






A Time to Marginalize

Few accusations in twenty-first century North America more rapidly gain traction than the claim that somebody or some group has been “marginalized,” in part because of our sad history of doing just that to successive waves of those who didn’t fit the self-image of the dominant Anglo-European culture.

First Native Americans, then African-Americans, were not only relegated to the sidelines, but in a still-unfolding and tragic story, grossly mistreated—then denied access to the justice system, the political establishment, and, of course, the mainstream economy. Generations of Irish, Italian, Eastern European, Hispanic, and Asian immigrants know the frustration of being kept on the margins of cultural power and success by both overt and subtle prejudice, regulations, and paranoia. Social marginalization is a real—and painful—issue that God’s remnant must consistently redress by illustrating that it is still the welcoming and **inclusive** community  envisioned in the teachings of both Jesus and the apostle Paul.

But there is a kind of marginalization that is both healthy and necessary for the church to practice. Recent events have underscored why now may be the moment for God’s people to thoughtfully and systematically exclude those elements that have proved themselves hostile to our life together.  Our authority for doing so is none other than the apostle of inclusiveness—Paul himself—who famously declared that “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28, RSV¹). Paul also tellingly wrote: “Take note of those who do not obey what we say in this letter; have nothing to do with them, so that they may be ashamed” (2 Thess. 3:14, NRSV²), and “Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths” (1 Tim. 4:7, RSV). In other words, exclude such  people; marginalize such foolishness.

In the cacophony of opinions swirling before the recent General Conference Session in San Antonio, we quickly learned that there were honest, constructive voices—even when they  disagreed with each other—that deserved to be part of the necessary conversations in which the church was engaged. They spoke with civility, practiced humility, and left us all the better for the good thinking they caused us to do, even when we weren’t initially attracted to their ideas.

But there were—and are—other voices who by their shrillness and their vitriol gave ample illustration that they don’t have the health of the body in mind, but instead, their own advantage. **They** make their living off our pain: they build **their** reputations even as they wound and rend the body of Christ. Unrighteous *ad hominem* attacks upon church leaders, respected theology 

teachers, and almost all who disagreed with **them** became their stock in trade. And sadly, the collective Adventist media **rewarded** them in just the way the national advertisers reward the angry pundits who slash and burn on Sunday morning television.



So here's a call to shut our ears, **protect our pulpits**, change the channel, and withhold our dollars from those of whatever ideological camp who practice the uncivil and unrighteous behaviors we witnessed before San Antonio. Yes, move them to the margins; draw the boundaries of our community in such a way that only repentance and changed behavior will again allow them full inclusion.



It falls to the body of Christ to defend itself when it is under attack from foes without—or within.