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I'm unsettled by the tone of America today. I grew up in the '50's and '60's when there was turmoil in our country. In grade school we feared the "Red Menace" of the Soviet Union and nuclear annihilation. We practiced hiding under our little desks at school in case of a nuclear attack. (As if that would have helped!) As that receded, Vietnam and the war came along and with it the upsurge in social unrest. The Civil Rights movement had its share of violence and prejudice. The "free love" hippies also adopted violence to protest the war and power of the state. Kent State and the shootings there kind of capped it all. That being said, America seems even more chaotic today. And apparently I'm not the only one that feels this way.

These past few weeks have cranked out polls to illustrate this unsettled feeling. The Rasmussen poll has 31% of Americans fearing a Civil War is a very real possibility. The tone of political tensions is running very high and getting stronger almost daily. I recall about 15 or 20 years ago reading a study done by a Russian political/demographic scientist. Basically he said that America would break apart in the coming years due to the fracturing of our society. He looked at our country and saw diversity as a negative. We have rich vs. poor; young vs. old; conservative vs. liberal/socialist; black vs. white; Hispanic vs. black, white, and Asian; educated vs. uneducated; and bill-payers vs. social welfare recipients to name a few. We've devolved from: "One nation under God, with liberty and justice for all" to a bunch of tribes and clans. This is called: the Balkanization of America. The question is: where will it end?

Strauss and Howe in their seminal book: "The Fourth Turning" talked about all this and forecast it about 40 years ago. They catalogued how history is cyclical and repeats itself nationally about every 75 to 80 years. We go through Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter as a nation. Spring is rebirth from the ashes of the past upheaval. Summer is a time of energy and accomplishment. Fall is basically resting on our laurels. And winter is categorized by unrest and discontent culminating in another upheaval. Then the process starts all over again. You can trace this in America starting with the Revolution to the Civil War to the Depression and WWII to today. Winter, or the 4th turning of the 4th turning, is occurring right now and usually lasts for 20 years or so. Some say we'll be in this state of upheaval until the mid 2020's.

As hatred and violence swirl around us, eventually the center cannot hold and it collapses. Then some sharp shock has to occur to reduce a nation to ashes so that it can rise again with a more sane perspective and outlook. I thought I saw that happen in the '60's and early '70's, but in many respects it is far worse today. Manners are forgotten. Language is studded with hate-filled words. Reasoning with many people and using facts in

your argument is shouted down. Flash mobs harass anyone they disagree with. Respect for the elderly is laughed at. The semi-anonymous nature of social media seems to have brought out the worst in people. Now we even have members of Congress exhorting the crowd to verbally (if not physically) assault those they perceive to be enemies. Is this “the land of the free and the home of the brave”?

It seems worse to me than in previous times. Why? What are the causal reasons; because until you grasp that, you cannot begin to make it better. I’m not a social scientist. I’m a Pastor. Even more, I’m a Christian. And I’m sure of one thing: when God is denigrated, ignored, and not respected “America, you’ve got a problem.” Or, as the Bible says: “Righteousness exalts a nation.” The church has historically been a bastion of civility and respect for all others. We teach that God is the Father of us all. We teach that God demands we shun violence and hate. We teach that the 10 commandments are a universal rule book for people to operate under. Our founders were Christian to a large extent. Our country was set up on such principles. They governed the social contract. But with the church being corrupted or considered outdated and irrelevant, well, the center isn’t holding any more.

As Christians, you and I have a tremendous opportunity to do something to make all this better. We can pray daily about it. We can invoke the Spirit to calm troubled souls. We can politely interact with our neighbors and families. We can appeal to their conscience and their own wellbeing. We can repent of our own inclination to violence or hatred of others. We can “do unto others as Christ does to us” turning the other cheek—and finding strength in forgiveness. And when things get totally out of hand we can also support the state as it punishes evildoers to protect the innocent. For again as the Bible says: “The powers that be are ordained of God.” Our Lord is not a Lord of chaos and ill-tempered manners. He is a God who expects and demands respect from all people. So, continue to show Him that respect and as always: “Trust in the Lord and lean not on your own understanding.”

Pastor Thomas H. Fox