

## **WHICH CHRISTIANITY IS LOST?**

**By Hayes Fletcher**

In a recent “Left-Right” dialogue column, Carl Mumpower mourned “... the hasty abandonment of our Christian heritage.” As usual, he blames the liberal establishment and social activism for moral decline. “This transition,” he says, “is important because Christianity has been our world’s civilizing force.”

I wonder what form of “Christianity” he considers lost. Is it the kind of “Christianity” formulated and enforced by Popes and kings that gave us the Crusades, built the fires under “heretics” and “witches?” Is it the fragmented church that failed to speak out against the slaughter of Native Americans?

Is it the “Christian church” that, either by direct support or by silent indifference, supported slavery, segregation and other heinous forms of prejudice and discrimination? (For a refresher course on this, see the movie “The Butler”). Surely, this is not a “Christianity” worth mourning the loss of.

If you mourn the loss of the early New Testament community based on the teachings of Jesus and practiced by St. Paul, then I will stand with you. But one must read (or re-read) the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and the epistles of St. Paul. Here you will find a community that emphasized loving one’s neighbor, helping the poor, sheltering the homeless, feeding the hungry, visiting the imprisoned, and clothing the needy.

Jesus said that “as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me.” That’s a strong directive that must be taken seriously by any community that is bold enough to use the word Christian.

The New Testament is the incarnation of a sharing and caring community, not a selfish and divisive one. Its central message is that we should become a people of loving kindness. Thankfully, there are still manifestations of that church (read the article about Rev. Brian Combs of the Haywood Street congregation in March 24, ACT). They are, however, in the minority.

Many of the social reforms designed to narrow the gap between rich and poor and that seem to reflect the teachings of Jesus have been opposed by so-called Christians in Washington and Raleigh. When a legislature passes laws that intentionally discriminate against minorities, women, the poor, the elderly, and the sick, it is a mockery of New Testament Christianity.

It is also sad to acknowledge that most of these lawmakers sit in pews each week and recite creeds that are not reflected in their public life.

I would suggest that when critics casually and loosely use the word Christianity, they should define what they mean. If they are asking for the pervasive influence of the New Testament Church, then they will need to think seriously about the admonition in John 14:12: “The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do.”

-----

Published: September 2013 Asheville Citizen Times,  
Asheville, NC

