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Character Scholarship Community



Welcome to our thirty-sixth edition of "The Academic Journal," a bimonthly bulletin in which you can read about MCA's educational philosophy, instructional methodology, and the various viewpoints and positions of our faculty, staff, students, and families.

Teaching – Because The Soul Matters Part 4: The Necessity of Virtue in a Republic

Not only is virtue required for a liberal education as explained previously (See December 2015 issue.), it is also required to sustain freedom in a republic. The irony of freedom is that freedom requires restraint, especially moral self-restraint. Full-blown, libertarian, do-what-you-want freedom logically leads to anarchy and ruin because absolute freedom sets up individuals as gods of their own tiny realms and precludes laws that hinder free self-expression. Absolute freedom leaves no way to arbitrate conflicts between these kingdoms, leaving disagreements to be settled only by coercion or power. Civil discourse and intellectual persuasion are downgraded to secondary, tertiary, or even lower means of persuasion. Mob rules.

The founding fathers understood this. It is in their discussions and in their writings, including the Federalist Papers, the Anti-Federalist Papers, and the U.S. Constitution. President James Madison pointed out, "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."

Charles Murray, author of *Coming Apart*, lists four virtues essential to the American experiment: industriousness, honesty, marriage, and religiosity. Murray later comments, "Adams, Madison, Jefferson, Washington and others, they all commented on them [the virtues], and they all said essentially the same thing... The constitution is all very well, but for the constitution to work it requires certain virtues from the people, and without those virtues in the people, the constitution will fail. Adams said very memorably, 'It would collapse like a whale going through a net.'"



Freedom requires moral self-restraint.

Oz Guinness, social critic and author of *A Free People's Suicide*, names other virtues of particular importance to the Framers of the Constitution: self-restraint, respect for rightful authority, acknowledgement of a requisite amount of social order, recognition of human dignity, and courage. Regardless of the particular set of virtues, it is evident that personal virtue is essential for the continuance of a healthy republic.

Today, character, especially public character, is dismissed as unnecessary, even passé. Public figures today would be excused from George Washington's *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior* as long as they are seen as competent. Consider, for example, former President Clinton. Sadly our culture goes even further to laud behaviors that admittedly go beyond the borders of the Civility and Decent Behavior. Consider reality shows, such as "The Real Housewives of DC " (or you name the city), "16 and Pregnant," or "Buckwild."

A commitment to intellectual truth was indispensable to the arguments that undergirded the founding documents, and the esteem of moral trust provided the substructure for a national life. In short, a virtuous character both in private and in public is vital to the continuance of freedom.

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