

Ernstraud Magazine

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happiness sharing as a way to peace

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§1 The Only True Church

Do you belong to the only true church? Perhaps you have friends who belong to the only true church. Most likely the club encompasses several churches.

Can members of "the only true church" define what the term means? Is the phrase an intellectually honest conclusion of verifiable scientific investigation? Is it rather the bleating of Orwellian sheep (Animal Farm, 1945) reciting a political slogan?

If religion is the practice of love, can it ever be anything but true? However, the valid practice of love does not assure that every statement by every teacher is and has always been unambiguously, rigorously accurate. Individual claims can be scrutinized for historical and intellectual accuracy, but one specific church is not an exhaustive, exclusive realization of the collective human condition.

Is arrogating to oneself the designation "only true church" an attempt to denigrate every alternative? Does it expose a craving for superiority and power?

Might all people of good will please turn away from this divisive and hurtful appellation!

§ 2 Why Not To Boycott

1) Being self-employed (i.e., everybody is my boss), I hope that customers will hire me because of my good character and well-developed professional skills. If "good character" means that I agree perfectly with the customer's political orientation or social values, then I will lose all of my customers--it does not lie within me to be a clone of another person or of all people. Reasonable people differ; every customer will find some point of disagreement. While always open to reason, I trust customers not to boycott me "for the good of my soul."

2) I cannot join the boycott of local markets, because I do not want my close friends to lose their jobs. The US did not boycott Bangladeshi clothing imports, because doing so would have destroyed the livelihoods, meager as they were, of thousands of Bangladeshi workers. Instead, the US banned child labor (Harkin Bill) with a reasonable transition period to allow countries to comply. (<http://snd.sc/104SV1F> at 3.19) The current discussion of labor safety standards likewise calls for productive negotiation of better conditions, not a boycott that would end the livelihood itself.

3) Commerce requires collaboration. The above examples illustrate that fragmenting human effort into small homogeneous compartments not only restricts diversity, it also destroys livelihood that happens through commerce. Boycotts look like hostile separation into opposing camps. Regardless of the good intent of the boycotters, they drive people apart. Negotiation (based on genuine understanding and accurate documentation) draws people together in pursuit of mutual improvement: "He drew a circle that shut me out; heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But love and I had the wit to win; we drew a circle that took him in." (Edwin Markham; citation found 05 May 2013 at www.quotelady.com/authors/author-m.html)

The perils of our time are fragmentation, compartmentalization, greed, and gridlock. To improve universal quality of life, I plead with all people to turn away from demands and boycotts, and instead to negotiate sharing and cooperation (www.cooperatetobehappy.org).

§ 3 Choosing Servitude

There is a cultural tradition that looks to soil and coffee to teach that the darker color is richer and more satisfying. A different tradition proposes that god left some people in the oven too long, took others out too soon, and made the middle group exactly right. Yet a different tradition associates divine light with the color white and eventually applies that association to skin color. Although such self-acceptance (not only of skin color) has sometimes been diabolically corrupted into a sense of superiority, basic mental health does include being happy in one's own condition. The simplest expression of health comes from Brian Tracy, my favorite success coach, who teaches the chant "I like myself."

Healthy self valuation prepares the individual for a positive role in society. It does not require, and is not achieved by, elevating self over others. While it is natural to adopt a religious construct that emphasizes one's talents, only morally corrupt man-made gods allow people to exercise ascendancy. We pursue health in order to benefit others. Divine favor (natural talent) expresses itself in service, not self-promotion.

1. In Genesis 13, Abram, the wiser older brother, gave Lot first choice of a land to occupy. Yielding the advantage was part of Abram's fulfillment (success), not a detriment to it.

2. The individual is vaccinated against seeking material advantage by the Buddhist teaching that one does not take that which is not offered.

3. In Matthew 23, Jesus set a high standard, declaring that the moral or intellectual leader voluntarily chooses the role of servant.

America is founded on succeeding from a position of material disadvantage, as proclaimed on the Statue of Liberty in Emma Lazarus's words

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

Mental health protects us from feelings of exceptionalism: one cannot successfully claim religion or nature as grounds for accepting a position of advantage. Self-confidence is the strength to rise above self-seeking, to the benefit of the community: in Ernstraudian terms, "Life is to promote my neighbors' welfare."

§ 4 This Is Not Pornography

Many years ago the local art museum displayed a painting of a nude waif standing against a black background which scarcely disclosed either a floor or a back wall. Upon entering the gallery a viewer might wonder whether the picture represented a young Lolita discovering the power of her body to attract an adult male. Upon closer approach, the viewer might wonder whether the painter meant to entrap the hidden pedophile in each male viewer. Then upon recognizing the expression of bewilderment and terror on the girl's face, the viewer could see the subject as his own daughter or sister who had been stripped of her clothing before being pushed into the gas chamber. At that point it becomes impossible to associate the painting with any degree of prurient excitement. May art generally invite this power of progressive observation and lead to wisdom. May we be conscientious artists.