

## HOW NATIONS DIE

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*By Kerby Anderson: Kerby Anderson is National Director of Probe Ministries International which operates in the United States of America. Probe Ministries is a non-profit ministry whose mission is to assist the church in renewing the minds of believers with a Christian worldview and to equip the church to engage the world for Christ.*

When we look at three thousand years of history, we observe that civilizations rise but eventually fall and die. The history of the world is the history of nations that are conquered by other nations or collapse into anarchy.

For most of us the destruction of Carthage, the rise of the Greek city-states, and the Fall of Rome are mere history lessons long forgotten. And such things as the capture of Constantinople, the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, the collapse of the kingdoms of France and Spain, and the slow withering decline of the British Empire are much less clear and less memorable. Most of us do not remember much from our history lessons but it is vital that we reconsider the nature of life in those earlier times, for within those eras and movements are the seeds of the troubles we face today.

There are many reasons for the decline and fall of a nation, but an important (and often overlooked) reason is its abandonment of religion. Russell Kirk has said that the roots of "culture" come from the "cult." and therefore based upon some form of religious or spiritual worldview. Egypt was a religious society founded on the worship of nature gods and goddesses. Greece and Rome had their pantheon of pagan deities. And the list of nations in India, China, and other parts of the globe all demonstrate the principle that civilization arises from religion.

And the opposite is also true. When the traditional beliefs of a nation erode, the nation dies. Religion provides the set of standards that govern a nation. Historian Will Durant said, "There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion."

Unfortunately, there are those today in our nation who have embarked on a journey to maintain a society without a religious code. Christian principles are no longer taught in the public schools and often ridiculed in the arenas of education and media. One has to wonder what the fate of this country will be in the future.

In his book *When Nations Die*, Jim Nelson Black lists three aspects of decay: social decay, cultural decay, and moral decay. Three important trends demonstrate social decay. They are "the crisis of lawlessness," the "loss of economic discipline," and "rising bureaucracy." History provides ample illustrations of the disastrous consequences of the collapse of law and order. "In ancient Greece, the first symptoms of disorder were a general loss of respect for tradition and the degradation of the young. Among the early symptoms was the decline of art and entertainment. The philosophers and pundits distorted the medium of communication. Rhetoric became combative and intolerant; intellectuals began to deride and attack all the traditional institutions of Hellenic society."

New thinkers in the society argued for "fundamental change" and called for giving the youth a "voice in society." Without traditional guidelines, the young men grew wild and undisciplined destroying the old order. Slowly Greece devolved into a disreputable and lawless nation. The Romans conquered Greece in 146 B.C. By placing everything under military authority, they were able to restore order and bring back the rule of law. The Roman Empire (as well as other great civilizations) understood that discipline and custom were essential to stability.

A similar story can be found in ancient Egypt during the fourth century B.C. Lawlessness and violence crippled the economy, and the nation was in chaos. When Alexander the Great invaded the country in 333 B.C., his first task was to restore order and institute martial law. With the death of Alexander, Egypt returned to its old ways until the Roman Empire brought peace to the region through conquest and martial law. Carthage was once called "the eternal rival of Rome" but its pre-eminence and impact waned as it "sank into debauchery and dissipation as a result of great wealth and luxury." Law and order were destroyed from within. Moreover, the rich young men of Carthage no longer wanted to serve in the military so they hired mercenaries to do their fighting. But when the army came into fierce conflict with Rome and other adversaries, the mercenaries ran and left the nation defenceless. Carthage fell to Rome in 146 B.C., and the first act of the Roman legions was to restore law and order.

Four important trends demonstrate cultural decay. They are the "decline of education," the "weakening of cultural foundations," the "loss of respect for tradition," and the "increase in materialism." In his study *The Civilization of Rome*, Donald Dudley says that no single cause, by itself, would have brought the empire to its knees. Instead, the fall came through "a number of weaknesses in Roman society; their effects may be variously estimated, but in combination they must have been largely responsible for the collapse."

The cultural decay of a nation leads inexorably to social and cultural decline. And the patterns are similar from one civilization to another. Samuel Eisenstadt wondered if the similarities were apparent or if they were historical and legitimate. After studying the work of a half dozen historians, he concluded that the similarities were actual. He concluded that "despite the great difference in cultural background-most of these empires have shown similar characteristics, and that these characteristics provide the key to an understanding of the processes of their decline."

The Roman poet Livy wrote that greed and self-indulgence led Romans to dangerous excesses. He said, "For it is true that when men had fewer possessions, they were also modest in their desires. Lately riches have brought avarice and abundant pleasures, and the desire to carry luxury and lust to the point of ruin and universal perdition."

In describing the decadence of the Roman Republic, historian Polybius wrote that this preoccupation with luxury led to carnal indulgences. "For some young men indulged in affairs with boys, others in affairs with courtesans." They paid a talent (roughly a thousand dollars) for a boy bought for sexual pleasure and three hundred drachmas for a jar of caviar. "Marcus Cato was outraged by this and, in a speech to the people, complained that one might be quite convinced of the decline of the republic, when pretty boys cost more than fields and jars of caviar cost more than ploughmen."

As we look at our society today, we too find ourselves in a world where values have been inverted and where citizens pursue hedonistic pleasures without counting the cost. Our nation would be wise to learn the lessons of the past.

Three important trends demonstrate moral decay. They are the "rise in immorality," the "decay of religious belief," and the "devaluing of human life." The classic study of Roman civilization, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, written by English historian Edward Gibbon was published in that famous year of 1776. He "observed that the leaders of the empire gave into the vices of strangers, morals collapsed, laws became oppressive, and the abuse of power made the nation vulnerable to the barbarian hordes."

British historian Catherine Edwards demonstrated that our current examples of immorality are not a modern phenomenon. In her study of the "politics of immorality" in ancient Rome, she says that contraception, abortion, and exposure were common ways to prevent childbirth in Rome. Life became cheap in the latter days of the Roman Empire. Eventually, children were seen as a needless burden and abortion and infanticide became commonplace. In some cases, children were sold into slavery. Manners and social life fell into debauchery. Under Justinian, entertainment grew bawdier and more bizarre. Orgies and love feasts were common. Homosexuality and bestiality were openly practiced. Under Nero, Christians were blamed for the great fire in Rome and horribly persecuted. Similar patterns can be found in other civilizations.

In Greece, the music of the young people became wild and coarse. Popular entertainment was brutal and vulgar. Promiscuity, homosexuality, and drunkenness became a daily part of life. And all moral and social restraints were lost leading to greater decadence.

Ornately carved funeral monuments depicting infant sacrifice can be seen today along with thousands of tiny stone coffins to infants sacrificed to the pagan goddess. The parallels to our own western civilisation are striking. No, we don't sacrifice infants to a pagan goddess, but we have aborted nearly 40 million babies on the altar of convenience. And various sexual practices are openly accepted as part of an alternative lifestyle.

Throughout this article we have been describing the patterns of decline in a nation. Many people looking at the patterns of social, cultural, and moral decay in other countries and civilizations have concluded that we are headed down the same path. When we understand the factors that led to the decline of great civilizations, we can easily see how we in this country can succumb to similar temptations and decadence. What happened in Greece, Rome, Egypt, Carthage, and many other civilizations can happen to us.

We as a nation and a people must rise to the occasion or suffer a fate similar to that which has befallen civilizations in the past. The task is not easy. Nations were subverted by false and foreign ideologies. We too find hostile ideas in the public arenas of media, politics, and education. Sexual promiscuity led to the downfall of these nations. So too we find similar patterns of sexual promiscuity and debauchery. As nations fell into decline, life became cheap. Infants were strangled, exposed to the elements, or sold into slavery. Others were sacrificed to pagan goddesses in order to ensure productivity or a long life. Today life has become cheap. At one end of the spectrum, unborn babies are aborted. At the other end, physician-assisted suicide is becoming acceptable for the aged. In his study of history, Arnold Toynbee describes the predictable pattern of "challenge and response." We as a nation are challenged in fundamental ways, and our response will either pull us back from the brink or push us over it. Will we follow the path to renewal and reformation or will we follow the path to destruction? The choice is ours.

**Source:** by Kerby Anderson