SATAN'S 3-PRONGED ATTACK AGAINST AMERICA

MEDIA
ENTERTAINMENT
EDUCATION

More Americans than ever are counting themselves among the 'nones.' The key question is: Why?

BY BILLY HALLOWELL

Americans seem confused, lost and culturally disengaged. A higher proportion of people than ever before are losing touch with their moral center, with a biblical and ethical disconnect rapidly deepening and intensifying.

To a degree, the likely catalysts for these changing dynamics are understandable. Life is ever complicated; most of us are busy with work, kids and the chaos of life. Perhaps we're too tied up to think about the finer things in life as deeply as we once did, though I would argue there are other far more pervasive causal factors at play. Many of us are increasingly glued to our smartphones, tablets, computers, TVs, MP3 players and other devices.

Through these avenues, the messages streaming from Hollywood and the media that were once relatively benign and contained to a few channels are now blasting at us from multiple angles. The TV shows, movies, lyrics and news we consume have changed dramatically over the years, with evolving content and subject matter yielding an intense flow of increasingly graphic content.

The consumption level of this content differs based on the person. One thing is for sure, though: Over time, our nation has collectively become desensitized, growing accustomed to what we're viewing and hearing.

The collective situation has created a fault line, and the beginnings of a cultural earthquake are most certainly afoot. From a transformation in traditional moral understandings to shifting theological alliances, society is, in many ways, at a bizarre and troubling turning point.

Why a 'Nones' Generation Is Rising

More Americans than ever before are counting themselves among the "nones"—the cohort of Americans who are either atheist, agnostic or unaffiliated with a particular faith. To give you an idea of just how quickly the tides have changed, consider that 16 percent of Americans called themselves "nones" in 2007. By 2014, that number was up to 23 percent.

We're living in an era in which people are increasingly unable to firmly embrace a set of solid truths. Just consider the fact that in 2016 nearly 6 out of 10 Americans said that "knowing what is right or wrong is a matter of personal experience"—whatever that means. Sadly, many of us don't even recognize what's happening as we trade in a set of norms that have underpinned our society for a moral relativism that offers little ethical consistency.

The key question surrounding all of these changes is, why? Though there are a plethora of potential reasons, I would argue fervently that there's a very specific cultural education paradigm at play that Americans, and in particular, Bible believers and political conservatives, must adequately understand if they want to help stem the tide of cultural chaos.

Pause for a moment and consider where many people, particularly young adults, receive an education in contemporary society, taking into account that my definition of education is, in this instance, extended to include any avenue or venue through which people are fed potentially transformational information. Without a doubt, the university classroom, the media and Hollywood are the three main systems, outside of the church, that feed the masses with life-changing and perspective-shaping information.

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Now here's the problem: There's evidence that these three main educational veins—the entertainment, the university system and mainstream media—lean to the political left and on a theological front typically misrepresent, under-represent or paint an inaccurate picture of what Christianity and faith truly encapsulates. And with some churches losing footing or, at the least, cultural reach—especially in those three educational settings—there's a clear problem we must confront.

Unmasking the Harlot in Hollywood

Hollywood is just one influential industry that often draws the ire of conservatives, evangelicals and Christians. But it seems the broader issue of concern is rooted not as much in political whims as in the increasingly raunchy content coming from Hollywood. Every year it seems TV shows and films get a little bit edgier, with many Americans wondering when the sex, violence and other unpalatable themes will cease, or at least temper. With adult content continuing to worsen in some sectors—particularly television—it's not surprising that some people see Hollywood as hostile or unfriendly to Christian values.

A Barna Group study found that less than 1 percent of Americans agreed that Hollywood is faithful to Christian beliefs. Just 10.4 percent said Hollywood portrays Christianity in a positive light.

Does that prove a bias? Well, that's a bit complicated, as public perception can only take us so far. What's clear is that something has profoundly changed when it comes to the nature of our entertainment. Even if one argues that Christianity isn't being intentionally attacked and sidelined, there's surely a feeling among many that the values embraced by the faithful are either under assault in pop culture, or are simply excluded from the majority of Hollywood content.

Ideologies aside, money is what drives Tinseltown—a fact that must be confronted when addressing how entertainment content has drifted so fluidly into a land of total and utter moral depravity. In a world where sex sells, one can see why—from a profit perspective—Hollywood companies have increased the use of shock factors, including violence and explicit themes. After all, the intended goal is to capture and retain audience attention, with executives constantly looking for the latest and greatest methods to make that happen.

The unintentional consequence of using these tactics, though, is that many of the faithful are marginalized, cut out of the discussion, misrepresented, told that their values are antiquated and unworthy, or—at the least—are simply not served by what the industry is offering. What results is a cornered market that, over time, shapes hearts and minds. The forces that have the most power and prevalence over the masses will have the greatest ability to impact public thought and perception.

Discerning Higher Education's Irony

Perhaps the greatest irony of our age is that colleges and universities—the very institutions that are intended to educate and intellectually challenge the masses—oftentimes foster one-sided and biased environments. College is intended to be an intensive time of self-exploration—one in which young people are theoretically opened up to the world around them with diverse perspectives and experiences helping to shape their contextual understandings. Yet, in contrast, higher education today is often a breeding ground for exclusively progressive ideals and values that are marketed to young minds as definitive, unadulterated truth.

Unfortunately young people are all too often fed this information from left-of-center professors who are injecting their worldview into the classroom with little regard for the need for divergent beliefs in the educational marketplace. Their ideals, presented as truth and many times so filtered that opposing views are either denigrated into silence or ignored entirely, are often pervasive and treated as gospel when in fact they're nothing more than mere personal opinion.

Don't get me wrong. There is absolutely nothing wrong with liberal professors being employed by colleges and universities (just so we're clear here). What is improper, however, is an environment in which young people are given an imbalanced perspective on key social, political and international issues, or one in which conservative professors are too afraid to share their views with colleagues for fear of reprisal.

Such imbalances create unaccommodating and uncomfortable environments for those who do not share left-of-center perspectives, though the more pervasive and concerning issue is the notion that young, impressionable minds are potentially robbed of the ability to make decisions for themselves, especially when they aren't presented with a fair assessment of all the available and pertinent information.

Mainstream Media's Clear Anti-Christ Bias

Like Hollywood and universities, the media too are routinely accused of holding anti-Christian and anti-conservative biases. When you dive deeper into the issue and examine reporters' personal views, demographics and expert analysis, the roots of the bias conundrum start to take shape.

It's no secret that many critics see the media as unfair and politically biased, but a topic that gets somewhat less attention is the "God gap" that has apparently taken root in many newsrooms. On the whole, it seems there is a disconnect between journalists and the public at large when it comes Christianity and, more specifically, evangelicalism. That fact is quite ironic considering that the nation overwhelmingly embraces the Christian faith, with evangelicals forming a sizable portion of the population.

There appears to be plenty of evidence to at least show that religious representation in American newsrooms isn't necessarily reflective of nationwide demographics. And while that doesn't directly prove bias, it is a factor worthy of discussion. Imbalanced statistics among reporters when it comes to their political and faith views most certainly point to a dearth of cultural diversity in American newsrooms. In the end, a lack of representation of Christians in media is ideologically dangerous. Fixing the problem, though, involves engaging an ignorance of sorts—an ignorance of the problem itself and a failure to understand why it really matters.

Religious adherence is unlike any other personal attribute; it plays a deeply intricate role in shaping the thoughts, feelings and actions of the faithful. Few descriptors or personal attributes hold such fervent power. Here's why that matters: True faith isn't merely a nominal marker. Rather than serving as a mere system that someone subscribes to by slapping a label on himself and marching on his merry way, Christianity calls on its adherents to live out its values in every area of their lives.

There are often intricate reasons why believers hold various stands on social and political issues. What seems like bigotry to some critics is quite often a sincerely held religious belief that is rooted in a long-standing theological explanation that goes far deeper than some critics comprehend. Understanding these intricacies is key because faith shapes how millions upon millions of Americans live their lives; it helps to mold and solidify beliefs, practices and actions like no other force.

But if mainstream reporters truly have little exposure to what Christians believe and why they believe it, is it really possible for outlets to always get it right when it comes to covering topics such as abortion and gay marriage, among others? And what about locating the best, most articulate—and representative—individuals among the evangelical ranks to discuss those issues? Without base knowledge of something as important as religious motivation, coverage gets a bit complicated.

4 Ways to Combat the 3-Pronged Attack

With all this in mind, it's clear we have a major cultural problem, as our three main educational spheres are dominated by values that run counter to Christianity. So what's the solution? One practical solution is for all of us to become more aware of what we're consuming and to make a concerted effort to avoid certain forms of negative content. Not only are we then protecting our hearts and minds, but we also can then send a collective message about what we're willing to tolerate.

At the least, we should all think more deeply about the media, entertainment and university messages we're consuming and ask some key questions: What am I really being told? What do these themes say about the current state of our society and culture?

Christian apologist Josh McDowell presented a series of steps and parameters he believes people must take seriously if they actually wish to understand and come to grips with the problems we face in modern society.

"One, you've got to be informed," he said, referencing John 8:32. "Second, you need to come to understand what are rational, physical, sound solutions, answers. See, most Christians can tell me what they believe, but 95 percent can't give me any intelligent reason why they believe it."

He said this dynamic will no longer suffice because people need to be fully aware and cognizant of not only what their values and beliefs are but why they subscribe to such ideals.

"Then, third, we've got to live it," McDowell said. "If we do not live out our faith in our own personal lives, in our marriages, with our children, in our business, in our ministry, whatever—if we don't live out Christ in a vibrant way—then no one is going to believe whatever we say, and they shouldn't."

The fourth and final solution McDowell offered is for people to truly learn to listen without interrupting or being judgmental. It's after listening to what people think and feel—particularly nonbelievers—that he said it's possible to more appropriately engage. It is through these steps we can begin to understand and fix the problem—or, at the least, have an impact by having a presence in the culture. Being informed, of course, is the first step, as McDowell noted; learning and discerning truth is key.

We need to be the shining examples of what we claim to espouse. We can't simply say we're Christians; we need to show it in the way we live, the decisions we make and the content we choose to consume. The stakes are high. Now more than ever we must take a stand, regardless of the uphill ideological battle. ◄

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