



St Paul's is a very harmonious parish with a wonderful loving, cooperative community spirit. In the larger church (i.e. at diocesan and national levels), however, there seems to be a great deal of tension, controversy, and divisiveness. Why?

Father William Bausch, a highly respected Roman Catholic priest, has written in his new book *Brave New Church*, (p.70ff.):

“After the 1960's, America experienced a cultural divide when the counterculture of the time not only challenged traditional moral norms but eventually overturned them. The counter-culture's intent was to liberate everyone from “bourgeois values” that were stultifying. In some instances, this movement was right on target—think of the civil rights movement it spawned—but it also would up liberating people from values that had a stabilizing and moralizing effect on society.

“This movement gave rise to two cultures in America: the dominant one, which is dedicated to protecting and extending individual freedom in all directions, with its secular, relativistic, and non-judgmental outlook; and the weaker culture, the one whose outlook is rooted in religious faith, moral conviction, concern for the traditional family, civility, and respect for authority. The two cultures are at war in our society today.

“The same two cultures are at war in the religious world as well. Sides have been taken on the hot-button issues of the role of women, homosexuality, abortion, the death penalty, the nature of the family, authority, identity, and competing ecclesiologies. In the Jewish community, for example, you have books like *Jew vs. Jew: The Struggle for the Soul of American Jews*, by Samuel G. Freedman, which addresses the fact that fierce divisions among their various factions, along with our highly secular culture and intermarriage, have undermined and absorbed the Jewish faith.

“The conservative and moderate Baptists have been at odds over whether to rebuke former President Clinton for declaring June as National Gay and Lesbian Pride month, as well as for his appointment of an openly gay man as ambassador to Luxembourg. They also clashed over purging seminaries and calling on wives “to submit graciously” to their husbands. The Methodists are divided over same-sex unions and gambling. And so it goes.

“The [Roman] Catholic Church is no exception to the culture wars; indeed, there the divisions seem most pronounced. At least they certainly seem to generate the most publicity. ...Now it is liberal versus conservative [Roman] Catholics all up and down the line, from priests, nuns, and religious education directors to the average parishioner. Issues divide and divide again: divorce and remarriage, the pope and papal authority—is he a defender of the faith or a curial dictator?—patriarchy, gender equality, contraception, abortion, and gay marriage, each camp adamantly insisting, ‘We are the Church; you are not.’”

The culture wars that Fr Bausch describes in American Judaism and the Baptist, Methodist, and Roman Catholic Churches are also present in the Episcopal Church.

St Paul's, however, is a religious community which is united in a deep commitment to the Benedictine expression of Catholicism. It is also a community whose prevailing culture is the second of these described by Fr Bausch (an outlook "rooted in religious faith, moral conviction, concern for the traditional family, civility, and respect for authority").

As in the classical Anglican—and Benedictine—tradition, though, St Paul's is not issue-driven nor interested in issue "litmus tests." (Someone once said that the only issue which drives St Paul's is growing in the life of the Triune God, and only "litmus test" is whether or not a person comes to the Eucharist.)

Although he is a Roman Catholic, Fr Bausch seems to have a clear sense of the traditional Anglican vision of balance when he writes:

"...perhaps we might follow, as a guide, the traditional attitude of the Church in its great theological disputes throughout history, when it tried to avoid an either/or position while holding divergent views in tension. Richard McBrien sums it up well:

Catholicism is a comprehensive, all-embracing, catholic tradition, characterized by a both/and rather than an either/or approach. It is not nature or grace, but graced nature, not reason or faith, but reason illuminated by faith; not law or Gospel, but inspired by the Gospel; not Scripture or tradition, but normative tradition within Scripture; not faith or works, but faith issuing in works and works as an expression of faith; not authority or freedom, but authority in the service of freedom.

Works cited:

William J. Bausch. *Brave New Church*, Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2001.
Richard McBrien. *Catholicism*, rev. ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1984.