

## **The Spiritual Aftermath of 9/11**

In the immediate wake of September 11, 2001, Americans reportedly began to re-examine the priorities of their lives. The tragic events of that day, many claimed, would move us to a deeper, more spiritually sensitive approach to life. In place of superficial and trivial pursuits we would re-discover what really mattered. Our mindless consumerism would yield to mindful awareness of the intangible blessings of family and community. We would nourish our souls with the simple pleasures of existence, and cultivate our life together.

But then we were urged to return to normalcy. Go shopping—it will be good for the economy. Act as if the terrorists have not fazed us. We are strong. Let nothing damper the indomitable spirit that is America.

Yet, mixed in with such “pep talk” was another sort of message, about the dangers and threats that exist beyond—and quite probably now within—our borders. We were warned about evildoers, and told that we must do everything in our power to destroy those who would otherwise destroy us.

The last five years have been surreal, in so many ways. We have repeatedly allowed ourselves to be lied to and deceived by government leaders; to be intimidated by vague threats and the rhetoric of war; to relinquish some of our most cherished rights and liberties; to abandon some of the hardest-won victories for democracy, freedom, and human decency in human history. We have wrecked havoc on the people of Iraq, and sowed the seeds of hatred and terror throughout the Middle East and much of the rest of the world.

The past five years should lay to rest any pretense that America is a Christian nation. Here’s my short list of things that are *not* Christian: aggressive war; lies and deceit; torture; despising enemies; exacting revenge; taking from the poor and giving to the rich; neglecting the needy and the most vulnerable, including children; exploiting and abusing God’s creation.

I see little evidence that the events of 9/11 yielded a “spiritual dividend.” If anything, we have been exposed as a spiritually vacuous people, who don’t know their left hands from their right, so to speak. The reaction to 9/11 has been unconscionably mindless, fearful, and vindictive. What if some national trauma of greater magnitude than 9/11 should happen in the future? Where will we find the spiritual resources and resolve to resist the demonic forces at work among us today?

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