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Educating and Activating Christians for Social, Political, and Spiritual Action

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Lift Not One Eyebrow Higher than the Other

Revisiting 110 Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation

Wise people store up knowledge, But the mouth of the foolish is near destruction. --Proverbs 10: 14

Love him or not, President Donald Trump draws large enthusiastic crowds to his post-election political rallies—some 17 since moving into the White House 18 months ago. Turnout has been reported to be no-less-than 6,000 attendees, and as high as 32,000 at one particular event. While no one is inferring crowds are drawn by the eloquence of Trump’s speeches, it appears millions of middle-class voters want to demonstrate their appreciation for his decisive action in matters that should have been attended to long ago. And, we say, AMEN!

For a myriad of others, however, particularly warriors committed to daily prayer for *kings and those in authority*, emotions are somewhat more nuanced. Their hearts are with him and for him, but enthusiasm for ad homonym attacks against political rivals—not so much. It is said what is taking place in America is painful, heartbreaking, and even akin to witnessing a nasty divorce.

This makes one wonder if we shouldn’t dig up some old copies of Dale Carnegie’s all-time best-seller, How to Win Friends and Influence People?¹ It was not all that long ago when we were commonly encouraged to offer the carrot rather than the stick.

On the eve of our hallowed Independence Day observances, it seems appropriate, even urgent, to review and consider the subject of personal and national decorum—whether in peace, war, or even *politics*—as modeled and implemented by America’s first Commander-in-Chief.

After accepting command of the Continental Army, General Washington headed north from Philadelphia on horseback—riding at express speeds for seven days in torrential rains—arriving at command central in Cambridge, Massachusetts on July 2, 1775. But, while he may have been prepared to lead, his army was ill-prepared to follow.

In a letter to Joseph Reed, Washington described the newly formed Continental Army as “men without arms, without ammunition, without anything fit for accommodation of a soldier.” He added, “Could I have foreseen what I have, and am likely to experience, no consideration upon earth should have induced me to accept this command.”²

Although most of the recruits were excellent marksmen, they brought varied and disgusting habits from the backwoods that were, in Washington’s mind, a detriment to order and discipline. He forthwith posted his *110 Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*.³ Among some of the “social graces” addressed were:

“2. When in company, put not your hand to any part of the body not usually discovered.”
11. Shift not yourself in the sight of others, nor gnaw your nails. **12.** Shake not the head, feet or legs, roll not the eyes, lift not one eyebrow higher than the other...and bedew no man’s face with your spittle by [approaching too near] him [when] you speak.”

“16. Do not puff up the cheeks, loll not out the tongue with the hands, or beard, [or] thrust out the lips...”

Most of the rules, however, dealt with issues of character and morality such as: *“22. Show not yourself glad at the misfortune of another though he were your enemy. 50. Be not hasty to believe flying reports to the disparagement of any. 56. Associate yourself with men of good quality if you esteem your own reputation; for ‘tis better to be alone than in bad company. 109. Let your recreations be manful not sinful. 110. Labor to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire called conscience.”*

Washington was even more concerned with some of the serious deficiencies he observed among the officers. Historian George Pappas writes, “The Articles of War and General Orders were frequently transgressed, and...some of his officers, instead of suppressing disorderly behavior, encouraged soldiers by their examples to plunder and commit other offenses...”⁴

On his second day in command, Washington issued a general order forbidding profane cursing, swearing and drunkenness, and requiring Church attendance for all officers and soldiers not on duty. Several days later, he appointed chaplains to every regiment and issued another general order calling for every officer and man “to live and act, as becomes a Christian Soldier...”⁵

Washington also understood that officers can never act with confidence until they are masters of their profession. Therefore, he and senior staff members drafted a proposal for the establishment of a military academy. Cadets would be instructed in “natural and experimental philosophy (physics and mechanics), eloquence and ‘belle letters,’ civil law, the law of nations, history and geography, mathematics, civil architecture, drawing, French, horsemanship, fencing, dancing, and music.” Officers were to be well prepared for infantry, cavalry, artillery, or engineer service.⁶

Though Washington died three years before the first cadets were officially admitted to West Point in 1802, his imprint is remarkably evident—even today—at all four U.S. military academies. Emphasizing the same core values as the Naval, Air Force, and Coast Guard academies, the mission of USMA West Point is:

“To educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character committed to the values of *Duty, Honor, Country*; professional growth throughout a career as an officer in the United States Army; and a lifetime of selfless service to the nation.”

Valley Forge was certainly a demonstration of selfless service to the nation. Washington was proud of his men and wrote in his journal, “To see men without clothes to cover their nakedness, without blankets to lie on, without shoes...and submitting without a murmur, is a proof of patience and obedience which in my opinion can scarce be paralleled.”⁷

At the same time, a soldier at Valley Forge wrote, “...the enemy grows weaker every day, and we are growing stronger. Our work is almost done, and with the blessing of heaven, and the valor of our worthy General, we shall soon drive these plunderers out of our country.” (Ibid., pg.325)

Our closing thoughts and prayer: “Lord, we are reminded of the cost each generation must weigh if liberty and freedom are to endure. We especially remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for such prized possessions. Grant to our leaders the courage of George Washington; to our fighting men a faith like that soldier, and to the heart of American education, a regard for the laws of nature and nature’s God.”

Rick Forcier

¹ Carnegie, Dale, 1888-1955, best-selling author of many business and self-help books and periodicals

² Pappas, George S., *To The Point*, 1993, Praeger Publisher, Westport, CT., pg. 4

³ Higbee, Mathew K., *Historic Documents on Disk*

⁴ Pappas, George S., *Ibid.*, pg. 5

⁵ Feder, William J., *America’s God And Country*, 1994, FAME Publishing, Coppell, TX., pg. 638

⁶ Pappas, George S., *Ibid.*, pg. 5

⁷ Marshall, Peter, *The Light and the Glory*, 1977, Fleming & Revell, Grand Rapids, MI., pg. 322