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A Christian Response to Pride Month: Pride and Sabbath

Abstract

"We... confess that the world is broken in deep ways, and we don't have to shy from the reality of the ways that people suffer and are marginalized in this world."

Posting about Sabbath as a Christian response to Pride Month from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

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A Christian Response to Pride Month: Pride and Sabbath

Donald Roth

June 22, 2022

If you read my last piece¹, you are deservedly waiting for the pay off. While I have sympathy for Carl Trueman's call for all out opposition to the celebration and symbols of Pride Month, I argued that social revolution is not the only thing on display.

Instead, it seems to me that many are using Pride in a way that philosopher Charles Taylor calls "anti-structure." That is, Pride is a temporary inversion of the social order that paradoxically serves to preserve, rather than eradicate it. Worse, coming down hard on Pride as revolution might serve to reinforce the stories it tells about oppressive religious folks. Reinforcing these narratives may make the revolutionary appeal stronger to those who otherwise participate in Pride with more anti-structural motives.

Most frustratingly of all, while I suspect that a majority of Pride revelers in most places are not revolutionaries, it is indisputable that many are. In other words, those who celebrate Pride as revolution share the streets with those who celebrate Pride as anti-structure, and both have a certain antipathy toward traditional Christianity, particularly its sexual mores.

So, what do we do as Christians? From the perspective of traditional Christian morality, whatever the reveler's motivations, Pride is still a celebration of sin that deserves to be countered, right?

Trueman's call for rolling out condemnation in op eds in major newspapers is a cultural clash on culture's terms, either out of a conviction that our side can win or a tragic commitment to put up a last heroic stand. While I'm not outright opposed to this option, I think there is a more meaningful response available.

Longing Echoes

If we see what sorts of longings lie at the heart of the intuitions behind both senses behind Pride, we can start to ask what Christians might do to address those same longings.

Pride as Revolution bristles at the ambivalence of anti-structure because it longs for coherence. The intuition is: if we long for the good, why are we tolerant of something less, even antithetical to it? For revolutionaries, Pride is meant to be a foretaste of the good things that could come if everyone came around to their point of view. It's really the opposite motive of

anti-structure. Rather than allowing a little moral indulgence to help everyone cope with structural pressures, it longs for a world where the structure wasn't a source of pressure.

Pride as Carnival recognizes that conformity to social structure is a burden, and it welcomes people to set their burdens aside for a season so that they might take them up later again with renewed strength. It also recognizes that this world has a way of pressing down on certain people with special force, and it elevates those people for a time to give them the sort of honor and dignity that they feel regularly deprived of.

Both of these cultural intuitions find resonance in Christianity. My contention is that a potent Christian response to Pride can be found by looking at what Christianity does with the longing for coherent good and the pressure of structural constraints. I think we find this response in a robust appreciation for the Sabbath.

Leaning into Sabbath

In the Sabbath, God offers us the chance to rest, lay down our striving, and enjoy the rich personal relation with God that is ours through Christ's righteous inheritance. At the same time, the practice of Sabbath offers us real comfort in a foretaste of something better, and more coherent, that is yet on the horizon.

The Sabbath is a response to Pride as Carnival because it, too, is meant to be a feast. Our world puts us under tremendous pressure to achieve. It not only saddles us with expectations of behavior, it expects us to define what is meaningful in the first place. We are expected to essentially create our own world and spin it into meaningful being. As Christians, our sincere desire to be holy can distort into a crushing expectation to appear holy that is, like Pride as Carnival recognizes, unlivable.

When God finished His creating and ordering of the cosmos, He entered into a rest that He welcomed His people to join. When God's people failed to enter into His rest, Christ came and redeemed them, securing for us an invitation into a rest that sits at the end of time. Recovering a rich practice of Sabbath means taking up the invitation to set aside our labors and feast.

However, instead of simply ignoring our moral burdens for a time, Scripture invites Christians to lay them down. Rather than a free ticket to "sin that grace may abound," the Apostle Paul makes it clear that we can instead live in joyful embrace of who we really are in Christ. In this age, the Christian Sabbath is not a momentary distraction from the week's drudgery, it is a redemption and reframing of it. Instead of trying to conform to a structure pressed in on us, we can joyfully take up some of the same elements from a posture of thanksgiving for demands satisfied in Christ. We know that we are weak and incapable of doing this perfectly, but in Christ, the most wonderful inversion occurs, and we are instead made strong, elevated to be co-heirs of a coming city.

This points to how Sabbath is also a response to Pride as Revolution because it shapes our longings for a time of reconciliation. The Christian hope isn't for a little relief from the burden we have to carry, it's for a reconciliation of all things in Christ. It's a hope for a transformation of the world, us included, so that holiness isn't a burden. We, too, confess that the world is broken in deep ways, and we don't have to shy from the reality of the ways that people suffer and are marginalized in this world. Recovering a rich practice of Sabbath means savoring every Lord's Day as a foretaste of the bridal feast of the Lamb.

Sabbath is a Christian practice where we come to worship God in a focused way. There we are reminded of the promise of the gospel and invited to lay our burdens down. For many Christians in America, the Sunday meal that follows might be one of the few family meals that everyone enjoys together. It is in many ways already a feast in miniature. While people sometimes argue about whether we can mow the lawn on Sunday, a practical observance of minimizing ordinary labor also lets our bodies rest. True, many Americans are a little too sedentary all week, but as I've taken some steps to repair that failing in my own life, I've come to a new appreciation of the gift it is to let my body, mind, and spirit rest all on one day. I'm far from perfect in that, but when I get it more right than not, it blesses my whole life with a joyful "rightness" that banishes the appeal of Carnival.

This is ultimately how Sabbath answers Pride. The rest that we so often need to be reminded to enjoy is true comfort for a weary, work-addled world. It is a rhythm of release that allows us to endure the labor of a time in tension, and it is a real foretaste of light and life for a people living in darkness. It doesn't fit neatly into a narrative of confrontation, but it confronts the powers of this world nonetheless. Better yet, we have a firm confidence that it is rooted in a victorious posture toward those powers.

Ultimately, my response to Trueman's rallying call is ambivalent. I have a sense of both support and reservation regarding the negative confrontation that he calls for, yet I have no such reservations about the positive response that is needed. Christ offers a better way and embracing the rhythms of the Sabbath helps inscribe that on a people prone too often to forget.

1. <https://inallthings.org/a-christian-response-to-pride-month-is-pride-revolution-or-carnival/>