



Called to Be Transformers

Leave it to the mother of two boys to find theological fodder in the summer blockbuster *Transformers*. In an archetypal tale of good versus evil, the heroic Autobots battle the dastardly Decepticons while the fate of humankind hangs in the balance. The movie opens with Optimus Prime, the leader of the Autobots, stating: "Before time began, there was the cube. We know not where it comes from, only that it holds the power to create worlds and fill them with life. For a time we lived in harmony, but like all great power, some wanted it for good and others for evil."

Outside the movie theater, we, too, live in a world at war, and we, too, are called to be transformers.

A remarkable shift in culture has taken place over the past several decades, leaving the most fundamental contours of American culture radically altered. The Judeo-Christian framework upon which our country was founded has given way to a postmodern, post-Christian, post-Western landscape that would be unrecognizable to our foremothers and fathers. Moral relativism has so shaped the culture that the vast majority of Americans now see themselves as their own moral arbiter. Truth has been internalized, privatized, and subjectified. Absolute or objective truth is denied outright.

The most influential sectors of society are allied in furthering the process of social disintegration. The consumption-driven media have so shaped the American consciousness that many citizens are now intellectually unable to sustain a serious moral conversation. Those who attempt to engage the American people in a serious moral conversation are met with

immediate dismissal or—more worrisome still—blank stares.

As women leaders, we are called to be transformers, purveyors of the whole gospel for the whole world. We need to raise our voices against the mainstreaming of violence, pornography, and banality. In a world where the search for truth has been abandoned in favor of political arguments over rights and privileges, we must live in a way that makes God's truth evident.

The church has long wrestled to understand its proper relationship to surrounding culture. In his groundbreaking 1951 publication, *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr traced five patterns of cultural response. While the book may have oversimplified the issues and now looks awkwardly optimistic, some of the patterns Niebuhr described are still evident. The church has at times withdrawn, seeking refuge by isolating from the culture. At other times the church has simply abdicated to the culture, reflecting the larger society rather than proclaiming the cross. Sometimes the church vacillates between these two extremes, capitulating to culture one minute and isolating from it the next—what ever seems most expedient at the time.

Once an authoritative voice able to discourage rebellion against God's commandments, the church today is often dismissed or outright ignored. Though sociologists point to continuing high levels of American religious activity and professions of faith—both of these in sharp contrast to other Western nations—the truth is that very little of this translates into authentic discipleship, active church membership, and bold Christian witness.

What, then, is Christ's body of believers to do? We must cultivate and deepen our understanding of the Christian worldview, and in so doing acknowledge that God is sovereign. While trends and ideas come and go, God is unchanging. The mission of the church in the midst of

this cultural crisis is to proclaim the truth and reach out to the casualties. But beware: To proclaim biblical truth to this culture is to risk social isolation, outright rejection, and, in some cases, potent attacks.

The church that proclaims that extra-marital sex is inherently and unquestionably sinful will quickly discover what it means to be cut off from the cultural mainstream. The preacher who takes on the divorce culture and preaches the inviolability of the marriage covenant will run into direct confrontation with society's attraction to "open marriage" and what some now describe as "serial monogamy." The Christian who stands in defense of the unborn will soon realize that her voice is unwelcome and unheeded. But that is what transformers do.

The church of Jesus Christ is comprised of sinners saved by grace. With the message of grace, we must reach out to those whose lives have been warped in the course of cultural decay. God alone, as revealed in the Bible, has honest answers to the most basic issues facing our society. Our challenge is to match truth with love, confrontation with compassion. This was true in the first century, and it is true now.

In our depravity, human beings naturally rebel against the truth of God's Word, but it reveals the only means not only of salvation but also of cultural transformation. Therein is found our charge: to bear witness and to be transformers.

As Optimus Prime states towards the close of the film, "At the end of this day, one shall stand, one shall fall." Those of us who believe already know who wins this war. But until that day, we are called to be transformers, and that calls for more than meets the eye. ■

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