BOWLING GREEN DAILY NEWS

Where the vision is flawed, the people also perish…

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As many readers are acutely aware, recent polls continue to show Americans are decidedly less religious than their predecessors.

Whereas the reasons for this decline often make for an interesting intellectual debate, it is important to recognize the trend as a natural consequence of a culture that is increasingly narcissistic and self-absorbed.

To be sure, Americans have always been defined by their individual inclinations. “Nobody is going to tell us what to do” might as well be embossed on our currency. But freedom without responsibility is an illusion; it simply doesn’t exist in the proverbial real world.

The fact that each succeeding generation has moved progressively further from a belief in God is not so much a consequence of our ancestors’ failure to endow their progeny with a reverence for spiritual realities as it is a confirmation of the eternal truth, “where there is no vision, the people perish.”

At a time when the fate of humanity hangs in the balance, and our shared destiny is irrevocably intertwined on a global scale, an unhealthy preoccupation with our own self-serving ambitions does not provide us with the best likelihood for survival. Instead of fixating on our individual desires, we should instead be focused on our collective needs.

Watching modern-day poets, priests and politicians, it is easy to see how we pay homage to a form of godliness while simultaneously making a sport of denying its power. Enlightenment is not rejecting our divine nature; enlightenment is accepting our place in the universe while respecting its Creator.

Or, as C.S. Lewis put it, “A man can no more diminish God’s glory by refusing to worship him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word ‘darkness’ on the walls of his cell.”

Then again, maybe I’m being too narrow-minded in assessing blame. There could be other reasons attendance is down.

Been to “church” lately? I have – and I have a few questions for my brothers and sisters.

First, when did worship become entertainment?

Somewhere along the line, “singing praises” has evolved into a “well-rehearsed praise team backed by a rock band and/or orchestra featuring semi-professional vocalists performing with a light show.” Who are we trying to impress – the Creator or the creation?

Second, when did we become so bureaucratic?

In some denominations, you have to take a class – or a series of classes – just to become a member of a local church family. When 3,000 souls were added to the church on Pentecost, I don’t remember Peter saying anything about those folks having to prove their worthiness.

Third, when did we become so credential-oriented?

These days, some ministers have more initials after their name than many of my colleagues in the Ivory Tower. My grandfather, one of the best gospel preachers I’ve ever heard, had an eighth-grade education. He knew the Bible backward and forward, but he would not have been allowed to stand behind the pulpit at most houses of worship in this region.

Finally, when did we start spending more on things than people?

A lot of the money raised by many congregations goes to maintain the building where they meet and to pay the salaries of those employed there. Colleges need campuses; churches don't.

Ninety percent of the offering collected when the basket is passed should go directly to the poor, the hungry and the disenfranchised – not toward the upkeep of a lavish cathedral with multimedia capabilities or enhancing the comfort and lifestyle of those in charge.

I realize that most of the folks who are taking us down the path to being "more relevant" probably have the best of intentions. But we need to be careful.

There is a reason the only people Jesus had a problem with were members of the religious establishment.

Honestly, I think one of the most important things we can do as we experience this unfortunate decline is pray for help in navigating the challenging times ahead.

So without further ado, I offer the following petition to the Almighty:

God save us from our inability to comprehend the limitations of our own intellect that leads us to believe our ways are comparable to yours.

God save us from well-intentioned but ultimately clueless leaders who are unable to recognize or compensate for their shortcomings.

God save us from those who cling to the self-destructive belief that loyalty to a person, party or movement is more important than allegiance to an ideal or a principle larger and more enduring than themselves or the present moment.

God save us from conspiracy theory hacks who can't seem to grasp the notion that the simplest explanation is almost always the most plausible.

God save us from passionate crusaders who would rather foment chaos and confusion than promote order and compassion.

God save us from holier-than-thou liberals who have lofty goals and aspirations but only a superficial and woefully inadequate understanding of basic economics.

God save us from holier-than-thou conservatives who earnestly believe we should go back to the good old days when women and 'minorities' knew their place.

God save us from those who think winning is more important than serving.

Finally, God save us from so-called left-leaning college professors who obviously think they have been endowed with insights into reality that were spared the less fortunate.



— Aaron W. Hughey is a university distinguished professor in the Department of Counseling and Student Affairs at Western Kentucky University. The views expressed in his columns are entirely his own.