

DECEMBER 27, 2009

A TRADITION IS BORN

(from a story by Ron Walters-WFIL radio magazine)

IN ONE *PEANUTS* COMIC STRIP, A LITTLE GIRL SAYS THAT CHRISTMAS IS A TIME OF KINDNESS AND JOY, AND TIME WHEN WE FORGIVE EACH OTHER. CHARLIE BROWN RESPONDS, “WHY JUST AT CHRISTMAS? WHY CAN’T WE BE KIND AND FORGIVING ALL THROUGH THE YEAR?” SHE LOOKS AT CHARLIE BROWN AND SAYS, “WHAT ARE YOU SOME KIND OF RELIGIOUS FANATIC?”

WE LAUGH, BUT SOMETIMES IT IS LIKE THAT. OUR CULTURE, IN ORDER TO BE PLEASING TO EVERYONE, OFTEN DILUTES OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH TO THE POINT THAT IT SEEMS THAT ANYTHING WE SAY IS UP FOR CHRIOSTICISM. THAT IS WHY WE ALL BALKED WHEN “MERRY CHRISTMAS” WAS REPLACED WITH THE IONNOCUOUS “HAPPY HOLIDAYS.” YET, HOW MANY OF US ARE WILLING TO STAND UP FOR OUR FAITH?

CHARLES SCHULTZ DID. DURING THE 1960’S HE CRETED THE COMIC STRIP PHENOMENON CALLED “PEANUTS”. PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND ALL ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS LOVED IT. IN TUMULTUOUS TIMES, PEOPLE WERE LOOKING FOR SIMPLE STORY LINES AND A TOUCH OF JOYOUS INNOCENCE. MADISON AVENUE CAUGHT ON RIGHT AWAY.

CBS APPROACHED SCHULTZ WITH THE IDEA OF AN ANIMATED CHRISTMAS SPECIAL BASED ON THE COMIC STRIP. THE FAST-APPROACHING DEADLINE DEMANDED A FAST TURNAROUND. SCHULTZ GOT TO WORK AND BEGAN PRESENTING THE SCRIPT TO CBS PIECE BY PIECE. HE CALLED THE SPECIAL, “A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS”.

CBS LOVE THE DEJECTED CHARLIE BROWN HOPING TO FIND A CHRISTMAS CARD ADDRESSES TO HIM. THEY LOVED LUCY IN HER PSYCHIATRIST BOOTH EXCLAIMING “CHRISTMAS IS NOTHING BUT STUPID TOYS. WHAT I REALLY WANT IS REALESTATE!” SNOOPY, BEING HIGHLY COMPETITIVE, THRILLED CBS WITH HIS OVER-DECORATED DOGHOUSE, TRYING TO WIN THE DECORATION CONTEST. THE CBS EXECS WERE LAUGHING AND CLAIMED “THIS IS GREAT!”

AND WHO WAS NOT TOUCHED BY CHARLIE BROWN BRINGING BACK THAT POOR, PATHETIC, TINY TREE. OH THE HUMILIATION AS THE KIDS SHOUT, "YOU BLOCKHEAD, CHARLIE BROWN!" DEJECTED CHARLIE SCREAMS, "WHAT IS CHRISTMAS ABOUT, ANYWAY!"

THE LINUS STEPPED INTO THE LIMELIGHT TO ANSWER: "AND THERE WERE SHEPHERDS ABIDING IN THE FIELD, KEEPING WATCH OVER THEIR FLOCKS BY NIGHT. AND, LO, AN ANGEL OF THE LORD CAME DOWN...AND HE PROCEEDED TO TELL OF THE CHRISTMAS BABY, THE MANGER, THE SWADDLING CLOTHES..."

"HOLD EVERYTHING!" DEMANDED CBS. YOU CAN'T RECITE THE BIBLE VERSES ON NATIONAL TELEVISION AND ESPECIALLY THE KING JAMES' VERSION. YOU WILL ALIENATE OUR VIEWERS, IRRITATE OUR AFFILIATES, SCARE ADVERTISERS AWAY."

SCHULTZ STOOD FIRM. "IF I CAN'T TELL THE CHRISTMAS STORY, YOU CAN'T HAVE THE PEANUTS CAST." CBS, WITH THE APPROACHING DEADLINE, GULPED AND SAID OK. "WE ARE GOING TO PAY A TERRIBLE PRICE," THEY SAID.

THE NIGHT IT AIRED THE SWITCHBOARDS LIT UP LIKE CHRISTMAS TREES. BUT ALL OF THEM WERE FROM PEOPLE WHO WANTED TO KNOW WHEN THE NEXT SPECIAL WOULD BE AIRED. AND A TV TRADITION WAS BORN. FIFTY PERCENT OF AMERICA WATCHED THE SHOW. IT WON AN EMMY. TV GUIDE CALLED LINUS'S BIBLICAL RECITATION AS ONE OF THE TOP 35 MOMENTS IN TV HISTORY. THE SHOW CONTINUES TO AIR EVERY YEAR.

THE CHRISTMAS STORY CAN NEVER BE TOLD TOO MUCH. THE COMING OF JESUS WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE HIDDEN, BUT PROCLAIMED TO THE WEARY WORLD. AFTER ALL, GOD STEPPED OUT OF ETERNITY AND BECAME A PERSON AND WE "BEHELD HIS GLORY".

HOW DID WE HEAR OF THE BIRTH. IT IS BECAUSE THE SHEPHERDS AND THE MAGI TOLD IT. IT IS BECAUSE THE APOSTLES AND THE EVANGELISTS MATTHEW AND LUKE PASSED IT ON TO OTHERS. IT IS BECAUSE GRANDMA OR GRANDPA, MOM OR DAD, OR THAT NICH CHURCH LADY SHARED BROUGHT US TO HEAR THE STORY. NEWS THAT GOD HAS COME TO EARTH TO OFFER LOVE AND FORGIVENESS AND TO SAVE US FROM

DRWEADFUL SIN..THAT IS WORTH TELLING. IT ISN'T EVRYDAY THAT WE LEARN ABOUT THE HOPE FOR ALL PEOPLE.

LIKE CHARLES SCHULTZ STOOD UP AND INSISTED THAT THE STORY BE SHARED, SO, WE TOO, SHOULD DO THE SAME. OH, WE CAN RESPECT OTHER TRADITIONS. WE CAN UNDERSTAND THAT NOT EVERY IONE BELIEVES WHAT WE BELIEVE. BUT THAT SHOULD NEVER SILENCE OUR VOICE.

WHEN POLITICALLY CORRECT DECISIONS, OR ECONOMIC DECISIONS, OR HOSTILE TO CHRISTIAN FAITH DECISIONS ATTEMPT TO SILENCE OUR STORY. WE NEED TO TELL IT ALL THE MORE. "FOR UNTO US A SAVIOR IS BORN" IT IS IMPORTANT TO EXPRESS GOD'S GIFT OF LOVE. GOD GAVE US GOD'S OWN SELF. WHAT A GREAT GIFT! AMEN