁴

The fact that victimization accrues power helps explain the wild exaggeration and hyperbole employed by so-called victim groups. The more victimized and oppressed you paint yourself, the more seriously you are taken. For example, consider the Yale University student who claimed “we’re dying” in response to an uncomfortable email.⁶⁵

But such cries are evidence not of victimization but of privilege. Think about it. Yazidis in Iraq or Christians in North Korea can truthfully claim that “We are dying here” without exaggerating. But to claim this as a privileged student at one of America’s most prestigious universities is to mock the meaning of the word *violence*.

Examples abound. Mobs of students shouting down their opponents with vitriol, cursing, property damage, threats of violence, and actual violence on the leafy campuses of Berkeley, Evergreen, Missouri State, Yale, Middlebury, and so on. According to Deion Kathawa, the students who engage in these mobs

... fervently believe that they are the front-line troops of an infallible moral vanguard, locked in an epic struggle for the very soul of their generation—and of their nation, rotten to the core ... [Given this] it is not quite so shocking that they understand themselves to have entirely legitimate grievances and are accordingly motivated to act in extreme ways.⁶⁶

A white, female professor at Evergreen wrote about how a group of students blocked her way and attempted to force her to join their protest.

In the first occasion, three female students and one male who claimed to not be a student surrounded me with raised voices and twisted my words when I responded to them. When I stopped to try to talk with them they refused to actually engage in conversation. The only thing which they would accept was my obedience, which you won't be surprised to learn I was not going to give. They followed me all the way across Red Square ... while berating me. By the time I got to the venue for the faculty meeting, I was shaking.⁶⁷

An observer added this:

These students are behaving like Maoists at a struggle session. They are literally demanding this woman justify her right to do anything else but obey them. It's reminiscent of students telling Evergreen President George Bridges he could only go to the bathroom if accompanied by two of their minders.⁶⁸

When you jettison the truth—Christian morality and a biblical worldview—this is what you get: raw power. This set of tactics to fight so-called victimization is increasingly used beyond college campuses as well, in places like Ferguson, Missouri; Baltimore; Portland, Oregon; Chicago; and elsewhere. It is powered by a vast array of revolutionary networks, enabled by

social media, and underwritten by incredible amounts of money provided by far-left donors and foundations.

The goal is to disrupt and silence foes. Noah Rothman writes:

For an unacceptably large number of progressive activists, a violent response to speech has not only become excusable but obligatory. Such undemocratic behavior is the natural outgrowth of an increasingly mainstream progressive worldview in which the distinctions between speech and violence have been blurred beyond recognition.⁶⁹

To advance this toxic new religion, adherents are using Nietzschean tactics, behaviors void of any aspect of Christian charity or morality. Civility, open discourse, dialogue, and debate are nowhere to be found, replaced by coercion, lies, deception, distortion, emotional outbursts, threats, and violence. They will do whatever it takes to further the cause and acquire power. Claiming victim status is but one technique.

Their tactics are not entirely new, of course. History is replete with examples of movements that sought to redefine truth and get their way through appeals to emotion, carefully constructed lies, claims of persecution, and threats of violence. Right before the American Civil War, pro-slavery forces were content not simply to be allowed to continue the ugly institution; they demanded that the anti-slavery northern states change their minds and declare slavery to be a positive good for all. So said Abraham Lincoln in his

acclaimed Cooper Union speech of 1860, a speech that propelled his run for the presidency.

“The question recurs, what will satisfy them?” Lincoln asked. “...This, and this only: cease to call slavery *wrong*, and join them in calling it *right*. And this must be done thoroughly—done in acts as well as in *words*. Silence will not be tolerated—we must place ourselves avowedly with them.”⁷⁰

How contemporary sound those words today! Those of us who hold to a biblical worldview, to time-tested understandings of morality, and to objective truth cannot sit out *our* intellectual battle. Silence is not an option. We must choose a side. And when we do, the cultural temperature will only get hotter and hotter.

IV. BATTLE LINES DRAWN

8. The Tyranny of Feelings

Not that long ago, the ideal in America and in other Western nations was that people settled important social matters largely through free and open discussion, using logic and facts. While the reality didn't always play out this way—think of the debates over slavery and civil rights that sometimes turned very bloody indeed—American civil order is predicated on civil discussion, at least most of the time. When opposing sides share the conviction that truth exists—that a real, objective reality exists beyond our personal, subjective beliefs—and that things tend to go well when the rules, policies, and laws that govern our common life accord with reality, our society generally flourishes.

The new religion, however, undermines all of this. Because of this new faith, feelings have largely replaced logic and reason. Postmodern relativism denies the existence of a real world “out there” that we must conform to. There

is no God, no transcendent morality, no good or evil. Rather, reality is socially constructed. With truth, reason, and logic undermined, feelings and emotions are in the driver's seat.

Our penchant for prioritizing feelings over reason has wormed its way into popular culture. More than one Disney film has trained children to "follow your heart." *Authenticity*, the new buzzword, means acting in accordance with strong emotions. The saying "I feel like" has become pervasive. While emotions can be good (after all, they are part of what it means to be human beings made in the image of God), they can be very dangerous when decoupled from reason. This new religion—a toxic mix of postmodern relativism, Marxist social analysis, and a Nietzschean will to power—has taken this trend to a whole new level. Today, emotions have become weaponized, used as blunt instruments to exert power.

Let's take another look at a prominent example from academia, where logic and reason are supposed to prevail. In September 2015, an administrative committee at Yale University asked students not to wear "appropriative" Halloween costumes that might be offensive. Yale professor Erika Christakis pushed back, worried about creeping censorship. "The ability to tolerate offense," she said, "is a central feature of a free and open society."

Christakis's email, rather than sparking a lively debate on the New Haven campus, instead triggered a massive student protest. One student stated, "It's so important to give students of color a chance to heal from all the pain we've been experiencing this past week." An open letter signed by more than 700 students condemned her email as "racist." Student activists flocked to Silliman,

the residential community home to Erika and her husband, respected Yale professor Nicholas Christakis. One chalked message on the sidewalk read, “I don’t *feel* safe here—and that’s on you!”

Reflecting an older paradigm of civility and respect, Nicholas Christakis came out to talk to these students, and the situation only got worse. In response, the new campus rage expressed itself via:

- anger, sobbing, weeping, yelling, and disgust, wildly out of proportion to what triggered the feelings—a simple email about Halloween costumes;
- extreme disrespect, intimidation, incivility, and outright contempt; and
- mob tactics.

The students would have none of the professor’s civility and desire for discourse. They were not interested in a discussion or debate. They wanted to *punish* him—to assign him guilt and publicly shame him, as the Chinese communists frequently did to dissenters during the Cultural Revolution.

Student 1: “What you did was create a space for violence to happen.”

(Note how the word “violence” has been redefined.)

Christakis: “That I disagree with. That I disagree with.”

Student 1: “It doesn’t matter whether you agree with me or not!”

Student 2: “It’s not a debate! It’s not a debate!”

Student 3: “You are not listening! You are disgusting!”⁷¹

This is the tyranny of feelings—the students venting raw, unbridled emotion in an effort to coerce Christakis to admit wrongdoing. One Yale student, sobbing hysterically and shaking in rage, demanded: “So then *apologize!* I don’t understand, like, what’s the issue?”

Political correctness (PC) is how most of us encounter the tyranny of feelings. PC is shorthand for speech codes (written or unwritten) that purport to protect the feelings of certain minority groups and avoid giving offense. However, they become blunt instruments of power by defining acceptable speech and by inflicting penalties on violators—public defamation, shaming, fines, and even the loss of employment. Perhaps the most illuminating moment of the interaction between Christakis and the students came with this important question:

Christakis: “Who gets to decide what [speech, language] is offensive? Who decides?”

Student: “When it hurts me.”

The 2018 nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court—regardless of what you think of the politics—highlights today’s eclipse of fact by feeling. The hearings were largely dominated by accusations of sexual misconduct from a generation earlier. There was little attempt to find out what really happened, because proof of the alleged events from decades ago was

simply impossible to obtain. The televised hearings became not a search for truth but for a determination of which person was more credible at a gut level.

Writing for The Gregorian Institute at Benedictine College, Tom Hoopes observed, “The question wasn’t: Can we discover what happened at that Georgetown Prep party? The question was: Which *feeling* will the public find more compelling? [Christine] Ford’s claim to the pain of being victimized or Kavanaugh’s claim to the pain of being falsely accused?”⁷²

This is the very essence of post-truth. In a post-truth culture, people are more likely to accept an argument based on their emotions and beliefs rather than on the facts.

People captured by this approach to reality say that my emotions (my claims of pain and suffering) trump your opinions and any right you might claim to speak freely. To exert control over others, adherents of the new religion claim emotional damage. If you somehow fail to admit your guilt, the PC furies will come down on your head. Example: A student who screams, “Now I want your job to be taken from you. I don’t want you to have this job!”

And so it was. Nicholas and Erika Christakis lost their employment at Yale. A fellow professor said later that “the administration threw them under the bus.” The students’ mob tactics were rewarded—they got what they demanded. Now we can expect even more of this kind of bullying, not only at Yale and university campuses across the nation but also in the broader culture as well. Comedian Kevin Hart stepped down from hosting the 2019 Academy Awards show after some of his years-old tweets disparaging homosexuals were

discovered, sparking a social-media furor and demands that Hart confess the error of his ways. Hart said he didn't want to be a distraction.

This conferring of power incentivizes victimhood. Professor Jonathan Haidt observes that it incentivizes people to “respond to even the slightest unintentional offense, even going so far as to falsify offenses.”⁷³

Thus we have an explosion of so-called “microaggressions.” The whole system is built upon the need to always find new reasons to be offended, new claims to victimhood. As Haidt says, “The goalposts shift, allowing participants to maintain a constant level of anger and constant level of perceived victimization. ... Some colleges have lowered the bar so far that an innocent question, motivated by curiosity, such as ‘where are you from’ is now branded as an act of aggression.”⁷⁴ Everyone walks around on egg shells, never knowing for certain if something said might trigger an emotionally fueled reaction and charge of racism, bigotry, or discrimination.

In a *New York Times* op-ed, Molly Worthen writes, “Calls for trigger warnings and safe spaces ... have eroded students’ inclination to assert or argue. It is safer to merely ‘feel.’ ... Asserting that others must respond to your hurt feelings and sense of being offended is a way of deflecting [and] avoiding engagement with another person. You cannot disagree.”⁷⁵

If you cannot disagree, there can be no dialogue. We can no longer try to understand all sides of an issue, to respectfully listen to arguments and alternative points of view. If this tyranny of feelings is allowed to continue unchecked, the load-bearing pillars of our free society will inevitably collapse.

We see this most clearly with the sexual orientation and gender issue. If I'm born biologically female, but "feel like" I'm male (or land anywhere on the "gender spectrum"), then I *am* a male (or whatever else is claimed). My feelings determine my reality. Postmodernism has empowered me to create my own personal identity—without any reference to biological facts.

The Nietzschean will to power then kicks in as I demand that others and society as a whole affirm my reality. If you don't, I can wield power by claiming offense, pain, suffering, and discrimination. I can bash you as a hater and a bigot if you fail to let me use the bathroom or locker room "of my choice." States now enforce this tyranny of feelings. In New York City, authorities can fine citizens up to \$250,000 for the novel crime of "misgendering"—maliciously referring to people by any words other than their pronouns of choice (including newly constructed words such as zie/hir, ey/em/eir and co).⁷⁶

Make no mistake: This new ideology is deadly serious. It is nothing less than a kind of cultural acid, eating away at the central pillars of a free and open society. Yale University is supposed to represent dialogue and learning. What happens when we can no longer openly dialogue, debate, and discuss different viewpoints because we fear offending someone who may claim our speech was "violence," leading to our public shaming or loss of employment? What kind of culture will this new ideology produce?

Today many university students put subjectivity over objectivity, feelings over the pursuit of truth. This is even happening on Christian campuses such as Wheaton College, known in some circles as the "evangelical Harvard." Ryan Bomberger, the chief creative officer of the Radiance Foundation, showed up

on the idyllic Midwestern campus in November 2018, invited by the College Republicans to give a hard-hitting multimedia presentation on the topic “Black Lives Matter In and Out of the Womb.” As you can imagine, it sparked no little controversy.

“I wanted to compel students to critically think,” Bomberger wrote. “Instead, some wanted to silence the message and smear the messenger.” Indeed. After the event, members of the Student Government Association and the Office of Student Activities sent a campus email alleging that Bomberger’s message about abortion and race “made many students, staff and faculty of color feel unheard, underrepresented and unsafe on our campus.”

Bomberger is an African American.⁷⁷

Maybe instead of simply critiquing this trend, we should provide an alternative. Here’s one: How about offering “growth spaces” of intellectual hospitality? Hospitality is a critical virtue of the Christian faith, of course. But we need to understand that hospitality is not simply opening our homes and “entertaining” friends, though this is certainly important. Rather, it is the art of befriending *strangers*.

Hebrews 13:2 captures the concept well: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” The Greek word translated “hospitality” is interesting. It is φιλοξενία (*philoxenia*), composed of two words, *philo* (friend, “one who associates familiarly”) and *xenos* (stranger, foreigner). These two terms combine to say “hospitality,” i.e. showing care to strangers.

It is profoundly interesting and significant that hospitality—*philoxenia*—is the counterpoint to a dominant term in today’s culture, i.e. *xenophobia*, “the fear of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange.” This term is especially applied to fear of people from other countries and cultures.

Too often, people are afraid of others who are different. They want to live and function where they can be “comfortable” and safe from differing ideas and perspectives—spaces of intellectual fear. The Bible, however, calls us to create spaces for hospitality, including intellectual hospitality.

Francis and Edith Schaeffer created such a space in the Swiss Alps. As Francis Schaeffer said, “A compassionate, open home is part of Christian responsibility, and should be practiced up to the level of capacity.” At L’Abri Fellowship, the Schaeffers “cared for strangers” from all over the world: Hindus from India, atheists from France, Muslims from Malaysia, communists, drug addicts, and burned-out Christians. All came with questions. All had a couple of burning issues: (1) Is there any truth? (2) What is true?

After spending many years in a stifling anti-intellectual environment (an evangelical seminary), Darrow and his wife Marilyn traveled to study, live, and work at L’Abri in the early 1970s. Francis and Edith, and their hosts Udo and Deborah Middelman, provided a living model of intellectual openness. They were happy to discuss ideas, such as the relevance of Christianity to the issue of poverty, without being the least bit defensive. They gladly answered questions and welcomed robust discussions from people from all over the world.

L'Abri was rich in human diversity, a place where people from a variety of cultural, educational, and life-experience backgrounds could ask both their intellectual and "emotional" questions as well as state their opinions in complete freedom. The Millers and the other visitors enjoyed many hours over meals and late into the evenings experiencing intellectual hospitality.

After three years at L'Abri, Marilyn and Darrow returned to the United States, where they sought to create a space for intellectual hospitality at their homes in Prescott and Flagstaff, Arizona, and Denver, Colorado. These were some of the most wonderfully challenging years of their lives.

Bob Trube, a campus minister with InterVarsity in the Ohio Valley, provides his thoughts on intellectual hospitality with international students who come to America's shores with different cultures and viewpoints:

Intellectual hospitality does not commit me to adopt the ideas, values and world view of the other person whom I'm welcoming into conversation.... Intellectual hospitality means we love truth more than we love holding onto our dearest ideas or being 'right'.... Intellectual hospitality honours the other person by taking the time and effort to really understand what [he or she is] saying.⁷⁸

John Bennett, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut, speaks of the importance of creating a space for intellectual hospitality in the university:

An indispensable characteristic of healthy learning communities, intellectual hospitality involves welcoming others through openness

in both sharing and receiving claims to knowledge and insight. The sharing is marked by considerateness toward others and recognition that others' distinctive individualities and overall experience are inherently relevant to their learning. The receiving is marked by awareness that however initially strange, the perspective of the other could easily supplement and perhaps correct one's own work or even transform one's self-understanding. Hospitable educators know that adverse evidence may have been overlooked, that the potential for self-deception always accompanies the desire to support one's position, and that different and even foreign perspectives can provide breakthroughs in understanding, the academy.⁷⁹

Intellectual hospitality is by no means easy, but the rewards can be substantial. In her masterful biography of Abraham Lincoln, *Team of Rivals*, historian Doris Kearns Goodwin describes how the newly elected president shrewdly brought three strong-willed and accomplished men—William H. Seward, Salmon P. Chase, and Edward Bates—into his cabinet. Each had different points of view, different personalities, and even different goals. Yet Lincoln was able to create a sometimes uncomfortable place of intellectual hospitality that helped him to ultimately navigate safely through the stormy waters of the Civil War.⁸⁰

Nobody grows by huddling in “safe spaces” free of conflicting ideas, where emotionalism trumps facts and where the tyranny of feelings reigns. Instead, in our homes and in our communities, let's point our culture to a better way. Let's create “growth spaces” where we can experience the ancient and profound

practice of intellectual hospitality, to the glory of God and the good of our neighbors.

9. The Redefinition of Words

You would think that the new religion by now would have created its own particular vocabulary—but no. For the last 50 years or so, it has simply redefined some of our culture’s most important words. For example, Eric Metaxas and Anne Morse note sardonically that the new religion’s abortion activists “like to use the same words we pro-lifers use, but they’re using an entirely different dictionary.”⁸¹

Which words have been redefined across culture? Only words such as *marriage, freedom, love, compassion, and justice*—words that are the very foundation stones of Western culture. According to Os Guinness, “There has been a subtle shift in the meaning of many Western ideas, so that once-strong Jewish and Christian [words] are now used in different ways that decisively change their meaning.”⁸²

This matters because *words* matter. They have the power to convey truth and help us understand reality—or obscure it. Words and language are the basic building blocks of culture. Stripping words of their true meaning turns out to be incredibly destructive.

Look, for example, at the word *violence*. As we mentioned earlier, the older dictionary defines violence as physical attack or abuse. The new dictionary, however, defines it as speech or language that members of self-described victim groups claim to be hurtful or offensive. Ironically, this new definition has become a justification for these same groups to act out violently, according to the definition in the old dictionary.

For example, in 2017 right-wing rabble-rouser Milo Yiannopoulos was invited by a group of college Republicans to speak at Berkeley University. The invitation to the famously left-wing school prompted a riot. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the scheduled speech prompted “masked agitators to throw Molotov cocktails, smash windows, hurl rocks at police, and ultimately cause \$100,000 worth of damage.” Yiannopoulos was forced to flee under armed guard without ever giving his talk. The student newspaper, however, ran an op-ed justifying all this, displaying the headline, “Violence helped ensure safety of students.”⁸³

So actual violence is justified when it “ensures safety.” Safety from *what?* From the “violence” of being exposed to offensive speech and language.

Calling the speech of your opponents not merely offensive but also “violent” is a rhetorical appeal to the emotions—a logical fallacy called an *argumentum ad passiones*. Most people intuitively know that violence against

the innocent is profoundly wrong. Proponents of the new religion cleverly leverage this sentiment, then twist it. Claiming that your opponent's speech is "violent" becomes an effective way of silencing it. This tactic also perverts the word. If language is violence, then what word can we use for physical assault, for example? Where does this perversion of language lead? What happens to a society that redefines words in order to accrue power and silence opponents?

If offensive speech is described as "violent," will certain speech become criminalized? The story of Sweetcakes by Melissa sheds a very sobering light on this question.

In February 2013, a lesbian couple filed a complaint with the State of Oregon against Aaron and Melissa Klein, bakery owners who respectfully declined to bake a cake for the couple's wedding. The Kleins cited their deeply held Christian beliefs about marriage—another word that has been redefined, with the new definition enshrined in law thanks to the Supreme Court's ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015.

The historic definition of marriage, held without question in nearly all cultures and religions for millennia, is nicely summarized by Ryan Anderson of the Heritage Foundation:

Marriage exists to bring a man and a woman together as husband and wife to be father and mother to any children their union produces. Marriage is based on the anthropological truth that men and women are complementary, the biological fact that reproduction depends on a man and a woman, and the social reality that children need a mother and a father.⁸⁴

In the new dictionary, “marriage” is now a legally recognized union of any two people, regardless of gender, based on a high level of emotional intensity and a desire to live together in a relationship of sexual intimacy and mutual support. The new definition has nothing to do with children or future generations. Its concern is limited to the interests of the adult couple.

The Kleins said their deeply held beliefs about marriage, rooted in the Scriptures, precluded them from participating in a celebration of a same-sex “marriage.” The lesbian couple, of course, could have taken a “live and let live” approach out of respect for Aaron and Melissa’s religious convictions. They could have simply gone to another baker.

Instead, they chose to punish the Kleins. They cited a long list of alleged physical, emotional, and mental damages that the Klein’s refusal caused them, including “acute loss of confidence,” “doubt,” “excessive sleep,” “felt mentally raped, dirty and shameful,” “high blood pressure,” “impaired digestion,” “loss of appetite,” “migraine headaches,” “pale and sick at home after work,” “resumption of smoking habit,” “shock,” “stunned,” “uncertainty,” “weight gain,” and “worry.” The state agreed, levying a \$135,000 fine against the Kleins. Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian even placed a gag order on the Kleins, ordering them to “cease and desist” *from speaking publicly* about not wanting to bake cakes for same-sex weddings based on their Christian beliefs.

The Kleins were eventually forced out of business.⁸⁵ Their respectful refusal was taken as an act of violence against the lesbian couple, based on the new definition of violence. Alarming, the government is increasingly using

its coercive power to force people to comply with the new definition of marriage, eviscerating our freedoms of speech, association, and religion.

A new religion has taken root in the West, and it advances by redefining words—vacating them of their true meanings and hijacking them to serve new purposes. This is a powerful tactic. We can already begin to see how the redefinition of a single word—marriage—is leading to troubling social and cultural repercussions. But we are not talking about a single word. We are talking about an entirely new dictionary.

We could look, for example, at the word *love*. In the old dictionary, love meant to seek the greatest good of another person, even an enemy, and to take action accordingly, regardless of one's feelings. In the new dictionary, love is nothing more than strong feelings or emotions.

In the old dictionary, *freedom* was defined as the ability to choose the good, right, and true. In the new dictionary, it is the ability to do anything I want, as long as it doesn't harm anyone.

In the old dictionary, *justice* was defined as *equal treatment*, regardless of race, sex, or religion. In the new dictionary, justice is *equal outcome*, regardless of personal action or behavior.

Again, the new religion isn't merely secular or atheistic. It is a toxic mix of postmodern relativism, Marxist social analysis, and a Nietzschean will to power. All of this feeds into and supports the redefinition of words.

Postmodernism holds that there is no objective, transcendent truth. Reality is simply "constructed" through words and language. Words have no objective meaning, only what meaning individuals or groups bring to them. According

to Guinness, “Postmodern philosophies have untethered words from any clear content, let alone objective meaning, and can be used in any way the speaker likes.”⁸⁶

This is sometimes referred to as “deconstructionism,” a postmodern view of language championed by the philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and concisely described in the ramblings of *Alice in Wonderland’s* Humpty Dumpty: “When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

Marxist social analysis, as we have seen, sees the world as a zero-sum competition between “victims” and “oppressors.” The “oppressors” use language to create a “reality” that is imposed upon so-called victims—often without them being aware of it—to maintain their own power and privilege. The “victims” can liberate themselves by “unmasking” these socially constructed realities. This form of Marxist thought is burgeoning on college campuses under the rubric of “critical theory,” supplanting the study of Western civilization.

The *Nietzschean will to power* ties all this together by seeking to manipulate or coerce others into using the new definitions, even if this means leveraging the power of the state to attain cultural supremacy. According to the new religious orthodoxy, words are no longer a means of communicating truth. They are tools to control others.

Christians must be open-eyed and discerning about how our language is being manipulated. To do this, we must recover a biblical lexicography. As Robert Louis Wilken said, “*We cannot be the Church if we lose our vocabulary*

and the conceptual framework that makes us Christian. ... Nothing is more needful today than the survival of Christian culture."⁸⁷

Christian culture survives if we understand that words have objective meanings. These meanings are given by God as revealed in Scripture. God is not some impersonal cosmic force, but rather *a person* who speaks and reveals Himself to us. As John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The written Word of God has come to us through the Jewish nation—through people such as Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Micah, Peter, John, Paul, and of course Jesus Himself. In his profound book, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels*, historian Thomas Cahill wrote these stirring words:

The Jews gave us a whole new vocabulary, a whole new Temple of the Spirit, an inner landscape of ideas and feelings that had never been known before. ... They gave us the Conscience of the West ... [They] gave us the Outside and the Inside—our outlook and our inner life. We can hardly get up in the morning or cross the street without being Jewish. We dream Jewish dreams and hope Jewish hopes. Most of our best words, in fact—new, adventure, surprise; unique, individual, person, vocation; time, history, future; freedom, progress, spirit; faith, hope, justice—are the gifts of the Jews.⁸⁸

These words are gifts—priceless gifts to the whole world. Yes, they were given through the Jewish people, but their ultimate source is God, "the Word"

who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). This is why we cannot redefine words such as freedom, love, and justice without serious consequence. Our task is to deeply understand the meaning of words and order our lives accordingly. Not only this, but we also need to speak the true meaning of words to the broader culture. We must be gracious, kind, and compassionate, yet refuse to be silenced.

God's Word is the North Star that guides us into all truth. Jesus said, "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me (John 18:37)." Contrary to postmodern deconstructionism, words are not empty vessels to be filled with whatever meanings we wish. They are not tools to be manipulated to acquire power. Words are precious conveyers of *reality*. They need to be treasured, conserved, embodied, and passed down.

God's Word is the only sure foundation for free, flourishing societies. The church is the repository and steward of the truth. We contribute to building flourishing communities as we understand, and order our lives according to, the true meanings of words. This should begin in our families and churches and continue on in our interactions in the public square. We have been blessed by God to be a blessing. There is no more powerful way we do this than by how we use and embody language.

Over the years, as this toxic new religion has begun to displace Christianity at the center of culture, biblical meanings have been eroded and words have been redefined. A new foundation is being laid—word by word—a foundation for a culture that is already showing itself to be intolerant, uncivil, and inhumane. For too long, Christians have stood by, uncritically adopting

(and thus reinforcing) the new meanings. This must end. If the followers of Jesus, the Word, fail to steward the true meaning of words and language, who will? If we fail to resist this toxic new religion, how can we say that we love our neighbors?

Whenever possible, we need to take personal stands for the truth, even if it costs us something—and it may. First, we must know the true meanings of these culture-forming words and understand how they differ from the redefined meanings. Scott and Darrow are carefully working on a book, *Twelve Words that Transform Culture*, that will present the biblical meanings of 12 key words, culture's redefinitions, and practical ways that we can take back these words and live them out before a watching world.⁸⁹

Once we are clear about the objective meanings of these words, we must allow the truth about them to form our lives at home, at church, in the workplace, and across the culture. For example, think about the education of our children. How can we make sure they grow up to know the true meanings and live them out day by day? What about the public square? In what ways can we help our neighbors near and far to discover the true meanings and challenge the redefinitions?

Because of her faith-inspired belief that marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman, Barronelle Stutzman, a florist in Washington state, declined in 2013 to make floral arrangements for a same-sex wedding. The Washington Supreme Court ruled against her, and the case made its way all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The nation's high court sent the dispute

back to the Washington court to reconsider its verdict to make sure there was no unconstitutional animus against Stutzman in the earlier ruling.⁹⁰

The case remains unresolved and she could possibly face \$1 million in legal fees, but this septuagenarian Southern Baptist woman continues to speak up for her rights—and, what’s more important, for reality. Though some have demonized her, she is ordering her life according to the true meaning of marriage, allowing it to shape her decisions. Stutzman is willing, not to go along, but to pay the price, publicly defending the truth—graciously, gently, respectfully, lovingly, and unwaveringly.

10. The Political Attack on Marriage

We have seen how the toxic new religion thrives on narrative rather than on objective truth. We have watched as it has redefined culture-bearing words for its own purposes. We have observed how its followers will play the victim while demeaning and demonizing those who block their path to power. In this chapter let's briefly take a look at how it works diligently to undermine marriage—not just by redefining it, as we have already seen, but also by the application of Machiavellian tactics in the worlds of politics, economic policy, and culture.

Marriage and the family, both of which are inventions of God, are under assault. Increasingly, governments are taking it upon themselves to enforce

politically correct doctrines about marriage and family. In fact, the concept of the family has been radically changed from that of parents (a committed male and female couple) and their offspring to that of state “ownership” of children. If parents do not teach what the authorities think they should teach, the state will attempt to take the children away.

We’re not exaggerating. In Norway, for example, Ruth and Marius Bodnariu had their five children forcibly removed and placed in foster homes. Their crime? Home schooling their children. The Norwegian child protective services agency, Barnevernet, charged the couple with “Christian indoctrination,” an offense serious enough to warrant removing the children from their parents. After an international outcry, the authorities reluctantly returned the children to the care of their parents.⁹¹

In Ontario, Canada, Bill 89, innocuously titled “The Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act of 2017,” passed by a vote of 63 to 23. The bill empowers the state to remove a child from any home that has an abusive environment. What has become a typical charge of abuse in Ontario? Parents not accepting and supporting a child’s chosen “gender identity.”⁹²

Similarly, Ontario’s Bill 28 reduces children to chattel. The bill removes “mother” and “father” from state documents, replaced with the generic, asexual “parents.”⁹³ A child may have up to four legal parents. The implication is that mothers and fathers no longer have a legal right to live with their children as a family, and the children have no right to live with their mothers and fathers. The state owns the children.

The cultural intimidation of stay-at-home moms is on the rise, too. For years, the mantra “a woman’s right to choose” has meant *not* the right to choose life but rather the right to choose abortion. Now it means the right (the responsibility, actually) to work in the marketplace. It apparently does not include the right to be a homemaker and nurturer of children.

Sarrah Le Marquand, an Australian columnist, represents the new face of “women’s liberation”:

Rather than wail about the supposed liberation in a woman’s right to choose to shun paid employment, we should make it a legal requirement that all parents of children of school-age or older are gainfully employed. ... Only when the female half of the population is expected to hold down a job and earn money to pay the bills ... will we see things change for the better for either gender.⁹⁴

Critics have cause to wonder if even President Obama tilted the scales against stay-at-home moms. Timothy P. Carney of the *Washington Examiner* certainly had some serious questions about the direction in which the country was being taken. Obama’s tax plan not only awarded those families that had two income earners; it also *encouraged* this, giving short-shrift to those moms and dads who sought to raise their children themselves. Carney said:

One clear message of the president’s tax plan: Moms who stay at home with their children are less valuable than moms who work for pay. Obama ... proposed tax cuts that go only to dual-income families.

In addition, President Obama called for a new “second-earner tax credit” and expanding a tax credit for commercial child care. Obama’s second-earner credit is worth \$500 for any dual-income family.⁹⁵

Not only is the parent-child relationship is under attack, but also so is marriage, in manifold ways.

Russian-American journalist Masha Gessen, an LGBT activist invited to speak at the U.S. Department of State, revealed that the movement wants not some virtuous-sounding concept called “marriage equality.” It actually seeks, according to Gessen, the *destruction* of marriage—and that lying is one of the tools they use to get there. Gessen stated:

It’s a no-brainer that we should have the right to marry, but I also think equally that it’s a no-brainer that the institution of marriage should not exist.

That causes my brain some trouble. And part of why it causes me trouble is because fighting for gay marriage generally involves lying about what we are going to do with marriage when we get there—because we lie that the institution of marriage is not going to change, and that is a lie.⁹⁶

Such efforts to undermine marriage are increasingly coming from the government. President Trump re-nominated law professor Chai Feldblum, an Obama administration appointee, to head the Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission. Feldblum's views on marriage and religious liberty sparked opposition from Senator Mike Lee of Utah, who said:

Feldblum has described modern-day politics as a “zero-sum game,” where rights for LGBT Americans are secured only by curtailing the rights of religious Americans.

Likewise, Feldblum believes her radical agenda “cannot be adequately advanced if pockets of resistance ... are permitted to flourish.” She therefore has argued that “no individual exceptions based on religious beliefs” should ever be allowed if they conflict with “the goal of liberty for gay people.”⁹⁷

Let us beware! While the gospel calls us to love our neighbors, strangers, and, yes, even our enemies, we must not be naive about the battle for the survival of human dignity. The very sacredness of the family as a God-ordained institution is on the line in our brave new postmodern world. Those who seek to redefine it, or simply to do away with it, are moving forcefully in the political and economic spheres of culture. Therefore, we must defend marriage in those spheres; yes, with grace and kindness, but defend it we must.

The family is essential to our social fabric, an underappreciated source of blessing for the whole society. When the family falls apart, we lose this blessing. The breakdown of family in the West has produced what Paul Irving, chairman of the Center for the Future of Aging at the Milken Institute, calls an “epidemic of loneliness.”

Writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, Irving says that a third of Americans under age 45 feel lonely, and that loneliness is especially evident in those under 25 and those over 65. “Marriage and fertility rates have fallen,” Irving says. “People are more mobile and more likely to live apart from friends and family than in past generations.”⁹⁸

Loneliness is more than an emotional problem. It has wide-ranging physical *and* fiscal implications in a society in which one in 11 Americans aged 50 and older has no husband, wife, or child.⁹⁹ “Policy makers are concerned this will strain the federal budget and undermine baby boomers’ health,” Janet Adamy and Paul Overberg write. “Researchers have found that loneliness takes a physical toll, and is as closely linked to early mortality as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day or consuming more than six alcoholic drinks a day. Loneliness is even worse for longevity than being obese or physically inactive.”¹⁰⁰

The mission of the church is to bless the nations, so we must stand firm for the family, one of God’s chief blessings to mankind. In addition to our concerted efforts to protect and nurture our own families, we must roll up our sleeves and support legal firms that take up the cause, judges who see the incalculable value of marriage and family as societal building blocks, legislators who seek to preserve the freedom of families to practice their faith, and churches that teach these truths with grace and conviction.

There is no excuse for a privatized faith—for marriage or for any other issue. This is a matter of Christian principle. Christian faith is needed in the public square now as much as it ever has been, and we dare not shirk this responsibility—for the good of our neighbors and the blessing of our world.

“I would suggest that faith is everyone’s business,” British parliamentarian William Wilberforce once said. “The advance or decline of faith is so intimately connected to the welfare of a society that it should be of particular interest to a politician.”¹⁰¹

Unfortunately, marriage and family are far from the only targets of the toxic new religion and its devotees.

11: The Growing Division

Janeane Garofalo, a comedian and political activist, has expressed support for the toxic new religion's attacks against the load-bearing supports of Western culture, and it's no joking matter:

“[W]hen I see the American flag, I go, “Oh my God, you’re insulting me.” That you can have a gay parade on Christopher Street in New York, with naked men and women on a float cheering, “We’re here, we’re queer!”—that’s what makes my heart swell. Not the flag, but a gay naked man or woman burning the flag. I get choked up with pride.¹⁰²

We are two distinct peoples sharing one topography. The Stars and Stripes shows the division clearly. One group, consisting of entertainers,

athletes, and other activists, views the American flag with suspicion, even disdain, for national sins—both real and imagined. Another, consisting of traditionalists and many others, sees the flag as a symbol of the nation’s most cherished virtues—belief in God, patriotism, military service, freedom, and justice, among others.

This division is not exclusive to the United States. Modern globalism, which was prominent for decades but is now being shaken by new forces, and postmodernism continue to grow slowly across the world. To make matters worse, today two ideologies of long provenance are enjoying new prominence: nationalism and Islam. As evidence of the former, Catalonians are seeking independence from Spain, and the Kurds are seeking freedom from Iraq and Turkey. Many Britons have decided that being a part of the European Union is no longer in the country’s interest and have voted to go it alone. Likewise, there is growing nationalism in France, Germany, and the Netherlands.

As evidence of the latter, we need only point to two historical data points: (1) in 2017, “Muhammad,” with its numerous variants, was the most popular baby name in Great Britain¹⁰³; and (2) more than 1 million Muslim immigrants have poured into Germany since 2015, prompting one official there to say in reaction, “Islam does not belong to Germany. Germany is characterized by Christianity.”¹⁰⁴

Increasingly, nations are being divided along racial, religious, tribal, and ideological lines. Of the 3,000-plus counties in the United States, only 146 (mostly on the coasts or in university towns) have largely embraced modern or postmodern ideologies. The vast majority of people in rural America, on the

other hand, operate on the conviction, or the memory, of Judeo-Christian theism. As Rabbi Daniel Lapin has so powerfully articulated, “We are no longer one nation under God. We are two separate nations with two distinct and incompatible moral visions.”¹⁰⁵

A fight not unlike the Civil War is on for the soul of the nation. The Civil War was between the North and South; today’s war is largely between the coasts and the heartland. On one side stand the drivers of the media, academics, and other governing elites. They typically function as atheist, either in a naturalist or a postmodern framework. These individuals dominate the messaging we see daily on TV, in movies, and through the mainstream media. They also largely dominate the universities. On the other side are the traditionalists, the conservatives, and the religious.

The divide we currently face is as great as, or greater than, the divide of the American Civil War that claimed more than 600,000 lives. It is a divide of both substance (the content of our differences) and of style (the way we relate to those with whom we disagree).

The substance (essence) of the Civil War was threefold: slavery, the threat of secession, and, to a lesser extent, two national visions—one of a rural, agricultural life versus the other of an urban, industrialized life. The style (means) of the conflict was bloody combat that sundered families, communities, and a nation.

Today the substance is a conflict of worldviews. In the 20th century the struggle was between Judeo-Christian theism and modernism. Now in the 21st century we are experiencing a conflict between the remnants of Judeo-

Christian theism and postmodernism. Today, the style has mostly been limited to speech, often marked by vulgarity, rudeness, and hatred. However, we are beginning to see strains of violence as well, both from the right (white supremacists and anti-Semites) and the left (Antifa, Black Lives Matter). As well, we have seen attempts from the left to limit by force of law the religious freedom of dissenters from the progressive agenda.

If adherents on both sides do not pull back from the brink, is it going too far to suggest that the foment could metastasize into an open civil war? We fear not. The division runs more deeply than many people recognize, all the way down to a paradigm—our worldview. From this foundation come its outworking in society: from *paradigm* to *principle* to *policy* to *program*. Each of these four “Ps” deals with a different question that helps define the whole. Let’s look at them in reverse order.

Programs deal with the very practical questions of any event:

- *Who* is going to do the activity?
- *Where* will they do it?
- *When* will it be done?
- *How* will they carry it out?

Policy deals with the concept of the program activity and answers the question, *What?*

Principles move away from the practical and concrete actions in programs. Principles look at the reasons behind the policies. They answer the question,

“*Why* do we have these policies?” Principles deal with the themes or ethos of culture.

Finally, if you ask, “*Why* do we have these particular principles?” the answer will take you to the deepest level: the *paradigm*, or worldview.

The daily, profound division on the level of our personal and corporate activities (programs) is ultimately rooted in these differences of worldview. We witness this division hourly in our news cycles: Antifa violence, killing of black youth by policemen, gun violence, tearing down statues of historical figures who owned slaves, the murder of unborn babies, arrests for using the wrong pronoun for a person’s gender identity, creation of “safe spaces” on college campuses, etc.

We witness daily dysfunction on the *policy* level in our government agencies. They set goals and objectives to solve the problems as they see them. Policies deal with the question, “*What* do we do?” Consequently, they differ greatly between various perspectives: Left vs. Right, Democrats vs. Republicans, Progressives vs. Conservatives, Main Street vs. Wall Street, Red states vs. Blue states, the elites vs. the common man (Hillary Clinton’s “deplorables”).

Policies don’t grow in a vacuum. They are derived from *principles* which are often unexamined by administrators, policy makers, and practitioners. Principles answer the question *Why?* Intangible principles translate to tangible policies and programs. They indicate why we do the things we do.

For instance, regarding abortion, does every human being have a right to life, or does every woman have a right to choose? The chosen principle will determine government and organizational policy as well as personal behavior.

Regarding gender, is the principle to sustain the natural family or to eliminate male/female distinctions?

Do we seek freedom *of* speech, or freedom *from* hate speech? Freedom *of* religion or freedom *from* religion?

Numerous battles are being fought on the airwaves, in newspapers, magazines, on the Web, in the streets, on university campuses, in the halls of government, and so on. For the most part, none of these touch the real issue, which is found at the level of paradigm. Most talking heads, most politicians, and most agency administrators think no more deeply than programs and policies. Lots of people are debating “the issues.” Very few are debating *the* issue: worldview.

Program and policy are small “i” issues. We live with them every day, but they do not ultimately shape our decisions or our lives. Our lives are shaped by the unexamined principles and paradigms that saturate the air we breathe, that shape the habits of the heart.

The *real* issue, the root that sprouts into a culture and largely determines the directions of our lives, is the *paradigm*. Worldview establishes the principles and all that logically follows from them. If someone asks, “Why do we have these particular principles?” the ultimate answer is, “Because we have this particular worldview.” If someone claims that a woman has a “right to

choose,” we should simply ask, “Why?” Pursuing this question to its logical end will bring us to the ultimate reason, the paradigm or worldview.

As others have said, everyone has a worldview. Worldview, whether people are aware of the concept or not, is at the root of how they think and act because it answers the basic questions of life:

- What is real?
- Where did we come from?
- What does it mean to be human?
- What is the purpose for human life? For my life?
- Is there right and wrong?
- Where did evil come from?
- What is beautiful?

Everyone holds a worldview, consciously or subconsciously, in faith. Judeo-Christian theism, atheism, and animism (ancient paganism as well as neo-paganism) all answer these basic questions, but each does so very differently. The differences lead to opposing principles, which *inevitably* lead to opposing policies and programs. In other words, worldviews create very different cultures leading to very different political, economic, and social institutions and programs.¹⁰⁶

Recently a young mother, Carrie DeKlyen, died just three days after giving birth to her sixth child, Life Lynn. Carrie was 37. She had been diagnosed with cancer after becoming pregnant and was advised to abort her

baby so her cancer could be treated. Carrie, however, refused the cancer treatment and, by her death, gave her baby the opportunity to live.¹⁰⁷

Carrie's choices stand in stark contrast to those of Irene Vilar, a woman who had 15 abortions in 17 years. In her book, *Impossible Motherhood: Testimony of an Abortion Addict*, she celebrates her abortion track record.¹⁰⁸

The choices of these two women on a “programmatic” level—one to sacrifice her life for her baby, the other to sacrifice 15 babies for her ego—reflect two very different principles: the right to life and the right to choose. These principles come from two very different worldviews: the Judeo-Christian worldview that understands that human life is sacred and the modern worldview that puts human beings and their immoral choices at the center of the world.

Our worldview shapes nations, cultures, and individual lives. The coming of Jesus Christ inaugurated not just a religious revolution but also a *worldview* revolution that transformed history by transforming people's thinking and actions.

In the first three centuries after Christ, His followers challenged paganism and laid the groundwork for Western civilization. While the Renaissance (14th-17th centuries) in Europe undermined the Bible's authoritative position in the lives of many, the Protestant Reformation (16th century) launched a return to a Judeo-Christian worldview and the reforming of Europe by emphasizing Christ's lordship over all things. When the church turned to pietism and a dualistic worldview in the 17th century, however,

human experience was divided into the sacred and the secular, with God restricted to the latter.

The 18th and 19th centuries saw revival and reformation once again, this time via the First and Second Great Awakenings. In the 20th century, as society faced a choice between ancient paganism and Judeo-Christian theism, the church neglected its Judeo-Christian roots. The Darwinian/modern worldview eventually prevailed, and we saw the rise of materialism both in the communist world and in the narcissistic consumer society of the West. One shameful outcome: an abortion culture that celebrates the termination of human life.

Today, in the early decades of the 21st century, we are witnessing a return to paganism in its postmodern, neo-pagan form. This is the toxic new religion.

Francis Schaeffer spoke prophetically almost a half a century ago about the struggle between adherents to the Christian and naturalistic worldviews:

These two worldviews stand as totals in complete antithesis to each other in content and also in their natural results—including sociological and governmental results, and specifically including law. It is not that these two worldviews are different only in how they understand the nature of reality and existence. They also inevitably produce totally different results. The operative word here is inevitably. It is not just that they happen to bring forth different results, but it is absolutely inevitable that they will bring forth different results.¹⁰⁹

Schaeffer's words include several important insights.

1. These two worldviews not only perceive the world differently. They also create two very different worlds.
2. The differences between these two worldviews are not slight, nor are they easily bridged. Rather, they are polar opposites, creating radically different moral visions. This is why there is such heated discussion over an issue like abortion. This goes to the heart of what it means to be a human.
3. Because ideas have consequences, it is not simply happenstance that two different nations are created. It is *inevitable*.
4. To understand why our nation is so divided, we must move beyond "the issues" to the Issue ... of worldview.

Yet having the right answer is not the end of the matter; it's only the beginning. How we argue in today's world matters greatly. So in considering any issue, Christians must consider both the *substance* of the discourse and its *style*—that is, how the disagreement is handled. In Ephesians 4:15, the Apostle Paul identified the virtues we need to do this well: "speaking the truth in love."

We must strive for this balance—the content of truth and a lifestyle of love. In fact, these two virtues define one another. Without truth, love is mere sentimentality. Without love, truth is simply dogmatism. To put it a little differently, if we leave love behind to speak the truth, we have not only lost love; we have also lost the truth. If we leave truth to speak in love, we have lost

both truth and love. We see both dynamics at work in today's contentious issues.

Jesus warned of the effects of such division: "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand" (Matt. 12:25).

So to heal our divisions, Christians must consider both the content and the style of our message. Jesus spoke the message and modeled the style. He inspired two great American leaders—Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr.—to deal with divisions in our country over slavery and civil rights. These two notable leaders drew from the words of Christ.

Abraham Lincoln understood the peril of division. On June 16, 1858, in his famous "house divided" speech, then senatorial candidate Abraham Lincoln applied the words of Christ from Matthew 12:25:

A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become lawful in all the States, old as well as new—North as well as South.¹¹⁰

Note some of Lincoln's insights:

- A “house,” be it a family or community or nation, cannot survive in a divided state. This is why this moment in the history of the United States is so important. We cannot continue to exist at the current level of division.
- At some point, the division over substance will end because one vision will triumph over the other. We cannot simply sit back and watch our nation unravel or return to a pagan culture. We must pray and work for a biblical vision of the kingdom of God, a nation of diverse people united in one kingdom.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke the truth in love. He modeled the *style* of loving your neighbor, and even your enemy, in advocating civil rights for all, an issue that divides our nation still. In his book *Strength in Love*, King drew inspiration from Christ’s words (Matt. 5:14, 44; John 8:12) in developing his strategy of nonviolent resistance. King said,

Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.¹¹¹

Our normal tendency is to return hate with hate, darkness with darkness, violence with violence, and rudeness with rudeness. King showed the world a different pathway based on the words and example of Jesus Christ. King, and

the movement he led, was willing to sacrifice. He was arrested and jailed and ultimately paid with his life. Our style is to reflect Christ's style: love your enemies, shine light in the darkness, confront lies with truth, transform the hideous with beauty, and triumph over evil with good.

Michael Brown, responding to the 2017 massacre in Las Vegas, commented on the need for decency in our national debates:

But whatever we do, let us have common decency, and let us recognize that during the hurricanes and during the shooting, strangers were helping strangers, regardless of their ethnicity or skin color or sex. Do you think anyone stopped to ask, "Did you vote for Trump or Hillary?" as they risked their lives to help others?¹¹²

We are spiraling into what could become a new civil war. What becomes of America will be determined by the application or the abandonment of the virtue of speaking the truth in love.

Which will we choose?

V. ATTACKS AND DELUSIONS

12. Sexual Insanity

As we have seen, postmodernism denies metanarrative, the idea that history or human life has a discernible meaning or purpose (an assertion which is itself a metanarrative, of course). Thus, postmodernism rejects the claims of Darwinian ideology as well as Judeo-Christian theism. The application of postmodernism in the area of human sexuality means there is no essentialism, no design or purpose in our sexuality. Postmoderns argue we are born without sexual identity.

This is far from an academic discussion. Postmodernism's ideal sexuality is androgyny, literally "male and female in one." The sexual order of creation that we see in Judeo-Christian theism is replaced with an uncertainty. In the creation order, lower forms of life such as paramecium and amoebas are

androgynous. Higher forms of life have greater design, complexity, and differentiation.

But because the modern and postmodern worldviews deny a transcendent Creator, there is no transcendent order, and therefore no transcendent sexuality. Feminine or masculine nature, in this view, are merely social constructs. That's one reason why the American Psychological Association has suddenly declared that "traditional masculinity—marked by stoicism, competitiveness, dominance, and aggression—is, on the whole, harmful."¹¹³

Many moderns reject transcendent sexuality; postmoderns take it even farther, arguing that male and female sexuality do not exist in and of themselves. They exist only in the mind. You are what you think you are. To move culture in this direction, postmoderns have eliminated the language of biology—i.e. "sex"—for the socially constructed term "gender."

Solomon observed that "there is nothing new under the sun."¹¹⁴ We certainly see the truth of this statement when we consider the emergence of neo-pagan sexuality. First-century pagans could not have imagined the seismic philosophical shifts we are experiencing via today's postmodernism, which says that reality is purely a mental construction. But they likely would have felt right at home with the re-emergence of the pagan sexual practices on display in the 21st century.

The ethics of paganism assigned little or no moral constraint to human sexuality. In fact, if there was an ethic at all, it was license. People could have multiple partners. They could engage with the same sex. Pedophilia (sex with children) was normal in some societies, as was bestiality (sex with mammals).

If moderns retain any abhorrence to bestiality and pedophilia, it is only because of the memory of the radical nature of human sexuality—one man and one woman in a covenantal marriage—brought to the world by Jews and Christians. As Judeo-Christian theism becomes a distant memory in the West, however, human sexuality is again devolving toward pagan practices.

One big reason is that postmoderns have influenced the language of sexuality. It may be fair to say they are winning the vocabulary battle. Doctors and midwives are still delivering *girls* and *boys*, but postmoderns want to eliminate even that distinction.

In the twilight of transcendent sexuality—i.e., love that is more than mere biology—a brand new concept has appeared: that some people are *born* with a propensity to sexual relations/romance with persons of their same sex. The *behavior* was not new. Ancient pagan cultures practiced homosexuality, along with many other behaviors that were not considered deviant until the Judeo-Christian worldview came to the fore. As reality took hold, the covenantal, one-man, one-woman marriage became the gold standard for human sexuality and the family. Now, the concept of homosexuality as an *identity*, and the societal recognition of such, has taken deep root.

The “LG” abbreviation quickly became fashionable. But the new normal is not merely “LG.” What we’re talking about is unadulterated pagan sexuality. As the modern world gave way to neo-pagan illusion, the language of “gender” replaced the language of “sex.” This opened the door to employing language, rather than biological reality, to determine who and what we are. “Homosexual” became “gay,” and, in a stroke, a practice forbidden by human

nature, by virtually all societies, and by the Scriptures of both Jews and Christians was something to be celebrated. In the postmodern framework of no-holds-barred, indeterminate human sexuality, gender is boundless. You may be or do anything you desire, with full impunity.

Michel Foucault, the postmodern French philosopher we discussed earlier, is the godfather of androgyny. In his radical work on Queer theory,¹¹⁵ Foucault argues that one's sexual and gender identity is a personal construct. Foucault calls the body an "inscribed surface of events."¹¹⁶ Postmodern feminist Pippa Brush writes, "The body becomes plastic, inscribed with gender and cultural standards. ... The constitution of the body rests in its inscription; the body becomes the text which is written upon it and from which it is indistinguishable"¹¹⁷

Such ideas move from the theoretical and philosophical through culture into institutions, such as legal codes, and then into the common life of the community. The shift of the Judeo-Christian understanding of the body to the postmodern idea of the body as an "inscribed surface of events" was enshrined into law when Justice Anthony Kennedy, as noted above, wrote for the majority in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992), stating that the fundamental principle of our liberty was "the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." This phrase invented a new principle: the right of each individual to define himself or herself before the law. This was a milestone in the flow of sexual history.

In the post-Christian and postmodern era of neo-paganism, we are losing our ontological identity of creation for a new, socially constructed identity in

which gender is elastic and boundless pagan sexual behavior becomes the norm. Now this concept is being established in government policy and in law.

As these ideas have seeped into the cultural mainstream, along with the corresponding change in the law, sexual preferences have become expansive, to say the least. What began as LG grew to LGBT and has now expanded to LGBTQIAP:

L—Lesbian—A female-identified person who is attracted to another female-identified person.

G—Gay—A male-identified person who is attracted to another male-identified person.

B—Bisexual—A person who is attracted to both men and women.

T—Transgender—Persons who are members of a gender other than what their sexual anatomy would suggest; or **Transsexual**—People who have undergone surgery or hormone therapy to change their bodies from one sex to another; or **Transvestites**—those who dress and act like people of the opposite sex.

Q—Queer—A broad term used to identify people of various sexual preferences and habits; or **Questioning**—People who are questioning their sexual identities.

I—Intersex—Someone whose physical anatomy cannot be categorized as only male or female.

A—Asexual—A person who is not sexually attracted to anyone; or **Ally**—A person who does not self-identify as LGBTQIAP but who supports people who do.

P—Pansexual—So-called “gender blind,” those who are attracted to people of all sexual and gender identities.

“Male and female he created them” has become passé. Now, gender is boundless. On the *Religious Tolerance* site we find this entry:

Scattered throughout the following three lists are terms that refer to adults or older adolescents having a sexual attraction towards young persons. The terms cover different age ranges for the young person:

Infantophilia: infants and toddlers ages birth to 3 years-of-age.

Pedophilia: child who has not reached puberty; typically under 13 years-of-age.

Hebephilia: child who is in the early years of puberty. Since children reach puberty at different ages, this may extend from 11 to 14 years-of-age.

Ephhebophilia: post-pubertal teens who are minors, typically in the age range of 14 to 17 years.¹¹⁸

Recognizing homosexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation—and thus giving license to LG—was unthought-of 50 years ago. *Promoting LGBTQIAP* was not on the horizon 10 or 15 years ago. Today pedophilia is on the horizon. Are we ready for a world in which infantophilia is practiced?

Many “marriage equality” advocates categorically deny any intention of opening a Pandora’s Box of pedophilia and bestiality, and we don’t doubt their sincerity. However, these folks are living off the cultural memory of a moral

universe, which put boundaries on our sexual practice. Others, however, such as the folks at *ReligiousTolerance.org*, are seemingly perfectly happy to lead society right back into destructive pagan sexual practices.

WORLD Magazine's Andree Seu Peterson exposes the incongruity and absurdity of the growing acronym:

Then “B” came along, and they had to fairly sneak it in when no one was looking, because claiming that you have an orientation that goes both ways sounds a lot like saying you just like to fool around and you don’t care who with. ... There is a huge gap between campaigning on a manifest biological imperative (early “G” and “L”) and the later ravenous clamor for the right to anything-goes (“B”).¹¹⁹

License, not liberty, is the new name of the postmodern sexual game. There is no end to what can happen. What if an adult has an attraction to a prepubescent child? What about an adult who desires sex with an infant? Why not?

This is insanity. This is quite literally *non-sense*.

As the LGBT community keeps adding letters, it must answer an inherent contradiction. Is our sexuality a matter of hardwiring (“I was born this way”), as many activists keep saying, or is it a social construction, as the postmoderns claim?

If we assume the second option, that all human sexuality is a social construct, the “I-was-born-this-way” argument is undermined, not only for the LGs but also for all the added initials as well.

On the other hand, if we assume the first option, that homosexuality is genetic, then we must make a decision about the other multiple sexual expressions. Currently there is a rift developing between the LG activists and the T activists. Lesbian and gay activists are seeking to distinguish their situation—which they say is based on science and reason—from the trans activists—who assert that gender is a mere social construct. Andrew Sullivan, a public intellectual and proud homosexual, writes:

We can treat different things differently. We can accept that the homosexual experience and the transgender experience are very different, and cannot be easily conflated. We can center the debate not on “gender identity” which insists on no difference between the trans and the cis, the male and the female, and instead focus on the very real experience of “gender dysphoria,” which deserves treatment and support and total acceptance for the individuals involved. We can respect the right of certain people to be identified as the gender they believe they are, and to remove any discrimination against them, while also seeing biology as a difference that requires a distinction. We can believe in nature and the immense complexity of the human mind and sexuality. We can see a way to accommodate everyone to the extent possible, without denying biological reality. Equality need not mean sameness.

We just have to abandon the faddish notion that sex is socially constructed or entirely in the brain, that sex and gender are

unconnected, that biology is irrelevant, and that there is something called an LGBTQ identity, when, in fact, the acronym contains extreme internal tensions and even outright contradictions.¹²⁰

Without a moral or metaphysical framework, the growth of the “LGBTQIAAP community” is checked only by the limit of sinful imagination (or the 26-letter English alphabet). Consider the disastrous consequences of the combination of the postmodern use of language, the unending expansion of gender variations, and the heritage of pagan culture with its legacy of pedophilia, bestiality, and the like. Do we really want to return to the degenerative world of paganism, where any imaginable sexual practice is deemed legitimate?

13. The Gender Delusion

Until recent years, we used *men's rooms* and *women's rooms*. No one would have thought of a man going into a women's restroom or shower room. Today, however, you can choose. That's because in our brave new world, biology doesn't matter. Only our self-chosen "gender identity" matters. This, of course, is delusion, and it will lead to the destruction of not only the natural family but also the very concept of male-female (binary) sexuality.

The activists say so themselves. Ricki Wilchins, founder of the Gender Public Advocacy Coalition, states, "Gay and transgender rights advocates have been quietly dodging the issue of binary heteronormativity, but that sound you hear is the other shoe finally dropping ... hard." She adds, "Ending our culture's obsession with what's 'male' and what's 'female' will be our salvation."¹²¹

Like the slave states in the Civil War era, LGBT leaders do not simply want to have the option to think and live differently; they demand that everyone else in society agree. These sexual rebels insist that you affirm their nonbinary standards—that is, affirm their delusion. Postmodern culture seeks to abolish the biological reality of sex and, with it, the family.

This denial of reality will lead to chaos. Indeed, it already has. What happens to those poor souls who “transition” to the opposite gender and remain confused and who eventually regret that decision? What happens to society?

With breathtaking speed, binary sexuality is increasingly regarded as obsolete and even dangerous. As is often the case, moderns and postmoderns in the United States are forcing this new sexual colonialism on the rest of the world.

The New York Times, in an article provocatively titled “Transgender Could Be Defined out of Existence under Trump Administration,” raised an alarm over a spring 2018 memo circulating in the Department of Health and Human Services about restoring the scientific and historical understanding of human sexuality for government purposes. The memo stated:

Sex means a person’s status as male or female based on immutable biological traits identifiable by or before birth. ... The sex listed on a person’s birth certificate, as originally issued, shall constitute definitive proof of a person’s sex unless rebutted by reliable genetic evidence. ...¹²²

The memo in question reveals that DHHS is calling on government agencies to adopt a uniform and explicit definition of sex that is founded “on a biological basis that is clear, grounded in science, objective and administrable,” where disputes would be settled through genetic testing.¹²³

In other words, the initiative would simply continue the nation’s existing laws and policies rooted in Judeo-Christian culture and recognized for millennia: that human sexuality is marked by two modalities, male and female, which are equal and complementary. In other words, one’s sex is determined by reality, not by the postmodern concept that sex is elastic, determined by one’s feelings and imagination.

Not surprisingly, those seeking to redefine sex by one’s feelings claimed to be shocked. The pro-homosexual *Washington BLADE* reported that 98 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, led by Representative Joseph Kennedy III, head of the Transgender Equality Task Force, wrote a letter accusing the DHHS of redefining the word “sex” under Title IX.¹²⁴

But the DHHS is not redefining; it is reaffirming the scientific (and historic) definition of human sexuality. The redefining is coming from an ideology trying to remake sex as nonbinary and fluid. This is an effort to eliminate science and reason for ideological purposes. The letter says that this definition of sex would be “cruel and unscientific,” an “attempt by extremists ... to infringe upon the dignity, rights and lives of transgender people.”¹²⁵

These men and women in the U.S. Congress see the concept of male-female binary sexuality as unscientific and cruel—parroting the postmodern

worldview that denies the validity of science and reason. To the contrary, to regard human sexuality as fluid violates our long-held scientific understanding.

At the heart of the division in the United States, as well as in many Western and some Southern countries, is a divide between Judeo-Christian theism and postmodernism. That 98 members of the House of Representatives would sign such a letter shows the depth of the animus against reason, reality, and revelation. It shows the profound divide between today's atheists and those embracing (or remembering) the Judeo-Christian founding of Western civilization.

If there is no fixed reality, every individual human being will be defined by his or her (to borrow Anthony Kennedy's phrasing) "concept of existence." The trans movement of self-definition will not confine itself to sexuality, however. It is already radiating outward to trans-race, trans-age, trans-species, and beyond.

Consider the case of Rachel Dolezal. Born of two white parents, she identified with blacks and so declared herself black. Anthony Ekundayo Lennon, a British theater director, is the son of white Irish parents. He is often mistaken as biracial, so he has identified himself as a black artist. Perhaps the most famous posterchild for trans-race is Senator Elizabeth Warren, who announced she was Native American on a registration card for the Texas State Bar and on an application to teach at Harvard University Law School. When she was challenged about her ancestry, she took a DNA test that revealed she had an indication of some Native American descendants six to 10 generations ago.

Emile Ratelband's biological age is 65. To avoid age discrimination on dating websites and work applications, Ratelband wants the date on his birth certificate to be legally changed by 20 years. His plea: "Now I'm an old man [65].... But if I have that age again [45], I have hope again. I am new again. The whole future is there for me again."¹²⁶

Amanda Rodgers, a British divorcee, married her Jack Russell terrier, Sheba, in a ceremony attended by 200 people. Amanda got the dog when it was two weeks old and fell in love with her. "I knew that we were meant to be."¹²⁷

Even the lines between humans and machines are blurring. On the most basic level, we are harvesting baby body parts for research and medicinal purposes.¹²⁸ This is akin to cannibalizing one machine, like an airplane or automobile, to fix another machine.

Now we have female robots that provide men with sex without the complications of relationship or marriage.¹²⁹ If Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy's proclamation that each of us gets to "define one's own concept of existence" is true, then the terms of your existence are defined by your imagination, not by reality. It's delusion.

People with a proclivity to be trans anything, however, are not our enemies. They need to be loved. We must reach out to them, show compassion, and practice empathy for their struggle. We need to simultaneously love the individual and reject the ideology and the policies derived from that ideology as untrue, unloving, and damaging to society.

The first step is to lovingly decline to defer to false terminology. We must resist postmodern language or lose the battle. We must stop sacrificing truth on the altar of being nice, of seeking to be liked. Of course, every encounter by the Christ-follower should be marked with grace and love. And it is not loving to foster a lie, to agree to anyone's concept of gender fluidity, or to cater to the demands of illegitimate language and fabricated personal pronouns. Therefore, we the authors insist we must:

- Avoid using the word “marriage” (one man and one woman for life) to describe the relationship of a same-sex couple. Use “civil union” or “legal union.”
- Politely and respectfully refuse to call a biological male a female, and vice versa.¹³⁰

Remember, sex is not the issue. The issue is worldview, a battle between Judeo-Christian theism and postmodern paganism. We should speak the truth in love—and in the process, pursue clarity, not compromise.

As we have seen, it was the “deviant” Jews and Christians who lifted pagan culture out of the pit. They established the gold standard for human sexuality and the natural family by teaching and functioning from the biblical worldview.

God's people successfully challenged paganism once before by “storying”—telling the story of the covenantal concept of marriage, advocating for it, and modeling it by building godly, natural families in the midst of a

deeply pagan culture. Notwithstanding the efforts of radicals to normalize homosexuality and transgenderism, these deviant acts are not normal. Christians can once again use our God-given talents to challenge gender confusion and point our neighbors to the liberating landscape of clarity.

If we desire that our neighbors, friends, children, and grandchildren truly flourish, then we must challenge postmodern culture and repent of our previous apathy. And all of us can do something:

- Some will help speak and write to reform the language and culture.
- Some will write songs and ballads to restore the dignity of marriage, the family, the maternal, the beauty of human sexuality, and the tying of our sexual intimacy to family formation.
- Some will preach and teach on the glory of our purpose and design and the biblical narrative on family and human sexuality.
- Some will lead protests in the public square to draw public attention to the madness we are facing.
- Some will draw lines in the sand and say, “No further. I am willing to pay the consequences for violating laws that legalize this non-sense and undermine our God-given freedom of conscience and freedom of religion.”
- Many will take seriously the cultural mandate to “be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth”—to marry, form families, enjoy the God-given gift of our human sexuality, and rejoice in the children who are the fruit of that intimacy.

What will *you* do?

14. The Attack on Liberty

In the previous chapter, we looked at the return of a pagan sexual ethic. In this one, let's examine the neo-pagan attack on liberty. These trends are related, of course.

Despite the many philosophical arguments advanced that purport to deny God's existence, we need to understand that people deny Him primarily for moral reasons, not metaphysical ones. They do not want God telling them what to do. In fact, they generally do not want *anyone* to tell them what to do. They do not want to be under anyone's authority. The bottom line: They want the freedom to do whatever they feel like doing, without bearing any responsibility for their actions.

This is not liberty as the American founders understood it—it is *license*. It has been said that license is the freedom to follow our instincts and desires,

as if we were cats and dogs. Liberty, however, is the freedom to choose the good—to do what we ought to do.

True freedom is the opportunity to do good. People who are truly free govern themselves within the framework of God’s laws and ordinances. License is the “right” to do the wrong thing. Little thought is given to others, or to the consequences of our behaviors. Feeling good in the moment is the only standard. The focus is on indulging the self. There is no moral order, no authority outside one’s own will.

Today’s libertines want to “liberate” humankind from traditional institutions, such as marriage, church, and moral absolutes. Their goal is to return people to a state of nature where basic natural instincts are given full play with no moral restraints. They want to follow their noses.

How do we tell the difference between libertinism and liberty? Libertines push the envelope in three critical areas:

- Truth: They suppress the truth. They replace truth with lies and illusions.
- Morals: The tolerance of the immoral is a virtue; defending the moral is a vice.
- Beauty: Darkness is considered light; the vulgar is considered superior to the beautiful.

The pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty has been the cornerstone of Western culture. The pursuit of their counterfeits will be its undoing. Truth,

beauty, and goodness are no longer pursued. Because postmoderns dismiss these concepts as relative, their influence in society has receded to the point of disappearing. This is not just a tragedy; it is a form of idolatry.

As the cult (worship) changes, culture changes. As neo-pagan idolatry grows, so do wickedness and barbarism. Webster's 1828 Dictionary defines a barbarian as "A man in his rude, savage state; an uncivilized person." As we slide farther from the Judeo-Christian theism that refined Europe, North America, and elsewhere, we are witnessing the rise of a new barbarism. Judeo-Christianity raised Western civilization from the impoverished, often enslaved, corrupt, coarse, uncultivated, underdeveloped cultures that predated it.

As Dennis Prager has argued, biblical theism redefined deviancy by launching a sexual revolution. The biblical worldview defied pagan licentiousness in all its forms and led to the freedom of a moral framework.

When Judaism demanded that all sexual activity be channeled into marriage, it changed the world. The Torah's prohibition of non-marital sex quite simply made the creation of Western civilization possible. Societies that did not place boundaries around sexuality were stymied in their development. The subsequent dominance of the Western world can largely be attributed to the sexual revolution initiated by Judaism and later carried forward by Christianity.

This revolution consisted of forcing the sexual genie into the marital bottle. It ensured that sex no longer dominated society, heightened

male-female love and sexuality (and thereby almost alone created the possibility of love and eroticism within marriage), and began the arduous task of elevating the status of women.¹³¹

Today, however, this framework is collapsing. In its place, the new paganism is producing a new barbarism—the practice and promotion of evil. Consider some current examples of unspeakable wickedness.¹³² They are running rampant the U.S., England, and Germany—all of which shared a Judeo-Christian heritage.

Voices are coming from the shadows to endorse all manner of sexual license. The ABC television series *Scandal* is just one example of the media celebrating adultery. Pedophilia, incest, and even bestiality are being celebrated in various parts of culture.

This is the behavioral product of a pagan worldview. While these things need to be dealt with on the behavioral level, change will come ultimately from a return to the Judeo-Christian worldview. We need revival and reformation. Rather than suppressing the truth, we need to recognize the truth and acknowledge, worship, and serve the living God.

We need a return to liberty, which is always accompanied by morality. Psalm 119:44-45 speaks to this reality:

I will always obey your law,
for ever and ever.
I will walk about in freedom,
for I have sought out your precepts.

Springing from the Enlightenment of the West, much of the world uses the word “freedom” to mean “license”—permission to do wrong without a penalty for one’s actions. In fact, people who pursue license often put the responsibility for the consequences of their choices on others. Those who engage in illicit sex demand the right to have—and have other people pay for—an abortion. Those who do illegal drugs sometimes demand free needles.

But true freedom is always found *within* the framework of law. Or to put it differently, we walk in the “widest world” when we walk within the framework of God’s ordinances. God has designed us for freedom. He intends that we discover our calling, that we fulfill our God-given potential. Becoming all we have been made to be is found within the order of God’s creation. People who self-govern based on God’s laws are the freest people in the world. As just one example, contrary to the impression you might get from popular culture, married couples generally enjoy more sexual satisfaction than sexual libertines.¹³³

In the modern and postmodern worlds, people seek freedom outside the law, beyond their human design. But this is not freedom. Rather, it is license to live without boundaries. This is lawlessness. It leads not to the wide boundaries of freedom but to slavery. The Hebrew puts it beautifully: “I shall walk in wide places!” I shall “go,” “travel,” “walk about,” in “broad,” “spacious,” “far reaching,” “extensive” spaces. This is liberty.

Matthew Henry, the 17th-century British Non-conformist pastor and perhaps one of the greatest Bible expositors of all time, beautifully captures the thoughts of David. Henry intimates that the law of God is not only good in

itself, because it reveals God's nature and His mind, but it is also good for you and me. When we walk in God's laws, we walk in liberty.

Here's Henry on Psalm 119:45:

*What David experienced of an affection to the law of God: "I seek thy precepts, v. 45. I desire to know and do my duty, and consult thy word accordingly; I do all I can to understand what the will of the Lord is and to discover the intimations of his mind. I seek thy precepts, for I have loved them, v. 47, 48. I not only give consent to them as good, but take complacency in them as good for me." All that love God love his government and therefore love all his commandments.*¹³⁴

We will either put chains on our sin and live as free men and women, or we will live lives of excess and be enslaved by our lawlessness. Let us find life, abundant life, by living in "the perfect law of liberty."

15. When the Delusion Goes Viral

Where is our delusion about sexuality heading? Unfortunately, contradicting the assurances of the activists of yesteryear, it is going to some very dark places indeed. We will share them briefly here, not out of a desire to be alarmist but because we need to see the world as it is. Until we do that, we will not be able to muster the will to turn back, to start anew. We must first admit that we have taken a wrong turn before we can get headed in the right direction.

As C.S. Lewis said:

If you are on the wrong road progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man. There is nothing

progressive about being pig-headed and refusing to admit a mistake. And I think if you look at the present state of the world it's pretty plain that humanity has been making some big mistake. We're on the wrong road. And if that is so we must go back. Going back is the quickest way on.¹³⁵

Members and advocates of the LGBTQ+ community told the world that they should be able to marry “whomever they loved,” just as heterosexuals do. Former Illinois Senator Mark Kirk summed up this approach to the issue by saying, “Life comes down to who you love and who loves you back—government has no place in the middle.”¹³⁶

It's just simple fairness, right? Not quite. In our postmodern world, where an individual can define his or her own “concept of existence” and where “love and mutual consent” become the only standards for sexual conduct, why must anyone stop at so-called *same-sex* “marriage”? Delusions, once indulged, rarely stop by themselves. The sexual plague has been unleashed in the West. The future is here, and it is a brave new world of thorough moral decay. Here are some of the boundaries crumbling before the onslaught.

Polygamy:

If same-sex “marriage” is legal between consenting adults, why not polygyny—that is, a husband with multiple wives?

Muslims in Italy raised this very question after that nation allowed civil unions for gays and lesbians. Because civil unions of homosexuals were now deemed a “civil right,” Muslims in Italy said their polygamous marriages should be accorded the same treatment under the law. Hamza Piccardo, founder of the Union of Islamic Communities and Organizations, wrote, “There’s no reason for Italy not to accept polygamous marriages of consenting persons.”¹³⁷

In the United States, the Brown family of the *Sister Wives* reality TV show, which is about a polygynous Utah family, argued similarly. They held that legalizing “same-sex” unions removed any remaining obstacles to legalizing polygamy. On December 13, 2015, U.S. District Court Judge Clark Waddoups ruled that state laws criminalizing polygamy were unconstitutional.¹³⁸

Incest:

Eighteen years after giving him up for adoption, Monica Mares was reunited with her son, Caleb Peterson. Their love was kindled—not the maternal love of a mother for her child, but the sexual passion between a man and a woman. They were “madly in love.” So if culture blesses sex and marriage with anyone you’re “in love with,” why should Monica and Caleb be refused the right to marry?¹³⁹

While increasingly the moral prohibition against incest has been removed, the practice is still illegal in all 50 states. That’s because any children

born of such unions bear an extremely high risk of genetic disorders, disease, or death. Monica and Caleb were charged in New Mexico but fought the charges not only because “they are in love,” but also to support the rights of others who have “genetic sexual attraction,” which is said to occur when close relatives are reunited as adults. Notice that what was once labeled “incest” is now given the more scientific-sounding term of “genetic sexual attraction.” The same thing happened when “sodomy” became “homosexuality,” before giving way to the “gay lifestyle.”

Incest advocate “Cristina,” 36, who is living with her biological brother in a sexual relationship, embodies this anything-goes philosophy. “As long as everybody is a consenting adult, they should be able to do whatever they want to do in their own bedrooms—it’s up to them how they want to live their lives,” she says. “Lots of people believe incest is wrong but it’s only wrong because it is illegal, but there are lots of things that are illegal now that won’t be in a few years.”¹⁴⁰

Pedophilia:

A recent op-ed piece in the *New York Times* argued that pedophilia is a mental disorder, not a crime, and that those who experience it therefore deserve civil rights protections.¹⁴¹ The writer said that the nation’s laws discriminate against those who are sexually attracted to children but who have not committed any crime against children—and may never do so. Assistant Law Professor Margo Kaplan, who works at Rutgers, said:

Tragically, the roughly 1 percent of “people who are sexually attracted to children” must hide their disorder from everyone they know—or risk losing educational and job opportunities, and face the prospect of harassment and even violence.

At least Kaplan says that pedophilia—the desire for sex with children—is a *disorder*. In Hollywood, however, pedophilia is excused, justified, and even promoted. In the wake of the #MeToo movement and the exposure of Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein’s serial sexual mistreatment of women, allegations against other prominent men in the industry surfaced. But some of these allegations involved something even darker, if that’s possible—pedophilia.

Former child actor Corey Feldman has claimed for years that Hollywood’s biggest problem isn’t the acknowledged sexual abuse of women by powerful men. He says, instead, that it is the abuse of minors like himself.

“This is a place,” Feldman said, “where adults have more direct and inappropriate connection with children than probably anywhere else in the world.”¹⁴²

But such perversion isn’t confined to Tinseltown. The state of California has passed a law that decriminalizes prostitution by minors (though sex with a minor still is criminal, considered statutory rape). Supporters say the measure will help victims of sex trafficking get off the streets and into safer environments. Opponents say the law will end up keeping more exploited children on the streets because there are not adequate programs in place to help them.¹⁴³

Transsexuals Having Babies:

Born as a female with the name Tracy in Honolulu, Thomas Beatie underwent sex-reassignment surgery in 2002 (keeping the female reproductive organs intact) and legally changed “his” gender from female to male. Beatie, now 45, became known as “The Pregnant Man” after becoming pregnant via artificial insemination, using cryogenic donated sperm.¹⁴⁴ Beatie has given birth to three children. Beatie’s first pregnancy, however, was ectopic, resulting in the loss of three children.¹⁴⁵

That’s just the beginning. Now we have the blaring headline, “TRANSGENDER MAN GIVES BIRTH TO HEALTHY BABY FIVE YEARS AFTER HAVING FIRST CHILD AS A WOMAN.”¹⁴⁶ The *Independent* describes how Kaci Sullivan, 30, a Wisconsin resident and transgender man, “has given birth to a healthy baby—five years after having his first child while living as a woman.” Sullivan says simply, “Pregnancy is not a gendered thing.”

Actually, it is. A transsexual man having a baby, like same-sex “marriage,” is a postmodern delusion. The reality is that a biological female (identifying as a male) has had intercourse or been artificially inseminated and then conceived, and a baby was the result. It was the reality of biology that conceived the child, not the illusion of transgender.

As horrifying as these postmodern sexual delusions can be, those caught in them need our compassion. But they also need to hear the truth—about human dignity, human sexuality, and the responsibility we have to protect

children. They need to hear us speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). This is a tall order in a world given over to delusion.

And we must begin with the church.

VI. WHAT ABOUT THE CHURCH?

16. Christian Millennials and Marriage

Abigail Rine, assistant professor of English at George Fox University, was facilitating a discussion with her young Christian evangelical students on the topic “What is Marriage?” They were exploring the issue in the context of various hot-button issues, such as gender, sexuality, and feminism. The responses were eye-opening.

I realized, as I listened to the discussion, that the idea of “redefining” marriage was nonsensical to them, because they had never encountered the philosophy behind the conjugal view of marriage. To them, the Christian argument against same-sex marriage is an appeal to the authority of a few disparate Bible verses, and therefore

compelling only to those with a literalist hermeneutic. What [has been named] as a “revisionist” idea of marriage—marriage as an emotional, romantic, sexual bond between two people—does not seem “new” to my students at all, because this is the view of marriage they were raised with, albeit with a scriptural, heterosexual gloss.¹⁴⁷

These young evangelicals grew up in Christian homes and evangelical churches but evidently had no grasp of the main purpose of marriage and human sexuality, i.e. forming families. Perhaps that is one reason why fewer and fewer Christians are having children. Analyzing data gathered from 1972-2016, researchers have found a 16 percent drop in birth rates among both conservative and mainline Protestants.¹⁴⁸

Young evangelicals apparently have not been taught a theology of marriage, sex, and family. They have not learned the beautiful, positive case for what some call “traditional” or “conjugal” marriage, as purposed by God at creation.

The traditional concept of marriage has several critical elements. It is between a man and a woman, in a covenantal relationship (faithful “until death do us part”). It is a comprehensive relationship that includes friendship, companionship, intimacy, *eros*, mutual respect, mutual work and worship, and joint stewarding of creation. First and foremost, it is also about forming families and conceiving, nourishing, and raising children for the health of the community and the future of the world.

What these young evangelicals may have heard was some negative preaching against fornication, adultery, and homosexuality, using a few

pointed scripture references. What they missed was what Christian tradition has called the threefold purpose of sex—the unitive, the procreative, and the sacramental. As Lauren F. Winner has said:

That means, in simpler language, that sex is meant to unite two people, it is meant to lead to children, and it is meant to recall, and even reenact, the promise that God makes to us and that we make to one another in the marriage vow—that is, we promise one another fidelity, and God’s Spirit promises a presence that will uphold us in our radical and crazy pledge of lifelong faithfulness.¹⁴⁹

What these young people were instead exposed to in society, and perhaps in the home and in the church, was what might be called the “revisionist view” of marriage (equivalent to the revisionist view of sexuality): i.e. sex and marriage are solely for the personal fulfillment and pleasure of the couple.

This tracks with the cultural view that marriage is primarily about romantic love and sexual pleasure, and only secondarily about having children—which, in fact, is optional. With some notable exceptions¹⁵⁰, Christian singles are waiting later to marry and begin their families. Many are embracing the postmodern practice of not having children at all, or perhaps having a token child.

“[T]he idea of ‘redefining’ marriage was nonsensical” to Rine’s Christian students because they already possessed a redefined view of sexuality and marriage. In their eyes, any discussion about the sanctity of marriage, whether in society or in the church, is not worth having. The only discussion worth

having is *how* we should define marriage and human sexuality from the many choices available. They believe that anyone who believes that the traditional view of marriage is the only view is narrow, bigoted, and intolerant.

Rine continued:

[I]t struck me that, on one level, they were right: marriage isn't in danger of being redefined; the redefinition began decades ago, in the wake of the sexual revolution. Once the link between sexuality and procreation was severed in our cultural imagination, marriage morphed into an exclusive romantic bond that has only an arbitrary relationship to reproduction. It is this redefinition, arguably, that has given rise to the same-sex marriage movement, rather than the other way around, and as the broader culture has shifted on this issue, so have many young evangelicals.¹⁵¹

What we are witnessing is not an attempt to redefine marriage. It is the logical outcome of ideas that have been accepted by the elites of society and propagated into common culture through the arts, media, and academic institutions.

When the church fails to disciple the nation, the nation will disciple the church. If the church is not consciously Trinitarian and intentionally biblical in her thought and practice, she will not be in a position to disciple the nation. Rather, the nation will disciple the church.

Culture is simply a reflection of worship. Western civilization was created largely by the worship of the God who created the universe and who is our

Father. The worship of man, i.e. in Darwinian thought, created the “modern world.” The worship of nature is creating the postmodern, neo-pagan world. We become like the God or gods we worship.

Right after the Second World War, Richard Weaver wrote a groundbreaking volume, *Ideas Have Consequences*.¹⁵² In this volume, the professor of English and rhetoric at the University of Chicago argued that the decline of Western civilization comes from our acceptance of relativism over absolute reality.

Maybe Weaver’s book wasn’t all that groundbreaking. The Apostle Paul essentially made the same argument way back in the Book of Romans, demonstrating that ideas have consequences. In Romans 1:18-32, Paul, under divine inspiration, argued that human beings reject the truth, even when God puts it right in front of them; and that, when we reject truth, we reject God; and that, when we reject God, our own humanity is distorted; and that, when our humanity is distorted, we are plunged into a strange new world of foolishness. Let’s call this entire devolution “the great exchange.” It set off a chain reaction that radically changed the world.

It all began with a change in belief system.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have

been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who

practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. (Rom. 1:18-32)

Paul argues that, by suppressing the truth and opting for foolishness, humans have made a *great exchange*. Not great as in grand or magnificent, but great as in profound. We have exchanged belief systems. This has naturally led to a change in values, and this, in turn, leads to destructive behavior.

This passage has three sets of parallel passages, each with a great exchange:

- 1:23—[they] exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.
- 1:25—they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.
- 1:28a—they did not see fit to acknowledge God.

This passage of Scripture says that, distilled to its essence, every religion and philosophy fits into one of three categories of answers to life's persistent questions. We will worship either the sovereign God, or human beings, or nature.

Let's look at each of these passages in turn.

The *first great exchange* (1:23) switches the focus of worship from the Creator to the creation. "Exchanged" here translates the Greek *allassō*: "to cause a difference by altering the nature or character of something, to

substitute one thing for another.” “Image” is the Greek *eikōn*: “image, likeness, representation.” We get the English word *icon* from *eikōn*. We have changed the *object* of our worship *from* the invisible God and Creator of the universe *to* icons of created things.

This exchange in gods brings a change in value systems, leading to a shift in behavior. Behavior produces consequences: good consequences if we worship the living God, bad consequences if we worship His creation.

Traditional cultures have worshiped nature in one of two forms. *Pantheism* sees all as god, while *polytheism* reveres many finite deities that resemble creatures. The modern world is dominated by various forms of *atheism* or *secular humanism*. In this worship system (yes, *worship*), man is the center of the universe. Human worship is focused on mankind as a species or on oneself.

The *second great exchange* (1:25) says, “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” Here, “exchanged” is the Greek word *metallassō*. The prefix *meta* is added to the *allaso* of verse 23. This word means “to barter away, cease and start, one activity for another.” They exchanged truth (*alētheia*), facts that correspond to reality, for a lie (*pseudos*, root of our English term *pseudo*).

It’s a poor trade-off to give up worship and service of the glorious God for a falsehood. This verse reminds us that whether we worship God or some aspect of His creation, we *will* worship. We were made to worship. We cannot avoid worshiping any more than birds can avoid flying or whales swimming.

If we deny God, we do not cease to worship; we simply worship created things, things made by God or by human beings (Psa. 115:2-8; Isa. 44:9-20).

There are no true atheists, only idolaters. The verse says they *worshipped* (*sebazomai*, honor religiously) and served (*latreuō*, minister or serve in religious duties) the idol.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky captures this alternative reality in *The Brothers Karamazov*: “Man cannot live without kneeling. . . . If he rejects God, he kneels before an idol of wood or of gold or an imaginary one. . . . They are all idolaters and not atheists. That’s what they ought to be called.”¹⁵³

The *third great exchange* is revealed in verse 28a: “they did not see fit to acknowledge God.”

This is stated differently than the first two: “they *did not see fit* to acknowledge God” (regard as worthwhile, judge as good). Although they knew God existed (1:21), they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge (*echo*, hold onto a relationship with, personally acknowledge, experience) God’s existence by entering into relationship with Him.

These three sections of the Bible reveal, on a personal level, an exchange of sacred belief systems and what happens when this is done. Yes, we are free to choose our worldview, but not free to choose the consequences. To say it differently, we become like the God (or gods) we worship.

On a corporate level, our cult (worship) will determine our culture, and our culture drives the kind of society we produce. While worship is universal, the object of our worship varies. Thus the outworking of that worship in culture-making varies.

When we acknowledge God and seek to live for Him, we have the opportunity to flourish. When we deny God and live in delusion, we receive the consequences of that delusion. Our increasingly postmodern culture is receiving the bitter fruit of this forgotten truth.

The sexual revolution came about through a shift in worldview. In the last two hundred years we have abandoned the Judeo-Christian worldview that largely gave us Western Civilization. This worldview gave way to the atheistic-materialist worldview of Darwin and ushered in the modern world. At the beginning of the 21st century we are witnessing the slow death of the Darwinian framework and modern culture and the return of the animistic, neo-pagan worldview.

This worldview shift has given rise to a shift in our understanding of human sexuality and marriage. It was the revisionist view of marriage and sexuality that eliminated the connection between sex, marriage, and procreation. In the new view, sex stands outside of marriage. Its relationship to procreation is incidental, not substantial.

Sex seemingly has little or nothing to do with marriage and procreation today. It's all about pleasure and personal happiness. It becomes a form of recreation, like jogging or hiking, or of entertainment, like a good meal out or a good movie. If recreational sex happens to lead to pregnancy, one can always abort the "product of conception." So it's no surprise that as sex has become decoupled from marriage, the rate of fornication (sex outside of marriage) has skyrocketed while the rate of marriage has plunged among the young.

According to the Pew Research Center, the share of those tying the knot between the ages of 18 and 32 has been declining steadily (and precipitously) since World War II. In 1960, fully 65 percent of the Silent Generation aged 18 to 32 was married. By 1980, however, only 48 percent of Baby Boomers in this age range were married. In 1997, just 36 percent of Gen X members in this cohort had tied the knot. And in 2013, an incredibly low 26 percent of Millennials between the ages of 18 and 32 were married.¹⁵⁴

And the problem is in the church. Several studies suggest that nearly four in every five unmarried, churchgoing, conservative Protestants who are dating someone are engaging in sex of some sort.¹⁵⁵ As the old saying goes, why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free?

With today's postmodern notion that "reality" is merely socially constructed, both marriage and sexuality can be redefined at will. So what has been the impact on the church, particularly on young evangelicals?

On one hand, acceptance of same-sex marriage continues to grow. The Public Religion Research Institute found in 2018 that while 58 percent of white evangelical Protestants as a whole remain opposed, 53 percent of those aged 18 to 29 *support* it. "Opposition to same-sex marriage is now confined to a few of the most conservative Christian religious traditions," PRRI says. "Nevertheless, even those religious groups most opposed to same-sex marriage have become more accepting of it over the last five years."¹⁵⁶

On the other hand, there are Millennial Christians who understand the stakes. Eric Teetsel, the executive director of the Manhattan Declaration, represents those who are willing to buck the trend and the pull of popular

culture to defend marriage. “We wasted a generation by being complacent and by believing that people would always understand what marriage is and why it matters,” said Teetsel at a marriage rally in Washington, D.C. “That’s no longer true, and now we have got to show them.”¹⁵⁷

But we face a long road ahead. Because the church has failed in its task to disciple the nation, the spirit of the postmodern age is permeating the church and having a profound impact on the attitudes and behavior of evangelical Millennials.

Rine notes that her students have accepted “a view of sex with little meaningful connection to procreation. And once such a view of sexuality is embraced, there is not much foothold, aside from appeals to biblical authority, to support the conjugal understanding of marriage.”¹⁵⁸

Tragically, too many Millennial evangelicals think that their parents and grandparents believe that the only purpose of marital sex is procreation. While some Christians may believe this, the traditional view of the family and sexual relations is actually robust and comprehensive. Just read the Song of Solomon to get a full-orbed picture of sexuality as God designed it.

Millennial evangelicals are often too close to postmodern culture to see how it influences their lives and beliefs. Many have succumbed to postmodern culture without even realizing it. In their attitudes and behavior they have separated sex and marriage from procreation.

May the church, her young and old, awaken to see the impact culture has made on our own lives and the lives of our institutions. May we, with heartfelt

motivation, seek to bring every thought regarding sexuality and marriage captive to Christ.

It's not too late. Another young evangelical defender of marriage is Owen Strachan, a professor of theology. "Many of us have drafted off the importance of marriage for years," Strachan said. "We've known at a subconscious level that this institution is important. Now that it is threatening to be undone culturally, we are waking up."¹⁵⁹

17. The Church vs. Narratives

As we have seen, the culture of narrative is dangerous to human flourishing, to both Christians and non-Christians. No one is safe from its siren song, which will draw us onto the rocks of cultural destruction if we fail to heed the sure compass of biblical truth. All who live in the West inhabit a culture increasingly dominated by postmodern assumptions, which makes it easy for well-meaning Christians to fall under the influence of powerful and deceitful narratives.

The previous chapter demonstrated that Millennial evangelicals who have come out of universities dominated by secular narratives are particularly at risk. By contrast, those of us educated before the 1960s typically were trained in the use of reason, logic, and critical thinking—subjects that by and large are no longer valued and are rarely included in educational curricula.

Thus, the momentum toward widespread acceptance of narratives continues. We must therefore practice continuous vigilance to avoid being swept along by this tide of unreason.

Here are four subtle ways Christians can become ensnared by destructive narratives:

1. The temptation to seek out only sources of information that validate our preferred narratives.

This is clearly a trend in the broader culture, and Christians are not immune. We have to be open-eyed to the ways that journalism and the media have abandoned the standards of unbiased reporting and have largely given themselves over to championing their preferred narratives. This means that if you get your news only from National Public Radio (as Scott did for many years), while reading occasional articles from the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, you will be exposed mainly to the narratives propagated and approved by those on the Left. The same can be said of news sources on the political right, such as Fox News or *National Review*, of course.

Whatever our political or cultural beliefs, all of us need to be exposed to ideas that challenge the narratives we encounter on the Left and the Right. Otherwise, we will all too easily find ourselves trapped in an ideological bubble.

Our colleague Stan Guthrie suggests that we at least sample the offerings coming from the other side of the cultural aisle. To Christians inclined to get their news exclusively from conservative sources, Guthrie says:

Let's break out of our personal, social media, and broadcast bubbles once in a while and sample, with discernment, some alternative viewpoints. Instead of a constant diet of Fox News and Sean Hannity, why not occasionally watch NPR and CNN? You may not agree with a lot of what you hear. Indeed, much of it is advocacy disguised as journalism, but you will at least get the other side in its own words and a few facts your go-to media sources may have overlooked.

There are good, fair-minded journalists working even at *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Find them. Read them. You might even learn from them.¹⁶⁰

And conversely, if you are getting most of your news from outlets on the left, why not take a break and check out some of the journalism coming from the right?

If you are tired of getting your news and opinion in soundbites or on Facebook or Twitter and long for more in-depth discussion, let us suggest that you engage *The Intellectual Dark Web*. It highlights a loose-knit group of intellectuals. They are engaging in long-form discussions that last anywhere from one to three hours before live audiences or on electronic platforms. They are creating a rare space in which truth can be pursued. Among the intellectually diverse contributors are Jordan Peterson, Camille Paglia, Ben Shapiro, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Dave Rubin, and Jonathan Haidt. Whatever their

differences, and there are profound differences, they share a commitment to free speech and reasoned discussion.

2. Falling for a postmodern version of truth.

Postmodernism asserts that objective, transcendent truth does not exist, or at least cannot be known. Rather, each individual is free to create his or her own truth—a personal narrative, if you will. Those who hold cultural power, however, go a step farther and impose their preferred narratives on others. We see this most strikingly in the political correctness running rampant on many college campuses today, even at Christian schools.

Most Christians, of course, won't deny the importance of truth. They will insist that they believe in truth, but what *kind* of truth are they talking about? For many, it is a *personal* truth. They may simply be saying that their faith is true—for *them*. Like the surrounding postmodern culture, they are comfortable with truth as personal, private belief, not as public truth with implications for everyone.

Lesslie Newbigin challenged this postmodern assumption:

A serious commitment to ... [the gospel], means a radical questioning of the reigning assumptions about public life. *It is to affirm the gospel not only as an invitation to a private and personal decision but as public truth which ought to be acknowledged as true for the whole of the life of society* [italics added].¹⁶¹

If you catch yourself describing your Christian faith as something “true for me,” implying that it is only a personal truth claim, beware! You may be more influenced by postmodernism than you realize. We need to reaffirm the existence of what Francis Schaeffer wisely called “true truth”—truth that is true for everyone, based upon “the lordship of Christ over the total culture.”

“The present chasm between the generations has been brought about almost entirely by a change in the concept of truth,” Schaeffer wrote in his classic work, *The God Who Is There*. “...This change in the concept of the way we come to knowledge about truth is the most crucial problem, as I understand it, facing Christianity today.”¹⁶² And it remains so in our time.

3. Falling for a postmodern version of love.

Christians rightly prioritize relationship. God created us for relationship with Himself, from the Garden of Eden in Genesis to the New Jerusalem in Revelation. Jesus, of course, epitomized God’s commitment to be with His people. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” John 1:14 reminds us, “and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

But the Christian faith is about more than our vertical relationship with God, as vital as that is. It is also about our horizontal relationships with one another. The people of God in the Old Testament—the Jewish nation—sought God together, supported one another, held one another accountable, rejoiced together, and wept together. They were called to be a living

embodiment for the nations to see what following God looked like. In the New Testament, the church has the same calling. It is not without reason that the Christian church is called the Body of Christ, with each member supporting the whole (see 1 Corinthians 12:12–14 and Ephesians 4:1–16).

We are all unique, individual creations of God, but we are not meant to go it alone. The Lord designed us to work best in community, to speak of His glory in community, to weep in community, and to rejoice in community. This commitment to community, as in ancient Israel, has an evangelistic purpose. The Apostle Peter said, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Or as Jesus told His disciples, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

Millennial Christians, among others in the Body of Christ, value relationship and resonate deeply with Christ’s commands to love others, in and out of the Body. They actively look for ways to love their non-Christian neighbors—to reach out to homosexuals, minorities, Muslims, and refugees with the love of Jesus Christ. This is praiseworthy and worthy of emulation.

Yet even here we face serious challenges if we are not careful. What postmodern culture defines as “loving” is very different from what “loving others” means biblically. According to the culture, “loving” requires validating and even affirming the personal beliefs and lifestyles of others—even if they are false and destructive. Those who refuse to do so will be considered unloving, even hateful.

Postmodern culture rejects the concept of “love the sinner, hate the sin.” To love, it says, you must abandon biblical notions of sin. The temptation thus arises for Christians to separate what they know to be true—including moral truth—from love, thereby validating a false, postmodern notion of love.

Biblically, however, the concepts of truth, love, and justice are deeply interwoven. In fact, they are inseparable, for to separate them is to destroy them. If you separate love from truth, you no longer have love. You have sentimentality. If you separate justice from truth, you no longer have justice. You have tyranny. If you separate truth from love, you are left with dogmatism. To love someone, you must tell him or her the truth.

The gospel itself shows the intimate relationship between truth, love, and justice. In love God sent His only Son, Jesus, to the cross to cleanse us of our sins in order to fulfill His righteous requirement of justice (John 3:16, a staggering truth claim). Telling someone anything other than the truth is not loving or just. May we Christians who follow the One who is the Source of all truth ever speak that truth in love (Ephesians 4:15)!

4. Allowing emotions, rather than reason, to lead.

In a postmodern culture, truth is not something you discover, it’s something you *create*—and you create it if it makes you feel good. In our day many people believe that absolute truth does not exist, and that those who persist in believing in it are not just wrong but also dangerous. Feelings trump

logic and reason. Narratives thrive in a postmodern culture because they appeal to our hearts rather than our heads.

Christians who succumb to this postmodern mode of operating can easily become ensnared in powerful cultural narratives, and the use of social media merely adds fuel to the fire. Its soundbite tweets and visual images play on emotions, not reasoning abilities.

This is not to say that feelings and emotions are bad. Far from it! Our emotions are a gift from God. The biblical worldview affirms both head and heart—feelings and reason. Yet it insists that reason be preeminent. Like a train, our lives run well when reason is the engine and emotions follow. It malfunctions when emotions are out in front. Take the biblical concept of love. We are commanded to love others, whether we feel like it or not. In other words, love is not a feeling, but a rational choice to seek and do what is best for others, regardless of how we feel.

Emotions are good, but they are also powerful and can be very dangerous when decoupled from reason. One of the fruits of our postmodern culture is the increasing tendency to advance a cause by emotionally inciting a mob through social media. Reflecting on this growing tendency, Rod Dreher writes, “American politics has entered a stage where *the passions of the mob increasingly rule both sides* [Republicans and Democrats], because *emotional extremism is rewarded*”¹⁶³ (italics added). This is playing with fire, and Christians should have nothing to do with it.

When confronted by narrative, the head must rule the heart. The only way to escape the grip of a powerful cultural narrative is to allow the head to

rule the heart. A narrative works through distortion—by presenting a small piece of the picture while deliberately ignoring or suppressing facts and evidence that we need to see the big picture. In a culture dominated by narrative, these missing pieces are not easy to find. It takes effort to carefully seek out facts and evidence from as many sources as possible, followed by a willingness to follow the evidence wherever it leads—even if it means rejecting a narrative to which you have a strong emotional attachment.

But many people are reluctant to do this. Some prefer not to challenge narratives because of a desire to be seen as acceptable by those with cultural influence and who promote particular narratives. Many are simply too busy to do the hard work of questioning narratives, and those who perpetuate them count on this. For those who value love over truth, challenging a narrative may put relationships at risk, and that is too high a price to pay. We need truth *and* love.

In the lamentable 2019 case of actor Jussie Smollett's claims of a hate crime perpetrated against him in Chicago, several of these factors were at work. Because Smollett's unsubstantiated charges fit their preconceived narratives, many cultural gatekeepers in the media and entertainment worlds believed him without question, and said so. When his story fell apart, however, many of his erstwhile backers slipped away quietly.

Christians must resist this temptation. Yes, we live in a culture dominated by narratives, but truth exists and we must pursue it. In that pursuit, we must not allow emotion to trump reason. If we allow ourselves to willingly accept and affirm the distorted narratives of our day, we've abandoned the truth, and

when truth is abandoned, both love and justice are harmed as well. The question is, how do we get at the truth and overcome false narratives? How do we choose rightly between reason and emotion? It's a matter of being trained and transformed by God's Word.

C.S. Lewis spoke of “men without chests”—people who lack the moral virtue required to regulate their intellects and their appetites, their reason and their emotions. As Guthrie has noted, “They have heads and stomachs, but no hearts.” The problem of narratives running rampant and the truth left behind reveals that this problem remains with us.¹⁶⁴

Let's do some spiritual heart surgery and make sure our emotions and our intellect are in proper, biblical balance. We'll know that this surgery was effective when our desire for truth enables us to put the world's narratives in their place. Let's explore this vital issue some more in the next chapter.

18. Countering Distorted Narratives

Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput's discourse at the University of Notre Dame's 2016 Bishops' Symposium¹⁶⁵ is a must-read. While Chaput was addressing a Catholic audience, his message applies to all faithful Christians.

He began by urging the church to courageously fight the darkness closing in around us:

C.S. Lewis ... said, Christianity is a "fighting religion"—not in the sense of hatred or violence directed at other persons, but rather in the spiritual struggle against the evil in ourselves and in the world around us, where our weapons are love, justice, courage and self-giving.

Many Christians find the idea of fighting against our secularized and postmodern culture unpalatable. Many Christians prefer to be “nice” instead of “dangerous.” Now there’s nothing wrong with being nice, as far as it goes, but let’s not confuse niceness with weakness. Love often requires the exercise of great strength in a noble fight. Indeed, fighting for the truth is the most important way we show love for our neighbor. So let us fight, but not with worldly weapons.

Chaput also addressed how a change of language always precedes a change of culture:

One of the things wrong with our country right now is the hollowing out and retooling of all the key words in our country’s public lexicon; words like democracy, representative government, freedom, justice, due process, religious liberty and constitutional protections. The language of our politics is the same. The content of the words is different.

This is, tragically, all too true. As we have seen, consider how the word “marriage” has been “hollowed out and retooled.” These redefinitions are done in the service of a larger narrative that exalts “equality” far beyond the way our forebears would have understood it, and thus leads to a totalitarian impulse to “realign reality.” Chaput continues:

[W]e’re not created “equal” in the secular meaning of that word. We’re obviously not equal in dozens of ways: health, intellect, athletic ability, opportunity, education, income, social status,

economic resources, wisdom, social skills, character, holiness, beauty or anything else. And we never will be. Wise social policy can ease our material inequalities and improve the lives of the poor. But as Tocqueville warned, the more we try to enforce a radical, unnatural, egalitarian equality, the more “totalitarian” democracy becomes.

[Postmodern progressivism] proceeds from the idea that we’re born as autonomous, self-creating individuals who need to be protected from, and made equal with, each other. It’s simply not true. And it leads to the peculiar progressive impulse to master and realign reality to conform to human desire, whereas the Christian masters and realigns his desires to conform to and improve reality.

That last sentence is a powerful summary of the two utterly incompatible worldviews contesting for the hearts, souls, and minds of our culture today. One seeks to “master and realign reality to conform to human desire,” whereas the other “realigns [human] desires to conform to and improve reality.”

Those who hold the latter view are heading for some very trying times—banned, fined, fired, silenced, and otherwise pushed to the margins of society.

So how do we respond? Here, Chaput offered pastoral advice. We must not lose heart or succumb to fear. Rather, we must cling ever more tightly to God, and to the truth.

Serenity of heart comes from consciously trying to live on a daily basis the things we claim to believe. Acting on our faith increases our faith. And it serves as a magnet for other people. To reclaim the

Church ... we should start by renewing in our people a sense that eternity is real, that together we have a mission the world depends on, and that our lives have consequences that transcend time.

Perhaps we have something to learn from others who have yet to bow the knee to postmodern American culture. Chaput said:

In Philadelphia I'm struck by how many women I now see on the street wearing the hijab or even the burqa. Some of my friends are annoyed by that kind of "in your face" Islam. But I understand it. The hijab and the burqa say two important things in a morally confused culture: "I'm not sexually available;" and "I belong to a community different and separate from you and your obsessions."

I have a long list of concerns with the content of Islam. But I admire the integrity of those Muslim women. And we need to help [Christians] recover their own sense of distinction from the surrounding secular meltdown. The Church ... can never be fully integrated [into our contemporary culture] without eviscerating the Christian faith. An appropriate "separateness" for [the Church] is already there in the New Testament. We've too often ignored it because Western civilization has such deep Christian roots. But we need to reclaim it, starting now.

If we think we can continue with one foot in a highly secularized, postmodern culture that has abandoned God and values human autonomy

above all else, while we keep the other foot in the church that proclaims the Lordship of Jesus Christ and Him alone, we are fooling ourselves. Choices will have to be made, and sadly, many are opting to leave the church in favor of culture. But as Chaput rightly said, “We should never be afraid of a smaller, lighter Church if her members are also more faithful, more zealous, more missionary and more committed to holiness.”

Followers of Jesus must stand out from the prevailing culture even more. We must have nothing to do with the creation and perpetuation of distorted narratives. Doing so runs counter to our core commitments as people of the truth. The dominant, postmodern culture rejects transcendent, objective reality and moral order—but we affirm it! A real, objective world exists outside of our minds, and it won’t conform itself to our beliefs. Truth exists. Truth matters. Facts and evidence matter.

This commitment to facts, evidence, and truth rests on a solid theological reality. God exists, whether we believe in Him or not. Jesus said, “I am ... the truth” (John 14:6). John 17:17 tells us that God’s word is truth. We read that “Every word of God proves true” (Proverbs 30:5). Narratives, by contrast, are based on distortion and deceit. These are the tactics of our adversary. As John 8:44 says, “When [Satan] lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” God *never* engages in deceit or distortion. Titus 1:2 tells us that “God never lies” and Hebrews 6:18 says, “It is impossible for God to lie.”

The hearts of all who affirm the doctrine of special revelation will resonate with these scriptural testimonies. But this witness is not restricted to the Bible

alone. The Protestant Reformers spoke of additional “books” that give witness to the truth. As Darrow has written, “Truth is found at the intersection of the books of Scripture, nature, and reason.”¹⁶⁶

Our guiding principle must be to follow the evidence ... wherever it leads. We must be open to changing our own strongly held positions *if* the weight of the evidence demands it. The Christian, who is pledged to the One who called Himself “the truth,” need never fear the truth, because his life is founded upon this bedrock of reality. After all, our faith rests on historical facts and evidence. In the words of the Apostle Peter, “We did not follow cleverly devised stories [he might have said *narratives*] when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (1 Peter 1:16).

The quest for truth is commended in Acts 17:11: “Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character ... for they received the message with great eagerness and *examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true*” (italics added).

In the powerful words of J.I. Packer:

The Evangelical is not afraid of facts, for he knows that all facts are God’s facts; nor is he afraid of thinking, for he knows that all truth is God’s truth, and right reason cannot endanger sound faith. ... A confident intellectualism expressive of robust faith in God, whose Word is truth, is part of the historic evangelical tradition. If present-day evangelicals fall short of this, they are false to their own principles and heritage.¹⁶⁷

Now just because truth exists, of course, doesn't mean that it is easy to understand, or that we can fully understand it. Rather, we are to search it out and understand as much as our finite, fallen minds are able. With God's help, we can see the big picture more clearly over time, for He provides His children with "the Spirit of Truth" to "guide [us] into all truth" (John 16:13). Even so, uncovering the truth in an age dominated by distorted narratives requires hard work. Those who perpetuate narratives count on the fact that most people will not do the hard work; they will not *want* to do it, but instead "will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3).

Let us not be counted among their number. Instead, let us joyfully pursue the truth. Let us think like detectives, hunting down facts and evidence. We'll have to factor in bias, including our own. We'll have to seek information from all sides—left, right, and center. This dogged pursuit of truth requires commitment and perseverance. But isn't the result worth it? Truth is the only hope we have in a culture dominated by distorted narratives. Narratives are a form of manipulation and bondage, but the truth will set us free (John 8:32).

To counter narratives, you must first be able to identify them. Because distorted narratives have multiplied so rapidly, recognizing them can be difficult. Here are two quick questions to help us.

Where does this story draw the line between good and evil?

Unlike narratives, truth can't be reduced to sound bites. Narratives are intended to appeal to our emotions and innate sense of justice, which is why they cast oppressors and victims in sharp relief. But the real world almost never functions like this. Rather, in the immortal words of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: "The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but *right through every human heart*"¹⁶⁸ (emphasis added).

Narratives almost always draw the good vs. evil line not through the human heart but between people or groups. *This* group is good. *That* group is evil. *This* group is comprised of victims. *That* group is comprised of oppressors. But as Solzhenitsyn understood, "There is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). Apart from the forgiveness offered by Jesus, all of us stand condemned.

How do people respond when their story is challenged?

If you suspect someone is promoting a narrative, watch how she reacts when challenged with contrary facts and evidence. If she becomes agitated, defensive, or hostile—if she shows no interest, doesn't listen, looks for ways to immediately discredit countervailing facts and evidence—beware. You are almost certainly dealing with a narrative.

By contrast, truth-seekers welcome questions and dialogue. They want to learn more, to be exposed to facts and evidence they may not have been aware of. They don't shut down debate, whereas proponents of narratives will, saying things like "there is nothing more to discuss" or "both sides have their facts," implying that a fuller understanding of the truth cannot be known.

As well, Christians must refuse the temptation to promote their own distorted narratives. That includes refusing to uncritically accept the narrative's definitions of victim and villain. Following Scripture's command to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matt. 10:16), believers must be cognizant of the unspoken goals of those promoting the narrative. We must never *willingly* allow ourselves to be manipulated and ensnared in a web of lies and distortions. Rather, we must be committed to the truth above all else.

Scripture also tells us to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), so we must do more than simply resist or avoid distorted narratives. We must answer them with the truth—as bracing, messy, and challenging as it may sometimes be. Truth provides the only path out of our current postmodern predicament, and applying it in our day won't be easy. But truth is the only way forward.

A compelling watchword of 1960s counterculture was "Question authority." While sometimes this led to campus violence and unnecessary suspicion against good institutions and people, at other times it was a necessary corrective to institutional corruption and entrenched arrogance. Today, we face new challenges but have the same need for boldness in order to shake up the status quo. So let us keep questioning corruption and arrogance, but with a new rallying cry: "*Question the narrative!*"

19. Pursuing the Truth in a Culture of Lies

Every narrative in literature has a beginning. The opening line launches the storyline, which creates the framework for the story's characters and sets them on their courses.

For example, Charles Dickens's historical novel about the French Revolution, *A Tale of Two Cities*, begins, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair...." This beginning sets the scene for the grand drama that is to come.

It provides the context for a classic tale that is full of heroism, cowardice, brutality, and kindness.

Cultural narratives also have beginnings. Carl Sagan began his widely influential *Cosmos* series with the words, “The Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be. Our feeblest contemplations of the Cosmos stir us—there is a tingling in the spine, a catch in the voice, a faint sensation, as if a distant memory, of falling from a height. We know we are approaching the greatest of mysteries.”¹⁶⁹

Sagan’s narrative about our mysterious universe, however much it tingles our spines, leaves no room for God. Many in our culture have latched onto this secular, atheistic explanation of life and how we got here. Not surprisingly, this narrative has provided the context for profound cultural changes that have cheapened human life, diminished people’s commitment to enduring values, and brought on a nihilistic relativism that continues injecting its poison into our cultural bloodstream. No wonder abortion—even infanticide—is accepted, we can no longer tell male from female, and political discourse has devolved into a raw battle for power over principle.

After all, in a quote attributed to Dostoyevsky, if God does not exist, everything is permitted.¹⁷⁰ There can be no moral absolutes in a relativistic, postmodern world without God, who is the only true and lasting source and guarantor of morality. Atheist pundits such as Christopher Hitchens can protest all day long that they can be moral without God. There have been many fine people who have disbelieved in God’s existence. But these folks have no firm ground for doing right and avoiding wrong without Him. In their

narrative, right and wrong are mere personal preferences, without foundation. They will melt away like the winter's snows at the coming of spring. Yet, ironically, these personal preferences turn into "arbitrary absolutes," to use Francis Schaeffer's phrase, when the man or woman holding them has power.¹⁷¹

We need a solid narrative for human life, one founded upon truth, not personal preference. The narrative for human life is revealed in the Bible. What's the opening line of the biblical narrative? "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). That opening creates the necessary framework for understanding all of life. In particular, it guides our understanding of the pursuit of truth and the life of free and responsible human beings.

The biblical narrative begins with God, not with nature or people. God is the first and the last. He is before the beginning and after the end of human history. It is His existence and presence that give our lives meaning.

The narrative continues with Genesis 1:26-28:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it

and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Here the narrative establishes our identity and purpose. As to *identity*, we are made male and female in the image of God. Our *purpose* is established in the cultural mandate, which has two subordinating principles: first, to form families and, second, to have dominion over creation.

We find in the biblical narrative that being made in the image of God means we are reasonable and volitional creatures, with the freedom to live in the midst of reality—the physical and spiritual realm as created and maintained by God. We are to live in this reality. We are to live in the truth.

We see the importance of truth in both the Gospel of John and in the Book of Acts. We read in John 8:31-32, “So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”

We find four noteworthy elements here.

- First, Jesus is addressing “the Jews who had believed him.”
- Second, Jesus makes a distinction between believers and disciples. To be a disciple is to abide in (“live in,” “continue in”) God’s word.
- Third, good consequences come for those who continue in God’s word. When we do this, we will “know the truth.”
- Fourth, knowing the truth leads to freedom.

There is an organic relationship between truth and freedom. And conversely, believing lies brings bondage and brokenness. When we reject God's truth, we inevitably head into bondage. We should emphasize one final time here that the source of truth is God's revelation, seen ultimately in the Bible.

In that vein, Acts 17:11 gives additional insight: "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

The Bereans were nobler than the Thessalonians. The Greek word translated "more noble" is *eugenes* and means to be open-minded. The mind that is open to new ideas, open to asking questions in search of the truth, is nobler than an ignorant mind that asks no questions. Why? Because truth is of paramount importance, and its pursuit is a noble undertaking. The Bereans were interested in truth. Where was truth to be found? In the Scriptures. The Bereans examined them every day to check the veracity of Paul's words. They were careful to abide in the Scriptures.

So we end this volume where we began. If we want to live in the truth, we must return to the Bible, which is God's sure word to humanity. The Scriptures tell us who we are, why we are here, and where we are going. They present the only narrative that is completely true, the one that points us to the only proper Object of worship—the Lord God who created the universe and who came to restore a sinful humanity into a right relationship with Himself. What we worship determines how we live. Will we live as beings created in

the *imago Dei* with inherent dignity, or as mere animals that must fulfill their urgings and instincts? It depends on the narrative that we believe.

Ideas truly *do* have consequences. Which idea will we choose? Which idea will *you* choose?

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