

## **MAGA and the Political Weaponisation of Family**

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One of the oldest tricks of hierarchy is to call itself protection — and American politics is currently running that trick at full volume, with One Nation and now the Liberal Party rehearsing it here in Australia.

The trick is older than any political movement, older than America, older than the church. It is visible in the foundational stories many of us inherited as moral bedrock. In Genesis, Eve is blamed for Adam's disobedience, and the architecture of woman-blaming is laid in the opening pages of scripture: when a man fails, find the woman whose influence can be named as the origin of disorder. His weakness becomes her fault. The pattern is set before the garden gate has closed.

By the story of Lot, the pattern has hardened into something colder. Lot offers his virgin daughters to a mob in order to shield the male guests under his roof, and the narrative moves on without the outrage a modern reader keeps waiting for. Hospitality to men outranks the bodies of daughters, and the text does not blink. Then, after the destruction of Sodom, it is the daughters who carry the stain. They are implicated in incest and made the origin of rival peoples, Moab and Ammon — their names a slur on two nations. The father who offered them to a mob is remembered in later scripture as a righteous man. The daughters are remembered as a cautionary tale.

This is not an argument that ancient scripture should be read as a modern policy document. It should not be, and almost no one truly reads it that way — not even those who claim to. The argument is about *how* it is read, because every reading is a choice, and the choice reveals the reader.

Genesis 19 read through conscience is a story of patriarchal collapse. The household head fails in the one duty his authority is supposed to justify — the protection of those beneath him — and the family order he embodies disintegrates into fear, exile, reproductive desperation and shame. On this reading, the chapter is a warning: authority that will sacrifice its daughters has already forfeited its claim to rule.

Read through hierarchy, the same chapter becomes something else entirely: one more story in which women absorb the blame for male failure, and the failure itself goes quietly unexamined.

That choice of reading matters, because it is being made right now, at scale, in American politics.

It is being made most consequentially within the MAGA movement, and Christian nationalism is the engine of it. The two are not identical — not every MAGA voter is a Christian nationalist, and the movement has secular wings — but Christian nationalism supplies MAGA's moral vocabulary. It is where the language of family, fatherhood, purity and ordained order comes from; it is what lets a political programme present itself as a divine restoration. When MAGA speaks of defending the family, it is speaking Christian nationalism's script. And that script reads scripture through hierarchy. It extracts the order and discards the failure. It praises fathers, family, purity, obedience and submission, and goes strangely silent on the question scripture itself keeps raising: what happens when male authority is the threat? In that silence, a sleight of hand occurs. Women are protected symbolically — exalted in rhetoric, draped in the language of cherishing — while being subordinated practically: their agency narrowed, their exits closed, their testimony discounted. And when they suffer under the arrangement, the suffering is renamed. It becomes disorder, temptation, rebellion, or simply the price of restoring civilisation. The woman harmed by the hierarchy is recast as evidence the hierarchy was not strict enough.

There is a simple test that cuts through all of this: protection that cannot be refused is not protection. A shield you are not permitted to put down is a cage. Genuine protection answers to the protected — it can be questioned, declined, held to account. Control answers only to itself, and calls the questioning ingratitude.

Trump has stated the doctrine more plainly than any theologian. He would protect women, he told a rally in 2024, "whether the women like it or not."<sup>1-6</sup> The context was crime by undocumented migrants — but the context is precisely what makes the construction revealing, because the protector in question is a man found civilly liable by a jury for sexual abuse, recorded boasting about grabbing women, and openly proud of appointing the judges who stripped American women of reproductive autonomy.<sup>3,4</sup> A protection racket is not redeemed by naming a plausible threat. His own advisers urged him not to say it. He said it anyway, and the crowd cheered<sup>1,5</sup> — because within the hierarchy he speaks for, protection imposed over a woman's objection is not a contradiction. It is the point. And the doctrine travels. In Australia,

Pauline Hanson — who once declared “I can see in Donald Trump a lot of me and what I stand for in Australia ... I think he's great,”<sup>7,8</sup> and whose One Nation party borrows MAGA’s slogans almost word for word<sup>9,10</sup> — wraps the same politics in the same protective language. She has lately taken to rejecting the Trump comparison, while keeping the slogan;<sup>10</sup> which is, in miniature, the whole manoeuvre this essay describes — disown the label, retain the architecture. The accent changes; the architecture does not.

Nor does the bridge run only through the populist fringe. It runs through the centre-right establishment, and its name is Tony Abbott. The former prime minister has described JD Vance as “very smart” and praised his capacity for strong, effective governance, suggesting that leadership in Vance’s mould would keep the United States stable and resilient.<sup>11</sup> Vance is worth pausing on, because his record shows precisely what the doctrine looks like when it reaches office. This is the man who lamented America’s “divorce culture” and suggested that people should remain in their marriages — “even violent ones” — for the sake of stability;<sup>12,13</sup> marital endurance recast as a public good, with women and children conscripted to do the enduring. It is the failed protection test again, this time drafted toward law. When Abbott — who voted consistently against same-sex marriage<sup>14</sup> and frames politics as a battle for civilisation itself at international conservative forums<sup>15</sup> — holds up leadership in Vance’s mould as the model, he is not borrowing a slogan. He is endorsing the governing template beneath it: the hierarchical household as rehearsal space for the hierarchical state.

And Abbott is no longer commentating from the sidelines. In May 2026 he was elected, unopposed, federal president of the Liberal Party — a move Reuters read as confirming the party’s rightward shift<sup>16</sup> — and his acceptance came wrapped in exactly the language this essay has been tracking. He declared it his “duty to serve” in a time of “existential crisis,” rebranded the Liberals as “the patriot party,” and diagnosed Australia with a “spiritual malaise.”<sup>17,18</sup> Listen to what that vocabulary does. *Existential crisis. Spiritual malaise. Society fragmenting. Security in peril.* These are not policy descriptions; they are emergency declarations — and emergencies are how hierarchies have always justified themselves. Crisis framing heightens fear, narrows deliberation, and makes authoritarian remedies look necessary rather than extreme. The household head protects the family from a dangerous world; the patriot party protects the nation from spiritual collapse; and in both cases the protection arrives pre-loaded with obedience.

The 49 Theses begin from that premise. Any system that claims to protect women while reducing their agency is not protection; it is control wearing protection's clothes. Any theology that treats women as vessels, temptations, property, lineage-bearers or moral hazards has already departed from justice, whatever scripture it quotes on the way out the door. And any politics that sanctifies male authority while insulating it from accountability should be judged not by its language — language is cheap, and “family” is the cheapest word in its vocabulary — but by its outcomes: by what actually happens to the women and children placed underneath it.

That is the measure. Not the hymn to the family, but the welfare of the people inside it.

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