

The Culture of Freedom – Western Civilisation and the Next Generation

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Some definitions of Culture

The Australian academic Pierre Ryckmans in his 1996 Boyer Lectures argues that “culture is the true and unique signature of man” and that “culture is the very means through which we realise the fullness of our humanity”.

At a time when multiculturalism rules and the focus is on diversity and difference Ryckmans also argues “You cannot usefully approach a foreign culture – especially a rich and sophisticated foreign culture – if you do not have a firm grasp of your own”.

In the following I would like to briefly outline what makes Western culture unique and how it is undermined by what in America is described as “enemies foreign and domestic”.

What makes Western culture unique?

While drawing on many other cultures and evolving over hundreds of years Western culture is geographically and historically unique.

Western culture is primarily European and Anglo/Celtic in character. It embodies a number of defining characteristics, including:

1. a Westminster, liberal/democratic form of representative government
2. as argued by Larry Siedentop in *Inventing the Individual* we enjoy a legal system based on natural law and Christian values such as the sanctity of life, free will and right and wrong action
3. Christianity as the dominant religion
4. a view of science, medicine and technology based on rationality and reason
5. a university and education system, ideally, that is committed to the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom and truth

See further below:

(1) Draws on a Westminster form of government that has evolved over hundreds of years since the time of Magna Carta. One that is:

- based on separation of powers
- free and open elections
- universal suffrage
- checks and balances
- inalienable rights, including “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”
- (notwithstanding 18c and the PC thought police) freedom of expression and religion, and
- the right to own property, free enterprise and the right to make a profit
- a division between church and state

(2) A legal system based on natural law, that is underpinned by Christianity and that has evolved since Magna Carta (the Great Charter) to include:

- the right to a just and timely trial
- the right to be judged by one’s peers
- concepts like habeas corpus, and
- innocent until proven guilty

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Tom Paine’s *Declaration of the Rights of Man* and the American *Declaration of Independence* could only have been written by those immersed in Western culture and thought

(3) T.S.Eliot argues that Christianity is central to Western culture, he writes:

“It is in Christianity that our arts have developed; it is in Christianity that the laws of Europe have been rooted. It is against a background of Christianity that all our thought has significance”.

- the ten commandments and Christian concepts like the sanctity of life, free will and all being equal before God underpin our legal system
- much of Western art, music, literature and architecture is steeped in Christianity
- Christian inspired and Christian managed health, education, social welfare and charitable groups and organisations are critical to Australia's well-being
- parliaments begin with the Lord's Prayer and the Constitution's Preamble refers to Almighty God

(4) Rationality and reason

- the ability to reason is based on the belief that knowledge and understanding should be based on what can be empirically proven in opposition to superstition, witchcraft or hearsay
- beginning with the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, and evolving over hundreds of years, Western thought represents a unique and powerful way to understand what it means to be human and the nature of the world in which we live
- Western mathematics, science and technology led to the industrial revolution and more recently split the atom put a man on the moon and underpinned revolutionary breakthroughs in medicine, food production, communication, life expectancy and quality of life
- It should not surprise that Silicon Valley and the digital revolution occurred in the West

(5) An education system, ideally, that is committed to the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom and truth:

- Cardinal Newman argues the ideal university education, instead of being utilitarian or driven by ideology and self-interest, should be:
disciplined for its own sake, for the perception of its higher object, and for its highest culture
- T S Eliot puts a similar argument when he states universities:
should stand for the preservation of learning, for the pursuit of truth, and in so far as men are capable of it, the attainment of wisdom

The enemy within: The Cultural Revolution

For those old enough to remember the 60s and 70s was the time of Woodstock, the Hippy movement, Vietnam moratoriums and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*. A time when:

- the cultural-left decided to take the long march through the institutions involving a revolt against established authority and the status quo
- intellectuals like Gramsci, Bourdieu, Althusser, Foucault, Barthes and Derrida advocated a rainbow alliance of radical theories – including postmodernism, deconstruction, feminism and post-colonial and LGBTQI theories
- as a result - received knowledge and wisdom were undermined and Western culture and our Judeo/Christian heritage were condemned
- a liberal education within the Western tradition was deconstructed in terms of power relationships and victimhood based on the new trinity of 'gender, ethnicity and class'

The cultural-left's long march has had a profound impact on education; especially school education

- in America Bowles and Gintis argued that the education system is instrumental in reproducing the capitalist system - socialists must take control of schools and use education to overthrow the status quo
- in England the new sociology of education movement argued there is nothing inherently worthwhile about academic studies, meritocracy or competition. The traditional, academic

curriculum is a 'socio-cultural construct', part of the 'ideological state apparatus' employed by dominant groups to maintain control

- education must be secular in nature and celebrate diversity and difference

The Impact of the Cultural Revolution

When describing the cultural left's impact on American universities Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr writes:

"The Western tradition, in this view, is inherently racist, sexist, hegemonic; irredeemably oppressive. The spread of Western culture is due not to any innate quality but simply to the spread of Western power."

Australia's Pierre Ryckmans, in a 1996 Boyer Lecture, argues:

"The main problem is not so much that the University as Western civilization knew it, is now virtually dead, but that its death has hardly registered in the consciousness of the public, or even the majority of academics themselves."

The Enemy without: Islamic Terrorism

As noted by the American academic Samuel P. Huntington's some 20 years ago: "The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural". And what we are seeing now on the world stage is a clash between Islamic terrorism and Christianity. David Murray in *The Strange Death of Europe* argues the situation is so dire that Europe as a bastion of Western culture will soon disappear.

- since the 9/11 attack in the US the rise of Islamic terrorism on a global scale – London, Paris, Bali bombings, Nice, Sydney and Manchester
- the establishment of an Islamic caliphate by ISIS in the Middle east
- as argued by Ayaan Hirsi Ali Islam is "not a peaceful religion" – fundamentalist Islam anti-Christian and anti-Western
- Islam is a theocracy - no division between church and state; the Koran is the word of the prophet that cannot be questioned or criticised
- Islam as a religion has never experienced a reformation or an enlightenment

What's to be done?

Acknowledge and celebrate the unique strengths and benefits of Western culture.

- according to the US based Freedom House those countries associated with Western culture have the highest rates for protecting "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"
- unlike totalitarian regimes across Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia – countries embracing Western culture guarantee freedom of religion, freedom of speech and a free media
- the scientific method of inquiry, one based on testing truth claims against the available evidence and revising and changing where necessary, has led to medical, scientific, technological and engineering breakthroughs that have changed the course of human history
- the history of Western thought, best exemplified by the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment, is one of renewal and an on-going search for knowledge, understanding and truth
- unlike theocratic and totalitarian ideologies and regimes, Western democracy embraces such principles as the separation of powers, free and open elections and universal franchise
- add freedom of religion and speech and freedom of the press and it is clear why citizens in Western nations enjoy so much peace and prosperity
- the reason so many oppressed millions are so desperate to risk the arduous and difficult journey to Western countries is because we have what they so desperately desire

Notwithstanding the dangers and difficulties faced by Western cultures, in Australia, there are positive signs that all is not lost.

- The fact that the Mannkal Foundation is doing so much to highlight the issue and that we are here today proves there is a beacon of hope
- In NSW the existence of Campion as a Liberal/Arts college and the establishment of the Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation proves there is cause for optimism
- the Institute of Public Affairs is also heavily involved with its 'Foundations of Western Civilisation Program'
- history tells us that while cultures and civilisations rise and fall the reality is that Western culture has the ability to sustain itself and to continue to be the 'culture of freedom'