

# *Reflections*

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## **Multiculturalism Is Not Pluralism**

America, from its founding, has been a pluralistic society welcoming people of diverse backgrounds, nationalities, religions and cultures. This has resulted in a nation whose strength lies in the multiplicity and diversity of ideas and talents of its populace. Within a generation or two, the customs and mores brought by the then-immigrants have harmonized with the extant ones to move towards a new, modified, unitary culture – a culture that receives continual refreshment from the arrival of new peoples.

The social history of this evolving American way of life has been one of striving for unity-amid-diversity. While never perfect, the success of the societal “mixing bowl” has rested on a communal commitment to tolerance and respect for individual rights. It also has required a broad consensus among the multiple communities, minority and majority alike, on the nation’s core beliefs and cultural values. Without this consensus, the nation could not continue to exist – at least as a democracy.

More recently, the traditional approach to pluralism has been transformed, as the emphasis has been to celebrate diversity over unity. While this may appear to be more tolerant, open-minded or progressive, with a greater commitment to promote equality and togetherness, it has a significant flaw. Multiculturalism is based on relativism. In its drive for impartiality and equity, it presents every culture and society as equally desirable and beneficial – except that of the prevailing majority which is consistently denigrated and pressured to be contrite for failings that were corrected generations ago. Peoples of other cultures are encouraged to express their traditions in glorified ways, but those of the country’s dominant culture are maligned with accusations of intolerance, bigotry, or nativism when they try to exhibit pride in the aims, ideals, achievements, heroes, struggles, sufferings, and triumphs of the nation’s past.



All cultures do not support liberty, equality, rule of law, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, etc.

Multiculturalism ignores the necessity for a common set of values. It acknowledges and promotes separate group identities and disparate societal principles. To obtain recognition and acquire special rights, groups speak with indignation and outrage, claiming histories of abuse. A common identity for the faction is promoted through consciousness raising and an emphasis on things that separate it from the rest of society. Spokesmen for the group assert that its members are victims of discrimination, a concept that is constantly enlarged and used to limit the freedom of opinion and autonomy of conscience of others. A charge of discrimination is a powerful accusation, especially in a nation founded on freedom, and often suppresses opposing views.

When core principles are in conflict, as when minority groups hold views or pursue activities that are anathema to the larger society, the nation becomes fragmented. Bitter conflicts arise when one group makes statements, displays images or behaves in ways that offend the

majority, especially when those actions are an attack on religious beliefs. Group identity then becomes a source of dissent, rather than adding to the richness of a shared culture.

Militant factions often redefine words to extend their meaning and justify previously unacceptable behavior, create new rights, or socially sanction others. Claims of privacy are used to justify abortion; artistic expression to legitimize lewd public behavior and denigrate religious symbols; tolerance to negate objections to same sex marriage; oppression to cower the Church into conferring priestly ordination on women. Catholic hospitals, doctors, and pharmacists are excoriated for violating a patient's presumed rights when they refuse to provide contraceptives and abortifacients, even though those actions are in accord with their religious beliefs.

The strength and permanence of a society, especially a democracy in which government is invested in the people, requires a commitment to shared constants that provide criteria for communal action. America was founded on Christian principles. Its common standards are based on values and virtues that are best taught by religion. But this nation, as Europe before it, has relegated religion to the private sphere and banned any mention of God from public discourse or expression. When there is no belief that God is central to our lives or no respect and reverence for that which is holy, individuals attempt to achieve self-fulfillment through a predominant focus on wealth, consumerism, and personal pleasure. The results are declining moral standards, a neglect of the common good and, at best, a temporary faithfulness to family and community.

America has succeeded on the basis of pluralism, in which a balance has been struck between adherence to a common set of values – based on Christian teachings – and the prerogative for peoples of varying backgrounds and beliefs to maintain their own identities. Multiculturalism, which often promotes relativistic secularism, undermines core values such as freedom of conscience, the dignity of the individual, human rights at all stages of life, concern for the common good, and patriotism. American, without those values, is a profane and hedonistic society.

The Knights of Columbus, with approximately 1.5 million members in the United States, can have a very significant effect on the future of this nation by, as Pope Benedict XVI has stated, continuing “with renewed energy the Church's evangelizing mission in the context of modern cultural movements”. It can work to strengthen the understanding of the Catholic Faith among its members, encourage them to live and lead their families according to these teachings, and serve as a catalyst in the public arena to strengthen the Christian principles that underlie the culture of the nation. We must once again act and live as if we are one nation under God.

*Vivat Jesus!*