

Rev. Dwyian N. Davis  
Remarks – July 1, 2010  
St. Titus Episcopal Church – Service in honor of Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray

'The Road to Social Justice: Excerpts from the Life & Legacy of Pauli Murray'

☐Gen 5:1 ¶ This [is] the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him;

☐Gen 5:2 Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.

Pauli Murray preached “Male and Female He Created Them” on May 21, 1978, at Lincoln Temple, United Church of Christ, in Washington, D.C. The sermon was based on the scripture which *I read for your hearing*. *In this sermon* She stresses that man as used in Genesis, means male and female.

Murray asserts that because all humanity, male and female, was modeled after God, sexism directly opposes God’s plan for creation. Murray further asserts that sexism is the root of human oppression and that patriarchy “has served as a model for other forms of human exploitation and alienation”.

Murray also moves beyond imaging humanity and God with a male-female dichotomy (dī-kōt' ə-mē). She extensively references the work of Phyllis Tribble, who argues that the first being created was “androgynous”, which reflected the wholeness of God’s being, containing the potentiality of both sexes.” Murray asserts that both men and women must be set free from the “rigid roles dominated by a male-oriented hierarchy” in order “to be wholly human,” as they were originally created to be.

When I was asked to participate in this program honoring Pauli Murray, I asked myself the question, “what do I think Pauli Murray’s Life & Legacy says about Social Justice?”, that can be conveyed within 6 minutes. (I came up with two theories which Pauli Murray’s life, legacy & writings seem to suggest.....)

- ‘Social Justice’ will never be achieved until ‘Divine Design’ is understood & Accepted
- Individually we must be determined to be all that God has designed us to be.....



In her "Father's Day Sermon" Pauli Murray reflects back to when she was a freshman at Hunter College. She recalls attempting to teach a Sunday Class of twelve-year-old boys, and the theme for the church year was the life of Jesus Christ. She states that "after about two lessons with those squirming youngsters, I experienced perhaps my first defeat in performance." She continues later in this same sermon "And so a crisis in teaching became a crisis of faith. Until I could know and understand the human Jesus, I would never be able to interpret the Christ of faith. I resigned from teaching the Sunday school class, eventually dropped out of church for several years, and began a lifelong quest for the meaning of Jesus Christ in my life.

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In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the theologian must also speak to his or her own era, and it is my understanding as a student of theology that God is not limited by any man's notion of sex, or gender, or race, or ethnic origin, or status – God is all-inclusive.

To think of oneself as a child of God is a liberating experience; it is to free oneself from all feelings of inferiority, whether of race, or color, or sex, or age, or economic status, or position in life. When I say that I am a child of God – made in his image – I imply that "Black is beautiful," that White is beautiful, that Red is beautiful, or Yellow is beautiful. I do not need to make special pleading for my sex – male or female, or in-between – to bolster self esteem. When I truly believe that God is my Father and Mother, in short, my creator, I am bound also to believe that all men, women, and children of whatever race, color, creed, or ethnic origin, are my sisters-and-brothers-in-Christ.....

But, if I am a child of God, made in his image, I am also human – self-willed, wayward, rebellious, defiant, spiteful, mean, petty, vindictive, gossipy, hurtful of others – in short, sinful, "kept in perpetual tension between the pull of heaven and the pull of earth." My soul is a battleground between what God wants me to be, and what I will to be.

I say with my lips, "Thy will be done," and then I turn around and argue with God to get my own will."

Pauli Murray in her essay entitled "Minority Women and Feminist Spirituality" states 'I submit that our openness to self-criticism is an antidote to the guilt that often paralyzes our actions and makes us resistant to change. I also believe that the sharing of personal histories and feelings in face-to-face contact brings and understanding that we cannot achieve merely through the absorption of historical and statistical data. Both are important steps in the healing process that builds mutual trust and the basis of genuine solidarity as we strive together in our daily lives to make real our vision of human wholeness.'

We should not extract from Pauli's life by celebrating the part of her struggle that suits me, but we should accept her life in total:

Pauli was not designed as a woman to be inferior to a man, so she refused to be contained by the 'man-made box of sexism':.....but this only a part of her struggles

Pauli was not designed as a woman of color to be inferior to anyone, so she refused to be contained by the 'man-made box of racism': .....but this only a part of her struggles

*Pauli was not designed as a woman to be inferior to a man, so she refused to be contained by the 'man-made box of sexuality': .....but this only a part of her struggles*

Pauli was not designed as a spiritual woman to be inferior to a spiritual man, so she refused to be contained by the 'man-made box of religion': .....but this only a part of her struggles

Through all of her struggles, Pauli was determined to be all that God designed her to be. Although she accomplished much during her lifetime....

Pauli Murray seemed to have realized that In order to understand divine design and to understand who she was designed to be...she must get in touch with the designer.....after all that Pauli Murray achieved in her life.....

Yet one more first remained for Pauli Murray. When she was 62, just a few years away from what many would consider retirement age, she entered the master of divinity degree program at General Theological Seminary in New York City. She became the first American black woman to become an Episcopal priest on January 8, 1977, in the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. She celebrated her first Eucharist in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in the little church where her grandmother, a slave, had been baptized in 1854. **"All the strands of my life had come together,"** Murray recalled in her autobiography (*Song in a Weary Throat: An American Pilgrimage*). "Descendent of slave and of slave owner ... now I was empowered to minister the sacrament of One in whom there is no north or south, no black or white, no male or female—only the spirit of love and reconciliation drawing us all toward the goal of human wholeness."

Quotes from *Pauli Murray: Selected Sermons and Writings*, edited by Anthony B. Pinn, (Maryknoll, NY Orbis Books, 2006).