

The Time is Ripe for a Christian Renaissance

(and home schoolers have an important role to play in it!)

The twentieth century, at least in the West, was an almost complete disaster. We abandoned our faith in God in the nineteenth century (or earlier), and we reaped the bitter harvest in the twentieth: two world wars, the holocaust, Mao, Stalin – you know the sad history. Even in the midst of our unimagined material affluence, the fruits of our abandoned faith are evident: the emptiness of life, the breakdown of marriage and family. We have moved, in a very short time, from delighting in children to fighting for our right to murder them. In America, our faith lasted a little longer. It was largely intact even through the 1950s. I was a child then, and it was a very different world. I would go out and play for hours and my parents never worried about treacherous neighbors, human predators. But then the sixties happened, and American has never really been the same.

So what will this new century be like? There are many reasons for hope. One of the greatest is the amazing growth of the church worldwide. It is only in the West that we are in the spiritual doldrums; in most other parts of the world, the church is suffering, but vibrant. In spite of the earlier challenge of communism, and the current (and very real) challenge of Islam, God is clearly on this throne building His church and kingdom throughout the earth. Home schooling is becoming an international phenomenon. My wife and I had the privilege of witnessing the birth of the home school movement in Taiwan. A conference that was expected to attract twenty families exploded with over sixty. These young, Chinese families were very eager to embark on an educational adventure very new in that country. Our oldest son, then in college, spoke to them as a “product” of home schooling. They were intensely interested in what could be done, and very impressed—not simply by what he said, but by his character. In a recent, very encouraging book by Os Guinness, *Renaissance (the power of the gospel no matter how dark the times)*, Os challenges us to strengthen the hands of our brothers and sisters in what used to be called the “third world” and he refers to as the “global south.” We have the roots, they have the fruits. We need each other. I hope to tell that story in another article.

Another reason for hope is the very exhaustion of the radical movements that have triumphed in the West. In a very real sense they have won, and we are all living in the world they have given us. The modern world was characterized by pride. From the Enlightenment onward it was believed that we had “grown up.” God is for kids. We have science, technology and human reason. We have Isaac Newton. We can solve our own problems and save ourselves. We don’t need God. We ceased believing in the Fall, and believed only in Creation. This confidence and arrogance in the eighteenth century led directly to the despair of the twentieth. We discovered that human reason, science and technology, apart from God, cannot save us. The post-modern world in which we live is characterized not by pride, but by despair. Pride always “goeth before a fall,” and has again in our recent history. Scratch the shiny surface of our affluent culture and you find meaninglessness and despair. We no longer believe in Creation, but only in the Fall. Not believing in a good God, our neighbors find themselves no longer able to believe in goodness in any sense. They desperately need what we have, the hope of the gospel. We have chosen to invest ourselves directly in our children, to disciple them, to care not simply about their academic development, but to plant this firmly on a solid spiritual foundation.

And this is why the time is ripe for a specifically *Christian* renaissance. Our neighbors, even in America, in losing faith in God, have lost also faith not only in goodness, but in truth and beauty as well. The STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) are in some sense still flourishing today, but these subjects cannot give meaning to our lives. They minister to the needs of the body and not the soul. The needs of the body are real, and studying these subjects is a good thing. If you have a child gifted in these areas, by all means encourage him or her. But Jesus said, “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?” If we have no souls to lose, why not gain the whole world as the next best thing? This is indeed what the world thinks, and why higher education has become job training, and not the search for wisdom and right living that it once was.

So how are we different from the world?

We know, as believers, that God is *not* dead, and that we do have souls to lose (and save). We know that the meaning of life is found in loving God with our heart, soul, strength and mind, and in loving our brothers and sisters in Christ as He has loved us. And we know that these things are more important than “gaining the whole world.”

And that is why we say, “The Bible first, but not the Bible only”: why we study the classical liberal arts *in the light of the* Word of God. Sure as believers we want to serve the nation, to revive the economy—these are *good things*. But they don’t answer the question, “What is life all about? What matters supremely?” And this the Bible does specifically, and the classical liberal arts do more generally. The combination of the two is very powerful. They help us envision what the good life, human flourishing, looks like and involves.

Every day I pray three things:

- **God, help me *remember* Your goodness.** This is what history is all about. It really is His Story. Bible history, and all history, is a record ultimately of God’s goodness, His faithful dealings with us, His people, His sheep. He causes “all things to work together for good to them that love Him and are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). Our memories are thus a wonderful gift from God. God was faithful yesterday, and He will be so today.
- **God, help me to *reckon* on Your truth.** This is what theology (and philosophy) is all about. God teaches us wonderful truths about Himself in His Word, and He wants us to reckon on them. Indeed, He wants us to rest our very lives on them. We have been justified by faith in Christ, and so we can answer Satan when He attacks and accuses us. We don’t have to starve or cut ourselves, because God’s love is real and true. He has numbered the very hairs on our heads. Thus our reason is also a great gift from God.
- **God, help me to *revel* in Your beauty.** This is what literature (and the arts) help us do. Ultimately, we become like what we worship. We best glorify God by delighting in Him. “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (II Cor. 3:18). Our imaginations are also a wonderful gift from God. They enable us to behold.

As Americans we cherish our rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But life is much more than mere physical survival, and liberty is precious because God has given us “all things richly to enjoy.” The real poser has always been, “What is ‘the pursuit of happiness’ all about?” How can we be

truly happy? This has always been the central question of the classical liberal arts, why we study history, philosophy, and literature. Only the Bible answers that question ultimately. If God is dead, then so is meaning. If there are no answers to the big questions of life—Who am I, Where have I come from? What happens after death?—then the questions themselves become pointless, embarrassing. This is why the classical liberal arts have withered on college campuses today, but it is also why they are so important and exciting for us as believers. The study of history, philosophy, and literature, of goodness, truth, and beauty, in the light of their queen, theology, feeds not our bodies, but our souls.

This is why the time is ripe for a specifically *Christian* renaissance. And we who are discipling our children, who are soaking them in the Word of God, who are producing avid readers, young people who love God with their minds in the context of loving Him with their heart, soul and strength, have a LOT to contribute to such a renaissance. Your child might write the big book, might create the seminal work of art, might make the pivotal movie that will help bring us back to God in the West.