

Welcome to the minority

By Dean Merrill

Did you know you belong to a minority group? Yes, you do, even if your skin is white, and you speak nothing but English. The very fact that you're reading this magazine says you're probably among the less than 40 percent of Americans who go to church on an average Sunday morning. Meanwhile, the other 60 percent are playing golf, reading the paper or sleeping in.

Forty percent, my friends, is not a majority. And even some of those in church pews aren't there for truly spiritual reasons. What we have in America today is a Christ-following minority ... and an independent majority. By "independent" I mean they are beholden to no particular authority other than themselves. They are self-managed, going through life just as the Israelites did long ago in the time of the judges, when "everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 21:25, NIV).

Some of them are very nice; many are intelligent. You probably have several neighbors in this category who

say hello at the mailbox and might even loan you a snow shovel if you needed it ... but they are still independently controlled. An academic friend of mine refers to them as "atheists unawares."

So how do we in the moral minority conduct our-

selves? Four styles are common among Christians today:

1. *Anxiousness.* There is an abundance of hand-wringing in the land. "Did you hear what the Supreme Court did now? Isn't it terrible? I just don't know what's going to become of this country before long."

Others believe they do know what's going to become of us. "We're headed right down the drain as a nation," they predict. "This society is so rotten we won't last another 30 years."

2. *Apathy.* This reaction is related to the first, but is less emotional: "The country is going to the dogs, and there's not much that either you or I can do about it. The unrighteous element is so strong these days ... You can't fight city hall ... Nobody will listen anymore to what the Bible has to say." So they elect to save their energy.

3. *Anger.* This response refuses to give in. With mounting indignation, it declares war on the ungodly and grits its teeth in determination to flatten the opponents.

Anger is a powerful emotion, and in a culture war it gets people fired up. Once the adrenaline is pumping, of course, it is hard to shut it off. Sometimes the innocent get scorched along with the guilty.

William Law, a British devotional writer of the 18th century, wrote: "If I hate or despise any man in the world, I hate that which God cannot hate, and despise that which He loves ...

"There is no greater sign of your own baptism in the Spirit than when you find yourself all love and compassion toward them that are very weak and sinful and especially toward those who oppose or misuse you."

That leads to the fourth response for Christ-followers:

4. *Apologetics.* This word has two very different meanings. I use it here in the formal sense of explaining and defending one's beliefs, not in the casual sense of saying you're sorry because you bumped someone in a

crowded store.

Christians who understand their minority status, but still want to influence the culture for good, engage in reasonable dialogue about the issues. They control their voice level and even keep a smile on their faces while they present common-sense reasons why A might be a better option than B or C for all concerned. The source of their common sense, of course, is God's wisdom as revealed in the Bible. But Christian apologists usually get further by speaking of policies, laws and programs that are *effective, useful, helpful, a good example, beneficial in the long run.* These words carry a wider appeal.

This is not compromise or hiding one's light under a bushel. Even the Bible itself does this at times. Listen to Moses, the great lawgiver, telling a new generation of Israelites "to observe the Lord's commands and decrees ... *for your own good*" (Deuteronomy 10:13, italics added). Isn't that interesting? In addition to God's authority (*obey because He said so, or else*), there's a practical reason to live God's way: It's good for your health and well-being.

If we use such logic, of course, we still may not win the discussion. What we are advocating may be too much for the self-gratifying desires of our fellow citizens. But as Charles Colson, the one-time White House "hatchet man," has written, "We must defend the truth lovingly, winsomely, letting others see in all we do the excellence of Him who has called us from darkness into light."

We represent a God who doesn't bludgeon sinners into submission. He woos human beings to come willingly to His point of view. He lays out His truth and then merely opens His arms. ■

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