Why Empires Fall

Kerby Anderson looks at six insightful books and videos exploring alarming parallels between the U.S. and failed empires of history.

Collapse of Empires

If you study world history, you realize that empires come and go. In this article I want to look at what has happened to some of the major empires because we can also learn about what is happening today in our country. I will be quoting from recent books that have documented the decline and fall of empires.



First, I will merely quote from a recent YouTube video{1} that describes a pattern in history that has destroyed three global superpowers in the last 500 years: Spain, Britain, and the Soviet Union. Today, the U.S. is following a similar pattern.

In 1590, Spain was the richest empire on earth. Spain controlled half the world's gold and silver. Spain's military dominated Europe. Their currency was accepted everywhere. Yet within 80 years, the Spanish government was bankrupt.

The Spanish coin that was supposed to be pure silver became 50% copper, then 75% copper. By 1600 Spanish coin contained barely any silver. Inflation exploded. Spain went into a debt spiral and borrowed constantly. Manufacturing declined. Agriculture stagnated.

In 1914, Britain ruled the largest empire in human history. At the time, it was said that the sun never set on British empire. Britain controlled 25% of the land surface. The pound sterling was the global reserve currency. Yet within 40 years, the empire was gone. The currency collapsed.

Britain had too many military commitments around the world. They won World War I, but at a terrible cost. By 1931, Britain had to abandon the gold standard. The pound lost 25% of its value overnight.

In 1991, the Soviet Union still seemed dominant. It was another superpower. It had nuclear weapons, global influence, and satellites spanning the globe. Yet the Soviet Union ceased to exist 900 days later due to economic implosion.

The idea that nations follow a pattern as they collapse isn't new. Decades ago, I did a week of radio programs on "The Decline of a Nation." A decade later, I did another week on "When Nations Die" because of a book that was published with that title.

What is new is how this video explains the seven stages of collapse and applies them to previous empires. But the key point of the video is the reality that America has already completed five of the seven stages. We aren't approaching the pattern but are within it.

As I often suggest, we can resolve some of these issues, but the first step is to admit that we are following this pattern of collapse. Below we will be looking at some of the reasons other empires fell and connect it to what is happening in our world today.

End of Everything

Now we will look at the book by Victor Davis Hanson, *The End of Everything: How Wars Descend into Annihilation.*{2}

In his book he provides four historical examples: the city-state of Thebes, ancient Carthage, Byzantine Constantinople, and the Aztec Empire. The leaders believed their illustrious pasts would be enough to prevent their destruction. Alexander the Great, Roman Scipio, Muslim Mehmet, and the Spanish conquistador Cortés proved them wrong.

He explains that the leveling of Thebes by Alexander the Great, the erasure of Carthage by Scipio, the conquest and transformation of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmet, and the obliteration of the Aztecs all marked the end of cultures and civilizations.

Alexander, for example, brought an end to classical Greece. The fall of Constantinople marked the end of the Mediterranean world as the nexus of European commerce. And the largest Christian cathedral in the West became the greatest mosque in the Islamic world.

The book is a warning to us today, but I also realize that few people will read his book. That is why I would encourage you to watch his five-minute video summary produced by Hillsdale College.{3}

He says his book "is about the existential destruction of the losing side in a war. This is very rare in history. It doesn't happen very often. But when it does, it should enlighten us how it does why it does, and can it happen again?"

He explains that he wrote his book "not just as a historical journey to document the rare cases of a targeted nation being completely destroyed, but as a warning that human nature doesn't change." We naively assumed that globalization would create a common humanity and bring an end to global conflict. Instead, he "noticed that there were more and more existential threats coming from autocratic regimes."

He reminds us that the same mentalities and delusions that doomed the Thebans, Carthaginians, the Byzantines, and the Aztecs are still with us today. Even as they were about to be slaughtered, some may still have been thinking, "It cannot happen here."

He wants us to be aware that what happened in the past could happen in the future. We need to learn from the past and protect ourselves in the future. This is a sobering call for

contemporary readers to heed the lessons of obliteration, lest we blunder into catastrophe once again. He reminds us that the world needs a strong America so that we can prevent "the end of everything."

Peak Human

Let's now turn to examine the book *Peak Human,*{4} written by historian Johan Norberg.

His book explains what we can learn from the rise and fall of "golden ages." He describes seven of humanity's greatest civilizations from ancient Athens and the Roman Republic to Renaissance Italy, the Dutch Republic, and today's Anglosphere.

Each had their golden age and contributed to our world today. Ancient Greece gave us democracy and the rule of law. From the Muslim world came algebra and modern medicine. The Dutch Republic gave us economic ideas and some of the greatest artistic movements.

He explained that he picked these civilizations because each of them exemplifies what can be described as a golden age. This was a period of innovations that revolutionized many fields and sectors in a short period of time. The characteristics are cultural creativity, scientific discoveries, technological achievements, and economic growth.

He laments that human history is a long list of deprivations and horrors. But it is also the source of the knowledge, institutions, and technologies that have set most of humanity free from such horrors. It requires raw material, but the citizens needed to be free to experiment and innovate, without being subject to feudal lords, centralized governments, or raving armies.

In a recent interview with John Stossel{5}, he talked about how Rome inspired our form of government, a republic with a

system of checks and balances. “There is a reason why we have a Senate, and they meet in the Capitol,” Norberg explained. “We borrow these ideas from the Romans.”

Of course, these empires fell. “The emperors wanted to become popular by handing out free stuff to people. Originally, this started small. You just handed the very poor means of subsistence. But it was popular, so the group that lived on the public’s expense grew larger all the time.”

Eventually the ever-expanding system of entitlements became too much. Norberg observed, “Romans could conquer the world, but they couldn’t do entitlement reform.” To pay for this, the Roman emperors devalued their currency by putting less gold and silver in each coin. He concluded that, “Inflation was much worse than barbarian invaders.”

This sounds like our world today. Modern governments, including our own, make more financial promises than they can keep. To pay for it, they print more money. We have been living in a golden age, but the question before us today is whether it will continue.

Loss of Moral Values

In this section we will look at an essay by Allen Mashburn who reminds us that “Societies That Surrender Moral Foundation Historically Self-Destruct.”{6}

This is not a new idea. Decades ago, I did a week of radio programs on “The Decline of a Nation.” A decade later, I did another week on “When Nations Die” because of a book that was published with that title. And more recently I even did a week of programs based on a book that compared America to Rome.

The reason for Mashburn’s article were several events that took place during Pride Month. He “never envisioned a day where transvestites would lecture us on human biology, or sterilizers would pose as health professionals advocating for

human rights. It seems that our nation has descended into a state of utter madness, where men can now claim pregnancy and the number of genders rivals the alphabet."

Those issues are just a few of the many legitimate concerns which point to the well-documented decline and fall of other civilizations. Greece tolerated and even celebrated immoral behavior. And "the decline of the Roman Empire can be attributed to the abandonment of strong familial bonds and moral values in favor of weakness and laxity." He observes that the similarity between Rome and America is alarming.

Of course, the pattern we recognize in Greece and Rome can be seen in other civilizations in the past. That would include the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Persians, and even the nation of Israel. In Isaiah 5:20 we read that God pronounced judgment on Israel. "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter."

Of course, there is another side of this equation. Mashburn reminds us that "whenever a nation upholds high moral standards, it reaches the pinnacle of success." Yes, it is true that nations decline when they lose a moral foundation for society. But they also flourish when it upholds morality and integrity while also supporting and encouraging strong families.

He also quotes from the book, *Christians in the Wake of the Sexual Revolution*, by Randy Alcorn. He warns that unless our country experiences spiritual repentance and undergoes a profound reversal of moral values, we risk inviting the same judgment that befell Sodom and Gomorrah.

That is why Christians should devote themselves to daily prayers for our nation's spiritual and moral well-being. The only way to reverse this downward moral spiral is for a spiritual revival and spiritual repentance in this country.

America's Expiration Date

Finally, we will look at a book by Cal Thomas, *America's Expiration Date*.{7}

He asks, what is America's future? The book came out years ago but has a new preface and is more relevant today. He was on my radio program to talk about the fall of empires and the future of the United States.

He begins with an observation by Sir John Glubb, who wrote *The Fate of Empires and the Search for Survival*. He noticed an interesting historical fact. The average age of a nation or empire's greatness is only 250 years. Most nations lose their way in a relatively short amount of time.

Using that ruler, Cal Thomas gives us a history lesson of the Persian Empire, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Arab Empire, the Spanish Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the British Empire, and the Russian Empire. He concludes with the United States.

Each empire fell for different reasons, but they are lessons to us today. Sometimes they fell because they became too prosperous and thus too apathetic. Sometimes they fell because the empire was over extended. Most had a period of decadence and decline. The Spanish empire was so riven with conflict, they were never invaded because other countries saw nothing worth conquering.

Persia's decline was due to class struggle. The common people, who were not part of the upper class, began organizing riots and revolts. Kings became greedy and started stealing from the nation's wealth rather than sharing the wealth with the people. The social structure collapsed.

As we have discussed above, Rome's fall was gradual. The familiar saying, "Rome wasn't built in a day." Neither was it destroyed in a day. As the Roman empire grew, more money

needed to be provided to the military. The empire's infrastructure suffered. And the common people suffered because the ruling class cared more about what was on the next horizon than what was at home.

He does believe that there is still time to resurrect the republic, but the answer can't be found in politicians. Our future doesn't depend on the White House, but instead is dependent on what we do in our house.

Cal Thomas ends his book with valuable suggestions. First, set standards of decency and morality for your yourself and your family. Reevaluate the education of your children. Don't send them to schools or universities that have largely become propaganda centers for secular progressives. Gather with other believers to worship, celebrate, and to encourage one another. Daily obey the call to "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19), often witnessing with words and actions.

Notes

1. The 7-Stage Collapse Pattern, www.youtube.com/watch?v=wb39CeK_yWg.
2. Victor Davis Hanson, *The End of Everything: How Wars Descend into Annihilation*, NY: Basic Books, 2024.
3. Victor Davis Hanson, www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8cOEuIUTTw.
4. Johan Norberg, *Peak Human*, London: Atlantic Books, 2025.
5. John Stossel, *Golden Ages*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=opHnY8tjzug
6. Allen Mashburn, "Societies That Surrender Moral Foundation Historically Self-Destruct," amgreatness.com/2023/07/06/societies-that-surrender-moral-foundation-historically-self-destruct/.
7. Cal Thomas, *America's Expiration Date*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020.

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Woke Theology

We frequently hear the term “woke” in current discussions. Campuses, corporations, and even some churches are described as being woke. What does the term mean? How are these ideas influencing society? Is there any connection to ESG mandates and stakeholder capitalism? And how should Christians respond to the influence of wokeness?

Definition of the Term



The term means that one is “awake” to the true nature of the world at a time when so many in society are asleep. In his book on *Christianity and Wokeness*, Owen Strachan explains that “wokeness occurs when one embraces the system of thought called critical race theory. CRT teaches that all societal life is structured along racial power dynamics.”

According to this view, race is a “social construct,” not biologically based, and merely exists in our imagination. This is one place where there might be some agreement between wokeness and the Bible. The Bible teaches that we are “one race.” Some translations, for example, for Acts 17:26 refer to all humans as “one blood.” Another verse would be Galatians 3:28 which says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

I have found that woke theology often surfaces in the non-Christian world as a substitute religion. Woke theology also surfaces in some churches that are legitimately concerned about injustice. They want to be relevant to the cultural

dialogue and thus adopt wokeness.

These terms are sometimes misused, which is why Strachan also devotes a section on explaining what wokeness is *not*. Here are just five statements of the fifteen he discusses:

- Wanting societal harmony across backgrounds does not make you woke.

- Seeing massive failings in American and Western history, sustained patterns of racist thought, does not make you woke.

- Doing everything you can and know to do to build bonds with people different from you in various ways does not make you woke.

- Praying for greater diversity in your church through saving of fellow sinners does not make you woke.

- Wanting greater justice in the world doesn't make you woke.

In this article we will be looking at various aspects of woke theology. What is the ideology? How does it relate to critical race theory? What about corporations that have adopted a woke ideology? And how can we as Christians respond to this current cultural trend?

Woke Ideology

Wokeness includes the ideas of critical race theory and antiracism but is broader than just these ideas about race and racial justice. It also includes other social, legal, and even environmental concerns. These ideas were first developed and promoted on university campuses but have made their way into government, corporations, and nearly every part of society.

It is most visible through the actions of people who call themselves "social justice warriors." Critics might describe them as "virtue-signaling liberals" or merely call them "the woke." Whatever name you give to these groups, they have been

successful in influencing nearly every
institution in America and much of the Western world.

They use inflamed rhetoric and what one commentator calls "*ex-cathedra* incantations of pseudo-values so absurd that only a few years ago it would have seemed like they must be kidding." That's a fancy way of saying that you can't believe people are completely serious when they are saying crazy things about race, gender, and science.

Much of this began on university campuses across the nation. Professors promoted ideas about cultural transformation that influenced the young minds who became the future opinion-forming elite of today. These ideas were reinforced because of a liberal media forming a feed-back loop between a leftist academy and a liberal establishment media.

This is an important principle to understand. In the past, we used to hear parents and others argue that the nutty ideas in the heads of college students would fade away as they had to earn a living and deal with the realities of the world of business. What happened was the fact that these college graduates found previous graduates in some of these corporations who were woke soul mates. The woke ideas on campus often became the foundational ideas in business and government. The media continued to reinforce those crazy woke ideas.

In her book, *Awake: Not Woke*, Noelle Mering explains how many in this emerging generation do not believe they are defined as being in the image of God but instead are called to fight evil in society. They are merely one entity in a group identity rather than someone made in the image and likeness of God. They aren't praised or criticized by their actions and attitudes. Instead, they are elevated or condemned based on their group, their racial background, or their gender. They are not only being indoctrinated by critical theory on race but also by critical theory on sex and gender. And obedience

to these ideas is achieved through thought and speech control.

Critical Race Theory

One aspect of wokeness is critical race theory. Critical theory began at the University of Frankfurt's Institute for Social Research, which came to be known as the "Frankfurt School." The Frankfurt scholars fled to Columbia University's Teachers College in New York in 1934 to escape the Nazis.

Critical theory traces all social injustice to inequities in power that are based on class, race, gender, or sexual orientation. In classical Marxism, the focus was on class, with the assumption that the working class would rise up against the capitalist oppressors. By contrast, critical theory is a form of cultural Marxism that seeks a radical transformation of society by uprooting present social authorities. Cultural Marxism retains basic Marxist assumptions but advocated a "long march through the institutions," to quote a leading thinker, Antonio Gramsci.

You are either in power or out of power. If you are in power, you are automatically discredited. If you are underprivileged, you are immune from criticism. The underprivileged can make demands, but they need not make arguments, since the whole system, including basic rationality, is rigged against them. This also means that the claims of critical race theory are unfalsifiable.

At its core, critical race theory is impractical. James Lindsay asks you to imagine you own a small tailor shop where you must assist each customer individually. Two people enter your store: one is white, and the other is black. If you choose to serve the black person first, it shows you are racist because you don't trust a black person in the store unsupervised. If you choose to serve the white person first, it shows you are racist because you value white people over black people.

How should we respond to these claims? First, the Bible teaches that truth exists and can be discerned (Proverbs 30:5, John 8:32, 2 Timothy 3:16). Racial bias may be a problem, but the real impediment to proper biblical interpretation is our sin (John 3:19-20). Proponents of the woke agenda reject rational arguments and censor contrary ideas about race and society.

Christians are to love God with our minds (Mark 12:30). We are to "destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God" because we are to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Second is the issue of grace. According to their view, members of an "oppressor" race will never really be forgiven because they will always be part of that race. By contrast, the Bible teaches that we are guilty because we are sinful (Romans 3:23, 6:23) not because of our racial status. We cannot earn salvation by good works because salvation is a gift of grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). We are redeemed through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22-24).

Woke Corporations

Corporations that have gone woke have been increasingly involved in politics. Here are just a few examples from the last year.

When the Georgia legislature debated and then passed voter integrity laws, the CEOs of several corporations took to the media to express their displeasure. For example, the CEO of Coca-Cola complained the voting law was oppressive, which then brought attention to the fact that the company was doing business in China with oppressive human rights violations. The CEO of Delta Airlines complained about voter IDs as other critics were reminding them that you couldn't get on a Delta flight without showing a form of ID. But if these Georgia laws were supposedly an attempt at voter suppression, they failed

since the number of voters in the latest election set records.

Many of these companies seem to be reevaluating their past actions. They can see the downward financial trajectory of past woke companies. The common phrase “get woke, go broke” seems to be true.

They also have noticed how members of Congress have responded. Senator Rick Scott wrote an open letter to “Woke Corporate America,” saying that he hoped they were having fun with their virtue signaling and the attempts to one-up each other. But he reminded them they destroyed working people’s jobs and destroyed some small businesses.

Although there are some members in Congress who want to pressure corporations to be less woke, there are other significant pressures on these companies to be more woke. This comes from the enforcing of ESG standards. The “E” stands for environmental concerns. What is the company doing to address the threat of climate change by lowering carbon emissions? The “S” stands for social and looks at the company’s relationship with stakeholders (often called stakeholder capitalism). The “G” stands for governance and desires diversity on the board of directors and corporate transparency.

While many of the ESG goals are admirable, recent examples show how it has been used as a political tool against anyone who dissents. A senior HSBC banker was canceled merely because he correctly observed that some of the climate change rhetoric was shrill and unsubstantiated.

Recently Tesla was removed from the S&P 500 ESG Index, even though they are the largest producer of electric cars and a few months ago had the fourth largest weighting in the index. Could it be that this change had more to do with the words and actions of Elon Musk than anything at Tesla?

How Should We Respond?

We are living in a time when we can be canceled for something we say or even for our lack of enthusiasm for a particular policy or piece of legislation. That is why Rod Dreher warns us in his book, *Live Not by Lies*, of a coming "soft totalitarianism." The old, hard totalitarianism came from the state (Germany, Russia) and was dedicated to the eradication of Christianity. This new totalitarianism usually comes from the Left in society but is also dedicated to the eradication of Christianity.

The soft totalitarianism of today demands allegiance to a set of progressive beliefs. Compliance is forced less by the state than by elites who form public opinion, and by private corporations that control our lives through technology. Citizens won't be taken away in handcuffs by the state, but their lives will be devastated by Leftist elites that will do what they can to destroy their lives.

Dissenters from the woke party line find their businesses, careers, and reputations destroyed. They are pushed out of the public square, stigmatized, canceled, and demonized as racists, sexists, and homophobes.

His book is full of stories from Christians who endured hard totalitarianism and provide us with models for how to address this more insidious form of soft totalitarianism. Often this is coming from business and the media.

What is a biblical perspective on race and gender? Christians and churches are facing persecution because many of these woke ideas are contrary to Scripture. Nevertheless, many of these woke ideas are making their way into the pulpits and Sunday School classes of many churches.

Woke religion rejects the salvation of Christ and supplants it with a utopian view that true salvation can be found in

environmental activism, racial activism, and stakeholder capitalism. We can applaud young people looking to make the world a better place, but they have put their allegiance into a worldview contrary to biblical principles.

Woke faith at its core is atheistic and denies God and Christ. Much of it is rooted in a Marxist view of the world. Second, it also replaces the biblical idea of sin (Romans 3:23) with salvation through environmental activism and racial struggle. Third, it is a utopian vision that assumes we can create "heaven on Earth" without Christ.

If we want to address real social problems in our society, we need to come back to biblical principles. Many of the successful social movements in the last two centuries (abolition, suffrage, civil rights) rested on a biblical foundation. We don't need woke theology to bring salt and light to our fallen world.

Additional Reading

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical View on Wokeness,* Point of View booklet, 2022.
Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical View on Critical Race Theory,* Point of View booklet, 2021.
Rod Dreher, *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents,* New York: Sentinel, 2020.
Noelle Mering, *Awake: Not Woke, A Christian Response to the Cult of Progressive Ideology*, Gastonia, NC: Tan Books, 2021.
Vivek Ramaswamy, *Woke, Inc.,* New York: Center Street, 2021.
Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel and the Way to Stop It*, Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021.

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Gen-Z: The Generation That Ends Christian Influence in America?

In order to grow the number of Gen-Z Christians, we need an understanding of ways to build bridges from their pluralistic, secular worldview to seriously contemplating the unique grace of God. Steve Cable draws upon the wisdom of two pastors who are making a real difference in the lives of young adults to address this important topic.

What Are Gen-Zs Like?



In this article we look beyond the Millennials to consider the latest generation and what they tell us about the future of Evangelicals in America. Gen-Z is the generation born between 1995 and 2010. This year, half of the Gen-Z generation are 18 or older. By the time they are all at least 18, the Millennials and Gen-Zs will make up almost 50% of the adult population. We will consider how this generation compares with previous generations. We want to understand this generation to truly communicate the good news of the gospel to them; to help them "to walk in a manner worth of the Lord."{1}

In their book, *So the Next Generation Will Know*{2}, Sean McDowell and J. Warner Wallace identified some key traits common among Gen-Zs. They are:

1. Digital Multitaskers – "spending nearly every waking hour interacting with . . . digital technology," often while watching television

2. Impatient – quickly moving from thing to thing with an attention span of around 8 seconds
3. Fluid – constantly blurring the lines; making truth, genders, and family structures personal choices
4. Lonely – swamped in social media where personal relationships are minimized while personal troubles follow them everywhere. Sean points to "the availability of endless counterfeits that claim to be able to fill their hearts with meaning."{3}
5. Individualistic – individual feelings more important than facts while judging the choices of others is avoided. As James White points out in Meet Generation Z{4}, "the ability to find whatever they're after without the help of intermediaries . . . has made them more independent. . . . Like no other generation before, Gen-Z faces a widening chasm between wisdom and information."{5}

Most importantly, most of these young Americans are thoroughly secular with little exposure to Christian theology. As White opines, "They are lost. They are not simply living in and being shaped by a post-Christian cultural context. They do not even have a memory of the gospel. . . . They have endless amounts of information but little wisdom, and virtually no mentors."{6}

As they enter adulthood, the culture around them will not encourage them to consider the claims of Christ. In fact, the Millennials going before them are already seen leaving any Christian background behind as they age into their thirties.

Gen-Z: How Are They Trending?

What can we truly know about the religious thinking of Gen-Zs age 11 to 25? Pew Research surveyed teens and their parents giving us a glimpse into both{7}.

They found *one third* of American teens are religiously

Unaffiliated.{8} In contrast, their parents were less than *one quarter* Unaffiliated. Another Pew survey{9} found more than *half* of young adult Gen-Zs are unaffiliated. This group is easily the largest religious group among Gen-Zs.

Teens attend church services with their parents, but lag behind in other areas. Less than *one fourth* of teens consider religion very important. And on an absolute belief in God and praying daily, the teens trail their parents significantly.

Using an index of religious commitment{10}, almost *half* of the parents but only *one third* of teens rated high. In fact, almost half of teenagers with parents who rated high did not rate high themselves.{11}

Perhaps the minds of teenagers are mush. Their views will firm up as they age. In reality, older Gen-Zs and Millennials also trail older adults by more than 20 points in believing in God and praying daily.{12} Also, church attendance drops dramatically among these young adults who are no longer attending with parents.

If religion were important to teens, they would look to religious teaching and beliefs to help make decisions about what is right and wrong. But less than *one third* of teens affiliated with a religion turned to its teachings to make such decisions.

As George Barna reports,{13} "The faith gap between Millennials and their predecessors is the widest intergenerational difference identified at any time in the last seven decades." It seems that Gen-Z will increase this gap.

Gen-Z: Worldview and Apologetics

Why have the Unaffiliated been growing dramatically over the last 25 years while doctrinally consistent Christians have been declining? At one level, we recognize the watered-down

gospel taught in many churches encourages people to pursue other things and not waste time on church. That may have been the primary issue at one time. But in this decade, we are seeing a real reduction in the number of Evangelicals as well. The self-professed Evangelicals{14} among those ages 18 to 29 has reduced from 29% down to 20%, a reduction of almost one third.

One major driver is the dominant worldview of our young adult society. The worldview promoted by our schools, media, and entertainment industry has changed from a Christian inspired worldview to a worldview which is secular and specifically anti-Christian. As James White observes, "It's simply a cultural reality that people in a post-Christian world are genuinely incredulous that anyone would think like a Christian—or at least, what it means in their minds to think like a Christian."{15}

Almost all Gen-Zs have been brought up hearing the worldview of Scientism espoused. This worldview teaches "that all that can be known within nature is that which can be empirically verified . . . If something cannot be examined in a tangible, scientific manner, it is not simply unknowable, it is meaningless."{16} At the same time, most Gen-Zs have not even been exposed to an Evangelical Christian worldview. Consequently, apologetics is critical for opening their minds to hear the truth of the gospel. Many of them need to understand that the basic tenets of a Christian worldview can be true before they will consider whether these tenets are true for them. Answering questions such as: "Could there be a creator of this universe?" and "Could that creator possibly be involved in this world which has so much pain and suffering?" is a starting point to opening their minds to a Christian view.

Encouraging Gen-Zs to understand the tenets of their worldview and comparing them to a Christian worldview begins the process of introducing them to the gospel. As White points out, "I

have found that discussing the awe and wonder of the universe, openly raising the many questions surrounding the universe and then positing the existence of God, is one of the most valuable approaches that can be pursued."{17} The Christian worldview is coherent, comprehensive and compelling as it explains why our world is the way it is and how its trajectory may be corrected into one that honors our Creator and lifts up people to a new level of life.

Gen-Z: Removing the Isolation of Faith

What will it take to reach Gen-Z? James White says, ". . . the primary reason Gen-Z disconnects from the church is our failure to equip them with a biblical worldview that empowers them to understand and navigate today's culture."{18} If we want to equip Gen-Zs to embrace faith, we must directly discuss worldview issues with them.

The challenge is exacerbated as most Gen-Zs are taught a redefined tolerance: to not only accept classmates with different worldviews, e.g. Muslims and the Unaffiliated, but to believe that it is as true for them as your parents' worldview is for them. As Sean McDowell states, "Gen-Zs are exposed to more competing worldviews—and at an earlier age—than any generation in history."{19}

The new tolerance leads directly to a pluralistic view of salvation. Christ stated, "No one comes to the Father except through me,"{20} and Peter preached that "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven . . . by which we must be saved."{21} Yet the survey of American teens{22} finds *less than one third* believe that only one religion is true, broken up into *two-thirds* of Evangelicals and *less than one-third* of Mainlines and Catholics.

Compounding these issues is the growing practice of limiting the impact of religious beliefs on real life. Sean points out, "The biggest challenge in teaching worldview to young people

is the way our increasingly secular culture fosters the compartmentalization of faith."{23} We need to help them see how a consistent Christian worldview applies to all issues. It is foolish to segregate your spiritual beliefs from your life decisions.

As an example, many Gen-Zs are enamored by a socialist view that the government should provide everything we need, equally distributing goods and services to all. Those who work hard and excel will have their productivity redistributed equally. It sounds like a possibly good approach and yet it has destroyed the economies of many countries including Russia, Cuba, and Venezuela. It fails because it is based on a worldview that "assumes greed comes from inequality in the distribution of material goods in society."{24} In contrast, the Bible is clear that greed is part of the fallenness of the human heart. As a result, any centralized function with no competition discourages productivity and becomes an inefficient bureaucracy.

Reaching Gen-Zs

Today, most Gen-Zs move into adulthood with little exposure to the gospel. The majority are either Unaffiliated, another religion, or have a nominal Christian background. Current surveys find that 98% of young Americans do not have a Christian worldview.{25}

This sobering data does not mean giving up on reaching Gen-Z. But if we are not intentional about it, we are not going to stem the tide. As James White observes, "What is killing the church today is (focusing) on keeping Christians within the church happy, well fed, and growing. The mission . . . must be about those who have not crossed the line of faith."

And Sean McDowell points out that we need "to teach the difference between subjective and objective truth claims and make sure they understand that Christianity falls in the

latter category."{26}

Sean encourages a focus on relationships saying, "Relationships are the runway on which truth lands. Take the time to listen with empathy, monitor from a place of wisdom, and demonstrate your concern."{27} White agrees, saying, "If we want (them) to know the faith, we have to teach, model and incarnate truth in our relationship with them."{28} From a place of relationship, we can address challenges keeping them from truly hearing the gospel.

One key challenge is the role of media. As Sean notes, "Media shapes their beliefs, and it also shapes the orientation of their hearts."{29} To counter this pervasive influence, he suggests engaging them in a skeptic's blog. Help them consider 1) what claim is being made, 2) is the claim relevant if true, and 3) decide how to investigate the claim.{30} By learning to investigate claims, they are examining the truth of the gospel. We should never fear the gospel coming up short when looking for the truth.

Key ways White's church is connecting with the Unaffiliated include:

1. Rethinking evangelism around Paul's message in Athens. Tantalizing those with no background to search for truth in Christ.
2. Teaching the grace/truth dynamic in quick segments consistent with their learning styles.
3. Being cultural missionaries – learning from those who have not been Christians.
4. Cultivating a culture of invitation by creating tools to invite friends all the time.

If we focus on growing the number of Gen-Z Christians, we could change the trajectory of American faith. If we devote ourselves to prayer, the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and reaching the lost in America rather than continuing church as

usual, God can use us to turn the tide.

Notes

1. Colossians 1:9.
2. Josh McDowell and J. Warner Wallace, *So the Next Generation Will Know*, 2019, David C. Cook.
3. McDowell and Wallace, p. 66.
4. James White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World*, Baker Books, 2017.
5. White, p. 44.
6. White, p. 64-65.
7. Pew Research Center, U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals, September 10, 2020.
8. These are people who self-identify as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular. In previous surveys, we referred to them as the Nones. Calling them the "unaffiliated" helps us avoid the confusion between "Nones" and "nuns."
9. Call out Pew survey from 2019.
10. The index of religious commitment looks at the answers to questions on church attendance, belief in God, prayer, and importance of religion and rates a respondents commitment from high to low based on their answers.
General Social Survey, 2018.
11. 42% of the teenagers with parents with a high index had a medium or low index.
12. General Social Survey, 2018
13. American Worldview Inventory 2020, Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University.
14. Pew Research surveys 2007, 2014, 2019.
15. White, p. 130.
16. White, p. 141.
17. White, p. 139.
18. White, p. 80.
19. McDowell and Wallace, p. 81.
20. John 14:6b.
21. Acts 4:12.

22. Pew Research Center, U.S. Teens.
23. McDowell and Wallace, p. 87.
24. Ibid, p. 93.
25. American Worldview Inventory 2020.
26. McDowell and Wallace, p. 113.
27. McDowell and Wallace, p. 78.
28. White, p. 64.
29. McDowell and Wallace, p. 164.
30. Ibid, p. 173-4.

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Socialism and Society

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of the popularity of socialist ideas in America from a biblical perspective.

Socialism is more popular today than anyone would have predicted a few years ago. A significant number of socialist characters can be found in Congress. Universities have many professors who are promoting socialism. And more young people than ever believe socialism is superior to capitalism.



Why is socialism so appealing to so many Americans? Young people are drawn to the siren song of Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Part of the reason is that it appeals to their sense of fairness. Another reason is that it promises lots of free stuff.

Free college tuition and student loan forgiveness are examples. The millennial generation (Generation Y) and the iGen generation (Generation Z) have lots of student debt. They see the need but forget that someone would have to pay for this new massive entitlement. And they rarely stop and think about why someone who didn't go to college and took a blue-collar job should pay for their university education. These may be the most educated generations in history, but they don't seem to spend too much time reflecting on what they supposedly learned in economics.

The cost of some of these policies is enormous. Just covering the cost of tuition at public colleges and universities is estimated at $70 billion a year. One study of the cost of government-run health care (called "Medicare for All") was estimated to cost $32 trillion during the first ten years. Some estimate the cost of the "Green New Deal" to be $93 trillion. We can certainly debate how accurate some of those estimates are, but we can't ignore that they would be very expensive once these programs are implemented.

There is some evidence that the popularity of socialism is waning. A post-election survey done by the Cultural Research Center shows a significant decline in support for socialism. George Barna believes that another reason for this decline is the aggressive marketing of a government-driven culture that show young and old what socialism in America would really be like.

He found that the most precipitous decline in support for socialism was among Americans ages 30 to 49. Just a decade ago, they were the demographic I often pointed to as those who supported socialism more than capitalism. That has changed significantly.

Socialism is less popular even for Americans who are age 50 years or older. In the past, they have been the group most consistent in their support of capitalism. But even in this

group, there was an eight percentage-point decline of support for socialism.

The demographic groups with the least support for socialism were Christians who had a biblical worldview and what George Barna calls SAGE Cons (Spiritually Active Governance Engaged Conservative Christians). But there are still a small percentage of them who support socialism. That is why I also address whether the Bible teaches socialism.

The Promise of Socialism

In order to understand the appeal of socialism, we need to make a clear distinction between capitalism and socialism. *Capitalism* is an economic system in which there is private property and the means of production are privately owned. In capitalism, there is a limited role for government. *Socialism* is an economic system in which there is public or state ownership of the means of production, and the primary focus is on providing an equality of outcomes. In socialism, the state is all-important and involved in central planning.

Often when young people are surveyed about socialism, the pollster does not provide a definition. If you merely believe socialism means more equality in society, then you can see why so many choose socialism over capitalism. Also, young people under the age of 30 are probably the least likely to associate socialism with Soviet-style repression. Instead, they may have in their minds the current government push toward European socialism and find that more attractive.

There is also an important philosophical reason for the popularity of socialism. When Karl Marx first proposed the concepts of socialism and communism, he enjoyed an intellectual advantage. He could talk about the problems with capitalism the modern world was going through as they were adapting to the difficult process of industrialization. He

could contrast the *reality* of capitalism with the *utopian* ideal of socialism.

Utopian visions will always win out over the harsh reality of the world. But we now have the terrible record of socialism. Unfortunately, socialism's death toll never quite gets factored into any equation. The late columnist Joseph Sobran said: "It makes no difference that socialism's actual record is terribly bloody; socialism is forever judged by its promises and supposed possibilities, while capitalism is judged by its worst cases."{1}

Dinesh D'Souza reminds us that many countries have tried socialism and all failed. The first socialist experiment was the Soviet Union, then came lots of countries in eastern Europe (Poland, Yugoslavia, Albania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and East Germany). Add to that countries in Asia (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, North Korea, and China) and countries in South America (Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Venezuela) and Africa (Angola, Ghana, Tanzania, Benin, Mali, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). By his count, there are 25 failed experiments in socialism.{2}

The typical answer to these failures is that each of these wasn't done correctly. The failure of these socialist experiments was a failure of implementation. But this time, they say, we will get it right. Believing in socialism apparently mean never having to say you're sorry.

In the next section we will look at the argument that democratic socialism is the ideal we should pursue. We should ignore this list of socialist failures and focus on socialism in the Scandinavian countries.

A Different Kind of Socialism

Proponents of socialism not only argue that it was not implemented correctly in the past but also argue that what

they are proposing is “democratic socialism.” They usually point to the Scandinavian countries as examples.

Anders Hagstrom in one of his videos asks, “What does socialism mean to [people such as actor and comedian Jim Carrey]?” He says that conversations about socialism often go like this: “A liberal says we should be socialist. A conservative points to Venezuela, and says socialism doesn’t work. A liberal says, What about Sweden and Norway? The conservative then points out that those countries aren’t actually socialist.”{3}

He says that even if we accept the comment by liberals, there is a problem. “Nordic countries have tiny populations of less than 10 million. And copying and pasting their policies to a country of 330 million isn’t going to work.” These Nordic countries were successful before they adopted the redistributive policies they have now. Here’s a reality check: if Sweden were to join the U.S. as a state, Sweden would be poorer than all but 12 states.

Hagstrom also explains that the policies of true socialists like Senator Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio Cortez go far beyond what the Nordic countries have. For example, Bernie Sanders wants a planned economy. None of the Nordic states have this. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez wants to abolish profit. None of the Nordic countries have done that. And both of them want a universal minimum wage. None of the Nordic states have that.

There’s another problem with the argument. These countries aren’t socialist. John Stossel in one of his videos interviewed a prominent Swedish historian.{4} Johan Norberg makes it clear that “Sweden is not socialist—because the government doesn’t own the means of production. To see that, you have to go to Venezuela or Cuba or North Korea.” He does admit that the country did have something that resembled socialism a few decades ago. The government heavily taxed the

citizens and spent heavily. That was not a good period in Swedish history, especially for the economy.

Yet even with the high Swedish taxes, there was simply not enough money to fund Sweden's huge welfare state. Norberg explains that "People couldn't get the pension that they thought they depended on for the future." At this point, the Swedish people had enough and began to reduce the size and scope of the government.

John Stossel says, "They cut public spending, privatized the national rail network, abolished certain government monopolies, eliminated inheritance taxes and sold state-owned businesses like the maker of Absolut vodka." While it is true that Sweden does have a larger welfare state than the US and higher taxes than the US, there are many other areas where Sweden is actually more free market.

Socialism and Equality

One of the moral arguments for socialism is that it creates a society with more social and economic equality. Proponents want us to consider the fairness argument when applied to a free market. How fair is it that basketball star Lebron James makes more than $37 million when a social worker starting out only makes about $30,000? Even more extreme is the estimate that Jeff Bezos makes more than $320 million a day while the average Amazon salary is around $35,000 a year.

Of course, this is what happens in a free society where people with different skills, different abilities, and different motivations are allowed to participate in a free market. You will get inequality, but you also have a free society where people can use their gifts to pursue their calling and still receive a good income.

We don't have to guess what will happen in a socialist economy because we have lots of historical examples. In a desire to

bring equality, socialism doesn't bring people up out of poverty. Instead, it drives them into poverty. Consider two test cases (Germany and Korea).

After World War II, Germany was divided into two countries: West Germany was capitalist, while East Germany was socialist. Throughout the time they were divided, there was a striking difference between the two countries. When the two countries were reunified, the GDP of East Germany was a third of the GDP of West Germany.

An even better example is North and South Korea, because it lasted longer and continues to this day. South Korea is now more than 20 times richer than North Korea. Of course, people in South Korea are also freer than North Korea. They are also taller and live about 12 years longer than people in North Korea.{5}

By contrast, capitalism provides every person a chance to influence the society. In his book, *United States of Socialism*, Dinesh D'Souza doesn't ignore the issue of justice but actually embraces it. Capitalism, he says, "far more than socialism, reflects the will of the people and expresses democratic consent."{6} A consumer is like a voter. As a citizen, we get to vote in an election every two to four years. But a consumer gets to vote every day with his or her dollar bills. That money represents the time and effort put in to get those dollar bills.

The free market provides you a level of popular participation and democratic consent that politics can never provide. You get to vote every day with your dollars and send economic signals to people and companies providing goods and services. Essentially, capitalism, like democracy, is a clear form of social justice.

The Bible and Socialism

Perhaps you have heard some Christians argue that the Bible actually supports socialism. The book of Acts seems to approve of socialism. In Acts 4, we find a statement that the believers in Jerusalem "had all things in common." It also says that those who possessed land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds to the apostles' feet. They distributed these gifts to anyone in need. This looks like socialism to many who are already predisposed to believe it should be the economic system of choice.

First, we need to realize that this practice was only done in Jerusalem. As you read through the rest of the book of Acts and read the letters of Paul and Peter, you see that most believers in other parts of the Roman world had private property and possessions. Paul calls upon them to give voluntarily to the work of ministry.

Second, the word voluntary applies not only to Christians in other parts of the world, but it also was a voluntary act by the believers in Jerusalem to give sacrificially to each other in the midst of persecution. This one passage in the book of Act is not a mandate for socialism.

If you keep reading in the book of Acts, you can also see that the believers in Jerusalem owned the property before they voluntarily gave the proceeds to the apostles. The next chapter (Acts 5) clearly teaches that. When Peter confronted Ananias, he clearly stated that: "While it remained, was it not your own? After it was sold, was it not in your own control?"

Owning property contradicts one of the fundamental principles of socialism. In the *Communist Manifesto*, "the abolition of property" is a major item in the plan for moving from capitalism to socialism and eventually to communism.

By contrast, the Ten Commandments assume private property. The eighth commandment forbidding stealing and the tenth commandment about coveting both assume that people have private property rights.

In fact, we can use biblical principles to evaluate economic systems like capitalism and socialism. Although the Bible does not endorse a particular system, it does have key principles about human nature, private property rights, and the role of government. These can be used to evaluate economic systems like socialism and communism.

Socialism is still a popular idea, especially among young people. Recent polls along with various books about capitalism and socialism illustrate the need for us to discuss and explain the differences between capitalism and socialism. Socialism may sound appealing until you begin to look at the devastating impact it has had on countries that travel down the road of greater governmental control.

Notes

1. Joseph Sobran quoted by Robert Knight, "Bernie's siren song of socialism," *Washington Times*. September 13, 2015, www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/sep/13/robert-knight-bernie-sanders-siren-song-of-sociali/
2. Dinesh D'Souza, *United States of Socialism*, New York: All Points Books, 2020, 3.
3. Anders Hagstrom, "When you are forced to argue socialism with a liberal," www.facebook.com/watch/?v=234493017230024.
4. John Stossel, "Sweden is not a socialist success," www.facebook.com/watch/?v=407319650027595.
5. Ibid., 5.
6. Ibid., 186.

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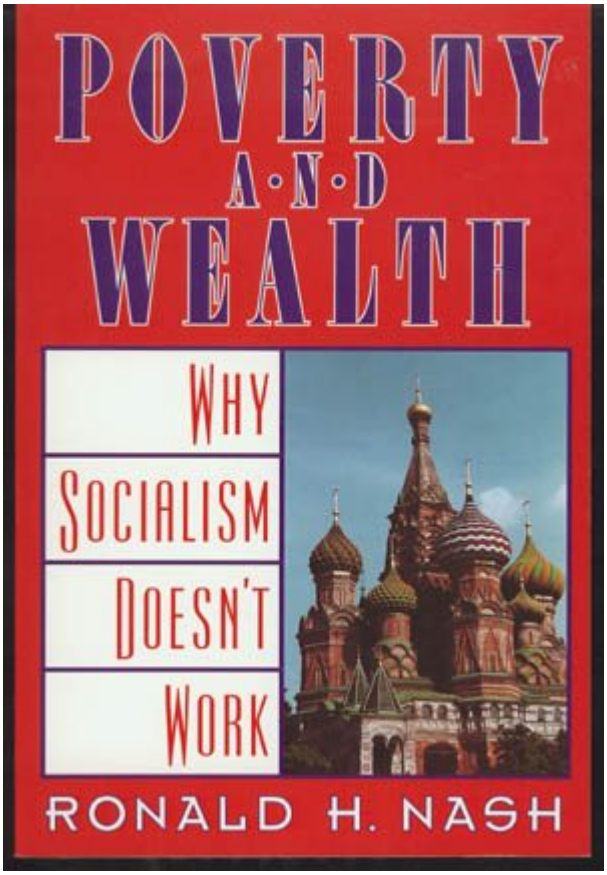
Poverty and Wealth

Don Closson examines the arguments in Ronald Nash's book Poverty and Wealth: Why Socialism Doesn't Work *and concludes that capitalism is compatible with biblical ethics.*

It's disheartening to meet young Christians who are convinced of the immorality of capitalism and the free market system. Sincere Christians often quote the second chapter of Acts which describes how the church in Jerusalem held all things in common as proof that socialism or collectivism is more biblical than the free market. Sometimes they use the Marxist critique that "poor nations are poor because rich nations oppress them." It's unusual to meet students who wholeheartedly endorses capitalism. They recognize that it works well enough to make the U.S. the richest nation on earth, but it's not something to be proud of or openly endorse.



There continues to be a heated debate in our country over which economic system is the most just and best able to weather the inevitable economic ups and downs in today's complex worldwide economy. Christians wonder if capitalism is inherently incompatible with Christian ethics. Is it driven by greed and self-interest alone? Does it thrive on oppression? Does it conflict with a biblical view of human nature?



Ronald Nash's book *Poverty and Wealth: Why Socialism Doesn't Work*{1} faces these questions head on and concludes that free market capitalism leads to abundance and political freedom because it is based on the laws of economics and the truth about human nature. Social and economic programs that ignore these laws will inevitably cause more harm than good. Even more importantly, Nash argues that capitalism is compatible with biblical ethics. He writes,

> Capitalism is quite simply the most moral system, the most effective system, and the most equitable system of economic exchange. When capitalism, the system of free economic exchange, is described fairly, there can be no question that it, rather than socialism or interventionism, comes closer to matching the demands of the Biblical ethic.{2}

In order to understand Dr. Nash's point we will define some basic economic concepts and compare capitalism with socialism and interventionism. Neither Dr. Nash's book nor I question the intentions of Christians who have accepted Marxist solutions, but we do question their wisdom. In the words of Dr. Nash,

> “Unfortunately, many Christians act as though the only thing that counts is intention. But when good intentions are not wedded to sound theory, especially sound economic theory, good intentions can often result in actions that produce consequences directly opposite to those we planned.”

Even the acceptance of free markets by China and Eastern Europe have not swayed the true believer of Marxist thinking. Our young people will encounter a Marxist critique of capitalism and the free market system at some point in their education. As parents we owe it to our children to have an answer to their certain questions.

The Market System

The market system is the set of rules that creates a voluntary system of exchange resulting in the price, selection, and quantity of products that are made and sold in an economy. Those who support capitalism believe that both parties benefit from the voluntary exchange of goods and services. Marxists, on the other hand, often argue that the free market system results in a win/lose relationship. What are the rules that define a free market system and what role should government play in maintaining it?

The rules of a free market system are simple. First, people should not be coerced into making economic exchanges. This means that they should be free from force, fraud, or theft. Another rule is that people must honor their contracts to buy or sell with another party. Just as local government provides for the traffic signals in a town, government is responsible for enforcing the basic rules of the free market. Traffic signals create order out of potential chaos on our roads. Likewise, the rules of the free market system create order out of potential economic chaos. But in neither case do the rules tell people where to go or what to trade. Both systems are neutral to an individual’s personal goals.

The decentralized actions of producers and consumers encourage the production of a vast array of products at prices that people are willing to pay. These goods and services are produced, not because someone is forced to, but because they know that by satisfying needs they can earn an income and satisfy their own desires. Free market capitalism is based on this principle of mutual accommodation. The market also encourages the efficient use of resources. Price is a factor of demand for a product and the scarcity of its components. It is the market which takes into account an almost infinite number of decisions and variables to make goods available at the best possible price. Profits and losses within the market encourage producers to move into or out of the production of a given item. Inefficient production or over-production of an item will result in losses sufficient enough to change a producer's behavior.

Government is necessary for enforcing the basic rules of a free market economy. Its interest should be to make sure that justice prevails, and to ensure the common good. This includes the right to own and exchange property, the enforcement of contracts, as well as laws forbidding the use of force, fraud, and theft. If the government itself begins to intervene beyond this role, it becomes a detriment to the market and can itself become the source of injustice. A system based on, or highly influenced, by government coercion cannot be called a free market system.

Capitalism vs. Socialism

A former president of the Evangelical Theological Society has written that capitalism violates "the basic ethical principles of Christianity" and that there is an essential political and economic dimension to the Kingdom of God which capitalism defiles. This thinking has the effect of placing supporters of capitalism among the heretics and against the Kingdom of God. Does capitalism really violate the gospel message and a

biblical worldview? Does socialism offer the only righteous means for creating and distributing wealth?

Capitalism argues that individuals have the right to make decisions about what they own. This not only assumes the right to own property, but to exchange what one owns for something else, and to be free from force in the form of fraud, theft, or the violation of a contract. The moral base of “thou shalt not steal” and “thou shalt not lie” are essential to the success of a capitalistic system. In fact, these basic rules of capitalism are very similar to an Old Testament view of righteousness which focused on the completion of covenant agreements. God is considered a righteous God partially because He fulfills His covenants with His creation.

Marxists love to point to examples like the Philippines under Ferdinand Marcos in order to criticize capitalism. This corrupt regime can surely be criticized, but not as an example of capitalism. It is representative of what might be called an interventionist economy. There are three general types of economies: capitalist, interventionist, and socialist. Capitalism and socialism are at the two ends of the continuum with interventionism in the middle. The two opposites represent two possible means of exchange. Capitalism is defined by its advocacy of free or peaceful exchange, allowing individual choice regarding the use of personal property. Socialism is defined by centralized planning, using force to get individuals to conform to its decisions. A system becomes less capitalistic and more interventionist as more and more economic decisions are coerced by the government. It becomes socialistic when basic needs are met only by the government, forcing people to deal with it exclusively. The ideal of capitalism is freedom; the ideal of socialism is forced compliance with government planning.

Critics of capitalism condemn economic systems in which interest groups use the power of government to intervene on their behalf, forcing consumers via taxes or mandates to spend

their money or use their talents in a way they would not freely choose. But this isn’t capitalism; it’s interventionism, and unfortunately a pretty good description of where the U.S. is headed.

Economic Systems and Human Nature

Is capitalism the primary cause of world poverty? Although the Bible does teach that exploitation is one cause of poverty, it also teaches that it results from indigence and sloth as well as accidents, injuries, and illness. When the prophet Amos condemned the Jews for forcing the poor to give them grain, for taking bribes, and depriving the oppressed justice, he was highlighting violations of free market capitalism as well.

Some believe that capitalism is built on greed, which the Bible condemns. However, the Bible does teach a certain level of self-interest. For example, 1 Timothy 5:8 is critical of anyone who does not provide for the needs of his family. And although selfishness exists in capitalistic countries, it is not inherent to the system; it is inherent to humanity. Either we allow people to make choices based on their own self-interest and moral virtue, or we turn those decisions over to a central government. Could it be naïve to think that government officials will use wealth in a morally superior way to those outside of government? History teaches that when power is centralized it has the tendency to be abused.

In a non-coercive free market environment, those who serve the needs of others will prosper. As long as the rule of law prevails and the government isn’t allowed to stack the deck for one particular group against another, the market protects us from the greed of others. The free market is by definition one place where coercion is not possible.

Socialists contend that competition is another evil of capitalism, but is competition itself an evil? We can agree

that using force, fraud, or theft to compete is morally wrong, but can we really say that all competition is wrong? Scarcity demands competition; as long as resources are limited we will find some competitive means for allocating them. Socialist societies use long waiting lines and bureaucratic red tape to dole out limited goods, and competition is intense for political positions that result in material gain.

There are only two ways to resolve conflict that results from scarcity. One is by force, the other is by free market competition. Non-violent free market competition has helped to alleviate the effects of scarcity by stirring people to high levels of excellence in manufacturing and services. Socialist countries are not usually known for the quantity or quality of their goods and services.

Economist Walter Williams notes that "Capitalism has a strong bias toward serving the common man. . . . Political allocation of resources, regardless of its stated purpose, is strongly biased in favor of the elite."{3} Maybe that is why the elite have such disdain for capitalism.

Critiquing Socialism

Highly collectivist economies are not known for producing what people need at a price they can afford. In the 1920s, economist Ludwig von Mises showed why central planners can never replace the market: they are unable to gather the necessary information to plan accurately. The market system provides incentives to both producers and buyers that are missing in socialistic countries. Under socialism "rewards are not related to effort and commercial risk-taking, but to party membership, bureaucratic status, political fiat and corruption."{4} Sociologist Peter Burger writes, "Simply put, Socialist equality is shared poverty by serfs, coupled with the monopolization of both privilege and power by a small (increasingly hereditary) aristocracy."{5}

One evangelical writer contends that Marxism has "a deep compassion for people. Unlike present political systems—big business, even the Church—it [Marxism] does not seem to have any particular vested interests to defend."{6} In other words, only Marxists really care about people. However, history has not been kind to Marxist collectivism. Some of the worst human rights records have been accumulated by Marxist regimes in the U.S.S.R., China, Cambodia, North Korea and Cuba. I find it hard to imagine that the millions who died at the hands of Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, or the Khmer Rouge were very impressed by the compassion of their nation's Marxist leaders.

But what about the example in Acts of all Christians sharing their goods in common or of Barnabas selling his property for the good of other believers? What some people miss is that both of these examples are of individuals making free moral choices to use their property for the good of others. They are making free market decisions regarding their possessions. This can only occur when individuals have the freedom to use their possessions to help others. If all economic decisions are made by centralized planners, moral choice is removed and the option to act upon personal moral convictions is reduced.

Living within a capitalistic society allows believers to exercise their personal responsibility to provide for the poor and less fortunate. This has resulted in remarkable examples of philanthropy in America and other capitalistic nations. In fact, no other people on earth have given as much to other nations as have Americans.

A properly functioning market system is an effective tool against oppression and corruption because it promotes the rule of law for all citizens. However, a strong moral system is necessary to keep it from being controlled by special interests. There are too many examples of economies that have been shaped for the benefit of a few. Christ's advocacy for the poor should make us a strong moral barrier to this kind of corruption.

Notes

1. Ronald H. Nash, *Poverty and Wealth: Why Socialism Doesn't Work* (Dallas: Probe Books, 1986).
2. Ibid., 80.
3. Ibid., 75.
4. Ibid., 87.
5. Ibid.
6 . Andrew Kirk, *The Good News of the Kingdom Coming* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 45, quoted in Nash, Poverty and Wealth, 191.

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Coddling of the American Mind

Drawing on the book The Coddling of the American Mind*, Kerby Anderson examines the insanity on college campuses where students cannot handle ideas and people they disagree with.*



In this article we will talk about what is happening on college campuses, and even focus on why it is happening. Much of the material is taken from the book, *The Coddling of the American Mind.*{1}

Greg Lukianoff was trying to solve a puzzle and sat down with Jonathan Haidt. Greg was a first amendment lawyer working with the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE). He was trying to figure out why students (who used to support free speech on campus) were now working to prevent speakers from coming on campus and triggered by words or phrases used by professors.

Greg also noticed something else. He has suffered from bouts

of depression and noticed some striking similarities with some of the comments by students. He found in his treatment that sometimes he and others would engage in "catastrophizing" and assuming the worst outcome. He was seeing these distorted and irrational thought patterns in students.

After a lengthy discussion they decided to write an article about it for *The Atlantic* with the title, "Arguing Towards Misery: How Campuses Teach Cognitive Distortions." The editor suggested the more provocative title, "The Coddling of the American Mind." The piece from *The Atlantic* was one of the most viewed articles of all time and was then expanded to this book.

That book used the same title: *The Coddling of the American Mind*. Jonathan was on *Point of View* last year to talk about the book. The authors believe that these significant psychological changes that have taken place in the minds of students explain much of the campus insanity we see on campus today.

They point out that two terms rose from obscurity into common campus parlance. Microaggressions are small actions or word choices that are now thought as a kind of violence. Trigger warnings are an alert the professors now must use if they may be discussing a topic that might generate a strong emotional response.

Before we talk about some of the insight in the book, it is worth mentioning that though there is a psychological component to all of this insanity, there is also an ideological component. When the original article appeared, Heather MacDonald asked if "risk-adverse child-rearing is merely the source of the problem. For example, why aren't heterosexual white males demanding safe spaces?"{2} They all had the same sort of parents who probably coddled many of them.

It would probably be best to say that the mixture of psychological deficits also with the liberal, progressive ideological ideas promoted on campus have given us the insanity we see today. We have had liberal teaching on campuses for a century, but the problem has become worse in the last decade because of the psychological issues described in the book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*.

Three Untruths (Part 1)

The book can easily be summarized in three untruths that make up the first three chapters of the book. The first is the "Untruth of Fragility: What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Weaker." Nietzsche's original aphorism was, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." The younger generation has turned this idea on its head.

It is true that some things are fragile (like china teacups), while other things are resilient (and can withstand shocks). But they also note that some things are *antifragile*. In other words, they actually require stressors and challenges to grow. Our muscles are like that. Our immune system is like that. And university education is supposed to be like that. Students are supposed to be challenged by new ideas, not locked away in "safe spaces."

Unfortunately, most young people have been protected by a culture that promotes what they refer to as "safetyism." It has become a cult of safety that is obsessed with eliminating threats (whether real or imagined) to the point where fragility becomes expected and routine. And while this is true for the millennial generation (also called Generation Y), it is even truer for the iGen generation (also called Generation Z) who are even more obsessed with safety.

Part of the problem in these untruths is what they call "concept creep." Safety used to mean to be safe from physical

threats. But that has expanded to the idea that safety must also include emotional comfort. In order to provide that comfort, professors and students a few years ago introduced the idea of creating “safe spaces” for students. And in order to keep those students emotionally safe in the classroom, professors must issue “trigger warnings” so these students don’t experience trauma during a classroom lecture or discussion.

The second untruth is the “Untruth of Emotional Reasoning: Always Trust Your Feelings.” You can get yourself in some difficult circumstances quickly if you always trust your emotions. It is easy in this world to get frustrated, discouraged, and even depressed. Psychologists have found that certain patients can get themselves caught in a feedback loop in which irrational negative beliefs cause powerful negative feelings. We are seeing that on college campuses today.

Psychologists describe “the cognitive triad” of depression. These are: “I’m no good” and “My world is bleak” and “My future is hopeless.” Psychologists have effective ways of helping someone break the disempowering feedback cycle between negative beliefs and negative emotions. But very few adults (parents, professors, administrators) are working to correct mistaken ideas.

Three Untruths (Part 2)

In a college classroom, students are apt to make some sweeping generalization and engage in simplistic labeling of the lecture or reading material. In that case, we would hope that a professor would move the discussion by asking questions or even challenging the assertion.

Instead, many professors and colleges go along with the student comments. In fact, many even argue that any perceived slight adds up to what today are called “microaggressions.” In

many cases, slights may be unintentional and actually wholly formed from the listener's interpretation.

Here is how it develops. First, you prevent certain topics from being discussed in class. Next, you prevent certain speakers from coming to campus because they might present a perspective that aggrieved students believe should not be discussed. In the book is a chart illustrating how many speakers have been disinvited from universities. Five years ago, the line jumps up significantly.

The third untruth follows from that assumption. It is the "Untruth of Us Versus Them: Life is a Battle Between Good People and Evil People." The authors argue that "the human mind is prepared for tribalism." They even provide psychological research demonstrating that. But that doesn't mean we have to live that way. In fact, conditions in society can turn tribalism up, down, or off. Certain conflicts can turn tribalism up and make them more attentive to signs about which team a person may be on. Peace and prosperity usually turn tribalism down.

Unfortunately, in the university community, distinctions between groups are not downplayed but emphasized. Distinctions defined by race, gender, and sexual preference are given prominence. Mix that with the identity politics we see in society, and you generate the conflict we see almost every day in America.

The authors make an important distinction between two kinds of identity politics. Martin Luther King, Jr. epitomized what could be called "common-humanity identity politics." He addressed the evil of racism by appealing to the shared morals of Americans using the unifying language of religion.

That is different from what we find on college campuses today that could be called "common-enemy identity politics." It attempts to identify a common enemy as a way to enlarge and

motivate your tribe. Their slogan sounds like this: Our battle for identity and survival is a battle between good people and bad people. We're the good guys and need to defeat the bad guys.

An Example: Evergreen State College

One good example of how these untruths play out can be found at what happened on a college campus in Olympia, Washington. The entire story is described in chapter five but also is featured prominently in the opening chapter of the book *No Safe Spaces* and in the movie with the same title.

Just a few years ago, Evergreen State College was probably best known as the alma mater for rapper Macklemore and Matt Groening, the creator of *The Simpsons*. That all changed with an email biology professor Bret Weinstein sent.

In the past, the school had a tradition known as the "National Day of Absence." Usually, minority faculty and students leave the campus for a day to make a statement. But in 2017, the college wanted to change things and wanted white students and faculty to stay away from campus.

Professor Weinstein argued in an email that there is a difference between letting people be absent and telling people "to go away." And he added that he would show up for work. When he did, he was confronted by a mob of students. When the administration tried to appease the demonstrators, things got worse.

Weinstein has described himself as a political progressive and left-leaning libertarian. But his liberal commitments did not protect him from the student mob. The campus police warned him about a potential danger. The next morning, as he rode his bike into town, he saw protesters poised along his route tapping into their phones. He rode to the campus police department and was abruptly told: "You're not safe on campus,

and you're not safe anywhere in town on your bicycle." Weinstein and his wife eventually resigned and finally received a financial settlement from the university.

The Evergreen students and faculty displayed each of the three great untruths. The Untruth of Fragility (What doesn't kill you makes you weaker) came from a faculty member who supported the protesters and addressed some of her faculty colleagues in an angry monologue. She warned, "I am too tired. This [blank] is literally going to kill me." A student at a large town hall meeting verbalized her anxiety and illustrated the Untruth of Emotional Reasoning (Always trust your feelings). She expressed, "I want to cry. I can't tell you how fast my heart is beating. I am shaking in my boots."

And the whole episode illustrates the Untruth of Us Versus Them (Life is a battle between good people and evil people). The students and faculty engaged in common-enemy identity politics by labeling a politically progressive college and liberal professors as examples of white supremacy. One student (who refused to join the protest) later testified to the college trustees, "If you offer any kind of alternative viewpoint, you're the enemy."

What Can We Do?

The book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, identifies many disturbing trends on college campuses that are beginning to spill over into society. What can we do to stem the tide?

Obviously, the long-term solution to the insanity on campus and in society is to pray for revival in the church and spiritual awakening in America. But there are some practical things that must be done immediately.

First, college administrators must get control of their campus. The riots at some of these universities resulted in

violence and property destruction. Often the campus police and even the local police failed to take action. Sadly, the university administration rarely took action afterwards.

Some form of deterrence would have prevented future actions on the University of California, Berkeley campus. Instead, the inaction established a precedent that likely allowed the conflict at Middlebury College. Students not only shut down the lecture, but they assaulted one of the campus professors. Once again, no significant action was taken against the students and outside agitators. The problem will get worse if there is no deterrence.

Second, professors must get control of their classrooms. Students cannot be allowed to determine what subjects cannot be taught and what topics cannot be discussed. The authors of this book are concerned about the tendency to encourage students to develop extra-thin skins just before they enter into the real world. Employers aren't going to care too much about their feelings. Students don't have the right not to be offended.

Third, we need to educate this generation about free speech. One poll done by the Brookings Institute discovered that nearly half (44%) of all college students believe that hate speech is NOT protected by the First Amendment. And since many students label just about anything they don't like as hate speech, you can see why we have this behavior on college campuses. More than half (51%) of college students think they have a right to shout down a speaker with whom they disagree. A smaller percentage (19%) of college students think it is acceptable to use violence to prevent a speaker from speaking on campus.

Finally, the adults need to make their voice heard. We pay for public universities through our tax dollars. Parents send their kids off to some of these schools. We should not tolerate the insanity taking place on many college campuses

today.

The authors have identified certain concerns that colleges and universities need to address. They remind us how hostile the academic world has become, not only to traditional Christian values, but also to mere common sense. We need to pray for what is taking place in the college environment.

Notes

1. Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff, et al., *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure.*New York City: Penguin Press, 2018.
2. www.thecollegefix.com/heres-the-9-best-takeaways-from-heather-mac-donalds-new-diversity-delusion-book/

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Nuclear War

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of nuclear war from Annie Jacobsen's book Nuclear War: A Scenario *with a biblical response.*

Hell on Earth

Annie Jacobsen begins her book with a scenario:{1} a one-megaton thermonuclear bomb strikes the Pentagon and vaporizes the building and the 27,000 employees within it. A mile away the marble columns of the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials burst apart and disintegrate. Two and a half miles west at National Park, the clothes of a majority of the 35,000 people watching the ballgame catch on fire.



Her book, *Nuclear War: A Scenario*, takes you through, in a minute-by-minute description, what would happen if a “bolt out of the blue” nuclear attack took place on U.S. soil. This 370-page book isn’t for the faint-hearted, but it is an in-depth investigation in how we got to this place in world history and what would happen if the unthinkable became reality. And the book provides a sequel to the 2023 biographical film, *Oppenheimer*.

Why are we discussing this difficult topic of nuclear war now? First, there is a need to educate a new generation. Although Americans talked about the danger of nuclear war during the Cold War years, much less has been said in recent years. Second, the threat of nuclear war is even greater today because of countries like North Korea that have nuclear weapons and other countries like Iran that are attempting to develop nuclear weapons. Third, this discussion is relevant because so many documents about nuclear war have been declassified. We know so much more about nuclear war than we knew just a few years ago.

It is impossible for our minds to comprehend what happens in a nuclear blast. The air heats to one hundred and eighty million degrees Fahrenheit. This is nearly five times hotter than the temperature in the center of the sun. The blast levels any structure within miles, but also creates winds travelling at several hundred miles per hour.

The nuclear fireball then rises like a hot-air balloon forming the iconic mushroom cloud with cap and stem. Then the inferno begins. Gas lines explode and look like giant blowtorches. Washington, D.C. has now become a mega-inferno. Asphalt streets turn to liquid from the intense heat. More than a million people are dead or dying within two minutes after the detonation.

Outside of the blast area, the electromagnetic pulse

obliterates all radio, television, and the Internet. Cars with electric ignition systems cannot start. Water stations cannot pump water. And deadly radiation spreads to those who survived the initial blast.

Nuclear war may be unthinkable, but that is why we are thinking and talking about it.

Happens Too Fast

Nuclear war could develop unthinkably fast and devastate our world.

An intercontinental ballistic missile is a long-range missile that delivers nuclear weapons to political and military targets on the other side of the world. These ICBMs exist to do one thing: kill millions of people in another country.

Back when the ICBM was invented, Herb York, the Pentagon's chief scientist, wanted to calculate how many minutes it would take for it to reach the Soviet Union.{2} A group of defense scientists estimated that it would take 26 minutes and 40 seconds. From launch to annihilation takes just 1,600 seconds. Nuclear war happens too fast.

Today that estimate varies because we have nine countries that possess nuclear weapons: Russia, France, China, Pakistan, India, Israel, North Korea, the UK, and the US. Given North Korea's geographical location, the launch-to-target time frame from the Korean peninsula to the East Coast of the US would be about 33 minutes.

But a nuclear blast can come even sooner from nuclear-armed, nuclear-powered submarines. These submarines are called "boomers" or even have been called the "handmaidens of the apocalypse." They are undetectable under the sea and can sneak up very close to a nation's coast and launch a first-strike attack. This is why the president actually has only a six-

minute window to decide on a nuclear counterattack.

Launch on Warning

America has a policy known as “launch on warning.”{3} What that means is that America will launch its nuclear weapons once its early-warning electronic sensor system warns of an impending nuclear attack. Put another way, the US won’t wait to check if a warning is accurate, it will not wait and physically absorb a nuclear blow before launching its own nuclear weapons at whoever sent a missile to them.

This policy has been in place since the height of the cold war and represented an incredibly high risk. As one advisor explains, launch on warning during at time of intense crisis is a recipe for catastrophe.

Presidential candidates have promised to change this policy, but nothing has happened so far. George W. Bush in 2000 vowed to address this policy: “Keeping so many weapons on high alert may create an unacceptable risk for accidental of unauthorized launch.” Barack Obama argued that “keeping nuclear weapons ready to launch on a moment’s notice is a dangerous relic of the Cold War.” President Biden has also encouraged to eliminate this perilous policy. No change has been made.

President’s Football

The decision to launch a nuclear strike comes from the president. How did the government decide to give the president the nuclear football? The story begins with Harold Agnew back in 1959.{4} He visited a NATO base and noticed there were four F-84F aircraft at the end of the runway; each was carrying two nuclear gravity bombs. This meant that these nuclear bombs were in the custody of one U.S. Army private armed with a M1 rifle with eight rounds of ammunition. The only safeguard against unauthorized use of an atomic bomb was this single GI surrounded by numbers of foreign troops on

foreign territory with thousands of Soviet troops just miles away.

When he got back to the U.S., Agnew contacted a project engineer at Sandia Laboratories and asked if they could put an electronic "lock" on the bomb's firing circuits that would prevent others from arming the nuclear bomb. They produced a lock and coded switch that would be activated with a three-digit code.

They presented the idea and the device to the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and then to President Kennedy who ordered it to be done. But the military objected. A general asked how a pilot somewhere in the world could get a code from the President of the United States to arm a nuclear weapon before being overrun by a massively superior number of Soviet troops? And why not have other nuclear bombs also coded?

The answer came in the creation of the President's Football, which is an emergency satchel. This gave the president, not the military, control of America's nuclear arsenal. The Football must always be near the president.

There is a story of how important it is for the president to have access to the Football.{5} When President Clinton was visiting Syria, President Hafez al-Assad's handlers tried to prevent Clinton's military aide from riding in an elevator with him. The Secret Service would not let that happen, and they did not let that happen.

Inside is a set of documents known as the Black Book. Robert "Buzz" Patterson served as a military aide to President Clinton, and I was able to interview him one time on my radio program. He likened the Black Book to a "Denny's breakfast menu" because of how it looked. The president must choose retaliatory targets from a predetermined nuclear strike list on the menu.

Let me end with this question: Do you believe the current

president has a mental capacity to make a rational decision of about launching nuclear weapons?

War Games

One question that was asked more than forty years ago was whether anyone could win a nuclear war. Spoiler alert: no one can. President Reagan ordered a simulated war game with the name Proud Prophet to explore the outcome and long-term effects of a nuclear war.{6}

The research used mathematical models to predict outcomes and was conducted at the National War College. Participants were cloistered away inside a secure location to prevent leaks. The results were only declassified in 2012, but much of the material was blacked out. Fortunately, this declassification allowed participants to discuss it without violating the Espionage Act of 1917.

Over the two weeks, every simulated scenario ended the same way. Sometimes they began with a tactical nuclear strike and a so-called limited nuclear war. Other times they simulated exercises with NATO and then with other exercises without NATO. There were scenarios where the U.S. launched nuclear war preemptively. Sometimes that was when the Pentagon was supposedly in focused calm and other when in a crisis mode.

Sadly, the result was the same. Once a nuclear war starts, there is no way to win it or even end it. No matter how a nuclear war begins, it ends with complete Armageddon-like destruction. As one participant put it, this destruction "made all the wars of the past five hundred years pale in comparison." At least a half billion (and probably more like a billion) people die in the war's opening salvo. Then billions more die of radiation poisoning and starvation.

Nuclear Winter

When the bombs cease striking targets, the world turns cold and dark. Everything is on fire. Smoke produces noxious smog of pyrotoxins. Fires in the cities ignite other fires. Even in the less-populated areas, forest fires rage.

The density of soot reduces global temperatures by 20-40 degrees depending on the location. Earth plunges into the horror known as a "nuclear winter." This might be a familiar term for those of us who lived in the 1980s. Astronomer Carl Sagan wrote about it and warned us of the dangers of nuclear war.

A nuclear war would change the troposphere and thus the amount of sunlight reaching the earth. Once the radioactive fog and haze diminish, the ozone layer disappears, and the sun's warming rays are now killer UV rays.

Earth is no longer as hospitable for humans as it once was. After millennia of planting and harvesting, the few humans to survive return to a hunter-gatherer existence.

Biblical Perspective

We will conclude this discussion of nuclear war with a biblical perspective. Let's begin with the realization that God is sovereign and in control. But that doesn't mean that He would never allow a nuclear war to take place. Throughout history, we have had tyrants and armies destroy people groups and civilizations. God used pagan nations to judge the nation of Israel.

How should we respond? Since the first atomic bombings at the end of World War II, there has been a condition known as "nuclear anxiety." Jesus instructs us not to "be anxious about tomorrow" (Matthew 6:34), and Paul also tells us not to "be anxious about anything" (Philippians 4:6). Jesus even says that "if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved" (Matthew 24:22).

In the book of Daniel, we have another reminder of God's sovereignty that came in the second dream of Nebuchadnezzar. It reminded him of the fact that God "rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men" (Daniel 4:17). Nebuchadnezzar knew more about human sovereignty than anyone and proclaimed God's sovereignty over the earth at the end of his days (4:34).

Some Christians have suggested that the Bible may be describing a nuclear war. In the book of Revelation, there is a description of the poisoning of the waters (8:11), death of the earth's vegetation (8:17), the end of ocean life (16:3), and the inability to block the sun's rays resulting in severe burns (16:8).

There is a description of stars of heaven falling to earth (6:13) that some have suggested might be describing nuclear missiles raining down on earth during a nuclear war. These would be visible as they enter the atmosphere and begin striking the cities on earth.

Even passages in the Old Testament might point to the effects of a nuclear war. For example, in Zechariah 14:12 we read that "the Lord will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths."

One prophecy yet to be fulfilled can be found in Ezekiel 38 that describes nations that will come against Israel. But critics point to the fact that it says they are riding horses, wearing helmets and armor, and wielding swords (38:4-5). That doesn't look like a modern army. But I remember a famous quote from Albert Einstein: "I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones." The world might look very different after a nuclear war.

In this article we have been discussing the unthinkable: a nuclear war. We should remember the words of Jesus: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Notes

1. Annie Jacobsen, *Nuclear War: A Scenario*, NY: Dutton, 2024, xvii.
2. Ibid., 53-55.
3. Ibid., 59-60.
4. Ibid., 86-87.
5. Ibid., 84-85.
6. Ibid., 173-178.

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Kingdom Singleness

Renea McKenzie takes a look at two books providing thoughtful responses to being Christian and single.

While studying at L’Abri Fellowship, I encountered two books that really made an impression upon me for the simple reason that, of all the many books I come across in my years of work with students, my studies, and my personal reading, I had never seen even the likes of anything like them. I’m speaking of Laura Smit’s *Loves Me, Loves Me Not* and Lauren Winner’s *Real Sex*. These two books contain what’s desperately missing in the “Christian living” section of our bookstores, particularly for singles.

A Theology of Romance



I really appreciate and highly recommend Laura Smit's book, *Loves Me, Loves Me Not: The Ethics of Unrequited Love*.{1} It isn't your typical book on singles and romance. Right away, the subtitle lets you know this book is special because while there are countless books on mutual love and our moral responsibilities as Christian lovers, hardly anyone writes about our responsibility toward virtue when feelings are not mutual. Smit begins with a "theology of romance" in which she details God's nature as love, God's creational plans both in Eden and in the New Heaven and the New Earth, sin's effect on those plans, and finally, virtuous and vicious romance, how sin twists God's intentions for love and how we can be virtuous by shaping our romantic lives to God's plans. This framework is centered on New Testament teachings on marriage and family and singleness, teachings many Christians, myself included up to now, have been successfully avoiding.

Smit notes the importance of pouring a new understanding of marriage and family into new wineskins. In Matthew chapter 19, Jesus makes this astonishing statement: "For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it" (v. 12). And shortly after that, in response to the Sadducees, Jesus declares, "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven" (Matt. 22:30).

Jesus also asserts that the way we think about family changes when he enters the scene. Jesus is teaching and his biological family interrupts him, expecting that they deserve more of Jesus' attention than the crowd. And it was natural for them to expect this. But again, Jesus turns social expectation on its head, responding, "'Who is my mother, and who are my

brothers?’ Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother’” (Matt. 12:48-50).

Jesus seems to be saying marriage is not ultimate; only the union between Christ and his Church is ultimate. He is also saying our biological families are not ultimate; only the family of faith is ultimate. Saying all this about marriage and family was a big deal. In Jesus’ day, everyone’s number one loyalty was to his or her biological family, people who were married were higher on the social ladder than those who were not, and couples who had children (well, sons) were even higher. Jesus came and changed our primary loyalties, and he declared that the only members of society who are valuable to God’s kingdom are those who do God’s will, regardless of their social status.

By looking into these passages of Scripture, Smit is asking us to consider: Should Jesus’ teachings change the emphasis American Christians place on marriage and family? Why do most unmarried Christians feel social pressure from the church to get married and start a family? They also feel excluded from congregations whose messages and activities have a biological family focus instead of a spiritual family focus. How then can we change our focus and the ways in which we interact with one another so that we are following in Jesus’ revolutionary footsteps?

A Theology of Romance Gets Personal

Smit suggests that not only will the way we think about (and consequently our behavior toward) others change, but so will the way we think about our own lives. To give you an example of how we, the Christian culture in America, think about marriage, specifically the expectations we have regarding marriage in our own lives, let me share with you this story.

Several weeks ago, I was subbing in AWANA, and the third through fifth grade girls were asked what they foresaw in their future. Every girl there stated, rather confidently, "I'm going to go to college then get married." What a wonderful vision for one's future! What's interesting is that each child had the *same* vision for her future, which simply speaks to the fact that marriage is socially expected for church girls (and boys too as a matter of fact). It's what Christians consider normal and the "natural thing to do." Again, marriage is wonderful. The question is, are we limiting ourselves, and our daughters, and ultimately, Christ and the Church, when we consume this view of marriage and personhood wholesale? Is it a limited vision rather than a Kingdom-vision?

To give you a clearer picture of what I mean by "Kingdom-vision," let's look directly at Smit. She notes:

> Our primary loyalties shift when we come into contact with Jesus. Whereas in the Old Testament the family was one's primary loyalty, Jesus redefines this, saying, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:50). Jesus is our family now and the community of faith is our primary social commitment. "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son and daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:37-39). Jesus insists that his followers live sacrificial lives that will make little sense in the eyes of the world.{2}

That's interesting, isn't it? Think for a moment about the political implications for the Religious Right. Marriage and family concerns wouldn't cease to exist, but would rather exist within a broader context, under a farther-reaching banner. What might such a banner look like? Let's look again

at Smit. She posits:

> If all Christians everywhere were to take [seriously Jesus' teaching that marriage is not ultimate], stop getting married, and stop having children, perhaps the church would start to grow through evangelism rather than through procreation. In this case, the church would be a blessing to the nations, just as we are supposed to be, with most of our nurturing energy going outside our own community. Finally, if we actually converted everyone in the world, and everyone in the world then embraced continent singleness so that no children were being born (a rather unlikely scenario), wouldn't that mean it was time for Jesus to come again? All Christians are supposed to be longing for his second coming and doing everything possible to bring it about.{3}

Wow! What a bold statement! Well, don't worry, in the very next lines she says,

> I do not believe that all Christians need to be single [or stop having children], but all Christians must come to terms with Jesus' teaching that marriage is not ultimate. Taking [this] teaching seriously will change how we think about the possibility of marriage in our own life and how we treat people around us—particularly within the church—who are single.{4}

I think it important to note that throughout her entire book, Smit never once devalues marriage or children—particularly within the church. And that is part of the point. Jesus came and demolished value hierarchies society had placed upon people. The apostle Paul states that this is to be the case particularly within the church: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Marriage and children and sex and singlehood and abstinence and romance each offer valuable life-pictures that teach the church about who God is and our relationship with him.

With that in mind, we are now ready to consider the romantic lives of unmarried folk with nuance. Smit's book challenges Christians to govern our romantic relationships with a Kingdom-perspective, reminding us to readjust our ingrown eyeballs: to look up toward God and out toward others. How do we do that when we're in love with someone who doesn't love us back?

The Ethics of Unrequited Love

Loves Me, Loves Me Not helps us learn how to behave virtuously in loving someone who does not return our romantic affection. It also helps us to behave virtuously toward someone who cares romantically for us, when we desire only friendship for him or her. Smit encourages her readers to consider true Christian charity in these situations and whether or not charity—or we might use the word *agape*—supports or rejects society's scripts for such roles. Whether we realize it or not, our society has our lines and stage directions all laid out. From film and literature alike we know how to behave if we find our love rejected. We will hold on to our rejected love by continuing to pursue until resignation is absolutely necessary; in which case, we resign to martyrdom upon the cross of love, sometimes in a gallon of ice cream and sappy movies, sometimes quite literally, leaving our legacy behind on the suicide note. Or, we simply move on. It is their loss, and undoubtedly there is someone out there who is more deserving of us.

Certainly both scenarios can be true. Sometimes we ought to continue to pursue and not give up too quickly; sometimes our love is misplaced upon someone undeserving and we must recognize the fact and move on. But motives matter. That is Smit's point.

How do we counter our ingrained selfish patterns and social scripts when we love someone who doesn't love us back? I'm not going to give away the whole book; I'm hoping you'll pick up

your own copy. But I will pass on one practical tip from Smit: we must desist from wanting to posses the other person. Now, that sounds creepy in the restraining order kind of way; and you're thinking, *I don't do that*. But we all do it. We do it when we create a whole imaginary life with our crush—where we go on dates, how we sit together in church, how he kisses me hello, how she makes my friends envious. We also get possessive of our crush when we allow our hurt and jealousy to win over our charity (love) for him or her. Because if I didn't think he and his affections were (or ought to be) *mine* I wouldn't be jealous that, in reality, he's interested in another girl. But the truth is he's a person, not an object; and as a person he is free to be interested in whomever he chooses. And if I really love him as a person rather than lust after him as an object, I will honor, value, and even celebrate that freedom. Not that at times it won't be painful; it will be.

What about when someone loves us and we don't return their romantic feelings? What's easiest is to simply ignore that person. Don't return his calls. Pretend you didn't see her. Flirt with someone else right in front of her. Tell him you have to wash your hair. It's much more difficult to actually continue to be that person's friend, behaving in Christian love toward him or her, considering them to be better than yourself. Part of the reason this path is more difficult is because it makes you all the more attractive and difficult to get over, and it's easier to convince ourselves that we're doing the other person a favor by being a jerk.

Sometimes it is appropriate and necessary and loving to give the other person his space or to stop returning her phone calls. Sometimes it isn't. Sometimes I wish God designed our relationships to be governed by clear-cut, black and white formulas: do this, get this result . . . always. But he didn't. God designed our relationships to be governed by faith. So we have to work hard to live counter-cultural lives,

acting out according to God's script rather than what's socially expected of us. Smit's exhortation to consider what motivates our behavior is key. Are we responding lovingly or selfishly? And while motives cannot always be wholly separated or distinguished in such a clear-cut way, God always honors the search.

Smit has in *Loves Me, Loves Me Not* some very powerful exhortations for the church that I appreciate on two levels: one, she forces readers to think seriously about New Testament teachings on marriage, family, and singleness; and two, she gives singles in the church a voice, in part simply by writing a book that addresses the lives of unmarried folk in a thought-provoking, holistic, and meaningful way. If my brief look into the book has sparked your interest, and if you want the specific, and I think rather good, suggestions Smit makes as to how we can pursue loving virtue in our relationships, be sure to pick up a copy of this singular book.

Why We Need *Another* Book about Sex

Lauren Winner, author of *Girl Meets God* and, recently, *Mudhouse Sabbath*, put out a book in 2005 titled *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity*.{5} And that's exactly what Winner designs to do: talk about sex in a realistic fashion, from a biblical worldview, that allows us to get past various myths, including the highly eroticized and romanticized beliefs about sex we frequently absorb from both the world and the church.

You're familiar, no doubt, with the statistics on Christian sexuality. We don't stand out as very different in our sexual behavior, which means our basic beliefs and ideas about sex must not be that different either. If all those books in the "Christian living" section of the bookstore aren't helping us develop ideas regarding our sexuality that differ from social norms, if they aren't helping us believe that what the Bible has to say about sex is relevant and true, something isn't

right. So what makes Winner different? *Real Sex* offers an alternative to the magazine-like "Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity" by stretching beyond spoon-fed "dos and don'ts" derived from proof-texted Scripture, and instead presents the case for sex within marriage from a holistic, biblical view of who we are and how we relate in the world sexually.

From the creation-fall-redemption narrative presented in the arc of the gospel, Winner posits that an important part of who we are is that we are embodied, and the main way in which we relate in the world sexually is communal. Chapter three is aptly titled "Communal Sex: *Or, Why Your Neighbor Has Any Business Asking You What You Did Last Night,*" and helps remind us that community is a part of the creational order; we were created in and for community. And though we have fallen from God's original order for creation, he has, throughout history, made a way for his people to live redeemed, creational lives. When Jesus Christ came embodied to earth, he came as the Way, finally making it possible for those who believe to no longer live under compulsion of the fallen, distorted patterns of the flesh, but rather in habits redeemed and restored to God's creational intent. Winner reminds us that Scripture flies in the face of our over-individualized, over-privatized American way, exhorting the community of the faith to be intimately involved in one another's lives. She puts it this way:

> The Bible tells us to intrude—or rather, the Bible tells us that talking to one another about what is really going on in our lives is in fact not an intrusion at all, because what's going on in my life is already your concern; by dint of the baptism that made me your sister, my joys are your joys and my crises are your crises. We are called to speak to one another lovingly, to be sure, and with edifying, rather than gossipy or hurtful, goals. But we are called nonetheless to transform seemingly private matters into communal matters (53).{6}

Already we're presented with a meaty alternative to the false

views of sex, or we could say, unreal sex propagated in force by our surrounding culture. The next two chapters speak truth against the lies about sex we hear both from our culture and our churches. These chapters give readers an opportunity to take a step outside of their everyday, cultural surroundings and consider them. Opening up the conversation of sex and our sexuality to the whole of Scripture and to our Christian communities is like opening the windows of a dark room. By this light we see the lies our culture tells about sex, and we can work together to begin rejecting such ideologies, establishing a core understanding of human sexuality that, in fact, stands apart; we can develop beliefs and habits of a sacred sexuality. Winner points out that society tells lies, like "sex can be wholly separated from procreation" (64), cohabitation is a good practice-run (68), modesty doesn't matter (71), and "good sex can't happen in the humdrum routine of marriage" (77).

Of those four statements, which strikes you as most dangerous? We might think it's the prolific idea of shacking up; and in fact, the church is usually pretty clear on its position regarding premarital sex. However, I would like to suggest that a subtle distortion is always more dangerous than an obvious one. Winner agrees; she states,

> Too often we assume that contemporary American sexual life is a one-dimensional world of licentious prurience. Yet it may be more important for contemporary Christian ethics to constructively engage secular romanticism than to righteously denounce sexual libertinism. It is, after all, pretty easy for us Christians to distinguish ourselves from the sex-is-recreation ethic. The real question is not whether we can counter the message that sex is just like racquetball, but whether we can also articulate a Christian alternative to the regnant ideal of sex as an otherworldly, illicit romance, an escape from quotidian, domestic life (80).

Sex isn’t meaningful because it’s an erotic escape from everyday realities. Rather, sex is meaningful because it’s real (81). And while romance is certainly appropriate, even important, as part of sustaining love, if it serves merely to compartmentalize our lives rather than integrate them, our lives will be less, not more, fulfilling.

Getting Real

This next chapter is perhaps where we get a bit more personal: “Straight Talk II: *Lies the Church Tells about Sex.”* In an effort to do right and protect the biblical ethic of sex within marriage, and with honorable intentions, “the church tells a few fibs of its own” (85). Winner chooses to discuss four of these fibs: “premarital sex is guaranteed to make you feel lousy” (85), “women don’t really want to have sex anyway” (90), “bodies (and sex) are gross, dirty, or just plain unimportant” (93), and finally, that good sex is all about technique, a secular myth that we can, and should, Christianize (97).

I can’t talk about all of these ideas (and I wouldn’t want to give away the whole book!), but I do want to address a couple of them. I’m sure some of you are thinking, “Doesn’t premarital sex make you feel lousy, full of guilt and regret? And if it doesn’t, shouldn’t it?” It’s possible there’s more truth in the second thought than the first one because, let’s face it, sex feels good, even sinful sex. If it didn’t, premarital (and extramarital) sex would certainly be a lot easier to avoid. We wouldn’t need Winner’s book, or any other book, not to mention the community of faith, the Bible, or the Holy Spirit for that matter; at least, not insofar as we need them for our journey toward right-living (89). “What the church means to say,” posits Winner, “is that premarital sex *is* bad for us, even if it happens to *feel* great” (90).

But at least we’ve come to recognize that sex in marriage

feels great and should feel great. And while it seems we may never be able to fully shake Gnostic parasites from the gospel, I believe churches have generally come to embrace marital sex as good. However, the message from the pulpit can still be a bit confusing, especially for women. Winner notes a study of teenage girls which shows the "strongest predictor of teenage virginity" isn't church involvement or the youth group, but team sports (18). That may seem obscure, but athletics teaches girls (and boys) something about bodies being good, not to mention useful—for other purposes than sex. This is a message we are not communicating well.

What should we do? Have more church sports leagues? Perhaps. But, maybe not. We can, however, change the language we use when we talk about sex and modesty. Personally, as a woman who grew up constantly hearing from youth group and other parachurch media that my body was the vehicle of lust and destruction for young men everywhere, it took lots of time to unlearn negative associations about my body and become comfortable in my own skin, though perhaps less time than others; I played sports. The way we talk about sex and modesty in the church isn't only damaging to women. To suggest that men simply can't help themselves is to suggest that men are less than human, or that they can experience the fruit of the Spirit in all areas but lust. It is essentially degrading to men to imply that men are animals and women are angels, that somehow women are morally superior to men and therefore responsible for them (73). Certainly we are responsible *to* one another as brothers and sisters, but responsible *for* is another thing entirely.

The last few chapters of Winner's book touch on topics such as kissing, pornography, and masturbation, and dish out practical—and I think rather good—ideas to guide us in practicing chastity within our caring, Christian communities. Winner reunites chastity with the other spiritual disciplines, and talks about what marriage, children, sex, and singleness

teach the church, and why each is important in God's economy, an economy of repentance and forgiveness. Placing sexual purity back within a story that's bigger than itself makes the issue of chastity important, rather than indifferent; and gives it meaning by giving it context.

Notes

1. Laura Smit, *Loves Me, Loves Me Not: The Ethics of Unrequited Love* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).
2. Smit, *Loves Me*, 65.
3. Ibid., 71.
4. Ibid.
5. Lauren Winner, *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005).
6. Page numbers in the text refer to Winner, *Real Sex*.

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Realignment of America

We are witnessing some dramatic changes in this country. The U.S. is experiencing various kinds of realignment: marriage and cohabitation, geography, political and economic.

In this article I want to talk about the realignment of America. We are witnessing some dramatic changes in this country. Some are political changes; some are economic changes; and some are geographic changes. If you are building a business, planting a church, or just trying to understand some of these fundamental changes, you need to pay attention to these changes in America.



First, we need to understand the times in which we are living. 1 Chronicles 12:32 says that the sons of Issachar were “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.” Likewise we need to understand our time with knowledge of what we as Christians should do.

Second, we should also plan for the future. Isaiah 32:8 says that “the noble man devises noble plans, and by noble plans he stands.” You, your family, and your church should have plans for the future based upon some of the things we will be discussing.

Proverbs 16:9 says “the mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.” So we should not only plan for the future, but commit those plans to the Lord and be sensitive to His leading in our lives.

One place where we see a dramatic shift in both attitudes and behavior is marriage. America is in the midst of redefining marriage. Some of these redefinitions are taking place in the legislatures and courtrooms. But marriage is also being redefined through cohabitation.

Over the last few decades, the U.S. Census Bureau has documented the increasing percentage of people who fit into the category of “adults living alone.” These are often lumped into a larger category of “non-family households.” Within this larger category are singles that are living alone as well as a growing number of unmarried, cohabiting couples that are “living together.” The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that in 2000 there were nearly ten million Americans living with an unmarried opposite-sex partner and another 1.2 million Americans living with a same-sex partner.

These numbers are unprecedented. It is estimated that during most of the 1960s and 1970s, only about a half a million Americans were living together. And by 1980, that number was

just 1.5 million.{1} Now that number is more than twelve million.

Cohabiting couples are also changing the nature of marriage. Researchers estimate that half of Americans will cohabit at one time or another prior to marriage. And this arrangement often includes children. The traditional stereotype of two young, childless people living together is not completely accurate; currently, some forty percent of cohabiting relationships involve children.{2}

Marriage may not yet be in the endangered species list, but many more couples are choosing to live together rather than get married. This is just one example of the realignment of America.

Geographic Realignment

Another realignment in America is geographic realignment. If you haven't noticed, people move around quite a bit. And I am not just talking about your neighbors who drove off the other day in a U-Haul truck. I am talking about the realignment of America.

I think we have all heard that the U.S. population is flowing from the Snow Belt to the Sun Belt. But Michael Barone in an article in *The Wall Street Journal* explains that the trends are a bit more complex than that.{3} Let's start with what he calls the "Coastal Megalopolises" (New York, Los Angeles, Miami, etc.). Here you find that Americans are moving out and immigrants are moving in with a low net population growth.

Contrast this with what he called "the Interior Boomtowns." Their population has grown eighteen percent in six years. And this means that the nation's center of gravity is shifting. Dallas is now larger than San Francisco, Houston is larger than Boston, Charlotte is now larger than Milwaukee.

Another section would be the old Rust Belt. The six metro areas (Detroit, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Buffalo, Rochester) have lost population since 2000. And you also have "the Static Cities." These eighteen metropolitan areas have little immigrant inflow and little domestic inflow or outflow.

The political impact of this realignment is significant. Many of the metro areas voted in significant proportions for John Kerry in 2004 while the Interior Boomtowns voted for George W. Bush. But there is more at stake than just the presidential election.

In less than two years we will have another census, and that will determine congressional districts. House seats and electoral votes will shift from New York, New Jersey, and Illinois to Texas, Florida, Georgia, Arizona, and Nevada.

That is why Michael Barone says in another column that it is time to throw out the old electoral maps.{4} The old maps with red states and blue states served us well for the last two presidential elections, but there is good evidence that it is now out-of-date. In 2000 and 2004, the Republicans nominated the same man, and the Democrats nominated men with similar views and backgrounds. All of that has changed in 2008.

It is clear that some of the states that went Democratic in 2004 may be available to Republicans. And it is also clear that some of the states that went Republican that same year are possibilities for the Democrats. And let's not forget the surge of new voters coming into the electoral process that are potentially available to either candidate.

Social scientists say: "Demography is destiny." That is a simple way of saying that demographic changes alter our future. But you don't have to be a social scientist to see the impact. We all know that people move around, and that changes the political landscape.

Political Realignment

In addition to marriage and geographical realignment, political realignment is also taking place due to differences in fertility. Does fertility affect voting patterns? Apparently it does much more than we realize. And this has been a topic of discussion for both liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans.

Arthur Brooks wrote about the "Fertility Gap" in a column in *The Wall Street Journal*.{5} He said: "Simply put, liberals have a big baby problem: They're not having enough of them . . . and their pool of potential new voters is suffering as a result."

Brooks noted that "…if you picked 100 unrelated politically liberal adults at random, you would find that they had, between them, 147 children. If you picked 100 conservatives, you would find 208 kids." That is a "fertility gap" of forty-one percent.

We know that about eighty percent of people with an identifiable party preference grow up to vote essentially the same way as their parents. Brooks says that this "fertility gap" therefore "translates into lots more little Republicans than little Democrats to vote in future elections." He also points out that over the past thirty years this gap has not been below twenty percent which he says explains to a large extent the current ineffectiveness of liberal youth voter campaigns.

Brooks also points out that the fertility gap "doesn't budge when we correct for factors like age, income, education, sex, race—or even religion." Even if all these factors are identical between a liberal and a conservative, "the liberal will still be 19 percentage points more likely to be childless than the conservative." This fertility gap is real and will no doubt affect politics for many years to come.

So what could this mean for future presidential elections? Consider the key swing state of Ohio which is currently split fifty-fifty between left and right. If current patterns continue, Brooks estimates that Ohio will swing to the right and by 2012 will be fifty-four percent to forty-six percent. By 2020, it will be solidly conservative by a margin of fifty-nine percent to forty-one percent.

Now look at the state of California that tilts in favor of liberals by fifty-five percent to forty-five percent. By the year 2020, it will be swing conservative by a percentage of fifty-four percent to forty-six percent. The reason is due to the "fertility gap."

Of course most people vote for politicians, personalities, and issues, not parties. But the general trend of the "fertility gap" cannot be ignored especially if Democrats continue to appeal to liberals and Republicans to conservatives.

Economic Realignment

Earlier we talked about political and geographical realignment in America. It turns out that some of that realignment is due to economic factors.

A recent survey by United Van Lines uncovers some interesting patterns of movement in America.{6} An average of twenty thousand Americans relocate across state lines each day for a record eight million Americans each year. The general pattern is for people to move from the Northeast and Midwest to the South and West. But the details are even more interesting than the general trends.

The survey found that the most reliable indicator of movement was income tax. People tend to move from states with high income-tax rates to states with little or no income taxes. Families are leaving Michigan, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. Now consider the eight states that

have no income tax (Florida, Nevada, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming). Every one of these states gained in net domestic migrants. And each one except Florida (which has sky-high property taxes) “ranked in the top 12 of destination states.”

In order to see the phenomenon in action, compare North Dakota to South Dakota. Both states are essentially the same in terms of geography and climate. But they couldn’t be more different in terms of migration. North Dakota lost a greater percentage of citizens than any other state except Michigan. South Dakota ranked in the top twelve states in terms of net domestic migration. People are moving out of North Dakota, but they are moving to South Dakota in droves. North Dakota has an income tax. South Dakota does not.

For many years now, demographers have noted the flight of upper income, educated families from California. California is the only Pacific Coast state to lose migrant population in 2007. One of the major reasons is the fact that California has the highest state income tax in the nation. So now more than one and a half million Californians have left the state in the last ten years.

So where are many of these people going? They are moving to neighboring Nevada, which has no income tax. “High income Californians can buy a house in Las Vegas for the amount they save in three or four years by not paying California income taxes.”

An old adage says high taxes don’t redistribute income, they redistribute people. Once again we see the realignment of America. People vote with their feet, and it seems that taxes are one of the reasons they leave one state for another state.

Income Realignment

I would like to conclude by looking once again at economic statistics, but this time focus on family income. If you turn on a television or open a newspaper, and you are certain to hear or read someone say that the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. But would it surprise you to know that other governmental data says just the opposite?

The latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau does seem to indicate that the rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. But these numbers do not reflect the economic improvement of individuals and families.

Data from the Internal Revenue Service does show this movement. It shows that people in the bottom fifth have nearly doubled their income in the last ten years. It also shows that the top one percent saw their incomes decline by twenty-six percent.{7}

Why do these two set of governmental statistics differ? It turns out that the IRS tracks people over time. After all, people don't stay in the same income brackets throughout their lives. Millions of people move from one bracket to another.

The IRS tracks people each year and thus reflects real changes to real people while the Census Bureau merely creates the illusion of tracking people. The best way to follow people is to actually follow people. That's what the IRS statistics do, and so they are more accurate.

What about the claims that family income has stagnated? First, we need to make a distinction between household income and per capita income. Household or family income can remain essentially unchanged for a decade while per capita income is increasing.

The reason is simple: the number of people per household and per family is declining. If annual household income is

$60,000, the per capita income for a family of six would be $10,000 but for a family of three would be $20,000.

The difference in the number of people also affects economic statistics for different ethnic groups. Hispanics have higher household incomes than African-Americans. But blacks have higher individual incomes than Hispanics. The reason for the different is family size.

Second, we should also take a second look at the statistics that say income has stagnated. If we go back to the IRS numbers, we find that the average taxpayer's real income has increased by twenty-four percent in the last decade.

The point to all of this is that economic statistics can sometimes be misleading. They may be true but they lead to misleading conclusions.

As we've seen, there have been some dramatic shifts in the social, political, economic, and geographic nature of this country. A wise and discerning Christian will pay attention to this realignment and make wise plans for the future. Isaiah 32:8 says that "the noble man devises noble plans, and by noble plans he stands." As Christians we need to wisely plan for the future.

Notes

1. U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports,* Series P20-537; America's Families and Living Arrangements: March 2000 and earlier reports.
2. Larry L. Bumpass, James A. Sweet, and Andrew Cherlin, "The Role of Cohabitation in the Declining Rates of Marriage," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 53 (1991), 926.
3. Michael Barone, "The Realignment of America," *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 May, 2007.
4. Michael Barone, "Throw Out the Old Electoral Maps in 2008," Townhall.com, 1 March 2008.
5. Arthur C. Brooks, "The Fertility Gap," *The Wall Street*

Journal, 22 August 2006.
6. "States of Opportunity," *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 February 2008.
7. Thomas Sowell, "Income Confusion," Townhall.com, 21 November 2007.

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The Emerging Generation

Kerby Anderson examines the characteristics of the millennial generation and how pastors, Christian leaders, and the church can reach out to this emerging generation.

Millennial Generation and Faith

Awhile back *USA Today* had a front page article on the millennial generation and faith.{1} It demonstrates that even mainstream newspapers are noticing a disturbing trend that many of us in the Christian world have been talking about for some time.

The article started out by saying, "Most young adults today don't pray, don't worship and don't read the Bible." Those are conclusions that come not only from *USA Today* but from research done by the Barna Research Group, the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, and LifeWay Christian Resources. Although the numbers differ slightly between groups, they all come to essentially the same conclusion. This emerging generation is less religious and less committed to the Christian faith than any generation preceding it.

The LifeWay study concluded that two-thirds (65%) rarely or never pray with others. Two thirds (65%) rarely or never

attend worship services. And two-thirds (67%) don't read the Bible or other sacred texts. As you might imagine, their theology is not orthodox. For example, when asked if Jesus is the only path to heaven, half say yes and half say no. Not surprisingly, only 17% say they read the Bible daily.

How important is faith or spirituality to the millennial generation? Apparently, it isn't very important. When asked what was "really important in life," two thirds (68%) did not mention faith, religion, or spirituality. And that term "spirituality" is an important one to remember. Almost three-fourths (72%) agree that they're more spiritual than religious. This reflects their world. Lots of books, movies, and Web sites now promote spirituality that is anything but Christian.

Among the two thirds (65%) who call themselves Christians, "many are either mushy Christians or Christians in name only." That is the conclusion of Thom Rainer, president of LifeWay Christian Resources. "Most are just indifferent. The more precisely you try to measure their Christianity, the fewer you find committed to the faith."

This also shows up in behavior and personal morality. This generation is twice as likely as the baby boom generation to have had multiple sex partners by age eighteen.{2} Substance abuse and cheating are common. There is a tendency toward "short-horizon thinking" with a "live today, for tomorrow we die" ethic. After all, they live in a pop culture with no absolutes that is awash in moral relativism.

Thom Rainer believes the church needs to take responsibility. He says, "We have dumbed down what it means to be part of the church so much that it means almost nothing, even to people who already say they are part of the church."

It is time for Christian leaders and pastors to get serious about what is happening to this generation. They need to take

note and develop creative ways to reach out to a generation that has not connected with church and basic Christian doctrine.

Psychological Characteristics

A special report on the millennial generation describes several aspects of what many are calling the emerging generation in addition to faith.{3}

One characteristic is narcissism. Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell talk about the "narcissism epidemic" in their book to describe the soaring rates of self-obsession, attention-seeking, and an entitlement mindset among the youth.{4} They report that narcissistic personality traits have risen as fast as obesity from the 1980s to the present.

The emerging generation is also uninhibited. They are much more likely than previous generations to be open about the intimate details of their lives. They are casual about personal matters and lack understanding of appropriate boundaries and propriety. They also show disrespect for privacy. They will often post details online in an exhibitionist manner not found in previous generations. We will talk about this later when discussing their connectedness through social networks like Facebook and MySpace.

The emerging generation is overly self-confident. Millennials are rarely told no. They have also felt special and have inflated expectations of their own abilities and potential. Part of that optimism comes from the fact that they have rarely been allowed to fail. They have played in organized sports where everyone gets a trophy. They go to school where grade inflation is rampant.

The emerging generation is slow to make decisions. This generation is apt to explore all of the possibilities before making a commitment. This is understandable. If there is

anything we have learned over the years in the social sciences, it is this: as choice increases, commitment decreases. The more choices I have, the less committed I will probably be to any one of those choices. In fact, I might even become more confused with those choices.

Some have argued that this difficulty in making decisions does two things. First, it causes members of this generation to doubt their own judgments. They live in the world of uncertainty. Second, it forces them to rely on authority figures to tell them what to do.{5}

These characteristics of the emerging generation pose a challenge to the church but one that can be met by those who disciple and mentor them. Biblical teaching and interaction with members of this generation about their self-image and self-esteem is a key component. We should also be willing to address the complexity of the world with thoughtful biblical answers.

Social Characteristics

The emerging generation would like to change the world. Six out of ten (60%) say they feel personally responsible for making a difference in the world.{6} This is encouraging since there are other surveys that also show this generation to be isolated and self-focused. The church and Christian leaders may be able to focus on this desire to change the world in calling for them to become leaders and make a difference in their communities.

This generation is also driven by pragmatism. They want what works. The positive aspect of this is that they are focused on results and getting something done. But the negative part of this is that pragmatism easily can lead to an “end justifies the means” mentality that can rationalize immoral and unethical actions.

The emerging generation also lives in a world of complexity. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons talk about this in their book, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity*.{7} They say those in this generation "relish mystery, uncertainty, ambiguity. They are not bothered by contradictions." When faced with a paradox or questions, they don't feel the need to rush to find answers.

Bill Perry, founder of the Recon generational college ministry, explains: "The established generation is more interested in the bottom line (truth, biblical worldview, right answers, etc.) and in getting there as quickly as possible. Not so with the emerging generation. For them, it's as much the journey as the destination."

A fourth characteristic of this generation is most disturbing. They have a negative view of the church. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons describe this in some detail in their book *unChristian*. This generation sees themselves as "outsiders." They view the church as anti-homosexual, judgmental, political, and hypocritical. They see born-again Christians in a negative light.

We should not be surprised. Imagine if you grew up in a world where your perceptions of Christianity were informed by The Simpsons, Comedy Central, and Saturday Night Live. Imagine if whenever you went to the movies, any character who was a Christian was always portrayed in a negative light. New stories talk about scandals in government, scandals in business, and scandals in the church. It would be very hard to not be cynical about major institutions in society, including the church.

This is certainly a call for us to live a righteous and authentic life. If we do so, I believe we can have a positive impact on this emerging generation.

Social Connections

The emerging generation is extremely well connected. This is easily illustrated by their use of networking sites like Facebook and MySpace. They also value teamwork, even to the point of showing groupthink. They have lots of connections, but one wonders how many of these connections would actually be what most of us would consider to be "friends." Yes, they are called friends on these networking sites, but they may actually be fairly superficial.

This leads to another characteristic of this generation. Most in this generation are lonely. Sean McDowell, in his book *Apologetics for a New Generation*, calls them the "loneliest generation" because their relationships are mostly on the surface and don't meet the deepest need of their heart.{8} Shane Hipps has a different term. He calls them "digital natives." Those in the millennial generation are so accustomed to mediated interaction that they find face-to-face interaction increasingly intolerable and undesirable. This is especially true when discussing a conflict.{9}

The emerging generation multitasks. They are the consummate multitaskers. Nearly one-third of 8- to 18-year olds say they multitask "most of the time" by doing homework, watching TV, sending text messages, surfing the Web, or listening to music. And they do all of this simultaneously.

First, this is dangerous. Researchers have found that talking or texting is much more dangerous than many of us might even imagine. The Center for Auto Safety has released hundreds of pages of research documenting the dangerous impact of cell phone use on America's highways.{10} Talking or texting while driving is more dangerous than driving drunk.

Second, it is also relationally damaging. This generation thinks nothing of texting others while in the presence of other people. As we have just mentioned, they would rather

send a text or e-mail than talk to a person face-to-face.

The emerging generation is overwhelmingly stressed out. One fourth of millennials feel unfulfilled in life, and nearly half say they are stressed out. This is twice the level of baby boomers. What is even more disturbing is that most parents are unaware of how stressed out their children are and how that is negatively impacting them. One very tragic result of this stress is the suicide rate. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15- to 24-year-olds.

Biblical Perspective

We noted that this is a generation that is narcissistic (2 Timothy 3:1-2) and overly self-confident. This is where the Bible and the church can provide perspective to a generation with great expectations and unwarranted confidence. Messages and Sunday school lessons along with discipleship programs aimed at issues like ego (Philippians 2:1-10), pride (Proverbs 16:18-19), and envy (Galatians 5:21) would be important to address some of these characteristics of the emerging generation.

This is a generation that finds it difficult to make decisions. Here is an opportunity to come alongside members of the emerging generation and provide them with biblical tools (2 Timothy 2:15) for wise and moral decision-making. Messages (sermons, lessons) on the importance of commitment and how following biblical principles concerning life decisions can develop confidence and responsibility would also be important.

Many in the emerging generation want to change the world. This is an opportunity for pastors, teachers, and mentors to challenge this generation to make an impact for Jesus Christ in our world. We should challenge them with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

The emerging generation has a negative view of the church.

When the institutional church has been wrong, we should be willingly to admit it. But we should also be alert to the fact that sometimes the criticisms we hear are unjustified. Skeptics might know someone who professes to be a Christian who they believe is a hypocrite. The person may not really be a Bible-believing Christian. Or he may not be representative of others in the same church.

We should also be willing to challenge the stereotype skeptics have of Christianity. If all they know of Christianity is what they see on television or read in the newspapers, they may not have an accurate view of Christianity.

This generation is also lonely and stressed out. They need to know how to develop deep, lasting relationships (Proverbs 18:24). They live in a world where relationships are disposable. It is a world where a "friend" on Facebook can "delete" them by hitting a key on their computer keyboard. They also need to learn how to develop friendships without becoming codependent.

They also need to know that a relationship with Christ provides a peace "which surpasses all comprehension" (Philippians 4:7). They may also need instruction on practical life issues and learn to develop healthy habits that develop their physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions.

Pastors, church leaders, and individual Christians have an opportunity to make a positive impact on this emerging generation. Hopefully this has given you a better understanding of this generation and provided practical ideas for ministry.

Notes

1. Cathy Lynn Grossman, "Young adults less devoted to faith," *USA Today*, 27 April 2010, 1A.
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