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Multiculturalism is Here, So Enjoy It

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and certainly one I don't want to resist entirely. I mean the bills are coming in for my adventure: the ambulance, the Emergency Room, the doctors, and the medicine. Over \$490 so far. I'm insured, thank goodness (is there a patron saint for being insured?); and the laborers are certainly worth their hire. But I find myself wishing now that in his long encyclical the pope had said a bit more about what some heterodox moralists used to call "systemic evil." Counting up the costs and consequences now, maybe I should have just let those kids have the encyclical. One glimpse of it and they might have fled in fear and trembling. PATRICK JORDAN

REPORT FROM HOUSTON

MULTICULTURALISM IS HERE SO ENJOY IT

Multiculturalism will start a fight in an empty bar. Its extreme proponents offer little hope for constituting a common ground among different cultural groups; its extreme opponents fear that it treads upon the very ideals of Western civilization.

A lot more heat than light is shed in such polemics. And the fact is, there are undeniable cultural changes ensuing especially in such cities as Los Angeles, Miami, and Houston which have very little to do with assaults on Western civilization yet cannot be handled effectively by prevailing custom. Multiculturalism for an increasing number of Americans is not a cause, fad, or theory but a lived reality.

Houston, for instance, has been dramatically transformed by Latino and Asian immigration over the past fifteen years. In this citadel of Anglo-Saxon frontier individualism, no single ethnic or racial group now constitutes a majority. By century's end, in all likelihood, Latinos will be the largest group.

The sheer number of Latino immigrants continuing to stream into this country (the rate of which will not diminish significantly with NAFTA); their geographic proximity to both Mexico and Central America; and the spread of *Univision* and other American-based, Spanish-speaking media means the assimilation patterns experienced by European-Americans a century ago will not be replicated. If anything, California, Florida, and Texas, among other places, will increasingly be imbued with Latino culture. As a Mexican-American on a *Frontline* documentary dealing with the L.A. riots commented: "We may not overcome, but we will overwhelm."

This does not necessarily threaten the American cultural consensus. Even if one has to speak Spanish at Wendy's to place an order, one still gets a Dave Thomas burger. Much closer to the bone, however, was the furor that arose in July over a citizenship ceremony in Tucson, Arizona, which was conducted in Spanish instead of English. These new citizens simply expressed their heartfelt fidelity to this country in the most mean-

ingful way possible. Those who would question their patriotism should note that Mexican-Americans won more medals of honor in World War II than any other ethnic group.

Immigrants should learn English, for it will remain the language of business and political power in this country. But why should they have to speak "English only" when English is not the language of choice on many streets? As Carlos Fuentes told Bill Moyers, "When you get a proposition in California to vote the English language as the official language of the state of California, this only means one thing: that English is no longer the official language of the state of California."

In the diocese of Galveston-Houston, parishes which are combinations of European-, African-, Asian-, and Latino-Americans are increasingly the norm, not the exception. Saint Jerome's Parish, where I have been facilitating multicultural relations, has Masses in Spanish, Vietnamese, and English. Although the English-speaking community (mostly European-American) founded the parish over three decades ago and remains its financial and leadership base, a quick glance at those presently being baptized, receiving First Communion, and being confirmed suggests that the parish is rapidly becoming comprised of first-generation Mexicans and Central Americans. The majority of the parish and 90 percent of the youth in religious education classes are Latino.

Given this trend, the question is not whether one will have to deal with multiple cultures, but how. Will it be in a begrudging fashion which at best tolerates the presence of "others" and otherwise begets hostility? Or will it be by creatively enabling these newer, growing communities to assume leadership roles without having to sacrifice their cultures?

Based on the latter course, over the past two years I have coordinated the Saint Jerome's Multicultural Relations Committee, comprised of members from the parish's three language communities. We have no predetermined multicultural agenda, nor do other parish committees have to obtain our *imprimatur* before dealing with the multicultural dimensions of their activities. Rather, we simply discuss how to use our respective heritages to link rather than separate ourselves.

For instance, prior to the committee's inception, the pastoral council was largely comprised of European-Americans. The difficulty was that the nomination process reflected the manners of the English-speaking community: forms were filled out by individual parishioners two to three weeks before the discernment evening. The committee modified this format to include alternative channels of communication: with the Latinos, face-to-face communication at both the Sunday Masses and the charismatic prayer group meeting near the discernment evening; with the Vietnamese, given their hierarchical orientation, consultation with their leadership council. Subsequently, more Latinos and Vietnamese have both participated in the process and served on the pastoral council.

Essentially, the committee aims for an atmosphere of openness and trust that makes multicultural coordination of parish activities easier. When people are treated with dignity, given a chance to speak in their own way, and in return reciprocate with respect for "the other," cultural barriers can be broken down,

if not overcome. And although the Vietnamese community at Saint Jerome's will be building its own church shortly—it has had a longstanding wish to form its own parish—better that such decisions be confronted in a forum of mutual understanding than left to the rumor mill of mutual misunderstanding.

The initiatives of one parish are hardly instructive for secular political communities whose constitutive groups are much more competitive and whose common "faith" is less clear-cut. But it is noteworthy that the city of Houston has turned to the Diocese of Galveston-Houston for assistance because of the diocese's concrete experience with multiple cultures.

Rather than necessarily being opposed to a moral consensus for America, advocates of a positive multiculturalism think that all cultures can in fact contribute to this consensus. For instance, in *The Good Society*, Robert Bellah argues that John Courtney Murray's *We Hold These Truths*—a text which reconciled Catholic natural law with the American compact—was the initial volley in a series of cultural challenges: first Catholics, then the civil rights, women's, and gay movements. The point is that inclusion in the political discourse need not be at the expense of abandoning one's cultural background. As pinpointed by a *Commonweal* editorial amid the sectarian atmosphere of the 1960 presidential campaign ("Catholics and the Presidency," January 1, 1960), are we to have "a pluralistic society with a strong Protestant tradition rather than a Protestant society with

a pluralistic tradition?"

Unfortunately, most of the debate over multiculturalism gets caught in an either-or: either one maintains that there has to be a universal national identity to which one must assimilate in order to be an American; or one must maintain that our cultural identities are so diverse and autonomous that the best we can do is guarantee the integrity of each enclave and abandon any notion of a substantive common good. When culture is conceptualized as a "possession," one is left with either the uniform identity of the "melting pot" or the relativist identities of "separate-but-equal" cultural enclaves. But when culture is understood as a relation between people, a "gift" to be shared with others, then one can envision a moral-political community which neither assimilates nor separates cultural groups.

If multiculturalism were indeed just the most recent academic vogue, then it might be fun to engage in polemical banter. But the rapid cultural diversification in Houston and elsewhere is very real. The question is not whether we have to deal with multiple cultures but how: seeking "unity in diversity" offers a much more constructive approach at the grassroots level than either imposing a monoculture or rending our communities and nation apart in the manner of the Balkans. *De Colores!*

JOHN FRANCIS BURKE

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OF SEVERAL MINDS Edward Gaffney, Jr.

ANTI-ABORTION RACKETEERS?

RICO GOES TO THE SUPREME COURT



On the first Monday in October, the Supreme Court opened its new term. As with any shift in the Court's personnel, the retirement of Justice Byron White and the appointment of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg to replace him has Court watchers off and running looking for clever things to say about her. Each detail of her decisions will undoubtedly come under the intense (which is not always to say careful) scrutiny of the pundits, in order to place her conveniently into a facile category that will enable them to predict the outcome of the Court's docket.

Sometimes the pundits draw conclusions larger than the facts warrant. For example, as an advocate many years ago Ginsburg successfully litigated several

equal-protection cases dealing with gender discrimination before the Court on which she now sits. It should be perfectly obvious from this and other things known about Justice Ginsburg that she will be sensitive to women's issues. But it does not necessarily follow, as *Time* magazine reports (October 4, 1993), that she will cast a decisive vote in *National Organization of Women, Inc. v. Scheidler*, to hold that the Racketeer-Influenced Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) may be applied to Operation Rescue for its repeated acts of civil disobedience at abortion clinics.

One does not have to agree with Operation Rescue tactics in order to reach the conclusion that the RICO law should not be expanded to sweep in the activities that Operation Rescue followers engage in. For example, I wrote a brief *amicus curiae* on

behalf of several organizations that engage in social activism relating to animal rights—including People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and Feminists for Animal Rights—opposing the broad reading of RICO that the National Organization of Women (NOW) has urged the Court to adopt in this case.

This brief adopts no position on the underlying issue of abortion in the *Scheidler* case. Some members and supporters of these organizations strongly support broad freedom of choice for women who seek abortion, and some strongly support unborn human life as at least equal in dignity to the lives of all the animals, large and small (from whales to sea lion pups), that they seek to protect.

If abortion is not the meeting ground for these activists, what is? The answer is the fear that allowing federal courts to apply the stiff sanctions of the RICO law to acts of civil disobedience such as those engaged in by Operation Rescue could have disastrous consequences for civil liberties in this country.

To do so, say these organizations, would constitute an unwarranted excursion into political and social advocacy and dissent