

CALLED TO BE CHRISTIANS TODAY!!!

The United States is no longer the 'land of the free and the home of the brave'. Oh, it is that, alright, but it is also the home of terrorists, militant religious groups, atheists, and the ACLU. Sure, we have always had our gangsters, mobsters, outlaws, and corrupt politicians. But these people, in their time, were out for personal gain but certainly not for the overthrow of our Government. Our laws and customs firmly dealt with this kind of corruption. Now our land is inhabited by individuals and groups who want to overthrow and outlaw our way of life. They want to crush our kind of freedom. They want to rid our land of the kind of religious freedom we have enjoyed and they want to make void the moral standards, ethics, and principles espoused by Christian beliefs.

Today, the challenge faced by those who profess the Christian faith is, indeed, very great. Hence, that faith calls for a firm and studied devotion in our times.

Allen Bloom, educator, wrote "The Closing of The American Mind". He was talking about "Education". Yet, he was also calling our attention to the fact that we are a people out of touch with our "story", historically, culturally, religiously... unaware of moral and ethical principles that make for personal and social stability. In other words, today, there is a great lack of a convicting sense of who we are.

Called to be Christians today is stretching our minds and convictions to comprehend what it means to be "Christian" in these times. Or what being something means as over against

'passive' drifting with the currents of the times. Or what a 'direction giving' faith means. Being a Christian means that we can never just settle in, become content, drift with the current tide. No, these days we constantly stand on the brink of some disaster. The Christian is constantly faced with decisions involving integrity, honesty, business ethics, citizenship demands. In the late 60s a department store displayed a "swagger" coat with a sign beside it that said: "This coat captures that informal air of complete unconcern." The Christian cannot wear that coat in this day and time! Christians are being confronted daily: "remove those Christian symbols from public places," "take, Under God, out of the Pledge," "teach this, teach that in the schools," "devise you moral standards to your own comforts". No, the Christian is never in a state of "complete unconcern"! There is always the Pilgrimage of faith, the journey of preparation, the mental and spiritual conditioning

The Christian tradition reaches far back. Moses heard the call: "Lead my people out..." Out of slavery. Abraham heard: "Get up and go to a country I will show you..." "Don't just settle in, establish a Nation!" "Be a blessing to generations in my Name." The Christians in our Nation have heard and heeded that call. And they have been a blessing to generations. They have 'served', they have been a 'blessing', and they have sought to make a people 'free'.

Moving the Christian up a few hundred years: we hear Paul calling the Church and Christians 'the Body of Christ'. all having gifts, all having roles

and responsibilities. In that famous 13th Chapter of 1st Corinthians Paul speaks of three vital factors that characterize the life of the Christian: Faith, Hope, and Love, or compassion. Faith gives the Christian a firm basis upon which to stand and face life. Hope constitutes a positive look toward the future. Love or Compassion is the characteristic that makes the Christian vitally alive in the course of this life... a firm foundation, a positive way of facing the future, a responsible guide for personal interactions.

Recently a University published a study dealing with religion and psychological health. It was found that generally religious people were more healthy. It was also suggested that people have better health because they are more compassionate. The study also concluded that 'compassion' is the active ingredient in relationships. Of course Paul was somewhat ahead of this study! He said, "I will show you a more excellent way..." and captured the vital elements of study and actually elaborated upon it! The alert Christian today is aware of a 'cloud of hate' that is rolling across our Country and that a personal stance is required to deal with it. Deep religious conviction generates the 'energy' necessary to move people to achieve significant social change.

Many centuries ago a man in North Africa wrote to Donatus, a friend and a Bishop. He said, "It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. Yet in the midst of it I have found a quiet and holy people. They have discovered a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure. They are despised and persecuted but they have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are the Christians and I am one of them..."

We are called today to be Christians in a world that has some incredibly bad features---wars, riots, terrorists, power seekers, haters, thugs of all types... But the Christians are the ones that have overcome or are overcoming the world and we are challenged to say, "And I am one of them...!"

As I write, Iraq is rejoicing in a great victory. Millions of citizens came out to vote for "freedom". They all faced death in order to cast that vote. A courageous hope was guiding them into a new future.

Once "We the people" fought a great, terrible, harsh, war for freedom. We have experienced the fruits of freedom. We are indebted to a people who had a firm conviction, a clear hope, and a compassion for freedom. Today we are called to say proudly, firmly, and intelligently, "I am one of them, I want to stand with them." As Christians, we are called to follow the "more excellent" way. When we cast our vote it should be for the person or the thing that is dedicated to true freedom and the better way.

Hughston R. Peyton
12-16-05