

Prayers for Washington

MINISTRY TO STATE | Fall 2021

RESCUING WORK FROM FUTILITY

Rev. Michael Langer

TERRIFYING BEAUTY

William Stockdale

HEALING FROM FRAUDULENT PASTORS

Adam Smith



MINISTERING TO THOSE SERVING IN GOVERNMENT
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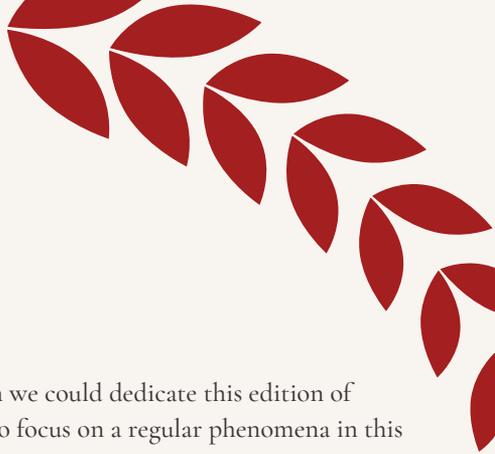
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Much fills our minds and media feeds to which we could dedicate this edition of *Prayers for Washington*. We decided, however, to focus on a regular phenomena in this city: transitions of power.

In January, Joseph P. Biden succeeded Donald J. Trump for the highest office in this land. Certainly, the events of January 6th drew more eyes to this usually mundane function of America's government. In most years, however, transitions of power in Washington go largely unnoticed.

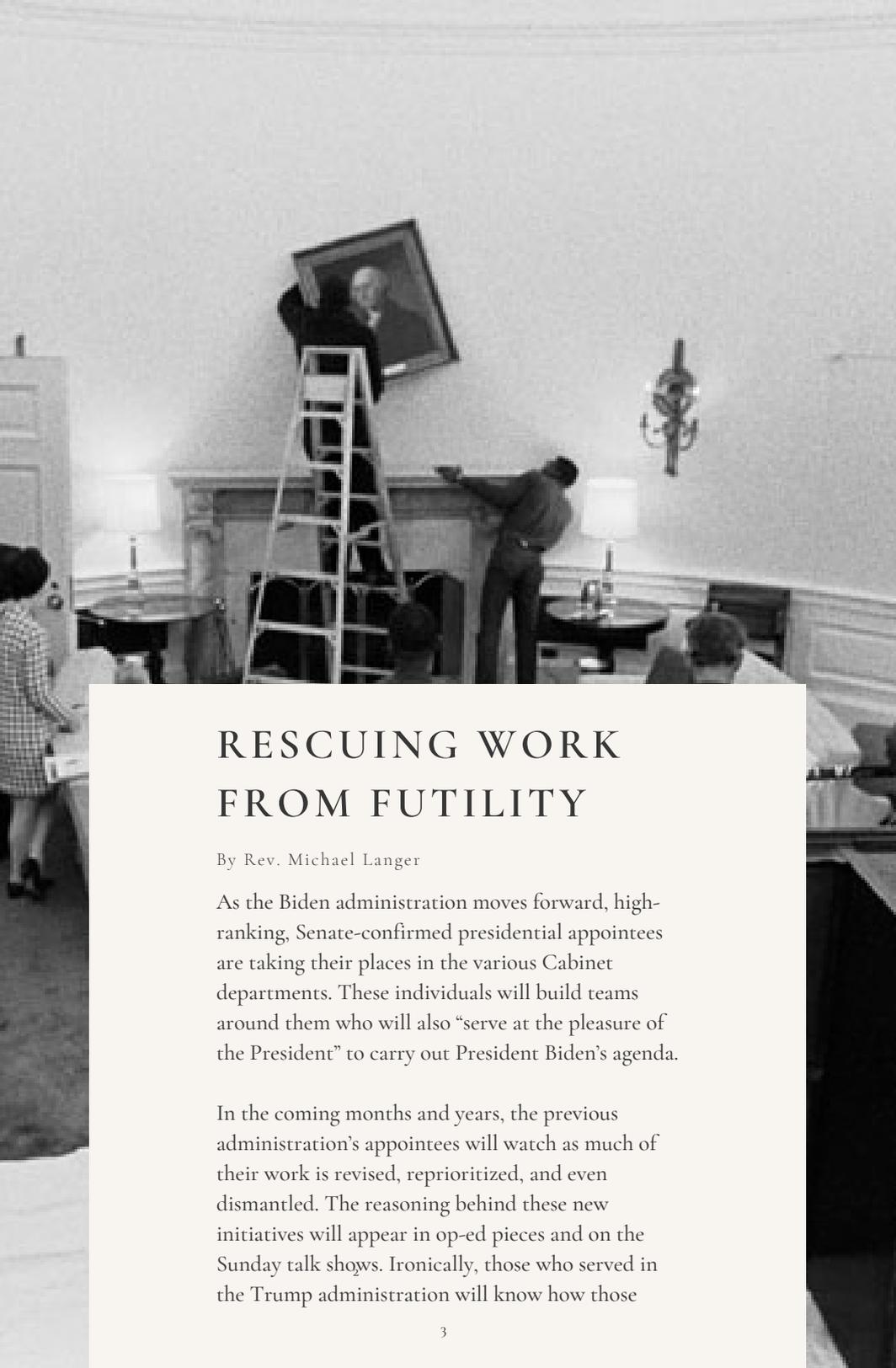
Not so for those who have been called to work in this nation's capital. For many, it is often a day of anxiety, stress, and frustration. Rev. Michael Langer has written a terrific essay on this very topic.

But politics is not the only sphere experiencing transitions. Churches too and large evangelical institutions deal with the same. Unfortunately, the cause is too often the moral failures of their leaders. How do Christians engage the process of healing from fraudulent pastors? I commend Adam Smith's piece to you for answers.

But in the midst of constant change, what, or who, anchors us? None other than the immutable and unchanging Triune God. William Stockdale has a brilliant devotional to direct our attention to the holy God of Sinai, now revealed in Jesus Christ.

The pieces that follow were written largely with those serving in government in mind. But I believe people of all vocations and stations of life can benefit. May they be a blessing to you.

In Christ,
Robert Hasler
Director of Communications, Ministry to State



RESCUING WORK FROM FUTILITY

By Rev. Michael Langer

As the Biden administration moves forward, high-ranking, Senate-confirmed presidential appointees are taking their places in the various Cabinet departments. These individuals will build teams around them who will also “serve at the pleasure of the President” to carry out President Biden’s agenda.

In the coming months and years, the previous administration’s appointees will watch as much of their work is revised, reprioritized, and even dismantled. The reasoning behind these new initiatives will appear in op-ed pieces and on the Sunday talk shows. Ironically, those who served in the Trump administration will know how those

who served in the Trump administration will know how those in the Obama administration must have felt four years ago.

This is a harsh reality for those who serve in government. One of the consequences of elections is that the victors set the agenda and define what it means to “Make America Great Again.” In all the making, there is also unmaking.

Those serving in government as career civil servants are having a different experience. For years they are told to work in one direction only to be told by a new administration to start in another. What one administration says is valuable, the next may say is insufficient, even harmful.

The analogy of building sandcastles seems fitting. Except, in this case, the appointees are directing the career officials to build the new sandcastle on top of the previous sandcastles, year after year. As they build, their work is commended and then, abruptly, told that it is not acceptable.

For everyone involved, this is rightly frustrating. Some might even say that the constant cycle of building, destruction, rebuilding, destruction, and rebuilding is even futile. How can anyone persevere, let alone take joy in their work?

The Apostle Paul understood this important question when he wrote to those living in Colossae,

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. (Col. 3:23-25)

These thoughts appear in Ephesians and 1 Peter as well because many of Paul and Peter’s audience were indentured servants on the wrong side of a vocational power differential.

What the Apostle wanted them to know was that as those redeemed by Christ, their work was an offering to the Lord. In other words, their work was redeemed from futility because God received it as worship! No matter which end of the power differential you find yourself in, Christ there is no futility of work. There is only the worship of the Carpenter who came to serve His Father and us. Jesus came to set us free from futility and to redeem our work.

In this passage, Paul even includes a good word for any new administration’s

appointees; especially in how to treat those whom they are about to ask to redo all their work of previous years,

Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. (Col. 4:1)

For appointees who are Christians, it is important to remember that it is not only their work, but the work of career officials as well which is meant to be offered and received as worship.

This means that those in leadership are called to create an environment in which those working for them know their supervisor believes their work is intentionally offered to God as worship. However, many in leadership often communicate to their subordinates that their work merely serves to advance his or her agenda. This drives work into futility.

The redemption of our work as worship is one of the great blessings of our life in Christ, made possible because of Jesus' work on the cross,

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col. 1:19-20)

In Acts 28-22 we read,

After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—though I had no charge to bring against my nation. For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain.

And they said to him, "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against."

Despite all his efforts for Christ, Paul was thrown out of numerous cities, beaten, and had rocks thrown at him. Now he found himself in prison. His situation was bleak: no one liked him, and although he had many skills, nothing seemed to be going well. He was also on the wrong end of a power differential.

It is disheartening and discouraging when all the external information

is negative and there seems to be no hope for change. And this hope that circumstances will change is exactly the reason why Paul points his audience to a hope that is elsewhere.

Paul understands something important about vocational calling and effort. God does not call us to be successful or well-liked, let alone to ‘change the world.’ Our heavenly Father does not guarantee that our efforts will lead to increased flourishing or be well received by those around us. Paul’s hope is not in the success of his efforts, but in the promise of the One who had already successfully overcome death in order to reconcile a people to himself. That is a hope which is unshakable.

This is why Acts 28 does not conclude with Paul in the despair that often arises out of futility,

He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. (Acts 28:30-31)

May the Lord bless those who serve Him by serving in government.

TERRIFYING BEAUTY

By William Stockdale

At Mount Sinai, the LORD descended in power in a way never before witnessed by the people of Israel. Not even Moses had seen God on display like this.

The mount was enveloped by black smoke like that from a kiln. It was thick and black, wrapping around from base to peak. No doubt such a sight was beautiful. But it was also undoubtedly terrifying.

Thunder rolling within was heard without. And when Moses returned from communing with the LORD the people of Israel stood trembling in fear. So frightened were they that they begged Moses to return up the mountain lest they be destroyed. And so Moses returned to the mountain. Walking towards that “thick darkness” to commune with their God whose glory was terrifyingly beautiful.

The glory and power of our God is too vast, too cosmic, too eternal to be limited by the archetypes of light and



dark representing good and evil, respectively. There is a thick darkness around God, but it does not exist due to any evil. For there is nothing bad or evil or corrupt in Him. Rather, in God there is a holy mystery infinitely outrunning our finite minds.

John Owen expressed similar thoughts in *The Mortification of Sin* when he wrote, “Can the mind of man, which is as nothing, do any more but swallow itself up in an infinite abyss?... That infinite and inconceivable distance that is between [God] and us, keeps us in the dark as to any sight of his face, or clear apprehensions of his perfections.”

In his prologue, John writes that “no one has ever seen God” but also that “truth came through Jesus Christ.” As followers of Christ we hold these two things in tension. That our God is eternally beyond us and that He came intimately. The God Who descended in glory on Mount Sinai has revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ.

And so this “thick darkness” surrounding God means something different for the followers of Jesus. In a world and life without God there is a darkness we dare not approach. But in living with God there are dark mysteries of his glory

that draw us in.

Like a painting by Rembrandt, the dark mysteries of God reveal as much as they hide. As a viewer stands before one of his paintings she must stare more deeply into the dark places to know what the artist is doing. As she peers into the dark, shapes and figures appear and there she learns more about Rembrandt than if she hadn't pressed in.

The mysteries of God's glory are something like that. They are deep and rich and textured beyond imagining. Rather than retreat in fear from the deep mysteries of God, we press in to look more closely because He came close to us. And there we see depth and dimension we could have never dreamed; a mystery hidden for the ages, but now shown to us in Jesus. Life in Christ means we can now begin the search that will continue for all eternity.

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HOW TO HEAL FROM FRAUDULENT PASTORS

By Adam Smith

I tried recently to relocate an article about pastors that I had previously read. As I typed the words 'Pastors are' into Google's search bar, I was struck by the top suggested searches, particularly the first one. It read, 'Pastors are frauds.'

As I read those words, it was a reminder that there are many silent-sufferers among us who have

experienced great pain at the hands of fraudulent pastors. That shouldn't surprise us, as we have seen the downfall of many prominent evangelical pastors and Catholic priests in recent years. Similarly, ample research exists, and enough stories have been told, that we should not be too surprised to learn about the presence of fraudulent pastors in our local churches either. It is simply far too common.

Those who have been hurt by leaders in the church are often left reeling and searching for answers as they try to navigate life without pastoral care. They may even begin to 'Google' things like 'pastors are frauds.'

But what guidance does Scripture offer those wounded by fraudulent pastors? I believe it offers, at least, these four helpful resources:

First, Scripture gives us spiritual language rather than therapeutic language to describe false leaders. Consider how Paul describes the false teachers who were being called “super-apostles” in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15,

“[They] are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So, it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.”

Paul’s message is clear: false leaders are doing the work of Satan!

Scripture doesn’t explain away the presence of false leaders as being primarily the result of pathological conditions as we so often do today (though that certainly may factor). Instead, it regularly describes false leaders as working for evil.

While I doubt many of us are comfortable with this language, it nevertheless proves to be very helpful because it gives us the right framework. Oftentimes, people in spiritually abusive situations believe they can fix things if they can simply convince the domineering leader to see a therapist or by reasoning with them.

But if we take Scripture at its word, we will see these problems not primarily as pathological, but as spiritual.

Second, Scripture shows that false leaders misrepresent God to gain power.

Dr. Diane Langberg writes in her book, *Redeeming Power*, that “Spiritual power...[often] is used to control, manipulate, or intimidate others to meet one’s own needs or the needs of a particular organization, often by using words cloaked in nice sounding spiritual language and concepts.” Scripture warns us of this danger too.

In 2 Corinthians 11:20, Paul described the Corinthians as being “enslaved,” “exploited,” and “taken advantage of” by false teachers. 2 Peter 2:3 says that false leaders “will exploit you with false words.”

Similarly, Jesus says in Matthew 7:15 to “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” The imagery here is vivid: false leaders devour. They may look innocent to many on the outside, but they’re secretly misrepresenting God in a quest for power.

Third, Scripture shows us that God is deeply concerned about the presence of false leaders and is working to bring them to justice.

A biblical study on this topic reveals that God sees injustice done in His Name as nothing less than abhorrently evil. He is not sitting idly by while false leaders roam free.

Regarding the false apostles in Corinth, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:15 that *“Their end will be what their actions deserve.”* Peter says, concerning false teachers, again in 2 Peter 2:3, that *“Their condemnation has long been hanging over them.”*

In Matthew 18, after Jesus receives little children and tells his followers that they must become like children themselves, he says that *“If anyone causes one of these little ones to stumble, it would be better for them have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”* Here we see that the tender Jesus is also the valiant defender of the innocent. He will not allow those who hurt his little ones to ultimately get away with it.

Finally, Scripture assures us that God will tenderly care for those who have been hurt by the Church.

Oftentimes, those who express hurt by church leadership are painted as being too needy or even as villains themselves. Leaders often dismiss hurt under the guise that ‘there’s no perfect

church’ and justify wounding members by simply pointing to the church’s organizational health.

Jesus, in great contrast, says in The Parable of the Lost Sheep, *“What man among you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?”* (Luke 15:4)

Here we learn that Christ, our True Shepherd, does not think in the same terms. He sees each one of the sheep as worthy of caring pursuit, no matter how needy they are or how far they go.

Thus, Scripture boldly attests: You are not too needy for Jesus. You are not too much trouble for Him to pursue. He is *“near to the broken hearted”* and he *“saves the crushed spirit.”* (Ps. 34:18) You can, therefore, *“cast all of your cares upon him, because he cares for you.”* (1 Pet. 5:7)

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