

Knights of Columbus Catholic Citizenship Essay Contest

America is the land of the Free, but only if one is liberal and progressive-minded. Freedom is the right to choose what is right and true, without restriction of the law. Unfortunately, following God is often the most difficult thing to do, especially when Christians always hear they are intolerant, hateful, bigots, or harmful to freedom, when they mention their views and beliefs. As I have grown older, I have realized how alienated Christians and Catholics have become, something that I realized very quickly last year.

Last year, I entered my first year of high school and took some art classes. I was absolutely ecstatic when I found out our next project was a protest piece. The teacher's guidelines: it can not be hateful, it should be brightly colored, the message it conveys should be clear, and it had to cover a civil problem in society. Many kids did their projects against drugs or abortion, but I have always had an aversion to the ordinary and unoriginal. So I chose to do a protest piece against homosexuality. I knew it would shake things up, make people uncomfortable and leave a lasting impression. It took a while to get it approved, because my teacher, like many creative people, is liberal. It took one of my friends from the school's Gay-Straight Alliance to come and tell the teacher it had her blessing (she thought it was a thoughtful and peaceful way to oppose same-sex marriage and relationships), even then my teacher was silently accusing me of bigotry. Many students praised me when they saw it, but they were only seeing the unfinished product. The final poster had a black and white striped heart (representing heterosexual love) melting into a loose, unstructured puddle colored with the Gay Pride rainbow. Underneath it all, I wrote, 'Homosexuality Morphs Love'. My teacher was

sick for a week when our class was working on this project, the substitute accredited me on my choice of subject. However, when I told her what I was writing as the caption, she gave me an irate look that told me she wished she could take her words back. As the class critique came around, everyone was dead silent when they saw my work. No one dared speak until the next artwork was displayed. In stark contrast, the girl who painted the 'Vote for Gay Rights' poster was commended greatly. My tempera-painted poster definitely drove a wedge between me and my favorite teacher; because of me, no one's piece was hung in the hallways for that project.

My class, in that story, is an accurate representation of the people today. Most of those kids were Christian, but were too scared to speak against the kids that did not approve of my protest art. There is great division between everyone, something caused by a lack of communication, which leads to misconceptions and error. Most error is the result of ignorance. Both Catholics and those who challenge us are ignorant; we would not find ourselves speechless and de-railed if we invested more time in creating a deeper devotion to Jesus through Catholicism. It is essential to learn the little things, because they are often the most valuable. After all, knowledge is power. Thus knowledge will give us Catholics the power to be proud and conscious of our Catholic Faith; so we will not despair nor become despondent when we are challenged for being loyal to God's Kingdom. Like Matthew Kelly says, "Be bold. Be Catholic."