

COMMENTARY

Seeing the face of God

By Ariana Gonzalez-Bonillas

I was nervous the first and only time I asked a group of people how they pictured God. The group of girls that were a part of my ninth-grade youth group answered with varying results, and I was reassured that there was not just one representation of God. I had recently started to try to change my mental image of God into a woman, trying to combat the prominent, traditional and patriarchal use of “He” in liturgy and prayers. Honestly, I was coming up with an image of a Latina woman that happened to look extremely similar to la Virgen de Guadalupe.

I only have asked once how people physically picture God because God is so personal for us in our Episcopal tradition and teachings. In the Catholic Church, it is traditional to ask the saints to pray on one’s behalf to God – there is a middleman, so to speak. But for Protestant faiths, we like to have a personal one-on-one relationship with God, which allows for diverse pictures of God. The picture that others have has nothing to do with me; I do not need to know how you physically picture God to know that you are faithful.

I first started in middle school to imagine a feminine face to God, started to think of God as Mother, She. Simul-

taneously, I started to learn more about the Virgin of Guadalupe, whose picture I had seen at my grandmothers’ houses.

Now, in college, I tend to consolidate the two, and recognize the ancient Aztec face of the Virgin who was the mother of gods and goddesses, Tonantzin, sometimes known as Coatlicue. I recognize this aspect of God because I am trying to reclaim my culture and pray to a Goddess that my ancestors believed in before it was torn away from them.

I recently read “Goddess of the Americas,” an anthology edited by Ana Castillo, where many Chicano/a writers, artists and other followers of the Virgin of Guadalupe — the patron saint of Mexico — explore their spirituality and connection to the Virgin and how she is a feminine entity of God that they recognize more than a masculine father figure of God.

I related to these writings because I grew up praying to the Virgin of Guadalupe along with God, but I was able to see that there were others that consolidated the two entities into one so that there was a representation of their mestiza identity in the God that they worshiped. This is college for me: I am exploring my roots through the lens of my religion, the most personal way to explore my soul and connect to the One who knows it.

For another part of the Trinity, I am trying to picture Jesus as the actual Middle-Eastern man that he was because all the representations I see of him are Anglo. I know he looks more like me, another brown person, but I have not seen

that represented at all.

I am trying to erase the picture of an Anglo Jesus that our society is surrounded by and to pray to the Middle-Eastern face of Jesus, so that he is represented accurately in my mind. I pray to him as Yeshua, since I am an adamant supporter of pronouncing names as they are supposed to be pronounced and not butchered by a dominant culture.

Unfortunately, I did not make time to attend church my first semester of my sophomore year, even though I did miss it. I didn’t realize how much I missed church until I was recently hired as a youth leader by a church in the neighboring community, and part of youth group is a church service. When the singing started, I threw my voice into it, because I missed being able to worship God this way and it made my heart lighter. I had not been praying as often as I needed to be, but I would often leave short prayers — no less sincere or significant than long prayers — when I lighted my veladora (candle) with a picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe on it.

A deacon who used to be at my home church in Arizona once gave a sermon



Photo/UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press

“Nuestra Madre” by Yolanda M. López, from the Guadalupe series, 1981-88, is created using acrylic and oil paint on masonite.

about how her two sons would call her at different points in their lives: one in his times of stress and the other in his times of happiness. I have found that I pray to God in my times of stress, anxiety, when I am at my most vulnerable, which happened many times this past semester.

However, I attempt to remember to send a prayer of thanks to God, in the times where I am laughing with friends or

when life is not too stressful. So I ask of God, Tonantzin, Diosita, or any of the other endearments of praise I call You, as a daughter of the Queen, please accept my Spanglish prayers and know that I love you even when I do not pray. ■

Ariana Gonzalez-Bonillas is a sophomore at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, studying physics and sociology, and tries to read Chicana literature and theory in her free time. She was second lay deputy for the Diocese of Arizona at General Convention 2015 and recently became youth leader at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Natick, Mass.

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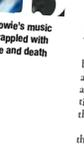
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Majority of primates call for temporary Episcopal Church sanctions

Curry says primates' statement will be painful for many Episcopalians

By Matthew Davies
Episcopal News Service

A majority of Anglican primates on Jan. 14 asked that the Episcopal Church, for three years, “no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies, should not be appointed or elected to an internal standing committee and that, while they will not take part in decision making on the Anglican Communion, doctrine or polity.”

Expressing their unanimous desire to walk together, the primates said that their call came in response to the decision by the Episcopal Church’s General Convention last July to change canonical language that defines marriage as being between a man and a woman (Resolution A035) and authorize two new marriage rites with language allowing them to be used by same-sex or opposite-sex couples (Resolution A054).

Primates are the senior archbishops and presiding bishops elected or appointed to lead each of the 38 autonomous provinces of the Anglican Communion. They are invited to the Primates’ Meetings by the archbishop of Canterbury to consult on theological, social and international issues.

An announcement posted on the Primates 2016 meeting website (www.primates2016.org) said that “the primates agreed [on] how they would walk together in the grace and love of Christ.”

“This agreement acknowledges the significant distance that remains and confirms their unanimous commitment to walk together,” said the announcement, which includes the full text of the primates’ call. The agreement “demonstrates the commitment of all the primates to continue the life of the communion with neither victor nor vanquished.”

Before the Jan. 14 vote, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry told the primates gathering Jan. 11-15 in Canterbury, England, that the statement calling for the sanction would be painful for many in the Episcopal Church to receive.

“Many of us have committed ourselves and our church to being a house of prayer for all people,” as the Bible says, when all are truly welcome,” Curry said.

“Our commitment to be an inclusive church is not based on a social theory or capitulation to the ways of the culture, but on our belief that the outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross are a sign of the very love of God reaching out to us all. While I understand that many disagree with us, our decision regarding marriage is based on the belief that the words of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians are true for the church today: all who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, for all are one in Christ.”

“For so many who are committed to following Jesus in the way of love and being a church that lives that love, this decision is a painful statement calling for the sanction would be painful for many in the Episcopal Church to receive.”



The Lenten season “Lub Wolsztyn,” completed in 1860 by the German artist Carl Spitzweg (1808-1885), refers to the carnival season that precedes the beginning of Lent in many cultures and locations. The painting juxtaposes the idea of excess, represented by the baroque, and penitence. The clown appears to have landed in prison, with only a jug of water for sustenance. The expression seems to indicate that Lent is a period of self-reflection and examination of the individual’s relationship with God.

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Presiding Bishop Michael Curry