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VOICES

Engaging views and analysis from outside contributors on the issues affecting society and faith today.

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A screed: Kanye, Zacchaeus, and the Prayer of Humble Access

By [Harry K. Zeiders](#)⁽¹⁾, Voices Contributor



Andre Hunter

Better Than

“What a relief! They could let their breaths out now. Miss Efficiency was a bigot. These days the thing about bigotry was, it was undignified. It was a sign . . . of inferior social status, of poor taste. So they were the superiors of their English baby nurse, after all. What a * — relief.” Such were the thoughts racing through the minds of a less-than-perfect Manhattan couple in Tom Wolfe’s *Bonfire of the Vanities* once they finally discover a character flaw in their prim and proper live-in assistant.

While Wolfe's novel is from the 1980s, it's as relevant today as ever for how it captures our all too predatory nature for sniffing out and relishing in the weaknesses and faults of our fellow humans. Twitterverse and blogspheres have been ablaze in recent weeks with the John MacArthur-Beth Moore firestorm, and then the armchair anxiety analyzing whether rapper Kanye West's recently announced conversion to Christ is genuine or not. I'm waiting for archaeologists to discover the lost tweets about Zacchaeus after his transformational experience with Jesus (Luke 19). I'm sure we'll find that the same cynical assassins who worked overtime to take down that notorious "sinner" (Luke 19.7) are part of the same band eager to take down Kanye.

Ever Thus

Ever since the Bible's First Husband tried to take the First Wife down a notch in order to make himself look not so bad, and ever since the First Elder Brother nursed his envy over God the Father's acceptance of the First Younger Brother, humans have been prone to tearing down one another. Jesus knew this about us — that's why his story of the Prodigal didn't end with the Younger Brother's repentance or the Father's acceptance of him. Jesus included the envious Elder Brother not as a superfluous epilogue but as the punch line to the story.

Part of our human condition is comparing ourselves to one another and the susceptibility to allow comparisons to fester . . . and fester . . . and fester . . . even to the point of shedding blood. And if brothers can do that to one another, and if a husband can let his wife out to dry even in the most pristine of circumstances conceivable in Eden, just think what the rest of us can do to one another in our broken world. We are vain indeed. 'Twas ever thus and ever thus 'twill be.

Last Month

"Conform . . ."

“For shame.”

“Better than this . . . by a damn sight!”

“If you don’t like [it] then do us a favor and get out . . .”

These strident tweets last month were related to small blip on the screen. What attracted these responses by Anglicans was a poll by an Anglican priest asking an honest question about a liturgical prayer composed nearly 500 years ago by Anglican founder Thomas Cranmer. Ironically, the piece of liturgy in question is called “The Prayer of Humble Access.” Clearly, these respondents felt like a precious part of their tradition was under attack and so their brains’ amygdalas got juiced up ready to fight for its honor. How quickly the virtue of humility is vetoed by the vice of hubris.

Kyrie Eleison – Lord, Have Mercy

When I was first pursuing ordination in The Episcopal Church, its progressive leaders were still, in the 1990s, giving lip service to evangelical Episcopalians, telling them how much they were valued and necessary in the ‘big tent’ of the denomination. But the contempt behind the scenes and the increasingly upfront rancor towards evangelicals and biblical authority in denominational politics made it clear that there would be no room for me there. A decade later, Episcopal lawsuits against evangelical priests and congregations revealed the true meaning of so-called tolerance.

The next stop for me and my young family was the Messianic Jewish movement where I nearly embraced a calling as a rabbi. But there too the movement increasingly fell temptation to the need to build itself up by lodging criticisms at others. At nearly every Messianic conference and gathering, the shofar sounded the loudest when blasting the Gentile church for its innumerable failings while extolling the virtues of the Messianic way of doing things. Clearly this Gentile had not yet found a hospitable home.

When Nancy my wife and I got introduced to the Holy Spirit's empowerment for today's church, I thoughtfully immersed myself into the current charismatic revival movement. I personally came to know and witness scores of people — including myself — who were physically healed, emotionally healed, and who matured in their walk with God through the ministry of renewal leaders. Woe to me if I — who have born comparatively little fruit — were to sit back and give room in my heart to a religious-pharisaical spirit against them. So, it baffled me and still saddens me to see so many self-appointed heretic hunters preoccupied with attempts to tear down this most fruitful portion of their own Body.

This past spring, I was at an Anglican conference where it seemed fashionable for attendees to use their open-mic time to talk smack about their nondenominational Christian siblings in what was pejoratively called the big-box churches . . . as if tiny-box denominational churches have a monopoly on perfecting church.

For Whom?

When we talk smack about each other, who benefits? Are we doing it for God? Is God in heaven wringing his hands over the same thing we're wringing our hands about? Does He really care?

Are we doing it for the Church? Are we so deluded to imagine we're living in a Christendom where we have the luxury of treating each other this way? Are we so insecure about our own identity and stature that we think aiming ad hominem at other parts of the Body will somehow contribute to building God's church? Are we so insular in 2019 that we think our intramural potshots don't spray innocent bystanders?

Are we doing it for the world? Will vitriol be a convincing apologetic for the Bohemian professor who is teetering somewhere between the Christian faith of his mother and the hedonistic neo-paganism of Burning Man? Will invectives be signs and wonders opening the eyes of the trans+ activist who relishes every opportunity to diss the church? Will airing another church's dirty laundry show the single mom-of-four, hustling to keep from drowning in bills, that we are the loving community for which she's been longing?

Is it not the Enemy who benefits most?

Of Whom?

As an Anglican priest, I've had to come to grips with the realization that Jesus has never called me to make disciples of Thomas Cranmer — let alone of John Calvin, John Wesley, John Henry Newman, or John Wimber. If I did, then that would be the worst form of idolatry. No, it's disciples of Jesus. He's not called me to make good little Anglicans anymore than he's called a Reformed teaching elder to make good little Calvinists or Arminians to make good little Wesleys or Anglo-Catholics to make good little Newmans and charismatics to make good little Wimbers.

We're not much better and too often worse than the Corinthian Christians. Paul had to spell it out for them that they were never called to form factions within the Church, let alone pit one against another. Rather, he reminded them that their identity was as those called out of the world and immersed into a fellowship united in Christ (1st Corinthians chapter 1).

In contrast, Paul and Sosthenes must use valuable space on his parchment to put the Corinthian reality into perspective: They have allowed a force of entropy to bifurcate the church into competing segments. Already, this 'New Testament church' (!) has replaced their maturing into Christ and his way of life by the gravitational force of celebrated leaders — their own versions of Toms and Johns (chapter 3).

Modest Proposal

Let's keep the powder of polemics and stridency dry for the attacks of the real Enemy and for the times when we clearly need to deliver godly judgment against a Christian sibling for God's agenda of restoration (1st Corinthians chapter 5). And let's be honest: Using Twitter, and YouTube, and open mics as 21st century parchments of rebuke is more about scoring points for self promotion — in a word, vanity — than genuine efforts to build up the Body of

Christ.

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