DIVERSITY, NORMALITY, AND EXPLANATION: UNITY WITHOUT A PRIVILEGED STORY

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I was a tough nut to crack. In the second half of the 20th century you'd have had a hard time being more privileged than I was. A white Protestant middle-class American male, growing up in the can-do Texas of the Eisenhower 50s and treated to a world-class education, I was overloaded with entitlements. I'm pretty sure I was in my middle 20s at the earliest before anybody ever really challenged me on anything. I was aware of diversity, of course, but I was not *part* of the diversity. I and people like me were the norm, and everyone else was more or less "diverse" from that norm—in short, a deviation. God looked at me and said not only, "You are good," but also, "You are the standard."

I'm now in my seventh decade, a period at which one becomes more obsessively reflective, and I welcome the invitation to speak here at Augustana as an incentive to ponder the seismic cultural shift that is registered in my current understanding of diversity, so radically different from what I thought in the middle of the last century. That doesn't get it quite right, however. Back in the 50s I didn't even *think* about it in any systematic or self-conscious sense. A world whose norm I was was just the way it was. I had at least a mild version of the commander in chief complex, characterized by my fellow-Texan George W. Bush in an interview with Bob Woodward: "I'm the commander in chief, see, I don't need to explain. I do not need to explain why I say things. That's the interesting part about being president. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don't feel like I owe anybody an explanation."[1]

This is why the civil rights and feminist revolutions have been so, well, revolutionary. They are part of the whole atmosphere change that is labeled postmodernism, a tag that can be ridiculed (I've done my share of pooh-poohing it) but that seems increasingly pointed and sharp to me. The heart of the postmodern upending of modernity is the direct challenge to the notion that there is a single authentic narrative, a story against which all other stories are measured. I used to think that the test of intellect, of understanding, was my ability to get all the ducks in a row. Now I think it's my ability to be amazed that the ducks are flying around all over the place and to try to watch them all. I'm as uncomfortable now with the notion that I'm the norm as I would have been then with the notion that I wasn't. And I am immensely grateful. It is actually a huge relief not to be the norm. Nothing could persuade me to go back to the way it was.

It is especially easy for a Christian to slip into the normative narrative trap. I will say later how I think there's a way—a profoundly Christian way—to get sprung from it, but for now I want to identify the snare. The Bible appears to be the ultimate privileged story—the account of those whom God called (and, for Christians, including the account of who God *was*), those who were to bless others and be blessed by them, the plot line worked out from creation to the new heaven and new earth, from alpha to omega with all the other letters falling right into place in the interim. The many passages about people falling away, about golden calves and betrayals, simply reinforce by way of contrast the central conviction that there is a way, one way, not always a clear way but the only way, to live an authentic life expressing what you are meant to be. The normative trap is built in to the Christian story, and it closes especially tight when it is

set in the midst of a society where nearly everybody adheres to the story. When, in high school, a friend told me, "You know, there is no God," I literally could not believe he was serious. My understanding of diversity was restricted to my conviction that he must be crazy.

I cannot let these introductory remarks give way to the main portion of my talk without noting how strongly another normative narrative is resisting the postmodern challenge. In an article called "The End of History," published in 1989, Francis Fukuyama argued that liberal democracy is the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and "the 'final form of human government,' and as such constituted the 'end of history.' That is, while earlier forms of government were characterized by grave defects and irrationalities that led to their eventual collapse, liberal democracy was arguably free from such fundamental internal contradictions."[2] The extent to which Fukuyama's conviction about the overarching normative historical narrative is driving current American foreign policy is sobering, to say the least.

But now: Any praise of diversity will have to confront eventually the question: How can we have any meaningful unity when there isn't a controlling narrative? This is not an easy question, and, on the face of it, the only possible answer is that we can't. But is such unity an impossibility, or is its apparent impossibility simply a function of our being so accustomed to a particular way of thinking and feeling that we are stuck, unable to think outside the box we've locked ourselves into? It is highly unlikely that I will work my way through to a thoroughly persuasive answer. It has taken me the better part of sixty years to become thoroughly suspicious of the narrative that had me always coming out on top, so what you are doing is eavesdropping on someone's trying to figure out the next stage in a lifetime's evolution. If I can get you to wondering about these matters too, I'll have felt it worth my time to come to Sioux Falls, and I hope you'll judge it worth your time spent listening to me.

First, though, a step, or several steps, back. There is no point in trying to figure out how we can have unity with diversity until we've thought carefully about what diversity really is, what its components are, its features, its nuances, its pitfalls, its delights, its sorrows, the tricks we can play on ourselves just when we think we're thinking clearly about it. Diversity is not some one thing, any more than life itself is some one thing. A single, controlling story about diversity would be self-contradictory.

Not so very long ago I was privileged to witness some fresh and engaging clues about the character of diversity. The Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, where I was executive director for twenty years before retiring three and half months ago, has taken the question of diversity to heart. The Institute is committed to first-person conversation—we are interested in people's experience, not their résumés or their bibliographies. Part of the Institute's mission is helping people find their own voices. And this requires time and patience. It takes a while—sometimes a long while—for people whose voices have been discounted, or even silenced, to get to where they can trust that others are really listening. I once heard a woman professor say that when a male colleague asked, "What are you working on?" and she replied, "An autobiography," he immediately responded, "An autobiography of whom?"

Instead of beginning with some highly structured, academic grant proposal to study "diversity," the Institute's Board of Directors asked itself, themselves, "Why is diversity important to me?"

The ground rules included the assurance that there are no wrong answers (even "It doesn't matter to me" is a right answer if it's true). What was wanted was a response that engages both thought and emotion. One Board member, a veteran of hundreds of diversity discussions, said, "If we say, 'This is what we feel individually about diversity,' we will have stepped farther than most groups. This will give authenticity to our decisions about diversity." In what follows I will draw not only on my own thought and experience over many decades but also on these spontaneous and heartfelt remarks of my friends and colleagues. (Most of the unidentified quotations in this text are from those statements.)

As soon as we start talking about diversity we break it into pieces, and the more we try to understand, the farther we are from the reality of the thing. But at the end I will offer an image that I hope will suggest a way of weaving the unraveled threads back together again.

I will divide the subject up into the following categories: Sociology; Theology; Experience; Strategy; Unity. And I am talking mainly about the United States.

Sociology

Many people say we have to come to terms with diversity because of changes in our society. More people in America encounter more people of other races, ethnicities, and religions today than ever before. By mid-century the majority will be the minority; there are more Muslims than Episcopalians; the US has a greater variety of Buddhists than any other country in the world (with huge implications for Buddhist "ecumenism")—the statistics tumble over one another, all of them reinforced by the globalization of commerce and communication. The World Wide Web cares hardly a fig about geography.

I believe there is good reason, which I will state a bit later, for saying that diversity should be our concern even if all these demographic changes weren't taking place. For starters, I experience myself as "diverse"—the Patrick of today would in many ways be unrecognizable to the Patrick of ten or thirty or fifty years ago, or maybe even yesterday, and if I ponder my own story, I get on the pulse a sense of what is writ large on the entire social map. I find it instructive that I have a sense of coherence, even of unity, despite parts of my story that don't fit together neatly at all.

But still: As an Institute Board member wrote, "No one today has the luxury of saying, 'I don't care about diversity.' Technology, transportation, and immigration have brought us together at a breathtaking pace. Our neighbors, co-workers, employees, and customers come from all over the globe and are very different from the immigrants of even ten years ago."

One of the intellectual blessings that came to me when I moved from being a professor to administering a research institute was my regular encounter with non-academic types, especially business people (who in fact constitute a major "diversity" category for Ph.D.s). From many of these people I learned that embracing diversity is not simply a matter of broadening the mind or even opening the heart. It gets to the bottom line, and is both a challenge and an opportunity for management—"to manage a diversity of people who have to work together. Diversity is an existing reality that requires management—understanding what motivates a diversity of people—if one is to be productive and profitable."

Yes, “diversity is an existing reality.” But it has been such a lot longer than many of us have realized. Just as I grew up being so much the norm that I didn’t even think about it, so also did our culture—or rather, those of us on top in our culture—go along for decades oblivious to unnoticed, unheard stories. “Black Studies appeared in the universities, and with that the discussion of rights and wrongs got heated. The American Indians did not want to be left behind in this assertion of diversity. What an eye-opener this was for me. I began to see that diversity had existed all along.” The image of “eye-opener” gets it exactly right. Diversity had been hidden in plain sight. And once eyes are opened, the question is insistent: “Who is not in this picture? Who has been read out of the story?”

When you begin to notice what has been hidden in plain sight, you start to wonder whether there is yet more, whether your peripheral vision is in good working order. Paying attention to race and ethnicity is a huge advance, but we mustn’t stop there. “It frustrates me when external markers are allowed to loom too large. Diversity seems so much more subtle and complex than can be acknowledged when external markers are the focus. The socio-economic barrier is more significant than the barriers of external markers. To some extent the external markers prevent alliances that could help address the socio-economic barrier, a barrier that is difficult to acknowledge because we love to live with the illusion that socio-economic differences are somehow the result of effort or ability or merit when so often they are not.”

Our stiff resistance even to admitting the difficulty of class diversity is highlighted in a, well, eye-opening essay by Robert Kaplan, called “The Media and the Military,” in the November issue of *The Atlantic*.[3] “Ever since the American-led invasion of Iraq last year, when hundreds of journalists were embedded with military units, people in media circles have been debating whether journalists lose their professional detachment under such circumstances and begin to identify too closely with the troops they are covering.” I imagine most of us have harbored this suspicion; it seems self-evident. But Kaplan won’t let us get away with it. “Having spent much of the past two years embedded with U.S. military units around the world, I find such fears to be a case of class prejudice. As with many forms of prejudice, the perpetrators are only vaguely aware of it, if at all.” And here is the real encounter with diversity, according to Kaplan: “I am talking about the working class and slightly above: that vast, forgotten multitude of Americans, especially between the two cosmopolitan coasts, with whom journalists in major media markets now have fewer and fewer opportunities to engage in a sustained, meaningful way except by embedding with the military.” Rather devastatingly, Kaplan holds this mirror up to himself, me, his fellow journalists, and probably many of you: “The meat-and-potatoes military is about practicalities . . . . Arguing over abstractions and refining differences between realism and idealism is the luxury of a well-to-do theory class.” Then the great divide: “Whereas the military is a lower-middle-class world in which a too-prominent sense of self is frowned on, the journalistic world too often represents the ultimate *me, me, me* culture of today’s international elite.” And here is the media’s problem: “They are supposed to explain what is happening in a diverse world, which is difficult to do if journalists all hail from the same social and economic background. The media establishment may claim eclectic origins, but whether a journalist grew up in New York or Hong Kong or Mexico City matters less than you might think if in any case he is affluent and well educated: the New Yorker will have more in common with his colleagues

from Asia or Latin America than he will with someone from a working-class background in Allentown, Pennsylvania." The solution, in part: "Embedding, which offers the media perhaps their last, best chance to reconnect with much of the society they claim to be a part of."

I have cited Kaplan at some length because his essay, though short, provides one of the most instructive lessons about diversity I have ever seen. One mark of genuine diversity is that it turns our assumptions inside out. We automatically are sure that journalistic embedding in military units is a threat to reporters' objectivity, whereas it may be the best chance reporters have to get pried loose from their prejudices. As an Institute Board member observed, "Change is a very difficult experience. How much variance do we want? Will our center or core value change with the variety? And the answer is yes it will." This change has a balancing stability, however. As another Board member said, "Diversity that has value should enhance and expand our lives, not constrain and demean them. Majority culture is enhanced by diversity, not molded into a new culture. The changes accepted as a result of diversity cannot be ones that make our society good for some at the expense of others."

Theology

Earlier I said one trap lurking in the Christian tradition is the allure of a single story, the main line track that you want to be on if you're going to avoid a train wreck. Sixty million copies in print of books in the *Left Behind* series are stunning testimony to the appeal of this sort of certainty. As Tim LaHaye, one of the co-authors states, "Well, we know that we're right, so we just present our position."[4]

There is another theological starting point, though, one that's at least as strongly rooted in the Bible as is the "tiny remnant" image. "Diversity is important to me because God created the world wildly diverse. We cheat ourselves and the entire world if we insist on sheltering ourselves in a rigid enclave of those 'like me.'" And you can go even deeper: "Diversity is one of the very building blocks of creation—diverse forms of matter, life, consciousness, human histories and cultures." Psalm 24 says it best: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." Not long ago a friend told me that the best homily he'd ever heard was a single sentence, preached when the scripture lesson was making this Psalm 24 point: "What part of *all* don't you understand?" It is this fundamental question that highlights why we should not have waited to pay attention to diversity until it was just down the street. Diversity is theologically prior to demographics.

Where did our cramped notion of God come from? Some people blame John Calvin, and, especially for America, his profound follower, Jonathan Edwards. But Edwards, most notoriously known for his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (which is actually more about God's mercy than about God's wrath, but that's another talk on another occasion), wrote some of the most passionate theology about beauty and the wild, glorious diversity of creation that you'll find anywhere in the literature. Calvin isn't the culprit. It's our culturally conditioned competitiveness, our bedrock assumption of scarcity, our fear that God hasn't really supplied all that we need, and that the world is, *at best*, a zero-sum game, and more likely the bottom line is way in deficit. In the *Left Behind* series, Christ slays millions upon millions, and a few survive. The part of *all* that many people don't understand is the part that they fear will push them aside, rub them out, take away what is theirs—as Vince Lombardi used to say, "Winning

isn't the main thing—it's the only thing." If this is how you see the world, if this is how the world *feels* to you, then diversity—indeed, *anybody else*—is bound to appear threatening. By confronting you with the radically other, God is at best testing you, and, more likely, punishing you. God created a diverse world not for your delight but to hedge you in.

An Institute Board member reports quite the opposite—that diversity not only expands our understanding of God, but also adds to our repertoire of *ways* of understanding God. "I truly believe diversity in all its many forms and expressions allows us to experience all the 'thickness' and possibility of God. In our Western culture we are so word bound. I still remember a conversation with a gentleman from the Caribbean who told me that God could only be spoken about through the drums."

Fifteen years ago I helped plan a conference in Minnesota that covered, in the great scheme of things, a very small swatch of the overall diversity spectrum, but in American academic history it was pretty radical. Saint John's University, Luther Seminary, and the University of Minnesota—three institutions not a whole lot like each other—teamed up to bring representatives of about a dozen religious traditions together to consider this question: "How does my tradition account for the fact that there are other traditions whose adherents are as deeply committed to them as I am to mine?" What we were getting at was not "What do you think about tradition X or Y?" but "How do *you* account for the *fact* of X and Y, and the *adherence* of people to them?" Answers were, as you might expect, all over the place, not only because divergent viewpoints are simply of the nature of such conferences but also because it was not always easy to keep participants focused on the question. But I believe the question is always worth asking, and is key to a deep appreciation of diversity. "I believe strongly what I believe. I must take seriously the fact that the other person believes something else equally strongly. On what grounds can I plausibly say to the other, 'You're wrong'?" And this is, at root, a theological question, at least for the Christian: What do I think the existence, the insistence, the inescapability of all this diversity tells me about the character of the God who made all this inescapable diversity? What part of *all* don't *I* understand? How could it ever have occurred to me that God made me the norm? As one participant in the conference suggested, it's as if "we are in a salt water marsh, where there is constant motion, teeming life, and an ever-shifting boundary between sea and land. Our task is not to figure out where we are, but to notice what is going on all around us."[5]

We have a choice. We can read the Bible to mean that the diversity is a mistake, a consequence of the fall, and that our vocation is to find our way out of the salt water marsh and bring as many with us as we can. Or, we can read the Bible to mean that God delights in the diversity, that the salt water marsh is where we are supposed to be, and the consequence of the fall is our not understanding all parts of all. Choosing to read the Bible this way—and the other way is equally a choice, not an inevitability—springs you free from the normative Christian trap.

<u>Experience</u>

I have not been through a 12-Step Program myself, but I know many who have, and I find that most of them understand most parts of all. As one wrote, "To embrace diversity, we must have openness, the desire to risk, and a spirit of active, fearless inquiry. As with AA Step 4—'Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.'"

Experience of diversity can be scary, but it can also be exhilarating. "I have found that, when I have a more-than-superficial encounter with people whose experience is markedly different from my own, I feel a connectedness that makes the world seem a better, safer place. I have also recognized wonderful qualities in others that are possibilities inside myself that were undiscovered, or atrophied." Did you hear the acknowledgment—that the world seems a *safer* place because people are so different from one another? That's as counter to our assumptions as is Kaplan's declaration that embedding makes journalists less prejudiced, and as you have already intuited, I think we need to pay special attention when what we suppose is so gets turned inside out.

Another Board member testifies to a similar experience, though puts it rather differently, emphasizing our deep affinity: "Diversity is also a test to find our sameness, that initial gift, in the unraveling of our mini-cultures and time-spaces. When the unraveling is true there is a rejoicing in the telling and in the sharing. It is in this rejoicing, the revelation of the self, that I realize diversity is, indeed, important, essential, to me."

The experience of diversity is not just one-way. One day I turned the tables, and wondered, Why should anyone else want to be associated with me? Diversity is not something I don't have that others bring to me. If they're worth my time, there's a presumption that I'm worth theirs. I have to be careful to avoid the trap of "normality," where I'm the standard and they're "diverse." There's an analogy to the nature of disciplines. We used to think there's theology, and then there's feminist theology and liberation theology and so on. But what justification is there for saying that theology done by white males in North Atlantic seminaries and universities requires any less a designation as "white male North Atlantic theology" than feminist theology or liberation theology need their adjectives? Diversity is not something that "theology" does not have that "feminist theology" brings to it. Diversity is an equal-opportunity qualifier.

For me, turning the tables in this way was mostly a thought experiment, though with consequences in my behavior and attitudes. For a member of the Institute's Board, however, who adopted children of another race, the tables were turned in daily encounters with people who thought of themselves as "normal." "When we became a bi-racial family, we had no idea what this would mean for us. It suddenly placed us in the position of having to 'explain' ourselves. Complete strangers felt a freedom to ask us many questions, make foolish comments, and in a few instances openly express their disapproval in non-verbal ways." In other words, these "complete strangers" acted like commanders in chief—"You, with your kids who don't look like you, need to explain yourselves to us, but we, whose kids look like us, don't feel like we owe anybody an explanation."

The profoundest experiences of diversity—at least the profoundest ones that I know about—have the character of conversion, of transforming both mind and heart. One mark of true conversion is your astonishment that you could ever have thought and felt the way you used to. Someone who spent time in Puerto Rico and Nicaragua says that "the view back at my own country was eye-opening. Diversity has the capacity to open our hearts and minds to truths, revelation, and grace in ways we can't even imagine until we are in the midst of the transformation, then we can just marvel and wonder at all we did not know before."

Another mark of conversion is the way duty gives way to delight. "I used to think about 'diversity' mostly in terms of justice—everybody has the right to be heard, to participate, to share in whatever there is. I haven't left that behind, but now when I think about diversity I'm more inclined to be moved by wisdom and beauty that diversity makes possible. It's not only that people have a 'right' to make their voices heard. It's even more that our lives and our communities need the wisdom that comes from different gene pools, different ways of thinking about the world, different ways of living together in different parts of the world. Life is so short. How can we bear the thought of missing out on what so many different kinds of people can offer each other?"

"Life is so short" leapt off the page at me. Yes, we really don't have time to waste on drawing lines and excluding and lording it over. But, while the question, "How can we bear the thought of missing out?" elicits an immediate response, "We can't, mustn't bear it!" there is a profound reason we do bear it. I invited responses to the original draft of this talk posted on the Augustana web site. I received two, and they are treasures.

"We have the privilege to choose our level of participation in a diverse world," wrote one. "We still have the luxury of choosing where we travel, what media we consume, where we go to church or college, and what sorts of people we really get to know well, and how we get to know them." She tells of becoming friends with some refugees who have settled in your city. "At the same time, I am aware that I know no American-born minorities, no severely impoverished white Americans, no one serving in this country's armed services, in anything but a superficial way. I can respond to my cross-continental friendship with a good deed here or there and an intellectual or spiritual wonder that these sorts of relationships are even possible today in a way they weren't for my grandparents and stop there. But if I really knew personally the racial tension and poverty in my own community, my excuses for not being outraged at the injustice I probably perpetuate would be poor indeed." Then, the crucial point of self-awareness: "I think I may be trying to say that unity is most difficult in close proximity. Even though we have greater opportunities to do otherwise, I fear my generation will surround ourselves with people like ourselves and pick and choose what sorts of diversity we're willing to allow into our lives. We won't stay very long in places where we can't breathe."

The other response notes, in effect, that it is easy to breathe in a relatively homogeneous community like Augustana College. "How does the issue of unity/diversity become real for people who would rather see themselves as fortunately unoppressed? Don't people need to be taught how to connect first, and then confront the issue of diversity? It seems that a majority of my peers don't take these issues personally; it's just 'that one guy in that one class.' How do people learn to understand unique, different voices as resonating from a similar center to their own?"

Strategy

Sociology, Theology, and Experience all have something to say about diversity—what it is, what it's connected to, how it shapes us, trips us up, transforms us, how difficult it is. Much of the power of diversity resides in our inability to control it. When we'd prefer to keep our eyes

closed, they get opened. Even commanders in chief can't deny reality forever. To those of you who your colleagues have worried are insulated from diversity, I can tell you: The world beyond this campus is various beyond your imagining, and you'd better start preparing your minds and hearts for it. But much more important: You are cheating yourself if you stay only where you can breathe easy. I wish for you the liberation I have experienced in being sometimes nudged, sometimes jolted out of the complacency that is a lethal side effect of thinking and feeling oneself the norm. Though I don't know your campus well, I'd wager a lot that there's lots more diversity here than you suspect. God has put diversity everywhere, even here.

But while we can't control, we can strategize, and as long as our strategies don't depend on manipulation, they might enhance diversity's promise and minimize its threat.

For starters, diversity isn't something that just happens because people just happen to be different. "Passive diversity (simply being in the same room with people who are different) won't do it, of course. The diversity has to be active and engaging." As another put it, we have to "'stay at the table' with divergent experiences and viewpoints." Window dressing, making the group photo look good in order to score a political point, is manipulation, and totally ineffective. Diversity simply for diversity's sake, "making diversity the vision and not a vision with diverse views," mistakes a means for an end.

Yet, while pretending isn't honest, neither is forcing. "By embracing diversity, I mean that it should be encouraged and allowed to happen, but it should not be forced. Forcing diversity, in some way I don't fully understand, changes or erodes the character of the diversifying elements so that the transforming strength of these elements is weakened to the detriment of the embracing enterprise." In other words, by forcing you into my world I am controlling you, manipulating you, and hence changing you, and you enter my world trimmed to fit my prior conviction about who you are, not in your radical otherness from me—and so, I go on with my world unchallenged and untransformed. My sense of my own normality may have sustained a brief nudge, but nothing seismic has registered. We are in danger of replacing true diversity with "a sterile individualism that demands to be treated as an honored guest rather than requiring that every person be a gracious host."

One Institute Board member looks to your generation, as I do, for instruction in strategies for dealing with diversity. "Our young people are often far more conscious of the richness of diversity and the struggle to find common ground as they attend schools where students represent a wide variety of religious, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. Those of us in institutions where such diversity is less obvious need to catch up with the younger generations' experience and their growing awareness of both the need for diversity and the difficulty in understanding and embracing our differences."

Yes, you know that understanding and embracing differences can be difficult, but it is also true that in many instances you don't have to "strategize," since a diverse world is as "natural" for you as the commander in chief world was "natural" for me in Texas half a century ago. A particularly striking example of this was the response to a question posed by a television reporter to a group of young people who served as a focus group following the recent vice-presidential debate. You will recall that the issue of gay marriage had come up in the discussion between

Vice President Cheney and Senator Edwards. The reporter asked this focus group, "How many of you would favor allowing gay marriage?" The entire group, at least a dozen, and not all cut from the same political cloth, raised their hands without hesitation. In their world, your world, gay people are a normal part of the world and don't need to explain themselves. "What," the young people in the focus group appeared to be wondering, "is all the fuss about?" Sociological change is shaping your experience which forms your theology, and I frankly envy you. There are, I'm sure, parts of all that you don't understand, but I think there were more parts of all that my generation didn't understand when we were your age.

<u>Unity</u>

I begin with reference back to the categories of Sociology, Theology, and Experience.

In terms of <u>sociology</u>, "unity" may be the wrong word. One Institute Board member suggested different terminology, noting that diversity is an essential step toward another goal, "solidarity—that is, a sense of oneness with all God's creation, including the wonderful richness of human cultures, races, faiths, etc. Diversity is a word we use to help folks get a manageable handle on the big goal of solidarity." The advantage of solidarity over unity is its allowance for difference to remain difference; it's like the term "reconciled diversity" that has moved to the center of much ecumenical discussion in recent years.

Now, solidarity, reconciled diversity, is a huge challenge, and there is a whole lot of evidence that we're very far from having achieved much of it anywhere. An Institute Board member, a world citizen who has lived many decades, noted wistfully, "My own learning curve during my life has given me a chance to appreciate diversity, but also with some sorrow I see its ambiguity in a world that looks for certainties." Remember the avenging Jesus of *Left Behind*, who expresses solidarity with very few and isn't interested in reconciling diversity at all, whose prophets are Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins who say, commander in chief style, "We know that we're right, so we just present our position."

In terms of <u>theology</u>, the center of gravity of my own thinking about unity has shifted over the years from the prayer of Jesus in John 17, "that they all may be one," to the image of God's house with many rooms, in John 14. I remember a motto on the door of a colleague at Swarthmore College, in the economics department, who was as fascinated by religion as he was skeptical of it: "Do not do unto others as you would have them do unto you—your tastes may be different." The image of God's house with many rooms allows for very different styles of decoration.

And if we truly believe that God created us all, that "we are all held in the love of the creator," and there isn't any part of all that we don't understand, then unity is a given, it's something we need to recognize, not an achievement. Actually, of course, having our eyes opened, really seeing what is right in front of our faces, is one of the most difficult of human accomplishments, as any therapist will tell you. One of the most electrifying moments in the Bible (Genesis 28) is when Jacob, having seen in a dream the ladder between heaven and earth, exclaims, "Surely the Lord is in this place, *and I did not know it*!" A precondition for unity in the midst of diversity is waking up when we'd really rather stay in bed.

In terms of experience, about a year ago I was handed some language that clarified something I had felt for years but never knew what to call it. It's a phrase coined by Krister Stendhal, former dean of Harvard Divinity School and Lutheran Archbishop of Stockholm. He speaks of "holy envy," the sense of longing for what someone in another tradition or from another culture has that you know you can't have because it requires that whole other atmosphere for its own breathing. A specific instance of this for me is the Jewish tradition of religious life centered around the family, especially the table. I can try to emulate it, but it will never be really like what it is for Jews steeped in generations of household worship and prayer. The brilliance of Stendhal's term is the modification of "envy," one of the seven deadly sins and maybe the worst of them, with "holy." The envy is no longer my wish that you didn't have what you have and I want but don't have; rather, the envy becomes my celebration of your having it, of its being part of the whole human story, of your being my friend. This doesn't come easy, however. As one of the Augustana responders to my original draft wrote, "Our brief forays, through travel, service-learning, reading, may not be enough to get us to 'holy envy.'" Holy envy presupposes, to use the title of a book by a dear friend and mentor of mine, "a spirituality for the long haul."[6]

In sum:

- Unity based on power, on commander in chief authority, in which some have to explain themselves to others who don't, will not last.

- Unity based on good will, on window dressing and photo ops, will not last.

- Unity based on multiculturalism, where cultures are related horizontally but not through the vertical dimensions of class, will not last.

- Unity based on tolerance without holy envy will not last.

The closest I've come to figuring out how we can have unity without a privileged story is to shift in my memory from words to music and dance. When I was in high school my mother took me to a performance of the Royal Danish Ballet on tour in Dallas. The concluding work was Benjamin Britten's "Variations on a Theme of Thomas Tallis," popularly known as "The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra." The ballet company was divided into segments corresponding to the sections of the orchestra, and all were dressed in primary color costumes. I don't remember which colors were which, though I'm pretty sure the brasses were bright red. As the variations were played, the dancers for that part of the orchestra were on stage. Then, at the end, when Britten takes the theme through all the arabesques and double helixes of a fugue, everyone was on stage, and unity in—not just in, but through—complex diversity was woven in front of our eyes and ears. From that moment until now, I suspect that the answer to how we can have unity without a privileged story lurks not in the categories of a philosopher but in the imagination of a choreographer.

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[1] Quoted from Woodward, *Bush at War*, in a column by Molly Ivins, "Bush and his plans leave her stunned," *St. Cloud [MN] Times*), October 7, 2004, 5B.

[2] http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/fukujama.htm; from the Introduction to Fukuyama's book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Penguin, 1992).

[3] *The Atlantic*, 294/4 (November 2004), 38-40; also at http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200411/kaplan.

[4] http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/04/13/60II/main611661.shtml (from "The Greatest Story Ever Sold," *60 Minutes II* (April 14, 2004).

[5] In Patrick Henry, "A Minnesota Response," the final chapter of Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes, editors, *Attitudes of Religions and Ideologies toward the Outsider: The Other*, Volume 1 of *Religions in Dialogue* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), p. 196.

[6] Robert S. Bilheimer, *A Spirituality for the Long Haul: Biblical Risk and Moral Stand* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).