

Editorial

Loving Denunciation and Civil Discourse

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Editor



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Of late, there has been growing concern over the question of civility – or lack thereof – in public discourse. In our ongoing culture wars ('cultural drama,' a term used by St John Paul II in *Memory and Identity*, is a richer and more civil term), shrillness routinely trumps substance. It is perhaps pointless to ask who is most prone to incivility, since in any case no cultural or ideological camp is immune to it.

That said, my own experience is that cautions against incivility on the right are far more numerous than cautions against incivility on the left. A standard script in contemporary religious circles reads: *we need to avoid the cranky denunciations of the religious right*. It's interesting to dwell on the opposite notion, which would read: *we need to pursue the softly-spoken affirmations of the secular left*. Really? Do we want our caution to take us that far?

Let's pursue balance in all things, including, perhaps, our desire to be perceived by others as perfectly balanced. And let's be cautious lest our cautions against incivility begin to say something that we don't want them to say. The concerns that propel thoughtful Christians into the public square do not carry any inherent risk of incivility, so let's not be painted into a corner by other players in the cultural drama, some of whom, let's be honest, are well capable of incivility.

By the same token, neither do we need to fear the judgment of those who are more strident or polemical in their defence of traditional values, or who believe that stridency is courage and its absence is cowardice. The letter to the Ephesians (4:14-15) states that error and deceit are remedied not simply by speaking the truth, but by *speaking the truth in love*.

For many people, the truths taught by Christ's followers are incompatible with love; they would rather hear us *changing* than *speaking* the truth in love. In that mindset, the term 'loving denunciation' could only ever be an oxymoron, yet those words describe an essential part of our task at this time.

It would be shameful and unwise to surrender the noun, 'denunciation,' to the adjective, 'cranky'. There is indeed such a thing as loving denunciation, just as a failure to denounce can be a manifestation of cowardice rather than love. One of the features that gives Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* its appeal is that it is full of loving denunciation. Nowhere in that wonderful document does the Pope resort to polemic or crankiness, yet nowhere does he refrain from calling a spade a spade.

The truth in love! Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical of that name, writes: 'A Christianity of charity without truth would be more or less interchangeable with a pool of good sentiments, helpful for social cohesion, but of little relevance.' The gospel is as searchingly relevant as ever, and its truths demand to be proclaimed with love, and without fear or favour.

Chris Hayden