

The Trouble with Multiculturalism

Freedom is the distinguishing feature of Western culture.

By Clifford D. May

Back in the day, when I was a newspaper columnist in Denver, representatives of the local chapter of the Anti-Defamation League paid a visit. Over coffee, they told the opinion editor and me that they had a program, “A World of Difference,” that “celebrates America’s diversity.” They asked for our editorial support. The editor and I had the same reaction: Would it not be better to celebrate all the things we have in common, all the things that unite Americans of whatever ethnic or religious backgrounds? Our friends left the meeting mightily miffed.

At the time, I viewed such initiatives (the ADL was hardly alone) as well-intentioned if somewhat ham-handed efforts to combat prejudice. I later realized this was part of a larger campaign to promote multiculturalism, which seemed like a fairly harmless attempt to encourage appreciation of varying styles of art, dress, and cuisine by pretending that all have equal merit. (But is there anyone who seriously believes that German cuisine is on a par with Chinese, French, or Indian?) Only years later did I come to realize: Multiculturalism is an ideology with far-reaching — and damaging — consequences.

This was forcefully driven home to me by a book probably not featured at your local book store: *Delectable Lie: A Liberal Repudiation of Multiculturalism*, by Salim Mansur, a professor of political science at the University of Ontario. Mansur recounts that back in the 1970s, Canada became the first Western nation to embrace multiculturalism on an official level, “sponsored by the state, supported by taxpayers, and monitored and enforced by thought-police (human rights commissions).” He makes a compelling case that adoption of this ideology has damaged Canada, and not only Canada: Multiculturalism, he writes, has been “destructive of the West’s liberal democratic heritage, tradition, and values based on individual rights and freedoms.”

Mansur observes that “freedom is the distinguishing feature of the West,” a core value that came under ferocious attack in the 20th century from fascism and Communism. In the current era, “the West is confronted with a new, or third, challenge of totalitarianism in the form of Islamism and its asymmetrical assault on liberal democracy, increasingly since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, against the United States.”

Multiculturalism insists that all cultures are equal and equally deserving of respect and celebration. It ignores the fact that freedom emerged and flowered in the West because of, Mansur writes, the “unique transmutation of Western culture and civilization brought about by the Enlightenment and the new scientific method pioneered by Galileo.” These influences “subjected religion to the scrutiny of reason.”

In the lands of Islam, it is generally the other way around: Reason is subject to the scrutiny of faith. Multiculturalism makes believe that the conflict between these two schools of thought is inconsequential. Worse, by emphasizing collective identities and group rights, and by pushing for equality of results rather than equality of opportunity, multiculturalism undermines individual freedom and devalues the Western cultures that have nurtured and defended it.

In Canada, the U.S., and other countries that accept a continuing stream of immigrants from non-Western societies, multiculturalism also inhibits the process of integration and assimilation. Instead, Mansur writes, it empowers new citizens “to demand that their host country adapt” to their cultural requirements while relieving them of any responsibility to weave themselves and their children into the cultural fabric of their adopted homeland. In this and other ways, multiculturalism is a “slippery slope” that “imperils” liberal democracies.

Mansur’s insights stem from experience as well as academic study. Born an Indian Muslim in Calcutta, he is Canadian by choice and conviction. His self-identification as a “dissident Muslim” undergirds his strong defense of Western values. “Faith does not take precedence over my duties . . . to Canada and its constitution, which I embrace freely,” he writes. You may not be surprised to learn that his statements have resulted in two fatwas calling for his execution.

Those whose religious and cultural beliefs lead them to the conclusion that Mansur deserves death also want to destroy Canada, America, Israel, and other “infidel” nations. That represents diversity — but should we really celebrate it?

Unable to answer that question, multiculturalists instead maintain the fiction that those who declare themselves enemies of the West are merely addressing “grievances” over such historical “crimes” as colonialism and imperialism, ignoring the fact that Islamists promote Islamic colonialism and seek to revive Islamic imperialism. Multiculturalists also decry the inequities of the global economic system, although their funds are derived from wealth created by Western agriculture and industry, and exchanged for Middle Eastern oil.

Mansur makes clear that Islamists are motivated by a fierce will to power and a deep antipathy for the West’s “civic culture, its freedom and democracy.” And Islamists, he adds, “find that multiculturalism increasingly in the post-9/11 world works in tandem with their interests to weaken the West politically and culturally from the inside.”

Most of those who advocate multiculturalism no doubt mean well. But their intellectual myopia is striking. The truth is, some cultures value freedom of religion; others see no virtue in granting free rein to what they regard as false religions. Some cultures prize free speech; others believe it is dangerous to permit open discourse and opt instead to censor many ideas. Some cultures believe that women and minorities should have the same rights as the majority; others consider that a blasphemous notion. Some cultures are willing to compromise to achieve peace; others are willing to fight and die for conquest and victory.

But the big trap of multiculturalism is simply this: If all cultures are equal, why defend your own? The culture that replaces it will be just as good, won't it?

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