

COLUMNISTS

Picnickers debate what drives the world

A few weeks ago at a picnic the sun was warm and the air clear, and the conversation shifted to a discussion of the major forces at work in the world. I couldn't resist becoming part of this tete-a-tete, and I confidently proclaimed that the major direction of all the world's efforts is toward human liberation.

Ever since the beginning of time, individual human beings and our many corporate efforts have been directed at freeing us from whatever constrains us and makes us unfree. I went on to assert that we all experience "unfreedoms" on the personal level, because of our various compulsions and fears; on the interpersonal level when we tolerate relationships that are driven by a dependency rather than mutuality; on the social, political and economic level when we are impoverished or deprived of a say in the decisions that affect us.

I pointed out that the world history upheld my point. Look at all the revolutions of modern times: They prove I'm right because they have all been about greater freedom and liberation. Look, too, at the great social movements. They are directed at freedom for some or other group that has been excluded and deprived. Look at the best spiritualities and today's self-help move-



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By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

ments directed at helping us overcome areas where we're not free, so they can help us be free.

I made such a good case, I thought, that I topped it off by announcing that it's human liberation that God is up to, too. Yessir, God's major desire for the world is that human beings are free.

As I said, the sun was warm and the air was clear, I had supped well, (and I'm usually pretty sure that I'm right anyway), so I finished my discourse and sat back on the lawn chair quite satisfied that I had solved the problem of where the world is going for the other picnickers.

But then someone spoke up and countered me. This fellow proclaimed that my view was interesting and quite optimistic, but that what really moves the world is greed. The great political

forces of history may look like they're directed at making us all free, but what is really at the heart of the forces that shape the world, is greed. Humans are driven by an always unsatisfied drive to secure our own advantage and accumulate more and more things.

This fellow said the greatest motivating force among us is our selfish desire for money and material goods. He assured us economics, not politics, is really at the heart of what drives the modern world. Furthermore, the whole free-market system that so recently defeated communism is built on the concept that the pursuit of self-interest and economic profit by individuals will benefit the whole society. This means, he proclaimed, that greed is perfectly OK in the modern systems that really govern the world. In fact, it is to be desired, even promoted.

Unrestrained personal interest creates wealth, so modern economic times have caused us to move beyond bringing other social values to the structures and institutions of society. My picnic adversary assured us that trying to bring social values like the common good to public decisions is impossible, since greed, even though it was once understood to be a disposition leading human beings to sin, is now acceptable as the

very foundation for world activity.

I realize that some reading this column are by now thinking how lucky they were not to be at this particular picnic! Our discussion provoked great comment from the others present, and its point-counterpoint format made it inevitable that everyone began taking sides: optimists with me, pessimists with him.

You may want me to end by telling you which side "won" and which side "lost." Actually the debate lost steam and soon we all lost interest. I did make one small resolution, however. It was to consider my own attitudes and behavior to discover whether I am more motivated by liberation or greed. And I also whispered a silent "thank you" for Catholic social teaching, which basically accepts free-market behavior but also maintains that fulfilling our own individual interests are never sufficient as the only motives for our individual economic decisions or the public economic policies we put into place.

The church reminds even picnickers, I think, that the common good always takes precedence over unreasonable individual self-interest.

...
Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

Vietnamese success story deserves close look

How does the Archdiocese of New Orleans explain its 22 Vietnamese priests, 40 professed Vietnamese nuns, numerous Vietnamese seminarians and a large Catholic Vietnamese population?

The simple answer is that when people are allowed to respond to God's inspiration and to be themselves, wonders never cease.

The story of New Orleans begins with Msgr. Dominic Luong, a seminary teacher in biology. As much as he enjoyed teaching, he felt called to help those of his people fleeing Vietnam after Saigon's collapse. He asked for and received permission to go to Guam to help them in their transition to the United States.

When they were taken to Fort Chaffee, Ark., he accompanied them because he had learned that Archbishop Philip Hannan was very open to helping to welcome and settle displaced refugees — a welcome continued by his successor, Archbishop Francis Schulte.

Ordinarily, a diocese would settle five or six refugees in one place. This tended



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By FATHER EUGENE HEMRICK

to break up families. But thanks to the concerted efforts of the archbishop, Catholic Charities and the U.S. Catholic Conference Office of Migration and Refugee Services, large families were able to remain together.

As Vietnamese began to cluster in various areas, the archbishop and Msgr. Luong encouraged them to design programs that would fit their particular cultural needs.

Msgr. Luong also was blessed in having among the refugees five Vietnamese priests, who were warmly welcomed and encouraged to be creative in their min-

istry. That encouragement, coupled with the refugees' own industriousness, is a major reason the Archdiocese of New Orleans is blessed with vocations and a thriving Catholic Vietnamese population.

When we look closer at this success story, many more "good things" are wrapped up in it.

Archbishops Hannan and Schulte, who opened the archdiocese's doors and kept refugee families together, demonstrated compassion, foresight and the virtue of kindness — a virtue that allows us to step back and promote the best in others.

And Msgr. Luong displayed a missionary spirit that, in responding to God's inspiration, leaves comfort behind in order to give comfort to others. Leaving a teaching position to serve your own people who are fleeing their homes may sound exciting — until one experiences the culture shock that inevitably is met.

This, then, is a story involving leaders who connect the work of social justice

with the driving force of caring and with Vatican Council II's spirit of shared responsibility.

It is the story of the missionary spirit of a priest willing to be uprooted so that others could find a permanent home.

And, I believe, there is a deeper story here that needs telling. It is one thing to welcome people and give them a home. It is yet another to let them care for that home as they see fit.

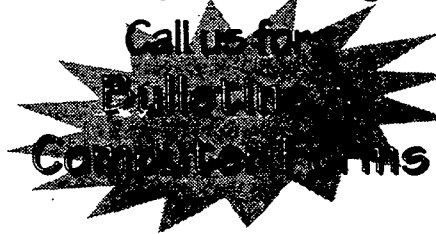
We have shelters for the homeless that can never be called homes for the homeless. Why? Because the homeless are not allowed to care for them.

When people are allowed to care for their churches as their own, they take ownership of them and make them home. Homes like these often give birth to vocations to the religious life and priesthood.

When people consider their church a home, it becomes a strong community.

...
Father Hemrick is director of diocesan relations at The Catholic University of America.

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