

Demonizing the Other

How Christians Can Build a Healthier Society



Companion Guide to
Be the Bee #152 | How Christians Can Save Politics

2020. COVID. Protests. Wildfires.

Oh, yeah. *And an election year.*

As if this year wasn't already strained, an election always increases the tension and intensity.

And this intensity only leads to one thing: ***division***.

The division in our country is very apparent. And it's causing a great deal of fear as to what will happen if "the other guys" win the upcoming election.



Democrats fear that the Republicans will *lead the country to the brink of civil war.*

Republicans fear that the Democrats will *destroy the nation's unborn children.*

We tend to focus on the issues that make us most afraid. Rather than working for "our guys," we spend more time working against the ***other*** guys.

Even worse, we start to justify this fear by seeing them as the ***bad*** guys.

That's what's really disheartening about an election year. We become so concerned with what makes the other side wrong, defective, and even ***bad***, that we spend little time focusing on what we can do in *our own lives* to improve.

Politics acts like a dysfunctional spiritual life: *we are far more concerned with what others are doing wrong than we can do right.*

Maybe this is why the Church, during Lent, encourages us to pray with St. Ephrem the Syrian:

*Help me to see my own sins and not to judge my brother,
For blessed and glorified art Thou, unto ages of ages. Amen.*

And that's why we've come up with this workbook today. Let's take some time to focus on our own sins, rather than the sins of others.

In Christ,
Steve and Christian

It's easy to make superficial evaluations of others. We do it all the time, without even thinking about it. We even do it to people that we don't know...

This is a problem.

Have you ever sized up a person the *moment* he walked into the room?

Have you ever been convinced that, based on nothing more than a glance, you knew *exactly* what kind of person he was?



Maybe you decided this based on his apparent mood.

Maybe you decided this based on the clothes he was wearing.

Or maybe you decided this because he simply reminded you of someone you actually do know.

It's easy to make wild assumptions that aren't grounded in reality.

We don't just do this with strangers: we do it with people we know very well.

For example, you may think that you know what motivated a choice your friend made; but in reality, you have no idea. You don't live in his

mind, so guess work like this actually can be wrong (if not downright *destructive*).

Why do we do make these baseless assumptions?

Why do we constantly evaluate and measure other people?

Believe it or not, there's a biological reason for this...

The biological system that causes us to bond with our family members and close friends is *the exact same biological system that makes us suspicious of strangers?*

It's true.

And, when we are suspicious of others, we are on guard for all the ways that they *might harm us*.

When we size someone up, we may be trying to determine if they a threat.

For example, if we think someone is better looking than us, this can feel like a threat:

“What if my significant other would rather be with them?”

Boom. *Threat.*



If we think someone dresses in a dangerous way, this can feel like a threat:

“What if they are carrying a gun and going to shoot us?”

Boom. *Threat.*

If we think someone is going to vote to take away our rights, this can feel like a threat:

“What if they try to take away my Church?”

Boom. *Threat.*

All of these things have one thing in common: *fear.*

And it is a fear that is *based in otherness.*

Fear can lead us to easily demonize other people, their ideas, and even their intentions.

And when that happens, we can easily lash out at what we perceive as *faults* in the other.

The problem is, these faults may exist only in our perception.



We may be lashing out to people based on what we *assume* about them rather than *who they actually are*.

Can you think of a time you've spoken poorly or acted poorly toward someone? What kinds of things did you believe about them?



Journal below.

Our assumptions about others (especially when we're dealing with controversial topics like politics) can be *very* negative. We may begin to view others as evil, if not outright demonic.

“He’s nothing more than an *evil babykiller*.”

“She’s nothing more than an *evil fascist*.”

“They’re nothing more than *soulless ghouls* who deserve to be wiped out.”

The problem is, by attributing demonic activity to others, we actually become guilty of demonic activity ourselves: we have dehumanized others and let our hearts grow hardened towards them.

That’s not good.

If we dig a little deeper, we may realize that the assumptions we make about others are actually grounded in a fear or insecurity that we carry in our own hearts.

When you acted poorly or assumed terrible things about someone (as you journaled above), what were you thinking about yourself?



That you were inadequate? Unsafe? Unwanted?

Again, remember that these things are often based in fear and not necessarily in reality.

Journal below.

There's still *a long way to go this year*. We still have to get through an election, not to mention the other controversies that will inevitably tear us apart in the months ahead.

We may be tempted to lean into that division by continuing to assume the worst about others.



But a different path is available.

Can we learn instead to *spread the love of the Lord*?

Can we *bring the Light of Christ* into a world that has grown dark and cold?

In order to do that, we may need to stand before Christ and confess the reality of our own sins, the sins which we have neglected because we have been too busy concerning ourselves with the sins of others.

(Sins which may not even be real, because we've allowed our assumptions about others to blind us to who they actually are.)



As you reflect on this latest episode of “Be the Bee” and the questions in this workbook, we want to encourage you to attend confession with your parish priest. We’ll even give you these final questions to stimulate your own reflection and penitence.

- How have I failed to see the image of Christ in my neighbor?
- How have I overlooked my own sins in order to focus on the sins of others?
- How have I responded to others out of fear, rather than trusting in God?



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