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West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”



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Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

We Hold These Truths: Defending Liberty in a Perilous Age

It was almost one hundred years ago, in the aftermath of the Great War, the war that did not end all wars, that William Butler Yeats sounded the warning in his famous poem, “*The Second Coming*:”

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity.

That poem was written in 1919 and it voiced for millions a loss of innocence and the evaporation of hope. We can now see that Yeats’s words grew only more prophetic over the last ninety-nine years. Things are falling apart. The center cannot hold.

We who now live in the late modern age are witnesses to a great falling apart, to a center that may not hold. As we meet today the most basic liberties enshrined in our Constitution are confused, contorted, and sometimes even condemned. The enumerated rights recognized in the First Amendment are now suspect in the eyes of many and injurious in the eyes of others. Religious freedom, freedom of speech, and the freedom of the press, along with the other rights recognized and respected within the Bill of Rights, are all threatened even as other rights are marginalized. Even more distressingly, a new regime of invented rights threatens to replace the rights that are clearly enumerated within the text of the Constitution.

How could this happen?

I speak as a Christian theologian. We can now see what so many have long denied—that the experiment in liberty and self-government known as the United States of America is premised upon an affirmation of human dignity and human rights that only makes sense within and can only be sustained by a worldview that is based on at least an inherited Christian conception and an affirmation of natural rights.



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The Declaration of Independence famously stated this affirmation in the most direct of terms: *“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”*

The Founders did not fully understand the affirmation they were making, as is clear from the horrible reality of slavery, but they were most certainly correct in their conception of unalienable rights endowed upon every human being by their Creator.

This same spirit gave birth to the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, without which the Constitution itself would never have been ratified. Religious liberty is the first freedom, the foundational liberty, upon which every other enumerated liberty depends.

But the center is not holding. Religious liberty becomes fragile in a secular age. Indeed, all liberties become fragile in a secular age. The very idea of human dignity will not long survive in a secular season, for once that dignity is grounded in anything other than the act of the divine Creator, human dignity withers to whatever dignity humanity can accord itself. The twentieth century should be warning enough of what happens when human dignity is grounded in a merely secular conception of humanity or dignity.

But religious liberty is also seen as problematic and out of date by those who see liberty in its most urgent form as liberation from the shackles of religious belief, divine revelation, and revealed morality. We live now on the leeward side of a revolution in sexuality and morality that threatens to sacrifice religious liberty as injurious to human freedom, sexual liberty, transgender liberation, and a host of new imperatives. In this view, religious liberty is just another way of allowing religious citizens to threaten the newly declared liberties of those long oppressed and invisible.

Consider the fact that religious liberty is now described as religious privilege. By definition, a privilege is not a right. It can be revoked or redefined as circumstances may dictate. It can be withdrawn or subverted by the courts in the name of liberation and justice. And, in our day, privilege is suspect in the first place—an embarrassment to be identified and corrected.

In 2016 the chairman of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Martin R. Castro, stated in an official report of the Commission:

“The phrases ‘religious liberty’ and ‘religious freedom’ will stand for nothing except hypocrisy so long as they remain code words for discrimination, intolerance, racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, Christian supremacy or any form of intolerance.”

The commission’s report included both religious liberty and religious freedom in scare quotes as if they are merely terms of art — linguistic constructions without any objective reality.

We are now witnessing a great and inevitable collision between religious liberty and newly declared and invented sexual liberties. The advocates of same-sex marriage saw this coming, as did the opponents of this legal and moral revolution.



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Judges and legal scholars also knew the collision was coming. Judge Michael McConnell, formerly a judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit and now director of Stanford University's Constitutional Law Center, suggested many years ago that the coming conflict would *"feature a seemingly irreconcilable clash between those who believe that homosexual conduct is immoral and those who believe that it is a natural and morally unobjectionable manifestation of human sexuality."* Accordingly, he called for a spirit of tolerance and respect, much like what society expects of religious believers and atheists — what he called *"civil toleration."*

But the advocates of same-sex marriage are not friendly to the idea of toleration. One prominent gay rights lawyer predicted just this kind of controversy almost a decade ago when she admitted that violations of conscience would be inevitable as same-sex marriage is legalized. Chai Feldblum, then a professor at the Yale Law School, also admitted that her acknowledgement of a violated conscience might be *"cold comfort"* to those whose consciences are violated.

"I'm having a hard time coming up with any case in which religious liberty should win.... Sexual liberty should win in most cases. There can be a conflict between religious liberty and sexual liberty, but in almost all cases sexual liberty should win because that's the only way that the dignity of gay people can be affirmed in any realistic manner."

Chai Feldblum was then a law professor at Yale. She is now a commissioner of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission of the United States, and she was just recently renominated.

Now, things are falling apart as Christian cake bakers, florists, and photographers face coercion or even expulsion from their livelihoods. In the oral arguments for the Obergefell case, Donald Verrilli, then Solicitor General of the United States, was asked if the legalization of same-sex marriage would mean that religious colleges and universities would have to offer same-sex marital housing. Verrilli infamously answered, *"It will be an issue."*

Indeed. It will be an issue. It is an inevitable issue.

Last month, the California Assembly passed legislation under the guise of consumer protection that would outlaw any transaction that might be related to any claim that sexual orientation or gender identity might be changed. The legislation would explicitly ban the sale of books and other materials that would represent orthodox biblical Christianity—the consensus of the Christian church wherever and whenever it has been found for two millennia. Assembly Bill 2943, as it is known, is blatantly unconstitutional, but it passed overwhelmingly in the California Assembly, a sign of the times.

Europe, especially in the west and the north, has followed a faster trajectory of secularization as compared to the United States, but the velocity of secular change in our own nation is increasing. The distance between Europe and the United States as measured by secularization is shortening. Keep that ominous reality in mind when you consider that just last week an Advocate General for the European Court of Justice advised that religious employers in Europe would see their right to discriminate on grounds of religious belief curtailed.



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One again, a legal authority spoke openly of balancing religious liberty and modern individual liberty and he found that religious liberty must give way. The Economist, hardly a fringe publication, ran the headline: “*A Court Ruling Makes it Harder for Faith-Based Employers to Discriminate.*”

The magazine opened the report with these words:

“It is a problem that arises in every liberal democracy that upholds religious belief (and hence, the freedom of religious bodies to manage their own affairs) while also aiming to defend citizens, including job-seekers, from unfair discrimination. As part of their entitlement to run their own show, faith groups often claim some exemption from equality laws when they are recruiting people.”

Then:

“To take an extreme case, it would run counter to common sense if a church were judicially obliged to appoint a militant atheist as a priest, even if that candidate as well qualified on paper. But how generous should those exemptions be?”

Note the language of the report — an extreme case, counter to common sense, judicially obliged, militant atheist, well qualified on paper, how generous?

We are now down to the question of generosity. How generous will a secular society committed to worship at the altar of sexual liberty be, when deciding whether or to what extent religious liberty is to be respected and recognized?

Just ask the California Assembly, or the European Court of Justice, or the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, or Commissioner Chai Feldblum of the E.E.O.C..

When a sexual revolution like this happens, it is always followed, not by persuasion but by coercion. And we see that coercion arriving right now. I often cite Theo Hobson about the reality of the moral revolution. He argued that for a moral revolution to take place, three conditions have to be met. The **first** condition is that what is condemned must be celebrated. The **second** is that what was celebrated must be condemned. But that is not enough. In order for a moral revolution to be complete, those who will not celebrate must be condemned. And that’s what we see here. It is the coercion of those who will not, cannot, celebrate.

Our constitutional order roots every successive right in the priority of religious liberty. The religious liberty clauses of the Constitution are more basic than any other among the enumerated rights. But, we would expect, when the most basic of all rights is threatened, so eventually are all others.

Furthermore, we find a basic moral and realistic logic of liberty within the First Amendment. We also find an interdependence of liberties. Thus, we should not be surprised that the freedom of speech and freedom of the press are also at risk.



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Americans are often shocked, and even offended by the claims that free speech is often denied, but on many of our most elite college and university campuses, free speech is dismissed as a bourgeois value. The University of California at Berkeley, — the very campus where the Free Speech Movement was born in the 1960s — has now grown hostile to free speech, with many students and faculty arguing that freedom speech renders the campus “unsafe.”

And for far too many, freedom of the press means freedom for the press they like, an impulse that can appear on both the Right and the Left. But freedom of the press means the freedom to print, publish, broadcast, post, and communicate as a logical and necessary extension of freedom of speech. Without freedom of the press, the populace is force fed and misled, increasingly unable even to recognize the truth, and freedom of speech disappears.

Frank Bruni, columnist for the New York Times, said that religious people need to understand that freedom of worship means the freedom to hold whatever position you believe and to teach whatever you want to teach in your homes, in your hearts, and in your pews. President Obama would restrict this as did the State Department to freedom of worship. Freedom of worship and religious liberty are not the same thing.

The Declaration of Independence expressed the convictions of this nation in stating boldly that we hold these truths to be self-evident. We hold these truths. These truths, not mere opinions or beliefs. Held, not merely asserted or argued. To hold is to exercise a stewardship. We hold these truths, not merely for ourselves and for our time, but for our children, and our children’s children, and all those who will become a part of this grand experiment in self-government. But we also hold these truths for the world and before the world. Such a stewardship requires the defense of these truths, the careful definition of these truths; truths that should be, but often are not, recognized as self-evident.

The First Amendment will not save us. Without prior and enduring commitment, the text is only words on paper. As Christians, we give thanks to God alone, who made us in his image, gives us life, and endowed us with these rights. Only Jesus Christ can save, and he saves to the uttermost. That is the great Good News. The sacred freedoms we cherish secure our right to worship God in spirit and in truth, to tell the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to teach the whole counsel of God.

The First Amendment will not save us, but it now falls to us to save the First Amendment.

We hold these truths. May God give us wisdom as we hold these precious truths in perilous times.

This is the full text of the keynote address delivered by Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr. at the First Amendment Lunch, hosted by the National Religious Broadcasters and the National Day of Prayer on Thursday on May 3, 2018 at the Capitol Hill Club in Washington, D.C.



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God's Dupes?

Is the Christian faith intellectual nonsense? Are Christians deluded?

“If God exists and takes an interest in the affairs of human beings, his will is not inscrutable,” writes Sam Harris about the 2004 tsunami in *Letter to a Christian Nation*. “The only thing inscrutable here is that so many otherwise rational men and women can deny the unmitigated horror of these events and think this is the height of moral wisdom” (p. 48). In his article “God’s Dupes,” Harris argues, “Everything of value that people get from religion can be had more honestly, without presuming anything on insufficient evidence. The rest is self-deception, set to music” (*The Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 2007). Ironically, Harris’ first book is entitled *The End of Faith*, but it should really be called “The End of Reason,” as it demonstrates again that the mind that is alienated from God in the name of reason can become totally irrational.

Oxford zoologist Richard Dawkins suggests that the idea of God is a virus, and we need to find software to eradicate it. Somehow, if we can expunge the virus that led us to think this way, we will be purified and rid of this bedeviling notion of God, good, and evil (“Viruses of the Mind,” 1992). Along with Christopher Hitchens and a few others, these atheists are calling for the banishment of all religious belief. “Away with this nonsense!” is their battle cry. In return, they promise a world of new hope and unlimited horizons once we have shed this delusion of God.

I have news for them — news to the contrary. The reality is that the emptiness that results from the loss of the transcendent is stark and devastating, philosophically and existentially. Indeed, the denial of an objective moral law, based on the compulsion to deny the existence of God, results ultimately in the denial of evil itself. Furthermore, one would like to ask Dawkins, are we morally bound to remove that virus? Somehow he himself is, of course, free from the virus and can therefore input our moral data.

In an attempt to escape what they call the contradiction between a good God and a world of evil, atheists try to dance around the reality of a moral law (and hence, a moral lawgiver) by introducing terms like “evolutionary ethics.” The one who raises the question against God in effect plays God while denying He exists. Now, one may wonder: Why do you actually need a moral lawgiver if you have a moral law? The answer is because the questioner and the issue he or she questions always involve the essential value of a person. You can never talk of morality in abstraction. Persons are implicit to the question and the object of the question. In a nutshell, positing a moral law without a moral lawgiver would be equivalent to raising the question of evil without a questioner. So you cannot have a moral law unless the moral law itself is intrinsically woven into personhood. This means that an intrinsically worthy person must exist if the moral law itself is to be valued. And that person can only be God.

Our inability to alter what is actual frustrates our grandiose delusions of being sovereign over everything. Yet the truth is that we cannot escape the existential rub by running from a moral law. Objective moral values exist only if God exists. Is it all right, for example, to mutilate babies for entertainment? Every reasonable person will say “no.” We know that objective moral values do exist. Therefore, God must exist. Examining those premises and their validity presents a very strong argument.

The prophet Jeremiah noted, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*” (Jeremiah 17:9). Similarly, the apostle James said, “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*”



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For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing” (James 1:22–25).

The world does not understand what the absoluteness of the moral law is all about. Some get caught, some don't get caught. Yet who of us would like our heart exposed on the front page of the newspaper today? Have there not been days and hours when, like Paul, you've struggled within yourself and said, *“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* (Romans 7:15, 24). Each of us knows this tension and conflict within if we are honest with ourselves.

Therefore, as Christians, we ought to take time to reflect seriously upon the question: *“Has God truly wrought a miracle in my life? Is my own heart proof of the supernatural intervention of God?”* In the West we go through these seasons of new-fangled theologies. The whole question of “lordship” plagued our debates for some time as we asked if there was such a thing as a minimalist view of conversion? *“We said the prayer and that's it.”* Yet how can there be a minimalist view of conversion when conversion itself is a maximal work of God's grace? *“The old has passed away; behold, the new has come”* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

If you were proposing marriage to someone, what would the one receiving the proposal say if you said, *“I want you to know this proposal changes nothing about my allegiances, my behavior, and my daily life; however, I do want you to know that should you accept my proposal, we shall theoretically be considered married. There will be no other changes in me on your behalf.”* In a strange way we have minimized every sacred commitment and made it the lowest common denominator. What does my new birth mean to me? That is a question we seldom ask. Who was I before God's work in me, and who am I now?

The immediate results of coming to know Jesus Christ are the new hungers and new pursuits that are planted within the human will. I will recall that dramatic change in my own way of thinking. There were new longings, new hopes, new dreams, new fulfillments, but most noticeably, there was a new will to do what was God's will. Thomas Chalmers characterized this change that Christ brings as *“the expulsive power of a new affection.”* This new affection of heart — the love of God wrought in us through the Holy Spirit — expels all other old seductions and attractions. The one who knows Christ begins to see that his or her own misguided heart is impoverished and in need of constant submission to the will of the Lord — spiritual surrender. Yes, we are all gifted with different personalities, but humility of spirit and the hallmark of conversion is to see one's own spiritual poverty. Arrogance and conceit ought to be inimical to the life of the believer. A deep awareness of one's own new hungers and longings is a convincing witness to God's grace within. ~ **Dr. Ravi Zacharias - President of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries**



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This is a photo taken at the McPhatters on June 15, 2018. As you can see the moms and their young children are having a wonderful time keeping cool.



Here is a picture of Lukie (with his mom Carrie) becoming accustomed to the new swimming platform that the Joyner's made for him. A prime example of how the body of Christ comes together to benefit a little one in order to improve his way of life.



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Birthday and Anniversary Corner - June 2018

Birthdays

*Gene A. (6)
Mike P. (27)*

Anniversaries

*Brian and Muriel R. (7)
Ben and Carrie P. (23)
Scott and Ruth T. (25)*

Treasuring Redemption’s Price

The key to understanding the cry of Jesus from the cross is found in Paul’s letter to the Galatians: *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’”* (Galatians 3:13, ESV).

To be cursed is to be removed from the presence of God, to be set outside the camp, to be cut off from His benefits. On the cross, Jesus was cursed. That is, He represented the Jewish nation of covenant breakers who were exposed to the curse and took the full measure of the curse on Himself. As the Lamb of God, the Sin Bearer, He was cut off from the presence of God.

On the cross, Jesus entered into the experience of forsakenness on our behalf. God turned His back on Jesus and cut Him off from all blessing, from all keeping, from all grace, and from all peace.

God is too holy to even look at iniquity. God the Father turned His back on the Son, cursing Him to the pit of hell while He hung on the cross. Here was the Son’s *“descent into hell.”* Here the fury of God raged against Him. His scream was the scream of the damned. For us. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



West Suffolk Leadership

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Please submit information to Walt Lawrence by the second Sunday of each month preceding publication by e-mail, in person or at the church office. The editor reserves the right to edit for content or space. May the Father be glorified in every word.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions from the contributors to this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of West Suffolk Baptist Church or it’s leadership.