

BOOK REVIEW

Indivisible: Restoring Faith, Family and Freedom Before It's Too Late. By James Robison and Jay W. Richards. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012. 362 pp. \$21.99. ISBN: 978-1-58617-726-3.

Before the close of the last century, there were two books – better than any others in my view – which captured the essence of the contemporary American cultural crisis. They were Robert Bork's *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (1996) and William Bennett's *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators: American Society at the End of the 20th Century* (1999). Both were the work of well-known public figures, the first a distinguished jurist and rejected Supreme Court nominee and the second a former high ranking government official and *New York Times* best-selling author. With many readers, these volumes set off alarms and signaled that a cultural collapse was in the offing if we continued on the present course.

More than a decade later now, the cultural crisis has not abated; it has only worsened. How much closer we are to collapse, it is hard to say. What we do have at this new historical moment is another book identifying many of the same causes of the cultural decline cited by Bork and Bennett, and this time linking them to the severe economic woes of the last few years. The authors, James Robison and Jay W. Richards, call their volume *Indivisible: Restoring Faith, Family and Freedom Before It's Too Late*. They stress that the social issues – like abortion and homosexuality which formerly got all the attention in the culture wars – are not separate from matters like debt, foreclosure and joblessness.

Besides the linkage of the social issues with the financial ones, the book by Robison and Richards is also noteworthy because it pairs two men of faith together who do not belong to the same religious body. Robison is an Evangelical and Richards is a Catholic. Back in 1994, Evangelicals and Catholics joined together and published *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*. What occasioned this historic event, in part, was a growing concern over the moral direction of our country. In 2009, this time with the support of the Orthodox Church, the *Manhattan Declaration* made its appearance. It is a statement of principles and beliefs by devout believers who are deeply worried over the erosion of the right to life, the institution of marriage and religious liberty. Today, it seems fair to say that the strongest resistance to cultural meltdown in America is found among Christian men and women. Sadly, the pushback against cultural decomposition is not stronger than it is because religious affiliation is not the same thing as convinced adherence in the public square.

Convinced adherents that they are, Robison and Richards still could not make their case against cultural slide without data. And thus they pepper their 20 chapters of text with findings from empirical studies and documented research. They report, for instance, that “in 2004, our total public debt...was around \$ 7 trillion.... A mere seven years later, in early 2011, we doubled that number and still add far more than a cool trillion dollars per year” (82). To remedy the crushing burden of excessive spending, according to Robison and Richards, we have to “recover the culture of thrift that made America great. Imagine what would happen if millions of us decided to start living *below* our means. It would take discipline, but we’re going to need that discipline as individuals if we’re going to have it as a nation. If we can’t muster the courage as a society to support politicians of both parties who will tell us the truth about government debt and entitlements, and work to fix it before it’s too late, we will destroy ourselves, which neither the communists nor the Islamic militants could have accomplished” (86).

The contention that cultural rehabilitation starts with personal responsibility is a necessary and obvious point, but where does the argument go from there? According to Robison and Richards, there has to be a renewal of our mediating institutions (158). By mediating institutions, they are referring to the family, the churches, and associations of various kinds – what today we call civil society. These mediating institutions “cultivate personal virtues and cultural values, without which a society cannot survive” (158). In his travels throughout the United States in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville was amazed at precisely this aspect of American culture – our voluntary associations – and said so explicitly in *Democracy in America* (1835), although he did not use the terminology of mediating institutions. More than a century later, the sociologist Peter L. Berger and then-Lutheran pastor Richard John Neuhaus published *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (1977), underscoring the indispensable and vital purpose mediating institutions have in creating and maintaining a healthy culture.

The renewal of mediating institutions is not all that is required, say Robison and Richards. They call for a creation of subcultures and parallel institutions (163). Singling out colleges like Christendom in Virginia, Ave Maria in Florida and Thomas Aquinas in California, the authors hold that these and many other institutions have helped our country from becoming as secular as Europe; nonetheless, their very existence shows that Christians and Catholics in particular have been pushed to the cultural margins (164). This phenomenon of marginalization, we have to acknowledge, is at work in the recent coercive implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act of 2010 by the Health and Human Services Department. If there is successful resistance

to this unjust law by Catholics and other concerned men and women of faith, it will tell us a lot about the staying power of the alternative subcultures in opposition to the mainstream culture.

Indivisible is definitely a timely contribution, and it may be especially helpful to readers who have a general sense of how troubled the culture is, but do not have a good grasp on the dimensions of the problem. It may also provide a challenge to those who want to confine faith to the sanctuary and divorce it from every other aspect of their lives. That group of people is, dare we say, very large. The difficulty, of course, is not just in terms of numbers but in how do we have a dialogue with them. In such an interdependent society with communication all the time about a vast array of matters, we still live in different worlds. Perhaps we will learn how to have this conversation through our own participation in the New Evangelization.

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