

WESTERN CIVILIZATION AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

by Melvin Lehman

I feel very certain that Western Civilization is doomed. The warnings are all around us and really quite evident. The handwriting is on the wall. According to the Guttmacher Institute, America will allow approximately 1.4 million legal abortions this year alone. Over the past thirty-three years since *Roe v. Wade*, we have aborted over 40 million babies in the United States. This is nothing short of a holocaust. In my opinion as a student of history, the Canaanites of old fell from grace and were subsequently expelled from the land of Canaan because they murdered their own little ones in the worship of their gods. The Central-American Indians apparently made the same mistake as well, and they too were brought down from their lofty place and humbled before the nations of the world.

Recently, I read an article in *Time Magazine* about the movie “Brokeback Mountain,” which from what I can tell not only exonerates a homosexual lifestyle but also promotes it. The magazine article itself clearly had an agenda—any moral opposition to such lifestyles should be ridiculed for being out of touch with reality.

We must understand this situation. You see, it is one thing for a society to take its drugs in secret because the law forbids drug abuse. It is quite another when the body that governs a group of people makes such action legal, and on top of it, even buys the drugs for the addict. I speak metaphorically, but the metaphor applies to the issues I have cited. The implications are incredible. I am astounded and frightened by this paradigm shift in Western Civilization. We must understand that the legalizing of sinful practice—even murder—is posited as a solution to the problem of a promiscuous society by intelligent, educated people. This is precisely the case with abortion. This is where we are.

The article in *Time* represents a similar shift in popular culture. Not many years ago, general culture frowned upon and ostracized homosexual behavior. The laws of the land discouraged such practices. Perhaps such an orientation was ostracized too much. I acknowledge this and the subsequent dishonor to people. Nevertheless, I must insist that a major milepost on the slippery slope of destruction has been passed when the laws of the land overtly encourage such behaviors and absolutely refuse to consider the possible involvement of a gross moral violation. To top it off, popular writers in popular magazines glorify and sanction such perversion. I remind you that there was once a society of people that gave way to such moral perversity and the Lord brought judgment via fire and brimstone.

And so I repeat: I believe Western Civilization is doomed.

The decline of Western Civilization will follow a path. I doubt that an apocalyptic day will come in which everything goes up in smoke and the survivors will awake to bury the dead and rebuild our cities. I expect a slower but relentless decline in economic stability, productivity, creativity, law and order, quality of education, and beyond. The decline will affect every critical area of civilized life. Authentic Christianity will come under attack; this is certain. Why? Radical Islamic practice and reaction is not going to disappear even if Osama bin Laden and his henchmen all die today. Demographics (population patterns) alone tell the tale. While Western Civilization is murdering their babies at a horrific rate and refusing to rear families of strength and character, the Moslems are having large families. And they are rearing these families in such a way that their sons and daughters are willing to blow themselves up in suicide attacks for the cause of the Islamic nation. The Western framework of selfishness and protectionism and atheism will never produce such a person—at least not in significant numbers, that I promise you. In short, there will be continual conflict between Islam and the West. It will not go away in spite of the moderate voices of Islam that seek to quiet our fears.

Now, here is the critical point. Eventually, mainstream evangelical Christianity will be accused of having a mindset that parallels the radical Islamic mindset. Unfortunately, the accusations will have some points where they stick. It gets closer home. No matter how hard we try to distance ourselves from this scenario, we as an Anabaptist people will surely be caught in the web of this conflict. Islam will understand us to be the enemy because we are Bible-believing Christians. Mainstream Western fundamental Christianity will be very angry with us because we will not take up arms against the Islamic encirclement. It could turn ugly.

And let me say additionally that no society has indefinitely tolerated a group of people who maintain that there are absolute standards by which they may be judged in every aspect of their lives. Eventually they come to hate those who hold this position.

Simply stated, I expect in the decades ahead—if the Lord tarries—to see the Church of Jesus Christ censured, ridiculed, pressured, and even persecuted from three sources: Islam, government, and tragically, a Christianity that has accepted the Constantinian heresy. By this I mean the marriage of church and state. This will affect us at every level of our lives.

What are the implications for us and how does this intersect with strategic planning at Faith Builders?

- Our strategy must be bold, because nothing is accomplished by fear. It must be bold because faith is bold.
- Our strategy must be courageous, because the path forward will not be easy. Rather, it will be increasingly difficult.
- Our strategy must be realistic, because life demands realism or debilitating disappointment.
- Our strategy must be good news, because the ultimate reality is the goodness of God. This must be communicated to the nations.

The day of chaos in civilization is the day of opportunity for the child of God. It is not the day for fear, cowardice, and inaction. None of us should run and hide. It is the day for courage and strength. It is the day for bold initiative in the fear of God. I have been encouraged by the forward movement I have felt from many of you during these days of strategic planning. Here is my perspective on what I heard from you.

Last year you spoke and I heard about the lack of connectedness within the organization. We have taken a few faltering steps to address that problem. We can do more, and we must. One means of communication that we are still developing is our Internet websites: the internal student and staff portal we call “Celebr8” and our public website at www.fbep.org. Please recall with me my point: our strategy must be bold! The Internet is shot through with decadence; there is no denying it. We have chosen ways to filter much of this decadence and shall continue to do so. But it is also a great highway of communication with an international posture. I support using the Internet as a tool to accomplish a good purpose in the hands of God’s people. However, I do have a few words of caution and perhaps even rebuke. These exotic means of communication—such as blogs, Xanga, Skype, personal pages—are a window through which unbelievers may gaze upon our household and way of life. This may be positive or negative. I call us to a high level of discretion. I do not mean to be stodgy or Victorian. I mean to call us to responsible use of such technology as followers and imitators of Jesus Christ—bold but discreet. We must not forget that the most significant connections normally occur along the way as we work together, play together, and worship together.

For a number of years now we have heard a call for help. The call is coming from our fellow teachers in the field. Their voice has changed a bit over the years. It used to be the shrieks of one about to drown. It is now a longing voice; it is the voice that cries out for the tools to do a very important job well. That job is to train the children of our communities for the challenges they will face in their generation...and who knows what they will face? We want to answer that call by offering what we can. We cannot do everything. We know that. But I believe we can play a pivotal role in building healthy educational climates in every Mennonite community and beyond. Steve and the academic department have begun to put together the components of an initiative that will head in this direction. Essentially this means taking many of the things we offer here directly to the communities and offering our help there.

The academic department is also leading us toward a greater involvement in publishing. We turned down an excellent opportunity to publish last year but that does not indicate a direction; the decision was an issue of timing and focus. It is time to pursue the written page. I am encouraged by Stephen Russell’s decision to write a book on nonresistance. I am also encouraged by the movement of FB Resource Group’s History Curriculum Project. It is more than satisfying to see Sharon Yoder and our daughter, Jolynn Schmucker, collaborating on a biography for children that is soon to go to press. Perhaps there are more in the pipeline that I do not know about. To these efforts, I say, “Amen!” Let’s have more of it!

Some of you have heard that we have set a goal of fifty students in three years. As of today we think that goal a bit ambitious. Nevertheless, let me tell you about several of the key components we are developing in this drive. First is the scholarship component. We are quite aware that funding is an issue for many students who would like to come to FBEP. We aim to bring together men of means and young folks with purpose. There are significant hurdles and hoops that stand in the way of this, but we are committed to jumping over them and going through them one by one until this becomes a reality. Merle Herr, the academic department, and board members are working on the developmental stage of this effort. Stay tuned and tell your friends about this initiative.

Second is the need for adequate staffing to offer a quality education to our students. Our core staff must grow to realize that fifty-student goal. Instructors are hard to come by, because most who qualify are already significantly committed to their home communities...and this is the way it ought to be. Join us in prayer as we seek people for our staffing needs.

Third is the physical plant development. We simply cannot house fifty students in this facility without some major overhaul. However, we are developing a plan that will allow us to manage fifty students without building beyond the existing parameters of the building. It's awesome...and so is the price! Plans of this proportion take boldness and courage to dream and approve. Sometimes implementing such a plan seems to require a denial of reality. But God has brought us through deep waters in the past, and He can still accomplish his good intentions.

In all seriousness, we do have a realistic plan for the next year or so that will allow us to accommodate at least 35 students. That plan calls for completing the Student Complex that is currently under construction. It also calls for the removal of the hill on the north side of the East Wing. This will permit renovation of 2,000-3,000 square foot of living space in the men's dorm area. These quarters could then be accessed from the north rather than from the internal hallway.

Some have heard that we are going to close Faith Builders Personal Care Home. After careful consideration, we have felt that increased state regulations, difficulty in recruiting staff, and lack of congruity with important aspects of the overall program pressure us to make this difficult decision. Throughout the organization we have appreciated the positive financial influence of our PCH. The outstanding reputation for sterling care that has been earned by our quality staff should not be forgotten. The community has seen, heard, understood, and appreciated the gift of love that our staff offered on a daily basis to these older folks. This has been a tough choice. Please remember us in prayer as we prepare for these changes.

Finally, I turn your attention to the Scriptures. Isaiah 40 says, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people," saith your God. ...O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!"

So, my fellow-laborers, while I am persuaded that the future of western civilization is dismal, I am more convinced that the message we offer in the Christian school to our children, the loving care we offer the aged in our Personal Care Home, the Judeo/Christian framework we teach MAP and TAP students, a clean and pleasant facility—yes, even good food—is indeed good news.

Thus I pray that as the memory of God recedes and western civilization declines, we will lift our voices and shout salvation from the rooftops.

- Melvin B. Lehman