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A Christian College Isn’t Batting An Eye
In Its Showdown With The Federal Government
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I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

These are very familiar words. But how is it possible for a widely diverse nation to be indivisible?

One way is to coerce everyone to believe the same thing. This is the desire and methodology of a growing and dangerous sector of our society. They are the proponents of radical gender-identity ideology and socialism.

Coercing people into unwilling silence may lead to one form of an indivisible nation, but it is not the kind of nation we are promised in the rest of the Pledge of Allegiance. We are to be an indivisible nation that also protects freedom for all and justice for all.

Coerced conformity is neither free nor just. It’s poisonous. And courage is the antidote. Courage like Tanner Cross has shown.

Tanner is an elementary school teacher in Loudoun County, Virginia, where the local school board has been pushing a policy that would require students and teachers to refer to “gender-expansive or transgender” elementary school-age students with whatever pronouns the students specify.

Tanner voiced his objections to the proposed policy, which forces teachers to contradict biology. For many, it also forces them to violate their faith.

“I love all of my students, but I will never lie to them regardless of the consequences,” Tanner said. “I’m a teacher, but I serve God first.”

School officials suspended Tanner for speaking up. So Alliance Defending Freedom filed a lawsuit on his behalf. A court reinstated Tanner, but his case heads to trial soon.

This is the type of courage this moment in history requires. To speak up — even when you know those who hold the power are against you.

Knowing this, how can we be indivisible? We must focus on the things that are true of every individual: All are created equal. All are endowed with inalienable rights. All have dignity that flows inherently from being created in the image of God.

Our nation is being deliberately divided by those who want to indoctrinate both young and old in a philosophy that looks at everyone as either oppressors or victims.

We can only be united, and thus indivisible, if we look at all of our fellow citizens as unique individuals created in the image of God and endowed with rights and dignity that flow from that exalted status.
Covid-19 restrictions provided a surprising benefit to this year's Blackstone Legal Fellowship, ADF's summer-long training program for Christian law students.

With most law schools operating virtually in the 2020-21 academic year, the Blackstone team was unable to hold its traditional on-campus recruitment events last fall — which ultimately worked in the program's favor.

“What started out seeming like a major obstacle turned into a major blessing,” says Tim Chandler, senior vice president of strategic relations & training for ADF. “Because we didn’t have to travel and could do the recruiting events online, we were able to recruit at far more law schools than we ever have before.”

Recruitment events were conducted at 110 law schools, almost double the usual number. The program drew its largest applicant pool as a result, enabling Blackstone to welcome 181 students this summer — the largest class in the program's history.

A New York photographer is challenging state laws that threaten steep fines and jail time if she operates her business according to her religious views.

ADF attorneys are representing Emilee Carpenter, challenging New York laws that force her to create photographs and blogs celebrating same-sex weddings if she does so for weddings between one man and one woman. Penalties for violating the law include fines of up to $100,000, a revoked business license, and up to a year in jail.

This year, Carpenter has received at least seven requests to create content celebrating same-sex weddings. In 2019, the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals and the Arizona Supreme Court ruled in favor of filmmakers and artists, respectively, who brought similar challenges against laws like New York’s.

Florida State University has agreed to settle a lawsuit after the school and its student senate unconstitutionally retaliated last year against Student Senate President Jack Denton for sharing his personal religious beliefs with other students.

The school removed Denton from his paid senate president position because of comments he made in a private text conversation among Catholic students. In the group chat, he suggested that BlackLivesMatter.com, Reclaim the Block, and the ACLU all advocate for causes opposed to Catholic teaching, and that Catholic students may wish to avoid supporting the organizations financially.

ADF filed a lawsuit against the school and members of the student senate after university officials refused to address the violation of Denton’s First Amendment freedoms. Under the settlement agreement, the school will restore Denton’s lost wages and pay $10,000 in damages to him.

Representing three post-secondary schools, ADF seeks to intervene in a lawsuit that would force students to forfeit critical financial aid in order to attend the religious college of their choice.

The suit, filed by an LGBT activist group on behalf of some current and former students, intends to prevent any students from using tuition grants, student loans, and any other federal financial assistance at schools that operate according to Christian beliefs on gender and sexual morality. ADF asked a federal district court to allow them to intervene in the suit.

The three schools — Corban University, William Jessup University, and Phoenix Seminary — are asking the court to allow them to defend the relevant provisions of Title IX, the federal law that is under attack. Among other things, Title IX allows students to use federal financial aid at private religious schools that operate according to their beliefs.
Scotland
A Scottish priest challenged his government’s blanket ban on public worship at Scotland’s top court – and won.

Canon Tom White of Glasgow joined other faith leaders in challenging the ban, which made it a criminal offense for churches to hold in-person services during the Covid-19 lockdown. Scotland was the only country in the UK to face a total ban on churches due to the pandemic. The Scottish government completely banned all churches from opening for the purpose of communal worship while “essential” businesses, including bicycle shops, remained open.

Scotland’s top court declared the worship ban to be unconstitutional and unlawful, having judged the measures as a disproportionate interference with Canon Tom’s right to open the church for public worship. The measures were therefore null and void, allowing worshippers to return to church. The ruling could prevent attempts at similar worship bans in the future.

ADF UK supported Canon Tom’s case and launched the Let Us Worship campaign, which generated significant media coverage and support from the public.

Connecticut
USA Today censored ADF client Chelsea Mitchell after she placed an op-ed in the news outlet to recount her experiences as a female track athlete lining up against male competitors.

Mitchell is one of four runners who filed a lawsuit to challenge a Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference policy that allows males who identify as females to compete in girls’ athletic events.

Three days after publishing Mitchell’s op-ed, USA Today changed the word “male” to “transgender” without notifying Mitchell and added an editor’s note, saying, “We regret that hurtful language was used.” The outlet also removed a sentence explaining that men have natural physical advantages.

USA Today editors, rather than stand up as honest brokers of public debate, gave in to the demands of the woke mob.

— Christiana Holcomb
ADF Attorney

Chile
Are religious communities free to decide who will teach religion on their behalf? The Inter-American Court of Human Rights will soon answer this question for 35 countries in North and South America in the landmark case of Pavez v. Chile.

Sandra Pavez taught Catholic religion classes in a municipal school in San Bernardo, Chile. When the local diocese learned that she had entered into a same-sex relationship, they informed her that they could no longer certify her as eligible to teach the Catholic faith.

Pavez was able to continue her employment at the school in a different capacity and was even promoted to a leadership position. But she took legal action against the church, claiming discrimination. When the Chilean Supreme Court upheld the church’s freedom to certify its teachers, she filed her complaint against Chile at the Inter-American Court. The public hearing was held in May.

ADF International has submitted a brief to the court to voice the concerns of religious families, who fear that faith-based schools will face a crisis of integrity, should their instructors not be required to adhere to the tenets of their faith.

The erasure of the church from public life is severely damaging to the whole community.

— Canon Tom White
Jack Phillips, the proprietor of Masterpiece Cakeshop, is once again in the dock. This time, he stands accused of violating Colorado’s anti-discrimination law by declining to create a cake that would symbolize and celebrate a customer’s gender transition. Jack stood trial in March, and on June 15, a Denver County court ordered him to pay a fine.

The court framed the case as a simple matter of applying public-accommodation law to punish an unlawful refusal of service. “The anti-discrimination laws,” the court wrote, “are intended to ensure that members of our society who have historically been treated unfairly, who have been deprived of even the every-day right of access of businesses to buy products, are no longer treated as ‘others.’”

The court flatly rejected the notion that issues of constitutional import were at play, concluding: “This case is about one such product — a pink-and-blue birthday cake — and not compelled speech.”

I represented Jack during his trial. To say his case is about a pink-and-blue birthday cake is akin to arguing that the Declaration of Independence was about a local dispute among Boston tea merchants. In the law, great questions are often debated through the lens of everyday life. Jack’s case raises great questions: What does tolerance look like in 2021 America? Who is entitled to civil rights? Are all Americans equal under the law? Or are some more equal than others?

In his work Repressive Tolerance, the German intellectual Herbert Marcuse explained his view that tolerance, properly understood, does not imply a level playing field. Rather, in Marcuse’s view, a “liberating tolerance” requires “intolerance against movements from the Right and toleration of movements from the Left.” According to Marcuse, this subversive form of tolerance was necessary “as a means of shifting the balance between Right and Left by restraining the liberty of the Right, thus counteracting the pervasive inequality of freedom” and “strengthening the oppressed.”

To say his case is about a pink-and-blue birthday cake is akin to arguing that the Declaration of Independence was about a local dispute among Boston tea merchants.

Ryan Bangert
The trial of Jack Phillips is indeed a tale of intolerance — the intolerance of an aggressive woke ideology determined to target, harass, persecute, and punish all who disagree with its tenets.

Ryan Bangert

To most Americans, this odd form of “tolerance” sounds like a recipe for the oppression of disfavored beliefs. Applied to public-accommodation laws, this subversion of tolerance to promote intolerant ends is corrosive of the bedrock value of equality before the law and the maintenance of fundamental civil liberties. The trial of Jack Phillips, like a modern-day morality play, illustrates how pernicious — and far advanced — this subversion has become.

From the beginning, the plaintiff, a lawyer named Autumn Scardina who identifies as female, intentionally targeted Jack. At one point, Scardina called Jack and requested a cake depicting Satan smoking a joint to “correct Mr. Phillips’ errors of thinking.”

Scardina also called Jack on the day the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear Jack’s first case and requested the pink cake with blue icing. Scardina carefully crafted the conversation as a “test” and “verification” of Jack’s beliefs — only revealing the purpose of the cake to celebrate a gender transition after confirming that Masterpiece Cakeshop could, in fact, create a pink-and-blue “birthday cake.”

Why the elaborate ruse? Why not simply tell Jack that Scardina identifies as a woman, without asking for custom art with a message that obviously conflicts with Phillips’ well-known religious beliefs? Wouldn’t that be a better test of Jack’s intent? The reason, as the evidence at trial established, is that Jack serves everyone, regardless of any number of characteristics, including sexual orientation and gender identity. He just won’t communicate certain messages that conflict with his core beliefs.

L isa Eldfrick, Jack’s daughter who works at Masterpiece Cakeshop, testified about gladly serving customers who identify as gay or transgender, including some who are repeat customers. Mike Jones, who identifies as gay and was once an LGBTQ activist, testified about his deep friendship with Jack and the profound love and respect he experienced each time he stepped into Masterpiece Cakeshop.

The court heard this evidence, yet still found that Jack violated Colorado law because “the refusal to provide the bakery item is inextricably intertwined with the refusal to recognize Ms. Scardina as a woman.” In short, Jack must pay a fine because he will not violate his conscience and change his thinking about a matter fundamental to his faith. This troubling result conflicts with the First Amendment and the core religious-speech liberties it protects, but it would have been celebrated by Herbert Marcuse.

The trial of Jack Phillips is indeed a tale of intolerance — the intolerance of an aggressive woke ideology determined to target, harass, persecute, and punish all who disagree with its tenets. That includes those, like Jack and his family, whose faith commands them to love and serve everyone.

Scardina could have obtained a cake celebrating gender transitioning from nearly any other bakery in Denver. But this case was never about ensuring that “members of our society who have historically been treated unfairly” receive “the every-day right of access of businesses to buy products.” It was, from the beginning, about “correcting” the perceived “errors” of Jack’s thinking.

Jack’s trial, then, is a case study in the application of repressive tolerance. To paraphrase Marcuse, sometimes the civil rights of men such as Jack must be stripped away to rebalance the scales of power in favor of those whom the elite deem sufficiently oppressed. Such a system, which dispenses legal privileges and disabilities based on shifting perceptions of one’s position within a hierarchy of oppression, will never guarantee fundamental liberties. It is a recipe for the sort of despotism our nation’s founders risked everything to overcome.

Rather than grant privileges and rights to favored groups, our founders restrained the state based on an understanding of equality before the law coupled with God-given inalienable rights. As Jack Phillips has shown us, that understanding is under assault. The hour is late. The battle must be joined.

Ryan Bangert is senior counsel and vice president of legal strategy at Alliance Defending Freedom. This article originally appeared at National Review Online on June 23, 2021.
Much of America has lost its moral compass, and our God-given freedoms face increasing threats. But all is not lost! The praying church stands as the preserver of freedom. That is why Alliance Defending Freedom is starting the Generational Wins Prayer Initiative: to mobilize and equip Christians to consistently and fervently pray to preserve freedom for future generations.

We believe that prayer is the catalyst not only for preserving freedom's future, but also for seeing the great spiritual awakening and societal transformation that America desperately needs.

What is a Generational Win?

1. Achieves a significant victory changing the law and culture of the nation for a generation.

2. Is sustained by deliberate action so that the victory endures for generations to come.

JOIN THE PRAYER INITIATIVE: Visit ADFlegal.org/prayer

These are ADF’s Five Generational Wins:

- Sanctity of Life
- Religious Freedom
- Free Speech
- Marriage & Family
- Parental Rights

Other Ways To Get Involved

ADF Ambassador Program
ADF Ambassadors connect people within their sphere of influence — friends, family, church, and community — to the mission of ADF.

Church & Ministry Alliance
ADF provides religious liberty legal help to churches and ministries through affordable legal membership programs.

Social Media
Join ADF’s social media community of 2 million followers and growing. Comment, like, share, and let your voice be heard.

Attorney Referral
If you know an attorney who might be willing to serve the Body of Christ, please encourage him or her to explore our Allied Attorney program.

Financial Support
Your donation makes it possible for ADF to defend religious liberty, the sanctity of life, free speech, parental rights, and marriage and family.

LEARN MORE: Visit ADFLegal.org/Get-Involved
After 22 years presenting pro-life apologetics in more than 1,000 presentations all over the world — including debates with abortion doctors, professors, and prominent pro-choice leaders — Connors doesn’t lack for such stories. She’s shared many of them with the students in Alliance Defending Freedom’s Blackstone Legal Fellowship program, where she’s been a featured speaker since 2012.

“Experience has taught me how someone’s personal life story can influence their willingness to receive the pro-life message,” Connors says. Those stories often come out in quiet discussions with members of her audience, after an event has ended.

“There have been moments of great emotion and intensity,” she says. “It’s really opened my eyes to the brokenness of the world, the woundedness of the people walking past us and interacting with us every day.”

**Experience has taught me how someone’s personal life story can influence their willingness to receive the pro-life message.**

— Stephanie Gray Connors

Connors’ own story began in Canada, where she grew up watching her pro-life advocate parents lead and participate in events, interacting with a wide variety of people and attitudes. Then, as a college student, she heard a speaker say, “There are more people working full time to kill babies than there are working full time to save them.” That was Connors’ summons into ministry.

A climactic moment for that ministry was an extraordinary invitation in 2017 to share her views with the staff at Google — a company not known for its pro-life leanings.

“If You want it to happen, show Your glory,” she prayed. Not only was her talk well received, but Google posted it on the company’s YouTube channel, where it’s drawn more than 245,000 viewers over the last four years.

Moments like that — and stories of lives transformed — give Connors courage to engage, and enlist others to engage, the still-formidable challenge of ending abortion in America. “Oh, my goodness, there’s such a big battle ahead,” she says. “We know the end of the story, that God reigns … but we do have a big fight on our hands.”

**VISIT loveunleasheslife.com to learn more about Stephanie’s pro-life ministry**
So many kinds of green,” a student comments, looking out the window of the van carrying her across her college campus. She has lived on these thousand acres for more than two years, but still delights in the same pastoral scenes that bring the tour buses up from nearby Branson several times a week.

Soft, low hills rolling on and on into the Missouri distance. Tall trees, alive with bird choirs, and crisp lawns that weave between dorms and classrooms … a gymnasium and a chapel … the mill, the greenhouse, the dairy, the hog farm.

Here and there, a student on the landscaping crew hops off a truck and swims through the 100-percent humidity toward his next chore. Other young people stride up the long, steep rise toward their jobs at the crown jewel of the campus, The Keeter Center hotel and restaurant, their white shirts already damp in the morning sun.

It’s summer at College of the Ozarks.

If you have to work on this beautiful, blazing day, the college is a cheerful place to do it. And if you’re a student at College of the Ozarks, you have to work. This is a work school, meaning the nearly 1,500 students here don’t pay tuition, they earn it — laboring for at least 15 hours a week at one of the nearly 100 workstations available or assigned.

Scrubbing pots in “the dish pit.” Pouring cups at The Keeter Center coffee counter. Romping with youngsters in day care. Answering phones in the alumni office, making beds, weaving baskets, milking cows. All of that, for many students, in addition to the extra hours they pick up with off-campus employers.

No wonder *The Wall Street Journal* named it “Hard Work U.”

Many a parent fantasizes about sending their child to a school like this, but administrators make it clear this is no year-round camp for young couch potatoes. Ninety percent
of the students at College of the Ozarks demonstrate serious financial need. They come because their parents are missionaries … because they grew up in foster care … because they have 10 siblings and their parents run a farm … because they can’t afford to get this kind of Christian education anywhere else.

"This is not Easy Street," says Dr. Sue Head, vice president of cultural affairs and dean of character education, whose title is nearly as long as the climb up Keeter Hill. “Our students aren’t going to get their college education another way. They have to work. The mission of this institution is to help those without the means … and there’s no mission drift here. They get a grade in their work, and it goes on their permanent transcript.”

That translates into many things — some spiritual, some practical — according to administrators, alumni, and the students themselves. On Career Day, Head says, "students are getting job offers on the spot. Employers don’t really even care if they have the skills — they just want the work ethic.”

It’s more than the students’ reputation for working, says Matt Farmer, Class of 2012, a nursing administrator at a local hospital who also runs a popular coffee shop in the community. “I can find people who want to work hard, but the values, the character — that’s the thing that really sets C of O apart. I can trust that the people who are going here and have graduated demonstrate and keep a certain set of values.

“It’s not just a work college,” he adds. “It’s the character. It’s the patriotism. It’s the academics. Everything here is taken to that higher level.”

But that higher level is fast becoming a major battleground, not only for the future of College of the Ozarks, but for religious freedom in America. Many at the school, including its formidable leader, believe that battle can be won.

But, like the path to The Keeter Center, it’s going to be uphill all the way.

The showdown that may have far-reaching repercussions for Christian schools all over the country began a long way from the Ozarks, in the Washington, D.C., offices of Alliance Defending Freedom’s Regulatory Litigation team.

Attorneys on that team are developing a new approach that takes legal strategy even deeper than what the ministry has specialized in for nearly 30 years. Rather than moving to defend those already caught in a legal snare, Regulatory Litigation is charged with figuring out where
the next snares are being laid. Studying the agenda and activities of the current presidential administration, ADF attorneys realized that a veritable trap line was being set around the federal Fair Housing Act.

The FHA is part of the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Applied to all housing in America more permanent than a hotel room, it was designed to prevent landlords from denying a dwelling place because of people's inherent characteristics like race or sex — i.e., keeping black people out of a given neighborhood, or sexually harassing female tenants. The Biden administration, though, has opted to reinterpret that original purpose. Not by urging Congress to change the law ... but by issuing a directive on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development website.

The directive, says ADF Senior Counsel Julie Marie Blake, declares that “the Fair Housing Act’s protections against discrimination on the basis of sex now include sexual orientation and gender identity.” That means every college and university — including those grounded in Christian convictions and biblical beliefs — can be forced to open their dorm rooms, locker rooms, bathrooms, and shared shower spaces to members of the opposite sex.

“This new directive applies to private, religious college campuses, even if they turn down every cent of federal money, in keeping with their strong First Amendment convictions,” Blake says. “And there’s no way out.

“Do you own housing in America that you rent to students? If so, the Fair Housing Act applies to you ... and now it’s got a new mandate.” Colleges that do not comply face fines of up to six figures.

ADF attorneys didn’t want the government taking the high ground for the coming battle while educators sat idly waiting for crippling fines and penalties to be imposed. They wanted to take the battle directly to the administration, in a way that would show how faceless bureaucratic mandates pose a mortal threat to freedom of speech and religious liberty.

But ADF is not a college, Blake points out; it can’t bring suit itself. Christian colleges would have to learn about this nationwide mandate buried on a government website, recognize the threat, and be willing to “poke the bear” by taking on the federal government in a case where failure to fight could lead to devastating consequences.

“There are three options,” Blake says, for Christian colleges under this new FHA directive. “One, the college can ignore its religious beliefs and just comply. Two, the college can refuse to do what they’re being told to do, pay massive fines over and over again, and potentially suffer criminal penalties. Going out of business is a possibility. Going to prison is, too.

“Option Three is exiting the business of providing student housing.” No more dorms, no more students living on campus ... and the likelihood of a significant, if not fatal, drop in enrollment.

Those are sobering options for any college official to contemplate, even against the chance of a landmark legal victory for Christian education and religious freedom in America. Yet no religious school in the country — even of those able to grasp the true nature of the government’s bureaucratic threat — stood up to confront that challenge head on. Except one.

It’s not just a work college. It’s the character. It’s the patriotism. It’s the academics. Everything here is taken to that higher level.

Matt Farmer, College of the Ozarks Alumnus

Julie Marie Blake
People say, ‘What is your legacy?’” Dr. Jerry C. Davis, president of the college, smiles. “They ask you that when you’ve been around a long time.” The average tenure of a college president is estimated at five-to-six years. Davis, age 77, has been at College of the Ozarks for 33.

He didn’t come by the usual route. Born in rural Georgia during World War II, he was one of three wild brothers deserted by their dad, then their mom, and raised by grandparents. His brothers found their destinies through military service; Dr. Davis found his in a work school.

“I learned how to work,” he says. “I learned the value of work.” He also found people who believed in him and nurtured his confidence, particularly in the classroom. He earned a doctorate in biological sciences, with a focus on entomology. At Ohio State University, he taught the hard sciences (“If it had ‘ology’ on the end of it, I probably taught it”), but found a growing interest and talent for fundraising.

“It’s a high-risk thing, very meaningful,” Davis says. In time, he learned what kind of people give to a college, and why. “I just sit and listen,” he says, marveling at how many of his fellow presidents won’t make the time to visit and learn from the people who support them. “A lot of people just want you to listen.”

At 33, Davis was hired to lead another work college, deep in financial distress and far adrift from its philosophical moorings. “I fit the type of kids they were trying to help,” he says. “I was told to ‘make it more like it used to be, or you’re going to preside over closing it.’” He took the mandate seriously, evicting the one-fourth of the student body who refused to meet expectations. Within a few years, the school was thoroughly invigorated — financially, academically, spiritually.

It’s important that people know that you know who you are and what you represent, and that you’ve got the wherewithal to carry it out.

“Dr. Jerry C. Davis, President, College of the Ozarks
That’s when College of the Ozarks came calling, in need of a similar revival. Davis again held fast to the school’s founding principles, and spent his first decade grappling with recalcitrant faculty and administrators. “There were people, including some faculty members, who wanted this to be Harvard on the White River,” Head says. “They didn’t really like this work thing, this impoverished student thing. They were trying to take it somewhere else.”

“You’d think we were moving graveyards,” Davis says. “I’m here to carry the mission out. I’m going to do that, and anything that gets in my way is going to have to be pushed aside — because the mission is bigger than all of us. Including me.’

“It’s important that people know that you know who you are and what you represent, and that you’ve got the wherewithal to carry it out,” he says. That was eventually communicated … as was Davis’ genuine love for the students.

“He’s one of us,” says Linsey Garrison, a senior from Nixa, Missouri, and student body president. “He didn’t come from the best background. He’s been through it, like we’ve been through it, and even worse. He didn’t have really great opportunities, but he made it and he wants other people to make it, too.”

“If I hadn’t had the opportunity, where would I be?” Davis says. “Without opportunity, you can’t have the American dream. Well, you’re not going to have the opportunity if you don’t have the money to get it.”

Davis and his team set out to get the money. Today, College of the Ozarks has a substantial endowment — and one of the highest student / endowment ratios in the country. In exchange for their 15-hour-a-week work efforts, students partake of 50 fully accredited academic programs and graduate debt-free, with no loans to repay.

But character education — a five-part program that emphasizes faith, patriotism, and cultural sensibility, as well as academic and vocational training — is at the heart of Ozarks’ mission.

“We tell them, ‘We’re trying to get you ready to take a leadership role in a culture that badly needs your help,’” Davis says. “But first you need to know what you believe in, and why you believe it. You need to get as well-educated as you can, and then you will be invited to the table of influence — otherwise they won’t listen to you. They’ll scoff at you.”

“You do have to make a personal sacrifice to come here, when it comes to your time and your priorities,” says Tatum Manary, a junior. “You really have to be disciplined and willing to give up some of the things that you love. You have to learn to be independent.

“It’s been hard, but it’s been worth it.”

“How you conduct yourself matters,” Davis says. “You will not survive if you don’t know who you are, what you believe, and have the courage to stick with it.”

Linsey Garrison, Student Body President

If you call yourself a Christian and a believer, then you have to stand by that. You can’t make exceptions. You have to stand firm.

Linsey Garrison
“So, [the government] is going to irreparably harm a school that, for over 100 years, has been doing what everybody in this do-gooder culture up there in Washington thinks we ought to be doing to help kids get a leg up who can’t afford it? What do they want to do, put us out of business? What are we going to have next? Reeducation camps if we don’t agree with them?”

He is saddened — but not deterred — by the lack of support from other Christian schools, and even from churches and denominations.

“This lawsuit tells you a lot about how much these institutions believe in who they say they are,” he says. “I haven’t heard from anyone [at other colleges]. I don’t see people doing anything. Where are they? I’m so disappointed in the people of faith. Above all else, they ought to be clamoring about religious liberty. It matters to everybody.”

Blake says Davis has the increasingly rare courage “to go out, stand, lead, and try and win a ruling that protects not just you, but everyone else … so that everyone else doesn’t have to make that choice.”

Garrison says most students understand why Davis and his team are taking this action. “It’s not just waiting for something bad to happen,” she says. “It’s protecting us now so that we can keep our goals and keep on making people’s lives around here better. It’s giving people opportunities.”

Round One in the legal showdown went to the opposition. Earlier this year, a district judge in Missouri ruled in favor of the government and against College of the Ozarks.

“What the district court said was, ‘You’re not even allowed to challenge this in court,’” Blake says. “We have to wait until the government comes after us before we can have a judge say whether what they’re doing is lawful or not.”

ADF attorneys asked for an injunction that would block the FHA mandate while the case proceeds. The district judge rejected that request and dismissed the case.

“The judge said, ‘Come back later, after you’re in really big trouble’ — which is outrageous,” Blake says. “If they’re trying to make changes and enforce a new mandate on this now, the harm is already here.”

ADF attorneys appealed that request for an injunction to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 8th Circuit, a court with a history of strong support for free speech and religious freedom, Blake says.
“I really think this court is going to care about the free speech aspects of the College of the Ozarks case,” she says. “We should win. I’m optimistic — but it’s a really big deal. The administrative state has done what it wants for a long time.”

If the 8th Circuit chooses not to grant the injunction, College of the Ozarks will be under orders to comply with the FHA mandate beginning this fall semester.

“That’s not going to happen here, if I can help it,” says Davis. “I am not going to violate my conscience.” His team, his board, and the students all know Davis means that.

“He was made for this,” Head says. “He really was. He’s lived his whole life this way. He’s not going to blink.”

“They’re going to come for us, and you have to be ready,” Garrison says. “If you call yourself a Christian and a believer, then you have to stand by that. You can’t make exceptions. You have to stand firm.

“If you want to win, don’t wait for them to come after you. They are coming after you. If you want to win ... you better stand up now.

Julie Marie Blake, ADF Senior Counsel

“Whatever happens, I know that C of O will be fighting until the very end,” she says, “defending their mission and their goals, defending the students and what this institution stands for.”

“I’m trying to wake people up,” Davis says. “For whatever reason, this school has been blessed with a unique mission, no debt, thousands of supporters all over the United States, and a board with the guts to keep it on the straight and narrow ... so maybe we ought to be the ones to stand up and be counted. If not us, then who?”

“He gets that this is a moment that people need to stand for their values or there won’t be any values left to stand for,” Blake says. “The Biden administration is very aggressive in pushing the LGBTQ agenda. And they don’t respect free speech at all. They think everyone who’s against them is a bigot, and they intend to give no quarter unless directly ordered by a court to do so — and, even then, not until they’ve exhausted all appeals.”

Other colleges and universities need to understand, Blake says, that “if you want to win, don’t wait for them to come after you. They are coming after you. If you want to win, as opposed to just being forced to knuckle under, you better stand up now.”

“People say to me, ‘You’re out here, stirring up all this trouble,’” Davis says. “No, the government is, and every religious organization in America ought to be fighting this. But why am I the only one in the ring?”

Listening to that, Head smiles. She knows him better than that.

“He doesn’t mind being alone in the ring.”
The last thing Pastor Shelton Vishwanathan recalls happening before he lost consciousness in a village in northeast India was Hindu extremists threatening to offer him as a sacrifice to their god as they belted his head.

“They punched my back and told me that they would offer me as a sacrifice to their deity as a punishment for distributing Gospel tracts,” he says. “They struck severe blows on my head, so that I soon fainted.”

When the six radical Hindus first stopped him and told him to quit handing out tracts in Tiryani village, in his home state of Bihar, he told them “Fine.” He was about to go on his way when one of them seized the keys from his scooter, took away his phone, and signaled the others to attack him.

When he regained consciousness, he found himself locked in a dark room.

“I shouted for help ... hoping someone would hear my cries and come to help me, but nobody could hear me,” Vishwanathan says. “I was lying down on the floor without food or water for the next few days. They did not give me anything to eat or drink.”

Seven days later, an elderly woman who lives nearby heard his cries and knocked on the door.

“She told me that the door was bolted from outside and that she would open it for me on the condition that I would not tell anyone that she opened it,” says Vishwanathan, who leads a house church of 18 people. “She was very scared that if the assailants found out that she opened the door, she would also land in trouble.”

He explained what had happened and told her he would starve and die there if she did not open the door. She took him out of the room and later gave him food and water.

“Had she not helped, I would not be alive today,” he says. “I fully believe that it was God who sent her to help me.”

Strangers helped him find his way home by foot, but his family was not there when he returned. He learned from neighbors that his family had searched for him throughout the district. Frightened, family members sold some furniture in order to make it to his wife’s hometown in Nepal.

The assailants had taken his phone — which contained his in-laws’ phone number — and Vishwanathan had no money to make a phone call. Neighbors offered him food, money, and an old cell phone, but for weeks he could not reach his wife. With help from other Christians, eventually he was able to make contact and pay for his family to return home in late November.

“I survived only because of God’s grace.”

Pastor Shelton Vishwanathan
Through the intervention of ADF India, senior pastors from Patna, capital of Bihar state, offered their assistance. They suggested he file charges against the attackers.

“But I did not want to pursue a case against the assailants,” Vishwanathan says. “As the Navratri [Hindu festival] celebrations were in full swing, if I was found again the assailants might have really offered me as a sacrifice to the deity.”

His experience in Tiryani village was not his first violent encounter with radical Hindus. He had come under attack several times for leading a home church and sharing the Gospel in villages. In June 2019, eight Hindu extremists had followed him on motorcycles and attacked him, pushing him off his scooter and breaking his hand and foot as they beat him.

“I survived only because of God’s grace,” he says. After the motorcycle incident, some of his Christian friends went to the police station to inform officers about the attack. But the police said their hands were tied and that they could not take any action.

Violence against Christians in Bihar state has increased in the past two years, with attacks on house churches and pastors happening weekly, sources say. Many of those attacked choose not to call police, as officers are often complicit in Hindu extremist aggression.

Following his most recent attack, Vishwanathan has had to vacate his home.

“The landlord of our rented home got to know that I was locked up in a room for a week, and he told me that he cannot risk the lives of others by letting me stay in the house knowing there is a threat to my life,” Vishwanathan says. “He issued an ultimatum to vacate the house.”

With financial help from Christian groups, he was able to find another rented house. However, he is still without transportation. The assailants took his scooter, and since he bought it used and has no vehicle documents, police have told him there is no way to find it.

The pastor hopes to continue distributing Gospel tracts.

“I am overjoyed to see the Lord’s hand in every situation over the past two months,” says Vishwanathan. “My family who thought I must have been lost and died have returned to see me alive. We give thanks and praises to the Lord.”

This article was adapted from a story that originally appeared in Morning Star News in December 2020.

Mob Violence On The Rise

Violence against Christians in India has risen significantly since 2019. The country is ranked 10th on Christian support organization Open Doors’ 2020 World Watch List of the countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. Following are stories of incidents of Christians in India who, like Pastor Vishwanathan, recently fell victim to mob violence:

IN DECEMBER 2020 a mob of over 50 religious extremists attacked 12 Christians who had gathered for prayer in a home. The Christians, most of them women, were violently beaten. The attackers tore off their clothing and molested them. One woman lost consciousness when she was kicked to the ground. Later, on the way to the hospital, she delivered a stillborn baby. The Christians reported the incident to the police, but the police refused to register a complaint and even denied that any violence had taken place.

IN JANUARY 2021 a Christian prayer service was disrupted by a mob of around 150 religious extremists. They barged into a hall where about 50 Christians were gathered, and attacked the group with sticks and batons. The attackers then filed a complaint, falsely alleging that the Christians had conducted forceful conversions. The police detained nine Christians — five men and four women — until ADF India allied lawyers were able to secure bail months later.

Through a wide network of local lawyers, ADF India defends the rights of Christians and other religious minorities who face persecution in India and other south Asian countries. ADF India also works to bring the plight of religious minorities to the attention of the international community.
A native of New York City, William Barr served as attorney general of the United States during the administrations of Presidents George H.W. Bush (1991-93) and Donald J. Trump (2019-20). He holds degrees from Columbia and George Washington University, where he earned his law degree at night while working as an intelligence analyst for the CIA by day. He later did legal work as part of the Reagan administration, corporate legal work for GTE and Verizon Communications, and served on the board of directors for Time Warner.

Barr and his wife, Christine, are the parents of three daughters — all of them attorneys who have served in government. He enjoys playing the bagpipe.

In May, Alliance Defending Freedom presented Barr with its annual Edwin Meese III Award for Originalism and Religious Liberty. In a speech accepting the award, Barr shared his thoughts on the current challenges undermining public education in America. The following was adapted from his speech.

F&J: You’ve said that America’s greatest threat to religious liberty today is the extreme secular-progressive climate of our state-run education system. Why is that so?

WB: Over the past tumultuous year, there has been a great deal of discussion about the radical ideology being promoted in our schools, and what it means for national unity, public safety, and the health of our politics. Much less has been said about what could be an even greater long-term consequence: what this indoctrination in public schools means for the rights of people of faith. We are rapidly approaching the point — if we have not already — at which the heavy-handed enforcement of secular-progressive orthodoxy through government-run schools is totally incompatible with traditional Christianity and other major religious traditions in our country. In light of this, we must confront the reality that it may no longer be fair, practical, or even constitutional to provide publicly funded education solely through the vehicle of state-operated schools.

F&J: How has public schools’ approach to religion changed over the years?

WB: Throughout the history of Western civilization, it has been generally understood that a true education — as opposed to merely the conveyance of technical skills or vocational know-how — is inherently bound up with religion and morality. It necessarily deals with the big questions: Is there truth? How do we arrive at the truth? What is the end of life? How should we live? Civic virtue, moral virtue, religion, and knowledge were always
regarded as inextricably interlinked. The notion that we can seal off religion from education is a relatively novel idea — and it is an idea that the experience of the past half century has refuted in rather spectacular fashion.

Up until the 1970s or so, instruction in the public school system openly embraced Judeo-Christian beliefs and values. But in the latter part of the 20th century, the Left embarked on a relentless campaign of secularization intent on driving every vestige of traditional religion from the public square. Public schools quickly became the central battleground. The rich Judeo-Christian tradition was replaced with trite talk of liberal values — be a good person, be caring. But there was no underpinning for these values. It is hard to teach that someone ought to behave in a certain way unless you can explain why. When you take away religion, you have left a moral vacuum.

F&J: That secularization continues to evolve. How is it impacting public schools today?

WB: In many places in the country, the state of our public schools is becoming an absurdity that can scarcely be believed. Consider one example: earlier this year, an Iowa public school district taught transgenderism and homosexuality to students at all grade levels — including preschool. As part of a “Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action,” the school district distributed a children’s coloring book page that teaches “Everyone gets to choose if they are a girl or a boy or both or neither or someone else, and no one else gets to choose for them.” Until very recently, virtually no one in America had even heard of these radical notions. Now we see the indoctrination of children with a secular belief system that is a substitute for religion and is antithetical to the beliefs and values of traditional God-centered religion.

F&J: How does this point to a larger problem?

WB: What is taking shape is a full-blown subversion of the religious worldview. Telling schoolchildren that they get to choose their gender and that no one else has anything to say about it does not just contradict particular religious teachings on gender and the authority of parents. It is a broadside attack on the very idea of natural law, which is integral to the moral doctrines of a number of religious denominations. For the government to get into the business through public schools of indoctrination of students into secular beliefs systems that are directly contrary to the traditional religious beliefs of students and their families raises fundamental constitutional problems.

It certainly raises a free exercise problem. As the Supreme Court has recognized, nothing is more fundamental than the right of parents to pass religious faith to their children. It is monstrous for the state to interfere in that by indoctrinating children into alternative belief systems that are antithetical to those religious beliefs. The courts have foreseen the potential for secularism itself to become established as a state religion. In one of the first cases abolishing school prayer, the Supreme Court acknowledged that “the State may not establish a ‘religion of secularism’ in the sense of affirmatively opposing or showing hostility to religion, thus ‘preferring those who believe in no religion over those who do believe.’” We have to consider whether our public schools are doing exactly that.

F&J: Is there a solution?

WB: Public funding of education does not require that instruction be delivered by government-run schools. The alternative is to have public funds travel with each student, allowing the student and the parents to choose the school that best fits their needs and the dictates of their conscience. In this environment, vouchers may be the only workable solution. They would also promote all kinds of diversity in our schools — diversity of viewpoints, backgrounds, and ways of thinking. Americans would be free to live according to their beliefs even if their views do not conform to the dominant culture. Happily, vouchers also tend to provide greater opportunity for less privileged children as well.

Confronting this issue is one of the most urgent tasks for concerned legislators, lawyers, and organizations such as Alliance Defending Freedom. To save religious liberty, we must save our families and their children from the extreme secular-progressivism that pervades our current system of public schools.

To save religious liberty, we must save our families and their children from the extreme secular-progressivism that pervades our current system of public schools.

William Barr

WATCH William Barr’s speech at ADFlegal.org/William-Barr-Interview
The pro-life movement in America is fighting for several things.

Obviously, the ultimate goal is to save lives and revitalize our culture’s appreciation for every individual life. But to do that, we are also working to bring clarity to the way our culture — and our courts — think and speak about life. We want our laws to be grounded in truth, because the truth is liberating.

There is not much clarity on the future of abortion laws right now, and there is certainly not widespread respect for every human life. But with the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to hear Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health, we have a chance to tell the truth about life on the biggest legal stage there is.

Dobbs concerns a Mississippi state law that protects preborn life from abortion after 15 weeks. At this stage, a baby has fingers and toes, taste buds, and eyelids. She gets the hiccups. She has had fingernails for over a month. For over two months, her little heart has been beating. She responds to touch and reacts to pain.

With its law, the state of Mississippi is asserting its right to protect the health and safety of its citizens by regulating late-term abortion, which not only kills the little person in the womb but also poses significant physical risks for the mother.

Currently, the U.S. is an extreme outlier in abortion law and policy. Only a handful of other nations have no restrictions on late-term abortions, including China and North Korea. The practice of late-term abortion is, quite frankly, barbaric — and the majority of Americans agree.

Mississippi’s law takes the state out of the extreme fringes and into the mainstream.

But, of course, abortion extremists are opposing this commonsense law. They insist that the protections for women and children in the Mississippi law impose an “undue burden” on women seeking an abortion, and that this makes the law unconstitutional.

With Dobbs, the Supreme Court has a chance to clarify that states have the power to pass laws that protect all their citizens — and to clarify that “all
citizens” includes women seeking abortion and unborn babies who can suck their thumbs and respond to their mother’s voice.

Previously, the court has said that before “viability” (when a baby can survive outside the womb), states have limited power to regulate abortion. After “viability,” however, states have much more power to protect their citizens from this tragedy. But “viability” is changing rapidly.

At one time, babies could not survive outside the womb before 28 weeks. Now many survive at 22 weeks, and even a few at 21 weeks. As medical technology advances, we can expect to see younger and younger babies live outside the womb. So what is “viability” under the law? No one knows.

This muddled definition of “viability” is at the core of our nation’s abortion laws, and clarifying it — or getting rid of it altogether — will go a long way toward protecting the rights of every American for generations to come. 

Dobbs isn’t likely to overturn Roe v. Wade. But this case is unquestionably important. Dobbs gives the court a chance to abandon misleading language about life and uphold states’ ability to protect the health and safety of their people.

Please pray for the justices as they begin wrestling with the paradox that our nation guarantees “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” to its people but, at the same time, routinely allows abortion providers to murder hundreds of thousands of those people every year.

And pray that they will recognize that babies who have all their limbs and can move, suck their thumbs, and respond to Mama’s voice most certainly have the right to life. 

Denise Harle is senior counsel with Alliance Defending Freedom’s Center for Life.

Only a handful of other nations have no restrictions on late-term abortions, including China and North Korea.

Denise Harle, Senior Counsel
ADF Center for Life
“God has greatly blessed our lives in so many ways. Providing a Legacy Gift to Alliance Defending Freedom is a way that we may use the many blessings of God and return them to His work and His people.”

— Ken & Barbara L.