

Preface by Robert H. Bork  
Foreword by Charles Colson

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# IDOLS *for* DESTRUCTION

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**The Conflict of  
Christian Faith and  
American Culture**

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Herbert Schlossberg

## **Idols for Destruction: The Conflict of Christian Faith and American Culture**

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*"The bookshelf next to my desk holds Christian classics and books I refer to often. Idols sits on that shelf, for Herb's lucid critique has been an invaluable reference for my own writings. It helps believers to understand the ideologies that undergird secular culture, and how they dramatically--and dangerously--differ from the Judeo-Christian view based on adherence to absolute truth."* --Charles Colson, Prison Fellowship

*"Well-written and highly readable... discerning and critical analysis of our times; a stimulating contribution."* --Carl F. H. Henry

*"This book has become a vade mecum for thousands of Christians who understand the cultural disaster of our time and are determined to do something about it."* --Richard John Neuhaus, Editor-in-chief, *First Things*

*"Now that Francis Schaeffer is no longer with us, Schlossberg is just about the most provocative Christian thinker around."* --Harold O. J. Brown, Professor of Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

*"Years before anyone talked about an American 'culture war,' Herb Schlossberg penned an acute description of the crisis of virtue that is the domestic issue of the 1990s. His diagnosis remains essential reading for everyone who believes that self-governing republic requires self-governing and morally serious citizens."* --George Weigel, President, Ethics and Public Policy Center

*"Thorough, provocative and especially penetrating. If you want to think Christianly about culture Idols for Destruction is must reading!"* --John H. White, President, Geneva College

## Idols for Destruction: The Conflict of Christian Faith and American Culture Details

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# From Reader Review Idols for Destruction: The Conflict of Christian Faith and American Culture for online ebook

## JR Snow says

Good. Could have integrated the various idols and their underlying philosophies a bit more, and acknowledged his reliance on the thought of Rushdoony and North. He seems to quote liberal thinkers far more often, but think more like a Reconstructonist.

Overall, a good overview of culture, politics, and the Christian.

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## Corey says

An absolute must-read.

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## John Wise says

Incredible. This book is extremely helpful and challenging. Five challenging quotes.

When H.G. Wells published *The Shape of things to Come* in 1933, “he could see no better way to overcome the stubbornness and selfishness between people and nations than a desperate action by intellectual idealists to seize control of the world by force and establish their vision with a universal compulsory educational program.” p. 2

“Humanitarian policies create situations that humanitarian theorists find intolerable, blame on the wrong causes, and then supplement with an elaborate new set of destructive humanitarian policies.” p. 67

“When we understand that there is no economic difference between flooding the nation with money from counterfeiters’ presses and doing the same thing with money from the official press, then we begin to comprehend the nature of modern inflations...The Hebrew prophets denounced...changeable weights and measures as a form of oppression that merited judgment.” p. 9

“There seems to be a touching belief among certain Ph.D.’s in sociology that Ph.D.’s in sociology will never be corrupted by power.” ~Alduous Huxley p. 198-199

“In asserting total autonomy...the individualist sets the stage for his complete loss of liberty, for there is nothing then to protect him from the idol state.” p. 212

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## Evan says

Since the beginning of time, a battle has been steadily raging, having as its object the complete control and

sovereignty over the mind of mankind. This conflict is over the most important question of man's existence: who or what is god? Who holds the ultimate authority, and who establishes the standards that guide my conduct? The roots of this conflict are found in the Garden of Eden, where the first man and woman succumbed to the temptation to "be as God."<sup>1</sup> This temptation has plagued the human race ever since, and our sin nature has, since the time of the original sin, willingly turned the human heart into a "perpetual forge of idols."<sup>2</sup> In ancient times the drive to create idols manifested itself in the worshipping of stone and metal figures, or even in the divinization of certain men chosen to bear the ultimate authority in a culture, such as the Pharaoh of Egypt, and the kings of Assyria and Babylon. Today, however, one would be hard pressed to find such blatant and visible objects of worship, because modern idolatry is much more insidious. We have help in identifying modern idolatry, however, thanks to the book *Idols For Destruction*, by Herbert Schlossberg, which is a valiant and successful effort to unveil the modern forms of idolatry.

Schlossberg's foundational argument is that, to truly understand both past history and present events, you must view them in the context of God's covenant blessings to His faithful people, and His judgments on those people and nations which have rejected Him. To support this view, he puts forward the explanation given by Scripture as to why the nation of Israel fell: "Far from being a typical nationalistic exaltation of a 'chosen people,' the Old Testament portrays Israel as having become an evil nation, fully deserving the judgment that God meted to it. Its rebellion against God was accompanied by a turning to idols, and this idolatry brought the nation to its end. 'With their silver and their gold,' said the prophet Hosea, 'they made idols for their own destruction' (Hosea 8:4)."<sup>3</sup> Thus a disintegrating nation is by necessity an idolatrous one, its idols consisting of everything that its citizens substitute for the one true God.

Schlossberg continues throughout the rest of his book to examine all the modern "incarnations" of modern idolatry, starting with the idols of history, and then proceeding to those of humanity, mammon, nature, power, and religion. Each of these areas is given a chapter of their own, and is closely examined in order to give a complete understanding of the origins of each idol, the main subscribers to it, its basic beliefs, and its logical conclusion. Of particular interest are the multitude of quotes, references, and clarifications in each chapter, which draw from an amazing variety of philosophers, historians, theologians, and other people who have greatly influenced modern culture. The sheer number of such notes reveals the vast nature of Schlossberg's research for this book, and gives readers an in-depth look at how idolatry has been expressed, and just how widespread it has become. His writing style is deep and powerful, and his grasp of the many complexities inherent in philosophical discussions is commendable. The only difficulty for the average reader is the depth of his analyses and his use of philosophical terms. These things may make it slow reading, but also makes it very rich and rewarding reading, and an excellent candidate for repeated readings.

Schlossberg is successful in his critiques of modern culture, and it is for this reason: he has both acknowledged the fact of God's sovereignty over creation, and made it the foundation of his thought. He explains his own position very well: "Pontius Pilate's question, 'What is truth?,' is everywhere on the lips of relativists who do not believe there exists a principle which affords certainty for any kind of knowledge, factual or ethical. The descent into irrationality is avoidable only by returning to the theological certainties. Human rationality stems from the divine reason that preexisted human beings. Only the certainty that man was created in the image of God gives a solid foundation to reason and therefore to the possibility of human knowledge."<sup>4</sup> This certainty gives coherence to Schlossberg's analyses.

After masterfully exposing idolatry, *Idols For Destruction* concludes on a positive note, giving readers hope for the future, as only faith in a sovereign God can do: "Biblical faith finds great power – as does its imitator, Marxism – in the conviction that history is going its way. Or rather, that since Christ is the Lord of history, it is going history's way. Final victory is not dependent upon how well the work is done; rather it is assured regardless of all contingent factors. 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,' is not a

pious wish, but a certainty. We do not question if we shall be able to bring such a happy state of affairs into being, but rather what our role should be in its inevitable fulfillment. Since the world's powers were 'disarmed' in Christ (Col 2:15) their might is limited, despite the illusions of invincibility they are able to project. The eschatology of victory is a principal theme of the New Testament."5

*Idols for Destruction* is a brilliantly written examination of the reasons and thought processes behind the deterioration of modern culture. The reader will be edified, enlightened, and encouraged by this book, and his/her understanding of modern culture will increase exponentially. I would recommend this book to all Christians who desire to engage today's society in a Christocentric manner. This book is an indispensable resource for Christians who want to reconstruct their society according to the perfect law of God, and deserves not only a place in your library, but to be kept close by as a primary resource in understanding the modern world we live in.

1 Genesis 3:5

2 Institutes of the Christian Religion, John Calvin, Book I.XI.8-9

3 *Idols For Destruction*, Herbert Schlossberg, pg. 6

4 *Ibid*, pgs. 299 - 300

5 *Ibid*, pg. 333

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### **Jenn West says**

I look forward to doing some personal research and then returning to this book for a better understanding of the particulars of some of Schlossberg's laments.

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### **Candice says**

This book is something of a more "in-depth" version of Nancy Pearcey's "Total Truth". I recommend this book to any Christian seeking to look past the idols that have been erected in our society and see the truth of Christianity.

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### **Luke Miller says**

This is an impressive book with comprehensive historical research and creative application to American culture. It presents a powerful critique of secular humanism and all related attachments.

Schlossberg approaches culture, politics, and economics with solid biblical presuppositions, which is why the theme of idolatry is an apt metaphor for his book. He discusses the idols of history, nature, humanity, money, and power, and he shows how these idols are ultimately the fruit of distorting or denying the biblical distinction between Creator and Creation.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone who is thinking through the cultural, political, philosophical, and economic implications of the Scripture.

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## **Steve Hemmeke says**

Excellent critique of culture, through lens of first commandment

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## **Brian says**

This book was not the easiest to read, nor fun, but necessary. This book challenged my presuppositions, and yet after reading I felt I grasped about a tenth of what he was getting at. I have re-read sections throughout the years because it is a book that has a lot of depth to it. Enjoy at your own risk.

The author shows the destructive nature of mans desire to replace God with a number of other things. The Bible warns time and again against making idols, but in the hearts longing for God it either quenches that desire with worship of the one true God or an Idol.

Chapters:

Idols of History

Idols of Humanity

Idols of Mammon

Idols of Nature

Idols of Power

Idols of Religion

Consequences and Expectations

The New Community

Idolatry is probabaly the most rampant sin, so how should we live, some interesting answers inside the covers.

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## **John says**

A brief review of this book is certain to fail in capturing the brilliance of this book. I suspect that outside of the Bible, this book is the most important and best book I will have ever read. This is not meant as hyperbole, but as respect for a book that is the best encapsulation that I've encountered of how the Christian ought to interact with the society around us--cultural, political, economic, and religious.

I have typed nearly twenty pages of quotations from this book as I've read it to further ponder and study. I cannot say this of any other book I've ever read. Schlossberg wrote the book over twenty-five years ago, but his analysis of our current socio-economic and political environment is remarkably insightful because it captures the failings of the modern nation-state and the crisis in the consciences of its people. These things were just as true twenty five years ago as they are today.

Buy this book, read it, study it, and I am confident you will not regret it. This is a remarkable book, and a gift to the church unlike any other I've ever read.

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Here's a review of the book that I wrote more recently for a church publication:

Some time ago a friend posted a question on Facebook, asking, “What happens to the nation whose God is not the Lord?” Thirty years ago, Herbert Schlossberg sought to answer this very same question and his conclusions were published in a remarkable book entitled *Idols For Destruction*. Why write a book review in 2011 for a book first published in 1983 (and republished in 1990)? This book, like few others, prophetically captures the essence of our culture—critiquing and chastising it. The book was relevant when published, but its relevance has only increased in the years since its publication. Schlossberg argues that idolatry is at the heart of cultural decay, and describes in horrific detail the results. He writes, “...when the people turn to idolatries, and the outcome of those faiths become incarnated in society’s institutions, the rot sets in. What happens in the future depends on the moral state of the people who decide to follow one course of action rather than another.”

One can immediately see Schlossberg’s intent in the opening chapter of *Idols For Destruction* as he ponders the meaning of the fall of civilizations. His concern, writing in the early 1980s, was to diagnose the ills of society in light of God’s Word. He begins the book examining what the Bible says about the decline of civilizations. He observes, “It is a curious fact that the Old Testament, which describes the beginning, course, and end of a number of societies, never assesses them as being on the rise or decline, as progressing or regressing, as growing to maturity or falling to senescence.” Instead, “...the biblical explanation of the end of societies uses the concept of judgment. It depicts them as either having submitted themselves to God or else having rebelled against him.” (p. 5)

Schlossberg echoes C.S. Lewis’s remark that, “...human history... [is] the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.” Schlossberg argues we went astray through the rejection of God’s authority and the enshrinement of humanism. He begins by decrying humanists who, “are hostile to any notion of law that is external to the legislative organs under human control, and this means that morality cannot be predicated on universal codes.” (p. 43) The humanist has rejected the supernatural and embraced the material—all that exists is matter, and only matter, matters. He writes, “Being poor is the greatest evil, in humanitarian thinking, because having material possessions is the greatest good... Modern materialism is not only an ethical philosophy that places a high value on money and possessions but a social philosophy that says that human relations are determined by material factors.” (p. 61) This materialist philosophy being at the heart of humanitarian project, explains what is perhaps the most important concept in the book—the power of envy, and jealousy, in shaping and reshaping human institutions—something Schlossberg calls resentment. The Humanitarian impulse, “is not to raise those who are down but to topple those who are up; resentment is the motive.” (p. 55)

Schlossberg exposes the fraud of humanitarianism—it seeks not the betterment of society, but simply to “exercise power.” The state is the humanitarian’s “lever of power” to reshape society. (p. 75-76) It is the state who, rather than God, becomes “the Father.” Schlossberg says “Looking to the state for sustenance is a cultic act; we rightly learn to expect food from parents, and when we regard the state as the source of physical provision we render to it the obeisance of idolatry.” (p. 183)

Herein lies the central lesson of *Idols For Destruction*:

“The paternal state not only feeds its children, but nurtures, educates, comforts, and disciplines them, providing all they need for their security. This appears to be a mildly insulting way to treat adults, but it is really a great crime because it transforms the state from being a gift of God, given to protect against



violence, into an idol. It supplies us with all blessings, and we look to it for all our needs. Once we sink to that level, as Lewis says, there is no point in telling state officials to mind their own business. “Our whole lives are their business.” The paternalism of the state is that of the bad parent who wants his children dependent on him forever... The paternal state thrives on dependency. When the dependents free themselves, it loses power. It is, therefore, parasitic on the very persons whom it turns into parasites. Thus, the state and its dependents march symbiotically to destruction.” (p. 184)

The paternal state grappling for power, in opposition to God, and its Machiavellian means of maintaining power, lead to the kinds of policies en vogue in national capitals across the globe. Governments use monopoly power over the creation of currencies and their inflationary policies to enrich themselves at the expense of its citizenry, all the while giving the perception of economic expansion. America has been pursuing inflationary monetary policy for decades, but never so rapidly as the last three years. These policies, Schlossberg writes have, “both moral and economic consequences.” (p. 99) He adds, “A society that inflates its currency tampers with a moral value. If the economic system lacks the basic honesty that permits economic transactions to reward both seller and buyer, lender and borrower, there can be no sense of justice.” (p. 101) Yet it is “both a cause and effect of moral decline... As long as people think they are advancing economically, the pressure to continue inflating outweigh those for stopping. When a society becomes pragmatic, the moral considerations seem less important than the economic ones.” (p. 102)

Inflationary economies “promise wealth without end.” Yet Christians know, as Jesus teaches, “the poor you always have with you.” (John 12:8) Ours is not a world of “wealth without end”—ours is a “world of scarcity.” He argues, “...compound interest without end and growth without end are in the same category as entitlements without end; they are illusions. But illusions in which people place their faith take on a sinister reality. When they are cashed in without sufficient resources to pay everyone off, then a process of allocation must be devised to settle claims. That process often is violence.” (p. 108) If you doubt this, recall the power of envy—it “cannot be assuaged any more than cancer can be; they are both pathologies whose very being requires expansion to their neighbor's territory. There is no fence that will ever be respected, no limitation that will be recognized as legitimate, no sense of proportion or humility sufficient to smother a sense of inferiority.” (p. 104) We’ve recently seen these forces unleashed around us—look at Greece (or Wisconsin, for that matter) where people facing the loss of entitlements resort to violence and mass protest.

The state has become the central god in the Humanist pantheon because of the power inherent in its function as arbiter of justice and role as law keeper. Schlossberg compares our age to the Kingdom of Judah: “Ecclesiastical support for the state idolatry is unconsciously imitative of the temple religion that endorsed and undergirded the unjust rules of Judah.”

He condemns the modern false prophets and those with “itching ears” (2 Tim. 4:3):

“People desire false teaching because it enables them to absolutize contingent systems to which they have given allegiance. They seek religious leaders who will bless their idolization of the nation, or the state, or the unrestricted pursuit of wealth or power, or the acting out of their hatred and resentment through humanitarian policy.” (p. 255-256)

America long ago switched allegiance with the One True God to The State, and the American church, in the guise of being “subject to the governing authorities,” (Romans 13:1) is in danger of the same apostasy. So, “what happens to a nation whose God is not the Lord?”

Schlossberg argues that one of the clearest manifestations of God’s judgment is a decline in wealth—moral and monetary. Christianity has built “moral capital” that we’ve squandered, and upon which we are now

living. Once this reserve has been used up, a range of horrors will be unleashed upon a people. This is the civilizational collapse—the long prophesied lapse into barbarism. One only has to read the Old Testament to be reminded of these scenarios. Recall Gideon threshing wheat in his winepress, hiding from the Midianites and Amalekites, so as to avoid being plundered by these foreign armies. (Judges 6) Ben Hadad's Siege of Samaria in 2 Kings 6 was appallingly brutal—people resorted to eating dung and even human flesh. The Israelites in 2 Kings 17 “burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and omens and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger.” These are the sort of judgments levied upon idolatrous nations in the Bible. Our own national history records analogous judgments: the Civil War in particular was a time of savagery, famine, mutilation, destitution, rape, and pillage. The Bible teaches that these things are judgments from God—where guilty and innocent are caught up together in the judgment of God.

Schlossberg has much more to say than can be summarized in such a brief review. But Schlossberg is clear, “The practice of idolatry has serious consequences, which the prophets of Israel identified as oppression, injustice, and bloodshed.” (p. 262) But as C.S. Lewis writes, “Perhaps civilization will never be safe until we care for something else more than we care for it?”

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### **Jeremy says**

Marvin Olasky puts it in his top 5 books on Christian politics (along with Augustine's *City of God*, Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, *The Federalist Papers*, and de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*). Doug Wilson put this in his top 5 (along with Calvin's *Institutes*, Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*, N.D. Wilson's *Tilt*, and Beale's *We Become Like What We Worship*; see Plodcast, Episode #2).

"The Bible can be interpreted as a string of God's triumphs disguised as disasters" (304).

Olasky's interview with Schlossberg.

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### **Jesse says**

Good. Helpful discussion on the idols of the modern world.

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### **Douglas Wilson says**

Superb. I don't read a lot of books more than once, but this is one of them. Read the first time in September of 1983.

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### **Daniel Alders says**

Fantastic work by Schlossberg. Sets forth the situation clearly and leaves us with only one response. Schlossberg correctly identified the problems with American society back in the 80s, and his thoughts are relevant even now - 30 years later. A must read for anyone looking to build a Christian culture.

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## **Christopher says**

This was a daunting read, but well worth the time. A trenchant look at the infidelities and apostasies that have always plagued mankind, with a lens to to modern idolatries of history and nature before the turn of the last century (most of it still hits home today) and the perennial cures that Christ alone, the Lord of history and nature provides.

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