

Napkin Scribbles by Leonard Sweet – *The Two Violas* – Transcript

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Hello, you're listening to "Napkin Scribbles;" thoughtful sketches of God and life from thinker and author Leonard Sweet. Len's verbal imagery is being shared with you through the generous support of George Fox Evangelical Seminary in Portland Oregon. George Fox Evangelical Seminary, a matter of mind and spirit. Now, let's sit down with Leonard Sweet, wherever in the world he is.

I'm like a little kid sometimes. You know, I discover something, and then I can't go anywhere without it. I want to be with it all times, and I'm kind of that way today because I left a book behind.

There are two Violas that I'm desperately hunting after and trying to read everything that I can to keep up with them. One is the video artist Bill Viola. I don't know if you are familiar with this sound architect, this video artist. He is a classic; one of a kind. Orchestras are experimenting with video and film to keep people coming. And they are using Bill Viola's work. I think his new kind of artistry that he is pioneering is one that people will be talking about in the future.

But there is another Viola, and it's Frank Viola. He pronounces his name a little differently, I think. But these two Violas are both paradigm busters.

Frank Viola is, I think, the reigning paradigm buster around today. Do you know the whole organic church movement? I think you know about the church growth emphasis in the 70's and 80's, and then the church health emphasis in the 90's. I think what we are seeing today is a real kind of healthy movement towards organic church. You have names associated with it: Neil Cole, Joe Myers, Wolfgang Simpson, Alan Hirsch. The one that seems to get left out a lot, but ought to be right in there with the rest of them is Robert Dale, whose writings on organic church are very significant, I think.

But the other name that you often don't hear, but it needs to be put in that context, is Frank Viola. Here is somebody who wrote this book with George Barna called [Pagan Christianity](#). Actually he is the one who did most of the work on it. He did most of the research on it. But his follow-up book is called [Reimagining Church](#). It just came out not too long ago. If you want a paradigm-busting book that's it. I've been taking this book with me. I've assigned it to my students. Unfortunately I've left it, so I'm kind of without my "blanket."

Is there a role for professional clergy? Well, guess what Frank Viola says? Is there a role for institutional churches? Well, guess what Frank Viola says? Is there a role for even the individual Christian? Is there even a concept or is there such a thing as the individual Christian? Well, guess what Frank Viola says?

It's half time, things aren't going well, you're losing the game, and the coach comes in and says, "You know what? It's back to basics." It's half time. The Church isn't doing well; Frank Viola comes in and says, "It's back to basics."

This is kind of my "back to basics" person and writer. You just need to know about him and about his work.

The other thing I like about Frank and Frank's work is that wherever he ends up, you always know where he is going to end up. Even though he rattles the cages and shakes the foundations and everything comes toppling down, you always know what's going to be left.

What's going to be left is Christ.

Not the dead Jesus, but the living Christ. Not, "let's go back to Jesus," but "let's go forward to where He already is in this future. " The living Christ is pulling us, pulling us, not pushing us from behind, but pulling us from up forward.

I think this is a critique of the whole organic church movement. We can get very mechanistic with the organic. We approach the organic in a very mechanistic way. Not Frank. He's organic all the way down; organic all the way towards the very organism of Jesus Christ.

Incarnation is all about the downward bend. God came down. How far down? All the way down. The question of Jesus' ministry that He asks all of us – and the question of the living Christ – is pulling us towards. How far down are you willing to go? How far down are you willing to go? Jesus said drink deep of the living water, all the way down. Jesus went all the way down to His hands and knees, getting His hands wet and dirty; His knees on the ground washing His disciples' feet.

Are we willing to come all the way down? Church, are we willing to drink deep the living water? That water is Christ.

I'm one freed ear, missing his book that he left behind in Cleveland Tennessee.

Leonard Sweet

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