

RACISM

Paradox of the Unique and Universal

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Race continues to divide our families, our cities and our nation. Race, skin color, religion, creed, national origin (ancestry), sex, age, disability, military status, accent bias, language discrimination etc. are a few of the “isms” that continue to plague our society irrespective of legal protections, integration efforts and economic development. African-Americans, Latino Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian and Pacific Islanders and Mixed Race Americans are at the receiving end of these forms of discrimination not to mention outright institutional and personal racism. The words of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King’s still echo today that, “We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.” As Church our role in the civil rights movement has been admirable....but much remains to be done. What is our tradition’s spiritual understanding of sameness and difference?

We are universally unique...and uniquely universal in our diversity. In Genesis, Chapter 11 in the story of the Tower of Babel we are told the “whole world had the same language and the same words.” God resolutely turns the one language into the babble of many languages and cultures. There is, according to the story, a kind of unity (mono-cultural, mono-national and a sole linguistic identity) that God does not will and a diversity (multicultural, multinational and multilingual identities) that God does will. The dispersal of peoples and languages is NOT a punishment, but rather a completion of creation, filling the Earth per God’s command to “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it”. Clearly God’s gift of diversity of language and culture is the intentional context in which all humankind shall be in covenant with God. He in fact is the author of this sacred paradox in which we are both unique and universal at the same time.

We are called to live that Paradox.

In 1 Corinthians 12 we are taught that

“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit;
there are different forms of service but the same Lord;
there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.”
And the sentence, which is often, overlooked, “To each individual the manifestation of
the Spirit *is given for some benefit.*” There is a divine legitimacy of this paradox of
pluralism and singularity that offer benefit for the universal common good.

Our Church teaches that “The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as
persons and the rights that flow from it: “Every form of social or cultural discrimination in
fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions,
language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s
design.”

As early as the Eighteen century Charles Caleb Cotton observed that “We hate some
persons because we do not know them; and will not know them because we hate them.”
This describes the contaminated soil of broken trust and absence of human
relationships in which racism grows into intergenerational distrust, discrimination and
violence. This key insight points to the Church’s potential to be a bridge builder of trust
and relationship by modeling equity, parity and inclusion in our clergy, seminaries,
parish councils, pastoral ministries and outreach to the fringes of society, even to those
who seem farthest away, most indifferent..

If we do what we have always done, we will get what we have always gotten. We know
that the Jerry Springer School of diversity training does not work in our workplaces and
church places. It is time to shift strategy on how to navigate cultural pluralism back by
returning to Sacred Scripture. Jesus is our teacher and our model. He told the apostles
to make disciples of all nations. They were in fact the first cultural navigators to journey
across the diversity of nations, cultures and languages. We must take up their footsteps.

We must remember that we are a nation of immigrants from around the world who came from abroad to live with the 562 federally recognized Native American tribal nations indigenous to our homeland.

Its time to create a new history by calling forth a New Evangelization. The New Evangelization calls each of us to deepen our faith, believe in the Gospel message and go forth to proclaim the Gospel. We must re-propose the Gospel to those who have experienced a crisis of faith poisoned by the secularization of the nation. Secularization has led to prejudice, discrimination and antagonism directed against citizens of a different race.

The New Evangelization invites each Catholic to renew their relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church. The words 1 John 2:11 remind us, "But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes." Its time turn on the light of the Gospel remembering that as disciples we should be a transparent medium through whom Jesus is present to declare the Eternal Father's divine invitation that "All races will be represented in heaven, "out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

For more information see U.S. Catholic Bishops
Pastoral Letter on Racism

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/brothers-and-sisters-to-us.cfm>