

THE
SEVEN
FAITH
TRIBES

*Who They Are, What They Believe,
and Why They Matter*

GEORGE
BARNA

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The Seven Faith Tribes: Who They Are, What They Believe, and Why They Matter

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You'd think after writing more than forty books I'd have figured out the process and this one would have been a breeze.

Well, I haven't and it wasn't.

I'm not complaining, but this book was a bear to write. First, there was the massive amount of data to plow through and try to make sense of. Then there were the divergent tracks of thought regarding what to do about these seven tribes whose worldviews and behavior are so different. Add to that the sociopolitical realities of the United States—you know, the fact that the country is dying a painful death and nobody seems to have much of a solution. And, of course, concurrent to working on the book, the other dimensions of my life stubbornly marched on—our family (three teenage girls), my company (can you say “declining economy”?), the church I lead (pray, people, pray!), and other responsibilities.

So as you can imagine, being able to churn out two hundred-plus pages of text could not have been done in isolation. I am eager to thank those who encouraged me and made this book possible.

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PREFACE

I AM PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN. This nation has an amazing profile of wonderful attributes and provides most of us with incredible experiences and opportunities. Having adopted three children from other less stable and fortunate nations, my wife and I are blessed to raise them here.

Like every nation in the world, the United States goes through cycles. During our up cycles, when things are going smoothly, we pay little attention to the long-term consequences of our choices and behaviors that could ultimately undermine the country's performance and potential. During the down cycles, we frantically rush to identify the problems that have brought about our decline and seek to repair the damage introduced by the careless or reckless choices of the recent past.

As we end the first decade of the third millennium, the United States is clearly immersed in a down cycle. The economy is unstable and in jeopardy. Our global relationships are strained. National security is compromised. Public education is ineffective. Marriage is on the rocks and on the precipice of being redefined, throwing families into turmoil. Natural disasters and an unpopular war are sucking vast amounts of money from our treasury. Old and new diseases are baffling our scientists and requiring record spending on health care. Traditional, Judeo-Christian morality is constantly challenged if not dismissed. Churches are struggling to remain relevant to people's lives. The political system is widely deemed to be broken.

But one of the greatest characteristics of America is its resilience. Consider all the challenges we have faced and overcome.

- There have been numerous wars in which Americans have sacrificed lives, money, and comfort, including

the Civil War, territorial hostilities such as the Spanish-American War or the War of 1812, a pair of World Wars, a series of regional battles (Vietnam, Gulf War), and the ongoing battle against terrorism. We have come out stronger as a nation after each conflict was resolved.

- We have endured a wide range of criminal activities, ranging from the iron grip of the underworld on our economy during the first quarter of the twentieth century to the continual sale and distribution of illegal drugs.
- America has been beset by homeland unrest, such as the race riots of the sixties and the marches and demonstrations mounted by the civil rights movement.
- The nation has dealt with leadership crises, such as the assassination of presidents (Lincoln, Kennedy) and social leaders (King), the resignation of a disgraced president (Nixon), the indictment of various government officials, economic plundering by greedy corporate executives (think Enron and the 2008 financial bailout), and the passing of revered statesmen.
- Health epidemics have claimed many lives and dollars. Since the turn of the twentieth century, the nation has battled epidemics such as the Spanish flu (which about one out of every four Americans had in 1918, killing more than a half-million people, and dropping the average life span by more than fifteen years!), tuberculosis, polio, Ebola, and HIV/AIDS.
- Natural disasters have taken a huge toll on the nation. Floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, and fires have robbed America of tens of thousands of lives and billions of dollars that have been invested in attempting to rebuild that which was lost.

Incredibly, the United States has always fought its way back to health. We have remained a forward-thinking country

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brought together by shared values, goals, and hope. Our track record of bouncing back from hardships is a powerful rebuff to those who claim that the end of our stability and influence is at hand. In fact, research has consistently shown that nations, organizations, and even individuals can stay vibrant and powerful only by constantly renewing themselves. It's the basis of the popular leadership adage "What got you to the top will not keep you on top."

But America's history of rebounding from severe challenges does not insulate us from the need to address the realities that have dragged us into our current down cycle. Nations can only rebound when they intentionally seek renewal. And such comebacks, historically, have demanded that Americans either restore or redefine significant dimensions of the prevailing culture.

This book is about the renewal that the United States needs at this moment in history. The global nature of our world, along with the intricacies introduced by technological advances, makes such a retooling complex. Our need for restoration is multi-dimensional, requiring an economic component, a health component, a political component, and a communications component. The thrust of this book, however, is that at this juncture the most important component of all—the one on which all others hinge—is the moral and spiritual nature of American society.

Granted, as a Christian evangelical, I believe that obedience to Jesus Christ is the ultimate solution to all of humankind's problems. But I do not believe that the next step required to return America to greatness is the aggressive evangelization of the nation's majority. Should the masses embrace Jesus as their Savior, the nature of our culture could be radically transformed—but as our past experience has shown, having tens of millions simply accept Christ and then live in ways that do not reflect the values Jesus taught gains us little ground. In fact, a strong argument can be made that it loses ground for the cause of Christ as well as the good of humanity.

So this is not a book that will attempt to convert you and

other readers to my particular theological or spiritual understanding. The motivation for writing this book is concern over the inadvertent self-destruction of America. As you come to understand more about the seven dominant faith tribes of the United States, you will see that many of the answers to America's dilemma relate to rebuilding our sense of shared moral values and resultant community. The future of America depends more upon the compassionate engagement with society by devoted Christians than upon their persistent insistence of their moral supremacy.

I have spent the past quarter century analyzing the complex interplay between faith and culture, drawing insight from several hundred national research studies that have involved interviews with more than a half-million people. Based on that experience I am convinced that Jesus was right when He said that love is the key. Sadly, Christians in America are not seen as loving, but we currently have a window of opportunity to demonstrate our love in the midst of the hard times, confusion, and cultural chaos facing the nation.

Achieving positive outcomes, though, requires that Christians work in harmony with non-Christians—and do so without a covert evangelistic agenda. The best evangelism is that which emanates from people's respect for our character and lifestyle. Unfortunately, the public perception of our character and lifestyle is one of the major reasons why our evangelistic efforts in the United States have been so ineffective in the past quarter century. Those who do not follow Christ watch those who do and see little reason to follow suit. So rather than seek to honor God by doing more of the same, which has not produced much fruit, it is time for us to take stock of reality and reinvent ourselves—as disciples of Christ who love the world, rather than argue the world, into God's presence.

I believe that the most appropriate and effective means of doing so is by allowing people to make their own spiritual choices, with devout Christians simply peacefully coexisting

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with those who choose to believe differently. That can happen only if we mutually agree to focus on the things that we have in common rather than get ugly over the things that make us distinct.

In other words, we need to stop competing, comparing, complaining, and condemning, and we must start cooperating, communicating, collaborating, and contributing. It's time to stop fighting and start loving. It's time to stop taking and start giving.

This is a critical moment in American history. Everything is changing—and some of the most salient aspects of our existence are not changing for the better. At the risk of sounding alarmist—I despise manipulative marketing and hysterical rhetoric—I am convinced that our nation is in a major crisis moment, a genuine emergency that demands an extraordinary response. Even our leading politicians have sensed the challenge, with the recent presidential election emphasizing the need for change, rightly asserting that we cannot afford to continue business as usual. However, even the candidates missed the point: we do not need change as much as we need transformation, less in terms of programs and structures than in values and relationships.

And I hope this book will become more than a report of national ills. Ultimately, it is a call to action because you are a vital part of the solution.

If you love and appreciate America—it truly has been the land of people who are free and courageous, and has enjoyed a prolonged and unprecedented era of liberty and justice—then take notice. Please do your best to read this book with an open mind and a willing heart. Suppress your urge to deny that what is said in these pages is true and significant.

As I have so often implored the leaders I speak to, when you hear the analysis of our situation, your task is not to like what has been presented, but to demonstrate responsible citizenship by strategically dealing with it.

So join me on a journey into the heart and soul of America

as we plow through our nation's twenty-fourth decade. This is a tenuous time that demands your full attention, best thinking, and wholehearted commitment.

And I pray that in the end, you will join me and others as we struggle to help renew the heart and soul of this country—our country. Time is of the essence. We must respond quickly and strategically.

But only you can make that choice. Choose wisely.

Yours for America's return to greatness,
GEORGE BARNA
Ventura, California
January 2009



CHAPTER
ONE

America Is on the Path to Self-Destruction

PERHAPS you have had the heart-wrenching experience of watching helplessly as a loved one—a parent, grandparent, sibling, or close friend—has wasted away due to a debilitating disease or accident. Maybe you have worked for a company that was once vibrant, profitable, and charging into the future—only to lose its way and go out of business.

The United States is in one of those moments. Unless we, the people, can rally to restore health to this once proud and mighty nation, we have a long and disturbing decline to look forward to.

Does it surprise you to hear that our greatest enemy is not al Qaeda or the oil cartel, but America itself? Such an audacious argument is possible, however, because we have steadily and incrementally abandoned what made us a great nation.

The elements that combined to establish the United States as perhaps the most unique and enviable nation in modern history can be restored—but only if we are wise enough, collectively, to focus on pursuing the good of society, not mere individual self-interest. It is this widespread drive to elevate self over community that has triggered our decline.

Some historians have examined the United States and concluded that it rose to prominence because of its world-class statesmen, foresighted Constitution, military might, abundant natural resources, and entrepreneurial spirit. Indisputably, such

factors have significantly contributed to the establishment of a great nation. But such elements, alone, could never sustain it—especially for two-hundred-plus years!

A democracy, such as that in the United States, achieves greatness and retains its strength on the basis of the values and beliefs that fuel people's choices. Every society adopts a body of principles that defines the national ethos and fosters its ability to withstand various challenges. Only those nations that have moral and spiritual depth, clarity of purpose and process, and nobility of heart and mind are able to persevere and triumph.¹

Achieving a state of internal equilibrium that generates forward movement is no small task. It has certainly eluded hundreds upon hundreds of nations and cultures over the course of time. A walk through world history underscores the difficulty of building and sustaining national greatness. Whether we examine the stories of ancient Rome and Greece, more modern examples such as the Soviet Union, Red China, the British Empire, and post-British India, or fascist experiments such as those in Germany and Italy, the outcomes are identical. After initial excitement and cooperation, each of these nations staggered into a dramatic decline, lacking the moral and spiritual fortitude to right themselves.

Among the lessons we learn from observing the demise of formidable countries and cultures are that a nation self-destructs when

- its people cannot hold a civil conversation over matters of disagreement because they are overly possessive of their values and beliefs and too unyielding of their preferences;
- public officials and cultural leaders insist upon positioning and posturing at the expense of their opponents after the exchange of competing ideas—even though those opponents are fellow citizens with an assumed similar interest in sustaining the health of the nation;

AMERICA IS ON THE PATH TO SELF-DESTRUCTION

- the public cannot agree on what constitutes goodness, morality, generosity, kindness, ethics, or beauty;
- a significant share of the electorate refuses to support legally elected officials who are faithfully upholding the Constitution and diligently pursuing the best interests of the nation;
- people lose respect for others and refuse to grant them the measure of dignity that every human being innately deserves;
- the population embraces the notion that citizens are accountable solely to themselves for their moral and ethical choices because there are no universal standards and moral leaders.

Do these descriptions strike fear in your heart? They should. Increasingly, these are attributes of twenty-first-century America. Such qualities have pushed the world's greatest democracy to the precipice of self-annihilation. No amount of global trade or technological innovation will compensate for the loss of common vision and values that are required to bolster a mighty nation.

The dominant lifestyle patterns of Americans are a direct outgrowth of our beliefs. Operating within the boundaries of our self-determined cultural parameters, Americans live in ways that are the natural and tangible applications of what we believe to be true, appropriate, right, and valuable.

Therefore, we may not be pleased, but we ought not be surprised by the cultural chaos and moral disintegration we see and experience every day. Such conditions are the inevitable outcomes of the choices we have made that are designed to satisfy our self-interest instead of our shared interests. For instance, when we abandon sound financial principles and take on personal debt in order to satisfy our desires for more material goods, we undermine society's best interests. When we allow our children to absorb countless hours of morally promiscuous media content rather than limit their exposure and insist on

better programming, we fail to protect our children and society's best interests. When we create a burgeoning industry of assisted living for our elderly relatives we don't have the time or inclination to care for, we redefine family and negate a fundamental strength of our society. When we donate less than 3 percent of our income to causes that enhance the quality and sustainability of life, our lack of generosity affects the future of our society. When we permit the blogosphere to become a rat hole of deceit, rudeness, and visual garbage, we forfeit part of the soul of our culture. When we allow "no fault" divorce to become the law of the land, as if nobody had any responsibilities in the demise of a marriage, we foster the demise of our society. When we choose to place our children in day care and prekindergarten programs for more hours than we share with them, we have made a definitive statement about what matters in our world.

Do we need to continue citing examples? Realize that all of those choices, and hundreds of others, reflect our true beliefs—not necessarily the beliefs to which we give lip service, but those to which we give behavioral support. And as we experience the hardships of a culture in transition from strength to weakness, we are merely reaping the harvest of our choices.

What has redirected us from what could be a pleasant and stable existence to one that produces widespread stress and flirts with the edge of disaster from day to day?

INSTITUTIONAL RECALIBRATION

A country as large and complex as the United States relies upon the development of various institutions to help make sense of reality and maintain a semblance of order and purpose. For many decades, our institutions served us well. They operated in synchronization, helping to keep balance in our society while advancing our common ends.

But during the past half century many of our pivotal institu-

tions have reeled from the effects of dramatic change. Briefly, consider the following.

- The family unit has always been the fundamental building block of American society. But the family has been severely challenged by divorce (the United States has the highest divorce rate in the developed world); cohabitation (resulting in a decline in marriage, a rise in divorce, extramarital sexual episodes, extensive physical abuse, and heightened numbers of births outside of marriage); abortions; increasing numbers of unwed mothers; and challenges to the very definition of family and marriage brought about by the demands of the homosexual population and the involvement of activist judges.
- The Christian church has been a cornerstone of American society. But research shows that churches have very limited impact on people's lives these days.² The loss of influence can be attributed to the confluence of many factors. These include the erosion of public confidence due to moral crises (e.g., sex scandals among Catholic priests, financial failings among TV preachers); the paucity of vision-driven leadership; growing doubts about the veracity and reliability of the Bible; a nearly universal reliance upon vacuous indicators of ministry impact (i.e., attendance, fundraising, breadth of programs, number of employees, size of buildings and facilities); ministry methods and models that hinder effective learning and interpersonal connections; innocuous and irregular calls to action; and counterproductive competition among churches as well as parachurch ministries. Fewer and fewer Americans think of themselves as members of a church-based faith community, as followers of a specific deity or faith, or as fully committed to being models of the faith they embrace.

- Public schools have transitioned from training children to possess good character and strong academic skills to producing young people who score well on standardized achievement tests and thereby satisfy government funding criteria. In the process, we have been exposed to values-free education, values-clarification training, and other educational approaches that promote a group of divergent worldviews as if they all possessed equal merit. In the meantime, our students have lost out on learning how to communicate effectively, and they consistently trail students from other countries in academic fundamentals such as reading, writing, mathematics, and science.
- Government agencies have facilitated the acceleration of cultural dissonance. An example is the values-neutral admittance of millions of immigrants. Historically, immigration has been one of the greatest reflections of the openness of America to embrace and work alongside people who share the fundamental ideals of our democracy and are eager to assimilate into the dominant American culture. Over the past quarter century, however, a larger share of the immigrants seeking to make the United States their homeland has come ashore with a different agenda: living a more comfortable and secure life without having to surrender their native culture (e.g., language, values, beliefs, customs, relationships, or behaviors). Rather than adopting the fundamentals that made America strong as part of their assimilation and naturalization process, growing numbers of them expect America to accept their desire to retain that which they personally feel most comfortable with, even though it is at odds with the mainstream experience that produced the nation to which they were attracted.³

Our institutions have been further challenged by other cultural realities. For instance, digital technology—computers, mobile phones, the Internet, digital cameras, video recorders, and the like—has created an opinionated population that has become more narrow-minded and isolated even in the midst of an avalanche of information and relational connections.⁴ That same technology has fostered an unprecedented degree of global awareness and interactivity within generations, while at the same time birthing new forms of discrimination and marginalization. Even the nation's economic transformation, moving from a world-class manufacturing nation to a country that consumes imported products and demands personal services, has altered our self-perceptions, national agenda, and global role.

ENTER THE NEW VALUES

The weakening of our institutions has freed the public to seize upon a revised assortment of values. An examination of the entire cluster gives a pretty sobering perspective on the new American mentality. As you will quickly realize, most of the elements in the emerging values set lead to the new focal point for America: self.

Consider the values transitions described below, along with the shifts in behavior that accompany the newly embraced perspectives, and ask yourself if any of them ring true.

From voluntary accountability to belligerent autonomy

Freedom traditionally implied that we were responsible to those whom we placed in authority—although we still had abundant opportunities to express our views and concerns, and to replace those whose leadership failed to live up to our expectations. In recent years, however, our perspectives on authority and accountability have changed to the point where many of us consider ourselves to be free agents, responsible only to ourselves. We resent others—individuals, family, public officials, organizations,

society—who place restrictions and limitations upon us, no matter how reasonable or necessary they may be. When people agree to be held accountable these days, such interaction is not so much about being held to predetermined standards as it is about providing explanations and justifications for the behavior in question, in order to produce absolution. Anyone who gets in the way of our autonomy runs the risk of being called out for such audacity and being cited for offenses such as censorship, fundamentalism, prudishness, narrow-mindedness, or intolerance.

From responsibilities to rights

From the earliest days of the republic, our nation's leaders accepted the notion that the freedom we fought for in the establishment of the nation could only be maintained if people were willing to accept the responsibilities and duties required to extend such freedom. Consequently, for many decades Americans have carried out the obligations of good citizens: obeying the law, supporting social institutions and leaders, mutually sacrificing, committing to the common good, exercising personal virtue and morality, and the like. To advance freedom, the health of the society must supersede the desires of the individual. But things have changed dramatically. People's concern these days is ensuring that they receive the benefits of the rights they perceive to be theirs. Standing in the way of such rights brings on threats of legal action; a lawsuit is now the default response to conditions that limit one's experiences. Ensuring the exercise of personal rights is the primary concern; exercising and protecting community rights are of secondary consideration.

From respect and dignity to incivility and arrogance

Historically, we have maintained that every person is worthy of respect and dignity. In contrast, increasing numbers of Americans these days are more likely to treat people with suspicion, indifference, or impatience. Americans have long had an international reputation for rudeness, but our levels of impolite behavior have escalated substantially in recent years. Beyond discourtesy, we

have become a society that is frequently and quickly critical of others. Rather than searching for the goodness in people, we are quick to point out their flaws and weaknesses. We have little patience with those who fail to live up to our expectations, and we have no hesitation in expressing our disapproval, regardless of the circumstances.

From discernment to tolerance

One of the most undesirable labels in our society is that of being judgmental. To avoid that critique, we have moved to the opposite extreme, allowing people to do whatever they please, as long as their choices do not put us directly in harm's way. In essence, we have abandoned discernment in favor of a self-protective permissiveness. This practice, of course, pushes us to the brink of anarchy, made all the more possible by our adoption of belligerent autonomy.

From pride in production to the joy of consumption

For decades, American citizens derived great satisfaction from the fruit of their labors and extolled the virtues of productivity. However, the source of pride now is in what we own or lease—the material goods that define our station in life and reflect our capacity to consume. In the past, a job was something that allowed us to add value to society and to participate in the work of a unified team. Now, growing numbers of people perceive their job to be a necessary evil, little more than a means to the end of acquiring the tangible items that may bring pleasure or prestige. As a result, the quality of our work efforts is seen as being less important than the rewards generated by those efforts. The hallowed concept of excellence has been left in the dust in our haste to embrace “adequacy” as the new standard for performance.

From contribution and sacrifice to comfort and fulfillment

Most Americans now perceive the ultimate purpose of life to be enjoying a comfortable lifestyle while possessing a positive self-image and a sense of fulfillment. The nature of one's contribution

to society—i.e., what we do to advance the good of society—is thought of as a bonus, if any such contribution is made at all. People rarely consider it necessary—or even the mark of a good citizen—to sacrifice personal benefits or resources for the good of their community or nation, whether that is practiced through political involvement, environmentalism, financial responsibility, child-rearing practices, or other means. Unless such practices produce personal comfort and fulfillment, they are considered strictly optional behavior.

From trust to skepticism

Knowing that truth is not always considered a virtue and that truth is now widely assumed to be whatever the speaker defines it to be—regardless of the facts—Americans are more cautious and caustic these days. What used to be called healthy skepticism has now blossomed into full-blown doubt. Incapable of placing complete confidence in what we are told, we are reticent to trust others. Their motives (selfish) and words (misleading) must now be run through a filter that prevents us from taking things at face value, resulting in constant tension about who and what to believe. Rather than giving someone the benefit of the doubt, the default position is to reserve our right to remain skeptical. That same degree of mistrust has even diminished our willingness to believe religious teachings, whether from “reliable sources” such as the Bible or from other authorities.

From intellect and character to fame and image

Who were the heroes in years past? Often they were people whose intellect and commitment to improving the human condition produced value for our society: scientists, engineers, theorists, doctors, professors, and the like. Those people introduced life-changing innovations and solutions to our culture. They were joined in the winner’s circle by parents, who were celebrated for their commitment to raising moral children and honorable citizens whose firm foundations of goodness would ensure the strength of the nation for years to come. Today these heroes have

been unceremoniously replaced by a revolving door of simple-minded celebrities whose partying exploits, marital failures, materialistic excesses, relational squabbles, and fashion faux pas capture the attention of the tabloids and paparazzi.

We have traded substance for superficiality, intelligence for style, and hard work for merely showing up at hip locations. Celebrities hire image consultants to ensure that the appeal of their public personae extends their fifteen minutes of fame. They influence the gullible public to pursue unreasonable body shapes and expensive clothing, use incorrect or inappropriate language, and embrace dubious ideas about life. In the process, edginess, extravagance, and national recognition have trumped the values of character and intelligence.

From moral absolutes to moral relativism

Apparently, when Jesus Christ told people to “let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No,’”⁵ that was not what He really meant—at least, according to contemporary Americans. During the past quarter century there has been a massive shift away from the acceptance of moral absolutes (i.e., things are right or wrong, regardless of the situation) to acceptance of moral relativism (i.e., there are no absolute moral standards, so everything depends on what we each decide is right or wrong based on our own personal convictions and current situations). This has affected judicial decisions, government policies, business strategies, personal relationships, financial dealings—in short, everything imaginable. There are fewer and fewer situations in which conventional morality prevails. Life is now more anxiety ridden because there is no predictability or consistency regarding right and wrong.

Remember, we act out what we believe. Values form the core of our actionable perspectives. The evolution of American society is thus a reflection of this morphing of our values, changing everything about what we believe to be acceptable, valuable, desirable, and even holy.

THE NEW GOALS

This movement in our thinking and behavior has even affected our aspirations. As we dream of the future we will pursue, we've adopted a new set of life goals.

As recently as the 1970s, Americans were dedicated to becoming good citizens; raising children with proper character and morals; knowing and living according to accepted moral truths; experiencing and appreciating beauty in art and nature; living with integrity; supporting family members in all dimensions of life; and performing all tasks and responsibilities with excellence. The notion of living the good life centered on fitting into one's world as a productive, reliable member of a caring society.⁶

If that profile seems anachronistic to you, it's because our notion of the good life received a serious makeover. The dominant goals of Americans these days are achieving a comfortable lifestyle; having as many exciting or unique experiences as possible; feeling good about oneself; having ample options from which to choose in all dimensions of life; being able to participate in everything that is personally meaningful or appealing; developing and maintaining a positive public image; and avoiding pain or sacrifice.

You don't need an advanced degree to notice that the focus of our goals has taken a 180-degree turn. We are less interested in the good of society than in the promotion and protection of self. We are not as committed to making a societal contribution as we are to ensuring personal comfort and satisfaction. We would like to do well at our assigned or necessary tasks, but we are more committed to having great experiences and adventures than to fulfilling our responsibilities with certifiable excellence.

If you doubt the reality of this shift, talk to anyone who has owned a business for the past thirty years about the change in the dedication and quality standards of the workforce. Or you could speak to veteran teachers about the motivations of students. Try questioning marriage counselors about the nature of the conversations they have with adults whose marriages are

on the rocks. Professionals whose work gives them insight into the nature of our culture will confirm the data that describe the reshaping of the mind and heart of America.

Another vantage point regarding who we have become—and are still becoming—is offered by people outside of the American experience. Sometimes we are too close to a situation to see it clearly; more objective perceptions are best provided by observers who are more physically removed from the situation. That's exactly what is provided by global surveys of attitudes. Several recent international research projects provided an outsider's view of American society. While the views of such people include various biases and assumptions—e.g., predispositions about Americans, our government, and our cultural preferences, all filtered through the survey respondent's own predispositions and preferences—the perceived decline in America's character comes through loud and clear. Europeans, South Americans, Asians, and Africans generally see us as insensitive, materialistic, self-absorbed, and superficially religious.⁷

THE WORLDVIEW REVOLUTION

Certainly, we have changed in meaningful ways. But no cultural transformation happens in a vacuum, and it is implausible that a national redefinition of this magnitude could have happened without some foundations being monumentally altered. In this case, the floodgates of our cultural transformation were pried open by our willingness to entertain—and eventually to adopt—alternative worldviews.

A worldview is simply the mental and emotional filter that each person embraces and uses to make sense of and respond to the world. Everyone has a worldview. Few have thought much about it or where it comes from, and even fewer can articulate the contents of their own worldview. But every person's life is a result of his or her worldview. And every nation's character is a product of the cumulative worldviews possessed and incarnated by its people.

In the 1950s and earlier, the dominant worldview in the United States might be characterized as Judeo-Christian. Most of the moral standards of the nation were based on Judeo-Christian principles regarding matters such as purpose, fairness, justice, value, goodness, beauty, relationships, family, generosity, evil, authority, compassion, and faith. While our nation has always had a multitude of faith groups and life philosophies resident within its shores, the past forty years in particular have seen the influx and acceptance of a variety of worldviews that are at odds with the historical foundations on which the country was built.

Because our worldviews direct our words and actions, this national transformation of our worldviews has changed life as we know it. Or, more correctly, knew it.

With the social upheaval that was ushered in during the sixties, everything was up for grabs—including the national sense of morality, spirituality, values, traditions, and lifestyle habits. To this day we are still experimenting and tinkering with our worldview: it remains a work in progress. But enough change has occurred that we can now see—and every day we encounter—the implications of this seismic shift in how we experience, interpret, and react to our world.

The bottom line is simply this: the substitution of alternative worldviews for the traditional Judeo-Christian version is responsible for America incrementally destroying itself. Gone are the days in which consensus was respected or personal views were maintained within the context of a different dominant worldview. Increasingly, we demand that the world embrace the worldview *we* possess or we respond in hostile ways: public criticism, nasty blogs and text messages, lawsuits, angry letters to public officials or professional associations, confrontational letters to the editor, damage to property, or other means of retaliation.

The element that facilitated a stable, consensual worldview in the past was the consistency of the religious beliefs of Americans. For more than two centuries, Americans generally held to some form of a Judeo-Christian perspective. Those who did not share

such a perspective understood that while they could hold their divergent worldviews, theirs would remain a respected minority view. There was a recognized cultural accommodation in which the majority and minority allowed each other their space and respective social and political standing.

But even though four out of five Americans still consider themselves to be Christians, the prevailing accommodation has been scrapped as the proponents of each alternative worldview have battled for supremacy. Our long-held worldview moorings have been assaulted and have lost ground to alternative perspectives. The problem is not that a general lack of faith or absence of personal theology has undermined the Judeo-Christian worldview. The underlying issue is that those who normally would have defended and advanced the predominant worldview have succumbed to the lure of alternative perspectives that promise greater freedom and fewer restrictions.

This nation's spiritual beliefs are constantly evolving and morphing. At this moment in time, the fundamental beliefs on which the nation was founded are no longer the central tenets on which our country operates.⁸ As we will see in subsequent chapters, basic ideals about God have been radically challenged, to the point where people no longer know what to believe and are warned not to speak in public about "Him/Her/Them/It." The idea of something being sacred—whether it be in reference to books (e.g., the Bible, Koran, Book of Mormon), beings (e.g., Jesus, Buddha), or places (e.g., Jerusalem, Mecca)—has been reduced from the extraordinary to the ordinary. The importance of following through on spiritual commitments, whether to God or to one's faith community, typically takes a backseat to other, more pressing commitments.

THE FAITH MIX: SEVEN TRIBES

To get a good understanding of the existing and evolving worldview mosaic, we must take a serious look at the dominant

spiritual groups in America. I will refer to these as our faith tribes, based on the fact that the religious history of most Americans—Christians, Jews, Muslims, and even Mormons—describes the various segments of each faith as tribes. A tribe, after all, is a group of people who are united by common beliefs, customs, and traditions; who follow a common leader; and who consider themselves to be a community based on these shared realities.

Religious beliefs and convictions provide the central spectrum of ideas from which our worldview is developed. Getting inside the mind and heart of the major faith tribes will provide the necessary insight into how our existing worldviews came about, why we cling to them, and where they are headed.

Based on extensive segmentation analysis of the spiritual beliefs and practices of more than thirty thousand U.S. adults whom The Barna Group interviewed, we concluded that the United States is home to more than two hundred different religious faiths and denominations but is dominated by seven faith tribes. Naturally, each tribe has distinct segments within it that deviate from the dominant ways of thinking and acting, but these tribes, by and large, are cohesive masses. They range in size from several million to tens of millions of people.

A large majority of Americans are Casual Christians. These are people who profess to be Christian but are notably lax in their beliefs and practices. Casuals represent two-thirds of all American adults. There are variations within this sizable spiritual class, but overall the segment is surprisingly consistent in numerous dimensions of spirituality and in their attitudes and lifestyle choices.

Their counterpart are the Captive Christians—those whose consistently biblical beliefs and Christlike behavior validate their commitment to being followers of Christ. Captives constitute one-sixth of the adult population. They are characterized by a deeper, more intentional devotion to the principles and practices they embrace from the Bible. They are the segment within Christianity that is most likely to be caricatured by the media

and by politicians, two groups that greatly misunderstand the motivations and objectives of Captives.

The rest of the nation is divided into five other faith tribes. Jewish people make up roughly 2 percent of the adult public. The percentage of Mormons is slightly smaller than that, though its adherents are strikingly unified in their ideology and practice. Pantheists—a combination of adherents to Eastern religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, etc.), along with those who have adopted the American hybrid we think of as New Age beliefs—are also slightly less than 2 percent of the public. Muslims, while growing in number, make up considerably less than one percent of the American population, but they represent a significant, if controversial, point of view on the faith spectrum. That leaves the largest of the non-Christian tribes: the Skeptics. These folks, nearly 11 percent strong, are atheists or agnostics. They are, in essence, religiously irreligious.

We will explore each of these tribes in relation to key dimensions—demographics, religious beliefs and behaviors, self-image, attitudes and perceptions, lifestyle routines, morals, family realities, and political perspectives and patterns. These insights will enable us to delve into the various worldviews that Americans possess and then discuss how we can restore health to our republic. The required solutions are not political or economic. We need spiritual wisdom backed by a mutual commitment to live up to the chief aims of our respective faith perspectives.

BEYOND THE BEHEMOTH

You may be wondering what there is to talk about if one tribe alone—the Casual Christians—represents two out of every three Americans. By dwarfing all other tribes, isn't a book about the effect of faith in America really just a book about the Casuals?

Yes and no.

By sheer weight of numbers, the Casuals define the status quo. This group is, in a very real sense, the eight-hundred-pound

gorilla that establishes the standards of the moral and spiritual life of the United States. In every respect, until something happens to intentionally alter matters, theirs is the default condition for the country.

To use a more familiar analogy, the Casuals are akin to the place of the Caucasian population in the United States. Each currently represents two-thirds of the population. Both groups are so numerous and familiar to everyone that they largely go unnoticed, but their significance is felt every moment of every day, whether we are conscious of it or not.

But in keeping with this analogy, recognize that they also represent a moving target for the smaller segments whose demographics, dreams, and desires are different from those of the behemoth. African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, and other ethnic and racial populations may be dwarfed by the Caucasian constituency, but they are never rendered irrelevant or powerless simply by being outnumbered. They simply have to try harder to get recognition, power, and favor in a country where they are minorities. And as our history shows, that is difficult but doable.

Is it truly possible for tribes that represent as little as one half of one percent of this massive country (i.e., Muslims) to overcome the standing of the group that encompasses 66 percent of the public? Absolutely! There are four significant reasons why small tribes have the potential to do so.

First, in a true democracy, everyone has a say. Sometimes even the tiniest voice speaks truths that others resonate with. With the prolific access to vehicles of communication in this country, and given the energetic defense of the freedom to express one's views, every tribe has the opportunity to make its case.

Second, influence is often magnified through dynamic partnerships in which multiple minor players coordinate their efforts to exert impact that transcends their numbers. The mosaic of our population is increasingly characterized by connections across lines—racial, political, economic, religious, and geographic. It is

common these days to see coalitions of groups that have never before worked together to break through preexisting barriers to jointly pursue outcomes that are important to all of them.

Third, one of the most powerful ways of influencing today's population is through modeling. People learn by example. Habits and predispositions are challenged by example. Trends are ignited by a relative handful of people who do something that grabs attention and generates interest.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, never underestimate the power of passion. Groups pursuing outcomes that they are willing to fight for with every resource they can muster often generate results far beyond the expectations of those who observe their battle with indifference or amusement.

For example, if it were up to the white majority during the middle of the last century, the African American community would still be living in segregated neighborhoods and dealing with a network of isolated social institutions, working for substandard pay in untenable conditions. During the civil rights movement of the sixties and seventies, the African American population was a mere one out of every ten Americans. In terms of raw numbers, they had little hope of changing the mores of this nation.

But because the United States is a democracy whose Constitution promises all people specific rights that give them a place at the table and the right to pursue their dreams, African Americans had a chance to change the larger social context. Through the strategic deployment of various legal means—such as peaceful demonstrations, political lobbying, media influence, boycotts, and prayer—they were able to make their case to the public and to work through the political system. They created viable partnerships with a broad coalition of external groups—churches, other minority populations, various political groups, and associations—to advance their cause. And they were able to defeat overwhelming odds, and endure great injustices en route, to gain ground. African Americans stood firmly behind their

leaders and refused to back down, even when it meant physical pain or other personal hardships. Their unflagging passion, directed by brilliant leaders and channeled through the sacrificial participation of a relative handful of African American people, enabled them to rewrite the well-established norms of a global superpower.

A current example of how a minuscule group can have a big voice in a cacophonous society is the experience of the gay community. Although gay people are no more than 3 percent to 5 percent of the adult population, the nation is in tumult over their demands for marriage rights and other changes in policies that affect their lives. Taking a page from the playbook of the civil rights movement, the gay population has used the freedoms and rights provided by the Constitution to its advantage, enabling its members to get the public's attention and persuade an increasingly sympathetic society to see things their way. Tens of millions of Americans who will never engage in or even consider embracing homosexual behaviors are nevertheless leaning toward or fully supportive of an array of new laws and policies that will satisfy the desires of the gay movement.

Sometimes the giant is vulnerable to the midget. The giant takes such great comfort in its size that it ignores or dismisses things that will eventually return to haunt it. And sometimes the same magnitude that has given the giant reason for comfort becomes the very attribute that disables the behemoth from responding in a timely, strategic, or otherwise effective manner.

THE ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

An inescapable fact of our society is that the vast majority of Americans are connected to Christianity to some degree. And yet, as further testimony to the fact that size is not everything, one of the disturbing conditions in present-day America is that no tribe—not even the Casual or Captive Christians—is allowed to freely pursue its faith without undue interference.

Like all faith tribes, Christian-based tribes must satisfy certain cultural requirements in order to live in a Christlike manner, which is their core spiritual mandate. Among those are to consistently worship their God, to obey His commands as outlined in the Bible, to serve God and people in meaningful ways, and to generously give and receive love. The nation's democracy was supposed to provide such opportunities to the Christians who sacrificed so much to establish the United States. The desire to experience such freedoms was one of the precipitating motivations for establishing independence from British rule.

Some readers will be surprised to hear that the Christian-based tribes in the United States do not currently have those freedoms and abilities. Similarly, in a country that is predicated upon delivering specified rights and their attendant freedoms to all of its citizens, other faith tribes suffer the indignity and injustice of being prevented from exercising those rights as their faith would lead them to.

If you doubt this, please read the biology textbooks used in many government-funded (i.e., public) schools, which make no bones about critiquing Christianity, eliminating faith-based views in favor of science-based explanations, or promoting "safe sex" rather than the biblical alternative of sexual abstinence. Consider the implications of laws that diminish the value of human life or redefine the biblical standard of marriage. Take note of government threats to, or restrictions on, families that homeschool their children for moral or religious reasons. Think about the implication of laws requiring Christian ministries to hire employees who reject their beliefs or who practice lifestyles that visibly and unapologetically conflict with the moral convictions of the ministry. Talk to Christian graduate students around the nation and discover how many of them jeopardize their advanced degrees or scholarly careers if they admit to believing in creationism. How many high school graduation speeches were altered this year by laws preventing students from incorporating

their religious beliefs into their remarks? In certain states, Bibles are not allowed in the public school classroom.

These are but a handful of the incendiary examples of how the religious freedoms of just one of the tribes are trampled in the alleged interest of freedom. How we handle these issues has consistently divided the tribes within our country.

NOT SEEKING A THEOCRACY

Please do not miss where I'm headed with this argument. America was not meant to be a theocracy—that is, ruled by a given religious tribe. The dominant spiritual classes in our society should neither possess nor expect to have the final say on all legal and moral matters. In fact, our research consistently shows that Christians in America appreciate their neighbors who belong to other faith tribes; they simply do not want their own ability to serve their God limited by the discomfort or desires of those other tribes any more than the minority tribes want their freedoms to be limited or negated by the larger tribal groups.

In an odd way we have reached a stalemate. Significantly, our research indicates that the United States is presently a nation in which

- none of our faith tribes feel they are able to freely practice their faith without breaking laws or upsetting members of other tribes;
- each tribe feels that the other tribes do not understand what their faith is about and that they cannot get other tribes to give them a fair hearing;
- the freedoms of tribes to practice their faith and hold their particular beliefs are being eliminated by whichever tribe outmaneuvers the others within the political and legal arenas;
- tribal leadership has become more about political prowess exercised in the public domain than about the

provision of spiritual and moral guidance within the confines of the tribe;

- people's inability to experience the religious freedom guaranteed under the Constitution is causing them to feel as if the nation is losing its heart and soul, and along with that, its greatness.

The problem facing America is not the presence of divergent faith tribes. For many years, the United States has had a diverse spiritual palette—and has been one of the most revered and successful nations on earth because of it. The experience of other nations further confirms that being home to multiple faith tribes is not necessarily an issue. In fact, one could make a compelling argument that it is healthy to have a variety of faith perspectives resident in the same marketplace of ideas and lifestyles. Faith tribes need not be adversarial; religious conflict is not so much an inevitable product of the differing principles of each tribe as it is a reflection of other values and factors driving the mother culture.

As we witness the deterioration of America, we have to ask the tough questions regarding why a once proud, stable, mighty country is now succumbing to shrill internecine battles over matters that could be creatively and amicably resolved. Based on an extensive examination of data and other cultural information, I'd like to offer a perspective for your consideration.

WORLDVIEWS AND VALUES

Everyone has some type of religious faith. That faith shapes our worldviews. Those worldviews dictate the values we embrace. These values influence the choices we make and the lives we lead.

The United States is a land in which there are competing worldviews and values, which produce diverse lifestyles and expectations. The breadth of worldviews and values that reside within the

nation are partly responsible for the variety that has enabled the country to continue to play a major role on the world stage.

But that variety can sometimes create a gulf between what makes for a strong and cohesive nation and one that is satisfied simply to feel good in the moment. America is faced with this dilemma today: should we demonstrate restraint and invest in cross-tribal relationships in order to remain a strong and vibrant nation over the long run, or should we give in to our desire to take the road that demands less now but will likely lead to our demise in the future?

Human history shows that sometimes we forget that what is possible and what is fruitful are two different things. America appears to be at a juncture in history where we have to clarify the shared values that are advantageous and the divergent viewpoints that could ultimately harm the nation.

A WORD ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This book addresses what some of my friends have characterized as a “big idea.” I want you to know that it is not simply a thought that has germinated in my mind for a while before I decided to commit it to paper. The concepts presented in these pages were borne from more than one million dollars’ worth of research.

For the past quarter century, I have been studying the role of faith in American society. From the nationwide surveys investigating people’s faith that my company regularly conducts with representative samples of one thousand or more adults, I have developed an extensive sense of what makes Americans tick. Each of our surveys includes a standard battery of theolographic questions—inquiries regarding what they believe, how they practice their faith, the role of faith, how it becomes integrated into their daily experience, and so forth.

For this book, I combined the results from a number of surveys, using the common theolographic questions as the foundation through which to filter a very wide range of attitudes, behaviors,

values, and perceptions expressed in the various surveys. In total, I had the opportunity to slice and dice the population in relation to more than 500 different measurement criteria (576 distinct variables, to be exact). Using various statistical techniques, I found that Americans' faith can be categorized into a series of segments, which we will refer to as the seven tribes. And it is on the basis of the information related to each tribe that I will be describing what is happening in our society today. **Please note that this is not a book of personal opinions but a compilation of thousands of opinions culled from the people being profiled.** I realize that not every member of any tribe thinks or behaves in exactly the same way. However, by providing an overview of each faith group, I believe we can come to a better understanding of what unites us. (For more information about the procedures used, read appendix 4, which describes our research methodology.)

ROAD MAP

Having made the argument that America is on a crash course for self-destruction, we can either sit back and watch, complicit in the collapse, or we can strategically attempt to revitalize the nation. Toward the latter course of action, let's take a strategic journey into the following areas.

Stage one

Identify and study the faith tribes: who they are, what they believe, how they live, and what they are passionate about. From this exploration we will be able to better identify and understand the core values that drive the nation—and may serve as the route to a better future.

Stage two

Identify and examine the prevalent worldviews that America's faith tribes embrace and determine what each body of beliefs and convictions adds to the American condition. Given our philosophical leanings, we can then identify common values and

principles that satisfy the views of the seven tribes. Acknowledging and pursuing those shared values can facilitate the healing and restoration of our nation. The necessary dialogue that must occur could revolve around our shared commitment to these ideals.

Stage three

Explore the reasons behind the failure of American leaders and institutions—political, religious, and family—to unite the nation around a set of shared values and goals. Consider why they've been unable to maintain a healthy and robust dialogue around the critical dimensions of modern life. Beyond such analysis, though, we will consider action steps that each of those critical entities could take to move America toward restoration.

Stage four

Americans are fighting wars on many fronts: financial, moral, religious, educational, military, familial, and so forth. We will end this journey with a challenge to adopt a common view of where we, as a nation, can go in unison. Accepting and mastering the challenge will then allow us to become better world citizens. The United States will face continued crises and challenges, but if the people of this republic can learn to share a set of values and goals that resonate with our most deeply held convictions, we will be better equipped to handle the trials and exploit the opportunities that arise.

THERE IS NO TIME TO LOSE

Hundreds of once-great societies have risen and collapsed in the face of similar challenges. From history, we can learn how to sidestep the tribulations that led to their demise. It is a multifaceted challenge that requires everyone, not just our best and our brightest, to participate in the solution. Greatness never comes by the government or charismatic leaders coercing the people to get in line. Cultural endurance is not the result of endless

experimentation and self-indulgence. A satisfied citizenry does not emerge from being pampered and spared the hard work of investing in and sustaining democratic principles and practices.

If the United States is to enter its fourth century as a strong and enduring nation, it must embrace and embody the selfless values that carried the country through its first two-plus centuries of freedom and fulfillment. We are indeed a resilient nation, but if we insist on shedding communal sensibilities in favor of personal liberty and self-satisfaction, we will experience an agonizing demise. If, however, we remember that there is a greater good, indeed a higher calling, that we can collectively achieve, we can effectively contribute to making our nation and the entire world a better place.

Faith, shared values, compassionate and empathetic dialogue, visionary leadership, healthy families—these are the components of restoration that must be harnessed for the common good. We have the capacity. Will we use it?

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