

My Final Straw – What is it That We are Doing?

Deacon Roger Fraser, October 14, 2020

The October 2020 Knights Navigator published an article, [Our Faith and Country at Crossroads](#), that troubled me. It applauded Fr. James Altman's divisive position that isolated and condemned fellow Catholics as being the source of the ills in America and our church. A link to Fr. Altman's speech was included.

I felt the article totally ignored the teachings of our USCCB Bishops in "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship" which presents the Bishop's guidance for the Catholic faithful in the exercise of our rights and duties as participants in our democracy.

More importantly, the article also ignored the consequences of Father Altman's opinions. His superior, Bishop William Callahan of La Crosse, WI, said in his Sept. 9, 2020 statement:

"When we approach issues that are contradictory to the Faith and teachings of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church, particularly on abortion and other life issues, we should invite dialogue and heart-felt conversion to the truth. Our approach must never seek to divide, isolate and condemn...it is not only the underlying truth that needs to be evaluated but also the manner of delivery and the tone of his message. Unfortunately, the tone Fr. Altman offers comes off as angry and judgmental, lacking any charity and in a way that causes scandal both in the Church and in society. His generalization and condemnation of entire groups of people is completely inappropriate and not in keeping with our values or the life of virtue," the bishop insisted... "I pray that Fr. Altman's heart and eyes might be open to the error of his ways and that he might take steps to correct his behavior and heal the wound he has inflicted on the Body of Christ."

Bishop Callahan's response prompted memories of last year's March 2019 DIG meeting, which I thought would help. It didn't. I had been hearing some contentious and hurtful remarks that concerned me and I wanted to change the narrative. I thought a lot about how we can engage in conversation with people we don't think hold the same values as we do. After discussions with the DIG leaders, I was invited to present at the March meeting.

Here is my presentation **"Getting Practical Ending Secularism"**:

"In recent years the overall social and political, and even the Catholic, climate has become more divisive and contentious. The intensity sometimes seems not only new but frightening. Polite discussion and working together for a common good seem to be things of the distant past. Disunity is the norm which contributes to a general feeling of hopelessness, and maybe even fear.

Our Catholic unity of bringing Christ into the world is our fundamental challenge. In these times, in all times, the Catholic Church should be a sign of unity. The Church works best when we embody the virtues of respect, compassion and sensitivity in everything we do. We need to "change the narrative" to reach common ground and understanding. This is how we should be approaching a subject, an issue, like Secularism. Words alone, and good intentions alone, and lip-service alone, don't count. We recognize authentic faith not by whether people say the right things, or if they have the right idea about things, but by whether they love others and reach out to them in charity and reconciliation. We recognize authentic community not by what people say about themselves or even by what goes on inside the community, but by whether the community brings about a visible effect, a positive effect on the world around it.

Without love in action, our religious activities like DIG [or KofC] mean little. But it is outside of here where we should check to see how we are doing. The only measure of our religious programs should be whether we go out into that world out there prepared to live the Gospel and do something generous for someone who doesn't deserve it. Nothing about how we run this place, or what goes on in here, makes very much difference, if when we leave here there is no change in the world out there. If no people have been given hope or encouragement because of us, if there is no reconciliation or great undertaking that is the result of what we do here, then what is it that are we doing?

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Let's now watch part of a video by Bishop Robert Barron on dealing with the Rise of the "Nones." We will then break out into our small table discussion on how we can engage with the "Nones" around us.

<https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/video/bishop-barron-on-the-rise-of-the-nones/5382/>

Questions for our small table discussions:

1. How have we experienced, as Bishop Barron says, going with Haste, being Astonished and Treasuring?
2. Practically speaking, how can we engage with the Nones we know to begin to reach common ground and understanding?

Let me give a practical example of how serious issues can be discussed and addressed to reach common ground and understanding:

A few years ago the CEO of AT&T, the company I worked for, told us at our annual Diversity and Inclusion Conference that he wasn't asking us to be merely "tolerant" of each other. He was speaking often in personal terms; about how racial tensions were ripping apart American communities. He called the recent shootings of black men and police officers "troubling" and urged us to begin a conversation to find common ground. It was also evident that with over 40% of our company being non-white employees that these racial tensions could easily spill over into our workforce. *"Our communities are being destroyed by racial tension and we are too polite to talk about it." "It is a difficult, tough issue. It's not pleasant to discuss. It takes work, it takes time, it takes emotion,"* he said, *"but we have to start communicating and if this is a dialogue that is going to begin at AT&T, I felt like it probably ought to start with me."* He then shared a story of an African-American physician and veteran whom he described as one of *"his closest friends in the world."* He said he was stunned that he wasn't aware of the racism his friend faced growing up in Louisiana and throughout his life. He said his friend makes sure to carry his driver's license when he jogs in his own neighborhood in case he gets questioned by police.

"If two very close friends of different races don't talk openly about this issue that is tearing our communities apart, how do we expect to find common ground and solutions for what's a really serious, serious problem?" "Tolerance is for cowards," he said. *"Being tolerant requires nothing from us but to be quiet and to not make waves, holding tightly to our views and judgments without being challenged. Do not tolerate each other. Work hard, move into uncomfortable territory and understand each other."*

I was never more proud or challenged to work for a company as I was that day!

[Update Dec. 2025: I'm definitely NOT SO PROUD anymore! AT&T has eliminated its diversity, equity and inclusiveness (DEI) policies and programs as part of a corporate realignment of business and workforce priorities, the telecommunications provider affirmed in a letter to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) this week.

The decision to eliminate its DEI policies comes nine months after FCC Chairman Brendan Carr promised his agency would increase its scrutiny of service providers and other regulated companies with DEI programs and who seek approval for licenses, business-related transactions and other matters. AT&T characterized the move as one necessary to super-serve its customers across its wireless and fiber business units. "...Moving forward, AT&T says it will not have any roles focused on DEI, and will instead prioritize "an environment where everyone is entrusted to contribute their best, reinforcing our commitment to a workplace where all employees perform their best, are challenged in their work and feel a sense of community."

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AT&T also “removed training related to diversity, equity and inclusion” and “any references to (DEI) from our internal and external messaging.” The company will not restrict workers from creating or joining employee groups based on diversity or inclusiveness characteristics, but said participation in those groups won’t be used in determinations on hiring or promotions. “Our workplace and culture are important factors in building our nation’s infrastructure and creating long-term shareholder value,” McAtee affirmed.]

Let’s now hear from Bishop Barron in part of his video on Love and Tolerance:

<https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/video/bishop-barron-on-love-tolerance-and-making-distinctions/4820/>

Questions for our small table discussions:

1. How have we experienced Love as “willing the good of the other?”
2. Practically speaking, how can we embody the virtues of respect, compassion and sensitivity to reach common ground and some understanding of each other?”

Our church is divided and in pain. Brother Knights, how can we make space for the hard work of all persons of faith *“who identify with the vulnerability of others, who reject the creation of a society of exclusion, and act instead as neighbors, lifting up and rehabilitating the fallen for the sake of the common good”*? (Fratelli Tutti (All Brothers), 67). How can we actually embody the virtues of respect, compassion and sensitivity to reach some common ground and a better understanding of each other?

Unfortunately, this session had no impact that I had hoped for.

In discussions with the KofC leadership and a parish priest, I asked that they disavow the article published in a KofC newsletter, *Our Faith and Country at Crossroads*, which supported Fr. James Altman and stated “...for his message...for standing up to our Catholic Church leaders (namely many Bishops, Cardinals and yes, even our Pope) for their soft, politically correct views....You cannot be Catholic & a Democrat. Period.”

“It’s complicated,” I was told.

No, it’s not!

It was time for a change.