

Including the Renegade

In the last six months, I've found myself stuck in two separate Sermons on Inclusion. These were public events. Neither was branded as left-wing. Both, however, gave the floor to speakers who explained the supreme value of making everyone feel included in the community.

In each case, my mid-sermon reaction was the same: "I don't think I've ever before felt so excluded in all my life."

Why would I react so negatively? It's not because I disagree with the one-sentence summary of the sermons. Sure, be friendly to people. Make them feel welcome. It's common decency. So what's the problem?

I'm tempted to blame the glaring hypocrisy. It was obvious that the speakers had zero interest in making Republicans, conservatives, macho males, traditional Christians, veterans, or economists feel included. In fact, the Sermons on Inclusion were full of thinly-veiled accusations against members of these groups.

Yet on reflection, glaring hypocrisy is too ubiquitous in life to explain why I personally felt so excluded by the Sermons on Inclusion.

The real reason I felt so excluded was that the preachers of both Sermons on Inclusion spoke as if human beings naturally value their cultural heritage. Frankly, I usually don't. I don't value my religious heritage. My mother was Catholic, and I was raised Catholic. But I deem the religion false and don't care about it. My don't value my ethnic heritage. My mother was Irish, my father was Jewish, but neither identity matters to me. I don't support Ireland or Israel... or any other country for that matter. My parents raised me to be an American nationalist; my schools taught me about the wonders of democracy. But in all honesty, the only institution I really believe in is business.

So what am I? A renegade. And I'm not alone. Lots of people turn their backs on the religion of their birth. Lots of people never feel – or lose interest in – their ethnic heritage. Lots of people dissent from "their" political culture. Cultural loyalists may call them traitors, sell-outs, self-haters, or *gusanos*. Yet despite our cosmic diversity, we renegades have one thing in common: We refuse to be ruled by the circumstances of our birth. And any sincere Sermon on Inclusion ought to acknowledge our existence and outlook.

Unfortunately, this omission is hard to correct. Why? Because one of the main goals of Sermons on Inclusion is to foster group pride, and the existence of renegades is an affront to group pride. You can't favorably discuss the assimilated Irish without tacitly snubbing people who cherish their Irish identity. You can't people who leave Orthodox Judaism

without tacitly snubbing Orthodox Jews. Et cetera.

But don't Sermons on Inclusion lionize *some* renegades, like anti-war veterans or the transgendered? Sure. But since the the Sermons barely acknowledge the existence of these renegades' groups of origin, there's little tension. It's easy to welcome renegades from group X if your default is to exclude typical members of group X.

Are efforts to promote inclusion therefore self-defeating? Not if you're careful, because actions speak louder than words. As I've argued before, the best way to make people feel included is just to be friendly and welcoming. Sermons divide us. Common decency brings us together.