MEMORY AND IDENTITY

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 28TH ASEACCU ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2022

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Preface

The 28 th ASEACCU conference, with the theme "Memory and Identity" was held between August 23 and 27, 2022, at Phnom Penh City and Saint Paul Institute (SPI).In fact, I'm worried about the disruption of COVID-19, which can have a small turnout and be difficult to manage with all the programs planned. But all those concerns were dispelled by the brilliant success of both the faculty and student programs.

It was an exciting moment for Saint Paul Institute's team and Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh to host the 28 th ASEACCU conference, and we were happy to welcome representatives from 38 universities that are members of ASEACCU and more than 180 delegates, both students and faculty, from the Philippines, Thailand, China, Australia, Cambodia, Korea, Japan, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

Of course, we have to recognize the success of the paper evaluation, which the participants confirmed showed that 79% of them were marked as excellent at organizing and managing various tasks during the 28 th ASEACCU conference, which is one of the best results of the conference. Clearly, all the outcomes of the program are always dependent on the participation of the various parts that work together. In fact, the conference received a lot of input from keynote speakers in Asia and Europe on various topics, such as Memory and Identity in the Context of Cambodia and Asia, Memory and Social Development in the Context of Cambodia, Identity and Social Issues in the Context of Cambodia and Global, Memory and Human Dignity in the Context of Global, Culture and Identity, Interreligious Dialogue, and Religious Practices in Cambodia. The conference provided a platform to discuss and share among participants and opportunities for Catholic higher education institutions to form a team to do research more deeply on "Memory and Identity" in regional and global contexts.

Memory and identity are a very important part of the history of mankind living in our universe. For this reason, we, the Catholic Universities of Asia, should actively contribute to the search for testimonies of truth for memory and identity, which is the basis of accuracy, integrity, and justice, and especially important lessons for the next generation.

This conference can only succeed as a team effort, so I would like to express my profound thanks to the ASEACCU steering committee, led by Rev. Fr. Richard G. Ang, O.P., former Executive Secretary, and SPI's team, for working in collaboration with Phnom Penh vicariate staff to make the 28 th ASEACCU 2022 conference happen with high success. Also, thank you very much to all ASEACCU members who attended and brought their expertise to our grateful gathering in Cambodia.

Thank God for all the blessings associated with the success of the 28 th ASEACCU conference in Cambodia.

God bless you all!

Olivier Schmitthaeusler
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Founder and Chancellor of Saint Paul Institute,
Cambodia

Memory and Identity: Treading new ground on human rights discussions

***Isabel Capeloa Gil*[1]**

"The reality is not conveyed by what is represented (…), but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers." Judith Butler, *Precarious Life,* 2004: 146.

"Human memory is a wonderful instrument, albeit a failing one." Primo Levi, *I sommersi e I salvati*, 1986: 13.

"(...) how strange to be forced into such an us." Mohsin Hamid, *The Last White Man*, 2022

ABSTRACT

Memory and identity are intertwined, playing a crucial role in shaping cultural and political identities. Collective identities rely on shared experiences, practices, and beliefs, while memory serves as a fragile, culturally situated construct. Memory studies have emerged to address past traumatic events and provide meaning through cultural intimacy. These studies expose modernity's contradictions, revealing the fine line between therapeutic oblivion and repressive amnesia in memory wars. Five cultural models of memorialization help understand the dynamics of memory and identity: strategic remembering, remembering to forget, critical remembering and postmemory, multidirectional memory, and transitional memory. These models involve institutional atonement, societal reconciliation, intergenerational engagement, diverse community interactions, and the pursuit of social justice, respectively. The ongoing conversation about memory among different communities highlights the importance of engaging with our past to affirm human dignity and identity, as well as navigate the complexities of our present and future.

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To speak of memory and identity continues to be politically relevant, socially essential and psychologically decisive. Individuals are huddled together and form groups, societies and nations, not simply by dint of necessity but by and large due to the embrace of structures of commonality, be they practices, experiences, beliefs or narratives. This commonality does not imply homogeneity (an ethnicity, a language, a place) but rather the acceptance of a convivial narrative, where difference in origin, practice and belief are reconciled through shared values and a common vision of the future. In sum, just as individual identity is constructed across time and articulates embodied markers and changing modes of cultural and societal allegiance, so too, do collective identities connote a shared sense of belonging to a common narrative that enlightens the past, anchors the present and controls anxiety vis-a-vis the future.

The shared sense of togetherness demands the imagination of a common or at least dialogical narrative, that is nonetheless and unavoidably prone to change and contestation. As social, political and cultural theory have defended over the past three decades, identity is a social and cultural construct that rests largely on modes of representation. There is nothing essential that links, for instance, Christianity to Italianness, rather the fact that the overall narrative of belonging shared by the large majority of Italians (Christian and non-Christian) rests on Roman Christian values, depends on situated historical events and contextual interactions amongst different bodies that have supported the deployment of such a value system. The formation of this collective 'we' resorts to props, to a prosthetic memory, as Allison Landsberg suggests (Landsberg, 2004) supported by different media (memory, films, photography, literature, film).[2] The story thus construed, produces a framework to understand the present pivoting around a selective unpacking of the past. A selection that is situated, responds to changing structures of feeling (Williams, 1971:136) and addresses the concerns of different communities. Processes of memorialization are hence crucial in the doing, undoing and redoing of cultural and political identities. But this connection may also prove to be toxic, destructive, impeding the working through of repressed or silenced traces of past trauma and violence.

Memory, as Sigmund Freud recognized is primarily a fragile process prone to falsification and change. It is a culturally situated, associative process strongly reliant on substitution and displacement. In an essay from 1899, titled, "Screen Memories," the

[2] Prosthetic memory refers to a kind of memory narrative that is a phenomenon of modernity and depends on its technological forms of transmission, occurring on the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, mediated in an experiential site, that may be, for instance, a museum of a movie theatre. (Landsberg, 2004:2)

Viennese psychoanalyst referred to screen memories as (*Deckerinnerungen*)[3] mnemic sensations that "owed its value as a memory not to its own content but to the relation existing between that content and some other, that [had] been suppressed." (Freud, SE III: 322). The screen memory hides another mnemic impulse, one that the psyche has chosen to suppress and it is deployed through processes of comparison and dislocation, structuring modes of meaning production across widely varied events, media and situations. In the 1980's, as memory studies exploded in academia, psychohistory stressed the similarities between individual and collective processes of remembering, recuperating the earlier work by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs on the importance of forms of social remembrance (Halbwachs,1992) and platforming the work of the couple, Jan and Aleida Assmann, particularly the novelty of observing that cultural memory as a collective process shaped through processes of mediation and fictionalization is structural to the construction of societal modes of belonging (Assmann, J., 1992).

Before the unspeakable violence exercised within modern societies by state actors and private individuals (from Germany to Japan, the US to China, England to Congo, Cambodia, Vietnam, Portugal, Spain, Italia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Russia and the Ukraine, Argentina and Brazil, Canada), the rise of memory studies as a specialized field in the humanities and the social sciences since the 1980's has been responding to the failure of historically and socially stable approaches to articulate shared values and forms of belonging. At the same time, memory studies react to the need to retrieve and accommodate violent and traumatic events of the past, while acknowledging distinct forms and perspectives of articulation. Other than the approach of historiography that proposes a rationale and a cognitive deployment of the events of the past, memory is unleashed through an affective attachment and personal investment. And yet, this does not disavow the understanding that mnemonic processes are situated, unstable, lending themselves to falsification and displacement. Memory always implies an investment of the imagination, but even so, as Freud argues, this is always a truthful process (Freud, SE III, 320). Even if remembrance is contaminated by rhetorically adjoining, albeit distinct, events, mnemonic processes materializing in fictional media (from literature to film) suture the gap of symbolization that results from traumatic experiences.

Let me explore on a personal note how the deployment of distinct memories assists in articulating the always tensional dynamic of identity formation.

[3] This essay is important in Freudian theory as a prequel to *The Interpretation of Dreams*. See Freud, SE V, 117.

I was 15 years old, when I visited for the first time a German concentration camp in Dachau, in Bavaria. This was my first contact with a site of genocide, where thousands of political prisoners, Jews, Roma, homosexuals and other deemed subversive by the Nazis were tortured and put to death in atrocious circumstances. Dachau was the experiment camp for the industrial system of genocide developed by the Nazi regime from 1933 to 1945. It was the primer to the *Vernichtungslager* (annihilation camps) in the East (Sobibor, Treblinka, Auschwitz, Belzec, Majdanek etc.), but also to camps implemented in other geographies such as the Tarrafal camp, or penal colony as the government named it, in the former Portuguese colony of Cape Verde (1936). In those early 1980's, much of the visual documentation we now are privy to and which surfaced in the aftermath of German reunification, was not yet accessible. Still, Dachau was different. Opened in March 1933, as the primer to the geography of annihilation, it was the only camp which for very long held evidentiary photography of the atrocities taken by the Nazi perpetrators themselves. Later, visual evidence from other camps surfaced, pictures that had either been smuggled out of the camps or even circulated in private family networks, taken by the guards and other personnel and kept in the family albums as iconic memorabilia of the war days.[4] Dachau shaped my relation to the memory of violence embedded in the divided identity of Europe, as Jeffrey Herf argues (Herf, 1999). This was an identity forged in the period after the Second World War through a process of rightful retribution in the Nuremberg and Auschwitz Trials, which necessarily drew a clear line between victims and perpetrators. And yet, the line was also a compromise, one that allowed Austria to claim the status of first victim of Nazi aggression, and that liberated the French from acknowledging collaboration, just as it flitted over Europe's structural anti-semitism. Ultimately, a memory pact enabled the reconciliation of Europe from a "blessed act of oblivion" as Winston Churchill remarked in his Zurich address of 1946 (Churchill, 1946).

Clearly, for a Portuguese girl brought up in a country that remained neutral during the war, Dachau, and thus the Holocaust more generally, became not simply an icon or a metaphor of the commandment to remember the victims and never repeat the past, but it also offered by association the structural template to deal with other silences, other traumas, closer to home.

Some of my earliest memories as a child are linked to the yellow pieces of paper upon

[4] These images were available for instance at the Crimes of the Wehrmacht exhibition, which opened in 1995 curated by the Institute of Contemporary History at the University of Hamburg and then toured Germany to a wide controversy. See Neiman, 2020.

which I scribbled mysterious messages, which I was told were sent to someone far away. The aerograms, sponsored by Salazar's 'National Feminine Movement,' an organization of the Portuguese New State, were the main mail medium between the Portuguese military fighting in Africa and their relatives back home. The mysterious receiver of the doodles was my father. A Navy Officer, he experienced all three fronts of what the regime called the African War or Overseas War, public opinion named the Colonial War and the African freedom fighters, the War of Independence. A war that lasted from 1961 till 1974, and involved the deployment of 148.000 troops to Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau. The death toll was 8289 Portuguese soldiers dead, and 16000 with permanent disability, and roughly 50000 African combatants killed. No numbers exist of African civilian victims. For the regular military, not the draftees, tours of duty had no limit. As a regular officer in the Navy, my father was shipped to Mozambique less than a year after I was born, in 1966, for a 30-month tour of duty. Other than the aerograms, the earliest memories of my father are photos and Super 8 home films sent through the mail. For me, before having a body, he was an image, an image that closed the gap of absence, the hiatus of experience. Africa and that which he observed were unspoken of in the family. The war was barely ever mentioned. In the Navy captain's way, his war diaries speak with the objectivity of a logbook, presenting a record of time and space, no operational details, and certainly no emotionally laden confessions. For 30 months, the diary maps the routine, the boredom, place names, numbers of prisoners. No emotional outbursts, those were kept for the love letters, he sent to my mother. The diaries are numb, emotionless, but once... On the 28th month of his tour of duty, he scribbles a cry: "I suffer…"

Writing about the experience of the first world war in a small essay published in the Czech journal *Welt im Wort* and titled "Erfahrung und Armut" (Experience and Poverty), Walter Benjamin diagnosed as an effect of the war the imposition of a symbolical pauperism, which paradoxically gave rise to a sense of deprivation in the utterance of experience. The silence, the inability to articulate, to communicate is a critical trait of the traumatic experience of violence. If communication is what makes us human in the face of disaster, as Primo Levi, a holocaust survivor argued, memory deployment works with the support of symbolization and representation to mend the wounded silence of trauma. Mnemonic deployment of holocaust narratives, in sum, have enabled processes of meaning making of other traumatic events, which have either taken place long before – as slavery – or that have occurred in other geographies of time and place. Michael Rothberg suggests the term multidirectional memory as a conceptual device that "Posits collective memory as partially disengaged from exclusive versions of cultural identity and acknowledges how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial,

temporal, and cultural sites." (Rothberg, 2020: 11) This by no means considers a comparative victimization, which is a toxic form of the current memory debate, but suggests that there is a 'cultural intimacy' (Rothberg, 2020: 7) in distinct traditions of remembrance.

In my case, the shards of my family's past history acquire a meaning through this cultural intimacy, and allow for a start to a renewed conversation with the tensional Portuguese past. What I learned from the German traumatic memory allowed me as a daughter, and also as an academic, to make sense of the hiatus in symbolization of my father's unspoken but always present past.

Memory studies express the contradictions of late modernity, haunted by the continuous *revenance of* traumatic experiences, too violent and intense to be claimed and impossible to address, rendering the narrative of modernity inalienably linked to the experience of atrocity (Bauman, 1995:71). However, remembrance processes also carry with them a toxic peril. While as the process of forgetting is an individual, physiological impossibility – memories shall always be kept and may be retrieved under the proper circumstances – collective processes of remembrance must inevitably undergird strategies of forgetting, lest they allow themselves to be appropriated for the sake of revanchist fantasies. Toxic remembrance validates the logic of resentment that French historian, Marc Ferro, diagnoses as one of the great accelerators of political transformation (Ferro, 2010). Let us not forget the cautionary tales presented by the German 'Stab in the back myth', which suggested the German Armed Forces had not suffered defeat in the battlefield but had instead been betrayed by Parliament; the long shadow of the French defeat in the French Prussian War of 1870 in shaping the Versailles retributions or the legacy of the Opium War and the unequal treaties in China which have still not disbanded the Chinese memory about the Western 'century of humiliation'.

Arguably, to make peace is often to forget, as Susan Sontag insightfully claims (Sontag, 2003:115), but under which conditions and for whom? And how does the selective amnesia about a past perceived at once as both grandiose and tyrannical, messianic and violent, contribute to mend clashing memories? In our memory-prone present, questions like these cannot aim at a comprehensive resolution and require instead a strategic accommodation. While for some the painful remembrance of the past is still deeply ingrained in both the personal and collective modes of self-identification, for others it is the nostalgic sympathy for the rhetoric of past greatness, regardless of contradictions, that somehow helps to overcome a pervasive feeling of present-day irrelevance.

German classicist, Christian Meier, read the grounds of the argument in favor of a selective amnesia in Athenian democracy. In the aftermath of violent conflict, the remembrance of the ills of the past and the memory of the fallen supported the affirmationof the State. The social and political function of Greek tragedy was precisely to create a safe space where violence could be revealed and contained through the apollonian veil of art. Notwithstanding in the 5th century BCE and in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian war that opposed Sparta to Athens, the Council of Elders took a number of resolutions forbidding the remembrance of the harmful and the unpleasant. *Mnesikakein* defined this ban on remembrance. Etymologically, to remember a gruesome past is approximate to the term *amnestia*, which in ancient Greek connotes amnesia, the failure to remember. And this, in turn, has made its way into another term: amnesty. The amnesty afforded to perpetrators in the wake of reconciliation commissions, in South Africa, for instance, or the amnesty for the crimes of the Franco regime during the Spanish Civil War, that grounded the country's return to democracy in 1975 congregate a conciliatory selective forgetting. Amnesty is then a politically enhanced failure of remembrance. Another instance of politically driven practices of memorialization is the act of remembrance as reconciliation, clearly present in the statement put out by Pope John Paul II in his visit to the Yad Vashem, in Israel. He said, "We remember, but not with any desire for vengeance or as an incentive to hatred. For us, to remember is to pray for peace and justice, and to commit ourselves to their cause. Only a world at peace, with justice for all, can avoid repeating the mistakes and terrible crimes of the past." (JPII, 2000) The Pope's words are a testament to transitional justice, invoking and acknowledging the memory of an abyssal past, but striding towards a future of harmony and reconciliation.

Evidently, the debates about the political and cultural impact of selective amnesia, often officially induced in structured forms of communal belonging, recover a long-standing pattern, not least the *perpetua oblivio et amnestia* formula that grounds the Peace of Wesphalia and the modern Western political order. Yet, whilst therapeutic oblivion has been perceived since antiquity as part of memory's career (Connerton, 2009), in the divisions and conflictual derisions of today's memory wars, the line separating the forgetting of perceived public ills from the repressive amnesia of minority memories has become increasingly thin. And more so, if the work of memory is compromised by a pact of silence. In fact, obsessive recall, nostalgic indulgence, melancholia, divisive memories and active discourses of dis-membering come together in a complex and at times pathological regime of competitive remembrance. Nonetheless, it is precisely in the managing of a selective amnesia that critical possibilities of reimagination surface, as Homi Bhabha has pointedly remarked for post-colonial narratives: "Being obliged to

forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification." (Bhabha, 1994: 161)

Arguably, because communities and individuals, remember in order to forget, as Aleida Assmann suggests (Assmann, 2010: 25), the illumination of the way to the past depends on processes of selection and deletion of unwholesome moments of past experience that threaten to disrupt the discursive consensus of celebratory public memory.

In sum, the academic and societal focus on memory has helped shape the self-understanding of global societies over the past decades and the changing modes of identity construction in the aftermath of division, strife and conflict. And while high level structures and the comparative study of strategic commonalities provide for mechanisms to understand □ □ □ how processes of memorialization shape culture, the way societies remember is always strongly situated, shaped by different identities and communities of experience, organized around belief, gender, ethnicity, class or age. Allow me a final flawed exercise – because it clearly looks for universal patterns while being aware of the provincial nature of the exercise – to expound five cultural models of memorialization that in the uneven conditions of our global world are useful to understand the transitions, the dynamic and the change in the dialectics of remembering and forgetting. They are by no means sequential and they may not be fully autonomous, lending themselves to articulation and negotiation according to historical change and political context.

1 – Strategic remembering

Processes of strategic remembering are driven by the necessity to atone for instances of past violence and are a therapeutic barrier against the renewal of violence and strife. Strategic remembering is institutionally driven and provides a framework against which the differing voices of familial and personal remembrance occurs. In the aftermath of the II World War the mandate to remember genocide in order to prevent its recurrence clashed with the impoverished experience of the victims, of the perpetrators and even the by-standers, as proposed by Raoul Hilberg in his landmark *the Destruction of European Jews* (1985). Strategic remembering is often allied with judiciary proceedings, such as the Nuremberg or Auschwitz Trials or the International Military Tribunal for the Far East a.k.a The Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal.

2 – Remembering to forget

The model articulates remembrance of past violence not as a goal but rather as a medium of societal reconciliation that will unavoidably require 'the blessed act of oblivion,' Churchill appealed to. I am indebted in this model to German scholar Aleida Assmann, who suggests that the appropriation of the Holocaust as a scene of instructionfor modes of social reconciliation, particularly with the memory debates of the 1980's relating to the singularity of the murder of European Jews and the individual and collective accountability for such a heinous act, served comparatively as a wider frame useful to raise a general awareness about the violent acts of the past (Assmann, 2010). The transformations witnessed in West German society with the debate and the transition from the argument of 'overcoming of the past' *(Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung)* to the more adequate 'working through the past' *(Vergangenheitsbearbeitung)* model (see Neiman, 2020) and the rising numbers of testimonial literature and art all worked to denounce the post war practice of prophylactic oblivion. Moving on could not imply repression of trauma. The event required the acceptance, first, and then the working through of the traumatic experience, which in turn allows for critical forgetting. In this economy, psychoanalysis becomes a facilitator between trauma and representation, enabling the overcoming of compulsory repetition by means of discursive articulation and transference. The process of transference and transposition *(Übertragung)* allows the traumatic to be articulated as culture,[5] to be worked through in a process of exchange that prompts the analyst to invest signification into the raw materiality of this forbidden and unclaimed experience (Caruth, 1996) and ultimately enable a selective forgetting foregrounding reconciliation.

3 – Critical remembering and postmemory

Strategic remembering was legitimized by the victim recognition and the empowerment of the survivor witness. Yet, as times goes by the first person witness, who could be simultaneously a legal and a moral witness to the events of the past is increasingly substituted by an ethical witness, who has no longer experienced the events but carries on the traumatic memory through deferred modes of memorialization. The generation of postmemory, as defined by Marianne Hirsch, is linked to the past through intragenerational connections within the family. Committed to reclaiming the indirect memory of the past as an indispensable part of the present, this generation of the children and grandchildren of the survivors bear an intimate relation to the remnants of this no longer lived past. They operate in a postmemory environment, an idea that "describes the

[5] See Freud, SE XV, 86.

relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up." (Hirsch, 1997: 27). These experiences "were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right." And she adds, "Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation." (Hirsch, 1997: 26) In turn, a postmnemonic approach to the past induces a critical reflexivity whereby the subject of postmemory critically rethinks her own identity vis-à-vis this past awareness.

4 – Multidirectional memory

Multidirectional memory is a term coined by Michael Rothberg. From the understanding that there is a direct line that runs between remembrance of the past and the formation of identity in the present, he addresses the articulation of the past in collective memory as a struggle amongst distinct communities of experience (Rothberg, 2009: 29). A struggle for recognition of diverse communities. In 2021, referring for the first time to the Portuguese Colonial War in political discourse (1974 to 2021 – 47 years of silence), the President of the Portuguese Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa demanded the reveal of a 'total past', in its contradictions and aporias, a past that does not facilitate competitive memories, of those who fought for the regime or the freedom fighters, but promotes the dynamic inclusion and conviviality of perhaps contradictory memory regimes. Unbeknownst, the President was in fact presenting a hands-on vision of multidirectional memory. The model favors articulation of difference over competition for victorious memory and platforms the presence of other remembrance models set in distinct contexts – such as the Holocaust, to promote an interaction of different, if not contradictory, memories of past violence, in order to illustrate the productivity of a comparative inter and transcultural dynamic to convey the complexity of the different voices who demand to be heard. Relevant is also the fact, that the question of victims and perpetrators is no longer a binary given, and that memory groups do not simply articulate fixed positions. Instead, multidirectional memory rests on the assumption that memory comes into being through the dialogical interaction of certain communities of remembrance with others. It is hence, contradictory and contentious (visits to Yad Vashem by families of perpetrators and survivors), comparative and radically situated (e.g., comparing slavery and the Lost Cause narrative with the holocaust).

5 – Transitional memory

A contemporary trait of memory studies in academia stems from the more general social demand for the right of all constituencies to have a voice and tell their story. This vernacular right to narration, to tell one's story and to memory underlies Hannah Arendt's fundamental claim for "the right to have rights." In The Origins of Totalitarianism published in 1951 she writes that "The right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself," adding, "It is by no means certain whether this is possible." (Arendt, 1997:132). In the wake of the terrible events of the II WW, Arendt was skeptical of humanity's possibility of doing otherwise.

Transitional remembrance rests on an understanding of memory as a commitment to contribute to a more equitable society, or at least to mobilize against some demeaning, degrading and unjust social combinations that persist in limiting the rights of some groups to access the rights of others. What defines transitional memory is the goal of using memory as a strategy to advance an agenda of social justice. This may be achieved through diverse mnemotechniques, from literature to film, art to social media. A good example of an extraordinary political *tour de force* that is simultaneously a remarkable piece of poetry and clearly epitomizes the demands and the opportunities of transitional memory is conveyed in Amanda Gorman's striking poem "The Hill We Climb." The poet calls for justice as a process in the making, which just like the nation, "…isn't broken, but simply unfinished" (Gorman, 2021:12). Gorman's poem is a testament to transitional justice, invoking and acknowledging the memory of a past that is both glorious and abyssal, but striding towards a future of reconciliation in the United States. As she writes "Being American is more than a pride we inherit -/ It's the past we step into, and how we repair it." In the end, the poem is a testament to representative democracy as flawed and unaccomplished and yet the one system that promises the right of every individual to have rights. Due to the aspirational glue that binds the nation's differences together, the poem promises it will never be done with: "while democracy can be periodically delayed,/it can never be permanently defeated." (Gorman, 2021: 18)

In 1995, Walter Benn Michaels asked in *Our America*, 1995: "Does it matter who we are? Why should any past count as ours?" (Michaels, 1995) The conversation about what creates a 'we' shall never be done with. It is precisely because the search for individual meaning and the recognition before similar communities of belonging are crucial to any affirmation of human dignity, that the dynamic articulation of memory in its various shapes and forms, across diverse communities of remembrance, at different times and different spaces, formulated by unstable techniques of mediation across a performative scene will never cease to convoke our fears and anxieties, our dreams and expectations.

.As in Art Spiegelmann's luminous Maus, we all 'bleed history", and this is a conversation that is unlikely to come to a close.

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Sociological Musings on Collective Memories and Shared Identities: The Case of the Philippines[2]

Clarence M. Batan, PhD[1]

ABSTRACT

This research commentary offers preliminary sociological musings on the collective memories and shared identities in the Philippines. It provides insights drawn from select research data and stories and argues on how the interrelated contexts, cultures, and Catholicity provide the social imaginary of Filipino collective memories and shared identities. This also highlights Jose Rizal's theory of the colonial Philippines in understanding the memory-making processes as a byproduct of coloniality and globalization. In so doing, the paper unravels a glimpse of the country's socio-historical engagements, tensions, and negotiations with her historical memories and the under-appreciated multicultural social identity. In conclusion, this paper provides an insight on a systematic documentation of how shared identities emerge from collective memories of faith, histories, culture, and social change.

Keywords: Sociology, collective memories, shared identities, cultures, Catholicity

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Interrogating the Concepts of Memory and Identity Sociologically

In general, a rich array of social science literature dealt with the concepts of memory and identity extensively. Specifically, these concepts mainly interrogate the questions on how human beings remember and construct identities (Aho, 2016; Araújo & dos Santos, 2009; Biernat, 2018; Conway, 2010; Hatfield, 1998). Across disciplinal lines, these concepts are popular subjects of discourse because of their theoretical power to understand the dynamics of cultures, change, and societies such as in historical studies (for example, Araújo & dos Santos, 2009; Hogan, 2011; Megill, 1998), political science (for example, Hedmen & Sidel, 2000; Yean, 2021), and, economics (for example, Kehily, 2009).

As a sociologist, the *problematique* that first comes to mind when one examines conceptually, memory and identity, is the question of the "social." That is, on how these concepts unravel the dynamics of social processes as by-products of relations between or among individuals dealing with varying histories, cultures, and socioeconomic and political structures. This inquiry point is best articulated by fellow social scientists in terms of *collective memories and shared identities* (Barash, 2016; Cordonnier et al., 2022; Knapp, 1989b; Nagano, 2013).

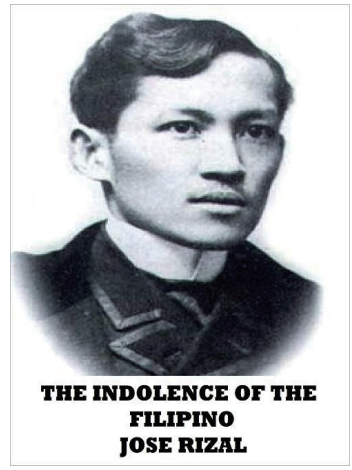
In this research commentary, I follow this interest in offering a sociological understanding of memory and identity, first as a collective, and second, as a shared social activity. I shall do this by proposing some preliminary ideas as byproducts of my "musings" drawn from my multifaceted training and research in the subfields of the sociology of children, youth, work, education, and Filipino Catholicism. Methodologically, my discussion uses research stories relating select empirical findings and sociological insights.

This examination flows through three working conceptual dimensions: contexts, cultures, and Catholicity to describe a sociology of collective memories and shared identities in the Philippines. I argue that the intertwining relations among these conceptual dimensions provide a social imaginary of Filipino collective and shared identities. Thus, unravelling a glimpse of the country's socio-historical engagements, tensions, and negotiations with her historical memories and under-appreciated multicultural identity (Aguas, 1987; Never & Albert, 2021).

Contexts

My initial attempt to understand the Philippine collective memories and shared identities is by looking at our socio-historical past. This exercise intends to provide *context* in order to have a historical grip of the societal conditions that make up our contemporary Philippines.

One distinct feature of our country that does not invite any contradiction is that the Philippines of today is a by-product of centuries of colonization (Decena, 2014; Lacson, 2004) by Spain, the US Americans, and Japan, for a brief but also disastrous time. Correspondingly, the memories of Filipino people are robbed-off of our pre-colonial histories (Alatas, 2014). As such, there is always a fascination with recovering long lost socio-historical memories (Um, 2012; Yu, 2008) in a hope that we can redefine our Filipino social identity (Aguas, 1987; Bernad, 1971). Thus, this led me to question how, in the context of the Philippine experience, are collective memories constructed and how shared identities emerge from a multi-colonial past?



Rizal, our 19th-century national hero may be instructive in this regard. Alatas (2014, 2017) argues that he may have been the first systematic social thinker in our region due to his writings on the state of colonial Philippines. A case in point is Rizal's (1890) writing on the indolence of the Filipinos where he strongly argues against the idea of the backwardness of the Filipinos on their alleged indolence by the Spanish colonizers. Rizal's agenda was clear to turn the Spanish argument on its head by showing the backwardness of the Filipinos was in fact a consequence of colonial rule. I see this as a lucid example of the power of socio-historical structures in the memory-making processes of how collective memories are historically constructed, and how such idea of a group of people, such as the Filipinos, may be seen as a collective - lazy and indolent.

Interestingly, this sociology of knowledge-making and knowledge productions when institutionalized, in government, educational, and even church spaces, evolve social mechanisms for the social reproduction of these knowledges as collective memories

(Barash, 2016; Jedlowski, 2001; Packard, 2009; Walker, 2018). These socio-historical and economic factors shape the lives of the collective (Grindstaff, 1999; Nemedi, 1995; Olick & Robbins, 1998). One strategy to overcome such discriminatory and stereotypical memories about a country or a group of people is by employing what Mills (1959) call as the "sociological imagination". He defines this as having a quality of mind that endeavor understanding the intersection between biography and history.

My analysis of the indolent Filipinos where I unearthed the concept of historical violence using sociological imagination may serve as an illustrative example. In this work (Batan, 2021b) I offered an articulation of the contemporary lazy indolent Filipinos called *istambays* (on standing by) using Rizal's theory of the colonial Philippines.

In this theoretical examination, I observed the familial-faith dynamic (Batan, 2010, 2012) that protects the *istambay* from the mal-effects of unemployment in a country where the economic structures are persistently weak in providing decent access to both education and livelihood to her citizens (Batan, 2016). I also observed in Rizal's writing, his interest at highlighting how practice of religious rituals remains strong and argue about its survival in our colonial past (Batan, 2021b), seemingly presenting a distinct way of seeing "religion", which I call as sociology of Catholicism in colonial Philippines. This is a salient point in understanding our collective memories.

To wit: "Key to Rizal's writings is his insistence of presenting the problem of Filipino indolence as being intertwined with the history of Catholicism in the context of colonialism. Rizal's way of doing a sociology of Catholicism is not simply a critiquing of our Catholic faith" (Batan, 2021b) but rather unravelling how the structures of colonialism (where Catholicism as a religion was used as a conduit for abuses) can powerfully distort collective memory-making processes. A vivid example of this is the phenomenon of indolent lazy Filipinos during Rizal's time that relatively persists in the stereotypical images of contemporary *istambays*.

Collective memories, therefore, are to be dealt with caution, critical mindedness, and historical contextual analysis to be freed from socio-historical distortions, misrepresentations, and revisionisms (Knapp, 1989a; Nemedi, 1995; Olick & Robbins, 1998). Such distortions are evident even in Rizal's time like the "fake news" and "made-up truths" littering our Internet and social media world of today. This demonstrates how collective memories and shared identities are historically constructed and negotiated against the perpetuated malpractice of memory-making processes (Araújo & dos Santos, 2009; Bankoff, 2001; Tupas, 2008).

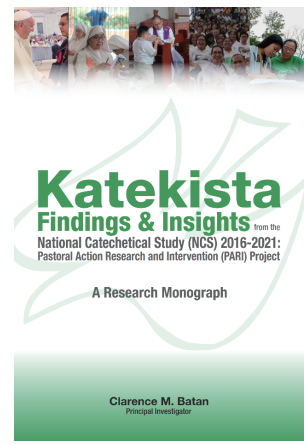
Cultures

An examination of "cultures" relative to the Philippine social landscape is another fascinating sociological dimension to muse about shared identities. I use the concept of cultures here as pertaining to the shared values, attitude, and way of life, with emphasis on the integrated pattern of inheriting, socializing, and constructing of knowledges and practices across generations (for more extensive definition, see Turner, 2006).

Some culturally fascinating facts about the Philippines are the following: Firstly, the Philippines is an archipelago of more than 7000 islands which shape her varying human geographies and cultural traits. Secondly, there are more or less 187 languages in the country depending on the kind of classifications (Aguas, 1987; Constantino, 1976). There are more than 100 ethno-linguistic groups constituting our indigenous peoples' groups. Thirdly, globalization has produced a distinct cultural phenomenon of Filipino diaspora in terms of overseas employment and emigration. To date we have about two million overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and the number of Filipinos opting to emigrate in various parts of the world to seek opportunities abroad. In a sense, this constitutes what may be regarded as living cultural memories of contemporary Philippines (Aguila, 2015; Yu, 2008).

This leads me to question: How do integrated cultural patterns shape our collective memories? And how do shared identities emerge from these cultural engagements?

I now draw attention to our five-year project, the National *Catechetical Study 2016-2021: Pastoral Action Research and Intervention (PARI) Project*[3] which documented the state of Catechetical Ministry (CM) in the Philippine Catholic Church. The study examined five CM dimensions such as the lives of (a) catechists – those teaching fundamental lessons about the Catholic faith; (b) catechetical leaders – usually functions as CM formators and coordinators; (c) the catechized – those who received catechetical instructions; (d) catechetical formation



[3] The project accomplishments may be accessed through the website: www.ncs2021pariproject.com. The research monograph, Katekista Findings and Insights can be downloaded online through this link - https://www.ncs2021pariproject.com/katekista-findings-insights .

practices; and (e) catechetical human resources including some inquiry on the relations of Filipino culture and Catholicism (Batan, 2021a).

This points to the insight that on the one hand, the Catholic faith has indeed, for five centuries, shaped our value system on family, community, and respect for others but on the other, this should also be perceived as shared human values across nations and religions that also points to our precolonial cultures and dispositions (Bernad, 1971; Rizal, 1890, 1972). Also, as Filipino Catholics continue to celebrate religious events, these may be seen as suggestive of how religious values inform and shape the humanity of Filipinos, our collective memories and shared identities now being transported and translocated across the world through migration and diaspora (Kulska, 2020).

Two insights come into play here. First, while our NCS research captured the collective memories of selected Filipino catechized respondents, the memories of various Filipino religious, cultural, and linguistic groups, remain wanting. Second, directs attention to a more seething cultural point of view of recognizing the multicultural nature and social dynamics of our contemporary Philippine society in our state laws and practices (Aguilar, 2019; Jose, 2001; Tiatco et al., 2019). As a sociologist, I am at awe seeing my country being weak in terms of implementing laws and policies relative to our multicultural identities as a country of many nations. To date, the Philippines does not have an explicit law on multiculturalism which maybe the reason why in terms of languages, the country adheres only to English and Filipino (Republic of the Philippines, 1987), the latter having been construed as a new language construction to recognize other languages but this is heavily biased on Tagalog, the language in Northern Philippines and Manila where the most powerful political and economic Filipino elites are based. Regrettably, our country has yet to fully recognize our indebtedness to our own indigenous peoples who should have been regarded as our *first nations*. Their cultural memories remain muted and voiceless.

These musings engender a social imaginary of a collective Filipino memories and shared identities that are multicultural (Aguila, 2015; Ismail, 2014; Jonsson, 2010), inclusive (Barash, 2016), historically-contextualized (Bankoff, 2001; Martin, 2020), and global (Nagano, 2013; Rüland, 2010; Vatikiotis, 1999). Correspondingly, this social imaginary requires structures and institutions to evolve, time and resources to negotiate, and people as social agents to recognize how cultural histories and memories make up shared identities.

Catholicity

The last dimension of my sociological musings is about Filipino Catholicity. This notion refers to the capacity of being in conformity with the Catholic faith (Joven et al., 2021). My interest here is to interrogate the following questions: *How does observed Catholicity in the NCS Project impact my understanding of collective memories? What does Catholicity tell me about shared identities?*

With reference to the earlier NCS data, the role of Catholic Schools was examined to know if they serve as spaces for new evangelization (Batan & de Vergara, 2021). Interestingly, based on the reports of Ecclesiastical Territories in the last ten years, there has been a steady growth in the number of Catholic schools, teachers, and enrollees. Further, these Catholic schools are serious in playing a pivotal role in molding the youth to become competent members of society, as in the case of the *Archdiocese of Zamboanga* (Batan & de Vergara, 2021, p. 15). I find it liberating to note the Catholic Schools sharing in the collective vision of being social agents of change in a world that is global, pluralistic, and multicultural (Gutierrez, 2007; Inyanwachi, 2007).

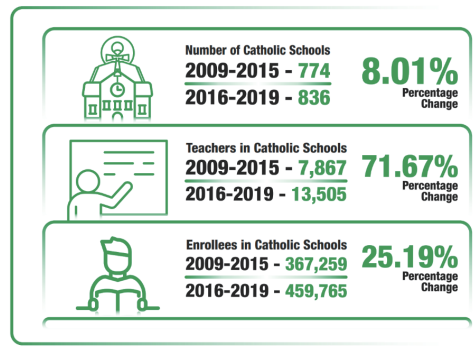


Figure 1.3. *Selected Demographic Indicators of Secondary/Junior High School Catholic Schools in the Philippines*

Moreover, the NCS reported from a sample of more than 6,000 catechized respondents' perceptions on Catholic schools, issues, social teachings, and, church involvement. Results suggest a relatively high sense of belongingness to the Catholic church, high sense of practice as Catholics, and their reported high level of happiness as Catholics (Joven et al., 2021, pp. 142, 144). Interestingly, when select catechized respondents were asked about church involvement in politics, more than half think that yes, the Catholic church should be involved (Joven et al., 2021, p. 152). Correspondingly, these respondents reported being aware of the positions of the Church in those identified social issues (Joven et al., 2021, p. 153).

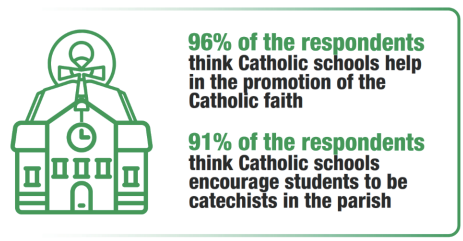


Figure 5.11. *Do you think these Catholic schools help in the promotion of the Catholic faith? (n= 4,809) Do you think these Catholic schools encourage students to be catechists in the parish? (n= 4,801)*

In my view, these findings point to the value on how social change in societies matter in shaping collective memories of particular social identity combinations such as Filipino Catholics or Catholic Filipinos traversing the contemporary world. These select catechized respondents also reported having positive views of the Catholic schools because they promote Catholic faith and encourage venues for catechetical engagements (Joven et al., 2021, pp. 155, 157). The catechized respondents also reported meaningful catechetical experiences growing-up, learning the concepts (such as goodness, love, forgiveness, conscience, morals, etc.), reflecting sets of shared human values that make up collective memories and identities (Joven et al., 2021, pp. 158-159). This observation contradicts the common portrayal of Filipino Catholics in main stream media.

An example of this contradiction is the encroaching fear of secularization as indicated by the decrease in mass attendance and the emergence of what other reports say as "doubtful Catholics" (Dobbelaere, 1981; Nghia, 1996; Sapitula & Cornelio, 2014; Stark, 1999). What were salient in both the literature and NCS findings are two-fold observations. First directs attention to contradictions to what we know about Filipino Catholics; and second, despite being considered a Catholic country, systematic and organized knowledge about the sociology of Filipino Catholics and Catholicism remains wanting.

Concluding Sociological Insight

The central argument of my sociological musings brings forth critical attention to the building of critical knowledge on the intersections of contexts, cultures, and Catholicities if informed collective memories and shared identities of Filipino Catholics and/or Catholic Filipinos is desired. This interest may bear fruit by building a network of institutes and centers to establish a shared *Catholic Studies Initiative* in the Philippines and internationally. In so doing, a systematic documentation of how shared identities may emerge from studying collective memories of faith, histories, culture, and social change.

This is the *problematique* of what I propose as the social imaginaries of collective memories and shared identities that can be interrogated empirically using the social sciences such as Sociology.

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Culture and Identity – Nationality and Nationalism: Indications for a Theological Reflection

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ABSTRACT

This paper begins with a brief consideration of the concept of national identity through the lens of Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities," highlighting the potential issues arising from his exclusion of God from the argument. Offering an alternative view based on the theology of Thomas Aquinas, Pope John Paul II, and John Henry Newman, the author proposes that identity can be understood as real, given, and open to the infinite, rather than imagined or limited. This approach emphasizes human dignity and creativity in the context of divine origins. The connection between Catholic Christianity and beauty is explored, with beauty seen as a unifying force drawing people closer to one another and to God. Catholic colleges and universities in the Asia Pacific exemplify this transformative power, providing education inspired by the belief in individual sacred dignity. The paper ultimately argues that acknowledging the transcendent unity underlying our various nationalities can lead to wonder instead of conflict.

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I should, perhaps, begin with two disclaimers. First, I write as a European living in Asia. I acknowledge that many of my perspectives are coloured by experiences and inheritances that, on the surface, may seem vastly different from those who originate from this part of the globe. I would contend, however, that, with a few notable exceptions at the very extreme margins – of which Cambodia's recent history is a particularly egregious example – those perspectives and inheritances are not so different at all and overlay a deeper common humanity grounded in our being made in the image and likeness of God. This goes to the second disclaimer: I am a Catholic theologian and I speak not with the methodological agnosticism of the sociologist or anthropologist but as an academic convinced of the saving truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God made man for our salvation – with all the scandal of particularity that goes with that and to which I will return later. These disclaimers are not apologies. I state them not seeking some kind of *laissez passer* or craving understanding forgiveness for assumed privilege but to make it clear from the outset that I bring to my thinking very distinct intellectual commitments and perspectives, which the reader might not share, and which lead me to conclusions that might cause us some mutual discomfort, lack of common understanding or even a deficit of sympathy for one another's views. If that is the case, then I trust that the reader will at least not be offended and recognize that my remarks are those of one seeking to engage in a receptive dialogue between those of good faith.

In this paper, I want to focus particularly on the question of national identity because in our region today it risks becoming an engine of discord and conflict, when – if kept in proper perspective – it can be a witness to the glorious richness of our humanity, a richness that expresses something of the glory of God. I hope this will give some indications for how we might, then, come the better to understand the matter of culture.

In 1983 Benedict Anderson published one of those books which changed the course of not only a particular discipline but an entire field of intellectual enquiry. The book, entitled *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism,*[2] posed a challenge to historians, social scientists and political scientists alike. Its thesis was that the nation-state is a social construct grounded in an imagined set of affinities, somewhat flexible, beyond which lay the "other", the "foreign".

[2] Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* First Edition (London; New York: Verso, 1983). For the purposes of this article, citations will be taken from the 1991 revised and extended edition.

Anderson saw himself, despite his Anglo-Irish ancestry, as a man of this region. He was born in Kunming, in Nationalist China in 1936 and died in 2015 in Indonesia, a country from which he had once been expelled for challenging publicly the historical basis of the nationalist myth-making of President Suharto. Anderson was a committed Marxist and anti-colonialist, who came to see the burgeoning nationalism across South East Asia (a nationalism that had arisen as a direct product of the anti-colonialism he espoused and supported) as deeply problematic. It should surprise no one that a Marxist should reject nationalism: the surprising thing, however, is the extent to which Anderson thought through the historical contingencies that had led to the emergence of the idea of the nation state as inherently limited and sovereign.[3] Unlike many Marxist thinkers (and, indeed, unlike Marx himself), rather than satisfying himself with simply identifying as fundamentally causal those historical events or trends that coincided with the emergence of the nation state – the industrial revolution and the emergence of an urban proletariat, for example – Anderson saw behind these secondary causes a more profound sense in which human beings naturally seek a "communion"[4] (that is the word he used) with others with whom they share certain characteristics, such as geographical proximity, language, religion and race. This desire causes them, Anderson argued, to imagine communities dependent upon and defined by those affinities which are understood as over and against other such imagined communities. Almost by an operation of logic this leads to "my nation, my imagined community" coming to be understood in part as being defined as "not your nation".

Reflecting upon the history of Europe since the seventeenth century and the rapid growth of the idea of the "nation state" in the anti-imperialist struggles in South East Asia, Benedict Anderson saw only too clearly both the good and the bad that came in its wake. After the anti-communist, in fact largely anti-Chinese purges in Indonesia in 1965/66,[5] Anderson came to view the nationalism that was, he thought, inevitably attendant on an anti-colonialism that relied upon the idea of the nation state as "like discovering that a loved one is a murderer."[6] Indeed, as he put it in Imagined Communities, "Ultimately it is

[3] Benedict R. O'G Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Rev. and extended edition (London; New York: Verso, 1991), p. 7.

[4] Anderson, Imagined Communities, p. 7.

[5] For a recent account, see Geoffrey Robinson, The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965-66, Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

[6] Jeet Heer, 'Benedict Anderson, a Man without a Country', The New Republic, 13 December 2015.

this" [this identity as a state defined by the imagined community of a more or less racially or religiously homogenous nation] "… that makes it possible, over the last two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings."[7]

But is it all as Anderson saw? Is it inevitable that the nation as imagined community – or the city, or the town, or the village, or the race, or the creed – ends up in violent, even deadly conflict, such that we must either become, in the words of one obituary of Anderson "a Man [or woman] without a country,"[8] or else be complicit in and culpable for that violence? I want to argue that the choice is – as is often the case when an argument is conceived upon a philosophical commitment to scientific materialism and Marxist dialectic – only inevitable if one seeks to exclude the possibility of God and specifically of a God who acts, indeed a God who became Man for our salvation in the person of Jesus Christ. I maintain that it is precisely the exclusion of God from Anderson's picture that leads us to the chaos of imagined identities that underpins not merely a nationalism of physical death, but the identitarian politics that spells the death of the soul. Furthermore, I contend that it is a faulty understanding of the imagination as a mental faculty that attempts to give expression to the unreal, the untrue rather than as one that brings to mind and makes real memories and intuitions, that lies at the root of the pessimistic, indeed hopeless prospect that Anderson's argument lays before us. In doing that, I offer instead a picture grounded in the theology of three saints – Thomas Aquinas, Pope John Paul II and John Henry Newman – which takes seriously the reality of our identity and sees it, in all its proper manifestations, as an expression of the glorious infinity of God which does not exhaust itself in the multiplicity of our human diversity, of our individuality, but which understands identity not as imagined or assumed or chosen or limited but as real and given and open to the infinite. It is a notion of identity grounded in culture, a cosmos – that is an ordered reality – understood as the sum total of our situatedness, our hic et nunc, our here and now, and in our God-given human striving for the one, true, good and beautiful, rather than in the nationalistic conflict of Anderson's imagined communities or the identitarian chaos of the intersectional stack of ultimately atomising assertions of identity that privileges a part of us – our gender, our sexuality, a favourite sports team, a style of music – over the reality of the whole, that is, as I have said, an expression of the truth that we are human beings made, in all our rich diversity and creativity, in the image and likeness of the infinite God in whom all potentialities are made actual.

[7] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 7.
[8] Heer.

It is, however, important first to explore the inherent notion of the attractiveness of Catholic Christianity and how that then feeds into a more focussed notion of culture that deliberately goes behind and beyond culture understood as an expression of identity to look at the relationship that human beings have with beauty.

There is, in fact, a simple logical syllogism at work here. The syllogism works from an antecedent premise – which, for the constraints of space upon this paper, will simply have to be stipulated rather than argued for or demonstrated – that Catholic Christianity represents the fullness of true religion which can lead us to beatitude. Given that premise, the subsequent argument proceeds as follows: human beings are made for eternal beatitude, blessedness, happiness with God; God is one, true, good and beautiful; therefore, human beings are made for all of those things including beauty.[9] That is to say that you and I are attracted to beauty – when sin doesn't get in the way[10] – because we are made for it. Furthermore, contrary to various subjectivist notions deriving from a misreading of Plato and coming to us by way of the philosophical dead end of German idealism (Kant notwithstanding), beauty is not "in the eye of the beholder", as the English aphorism has it, rather, it is something that we have a natural propensity to recognize, cultural assumptions notwithstanding. It is no accident, I think, that in what has been called the "axial age,"[11] within a couple of centuries of one another, the Buddha, Confucius, Plato and Aristotle saw that there was something universal about beauty that transcended individual tastes: something about balance and mean and proportion, about the avoidance of excess.[12] Interestingly – although this is outside the scope of my remarks today, they also all saw an intrinsic link between beauty and virtue.

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[9] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Marietti (Rome, 1950), Ia, 5, 4.

[10] ST Ia-IIae, 95, 1.c

[11] The term was coined as "*Achsenzeit*"in German by Karl Jaspers to refer to the period between 800BC and 200BC. See Matthias Bormuth, *Offener Horizont: Jahrbuch der Karl Jaspers-Gesellschaft 4/2017* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2018). The idea is not without its critics with, for example, Andrew Smith, 'Between Facts and Myth: Karl Jaspers and the Actuality of the Axial Age', *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 76.4 (2015), 315–34 <https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2015.1136794>., suggesting that it represents little more than the creation of a myth.

[12] See, for example, Aditta-pariyaya Sutta (SN 35.28), in Buddha, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya ; Translated from the Pāli*, ed. by Bikkhu Bodhi, The Teachings of the Buddha (Boston: Wisdom Publ, 2000), pp. 1152–54; James Legge, *Four Books: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, and The Works of Mencius* (S.l.: Forgotten Books, 2012), p. 137; Phaedo, in Plato, The Last Days of Socrates, ed. by Hugh Tredennick, trans. by Christopher Rowse, Penguin Classics (London ; New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 65d; Aristoteles, Christopher Kirwan, and Aristoteles, *Metaphysics: Books Gamma, Delta and Epsilon*, Clarendon Aristotle Series, 2. ed., reprint (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

If, then, we come to the word culture through this lens of beauty, we are faced with an interesting tension between, on the one hand, a natural human attraction to the beautiful as a unifying thing, a thing drawing each of us closer to one another as it draws us closer to the God who is beauty in all its actualized potentiality, and. on the other hand, the myriad expressions of that attraction that correspond to our individual appetites, formed by the particularities of our character, language, location, history and so on. How then to resolve that tension? Indeed, can it be resolved? Need it be resolved?

Addressing the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences at their meeting in Hong Kong in 1993,[13] the then Prefect of the Congregation fort the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger proposed an approach which I think is helpful to us. Like all good Catholic theology this approach is displayed in a willingness to hold in creative, even dynamic tension two or more seemingly distinct truths – what Ratzinger was elsewhere to call the "and/and not the either/or" approach to theology. This first principle is one that Pope Francis picks up to in chapter 7 of *Fratelli Tutti.*[14] There Pope Francis cautions against a hurried or forced attempt to reconcile what might at first appear contrary positions – in the field of aesthetics the assertion by one person that something is beautiful and the simultaneous assertion by another that the same thing, maybe a picture, a piece of music, a building, is distinctly not beautiful. Pope Francis urges interlocutors, partners in dialogue to rest with the difference of opinion, to be patient and allow for the possibility that the difference may not be resolvable in our own desired timeframes. This is not a call to a Hegelian dialectic but to a patient attendance on the Holy Spirit, who alone can bring about true reconciliation. Rather than a process of the struggle thesis-antithesis-synthesis, it is, in Ratzinger's words, "The tension of the many subjects in the one subject belongs essentially to the uncompleted drama of the incarnation of the Son. This tension is the real inner dynamism of history; it stands to be sure always under the sign of the cross."[15]

Ratzinger's second principle is, arguably, more important here. He reminds us that we are called to privilege the providential fact of the Incarnation and the ongoing action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. This second principle relies upon a simple fact of

[13] Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, 'Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures' (presented at the Meeting with the Doctrinal Commissions in Asia, Hong Kong, 1993) <https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/incontri/rc_con_cfaith_19930303_hong-kong-ratzinger_en.html> [accessed 3 March 2023].

[14] 'Fratelli Tutti (3 October 2020) | Francis' <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html> [accessed 4 March 2023], 225-70.

[15] Ratzinger, 2.

Christian belief: that Christ who came in the flesh (1 Jn. 4:3) came at a particular point in time, in a specific location, religious and political situation – in a culture, in that narrower sense, not by accident but because God had prepared that context as the very best one for His extraordinary breaking through into human history. This is the scandal of particularity, where the Universal Word, through whom all things that were made were made, becomes the Christ-child of Bethlehem, the eternal teaching Logos becomes the wandering Rabbi of the Judean byways and the all-transcendent Second Person of the Trinity becomes the God-Man redeeming the world through his one, perfect and all-sufficient sacrifice on the Cross.

Much ink has been spilled over the last century or so by theologians who ought to know better, seeking to departicularize this fundamental truth. To be sure, they have often done it in a noble attempt to decolonialize the Gospel, to seek to rebalance the Good News of Jesus Christ by freeing it, as they have seen it, from what they have perceived to be specific, often Eurocentric cultural accidents, and to recover the substance of the Mystery of the Incarnation precisely as incarnated not just in first-century Palestine but as a coming of God in the here, wherever that may be, and in the now, whenever that may be. Nevertheless, as is so often the case with attempted corrections of perhaps distorted theological emphases, as Ratzinger pointed out to the Asian Bishops in Hong Kong, these attempted corrections have repeatedly failed to account for the stubborn fact of precisely the providential particularity of the Incarnation:

> Whoever joins the Church must be aware that he is entering a cultural subject with its own historically developed and multi-tiered inter-culturality. One cannot become a Christian apart from a certain exodus, a break from one's previous life in all its aspects. Faith is not a private way to God; it leads into the People of God and its history. God bound himself to a history which is now also his and one which we cannot cast off. Christ remains man in eternity, he conserves his body in eternity. Being man and being body inevitably include however a history and culture, a quite particular history and culture, whether we like it or not. We cannot repeat the event of the incarnation to suit ourselves in the sense of taking away Christ's flesh and offering him another. Christ remains himself, indeed according to his body. But he draws us to himself. This means, since the People of God is not a particular cultural entity but rather has been drawn from all peoples, therefore even its first cultural identity, rising from the break, has its place. But not just that. This first identity is necessary to allow the incarnation of Christ, the incarnation of the Logos, to reach its fullness. The tension of the many subjects in the one subject belongs essentially to the uncompleted

> drama of the incarnation of the Son. This tension is the real inner dynamism of history; it stands to be sure always under the sign of the cross, that is to say, it always has to contend with the counter-stress of close-mindedness and refusal.[16]

The Church's liturgy is itself a privileged location where we find the Church's beliefs expressed and transmitted. This is, in fact, the meaning of the axiom, drawn from the fifth century layman, Prosper of Aquitaine, *lex orandi, lex credendi* or more fully *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*,[17] meaning "the law of prayer (that is the liturgy) supplies the law of belief," that is to say that what we believe is governed by what we pray. Many, if not all readers, will have been at an Easter Vigil Mass when the great Easter Proclamation, the Exsultet is sung. It is a moment when the Church expresses sublimely her faith in the Risen Christ as the Light of the whole of Creation. It is a moment when the *lex orandi* expresses as fully and solemnly as human words can the mystery of our redemption. It is liturgical prayer as dogmatic truth revealed in Christ and offered back to God as acceptable worship (Rom.12:1). This Easter Proclamation is supposed to be sung by the Deacon and as a Deacon, I regard it as the high-point of my service at the Altar each year. But there is another proclamation, scarcely less solemn, scarcely less rich that belongs to the Deacon and which the Church puts at the beginning of the First Mass of Christmas. Sadly, so attenuated is our liturgical life that most readers will never have heard this Christmas Proclamation, it having almost certainly been replaced by something less challenging and more congregational. I say "sadly" because this Christmas Proclamation, reminds us, expresses for us and transmits to us the Church's unshakeable commitment to the truth that Christ came in the flesh when He did and where He did because God had prepared that time and place, so that it was the very best time and place for the Incarnation. In the Christmas Proclamation, the Deacon (if you have one) sings of how the Incarnation took place at a remarkable conjunction of events and tides in human history. Drawing on what has been called the convergence of Athens, Rome and Jerusalem[18] and at unique and divinely deliberate moment. It so happened to have occurred at the moment, for example, when for the first time in 232 years that the City of Rome was not at war either with itself or with someone else. This, for the composers of our liturgical text in late antiquity was no mere accident. They saw Rome as *caput mundi*, the head of the whole world, or at least the only part of it that they could know, and so the coincidence of the Incarnation and this *Pax Romana* was of universal significance: as the

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[16] Ratzinger.

[17] Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina*, 221 vols (Paris, 1848), li, p. 0209C.

[18] 'Jerusalem, Athens and Rome, City - Symbols of Christian Culture' <http://www.humanitasreview.com/24-history/29-jerusalem-athens-and-rome-city-symbols-of-christian-culture> [accessed 6 March 2023].

Proclamation puts it in solemn slow notes "the whole world being at peace…the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh."[19]

Of course, and as ever when talking about the unfathomable, inexhaustible mysteries of God and His self-revelation to us, it is impossible satisfactorily to speak other than either by the very words of Sacred Scripture, that is the Holy Bible, or by the use of analogy. And it is a fundamental principle of the use of analogy in theology that what we assert to be true of God analogically is always less true than it is untrue: our language is, after all, finite but God is infinite.[20] Nevertheless, the underlying truth that the Christmas proclamation wants us to assimilate into our understanding of the Incarnation is that it is no happenstance that Jesus Christ was born a Jew in a Greek-speaking province of the Roman Empire. In fact, far from chance co-occurrence, here the *lex orandi* proclaims that it was God's deliberate plan and the specificities of that fact have normative value for our understanding and living out of its consequences: wherever, whenever, whoever we are. That is to say that the particular conjunction or confluence of what we might loosely call cultures at the point, place and person of the Incarnation are of universal significance.

The scandal of particularity marks out Christianity as inherently subverting and transforming of existing cultures. The culture of the pagan Mediterranean, of the whole of Europe was utterly subverted and transformed by the presence of Christianity in its midst. The sheer barbaric brutality of the Roman circus, the terrifying brutality of human sacrifice in the cultures of the indigenous peoples of Northern and Western Europe were swept away not because of some inherent dynamic of human progress but because of the insistent and persistent exposure to the Good News of Jesus Christ. If you want to see what "European values" look like, you have only to look at what has happened to a Europe that has largely abandoned Christianity. In laws related to abortion, euthanasia and self-created identities, you glimpse something of the pre-Christian in the de-Christianised despairing hopelessness of much of twenty-first century Europe.

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[19] "toto orbe in pace composito…nascitur ex Maria Virgine factus homo. Nativias Domini Nostri Iesu Christi secundum carnem." '20181224-Libretto-Natale_notte.Pdf' <https://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/libretti/2018/20181224-libretto-natale_notte.pdf#page=4> [accessed 6 March 2023].

[20] The logic of this principle of dissimilarity in analogy was expressed clearly by the Fathers of the Fourth Lateran Council in their condemnation of the theology of Joachim of Fiore and their endorsement of Peter Lombard. See Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, ed. by Peter Hünermann, Robert Fastiggi, and Anne Eglund Nash, 43rd edn (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 432.

Much of what post-colonial discourse has presented to us of Christianity here in Asia as being something European in its specificities and particularities from which our own Asian Christianity must be purified, is only European in the sense that Christianity had (for a time) subverted and transformed Europe. What looks European is a product of the engagement of the peoples of Europe with Christianity: in a sense, Christianity made European (one might even say Western) modernity.[21] To be sure, we need not necessarilyexpect the subversion and transformation of Asian cultures to proceed in copycat fashion to what has happened and continues to happen elsewhere but they will be "changed, changed utterly."[22] Examples abound: in my own home, Macao, the work of Catholic schools and of Caritas Macau has held out a vision of hope for the poorest, the most marginal. The work of reconciliation and the promotion of human dignity undertaken by the Church in Cambodia observed by participants in the ASEACCU conference of 2022 was another example of the healing love of Christ subverting and transforming society in ways that reject nothing that is good, indeed acknowledging and promoting the good, true and beautiful in pre-existing cultures, whilst bringing to them the unique hope that the truth of God made man for our salvation in Christ.

This is exactly the way in which Christianity first got a foothold in the Roman Empire in late-antiquity. The slave-holding, brutal blood-drenched world not just of Rome but of the surrounding European tribes was, in the course of perhaps fifteen or twenty generations, changed out of all recognition by Christianity. The existing culture was baptised and so transformed by the witness of the Good News: not primarily by the vocal assertion, the rhetorical transmission of dogmatic truths – that came later and has its place, an honored and essential place – but by Christians living lives radically grounded in the truth that all men and women were made in the image and likeness of a God who had so immersed Himself in His creation as to become one man amongst many, and to give His life for them: these men and women were all, therefore, sacred and inviolable. It mattered not if they were male or female, Jew or Greek, slave or free: they were sacred and possessed of an inherent dignity, that could not be simply discounted or set aside because of the cultural practices or societal norms that saw them as dispensable. The very fabric of Pagan Rome, of the Barbarian Tribes of the German Forests, of the druidic sacrifices of Gaul and the British Isles were completely undermined and changed by the Gospel. This

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[21] This is the thesis (not entirely uncontroversial in itself but which is broadly adopted for these present purposes) of Thomas E. Woods, *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization* (Washington, DC: Regnery History, 2012)., and (put less stridently but no less convincingly for all that) of Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (London: Little Brown Book, 2019).

[22] William Butler Yeats, 'Easter 1916', in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats,* ed. by Cedric Thomas Watts (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 2008), p. 152.

was a true inculturation. The effect of Christianity is to change the cultures in which it takes root in the same way as Divine Grace received in Baptism and renewed in the Sacraments, above all else in the Eucharist, changes you and changes me, makes us each a new creation. If Christianity is true to its own internal logic, the logic of that scandal of particularity, our Asian cultures too will be subverted and transformed by exposure to it. I am sure, for example, that no less a person than President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China sees this. In his call for the sinicization of Christianity (and indeed all religions), he implicitly recognises that the only alternative is the christianization of Chinese culture.

To push this analogy a little further, Divine Grace does not make me into you, nor you into me but it transforms each one of us such that we become more like unto Christ, our personal attributes taken up into the Divine. It will not make Asians into Europeans but it will make Asians into Christian Asians. So too, with existing cultures: they too, retain something of their origins and yet, through the action of the Good News, they too, become new creations.

The work of our Catholic Colleges and Universities across the Asia Pacific are examples of this. In their witness of education and research inspired by the belief in the sacred dignity of each of us made capable of eternal beatitude through Christ, they are signs of hope which proclaim the Gospel precisely because of that hope. Pope Francis (picking up on a theme first identified in the modern era by Pope Benedict XV in his 1919 Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* and run with very strongly by both Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI)[23] calls this evangelization by true attraction. And lest we think these modern Popes are saying something new, we only have to go back to Sacred Scripture to hear the voice of the first Pope, the Apostle Peter urging the readers and hearers of his First Epistle to "always be ready to give an account of the hope that is in you." (1 Pet.3:15). It hardly needs pointing out that this presupposes that the Christian is filled with hope – that is filled with the hope of God's transforming and saving action in and for each one of us – that he or she manifests that hope in their lives and does so in such a way that invites the question "why are you like this;" and all of this before ever you or I get to offer our story of faith.

[23] Pope Benedict XV, 'Maximum Illud', 1919 <http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xv_apl_19191130_maximum-illud.html> [accessed 6 July 2020]; 'Redemptoris Missio (7 December 1990) | John Paul II' <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html> [accessed 6 March 2023], 42; 'Apostolic Letter Issued "Motu Proprio" Porta Fidei for the Indiction of the Year of Faith (11 October 2011) | BENEDICT XVI' <https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20111011_porta-fidei.html> [accessed 6 March 2023], 7.

I find myself reflecting upon this constantly as I try to navigate my way through the relationship between my own university and the authorities of the People's Republic of China. We are the only Catholic University on the territory governed by the Central People's Government and there is not only an ideological gap to bridge but also one of unfamiliarity. Everything distinctively Catholic we do is, quite literally, a new thing for the Central People's Government. It requires the patience of Job on our part to repeat time and again that the Catholic Church runs its universities as a witness to the service of all and to propose an integral Christian humanism as the basis of education, rather than in an attempt to indoctrinate, to proselytize, to strong-arm people into becoming Catholics. Whether I am able to really convince the Communist authorities of this is another matter given their antecedent commitment to the ideological component of education. Nevertheless, I am determined to try. Important though that is, it is a digression from the theme of Culture and Identity and it is to that that I must now return.

In the video interview I showed at the conference when I asked Bishop Tighe (then of the Pontifical Council for Culture, now of the Dicastery for Bishops) to define culture for the purposes of the themes of Memory and Identity, he immediately turned to the subject of the importance of storytelling and story-sharing. In some respect that can be seen as an emanation of his own culture as an Irishman. Those of us from the Celtic peoples on the Western fringe, the Atlantic shores of Europe conceive of our own culture very much in terms of story-telling. The Irish, the Scots, the Bretons in France, the Galicians and my own people, the Welsh, are inveterate story-tellers. Our culture, our history and, in Benedict Anderson's expression, our imagined communities are defined over and against dominant neighbouring peoples – the English, the French and the Spanish – by a long and deep tradition of story-telling and, it is fair to say, this is for us the manner in which we have constructed and preserved our identity as distinct. Along with a fierce attachment to our languages (which are different from our bigger neighbours as, for example, Khmer is from Korean) and a distinct folk musical tradition, we have defined ourselves through these shared stories. Indeed, for my own people, who have preserved the speaking of *Yr hen iaith*, the Old Language perhaps better than most Celtic peoples, the telling of our stories (many of them largely unchanged, like the language itself, since shortly after the Roman Empire collapsed sixteen hundred years ago) in poetic form has been the only means available to us of preserving our culture and distinct identity, since first we lost our land and then our independence, as England's first colony some 1200 years ago.

But here's the thing: prior to the late eighteenth century and the emergence of the romantic movement in European literature and music, say 250 years ago, an attachment to

this distinct identity in my country, in Wales is almost impossible to trace. We still told our stories, spoke our language and recited our great poems, such as the saga-like Mabinogion, which dates from around AD600 and peers back into the magical, enchanted pre-Christian world of a pagan people.[24] What we did not do was wrap all that in a flag, in the sense of being a different political nation, with the almost inevitable attendantstruggle for political independence from our much wealthier, much more numerous and powerful English neighbours. Our Welsh identity, even our nationhood, was part of a complex, multi-layered sense of being Welsh, British, European, Christian. In Ireland alone – at least until the last thirty years – did this sense of multi-layered identity breakdown in the face of long-standing religious discrimination and persecution of a largely Catholic people ruled by a Protestant community of settlers. For us in Wales, it was enough to keep our language, to hold our *Eisteddfoddau* (poetry and music competitions) and, of course, regularly beat the English at Rugby. It did not require a clash of cultures. This very multi-layered identity meant that we could sit with difference: we could tell our stories and listen as they, whoever they were, told theirs. Such stories can be told across the globe and I offer this vignette into the forces and contingencies that have formed my own cultural and national identity, simply to stress how dependent these identities are on historical contingencies that could ever so easily have been very different. You will have your own.

In *Memory and Identity*, his last book before he died, Pope John Paul II reflected upon some of these issues through the very particular lens of his own experience.[25] The Polish people had managed to retain a distinct sense of identity entirely free of political nationhood for several centuries. What we now call Poland had, at various times, formed part of the territory of different political entities that had emerged, seemed ascendant for a while and then faded. Throughout, however, the Poles retained a sense of being Polish, even whilst – for example – living peacefully within other countries and empires. About twenty kilometres from where Pope John Paul was born in 1920 is a place where two rivers converge to form a third. It is known as "the three corners": it marked a point where – until the very year of the Pope's birth – three different political entities converged: the German Empire of the Second Reich, the Russian Empire and the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. The rivers were not wide – just a few metres – and the peoples who

[24] *Y Mabinogion: Diweddariad*, ed. by Dafydd Ifans, Rhiannon Ifans, and Brynley F. Roberts, 5. arg (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1993). The best modern English language translation (including textual variants and extensive notes) is The Mabinogion, ed. by Sioned Davies, Oxford World's Classics, Hardcover edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[25] John Paul II, *Pope John Paul II Memory and Identity - Personal Reflections*, 1st edn (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005).

lived on either side of their banks spoke Polish, ate distinctly Polish foods, and understood themselves as Polish, even whilst, like Pope John Paul's father, serving in the state apparatus of supra-national political entities that were not Polish.

The year Pope John Paul was born, as an outcome of the end of the First World War, Poland emerged as an independent country for the first time in 125 years (and with very different boundaries from those that had pertained formerly). What fascinated Pope John Paul, as he looked back on his long life in the shadow of that fragile independence – carved up between Germany and Russia during the Second World War, a vassal state of the Soviet Union for forty-plus years from 1945 – was why the national pride of the Poles did not give way to the aggressive nationalism of either Germany or Russia. Of course, he saw that the Catholic Poles differed in their notion of identity from either the Orthodox Russians, with their Church subject – as always in Eastern Orthodoxy since at least the end of the Iconoclast Crisis – to national political leadership. It differed too, he saw, from the Protestant Prussian Germans, whose nationalism was devoid of the broadening effect of Catholicism's sense of universal communion through time and space, and so could create a sense not simply of national distinctness but, when allied to nineteenth and early twentieth century eugenics and racial theory, ideas of national and racial superiority which led, almost by an inevitable logic, to the gas chambers of Auschwitz, only a few miles from John Paul's home town of Katowice.

I want to suggest that is precisely this leavening effect of Catholicism's global and trans-temporal identity that can serve as a bulwark against a narrow nationalism. The reality of a visible, tangible, ecclesial synchronic and diachronic communion means that for Catholics – whatever our national, sub-national or supra-national identity – our incorporation into Christ in Baptism is a fundamental identity that transcends and is ontologically prior to those other imagined communities. You and I are made – by the grace of Baptism – adopted first-born sons (to use the scandalously particular inculturated language of Sacred Scripture) of God: those chosen to inherit His Kingdom (Rom.8:29). Where then does that leave our attachment to the expression of our identity – or perhaps I should say the vehicles we are accustomed and attached to by which that identity has traditionally been imagined and transmitted?

The term "culture" is a product of the so-called Enlightment. It came to be used for the collective practices of particular groups as a category to express a notion of identity defined by a shared worldview or *Weltanschaung*, in contradistinction to an older usage

which equated it more or less with the Greek idea of *πόλις* or the Latin *civitas*.[26] The idea quickly became caught up with an aggressive nationalism. This occurred first in the German-speaking regions of Northern Europe in the attempt to create a notion of "Germany" (understood and realized as a nation-state) out of literally hundreds of independent principalities, dukedoms, free cities and other polities. Because the German-speaking peoples encompassed not only the predominantly Protestant Prussians, Saxons and others from Northern Germany, but also the overwhelmingly Catholic peoples of Southern Germany – including Pope Benedict XVI's native Bavaria – this idea of German culture had to be conceived of as something that excluded shared religion, shared cult. Indeed, under the influence of the Prussian Chancellor, Otto von Bismark, the newly united German state spent much of the late nineteenth century – when it was not invading France or Italy – engaged in a struggle to exclude religion, and specifically Catholicism, from the notion of German national identity and its expression. This *Kulturkampf*, this Cultural Struggle resulted in the exclusion of the church from the sphere of education, except under very strictly controlled conditions, the expulsion of religious orders and the confiscation of their property and the attempt to weave a sense of national identity that privileged the "Germaness" of the distinctive genius of, for example, the music of Bach and Beethoven, the literature of Brentano and Goethe, the philosophy of Fichte and Hegel and Schleiermacher, over any other less tidy, more specific identities.[27]

For those used to using the term culture to refer to literary, artistic, musical, culinary, or familial expressions of identity, the use of the term in this sense may come as a surprise, and yet it was against this background that John Paul II and, indeed, his two successors in the See of Peter have come to a consideration of culture and identity. They understood or understand that particular cultural expressions come freighted with complex issues of identity, not all of which should be viewed as benign outworkings of human ingenuity. They may, in fact, be destructive of the human person as made in the image and likeness of God, they may, in fact, be diabolical – a term which comes from the Greek verb *diabolein* meaning to cast apart, to separate what should be united, and of course, the word from which we get the English word "Devil".

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[26] Richard L. Velkley, *Being after Rousseau: Philosophy and Culture in Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 13.

[27] See, for example, Geoff Eley and David Blackbourn, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Richard J. Evans, *Rethinking German History: Nineteenth-Century Germany and the Origins of the Third Reich* (London: Routledge, 2016).

The last three Popes have been men of very different temperament: John Paul the Philosopher superstar, Benedict the quiet, gentle, scholarly Theologian and Francis the P-R Genius with a talent for often shockingly new ways of expressing the Gospel. What they share, however, is this common understanding that our identity is first and foremost given to us in our creation as men and women made in the image and likeness of God, secondarily it is incorporated into Christ and transformed by the action of God's free gift of grace in Baptism and only thereafter does it become a product of our being people of different cultures. The rejection of this notion of the primacy of our God-given, God-transformed identity in, for example, nationalism, or class struggle, or gender politics, or the alphabet soup of sexual identity politics, or the assault on life represented by poverty, hunger, warfare, so-called reproductive rights (a euphemistic term co-opted to mean little more than the destruction of human life in the womb), in the eugenic war on our humanity posed by transhumanism and in the marginalization and societally coerced killing of the old and sick (however defined or self-defined), in the rejection of this integral Catholic Humanism, of which all these things are examples, is a rejection of our true human identity, which – as an icon of God's infinity – finds expression in the almost inexhaustible creativity of individual identity.

If then our identity is indeed imagined, then it is not inevitable imagined in the sense that Benedict Anderson assumed. The dynamic of struggle between thesis and antithesis that he, good Marxist that he was, assumed would proceed by way of conflict, is capable of being avoided only through what we have already seen Josef Ratzinger called the real "inner dynamism of history": that is by the logic of the Cross. Here we come to our third sainted guide. The concept of the imagination has become almost inextricably tied up with the imaginary, the fantastical, the unreal. In his treatment of the subject in Grammar of Assent,[28] John Henry Newman offers a conception of the imagination and its role as being, in fact, quite the opposite. It is a faculty of the human mind concerned with the making real or the remembered, the experienced, and it is closely connected with the idea of the individual human subject understood in relation to and under the aspect of Christ. Elsewhere, I have written:

> At root, the concept of the imagination expressed in the *Grammar* is that of the mental faculty or power (Newman uses the words virtually indistinguishably) which impresses upon the mind of the individual subject the reality of an object through the apprehension, both synthetic and evocative, of images of that same object. This

[28] John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 1st edn (London: Burns, Lambert & Oates, 1870).

> process enables the subject to relate and respond to the object as real. By means of the imaginative process, "the 'objects' of (religious) consciousness, in all their paradoxical complexity, are so vividly 'realized (and so existentially 'charged') that they are able to command the subject's enduring commitment." These images are not, of course, the object itself as concrete, but, in Newman's words "representing as they do the concrete, have the power of the concrete upon the affections and passions, andby means of these indirectly become operative." In the specifically religious context, that is in the question of the real assent and response to the truth claims of faith, Newman understood the imagination as being the means by which believers have real access to the object of their faith, not merely to a notional assent to the *fides quae creditur*.[29]

If, then we bring together Newman's understanding of imagination and Anderson's concept of nations as "imagined communities", we are, I think, able to move beyond a narrow nationalism concerned primarily with defining our nations at least as much by what and who they are not, as by what and who they are, and to do so specifically in relation to the object of faith (for Newman and for us), that is in relation to Christ, the eternal Logos through whom all things were made that were made and who came in the flesh for our salvation. But it can only do this if we are able to recognize in the variety of nationalities, cultures, identities something to be received not as alien, unfamiliar, unwelcome, other, but rather as an expression of the glorious multiplicity of human expression of identity which is itself a participation in the actualized potentiality, the created beauty of God. Newman's thought offers us key as to how this might operate. In his consideration of beauty, he makes a distinction between an aesthetic in which beauty leads only to the beauty itself and that which leads to God, that is an aesthetic in which beauty is understood as "a power with which He has also endowed creation, so that through the appreciation of created beauty, Human persons made in His image and likeness might thereby be drawn to…Him."[30] This offers, I would argue, a radical counterweight to the tendency to imagine our nations, our identities as "other", that is other than those of other imagined communities who are encountered as unlike us. It brings before us the possibility of imagining national identities as expressions of humankind made in the image and likeness of God. It allows us to see a fundamental and transcendent unity that sits as a substrate, as something ontologically antecedent and existentially prior to the variety of its expression in our different nationalities. In fact,

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[29] Stephen Morgan, 'An Imaginative Mind', in *A Guide to John Henry Newman: His Life and Thought*, ed. by Juan R. Vélez (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), p. 48.

[30] Guy Nicholls, *Unearthly Beauty: The Aesthetic of St John Henry Newman*, 2019, p. 1.

what it holds out is the possibility that the apprehension of nationality and even the expressions of nationalism can be moments of blessed wonder, rather than occasions of accursed conflict. For this to occur, of course, it is necessary to accept and embrace that real inner dynamism of history that is the Cross, where Christ is "lifted up from the earth" and "[draws] all people to Myself." (Jn. 12:32). And for that to happen, it is necessary for us to be those agents of true attraction, those people always ready to give an account of the hope that is in us, such that our region, our world may be changed, changed utterly.

Back then to Thomas Aquinas, who presents to us an aesthetic, a yardstick for the judging of the beauty of our cultural expression in his reading of Plato through Aristotle, in the extreme-avoiding, excess-rejecting mean between the claims of our complex, multi-layered identities, and in their ordering towards the one, good, true and beautiful that, or rather who is God. Back to the scandal of particularity by which God enters human history in a definitive and unrepeatable way, to redeem it. Back then to John Paul II, who saw with absolute clarity the danger of the nation as an imagined community privileged and defined in opposition to other imagined communities, and the urgent need to recognise the irreducible importance of the human person and so turn away from the inevitability of the gas chambers, the gulags and the killing fields that comes with such a distorted understanding of culture and identity. And back then to John Henry Newman who understood imagination as the engine of our best expressions of human creativity, of culture, not as the summoning up the unreal but of making real of the remembered, the experienced in its sublime unity, its all-surpassing goodness, its infinite truth and its inexhaustible, transcendent, perfect beauty. Back then to God, our first cause and our final end.

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The Marriage of Preah Thong and Neang Neak: On Cultural Memory, Universalism and Eclecticism

John T. Giordano[1]

ABSTRACT

The momentum of globalization and universalism, operating through the media, information technology and politics, has steadily diminished the importance of cultural diversity. It has even threatened to erase many of our cultural traditions, or extinguish our diverse experiences of the sacred. Yet the sacred which seems to be lost is often still encased in our cultural objects, stories and religious rituals. This paper will discuss how the memories of the sacred can be both preserved and reawakened. This paper will focus on three scholars who develop alternative approaches to the universal. Franz Rosenzweig saw universal historical progress as oppressive. He believed that the practice of his Jewish religion offered a resistance and a possible correction to the general movement of history. Walter Benjamin saw the forgotten 'ruins' of history encase memories of the sacred and the silenced voices within history. For Benjamin, the role of interpretation is to awaken these hidden memories and voices which are encoded within our objects, images and commodities. This led him to a particular idea of a momentary messianic redemption in relation to greater flow of time. And finally, Jacob Taubes read St. Paul as offering a revolutionary model on how to live one's particular faith within a wider political order. In general, each writer developed an idea of redemption which involves a kind of remembrance of what has been obscured by the more general universal movement of history itself. This is especially relevant for the various religious and cultural communities within Cambodia. The paper will begin and end by discussing the origin story of Cambodia – the marriage between Preah Thong, the Indian prince, and Neag Neak, the Naga princess. I will additionally try to demonstrate that the story and its various reenactments is important because it represents a regenerative process rooted in the

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eclectic character of South East Asian culture in general. Various forms of memory within the syncretic or eclectic context of Southeast Asia can operate to preserve the sacred in an age of universalization and globalization. It also illustrates how the performance of memory can also offer an antidote to the "trauma" of Cambodia's past.

Keywords: Universalism; Cultural Memory; Preah Thong and Neang Neak; Franz Rosenzweig; Walter Benjamin; Jacob Taubes

Marriage part 1: Anchoring

I wish to structure my presentation by anchoring it in various places and concerns. First of all, we are 'here' meeting in Cambodia. If we wish to speak of the identity of Khmer culture and its memory, we must first examine the origin myths concerning the 'place' where we are meeting.

Next, we are a group of international scholars attending a conference sponsored by an institution connected to Catholic university, an institution named after St. Paul. And St. Paul has generated much philosophical attention in the past years by Christian philosophers like John Milbank to secular philosophers like Alain Badiou. They have particularly been interested in the concept of 'universalism.' As the information age continues to cast its net over the surface of the globe, many cultures face the crisis of how to balance local tradition with the innervation and interconnection with people around the world. We are faced both with the problem of universalism, and the reaction to universalism. In light of this, what does it mean for us international scholars to speak of the identity of Cambodian culture and memory?

Finally, is my own experience of living and teaching in various places. I have often wondered how my experiences of living in various cultures have given a 'place' to my thinking. If I am attracted to cultural difference or cultural memory, it is due to who I am or what I have become? And if I speak from these gaps between cultures, what kind of philosophical or theological logic does it entail?

And so, why begin a presentation with an anchoring? I feel that the greatest dangers associated with globalization involves a drifting and a forgetting of physical reality. And so, this is what I wish to explore today – here in Cambodia, at the St. Paul Institute, in front of an audience of Khmer and international scholars.

And so, where are we? We are holding this conference at a special spot of the earth which was given as a gift by the Naga King to his daughter and son-in-law. So, my Khmer audience knows well the story of the marriage between Preah Tong and Neang Neak. It is

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[2] Moura, J. Le *royaume du Cambodge*, Paris: Leroux, 1883, quoted by Paul Cravath. Cravath, Paul Russell. *Earth in Flower: An Historical and Descriptive Study of the Classical Dance Drama of Cambodia*. UMI Dissertation Information Service, 1987, 50

[3] Boreth Ly, *Traces of Trauma: Cambodian Visual Culture and National Identity in the Aftermath of Genocide*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020, 107

the origin story of Khmer people or Khmer culture. The following is the early description of J. Moura.

> According to the oral tradition recorded by the Chronicles, Preah Tong was the son of a north Indian king who was banished and came to Kok Thlok where he drove out the Cham ruler prior to his courtship of the beautiful daughter of the king of the Naga called Neang Neak (nana naka) or "Lady Serpent." Following a grand marriage, the Naga king created a kingdom for his son-in-law by drinking the waters covering a vast area on which he then formed houses and a palace. This kingdom took the new name of Kambuja, and Preah Thong was the first Khmer king.[2]

There are many versions of this myth concerning the marriage of Preah Tong and Neang Neak, but all express the process of the founding of civilization. The naga princess represents feminine forces of life, earth, and water, while the Indian prince represents the masculine solar and spiritual principle. Civilization results through the marriage of these two principles.

The scholar Boreth Ly in his book *Traces of Trauma*, points out that this story also provides the roots of the word 'Khmer.' He cites an inscription found in the Angkorian temple Abaksei Chamkrong,

> Honor self-created Kambu whose glory (like a star) rose at the horizon, and whose superior descendent, having obtained the conjunction of the Solar and the Lunar races, disperses ignorance [. . .], and is perfectly complete, accomplished in all the arts. I implore Mera, the most glorious of celestial women, whom Shiva, guru of the Three Worlds [. . .] gave from on high as queen to this wise man.[3]

He goes on to observe that this version of the marriage becomes the identity of the Khmer people:

> First, the coupling of Kambu and Mera gave birth to the word Khmer. Second, Mera

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[2] Moura, J. Le *royaume du Cambodge*, Paris: Leroux, 1883, quoted by Paul Cravath. Cravath, Paul Russell. *Earth in Flower: An Historical and Descriptive Study of the Classical Dance Drama of Cambodia*. UMI Dissertation Information Service, 1987, 50

[3] Boreth Ly, *Traces of Trauma: Cambodian Visual Culture and National Identity in the Aftermath of Genocide*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020, 107

> is a celestial dancer, suggesting that dance was and still is the primary artistic mode of expression in Cambodian culture. Third, Mera came from the lunar race and Kambu belonged to the solar race: the couple thus founded the lunar and solar dynasties in ancient Khmer dynastic genealogies. Last, although it is hard to make a clear distinction between "myth" and "history" in ancient Khmer definitions and notions of the past, it is clear that the story of Preah Thong Neang Neak had entered the Khmer historical imagination by the tenth century. The figure of Kambu supplanted Preah Thong, the Brahmin prince, and Mera became Neang Neak, the celestial dancer whose genealogy harkened back to the king of the nagas. These two serpent princesses, Mera and Neang Neak, are one and the same. More important, they are the mythical mothers of the Khmer ethnic group.[4]

This marriage is not only the founding myth of the Cambodian people but was ritualistically reenacted by the early Khmer kings. A form of this reenactment takes place to the present day in the rituals surrounding marriage. Boreth Ly writes:

> Not surprisingly, the story of Preah Thong Neang Neak is also reconstructed and reenacted at Khmer weddings. For example, the bride gives some snakeskins to the groom to symbolize his visit to the underworld, the kingdom of the naga. In addition, one of the ritual reenactments in Khmer weddings is called Preah Thong (kann) Sbay Neang Neak, which translates as "Preah Thong holding onto the sbay, his serpent bride's tail." In it the groom holds onto his bride's sbay from behind while the couple walks clock-wise in a circle three times to symbolize their entering into her naga realm.[5]

What is interesting are the reenactments of myths. Certainly, Mircea Eliade points out that myths are not merely intellectual but also need to be performed through rituals. For him it counteracts the deterioration of profane time by a cyclic return to the events which occur in sacred time.

But what of today? The media, the internet, global information systems have their own projections of reality and time. What can a belief, a minor ritual or the physical reenactment of cultural memory preserve in the face of the overwhelming movements of

[4] Ibid, 107
[5] Ibid., 107

global culture? The conflict as it has been developing seems to involve the choice between universalism and traditionalism, or between liberalism and conservatism. Not only are people encouraged to take a side with one extreme, these extremes have been carefully packaged and weaponized.

We are well aware of the liberal critique of conservatism, nationalism or traditionalism. But what of the critique of universalism? Those skeptical of universalism and its abuses are often labeled as reactionary and dangerous. In in his essay "Hegel and the Nazis" from 1943, Georg Lukacs denounced not only the National Socialist movement but all the philosophical approaches that denounce the onward movement of the rationalist Hegelian and Marxist version of history. Any philosophy which supports a mystical view of reality beginning with Romantics, is considered suspect.[6] This suggests that to overcome the violent destructive aspects of history, to avoid the irrational eruptions of history, all of history must be brought in line with universal reason. Certainly, in our time, through the power of our information technologies, this push towards the codified-rational-universal is steadily becoming realized. There are many divergent voices in cyberspace, but the rationality of our cybernetic technologies steers and manages these voices according to the logic of capital. And here is the problem. We can recognize the benefits of defining and universalizing our various values and ideals. But ultimately, in the rationality of the market, universal reason itself becomes a strategy for the exploitation of the world's resources for profit.

And you can see how disquieting this would be to various cultures around the world. For a culture to have a direction and an identity, there would need to be a practiced connection with its past, as well as an insulation to the more destructive practices of universal or instrumental rationality. But can there be a more nuanced view of the spiritual resistances to universalism that does not fall into the traps of fascism, religious fundamentalism, bigotry, or racism? The trick would be to reconsider the idea of the universal in a way which does not permit its abuse. I wish to call your attention the three writers.

Franz Rosenzweig

How can we hold a 'global conference' on cultural memory which would respect a

[6] Georg Lukacs, "Hegel and the Nazis," https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/1943/hegel-nazis.htm

culture's unique identity, its rootedness in the past, its projections into the future and its continued self-determination? Is not our very presence as global scholars speaking a universal language of philosophy or theology a serious obstacle? One way we can begin is to ask about the possibility of minor practices of identity and redemption to preserve themselves within the flows of a broader universal history. The writer who approaches this from a metaphysical perspective is Franz Rozenzweig. He was a German Jewish writer who was famous for his work *The Star of Redemption*. The work is partly a reaction to the idea of history based upon progress and universality which he associated not only with Hegel but with Christianity as well.

Any nation which tries to persevere in its identity, from Hegel's perspective, would be considered decadent because it resists the movement of universal history.7 But for Rosenzweig, such a movement of Christian/Hegelian universal history is itself decadent. Near the end of *The Star of Redemption*, he writes:

> But in this prospect of a future unified and universal world, without oppositions, of a day where God will be all in all, Christianity again confronts a danger, the last of the three great ones that are inevitable because inseparable from its greatness and its power: deification of the world or secularization of God, which, on account of the all in all would forget the One above all, and for which, on account of the lovingly active uniting of what is separated by the world in the one and universal edifice of the Kingdom, the pious trust in the inner, free, self-renewing strength of the soul, and in God's Providence that goes its own ways beyond human understanding, would disappear.[8]

Rosenzweig therefore resists the universalizing tendencies of such previous writers as Kant and Hegel. On one hand, Rosenzweig wants to emphasize the ability of the 'self' to transcend the particularity of its individual character which is rooted in a particular culture.[9] And yet, on the other hand, the culture in its particularity gives the resulting expression its own imprint. Truth is always related to the setting. The universal only emerges through the particular. This is rooted to the act of creation itself. The universal (the Creator) creates the particularity in the world, and so all the particular things in the

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[7] See for example Rosenzweig's work *Hegel and the State*, 369

[8] Franz Rozenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*. translated by Barbara E. Galli. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, 424

[9] See for example the section in *The Star of Redemption* entitled 'Laws of the World,' 84.

world, and so all the particular things in the world possess a trace of the universal. So, each expression of the universal always contains a "contagion of the particular."[10]

Any emphasis on the universal movement of history shifts the emphasis from the individual's experience. But much in the manner of Schelling's later philosophy or Kierkegaard's philosophy, this returns the focus to the living individual and the presence of the 'Creator within.'[11] Rosenzweig describes this in relation to the reflections of Moses Maimonides.

> [The] divine understanding of being does not happen in the Creation that took place once and for all, but momentarily; it is, of course, universal providence, but one that is renewed in every tiniest particular moment, for all existence of the sort that God "renews from day to day the work of the beginning." This providence renewed every morning is thus what is really meant in the idea of the creature.[12]

He also describes this in relation to Islam when he speaks of a "universal in miniature":

> An essential particular, that is a particular which is as it were a universal in miniature, a particular which, although particular, is nevertheless "always and everywhere" as far as it itself is concerned… So, Allah is required at every moment to create every singular thing, exactly as if it were itself the universal. So, providence now consists in an infinite multiplicity of splintered creative acts which, unconnected among themselves, each have the span of an entire Creation.[13]

This choice to push back against Christian/Hegelian universal history and support for a "momentary" or monadic "universal in miniature" leaves open a space for the experience of the sacred within the movement of time itself. It leaves open the possibilities for individuals and communities to preserve their own experiences of redemption within the larger movement of global history.

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[10] Rosenzweig writes: "This essence that encloses in itself all particularity, but is itself universal and recognizes itself at every moment as a whole is existence. In contrast to being, existence means the universal, full of the particular and not always and everywhere, but—affected by the contagion of the particular—must perpetually become new to preserve itself," 132

[11] For instance, in Schelling's *Ages of the World*, the human will is not subordinate to reason as it would be in St. Augustine, but the will is identified with God.

[12] Franz Rozenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 133

[13] Ibid, 134

During the period of the First World War Rosenzweig exchanged letters with his friend Rosenstock who converted to Christianity. He was forced to defend his adherence to Judaism which his friend now considered to be backward and not in line with the flows and aims of universal history. In Stéphane Mosès summary of this exchange, he concludes that for Rosenzweig:

> Every person, every society, and every nation attest to the aspect of truth revealed through their specific condition and vocation. But the multiplicity of situations experienced is ultimately subsumed in the duality of the two great religious cultures of the West, Judaism and Christianity. Each of them embodies a particular relationship to Redemption. That there are thus two paradigms of Redemption rather than only one conveys the ultimate finitude of the human condition.[14]

The experience of the individual and their particular religion is a form of resistance. A conception of time and redemption which is different than the mainstream of history. In contrast to the extension of redemption to the end of history, the Jewish experience situates redemption within a particular lived experience and religious practice. According to writers like Mosès, it is a stopping of time. He writes: "Only an absolutely synchronic time can allow the actualization of the most distant future in the flash of the present instant, in other words, anticipating Redemption."[15] And according the interpretation of Dana Hollander it is a "contraction" of time.[16] But the effect of this resistance is that it not only preserves a particular experience of redemption, it is also complementary to general history and provides the possibility of correction. He asks:

> Who might raise such objections against a faith that goes its way victoriously through

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[14] Stéphane Mosès, *The Angel of History*, 34

[15] Stéphane Mosès writes: "In most religious societies, stopping time functions to abolish the gap separating the present from the mythic past, from the time of origins. The identification of the believer with the founding events and the return to the primordial order are central experiences of religious life. In the case of Judaism, stopping time also, and perhaps mainly, has a completely different object: to annul the distance—no matter how incalculable—that separates the present from the extreme future, that is, from the ideal end of the historical process. Only an absolutely synchronic time can allow the actualization of the most distant future in the flash of the present instant, in other words, anticipating Redemption," 59

[16] Dana Hollander in the book *Exemplarity and Choseness* writes: "All secular history deals with expansion /extension/spreading out [Ausdehnung]. The reason power is the fundamental concept of history is that in Christianity revelation has begun to spread over the world, and thus every will to expand, even that which is consciously purely secular, has become the unconscious servant of this great movement of expansion… Judaism continually sheds un-Jewish elements [Unjüdisches] from itself, in order to produce out of itself e ver new remnants of archetypically Jewish elements [Urjüdisches]." Dana Hollander, *Exemplarity and Chosenness,* 71

> the world and to which the gods of the peoples—national myths, national heroes, national universes—do not stand firm. Who might do this? And yet: the Jew does it. Not with words—what good would words be here in this region of seeing! But with his existence, his silent existence. This existence of the Jew forces upon Christianity in all times the thought that it has arrived at neither the goal nor the truth, but always—remains on the way.[17]

The very presence of the Jew reminds Christian history of its incompleteness. It is the reminder that the world is not to be understood as an empty universality but as something alive and incomplete.

> The world must become fully alive. Instead of several centers of life, like raisins in a cake, the world must become fully alive. Existence must be alive through and through. That it is not yet so means simply, once again, that the world is not yet finished…. It is not the generation of a dead being from a universal law derived from thought, but only the plastic cosmos in its very colorful factuality that can reverse itself to become the Kingdom.[18]

This fact that the world is not yet complete turns our attention to the possibility of multiple forms of redemption, seeded within individual selves and local communities. This whole spectrum is the truth. And what connects this diverse spectrum of truth and provides the basis for these minor forms of redemption is our relationship to our neighbor.

> If a "not yet" is written above all redemptive union, the only result can be that, for the end, it is, at least to begin with, the present moment precisely that occurs, whereas for the universal and the highest reality, it is, at least to begin with, the neighbor who is precisely there. The bond of the complete and redemptive tie between man and the world is, at first, the neighbor, only and constantly the neighbor.[19]

Certainly, we can question the broad brushstrokes that Rosenzweig paints with when he characterizes the movement of secular history as Christian or Hegelian. But the underlying recognition of the limits of a certain idea of universal history or progress is crucial. The universal can never be a goal. Such a goal would be the extinguishing of the life of the world. The universal instead exists prior to the diversity of the world, and

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[17] Franz Rozenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 240

[18] Ibid, 240

[19] Ibid, 252

therefore, it can only be expressed in particular forms. This includes particular understandings of time and destiny.

Walter Benjamin and the Ruins of History

> Benjamin's famous invocation of the Angel of History also addresses this momentum.
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> A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[20]

The movement of history or 'progress' has a powerful and destructive momentum. While many scholars interpret this through Benjamin's affinities with the tradition of Jewish mysticism, Benjamin in my opinion, also draws deeply from the work of Friedrich Hölderlin. In Hölderlin's poetry, the movement of humanity through history is compared with the course of a river. It represents a continuity, and yet an inevitable movement away from the divine. Benjamin sees history in a similar manner. Benjamin's early essay on Hölderlin also borrows the idea of a horizontal and vertical plane. As we move through history, we modify it unknowingly. We walk on the temporal 'horizontal plane' of history as if on a carpet, and with each step we unknowingly leave our mark. We are also unconscious of the eternal vertical plane where we are held "upright as if by golden strings" by God. So, we are both unaware of the way we have imprinted our dreams and desires on history, and we are unaware of the divine in an age where the gods have retreated. It is the role of the poet for Hölderlin, and the philosophical interpreter for Benjamin, to connect these two planes and give people a momentary awareness of where they are.[21]

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[20] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*. ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1969, 257-258

[21] Walter Benjamin, "Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin." in *Selected Writings vol 1 1913-1926*. Cambridge, London: The Belknap Press, 1996

In other words, we need to examine the marks and paths to recover the sacred. In Benjamin's early work, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, he speaks like Hölderlin of a fundamental shift from the ability to access the divine through symbols, to the indirect access of the divine through allegory.

> In the field of allegorical intuition, the image is a fragment, a rune. Its beauty as a symbol evaporates when the light of divine learning falls upon it. The false appearance of totality is extinguished. For the *eidos* disappears, the simile ceases to exist, and the cosmos it contained shrivels up. The dry rebuses which remain contain an insight, which is still available to the confused investigator… In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting… Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.[22]

And so, we see in this early work a theme which he returns to in his passage on the Angel of History. The angel can only look back at the wreckage of history. So, the interpretation of this wreckage and ruin is the only possibility of changing history, of bringing an awareness to it. This is the importance of remembrance, it is a re-membering or restoration of what the passage of time breaks and scatters.

Standing here in Cambodia, we are especially aware of how deeply culture can be shattered, again and again, so that what remains are often pieces, fragments, monuments and ruins. We know that Pol Pot envisioned resetting Cambodia to the 'year zero' which involved erasing its memory of its past, its traditional knowledge and arts, and its influences from other cultures. So, Benjamin's idea of recovering the identities hidden in these remaining ruins and fragments resonates with ours concerns for the memory and identity of Cambodian culture.

For Benjamin, redemption would be the recovery of the past, what has been hidden and suppressed, an awakening of the whole spectrum of truths. This is similar to Rosenzweig where redemption would be making the world fully alive. The past surrenders its meaning only when the time is right. In his late writing on "The Concept of History," Benjamin speaks about a particular conception of messianism which is connected to remembrance. He writes:

> We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and

[22] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. trans. John Osborne. London: NLB, 1977, 178

> the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic, to which all those succumb who turn to the soothsayers for enlightenment. This does not imply, however that for the Jews the future turned into homogeneous, empty time. For ever second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.[23]

Stéphane Mosès points out that this creates a particular understanding of Messianism which Benjamin shares with Franz Rosenzweig and Gershom Scholem. It is a messianism not projected to the completion of history, but focused on the lived moment.[24]

And this connects to what Rosenzweig had also discussed about the imperfection of history. If history is always measured by its progress, *bildung*, or advances in knowledge, this diminishes every life in the past – or lives in the past are only measured according to their anticipation of the future. And of course, this means that with time our present lives will be diminished as well. The momentum of progress overlooks the struggles and moments of grace within every individual life. It overlooks how every life is a universal in miniature. It leads to an empty universal which is essentially involves the extinguishing of all human life.

Taubes on Paul's new covenant

We wish to continue to anchor this presentation in its place and time. So, since we are at St. Paul Institute it is important to deal with St. Paul. And of course, St. Paul is sometimes credited with the very idea of universalism.

There has been much discussion in recent philosophical literature about the idea of universalism in Paul. From John Milbank to Alain Badiou, they all have their own interpretations and agendas. But the writer who got this recent discussion started was the Jewish writer, Jacob Taubes. Taubes considered himself a Pauline Jew and focused primarily on the radicality of Paul's letter to the Romans.

> Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not

[23] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 1969, 264

[24] Stéphane Mosès writes: "Messianism is no longer conceived as waiting for an apotheosis that will materialize at the end of linear and continuous time, but rather as the possibility offered at each moment of time of the advent of the new."Stéphane Mosès, *The Angel of History*, 125

> murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet;" and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does not wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.[25]

For many commentators this marks Paul's idea that faith must eclipse the obedience to law. But Taubes interprets it differently. According to Taubes, the Jewish Paul is a new Moses creating a new covenant, one that opens to the redemption of non-Jews, and in doing this he creates a 'jealousy' among the Jews and the conditions for their redemption. We have a play of identity with respect to the tension between religious law and the broader community. In a way, the surpassing of the identity of a people calls attention to that identity. Law is both eclipsed and preserved through the universality of love.[26]

Taubes established a dialogue with Carl Schmitt the famous Catholic political theologian and law theorist who was associated with the National Socialists. Schmitt in his early work attempted to show that the idea of the 'political' is based upon the 'friend/enemy' distinction and its preservation through the 'state of exception.' Of course, for National Socialism, the Jews were considered the 'enemy' of the state, and therefore a mechanism of German self-identity. Yet Taubes, was still an admirer of Schmitt's work and so he sent letters to Schmitt attempting to engage him in a discussion to try to fathom the reason for Schmitt's support for the National Socialist movement. Taubes finally met with Schmitt and convinced him that Paul is both affirming and denying the distinction between Jew and Gentile. On one hand, Paul sets them as advisories, but on the other he unites them as adversaries against the Roman state. Taubes reflecting back on his discussions with Schmitt writes:

> And now comes this powerful sentence about which I deliberated with Carl Schmitt … That is when we came to the sentence: "As regards the gospel they are enemies" – enemies of God! Enemy is not a private concept; enemy is *hostis*, not *inimicus*, that's not my enemy. When it says, "Love your enemies" – yes perhaps, I'm not sure what it means there in the Sermon on the Mount. Here, in any case, we are not dealing with

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[25] Romans 13:8–10 cited in Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of St. Paul*. translated by Dana Hollander. Stanford: University of California Press, 2004

[26] See Samuel Goldman's discussion. "Paul's rejection of the law is, paradoxically, an affirmation of the law. After all, if he did not believe in the law's significance, Paul could merely recommend its adaptation to changing circumstances, like the Hellenizers of the ancient world or the liberal Jews of the 20th century. The fact that Paul insists on liberation from the law, Taubes holds, makes him at once a Christian and a more faithful Jew than any liberal compromiser. Paul perceived that a choice was necessary between law and grace—and he picked the latter." Samuel Goldman, Samuel. "The Apocalyptic Visions of Jacob Taubes and Meir Kahane," in Mosaic Magazine.

> private feuds, but with salvation – historical enemies of God. "Enemies for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their forefathers [II:28]. And this is the point I challenged Schmitt on… that he adopted not a text but a tradition, that is, the folk traditions of church antisemitism, onto which he, in 1933-36, in his uninhibited fashion, went on to graft the racist theozoology. That is something that he, the most important state law theorist, did indeed receive as a lesson. "That I did not know![27]

In this reading, there can be no basis for a Christian Anti-Semitism. Paul undermines the friend/enemy distinction between Jew and Gentile and sets them against a greater foe, the Roman state. Taubes convinces Schmitt that they are on the same page so to speak.

Taubes, of course, differs from Schmitt. Schmitt through the state of exception must act as a *katechon* and delay the apocalypse through an act of power. Taubes instead takes refuge in Benjamin. He writes: "Schmitt's fundamental vocabulary is here introduced by Benjamin, made use of, and so transformed into its opposite. Carl Schmitt's conception of the "state of exception" is dictatorial, dictated from above; in Benjamin it becomes a doctrine in the tradition of the oppressed."[28]

So, Taubes in his Jewish reading of Paul describes a kind of universalism which resists a larger, more oppressive, and empty universal. It affirms a universal love which does not reduce everything to sameness, and preserves spiritual diversity.[29]

> In the early letter that called Taubes to the attention of Carl Schmitt, Taubes wrote: For the law is not the first and the last, because there are "even" relations between man and man that "exceed," "infringe" the law – love, pity, forgiveness (not at all "sentimental," but "real") could not go one step further in my poor and often crooked life (and I have no idea how to go one step further) without holding fast to "these three," and that always leads me, against my "will," to St. Paul.[30]

And so, through the universality of love, pity and forgiveness, religious identity is preserved in the face of the erosive effects of a more powerful universal order.

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[27] Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of St. Paul*, 51

[28] Jacob Taubes. *To Carl Schmitt: Letters and Reflections*. translated by Keith Tribe. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, 52

[29] See for example the interpretation of Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*.

[30] Jacob Taubes. *To Carl Schmitt: Letters and Reflections*, 56

Cultural Diversity and the Global Universal (Derrida's Uneasiness)

And so, we recognize in these three writers a recognition of how the drama of history and redemption plays itself out in particular situations. It is the resistance to an empty over-arching universalism, and a turn instead to a lived universalism rooted in the sanctity of the individual life and connected with others through love, pity, and forgiveness. But how can we consider this centering of redemption in the individual while considering the movement of history itself? How can we balance the dignity and freedoms of an individual life with their rootedness in the broader community?

This is the problem of the global situation we are now in. On one hand power has colonized our ideals concerning human rights, freedoms and democracy. These liberal ideals are now often weaponized and used as a means to uproot human beings from their local cultures, traditions, and religious identities. The aim is to individuate human beings so they no longer find their "meanings" in their older identities and so can more easily be controlled through media and information. As a result, culture and religion now become the mystical 'Other' of universal reason, and a threat to a global order.

Yet the reaction to liberalism is also extremely destructive. An authentic grassroots liberalism remains crucial as the manner in which human beings continue to adapt to their society and their environment, the manner in which past injustices are corrected, diversity is respected, and rights are established. And it is an important part of the language through which we communicate with one another as global neighbors. So, how can we in the manner of a Rosenzweig, a Benjamin or a Taubes, navigate between the secular universal on one hand, and religious and cultural belief on the other?

One interpretation of Benjamin which I struggle with is one presented by Jacques Derrida in his essay "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority." Derrida refers to the tensions which we discussed above, that is, between the secular global version of the universal and the more minor practices of religion and redemption. He sees in Benjamin the recognition of the possibility of a compromise between these two dimensions or languages. He frames it as follows:

> This does not mean that one must simply renounce Enlightenment and the language of communication or of representation in favor of the language of expression. In his *Moscow Diary* in 1926-27, Benjamin specifies that the polarity between the two languages and all that they command cannot be maintained and deployed in a pure

> state, but that "compromise" is necessary or inevitable between them. Yet this remains a compromise between two incommensurable and radically heterogeneous dimensions. It is perhaps one of the lessons that we could draw here: the fatal nature of the compromise between the heterogeneous orders, which is a compromise, moreover, in the name of the justice that would command one to obey at the same time the law of representations [Aufkldrung, reason, objectification, comparison, explication, the taking into account of multiplicity and therefore the serialization of the unique) and the law that transcends representation and withholds the unique, all uniqueness, from its reinscription in an order of generality or of comparison. [31]

Derrida then goes on to refer to Benjamin's idea of "divine violence." At the end of his essay "The Critique of Violence," Benjamin imagined a "divine violence" that would finally break the history of humanity out of its cycles of law creating violence and law preserving violence, that is, out of the arbitrary cycles of authority. At the end of that essay Benjamin wrote: "But all mythic lawmaking violence, which we may call "executive," is pernicious. Pernicious, too, is the law-preserving, 'administrative' violence that serves it. Divine violence, which is the sign and seal but never the means of sacred dispatch, may be called 'sovereign' violence."[32] Derrida responding to this, writes:

> What I find, in conclusion, the most redoubtable, indeed (perhaps, almost) intolerable in this text, even beyond the affinities it maintains with the worst (the critique of Aufklarung, the theory of the fall and of originary authenticity, the polarity between originary language and fallen language, the critique of representation and of parliamentary democracy, etc.), is a temptation that it would leave open, and leave open notably to the survivors or the victims of the final solution, to its past, present or potential victims. Which temptation? The temptation to think the holocaust as an uninterpretable manifestation of divine violence insofar as this divine violence would be at the same time nihilating, expiatory and bloodless, says Benjamin, a divine violence that would destroy current law through a bloodless process that strikes and causes to expiate.[33]

He goes on to explain that for him, the text is still "too Heideggerian, too messianico-marxist or archeoeschatological." and that there is a responsibility to "think,

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[31] Jacques Derrida. "Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority,"" 61-62
[32] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 252
[33] Derrida, "Force of Law," 62

know, represent for ourselves, formalize, judge the possible complicity between all these discourses and the worst (here the final solution)."[34]

Derrida wishes to both deconstruct and yet 'preserve' the language of representation which was provided by the enlightenment. Just like Lukacs, he rejects the possibilities of a political upheaval originating from a dimension outside of the universal. And this is completely understandable when we consider the dangers of fascism, authoritarianism, nationalism, and theocratic governments. He has a 'responsibility' to distance himself from such radical disruptive possibilities which might lead to an event like the final solution.[35]

Yet it appears to me that Benjamin is considering only the 'possibility' of a divine violence. He is merely asking if there might be some way beyond the mere cycles of violence in history; asking if there is a way for the Angel of History to turn to face forward. And in doing so, Benjamin seems to almost push the idea of divine violence out of reach into the future and instead focuses on the recovery of the multiple expressions and silenced voices of history.[36] What can be the importance of a divine violence when the 'messiah' can emerge within each life at any moment?

But this does bring up a problem. There is of course a serious contradiction between Benjamin's mystical messianism and his 'messianico-marxism.' And so, this contradiction pits the universal and the religious diversity as opponents. The problem both in Benjamin, and in Derrida's reading of Benjamin, it seems to me, involves the way they consider the polarity or "compromise" between the languages of the sacred and universal reason.

And yet, this is precisely what is for the most part avoided in Southeast Asian culture. Here is something which goes beyond 'mere' compromise, that is neighborly coexistence.

Marriage part 2: Eclecticism

There is a shifting logic to my own experience and concerns. When I first began

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[34] Ibid, 62-63

[35] It seems to me that Derrida fails to consider the way power has colonized the languages not only of the enlightenment but even deconstruction itself.

[36] I believe that this is an important aspect in al-Farabi's conception of the virtuous city, his reading of Plato's Republic, where the idea of perfection which is always placed out of reach from the imperfections of human societies.

writing influenced by my various cultural experiences, I followed a strategy of affirming various cultural myths and practices as offering a kind of wisdom not recognized by the institutionalized thinking of the West. And the underlying hope would be one of a counter-balance, a correction, which does not have to be created out of thin air, but one which has always existed.

But as information technology, social media and online education, have become a more powerful influence on the consciousness and habits of people from various cultures, it is becoming clear to me that cultural wisdom does not in itself possess the power of arresting the momentum of global history, and in many cases is even vilified. But these myths also have a curious habit of expressing themselves at unexpected times. So, they are sometimes preserved until the time is right for them to have an effect, and provide the possibility of some transformation. But what is it that can preserve the ruins of history until they are given a chance to truly speak?

In other words, what kind of contract or 'covenant' does this marriage between Preah Thong and Neang Neak involve? It is a marriage between a stranger and a local. It is a marriage involving identity and difference. These combine to create a sense of 'place.' This is the very character of both culture and religion in Southeast Asian. It is a factor in how it spreads and takes root. In the book The Ramayana in Indonesia, Saran and Khanna describe the process of religious and cultural influence.

> By whatever name we choose to call the phenomenon of the arrival and absorption of Indian culture, it becomes so much more comprehensible if we see it not in terms of sudden and dramatic discontinuities but as a gradual and creative interaction between Indonesia's own beliefs, institutions and preferences on the one hand and the exciting opportunities offered by Indian experience on the other. There was no clash of civilizations, with one overwhelming the other. In fact, there was considerable similarity between the manner in which 'Sanskritic' ideas spread in the Indian subcontinent itself over the centuries, merging into rather than displacing the vast variety of local cultures, and the way this process extended across the seas to Southeast Asia.[37]

[37] Saran, Malini and Vinod C. Khanna. The Ramayana in Indonesia. Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2004. 29

We know the history of Cambodia was shaped by both influences and resistances with the Srivajaya kingdoms in Indonesia, both borrowings and wars with the Champa kingdom in Vietnam and the Thai kingdoms. Can we speak of a friend or of an enemy? That distinction is undermined by the fundamental currents which pass through Southeast Asian cultures. Identity is established in a manner which involves both borrowings and resistances.

Both Taubes in his dialogue with Schmitt, and Derrida in his work The Politics of Friendship attempted to call into question the ability to make such distinctions. And yet in Southeast Asia this is not an intellectual exercise, it is a matter of history. Different religions and cultures have lived together relatively peacefully as neighbors.

My Thai Buddhist colleague Veerachart Nimanong used to have many Western friends who would ask him to arrange vipassana meditation courses for them at various Buddhist temples. He once asked me if I could explain why Western people would desire to 'perfect' Buddhist meditation in this lifetime. He explained to me that Thai people believe that they have many lifetimes to perfect their spirituality. They can balance the development of their spirituality with their duties to their career and their families. I have often reflected on this conversation. It does seem that Western thought is preoccupied with perfection, completion and the reduction of the world to a kind of logic. We can see how the friend /enemy distinctions and even various forms of messianism emerge out of this desire for 'completion.' But what characterizes Southeast Asian attitude is a different conception of time, fortune, and the making of merit. Cultural relationships and human relationships are embedded in a larger flow of time which allows contradictions and resonances to exist side by side. This involves cultural identity and cultural difference, memory and forgetting.[38]

Syncretism is often looked down upon as the contamination of the canonical teachings of religion by heretical additions. But syncretism seems to actually be a significant feature of religion here in South East Asia.[39] It is clear in history the manner in which religious syncretism, tolerance and co-existence took place.

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[38] What would remain to be examined is how the 'exceptions' to this eclecticism and accommodation in Southeast Asian history occur. For instance; the outside ideologies that have permeated the Khmer Rouge, and the current messianic Maitreya Buddhist movements that have arisen in the aftermath.

[39] There are many interesting examples of instances of syncretism, often involving gender considerations. For example, the syncretism of Buddhism and animism in Thailand, Nat worship in Myanmar, Guanyin worship in Thailand and Vietnam, and the shrines to the Walisongo in Java.

We can broaden this by expanding syncretism to a condition of 'eclecticism.' This would involve the co-existence of not only religious beliefs, but also secularist and scientific beliefs. An individual can function in several registers. The breaks of logic are also a preservation of beliefs, forms, and objects from a more universal logic. This also allows for the possibility of reactivating and reinterpreting these beliefs, forms, and objects, leaving a space open for acts of redemption.

As we pointed out, in the present media age, the political aim is to individuate human beings and rule them through the flows of information. It is important for this ruling and coordinating to uproot them from their local environments. It is primarily disruptive. But the history of eclecticism is the spread of cultural ideas in such a way that they can take root. And once rooted, they can assimilate new cultural ideas. The older ideas live on although partly obscured. And interpretation, reinterpretation, artistic transformations are the manner to reawaken them at the right time. This reactivation of older forms in newer guises goes hand in hand with a more authentic grass-roots liberalism which allows a culture to adapt. Memory, identity and change move together.

We can return to the Cambodian born scholar Boreth Ly. He believed that stories and art are important ways to heal the Trauma of the Cambodian past, to heal what he calls the "broken body." This broken body represents both the real lived bodies who have been traumatized in Cambodia's history, and the mythical matrilineal body of Cambodia's past.[40] With reference to Derrida's discussions of the pharmakon, Ly writes:

> Like the serpent who is poisoned/poisonous but also capable of shedding its old skin, it is possible for the once-poisoned (traumatized) Cambodian nation to reinvent its identity in the aftermath of the genocide. In other words, the experiencing of trauma is neither poison nor cure but can contain both poison and remedy. I believe that the same is true of the traumatic experiences that artists expressed in their works produced in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia and its diaspora—they are poison cures."[41]

[40] Ly Writes: "I have pointed out that the broken body, especially the broken female body, is the site and sight of trauma in the Cambodian cultural context… Cambodia is arguably a matrilineal culture, and thus the female body comprises elements of water and land; the nagi is the embodiment of the Khmer kingdom," 124

[41] Ibid. 123

This positive ability of art to heal through the telling of stories is related to the negative underlying trauma. What Ly is presenting is extremely important. But what remains to be examined is how traumatic disruption provides an authenticity to art which resists the prefabricated propaganda which often attempts to pass itself off as memory.

And why root this presentation in site, myth, institution, and religion? It is because culture, identity and remembrance are the ways human lives are anchored to both nature and the sacred. A life which is solely subject to information and media becomes detached from its environment and from its past. Such a life becomes a kind of death.

A reflection which generates itself from its anchorings, can perhaps sidestep the distortions of the media age that threaten not only cultural diversity. It can lead to an appreciation of the 'inscape' of human life in its particular manifestations, not only in the present, but in the distant past and the future. In this spirit, I wish to end with a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

As kingfishers catch fire

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came*.

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —
Christ — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

(Gerard Manley Hopkins 1844-1889)

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Book Review

Pope John Paul II, Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millenium, (Weidenfeld and Nicholson: London, 2005), x + 198pp.

In Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium, Pope St. John Paul II offers a deeply personal, spiritual, and philosophical reflection on the nature of personal and collective memory, the challenges of modern society, and the identity of Europe. It was the last work in a long life of academic and intellectual endeavour and, as such, could be considered as much as John Paul II's closing remarks on his work, his pontificate and, more widely, the twentieth century, at least as viewed from Europe, as it is a set of indications that the Pope passionately hoped would inform the twenty-first on, perhaps a more global scale.

This book is a collection of conversations between the Pope and his friends, including philosophers, theologians, and politicians, and is divided into five sections, each composed of a number of chapters. Each section sheds light on a particular aspect of memory, identity, and the human experience.

Section 1: "The Perception of Time"

In this opening section, John Paul II discusses the human perception of time and the significance of memory in our lives. He emphasizes the importance of remembering our personal and collective past, as it shapes our identity and provides a framework for understanding our present and future. He encourages readers to examine their own memories and consider the impact of historical events on their lives.

The Pope also speaks about the role of memory in religious traditions, such as Christianity, and how the act of remembering forms a connection between believers and God. He cites the Eucharist as an example of a sacrament that relies on memory and the retelling of Jesus' sacrifice to maintain its significance. This chapter provides a thought-provoking exploration of the nature of time, memory, and the human experience, setting the stage for the subsequent chapters.

Section 2: "Memory and the History of Nations"

In the second section of the book, John Paul II delves into the concept of national memory, exploring how the collective experiences of a nation shape its identity and development. He draws on his own experiences as a Polish citizen, witnessing the struggles of his country throughout the 20th century, including Nazi occupation and Soviet oppression. The Pope highlights the significance of national memory in preserving a nation's cultural heritage and fostering a sense of unity among its people. He cautions against the manipulation of history for political purposes and emphasizes the importance of teaching younger generations about the past, so they can learn from it and avoid repeating its mistakes.

Section 3: "Memory and Identity"

The entire book pivots around this third and central section. Here the Pope discusses the relationship between memory and identity at both the individual and collective levels. He argues that our memories are an essential part of who we are, shaping our values, beliefs, and sense of self. He also asserts that a shared memory is crucial for the development of a collective identity within communities and nations. Exploring the concept of cultural identity, particularly in the context of Europe, which has a rich and complex history, the Pope emphasises the importance of recognising the Christian roots of European culture and the role that faith has played in shaping the continent's identity. He also acknowledges the impact of secularization and the challenge it poses to the maintenance of Europe's Christian heritage. For Asian readers it would be easy to make conclude that the Eurocentricity of this section means it is of little direct relevance. To do so would be a mistake, since all identity is particular – as are all memories – Pope John Paul’s reflections here provide rich food for reflection on how the Christian faith might come to influence and form the present and future in Asia, as it formed the past and present in Europe.

Section 4: "Memory and the Threat of Evil"

In this section, the Pope turns his attention to the darker side of human history, examining the role of memory in understanding and confronting evil. He discusses the Holocaust and other instances of genocide as examples of the atrocities that humans are capable of committing. He stresses the importance of remembering these events to ensure that they are not forgotten or repeated.

Pope John Paul II also considers the role of forgiveness and reconciliation in the face

of evil, arguing that while it is essential to remember and acknowledge the suffering caused by past injustices, it is also crucial to foster healing and unity. He encourages individuals and nations to seek forgiveness and to forgive in order to promote peace and understanding.

In a continent that has experienced more than its fair share of that very same dark side, and in a publication such as this one, of proceedings arising from a reflection on the themes of memory and identity in the context of a conference that took place in Cambodia, the issues raised in this section are both hard to read and essential.

Chapter 5: "Memory, the European Union, and the Church"

In the final part of the book, the Pope reflects on the European Union's development and the role of the Catholic Church in the modern world. He discusses the importance of a shared European identity and the need for unity among the diverse nations of the continent. He emphasizes that the EU must not disregard its Christian heritage, as it has played a vital role in shaping the continent's culture and values.

Pope John Paul II also once again addresses the challenges that the Catholic Church faces in contemporary society, such as secularisation and the erosion of religious belief. He calls for the Church to engage in dialogue with the modern world and to adapt to its changing circumstances while remaining faithful to its core teachings and traditions.

The book undoubtedly offers a unique perspective. As the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church and a significant figure in global politics and interfaith relations, Pope St John Paul II offered here a unique perspective on issues related to memory, identity, and human history. His life experiences, including growing up in Poland during World War II and witnessing the rise and fall of both Nazism/Fascism and Communism, informed his insights on these topics. They represent the deep soil in which his reflections were planted, took root and flourished. The book provides an opportunity for readers to engage with the Pope's philosophical and theological reflections on subjects like the nature of evil, human freedom, and the role of religion in shaping society. At the very least, Memory and Identity documents the thoughts and reflections of one of the most influential religious figures of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. As such, it serves as a valuable resource for those seeking to understand the ideas and actions of Pope John Paul II during his time as the head of the Roman Catholic Church. The book clearly promotes an honest ecumenical and interfaith dialogue,grounded in truth, courtesy and the

assurance of firm faith and does so by promoting an understanding of the importance of dialogue and cooperation among people of different faiths and cultures. This message is as relevant and important today, as the world continues to grapple with religious, cultural, and political differences, as it did when the book was written. It also serves as an inspiration for reflection: Pope St John Paul II's reflections on his personal experiences and the broader historical context can inspire readers to examine their own lives, memories, and identities. This process of reflection is, at times, difficult, even traumatic, yet the witness of John Paul's reflections here is that it is a necessary work if healing and growth are not to be overwhelmed by resentment and alienation.

Memory and Identity is a thought-provoking and deeply personal work that offers valuable insights into the nature of memory, identity, and the human experience. Pope John Paul II's reflections on his own life and the broader historical context provide a unique perspective on the challenges faced by individuals and nations in the modern world. The book's exploration of the relationship between memory and identity is particularly compelling, as it highlights the importance of understanding our past to inform our present and future. The Pope's emphasis on the Christian roots of European culture and the need to preserve this heritage in the face of secularisation offers an important reminder of the role that religion has played in shaping that continent's identity.

Some readers, especially those in Asia, may find that the book's focus on Christianity and European culture limits its applicability to a broader audience, at least without some additional serious critical and synthetic reflection. While the Pope acknowledges the importance of interfaith dialogue and the existence of diverse religious and cultural traditions, the book's primary emphasis on Christianity and Europe may make it less relatable to those from other backgrounds. Nevertheless, the role of Christianity in forming what is now "recognizable as European and given Pope John Paul II's life, formed in the crucible of twentieth century Europe this focus is entirely understandable. It would be a mistake to read this as meaning that the book has nothing to say in other settings: it clearly does.

The conversational format of the book, is engaging and intimate, but may also leave some readers desiring a more structured and comprehensive exploration of the topics at hand. Some arguments may seem underdeveloped or open-ended, yet this can be both a strength and a weakness, as *Memory and Identity* is clearly intended to invite further reflection and discussion rather provide definitive answers or solutions.

Despite these limitations, *Memory and Identity* remains a valuable and timely work that encourages readers to reflect on their own memories and the role they play in shaping their identities. Pope John Paul II's insights on the importance of forgiveness, reconciliation, and unity in the face of historical injustices are particularly relevant in today's increasingly polarised world. That it should serve as the inspiration for the theme of the 28th ASEACCU Conference in Cambodia was entirely appropriate and, dare one say, inspired.

Stephen Morgan
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