

THE LINE

Newsletter of the Convocation Of The West
OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS



The elite who dominate America have recently discovered diversity. Efforts are made to identify and honor “the diverse,” such as racial categories, some religious groups, or non-traditional gender forms. We are urged to respect “the diverse,” and it is celebrated when a “diverse” person achieves a breakthrough or higher status. Inclusion of “the diverse” is an important concern in employment, TV commercials, politics, and the like. Trendy denominations have followed along with national offices to minister to various “diverse” groups such as Latinos or African-Americans.

Few seem to notice that being identified as diverse means you are permanently excluded from the presumed majority of undiverse people. When trendy denominations issue apologies for discriminatory attitudes, they speak as the people at the center, undiverse and in charge, and not as a community including a wide spectrum of all kinds and sorts of people.

Even the designation of the groups to be regarded as diverse is decided by the elite. For example, although no one used the term “diverse,” Italians were regarded as diverse when I was a

child. Irish were considered diverse a generation before that and Poles a generation after that. But all European ethnicities are now assigned to an undifferentiated lump called “white,” or perhaps “Caucasian.” [The last time my Irish ancestors were in the Caucasus, if ever, was probably 10,000 years ago; a “homecoming” to there might prove awkward]. The woke have also decreed, for instance, that people with a Spanish linguistic background will be categorized henceforth as “Latinx,” to avoid any gender identification. But Spanish, unlike English, assigns gender everywhere. “El pueblo,” (masculine) means “the people.” “La gente” (feminine) means “the people.” One term is not more politically correct than the other and both get the job done without causing a fuss. “Latino” and “Latina” serve perfectly well.

Often, Latinos are simply lumped as a racial category called “brown,” shared with more or less everyone not considered white or Black. But Latino or Hispanic is not a race (as the U.S. Census rightly decided). It is not even an ethnicity.



The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.

Instead, it includes the wide range of ethnicities and races who speak Spanish, but otherwise are quite.... diverse, from each other.

It goes on. But you get the point.

Suppose we start instead from what God has done. Even a cursory look at creation reveals an incredible, and beautiful, diversity. I marvel at the intricate and dazzling designs of various bugs. And every human has been given a unique DNA. In other words, we are all diverse. The woke assign other humans to pigeon holes for various categories, whereas God creates each of us as a separate unique beings, even though we share multiple similarities. Taking a few of these similarities, such as pigment, to place you in your appropriate pigeon hole, while ignoring other similarities (say, brown eyes or big feet) for purposes of housing, employment or social life, is arbitrary and capricious.

But God approaches this quite differently. Each individual is loved by him or herself. All the categories into which that individual falls are simply included: ethnic, national, linguistic, extended family/clan, gender. Humans create borders, barriers and exclusive categories. God does not.

Therefore, we need to understand the nature of the Body of Christ. Despite our many diversities, all the people included in the Body of Christ (the “blessed company of all faithful people” [BCP 1928] or “living members of the Body of your Son” [BCP 2019]) are the

“undiverse” in that we are all sinners and all loved by God.

We are in fact rather exclusive. There is only one kind of people who are welcome in our churches: sinners. Since that category actually includes everybody, it is also quite inclusive. If there is one phenomenon illustrating the historic American assertion that “all men are created equal,” it is the equality of our sinful condition. Nor does God recognize categories of sinners: sinners light, sinners grievous, sinners beyond hope. There is just one big undiverse lump of sinners.

The biggest problem of the Church is that so many failed to get the memo. The Liturgy sends an obvious message by including an invariable confession of sin every time (the invitation/exhortation to confess does not begin with, as the airlines put it, “In the unlikely event that one of you has sinned”). Yet most people assume, usually correctly, that their own sins, even if confessed, would ostracize them in church circles. Worse, some in church circles assume that their own sins are such trifles compared to real sinners out there that they can differentiate themselves from the unchurched and less churched by actually believing they are

righteous, or close to it.

This has led to an incredible muddle, scrambling the message of the Church to the world and even to the Faithful. If you are wondering why your church pews are mostly empty during this time of great spiritual hunger among the populace, look no further. Evangelism in America gets nowhere unless it first starts by unlearning, refuting the distortions of what the Church and the Gospel are, caused by the muddled messages received out there.

There is one, and only one, difference between the people of the Body of Christ, and others. The offer of God’s grace made to all has been accepted by us (unless you are faking it, unwisely). While God’s offer is universal, it is made in love by Him who is Love. That love does not force you, but rather invites you. You can choose to accept or reject the love of humans, other creatures or God Himself. That loving offer of God, is (or should be) the sole message of the Church to the world.

With this thought, we arrive at All Saints Day. “Saints” has a

modern connotation of an extraordinarily righteous person. But there are, in fact, no people meeting that definition. We are, to repeat, all sinners. Our saintliness is not earned by righteousness, but is a response to grace. Chapter 7 in Revelation, the epistle appointed for All Saints Day, identifies the saints. As John sees his vision of heaven, he sees “a great multitude which



*The Forerunners of Christ with Saints and Martyrs by Fra Angelico
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no one could count” (7:9). They include the diversity of earth’s population, “from every nation, and all tribes and peoples and tongues.” Those diverse attributes remain, but the entire multitude stands united before the Throne equally, without barriers or borders.

These are the saints, all of them. They have been issued a white robe, to cover their sins. They have all “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14). By the grace of God, achieved by the sacrifice of our Lord, their sins are remembered no more and they stand before the Throne as the one family of the Father.

Creation sends the message that God has made diversity to enrich our earth, to allow the accomplishment of an enormous variety of tasks, to honor the uniqueness of each of us and to enhance our enjoyment of the Garden we have been given by grace. Revelation shows that when finality is arrived at, we will stand in all our diversity and in total unity and equality, praising God before the Throne in endless Eucharistic thanks for His perfect love.

Living in a Hostile World

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

Last Saturday I was invited over to a neighbor's house along with others for dinner. It was a wonderful evening, but in the course of our conversations, two very interesting topics came up. The first was "Confession". One of my friends went to a parochial school, even though she and her sisters were not Roman Catholic. She remembers waiting for her class to finish going to Confession (as the Sacrament of Reconciliation was called originally) while she and her sisters had to wait. Although what she expressed was a belief that Confession should not be necessary – that she can confess directly to God – there was an underlying subtext of her feeling excluded.

We all know what it feels like to be excluded. I would venture to guess that most of us were not the cool kids who hung out with the cool group. But this particular exclusion could have been explained. The only real problem is that the nun or teacher did not learn to "read minds". Teachers need to anticipate the thoughts of their students. Children who are excluded for a reason from something should have that reason explained to them.

I have another friend who is Jewish who was raised in Seattle. She went through a very similar thing. At that time, the best school in Seattle was a parochial school. So, her parents matriculated her into that school. Now, although those nuns were just as bad at explaining things, my friend was exceedingly bright and, at least in hindsight, understood what was taking place. But she was even more confused at first, especially because she had no idea that she was Jewish. Her parents kept that little fact from her for many years, fearing anti-Semitism. So, she often really didn't have a clue why things were excluded from her. She only knew that she was not Roman Catholic.

In most cases, people tend to assume. Teachers assume that the parents explain things to their children. Parents in turn assume the teachers, or in these cases, the nuns will explain things to their students. And the children, in the meantime, feel excluded and like they're second-class citizens, having no

explanation as to the reason for their exclusion.

I have a theory that this may have been what happened in the sixties when I was in school. The catechism at the time in parochial school was almost non-existent. The nuns and lay teachers didn't want to use the old Baltimore Catechism with its question and answer format. It was disfavored after Vatican II. Rather, they were to come up with a better curriculum – which turned out to be no curriculum! Meanwhile, our parents assumed that the school was doing what they did in the past, and they, in turn, did not catechize their own children.

But, as you can see, there are several lessons in here for us. The first is the need for a proper Catechism. We cannot "assume" when it comes to our children – or our adults for that matter. We must make sure that all understand our faith. This is paramount. The second is that we need to be better equipped to explain to people things they may not understand. Although our communion is open to all believing Christians, there are two requirements besides our beliefs that would exclude some people. The first is that they must be baptized. I personally have known Jewish people who are believing Christians but who have not been baptized yet, usually for family reasons. And, I am sure there are those who come from Hindu or Muslim or Buddhists or Atheist homes but who believe yet have not been baptized for the same or similar reasons. Therefore, we must explain this requirement before Communion, even if only briefly. The second is that they must believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This may exclude more. However, unlike Baptism, it may take a little longer to explain. Yet, once explained, most people will understand.

I do caution you about one thing: do not over-explain. I personally had a dreadful experience with an explanation I received at a Missouri Synod Lutheran church. At the top of their bulletin it stated that all believing Christians who have been baptized and believe in the Real Presence could receive communion. The usher at the time confirmed this with me. Then,

during the very long “passing of the peace”, I had two people, including the presiding priest in chasuble, tell me I couldn’t receive communion because the policy had just been changed and I had to be baptized into the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church. Talk about feeling welcomed! I am so glad they chose to do this during the passing of the peace. I never went back. Sometimes it’s best to stick to a simple explanation and trust the people to make their own determination of whether they can receive communion.

No one should feel excluded in our churches without understanding the theology behind it. Most people are reasonable. Some are not. But children are uniquely susceptible to both feeling excluded and understanding explanations. We must try to make sure they understand, and not assume that they do because we do.

This, in turn, leads me to an incident that happened this very same night that threw me for a bit of a loop. When speaking to my friend about Confession, how we Anglicans believe we can either confess directly or confess to a priest, I also said that there are times when we really need to “go to confession.” I explained how important it was for me when I came back to the faith after about 10 years of being an atheist. I then explained how patient and forgiving that Roman Catholic priest had been with me. This is when my world went cockeyed!

The host was listening and joined in on our conversation. I am pretty sure he is an atheist. He discounted the priest’s mercy and charity as merely an act of recruitment. He saw it as little more than a good business model. It was nothing more than pro forma. I was dumbfounded. Although I tried to explain that other priests may have been much more rigid, legalistic or unmerciful, he dismissed it all. Quite frankly, I was shocked. I just didn’t say anything more on the subject.

Now, as a former atheist, I understand the attitude and the beliefs of the unbeliever, but what I didn’t get, what really shocked me was the cynicism that the mercy was just an act to capture a new believer. I can see how an outsider could come to that conclusion, but there is an underlying belief that those

who maintain the faith really don’t believe it. They are just playing the part in order to “capture a consumer.”

Now, it is true we try to instill in all Christians the need to model Christ, including and most importantly, His mercy and love, but we do so because we believe. To write it off as an act and merely the actions of the “professional religious” was unfathomable to me. In my worst days of unbelief, I never doubted the sincerity of the believer, whether lay or ordained. I just thought they were duped by a myth. But my friend went one step beyond this and actually held that the religious don’t believe what they say.

We live in a fallen, hostile world that seems to be becoming more hostile with the passing of time. Some of the problems that exist stem from misunderstandings. However, these misunderstandings may produce people hostile to us because of a perceived slight, or because of the belief that they were somehow inferior and excluded. These are problems we can correct easily.

But sometimes we face bold, brazen hostility. It is a hatred of the faith. Here is where we must model Christ. We are to love our enemies – and most especially our friends who are hostile to our beliefs! Sometimes talking and reasoning can help. But sometimes it won’t. This last possibility is the hardest for me. As I have often said, being an atheist takes a lot of faith. And sometimes the non-believer has to “shut down” what actually appears good. They have to believe that there must be something hostile, cynical or false underneath in order to maintain their own lack of faith. And in those cases, all we can do as believers is pray and love and show them how wrong they really are through our example.

Facing a hostile world is difficult. Loving God with our whole heart, with our whole soul, with our whole strength, and with our whole mind is not. But living our lives like Christ

is. However, for each of us, that is what we are called to do. And with God’s help, we will be able to meet this challenge.

Amen.

