



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

Date: 26 November 2006
Title: **"Dual Nationals"**
Comment: Insert Comment here
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Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Daniel 7:9-14
Second Reading Revelation 1:1-8
Gospel John 18:33-37

About a week ago, I read an editorial in the Inquirer that spoke about dual-nationals. Those are the people who have two passports, each from a different country. The editor was skeptical about this since he thought it compromised the allegiance of such a person to be connected to two nations at the same time. This made me feel rather sheepish, since I am one of those people: I am the proud bearer of United States citizenship by reason of birth, but am also ranked as part of the "F.B.I."- the "Foreign-Born Irish" and I have a nice, purple European Union passport to prove it. My grandmother was born in Ireland, you see, and provision was made back when the country was poor to do like Israel does and allow its dispersed children to identify with the motherland and increase its numbers. Now that Ireland is rich, it may not be quite as generous, but I am now "grandmothered" into the scheme. I haven't abused this strange situation, although the queue at Heathrow is usually shorted for EU members. There are far, far fewer of us than of Filipino US passport holders, our own version of dual-nationals. This is a fact I noticed the first time I flew Northwest Airlines home and thought that I would be in the minority being expressed through the "U.S. Passports" line at immigration! No way!

The issue of dual-nationality has a religious application as well. Those who attempt to follow two separate religions at the same time might be considered "dual-

nationals," although the Bible has some really nasty things to call them too. The bible study has been dealing with the Old Testament this term- a part of the bible that is chock full of prophetic warnings about split allegiance. We are often far too smug as we read those passages about straying from the Lord's path to follow other gods. We quite simply don't recognize our own little gods who are nicely ensconced in our personal temples. Most of them are there because they are less demanding, less guilt-inducing and far less complicated than our jaded views of Jesus and His Church.

The 21st century encourages us to be open-minded about such things, especially here in Asia, but I'm not sure I can be anymore. I have dealt with religious dual-nationals personally in the Philippines, for example, when in dialogue with Chinese families who plan weddings, funerals and ribbon cuttings not around the Church Calendar, but according to the precepts of *feng shui*. I have dealt with dual-national Igorots when I was asked once to visit our Episcopal diocese in Baguio to address the local clergy on to discover that I was being enlisted to help write new liturgies for the sacrifice of carabaw, dogs and chickens...things that are still very much part of everyday religious life in the Cordilleras- the region we're so proud of for its 150 years of Episcopalianism. In each case, there is a very Asian compartmentalization of the religious mind: the Church teaching is followed in some circumstances, and the ethnic customs in others. This is usually called syncretism, mixing two religions, but it could also be called "dual-nationalism".

Lest anyone think that Fr Tyler is being anti-Chinese or anti-Igorot, let me say that people in Europe and North America have their forms of dual-nationalism: we call ours being practical when Christianity demands too much, being patriotic when Faith demands a higher loyalty, being "spiritual" when crystals and angelology are more fun than biblical principles or the mind of Christ. Less messy than sacrificing livestock and less exotic than feng shui, but a compromise of faith in any case. I am not proposing a return to ancient Jewish practice (in fact in the case of the Igorots, I think it's high time to finally move away from the animal sacrifice part). I am, however, increasingly aware that our attempts to be inclusive and open-minded can compromise not only our traditional religion, but even the idea of truth.

What do I mean? I mean looking seriously at the modernist statements coming out of main-line churches whose attitude can be characterized by the adage, "*My* truth meets *your* truth and we come to a greater truth." Sounds very enlightened, but it is also illogical. It works only when the two so-called truths are only slightly different: say, an ecumenical gathering of Methodists, Lutherans and Episcopalians. It is less genuine when trying to reconcile Christianity's Gospel of a single God taking human flesh in Jesus Christ with Buddhism's non-personal god who would and could do nothing of the sort. And how does Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross gel with the ceremonial slaughter of livestock in the Mountain Province? Don't ask me.

St Paul writes in Romans 2 about good, noble non-Christians who have "what the law requires written on their hearts." Some would say Paul is saying that non-Christian religions therefore can have value and merit, but that's not what he says. He doesn't write that if pagans keep their own religion, that's good enough for God. Paul was absolutely opposed to the religious practices in the pagan world around him. Rather Paul is pointing to another source: to what is written in everyone's hearts: the one good, the one truth, from the One God.

What we are dealing with here is a lie about the truth- an attempt to say that any specific teaching that differentiates itself from a general human spirituality must be bad because it splits people apart. Religion, we read in several recently published books and editorials, is the root of all human conflict. It is bad. But the problem is that by saying it's 'bad' means you have an idea of what is good and true. To feel that getting people together is part of a great, cosmic truth, you've set up yet another absolute- another thing that might keep people apart if they disagree. In the end, such fuzzy thinking becomes fuzzy believing- militantly maintaining that God is not pleased when we use our heads to discover what is true in religion, and that He is pleased only if we entertain warm, happy thoughts about each other. Nothing in life is that simple. And in its simplicity such think betrays the serious prayer, study and focus that has given us the Christian religion- a way of relating to God that is not just one of many opinions- not for us: not for Christians. For the Christian, it matters that our religion is based on what we believe to be true, absolutely true. It is almost as inconceivable to be "slightly Christian" as it is to be "slightly" pregnant. Both things are ultimately an all-or-nothing prospect.

Today we celebrate the feast of Christ the King- a celebration not of medieval monarchy, but of divine sovereignty: a rulership that is transcendent and final. Today is high time to consider our allegiance and the passport we bear. The Gospel reading is a somber one- Christ before Pilate, and the procurator's ironic question, "So you are a king?" It is a question that we are encouraged to ask ourselves today. So, Jesus, are you a king? Are you my king? Does Jesus have any claim on us at all? Or is he a Sunday kind of guy whom we visit here once a week just to keep in touch?

Baptism, by which we become members of Christ's kingdom, is not just joining a club for a set period of time until something better opens up. It's not saying that I will use the Christian Church for some things, and then go elsewhere for others. It is not saying that Christianity is a nice enough thing to hang around for the present. Rather it says that Christianity is a *true* enough thing for eternity. If it isn't true, then this is all a sham and a waste of a perfectly nice Sunday morning- in fact, it is a waste of all of our Sunday mornings.

There are warnings printed in US passports about people like me: dual-nationals. We are warned that when we are traveling to one or the other of our "native lands" we run the risk of being subject to its local laws. In other words, we won't be able to play one off the other. And that warning needs to be stamped on our baptismal certificates, too. "No one can serve two masters," says Jesus, "for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other." So whose passport do you carry? And whose kingdom do you claim going through the immigration windows of your life? Take it seriously, and read the warnings.