

Cover Letter for The Vision: Lee and his Chapel

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In many respects Lee Chapel stands as the centerpiece of the legacy that Robert E. Lee left to Washington College, and thence to Washington and Lee University. The history of its conception, construction, and use during Lee's presidency of the institution reveals perhaps more clearly than anything else the principles that guided his life and shaped his thinking on how best to educate the students under his care at Washington College. The following paper briefly traces what the Chapel meant to Lee and what he thought its role should be in the life of the college and its students.

Today, Lee Chapel, and all it stood for in Lee's estimation, is under threat of virtual annihilation. This must be resisted, and the Chapel saved, if indeed Washington and Lee itself is to be saved.

Please donate to The Generals Redoubt to pay for professional research related to defending Lee Chapel as a National Landmark, for future funding to educate students about the rich history and legacy of Robert E. Lee, and to help bring back diversity of thought. We need your help if we are to save Lee Chapel as a campus and national treasure. Thank you in advance for your support. Information on how to contribute is found at <https://www.thegeneralsredoubt.us/support>

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The Vision: Lee And His Chapel

... let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained

without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

George Washington
Farewell Address
September 19, 1796

The Robert E. Lee who came to Lexington in 1865 as President of Washington College was a man of religious faith, a faith deepened by the trials of the Civil War. During the war he had as much encouraged religious devotion in his soldiers as in himself, and had attended wartime worship services whenever he could -- and not for mere show. Douglas Southall Freeman, in his majestic biography of Lee, recounts an instance during the war when one of Lee's chaplains assured him that all the army's chaplains were praying for him; Lee replying, with tears in his eyes, "Please thank them for that, sir. I warmly appreciate it. And I can only say that I am nothing but a poor sinner, trusting in Christ alone for salvation, and need all the prayers they can offer me."

This humility and dependence upon God endured to the end of his life, as attested by Mrs. Lee, who, as Freeman again relates, wrote of her husband on the day of his death, "So humble was he as a Christian that he said not long ago to me he wished he felt sure of his acceptance. I said all who love and trust in the Savior need not fear. He did not reply, but a more upright conscientious Christian never lived." Moreover, Lee considered his Christian faith as both comprehending and extending the four Classical virtues of the Ancients -- justice, prudence, temperance, and courage -- inherent to the gentlemanly code of conduct to which he adhered all his life.

On his arrival at Washington College Lee's thinking naturally evolved beyond the concerns of his personal faith or that of his soldiers, to that of the college students now in his charge, who were engaged in intellectual training and the acquisition of

learning rather than in the prosecution of armed conflict with its attendance of imminent death. In his personal diary, as reported in R. David Cox's superb history of Lee Chapel, *Lee Chapel at 150*, Lee left a clear account of his thinking concerning the place of morality and religion in higher education. Among his diary entries we find:

Physical united with intellectual education, but without moral training produces a . . . dangerous character. It is persons so educated who compose a large section of clever & designing criminals, also ambitious and unprincipled men in different ranks of society.

And continuing with equal perspicacity,

Moral culture is valueless unless principle is confirmed into habit. A child may be taught that it is sinful to steal, lie or injure his neighbor, & yet have no proper sense of applying his knowledge to the regulation of his own conduct, , , , Exercise confirmed by habit is the best means of establishing virtuous character as far as it can be established by human means.

Lee echoes above the timeless wisdom of Aristotle, who, in the "Moral Goodness" section of his famous treatise on ethics, writes:

Moral goodness is the result of habit. . . . We are constituted by nature to receive them [the moral virtues], but their full development in us is due to habit. . . . the virtues, we acquire by first exercising them, just as happens in the arts. . . . Similarly, we become just by performing just acts, temperate by performing temperate ones, brave by performing brave ones. . . . It is a matter of no little importance what sort of habits we form from the earliest age -- it makes a vast difference, or rather all the difference in the world.

No doubt, as well, this thinking underlay Lee's conception of the practical working of Washington College's Honor System, which was to constrain students to the

exercise of right conduct until that conduct was matured into habit and thus permanently fixed in a student's character.

And finally from Lee's diary, following closely upon Washington,

[I]t is true, as taught by history, that greatness depends upon virtue, it is equally true that religion is the foundation and support of virtue. . . .

Lee, then, believed it essential that a worthy education provide moral as well as intellectual training, and furthermore believed, like Washington, that the foundation and sustenance of moral virtue lie in religion. Hence, his fostering of religious life at Washington College, and his motivation for building a chapel that could provide adequate space for worship to the growing enrollment at the college. Lee himself, working with his son, Custis, and VMI Professor Thomas H. Williamson, who taught a course in architecture at VMI and had authored one of the first textbooks on the subject, chose from among a variety of architectural styles, designed the building, and situated it to face the academic buildings of the Colonnade, symbolic of the synergetic relationship between moral and intellectual training, as Lee saw it.

Lee did not mandate that his Washington College students attend chapel worship services. Most did, however, following the powerfully influential example of Lee himself, who regularly attended the daily worship services held in the chapel on weekdays, always sitting in the same seat of the left-most pew at the front of the chapel. Chapel services were led by a regular rotation of ministers from the various denominations having churches in the Lexington area, no preference for any particular denomination being given. Chapel services were not held on Sundays, the students being left free to attend the local Lexington church of their choice on that day.

Thus, in brief, was Lee Chapel conceived, erected, and dedicated to use. Although the Chapel was meant to be used for other campus gatherings (commencement

exercises, etc.) besides religious worship, it represented, more than anything else, Lee's determination to cultivate moral goodness, under God, in his Washington College students, that they might join with him in devoting their lives to the service of others, and play their part in the work of rebuilding a broken country and healing the wounds of civil war.

It is this noble work, this great and good legacy, this beautiful Chapel left by Robert E. Lee to Washington and Lee University, that is now being shamelessly desecrated by the school's current Administration and Board of Trustees, through their ongoing actions to reduce it to utter obloquy, as a stain upon the campus, as a building forever vitiated as the final resting place of Robert E. Lee. The accumulating evidence suggests all too clearly that the Woke ideology to which Washington and Lee's current faculty and administration subscribe favors an essentially Godless, certainly non-Christian, campus, and by extension a negation of the God-given religious impulse inherent to human nature.

On my bookshelf still sits a copy of the *1965-66 Washington and Lee Bulletin*, which I have kept because it includes the final record of my graduating class of 1964. On page 16 of that bulletin is the sentence: "The second 'enduring adherence' of the University is its dedication to the Christian ideal, although its bylaws prohibit any form of sectarian domination of the institution." This was exactly the policy of Washington College President Robert E. Lee, a century prior. Gone are the days! The crowd currently running Washington and Lee are brushing aside in arrogance and contempt the principles and values dearest to the hearts of George Washington and Robert E. Lee, and dearest to ours.

Respectfully,

Kenneth G. Everett

Washington and Lee Class of 1964