

It's gone.

Some of you will remember when the Christian philosopher Francis Schaeffer told us back in the 1970s that someday we would wake up and find out that the America we once knew was gone. *That day is here.*

We have crossed an invisible line, and there are no signs that we are capable of turning back. Like a boat caught in the mighty torrent of the Niagara River, we are being swept along with powerful cultural currents that just might put us over the brink. Seemingly irrevocable trends put in motion forty years ago continue to gather greater momentum and speed. Our Judeo-Christian heritage that gave us the freedoms we have enjoyed is for the most part gone, and in its place is an intolerant form of humanism that can boast of one victory after another. The "cultural war" we used to speak about appears to be over, and we have lost.

Daily, perhaps hourly, we are losing the war for America's heart and mind. We must understand the direction and speed of this cultural river that has spilled over and engulfed our land. We

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must also ask: what should we be doing at this critical hour?

This booklet is above all a message of hope, a message intended *to help us refocus our priorities in a day of great opportunity*. Rather than lick our wounds, withdraw from the public debate, and stand aside as we bemoan the fate of this great nation, we must regroup, get our bearings, and remember why we are here and what we are called to do. Never before in American history has it been more important for the church to be all that it can be in a society that is increasingly hostile to Christian values.

My prayer is that after you have finished reading these pages, you will be encouraged, hopeful, and excited to be alive at this moment of history. We as a church must embrace our present challenges with the sure knowledge that we are here by divine appointment. We have come to a crisis for which we must be prepared. We have work to do.

Before I seek to give both hope and direction to the church at this time of uncertainty, we need to survey the extent of the moral and spiritual devastation we see around us. Let's look at where we *are* before we outline what we should *do*.

There are at least five seemingly irreversible

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trends in our society that we as a church must be prepared to address. I have no doubt that God is taking us where we have never been before, but He is not taking us where His grace cannot keep us.

Here I simply list these trends with a brief explanation.

FIVE TROUBLING TRENDS

Economic Decline

Even as I write these words, our ticking national debt clock tells us that we are increasing our debt by 3 billion dollars a day. We hear repeatedly that the 16 trillion dollars we owe nationally is “unsustainable”; that is to say, we cannot continue along this path of spending without drastic and long-term consequences. Our politicians have not yet learned that *we cannot borrow our way into prosperity and survive.*

Although there are many differences between America and post-World War I Germany, history has some economic lessons to teach us. Remember that after World War I, Germany was saddled with huge debts the nation chose to pay through the printing of money, and more money. Not everyone was hurt as a result of this strategy; businesses with huge debts paid them off with

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essentially worthless pieces of paper. The result, of course, was rapid inflation until the mark became worthless, and many people's savings were wiped out. The resulting economic collapse paved the way for a strong leader who promised to end the madness, and thus Hitler rose to power.

As of this moment I cannot predict what the long-term consequences of our spending binge will be, but most economists not only predict inflation (which is already happening) but possibly a severe recession, just as we witness one country after another in Europe struggling with high unemployment, wary investors, and the need for multibillion dollar bailouts. Yet because cutbacks are unpopular, Washington turns a deaf ear to the lessons of history.

Alexander Fraser Tyler, an eighteenth-century Scottish lawyer who was skeptical of democracy, ominously predicted:

A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves largesse from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority will always vote for candidates promising the most benefits from the public treasury with the result that

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democracy always collapses over bad fiscal policy, always followed by a dictatorship.

We can be glad when the government helps the truly needy. But when elections are won or lost depending on which candidate promises the greatest “largesse,” then we know that democracy is failing us. And when politicians are willing to keep increasing our national debt for immediate gain without regard for long-term consequences, then we know that we have lost our way.

Of course, it is not simply our national debt that should be of concern to us. Those of us who live in the state of Illinois are probably aware that the per-person debt in our state is among the highest in the nation. To be precise, our state is in debt to the tune of \$21,000 for every person in Illinois! With the state treasury bankrupt, payments are either late or not paid at all.¹ A day of reckoning is coming.

My concern about the nation’s economy is not just the effect a serious recession (or collapse) would have within our borders. Just think of America’s global economic impact; then think of all the missionary organizations and agencies funded by American Christians. These sources of income, so desperately needed for the cause

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of the Gospel overseas, would dry up, and many Gospel-centered ministries would suffer around the world.

In anticipation of coming financial upheaval, we as a church should be grappling with relevant questions and design strategies that will help us care for those who are in need. The early church faced an economic crisis and helped its most under-resourced members. Our pride in our individualism must give way to a spirit of generosity, sharing, and sacrifice. We may have to learn such lessons the hard way.

Moral Decline

President Obama would not have pledged his support for same-sex marriage if he did not believe that in recent years there has been a massive public shift in cultural mores. Again, I refer to Francis Schaeffer, who warned us that what is unthinkable in one generation can become thinkable in another. What this moral shift toward the acceptance of same-sex marriage means for our children and succeeding generations is frightening.

The media has played an important role in making the unthinkable, thinkable. Pro-homosexual lobbies have exerted pressure and control