

December 23, 2022

Nancy Pelosi's Faith

As a student of religion, I know that it can be the source of the best and the worst of humankind. Much has been and will be written about the Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. There are many aspects to this diamond of a woman, and one of the most important is her faith. Religion is more than doctrines, disciplines, and rituals. At its best, it is a means to an end. It is a way to define morals and a way of being in the world. It is a way that can craft and understand our relationship with a transcendent Other and with human beings, nature and creation. We know the essence of one's religious convictions by what one does. Religion, if it exists at all in a person's life, is visible.

There have been at least two times that I saw Speaker Pelosi's faith in what she both said and what she did. One was recently when she said on television before the election that growing up in a political family that she was taught never to pray for victory in an election, but rather to pray for God's will. This is unconditional faith. The other was December 5, 2019.

It was her usual weekly press conference. This press conference was different because she was going to announce that the House of Representatives would move forward with investigations into whether or not to impeach Donald Trump. She was on message. The For the People agenda was moving forward, a political agenda that included lower costs for health care and for prescription drugs; voting rights; legislation to address insider trading; background checks for gun purchases; paycheck fairness for women; reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act; increase in the minimum wage; Equality Act to address discrimination against LGBTQ+ people; the Promise Act for Dreamers, a path to legal status for undocumented people who were brought to this country as children; the SAFE Act to safeguard federal elections; and legislation to address Climate Change.

She said there were three parts to the work of House Democrats – legislate, investigate, and litigate. “We see our mission as defending democracy For the People,” she said. She took questions. When asked if the Democrats were proceeding too rapidly toward impeachment, she said:

“We are proceeding in a manner worthy of the Constitution. We feel comfortable with all of the time that has gone into this, two and a half years since the appointment of Mueller and all that has transpired since then. I have confidence, humility, again a heart full of love for America.”

With that, the press conference was over. She was walking out the door when James Rosen of Sinclair Television asked her: “Do you hate the president Madame Speaker?”

She could have ignored the question and just kept on walking, but she did not. She stopped to answer that she does not hate anybody. She referenced her Catholic upbringing. The question sounded like an accusation, and she was not having any of it. She was demonstrating her faith, defending her faith.

There could have been a very different answer. As an African-American Baptist, my faith is mediated through the Bible. Since a child, learning the pledge of allegiance to the Bible, it has been the basis of my moral reckoning, and the Bible teaches that there is a time to love and a time to hate. There are things that God hates including a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers. (Proverbs 6:16-19)

Had the reporter asked me, my answer would have been: “I hate him with a perfect hatred. I count him my enemy.” However, a perfect hatred can never be the end point for a believer. Perfect hatred requires serious self-examination. I have to ask God, the Transcendent Other, Divine Love to “Search me and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties and see if there is any wicked way in me. (Psalm 139:22-24) This self-examination always shows me that I have

work to do on my own soul that leaves no time to hate. Also, as a person who tries to follow the moral teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Humanity, I have to consider what the requirement to love one's enemies means. Martin Luther King, Jr., a teacher/preacher of radical love reminded us that we are not asked to like our enemies, but we are commanded to love them. What kind of love is this?

It is not a love that wants to be with or near the person one loves. It is not a warm fuzzy love. It is a love that comes from a greater love. The greater love is a love of the Transcendent. It is a love of the Creator God, the love of nature and creation itself. It is a love that is so deep that it embraces the individual that is our enemy because we see them as part of that which we do love. So, love of enemy comes from the expansive character of Divine Love.

Speaker Pelosi returned to the podium to explain that she thought Trump was a coward, that he was cruel, and in denial about the climate crisis, but these are matters to be settled through an election. She said that she prays for the president. I believe her because of her ability to speak about a heart full of love. What comes out of our mouths originates in our heart/mind. The reporter had aroused the wrath of Mom. "So don't mess with me when it comes to words like that", she said

Boom. Drop the mic. And the rest was silence.