

**Young Leaders in Ministry November 2022**

**Call-out Culture's Shadow Side**

By Cate Anthony

The culture of irredeemability in the United States, begotten of the desire for progress and justice in American society, pervades relationality at local and national levels and undermines the very progress that it claims to champion. This culture threatens to destroy our society's ability to share one Earth and to create healthy, cooperative, just systems of relationship. The culture of irredeemability is the shadow side of the very methods used to seek systemic justice, and in particular, it is the shadow side of 21st-century America's "call-out culture."

What, exactly, is "call-out culture?" Broadly, it's a colloquialism for the practice of public accountability (usually on social media) that aims to hold individuals and groups responsible for their actions by calling attention to behavior that is perceived to be problematic, like sexism, racism or homophobia. Additionally, the practice of "calling-out" has grown in popularity concurrent with the contemporary era in which marginalized and minority groups acquire ever-increasing access to platforms which amplify their voices over and against those who traditionally hold power.

In this context, calling out "is an act of withdrawing from someone whose expression – whether political, artistic or otherwise – was once welcome or at least tolerated, but no longer is." At its best, this practice has the potential to reclaim and redistribute power in systems previously unbalanced. In this way, call-out culture is a kind of "cultural boycott" which refuses to amplify voices of racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ableism and more. [\[1\]](#) This practice is central to the revelation of a more just, safe, equitable world – in theory, it assumes first and foremost the redeemability of what was previously distorted. Where, then, has it gone wrong? [\[2\]](#)

**Social Media's impact**

The precise marriage of call-out culture to modern forms of social media marked a particular turning point in the evolution of the culture of irredeemability. Social media, to be celebrated for the ways it transcends boundaries of all forms to enable connection previously impossible, also risks a kind of dehumanization of those with whom we interact on such platforms. Rather than calling out in order to improve relationship and society, call-out culture transforms into cancel culture. Intention transforms, too: rather than boycott voices of oppression, cancel culture seeks to cut out real people whose ideologies or identities are not popular in public regard. We cancel human beings as though they are magazine subscriptions.

As our technological lives become ever more intertwined with our actual lives, this "cancel culture" has morphed into an acceptable default way of relating to one another. Rather than assume the redeemability of broken systems, we now assume that what is broken, or conservative, or flawed, or

harmful is best dealt with by excising from community and relationship altogether. *This* is the crisis of irredeemability.

### **Jesus and irredeemability**

As a follower of Christ – and, more basically, as a living, breathing, hopeful human being – I am terrified by this crisis. Moreover, I stand in wonder at the discovery of the attitude of irredeemability inside of me. How often have I thought to cut off relationship from someone with whom I do not agree? How insidiously the desire to “other” voices of disagreement has crept its way into my heart!

Cancel culture, the crisis of irredeemability: these are not the Good News of Jesus Christ. As Christians we know that Jesus gave himself on the cross in order to ameliorate our sins and to rescue us from the evil of this present age. Moreover, we know that Jesus’ death and resurrection on the cross marks the salvation and redemption of all humankind from the fallen nature of creaturely sinfulness. Jesus “is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.”<sup>[3]</sup> If I am truly a Christian, the question of Jesus’ redemption-for-all is not a question at all. It is the unshakeable foundation for how I view the whole world, the society in which I live and my neighbors. It is the heart with which I must greet those who hurt me, those who stand opposed to me, those toward whom it would be exponentially easier to harden my heart.

How, then, have I come to discover within myself a heart hardened against those who hurt me or who cannot get onboard with my worldview? Of course, some of this action is based on a desire to stand in solidarity with those who suffer among us. This stand necessitates a boundary *against* the perpetrating Other, a moral imperative if we are to lead one another to a more just way of being community (oppression should be stood against, always, every time). And yet too often we stop in our stance against the Other, holding the boundary and marking the Other as permanently out-of-touch.

The truth of Jesus’ redemption of all through his death on the cross, and what this redemption means for the redeem-ability of humanity, is the lifeblood of what it means to be Christian. As I survey the socio-cultural landscape around me (and frankly, as I try just to be a moderately okay person in the world!), I worry that we’ve forgotten this lifeblood, that we’ve let it drain out of our bodies and dry on the ground. We’ve become accustomed to polarized communities, allowing ourselves to cast out from our lives those with whom we disagree.<sup>[4]</sup>

### **The Church as a counter-cultural beacon of hope**

In the face of these questions and realities, what might it look like for the Church to stand as a counter-cultural beacon of hope, reminding the world around us of the miracle of our redemption? How might we think about this miracle theologically, pastorally and ritually? In particular, how might we enact these beliefs on a really concrete, at-home, vulnerable level? When we are hurt by someone in our immediate community, how might we welcome them home instead of casting them out? And – where *do* we hold the line? What harms are too great for redemption to happen through our own work, requiring instead time and the immutable grace of God?

I don’t have answers for all of these questions yet, but I am working on them each day in my life and in my ministry as a priest at St. Stephen’s, Richmond. Through my Episcopal Church Foundation fellowship, I am crafting a program aimed at helping my community practice how to *reckon* with one another – how

to do the work of feeling, repenting, praying, forgiving. Bit by bit, we learn how to hold our boundaries so that we can find health together, and how also to ensure that those boundaries are porous enough to let new life come through.

I believe there is something universal in our common call to community and our common bond of Christ's love. Polarization, Othering, casting-out: these behaviors harm us all and exacerbate every other form of injustice and oppression. And so I pray that together we will call one another home, even (especially!) when we fall short, and that this will beget a mutual kind of imagining and remembering about our redemption – an imagining to re-shape the world.

[1] Jonah Engel Bromwich, "The Age of Celebrity Is Being Canceled," *The New York Times*, July 1, 2018, sec. ST.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Hebrews 9:15

[4] The Pew Foundation reports that citizens are more divided along ideological lines – and partisan antipathy is deeper and more extensive – than at any point in the last two decades.

*The Rev. Cate Anthony is delighted to begin her ordained ministry at St. Stephen's. A child of Florida and Delaware, Cate is a graduate of McGill University, Berkeley Divinity School and Yale Divinity School. During her time at YDS, Cate's academic and pastoral work focused on ministry to individuals and communities in the midst of trauma and conflict. She was privileged to pray and wrestle as a member of the Reconciling Practices cohort, a group of ten seminarians (now mostly clergy) from the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church in North America. Together the group imagined lived practices of reconciliation and community even across wide chasms of difference. Cate continues this work in a parish context as a current fellow of the Episcopal Church Foundation. Her ECF project focuses on creating spaces of reconciliation and reckoning in everyday life.*

#### **Resources:**

- [The Third Place](#) by Jon Davis, Vestry Papers, May 2022
- [In Christ the Bottom Holds](#) by Bob Leopold, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 16, 2014
- [Crowds, Rocks, and Seeing the Face of God](#) by Alan Bentrup, an ECF Vital Practices blog, February 3, 2020
- [Fear of the "Other"](#) by Richelle Thompson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, November 30, 2016

#### **Love in Humble Service**

By Stephen Rumler

Music touches our souls and inspires us in ways that no other mode of communication can. At our lowest points, it lifts us. In our rejoicing and celebration, it animates us. When the world seems silent, it speaks to us. In our anger, anxiety and sadness, it soothes us. The playful rhythm of conversation, ornate melodies of bird songs and diminished triad of a passing train's horn all contribute to our shared human experience. Even for those who cannot hear, music finds a way. Music is, in fact, an unavoidable grace that we receive each day. As an integral part of our worship as Episcopalians, music draws us into prayer, placing the comforting, demanding and sometimes alarming words of scripture onto our lips and into our hearts through a treasury of hymns sung through the generations.

As Episcopalians, we share an extraordinary repertoire of choral music that offers rest, haven, and healing for many musicians in our parishes. The choir room becomes a shelter and community of singers, a second family. Creating music as community unites us in ways that no team or organization ever will. We share a common goal and must realize it together with the utmost accuracy, patience and cooperation. The pilgrimage, from the beginning of a piece to its end, humbles us to learn that nothing in our mortal life happens immediately. Through the successful completion of an artistically sung chorus, we have only just begun our journey of understanding musicality, text, and most importantly, each other.

### **COVID's impact on choral and congregational singing**

In March of 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic forced us into our homes, and our churches, once lively places of worship, song and celebration, grew dormant. Concert dress rehearsals and Easter preparations were well underway when in only a few days, all who craved sung communion found deprivation and the uncertainty that reshaped our world, heightening fear, depression and loneliness. The centering experience that group singing offered was considered high-risk and lethal.

Some questioned whether this was the end of choral singing altogether, and perhaps even humanity as we knew it. Amid the chaos, music found a way. Church, university and community choirs quickly learned to assemble virtual video choirs, Zoom cocktail hours and even safely-distanced, outdoor gatherings and drive-by events. These were no substitute for ensemble singing and in-person gatherings, but they offered some sense of human connection and relief from the troubling uncertainty that engulfed us.

At Grace Episcopal Church in Holland, Michigan, where I serve as Music Director, we too found a way to retain a sense of community by streaming the Sunday Eucharist. Though crude in quality, many congregants found the sounds of the pipe organ, peaceable timbre of the rector's voice and familiar view of the pulpit and altar space comforting. Though we could not gather in person, worshippers participated by commenting on the live feed, responding to the dialogues of the mass, offering universal prayers and even passing the peace. As the organist played the hymns, those with copies of *The Hymnal 1982* at home sang along. We offered drive-thru communion in the parking lot, so that we could continue sharing in the Body of Christ. While the live video worship experience quenched the thirst for liturgy and some sense of church community, our need for sung communion remained unfulfilled.

### **Struggle and joy for singers and worshippers alike**

On Christmas Eve 2020, the faithful of Grace gathered outdoors on a beautiful, snowy evening to celebrate the birth of Christ. The hymns, played by the organist from inside the church were streamed for those gathered, uniting them in congregational song after nearly nine months. The beauty of the evening and blending of voices wove a powerful, comforting sense of normalcy, briefly blanketing our distorted reality. Our pilgrimage through the pandemic was far from over, but our ability to rest, sing and feast at Christ's table offered healing and the strength to carry on.

In June of 2021, when COVID cases reached an all-time low following the winter months, we were once again able to gather as church indoors. Seeing the faces and hearing the voices of those we had not encountered in person for over a year brought newfound joy and childlike giddiness into our church, another moment of rest for weary travelers. Once again, congregational song found its place in our lives.

In-person worship continued through summer and into autumn, bringing back the comfort of the Sunday routine.

Finally, in October of 2021, the Grace Chamber Choir resumed rehearsals after a two-year hiatus. We implemented COVID-mitigation strategies such as masking, distancing and a powerful air purifier to ensure the health and safety of all choristers. After such a significant break, it took some time to relearn the courtesies of choral singing (especially with masks), blending and group interaction, and required patience, understanding hearts and prayer.

As we approached Christmas in 2021, Grace Choir had regained most of what was lost over the course of two years and presented beautiful, stirring music for the service of Lessons and Carols on the fourth Sunday of Advent. Unfortunately, with COVID cases rising sharply, even among choristers, the choir once again had to pause, just days before Christmas Eve. This pause continued until Ash Wednesday, when we were once again able to sing as ensemble.

Later in March, COVID cases had decreased to the point where masks could be removed, bringing an even greater sense of normalcy into our choir space. As we celebrated the Paschal Triduum and Easter Sunday, the peace of the Risen Christ and joy of our resurrected choir filled Grace Church with a sense of excitement that I will remember for the rest of my life. Music indeed found a way.

*Stephen Rumler moved to West Michigan after graduating from Aquinas College in the class of 2020. He was delighted to join Grace Episcopal Church as Music Director in the Fall of 2021. In addition to singing, playing piano and organ, Stephen enjoys cooking, staying active and spending time with friends and family.*

#### **Resources:**

- [Singing Our Song](#) by Anna Olson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 8, 2016
- [The Creed: Profession of Faith, Love Song and Prayer](#) by Lisa G. Fischbeck, an ECF Vital Practices blog, August 6, 2019
- [Music for Team Building](#) by Sandra T. Montes, Vestry Papers, January 2019
- [Music and Change: A Conversation with Dent Davidson](#), by Sandra T. Montes, Vestry Papers, July 2021

#### **On Being Available Always**

A video by Nia McKinney

Wise beyond her 27 years, Nia McKenney shares her thoughts about the concept of “always being available” in this short, seven-minute video. This idea, that one should always be “on” and “ready” for the next thing coming around the corner fast is an American curse that has spread worldwide. (Maybe it has something to do with baseball, who knows?) Nia clearly and carefully points out that constant availability leads to constant vigilance, which leads to worry and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). She says, “I don’t know if you’re a person who experiences worry a lot, but it’s exhausting and not a space where a person can thrive.” This is true, and too much of that kind of worry can lead to chronic anxiety.

Early on, she implores us to respect one another’s time, since we all exist within the confines of hours, days, months, etc. “If my first goal is to ensure that I’m respecting another person’s boundaries within

that, then I know that I'm doing my best to ensure that they can take care of themselves in the ways that they know best."

I encourage you to listen to this woman. Ever respectful of our boundaries, she says a lot in a short period of time.

Cathy Hornberger

*Nia McKenney is a constant and curious learner. A musician and Episcopalian since childhood, she loves her sisters, learning to embroider and being outside – and especially a combination of all three.*

#### **Resources:**

- [What's the appropriate pace of change?](#) by Miguel Escobar, an ECF Vital Practices blog, February 28, 2012
- [Endurance And Rest](#) by Greg Syler, an ECF Vital Practices blog, December 18, 2014
- [Rest for the Journey](#) by Annette Buchanan, an ECF Vital Practices blog, August 24, 2020

#### **To Feel or Not to Feel**

By Prema Vas

We live in a culture that is all about trusting your feelings. Follow your heart. Listen to your gut. Feel all the feelings. But the truth is that we can't trust our feelings, not all the time.

If I always followed my feelings, I would never work out. I'd eat whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, regardless of how it made my body or brain feel. I'd quit projects before finishing them. I'd start all sorts of fires of over jealousy and bitterness. I'd hold grudges. I'd fall out of love to fall into love to fall out of love again. I'd live in my bed and binge watch cooking shows all day.

This is pretty much what does happen when I am swayed by my feelings. But that doesn't mean that some of my feelings aren't trustworthy and good at times. It doesn't mean that I don't observe my feelings and seek to understand them. It doesn't mean I suppress them or shove them away.

I think feelings matter, but I don't want to be defined or ruled by them, because they change every two seconds.

#### **Should we trust our feelings?**

Over the past two years, I've begun to realize that my feelings – big as they are – are not the best tour guides for my life. They weren't giving me the most accurate information. They weren't making my life any better or more free. They were making it harder for me to make solid, wise decisions.

They were not allowing me to thrive, because I was investing so much in them. Most days, I felt that I

was a captive to whatever I was feeling in that moment, that hour, that day, and they were hardly good or useful feelings.

I felt like a failure. I felt sad and depressed. I felt the need to perform and to always be impressive. My feelings ping-ponged, sending me in a lot of different directions. I couldn't see that they didn't always have my best interests in mind.

Feelings can be beautiful, though, and it would be hopelessly boring to navigate this life without them. They inspire people to write love stories that can shake the world. They can stir you up, make you clench your fists and act when you see an injustice taking place. They are what move you to tears when you read a good book or listen to an incredible song.

We need these things to make life full of beauty and passion. I believe that we have feelings because God intends for us to have them. Yet we are encouraged to follow our hearts, while often told that the heart is fickle and does not know what it wants. So which is it?

### **Bringing our feelings to God**

I think it is both. I think you can live a beautiful life and lead from your heart while also learning to bring the things in your heart to God. I think there is a way to see and acknowledge your feelings, while also being in control of them. I think there's a power-packed and thriving version of life to live where we can be stronger and better because we trust faith over fleeting feelings.

Jesus felt things. Majorly. And I get so much comfort in that. He wept. He experienced anger. He called out injustice. He felt fear. He loved and he laughed and made the most of his time on this planet.

But throughout the texts, you read that Jesus was alone with God – a lot! More than he preached or taught or performed miracles, he spent time away with God. I imagine that is where he first began to deal with the feelings inside him. And that's what I want to focus on today.

When we spend time alone with God and bring our feelings to him, we can both honor the things inside us and open up to seeing them from a different perspective – God's perspective. We can say freely, "I'm tempted to trust this feeling right now, but I want to trust You more. I want to understand why I feel this way."

There's always a reason. Something beneath the surface. Something to learn. Something God wants to illuminate through our feeling happiness, loneliness, sadness, jealousy or rejection. God wants to be close to us, and I think God uses our feelings to get closer, to show us more of who we could become if we would just let go of that which doesn't serve us.

I have immense and big, big feelings. But I have an even more immense and bigger God.

***Prema Vas** is a third culture kid, born and raised in Kuwait, from Kerala. She studied in Pune, worked in Mumbai and is currently living with her husband in the beautiful city of Bangalore.*

*She currently works as the Operations Director in Alpha India, a global organization that sparks conversations about faith, life and meaning through the church.*

*She and her husband are on a mission to bring light and love into every dark, isolated space through their movement Little More Love, a gospel platform Awe and Wonder and a gathering at home called Wednesdays.*

This piece was first published on [Awe and Wonder](#).

**Resources:**

- [Leadership in Times of Change](#) by Robin Hammeal-Urban, Vestry Papers, May 2015
- [The God Who Sees Me](#) by Nicole Foster, an ECF Vital Practices blog, December 30, 2020
- [A Throne in Your Heart](#) by Linda Buskirk, an ECF Vital Practices blog, December 18, 2018
- [Worry... And Heart](#) by Anna Olson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, August 13, 2014