

Notre Dame Burns. As Does Our Civilization?

Nine-hundred years of heritage and beauty were left in smoldering ashes today after a fire consumed the once-great Cathedral of Notre Dame.

Back in college, and before I converted to Catholicism, I had the great fortune of visiting the Cathedral. Unfortunately, I didn't appreciate it nearly enough. As a typical college kid, I went in and looked around, but I did not savor the moment. No, it was just one of several things planned for the day before I was free to drink wine with my buddies in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower.

I had always hoped to revisit the Cathedral. I knew I failed to properly appreciate her beauty, grandeur, and heritage the first time. That opportunity is now lost as rebuilding will probably take the remainder of my life – and it won't be the same.

How eerily the burning of Notre Dame could symbolize the demise of Western Civilization.

We men of the West have come to take our civilization for granted. We believe in perpetual progress and continuous revolution in pursuit of the perfection of man. We see little need for appreciation of the past or defending our traditions and principles. Rather, always onward, always forward.

Much as I foolishly did at Notre Dame, we fail to appreciate what we have and what is required to maintain it. We assume

that it will always be there, despite our neglect.

Construction on Notre Dame was begun by Pope Alexander III in 1163. It took nearly *200 years* to build with completion occurring in 1345 under the reign of King Philip VI of France and Pope Clement VI. Notre Dame survived countless wars, plagues, and revolutions, always there as a reminder of the Christian Faith that served as the foundation of France and Western Civilization.

But now she is a burned-out relic, much like the Christian Faith in France and most of the West. In 2017, *La Croix* [published](#) the results of a study commissioned by the Bayard Group that reported only 5% of French Catholics attend Mass regularly. Once the great defender of Christianity, France is now a secular state. Her leaders and her people have lost the Faith.

In America, too, it looks like we are following in the path of France. According to a study [released](#) just last week, “No Religion” is the largest identity-group for Americans, with 23.1% of respondents claiming that title. Catholics have fallen to only 23% of the population and evangelicals are at 22.5%.

The question before us, and one that we will likely see answered in our lifetimes, is whether or not Western Civilization can survive without its foundational beliefs.

In pondering this question, I am reminded of Whitaker Chambers' *Letter to My Children*:

Human societies, like human beings, live by faith and die when faith dies...

...It is our fate to live upon that turning point in history.

... Few men are so dull that they do not know that the crisis exists and that it threatens their lives at every point. It is popular to call it a social crisis. It is in fact a total crisis – religious, moral, intellectual, social, political, economic. It is popular to call it a crisis of the Western world. It is in fact a crisis of the whole world.

The beauty of Notre Dame was inspired not by materialism or consumerism or Socialism, but by the desire to erect something that celebrated the eternal. For nearly 200 years, men toiled and sweat to build something that few would ever see completed. Who among us now has such Faith and dedication?

There are some out there. We either join them to confront the burning crisis before us, or, sadly, we will have to rebuild on the ruins.

Ave Maria pic.twitter.com/lb6Y5XV05a

– Ignacio Gil (@Inaki_Gil) [April 15, 2019](#)