

# Rebels With A Cause

by Joseph B. Baity

***Forerunner, "WorldWatch," August-December 2019***

For generations, outraged or marginalized citizens of the world have occasionally resorted to some form of civil disobedience to air their grievances publicly against the established order.

History is replete with the passionate protests of genuinely marginalized adults. However, a more modern picture of the “civilly disobedient” is that of a less-marginalized but overwrought college student demanding an over-idealized solution to a trendy, complex issue. Take, for example, the Occupy Wall Street movement or the anti-nuclear protests of the past decades.

However, as our agitated world lurches forward into a frightfully uncertain future, particularly from an economic perspective, weightier issues are inspiring people—young and old alike—to take to the streets.

Since the fourth quarter of 2019, we have witnessed frequent, passionate, and often violent demonstrations in the streets of Brazil, Chile, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Greece, Haiti, Hong Kong, India, Iraq, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Tibet, Turkey, Ukraine, the United States, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe, among many others.

Not only are the causes more weighty, but the frequency and intensity of the protestations among the many angry movements are increasingly destabilizing society at large.

CNBC Journalist David Reid, in his recent online article titled, “Almost 40% of the world’s countries will witness civil unrest in 2020, research claims,” cites data from a study by Verisk Maplecroft, a socio-economic and political analysis firm, that indicates nearly forty percent of all nations—75 out of 195—are experiencing rising levels of civil unrest.

Though the details behind all the unrest are as varied as the countries, there are common cores of causality: growing economic inequality, socio-political animus, and surging nationalistic pride.

Since the Great Recession of 2008 and 2009, a growing number of people around the globe find themselves in dire financial straits, living anxiously from paycheck to paycheck, if they are working at all. Many approach retirement with nothing to fall back on but anemic government programs and forced austerity. Meanwhile, usually with governmental blessing, the rosters of the hyper-rich multiply along with the respective segments of the global economy that cater exclusively to their extravagant desires and whims.

At the same time, even more social and political pressures are mounting throughout the world as diverse cultural, religious, generational, and political ideologies clash.

In Hong Kong, the streets are teeming with ideologues wishing to prevent the creeping authoritarianism of mainland China. In France, a pension crisis has many fearing for their retirement security. Small hikes in public transportation fares sparked the riots in Chile. The Muslim minority of India seeks to gain clout against a hostile, Hindu majority. Iraqis are protesting to rid their country of Iranian political influence. Venezuelans are marching for their very lives against a powerful socialist

regime that has destroyed the country's economy. Americans seem intent upon civil war, spurred by animus against the administration of Donald Trump and the upcoming presidential election. Virtually every nation has experienced some degree of LGBTQ and climate-change protest madness.

If there is a bottom line to all of this, it would appear that the 2020s will be a decade of growing instability, crisis, and attack on the established order, the likes of which could easily distress and distract all Christians—particularly those who are overly anxious. Therefore, we need to exercise discernment (Matthew 24:4; I John 4:1) while gathering and sharing news, being especially cautious not to fall for—or engage in—rumor and speculation, which promise to be rampant (Matthew 24:23; Proverbs 15:14).

Although immediate resolutions for the core group of troubling issues seem unlikely today, history shows that civilization has a way of adapting and moving on. Unfortunately, it tends to move toward other troubles that will one day dwarf those we are experiencing today.

Eventually, a series of crises will set off an astonishing succession of prophetic events such as the world has never seen. As wise Christians, we should pay attention to these disconcerting developments while also maintaining a safe distance and perspective—to avoid experiencing or causing unnecessary anxiety (Matthew 24:6). In this way, we can concentrate our greater energies on overcoming our worldly ways while developing a stronger relationship with God, our only shelter from the coming storms of the end.