



Christian Citizenship

“You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world” (Mt. 5:13-16). One way to be salty and let our light shine is by being good citizens on earth. Our vocation as citizens of both the secular kingdom and God’s kingdom gives us the responsibility to proclaim God’s Word and care for our neighbors. We are called to engage the “public square” with our message of Christ’s mercy for all. Please pray for God’s will to be done... in Jesus’ name.

Speaking Truth to Power

“Edward Coles isn’t a well-known figure in American history,” writes Alexandra Hudson, “but he should be.” Hudson explains why in her book, *The Soul of Civility: Timeless Principles to Heal Society and Ourselves*.

Edward Coles was a contemporary of Thomas Jefferson. Both “believed in basic human equality. Unlike Jefferson, however, [Coles] made personal sacrifices to live out the ideal of the equal moral worth of persons: Coles freed his slaves as soon as he inherited them. Coles shows how the disposition of civility has been a tool of pursuing justice and equality for all in our past, and how civility can help us do so now. He shows us how disobeying prevailing norms—norms that require us to be silent in the face of injustice—is a duty of civility and integral to promoting justice in our world.”

Coles was “born to a wealthy founding Virginian family . . . a generation behind the founding fathers. He was a young neighbor to Thomas Jefferson and a political aide to James Madison when he was president. In 1807, at the age of twenty-one, Coles became convinced that slavery was not only morally wrong but detrimental to the republic. He decided to do something about it. After his father died, Coles inherited his family’s estate, which included nineteen slaves. Coles put his farm up for sale, freed his slaves, and immediately left Virginia for a non-slaveholding territory, Illinois. There, he ran for governor on an abolitionist platform and won, serving from 1822 to 1826. In 1814, while an aide to President James Madison, Coles wrote Thomas Jefferson, his famous neighbor, a rather pointed letter. How, Coles asked, could Jefferson claim to believe that all persons were fundamentally equal while simultaneously owning persons as property?” Young Coles had reason to be “terrified.” He was, after all, calling out the former U.S.

president and “saying that for all of Jefferson’s achievements, his moral failings in owning slaves was inexcusable. . . . Cole knew that calling out someone in Jefferson’s position of power could be costly. It could mean the loss of his job and possibly any prospect of ever working in American politics again. But Coles boldly questioned Jefferson anyway. He asked him about the tension between his ideals and his practices. He pleaded with Jefferson to not only emancipate his slaves, but to join him in the abolitionist cause and help see the end of slavery throughout the nation.”

Hudson explains that Jefferson responded to Coles, “maybe because he was fond of, or amused by, the young, idealistic, upstart politico. Maybe he felt internally conflicted. He was the Architect of American Liberty publicly, and a slave owner privately. Perhaps he wrote back because he felt the need to justify his actions not to Coles, but to *himself*. . . . Jefferson began his reply by acknowledging Coles’s concern. He agreed that justice was on the side of abolitionists, and lamented that slavery still existed. . . . He mentioned his past efforts at emancipation. . . . [He noted that] abolition was clearly in the near future. He expressed support for gradual emancipation, freeing those slaves born after a certain day. But he concluded that he was too old for the task. . . . Abolishing slavery was a challenge best left to younger men, Jefferson said to Coles before signing off and offering ‘all [his] prayers’ for the abolitionist cause. Prayers, Jefferson claimed, were the only resources a man of his advanced years had left.”

Coles, writes Hudson, was “undeterred. . . . [He] wrote one more letter imploring Jefferson to change his mind.” In so many words, Coles said: Your prayers are not enough. We need your action, too. Coles “appealed to Jefferson’s conscience. He tried to re-frame Jefferson’s old age as an advantage—what could he have to lose at this point? He even prodded Jefferson’s pride: Benjamin Franklin—in *his* old age!—had seen it fit to fight for the cause of ending American slavery. Couldn’t Jefferson, too?” Jefferson never answered Coles. He “did not even attempt to justify retaining his slaves. He couldn’t.”

Hudson asks her readers, “Was Coles out of line to confront Jefferson with his hypocrisy? Not at all. His

letters showed how much he respected Jefferson, because he was telling the elderly statesman an important truth—albeit an uncomfortable one. Coles was “speaking truth to power [which is] the hallmark of citizenship, justice, and civility.” (Excerpted from *The Soul of Civility*, 207-213, 230.)

What can we do? Discern the difference between civility and politeness. Ask: Are we too often afraid to speak truth because it might cause offense or reprisal? If that is the case, has politeness become a tool of silence and suppression? Discuss the *civil* part of civil disobedience; that is, “the duties of a citizen to defy prevailing norms for a higher principle, such as justice and equality for all.” Read Matthew 12:34. Was Jesus being polite, or civil? Which is the better way to respect and love people: 1) Coddling them in their misguided beliefs, selfishness, and sin, or 2) Telling them the truth? “Recollect that civility is both an *instrumental* good—a useful tool to achieve important goals—and an *inherent* good, because respecting the dignity of others is good for its own sake.”

Please pray for courageous civility... in Jesus' name.

Pagan America

What follows is taken from an essay written by John Daniel Davidson. The essay is adapted from his new book, *Pagan America: The Decline of Christianity and the Dark Age to Come*.

America is becoming pagan. [It is embracing] a fundamentally pagan worldview that rejects both the transcendent moral truth and objective reality, and insists instead that truth is relative and reality is what we will it to be.

Recall that ancient pagans ascribed sacred or divine status to the here and now, to things or activities, even to human beings if they were powerful enough (like a pharaoh or a Roman emperor). They rejected the notion of an omnipotent, transcendent God—and all that the existence of God would imply. . . .

[P]aganism . . . as the Romans well understood, is fundamentally incompatible with the Christian faith.

What does that mean for America? It means the end of America as we know it, and the emergence of something new and terrifying in its place. . . . America was founded not just on certain ideals but on a certain kind of people, a predominantly Christian people, and it depends for its survival on their moral virtue, without which the entire experiment in self-

government will unravel. As Christianity fades in America, so too will our system of government, our civil society, and all our rights and freedoms. . . . Instead of free citizens in a republic, we will be slaves in a pagan empire. . . . Western civilization and its accoutrements depend on Christianity, not just in the abstract but in practice. Liberalism relies on a source of vitality that does not originate from it and that it cannot replenish. That source is the Christian faith, in the absence of which we will revert to an older form of civilization, one in which power alone matters and the weak and the vulnerable count for nothing. . . . [N]early all pagan civilizations, especially the most “advanced” ones, were slave empires. The more advanced they were, the more brutal and violent they became.

The lionization of abortion, the rise of transgenderism, the normalization of euthanasia, the destruction of the family, the sexualization of children and mainstreaming of pedophilia, and the emergence of a materialist supernaturalism as a substitute for traditional religion are all happening right now as a result of Christianity's decline. (“America's Stunning Embrace of Paganism Signals The End Of This Country As We Know It,” John Daniel Davidson, *The Federalist*, 4/4/2024.)

What can we do? Remember history. “The mystery cults of pagan Rome and Babylon were not just theatrical or fanciful expressions of polytheistic urges in the populace, they were mechanisms of social control.” Recognize paganism in the sociopolitical control of social media, artificial intelligence (AI), and powerful corporations working in concert with the state, none of which are tolerant of Christianity. Know that if Christianity is overthrown, the void will be filled by “some uncouth, pernicious, and degrading superstition” (Edmund Burke). Do not be naïve; an oppressive government will rule by way of raw power, not principle. Dress for spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-18). There is demonic power behind pagan gods, pagan order, and pagan practices. See to it that no one takes you captive (Colossians 2:8). Train yourself and your children for godliness (1 Timothy 4:7-10). Prepare for the storm to break and do not despair. Christians have always lived in a sinful and corrupt world that rebels against God. “Christ Himself came into a pagan world that regarded His message with contempt and incomprehension.” Look to Jesus who conquered sin and death. Until the Day of His return, repair foundations (Nehemiah 4), meet together and encourage one another (Hebrews 10:25).

Please pray God's will be done... in Jesus' name.

