

Wisdom for the New Year: A Century in Review



For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He has set the world upon them." (1 Sam. 2:8). These pillars, foundations for every institution, became progressively clear as the Bible was unchained from a few elite into the hands of millions of everyday people in the 16th & 17th centuries in Europe. The foundations of liberty in America were built by the faith, blood, and labors of our Christian ancestors.

The Seeds of Secularism (1900-1925)

By 1900, Christians should have been poised to expand God's kingdom in America. We were just coming out of the greatest missionary century in history, with America leading the way. And the major institutions and laws of our land still mirrored the biblical nation of a century before, with the added advantage of prosperity sparked by Christian free enterprise.

But behind the soothing facade of the Victorian era and its family values, dangerous theological heresies – including cults, the evolutionary theory, Marxist ideology, and Freudian psychology – were capturing the minds of the new generation, especially those in the universities.

Christianity, which had essential unity of belief a century earlier, was deeply divided. Many of the mainline denominations became progressively more liberal, denying the deity of Christ and the inerrancy of Scripture, mainly due to German higher criticism in seminaries. At the same time, millions of evangelical, Bible-believing Christians left the old denominations and withdrew to start their own schools and churches. In their desire to hold on to the faith, many of these believers withdrew from involvement in social, political, or cultural issues.

This left society open to the dominance of humanistic thought, even though committed humanists numbered less than three percent. Humanists became busy rewriting school textbooks, preparing for government service, and moving into Hollywood and New York to influence the entertainment industry.

The Fruit of Secularism (1925-1950)

The second quarter of the twentieth century was dominated by the great Depression and World War II. Both of these tragedies should have caused Americans to turn to God and experience a great spiritual awakening such as happened in the Great Awakening (1739-1750) and the Civil War Awakening (1857-1865). But instead, what our founders most feared happened: Americans were deceived by leaders such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt who revealed his statist plans in a 1930 radio address. He said, "Now to bring about government by oligarchy masquerading as democracy, it is fundamentally essential that practically all authority and control be centralized in our National Government." The American welfare state was born in the 1930s. The Church did not stand against the dangers of statist power as Christians had done since our early settlers. We, as their grandchildren, are now paying the price.

America Jettisons Its Cultural Pillars (1950-1975)

The third quarter of the century was the greatest institutional revolution in American history. Most cultural pillars were cut and severed, ripped away from their Christian roots. Most families, while still nominally Christian, moved to the suburbs for the good life and had no stomach to carry on a cultural war for the sovereignty of God. Christianity was reduced to a personal, private matter, while public policy was secularized. By 1975 and the end of the war in Vietnam, the '60s revolution had succeeded in breaking down most authority. The radicals settled into graduate schools and became the tenured professors and politicians of the 21st century. The only values that were highly esteemed in this generation, according to Francis Schaeffer, were "personal peace and affluence."

The American Church, as a whole, by withdrawing from active leadership in our culture, gave secularists control of our major institutions for most of the 20th century. These humanists have failed in all their tinkering and brought us to the brink of cultural chaos. Their experiments with our schools have failed, their statist bureaucracy is intrusive and has led us to bankruptcy, and their moral relativism has left America plagued with violence, illegitimacy, drugs, and pornography.

The secular Camelot that seemed destined to rule the world, with "progress" as its most important product, is proving to be a charade. The mainstream intellectuals and media pundits of the Western world have proved themselves poor guides to the future. These self-proclaimed "experts" have led millions from Darwin, through Marx, to Freud, leading to a culture of despair.

A City Upon a Hill (1975-2010)

Historian Paul Johnson analyzes the secular intelligentsia in his important book, *Intellectuals*:

It is just about two hundred years since the secular intellectuals began to replace the old clerisy [clergy] as the guides and mentors of mankind...I detect

today a certain public skepticism when intellectuals stand up to preach to us, a growing tendency among ordinary people to dispute the right of academics, writers, and philosophers, eminent though they may be, to tell us how to behave and conduct our affairs. The belief seems to be spreading that intellectuals are no wiser as mentors, or worthy as exemplars, than the witch doctors or priests of old. I share that skepticism. *A dozen people picked at random on the street are at least as likely to offer sensible views on moral and political matters as a cross-section of the intelligentsia.*

Here lies our hope. Faith in the humanist's idealized man is dying. People are seeing through the rhetoric of the "New Deal," the "Great Society," the "Bridge to the 21st Century" and "Change." They know America's greatness taps into a much greater source than political slogans. Millions of parents and students are rediscovering the covenants of our forebears. They are learning that cultural stability and security are found in the divine pillars upon which America was built. As parents are training a new generation in the unchanging biblical principles of life, these young leaders of the future are rising up and offering real hope to restore the "holy cause of liberty."

Building upon our inheritance, our true history, we can once again become a "city upon a hill" for the 21st century, an example to other nations, rather than a reproach.

John Winthrop had such a vision when he landed in Boston in 1630:

We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when He shall make us a praise and glory, that men of succeeding plantations shall say, 'The Lord make it like that of New England.' For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us.

- Dr. Marshall Foster