

Was the Election of 2012 America's Adrianople?

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Was the re-election of Barack Obama in 2012 America's Adrianople – the watershed event that decisively determined America's demise as the most prosperous and powerful nation in human history? Given the fact that America has also been a unique nation in terms of its influence on world culture and civilization, its collapse portends ominous consequences not only for the American people but for the rest of humanity.

The Beginning of the End

Classical historians date the beginning of the decline of the Roman Empire to the death of Marcus Aurelius, the last of the so-called “five good emperors,” in 180 A.D. Two hundred years later, following generations of pervasive corruption and misgovernment, the final phase of Rome's fall began in 378 A.D. at the Battle of Adrianople, fought about fifty miles west of the Eastern Roman capital of Constantinople. This was one of the great battles – and certainly one of the most fateful events – in the whole history of the Roman Empire.

The battle was the lynch-pin of the Gothic War of 376-82 A.D. in which the Romans were trying to subdue a coalition of Goths that had settled in Roman territories to evade the Hunnish invasion of Eastern Europe in 376 A.D. In response to unjust treatment by Roman officials, the Goths and their allies took up arms and instigated an insurrection that culminated in the battle at Adrianople.

As the Roman legions marshaled their forces, so great was their confidence that the Western emperor, Valens, personally assumed command of the army. The barbarian coalition was led by three chieftains, the most noteworthy being the Gothic warlord Fritigern. According to our best sources, tens of thousands of soldiers were involved, and both sides were fairly evenly-matched with at least 10,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry. However, the Goths held the high ground, and by the time the Romans formed their ranks to attack, most of their troops were

exhausted following a grueling seven-hour march over rugged terrain. Out-strategized, out-maneuvered and out-fought, the Roman ranks collapsed and were crushed. The battle ended in a great rout and a bloody slaughter – the worst Roman defeat in over a century.

Why did the Romans lose at Adrianople? The causes were as many as the reasons why the empire itself later collapsed, and the defeat was symbolic of a process that had been at work for centuries. But foremost was the fact that the empire was rotten to the core, and it essentially fell under the weight of its own corruption. A generally ignorant, selfish and apathetic citizenry, obsessed with pleasure and entertainment, had lost any sense of self-sacrifice and patriotism. Furthermore, corrupt and incompetent political leaders had for generations so squandered and mismanaged the empire's economic resources – largely to sustain a bloated, extravagant and wasteful imperial government – that the economy no longer provided the wealth necessary to adequately maintain public services, the critical infrastructure, or even the empire's military forces. (Does all this sound familiar?)

Although it wasn't apparent at the time, the Battle of Adrianople had monumental consequences. In retrospect, it was the crucial tipping-point in the history of the Western Roman Empire – although it took another century before Roman civilization in the West totally dissolved. But keep in mind that in pre-modern times history typically crept along at the proverbial snail's pace. Today, especially since the turn of the 20th

century, events often moves at hyper-speed. For example, the Roman Empire lasted half a millennium, whereas the Soviet Empire dissolved in a little over 70 years and Hitler's Third Reich, which he boasted would last for a thousand years, came crashing down after a mere twelve years.

America's Adrianople

In the past two months I've begun to wonder if perhaps the past election was in effect America's Adrianople – the beginning of the end of America (or at least, the America as we've known it). A President who had vowed to “fundamentally transform” the nation in the previous campaign is well on the way to doing just that, aided and abetted by a compliant news media and powerful allies in the education establishments, the judiciary and Hollywood – and most decisively, by a generally ignorant, ill-informed and apathetic citizenry. Of course, there are limitations in terms of how far we take the Adrianople analogy. In all likelihood, the final phase of America's demise will not result from some climactic battle. But nonetheless, the 2012 election was the culmination of an intense and ferocious campaign between two candidates representing starkly contrasting and irreconcilable philosophies of the proper role and scope of government.

Partisan politics aside, there were serious moral issues at stake in the election. As I wrote in *The Gospel According To Barack*:

It is troubling that President Obama, a professing Christian, seems so bizarrely confused on a wide range of moral and religious issues. Throughout his political career he has been consistently pro-abortion, even to the point of opposing parental notification and supporting partial-birth abortion, a horrific and unconscionable practice. In 2008 he commented that if one of his daughters made a “mistake” and became pregnant, he would not want her “punished with a baby,” and following the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (“Obamacare”) his administration announced that church-run institutions must provide access to contraceptives and abortifacients in health insurance plans for their employees. As the Roman Catholic Council of Bishops later charged, the Obama administration poses the greatest threat to religious liberty in American history. [*The Gospel According To Barack: Where Did Barack Obama Get His Ideas About Christianity?* (Areopagus Publishing, 2012), p.3.]

In an unprecedented display of authoritarian usurpation that exceeds all prudent and reasonable limits on the proper function of government, Obamacare's Health & Human Services guidelines mandate that employers must pay for contraceptives and abortifacient drugs in their health care plans. This creates a terrible dilemma for Christian businesses that face devastating fines if they refuse to comply.

Regarding the issue of religious liberty, the Supreme Court, in the case of *Hosanna Tabor v. EEOC* (2012), unanimously rejected the Obama Administration's attempt to force Hosanna Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School in Redford, Michigan to rehire a minister whose contract had been terminated. The Court upheld the right of religious institutions to set their own standards when it comes to hiring ministers – in effect, ruling that federal anti-discrimination laws do not apply in such cases. As Chief Justice John Roberts noted, “The Establishment Clause [of the U.S. Constitution] prevents the Government from appointing ministers, and the Free Exercise Clause prevents it from interfering with the freedom of religious groups to select their own.”

So what explains the outcome of the 2012 election? Political commentators disagree on much, usually depending upon their political orientation, but undoubtedly several factors coalesced to form a perfect political storm.

1. Voter ignorance and apathy. Consider that in four years, President Obama...

- Failed to oversee the passage of a single federal budget in Congress;
- Failed to lower the nation's unemployment rate;
- Increased the nation's national debt more than all his predecessors combined (including four straight years of trillion-dollar budget deficits);
- Squandered nearly a trillion dollars in “stimulus” funds that failed to ignite the economy and were mostly funneled into pork-barrel projects to reward unions for their political support;
- More than doubled the number of food stamp recipients;
- Blocked offshore oil drilling and cancelled the Keystone Pipeline project that would help alleviate America's energy dependence on foreign oil; and
- Governed largely by executive fiat without Congressional consent.

In addition, as mentioned above, he has aggressively promoted a radical pro-abortion agenda, rallied public support for same-sex marriage, and violated the principle of separation of church and state. His sole "accomplishment" was to socialize America's healthcare system in a massive and unprecedented government takeover of 18% of the nation's entire economy. Oh – actually, one more thing: he did manage to win a Nobel Peace Prize – the first recipient in history to be awarded the prestigious medal in lieu of any contribution to world peace whatsoever. For all of this, the American people – or at least the majority of the 60% of eligible voters who showed up at the polls – rewarded him with a second term.

How is this possible? I think it is only explicable in light of a precipitous decline in personal morality and civic-mindedness. The rejection of traditional biblical values and the secularization of American society does nothing but lower standards in every area of life – including moral sensibilities and public ethics. This, in turn, impacts our political culture.

Many people don't vote thoughtfully, but they usually vote their values, and when a candidate's style, charisma, party affiliation and/or race are deemed more important than his or her positions on the great social, economic and political issues of our day, the outcome can be disastrous. Barack Obama has proven to be an incompetent leader, and his first term in office was a dismal failure by virtually any objective standard. Yet in a country in which more than 40% of its citizens did not vote – either due to gross ignorance or unforgivable indifference – less than 30% of the American people voted to fire Obama. This is not encouraging for the future of the republic.

2. A biased and dishonest media. In recent years the mainstream media in America have become increasingly, adamantly and shamelessly biased in their reportage. In particular, most major metropolitan newspapers and TV networks such as NBC, CBS, ABC, PBS and CNN simply cannot be trusted to report the news fairly and honestly. For verifiable proof on how the media influenced the recent election, visit Accuracy in Media's website. Furthermore, as in the Benghazi incident and the GAO report of January 18, 2013 on the state of the economy, the problem is not merely the slanted way that news is often presented, but also the refusal by many media outlets to cover significant issues and events that

might reflect poorly on liberal policies and politicians.

3. Educational indoctrination. From kindergarten to graduate school, America is suffering the cumulative effects of decades of secular-liberal indoctrination masquerading as "values-free" education – which merely means, in reality, free of any Christian values.

4. Popular culture. The stultifying effects of 60 years of popular culture – celebrity magazines, movies, TV and music – have rendered many Americans incapable of thinking clearly when it comes to the great moral, social and cultural issues of our day. Obviously, a society obsessed with materialism and hedonism and fixated on the latest techno-toys, Lady Gaga, hip-hop, the Kardashians, "American Idol," the Super Bowl and NASCAR races isn't one that is likely to make prudent and thoughtful decisions when it comes to serious matters such as the fine art and science of governance. (For a short lesson in the perversion of mainstream popular culture, go to YouTube and compare the Beatles' first appearances on the *Ed Sullivan Show* to recent videos of Madonna or most other pop icons – then ponder the effects of this kind of pervasive pollution on the souls of young people.)

5. A failure of Christian leadership. The apathy and ignorance on the part of many Christians and Christian leaders is the most disturbing factor of all. There exists today a pietistic mindset that seeks to create a false dichotomy between the "spiritual" and the "secular," and imagines that Christians should be "above politics." Quite frankly, this is not only ignorant but irresponsible. The result is that Christians cease to be a source of light and truth in the public square while the very worst people weasel their way to the top and assume positions of great power and influence. [For more on this, see below, "Is There a Solution?"]

In her article, "Post-Mortem on the 2012 Election," Dr. Laura Hollis, an Associate Professor of Law at the University of Notre Dame, noted several reasons why President Obama was reelected. Among the factors she enumerated:

1. We are outnumbered. There are... fewer Americans who desire a free republic with a free people than there are those who think the government should give them stuff.

2. It's the culture. We have been trying to fight this battle every four years at the voting

booth. It is long past time we admit that is not where the battle really is. We abdicated control of the culture – starting back in the 1960s. And now our largest primary social institutions – education, the media, Hollywood (entertainment) have become really nothing more than an assembly line for cranking out reliable little Leftists. Furthermore, we have allowed the government to undermine the institutions that instill good character – marriage, the family, communities, schools, our churches. So... we are reaping what we have sown. It took nearly fifty years to get here; it will take another fifty years to get back. But it starts with the determination to reclaim education, the media, and the entertainment business. If we fail to do that, we can kiss every election goodbye from here on out.

6. It's not about giving up on "social issues." [W]e do not hold the values we do because they garner votes. We hold the values we do because we believe that they are time-tested principles without which a civilized, free and prosperous society is not possible.

We defend the unborn because we understand that a society which views some lives as expendable is capable of viewing all lives as expendable. We defend family – mothers, fathers, marriage, children – because history makes it quite clear that societies without intact families quickly descend into anarchy and barbarism, and we have plenty of proof of that in our inner cities where marriage is infrequent and unwed motherhood approaches 80 percent.... There is no giving up on social issues. There is only the realization that we have to fight the battle on other fronts....

8. The Corrupt Media. I have been watching the media try to throw elections since at least the early 1990s. In 2008 and again this year, we saw the media cravenly cover up for the incompetence and deceit of this President, while demonizing a good, honorable and decent man with lies and smears. This is on top of the daily barrage of insults that conservatives (and by that I mean the electorate, not the politicians) must endure at the hands of this arrogant bunch of elitist snobs....

Bias is one thing. What we observed with Benghazi was professional malpractice and fraud....

11. It's possible that America just has to hit rock bottom. I truly believe that most Americans who voted for Obama have no

idea what they are in for.... America is on a horrific bender.... What that means, I fear, is that they will not see what is coming until the whole thing collapses. That is what makes me so sad today. I see the country I love headed toward its own "rock bottom," and I cannot seem to reach those who are taking it there. [<http://townhall.com/columnists/laurahollis/2012/11/08/postmortem/page/full/>]

Is There a Solution?

Many Christians become very uneasy whenever such issues arise. For them anything "political" is unseemly, spiritually-suspect, and outside the boundaries of proper Christian thought and public discussion. But in their aversion to anything "political," they entirely miss the point. What I'm referring to here are fundamental moral and ethical issues that impact people's individual lives and our culture in general. Certainly there is a political component in all of this, just as there is in everything in life. But it's not primarily about politics – it's about fundamental moral and ethical principles such as liberty, justice, fairness, decency, civility, and individual responsibility.

For those Christians who consider it inappropriate for Christians to politicize such matters, I would remind them that their very argument is itself a political position. To say that Christians should be above politics is itself a political position. We can no more be "apolitical" than we can be "amoral" – nor can politics be divorced from morality. For thoughtful Christians who take such matters seriously, it is precisely our moral values that inform and determine our political positions. And on a deeper level, our moral values are simply our personal and social expressions of our beliefs about God, human nature, and our sense of righteousness and justice.

It is one thing to acknowledge that no political ideology, and certainly no political party, represents the values and agenda of the Kingdom of God here on earth. All political parties and ideologies are flawed, and all are subject to critique. But it is quite another thing to contend that Christians should avoid talking about "politics" in church, which is tantamount to saying that an entire area of morality and ethics should be off-limits. Would we say the same about sexual morality or business ethics? Hopefully not.

But in fact, churches really need not delve into partisan politics if they practice a wholistic

approach to Christian education and discipleship. If, in the context of youth and adult education, Christians are challenged to seriously explore the presuppositions and ramifications of various worldviews, philosophies and socio/political ideologies within the context of a biblical Christian worldview, we need not descend to the lowest level, which is partisan politics. In other words, most Christians are perfectly capable of connecting the dots (or in this case, the final dot) if we do our job at the higher levels of analysis. It is the failure to do precisely this that causes most of the friction and controversies among Christians when it comes to politics.

Christians who understand what has happened in American society and culture over the past 50 years realize that we are entering a precarious new phase of history. In lieu of some unforeseen revival of moral-based sanity, not only is our economic system in peril but much of what has distinguished American civilization in the past. The Christian influences in our culture are rapidly eroding, and the fact that many Christians either don't see it or refuse to acknowledge the gravity of the situation doesn't alter the reality of it.

In his classic, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis wrote of what he called the "key to history:" Over time, terrific energy is expended building civilizations and cultural institutions, only to have it all ruined as the most selfish, ambitious and cruel people claw their way to the top and eventually bring the whole system crashing down. In the end, greed and the lust for power corrupts most of the good that institutions and civilizations stand for.

Commenting on the spiritual vision of the early Desert Fathers of the 4th century, Thomas Merton notes in *The Wisdom of the Desert*:

Society... was regarded by them as a shipwreck from which each single individual had to swim for his life... These were men who believed that to let oneself drift along, passively accepting the tenets and values of what they knew as society, was purely and simply a disaster. [*The Way of the Desert* (New Directions Publishing Corp., 1960), p. 3.]

Reflecting on Merton's comments, Henri Nouwen reminds us in his contemplative classic, *The Way of the Heart*, that our society is no better:

Our society is not a community radiant with the love of Christ, but a dangerous network of

domination and manipulation in which we can easily get entangled and lose our soul. The basic question is whether we... have not already been so deeply molded by the seductive powers of our dark world that we have become blind to our own fatal state and have lost the power and motivation to swim for our lives. [*The Way of the Heart* (Ballantine Books, 1981), p. 11.]

C. S. Lewis understood this well, which is why in *Mere Christianity* he characterized history since the time of Christ as akin to a civil war in which Christians find themselves living in rebel-occupied territory. As he put it:

Enemy-occupied territory – that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed... and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage. [*Mere Christianity* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1952), p. 46.]

Now if you're like me, the image of Christians as "cultural saboteurs" carries some negative connotations that are unacceptable. But there is no doubt that we are called to be beacons of light and truth in an increasingly corrupt and degenerate society. So, with all due respect to Master Lewis, I would say that our calling in this life is two-fold: (1) to live in such a way as to bring glory to God and be effective witnesses to the life-transforming truth and love of Jesus Christ; and (2) to understand our mission as counter-cultural subversives who are called to undermine the dominant beliefs and values of our society and its institutions. To think and act otherwise is a failure to understand and practice wholistic Christian discipleship.

Finally, is such an assessment of our current situation too pessimistic? In response, I would simply say that all that matters is truth, and I would hope that we have the courage to face up to the realities of our situation. Whether this is optimistic or pessimistic is frankly irrelevant, and it is disingenuous to try to paint a happy face on it. Of course, it's possible that things could change for the better, but presently there is no evidence that it will. Regardless, we must deal in the realm of reality. Otherwise, we cannot begin to accurately assess our condition – let alone do anything about it.

