

HOW DID THE CHURCH LOOSE ITS MIND?

The Apostle Paul's words were a sober warning to the church of all ages when he wrote in Romans 12:1-2 “. . . *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*”

Paul is saying that in light of all that God has done in Christ to provide a salvation that is by grace alone, through faith alone, by Christ alone; our lives should reflect how we live. Our lives are to be lived as a sacrifice to Him, holy and acceptable to God. We are not to be conformed to this world. The word *world* means aion--"an age, a period of time," marked in the New Testament usage by spiritual or moral characteristics, is sometimes translated "world"; the RV marg. always has "age." We are to live in the world but not to be entangled with it. This was Jesus' prayer in John 17.

John 17:14-16 "I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one."

What an exciting time we live in. Christianity finds itself in a unique place in history. We can have an influence on the way Christianity is perceived and practiced if we understand how we got to where we are and respond in a redemptive way to our situation. Our time is best described in the opening words of Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, "*It was the best of times and it was the worst of times.*" This writing addressed the French Revolution of 1789 better known as the beginning of the Age of the Enlightenment. The Age of the Enlightenment which began in 1789 with the fall of the Bastille, ended with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. Sociologists have called it Modernity.

Modernity was an 'age' characterized by man being exalted while God was being debased. Modernity was to be the age where mankind was going to loosen the bonds of superstitious religion in favor of man coming of age. This age was where reason would replace revelation. This age would be characterized by scientific advancement, which would answer all

our questions and all our ills. Knowledge would no longer be grounded in reason undergirded by faith but knowledge would be limited to that which could be seen. It was basically intellectual autonomy. Christianity opposes autonomy on grounds of creation, the fall, and redemption. While there, was truth; it was not contained or to be found in any particular group. The Enlightenment relegated God to a remote caretaker or irrelevant possibility, denied the incapacity of human nature to attain heaven by its own created resources and affirm that the moral life, conducted in good faith fulfils the basic purpose of existence. The Christian response was Deism. These are the “seeds” of present-day evangelicalism, which sees God as a distant, out of touch, not involved, Deity.

When we walk out the door, so to speak, we can smell society rotting. The stench of a culture that has promoted perversion over purity, injustice over justice, personal rights over responsibility, and slavery over freedom as expressed in our present day welfare system. Our beloved American society smells like meat left in the noonday sun-the stench is overwhelming. Salt that is used to preserve a product has lost its savor.

Matthew 5:13-16 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

We are a culture that like New Orleans after hurricane Katrina, smells with the decay of those, for whatever reason, failed or were unable to get out and thus stayed there and died. Warnings have been coming for years but the Christian community has failed to heed those warnings and response in a proactive way to those warnings. The enemy to our souls has crept in and sowed seeds of deception.

Matthew 13:24-28 "He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your

field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.'"

The church has been asleep and an enemy has entered and sowed seeds of philosophical destruction that has changed the landscape of American evangelicalism. We are explicitly told by Scripture. . .

Matthew 28:19-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Our task is to make disciples by teaching them about God and His Christ. In so doing, we will glorify God by demonstrating the presence of God among us.

"This is our task to establish Christ as living Teacher in the midst of His people. He has been removed by various historical developments: assigned the role of mere sacrifice for sin or social prophet and martyr. But where there is no teacher there can be no students or disciples."¹

Not producing biblically literate disciples has produced illiterate Christians. Culture is reflecting that spiritually ignorant situation by our embracing death over life. A culture of death has settled like a glass doom over our beloved America. In addition, what does the Bible say about this?

Proverbs 8:35-36 (ESV) "For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD, but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death."

This culture of death has seen abortion and euthanasia come in and take the lives of the innocent. Two hundred plus years of embracing the "God is Dead" philosophy of German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche has come home to roost.

The Roe v. Wade case has placed abortion at the flash point of American politics. Scott Klusendorf of Life Training Institute said we are at a place in history like we were just preceding and during the Civil War. The question was then, "Who determines what life is and the value

¹J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 13.

that life has?” Is that a state’s right or is it according to the constitution an inalienable right given to us by our Creator?² If we do not acknowledge that God gives our rights to us then the state will exercise that judgment. Mr. Klusendorf seems to think that we are at that place once again; evaluating life from a pragmatic viewpoint. Teri Shavio, the young woman in Florida who was on life support system for some ten years and then under court order the feeding tube was removed, was an interesting but sad case in point. Her life was valuable whether she recovered or not.

Our culture has been dumbing down our education in America for decades, and it has been happening in our churches, as well. Dr. R. C. Sproul writes,

“We live in what may be the most anti-intellectual period in the history of Western civilization. . . we must have passion—indeed hearts on fire for the things of God. That passion must resist with intensity the anti-intellectual spirit of the world.”³

In a 1980 Gallup Poll on Religion the Poll states,

“We are having a revival of feelings but not of the knowledge of God. The church today is more guided by feelings than by convictions. We value enthusiasm more than informed commitment.”⁴

In addition, it is a fact that we act according to what we believe. We can only relate to someone to the extent that we know them. Our knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves is at an all time low. John Calvin in his Institutes of the Christian Religion places the right prior on knowledge.

²This conversation took place between Scott and myself at a breakfast sponsored by A Woman’s Pregnancy Center in Tallahassee, Florida, September .

³R. C. Sproul, Burning Hearts Are Not Nourished by Empty Heads,” *Christianity Today* 26: (September 3, 1982), 100.

⁴J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, 19.

“Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”⁵

Calvin went on to say.

“Accordingly, the knowledge of ourselves not only arouses us to seek God, but also, as it was, leads us by the hand to find him.”

Harry Blamires in 1963 is probably truer now than ever. “There is no Christian mind. . . the Christian mind has succumbed to the secular drift with a degree of weakness unmatched in Christian history.”⁶ And yet the Scriptures tell us in 1 Corinthians 14:20 “Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature.”

Where and when did the church lose its mind? Two events mark the rule to evangelical demise.

The first event was the emergence of anti-intellectualism. We should remind ourselves of what I have said earlier, Jesus says that if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? Our task, as the church, is to be salty to the world and if society is rotting, then we need to look to ourselves and question what we are doing. Are we becoming disciples of Jesus Christ or just consumers of good preachers telling us stories?

So what has happened? An anti-intellectualism has failed to see the importance of a classical worldview. In shifting from a Judeo-Christian understanding of reality to a post-Christian one, we have taken on an anti-intellectualism that has resulted in a marginalizing of Christianity in society. The church is no longer participating in the war of ideas. We have given in. When you go to a university and study the great men and women of history, Jesus Christ is not one of them. If you study law, ethics, philosophy, politics, education, science, business, etc. Jesus Christ is not considered as a contributor to any of these disciplines.

⁵John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

⁶Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (London: SPCK, 1963), vii, 3.

Why? A major reason is that we because we have bought into the dichotomy of the sacred and secular. Sacred is defined as that which is holy and separate relating to religion of worship of God. Faith in Christ is considered sacred and the sacred part of life has been divorced from living. It is a religious thing. Secular is defined as that which pertains to this present world not relating to spiritual matters. We bought into the lie that as Christians we follow faith that is void of thinking. Moreover, have we paid a price for that error!

The legacy of the Puritans was lost by the late 1700's. Cotton Mather said, "*Ignorance is the Mother of heresy not of devotion.*"⁷ From 1650-1700, the literacy rate in Massachusetts and Connecticut was between 89 and 95%. Children were taught to read and write before the age of six. They studied art, science, philosophy and other fields that expanded their minds. In the late 1700s and early 1800s things changed. Three (3) movements in America joined the European invasion of German higher criticism and legalistic Calvinism that moved evangelicalism of its foundation. Those three (3) movements were: the Second Great Awakening (1800-1820); the revivals of Charles Finney (1824-1837); and the Layman's Prayer Revival (1856-1858)—this was sometimes referred to as the Third Awakening.

What happened was a de-emphasis in doctrinal accuracy consisting of doctrinally precise sermons. In exchange for accuracy they emphasized immediate personal conversions, emotionalism, simple and popular preaching that was basically intellectually shallow, theologically ignorant and was what the general populist wanted to hear. Those sermons underscored the pioneering spirit of the rugged individualism that was prevalent in the 1800s. One very obvious result was what historians refer to as the Burned Over District in upstate New York. Thousands were reported as converted by revivalist preaching but had no real intellectual grasp of Christian teaching was. Notwithstanding, spirit-led revivals gave way to man-made revivals. True revivals gave way to revivalism. George Marsden mentions in his book,

⁷Quoted from *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, J. P. Moreland, 22.

Fundamentalism and American Culture, “anti-intellectualism was a feature of American revivalism.”⁸

As a result, three major American cults began in the Burned Over District among the unstable, untaught, and unconverted: Mormonism in 1830; Jehovah’s Witnesses in 1884; Christian Science in 1866. Joining these aberrations and distortions of the gospel was Dispensationalism that started in the British Isles in the 1830’s. This movement struck a meaningful cord in America theology under the leadership of C. I. Scofield when he published his notes in the Scofield Bible. Scofieldism is steeped in free-will Arminianism, a warped view of Christ’s second coming, wrongfully dividing redemptive history into separated dispensations, wrong scriptural view of the covenant (one covenant for Israel and another for Gentiles), and a faulty view of salvation by grace.

Deceived, bewildered, and disconnected, the evangelical movement in America was ill prepared for what it would encounter from its European constituents. Into this theological vacuum poured German higher criticisms; which consisted of challenging old established truths of the Scriptures such as miracles and the new birth. Higher Criticism captured many main line denominations.

Weakened by the onslaught of modernism, Unitarianism made a significant headway in and around Boston in 1820. It was the Unitarian Affirmation of Faith: “The fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the leadership of Jesus, salvation by character, and the progress of mankind onward and upward forever.” Unitarianism was an upper class religion while Universalism was a middle to lower class belief that had denied hell—all would be saved, even the devil.

The Enlightenment understood science to be the answer to man’s problems. Revelation was set aside for reason and God was gently relegated to a place in heaven; silenced by a practical atheism on the part of the church. With this philosophy came evolution led by Charles Darwin who was supported by the likes of John Dewey, the father of modern education. The Modern

⁸George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford, 1980), 212.

Era which began in 1789 with the French Revolution would end in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin wall and in those two hundred years was a nation, spiritually, drowning in humanism supported by a church that had fallen to the ill-fated philosophy that man could by himself better himself.

The judicial system was undergoing change as well. Up and through the eighteenth century, American jurisprudence was grounded and rooted in English law that taught the very nature of things was an expression of the will of God. That changed as law makers gave way to the conclusion that law should meet the needs of man rather than conform to the will of God. Our law system has moved away from the Judeo-Christian worldview of law to a sociological law. This simply means,

*“Law that has no fixed base but law in which a group of people decides what is sociologically good for society at the given moment and what they arbitrarily decide becomes law.”*⁹

Oliver Wendall Holmes (1841-1935) believed, and in fact, insisted, *“that the law must adapt itself to a changing social environment. Law ceases to represent eternal moral principles and comes to be merely an expression of popular sentiment at a given time.”*¹⁰ He went on to say, *“The life of the law has not been logic; it has been experience.”*¹¹ That is, there is no basis for law except man has limited experience. And Holmes again summed it up by saying, *“. . . the majority vote of that nation that could lick all others.”*¹² This is just another way of saying that power makes right.

In the recent Senate hearings for the confirmation of Judge Roberts, Judge Roberts likens

⁹Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1981), 41.

¹⁰C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1981), 124.

¹¹American Law Review, XIV, (1880), 233.

¹²Harvard Law Review, XL, (1918).

his job to that of an umpire. His job as a justice was to call balls and strikes. However, the next day, Senator Biden of Maryland, in his opening remarks, stated that while what judge Robert said was cute, it was not accurate. As a Supreme Court Judge he could change the strike zone. This is indicative of what had happened. There are those who want the court to be more elastic and not so ridged. The law, they said, should reflect the trends in our culture.

The same holds true in the church. There are those who say that the gospel message needs to become more relevant to culture. The problem is not that the gospel is not relevant or that it is out of step with the culture; the problem is culture is out of step with the message of the Bible.

The second event that forever changed the church in the latter part of the eighteenth century was where evangelicalism begins to withdraw from its “salt and light” position. The anti-intellectuals move in the church started the retreat of the church from its cultural responsibility of being salt and light. Instead of warring against the spiritual forces that was coming against the church, the church simply retreated into its differing views of reality. The church and its lack of having its mind continually renewed to Scripture placed itself in a compromising position. Its lack of readiness for what was to come proved to be fatal. The church was ill prepared for the invasion of higher criticism from Germany. It attacked every major seminary in America. In addition, people begin to see the Bible as less than a revealer of truth. The Bible was being questioned as never before and what could be known about truth, they said, was left to the theologians only, not the lay person. People began to see the Bible as a practical guide to spiritual growth and personal ethics and piety. People began to depend more on the “leading of the Holy Spirit” and less on historical and grammatical understanding of Scriptures.

Religion in America is based more on how I feel rather than what does the Bible say. Religion has become private and personal with little to do with exercising our faith in the marketplace. There is very little, if any, conscience-ness of a Christian worldview. Far too many Sunday School programs and pulpits address heart issues about personal piety and personal growth at the expense of cultivating an intellectual understanding that this world is my Father’s

world!

Modernism in the church led to a decline in true missionary endeavors. Modernist preached a liberation theology that excluded Christ as a substitute for sinners. Liberation Theology is nothing more than Marxism in religious grab. Where do you think the Sandinistas' come from?

Modernity was looked at to be the age of promise. When World War One was considered to be the war to end all wars and did not; our culture slid into deep depression. Another World War followed the First World War but not before a huge economic set back in the Great Depression. After World War 2 religion was shouting, but not about relevant issues. The shouts were: do not go to movies, do not drink, do not play cards, etc. By the 1960s, Modernity was all but over. A new movement was beginning; Post Modernity was now the answer to man's problems. Science had gone too far into Darwinism by totally rejecting religion. Modernity had said truth was not to be found in any one particular group, everyone held truth. However, Post Modernity said truth did not exist. With truth having been banished to the outpost of cultural existence, morality left the American conscience. Haight Ashbury in San Francisco became ground zero for moral decadents. Post Modernism is now the culprit to deal with.

Now, as I mentioned in the beginning, I think it is a great time in history! I believe, like times before us, Jesus is the answer. This is my Father's world and He has not left it.

1. **Be a consumer of God's Word.** As Paul says, Galatians 4:19 "my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" The mystery of the gospel is that Christ takes up residence in us. We become Christ's body. We become a living demonstration of the presence of God in the earth. When we get Christ, we get wisdom. This godly wisdom helps us to conduct ourselves as ambassadors of His kingdom. We are Kingdom people; people of His presence; people filled with the Holy Spirit. Have you ever noticed how confident you are when you know what you are talking about? The more we know about Christ the more confident we are to telling others about our Savior. This is about, as Jonathan Edwards called, "Theology on fire!"
2. **Understand that the Bible is a blue print for a Godly worldview.** The Bible is clear in the opening verses as to what God has done and what He is interested in.
3. **Live the life of God before your children and expect them to follow.**