**HAPPENINGS IN THE CHURCH**

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**CULTURAL WARFARE AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

 David Brooks, in a *New York Times* article on June 30, (”The Next Culture War”) notes that Christianity is in decline:

 ***Christianity’s gravest setbacks are in the realm of values. American culture is shifting away from orthodox Christian positions on homosexuality, premarital sex, contraception, out-of-wedlock childbearing, divorce and a range of other social issues. More and more Christians feel estranged from mainstream culture. They fear they will soon be treated as social pariahs, the moral equivalent of segregationalists because of their adherence to scriptural teaching on gay marriage. They fear their colleges will be decertified, their religious institutions will lose their tax-exempt status, their religious liberty will come under greater assault.***

 Unfortunately--true. Brooks has a suggestion: fight a different culture war:

***We live in a society plagued by formlessness and radical flux, in which bonds, social structures and commitments are strained and frayed. Millions of kids live in stressed and fluid living arrangements. Many communities have suffered a loss of social capital. Many young people grow up in a sexual and social environment rendered barbaric because there are no common norms. Many adults hunger for meaning and goodness, but lack a spiritual vocabulary to think things through.***

 ***Social conservatives could be the people who help reweave the sinews of society. They already subscribe to a faith built on selfless love. They can serve as examples of commitment. They are equipped with a vocabulary to distinguish right from wrong, what dignifies and what demeans. They already, but in private, tithe to the poor and nurture the lonely.***

 ***The defining face of social conservatism could be this: Those are the people who go into underprivileged areas and form organizations to help nurture stable families. Those are the people who build community institutions in places where they are sparse. Those are the people who can help us think about how economic joblessness and spiritual poverty reinforce each other. Those are the people who converse with us about the transcendent in everyday life.***

 Good suggestion, Mr. Brooks. But we have news for you. Christians, at least evangelical Christians, are already fighting the war you speak of. Despite the secularizing forces wanting to introduce a brave new world (let’s see, wasn’t it the Soviet Union who wanted to introduce a brave new world based on secularism? And Nazi Germany? And Cuba? And Mao’s China?), the “sinews of society” continue to be woven. There is a vocabulary of right and wrong and of what demeans and what does not. There are ministries to the poor. They probably don’t exist so much in New York, where the *New York Times* originates, but that may not be the best place to find them.

 I traveled back to my home, LaGrange County, Indiana, a week ago. That’s where the Amish and Mennonites are. It is where people smile, where the gardens are well kept and the flowers bloom in abundance (mostly organic in case it matters). It is where Christian music plays in the business establishments and where stores are closed on Sunday. It is where good food is served. It so happens the county has the lowest per capita income in Indiana, but it has among the highest percentage of home ownership and the lowest percentage of persons on food stamps. It is where a person’s word is so trusted that often parties don’t need written contracts.

 While there I attended the musical, “Josiah for President,” a comedy about an Amish man who, by a strange turn of events, is elected president of the United States, and with integrity, good humor and common sense, turns the nation around. Totally corny, of course, but it gives people some hope.

 But I don’t need LaGrange County. For the past three Sundays in the United Methodist Church I attend we have had persons praying at the church’s altar, responding to an altar call. A young 19 old woman named Denise accepted Christ at a young adult cook out. Another young adult, Bryan, led a friend of his father’s to Christ. Three college-age young women worked all summer at the conference junior high camp and report scores of conversions. The church is opening a ministry to a trailer park.

. A man I met at the gym tells me about the revival taking place in his Pentecostal Church. A group called “Huddle” gathers 150 men each week for Christian fellowship. A group of 20 ministers pray each week for the spiritual welfare of the city. The Kokomo Rescue Mission ministers to the least and the lost with a 2 million dollar budget. None of the money is tax money (to keep the ministry free from government interference) yet there is support from city agencies and from non-Christians. A number of other Christian-based non-profits are active in the community, including Kokomo Urban Outreach, which is United Methodist oriented. In the next county over Youth for Christ and Fellowship of Christian Athletes flourish. A number of churches, including United Methodists churches, are involved in a movement of God’s Spirit called Revive Indiana, which started in northern Indiana out of the Amish-Mennonite community.

 Another friend tells me about the church his daughter attended before she graduated from the state university. It is not denominationally affiliated and is mostly student led, but college students are attending in large numbers including some who have never been to church.

 The country is not yet sold out to secularism. The Christian faith is not yet sold out to secularism. The United Methodist Church is not yet sold out to secularism. There is ugliness in the land, and even in the church. There is bullying. There is hopelessness. There are drugs and poverty and alcoholism and broken homes and cynicism and anger, but there is also the truth of Jesus Christ and there are believers who committed to share that truth with a needy world.

 A culture war? Bigger than that. Spiritual warfare. But Christians carry the armor of God.