

Divisive Concepts



by Albert Norton, Jr.

Today (Aug. 11, 2023) is day two of a termination hearing concerning a fifth-grade teacher in Cobb County, Georgia, who read a book to her class relating to gender fluidity, arguably in violation of Georgia's "divisive concepts" law. State legislation like this to limit gender ideological indoctrination has been much in the news lately. The argument against is that it is an undue restriction on teachers' pedagogical efforts.

Should teachers be allowed to teach anything they want? Because if so, then why can't they teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ? If not, then gender ideologues should not be allowed to teach gender fluidity.

Gender ideology is not just an isolated idea that collides with conservative religious beliefs. It is part of a collection of beliefs that together amount to a state religion. Writing on the sex identification component of

postmodern ideology, Mary Harrington [remarks](#):

[I]f something looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's probably a duck. And when a movement with an instantly recognizable symbol [e.g., the "pride" flag], a distinctive metaphysics (identity precedes biology, all desire must be celebrated) and a calendar of feast days celebrated by governments, corporations, universities and public bodies acquires the ability to punish those who deface its symbols, the only possible thing you can call it is an emerging faith—one with a tightening grip on institutional power across the West.

The American principle of separation of church and state was originally intended to prevent government adoption of one religious narrative at the expense of others. Why wouldn't the same principle apply to worldviews that are just as thoroughly doctrinal, but not traditionally called religious? Especially when the potential for tyranny is as great or greater?

Western religions at the time of the country's founding advanced a metanarrative, a set of principles that combine as a *weltanschauung*, a worldview concerning metaphysics, human nature, and ethics. A worldview is one by which a person makes sense of the world and navigates his way in it. Christian religion involves belief about God both transcendent and immanent in this world; a moral imprint on the conscience of people from that God; a sin-inclination in the heart despite that conscience; and redemption from sin in Christ. There are varieties of theological belief within this basic framework.

The postmodern worldview, of which gender ideology is a part, rejects these religious premises but is similarly a worldview by which one apprehends reality, concerning metaphysics, human nature, and ethics. It involves a monist metaphysics of matter and energy, and ideals emergent from the mental

processes of people. It finds truth and morality in social process, and identity from within. It perceives human nature as being mutable and essentially good except as corrupted by influences of individualistic selfishness among others in society. Its perspective is primarily collectivist, concerned with social consciousness, socially-formed values, and social justice.

The postmodern worldview addresses the same matters of metaphysics, human nature, and ethics, as does religion. We wouldn't call the tenets of postmodern gender ideology a "religion" only because we generally use the word "religion" for belief systems that feature God or gods, with attendant doctrines reinforced in group rites and practices. But postmodernism and the gender ideology which it supports is as much a worldview as religion.

We avoid government sponsorship of a religion because it would create fertile ground for tyranny against other religions. The exact same principle ought to apply to worldviews we don't describe as "religious," and for the very same reason: they consist in dogmas and doctrines that, when engrafted onto government, result in tyranny against those who don't subscribe to them. Gender ideology should not be sponsored by government for the same reason religion shouldn't be.

But it is. Government not only sponsors postmodern ideologies, it propagates them through its politically unaccountable administrative shadow, and the ideology is then echoed in the power centers of big media, social media, big tech, and Wall Street. The worldview of this Machine is supported also by institutions of education, with the result of extirpating competing worldviews like religion from among the next generation. In this environment, religious worldviews are actively suppressed, and the postmodern worldview is actively and exclusively sponsored. Why shouldn't the concerns against tyranny that animated the principle of separation of church and state apply to gender ideology? Why are only religious

worldviews excluded in public education, and not postmodern ideologies concerning race and gender?

Albert Norton, Jr. is the author of, most recently, *The Mountain and the River/Genesis, Postmodernism, and the Machine* (New English Review Press 2023).