



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.

God’s Children Are Not for Sale

On July 3, 2023, the *Sound of Freedom* will be shown in theaters across the U.S. The film, which puts child trafficking in the spotlight, is the true story of Tim Ballard who spent more than a decade as a special agent with the Department of Homeland Security. He’s worked in the U.S. and multiple foreign countries to infiltrate child trafficking organizations and successfully rescue young boys and girls. In 2013, when he was prevented from rescuing more children, Ballard left the security of his job so that he could devote his life to rescuing children from global sex traffickers. Ballard and a team of former government operatives started the private foundation, Operation Underground Railroad (OUR). Ballard has created a team that can work in any jurisdiction and in conjunction with law enforcement to rescue children directly. That team exists today and works all over the world. Ballard and his wife, who is supportive of his rescue missions, are the parents of nine children.

Jim Caviezel, known for his portrayal of Jesus in *The Passion of the Christ*, accepted the invitation to portray Ballard in the *Sound of Freedom*. Why? Because, Caviezel says, “God’s children are not for sale.” He wants Americans to be told about what is happening to children who are viewed as commodities and treated in unbelievably inhuman ways. Caviezel worked with multiple federal authorities while filming in Columbia. He is not shy about implicating “government agencies” in the trafficking of children. Caviezel quotes whistleblower Tara Lee Rodas who testified before Congress, saying, “85,000 children are missing. . . . Whether intentional or not, it can be argued that the U.S. government has become the middleman in a large-scale, multi-billion-dollar, child trafficking operation run by bad actors seeking to profit off the lives of children.” When Rodas went to help with

President Biden’s immigration crisis at the southern border, she found that “children are being trafficked through a sophisticated network that begins with being recruited in home country, smuggled to the U.S.,” and “delivered to sponsor[s] who might be “criminals,” “traffickers,” or “members of transnational criminal organizations.” In the film Caviezel quotes his character, Ballard, saying, “You can sell a bag of cocaine one time, but a child five to ten times a day.”

The work of OUR includes International Operations, Domestic Law Enforcement Relations, Aftercare, and Children Need Families (CNF) which is a project of OUR that connects children to families through adoption grants, collaborations and outreach. (Sources: Interview of Jim Caviezel by Steve Bannon, <https://www.wnd.com/2023/06/jim-caviezel-implicates-u-s-agencies-child-sex-trafficking/>; Operation Underground Railroad, www.ourrescue.org, and “How the Sound of Freedom Movie Can Be a Disruptive Force to End Child Sex Slavery,” Daily Signal, 6-22-2023.)

We can we do? Most people will not want to see the film *Sound of Freedom*, but every one of us should. You can watch the trailer here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyyyKcfJRGQ>

Locate a theater near you and purchase tickets online or at the door. Take a group of high school or college students, parents, and members of your congregation. Think on the words of Jesus in Mark 10:14: “Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them... .” Please consider how you might practice your vocation as a Christian citizen to help in this effort.

Please pray for the children who have been taken and for the heroes who risk their lives to rescue them... in Jesus’ name.

Self-government Requires Virtue

A growing number of young people in the United States are skeptical of organized religion. A great many cultural elites have an undisguised contempt toward Christianity. Yet, on the rise, are “religious traditions native to Asia and the Middle East,” or even “do-it-yourself religions.” In 1931, writes Kenneth Grasso, “the Supreme Court could describe Americans

as a 'Christian people.' Would anyone make that same claim today?"

Grasso, professor of political science at Texas State University, maintains that "self-government requires virtue, and virtue needs moral consensus." He sees "connections between our new post-Christian religious landscape and our contemporary malaises." Ben Franklin insisted that "only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters." When our nation was founded, explains Grasso, "religious institutions—primarily, Christian churches and associations—played a key role both in defining what virtue consists of and inculcating it. The contemporary collapse of these institutions, combined with their ongoing marginalization, has created a yawning vacuum at the heart of our culture." Grasso quotes Robert Bellah, who wrote that "any coherent and viable society rests on a common set of moral understandings about good and bad, right and wrong, in the realm of individual and social action."

"Civic moral systems," continues Grasso, "don't just hang in the air, but rather must be rooted in something deeper than themselves, in the society's understanding of man and the universe. This does not mean that there must be agreement on the totality of metaphysical and theological truths governing human life. It does mean, however, that there is enough commonality at this level to make possible an agreement on the moral principles governing public life. Political unity, in short, presupposes an antecedent cultural and moral unity." That moral unity was once provided by Christianity. When visiting America in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville of France noted that Christianity was "an established and irresistible fact" that greatly influenced American culture and character. The Frenchman acknowledged "many sects" in American, but they all belonged to "the great unity of Christendom." Thus, notes Grasso, "Christianity provided a common body of moral principles and a shared understanding of man, the human good, and the proper structure of social relationships from which public life could take its bearings."

With the collapse of "this shared religious heritage," we witness a "clash between fundamentally different understandings of the meaning and purpose of human existence." Grasso emphasizes the fact that "politics is decisively shaped by culture, and culture is decisively shaped by religion." (Excerpted from "The Collapse of American Christianity and the disuniting of America" by Kenneth Grasso, published in *Mercator*, June 26, 2023.)

What can we do? Recall what Jesus says in Matthew 6:13-16. "You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world." Remember that being a good citizen on earth is a vocation that is carried out by being salty and letting our light shine. We bear the responsibility of proclaiming God's Word and caring for our neighbors. We are called not only to engage others with God's Word in our homes and congregations, but also in the public square of our neighborhood, workplace, school, or campus where many have never heard the message of Christ's mercy for all. Know that Christianity powerfully impacted the sanctity of human life, marriage, children, ethics, and justice in the past; trust that it will continue to until Jesus returns.

Please pray to be salt and light... in Jesus' name.

Manhood: Needed by America

"All is not well with men in America," writes Josh Hawley in his newest book, *Manhood: The Masculine Virtues America Needs*. "And that spells trouble for the American republic." Fatherlessness abounds, says Senator Hawley (R-MO). "No menace to this nation is greater than the collapse of American manhood, the collapse of masculine strength." Many on the American left welcome that collapse. They "blame masculinity for America's woes." They claim that male strength is "toxic." Americans are labeled "transphobic" if they disagree that men can get pregnant. "To leftists," writes Hawley, "manhood is fake. Womanhood, too. Both are merely social confections that society made up and can remake at will. And today's left is determined to remake American men. . . . Members of today's left have pushed liberty into nihilism, defining it as the right to live free from biological sex, family, tradition, and God—free from reality. They paint every inherited structure, every moral duty and social obligation, as a shackle that must be smashed, by government if necessary . . ." (Excerpt from Chapter One of *Manhood* by Sen. Josh Hawley.)

What can we do? Do not be ashamed to mentor biblical manhood to sons and grandsons. Discover in Hawley's book the essential virtues every man should cultivate. Teach the noble purpose of men who are called by God to be husbands, fathers, warriors, priests, and kings. Get to know Hawley who is recognized in the U.S. Senate for defending unsung heroes in America who go to work and raise a family.

Please pray for the men in our families... in Jesus' name.

