

"Be of love a little more careful than anything."--E.E.Cummings

"Be of words a little more careful than anything except truth & love."--W.E.Elliott

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TERROR MINORITATIS: THE FEAR OF HURTING MINORITIES' FEELINGS

Like the prior one, this Thinksheet reflects on the Witness Statement of Craigville Theological Colloquy VI, which was on the theology of abortion. While I enthusiastically affirm the bottom-to-top doing-theology process that characterizes the Colloquies, I must remark that democracy has its glitches as well as its glories; & the Colloquies' products, the Witness Statements, manifest both. In the case of the Colloquy VI Witness Statement, the glitch #2346 was concerned with was linguistic (on which see the two lines preceding the present Thinksheet's title); in #2347, the glitch is moral. In the final plenary, I pointed to it: "The moral defect [of the Colloquy, as reflected in most of the group papers & in the Witness Statement] is the wistful-washy, bland, platitudinous refusal to face the fact of disproportionality. If at this moment we were to ask for a division of the house, everybody here knows that the result would be pro-choice. This Witness Statement deceptively conceals that fact beneath an evenhanded 'some/others' (eg, lines 50ff). Wherein is the moral flaw, the deception? A collective fact is used to veil a distributive reality by the falsely compassionate principle of the tyranny of the minority. If 1 person in 10 disagrees with the 9, it is a COLLECTIVE fact that the group could not come to consensus; but to mention that collective fact and not the DISTRIBUTIVE fact that the group members were almost without exception on one side, that repeats a spiritual and political error that accounts for the impasse and impotence in many of our congregations, viz, the tyranny of the minority. The irony of this mentality is that it parades itself as sensitivity to persons while collectivistically overriding and thus misrepresenting the position of almost all the persons involved."

1. The Statement is "to be used by the churches for information...." It MISinforms the churches not only by silence as to the radical disproportionality but also by flat untruth: "For some," abortion "would never be considered a viable option." Not even the Roman Catholic representative took that position, Rome's pre-Vatican-II position (that there are no exceptions to antiabortion, even at the cost of the mother's life). Never, at the Colloquy or anywhere else, have I met any UCCer of this position: strike "some" & read "none." Further, in balancing "some/others," the Statement would suggest about an equal division of the house, whose division (had it been taken) could scarcely have been more uneven....I suggest that the followup evaluation ask participants before/after locator-questions: Of the eight possible positions (as detailed on 2237, which was made available to the participants), which was yours (a) before & (b) after the Colloquy? In promoting the Colloquy, I heard a number of times "Why should I come? My mind's made up on that subject." Well, I'd like to know what if any mind-changing occurred as a result of the Colloquy, & where all the participant minds were before & are now. While the moral flaw of the Statement cannot be repaired, publishing the results of the followup evaluation would be a move in the right direction, as was the UCC Office of Communication (Hans Holznagel) press release ("By about a 5-to-1 majority, participants seemed to favor the woman's right to choose," the position "General Synod has taken repeatedly since 1971"). [Hans was a full & highly appreciated participant in the Colloquy, not just an observer-reporter.]

2. The moral flaw was motored, as is so much of liberal & "postliberal" Christianity, by (the negative pole) the **fear** of disunity, divisiveness, dissension, disruption, disintegration of "community" & by (the positive pole) the **longing** to maintain amiability ("peace") & achieve consensus ("unity"). I share the bright side of that fear & that longing; here I must note their dark side, which bedevils many of our congregations, overempowering a minority, which takes full advantage of the overempowerment & becomes tyrannical. (I knew a church whose deciding voice was the organist, whose power was in her threat to leave & take her "friends" with her. I call such a "doughnut church," hollow in the middle from running around the periphery in anxious hope of preventing anyone from escaping. As to such sick churches, & the anxiety of the Colloquy's leadership, please reread the last sentence of this Thinksheet's introduction.)

3. Love is amiable, truth is stern & often victimized by sentimentality representing itself as love, kindness (considerateness of others' feelings), fairness, justice. We pay too much for unity when the price is truth, integrity, honesty, honor. What price being "nice"? What cost consensus? What gain for anyone when speakers come, dump their load, & leave unchallenged? What respect is there in letting "minorities" play their games unchallenged because the "majority" is playing the game of patronism? What worth is there in a "united front," Christian or other, that comes unglued under dialectical stress?....Loving the Colloquies, I pray they'll become more honest.