

CIVILITY

by

Fr. David O’Leary, S.T.L., D.Phil.

Administrator

Good Shepherd Parish, Wayland, MA

The late great Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan said; “Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.” Facts are in very short supply today. Seems like people have their answers at ready even before all the information has been processed. One of my heroes in the field of Catholic Social Teachings is Reverend John Courtney Murray, S.J. He was the ghost writer for the Second Vatican Council document *Dignitatis Humanae* The Declaration on Religious Freedom. He spent many years writing and teaching on Catholic Social Ethics. In 1960 he wrote “We Hold These Truths, Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition. It is a profound book on United States politics.

He wrote:

“Arguments cease to be civil when they are dominated by passion and prejudice; when its vocabulary becomes solipsist, premised on the theory that my insight is mine alone and cannot be shared; when dialogue gives way to a series of monologues; when the parties to the conversation cease to listen to one another, or hear only what they want to hear, or see the other’s argument only through the screen of their own categories; when defiance is flung to the basic ontological principle of all ordered discourse which asserts Reality is an analogical structure, within which there are variant modes of reality, to each of which there corresponds a distinctive method of thought that imposes on argument its own special rules. When things like this happen, people cannot be locked together in argument. Conversation becomes merely quarrelsome. CIVILITY DIES WITH THE DEATH OF DIALOGUE.”

Yes, that is a very heavy quote. But both Moynihan and Murray are trying to get to the basics; we need to have accurate, correct information before the debate or argument begins. One needs to the correct facts AND a willingness to dialogue. To see the others’ personhood as being fundamentally good but challenging their reasoning, not their existence!

Both His Holiness Pope Francis and Reverend James Martin, S.J. have been attacked because of their writings. Maybe one should read Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation “*Amoris Laetitia – The Joy of Love*, before one questions if the Pope is Catholic. (See my blog on “*Amoris Laetitia* 6/25/17). Also, one should read Fr. Martin’s book “*Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion and Sensitivity*”, before one burns Fr. Martin at the stake.

Dialogue yes, hate no.