

## **THE JESUS MANIFESTO: A CALL TO REVOLUTION\***

The dawning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century finds the church of America in a moral and spiritual crisis. Decades of self-centered living and worldliness have taken their toll. Years of compromise and toothless gospel preaching have had their effect. And now we have reached the moment of truth: Either we wake up, stand up, speak up, and act up, or we run the risk of becoming a mere historic curiosity, an irrelevant religious sideshow, an entertaining, harmless spectacle. Something must change, and it must change now. There is no other choice.

Thirty-five years ago, a counterculture revolution swept through America, resulting in a sudden, steep moral decline. Since that time (from the early '60s until today), the divorce rate has doubled, the teen suicide rate has tripled, reported violent crime has quadrupled, the prison population has quintupled, the percentage of babies born out of wedlock has risen six-fold, and couples living together out of wedlock has risen sevenfold. And the end is not in sight.

The last generation's counterculture of rebellion has become this generation's establishment of revulsion, and what was unthinkable thirty years ago – daytime talk shows celebrating adultery and incest; homosexual love scenes on major network TV; eleven year-old multiple murderers; massacres in our schools and houses of worship – is a matter of course today. We need a revolution!

But this revolution will be different than other revolutions – including the revolution that birthed our nation more than 200 years ago. This revolution will not be fought with earthly weapons of destruction – not with guns and knives and bullets and bombs. It will not be fought with hatred, intimidation, or brute force. No. It will be fought with the message of the gospel, with the love of God, with the power of the Spirit, with radical holiness, with sacrifice, compassion, and courage. It will be a Jesus revolution, an intense clash between two spiritual kingdoms, a heavenly attack on the enemy's strongholds, a no compromise stand for morality and truth. And it will impact society in a lasting way. It must!

Revolution means upheaval. Revolution means the overthrowing of the status quo. We dare not downplay the significance of the word. Revolution is a matter of life and death, and our revolution flows from the blood of the Savior to the blood of the martyr. We put down our sword and take up our cross, overcoming Satan by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of our testimony, and by not loving our lives so much as to shrink from death (Rev. 12:11). Nothing can stop a revolution like this!

Our revolution is fueled by the power of the gospel, and the gospel does violence to the forces of hell. We must recover the fullness of the gospel of Jesus! It is nothing less than a direct assault on the kingdom of Satan, a frontal attack on hostile, spiritual powers, a mortal confrontation of light against darkness. It brings about the ultimate counterculture conflict.

That's why Jesus said to His disciples, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the

words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed My teaching, they will obey yours also" (John 15:18-20).

That's why Paul explained that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12), reminding the disciples that, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). God's people march to the beat of a different drummer. God's obedient people will always offend the world, no matter how much we seek to be peacemakers and to walk in compassion and love. Our very lifestyles are a reproof to the ungodly.

That's why Joseph Parker could say more than a century ago, "The man whose little sermon is 'repent' sets himself against his age, and will for the time being be battered mercilessly by the age whose moral tone he challenges. There is but one end for such a man -- 'off with his head!' You had better not try to preach repentance until you have pledged your head to heaven." The gospel means conflict and confrontation, and all who stand for righteousness will be resisted.

That's why Jesus was accused by his own people of being "a Samaritan and demon-possessed" (John 8:48), why Paul and Silas were accused of "throwing cities into an uproar" (Acts 16:20) and "causing trouble all over the world" (Acts 17:6), why Paul himself was mistaken for being an "Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert" (Acts 21:38). The gospel is subversive. The gospel is a threat to the kingdom of darkness. The gospel is revolutionary.

We're in a war, and war means conflict, hardship, and sacrifice. As Leonard Ravenhill wrote, "When a nation calls its prime men to battle, homes are broken, weeping sweethearts say their good-byes, businesses are closed, college careers are wrecked, factories are refitted for wartime production, rationing and discomforts are accepted -- all for war. Can we do less for the greatest fight that this world has ever known outside of the cross -- this end-time siege on sanity, morality, and spirituality?"

Satan's strategy is to institutionalize the Church, to turn the Body of Christ into a powerless religious system. If that tactic fails, he tries to desensitize us and lull us to sleep until we lose our convictions and our sense of outrage is gone. And he is always seeking to seduce us into sin until we become just like the world, enslaved by its passions and lusts. And when he thinks he has succeeded, when he no longer feels threatened by the people of God, then he gets aggressive and brazenly puts forth his agenda. He's doing it today. We need a revolution!

The cat is out of the bag. The secret is no longer a secret. Anti-God forces are after the soul of our nation, and if we don't wake up *now*, if we don't take a stand *now*, if we don't repent and pray and rise and speak and act *now*, then instead of this great country being "the land of the free and the home of the brave" our nation could become "the land of sleaze and the home of depraved." We need a revolution!

DNA tests to find out who fathered the baby are here. (In fifteen of our nation's largest cities, more than 90% of the babies born to teens are illegitimate.) Legalized same-sex "civil unions" are here. Children's textbooks encouraging adolescent fornication are here. School hallways

splattered with teenage blood are here. Bans on using the name of Jesus at our graduations are here. Topless, feminist worship services on our college campuses are here. We need a revolution!

We live in a time of ethical madness and social uncertainty, a time when talk of a moral revolution should be everywhere. Instead, the best-selling "revolutionary" books are books about new diets. What does this say for us as a people? When we need to be talking about the call to die for the gospel, we are talking instead about the call to diet for good looks. What a sad indictment! And what does it say of our self-deception and lack of discipline when we are at one and the same time the world's best-read nation on diet and nutrition and the world's most obese? Even our pets are overweight. We need a revolution!

The United States boasts the highest percentage of professing evangelicals in the industrialized world, with more than 36% of Americans – meaning more than 90 million people – classified as born-again. Yet America has:

- The highest percentage of single-parent families in the industrialized world
- The highest abortion rate in the industrialized world
- The highest rate of sexually transmitted diseases in the industrialized world (the rates of syphilis and gonorrhea transmission are almost 500% higher than the highest rates in the other industrialized nations)
- The highest teenage birth rate in the industrialized world (by far!)
- The highest rate of teenage drug use in the industrialized world

We need a revolution!

Our society is deteriorating all around us and even non-believers sense that something is wrong. Why? It is because we, the people of God, the army of the Lord Jesus, the messengers of liberation, the ambassadors of reconciliation, have been sidetracked by the love of this world and distracted by the cares of this age. As a result, we have not changed this generation. This generation has changed us!

Rather than seasoning the world like salt and brightening the world like light, we now smell and taste like the world, and its darkness is snuffing out our lamps. Rather than setting captives free by the power of Jesus' blood, many of us are being ensnared and enslaved, making a mockery of that sacred blood. Rather than making disciples of sinners and teaching them the ways of God, many of us are being discipled by them, learning their ways, imitating their lifestyles, and conforming to their values.

In the last thirty years, whose standards have changed more, those of the church or those of the society? Who is looking like whom? A 1997 survey conducted by George Barna used 152 different items to compare the church and the world. He found virtually no difference between

the two. In fact, the divorce rate today among evangelicals is higher than the divorce rate among atheists. We need a revolution!

Communist educators visiting America have been shocked by the materialism and worldliness of many of our Christian young people, while Islamic leaders are appalled by the rampant sexual sin and shameless immodesty among many who profess Christ as Lord. The ideals of the unsaved are often more lofty than the ideals of the saved. We need a revolution!

Just consider how far things have fallen, despite decades of 24-hour gospel radio and TV, hundreds of Bible colleges and seminaries, thousands of Christian schools and bookstores, and churches and ministries too numerous to count. Thirty years ago, men having sex with men and women having sex with women was considered perverse. Now it is considered perverse – homophobic, hateful, mean-spirited, and bigoted – to call such behavior wrong. We need a revolution!

Thirty years ago, not even science fiction writers would have predicted that American companies would be making money off the sale of the skin and brains and limbs and spinal chords of aborted babies. Today, Congress will not even pass legislation to make this thriving practice illegal. We need a revolution!

In 1960, only 2.3% of percent of white women had children out of wedlock. By 1997, more than 25% -- a ten-fold increase! – were having children out of wedlock (despite millions being aborted before they ever left the womb). In the African American community, that number rose from 23% percent to more than 68%. We need a revolution!

In 1962, the Supreme Court outlawed organized, public prayer in our schools (without citing a single historic precedent to back its decision), and we complied with that ruling. Now, in the year 2000, the Court has banned *voluntary* public prayer in our schools. Will we comply with this ruling too? At what point do we say, "We must obey God rather than man"? At what point do we say, "Enough is enough"? We need a revolution!

On April 12, 2000, at Pearl River Central High School in Carriere, Mississippi, the Spirit of God fell upon the students attending a voluntary, pre-class assembly led by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. As students lined up fifty deep to confess their sins and get right with God and one another, the principal, Lolita Lee, herself a Christian, decided to let the meeting go on through the day. Civil libertarians were outraged, but, as *Time* magazine reported (June 5, 2000, p. 61), "The school received hundreds of congratulatory e-mails. 'Thank you for your courage,' wrote an Ohio man to Lee. 'You have done the equivalent of not moving to the back of the bus.'" Isn't it time we follow suit? If not now, when? What more needs to happen?

For more than two hundred years, the Bible was commonly used as a textbook in our schools, and generations of children learned the ABC's with a Scripture truth for each letter. But in 1963, the Supreme Court banned required reading of the Scriptures from our schools, and once again, we complied with the ruling. Why? By 1980, the Court had ordered the removal of the Ten Commandments from public view in our schools and by 1985, it outlawed benedictions or

invocations in formal school activities. Some lower courts even ruled against students praying out loud over their cafeteria meals. We need a revolution!

When the governing authorities seized the apostles and charged them not to speak in Jesus' name, Peter replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). And they kept speaking! As a result, they were arrested, whipped, and strictly ordered not to speak any more in Jesus' name. But, Scripture records, "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah" (Acts 5:41-42). Can we learn something from this?

Christians around the world today are severely persecuted because they refuse to obey oppressive, unjust laws. Many of them are model citizens in every way, obedient, respectful and peace loving. But when the government – or religious establishment – forbids them to read their Bibles, forbids them to baptize, forbids them to share their faith, forbids them to gather together, forbids them to make disciples, then they say with the apostles, "We must obey God rather than man." At what point does this apply to us?

Our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world have been discriminated against, deprived of their livelihoods, imprisoned, tortured, and killed, all because they refused to render to Caesar that which does not belong to Caesar. Yet we are afraid to take a stand for Jesus if it would threaten our income, or cost us a scholarship, or make us unpopular. Why this double standard? Why do they refuse to comply – even when threatened with imprisonment and death – while we willfully comply, even when there is no threat? We need a revolution!

When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were commanded to worship an idol or be subject to a fiery death, they refused to bow down (Daniel 3). But today, with no one commanding us, we freely worship the idols of our society, bowing down to the gods of unclean entertainment, sensual fashion, and unbridled materialism and greed. Our obsession with sports is idolatrous as well, to the point that many churches throughout the land make sure their Sunday services end in time for the afternoon football games, canceling their services entirely the night of the Super Bowl. We need a revolution!

When Daniel was told that an edict had been passed declaring that "anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to [the] king, shall be thrown into the lions' den . . . he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before" (Daniel 6:10-12). It's time that we follow his lead. Godly defiance spells triumph while retreat spells defeat. We need a revolution!

Year by year our religious freedoms have been taken away, while special rights and freedoms have been given to those whom the Bible calls "wicked" (see 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; in the Scriptures, homosexuality is classified along with adultery, fornication, theft, drunkenness, hatred, anger, greed, and hypocrisy, and all who practice such things are called "wicked"). Thus the Supreme Court ruled that a school full of Christians cannot choose to have prayer before a

school sporting event since it would offend and exclude the minority who don't want to pray. But when homosexuals introduce children's textbooks into our schools outlining in graphic detail the intricacies of gay sex, the offended majority is told to accept it. Right is now wrong and wrong is now right, and the will of the godless is imposed on the will of the godly. We need a revolution!

When a gay man is beaten to death because he is gay – this is a reprehensible, despicable act that every decent person should abhor – it causes a national uproar, with loud voices in the government calling for new legislation against hate crimes. And we *should* speak out against such deplorable crimes. But when Christians students are shot to death as they profess their faith in God, the government raises its voice to forbid the placing of memorial crosses on school property. The handwriting is on the wall. The strategy is clear. We need a revolution!

Teachers in our public schools can give condom demonstrations to our teens and use books like "Heather Had Two Mommies" to teach our kids to read, and we are required to support this with our own tax dollars. But let a teacher read from the Scriptures to a seeking, needy student, and that teacher could be out of a job – all because of the First Amendment's so-called separation of Church and State.

But that is not what the First Amendment intended. It simply stated that, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," meaning, first, that the government could not form a national denomination (like the Church of England of old) and require all Americans to be part of it, and second, that there would be religious freedom for all. As emphasized by Stephen Carter, professor of law at Yale University, "The wall of separation of church and state is not there to protect the state from the church; it is there to protect the church from the state. It stands as a divide to preserve religious freedom. And one needs to protect the church from the state because the latter will utilize its enormous powers to do what the state has always done – either subvert the religion or destroy it. If we continue our slide toward a state that breaches the wall of separation whenever it is convenient, then I worry about the great risk to religious freedom. In the end, such a breach could destroy our ability to form the communities of resistance that are crucial if we are going to have a chance to transform the nation."

Our forefathers wanted to ensure that the government would not be able to impose its will on the church. For more than one generation now, this has been totally reversed and stood on its head, and the price has been very high, with skyrocketing crime rates and plummeting rates of morality and literacy. And what has become of the First Amendment's guarantee of "the free exercise" of religion when the courts tell us that we cannot use religious symbols on public property, cannot post the Ten Commandments in government buildings, and cannot use the name of Jesus in public school events? We *have* lost our religious freedom. We need a revolution!

In 1999, a bill was brought before Congress that would have required churches and religious institutions to hire gays and lesbians if they were qualified for the job in question – despite their sexual preference. And the bill failed by only one vote! Even more distressing is that if the bill did pass, there was another bill ready to follow, calling for a ban on even speaking against a person's sexual preference. Such speech would be deemed hate speech, punishable by law, and

potentially meaning that a pastor simply expounding the Scriptures to his flock could be arrested. Yet this is the very thing our Founding Fathers were trying to protect us from. So much for the First Amendment and religious freedom! The fact that such laws could even be crafted for Congress proves that we have long since passed the breaking point – yet some Christian leaders would have felt obligated to obey these laws if they had passed. We need a revolution!

We have gone from debating a woman's "right to choose" to sucking out the brains of third trimester babies, from arguing about the medical definition of death to legalizing physician-assisted suicide, from needing metal detectors at airports to needing metal detectors at schools (and soon at houses of worship?), from tracking down absentee fathers to trying to figure out who the father is, from the outlawing of mandatory school prayer to the outlawing of voluntary school prayer. We need a revolution!

Without a holy, counterculture revolution, America could become a society where candid religious expression is outlawed, a society where it is almost impossible to keep our children free from the pollution of the world, a society teetering perilously close to the thunderous judgments of God. Such things have happened to other nations, and such things could happen to us.

But all is not lost! The gospel has changed societies before, and the gospel can change societies again. For countless centuries, India had the practice of widow-burning, where the widow of a deceased man was sometimes burned alive with her husband's corpse. This horrific practice was outlawed through the tireless efforts of missionary William Carey. Both slave-trading and unjust child-labor laws were abolished in Britain through the fearless work of the Christian political leader William Wilberforce. And this followed on the heels of England's transformation through the sacrificial labors of John Wesley and his Methodist followers, saving the nation from the anarchy and violence of the French Revolution. Around the world today, whole communities are being impacted by united prayer and evangelism, and here in our land, there is a rising momentum of concerted, city-wide prayer not seen for decades.

There are pockets of spiritual renewal throughout the country, and the tides of a radical youth revival are rapidly rising. Another Jesus people movement could be near, a heaven-sent revolution far greater than the worldwide Jesus movement of 1971-1975, when hundreds of thousands of hippies and radicals were swept into the kingdom. Even now, it is at the door. And not only will multitudes of lost sinners be truly saved, but multitudes of casual church goers will also be truly saved. Just think of what would happen if even one-quarter of America's professing believers got totally and uncompromisingly right with God – and then each of them touched just five or six other people. It would quickly reverse our nation's moral decline. Despite our perilous condition, it's still not too late!

If our nation could be changed for the worse in one decade – this is what happened in the 1960s, despite progress in Civil Rights and some other social areas – it can be changed for the better in one decade. If angry student protests on college campuses could help stop an international war (Vietnam), what could holy student "protests" on our campuses accomplish?

America can be impacted for the good, and as followers of Jesus, we are called to make that impact. We do it by walking in the light, as He is in the light; by calling the lost to turn back to

God in repentance; by preaching the gospel and making disciples; by proclaiming liberty to the captives; by pursuing righteousness in every area of public and private life; by acts of kindness, mercy, and compassion, overcoming evil with good; by prayer, fasting, and the power of God; by living holy lives and setting holy examples; by being a prophetic voice and a moral conscience to society; by Spirit-led community involvement and godly political action; by non-violent resistance of injustice and oppression.

What else should Christians do? Should not the presence of tens of millions of believers be felt in a nation? Should we not make a difference for God? Should we not be a force for spiritual and moral reformation? Should we not actively extend the kingdom of God? Should not the Great Commission leave tangible results in its wake?

This is our sacred moment, our solemn time for action. If we will unshackle ourselves from the love of this world – from our lusts, our addictions, our obsessions – and give ourselves wholly to the purposes of God, we can shake this nation. If we learn the principle that to save our lives is to lose our lives, while to lose our lives for the Lord is to save our lives, then we can really live. It's time we experience life!

The counterculture revolution began when people said, "Something is missing. Something is wrong. There must be something greater than this." And they were right! There must be something greater than eating and drinking, working and sleeping, *existing*. There must be something greater than the American dream. There must be something greater than simply getting a good education so that you can find a good job and have a good family so that your kids can get a good education and find a good job and have a good family so that their kids can get a good education . . . . Is this really it? Is this why God put us here on this earth? There is more!

Our goal is revival, not survival; the transformation of the human race, not the preservation of the human race. There is a divine purpose and destiny to our time here on earth. Even atheistic revolutionaries understand that there must be a higher purpose to life, and they give themselves for their cause, freely dying for their revolution so that their families can live in what they hope will be a better world. And they do this without the promise of heaven or eternal life. How much more should we give ourselves to the cause of our Master? How much more readily should we hear the call?

Nate Saint and Jim Elliot, martyred as missionaries in 1956, understood this well. They recognized that life was far more meaningful, far more rich, far more significant than most of us ever realize, even if we live to be 100 years old. As Nate Saint wrote, "People who do not know the Lord ask why in the world we waste our lives as missionaries. They forget they too are expending their lives and when the bubble has burst they will have nothing of eternal significance to show for the years they have wasted."

Yes, everyone's bubble will burst one day. The dust will return to dust and the spirit will return to God who gave it (see Ecc. 12:7). On that day, only one thing will matter: Did we fulfill the purpose of God? Did we make a lasting impact for Jesus? Did we leave behind a blessed legacy for the generation to come? All the silly little things that seemed so important to us during our

few years here on earth will seem utterly insignificant when they are viewed in the light of eternity.

How wise it was for Jim Elliot to write these now-famous words: "That man is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." And how wise it was for him to lift up this petition before the Lord as a young man in college: "God, I pray, Thee, light these idle sticks of my life and may I burn for Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine. I seek not a long life, but a full one, like you, Lord Jesus." Oh, that all of us would lead truly full lives!

Rachel Scott was not wrong when she wrote in her journal, "I have no more personal friends at school. But you know what? I am not going to apologize for speaking the name of Jesus. I am not going to justify my faith to them, and I am not going to hide the light that God has put into me. If I have to sacrifice everything, I will. I will take it. If my friends have to become my enemies for me to be with my best friend Jesus, then that's fine with me." Jesus is worth it to the end!

Fellow-soldiers, holy servants of the risen Lord, blood-bought disciples of the Master, heed the call. It's now or never, time to put up or shut up. Either we take a stand once and for all or forever we hang our heads in shame. History is eagerly anticipating our next move. This is the hour we have been waiting for. So, on with it – by life or by death. The revolution won't wait.

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