

A Counterpunch to the Assault on Manliness

On a mid-October visit with my daughter and her family, my son-in-law began recounting stories from a former construction job. He spoke of end-of-day contests—monkey-bar style races, for example, in which construction workers would race across the trusses of a building using hammers instead of the hands, which lasted until one guy slipped and concussed himself with the hammer.

My friend John, a former concrete laborer, added his tale about the time a chunk of cement fell and whacked him in the head, sending him to the emergency room with blood streaming down his face.

I chipped in with tales from my long-ago military school days, when fights broke out at a misspoken insult and where battles using bent paperclips and rubber bands for slings could leave a welt like a bee sting on the skin of the victim. Such escapades apparently still exist in a few places, for my teenage grandson, visiting from his all-male boarding school, also recounted stories of dorm fights and concussions.

All of these activities involve physical strength, an element of danger, a lack of prudence sometimes approaching lunacy, creativity—only a boy would make a weapon of paperclips and rubber band—and a tough hide. Many male readers could easily add their own exploits to this list. But such manliness is gradually disappearing from society.

That's unfortunate, because these male traits and others are crucial for the building of civilization, a fact which author and professor Anthony Esolen points out in his recent book, [*No Apologies: Why Civilization Depends on the Strength of Men.*](#) Down through the ages, Esolen contends, men have constructed

everything from cities to castles to superhighways, founded governments, written constitutions, fought wars, protected their women and their children, and given the world much of its great art.

But no more. As Esolen notes in the very first sentence, "I am writing a book that should not have to be written, to return to men a sense of their worth *as men*, and to give to boys the noble aim of manliness, an aim which is their due by right."

That phrase "noble aim of manliness" may induce heart palpitations in some people in our feminist culture. Indeed, that old-fashioned word "manliness" alone would doubtless raise the hackles of gender radicals intent on refashioning men into pajama boys unsuited for erecting skyscrapers, fending off enemies in a war, or being good husbands and fathers.

Esolen is correct that such a book about the noble aim of manliness should not have to be written. Over the centuries writers have authored many books and essays on the meaning of manhood and its virtues—Theodore Roosevelt comes immediately to mind—but a book calling for the restoration of manhood itself is rare. But after decades of men and manhood taking hits like a heavy bag in a gym, however, *No Apologies* is also absolutely necessary, a counterpunch to the ongoing cultural assault on manliness.

C. S. Lewis prophetically sensed this assault on virility when he wrote in [*The Abolition of Man*](#), "In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful."

Esolen examines the horrific wounds inflicted by this surgery of "ghastly simplicity" and the damage it has done not only to

men, but to marriage, the family, and our culture at large. The picture is not pretty. “If you look at the present state of the world it’s pretty plain that humanity has been making some big mistake,” Lewis advises in [The Case for Christianity](#). “We’re on the wrong road. And if that is so we must go back. Going back is the quickest way on.”

Like Lewis, Esolen tells us that we must reverse course and, in this case, restore the honor and respect due to manhood if we hope to repair the foundations of civilization. Given “the present state of the world,” most of us would likely agree.

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