

Amid Rising Ungodliness, Can the Church Make a Difference Again?

No reader will be surprised to hear that America's cultural battle is intensifying. Many want to see biblical values erased from our culture. And it seems things are getting worse by the day, as our cover story reports.

But these are not the worst times the church has faced—not by a long shot. The war between good and evil has existed since the beginning of time. We often forget that America's history includes many terrible times of godlessness. Our culture wars began in the early part of the 20th century with the repeal of Prohibition, the rise of the entertainment industry and the loose lifestyle it glorified, and secularists winning the argument (in the general culture) over whether God created the world or evolution brought us to the place we are today.

Someone once told me that the past is never as wonderful as we remember, nor is the future as foreboding as we fear. As believers we know God has all things under control and He has always had a remnant. When things seemed most bleak, God brought revival—whether in Germany in Martin Luther's day, in England with John Wesley or in the various great awakenings in our nation. If anything is changing, it's that the general culture is shedding the facade of Christianity while the church is beginning to wake up after having been lulled into believing that we are a Christian nation just because polls have shown a majority of Americans identify with Christianity (as opposed to another world religion or no religion). So it's good that the church is waking up!

This is the backdrop I see as a reporter on the church world who for four decades has documented the charismatic movement

since *Charisma* began in 1975. I realize, like everyone else, that I see “through a glass darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). Yet I hope to bring perspective on what has been happening through my writing in each issue of *Charisma* during this our 40th anniversary year.

When *Charisma* began as a simple church magazine there were other well-respected magazines such as *Logos Journal*, *New Wine* and *Christian Life*. CBN was booming and *PTL* and *TBN* were in their infancy. The Roman Catholic charismatic movement was at full steam.

Calvary Assembly in Orlando, Florida, which birthed *Charisma*, was also booming. It sponsored huge “Jesus festivals” in the 1970s, was one of the fastest-growing churches in the nation, had a youth ministry that became the model for many and was typical of other charismatic churches that were booming in various parts of the United States.

Yet the 1970s were a turbulent time. The Watergate scandal cast a pall over the entire decade. There was unrest with the anti-Vietnam War protests, and homosexuals began calling themselves “gay” and coming “out of the closet”—saying for the first time that it was OK to be gay.

Unrest in the Middle East grew after the Yom Kippur War, while Iran’s Shah was overthrown, setting the stage for radical Islam. The economy was bad here at home. When the nation elected Jimmy Carter, things went from bad to worse. Under President Carter inflation rose up to 18 percent a year and interest rates were 22 percent at one point.

Yet amid all this came a spiritual revival, and out of a renewal movement *Charisma* was born. Even the secular media sensed something going on as the Jesus Movement of the early ’70s attracted widespread coverage, and in 1976 *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines declared it the “Year of the Evangelical,” partly because President Carter described himself as a born-

again Christian.

Today one can wonder if the revival did any good as we've seen the culture deteriorate. Yet an argument can be made that leaders arose to give Ronald Reagan the impetus to defeat a sitting president after one term. To me, things seemed to improve in the 1980s with the better economy and when communism was brought down—something I didn't think I would live to see. It was the Christian support and events such as "Washington for Jesus" in 1980 that I believe made a difference.

Can the church make a difference again? It seems like we are shouting to the wind in a hurricane of ungodliness. Yet we know God is the one who stills the storm, and He's the one who calls us to be His eyes and hands to the world, calling them to repentance. In a way it's good that cultural Christianity is on the wane because we can focus on biblical Christianity. We need a praying church to believe God to first clean up the church (beginning in each of our lives) and then to call the nation to repentance.

Who are the leaders that will do this? And will history repeat itself?

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