

Synopsis -- *One Nation, Over God*

The Americanisation of Christianity

by Andy Fletcher

Thesis: The thesis lies in several parts. American history began with the idea that America was a nation chosen and set apart by God as a New Jerusalem, a New Israel, the "shining city on the hill" in the words of Cotton Mather. What this caused us to do, besides the many positive things, was to begin to make the assumption that we were the Good Guys, and all others who dared to oppose us were the Bad Guys. When the line between good and evil grew fuzzy, as it did almost immediately, we fell into the type of national error which had far-reaching consequences. We began to define the evil ones as those who opposed our national policies and activities, rather than those who opposed our faith and belief systems. We created and create still national heroes who become civic messiahs, our replacements for Christ who offer salvation of a different type, and use quite different methods. It is here that the second part of the thesis began to evolve.

What occurred is that our faith and belief system became intermingled with our national political philosophy. That is, as America was presumed to be God's chosen nation, America and things American were exalted to the point of deification, or, in a more precise term, idolatry. It is not to say that any of these political philosophies are in and of themselves evil; quite the contrary. It is rather to say that, like wood and gold in the Old Testament, as man's creation they were given the role of gods. This idolatry, quite simply, may be the source of the vile and violent malaise in American society today.

The third major part of the thesis is most significant. Many Christian writers are discovering in print today that the abuse of personal freedom, radical individualism, and rampant selfish materialism (capitalism) have led to the social degeneration in which we as Americans find ourselves. In one major example, when German theologians and political philosophers detected the erosion of society through idolatrous worship of freedom and individualism, the search for villains began. That search found its seed in the persecution of the retarded, the homosexuals, and the communists. It rooted in oppression of the arts community, the film community, and in the liberal thinkers. It ripened in elimination of the foreigners, the Jews, and those who dared support them, including the Christians who heretofore, in many cases, had acquiesced to the horrors in silence.

If we in America begin to look for villainy in our land, as many are doing, we will begin to find them in the homosexual community, in the film and arts community, in the criminal classes and the immigrants, among the liberal left, and finally within the democratic process itself, as we increasingly blame the government for the troubles we have given them the mandate to create. If we seek to blame these enemies, the symptoms of our disease, for our sickness, then we will destroy our nation. If we seek the cause and find it in our idolatry of our own nation, then we may yet save ourselves from the destruction that so many nations, including Israel, brought upon themselves in the Old Testament and throughout history. It is not the evil others in society which have destroyed us. It is we who pretend to faith with all manner of ritual and morality. It is we idolatrous American Christians who have brought us into disaster.

There are some sub-themes of significance which support the thesis. Today's new atheists tend to focus on the evil the church has done in history, in order to demonstrate how horrible and hypocritical religion is and how Christians are and have been. Christians tend to point the many wonderful things the church has accomplished, consider the discomfiting bits of our history as anomalous, and those who perpetrated these deeds as apostate.

We however will divide the church into three sections on its path through history. We will write of the holy church, the modern martyrs of the faith who saw fit to stand up in defence of the oppressed, and who suffered or died as a result.

We will speak of the unholy church, those who pretended to faith but had none, smearing the walls of Christendom with the blood of innocents.

But we will investigate most of all the indifferent church, those who practised many of the good and holy tenets of Christ, but somehow, in confusing their national faith with their religious and God-given beliefs, lost sight of the Christ they meant to emulate. These are the believers who threaten us as a nation, because their god has become the nation.

A second, important sub-theme is found in the stories of Vietnam and the Civil Rights years. We advance the proposal that because the church sacrificed so much of its moral authority in defence of a questionable war and segregation simultaneously, when the next generation looked around for a moral basis on which to live, Christianity was rejected along with establishment politics. What was left was materialism and individualism unencumbered with beliefs, morality or ethics. The compromising of Christ continued with the support by many main-stream Christians of various other political misadventures throughout the 70s and 80s. As a result, the church no longer is the place where young Americans look for moral teaching, and the theory is advanced that the violent swamp of immorality in which we find ourselves in the outcome.

Ultimately, we will propose that the idolatry of freedom, individualism, capitalism, and democracy has led to the erosion of community, the exaltation of consumerism, and the victory of selfish pursuits. It is hard to see any element of the American disease that is not a symptom of these three, a pagan Trinity.

The version of the book discussed here is divided into two parts, with six chapters in the first section and seventeen chapters in the second. It is the shortest version of three available. A synopsis of each follows:

Chapter 2: The Fall of the Wall

Whereas Christians were always told that the Evil Empire persecuted Christians to near extinction, the truth revealed by the fall of the wall and the collapse of communism in the east was that Christianity thrived. It is in Western Europe that Christianity is dead or dying, and it seems most likely that under persecution, Christianity prospers, and under long periods of freedom, Christianity is emasculated. When Christianity is nationalised, that is, absorbed into the national psyche, it is the nation which becomes the god, and idolatry, that great ignored Biblical theme, which assumes control. Idolatry is defined in this chapter as that which enslaves its supplicants (enslaved by freedom, as it were); that we pretend to control our idols (placing man above both God and his gods); that our idols are intellectual first, and not only made of gold or wood; and that the condemnation for idolatry from God is directed at the people of God, and not at the pagans. It is noted that a society is condemned to sexual immorality and homosexuality by God for practising idolatry (Romans 1), and it is the idolatry again of the people of God which leads to this condemnation. Thus we open the discussion. We must be confronted with our idolatry, which must in turn be demonstrated.

We must acknowledge that in idolising individualism within our faith we have lost any sense of corporate responsibility. We no longer realise that we will be held accountable as a Christian people for our idolatry, and that our repentance must be corporate. Our faith has become only for the individual, and divorced from any need to be called to corporate, national spiritual integrity.

Chapter 3: A Nationalised Faith

We begin to document evidence of a nationalised Christianity in America by assuming that if our national faith takes precedence over our spiritual faith, we will sacrifice the things of God for the things of America. A first look is taken at Christian racism in the form of hatred of blacks and illegal aliens. We give an overview of anti-communism, not in any sense defending communism, but wondering how we could commit egregious acts of oppression and violence in an attempt to defend ourselves and our nation against those we condemned for acts of oppression and violence. Such things as support of despotic regimes, rescuing Nazis from post-war Europe, and so on are mentioned. The purpose is to begin to illustrate what violence we have committed in recent history to defend our spiritual faith from political oppression.

Chapter 4: Society in crisis.

Having looked in the last chapter at a few foreign exploits, we turn briefly in this chapter to examine our own social crisis. Again in an introductory way, we look at society's obsession with freedom and the social results; poverty and the gap between the rich and the poor, at homelessness, at the drug crisis, at violent crime and our loss of personal freedoms, at gun violence, and so on. We also discuss the hatred many Christians have of people who have differing political beliefs, and at examples of idolatry found in the exaltation of the flag and the pledge of allegiance over the cross. The chapter finishes with a description of idolatry of freedom.

Chapter 5: The Puritans nationalise Christianity.

The idolatry of America by American Christians traces its roots to the earliest days of our history, and still later when we categorised the struggle for independence as a struggle between God and Satan. In imagining spiritual persecution out of what was perceived as excessive taxation, we justified not only the war with England, but continued persecuting Indians and began persecuting those Christians who disagreed with the motivations for the war. What evolved as well was a legalistic interpretation of the faith which has persisted down through the entirety of our history, the dangers of which will be shown not only in present day US Christianity, but in ancient Israel and Nazi Germany both.

Chapter 6: A free society out of control.

Having laid down the groundwork for understanding the basis of American idolatry and the evolution of legalism in American Christianity, a parallel case is drawn between Nazi Germany and modern day America. German conservative Christian theologians in the late '20s and early '30s saw many of the same social stresses that American conservative Christian theologians perceive in our country, and had as well the same concept of Germany as God's chosen nation. That combination led them to create enemies of communists, homosexuals, liberals, the agents of government, the film and arts communities, and so on, and to long for a return to earlier days, when Germany had law, order, and world stature and respect. They saw Hitler as God's chosen agent to return Germany to world domination, and supported national socialism throughout the pre-war and war years, including the Final Solution. It was a Christian legalistic reaction against legitimate concerns about a society in crisis, and it stands as a warning to our country, and more specifically to us as Christians.

Chapter 7. The Jews.

Having drawn the parallel between revolutionary-era America and W.W.II Germany, the parallel is extended to the Jews of the Old Testament. The whole of the OT involves the people of God being brought out of slavery into freedom, only to collapse again into idolatry and rejection of God. The final straw was when Israel began to be more important to the Jews as the Chosen Nation and the Chosen People of God than was the worship of God himself. The results in Jewish society were violence, crime, oppression of minorities, aliens, and the innocent, government corruption, immorality, corruption in the church leaders, and many other elements of social disruption that we see around us today. God's answer to them was that they were to be, and subsequently were, destroyed and taken into captivity by a nation just like Israel, a nation that worshipped itself and its military power, a nation that practised corruption, oppression, injustice, and violence - the nation of Babylon. If the parallel fits, then American Christians are condemning us all to a similar fate, because we worship God second, and America first. And when we react with legalistic anger and rage, creating enemies and hatred instead of repenting and returning to the worship of God, we fall further into the sin of Israel, and the sin of Nazi Germany.

Part Two.

Chapter 8. The American hero.

We begin the second part with an analysis of whom we chose as the American hero, and whom we set up as the enemies of America. I chose Batman to represent our civic messiah, because we look for a saviour in his nature, in the nature of Rambo and Dirty Harry, one who will save us from evil by blasting evil into oblivion. We blame the evil in society not on our idolatry, but on the evil that results from our idolatry, and we choose our enemies based upon not only moral and ethical grounds, but on political grounds as well. It is not only drug dealers and child rapists who become the evil ones, but Democrats, liberals, and the President (if he is a Democrat). We want a violent resolution to societal evil, we want a violent messiah, and we condemn ourselves to being a violent land. Hatred becomes our creed, and love is reserved for family and friends.

Chapter 9. Ronald Reagan, American Hero.

As the hero of much of American Christianity, Reagan epitomised and incarnated our will as a people. It is not to blame Reagan for what he did or did not do. It is to say that he represented our will to power and fought the battles we wanted him to fight. He defined the enemies for us in clear unmistakable terms, not because we did not know them, but because he was an extension of us.

Reagan was not the beginning of the process, but the culmination. A careful examination of the history of anti-communism is undertaken in detail, showing both the reality and the perception of reality. The first enemy was Russia, Satan's kingdom on earth, and his demons were manifold.

Chapter 10. The church as opiate.

Marx condemned the church for its complicity with industrialists in oppressing the working masses. The oppression was real, and the complicity of the church by and large was also reality. Communism was rooted in the need for a living wage, for job security, for medical insurance, for job safety, against child labour practices. Though communism was a moral aberration in history, a deeply flawed and ultimately evil device of economic theory, that against which it struggled was supported by churches and Christians world-wide, and the violence, the injustice, the oppression, the exploitation was directly counter to that to which we are called by scripture.

Chapter 11. American Heroes

Not only has our country infused our national domestic faith with violent rebellion from the outset of our history as a nation, but we have built our foreign policy in the last half of this century around a similar framework. We divided the world into two pieces; the good guys and the bad guys. The good guys can do bad things, as long as they do not do communist things, but the bad guys can't do good things, unless they get rid of communism. As we have seen, that has led us into liaisons with some of the worst bad guys history has ever seen, and has caused us to participate in deplorable acts as a nation, acts which many Christians still refuse to admit as evil, because to do so blasphemes our nation as the highest good and god. And thus, the Indian wars and Oliver North, our modern Yellow Hair.

Chapters 12. The good church, the bad church, and the ugly church. (compressed from two chapters)

With Clint Eastwood's film characters as perfect representations of the American hero-messiah, we borrow and use one of his film titles to illustrate how the church has divided itself throughout its history. As we mentioned in the summary above, it is too easy to blame the entire church for the evil done by some of its adherents, and inaccurate to take credit only for the good. Part of the church is always complicit in societal evil, part is always resistant, and the largest part is largely indifferent, believing that politics and societal stress lies outside the province of the church. This derives from our individual faiths, which allow us to distance ourselves from what we do as a people of God, and focus on self-improvement and self-spiritual growth.

The example given is a history of the Philippines and both the involvement of the US, and the spiritual detachment by American Christians. We went into the Philippines as Spain did much earlier in history, with the Bible, the trade book, and the sword, intent on both converting and exploiting the natives for God and country. The presence of all three churches is shown in the final denouement of the Marcos' years, and the hope of following the spirit of Christ in our actions is manifested.

Chapter 13. Vietnam. (compressed from two chapters)

Vietnam was the spiritual descendent to the Philippines, and our involvement in Vietnam paralleled in many ways that in the Philippines. American Christians in their millions supported their country, with no knowledge of French or US history in Vietnam, no clue about the roots of Vietnamese rebellion. We accepted the story that we were fighting communism, and therefore to us the enemies were demonic, born of Satan. The war was perceived as oppressive, unjust, supremely violent, a killer of innocent women and children, a destroyer of the poor and helpless. What resulted is that when the youth of America rejected the war and the government, they rejected American Christianity as well. When that generation and subsequent generations of American youth looked for moral and ethical guidance, the church no longer had moral or spiritual relevance. The door was open for each of us to define for ourselves our own belief systems. It was through that door that moral relativism entered, and the moral swamp began to extend its reach into all of American culture. Through that same door came the explosion of violence, drug abuse, and the creation of enemies to blame. Chapter thirteen closes with a poem by a black poet who apparently had been in Vietnam.

Chapter 14. We wear the mask. (compressed from two chapters)

The title, to tie the last chapter together with this one, is taken from a poem again by a black poet from the late 19th century, and the chapter flows from the oppression and injustice of the Vietnam War to that of black slavery and continued social oppression. Again originally two chapters, evidence of institutional Christian racism is given, that is, racism that involved not just the isolated individual case, but the American church as a whole or in part. It was during and after the Civil Rights years that American black youth lost their faith in America, in the government, in the legal system, and in the church, not only the white church but in many cases the black church as well. When the moral basis for society erodes, when a generation is taught to be violent as a people, when drugs and sex become free and easy, it is not hard to surmise where the moral codes are created, and when one combines two centuries of direct, legal oppression with four decades of indirect injustice, it is no wonder that the black subculture is dysfunctional. Though the blacks bear most of the burden for healing their own society, whites who will actively reach into that society with repentance and a desire to reconcile and heal will go with the power of the spirit.

Chapter 15. The huddled masses.

As a bridge between anti-communism, black oppression, and poverty, we will use the issue of illegal immigration. Though all studies point to the contrary, illegal immigrants have become, like the blacks, the enemy and the destroyer of American society. We define immigration on the basis of good guy (anti-Communist) and bad guy (Communist) governments, and weight acceptance heavily in favour of the good guy immigrants. When the poor try to enter our country, as did most of our ancestors, to try to better their lives, to feed their children and provide them with a future, we condemn them as alien invaders intent on ripping the fabric of society apart. We use them to harvest our crops, wash our cars, and clean our houses, but we blame them for unemployment among defence industry workers and the destroyers of our schools. They have become the enemy, though our God calls us to honour the alien, for we were all aliens once.

Chapter 16. "Homeless by choice"

Out of immigrants and into poverty: the myths of the homeless and poor exposed. As yet another of our helpless enemies, those who cannot defend themselves, we find them an easy target to blame for the travails of society. They are condemned spiritually, as the communists were, not because they do not believe in God, but because they have sinned and fallen short of the glory of the American dream. Because they are poor and/or homeless, even if they work, as many do, they are cast out of the US garden as sinners, failures at earning salvation from the American gods. Curiously, now there are many of Us who have become poor with Them, and it becomes more difficult to hate them, with we are in similar circumstances. "They", however, are "homeless by choice"; "We" have been hurt by the system, the politicians, the president, the elected enemies of the people.

Chapter 17. A question of money.

Since we have looked carefully at the myths of poverty, it seems useful to look at the myths of wealth and the idolatry of money which percolates not far under the surface of our national idolatry. The greatest upward redistribution of wealth in US history is analysed, along with a close look at our worship, not only of money, but of the people who have money, and their penuriousness with regard to charitable giving. It is not to condemn the wealthy in general, but it is most useful to look

at wealthy church leaders who have been made wealthy not by their cleverness alone, but by the greed with which we worship them and the dollars they represent. Where the poor are the enemy of America, the rich are the heroes.

Chapter 18. The cowboy capitalists and the capitalist missionaries.

It is in this chapter time to tie together the American hero, our Jesus-Rambo, with our evangelistic worship of money. Our heroes are the rich and the powerful, and it is their lives we seek to emulate in our spirits, if not in fact. But their lives are paltry and trivial, reduced to insignificance by the insignificance of the god they, and we, worship. Although they are the great American heroes, many times they are in fact the great American villains, protected from societal wrath by the respect with which we hold their obsession. One in particular, a Christian, will be examined closely, and the most powerful critique will be delivered by a wealthy atheist.

Chapter 19. Acts of war.

To protect our wealth and our land, we dedicated ourselves to spending on defence, finding enemies under every rock and behind every flag. What seems to be true in history is that the nation which sacrifices its productive economic base to focus on non-productive defence spending is the nation which loses in Great Power conflicts. In most of the decades since the end of W.W.II, we have developed the largest defence industry in world history, and the price ultimately to be paid may be the end of our status as a Great Nation, if not the very existence of the nation itself. It is not only the waging of war and the arming of our forces that has put us at risk. It is also that we have armed the world in order to keep our defence industry robust, causing wars and supporting despots, many of whom eventually turned on us and used our own weapons to kill our own children. Nations have been impoverished and peoples decimated by arms sales to the third world, and we have been the largest seller of weapons to the third world. It is easier to create enemies, and more profitable in the short run. When it can be done with what we believe to be the backing of God, all the better.

Chapter 20. In search of enemies.

The question is asked at the beginning of the chapter - What has been the social cost of our endless search for enemies? It has caused us to be blamers rather than healers, condemners rather than forgivers. Rather than try to rehabilitate criminals, we focus on punishment. Rather than take handguns away from an immature, angry, enemy-oriented populace, we continue to arm each other, and to kill our friends and relatives. We sue at the least sign of offence, secretly hoping for the pot of gold at the end of the litigation rainbow. We divorce rather than reconcile, each seeking his or her own way. We blame teachers rather than television for poor students, abrogating our responsibilities as parents to the state, and complaining bitterly when it doesn't work out. We blame the homeless, the poor, the blacks, the Asians, and the illegal immigrants for our problems, rather than the corrupt rich who destroy the savings and loan industry, or the collapse of the defence industry as its pretend enemies evaporate into history. We worship the self, the individual, and our worship of ourselves becomes so focused on the self that everyone else becomes the enemy to each our own personal chasing of the American leprechaun.

As well, we react with legalism, seeking to enforce our faith legislatively, rather than with repentance, and we seek to hate rather than to love the enemies Christ himself has called us to love.

Chapter 21. The search for community.

What we have done in exalting the individual is to destroy community, and yet we constantly crave the safety and comfort of community. We spend fortunes and time trying to create community without commitment, and so we watch soap operas and sit-coms, join gangs and exercise clubs, and seek intimacy through formless sex, wanting to be satisfied without trying to satisfy in return. Our churches provide entertainment without commitment, salvation without relationship, ritual without service, superficial friendship without sacrifice. We have become a nation of individuals afraid of commitment who desperately need as the blood of life the community of committed believers, with love defined as sacrifice, corporate responsibility, and mutual commitment. It is only when we enter into community and lose the self that we will find the self, revealed in the body of Christ.

Chapter 22. The remnant.

This chapter calls us to repentance, to commitment one to another, to love instead of hatred, to a search for community rather than a search for enemies, a sacrifice of self to the community of believers. It is meant to say that the Bible shows us that the remnant is always preserved by God to carry on the faith, and the remnant is found in the good church. It offers some hope to us all, if we will love God with all of our souls, bodies, minds, and spirits, forsaking all idols of the mind and heart, and if we will love, and not hate, our Samaritan neighbour as we love ourselves so well.

Epilogue and End

There are additional chapters to consider which are absent from this incarnation of the synopsis. They were omitted not because of poorer quality, but in the interest purely of brevity, and at some sacrifice. I include the titles and a brief description:

(After *The Jews*) *Nationalisation in History* -- a look at other examples of nations integrating their political and spiritual faiths

(After the Civil Rights chapters) -- *Kill Them All!* and *Freedom Fighters* -- Nicaragua, two chapters; "*The Saviour*" -- El Salvador. Looking for the same patterns in more modern times.

(After *Acts of War*) -- *Engulfed* -- The Gulf Wars. Finding the same patterns.