

When a Nation Rejects God

The appalling increase in violence and incivility that is tearing our nation apart should not come as a surprise. The causes were identified long ago in the Bible.

“There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed. Therefore, the land will mourn . . .” (Hos. 4:1-3).

“Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters . . .” (Rom. 1:28-30).



In his 1971 song, “Imagine,” John Lennon challenged listeners to “imagine there's no heaven . . . no hell below us . . . all the people living for today.” In his mythical world, there would be “nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too . . . all the people living life in peace.” This song served as an anthem for a new wave of humanity desperate to escape the evils of past generations. If only we would ditch our primitive belief systems and focus our lives on the here and now, we could all live together in peace and harmony.

In the decades since Lennon penned these words, Western societies, including America, have eagerly embraced this message.

Large swaths of our population have ditched God, religion, and belief in an afterlife, and are truly “living for today.” Theoretically, therefore, we no longer have anything to kill or die for, and can now all live together in peace.

How’s that program working out for us?

As our nation spirals deeper into a vortex of hate and violence, Lennon’s utopian words sound glib. With God and religion moved to the margins, the social bonds that once held our people together are unraveling, replaced by a rising tide of envy, anger, outrage, and vengeance. Everyone now claims to be a victim of one kind or another, and the solution is to make everyone else somehow pay for the injustice. Mental illness, suicide, and mass killings are becoming more prevalent. Selfishness is destroying our families, and polarization is poisoning our politics. This can’t go on forever.

The Bible predicted this outcome long ago. Hosea, Paul, and other writers addressed this phenomenon, summarized in a simple formula: *Social cohesion is a function of respect for God*. When people broadly accept God’s moral order in their lives, that respect is reflected in how they treat each other. But when God is kicked to the curb, the rules by which they live together are also jettisoned, with terrible results. The history of our nation is a prime example of that principle in practice—on both sides of the equation.

We stand on the edge of an abyss, and everyone knows it. Even Richard Dawkins, whose 2006 book, *The God Delusion*, was a blistering attack on Christianity, has now softened his views, acknowledging that “the relatively benign Christian religion” serves as a “bulwark against something worse” (*The Guardian*, Mar. 20, 2018). Christianity has its flaws, but it’s better than the alternative. We are now learning that lesson the hard way.

Our leaders can pass laws against hate crimes, guns, and plastic straws until the cows come home, but unless large numbers of our citizens repent and turn their hearts to God, those laws are just band-aids slapped on a cancerous tumor. The death spiral that our nation finds itself in cannot be reversed without a wholesale restoration of faith. Failing that, our country is doomed.

Lennon’s song may have inspired a generation to dream of peace and love, but dreams cannot compete with depravity in the human heart. Only the gospel of Christ can fix that problem.

— David King