

Christian Perspectives

I have a couple of friends who tend to send me pass-on emails with Christian content. Some items are truly helpful but I am frustrated by some that mainly come out of the U.S.A. which can be at best misinformed and at worst, down right nasty. They sound just about anything but ?Christian.? Many are anti- Muslim as if some how being anti-anything makes you more Christian. Some are highly critical of President Obama. They aren't critical of his political policies but characterize him as anti-Christian. Obama, a professing Christian, is at least as respectful of others as most politicians, maybe more so. His program to bring government health care to all Americans, in other places in the world would be viewed as an obvious ?love your neighbour? move but according to the initiators of these so called Christian values emails, it is plot against the values of the country. The emails express a sense of being persecuted, whether it is truly warranted or not. Those emails are only a symptom of the root cause.

The problem is change. Our western countries are much more diverse than they were even fifty years ago. We live in a pluralistic society. Current immigrant populations, just as early settlers of the 1700's to 1900's have brought their traditions of faith and spiritual development with them. Descendants of Anglo and Francophone Canadians are no longer living in the time when most people around them believed and worshiped as they did. People are having trouble getting used to the new diversity. There is uneasiness that as Christians, we may not be so sure of what we believe while some of the new people around us appear to be more devout and more sure of their beliefs as they work towards having their traditions recognized by the society.

Jesus was born into just such a pluralistic society. The golden age of the country inherited by the people descended from the twelve sons of Jacob, known as Israel was long past. International trade, the importing of slaves, the intermixing with Babylonians during the time of exile and with neighbouring tribes all contributed to diversity in the population of the country. Most recently, the Greeks and then the Romans had invaded and brought their government and culture in as well. The society was highly diverse for that time. There was anxiety around the sudden appearance of a new faith system ? Christianity. We know that Paul and the other apostles often met opposition when they moved into a city with the ?Good News? of Jesus. Not all the locals saw it as good news. Christians had to be brave.

In our time we have seen great change. What began as tolerance of a variety of faiths has morphed into a rejection of faith. We saw it first in the political system of communism. Here in the west, under the banner of promoting freedom, we are finding that faith is being excluded from our value systems as it loses representation in our schools, government and other institutions. This is what is prompting the hate emails although I don't think that is the way to stand up for Christianity. The huge emphasis placed on our free market economy has meant an erosion of legislation around Sunday as a day of rest. Bombarded with advertising and faced with commitments to hockey, soccer and other children's activities, families increasingly make the choice to shop or participate in sports activities on Sundays. Many individuals have to be at work rather than in places of worship. This is one ?arena? (if you will pardon the use of the word) where Christians today have to be brave. Our society is no longer co-operating to make it easy for people to practise their faith. It is working against us. It takes bravery to say, ?Without causing hardship to others, I would prefer to work on Sunday as seldom as possible,? or ?Yes, we would love to come to visit, we'll be there after church.? It takes bravery to hold a children's sleepover Friday night to Saturday, when you may be more tired and have less time to prepare rather than Saturday to Sunday. It takes bravery to have the children picked up Sunday before church or ask that they may accompany your family to church. The people to whom you are speaking may have no idea why this could be important to you. But don't underestimate that your example can be a powerful witness of your faith to others even when you never talk about God.

The first disciples Jesus called learned to become brave in the face of persecution for their faith. We, too have to become bold in acknowledging our faith and making it clear to others that it is important to us. Being brave does not include disrespecting others through email and other media. Christians are to stand up for Jesus, not stand against other human beings.

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