

What Catholicism Can Teach “DEI”

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The movement for “diversity, equity, and inclusion” (DEI) has swept the country with lightning speed and has quickly established itself in institutions of all kinds, from schools to libraries to businesses. **Countless Catholic schools and universities have quickly joined the party by creating DEI offices and programs virtually identical to those found in secular institutions.** Occasionally, a school may try to place a Catholic accent on these programs. But in essence, they’re timidly following a secular model and, in many cases, elevating DEI as a defining institutional priority, with “equitable curricula” and “equitable hiring” at the top of the list.

On one level, this mimicry is no surprise. Since the 1960s, Catholic universities and schools have behaved like ancient Israel demanding a king “that we also may be like all the nations.” (1 Sam 8:20) To be like all the schools – especially Ivy League schools – **Catholic administrators hid or jettisoned what made their schools distinctly Catholic and adopted whole cloth whatever the secular schools were doing. Copying the DEI movement so vigorously touted by secular schools is only the latest example of a primordial problem for the People of God: wanting to be not God’s people, but just like every other people.**

At the same time, it’s a travesty that Catholic schools do not proudly declare that their own offerings are “better” – that is, more deeply thought out, more encompassing of human nature, and more oriented toward the human person’s true destiny – than are programs at secular schools.

So, let’s engage in a thought experiment. Let’s put aside any potential agendas associated with DEI and take the movement at face value. Diversity celebrates the many differences among people that are supposed to enrich us all. Equity promises that every person receives

fair treatment. (That's in the most generous reading; in fact, it makes a radical demand for equal *outcomes* and representations for “minorities” in every sector of society). Inclusion brings every person into every conversation or situation as is appropriate.

There is nothing wrong with any of these three goals stated in this way. But a Catholic school should ask itself: Is this all that we want to offer our students? If a school exists to lead students to the truth, and the truth is the Triune God, should not deeper, more fundamental concerns drive the school and the way its personnel and students interact – concerns that are eternal and moral rather than political and practical?

Contrary to what secular supporters may think, **opportunities for diversity, equity, and inclusion do not speak to the inner recesses of the human heart**, which is restless until it rests in the God that Catholic schools exist to teach. People crave a great deal more than difference, acceptance, and opportunity. And Catholic schools should give them what their very existence shows that they need.

So what if Catholic schools were to cease talking about “DEI” and instead offer their students “UCT” – universality, charity, and transformation?



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“Catholic” means universal. Variety may be the spice of life in choosing ice cream flavors, but **people long to belong to – and fit into – something bigger than themselves, something that can supply meaning and purpose for what they do.** Difference for difference’s sake leads nowhere, and what good are “diverse authors” if they merely regurgitate what students already think they know and don’t shed light on a coherent – which is to say Catholic and divine – whole?

The Catholic Church has a place for everyone’s unique gifts and quirks, as St. Paul makes abundantly clear in his extended analogy of the Church’s members to the different parts of a single body. (1 Cor 12) What God declared to Jeremiah applies to each individual person: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you.” (Jer 1:5) Catholic schools should lead their students to discover their diverse vocations in light of God’s singular plan of salvation.

In any decent institution, fair treatment of workers and employees should be a minimum requirement. But Jesus demands much more from His disciples than merely treating their neighbors equally before the law. He requires them to show genuine charity in imitation of Him: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” (John 13:34)

Catholic schools, in teaching their students how to become saints, should not promise their students the minimum. They should advertise that, compelled by the love of Christ (2 Cor 5:14), each person in the school will take part in a mission to love others as Christ commands.

As mentioned above, the human desire to belong prompts us to join groups and associations. But **the goal of Catholic schools is not simply to “include” everyone. It’s to transform each of its members from sinners into saints. In technical theological terms, this transformation is called divinization or *theosis*, the process by which we become like God through the gift of His grace. If Catholic schools fail to make their students more like God, then they have failed in their mission.**

A promise of universality, charity, and transformation exceeds that of diversity, equity, and inclusion in every way. Why would Catholics want to imitate the minimum standards of the world when they can instead offer those in the world what they truly need: a place in God's Kingdom, a touch of God's love, an encounter with God's salvation. It's time to update the websites and the slogans: Catholic schools offer UCT to all their students and employees so they can live forever. Done right, it just might lead to secular institutions copying Catholic ones.

***Image:** *The Triumph of the Immaculate* by Paolo de Matteis, 1716 [Gemäldegalerie, Berlin]

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