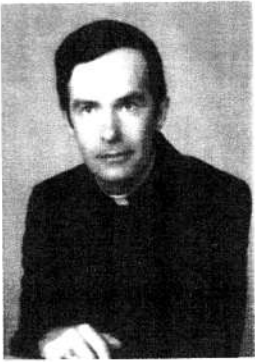


## Chaplain's Corner, Hughes Camp Chaplain Richard W Rudd



In our Declaration of Independence, Jefferson wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident (obvious), that...men are...endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these (is) liberty (freedom)..." Freedom enables us to determine our beliefs and actions.

God told Adam, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." (Gen. 2:16) The variety of trees to choose from and the warning regarding the dire consequences of choosing to eat of the forbidden tree imply that God granted man freedom of choice at his creation and this freedom is inseparable from the responsibility and consequences that accompany it.

There was a period of time among the ancient Israelites when they had no government and "...every man did what was right in his own eyes." (Jdg. 17:6) Soon, men did what was not right in God's eyes. Corruption, lawlessness, and anarchy ensued. Because of the Founding Fathers' knowledge of history and the propensities of human nature, Jefferson also wrote, "That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men..." Governments enact laws. "Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully..." (1 Tim. 1:8) Good laws protect freedom, restrain sin, and teach men their duty and responsibility. When asked about the law and our responsibility under it, Christ said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." Next, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matt. 22:37) "Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness." (1 Jn. 3:4)

Samuel administered justice as a judge over Israel. When he became old and could no longer function, Israel declined into corruption and lawlessness. "Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel..., and...they said, 'Give us a king to govern us.'" "And the Lord said to Samuel, '...(T)hey have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.'" Samuel

told the people, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you..." and he proceeded to explain how the king's government would oppress them. (1 Sam. 7:15, 8-17) It is God's grace given to those who freely choose to obey Him, not the law, that changes men's hearts. "And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; ...I will put My laws in their hearts, and write them on their minds..." (Heb. 10:15) When there are more Christians per capita within a nation's population, there is less need of government legislation and bureaucratic regulations. This was true in the US until the mid-20th century. There exists an exponential equation in the shift from a Christian civilization and free society to a secular civilization and society with intensified government intrusion into citizens' lives. When a nation's citizens turn from the influence of God in their personal lives and fail to take responsibility for their actions or exercise self-control, corruption, lawlessness, and anarchy replace justice, respect for law, and peace. Like the ancient Israelites in Samuel's day, the people turn from God to government, from freedom to tyranny. After the advent of the 21st century and during his term of office, BO boldly proclaimed that the US is no longer a Christian nation. While that claim might be debatable, the evidence of current events documents that we are less Christian. My generation can remember when small towns and rural communities did not need police departments, schools and other government buildings and even some homes were unlocked, cameras did not spy on citizens, stores did not have armed guards, airports did not search your luggage and frisk your body, crimes of violence and massive theft were exceptions rather than daily events. We also remember when on Sundays more people were in church than in stores or on golf courses and ball fields.

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Patrick Henry said, "Give me liberty, or give me death." Later generations of Americans said, "Give me liberty." Today, more Americans are saying, "Give me." Their simultaneous demands for more freedom and more government are not contradictory because their concept of freedom has changed. Jefferson also wrote that one of the rights of man is "...the pursuit of happiness." To acquire happiness, one must take the responsibility of pursuing it.

Therein lies the problem. More of today's Americans are wanting freedom from responsibility. They want the fruits of socialism instead of the work that capitalism requires, of indoctrination rather than the effort needed for freedom of thought and honest debate, of relativism to fill the void of the rejection of self-discipline associated with a Christian moral code of conduct.

Like the origin of freedom, the rejection of responsibility is not novel. Just as when a child reaches the age of accountability, so when Adam and Eve learned the difference between good and evil that knowledge made them accountable or responsible for their actions. After Adam and Eve chose to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, they refused to take responsibility for their actions. Adam blamed God and Eve, saying, "The woman whom Thou gave me to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree..." (Gen. 3:12) Eve passed the buck, saying, "The serpent beguiled me..." (Gen. 3:13) Eve saw "...that the tree was to be desired to make one wise..." (Gen. 3:6) So man today "...is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire...gives birth to sin..." (Jas. 1:14) The serpent can only lure and entice; he cannot make us sin. Thus, freedom of choice and responsibility are inseparable.

St. Peter said, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour." (I Pet. 5:8) Jefferson agreed. "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance." Freedom and responsibility can never be separated. St. Paul tells us, "For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of God..." "So each of us shall give account of himself to God." (Rom. 14:10, 12) Ultimately, we are responsible to God for the freedom He gives us. Christ said, "... (Y)ou will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (Jn. 8:32) How do we know the truth? Christ said, "I am the...truth..." (Jn. 14:6) There will be no Christ, no truth, and no freedom in our lives if we are not vigilant in seeking to know Christ, know truth, and know freedom. We are free to decide what we choose to believe and do. The responsibility is ours.

***Father Richard W Rudd***

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