

## **Tradition and Culture**

### **Fr. Patrick Henry Reardon**

**Phillip Fisher defines culture as the transmission of an intergenerational inheritance, the concrete rendering present of a community's memory, and it's memory is the source and sustenance of a community's identity. It is not simply the preservation of the past, for that would be the philosophy of museum. Culture is not an exercise in archaeology. Culture is something alive. If it's not alive, it's not a culture; ask any biologist. Culture is the living moment of the past becoming future. A living culture is that which guarantees the past is not dead. To have the transmission of a culture, you must have a trans-generational community. The living maintenance of the culture means that a community is surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses and these witnesses identify to the community's identity.**

**One of the major differences I see between the philosophy in which I was raised, which would be roughly G.K. Chesterton, and that's not bad. He speaks about the democracy of the dead, in which he means that those who have died do not lose their authority simply by the fact that they're not walking around anymore, that I consult my father and grandfather as well as the people around me. That's how he identifies and describes the democracy of the dead. It appears to me in the Orthodox Church, we have a certain aristocracy of the dead. They have more authority, not less, because an inheritance is necessarily received from someplace else. And it's received in a context of authority.**

**It's the nature of a culture that it must in its essentials be transmitted and received. See a culture is not something you can buy, you can't purchase it. It's not a commodity. You don't get culture by buying opera tickets or visiting someplace in the library, or going to a museum. You don't get culture that way. There may be people that do, I know, but they're not cultured. They've been able to afford certain commodities, but they're not**

**a cultured people. To have a culture is to be going someplace, because you've come from someplace. If you haven't come from someplace, you're not going anywhere. If you're not going anywhere, you better go with the group that is going someplace.**

**The difference between a person and an individual, I believe is operative in this context. When I pray that prayer, right after the Lord's Prayer, that we pray for the individual needs of each of us, I always change that because it's a mistranslation. I'm not an individual, I'm a person; it's the personal needs of each of us. An individual is a cipher, a unit. You can't have one person. There's a trinitarian reason you can't have one person, because as soon as you have one, you have three.**

**The difference between a culture and a commodity, I believe is essentially the difference between a person and an individual. A person lives within a community, and is identified within a community, and the community is trans-generational. We inherit who we are. We're given our name by somebody else. I mean, how do I know that I'm Pat Reardon? My parents told me; they gave me my identity. I had very wise parents considering they were very young. Goodness, they were very young; they were very wise. For example, they did not let me grow up to decide what language I was going to speak. They imposed English on me. They took away my freedom of choice. And it was terrible; it's called child abuse. They wouldn't let me grow up and choose, you know, whether I wanted to speak English or something else. They imposed on me; they imposed an identity on me.**

**And in teaching me English, they gave me a culture. They made me an heir to a body of thought and literature, music, history. Here I am an Irishman, by and large an Irishman, and central to my identity is the Battle of Hastings. Even though it's not part of my blood history, it's very much part of who I am, because to speak English is to deal with the trauma of the Battle of Hastings. First of all, it's to speak two languages. I mean that's why English has the largest vocabulary of any known language,**

because it's already the fusion of two languages. That's why we not only make out a will, we make out a will and testament. You have to say it in Anglo-Saxon and then you have to say it in Norman. By the way, that's one of the things that makes the Book of Common Prayer such a marvel is this constant juxtaposition of Anglo-Saxon and Norman roots throughout the Book of Common Prayer. It fits in extremely well with the couplet style of the Psalms. The Psalms sound better in English than any language except perhaps Hebrew. It has to do with history; I'm just giving you an example of the English language. It's in the English language that I become a person, because I've inherited what my mother and father handed on to me. A person therefore is someone who is cultured. An individual is someone who is not. And that's why there's no such thing as culture without tradition. It is by nature, trans-generational.

A culture therefore may be more minutely defined as the living tradition of persons bound together in a shared generational community. The principle of a living culture may be summed up in these words: I handed on to you that which I also received. That's the secret: I-you. I handed on to you; it's I-you. Or, as Fr. Connley would propose, I-Thou, which you have to admit, has a great deal more elegance to it. There's an interpersonal dynamic involved in that. It's: I handed on to you, that which I also received. Now this of course is from St. Paul in 1 Corinthians, but notice it's I-you. It's plural there. A you and an I are both identified by relationships to each other. The I has and the you receives. It's not a relationship of parody. It's a relationship of eldership. I handed on to you that which I also received. The idea that I could ever be the equal of my father is unthinkable. The idea that I could ever be equal of my grandfather borders on blasphemy. This is not a relationship of equality, but a relationship of authority. Tradition means authority. It doesn't mean this is the way we've been doing it. This is the way we must do it. I handed on to you that which I also received.

Tradition therefore is necessarily, intrinsically and essentially heirarchical. It means the archee has a sacred structure to it; it's

a heirarchical thing. The past in living tradition speaks with binding authority. If it doesn't, it's not really living tradition; it's just customs. So tradition then is both prescriptive and is heirarchical. And because it is inherited by a trans-generational transmission it is impossible without the authority of the past. It is not abstract. It is essentially personal. It's I-Thou. It involves an eldership.

I think you probably already realize this is one of the reasons we have iconography in the Church, and have always had iconography in the Church. Even when the Fathers of the Church have said that icons were . . . , and you'll find those quotations. I certainly appreciate what Siedna(?) Mark said earlier, be careful about theologians who were first lawyers. I kept thinking back, my major work back when I was going to graduate school, I wrote a long study on Tertullian, a Latin speaking lawyer, and published a long, long study in Edinborough many years ago on Calvin, another Latin speaking lawyer, and I'm still recovering from this. You see these icons represent the great cloud of witnesses, and even when there were theologians in the Church that said icons are bad, the people paid no attention to them and put the icons on the walls anyway. Go down to the Capella Greca in the catacomb of St. Priscilla which is the north of town up on the Via Solaria, go down to the Capella Greca, the walls are covered with iconography. This is a very early Christian church. The walls are covered with iconography. That land by the way, I note this parenthetically, that land apparently was purchased with that large sum of money that Marcian gave to the Church. Remember the story about Marcian giving all the money to the Church when he came to Rome? Apparently that money was used to purchase this land up on the Via Solaria, the Nomentana(?) north of town to buy that property. I think that's kind of interesting that some of the catacomb real estate was purchased with heretical money. Maybe you don't find that interesting, but I think it's fascinating.

Now secondly, I handed on to you that which. There's the objective content of the transmission; that which. What is

handed on is the living reality that has content. In every genuine tradition, what is handed on has substance. Part of that substance is a certain way of looking at the world. A certain regard . . . , since somebody used the word *gestalt* this morning, let me go you two syllables better okay, *veltungshelt* (?) . . . , a certain way of looking at the world. Ken Myers means this I think when he calls tradition a community of binding address. In one component of any living tradition, is a worldview that imposes a certain style of behavior. So the essence of a living tradition is that there are expected norms by which the beneficiaries of the tradition are to live. That would be the ethical, the moral dimension. In the traditional four senses of scripture this would be the moral sense of scripture.

Now, that which I also received: that is to say the transmitters of the culture cannot make it up as they go along. Now one of the reasons our parish, I believe, is growing, is because that is largely what is happening in the evangelical world, they're making it up as they go along. When I lecture at Moody . . . (which I'm always glad to do and Moody students, they treat me just wonderfully over there . . . , I don't think they've ever had another Orthodox priest lecture over there, but I'm there every semester . . . ), I will occasionally by way of illustrating a point, refer to what I would think of as a standard hymn that they should all know, *Nun Danket Alles Gott, Now Thank We All Our God*, with hearts and hands and voices, the things we use to pray. Not a student in there has ever heard the hymn. Now why is that? Because there's an entire evangelical music ministry, in fact they have ministers of music, who apparently, like certain senior members of the altar guild, are answerable to no one. That was a witticism, that you apparently did not pick up on at all.

These ministers of music are part of a network, and the recording industry is constantly coming out with brand new music, and every six months the entire repertoire of the music is changed. They've utterly destroyed. . . The Protestants actually had a wonderful, even more, several wonderful musical

traditions. The traditions of the Germans, the Scandinavians, and the Anglicans, oh the Calvinists less so, but there were theological reasons for that, but you see, it's gone now. It's gone now. Even the groups like the Anglicans have sanitized hymns now, which you can't refer to God as He, mainly. You see what I mean by that, that this tradition has been sort of destroyed.

One of the reasons our congregation is growing is because people are coming to us because they haven't come from any place and they're not going anywhere, and they want . . . that is the appeal I believe that Orthodoxy's making, which is why I have absolutely no sympathies, (let's get this on record), okay. I have no sympathies with the kind of liturgical renewal that is being pushed in our seminaries, I have no sympathy for that at all. The . . . we had a professor from one of our east coast seminaries speak to our own clergy conference at Antiochian Village a couple of years ago, (I wrote this up in Touchstone), and he was telling us . . . , here we are four out of every five of us priests are converts to Orthodoxy, and here's a cradle Orthodox telling us that the Orthodox liturgical style no longer speaks to modern man and we need to change all this. And you know, it's only Orthodox asceticism that kept us from rushing at the pulpit . . . , the . . . , and dismembering him, you know. We came to find the stuff he's trying to get rid of. It was awful. I remember he complained about the baptismal rite speaks of the four elements of nature; water, air, fire, earth. He was complaining about this. He says high school students, they know better than that now.

Well you know I was . . . , I mean I didn't get a good education, but I was educated somewhat after the discovery of the atom, and I knew about the Periodic Table, but it had never occurred to me that knowing about the Periodic Table kept me from praying the Psalms. It just never crossed my . . . , apparently it only . . . the thought only passes through the rarified minds of seminary professors. Got to thinking about this afterwards, and I think I hadn't really noticed my own high school students in our parish, that they're not really that hung up on the periodic

table. I mean, I listen to those discussions, they never hardly ever refer to the chemical weight of anything. Maybe our high school students are just backwards. Other high school students, they're into all this, always going around talking about fluorine oxide and things of this sort, but I haven't noticed.

Well what do they talk about? What do our high school students talk about? Oh the last few years, they've been talking mainly about the Ring trilogy and Tolkein. That's what they're talking about. They're talking about a cultural world of literature and its cinematography in which you have four elements, earth, air, fire, and water. I need to get that off my chest and get that on tape. I want that to go out . . . I want that to go out over Ancient Faith Radio that I do not approve of what's going on in certain places.

You can't make it up as you go along. It has to be inherited. Where we chiefly inherit things is in our worship, but I don't need to address that point at length, you've heard that a lot from last night to today, that's where it's chiefly handed on is in the worship. And precisely in respect to the worship is where St. Paul said it. I hand it on to you that which I also receive. When we hand on the tradition, how do we hand it on? Every time somebody comes up and opens his mouth and the priest takes from the chalice and puts in his mouth and says the servant of God receives, he is handing on the tradition. You see, it's not ideal, it's res(?), . . . the Greek word, it's pragma. It's something concrete. You hand on the tradition when you dunk somebody under the water. The teaching is handed on in a context of worship that's very concrete. And we don't want to mess with that. There should be a certain creativity in a culture, but it should not destroy the culture itself. I've been struck by the fact that in the Antiochian Archdiocese I think one of the bishops told me we have 4000 pieces of music that have been approved in our archdiocese. So it's not unproductive. One of the melodies you heard last night at vespers I believe was written by Bishop Basil, the one toward the end. Umm . . . I can't hum it for you. I'm not good, I'd croak it out. And the fact that in our own hymnal is a loose leaf binder tells you a lot. It tells you a great deal.

**There's creativity going on. We don't print them out; we put them in loose leaf binders. It's something alive and so forth. But we don't destroy what we receive by what we create within that, because part of the tradition, part of the culture, is the renewal of the cell life. You have to have a certain protein within the culture for renewal. Those who transmit the tradition, therefore, must be constantly receiving of the past even as they hand it on to the future. Otherwise, they will not be handing on a living reality. For this reason, there is no culture without a moral and intellectual commitment.**

**The foregoing comments about tradition and culture, stand foursquare against what we might call, for want of a better word, modernity. I believe the word modern age first appears in a decree from Charlemagne, which I think is kind of interesting. Since the eighth century, people have thought of themselves as modern. Now the problem with modernity as I see it, is that culture has been replaced by commodity. Culture's been replaced by lifestyle. Individuals imagine they can acquire a culture by their own choice. The culture's treated as a commodity that can be chosen or purchased. It has to do with your choice. And this is very much a part of American religion isn't it. You go to the church of your choice, not the church that's true, the church of your choice. That is make yourself your own pope. You decide what works for you. Such folks do not inherit the culture, they believe that the culture belongs to them. You see, if it's a real culture, you belong to the culture. Only then does the culture belong to you. These folks are only what I have to call consumers. They're not people belonging to a culture. They do not belong to a sovereign community of binding address with authority over them. There's no eldership. Rather they choose what cultural commodities they will embrace and discard. Such folk are essentially consumers who believe that the customer is always right. You see, consumers as such are answerable to no one; it's the power of the market. Consumers establish their own standards by which they make their choices according to their own taste.**

Let me take education as an example. Traditionally, the purpose of education was to steep a person in his inherited culture. One went to school in order to acquire possession of one's birthright from people who had authority to hand it on. In modernity, however, an education is a commodity that an individual purchases as an advantage that will help him to attain other commodities, so the teacher in such a situation is no longer the guardian or custodian of a tradition. The teacher is no longer one who speaks with the authority invested in him by the past. The teacher is now the servant who takes care of the customer. And of course, the customer is always right. Which is now why we have such things as teacher evaluation.

I just taught a semester course a Nashota(?) House in one week. I taught the three semester . . . , three hour credit course. I lectured six hours a day for five days. This was week before last. And I called it my vacation. Well at least the phone didn't ring while I was there. So I took my week's vacation this year and taught at Nashota(?) House. And the last day the students had to do an evaluation of me. And I suppose the evaluation will be okay. The students seemed please and also . . . . Can you imagine anybody at the Academy evaluating Plato? And I've got it all over Plato. I mean, I'm a Christian. And he was just a pagan, sort of . . . thinking. You know, nobody's . . . , they've accused me of being a pagan but they've never accused me of thinking. But I'm handing on a tradition, and the students are evaluating it. That's very, very, very, very interesting.

The teacher is now the servant who takes care of the customer. And in education, as in everything else nowadays, the consumer is sovereign. It is supremely the point of pursuit of education . . . . , it is in the pursuit of education, that culture has been replaced by the consumerism. The great failure of contemporary academics is the result of having succumbed to modern consumerism, which we started doing near the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact because of this, modern education has become in many respects, the enemy of culture. Sometimes you get the impression that universities are founded simply to

destroy culture. I certainly have the impression. I welcome you to . . . , pardon me, I invite you to read Mike S. Adams book, *Welcome to the Ivory Tower of Babel*. It's a very interesting little book, and Mike Adams is very interesting. Back at the beginning of the twentieth century, Irving Babbit made the same point in his book, *Literature and the American College*. It's a book, thank God, that always stays in print. My own copy's in paperback.

Now modernity is already old. It's already destroyed much of our own cultural birthright. Without an inherited culture, you see, there's no such thing as a community. If folks . . . when folks join the Orthodox Church, part of it is going to be joining a community. And that's go to be an essential thing, not just joining an ideal, but joining a living community. And frankly, that's where some of the crux comes down, because some Orthodox communities, some literally do not want us. That's true, they don't want us, and I've heard them say it, they don't want us. But you don't bother with them, because there's people that do want us. But when we join, we have to relearn some things, things that we thought we knew. We have to be willing to learn from this community, an imperfect community. We have to have the humility to learn from imperfect community that we join. I have never had that insuperable problem, by the way, in Orthodoxy. I've always been welcome every place I've gone. The places where I thought I wouldn't be welcome, I didn't go. There are Orthodox and Orthodox. But without an inherited culture, there's really no such thing as community, so when we join the community, we really have to acquiesce in the expectations of the community.

Community nowadays, has been replaced by what has been called mass individualism, which refers at most to conformity to contemporary biases. These contemporary biases change with the frequency of the weather because they are rootless. These biases are also driven, as I've suggested, by market forces and popular entertainment. Certainly contemporary religious music . . . , I don't want to name any individual churches, but we have them in Chicago . . . , it's driven by concerns of entertainment.

Where does this leave the young? The young after all, are the most conservative members of any society. I remember back when I used to teach sociology . . . , I had to teach all sorts of things when they kicked me out of . . . . I lost my job teaching Old Testament Hebrew at the Episcopal Seminary when we became Orthodox, and I taught all sorts of things over the next few years. And one of the things I taught was sociology. I asked the sociology students, who are the most conservative members of any society. And of course college students say, old people. I say, no, no, that's not my experience at all. My experience is the two year olds are the most conservative members of any society.

You know, back when we were raising our children, I bathed the children every night, that was one of my tasks. I read to them for an hour every night, right after supper we read for a whole hour. We would always read a Bible story, then we'd read, well we read all seven volumes of Narnia four times, and we read the Ring trilogy. We read volumes, shelves of books, and poetry and all. And then I'd take them up and bathe them. I discovered that I had to bathe them in the same order. You had to start someplace. If you bathed the right ear before the left ear, if you did it three times in a row it was a tradition. But see, if you're only eighteen months old, it is a tradition, it's a significant piece of your lifetime. But I found how . . . , anyway, I'd bathe the children and while I was bathing them I'd sing through all thirty two stanzas of Abul ... (?) Mir and Ivan Skavinshky's (?) Schavar (?), you know that great sword fight between the Russian and the Turk, which is what my father used to sing to me when he bathed me. So I sang that to the children, and you know, dried them off the same way, and then do their piggies. I mean it was always . . . , but the children are conservatives. The children are conservative. And if you change things in your home, the children are accustomed to, you're going to pay a very, very serious price. But if the parents are rootless, and don't appreciate this, it destroys the children.

The young after all are the most conservative members of a society, because they have a natural need to be the recipients of an inherited culture. Teach me how to think. Teach me how to speak. They want to be taught. They can't even learn their own native language by themselves. The young, thus deprived of their birthright, begin to seek their identity, not from their elders, but from their contemporaries. And that's why there's such colossal pressures on kids in school. Their authority are their contemporaries. What we now have is a modern world in which there is a great alienation of generations. It is as though all parents now are the immigrant parents of a century ago. The children are coming home with strange, exotic, and sometimes recognizably dangerous ideas.

This modern destruction of an inherited culture is widely noted and has been variously described. Some have called it auto-culturalism, which means that each person has become a culture unto himself. Now this term is accurate in suggesting the deep isolation . . . that deep isolation experienced in modern life. A lot of that, person lost in the crowd. However, auto-culturalism is not really true . . . it is not true that each person becomes a culture unto himself. In fact, modernity demands every bit as much conformity as does tradition.

I mean these kids you see walking around, these guys with these pants that come just below their knees, and these great big tennis shoes, and these baggy shirts with dumb things on them, and these baseball caps turned around backwards. Why are they wearing that stuff? Because their parents say that's the way you have to dress. You see, somebodys telling them that's the way you have to . . . you think sane people would dress that way, if it was up to them? I mean, if we made prisoners in the state pen dress that way we'd . . . , the civil liberties union would bring us up on charges. You see, there's just as much conformity, perhaps more, without a tradition as there is with a tradition.

Closer to the truth perhaps, is Ken Meyer's description of

modernity as anti-cultural. This description indicates the utter nihilism of modern life. The one I like the best, however, is Christopher Claussen in his book, "Faded Mosaic", the subtitle of which is "The Emergence of Post-Cultural America". That's Christopher Claussen, Claussen with a C, "Faded Mosaic, The Emergence of Post-Cultural America". He goes even further by suggesting that modernity has almost finished off its work of cultural destruction. We are soon to enter, he argues, an age of post-culturalism. Now if Claussen is right, and I fear he is, let me suggest there's going to be a counter movement of great proportions very soon. Literally millions of Americans will be living . . . , looking for a real living tradition, because they're going to feel their own existence so impoverished and nihilistic and empty.

Most American religion right now cannot address or satisfy that need because they're part of the problem. American churches are contributing to the problem. Most American religion right now is consumer driven. American religion on the whole is largely devoted to consumption and entertainment. It has become completely rootless. It is not Protestant. I mean, if the great reformers, Luther, Calvin, the others, with whom I have serious theological difficulties, if they were to walk into the churches right now that they themselves had a hand in founding, they'd be shocked and horrified, and would catch the next plane to the Vatican and repent. What goes on in contemporary Protestant churches has no more relationship to the Protestant Reformation than it does to the Orthodox Church. These modern churches have not . . . , have been just as destructive of tradition as have been the entertainment industry, and at a much deeper level. Indeed, it's sometimes hard to tell them apart. See modern American churches do not even claim to speak with authority. And I have so many of the folks who have come to us from outside of All Saints, they talk about . . . , Tanya I think you've said that to me before, how good it is to come to a place where they'll tell you what to do. And if it's something you don't want to do, they'll say it a little louder. The contemporary churches tend to be all about now,

**and they're simply the ecclesiastical expressions of radical individualism. They're not true communities. They are what Robert Bellah called lifestyle enclaves, meeting places of similar minds.**

**Let me suggest that the Orthodox Church must do . . . , I'm preaching to the Orthodox here, . . . what the Orthodox Church must do is to prepare for the number of people who are going to come beating on our doors. I suggest it's going to be a tidal wave. It's going to be a tsunami over the next few decades. Whether the Orthodox Church is equipped to handle this, . . . our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. Thank you.**