

Father Michael G. Ryan
Pastor, St. James Cathedral
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Thursday, 28 November 2019
Re: The Cathedral Kitchen

Dear Father Ryan,

In the name of humanity from a non-Christian.

In preparation for what I am about to say I have devoted every evening of the past several weeks reading an English translation of the *History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* by Bohn Eusebius (260 - 339 AD), Bishop of Caesarea. A work with which you are likely very familiar, if only in name. I began this work with certain assumptions that have since been set aside and believe it to be a good spring-board for what I am about to say.

On October 16, 2019 I ended a three-year, one-month, and five-day ordeal as a homeless person in Seattle. After my return from Saudi Arabia where I was employed for more than three years as a university lecturer at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, I discovered that I was unemployable in the United States and everywhere else in the world that I sought employment. The primary reasons for this were my age and a credentials industry that had grown up around my field and profession. What followed you have probably heard many more times than you care to hear.

During the aforementioned misfortune I observed carefully both from a distance and close up how the homeless community is organized and behaves. I was inexorably drawn to the uncomfortable conclusion that it is not good.

As a graduate with an M.A. in economics from the University of Washington, an A.B in anthropology from the University of Michigan, and the degree-equivalent of an M.A. in German Language and Literature from Michigan and Wayne State Universities I have had the rare opportunity to test these formal value systems (exclusive, collective, and

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personal value, respectively) against the less abstract world that these fine institutions seek to explain. This experimentation was conducted in eight countries on three continents comprising nearly three decades of overseas experience in Japan (9 years), Hong Kong (7 years), Saudi Arabia (4 years), and shorter periods in Korea, Thailand, Germany, and France. I am bringing this wealth of experience and education to your attention in order to inspire you to read the very simple message that I am about to share with you.

Under the assumption that the martyrdom of those, who followed in the foot-steps of Jesus of Nazareth in the many decades, centuries, and even millennia after his death, is still highly revered among the members of the contemporary church it is understandable that you, as head of the cathedral, do not distinguish between a criminal and a needy person while serving food at the counter in the Cathedral Kitchen. May I also be so bold to assume that you strive to treat everyone as *God's children* and actively avoid rendering judgment on the fate of those who seek your help.

Do you realize, however, that this apparent indifference is causing havoc among those whom you are seeking to help and is abetting asocial behavior? The mechanism for this negative outcome is probably easy for you to understand, but the solution less so.

May I suggest, in consequence, that before each meal everyone desirous of your offering be gathered together in whatever manner that is logistically convenient, and be compelled to listen to a prayer -- led by yourself, staff, fellow parishioners, or the homeless themselves -- that includes what the church considers proper thought and good behavior.

Now, I realize that you will likely discover an immediate drop in attendance at the Cathedral Kitchen, but you will also likely realize the following:

1. an increase in attendance at the Sunday mass
2. an absence in the need of the state to enforce proper speech and good behavior,
3. a more pleasant working environment for the faithful volunteers that make the kitchen possible.

Make sure that the door is closed before the prayer begins and opened only for exit until the last plate is served including seconds.

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Over the centuries Christians have taken great pride -- albeit with the greatest humility -- in frustrating their adversaries by simply insisting that they are Christian. For this insistence they have suffered enormous pain and won over many a non-believer. Please give those who are willing to open their hearts to the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth the opportunity to benefit from the fruits of his instruction, rather than the poison of its absence.

In the end suffering is only a good teacher for those who are predisposed to learning in the first place. Why do you insist on relieving the suffering of those who make no effort to acquire the gospel?

No, I can never become a believer in any religious faith, but I do appreciate the social good that all religious faith provides. This said, I promise to bow my head and fold my hands and endure the pang that will surely beset my conscience before each and every meal -- rather this than an upset stomach and another swollen eye.

Indeed, my pang of consciousness will be soothed by the knowledge that I am the author of my own suffering and by the good-will that I have brought to others of my own species.

In closing, I would like to thank the Cathedral for its part in all the good that the Christian Church and others have provided me during the past three years and especially those who have manned the front line in my service.

It has been simply amazing! I could not have made it this far without your help. Yes, you are welcome to share these thoughts with your congregation.

Gratefully yours,

Roddy A. Stegemann, A.B., M.A., M.A.
Founding Director

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