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WALSH: The Real Reason Young People Are Leaving The Church



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I don't know if I can still be considered a "young person" as I approach the age of 32, but at least I can say I have recent experience in being a young person. From that experience I know that young people tend to have two sets of qualities that seem to be in competition with each other.

On one hand, they can be frivolous, shallow, and easily distracted. On the other, they can be radical, militant, idealistic, revolutionary, eager to join a cause, and hungry for change. The Church has had so much trouble connecting with the younger demographics because it has tried to appeal to the former qualities. It

has hoped to use bad rock music, a casual atmosphere, pop culture references, and a general spirit of irreverence and worldliness as a means to entice the next

generation into the pews. It has exploited all of the worst and most transitory aspects of youth, and all it has done is alienate the very people it deformed itself to attract.

Young people can spot a poser from 1,000 miles away. "Cool" Christianity is a poser Christianity, and the pose is not fooling anyone. Christianity will never be cool and shouldn't try. Cool things are by definition trendy, which is to say they follow the whims of the world. But the Church should not be obeying the culture for the same reason that the sun doesn't change according to the seasons. Rather, the seasons change according to the sun, just as the Church should be dictating to the culture instead of letting the culture dictate to it.

Anytime you criticize the worldliness in the modern church — the rock music and the sleek architecture and the pastors in skinny jeans and everything else — people will always ask you to explain why these things are so wrong. I have just explained it, but I think I shouldn't really have to explain why the things are wrong until you explain why they are right. The burden of proof is on the reformer. Especially when the thing he is reforming has existed for 2,000 years and accomplished the minor feat of building our civilization in the meantime.

But the people who inject the modern trends into church have never explained, and never even tried to explain, why the modern trends are better. They just point out that the new stuff is new, as if newness is automatically an improvement. If that's the case, then I guess we ought to cover the Sistine Chapel with graffiti and banish Shakespeare from the classroom in favor of EL James' latest masterpiece.

Of course, I do not suggest that old stuff is automatically better because it is old, but at least this much can be said in its favor: it has endured. People are still

marveling at the beauty of churches built 600 years ago, and singing hymns composed 200 years ago, and reading sermons John Chrysostom wrote 1600 years ago. In the year 2518, will people be taking pilgrimages to the ruins of Elevation Church? Will they be singing ancient hymns like "One Thing Remains" and "Our God is an Awesome God"? Will they be reading Joel Osteen books? I tend to doubt it. The modern church has gorged itself on temporal, forgettable, fashionable things. As a result, everything about this era of the church, in this part of the world, will be lost to decay.

That is quite a high price to pay for a strategy that hasn't even panned out. All of this to stay relevant and appeal to the youth, but the Church has never been less relevant in America or more unappealing to the youth. Maybe it would be better to connect another way. Maybe the key is that latter set of qualities I mentioned at the beginning. Young people are energetic, eager, radical, revolutionary, idealistic, desperate for a cause to join and a battle to fight. It just so happens that Christianity is radical and revolutionary. It holds the keys to the highest ideals a man can strive towards. It is a cause. It is a battle. And it needs energetic and eager warriors to fight. Christianity and young people are, quite literally, a match made in Heaven. Rather than the church contorting itself to seem trendy and stupid and shallow – which only insults the very people it is supposed to convert – it should simply be what it is and present the truth, nothing less.

What is that truth? The truth is that we are living in the midst of a great battle between good and evil. As we speak, there are angels and demons all around us, fighting over us. We are not only soldiers enlisted to fight on the side of angles, we are also the prize these awesome forces are struggling to win. Our leader is a

God who was so desperate to save us from destruction that He came here on a rescue mission, plunging Himself into the abyss of human existence and

ultimately submitting Himself to a gruesome death on a cross. Then He rose from the dead, and what seemed like defeat became, in an instant, the greatest victory the world has ever known. The victorious Christ now calls us to leave our old lives behind, reject the dreary ways of the world, and come into a life of untold joy and fulfillment. But before our journey on Earth is complete, and our joy and fulfillment can be perfectly realized in an eternal Paradise, we will have to make many sacrifices, and endure much suffering, and fight many battles every day, all for the sake of this heroic cause for which our Leader, General, and King has commissioned us.

How can such a message fail to excite young people? How can a Church that possesses the knowledge of this truth fail to enlist people by proclaiming it? Only if it does not proclaim it. Only if it takes pains to gloss over and distract from the drama and excitement and radicalism of the faith it claims to profess. Only if it takes all of this and boils it down to something bland and ordinary. In order to lose young people, the Church in America first had to lose itself.

I pray that it finds both again, and soon.