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The Whole Counsel of God

*Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first...
--2Thessalonians 2:3*

Plethora—that’s a good word—we have a plethora of worthwhile books adorning our office shelves, penned by many outstanding contemporary Christian thinkers, teachers, and preachers who still marvel at the American experiment. A caveat contained in most of these post-modern-era narratives, however, is a clear warning that the world’s longest-enduring constitutional republic cannot be sustained indefinitely without a resurgence of moral and spiritual constraints.

A somewhat different twist comes from a perky-appearing young internet blogger who isn’t wringing her hands about America’s seeming moral, spiritual, and thus, economic freefall. Her concerns rest with an overbearing evangelical Church.

Rachel Held Evans is 32 and blogs for the Cable News Network (CNN). She says she is often asked why *millennials* (those born between 1981 and 2000) are leaving the church.”¹ In her opinion, she is in a position to respond because she is “armed with the latest surveys, along with personal testimonies from friends and readers which explain how young adults perceive evangelical Christianity to be too political, too exclusive, old-fashioned, unconcerned with social justice and hostile to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.”

“Many of us,” says our young millennial, “myself included, are finding ourselves increasingly drawn to high church traditions...precisely because the ancient forms of liturgy seem so unpretentious, so unconcerned with being “cool,” and we find that refreshingly authentic.” She also quips that “evangelical obsession with sex can make Christian living seem like little more than sticking to a list of rules...” adding that “millennials long for faith communities in which they are safe asking tough questions and wrestling with doubt.”

Ms. Evans suggests that “young evangelicals often feel they have to choose between their intellectual integrity and their faith, between science and Christianity, between compassion and holiness.”

So what would make the evangelical Church attractive to young adults? Rachel says:

“What millennials really want from the church is not a change in style but a change in substance.” We want an end to the culture wars. We want a truce between science and faith. We want to be known for what we stand for, not what we are against. We want churches that emphasize an allegiance to the kingdom of God over an allegiance to a single political party or a single nation. We want our LGBT friends to feel truly welcome in our faith communities.”

We want to be challenged to lives of holiness, not only when it comes to sex, but also when it comes to living simply, caring for the poor and oppressed, pursuing reconciliation, engaging in creation care and becoming peacemakers.

You can’t hand us a latte and then go about business as usual and expect us to stick around. We’re not leaving the church because we don’t find the cool factor there; we’re leaving the church because we don’t find Jesus there.”

If we could sit down for a “latte summit” with Rachel, we might say to her that we too, who are dubbed “evangelicals,” long for Jesus. It pains us to admit that while HE always shows up where HE is invited, we are sometimes no-shows, or worse, empty suits. We’re very busy people—evangelicals, millennials and everyone else. Jesus pursues us every day, but much too frequently, we place Him on hold. Yes, we who occupy the pulpits and the pews are problematic. One might say we are works in progress.

Concerning charges that evangelical churches make young people feel like they must check their intellectual integrity at the door, we have to ask, where exactly did they acquire all this intellectual integrity? Was it from public schools and universities? Maybe the arts, entertainment industry, or the media? And, which Jesus are they searching for? One who satisfies their desires, or the ONE whose ways are higher than ours?

As for our LGBT friends, we too would like them to feel truly welcome in our faith communities, but not necessarily comfortable. At least not at the expense of TRUTH. Although it collides with Rachel’s idea of established science and equitable social policy, Jesus says, “...at the beginning the Creator made them male and female...” (Matt 19:4-6). Paul sends a clear warning to guard against “*unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*” (2Thes 2:10)

There is no equivocating. God loves us too much to leave us the way we are. The work of the Holy Spirit through the five-fold ministry of the Church, is to conform us to the image of Jesus. He doesn’t condemn, but He does convict us of our besetting sins. Sad to say, the Word of God is a deal-breaker for many.

We mentioned books in our office that speak to our times. One of them, Storm Warning, is intended to be *apocalyptic* according to its author, Dr. Billy Graham. In the first chapter, Graham recalls groups of people in Pass Christian, Mississippi who decided to throw parties in the face of a rapidly approaching monster hurricane, even though warnings had been issued to clear the area and head inland. He writes:

“...the wind was howling outside the posh Richelieu Apartments when Police Chief Jerry Peralta pulled up sometime after dark. Facing the beach less than 250 feet from the surf, the apartments were directly in the line of danger. A man with a drink in his hand came out on the second-floor balcony and waived. Peralta yelled up, ‘You all need to clear out of here as quickly as you can. The storm’s getting worse.’ But as others joined the man on the balcony, they just laughed at Peralta’s order to leave. ‘This is my land,’ one of them yelled back. ‘If you want me off, you’ll have to arrest me.’”

Peralta didn’t arrest anyone, but he wasn’t able to persuade them to leave either. He wrote down the names of the next of kin of the twenty or so people who gathered there to party through the storm. They laughed as he took their names. They had been warned, but they had no intention of leaving.

It was 10:15 PM when the front wall of the storm came ashore. Scientists clocked Camille’s speed at more than 205 miles per hour, the strongest on record. Raindrops hit with the force of bullets, and waves off the Gulf Coast crested between twenty-two and twenty-eight feet high.

News reports later showed that the worst damage came at the little settlement of motels, go-go bars, and gambling houses known as Pass Christian, Mississippi, where some twenty people were killed at a hurricane party in the Richelieu Apartments. Nothing was left of that three-story structure but the foundation...”²

Bottom line—the Church is in the rescue business and we must exude an unrelenting sense of urgency. While we may need to be more introspective, seeking input from a culture that is arguably racing toward destruction is like Nehemiah requesting help from Sanballat.

Lighten up on the weekend theatrics—maybe. On the whole counsel of God—NEVER!

Rick Forcier

¹ Evans, Rachel Held, *Why millennials are leaving the church*, author of “Evolving in Monkey Town,” blogs at rachelheldevans.com

² Graham, Billy, Storm Warning, Word Publishing, Dallas, TX, 1992, pg. 15, 16