

Don't Put Your Light Under a Basket!

Whenever I hear Christian leaders talk about the inevitable collapse of the church of America (or elsewhere) I ask myself, "But hasn't Jesus risen from the dead? Didn't He ascend to the right hand of the Father? Hasn't all authority in heaven and earth been given to Him? And aren't we commanded to go and make disciples in His name and by His authority?"

If so, how then we can speak of any inevitable collapse of the church (or, specifically, of Christian society), regardless of how inevitable that collapse appears to human eyes?

I therefore differ strongly with conservative journalist Rod Dreher, who has written that, "The culture war that began with the Sexual Revolution in the 1960s has now ended in defeat for Christian conservatives. ... Don't be fooled: the upset presidential victory of Donald Trump has at best given us a bit more time to prepare for the inevitable" (from his new book *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*).

The culture war has hardly "ended," and there is nothing "inevitable" about the collapse of Christian society in America, although, without question, the patient is mortally ill and in need of radical surgery and rehabilitation. But the heart is still beating, there are millions of committed believers throughout the land, prayers are ascending to heaven 24/7 for another great awakening, and it's actually possible that America's best days are still ahead, regardless of how bleak things look right now (and without a doubt, they look very, very bleak). Are not all things possible to the one who believes?

What makes today's spiritual pessimism all the more galling is

that, in my view, the biggest reason for America's current moral and spiritual decline is the backslidden, un-engaged, carnal state of the much of the church. In other words, America is messed up because the church has been messed up, because we who profess faith in Jesus have all too often been superficial in our commitment, as a result of which, the world has changed us rather than us changing the world.

When it comes to the mainline denominations, in many instances, there has been a wholesale departure from the authority of Scripture and the lordship of Jesus, leading to the abandonment of our moral compass.

When it comes to evangelical Christians, we have often preached a narcissistic, "what's in it for me" gospel, a self-centered message that bypasses the cross and calls for virtually no sacrifice or service, a message that empowers the sinner rather than transforms the sinner, leading to "Christian" rappers who talk about Jesus in the midst of profanity-laced rants (all while still getting high, going to strip clubs and partying), and to "Christian" models and actresses who strip down in the most seductive poses, simply because it's part of their job—and I assure you they can find big churches in America who will welcome them with open arms and celebrate their "liberty" in Jesus. (It's one thing to welcome the worst of sinners into our midst with open arms and without condemnation; it's another thing to celebrate carnality and compromise.)

Little wonder that the rest of the public is so confused. After all, the church is supposed to function as the conscience of the nation.

When it comes to social issues like abortion and homosexuality, the vast majority of Christian conservatives in our country have no almost regular engagement with women having abortions and engage in very little compassionate outreach to those who identify as LGBT. As for those of us who

do get involved in social issues, we tend to do it politically, looking to the government (especially the Republican Party) to fix things, as if passing a law alone would “fix” the desecration of life or reverse the breakdown of the family.

In that regard, Dreher is quite right in urging us not to put our trust in the political system, and I wholeheartedly affirm his conclusion: “We are going to have to change our lives, and our approach to life, in radical ways. In short, we are going to have to be the church, without compromise, no matter what it costs.”

But being the church means heeding the words of Jesus, who calls us out of the world when it comes to participating in sin but into the world when it comes to fulfilling our mission, which is to shine like lights in dark places, to boldly proclaim the message of redemption, to reach out to hurting and suffering sinners, to make a difference in the communities in which we are planted and to stand for truth and righteousness “without compromise, no matter what it costs.”

After all, we’re here as the Lord’s ambassadors, declaring the gospel to a dying world, and if we back down and retreat, who will reach this generation with the good news?

But to say, “We’ve failed so far, so let’s concede the war” is like a coach saying to his team at halftime, “We hardly played at all in that first half, which is why we’re way behind; so let’s quit now before it gets worse.” To the contrary, he sounds a loud wake-up call, urging his team to play as never before, since the rest of the game is still ahead.

As theologian Douglas Wilson said, “I am against surrendering in any case, but I am really against surrendering before the battle is really joined.”

The solution, then, is not to retreat into some kind of monastic refuge but rather to repent of our sins, to give

ourselves afresh to the Lord, and to let our light shine before an onlooking, skeptical, and mocking world. That is the gospel way.

In the words of Jesus, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a basket, but on a candlestick. And it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16; for further scriptural exhortations, see [here](#)).

I'm all for separating ourselves from the pollution of the world as much as possible. (At one point, 95 percent of the families in my home congregation homeschooled their children, and for many years of our marriage, Nancy and I chose not to have a TV in our house; I have other friends who live in shared community, while still others have left business and careers to serve and live among the poorest of the poor.) At the same time, I am not for withdrawing from our calling to go into the world and touch the lost.

By all means, then, let us live with a sense of holy urgency (after all, we're here for a moment and then gone, with eternity ahead of us), and let us make a fresh, complete and uncompromising commitment to our Lord. But let us stand up, not shrink back, raising our voices for the world to hear and living our lives for the world to see. And if America is determined to go to hell, then let it go to hell over our dead bodies.

As Charles H. Spurgeon famously said, "If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for."

To our knees, then, in holistic repentance, and to our feet, in wholehearted obedience. This generation desperately needs the message of new life in Jesus—the message you and I have. Don't hide it under a basket! {eoa}