

Circle of Peace – Interfaith Address
Rev. Charles Cooper
Pioneer Courthouse Square, Portland, OR, 4 Sept 2011

Speaking of Christianity, Roman Catholic Sister Mary Margaret Funk writes:

Humility...is at the core of our experience...So central is this quality of being (she writes) that it may be said that humility is for a Christian what enlightenment is for a Buddhist, realization is for a Hindu, sincerity is for a Confucian, righteousness is for a Jew, surrender is for a Muslim and annihilation is for a Sufi. Humility is what others see of our purity of heart.

Indeed the scandal of Christianity is its sacred narrative described by St Paul in the Letter to the Philippians:

*Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God...
...humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.*

Without this story of the humble and crucified God, Christianity has no core. Without purity of heart, Christianity has no soul. Without humility Christianity has no integrity.

Ironically the shadow side of humility is pride and pride so easily precedes a fall. Without looking at this shadow side, the Church naturally falls into its own darkness. Too often we project this darkness out on the world in the form of the demonization of the other.

This is our besetting sin both in our long complicity in anti-Semitism leading to Shoah and in the contemporary hatred expressed by many who identify as Christians who declare Muslims to be dangerous or even evil.

But Christianity's theme is redemption gained through true contrition and confession followed by action prescribed to right our wrong and to balance out the world again. This redemption is bound up in the experience of the love of God, indeed that God is Love, and that God, as St John writes in his Gospel, "*so loved the world.*"

We Christians are at our worst when we claim to be superior, final, and triumphant. We Christians are at our best when we live out the teachings of Jesus, humbly and respectfully among the other religions in the world as Christ's redeeming Church.

Given our history to be more often at our worst, in order to promote peace and justice in our time, it is time for those of us who are the Church today to say, "We are sorry. We humbly repent for the historic and contemporary violent deeds committed and destructive words spoken in the name of God and Christ.

"We have too easily allied and aligned ourselves with power and have colluded in oppressing the powerless. We have been too quick to gain benefactors while neglecting the poor. We have sacralized violence and neglected the work of peace. We have too easily put a bandage on the world's wounds without working for justice.

"We ask forgiveness. In the words of the ancient confession known as the Confiteor, 'we have sinned exceedingly in thought word and deed through our fault, through our fault, through our most grievous fault'. May God have mercy on us and forgive us our sins."

In our time, I pray that we who are Christians may offer the gift of humility as our contribution to global peace and justice by living out the message of our humble sage and Saviour in word and in deed when he said:

By this shall all people know you are my disciples, if you have love the one for the other;

and by following his way in self-giving love for others, especially those who are marginalized and oppressed.

It is then that we shall be able to contribute, with other world religions, toward the realization of our common humanity and a world of peace and justice for all.