

God's Character and America's Future

God does not exist in history. He is not merely a part of the grand drama of human time and action like the rest of us. He participates in and guides it, even as He initiated and will consummate it.

The social historian Herbert Schlossberg, in his landmark work *Idols for Destruction*, argues, "The biblical view is that history had a beginning and will have an end, and that both the beginning and the end are in God's hands ... [God's] will and personality dominate everything and make of history a moral arena."

The idea that history is always cyclical or that progress is somehow inevitable are forms of intellectual idolatry. In recent remarks made at a campaign stop for Virginia Democratic gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe, Hillary Clinton said conservatives "do not believe in America's progress," implying that change invariably leads to improvement. This is as much a statement of faith as any theological creed.

Why is this important? One's understanding of history will shape one's view of morality, public policy, family life, entertainment and much more. If history is a force operating under its own initiative and if social and political changes, as proposed by cultural elites, invariably are beneficial, then God's action or inaction in time and space is unimportant. He becomes a benign, indulgent but passive being in the distance. He may be called upon for comfort in times of calamity, but He will remain unsought and unneeded as we march unaided to the realization of our fondest dreams, the most culminative of which is "We will be like gods."

The central assumptions of many Americans, is that God—if He

exists at all—is an irrelevant, acquiescent deity and that fulfillment of the autonomous individual's desires is the main purpose of existence. This belief animates much of their political agenda. Thus, abortion on demand, the redefinition of marriage and the family, the suspension of religious liberty when it impedes enactment of socio-political goals, and the commodification of the individual's sexuality are seen as primary goods.

To use Nicholas von Hoffman's memorable analogy, the God of the Bible is not this kind of convenient divine mush. He is not unknown or unknowable. He reveals His character, acts in history, accomplishes His purposes and holds moral actors accountable for their actions.

This is why Schlossberg argues that the true themes of history are God's judgment and mercy. In His mercy, He calls on us to turn from moral evil. When, over time, we fail to do so, His justice compels judgment. Schlossberg writes, "Human acts have moral meaning and have consequences that transcend moral contingencies." "We reap what we sow" is not only true for individuals but for cultures and nations too.

Abraham Lincoln saw the Civil War as a form of God's judgment. In his second inaugural address, he said:

"If God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"

Let us presume he was right—that a war costing America 700,000 or more lives, countless wounded, shattered families and ruined economies reflected God's righteous judgment on a nation that had long abetted the dehumanization of an entire race. Perhaps in other grave, catastrophic events in our

history and in history at large, we see His hand moving against us.

No one knows how or when God will judge America or if the nation will become a dead ember in the crucible of history. Predictions of an impending final apocalypse always have proven false, and dogmatically identifying specific events as evidences of God's wrath can be not just pretentious and silly but, more importantly, irreverent. What we can be certain of, however, is that God exists, that He is just and that His patience should not be mistaken for His complacency.

These assertions are relevant because since 1973, roughly 55 million unborn children have been aborted in our country. Popular culture and both federal and state courts are heralding same-sex "marriage" as a matter of justice and moral necessity. People of orthodox Christian faith are being marginalized and the exercise of their convictions limited. Cohabitation and divorce are seen as wholly viable options in a self-preoccupied society. Sexual abuse is on the rise among the young, and substance abuse is metastasizing across the culture.

If we think God is unconcerned with such violations of His will, known through His Word and through "the law written on the heart," the conscience, and demonstrated as harmful in myriad ways, then we need to rethink our understanding of God.

Could it be that our many social, economic and foreign policy problems are evidence of, at least, His turning away from a nation that has abandoned reverence for Him, if not His active punishment for what we have become? This question should at least give Christians sufficient pause for serious contemplation.

The apostle James reminds us that in God's economy, "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). Let us so pray and work that the ground of His mercy—corporately turning from evil and

choosing to do good—will become real in our culture.

He does not sleep or overlook. He acts in the manner and over the time of His choosing. Of this we can be sure.

Rob Schwarzwald *is senior vice president at Family Research Council. This article appeared on the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission's website on Oct. 24.*