

The Culture War and the Two Americas

The Undeniable Realities

Jeffrey D. Breshears

In the 1992 presidential campaign, Bill Clinton's advisors sensed that despite all the issues that might impact the election – whether foreign, domestic, or personal – the overriding concern was the economy. They were so convinced of this that they adopted a kind of campaign mantra, “It's the economy, stupid,” and maintained a sharp focus and a clear message that eventually proved a winning formula.

It's the Culture...

Based on the results of the 2008 election, the economy is apparently still the main priority for most Americans most of the time. Evidently, what matters most is money – despite all the other issues regarding contrasting political ideologies, constitutional theories, foreign policies, social programs, personal and public morality, and various personality factors.

Economics, tax policies, deficit spending and the national debt are always significant, and their importance should never be minimized. Indeed, practically-speaking, economics a foundational pillar of any civilization. But informed Christians understand that there are issues that transcend economics, and that the priority should always be the moral and ethical condition of our culture. In the civic realm, our concern should never be to impose specifically-Christian beliefs and practices on mainstream society but to promote universal values, based on the principles of natural (moral) law, that cultivate a civil and decent public square for the general welfare and common good of all.

In terms of a Christian view of civic responsibility, the fundamental issues are always generically moral and ethical. In what kind of society do we want to live, and what kind of culture do we want to pass on to our children and grandchildren? Are we committed to working for a society that offers equal opportunity and justice for all, or one that grants special status and privileges to certain people based on their religion, race, class, sex, or group identity? Do we want a society that acknowledges and values the principles of natural moral law on which this nation was founded –

those “self-evident truths” that Jefferson referred to in the Declaration of Independence – or do we prefer a culture characterized by moral and ethical relativism in which everything is ambiguous and subjective? Do we want a society that encourages individual responsibility or a libertine culture that glorifies materialism, consumerism, hedonism, narcissism, and every kind of irresponsible behavior imaginable? Do we want a political and legal system committed to the rule of law based on the original intent of the U.S. Constitution, or one that changes with the times according to the latest socio/political and legal trends? And furthermore, do we want a nation that acknowledges its religious heritage, or one that allows that heritage to be misrepresented and even obliterated by cultural elites who seek to replace it with a radical secular humanistic philosophy?

These are among the most fundamental issues in the contemporary culture war, and there is no question that those who stand for traditional moral, religious, political, and social values are on the defensive. In little over a generation, much of our society and culture has been transformed by cultural liberals promoting a radical left-wing agenda. Some Christians understand this and have sought to inform and prepare themselves accordingly for the challenges of our time. Many more, however, seem oblivious to the threat – either due to ignorance, apathy, or the myriad distractions of life.

In the 2008 presidential primaries, Democratic candidate John Edwards ran on a theme of the “Two Americas.” Edwards hoped to win the Democratic nomination over his rivals, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, by staking out an

extreme left-wing position and playing the “class card” – i.e., seeking to exploit the perennial issue of class envy. Although he owned a 10,000 square-foot, multi-million-dollar mansion and indulged in \$400 haircuts, he disingenuously portrayed himself as the advocate of poor Americans against the greedy rich. Edwards’ campaign never gained traction, and he finally dropped out of the race. Later, it was revealed that he had been carrying on an affair with a campaign groupie at the same time his wife was suffering from cancer, that he fathered a child by the woman, and that he used campaign funds to help support her financially.

Edwards was a hypocritical political opportunist, but he was right about one thing: there *are* “Two Americas.” But he was wrong about the dividing line between them. It has nothing to do with class but everything to do with worldviews. As historian Gertrude Himmelfarb has characterized it, it is analogous to two cultures existing within one nation. Fundamentally, it is values and beliefs – not wealth and socio/economic status – that divides Americans into two broad categories: cultural conservatives and cultural liberals.

Most people, including most Christians, fail to understand this. Focused on immediate concerns, specific issues and the tyranny of the urgent, most don’t think (or act) consistent with their fundamental core beliefs. In fact, research by the Barna Group reveals that only a small minority of professing Christians hold anything like a consistent biblical worldview or apply biblical principles to their beliefs about political, social and cultural issues. Undoubtedly, this is a major factor why, for the past century-and-a-half, Christians have essentially forfeited the culture war. Secularists and cultural liberals have dominated in the public square not because their ideas are better but because they’ve been well-organized, goal-oriented, and largely unopposed. As a result, we see the inevitable consequences all around us in virtually every area of life: a society whose superstructure is collapsing because its moral foundations have been so undermined by internal corruption and decay.

There are many salient issues that divide the Two Americas, but I will focus on seven of the most basic ones that expose the deep and irreconcilable separation between cultural conservatives and liberals:

(1) Is the culture war real, or is it an alarmist myth generated by cultural conservatives (and some liberals) to divide America and advance their own agenda?

(2) The contrasting interpretations of American history by cultural conservatives and liberals, and their differing visions of what kind of society America should be;

(3) Contrasting views on the nature of law and the U.S. Constitution;

(4) Conflicts over competing educational philosophies and policies;

(5) Controversies over issues related to race, racism, and racialism;

(6) Contrasting views on sex-related issues, including the abortion controversy; and

(7) Politics and the culture war.

1. America’s Perennial Struggle

The idea of a culture war is not a popular topic, and anyone who raises the issue risks public ridicule and condemnation. Many Americans, including many Christian leaders, either minimize its significance or even deny its existence. This is understandable because we would all like to think the best of others, including those with whom we disagree. We would like to believe that most Americans love this country and its traditions. As a matter of course, we often assume that most everyone shares essentially common values and a common vision for America although our methods and priorities may differ.

This ideal is particularly attractive to Christians because we naturally assume that it is more Christlike to function as a peacemaker than a culture warrior, or as a bridge-builder rather than a wall-builder. But the harsh reality is that not everyone shares a common value system, a common vision, or a common moral code. There are, unfortunately, two Americas whose values and goals are incompatible, and in such situations in which truth and morality are at stake, peacemaking is attainable neither through compromise nor capitulation. True peace is only achievable when aggressive evil is contained, and considering the pervasive nature of evil in our society, the failure to confront it is irresponsible and cowardly. As Christians, our moral responsibilities extend beyond merely ourselves, our own families, and perhaps our own church. We are members of a larger social community, and we simply cannot ignore the larger cultural issues swirling around us. When the culture is toxic, it pollutes everything (and everyone) in it.

From point of fact, the culture war is real whether we prefer to acknowledge it or not. Furthermore, it is nothing new. It was present at the outset of American history, and from the beginning

there has been an ongoing struggle between those who envisioned America as a potential New Jerusalem versus those who wished to create a New Babylon. The former were mostly conscientious Christians who held many beliefs, especially regarding personal morality and family values, similar to cultural conservatives today. The latter was an eclectic assortment of political libertarians, social nonconformists, hedonists, and militant individualists whose attitudes and sensibilities were shaped less by biblical principles than the spirit of their times.

From the outset the question has been: Is America in any way unique among the nations in world history – in other words, does America have some higher purpose – or was it merely the next nation-state to emerge out of the ongoing evolution of Western civilization? Furthermore, what should be the dominant values of America? Are they best represented by Main Street or Wall Street – by traditional social and moral values or by Hollywood and Las Vegas? The reality, of course, is that America has never been exclusively the City of God or the City of Man but a complex and symbiotic mix of the two.

Most Americans know that in the beginning our country was settled in part by devout Christians who sought refuge from a tyrannical king, a corrupt Parliament, and a sycophantic state church that threatened their religious liberty. In the early years they settled mostly in the New England area, and their goal – however misguided or idealistic it might have been – was to establish a Holy Commonwealth and a thoroughly Christianized society. They were not indifferent to the blessings of political and economic freedom, but their primary motive was to create a more just, a more moral, and a more legitimately Christian society than what they left behind in England. Historians have tended to emphasize their imperfections and portray them as self-righteous and hypocritical prudes which, unfortunately, was often true. After all, despite their lofty ideals, they were only human beings and products of their time. But on the other hand, one must admire the fact that they earnestly endeavored to honor God by establishing a decent civil society that sought to integrate individual liberty with responsible civic-mindedness.

But from the outset there were other colonists with a competing vision. Although nominally “Christian” (virtually everyone in 17th century England was a “Christian” – or at least a nominal Anglican), their primary motive was to escape not

only direct political oversight but the social and moral codes that regulated 17th century English society. For these, colonization was mostly about economic freedom, the potential for upward mobility, and independence from the strictures of civil government. For the most part, these were the hearty souls who founded Jamestown, the first permanent colony, and throughout colonial history they were the clear majority.

From the beginning there was tension between the sober Puritans of New England the more secular and worldly-minded libertarians who founded Jamestown. In fact, it was precisely to avoid their fellow Englishmen in Virginia that the Pilgrims sought to settle on the extreme northern edge of the London Company’s land grant. But they had been here only a little more than three years when their exclusive sanctuary was threatened by some new (and unwelcome) neighbors, a group of young Englishmen led by Thomas Morton who founded the Merrymount colony early in 1624. When the new arrivals set aside several days for revelry with local natives and erected a Maypole on May Day, the Pilgrims responded with a preemptive strike. Accusing Morton and his fellow heonists of indulging in a pagan bacchanalia, they arrested him, scattered the colony, and chopped down the Maypole.

In retrospect, one can see the encounter at Merrymount as the first clash in an ongoing culture war between Two Americas, represented by two distinct worldviews: those with essentially traditional moral and ethical beliefs and others with more secular or libertine values. To be sure, there has been a lack of charity and tolerance on both sides – mostly by traditionalists in the beginning but more recently by the secularists as they’ve gained the ascendancy – but for the most part the two sides have lived in a state of peaceful coexistence despite the tensions underlying their contrasting value systems. But since the 1960s the fissure separating the two has widened into a gaping chasm to the point that it’s now clear that what is at stake is a clash between two fundamentally irreconcilable worldviews.

As the culture war has intensified since the 1960s, the main difference between now and earlier in history is that the dam has broken and the flood of secularism has inundated much of the American landscape. Whereas these forces were mostly contained in the past, they now dominate and control most major public institutions in American life. To borrow a phrase from Karl Marx, cultural

liberals now control the “commanding heights” of the culture – those key sectors of our society that most influence our educational, political, and legal systems just as they dominate the media, popular culture, and many of our religious institutions.

2. American Exceptionalism

The culture war transcends the political sphere of life, although politics is an integral part of it. Essentially, it is a conflict between different views of America and visions for our nation’s future. Although it is often expressed as contrasting views of personal morality and



socio/political policies, at its core it is a struggle between two incompatible worldviews. Cultural conservatism is founded in part on the principle of natural law – universal and inviolable moral principles that can (and should) regulate human affairs; contradictorily, cultural liberalism reflects the relativistic view that morals and ethics are manmade and should therefore reflect current thinking and sensibilities. This fundamental difference explains why there is so little common ground between these positions, and why the two sides seem intractable.

Many culturally conservative Christians understand that we should be only selectively traditionalistic in our values since some traditional values – sexism, racism, classism, xenophobia, etc. – are obviously contrary to biblical ethics. In other words, there are aspects of our cultural past that definitely should be discarded because they were always antithetical to the spirit of Christian humanitarianism, social justice, and true *agape* love.

Similarly, knowledgeable and realistic cultural conservatives are not naive about our national past, nor do they seek to sanitize it. They understand that the uniqueness of America derives from a unique blend of two influences: a religious and moral heritage derived from biblical Christianity, and a humanistic and pragmatic socio/political tradition based on the tenets of classical liberalism as

articulated by Enlightenment theoreticians such as John Locke, Thomas Jefferson and others. This fusion eventually created a society whose national government, while officially neutral on religious matters, nonetheless encouraged a moral and religious citizenry.

Knowledgeable cultural conservatives understand that much of our history, like that of any other nation, is shrouded in greed, hypocrisy, exploitation, oppression, and violence. From the outset, relations between European settlers and Native Americans were complicated and confusing and often marked by misunderstandings, suspicions, treachery and violence on both sides. Regardless, much of the treatment of the natives was inexcusable by any reasonable humanitarian standards (or biblical standards). Similarly, the exploitation of African slave labor for the first 240 years of our history was unjust, inhumane, and shameful – the bitter legacy of which still plagues our society today.

In the 19th century the policy of Manifest Destiny sanctioned a gigantic land-grab that overpowered any Indians or Mexicans who got in the way. The culmination was the Mexican War of 1848, and as eminent Americans from Henry David Thoreau to John Quincy Adams and Abraham Lincoln asserted, the war was a clear-cut case of American imperialism. Yet ironically, although unjustifiable, Manifest Destiny has been overwhelmingly beneficial to the residents of the Southwest and California – the proof being that over 40 million Mexicans have crossed the border (both legally and illegally) into the United States over the past 70 years seeking a better life than what they left behind. Similarly, while acknowledging the evils of past slavery and racial bigotry, we recognize that there is no other nation on earth where people of African descent enjoy more freedom, more equality of opportunity, and a higher standard of living than in America today.

In recent history there is no question that U.S. foreign policy has often been driven as much by economic self-interest and the demands of corporate capitalism as by sincere humanitarian interests. As the world’s richest and most powerful nation, America is indisputably the source of some of the world’s greatest evils – e.g., it is the largest exporter of pornography and the foremost consumer of illegal drugs in the world. There is scarcely a nation or a region on earth that has not been polluted by American television, Hollywood movies, and

decadent American pop music.

But cultural conservatives also recognize the unique goodness of America as a force for freedom and justice. No other nation contributes so generously to alleviating human suffering in the world – from famine and poverty relief to fighting AIDS. Furthermore, the American military remains the greatest force for world peace and stability and the greatest deterrent to global Islamic terrorism.

As John Adams expressed at the founding, America has been – and continues to be – “the last and best hope for mankind.” G. K. Chesterton referred to this reality when he commented that America was the first nation born of a creed – those “self-evident” principles based on natural law that Jefferson alluded to in the Declaration of Independence. This concept is sometimes called American exceptionalism, and like the principle of natural law it is anathema to cultural liberals. Yet an honest and fair assessment of history reveals that more than any other nation in world history, the United States has functioned as a model and a force for good.

[NOTE: There is hardly an issue that provokes more contempt and outrage among academic and media elites (both in America and abroad) as the concept of American exceptionalism. For an extended critique of the idea, see Godfrey Hodgson’s *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (Yale University Press, 2009). While conceding that some aspects of America’s history and culture have indeed been unique, Hodgson, an English scholar, attributes much of America’s success to pure luck, and he rejects the notion that America has been qualitatively superior to Britain or other Western nations as a homeland for freedom, democracy and economic opportunity. Hodgson makes some valid points, but he cannot contain his general bias and disdain for America, and many of his assertions are questionable at best.]

Cultural liberals tend to focus on the negative and darker side of American history to the near-exclusion of the good. For them, America’s past has been mostly about the genocide of native tribes, the exploitation of African slavery, capitalistic greed, social injustice, sexist discrimination toward women, racial bigotry toward blacks and other minorities, homophobia, xenophobia, cultural elitism, environmental exploitation, and imperialism in foreign affairs. In contrast to the sanitized version of U.S. history that textbooks offered up prior to the 1970s, Marxist and liberal historians put forth an equally unbalanced view of

the past that exaggerates our national conflicts and failures.

Likewise, liberal historians and journalists typically ignore the significant contributions that the Christian faith has made to American society while accentuating examples of religious greed, hypocrisy, and conflicts in our past. Many on the extreme left even charge that the United States, far from being a force for freedom and democracy, has been one of the greatest sources of evil and exploitation in the world. This is a dishonest misrepresentation of American history that is transparently fallacious. It represents the worst kind of radical historical revisionism, and it is virtually indistinguishable from the kind of anti-American propaganda disseminated by Muslim Jihadists and other America-haters. Although an unpleasant prospect, one can hardly evade the conclusion that the prime motive of the left is to undermine people’s respect for our past in order to clear the way for a radical restructuring of our society, our culture, and our moral values.

Cultural conservatives appreciate the unique spiritual, political, economic, and social heritage of America, and want to see that tradition preserved for the most part. Although they welcome legal immigrants, cultural conservatives expect them to master the English language and integrate into mainstream society as immigrants have done in the past. They agree with Theodore Roosevelt that those who resist integration and insist on defining themselves as “hyphenated-Americans” detract from the sense of national unity and purpose that Americans should hold in common and in keeping with our national motto, “E pluribus unum” (“Out of many, one”). Cultural conservatives are proud of America’s uniqueness, and they believe the liberal ideology of multiculturalism promotes a society of separate and competing groups that can only Balkanize our nation and further shatter any sense of a shared culture and a unified national identity.

Cultural liberals embrace the ideology of multiculturalism and celebrate the religious, political, and social fragmentation that it encourages. Rejecting the tenet of American exceptionalism and the unique Judeo-Christian values that are a vital part of our heritage, they envision the United States becoming more like secular Europe in its culture and morals. Not content with a national government and state governments that are officially neutral on religious matters, many on the left want a thoroughly secularized public square that excludes all

recognition of God and the religious principles on which this nation was founded. It is perfectly understandable why the secularist agenda would appeal to atheists and agnostics, but in fact many cultural liberals are at least nominally religious, including many professing Christians who are theologically-liberal and even a growing number of evangelicals.

3. The Rule of Law and Original Intent

Cultural conservatives believe the U.S. Constitution, as interpreted in the context of its original intent, should govern and regulate all areas of life unless duly amended. In that respect, they object to unwarranted judicial activism and insist that legislatures rather than judges make new laws.

Cultural liberals, on the other hand, promote the idea of a “living, dynamic” Constitution, and contend that the role of judges is to assure that American society is as fair and equal as possible even to the extent of granting preferential treatment to individuals or groups that they define as disadvantaged. For them, equality of opportunity is not sufficient; they insist upon equality of results – a utopian pipe-dream that denies the inherent differences in individuals. In contrast to the objective Constitutional standard that conservatives uphold, liberals call for a more subjective approach to jurisprudence based on changing social standards and moral values. For liberals everything is negotiable, and the Constitution is not so much the ironclad law of the land as an historically-based document that can be adapted to the needs of a constantly changing and dynamic society and culture.

4. Education or Indoctrination?

One of the primary battle fronts of the culture war is in education. For decades cultural liberals, working primarily through the federal Department of Education, the National Education Association, and graduate schools of education, have used public schools as their primary laboratory to promote a leftwing social and political agenda. For many education theorists and professional educators, the traditional role that education has played in society – i.e., the inculcation of a disciplined work ethic along with the mastery of a core body of knowledge and associated skills that have defined education since the time of classical Greece – has been superseded by a socialistic agenda that regards social engineering and social transformation as the paramount objectives.

The postmodernist denial of objective truth has had a corrosive and devastating effect on education in that it reduces all truth-claims to mere opinions. For example, in the field of history all interpretive analyses of the past are dismissed as mere opinions to the extent that history itself is rendered meaningless. Similarly, in psychology there is no truth about human nature, only competing theories. Likewise, in theology there is no ultimate truth about God as revealed in holy scripture and preserved in the doctrines and practices of any particular religion, but only manmade conceptions of God that render all religions more-or-less equally valid (or invalid).

Without a doubt, this kind of epistemic cynicism corrupts education to the core. It is also a major contributing factor in declining academic standards and grade inflation. After all, if there are no absolutes and if everything is relative, then there are no standards by which to assess the quality of students’ work and no valid bases for comparison between individual students. In fact, many postmodernist educators now consider assigning grades to exams and essays to be an act of academic violence. In their minds, it is purely arbitrary, unfair, and discriminatory for teachers to judge some students’ work as superior or inferior to others.

Virtually all liberal arts and humanities departments in our colleges and universities are dominated by cultural liberals. Despite the promotion of tolerance as an ultimate virtue and the obsession with racial, ethnic, and gender-based diversity as a primary academic goal, in fact there is little tolerance and diversity in the one realm where it matters the most: ideology. Research surveys over the past 25 years have verified that the social and political views of college and university faculties are far more liberal than mainstream America. Furthermore, in the current politically-correct academic environment, there is virtually no attempt to present any ideological balance either in the classroom or in the selection of guest speakers for forums and graduation commencement addresses. Far from being a venue for the free and open discussion of ideas, the modern university is a closed shop in which only liberal and radical leftwing voices are heard. Conservative opinions are dismissed as ignorant, antiquated, and unworthy of consideration. In fact, traditional values are typically regarded as an embarrassment.

Likewise, in science departments proponents of Intelligent Design and others who question the

adequacy of Neo-Darwinism as a sufficient explanatory cause for biological life are subjected to ridicule, ostracism, censorship, and even dismissal. Such an environment, of course, stifles academic freedom, and it is exceedingly difficult for Christians and other cultural conservatives to get hired and promoted once their views become known. As a result, education is reduced to indoctrination, and students are denied the opportunity to hear and discuss alternative opinions and interpretations that challenge the politically-correct status quo.

In response to the federal government's virtual monopoly in education, cultural conservatives support substantive reforms and creative alternatives to the public school establishment. A healthy and competitive mix of private schools, charter schools, vouchers, home schooling, parental freedom of choice, and free market competition could force the kind of changes that the liberal elites who control public education most fear. In a system as flawed, dysfunctional, and philosophically bankrupt as contemporary government-controlled education, substantive curricular and methodological reforms are imperative lest another generation of American youth be cheated and deprived of the quality education they deserve.

5. Race, Racism, and Racialism

Echoing the sentiments of Martin Luther King Jr., cultural conservatives advocate a color-blind society in which individuals are judged on the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. Considering the fact that the last vestiges of legally-sanctioned race-based discrimination ended more than 40 years ago with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, conservatives oppose affirmative action quotas and other forms of legalized discrimination that give preferential treatment to blacks and other minorities based solely or primarily on their race in terms of admissions, scholarships, hiring, and promotions. Such policies constitute reverse discrimination against whites and stigmatize blacks and other minorities who are capable of competing on an open and level playing field in which the sole basis for success is one's competence.

Cultural liberals continue to insist that white racism is endemic to American society and a major problem that can only be remedied through perpetual affirmative action programs and racial quotas that favor minorities over whites even in situations where no apparent racial discrimination

has existed.

Cultural conservatives understand racism in the context of its traditional definition – i.e., the belief in the inherent genetic superiority of a certain race (or races) over others, and the attendant discrimination that accompanies such beliefs. Therefore, according to the traditional definition, whites, blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and any and all other ethnic and racial groups can be guilty of racism and racial bigotry.

Many cultural liberals accept a recent redefinition of racism that limits the term exclusively to white prejudice and discrimination. This concept, first put forth by Afro-centrists and postmodernists in the 1980s, is based on the assumption that since whites are the majority and the power-elite in American society, they alone can be "racist" since only they have the power to enforce bigotry. Such a notion is intellectually dishonest and defies reality. Apparently, the intention is to assign permanent victimhood status to blacks and other minorities and to attribute their problems to white racism. But this simplistic rationalization does nothing to explain the inordinately high levels of poverty, crime, and illegitimate births in the black community.

Realistically, a more pervasive and insidious problem than racism in American society today is racialism – an extreme hyper-sensitivity toward all things racial. Racialists are fixated on race and process everything through a racial prism, which colors their whole perspective on reality (no pun intended). Racialists are not necessarily racists in the true sense of the term, but nonetheless, like racism, racialism is a pernicious mental disorder. Undoubtedly, residual racism still exists in American society, but it is a prevailing problem that transcends all social, cultural, political, and religious boundaries and affects whites, blacks, and all other racial and ethnic groups alike.

But racialism is often a greater problem than racism, and unfortunately it is an accepted component in the whole postmodernist politically-correct orientation. Although many blacks and their white liberal allies reject racism per se, racialism is not only tolerated but actively promoted through programs and institutions that foster racial and ethnic separatism – everything from African-American studies departments in universities to the Congressional Black Caucus and the Black Entertainment Television network.

6. The Sexual Front

Many of the most intense conflicts in the culture war are waged on the sexual front between those who seek to uphold standards based on traditional moral values and those who prefer a more libertine and permissive attitude regarding human sexuality. Many Christians understand that in a nation built on individual civil liberties, the high standards of biblical sexual morality cannot be imposed on consenting adults in mainstream society. (Of course, society would be better off if biblical sexual morals were strictly enforced, but this is unrealistic and, as history has often demonstrated, actually counterproductive to the cause of Christ.) Therefore, this is always a problematical issue.

Like many culture war issues, our beliefs and practices regarding human sexuality derive directly from our core worldview. Christians believe that humanity is created in the *imago Dei* (the image of God), and as such we are more than just highly-evolved animals. We have a distinct and fixed nature, along with an innate moral conscience and are accountable to God for how we think and act. Furthermore, God has a purpose and intention for human sexuality just as he does for everything else in life. Nothing is accidental, nothing is a matter of divine indifference, and in his love for humanity God has established specific guidelines regarding sexual morality. Therefore, Christians recognize that divinely-ordained guidelines exist that are absolute and universal, and that these are not intended to repress sexuality so much as to provide natural, safe and sane parameters for the good of individuals and society in general.

Christians and other cultural conservatives accept what people have always recognized: that males and females are inherently different. Remarkably, many cultural liberals don't see it that way, which accounts for their promotion of unisex social standards and practices as well as their acceptance of homosexuality. They assume that humans a product of biological evolution, which is always in transition, with similar instincts and impulses as other animals. Theirs is a naturalistic, relativistic, and subjective philosophy of sexuality that is guided more by one's personal feelings than by any sense of a fixed human nature and objective moral laws regarding human sexuality. Although many don't personally surrender to the old sixties' credo, "If it feels good, do it," there is little governing their beliefs and practices other than their personal feelings and what they subjectively choose to impose upon themselves.

Cultural conservatives are concerned about the pernicious effects of open and unrestrained sexual exhibitionism in our society that sexualizes our children and pornifies our culture. In a free society little can be done regarding people's private access to sexual material on the Internet, but certainly there should be reasonable guidelines regulating overtly sexual images and messages in advertising and public media such as radio and television. In his classic, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis noted that there are people who endeavor to keep our sexual passions constantly inflamed in order to turn us into sex addicts either for the sole purpose of corrupting our morals or to exploit us for their own financial gain. When they have virtually open access to the public, the results are the further degradation of our culture and a steady increase in sex-driven social pathologies that wreak havoc on society.

Writing in the 1940s, many of Lewis' observations regarding the moral state of English society are applicable to contemporary America. In his view, England was suffering from an unnatural and unhealthy obsession with sex. As an example, he noted that one could easily attract a large audience by staging a strip-tease show and charging money for it. Now what would we think of a society in which large numbers of people would pay to see someone bring a covered plate onto the stage of a theater and then slowly, tantalizingly, lift the cover to expose the meat inside? He asks,

Would you not think that in such a country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food? And would not anyone who had grown up in a different [society] think there was something equally [strange] about the state of the sex instinct among us? [*Mere Christianity*, p. 96]

Lewis went on to observe that ever since the 1920s and the dawn of the Jazz Age, Western societies have been saturated with sexual propaganda – the result of which has been sexual anarchy and sexual chaos:

We have been told... that sexual desire is [the same] as any of our other natural desires and that if only we would abandon the silly old Victorian idea of hushing it up, everything in the garden will be lovely. It is not true. The moment you look at the facts, away from the propaganda, you see that it is not.

They tell you sex has become a mess because it was hushed up. But for the last twenty years it has not been. It has been chattered about all day long. Yet it is still in a mess... I think it is the other way round. I think the human race originally hushed it up because it had become such a mess. [*Ibid.*, pp. 97-98]

From point of fact, most societies repressed sexual libertinism in the past because it was considered irresponsible and contributed to social problems such as increased prostitution, venereal diseases, illegitimate births, the divorce rate, and the breakdown of traditional family life. But in the 20th century sex propagandists such as Sigmund Freud, Eric Fromm, Alfred Kinsey and others argued that repression of the sexual libido was psychologically unhealthy and, in many ways, worse than sexual promiscuity. But this defies both reason and experience, and as Lewis noted, “Everyone knows that the sexual appetite, like our other appetites, grows by indulgence.” Like a serious eating disorder, it can only be temporarily satisfied by indulgence before it soon craves more.

There is no doubt that the sexualization (or in many cases, pornification) of America through Hollywood movies, television, popular music, and many mainstream media outlets is a major contributing factor to the moral chaos that is degrading our culture. However, cultural liberals who are still stuck on the liberation fads of the 1960s refuse to acknowledge this, just as they often oppose efforts to impose reasonable restrictions on public obscenity. Confusing liberty with libertinism, they often show more support for those who are perverting our society than for those who find such filth to be offensive and degrading.

The same kind of cultural division is apparent when it comes to other sex- and gender-related issues such as marriage and abortion. Cultural conservatives believe that marriage is by definition the union of one man and one woman. This has been the unquestioned understanding of marriage since the dawn of recorded history until recently, and it remains the ideal family environment for raising healthy and well-adjusted children. Stable marriages are the indispensable foundation of a functional society, and same-sex civil unions should not be accorded the same legal rights and privileges as traditional marriages.

Disingenuously, cultural liberals think they have the prerogative to redefine marriage. They believe that a marriage, like most everything else, is a matter of interpretation, that same-sex unions are just as valid and socially beneficial as traditional marriages, and that same-sex couples should receive the same legal rights and benefits as married couples. According to this view, children raised by gay or lesbian couples suffer no harmful social, psychological, or spiritual effects and can grow up to be just as healthy and well-adjusted as those

raised in traditional families. Undoubtedly, many traditional marriage relationships are dysfunctional, contentious, and destructive to the emotional and spiritual nurturing of children. Furthermore, there is no denying that many same-sex couples conscientiously try to provide a warm and nurturing environment for children. But history, sociology, and common sense (not to mention the Bible) support traditional marriage between a loving husband and wife as the ideal environment for raising children and stabilizing society.

One of the most intractably divisive conflicts over the past 35 years has been abortion. Cultural conservatives believe that human life is sacred and that abortion-on-demand is an unconscionable crime against humanity. Undoubtedly, when Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence that the right to life is one of the most “sacred” and “self-evident” of all human rights, he wasn’t thinking specifically of abortion, but for those who believe that human life begins at conception, abortion is qualitatively tantamount to infanticide – the killing of the most innocent of all human beings.

The *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973 that legalized abortion was a legal atrocity and one of the most egregious usurpations of authority in Supreme Court history, and at the very least the matter should be decided on a state-by-state basis rather than by federal mandate.

Cultural liberals want to deny that human life begins at conception, although they have no rational or scientific justification for such a position. Their argument that a woman should have the legal right to choose whether or not to kill her pre-born baby cannot be justified morally, just as their denial that a fetus (Latin for “baby”) constitutes a separate person from the mother has no scientific validity. In their pathological obsession for abortion “rights,” not only do they oppose common sense provisions such as mandatory parental notification in the case of underage daughters seeking abortions, but they also demand public financing of abortions.

The modern abortion movement was conceived by eugenics advocates such as Margaret Sanger (a founder of Planned Parenthood) in an attempt to purge as many Negro, mentally-retarded, Downs Syndrome, and other “inferior” babies as possible from the human gene pool. In addition, the agenda was promoted by sexual revolutionaries whose intention was to decouple sexual activity from the consequence of unwanted pregnancy. The twisted rationale for abortion was expressed in the

comment by Sen. Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential campaign that if one of his daughters were to become pregnant, he wouldn't want to "punish" her by insisting that she have the baby. To say the least, this is an astonishingly cavalier and calloused attitude toward the sanctity of human life.

7. Politics and the Culture War

The corruption and moral confusion in America today has wreaked havoc on our political culture, and over the past 40 years the culture war has become increasingly politicized.

For most of my adult life I've striven to be studiously and scrupulously nonpartisan. Realizing that neither political party has ever had a monopoly on common sense or virtue, I believed there were honorable and admirable leaders in both parties who were worthy of respect. Regrettably, that position has become passe as the parties have come to represent not only two opposing political ideologies but, in many ways, virtually different worldviews. Ever since the late-sixties the Democratic Party has been pulled farther and farther to the left to the point that it now advocates a massive cradle-to-the-grave socialistic welfare state, increased government control over the economy, education, and health care, and a naive foreign policy that often reflects the values and interests of the United Nations more than the American people.

The Democratic Party has become the party of refuge for most secularists, cultural liberals, multiculturalists, the media, Hollywood and academic elites, labor unions, the trial lawyers associations, the open-borders lobby, neo-Marxists, environmental extremists, radical feminists, homosexual activists, and black nationalists. Watching Democratic conventions and listening to their political leaders and spin doctors, one can only conclude that the party has lost not only all common sense but any moral sensibilities that it might once have possessed.

Having conceded that, one must admit that in many respects the Republican Party is an outright embarrassment. If Democrats have collectively sold their souls, many Republicans have lost not only their vision but their courage. On numerous vital issues over the past fifteen years Republican politicians, even when in the majority, have capitulated to their opponents. Following the scandal-driven resignation in 2001 of the party's de facto ideological leader, Newt Gingrich, the party has been essentially leaderless and directionless.

Although cultural conservatives constitute about half of the party's support base, they are locked in a protracted struggle with many of the party's establishment elites who care little about the social and cultural issues so long as the party continues to endorse lower taxes and less government regulation of business. Like the liberal Republican "me-tooers" of the 1940s and '50s, moderate Republicans offer little resistance to the budget-busting policies of the Bush administration and an astonishingly corrupt and incompetent Democratic-controlled Congress that is wrecking America's economy and bankrupting the nation while it does nothing to curtail illegal immigration or alleviate America's perilous dependence on foreign oil.

In actuality, the main difference in the political parties is that the Republican Party has a base of cultural conservatives who care about the corruption of our national values while the Democratic Party functions as the political arm of a radical secular cultural agenda that is devastating the moral and civic climate in America. While the Republican Party is conceivably reformable, the Democratic Party appears hopeless – and therein lies the difference.

There is a saying that "the enemy of the good is the best" – i.e., those who insist on perfection often end up with the very worst option. This is certainly true in politics, which often comes down to a choice between two undesirable candidates. But no two people on earth are equal, so one candidate is always at least a shade better than the other. Realistically, politics is often about damage control – i.e., who will do the least harm – and Christians have a moral and civic responsibility to do what they can to keep the very worst men and women out of office even when the alternative is no better than mediocre. To do otherwise is not only irresponsible but reprehensible.

My concern is that when leaders in the Democratic Party talk so glibly about "change," they don't mean a sober reassessment of policies and programs that have obviously failed. Because the party has become the political enforcer of a radical secular left-wing agenda, I fear that their idea of "change" means altering the fundamental core values, the institutions, and the socio/political philosophy on which America was founded. Based on their cynical view of our nation's past, their goal appears to be a radical restructuring of America that includes all aspects of American life and culture.

The Summa

Many Christians are uncomfortable with the idea of a culture war. By nature, I can relate to that feeling. As Christians, we sincerely desire to live in peace with all people as much as possible, just as we earnestly aspire to be as tolerant and accepting of others as possible. Furthermore, there is an almost unavoidable spirit of self-righteous judgmentalism that accompanies the whole culture war concept that is most insidious and unappealing. There is always the temptation to assume that God is on our side instead of continually questioning our thoughts, our actions, and our motives to discern whether or not we are in fact on God's side.

But idealism doesn't alter reality, and the truth is that the culture war exists whether we prefer to acknowledge it or not. In fact, it is precisely because so many Christians have been so reluctant to recognize it and so fearful to engage it that we find ourselves in our current predicament. We are losing the culture war, and we are losing it decisively – not because the Christian faith has nothing to offer to modern man, but because we have essentially forfeited the war to our opponents. As a result, we see the consequences in a culture that is rapidly decaying and disintegrating all around us.

In *How To Win the Culture War*, Peter Kreeft, in the literary tradition of C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, constructs an imaginary lecture by Satan to a "captive audience" of demons in which he sets forth a master strategy for winning what he calls "the Great War" and "the Mother of all wars" – the war to destroy Western culture and civilization. Satan's fourth principle is particularly relevant to the theme of this article.

A fourth principle of our success is to get them [i.e., Americans] to cover up the battlefield with peace banners, to deny the very existence of the war they're in. This easily follows from the success of the third principle: the Big Lie of relativism. If your philosophy tells you that there are no real absolutes, then there can be no real war. If you reject the idea that there is any real evil worth fighting, and any real good worth fighting for, you reject the idea of fighting, the ideas of spiritual warfare itself. What a terrific advantage this gives us on the battlefield: most of our Enemy's troops don't even know it is a battlefield. [Peter Kreeft, *How To Win the Culture War* (2002), p. 73.]

American Christianity faces many challenges, but the greatest threats come from within our own society under the rubric of cultural liberalism. This ideology, whether we identify it as Secular Humanism, cultural Marxism or Political

Correctness, poses the greatest threat today to individual morality, civic virtue, social sanity, our public institutions, and virtually every aspect of American culture – including the church itself. As the Christian academic Gene Edward Veith has observed...

It is not just social conservatives who have a cultural agenda. The true agenda of the left is not so much economic or big-government as cultural....

The goal of the left is the liberation of mankind from traditional institutions and codes of behavior, especially moral codes. It seeks a restoration of a state of nature, one of absolute individual liberty....

While many conservatives... focus on free-market economics and small government, they do not realize that hard-core leftists do not really care much about such things. Meanwhile, the social liberals march through the culture largely unopposed...." [Gene Edward Veith, "Cultural Agendas: The Left Isn't Motivated by Economic Policy." *World* (March 8/15, 2008), p. 35.]

America's culture war is not an illusion, and those who refuse to acknowledge it are either spiritually and morally blind, egregiously apathetic, or too timid to engage it.

There are, of course, other fronts in the culture war other than the seven issues discussed in this article, but these represent some of the most salient issues in the conflict. As such, they expose the irreconcilable differences that divide cultural conservatives and liberals that stem from two contrasting worldviews. The issues at stake are not trivial. They are substantive and serious, and they reveal fundamental differences regarding our understanding of truth, morality, and justice, as well as our view of what kind of society and culture America should be. Unfortunately, on matters such as these, there is relatively little room for compromise.

Turbulent times call for people of courage and conviction who understand the issues at stake and are willing to engage the fight. As Christians, we understand that underlying the culture war is a spiritual struggle between reality, truth, justice, morality, and civility on the one hand and utopian idealism, deceit, injustice, immorality, and incivility on the other. Furthermore, we know that the primary battle ground in this war is the human heart, and that what we see manifest in our society and culture today is merely the expression of a titanic struggle between good and evil that is being waged in the spiritual realm.

Naturally, we would like to see Americans put aside petty partisanship, transcend their ideological

differences, and unite in the cause of justice, morality, and civility for the sake of all. We would like to see the two Americas fuse into one. But unfortunately, this is unrealistic because the differences that divide us are not superficial or simply stylistic or primarily tactical. In substance, the division is between those who believe in absolute truth and universal moral laws versus those who think that everything is relative and subjective. As radio talk show host Dennis Prager has noted, “America will be united only when one [of these worldviews] prevails over the other.” Many cultural liberals seem to understand this, but many cultural conservatives – including many Christians – apparently do not.



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Jefrey Breshears, Ph.D., is a Christian historian, apologist, and the founder and president of The Areopagus, a Christian study center and education ministry in the Atlanta area.

JBreshears@TheAreopagus.org

The Areopagus