

The Christian Foundation for Ordered Society and Public Justice aka Classical Liberalism

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INTRODUCTION

Tertullian, a Church Father as well as a lawyer, famously asked, “What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?” His point is used to illustrate what has come to be known as “the antithesis,” a key theological concept, particularly in presuppositional apologetics.¹

Yet, wrongly understood, this concept can lead to a form of dualism, the notion that what is Christian is “heavenly, spiritual, and eternal” and what is secular is “earthly, carnal, and temporal” – without any overlap or even relevance to one another. To draw such a bifurcated dualistic line, however, is to

¹ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic – Readings & Analysis*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R 1998), 273-87

conceptually enervate the Lordship of Christ who is to have preeminence in all things², including our very thinking³. And this is no less true when it comes to public justice and ordering society. Christ's Lordship, if it's real, must necessarily impact all of reality, including society's ordering and public justice⁴. This raises two questions: (1) How does the Christian worldview relate to ordering society? And, not so obviously (2) Does Classical Liberalism optimally instantiate the key precepts supplied by the Christian worldview?

First, a preliminary question: Why reference Classical Liberalism in this inquiry? The common tale is that the Enlightenment unshackled mankind from Christianity's fearful superstitions and finally allowed true humanism to bloom, including Classical Liberalism's formation and birth. The reality, however, is that the predicates to Classical Liberalism actually (1) predate the Enlightenment; and (2) predominantly stem from Christianity and its worldview. Recent *non-Christian* scholarship verifies

² Col 2:18

³ 2 Cor. 10:5

⁴ On occasion, the term "ordered liberty" will be used as a shorthand for addressing both the ordered society and public justice. But these are different technically: the former denotes pre-political civil society and its mediating institutions while the latter denotes the State, its structure and its interface with the former.

this.⁵ Accordingly, Christianity supplies the key predicates to what comprises the pillars of Classical Liberalism: a valorized, yet fallen⁶, individual imbued with liberty, a limited State, civil society teeming with innovative mediating institutions, a virtuous market with free trade -- all operating within an overarching moral framework.

How then does the Christian worldview predicated on Christ's Lordship inform and forge the common features of ordered society and notions of public justice? What should those features be? What should those features promote; what should they restrain? How then should society and State be structured? Bottom line: Can we really make a *theological* case for human flourishing and ordered liberty that employs Classical Liberalism without on the one hand, undermining Christian precepts, nor on the other hand erecting a theocratic State or resurrecting some version of a coercive Statist Star Chamber?

⁵ Honest pagan yet unbelieving scholarship notes this: *See, e.g.,* Luc Ferry, *A Brief History of Thought*, (1996), Tom Holland, *Dominion*, (2019), Larry Sidentop, *Inventing the Individual – The Origins of Liberalism* (2014), Steven D. Smith, *Pagans & Christians in the City – Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac* (2018).

⁶ As James Madison eloquently put it in *Federalist No. 51*: “If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.” In many ways, *The Federalist* represents the apex of practical reason used to implement Classical Liberalism in a political order.

A Test Case: Free Speech

Consider “free speech,” a crucial component to Classical Liberalism.⁷ In the US context, many invoke the 1st amendment as a protector⁸ of free expression. Question: did this freedom exist prior to 1791, that is, prior to the amendment’s ratification? Did it exist prior to the Enlightenment? Yes, but why? Is there a *theological* justification for free speech? Does the Christian worldview inform, or better, *require* protecting free speech for humanity’s purposes and flourishing?

Free Speech Before the Fall

Before the Fall, God directed Adam and Eve with a particular task derived from their being the *Imago Dei*: exercise dominion over the entire created order.⁹ Now, this task at the outset no doubt

⁷ In fact, since at least Plato’s time, many have recognized the crucial role free speech plays politically and institutionally: “Free interpersonal communication anchored in the truth of reality—the reality of the world around us, the reality of ourselves, and the reality of God as well[,] serves to structure society’s framework and overall condition. See, Josef Pieper, *Abuse of Language-Abuse of Power*, (Ignatius 1974), 39.

⁸ Note well: according to the Declaration of Independence, governments *secure*, not *confer*, fundamental rights and therefore the “bill of rights” protects *inherent* rights. The source of rights is not the State.

⁹ Gen. 1: 27, 28 – note also that God directed this command, known as the “cultural mandate,” jointly to both Adam and Eve. See, P. Andrew Sandlin, *Creational Marriage – Issues and Controversies*, (2022), 37

seemed daunting; it would require development, expansion, and other persons, as well as an inchoate division of labor. It would also require acquiring and processing raw materials that existed outside the Garden.¹⁰ This task therefore presupposed coordination, collaboration, and therefore communication.

Unfettered speech ordered to virtuous human flourishing undergirded and would facilitate the mission God conferred upon Adam and Eve. And, this same cultural mandate remains mankind's mission after the Fall¹¹ and accordingly, protecting free speech remains a crucial component of ordered liberty – all because of a theological rationale.

Free Speech After the Fall

Moreover, after the Fall, Jesus commanded that His followers execute another mandate, known as the Great Commission: discipling the nations.¹² Plainly,

¹⁰ As Genesis 2:11 & 12 indicate key resources like gold existed beyond the garden's boundaries in a different land (Havilah), and obviously resources derived from the seas and oceans lay beyond the Garden as well.

¹¹ Gen. 9:1, 7

¹² Matt. 28:18:20

this mandate likewise required and continues to require robust protection for *publicly* proclaiming the Gospel – free speech. Both the cultural mandate and the Great Commission require rejecting a privatized religion as well as spiritual dualism. Both mandates must be pursued temporally and publicly – prior to eternity. And, those tasks require free speech, which Classical Liberalism is zealous to protect.

What other conditions promote, sustain, and protect ordered liberty?

Foundational Preconditions for Ordered Liberty

First a word of caution: As Paul noted, activism, even for God, can be zealous, but lack knowledge.¹³ Twin risks exist: either (1) the Christian retreats from public engagement into a cocoon of privatized pietism¹⁴, or (2) the Christian swash buckles in the public square like a clanging cymbal or a bull in a

¹³ Rom. 10:2

¹⁴ Radical “two kingdom” theology seeks to justify this sort of retreat. For a rebuttal see John M. Frame, *The Escondido Theology: A Reformed Response to Two Kingdom Theology*, (2011) and Brian G. Mattson, *Cultural Amnesia: Three Essays on Two Kingdoms Theology* (2018)

China closet, precipitating PR and legal setbacks¹⁵. To avoid these tendencies and to thereby actually promote ordered liberty – forged by Christian conviction - requires embracing three fundamental preconditions. These three preconditions vitiate both fruitless privatization and resulting diffidence as well as unwise, tone deaf, and unproductive churning. Each will be outlined.

Competence

A story is told about a Priest and a Rabbi who became friends. They would enjoy coffee together, attend opera, and even some sporting events. One evening they attended a boxing match, something the Rabbi had never seen. One scene captivated the Rabbi: A Latin American competitor entered the ring, knelt down, and made the sign of the cross. The Rabbi with bold enthusiasm demanded to know: “What’s that mean, what’s that mean??!!” The Priest responded, “What’s what mean?” The Rabbi explained: “That man, after he entered, he knelt and

¹⁵ This often occurred in conjunction with the so-called “abolitionists” who rightly opposed abortion, but whose tactics actually galvanized cultural and legal opposition. Thankfully, the strategic “incrementalists” prevailed in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, (June 24, 2022)

did this thing with his hands; what's that mean??!!”
The Priest wryly responded: “Oh, that; that doesn't
mean a darn thing . . . unless he can fight”.¹⁶

Here's the point: piety is never a substitute for technique.¹⁷ One cannot “do good” culturally, politically, or legally unless he does certain things well, with excellence and skill. Far too many zealous people rush into cultural battles (or their daily jobs) armed perhaps with having the “right answers,” but yet have failed to cultivate, forge, and hone the skills, character, and expertise necessary for implementing those answers in an effective way. Ordered liberty requires Christians to be both pious and competent as they voice and implement choices pertaining to ordered liberty. A free society rooted in ordered liberty as structured by Classical Liberalism valorizes competence because it lubricates an effective feedback loop: the market based on individual responsibility and accountability – and

¹⁶ I first heard this story as Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta addressed a class of newly commissioned USMC officers.

¹⁷ Thanks to my friend Fr. Robert Sirico for relating this notion based on the 20th century Thomist Etienne Gilson.

consequences when competence lapses. Both stem from Christian concepts¹⁸

What's Your Textual Orientation?

To illustrate this next precondition, consider these inquiries¹⁹:

1. TRUE or FALSE: Delilah sheared Samson's hair²⁰

2. WHERE in the Bible does it say: "*Ashes to ashes, dust to dust*"?²¹

3. TRUE or FALSE: The Bible says "Pride goes before a fall"²²

¹⁸ Note that Paul directs that "*If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat*" (2 Thess.3:10) – there exists an immediate market-based feedback loop – a growling stomach - based on individual responsibility and accountability.

¹⁹ Many of these are derived from Gary DeMar, *Myths, Lies, and Half-truths – How Misreading the Bible Neutralized Christians* (American Vision 2010)

²⁰ FALSE (Judges 16:19)

²¹ It does not – that is language from the Book of Common Prayer

²² FALSE – "*Pride goes before destruction . . .*" Pr. 16:18 (KJV)

4. TRUE or FALSE: Noah's ark landed on Mt. Ararat²³
5. FILL in the BLANK: "*The ____ will dwell with the Lamb*"²⁴
6. TRUE or FALSE: Elijah was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot²⁵
7. Question: How many wise men came to visit Jesus while He lay in a manger?²⁶
8. TRUE or FALSE: The bible says "There is no God"?²⁷
9. TRUE or FALSE: Jesus stumbled and fell while carrying his cross²⁸
10. Where is 6-6-6 found in the Bible?²⁹

²³ FALSE – "*The mountains of Ararat*" Gen. 8:4

²⁴ Wolf, not Lion – Is. 11:6 and Is. 65:25

²⁵ FALSE – a whirlwind, 2 Kg. 2:1, 11

²⁶ ZERO – they saw Him in a HOUSE and gave three gifts – the actual number of Magi, however is never disclosed - Matt. 2:11

²⁷ TRUE: Psalm 14:1; 53:1

²⁸ INDETERMINATE; we do not know – no textual evidence exists which indicates one way or another; what is known is that another – Simon the Cyrene -- carried the cross and thus some have inferred that Jesus stumbled and fell, dropping the cross. *See*, Matt. 27:32

²⁹ Technically, it's not, as the Greek and Hebrew reflect 600 60 and 6 – Rev. 13:18 and 1 Kgs 10:14; the Bible's original languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, do however reflect gematria (values derived because the linguistic symbols contain alpha-numeric coding) totaling six hundred sixty-six: 1 Kings 10:14 and Rev. 13:18

What are the implications of this “Sword Drill” or “Baptist Air-Conditioning” exercise?

We at times are SO certain about our own picayune preferences – Psalms or Hymns, PowerPoints or Hymnals, Bible Translations and textual traditions, Schooling Modes – home, Christian, Christian Classical³⁰, Dating or “Courtship,” the color of the carpet - and yet, we often do not know the normative text of our Faith –

And if we are to develop and embrace Christian convictions to inform ordered society and public justice, we need to know that text at the very least, avoiding the temptation to convert our “ant hill” preferences into “mountains to die on” precepts³¹. Far too often people seeking the limelight label a policy or legal position “Christian” perhaps to gain followers or funding. Yet the proposed position itself may be flatly confuted by the Bible.

³⁰ A recent further hyphenated sub-distinction describing yet another version of schooling is now “Christian, Classical, and Constitutional” – *see, e.g.*, Tipping Point Academy, video re: Values: <https://tippingpointacademy.com/>

³¹ Jeffery J. Ventrella, “When Preferences Become Precept,” *New Horizons*, https://opc.org/new_horizons/NH99/NH9905d.html

Textual ignorance is a problem and arrogant textual ignorance is worse. Because the Bible itself addresses society and public justice, we must know it.³² Or, put differently, to be Christlike, we must know what Christ is like as scripture reveals Him and His will for the created order. And, the scripture contains key predicates upon which Classical Liberalism rests.

What's Your Theological Orientation?

Just as important, however is understanding how the Faith as confessed as a whole unit – Christian creedalism³³ – also provides a foundation and structural cues for ordering society and maximizing public justice. Why?

³² For example, scripture proscribes theft generally whether by individuals, groups, or the State. (8th Commandment). Similarly, scripture proscribes envy and covetousness. (10th Commandment). And, scripture in describing societal justice, proscribes favoring both the wealthy and the poor. (*See, e.g.*, Ex. 23:3, Lev. 19:15, Deut., 1:17). This stands to reason since scripture, according to Paul equips the godly for “every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16,17) and both the Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission comprise public and societal good works requiring ordered liberty. Scripture supplies the key predicates for ordering society so that those public good works can be optimally accomplished. Accordingly, Christians need to know the scripture.

³³ This is not to suggest that creeds and confessions supersede or supplant the Holy Scriptures. Rather, creeds and confessions evidence mature reflection by the Christian community regarding the fundamental tenets of what the Holy Scriptures teach. And, those tenets concretize what we are to believe and how we are to live, including living socially and publicly. This contrasts with the “hot takes” approach so rife on social media, takes that often deviate from Christian maturity and even orthodoxy.

First, creeds crystalize the gist of the Faith thereby informing and providing the church's non-negotiable identity, as Al Mohler notes:

“The church must also stand on confessional fidelity as a hallmark of its identity. The faith once delivered to the saints must be expressed and defined and defended in confessional form.”³⁴

Second, there are, and must be, creedal implications for law because law/ethics correlate to theology/doctrine.

This correlation between creed and conduct is recognized by leading legal scholars: Cass Sunstein, a non-Christian, and Adrian Vermeule, a Christian, note that the Nicene Creed, like the US Constitution and the Declaration, reflect “enduring legal and political frameworks.”³⁵

³⁴ R. Albert Mohler Jr, *The Gathering Storm; Secularism, Culture, and the Church*; (Nelson Books; Nashville, TN; Fidelitas Corporation 2020), 36

³⁵ Cass R Sunstein, and Adrian Vermeule,; *Law & Leviathan; Redeeming the Administrative State* (2022); 6

Indeed, as Jonathan Burnside noted, “law is a backstage pass to theology.”³⁶ Law and theology correlate and accordingly much of the “culture wars” stem from which theology and therefore which law will gain ascendance in society.

As one man explained:

*Whatever is the source of law in society is that society’s god. This authority may be the Party, or the Leader, or the People, or the Constitution.*³⁷

Accordingly:

Every social order rests on a creed, on a concept of life and law, and represents a religion in action. Culture is religion externalized, and, as Henry Van Til observed, “a people’s religion comes to

³⁶ Jonathan Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society: Aspects of Law and Legality in the Bible*, (OUP 2011), xxviii

³⁷ Gary North, *Healer of the Nations—Biblical Principles for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press 1987) 31, citing R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), 4

*expression in its culture, and Christians can be satisfied with nothing less than a Christian organization of society.” Wherever there is an attack on the organization of society, there is an attack on its religion.*³⁸

To rightly order society and to influence culture in that direction, Christians must know the Faith’s foundational text and its foundational creeds and confessions, as they both supply key content for understanding reality as it really is. Classical Liberalism invokes key aspects of “real reality” as it structures the society’s political economy:

A valorized, yet fallen, individual imbued with liberty, a limited State, civil society teeming with innovative mediating institutions, a virtuous market with free trade -- all operating

³⁸ Henry Van Til: *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 245. Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, (1959, Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Foundations of Social Order* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1978), 219

within an overarching moral framework.

Human Flourishing, Christian Calling, and the Common Good

How do we understand and begin applying the parameters and preconditions for human flourishing? What should a well-ordered society and public justice look like? Let's begin with a story, a true story, a Christian story.

With the Edict of Milan (313) the practice of Christianity ceased to be illegal. This became known as the "Constantinian settlement."³⁹ The empire continued thereafter, albeit with a new aroma of tolerance, liberty, including religious liberty, furnished by the budding public application of Christian precepts societally.

70 years later (383), another emperor, Theodosius permitted immigration in the empire's Eastern region

³⁹ Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine, The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawning of Christendom*, (2010)

– this policy of welcoming aliens and strangers also derives from Christian precepts rooted in the Old Testament and now being applied beyond Israel to Roman society.⁴⁰

A few years later in 387 a cleric ironically from Milan performed a now common and routine “religious, spiritual, and heavenly” ritual of initiation: baptizing a disciple named Augustine. That’s what clerics do and supposedly only do: spiritual and “other worldly” “higher” good . . . again, supposedly, at least according to dualistic assumptions.

In 390 the empire experienced an uprising in the East, specifically involving the immigrants in the city of Thessaloniki. This riot resulted in the death of a Roman military officer. Full stop.

When the news reached Emperor Theodosius’s ear, he immediately sent troops to quell the riot and in the process sent a message by indiscriminately slaughtering about 7000 immigrants: Men, women,

⁴⁰ For example, *see* Matt. 5:17-20 and 2 Tim. 3:16, 17.

and children. The message conveyed? Don't mess with Rome.

However, that baptizing cleric who had discharged his “spiritual” “higher” duty by preaching and performing the sacraments, learned of these killings. What did he do? Was he satisfied by doing his “higher calling” of conducting spiritual rituals? Hardly. Instead, he confronted Emperor Theodosius to his face.⁴¹ This cleric, Bishop Ambrose, possessed the moral clarity, moral conviction, and moral courage to engage the temporal in the public square for public justice and the common good. He rejected the dualistic fable that his calling confined him to only doing supposedly otherworldly “eternal” tasks in “spiritual heavenly” spaces involving rituals, preaching, and other “church stuff.” Instead, without hesitating or flinching he informed the great emperor that as a Christian man, taking one innocent life violates the Lord's law; how much more does taking 7000 innocent lives compound his sin? Ambrose then barred the emperor from the eucharist until he

⁴¹ This is not unlike John the Baptist confronting King Herod for violating another creational norm: Marriage. Matt. 14:1-4. To assert that the Faith has nothing to do with the political – politicians and/or policies – is to ignore not only the implications of Christ's Lordship, but also wide swaths of Scripture's narrative. See also, Jeffery J. Ventrella, *Law & Public Policy – Not a Gospel Issue?* (2019)

repented. And Theodosius did so, by God's grace seven months later.

Here's the key point: Ambrose's action was not optional, outside, or beyond his vocation as Bishop, but rather cohered with and expressed it. What he believed (theology) and how he acted (ethics) correlated. The lesson here is plain and negates all dualistic formulae: Religious conviction should actuate and generate public religious exercise for the common good.⁴² This incident supplies a big hint about how ordered liberty should look. There must be public and civic space – aka liberty - for the Faith to be proclaimed and practiced, including its moral precepts beyond the church's doors.

A rightly formed Christian, like Ambrose, will reject any dualism that pits law against gospel, sacred against secular, nature against grace, clergy against laity, et al. Dualism at best privatizes the faith and over time will at worst subject society to increasing injustice. Neither is an option for ordered liberty.

⁴² I call this the "Ambrose Option."

This Ambrose Option illustrates a course of conduct that reflects Christian calling, protects human flourishing, and promotes the common good for all, while avoiding the invocation of and reliance upon an overreaching Leviathan State.⁴³ In fact, the State comprised the problem here. Classical Liberalism “incarnates” these precepts at many points.

This Christian conception of the public sphere, as this incident illustrates, provides the foundation for ordered liberty. That foundation in particular, establishes that (1) no ruler is above God’s law; (2) arbitrarily destroying humans made in God’s image and likeness – irrespective of tribe, clan, citizenship, et al, -- manifests injustice, and therefore (3) the State, and thus its positive law, have roles as well as limits/boundaries. This is a crucial recognition as Benjamin Wiker explains:

By recognizing a moral code that stood above all merely human laws and judged them, the Christian Roman civil law instilled in the minds

⁴³ A Leviathan “savior State” cannot comport with Christ’s Lordship. If Christ is the omnipotent King, the State cannot rightly act as such.

of the converted *the profoundly revolutionary truth that the sovereign's will is only law insofar as it conforms to God's revealed moral law – and no farther.*⁴⁴

Notably, Ambrose did not invent or improvise his actions. Rather, he applied the developing Christian practice of public justice based on God's universal moral standards. Glimpses of this began emerging soon after Christ's Ascension. For example, church father (and lawyer) Tertullian coined the term and advocated for "religious liberty."⁴⁵ Gregory of Nyssa preached boldly against a predominant social evil: chattel slavery.⁴⁶ Empower Justinian's Christian-based legal code protected conscience and religious liberty among both pagans and Jews.⁴⁷

Why and how did this Christian practice of public justice and advocacy develop? Was it a fluke or a

⁴⁴ Benjamin Wiker, *Worshipping the State: How Liberalism Became Our State Religion* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2013), 70. Compare this to the contemporary coziness to State power being advocated today on the political Right by Catholic Integralists, Protestant "retrievalists", as well as advocates for "National Conservatism" and so-called "Christian Nationalism."

⁴⁵ Robert Louis Wilkin, *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom*, (2019)

⁴⁶ <https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/gregory-of-nyssa-a-lone-voice-against-slavery>

⁴⁷ Robert Louis Wilkin, *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom*, (2019)

feature of Christian conviction? The answer stems from the Christian worldview.

Real Reality as Justice's Context and Ground

Suppose you are tasked to design an aircraft. Aircraft design is certainly abstract and theoretical, but it is not only abstract and theoretical. A good engineer who is designing an aircraft designed to function in the real world must take into account the context of his efforts, that is, the actual real world. The designer must consider many factors, including ambient air temperature at altitude, oxygen levels for the pilot and crew, G-forces, lift coefficients, propulsion, and of course, gravity.

In the same way, when considering human flourishing and the common good, there is a context that must be considered. Otherwise, to ignore that context would be equivalent to designing an aircraft without considering gravity. Put differently: any Christian advocating for public justice must be formed by the Faith and informed by the reality set forth by that Faith. This requires understanding

Creation and in particular, Cosmology, and Christian Anthropology.⁴⁸

As to Creation and Justice

Justice rightly considered stems not from abstract untethered musings like the Hellenists fondly favored, but rather from a personal God who Himself is just.⁴⁹ Accordingly, addressing justice in God's creation, must commence with reiterating that reality is His creation:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and earth”⁵⁰

Reality begins – NOT with stuff or ideas – but with a personal God creating *ex nihilo* – from nothing - by law – a command issued from the omnipotent commander who is Lord → The universe is God-rigged and includes in its very structure non-

⁴⁸ This chapter will not expound the Christian anthropological factor. I expounded it recently in Sandlin, ed., *Failed Church- Restoring a Vision of Ecclesial Victory*, (Center for Cultural Leadership: Coulterville, CA 2022), 38-41.

⁴⁹ Deut. 32:4; compare, WSC Q&A 4.

⁵⁰ Gen. 1:1

⁵¹ P. Andrew Sandlin, *Creational Marriage – Issues and Controversies* (2022)

negotiable givens. Ordered liberty must cohere with – and coheres best with - these non-negotiables.

This is because this creative act constitutes NOT a bare act nor purposeless act, but an act structuring reality (a Cosmology), a reality designed for instantiating God’s purposes, including human flourishing – Creation reflects an “operating system.”⁵¹ And it matters. Why? Why should a Christian take into account the nature of reality when pondering justice⁵²?

Consider Christ: He is the object of our faith. And as that object He is both the mediator of *redemption* as well as the mediator of *creation*. Christ is there “in the beginning” dealing with and directing all created reality.

Most believers recognize that the Faith is a redemptive faith. There exists but one mediator between God and man and that is Christ.⁵³ And,

⁵² Or in presenting the Gospel? The Gospel only makes sense in the reality God created – extracting the Gospel from Creation dilutes, degrades, and ultimately denudes the Gospel itself. See, P. Andrew Sandlin, *Creational Worldview* (2020).

⁵³ 1 Tim. 2:5

Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant.⁵⁴ How does this bear upon justice and ordered liberty? In today's American evangelicalism, the Bible's scope of redemption is often neglected, or restricted to "saving souls". Yet, this conception deviates from the robust redemption set forth in the scriptures.

Redemption by design is explicitly comprehensive and includes more than individual conversion narratives.⁵⁵ Indeed Christ is making "all things new,"⁵⁶ because He loves the cosmos.⁵⁷ He is to have preeminence in all things, including our very thinking.⁵⁸ The Christian's task is thus to apply Christ's comprehensive redemption to the temporal realm here and now in a comprehensive way – all of which requires ordered liberty and the protection of freedom publicly:

[T]he "redemptive revelation of God had to be as comprehensive as the

⁵⁴ Mk. 14:24

⁵⁵ Timothy J. Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (2008), 110: "This world is not simply a theater for individual conversion narratives, to be discarded at the end when we all go to heaven. No, the ultimate purpose of Jesus is not only individual salvation and pardon for sins but also the renewal of this world, the end of disease, poverty, injustice, violence, suffering, and death. The climax of history is not a higher form of disembodied consciousness but a feast."

⁵⁶ Rev. 21:5

⁵⁷ Jn. 3:16

⁵⁸ Col. 1:13 and 2 Cor. 10:5

sweep of sin. Redemption must, in the nature of the case, be for the whole world. This does not mean that it must save every individual sinner in the world. It does mean, however, that the created universe which has been created as a unit must also be saved as a unit.”⁵⁹

As Christians pray to be “delivered from evil,”⁶⁰ this means that applying redemption is not only comprehensive, but specifically targets the extermination of public evil to the extent possible:

The individual believer has a comprehensive task. His is the task of exterminating evil from the whole universe. He must begin this program in himself. As a king reinstated, it is his first battle to fight sin within his own heart. This will remain his first battle till his dying day.

⁵⁹ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, (P&R, 1974), 133

⁶⁰ Matt. 6:13

We must go one step further. It is our duty not only to seek to destroy evil in ourselves and in our fellow Christians, but it is our further duty to seek to destroy evil in our fellow man...

Still further we must note that our task with respect to the destruction of evil is not done if we have sought to fight sin itself everywhere we see it. We have the further obligation to destroy the consequences of sin in this world as far as we can . . .⁶¹

Exterminating evil can only be validly done according to God's own standards, rightly understood, contextualized, and prudently applied. This also means that neither dualistic pietism (non-engagement), nor coerced virtue (via Statism) can be apt options. Redemption rightly understood and applied requires the protection of freedom, and Classical Liberalism with its feature of liberty within structural pluralism supports this necessity.

⁶¹ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 86-87 (emphasis added)

This is likewise true because the Faith is also a Creational Faith. Real reality matters because Christ mediates creation for His own purpose, and that purpose includes holding legal and political institutions – denominated scripturally as “thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities” – accountable for executing His purposes⁶²:

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things were created through him and for him⁶³

As to Cosmology and Justice

The very design of reality impacts and provides both the foundation for - and how to conceive of - public justice. How does the creation’s design do this? Two implications will be briefly sketched: Anthropology and missional responsibility.

⁶² Consequently, the civil magistrate is called a “servant – literally minister - of God” (Rom. 13:4)

⁶³ Col. 1:16; *cf.*, Ps 2 calling kings and rulers to “kiss the son.” (vv., 10-12)

When considering the foundational question, “what is mankind?” it is important to recognize the corrosive effect modernity imposed on answering that question. For example, the precepts of Darwin, Critical Theory, and post-modernity reject the very notion of “nature” or metaphysics. Instead of having a fixed nature, mankind supposedly evolves, is socially constructed, and lacks any comprehensive narrative explaining his reality.⁶⁴

In contrast, the Bible teaches that mankind possesses both a fixed universal nature and a determinate purpose. This means that man’s actions, including actions seeking justice, must accord with that design. Put simply, what mankind is for must dictate what mankind does.⁶⁵ This crucial distinction implicates how one orders society and structures the legal and political order for justice and human flourishing. There exists a conflict of vision between these worldviews.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ See generally, Carl R Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Crossway, 2020)

⁶⁵ Jeffery J. Ventrella, *From Telos to Technos – Implications for a Christian Public Life and Ethic* (CCL Coulterville, CA 2017).

⁶⁶ See, Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (Basic Books 2007)

Consider the nearly ubiquitous clamoring for “human rights.” Many popular expressions in law and society seek to buttress “human rights:”

- Charters of Rights
- Bills of Rights⁶⁷
- Covenants and Conventions of Rights
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Despite these attempts, both the well-intended and those done for subversive purposes⁶⁸, we still actually see an alarming increase reflecting:

⁶⁷ As Justice Scalia often noted, every tin-plated dictator voiced support for “human rights” and the Soviet “bill of rights” greatly exceeded the rather meager list of protections contained in the U.S. Constitution – yet humans do not flourish under tyranny. For example, after quoting the florid language of the Soviet “guarantees,” the Justice commented: “Wonderful stuff. These were provisions of the 1977 Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. They were not worth the paper they were printed on, as are the human rights guarantees of a large number of still-extant countries governed by Presidents-for-life. They are what the Framers of our Constitution called “parchment guarantees,” because the real constitutions of those countries—the provisions that establish the institutions of government—do not prevent the centralization of power in one man or one party, thus enabling the guarantees to be ignored. Structure is everything.” Antonin Scalia, Foreword: The Importance of Structure in Constitutional Interpretation, 83 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 1417, 1418 (2008) [hereinafter *The Importance of Structure*]

⁶⁸ A “soft law” example furthering subversion of the Western Legal tradition would be the Yogyakarta Principles (2006), or consider the Administrative State’s deployment of Behavioral Insights Teams (BIT) utilized to “nudge” societies to predetermined outcomes for the “common good,” as defined by elites. Nudge theory was pioneered by behavioral economists Robert Thaler and Cass Sunstein, popularly published in *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (Yale University Press 2008). Sunstein later served the Obama Administration’s BIT in 2014. For a longer discussion, see, Stella Morabito, *The Weaponization of Loneliness – How Tyrants Stoke Our Fear of Isolation to Silence, Divide, and Conquer*, (Bombardier Books, 2022), 62, 63.

- Persecution of Christians⁶⁹
- Censorship of Speech, even silent prayer⁷⁰
- Crushing of Dissent⁷¹
- Destruction of the Weakest, including the Unborn⁷²
- Malformation of Holy Matrimony⁷³
- Sexual Expressionism and Anarchy⁷⁴
- Erosion and Displacement of Parental Authority⁷⁵

⁶⁹ www.adflegal.org

⁷⁰ <https://adf.uk/woman-charged-for-thoughtcrime/>

⁷¹ D.A. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance*, (Eerdmans, 2012)

⁷² See, e.g., Ryan P. Anderson and Alexandra DeSanctus, *Tearing Us Apart – How Abortion Harms Everything and Solves Nothing* (CITE 2022)

⁷³ Robert P. George, Ryan P. Anderson, Sherif Girgis, *What is Marriage?* (CITE) and Darel E Paul, *From Tolerance to Equality – How Elites Brought America to Same-Sex Marriage*, (Baylor 2018)

⁷⁴ Helen M. Alvare, *Religious Freedom After the Sexual Revolution* (CITE 2022)

⁷⁵ Melissa Moschella, *To Whom Do Children Belong? Parental Rights, Civic Education and Children's Autonomy* (Cambridge 2016), and Helen M. Alvare, *Putting Children's Interests First in U.S. Family Law and Policy* (Cambridge 2018)

- Gender Ideology that justifies Children being Mutilated and rendered Sterile⁷⁶
- Economic protectionism, crabbed and partial industrial policy, and contra market tampering⁷⁷

Despite all the contemporary clamoring for “rights,” actual flourishing is thereby constrained or truncated. And, the common good suffers. Solving these and other deficits first requires understanding what it means to be human. The polis must first get “human” right before it can get “human rights” right and order society accordingly. This is why understanding the created order and anthropology is crucial, not optional, and must be foundational for protecting and promoting human flourishing. Ordered liberty begins here. The biblical witness confirms this approach.

⁷⁶Ryan P. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment* (Encounter Books, 2018)

⁷⁷ While including economic considerations here may be jarring to some readers, such a reaction shows how far the evangelical ethos has departed from understanding the morality – and requirement of – a virtuous market for human flourishing and the common good. Note that the parable Jesus told in Matt. 20 presupposes the freedom of contract to illustrate the greater point He is making. *See also*, Samuel Gregg, *The Next American Economy – Nation, State, and Markets in an Uncertain World* (Encounter Books 2022), David L. Bahnsen, *There’s No Free Lunch – 250 Economic Truths*, (Post Hill Press 2021) and *The Crisis of Responsibility – Our Cultural Addiction to Blame and How You can Cure it* (Post Hill Press 2018)

The biblical witness exhibits temporal engagement explicitly invoking the Creator and the creation when making ethical points, all ordered to human flourishing and the common good. Consider these examples:

- Jesus describes marriage – the foundational social and ordering institution - as being pre-political⁷⁸ and draws its *definition* as well as its *ethics* predicated on the Creator who “*created them from the beginning*”⁷⁹
- Paul doctrinally explains reality commencing with the Creator-Creature distinction and explains that ethics stems from either true or false worship,⁸⁰ signaling that theology (religious belief) and ethics (religious exercise) correlate and ought not – nor can be - separated⁸¹
- Consistent with this doctrinal outline, Paul engages the philosophers in Athens by using the

⁷⁸ Meaning, *inter alia*, that marriage is a creational norm recognized and regulated by the State, but may not be redefined by it.

⁷⁹Matt. 19:4-9, especially verses 4 and 8.

⁸⁰ Rom. 1:18-32

⁸¹ This is decidedly not to say or suggest that *church* – and opposed to morality - and State should be unseparated or merged. The Bible categorically separates church and State.

same terms and analytic model: “*The God who made heaven and earth [all reality] . . .*”⁸²

As noted, the details of anthropology have been set forth elsewhere, however, a few anthropological features that bear upon the foundation for public justice should be briefly rehearsed. The apostles, when making ethical admonitions – to both Christians and pagans - relied on the reality that all humans possess a fixed human nature. This formed a predicate for their ethical reasoning.⁸³ Note well: This is a *Christian* predicate, rejected by modernity and its cousins, that remains fundamental for ordering society, sustaining liberty, and promoting the common good. How so?

This predicate, for example, justifies equality under the law for all and therefore requiring that the law must be applied equally to each person – without favoritism or partiality.⁸⁴ This means, for example,

⁸² Acts 17:24 – compare with Romans 1: 21 where Paul asserts that the pagans actually know this particular creator God – *gnostes ton theon*

⁸³ As to Christians: James 5:17- “*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours*”; as to pagans, Acts 14:15 – “*Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them.*” Note the latter bottomed the exhortation on the rationale that God is the Creator.

⁸⁴ See, e.g., Deut. 10:17, 2 Chron. 19:7, Job 34:19. Acts 10:34, Rom. 2:11, Gal. 2:6, Luke 20:21, Job 13:8, Job 13:10, Job 32:21, Mal. 2:9, 1 Tim. 5:21, Jas. 2:1, Ex. 23:3, Lev. 19:15, Deut. 1:17, Deut. 16:19, Ps. 82:2, Pr. 18:5, Pr. 24:23, Pr. 28:21, Eph. 6:9, Col. 3:25

that racism is always wrong and that therefore justice must be blind. This contrasts with the current trend on the Left (and increasingly on the Right) to malform and redefine justice via State power by putting statist thumbs on justice's scales: On the Left by Critical Theory⁸⁵, Critical Race Theory⁸⁶, soft law edicts⁸⁷; and on the Right via so-called Christian Nationalism and its embrace of kinism⁸⁸.

In contrast, these Christian predicates rooted in the metaphysics of creational norms provide the ballast for discharging mankind's missional responsibilities unto human flourishing: the cultural mandate and the Great Commission. Put differently, both mandates presuppose and require liberty and structures inherent to these creational norms, particularly those relating to anthropology and a free civil society within which to operate: (1) *imago Dei*, (2) an immutable sexed dimorph consisting [only] of

⁸⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *Repressive Tolerance*, <https://www.marcuse.org/herbert/publications/1960s/1965-repressive-tolerance-fulltext.html>

⁸⁶ Henry Rogers aka Ibram X. Kendi: *How to Be an Antiracist*, (2019): "The only remedy to racist discrimination is antiracist discrimination. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination." at 19 See also, <https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2020/06/ibram-x-kendi-definition-of-antiracist>

⁸⁷ For example, The Yogyakarta Principles (2006) posit coercive (and expansive) State action to remedy perceived social ills.

⁸⁸ Thomas Achord and Darrell Dow, *Who is My Neighbor? An Anthology in Natural Relations* (2021) – this is an especially vile promotion of a nationalistic "blood and soil" perspective, utterly unchristian in toto.

male and female embodied in a fixed universal nature, and (3) morally responsible actions.

This structure of reality, that is, cosmology, also relates to the ethics applicable to that reality. One event encapsulates this. A number of years ago a debate was sponsored by the Beverly Hills Bar Association. The debate's question addressed whether the constitution mandated same-sex "marriage".

During the Q & A session, one attendee posed this question to the participant arguing for legally changing marriage's definition:

"David, you've contended all evening that this is about securing rights; my question is this: what is the source of rights?"

David quickly asserted that rights do not stem from morality or religion and then he hemmed and hawed

before announcing that: “Rights come from the State.”

In rebuttal the other participate, who happened to be the author here, recognizing this debate occurred at the Museum of Tolerance, a venue dedicated to remembering the Holocaust, replied as followed:

“Be careful David, with that answer, because what you just told this audience is that *Nuremberg was wrong and Dachau was right* because everything the Nazi state did was legal.”⁸⁹

One could hear a pin drop.

This episode frames the real issues that must be addressed when contemplating public justice and society’s structure, issues that can only be satisfactorily answered by “real reality”: Who or

⁸⁹ See, *Till Death Do Us Part: Marriage, Same-Sex Couples and The Law*, Debate sponsored by the Beverly Hills Bar Association; David Codell and Jeffery J. Ventrella at the Museum of Tolerance (September 6, 2006) All quotations stem from memory as the recording of the debate has been removed from the website.

what is God, that is, what is the transcendent authority functioning or operating in the culture and thus impacting the legal and justice system? Why? Because “law is a backstage pass to theology.”⁹⁰ Law expresses Lordship.

Now, the question then becomes which authority provides an intelligible transcendent that correlates with real reality and maximizes human flourishing. The Communists had one answer: The Central Planners attentively [supposedly] working on behalf of the Proletariat – “the People” -- that consequently limited every dissenter’s freedom—or life. The radical Muslims furnish another answer: Sharia Law that crushes women and infidels. The Christian answer: The Christian Faith.⁹¹ Law and policy, and therefore public justice must relate and apply to reality, both as it is created and as it is being redeemed.

⁹⁰ Jonathan Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society: Aspects of Law and Legality in the Bible*, (OUP 2011), xxviii

⁹¹ Note: this is NOT to assert some form of theocracy or ecclesiolatry nor a version of Integralism. Rather, and more precisely, it’s the worldview of the Christian Faith that provides the predicates for and animates this structure: liberty, mediating institutions, a limited State, accountability, and human flourishing, et al. The Christian Faith is not only a viable contender in providing this basis; it is the only worldview that coherently makes sense of real reality. See, Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready – Directions for Defending the Faith* (CMF 1996)

And, this produces the optimal common good because it is the Christian faith with its valorization of every human, individual liberty together with its protective cosmological structure that restrains Leviathan that precipitates human flourishing, irrespective of individual religious conviction. The Christian worldview is that all humans should exist in maximal societal conditions for their flourishing, including religious liberty for all.

In view of this cosmological imperative, how ought we to rightly address human flourishing and public justice?

Suppose that you walk into a room and it's utterly flooded. Unless you are willing to (1) repair the pipe; and (2) turn off the tap, simply (3) wiping up the water really won't matter that much.⁹² A Christian view of ordered liberty must focus not simply on *symptoms* (wiping up the wet floor), but also on *systems* (repairing the pipes and closing the faucets) – something beyond “saving souls” for eternity. Given the breadth of this calling, the State cannot be

⁹² Illustration taken from Thaddeus Barnum, *Never Silent* (2008)

seen as reliably rectifying all social evils without becoming Leviathan, something proscribed by Christian cosmology.

As Don Carson explains, going beyond symptoms comprises our non-negotiable Christian duty between Cross and Consummation:

[Yet], it is possible so to focus on the rescue and regeneration of individuals that *we fail to see the temporally good things we can do to improve and transform some social structures*. *One does not abolish slavery by doing nothing more than helping individual slaves. Christian educational and academic structures may help countless thousands develop a countercultural way of looking at all reality under the Lordship of Christ.* Sometimes a disease *can* be knocked out; sometimes sex traffic *can* be considerably reduced; sometimes slavery *can* be abolished in a region; sometimes engagement in the arts

*can produce wonderful work that inspires a new generation . . . More importantly, doing good to the city, [cf., Jer. 29] doing good to all people . . . is part of our responsibility as God's redeemed people in this time of tension between the "already" and the "not yet."*⁹³

Think about this paradigm and what the early Christians faced – and how they responded. Christianity had ethical competitors as well as the obvious religious competitors. As the Faith developed it faced a society littered with vile ethical norms, norms that were sadly sustained and justified by a different worldview. The extant ethical order the early Christians encountered derived from a pagan worldview which justified:

First, notice that they did not ignore them, nor embrace some form of dualism, claiming that addressing such societal maladies was somehow less important or unspiritual or a “distraction” from

⁹³ D.A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, (2012) at 217, 218, footnotes omitted.

“pure religion.”⁹⁴ Rather, they understood that conviction requires conduct; religious belief requires religious exercise; and true theology correlates with true ethics.

Second, consider the Didache (perhaps crafted around 70 AD), which is likely the earliest non-inspired expression of what it means to live as a Christian in the world Christ came to redeem. That document sets forth both Religious rituals as well as Religious exercise. The Didache addresses two main topics describing what it called the *Way of Life* for the Christian and contrasted it to the *Way of Death*:

1. **Religious Rituals** → *Liturgy* and *Ceremonies* like the *Sacraments* (Going to Church stuff) – AND

2. **Religious Exercise** → *Publicly targeting* societal ills and unjust Laws → this public engagement

⁹⁴ Note that James roots “pure religion” (1:27) in temporal action that addresses extant societal injustice – and further note that remedying injustice consists of private charity not some imposed Statist redistributionist policy.

expressed the *part* and *parcel* of the *Christian's focus* from the *earliest days* of the *faith* – this public ethical action is NOT rightly deemed an *extra, optional, or add on, and certainly not limited to an only heavenly-minded privatized piety*

3. *This early Christian consensus expressed how to live among the pagans by loving their pagan neighbors:*

a. "But the second commandment of the teaching is this:

b. Thou shalt do no *murder*, thou shalt not commit *adultery*"; thou shalt not *commit sodomy*; thou shalt not *commit fornication*; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not use magic; thou shalt not use philtres; thou shalt not *procure abortion*, nor commit

infanticide; "thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods"⁹⁵

Christians faced terrible societal problems justified by the extant non-Christian worldview, but problems that got solved, largely due to faithful Christians living the faith faithfully –

HOW??!!

- ANSWER: *Kobayashi Maru*⁹⁶ → Christians changed the operative analytic conditions by embracing Christian presuppositions, not “nature” or “natural relations,” nor supposedly autonomous reason

How so?

⁹⁵ *Didache*, Article II, Loving Neighbor:

⁹⁶ Derived from the famous scene from the second Star Trek film, *The Wrath of Khan* (1982)– a no-win situation cannot be overcome unless the conditions – in this case the pedagogical computer program – are changed, which is exactly what the Christians did by rejecting the pagan cosmology and substituting the Christian – and truthful – cosmology.

By embracing a calling and faith-informed action (Religious Exercise) ordered to human flourishing for the Common Good.

In particular, Christians did this by learning from, and then relying upon, a cosmology and a new worldview that embraced “Real Reality,” a reality that fostered, anchored, and justified human flourishing for all society in contrast with the extant pagan worldview that enslaved, marginalized – and worse, killed - other innocent persons.

In doing so Christians consistently over time:

- Exposed Evil
- Opposed Evil
- Foreclosed Evil

WHY??!! On What Basis???

Christians engaged publicly using a new premise⁹⁷, a premise derived from Christian cosmology.

As Professor Steve Smith articulated:

It was the belief in a *transcendent standard* that in *time* would permit *Christians to pronounce a practice* – infanticide, gladiatorial combat, eventually slavery – to be *unjust and immoral* even if it had been widely practiced and accepted by all known human cultures.⁹⁸

That transcendent standard could be used to criticize – and, in time, to reform – practices that were taken for granted in the pagan world: infanticide, slavery, inequality, the

⁹⁷ Using pagan premises for ordered liberty would be like watching a lackluster film and hoping that it becomes stellar by simply rewatching it. The early Christians knew better.

⁹⁸ Steven D. Smith, *Pagans & Christians in the City: Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2018), 147

*neglect of the poor and the diseased.*⁹⁹

Again: consider Nuremburg or Dachau? The Nazis leaned on “nature” and “natural relations” and it eventually justified the Holocaust. In contrast, the early Christians’ compass ignored fallen natural desires and instead used the creational norms of cosmology to expose, oppose, and eventually foreclose true social evils.

As a corollary, the Christian worldview understands the impossibility of neutrality, including with respect to positive law and public justice.¹⁰⁰ Note this vexing question posed by the Psalmist, a question which signals another implication of applying this Christian cosmology:

⁹⁹ Steven D. Smith, *Pagans & Christians in the City: Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2018), 128

¹⁰⁰ This is likewise true with respect to political theories. Some critique Classical Liberalism for purportedly being neutral, but that is wholly inaccurate. Classical Liberalism holds that the State must not be neutral but rather, must demand that everyone engage with the same rule book, that is, the same moral sociopolitical rules, which hardly reflects a commitment to neutrality. Classical Liberalism decidedly takes both procedural and substantive moral positions.

*Can wicked rulers be allied with you,
those who frame injustice by
statute?¹⁰¹*

This question assumes at least these points:

- Positive Law embraces a *moral dimension*
- Positive Law is a *conduit* for EITHER *just or unjust statutes* → and *Christians should be discerning*¹⁰² *these differences*
- *Secular neutrality* toward things in general and law in particular *is a myth . . .*

In fact, purported neutrality is both a myth and a conceit as Tom Holland observes:

¹⁰¹ Ps. 94:20

¹⁰² Maturity in part consists in developing the acumen to discern good from evil – that exercise is far from automatic. *See, e.g.,* Heb. 5:14

The great claim of what, in 1846, an English newspaper editor first termed ‘secularism’ was to neutrality. Yet this was a conceit. *Secularism was not a neutral concept*. The very word came trailing incense clouds of meaning that were irrevocably and venerably Christian¹⁰³.

As C.S. Lewis puts it:

“[T]here is no neutral ground in the universe; every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan.”¹⁰⁴

If there is no neutrality, how then can the Christian pursue public justice and human flourishing? By what standard? First, realize that recognizing non-neutrality will not in itself provide answers. This is because sin exists and fallen man tends to suppress

¹⁰³ Tom Holland, *Dominion; How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*, (2019), 427

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Charles J. Chaput, *Render Unto Caesar – Serving the Nation By Living Our Catholic Beliefs in Political Life* (2009) _____

or distort truth, as sin even produces noetic effects.¹⁰⁵ As N.T. Wright cautioned:

*“It is one thing to insist on walking south when the compass is pointing north. But to “fix” the compass so that it tells you that the wrong way is the right way is far, far worse. You can correct a mistake. But once you tell yourself it wasn’t a mistake there’s no way back.”*¹⁰⁶

We must have a rightly calibrated compass, and Creeds – reflecting and incorporating a well-informed Anthropology and worldview - help us to do so as will be discussed shortly.

Second, Christians must recognize that it is demonstrably true that the Christian Worldview – not Progressivism nor the Enlightenment – provides and

¹⁰⁵ Rm. 1:21 and 25; Col. 1:21 (“hostile in mind”). The failure to account for the noetic effects of sin signals a large red flag to any phenomenological, empirical, or other methodology that rests on “natural affinity” or Kinist considerations (a mis-calibrated compass) and thus, they cannot be reliable indicators for forming political philosophy let alone concrete political policies. And, naturally, products or conclusions from these defective or incomplete methodologies cannot be deemed universal nor universally applicable to all as they are by definition bound geographically, temporally, and culturally. What is “felt” to be a “natural” affinity for an American or European dissenter may be deemed rubbish by a Hindustani or a Shia Muslim or a Tibetan Buddhist. Classical Liberalism avoids this self-defeating predicament precisely because it instantiates critical Christian premisses.

¹⁰⁶ N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (2010), 153

sustains, for example, the justification and tools for protecting and promoting:

- Religious liberty for all¹⁰⁷
- Associational freedom, including familial liberty for all¹⁰⁸
- Free Speech for all¹⁰⁹

Third, note that the foundational Christian Creeds indicate something so obvious Christians may overlook or take for granted: the past (history) matters to the present and the future.¹¹⁰ This may seem trivial but in fact reflects a key point of contention in today's culture. Why?

The infiltration and dominance of Critical Theory takes a different – and opposite – view. With Critical

¹⁰⁷ John S. Redd, "The Earth is the Lord's: A Biblical Theology of Religious Liberty," contained in Art Lindsley & Anne R. Bradley, *Set Free – Restoring Religious Freedom for All*, (Abilene Christian University Press 2019), 26-40

¹⁰⁸ Luke C. Sheehan, *Why Associations Matter: The Case for First Amendment Pluralism* (University of Kansas Press: 2019)

¹⁰⁹ Jacob Mchangama, *Free Speech: A History from Socrates to Social Media* (2022)

¹¹⁰ The early Christians embraced history when engaging the temporal culture: Creation and its creational norms as well as the historical reality of redemption: Incarnation, the Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension.

Theory, derived from its Marxist roots, the past ceases to be foundational, but rather is to be repudiated as an enemy. Armed with a “hermeneutic of suspicion”¹¹¹ - compare Gen. 3:1 – the past becomes problematic and is deemed to be “the oppressor” that must be suppressed, silenced, or eradicated: history and culture¹¹², parents¹¹³, sex,¹¹⁴ et al

Positively, consider the “compass” erected by the Chalcedon Formula, an ecumenical creed appearing in 451 AD. That council addressed how Christ is both human and divine, yet in doing so provided key metaphysical and ethical predicates, predicates which perpetually relate to and inform about public justice and human flourishing.

Chalcedon affirms:

¹¹¹ Philosopher Paul Ricoeur, (1913-2005) coined the term “hermeneutics of suspicion”

¹¹² For example, the war against the West and its Great Books tradition by “canceling” Plato, Aristotle, Shakespeare, et al

¹¹³ For example, Radicals often reject even the names given to them by their parents: Henry Rogers became Ibrahm X. Kendi, Malcolm Little became Malcolm X, Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili became Joseph Stalin, Saloth Sar became Pol Pot, Vernon Howell became David Koresh, et al

¹¹⁴ Gender ideology as expressed in the Transgender Moment, as Ryan Anderson denoted it (*When Harry Became Sally – Responding to the Transgender Moment* (2019)), is bottomed on the rejection of one’s personal biological history and being.

- Jesus is truly man → affirming human nature, *negating* Critical Theory's and Post-modernity's anti-essentialism and constructivist notions that reject "nature"
- Jesus possesses a reasonable [rational] soul and body → affirming that mankind in this nature is an integrated and embodied person, *negating* Gnostic and dualistic formulations foundational to Gender ideology
- Jesus' mankind is "like unto us" → affirming that human nature is universal, that there exists a robust human anthropology present in every human that does not vary as to time, geography, ethnicity, coloration, clan, and tribe, *negating* the notion of identity politics and Kinist errors
- Jesus is "one person" → affirming and valorizing individual persons who must be treated equally under the law, thereby *negating* Critical Theory's notion that identity only can be constructed from group affiliation and intersectionality and that to

be “just” requires putting a thumb on the scale to produce “equity” defined to be “equal outcomes”

On a larger scale, Chalcedon takes these metaphysical predicates and informs the public square’s ethics and policies because this Creed – and the Christian Faith:

- *Defeated Statism* in principle → with Progressivism, et al, the State and its coercive tools is the highest and ultimate societal authority¹¹⁵ - Chalcedon affirms Christ and His Lordship as ultimate and supreme; the State cannot be.
- *Legitimated the State*, but with defined roles and limits to its operating space and authority. This became the impetus for crafting political economies that separated powers, opposed power consolidation, protected “negative rights” all ordered toward permitting robust innovation

¹¹⁵ Sadly, some pockets of the Right via Integralism, National Conservatism, and so-called Christian Nationalism are now embracing this trend by in essence looking to the State as Savior, instead of Servant, as Rm. 13 denotes it. Note too that Jesus – remarkably when in court [!]- articulates this operative cosmological principle to the magistrate, Pontius Pilate: “*You would have no authority over me unless it had been given to you from above.*” (Jn 19:11) The State is legitimate, but neither ultimate, nor infallible.

and liberty for pre-political institutions. These Christian notions – not the Enlightenment -- informed Classical Liberalism.¹¹⁶ And, Classical Liberalism identifies these “natural rights”¹¹⁷ as fundamental for human flourishing:

- Life
- Liberty
- Property
- Religious Liberty
- “Happiness”¹¹⁸
- Reputation
- Marriage

Law is designed to apply to real people facing real situations – to optimally address these situations, we **MUST** first get “human” right. This requires a Christian anthropology situated within creational norms.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ See, note 5.

¹¹⁷ Thomas G. West, *The Political Theory of the American Founding – Natural Rights, Public Policy, and the Moral Conditions of Freedom* (Cambridge: 2017), 28-35

¹¹⁸ For an historical exposition of this frequently misunderstood concept, see, Carli N. Conklin, *The Pursuit of Happiness in the Founding Era – An Intellectual History*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press 2019).

¹¹⁹ This predicate illustrates the limits to natural law reasoning, whether Thomistic or otherwise, since one cannot deduce *Imago Dei* by natural law reasoning (without smuggling the Christian worldview into the calculus).

By getting “human” right, we can – and will - advance and protect “human rights” – because getting “human” right requires embracing and applying Christian creational norms, including cosmology and anthropology.

To ignore, diminish, or dismiss, these creational norms would undermine or jettison a Christian view of world order¹²⁰, including law and the political enterprise, thereby embracing wrong ideas. Ideas have consequences, and bad ideas have victims.¹²¹

CONCLUSION

Ordered society and public justice must fundamentally derive from and defer to Creation, Cosmology, and Christian Anthropology – thereby affirming and promoting: Christian Calling, Human Flourishing, and the Common Good. This is best expressed today in Classical Liberalism. This advances both liberty and virtue while

¹²⁰ See, John Murray, “The Christian World Order” contained in *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 1 (Banner of Truth 1976), 356

¹²¹ John Stonestreet & Brett Kunkle, *A Practice Guide to Culture – Helping the Next Generation Navigate Today’s World*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2017)

simultaneously constraining Leviathan no matter how well intended Statist impulses or activists' impatience may be. Freedom and virtue must undergird any valid Christian political and legal philosophy. Any other formulation would at best be incomplete and at worst, tyrannical.