No tradition, no civilization

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Having lived in Europe for the last forty years, I have enjoyed the experience of my historical and cultural roots. My residence of the last thirty-five years, for example, was constructed the year that the Church of Scotland was founded, that Madrid became the capital of Spain, and the tobacco plant was imported to Western Europe by Jean Nicot. The buildings in my immediate Roman neighbourhood are much older. The Colonna Palace, half a block away from my front door, was described by the Italian humanist Petrarch (1304-1374). The final discovery-scene of 'Roman Holiday' was filmed there.

Living in Europe is living in a place where the stones speak; however, if you have not done your homework, you will not understand what they are saying. Returning annually for three months to the United States, I have the experience of what the anti-Western-Civilization lobby would call 'freedom' from the obscurantism and oppressive burdens of a democratic Christian—especially Roman Catholic—tradition. I can enjoy the 'freedom' of a world without history, tradition and roots, the world of what Vance Packard called 'fun culture,' the realm of a superior and untethered virtual reality. In short, I return to a place where both the educational system and mass media assiduously avoid the 'homework' without which we cannot hear or understand what the stones of our European heritage have to tell us.

An expatriate American author and actor living in Rome expressed his dismay to me, as far back as the early sixties, about the cultural *tabula rasa* that radically handicapped young Americans for understanding or appreciating their Roman experience in churches where they had no idea of what the religious paintings and sculpture represented because they were culturally un-equipped for any meaningful experience.

Somewhat paradoxically, for a nation where the majority still has its roots in Western civilization, the American academic elite and mass media exalt minorities and programmatically shun or put down America's foundations in Western civilization. Prioritizing all non-western cultures transgresses even the nihilist assumption that where everything is the same, everything is equally meaningless. Hostility towards Western civilization, accompanied by odious comparisons with non-Western civilizations, ironically implies that Western civilization is by no means

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equal, but either superior or inferior to the other civilizations.

Equally paradoxical, abhorrence for Western civilization does not come primarily from non-western cultures or minorities, but rather from the West itself. My first insight into this paradox occurred in the early sixties when I enjoyed a lengthy and friendly discussion with the socialist chief-editor of the Swedish film magazine, *Chaplin*, who had just returned from the Marxist film festival at Pesaro. He explained to me the quasi-evangelizing or proselytizing purpose of Marxist film makers, committed to liberating us from the cultural and moral baggage of traditional Western civilization for a new mankind, free of all the taboos of pre-Marxist civilization. When I asked for an example of the new freedoms, he mentioned the 'bourgeois' family. I had never heard this phrase before, and asked with considerable curiosity what it meant. He said that such a family is based on the authoritarian, fascism-fostering assumption of the hierarchical family governed by parents with children as subjects. I pressed for more details, and he obliged. Husbands and wives should not be accountable to each other for their affairs, nor should children be accountable to their parents for their affairs, sexual or otherwise. Years before Woodstock, the young Swede was promulgating the 'Anything goes' motto of the sexual revolution promoted by the Frankfurt School which argued that religion in general and Christianity in particular was the greatest impediment to a free new world and the social revolution.

For the social engineering on behalf of the Frankfurt School's new world, new society, and new mankind, Western civilization is the enemy, an obstacle to their social crusading and proselytizing. The knowledge and study of Western civilization risks equipping persons with ideas and values opposed to Marxist utopianism. All history, whether bible history, church history, western or eastern history, is not only useless baggage but an obstacle to the creation of a new mankind free of its bondage to historical traditions and their values. No wonder that a common element in all the Marxist films of the Pesaro festival was ridicule, satire and mockery for traditional family, social and religious values. (Unfortunately, most American Catholic film critics never seemed to pick up on the militant propagandizing of these films.)

Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italian Marxist film-maker, occasionally requested that I act as interpreter for North American priest film critics who wanted to interview him. All too often the ingenuousness and reverence of the interviewing priests disarmed and dismayed Pasolini. They seemed more like awe-struck disciples than men with critical intelligence. On one occasion. Pasolini was startled when the priest-interviewer immediately echoed Pasolini's statement, 'Religion will disappear from industrialized societies.' When I stepped out of my

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interpreter's role to interject that this was a false assumption, for America was both the world's most industrial and religious First World nation, Pasolini modestly admitted that that had not occurred to him.

Even though the 'Evil Empire' is no more, its anti-religious mind-set and hostility toward the values of Western civilization are undiminished. The Frankfurt School agenda for the modern world has already achieved many of its goals for a value-free, nihilistic, anything goes, educational system and culture. The achievement has been almost imperceptible because of its gradualism and subtlety throughout most of western society.

The mankind-without-a-history syndrome has impacted on the Christian world where graduates of religious schools do not know the most basic Bible stories, the story of either Judaism or Christianity, the story of Western civilization and the United States, the story of art, architecture, philosophy, literature and culture. Religious and cultural amnesia leaves a vacuum that easily falls prey to the manipulation of ideological demagogues. Pol Pot eliminated persons with glasses because they might possibly be intelligent enough to question his sweeping imbecilities. It is not so easy to deceive people who have done their historical homework, and recognize the recurrence of dehumanizing, anti-social and self-destructive ideologies.

Insofar as both Judaism and Christianity are historically revealed religions, their survival is a question of knowing their story. Within the Christian community, the people-without-a-history syndrome has a New Age flavour that abstracts from the historical concreteness of the history of the community. The New Age syndrome surfaces in the stream of abstractions issuing from Catholics who studiously avoid such words as 'God,' 'Jesus,' 'Father,' 'Son,' 'Spirit,' 'Christian,' 'Church,' 'Catholic,' 'Mass,' 'sacraments,' and the like. The New Age virus has infected the Christian world no less than the rest of the cultural world. No less than Marxism, it represents another manifestation of the people-without-a-history syndrome, anonymous, hollow, rootless, homogenized people without traditions. The existence of Israel, on the contrary, bears witness to the vitality and identity of a people who, despite centuries without a nation, have successfully preserved their identity/tradition.

Remembering one's tradition is at the heart of both the Jewish and Christian identity. Israel's remembering is essential for her continued existence as God's covenant people; forgetting God's saving acts would bring her destruction: 'You shall remember the Lord your God . . . that he may confirm his covenant which he swore to your father, as at this day. And if you forget the Lord your God . . . I solemnly warn you that you shall surely perish' (*Deut.* 8:18-19). Through her remembering, Israel's redemptive history continues in a living tradition where the divine

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commands perdure as historical events challenging successive generations to decision and that obedience which enables Israel to share in the redemption of her forefathers.

The imperative to remember God's savings event in the crucified and risen Christ is at the heart of Christian identity and life. The life of the Christian community is a welcoming response to the grace and call of Christ: 'Do this in commemoration of me' (*Luke* 22:19). The eucharistic celebration reenacts Christ's sacrifice and actively expresses the Church's remembering: 'This is my body which shall be given up for you; do this in remembrance of me' (1 *Cor.* 11:24). The future of the Christian community is promising because it remembers a past of promises: 'Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day' (*John* 6:54). Even at the purely secular level, we have no future in any field of human achievement apart from some tradition or other. Contempt for tradition as such is an implicit contempt for human development and civilization.

Tradition, human development and civilization

Traditions, social, cultural, intellectual, moral and religious, provide the resources for human development. Tradition represents the acquired and retained experience and wisdom of a community or society. In this respect, memories make the future; for there is no human development apart from the human resources enabling it.

Virgil's Aeneid represents the role of tradition symbolically in the relationship of Aeneas with his father Anchises and his son Ascanius as all three abandon the burning city of Troy in search of a new life story. Aeneas bears his father on his back, and leads his son by the hand, with the implication that every human life story begins with a 'patrimony' or heritage or tradition in response to the pull of the future. Anchises equips Aeneas to see and provide a future for Ascanius: memories (traditions) make the future.

Inasmuch as all human experience is interpreted experience, our traditions enable us to understand or interpret our experience. They are the equipment for human experience, whether for understanding our past and present or for seeking our future. To what extent our interpretations of our experience are true or false grounds the quality of our experience, determining whether we truly learn anything from it. The narrative quality of human life is based on the premise that there is no such thing as an uninterpreted human experience. What we bring to our experience preconditions what we shall find or how we shall understand it. In philosophical terms, the hermeneutical principle of the 'empty head' affirms that the less you bring to your experience, the more you acquire

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from it. This false principle assumes that experience speaks for itself. On the contrary, experience, like the stones that speak, speaks only for those who have the ears or equipment to hear. Symbolic biblical language expresses the principle of the 'empty head' in terms of the prophet's complaint about people who do not have the eyes to see nor the ears to hear the true meaning of what is going on in their lives.

Traditions provide the indispensable context for both our recognizing the questions raised by our experience and for our searching for their answers. The dynamic of the question at the heart of all human development and civilization always occurs within the context of traditions that serve as the matrix for such development. We experience the pull of the future in our search for the answers to questions raised by our ongoing experience within the different spheres or contexts of our relational existence.

We cannot truly understand anything out of context; consequently, we must recognize the context (tradition) of our question-raising experience in our search for answers, solutions, or working-hypotheses. Our living traditions in the different fields of human endeavour provide the indispensable contexts both for intelligently formulating our questions and for seeking our answers. Without having appropriated a tradition of some kind, we cannot intelligently formulate the questions raised within the experience of our relational existence.

The religious tradition of Israel, for example, is the historical context for Jesus' self-understanding and for that of his community of Christian faith. Jesus interprets his life story and mission within that tradition as the fulfilment of both God's promise to Abraham and of the messianic expectations of Israel's prophets. Christian biblical writers employed the Jewish biblical writings to explain the meaning and mission of Jesus and his community of faith. In Matthew's Gospel, for example, Jesus is understood as the New Moses for the New Israel.

The organic development of religious understanding within the Jewish and Christian traditions has its counterparts in all the other fields of human endeavour. The quest for human excellence inevitably occurs within the context of traditions.

If a pastless future means a groundless hope (Josef Pieper, *Problems of Modern Faith*, p. 162), remembering God's promises grounds our Christian hope. God, as our ultimate past and our ultimate future, is the ground of our hope. Remembering God's promises anticipates their fulfilment.

The present is the dynamic of the past (traditions, understandings, decisions and judgments, thrusting or tending towards the future. There is an entelechy, an inherent and form-giving cause of direction, directing

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force that models and patterns existence. Ideas, hopes, dreams and aspiration witness to its efficacy. The past is not passé: it is the shape of the present, the historical and biological effect of the historical and biological past. The past is the human equipment (traditions) for present judgment, decision and action. What we find in the past anticipates what we shall find in the future. A meaningless and absurd past anticipates a meaningless and absurd future; a significant past anticipates a meaningful future. Our moral and intellectual habits witness the force of the past giving shape to the present.

A Heart Close to Cracking: Preachers Resurrecting the Body in a Roman Catholic Crisis of Plausibility

Gregory Heille OP

On 6 January 2002, the *Boston Globe* revealed that the Archdiocese of Boston (since 1980) and its archbishop Cardinal Bernard F. Law (since 1984) had repeatedly reassigned the priest John J. Geoghan from parish to parish, in spite of numerous complaints and reports and repeated psychological treatment for sexually abusing children.[1] This essay invites theological reflection on the themes of sexuality and power as they pertain to the ecclesiastical crisis that this story represents and on resurrection preaching at a time of ecclesiastical implausibility.

Sexuality, Power, and a Crisis of Plausibility

As clear as we must be that paedophilia and ephebophilia are about power ("power over") at least as much as they are about sex, we must also be clear that the crisis of plausibility on the part of the Catholic bishops in the United States, as they presently are perceived by both civil society and the believing church, is also about power. For some twenty years, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has surrendered its internal authority to the controlling authority of the Roman Curia over a wide spectrum of issues ranging from liturgical

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