

God's Children

ADD LAUREN SANDLER'S

Righteous to the growing stack of books that attempt to explain American evangelicalism. Sandler's particular interest is young evangelicals, a population she believes is growing prodigiously. She calls this cohort the "Disciple Generation." To belong, you've got to be age 15 to 35, and "equally obsessed with Christ and with culture as a means to an Evangelical end." Sandler makes the rounds through young evangelicals' subculture across the country, attending Christian rock concerts, talking to pastors about their cruciform tattoos, wandering the halls at Patrick Henry College (a Purcellville, Virginia, conservative Christian college founded in 2000 for students who were home-schooled), and interviewing biology teachers who endorse intelligent design. At a Colorado Springs megachurch, Sandler finds fervent Air Force cadets who view the conflict in Iraq as a holy war of the end times. Over coffeecake in a Seattle kitchen, she listens to a young wife and mother explain her belief in "wifely submission"—the idea, drawn from Ephesians 5:22, that wives should submit to their husbands "as to the Lord."

Sandler is a skilled reporter whose work has appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Elle*, but here she writes as a secular prophet too, and her book is something of a secularist's *cri de coeur*. She is baffled by the religious, philosophical, and political choices that members of the "Disciple Generation" make. How can kids whose moms burned their bras at Equal Rights Amendment marches grow up to embrace "wifely submission"? How can college students who've read Locke and Rousseau proclaim that the Bible is the inerrant word of God? And more than baffled, she is fearful. "There is a tyranny over the hearts and minds of this generation," she writes, and everyone, religious and secular, should be concerned.

RIGHTEOUS:

Dispatches From the Evangelical Youth Movement.

By Lauren Sandler.
Viking. 254 pp. \$24.95

Sandler's conclusion—that people in the modern world are lonely and isolated, and that loneliness brings people to religion—is not especially innovative. People have been spinning variations on this functionalist theme for centuries. Then Sandler makes a less predictable move: She turns her scrutiny on herself and her own community. Secularists "can't even find the words to express why life is worth living," she writes. In Sandler's account, they have left the task of meaning making to the likes of Rick Warren, the California pastor who wrote the best-selling manifesto *The Purpose-Driven Life*, and novelist Tim LaHaye, coauthor of the apocalyptic *Left Behind* series. If those on the secular left want to prevent America's takeover by fundamentalists, they must do a better job of articulating a vision of the good life that is compelling and humane: "It is time for our own secular Great Awakening," Sandler writes.

Perhaps she ought to give us a sequel in which, instead of describing a community she perceives as inimical, she uses her journalistic skills to paint pictures of secular folks who are living that good life, and does a little evangelizing for the values she believes are under threat.

—Lauren F. Winner

Party til the Cows Come Home

IF A PARENT SINCERELY believes that everyone is bound for either eternal paradise or eternal damnation, what could be worse than a child's selecting the wrong destination? The threat is doubly harrowing for the Old Order Amish, for whom the separation from a wayward child is as real in this life as it will be in the next. Amish adolescents who walk away from their faith do so literally, abandoning the drab attire and buggies of their communities for the fashionable dress

RUMSPRINGA:

To Be or Not to Be Amish.

By Tom Shachtman.
North Point. 286 pp. \$25