

The worst times?

By [Martin E. Marty](#)

November 22, 2010

We're pleased to

announce a new regular blogger: Martin E. Marty, emeritus professor at the University of Chicago. Marty's name has been on the Century masthead since 1956, currently as a contributing editor. --Ed.

I am moved again by something dredged up from an old sermon: the tomb-marker of Sir Robert Shirley, a baronet "whose singular praise it is to have done the best things in the worst times, and to have hoped them in the most calamitous."

Are these the worst and most calamitous times? My generation survived the Depression, World War II and other wars, the Cold War, McCarthyism and Watergate, earlier stages of the Culture Wars, 9/11 and non-found weapons of mass destruction. Each seemed worst and most calamitous. What is different this time is the breakdown of civility and discourse in civil society, drastic polarization in politics and numberless events and phenomena which do not need describing or enlarging upon here.

Agree with me or not that these are the worst times, I hope bloggees will indulge me in my impulse to look for some people, ideas and events which do or should elicit "singular praise." They will show up now and then in successor posts.