Culture War is Lost

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For Discussion: A Guide to the Negative World
(firebrandmag.com; August 20, 2024)
https://firebrandmag.com/articles/a-guide-to-the-negative-world

Also: **The Final Christian Generation Confronts What It Means To Lose A Culture War**
(roddreher.substack.com; August 30, 2024)
https://roddreher.substack.com/p/nixon-to-chinatrump-to-abortion-clinic

What is the Culture War?
A culture war is a form of cultural conflict between different social groups who struggle to politically impose their own ideology upon mainstream society.

How is the church doing in the culture war?
We are losing it. We live in a post-Christian society.

Didn't the Supreme Court Dobbs decision making abortion a state's issue signal a culture war win?
In each of the seven states in which an abortion referendum has been on the ballot since Dobbs, the pro-life side lost — even in three red states.

- Dobbs was a Pyrrhic victory because deep down, America is a functionally pro-choice, post-Christian nation. The Sexual Revolution has triumphed.
- A Pyrrhic victory is a victory that inflicts such a devastating toll on the victor that it is tantamount to defeat.

How have popular attitudes toward Christianity changed over time?
Aaron M. Renn's new book, *Life in the Negative World*, describes how the Western world has turned against Christians…

- The positive world lasted until the mid-1990s. In this context, to be known as a good, church-going Christian could enhance one's social status. On the other hand, violating norms of Christian behavior would have negative consequences. Christianity enjoyed a privileged status.
- The neutral world emerged around 1994. In this period being a Christian had no significant impact on social status. Christianity was viewed as one option among many in a pluralistic society.
- The negative world began around 2014. Being a Christian is now socially detrimental. "Christian morality is expressly repudiated and now seen as a threat to the public good and new public moral order." Public expressions of Christian faith and morality will have negative consequences.

Are these cultural shifts in America catching the church by surprise?
Yes… by and large most Christians are oblivious to the subtle changes reflecting the post-Christian nature of the culture. There are striking parallels of when the Roman Empire transitioned from paganism to cultural Christianity starting with Constantine in the AD 300's.

- By the 390s, paganism had waned so much that Christian bishops exercised political power to convince Roman officials to actively suppress paganism.
- The final pagan generation, up to the end, still believed that it was going to last forever… the pagan temples and statues of the gods remained long after paganism was effectively dead

What should we learn from the final pagan generation in Rome?
There are parallels with us as the final Christian generation…

- Stop thinking that the culture is always going to tolerate Christianity, and that anything short of radical action is sufficient. Don't miss how radically different the world is today.
- Do not mistake the presence of Christian churches and symbols in public life for the true condition of Christianity in the hearts and minds of people.

What are the prophetic implications of having lost the culture war in Western Civilization?
It reflects the failure of the church to make disciples wide and deep. The church being compromised with the culture is reflected in the apostacy of the church…

1 Timothy 4:1 – *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*

How does apostasy of the church impact the culture at large?

When professing Christians depart from the faith, you can imagine how this impacts a culture that once had values inspired by Christianity. This apostacy and cultural rot will be so bad that Jesus asked…

> Luke 18:8 – *when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*

This question is somewhat rhetorical and hyperbolic… When the rapture occurs, there will be so few true Christians on earth in relation to the population at large that it will seem like there are none.

- Barna: 4% of the most Christian nation on earth have a biblical worldview (~4M; 1% of 8B = 80M; still ~1%)
- And certainly, immediately after the rapture of the church, there will literally be no Christians on earth.

Should the church be involved in social issues and causes?

This issue is the cause of much controversy in the Christian community. Each of the two extremes is represented by those who feel very strongly that their position is the "Christian" one…

- There are those who spend many hours writing to their congressmen, picketing abortion clinics, campaigning for conservative candidates to influence government to the Christian worldview.
- Others at the other extreme take Jesus' words *"My kingdom is not of this world"* (John 18:36) as their motto, refusing to vote or get involved in any effort to affect the culture in which we live.

What does the Bible say about Christians being good citizens?

> Romans 13:1 – *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.*

Christians should be exemplary in their conduct regarding the laws of the land, choosing to disobey only those laws/rules that directly contradict the revealed Word of God.

What examples come to mind where there is a conflict between God's Word and the government?

Abortion was once forced by the government of China. The Chinese Christians who defied the law and refuse to have abortions were obeying the biblical commands *"choose life"* (Deuteronomy 30:19) and *"you shall not murder"* (Romans 13:9), thereby obeying the Word of God rather than the laws of man.

- But such instances are rare in contemporary Western culture.

What example did Jesus give us to understand our responsibilities in the social/cultural arena?

Jesus lived in a corrupt society but He perfectly maintained His Father's perspective on social and political matters.

- Cruel tyrants and dictators ruled and the institution of slavery was firmly entrenched.
- Legal and economic oppression of the Jews by Rome was rampant.

But even in the face of such tyranny, Jesus never issued a call for political changes, even by peaceful means.

- Jesus did not come to earth to be a political or social reformer. Rather, He came to establish a new spiritual order.
- He came not to make the old order moral through social and governmental reform, but to make new creatures holy through the saving power of the gospel and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

What was Jesus' strategy to change the culture?

When people's hearts are changed by Christ, godly governments and institutions will follow.

- What we need is not better government, but better men and women in government.

So, what is a Christian to do? Should Christians shun all political and social efforts to affect the culture?

Certainly, if our consciences convict us to do so and as long as our motivation is pure and not an effort to appear holier than those who do choose to be involved.

- Pride is too often the by-product of completely withdrawing from the culture. We are to be *in the world, but not of it*, and part of being in the world is modeling Christ-likeness for the world and Christian love toward one another.

Should we picket, campaign, and lobby our elected leaders on issues of concern to us?

Certainly, as long as we keep the ultimate goal in mind—to win people to Christ. But too often that goal and the activities described this question are in conflict.

What examples are there for Christian culture warriors having harmed the cause of Christ?

The misguided efforts by a small fringe group from Kansas who show up at the funerals of homosexuals with signs declaring "God hates fags" and "burn in hell."

- How likely is it that such cruel and vicious behavior will convince unbelievers we serve a loving and merciful God who will forgive sin?

The cause of Christ is not advanced by this type of activism, no matter what the motivation.

- Even the most gracious efforts to "clean up the culture" will not expand the cause of Christ.

What is the real battle in which the church should be engaged in?

Ours is a spiritual battle against worldly ideologies arrayed against God, and we achieve victory over them only with the weapon of Scripture.

> 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 – *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.*

Which is better, to spend our effort on fixing the culture, or making disciples of Christ?

The picture of the Christian in the world is well illustrated by the analogy of the train station. We (Christians) are waiting in the station to board the northbound (heavenly) train. We are surrounded by people who are preparing to board the southbound train, completely unaware of its tragic destination.

- Should we spend our time and energy pleading with them to switch trains? Or do we merely tidy up the train station instead?

The answer is obvious, and those who would tidy up the culture for the culture's sake are not only missing the point, they are misunderstanding the reason God leaves us in the world—to be His witness to the lost and condemned.

- Such a mission is far more *"good and profitable to men"* (Titus 3:8) than any amount of social or political activism.

How can we be good witnesses of Christ in our post-Christian culture?

- Be obedient to Christ despite the potential consequences
- Be excellent and thus be a blessing to the world… demonstrate why we are different from the unbelieving world.
- Be resilient, "antifragile," reduce our exposure to risk… Trials will come, but they need not defeat us.
- Be trustworthy, pursue integrity, honesty, and competence.
- Pursue Community Strength, focus on sustaining our countercultural communities and beliefs.
- Pursue economic ownership, cultivate entrepreneurship
- Engage missionally, in an age of deep moral and spiritual confusion, we can provide clarity on truth.

What applications do we see from this discussion?

- The culture war is lost… focus on making disciples, not winning ideological converts.
- The lost culture war is a manifestation of the apostacy of the church… one more sign of the end of the Age.
- If enough people's hearts change, the culture will change.
- The church working to clean up the culture harms the cause of Christ… change hearts, not the culture.