

Why History Matters pt.2

by Ted Byfield

Ted Byfield's sermon discusses the profound cultural and educational shifts initiated by the Sixties Revolution and their lasting impacts on society and Christianity.

Scripture: Psalm 78:4, Proverbs 22:6, Matthew 2:1, Luke 2:1, 1 Corinthians 1:23

Topics: "Cultural Decline", "Christian History"

Description

Ted Byfield preaches about the impact of the 'Sixties Revolution' on society, highlighting the cultural shifts, moral decline, and societal changes brought about by movements such as the Sexual Revolution, Feminist Revolution, and emphasis on 'love' and 'peace'. He discusses the consequences of John Dewey's educational philosophy, leading to an educational catastrophe and moral decay, emphasizing the need for a rediscovery of history, particularly Christian history, to restore values and understanding in society.

Transcript

DEWEY TRIUMPHANT:

THE 'SIXTIES REVOLUTION'

By the early 'sixties, the first products of the new elementary and secondary schools burst upon the universities, creating what we know as the 'Sixties Revolution. To describe that phenomenon is beyond the scope of this essay, but certain aspects of it should be noted. As part of the generation responsible for raising the 'Sixties one, I can write reminiscently. It descended upon us like a tornado--loud, bewildering, incomprehensible, terrifying, sometimes wantonly destructive, a veritable nightmare.

They were our children all right, but suddenly they had become

unrecognizable. Their dress was strange; they seemed to be adopting dirt and rags as a kind of uniform. The males began to look like the females in that their hair grew long, though it was rarely combed, just as they had beards that they did not trim. Some began hanging trinkets from the ears and nose, much like savages. Their music was similarly aboriginal--all tempo and no discernible melody, inane lyrics (inane to us, anyway) and best sung through the nose, rather than from the throat. To be properly enjoyed, it must vibrate the whole premises from which it originated, and be audible at least one half block away.

The young revolutionaries placed a great emphasis upon what they called "love." Though the scope and meaning of the word was never actually defined, they were sure of one thing: their parents knew nothing about it. It apparently applied exclusively to under-empowered social groups and underprivileged peoples whose interests they championed aggressively. Whether they significantly furthered the wellbeing of those groups has been debated ever since. It certainly opened for them greater opportunities which many took advantage of. But it also implanted a sense of entitlement, very new to the democratic culture. That is, social advance, rather than something to be earned, became something to be demanded and bestowed, an ominous and costly departure from the tradition.

Wherever else "love" might be applied, it soon became evident that the revolutionaries did not reliably extend it to what sociologists call "interpersonal relations." In fact, they went on to establish what is probably the highest divorce rate of any society in human history. To contend that Dewey sought to create a world in which people felt

no obligation to keep promises, pay their debts, tell the truth, relieve suffering, and care for their children is, of course, unfair. He was altogether aware that such rules were ultimately essential. But he diligently sought to destroy the existing basis for them. Children should be taught to do whatever serves "the community" or the public good," he said. But each child was to decide for himself what this might be. In short, each was to make up his own rules, decide his own morality, and the byword of the era became, "Do your own thing." This was most evident in the sphere of sexual relations. Concomitant with the 'Sixties Revolution came the Sexual Revolution, though its origins were as much technological as educational. Birth control, that is, became more accessible and dependable. Men wanted the freedom of sexual license without consequent marital responsibility. So why should they not have it, demanded Hugh Hefner through his Playboy magazine, which deftly conferred high-style market acceptance on the hitherto pornographic. The response of women was the Feminist Revolution, which presented itself as a quest for freedom from the tyranny of the man. But the real tyrant, as the woman well knew, was not the man, but the child. The consequence was a startling plunge in the birthrate, accompanied ironically by a demand for the legalization of abortion-- an irony because improved birth control should have meant fewer unwanted pregnancies, not more, and a diminished, not greater, demand for abortion. But the new freedom generated more unwanted pregnancies than ever, and it was soon discovered that "love" did not apply to unwanted babies. Though genetic science quietly affirmed that some fifty or more physical and mental qualities of the

individual who is to become you or me are determined at the instant of conception, this was dismissed or ignored. What mattered was the woman's "freedom to choose," nothing else, and Canada went on to adopt the world's most unrestricted access to abortion.

But "love" very much did apply to those who practiced what had previously been deemed the unacceptable. Over a seventy-year period, such things as adultery, sodomy and extra-marital sex advanced from the status of criminal conduct in some jurisdictions to become first legal, then acceptable, then even admirable--so admirable that to question almost any sexual practice was deemed an outrageous bigotry.¹⁰

Just as "love" was all-important, so too was "peace." Peace must at all costs be preserved. This could be done, as one un-emancipated commentator had dryly observed, "by scoffing at generals and reading newspapers." By the 'Sixties, peace was to be safeguarded by holding marches and public demonstrations and by learning to appreciate the virtues of slave states like Soviet Russia and Communist China. In the great test of the era, Viet-Nam, the 'Sixties Generation distinguished itself by losing the only war the United States had lost in its two-hundred-year history.

Though its assumptions were by now becoming embedded in the culture, the exhibitionist manifestations of the revolution came to an abrupt end on a fixed date. On May 4, 1970, during a protest rally at Kent State University, the Ohio National Guard opened fire on a student crowd. Four were killed and nine wounded.

There was, of course, universal outrage, but it's notable that thereafter protest marches and rallies rapidly declined and soon disappeared.

It was no longer fun. It was dangerous.¹¹

[10. A "scientific" basis for the Sexual Revolution was furnished by Dr. Alfred Kinsey of the University of Chicago in two "studies" -- Sexual Behavior in the Human Male (1948) and Sexual Behavior in the Human Female (1953). Kinsey was neither a psychologist nor a physician, but an entomologist. His field of study had been bugs. His reports, however, purporting to describe the bizarre sexual behaviour of average Americans, both shocked and intrigued a nation, astonished to discover that this must be the way the folks next door carry on, (though they certainly didn't themselves). The print media, whose gullibility for anything claiming "scientific credentials" was then (and still is) monumental, swallowed both reports whole, and from that point assured the world Kinsey had disclosed what routinely transpired in the bedrooms of America. It was later discovered, however, that Kinsey's study of the sex lives of Americans was based on interviews with homosexuals, prison inmates, prostitutes, paedophiles, and those who eagerly discussed their sexual predilections with total strangers. Since these could hardly be called typical, the Kinsey reports were plainly frauds, but two generations of Canadians and Americans had been taken in by them.]

[11. Thomas Carlyle in his history of the French Revolution tells how the Paris mobs, uncontrollable for years, were sharply and permanently subdued by a young French officer who turned the cannon on them and gave them what he called "a whiff of grapeshot." The whole revolution, says Carlyle was at that instant "blown into space by it, and become a thing that was!" The Kent State incident had the same effect. The young officer's name was Napoleon Bonaparte.]

THE FOUR KEYS

THAT CONTROL SOCIETY

By now however, as Dewey planned, the new order had spread from the schools to take over the whole culture, principally through the vastly expanded universities built by history's most affluent society, on the proceeds of the greatest economic advance the world had ever known. What at the beginning of the century had been the theory of a handful of academics at Chicago and Columbia by the century's last decades had become the mindset of an entire generation of journalists, novelists, musicians, television producers, advertising executives, "forward-thinking" clergymen and, of course, school teachers.

In this process, however, a certain deception was worked. The 'Sixties Generation certainly had the numbers. Their immediate forebears,

having survived the Great Depression and then fought and won the Second World War, had come home to establish the twentieth century's highest birth rate. But it was not their numbers that achieved the victory of the revolutionaries. In fact, it later became evident that they had converted only an insignificant fraction of their own generation. However, by shrewdly concentrating themselves in the four pivotal areas of modern society--the academy, the media, the bureaucracy and the seminaries of the mainline Christian denominations, including the Catholics--they were able to misrepresent the society as having wholly changed, when most of it had not. In fact, two incompatible societies began existing side by side - the minority one portrayed as a majority by the media and the "advanced" educators, bureaucrats and clergymen, the other by the increasingly bewildered majority.¹²

One area of learning, however, remained of necessity proof against the revolution, notably the physical (as distinct from the social) sciences. Here, facts had to remain facts, and rules had to remain rules. In physics and chemistry, things were either proven or they weren't. Experiments could fail, and so could students. Mistakes were real. Standards must be sustained. Here, in other words, authority remained firmly in place. But the humanities, wallowing in their new boundless "freedom" and captive to whatever "liberated" interest group could gain access to them, gradually declined into practical insignificance.

Looking back on his years in high school, one male Canadian student I know sadly observed: "My literature courses were courses in feminism, my social studies courses were courses in

socialism, and my sciences courses were courses in environmentalism.

The only thing they couldn't wreck was maths. I don't want another four years of this in university, and I don't want to take science or engineering, so why bother going?"

He was not alone. Over the years of the Deweyite revolution, university registration as a whole changed from 60 percent male to 60 percent female. The female majority in the humanities alone is much higher. Meanwhile, drop-out rates in high schools run four-to-one male. Most males, one must conclude, can learn best in a world of right-wrong, true-false, good-bad, pass-fail, win-lose. The so-called "alpha males"-often the ones with the liveliest imaginations, the greatest potential and therefore the hardest to control, meaning the least able to see themselves as "social beings"-were proving impossible to educate. Some observers saw an explanation for this. Back to the beginnings of the human race, rambunctious young males had been controlled by simply spanking them. But the new Dewey generation was the first one to discover that "violence teaches violence," so they used drugs instead and sedated the obstreperous males into dazed acquiescence. In the process, they somehow managed to raise what is arguably the most violent generation of children we have ever known.

The role of drugs in the revolution was not confined to tranquilizing rambunctious little boys. The 'Sixties introduced youth to the world of pot, speed, crack, methadone and other chemical novelties, in the course of this wrecking the lives of hundreds of thousands of young people. Surely, one might respond, you're

not blaming John Dewey for creating the drug scourge. No, not precisely for creating it, but for undermining and destroying the moral barriers that would otherwise have obstructed it. Before his "progressive educators" arrived, the response the pushers would have encountered among young people would have been: "We don't do that kind of stuff." And by we, they would have meant their people, their crowd, their town, their country, their society, and more than anything else their parents, their family and the members of their church or synagogue. But these were the very people Dewey had diligently trained them to oppose. These were "the Establishment." These were the old "Authority," the people who must be superseded. So the barriers were down and the "drug culture" was born--a multi-billion-dollar industry, both in selling the product and in coping with the massive crime it brought into being.

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[12. One figure revered in anthropological circles for much of the 20th Century was Margaret Mead. Her famous book, *Coming of Age in Samoa*--describing an idyllic, non-violent, free-loving Pacific island society, which encouraged pre-marital sex and recognized few restraining sexual rules at all--became required reading in first-year anthropology courses throughout the English-speaking world. In 1983, another anthropologist, Derek Freeman, having lived on the same islands for years, published another study of the Samoans that refuted Mead's book in almost every particular. She was the victim, he said, of a Samoan hoax. The Samoans were in fact an exceedingly puritanical people with rigid rules against sexual promiscuity, though they had a mischievous sense of humor. Later yet another senior anthropologist, Dr. Martin Orans, emeritus professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Riverside, apologized for the way he and his colleagues had also been drawn in by the hoax. "The greatest fault lies," he writes, "with those of us like myself who understood the requirements of science, but both failed to point out the deficiencies of Mead's work and tacitly supported such enterprise by repeatedly assigning it to students." Mead had gone to Samoa, said Freeman, pre-eminently to affirm the social views of her beloved mentor,

Dr. Franz Boas. Boas's close associate at Columbia for 31 years: John Dewey.]

THE CONSEQUENCE:

AN EDUCATIONAL CATASTROPHE

Very soon came disturbing reports that kids weren't actually learning much. The schools were costing more. Teacher salaries, once abysmally low, now appeared altogether adequate. But children didn't seem to read as well. Many were unquestionably illiterate and some could not add, subtract, multiply or divide. Moreover, the schools had become laboratories for esoteric experimentation. In the 1960s came "new maths," which by the 1970s had been quietly dumped as a failure. "Whole language" reading instruction came in with the 'Eighties and was mostly out by the end of the 'Nineties. How many lives had meanwhile been ruined by this irresponsible dicking, no one cared to say. Then in 1983, President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Education produced a report that shook the American educational establishment to the core. It was entitled "A Nation At Risk." In clear terms with unassailable data, it painted the picture of an educational catastrophe, revealing that the American school system, once one of the best in the industrialized world, was now one of the worst. There had been a steady drop for some years in Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores and the American College Test (ACT). (Canadian schools had no equivalent for such tests.) There had appeared a growing need for the universities to provide remedial classes to teach what the elementary and secondary schools had failed to teach. The performance of American students on international test scores was steadily declining. Knowledge

of the great works of literature had virtually disappeared and all tests showed a deepening and repulsive ignorance of historical fact. Finally, the American level of "functional illiteracy" was higher than that of any other industrialized nation.

Many wondered: How had this whole calamity been allowed to happen? Where were the defenders of our literary heritage when our literary heritage was being pitched out? Where indeed were the historians when their subject was being reduced to at best a dispensable adjunct of sociology? Even more astonishing: Where were the Christians when the whole premise of their teaching and theology was being rendered absurd? (How could Christ have died for our sins when there was no such thing as sin--or good or evil, or right or wrong?)

It soon became evident that even Christian schools had been blind to the fact that what their teachers were being required to learn in education college to gain the indispensable government "teaching certificate" was fundamentally incompatible with what was being taught by the Bible and by their churches. Even most state-supported Catholic schools in Canada had so obediently embraced the new ideas that their curricula became largely indistinguishable from those of the public schools.

But why should this have been surprising? Dewey himself was an avowed atheist. He saw the traditional teachings of the churches as a "delusion," which erected "obstacles to a student's intellectual and moral growth." Religion engendered "a slave mentality."

It recognized "an intolerant superiority on the part of a few," while imposing "an intolerable burden on the part of the many."

To Dewey, Christianity was "a dying myth." Christians were "preoccupied with the state of their character and concerned with the purity of their motives and the goodness of their souls." All this was a form of "spiritual egotism." Teachers must strive to remove "the crutch of dogma" and "of beliefs fixed by authority." They must seek to "liberate" people from Christianity and teach them instead "the service of the community."

Fifteen years after "A Nation At Risk" was published came a new report, "A Nation Still At Risk." It brought the doleful news that despite supposedly herculean efforts to improve the schools nothing much had changed. Some 30 percent of freshmen entering university were in need of remedial courses in reading, writing, and mathematics, said the report. In California the figure was 50 percent. "Employers report difficulty finding people to hire who have the skills, knowledge, habits, and attitudes they require for technologically sophisticated positions." This second report found that American 12th graders scored near the bottom on the latest International Math and Science Study--19th out of 21 developed nations in math, and 16th out of 21 in science. "Our advanced students did even worse, scoring dead last in physics."

Why, asked the second report, had the many reforms proposed by the first report gone unfulfilled? It answered its own question: The authors of the first had "underestimated the resilience of the status quo and the strength of the interests wedded to it." One of them, a former Minnesota governor, observed: "At that time I had no idea that the system was so reluctant to change." Reluctant yes, but also incapable. Those who run the system were so

deeply infected with the flawed philosophy lying behind it that they could comprehend no other.

So a doleful conclusion seemed inescapable: The system cannot repair itself. No significant change in the schools could occur without somehow supplanting the Dewey philosophy which continues to inhibit any serious restoration of standards. However, to say that such a sweeping change is impossible would argue against the first contention of this essay, notably that Dewey and his fellow educators in fact worked just such a transformation which in turn went on to transform the whole society. Dewey himself, that is, may have shown us the way to defeat Deweyism. But it would involve a counter-revolution in the faculties of education as convulsive as the one Dewey engineered. And even if such a phenomenon could be brought about, it would still take at least two generations to restore the effectiveness of the schools. Do we have that much time? In the competitive modern "global" environment, with the educational performance of other nations soaring above the North American, it seems most unlikely.

There was an even deeper problem, which Dewey himself acknowledged, and for which he offered no solution. A distinct amorality was becoming evident in society. The "self," as it came to be called, was becoming the only value of the "Me Generation." The Deweyite schools had successfully abolished the foundation under the old rules, but had found nothing workable to replace it.

"Science," Dewey was confident, would supplant the religious and traditional basis for ethical behaviour. But this is something of

which science is incapable. That is, it can exhaustively describe how human beings behave. But it cannot authoritatively assert how they should behave or ought to behave. Sociologists might draw up rules for an ideal society, but precisely what obligates the individual to respect those rules? One might reply: "the general welfare of humanity." But what obligates the individual to heed this "general welfare of humanity?" Suppose he elects instead to "look after No. 1?" Is he wrong? But how can he be wrong if there was no such thing? Dewey had turned to "science" for an answer, and science was of necessity silent. So too, it became clear, were the educators. Only they could save the schools, and they didn't know how.

THE HUMAN INSTINCT DEWEY FEARED

There is, however, another option, not in itself a solution, but something that would help pave the way to the kind of educational cataclysm that salvaging the school system will require.

Most people have within themselves an element that few

Deweyites understand, though Dewey himself plainly understood it and feared it. He no doubt saw it as an instrument capable of powerfully reinforcing the very beliefs, attitudes, rules and values that he strove so zealously to eradicate. That instrument is history.

There exists among many humans an understandable desire to discover how they got here. They know of course the biological answer, but as an account of the way in which towns, toilets, baseball, rocketry, music, fire hydrants, archbishops, fashion shows, bank robberies, traffic accidents, socialism, television and all the other zillion things they see around them came about, biology

alone does not offer a satisfactory explanation. Nor do any of the other sciences.

What does offer it is history. Perhaps that's why the historical, properly presented, often has a strange effect upon the modern psyche. History can become a sort of addiction, a good addiction, afflicting people of all ages and both sexes, of widely different educational levels, of different professional backgrounds, trades or careers, nationalities or religions. Such an addiction customarily develops when someone, often with little previous exposure to history, comes upon some person or event in the past, or perhaps merely the site of such an event, and finds developing in himself a keen fascination with this person, place or thing. He yearns to know more about it. He searches libraries, lays out money to buy books, and haunts the web seeking out others with a similar interest. It need not be some exotic figure from the past. It can be a personal ancestor, or a long-dead municipal politician, or even an abandoned railway line, or a deserted village. It holds, he realizes, a story, and he wants to know all about that story. So he pursues it, and in so doing to he begins to make a number of discoveries. His deserted village, for example, he finds was once a bustling community with a mayor and council and a school and a volunteer fire department. In an odd way, he begins to feel at home in that village. He knows some of the local people by name. But he also discovers that almost everything that happened there was determined by events outside it-by the province or state, which had a story of its own, which in turn was connected to other stories involving the whole country and a whole era in

which all these things were going on. So his interest in the village carries him to things well beyond it, to a whole world of people and events, all of whom, he strangely begins to understand and somehow identify with. For he has also found out how similar they are to the people of his own day, though they lived a very long time ago. Living conditions certainly have changed, but people have not.

Then he discovers something else. He is beginning to develop a broad picture of the past. His interest in the village has served as a path leading into a great forest. He has followed the path and found that it led to other paths, which in turn led to still others, until he was able to form in his mind a map of a whole section of the forest. This in turn connected to other sections he did not know, but which would no doubt all have stories of their own.

Strangest of all, the result of this experience has been to subtly change his view of the place and time in which he himself is living.

He once would have called this "the real world." But now he knows there are other worlds just as real as his, and that other equally real worlds would follow the one he's living in. Those past worlds had much to teach him because they enabled him to see more clearly what is going on in his own times.

He has found too that good and evil have come into sharp relief.

Some individuals really did shine like a light from a hilltop, spreading joy and truth wherever they went. Others brought darkness, and in the clash between the two the fate of their society was gradually being decided. He finds that those holding the popular view were frequently deluded, where those widely regarded as deluded

were in fact on the right track. Often, supposed steps forward were actually steps back, and while the majority might rule, the majority could often be dead wrong. Through it all he discovers that good and evil, far from mere matters of opinion, were the qualities upon which everything, every event, ultimately turned. And he realizes too there is one profound difference between that earlier time and his own. Dealing with the past, he knows how the story turned out, what finally happened and why. Dealing with his own time, he does not know. It is still being determined. But now he can play an informed part in the outcome.

Thus history serves him.

Beyond all this, he discovers something else. He is not so afraid. He finds that the terrors of the present are not so terrible any more, because humanity has survived them before and he has (so to speak) watched them do it. He finds that current human attitudes and supposedly unprecedented ideas and events are often very preceded indeed and are simply coming back for the umpteenth time. He is living, he now realizes, in what's actually the latest chapter in a very long book. He knows something about the earlier chapters, and he realizes that this gives him an extraordinary advantage over those who do not. It is not an accident that most of the great leaders of the Western world were keen scholars of history. They shared the addiction.

Now such an addiction wholly defeats Deweyism and for an understandable reason. While the great philosopher claimed to set men free by liberating them from the "shackles" of the past, the effect was to deliver them into the bondage of the present, making

them prisoners of what the Germans call the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the age. Dewey had led them to believe that the here and now, the going thing, the current style, the "acceptable" view, the latest "rage" was the only reality that existed. Thus fashion not freedom came to determine how they lived in a world where morality was a matter of "lifestyle" and truth a matter of viewpoint. They could not judge the world they lived in because they had no way to get out of it to look at it. He had locked them in. One way out was that path into the forest, so he made sure that few ever found it. History, he ruled, must be confined to "the relevant."

THE DAWNING REDISCOVERY

OF THE PAST

We need, therefore, a general "rediscovery" of the past. Happily, this has already begun, not significantly in the sphere of education, but in the book publishing and entertainment industries. The heartening success of the History Channel on television (when it is not straying into fiction) the extraordinary work of Ken Burns with his brilliant series on subjects as varied as the U.S. Civil War, jazz, baseball, Thomas Jefferson and others, the captivating histories by the late Barbara Tuchman and William Manchester, the indispensable accounts of the 19th and 20th Centuries being turned out so magnificently by Paul Johnson. The astonishing revival of interest in Remembrance Day, the delightful histories of towns and the stirring military histories of local regiments, all these put histories in the top ratings on television and high on the best-seller lists.

Similarly in Canada, we have the books of the late Pierre Berton who almost single-handedly provided a fascinating panorama of the country's past, and Peter Newman's portrait of the Diefenbaker and Pearson years, which introduced a whole new genre of Canadian political reporting. Less highly profiled were the writings of the late James H. "Jimmy" Gray whose delightful accounts of the Canadian West must soon be discovered nationally, while in Winnipeg the old house organ of the Hudson's Bay Company, the Beaver magazine, has been taken over by Canada's National History Society and become one of the best magazines in the country. In the national print media the names of Michael Bliss, Jack Granatstein and David Bercuson occur ever more frequently with commentary on current events. Always they give the past a new voice in the present, for all three are historians. Notably absent from this renaissance is the curriculum of most public schools, whose administrators, whether consciously or not, still view history through a Deweyite lens, requiring that it must be "relevant." But relevant to what, one wonders. The answer is to whatever cause or movement the system is currently championing—whether environmentalism, feminism, anti-industrialism, and in Canada anti-Americanism. The technique is always the same: Some fragment of history is summoned to support the central cause being expounded. There may be other facts, firmly in the historical record, which support the opposing contention, but these are tacitly omitted. In this way history is contemptuously reduced to propaganda. Better, surely, that it be ignored in the schools than perverted by them. The immediate use of history,

that is, is preferably left to the popular media.¹³

Not that any of us are proof against bias. The news and print media accounts of day-by-day events are often classics of blatant prejudice, bringing to mind Humbert Wolfe's amusing observation:

You cannot hope

To bribe or twist,

thank God! the

British journalist.

But seeing what

The man will do

unbribed, there's

no occasion to.

Yet, I've noticed that when the newspapers, and even television, delve into an historic subject, they often seem considerably more even-handed than they are with current events. Why this is so, I can only guess. We are not as close to the controversies of yesteryear as we are to those of yesterday afternoon. Journalists are (and should be) irrepressible story-tellers, and when we are writing of the long past, it's the story that energizes us, not the cause.

Before we can work a change in the schools, we must set on foot a change in the culture, and popular history is the tool which can bring such a change about. Because it reflects the great values of the past, it will work to restore the great values of the past, and the magnificent works of music, art and literature will be restored along with them. For these are among the facts and treasures of history. If we can achieve this, we have no reason to fear the threat posed by other cultures and other societies. Our habit as a civilization

has been to absorb the best of other cultures. Only one thing can prevent us from continuing to do so—that is, if we ourselves have forgotten who we are and what we have done.

[13. A new kind of attack on history emerged in the closing decades of the 20th Century, notably the habit of blurring the distinction between fact and fiction, both in books like the celebrated *Da Vinci Code*, and in what television producers took to calling "docudramas." These present as something that happened whatever the author or producer thinks he needs to reinforce the drama of his story, or its bias, or both. So he therefore quietly invents it. Manufactured quotes and facts are presented as authentic. In television, since the producer never tells us what part of his production is "docu" (that is, documented) and what part is "drama" (that is, fiction), an historical fraud is easily perpetrated, particularly on an historically ignorant audience. The effect is to reinforce the Deweyite dictum that history is so undependable as to be worthless.]

BUT WHY 'CHRISTIAN HISTORY'?

But why, someone has asked me, Christian history? The fact that I am the general editor of a twelve-volume series on the history of Christianity, now in production, gave rise to the question. The volumes begin at Pentecost, the Christian feast that follows 50 days behind Easter, and continue, century by century, era by era, through nearly two thousand years to the end of the second Christian millennium. Seven of the 12 volumes have been produced, reaching to the year A.D.1300. My answer to that question is that from the fourth century to the late eighteenth, Christian history and the history of the Western world are the same history, and any attempt to divorce the religious from the secular renders both incomprehensible.

Christianity, that is, begins in the first century of what the secularists have decreed must be called "the Common Era" (though the only thing common to it is Christianity). For its first three hundred years, the Christians grew from one of many eccentric Middle Eastern cults that had established a presence in Rome into a formidable force

all over the Roman world, recruiting to the service of Christ about one quarter of those living in the eastern Roman Empire and one tenth in the western one. A point to observe is that the Christians achieved this astonishing success, not through physical conquest, but through suffering. That is, they were so persuaded of the truth of the Christian Gospel and the genuine presence of Christ in their lives that they endured the most hideous tortures, enslavement and persecution that the imperial government could inflict upon them. Meanwhile their undoubted valor and their unstinting care for one another and those around them drew into their numbers the meek and the mighty, the rich and the poor, the learned and the illiterate.

Among the literate, they had something else going for them. They could rationally defend their faith against scoffers and skeptics. They did not shrink from philosophical disputation, and where in their earliest days the Greeks regarded their theology as "foolishness," (1 Corinthians 1:23) the learned soon began to respect it. In the early second century, for example, the Christian scholar Justin, invoking the Greek philosophers, so bested an erudite pagan in a public debate, that the man in a fury had him arrested, tried and executed. But the Christians could remind the Greeks that it was their man Plato, five centuries before Christ, who had concluded that if the perfectly good man ever came into the world he would be "impaled."

Finally one would-be emperor, whether out of opportunism, conviction or a mixture of both, decided to back the Christians rather than fight them. With a Christian symbol painted on his battle-shields, he

triumphed over six rival contenders and gained the imperial throne.

This suddenly reversed the status of the Christians within the empire.

Rather than its most formidable enemies, they now became its foremost champions, and Christianity, rather than a personal peril became the means to distinction, affluence and social advance.

However, its days of celebrity were brief and within a century and a half the whole western empire was overrun by barbarians whom the Christians slowly, diligently and painfully converted to the faith.

In much of that dark era, the church was the only stable form of government that existed, and it produced over the succeeding thousand years what became Western civilization. The core of its morality, law, theory of government, respect for the individual and theology were all drawn from the Bible and Christian teaching.

Since the late 18th Century, however, Christianity has once again become embattled (some would say with a new wave of barbarians, this time intellectual ones), and the story of John Dewey's endeavors to destroy the Christian culture is part of that battle, and therefore part of Christian history. So why Christian history?

Because in a sense that is all there is, and a strictly "secular" history of Western civilization is simply impossible.¹⁴ The story of the West is pre-eminently the story of Christianity.

There is a further reason to produce an academically sound and yet popular history of Christianity, and that is for Christians themselves. The Christian faith, after all, claims to be rooted in an historic event. The essayist Dorothy L. Sayers takes particular note of this:

Christianity is not the only religion that has found

the best explanation of human life in the idea of an incarnate and suffering god. The Egyptian Osiris died and rose again; Aeschylus in his play, *The Eumenides*, reconciled man to God by the theory of a suffering Zeus. But in most theologies, the god is supposed to have suffered and died in some remote and mythical period of pre-history. The Christian story, on the other hand, starts off briskly in St. Matthew's account with a place and a date: "When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King." St. Luke, still more practically and prosaically, pins the thing down by a reference to a piece of government finance. God, he says, was made man in the year when Caesar Augustus was taking a census in connection with a scheme of taxation. Similarly, we might date an event by saying it took place in the year that Great Britain went off the gold standard. About thirty-three years later (we are informed) God was executed, for being a political nuisance, "under Pontius Pilate"-much as we might say, "when Mr. Joynson-Hicks was Home Secretary." It is as definite and concrete as all that.

- From Dorothy L. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos*, London, 1949

Nevertheless, Christians are as notably ignorant of our own history as the world around us. Most of us are familiar with the New Testament era in the first century and the challenges we face in

the twenty-first, but for the two millennia in between we have only the vaguest notions of what happened. And while we say we really must do something about that, the fact is we don't actually care. Which is a mistake. We Christians have gone wrong in the past many times, and we will go wrong again, if we fail to profit from our past errors because we don't know anything about them. We might have seen in the doctrines of John Dewey, for instance, the same sinister content that the historians Neatby and Daly saw, and we would not perhaps have been so ready to turn our children over to his disciples.

Having done this, however, we now find ourselves facing a crisis.

Unless we can somehow restore the unity we once shared, our society will either disintegrate or change into something unrecognizable.

The chief essential in restoring it is to return to the teaching of history as an indispensable element in public education.

Not fragments of history as an adjunct to some other subject, but history as a subject in itself, taught effectively from kindergarten to university. However, before that is likely to happen, we must first advance history through the popular media--in books, documentary films, art, movies, plays, music, the web, and every other means of communication open to us.

But the books must come first. Before any substantial return to our Christian origins can occur, there needs be a restatement of what those origins are--that is, a presentation of the whole two-thousand-year Christian story, enticing to an educated reader, generally acceptable to Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox, to the religiously sceptical and the doctrinally polemical, always in sufficient detail

for all the major events to be adequately described and all the foremost players to be seen in their historic roles. Upon that foundation, children's books can be produced, and the other media will be free to find subjects of wide popular interest.

What am I suggesting? That the direction of society can be changed by a set of books? No. But as the old Jewish saying goes, it's better to light one candle than complain about the dark. This series, we believe, is such a candle.

[14. The single substantial criticism of Tim Burns's magnificent television series on the Civil War was the absence of the role of the Christian faith on both sides of that conflict. Not only was it the principal spur for the emancipation of the slaves, it was also the prime factor in the willingness of both the men in blue and the men in grey to die for their convictions. Burns brilliantly depicts their astonishing heroism, but by ignoring the Christian factor, he fails to account for it.]

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ted-byfield/why-history-matters-pt2/>

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