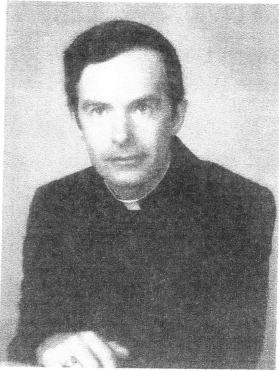


## Chaplain's Corner, Hughes Camp Chaplain Richard W Rudd



Civil strife is not unique to a particular people, place, or time. The tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim spoke the same language and shared a common ancestry. Their namesakes were the sons of Joseph, the grandsons of Jacob, and the great great

grandsons of Abraham. Yet, the Ephraimites nurtured an unreasonable hostility toward their kinsmen. They crossed the Jordan River into their perceived rivals' territory of Gilead and threatened to burn them in their homes. Under the leadership of Jephthah, the Gileadites repelled the Ephraimites, blocking their escape routes of retreat back across the Jordan. When captured Ephraimites denied their true identity, they were required to pronounce "Shibboleth," meaning river. Unable to pronounce the word, they said "Sibboleth." Their dialect betrayed their identity and they were slain.

Not only what we say, but how we say it, delineates our identity. The southern accent, actually a composite of numerous sub-regional dialects, forms the largest single accent spoken in the US. Accents can be more important than visual clues for other's assessment of who we are. They can become the basis for possible linguistic discrimination and stereotypes used to associate certain attributes of character, make subjective judgements about knowledge and abilities, determine social class or degree of respect for authority, and influence selection of friends, occupations, or place of residence. The southern accent and idioms have been the most negatively evaluated and derided among Americans. Detractors categorize southern speech as being illiterate and incorrect English.

Regardless of how sophisticated societies are today, our associations continue to be influenced by primitive tribal patterns primarily based not only on dialect, but also on geography, race, gender, religion, occupation, fraternal memberships, titles, social status and economic class, political philosophy, and ancestry. There are groups within groups and circles within circles. Each group defines and determines what constitutes belonging and solidarity, rank, and rights. Each has its own symbols, traditions, and values. Each protects its own for the sake of preservation, excluding outsiders, non-conformists, and those whose very essence is indelible.

Recently, social and political scientists have published articles and books about observations, surveys, and other research revealing how Americans tend to choose to live in neighborhoods populated by people who share similar beliefs and reinforce each other's convictions and behavior. This is most evident in election years when campaign signs sprout on lawns and votes are counted at the polls. Red and blue precincts and states dot the map. Most are incontrovertibly lopsided; few are 50/50. Real estate agents verify this phenomenon, but are unable to explain it. The explanation is found among those obvious facts revealing that tribal instincts are natural, evident in all of nature from the beginning of the recorded history of civilization. This is why radical liberals' and social engineers' dream of a utopian society achieved through forced and manipulated integration, miscegenation, socialism, and syncretism is unnatural, unrealistic, and unachievable. It is a skewed perception of reality that offers a false promise and a false hope. When dialects, especially accents and idioms, as well as other personal characteristics are considered, studies have documented that southerners tend to be more tolerant of differences than liberal northerners, who tend to be the most judgemental, intolerant, and condescending toward those traits which do not reflect their own.

When we are unjustly maligned and wronged, regardless of the reason, it has become a flippant and trite suggestion that we should just forgive and forget. This advice is neither practical nor Biblical. First, the more we try to forget, the more we reinforce our memory. Only God can intentionally forget. God promises contrite sinners, "...I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer. 31:34) Again, He reassures, "I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more." (Heb. 10:17) This is why David prayed, "Remember not the sins of my youth, or my transgressions..." (Ps. 25:7) Second, forgiveness is conditional and bilateral, not unconditional and unilateral. An attempt at unilateral forgiveness is usually viewed by the offender as a sign of weakness that is neither valued nor respected. It accomplishes nothing without a change of heart by the offender. Should we dare to consider ourselves more merciful and forgiving than God? God forbid! If we wish to be forgiven our sins, we are obligated to forgive others as God forgives us. As Christ continually offers forgiveness to us, so we must always stand ready to offer forgiveness to others. Peter asked Christ, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" Christ answered, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven." (Matt. 18:21) The conditions for forgiveness are two. First, we must admit we are wrong. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins..." (I Jn. 1:9) Second, we must amend our ways. "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out..." (Acts 3:19) Only then, "...as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us." (Ps. 103:12) Only then, as far as these conditions are met, is true forgiveness and "...the peace of God, which passes all understanding..." (Phil. 4:7) found within ourselves, our nation, and the world.

*Fr. Richard Rudd, Hughes Camp Chaplain*

*Hughes Camp Chaplain*