For Personal Reflection

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1. How do I envision unity?
2. Is unity an important value to me?
3. How do I attempt to be a unifying force in the lives of others?
4. Do I really challenge people to be more of who they are, rather than less?
5. How do I balance the desire for unity while allowing people to be themselves?
6. In what ways has this Salesian understanding of unity impacted on me? Have I learned anything new? Has it caused me to revisit some notions that I have taken for granted?

Further Reading

Treatise on the Love of God. St. Francis de Sales.

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WILMINGTON–PHILADELPHIA
V·J
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Visit us on the Internet:

www.oblates.org/dss

Email us:

dss@oblates.org

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Working For Unity

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

...By Celebrating Diversity

During every celebration of Eucharist, the presider raises the following prayer as the congregation prepares to receive communion: "Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles: I leave you peace, my peace I give you. Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom…" (*The Order of the Mass*)

"The supreme unity of God is opposed to confusion and disorder, but not to distinction and variety. On the contrary, it employs distinction and variety to bring forth beauty."

What is this unity for which the presider — and all of us — pray? "The state or quality of being one; singleness. The state or quality of being in accord; harmony." Its synonym, union, "connotes harmony, cohesiveness and unanimity among individuals united in a whole." (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language)

The unity for which we pray so often is not limited to hope of experiencing harmony and unanimity in heaven; we are called to work together in making something of this unity real here on earth.

St. Francis de Sales made the following observation in the opening chapter of his Treatise on the Love of God. "Since God wishes to make all things good and beautiful, God has reduced their plurality and distinction to perfect unity, and as it were, brought them all under one monarch. God has called all things to contribute to one another and all of them to be subject to the One who is their sovereign monarch. God reduces all our members to one body under one head. Out of many persons God forms a family; out of many families a city; out of many cities, a province; out of many provinces, a kingdom, a kingdom subject to a single King. Thus, over the countless multitude and variety of acts, movements, feelings, inclinations, habits, passions, faculties and powers that are in men and women, God establishes a natural monarchy of the will." (Treatise, Book I, Chapter 1)

If it is God's will that earth should reflect the unity of heaven, why do we experience — individually and collectively — so much division, contention, conflict and violence? Perhaps this happens because the unity that we seek conforms less with God's will, and more with ours.

"Since God wishes to make all things good and beautiful, God has reduced their plurality and distinction to perfect unity."

We short-circuit divine unity when we settle for sorry substitutes for it. We do this most frequently by striving to create "harmony, cohesiveness and unanimity" on our terms, when we seek unity at the cost of others' individuality. In short, we run afoul of God's unity by attempting to reduce — or eliminate — the real differences between and among individuals. On an individual level, such 'unity' is an expression of arrogance. On wholesale level, attempts at achieving such 'unity' manifests itself in brutal, intolerant and totalitarian regimes.

Herein lies the great paradox. Divine unity and peace can only be achieved by celebrating the rich legacy of human diversity. Authentic unity must name, encourage and call forth the distinct and unique gifts of individual men, women and children before it can hope to unify all these gifts around and under the vision of God's Kingdom.

"Divine unity and peace can only be achieved by celebrating the rich legacy of human diversity."

Francis de Sales observed: "The supreme unity of God is opposed to confusion and disorder, but not to distinction and variety. On the contrary, it employs distinction and variety to bring forth beauty by transforming all difference and diversity to proportion, proportion to order, and order to the unity of the world, which comprises all created things, both visible and invisible. All these together are called the universe, perhaps because all their diversity is transformed to unity, as if one were to say 'unidiverse,' that is, unique and diverse, unique along with diversity and diverse with unity." (Treatise, Book II, Chapter 2)

In order for us to pursue the unity of God's kingdom, we need to be very clear that it meets a divine standard, not a mere human one. This means that we need to work together — each and every day — for a unity that makes room for very real differences among very real people. In the eyes of God, human diversity is not an obstacle to the peace and unity of God's Kingdom. No, quite the contrary! In the eyes of God, human diversity is a beautiful thing to behold.