

MELTING POT, SALAD BOWL OR FAMILY OF GOD?

*...and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom.... (Revelation 5:9-10)*

Traditionally, America has seen itself as a *melting pot*. This metaphor was designed to show how immigrants from different backgrounds were supposed to assimilate into the dominant culture. The varied cultural elements were supposed to “melt” together into a new harmonious whole. In the latter part of the 20th century, however, many became uncomfortable with the melting pot concept. It seemed arrogant and ethnocentric. Why should others be like us? We have our own problems. Do we think we’re better than the rest of the world? And so the idea of the *salad bowl* was born. This more politically correct metaphor suggested that different cultures did not have to merge or melt together but could preserve their own unique identities and flavors – like ingredients in a tossed salad. The hope was that different cultures would mix together but remain distinct.

Today the pendulum seems to be swinging back. In Western Europe especially, a decades-long commitment to “multiculturalism” is being challenged by governments in Germany, England, Switzerland and France. Admittedly, the motivation for such a shift in public opinion is largely economics, politics and the ugly arrogance of old-fashioned nationalism, but the changing climate should be of great interest to the church of Jesus Christ. As government leaders look for new models and metaphors to cast a vision for how we should live together in a global society, this is the moment for God’s people to arise and humbly say, “We know the answer.”

On the day of Pentecost a new era was inaugurated when the church was born. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit redefined ethnic and national identities so that a whole new way of living together in this multicultural world was now possible. Suddenly men and women from 15 different nations were able to understand one another and have genuine fellowship based on their faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 2: 5-11). The curse of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) was broken, and genuine community that transcended cultural barriers was now possible. Christians discovered that their citizenship in God’s kingdom took precedence over all other cultural loyalties. The culture into which I was born, though beautiful and a thing to be cherished, has been trumped by the culture into which I have been reborn! The hope of the world is not a melting pot or a salad bowl. Rather, it is the family of God!

Frankly, I’m excited about the prospects before us as a church in this generation. We have an unprecedented opportunity. As the old models are crumbling and the bankruptcy of human schemes for a peaceful planet are seen for what they are (naïve, superficial, ineffective), the family of God has the chance to show the world how to live together. Not by talking about it but by modeling a new order of community where all are “one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

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