

Strange New World
Life, Liberty, and the
Pursuit of Happiness.

MODERN LIFE

THE PROBLEM WITH RELIGION

NOT TOLERANCE BUT EQUALITY

THE PROBLEM WITH FREE SPEECH

any... self, is inevitably bad, of...
Victimhood has an intrinsic virtue to it, and...
lay claim to the vocabulary of the victim has unlocked a major,
even irresistible, source of cultural power. Freedom of speech and
academic freedom are simply licenses to oppress and marginalize
the weak. True freedom is found in closing down such traditional
virtues and replacing them with a victim-centered authoritarianism.

Conclusion

The impact of expressive individualism on how we think about life and liberty has been dramatic. Old notions such as the sanctity of life and the importance of freedom of religion and speech have been transformed, even inverted, by this new, modern self. And all this is because the notion of happiness with which we now intuitively operate is one where a sense of personal, psychological well-being is central. We might say that happiness is for each of us first and foremost an individual thing, resting upon us being independent; all other relationships must serve that end or be seen as oppressive.

Ironically, this has led to a most strange and counterintuitive situation. While our notion of identity has become one where we are self-creators whose self-creations are not to be judged or criticized by others, it is clear that some identities must inevitably
stand over against or in contradiction to each other. The existence

of the traditional Christian is a threat to the person who identifies as transgender; the person who teaches Western civilization is a threat to the person whose identity is framed by the repudiation of the colonialist past. And that means that somebody has to make the decision as to which of these incommensurable and contradictory identities is to be given legitimacy in society and which are to be suppressed, outlawed, and banished.

And so we have an ironic situation at present: radical individual freedom has led to rather authoritarian forms of social control, from elementary schools that teach gender ideology to Ivy League schools that have abandoned traditional curricula, from workplaces that require sensitivity training on transgender issues to big tech giants boycotting states because of religious freedom legislation passed by democratically elected assemblies, from local schoolboards pressing ideological uniformity via the rhetoric of diversity to national governments broadening civil rights legislation to protect chaotic views of gender.

All of this obviously has serious implications for the church, for orthodox Christians, and for religiously and culturally conservative and traditional people in general. The world where freedom of religion, let alone freedom of speech, is now regarded by some (many?) as a problem for a free society rather than a basic foundation of the same is indeed a strange new world. But, strange and new as it is, it is also our world, the one to which we are called to respond. What such a response might look like, or in what it might consist, is the subject of the next and final chapter.

NEXT WEEK

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