

DOMINANT CULTURE /
THE UNITY OF THE OCCIDENT

NAUTILUS.UNIVERSE

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Our city is currently looking back to the year 754, the year in which Saint Boniface died, a man often referred to as the "architect of Christian Europe" and credited by historians with the first documented mention of the city of Erfurt (Erphesfurt) in the year 742. We are commemorating this hero of our Western culture, who lived during a time of significant upheaval in power relations in the Early Middle Ages and was one of the most influential figures in bringing about these changes.

We view ourselves as heirs to this early Christian occidental culture and celebrate the memory of the pioneers who dedicated their lives to spreading our current ideals. However, if we take a closer look, might we have to admit that the collective self-assurance of our community of shared values is actually based on rather unstable foundations?

If other forces had been victorious in history's struggle, would we be remembering other names today, from the perspective of a different set of values?

Would we not still be celebrating and honouring other heroes, even if those were values that completely opposed the ones we have now?

1. DOMINANT CULTURE

A society tends to draw on its historical roots and historically important figures as a foundation for its sense of identity.

In the process, it often overlooks the fact that its set of values usually only developed later due to the course taken by history and cannot be claimed as a virtually universal truth.

It also overlooks that its community of shared values was only one of several other alternatives, which managed to prevail over the others, and that its dominance is not necessarily evidence of the superiority of these values.

If this were not true, then there would only be one community of values, which, as the better model, would have eventually spread to dominate the entire world.

On the other hand, when we look very closely, do we not find a fundamental human canon of values shared by most religious communities?⁽¹⁾

2. THE QUEST FOR UNITY

Christian thinking did not in fact first spread north of the Alps in the eighth century at the time of Saint Boniface.

The Germanic tribes, who had invaded the borders of the Roman Empire when they were forced out of their kingdoms by bands of Huns on horseback in the fourth century, established their dominance on Roman territory in the following century and often had their power legitimised by the Byzantine Emperor.

Thus, these dynasties were incorporated into the Roman Empire and gradually took over the cultures of the people they conquered as well as their claims to power and religion.⁽²⁾

All the tribes that settled in the Empire's territory soon followed Christian teachings. The Merovingian ruler, Clovis, was baptised along with his army in Reims in 496 and adopted the Catholic faith according to the Roman model. During the sixth century, the Merovingian dynasty expanded their Frankish kingdom far beyond the borders of today's France. In 511, still under Clovis, the Catholic Church became the official church of the Frankish Empire.

The 40-year-old Benedictine monk, Winfrid of Wessex, had set out for the European mainland, like his Irish predecessors, to convert the remaining heathens using the power of the word and the sword.

In 719, as Boniface, he was officially charged with a mission to the Germanic tribes by Pope Gregory II. In subsequent years, he proved to be such a fervent missionary and loyal follower of the Holy See that Pope Gregory III not only ordained him Archbishop in 732, but also appointed him Vicar of Jesus Christ for the entire east Frankish missionary area.

Two important factors were the driving forces for social change during the time of Saint Boniface in the eighth century. The first factor in relation to nascent Europe was the Roman papacy, which had been striving for spiritual supremacy as the exclusive representative of Christ and successor of Saint Peter on earth since the fourth century.

This claim to power, something we would now never question, was not simply accepted without any opposition during the eight century. In fact, this long phase of papal emancipation was characterised by a smouldering rivalry to the Byzantine Catholic Church, but also the indomitability of the non-Roman regional Churches, which had been founded by the royal houses as sovereign territorial churches, who forbade any interference in their territorial interests.

The strengthened Frankish duchy, ruled by the Merovingian Majordomo Charles Martel, especially, ruled its own territory in any ecclesiastical questions according to its own discretion and without any consideration for Rome until Martel's death in 741.

What followed was a kind of race of the Christian missions. By founding monasteries and dioceses, the papacy strove to cover the Germanic territories with a dense network

of papal Churches and to weave the indomitable regional Churches into the web, so to speak, or to reduce them to insignificance.

In the years 732-742, the zealous Boniface founded eight dioceses and a number of monasteries.⁽³⁾

The second driving force of historical transformation in the eighth century was the growing power of the Carolingian line, the former Merovingian Majordomos.⁽⁴⁾

After the decline of the Merovingians under Clovis's successors, the duchy of the Carolingians was established, and it acquired increasing influence since the seventh century and the defeat of Charles Martel.

The expulsion of Muslims from the central Frankish territories east of the Pyrenees, in particular, strengthened Charles Martel's prestige and claims to power as the "Saviour of the Christian Frankish Empire".⁽⁵⁾

It also had far-reaching consequences that Charles Martel had his sons Karlmann and Pippin raised by Roman Catholic missionaries, so that only two years after their father's death, the first German synod "Concilium Germanicum" was convened by Boniface. The Bishops of Austrasia and Neustrasia swore allegiance to the pope in the synods.⁽⁶⁾

Pippin the Short recognised that the link to the Roman papacy held the key to his house achieving political dominance, legitimised by a successor of Saint Peter, in the Frankish kingdom.

Subsequently, Pippin gradually committed to the apostolic see and became willing to submit in ecclesiastical questions. Boniface took on the role of diplomatic communicator as "Envoy of Saint Peter".

In 751, Pippin the Short wrote a famous letter to Pope Zachary, in which he asked, "whether it was good someone was called a king although he no longer possessed any royal authority?" Zachary promptly replied: "It would be better the man who was called king also possessed the power of a king. Order would in this way be re-established." Upon receiving the reply, Pippin had the head of the last Merovingian, Chilperic III, shaved, banished him to a monastery and had himself elected king by the Franks in Soissons.

And so it continued: In 754, Pippin was declared "Patricius Romanorum" by Pope Stephen II in St. Denis, along with Pippin's sons, in order to secure the succession for the future.

In 756, the "Donation of Pippin" of the "Patrimonium Petri" became the foundation of the church state under the protective power of the Frankish-Roman royal house.

The final step towards the ideal of unity being pursued according to the model of the Roman Empire was the coronation of Charles the Great by Pope Leo III in the year 800 in St Peter's Basilica, making him "Imperator Romanorum", the Roman Emperor of Christianity.

3. DOMINATION AND ASSIMILATION

The story of the papal missionary Boniface is sophisticated and reads like a thriller. Fundamentally, it is not the story of Christianisation, the spread of Christian values in the realm of European culture, but the story of the form of power that legitimised its claim to power with those values.

It is the clever and cold-blooded creation of complete political facts claiming exclusivity – the forging of a ring of Christian unity around the people of nascent Europe. This ring represents this unity under the primacy of a spiritual and worldly protective power – the pope and the emperor.

4. OCTOGON RING

The art installation symbolised this imaginary ring, a heavy, solid and at the same time translucent relic made of steel, glass and water. It encircles the central column of the cellar vaults and illuminates the darkness from within.

The medium water, so important for life on this earth and one of the four mystical, primal elements, pulses and flows through the ring's outer shell, but at the same time is externally solidified in a monolithic form.

In this form, its elementary force seems overpowering, a transparent, but self-contained barrier. The observer intuitively senses the enormous weight slowly spreading out before them. The flowing, formless mass of ten tonnes of water is frozen by steel and glass and cast in a mythical form.

The RING is a powerful symbol of domination, the uncompromising will to power. It articulates our claim to our own superiority.

An image opposite to that which yields and balances, the RING is the symbol for that which demands and excludes.

Another theme of the RING is the instinct to spread immanent to every living thing, which goes beyond pure survival (perhaps the survival instinct once it has become autonomous?), the individual's urge to spread its own genes or its own state of existence as widely as possible.⁽⁷⁾

Weightless, floating particles can be identified in the depths of the barrier of water. The water object acts like a prism and bends the light, distorting the image from inside the basin and throughout it. It confuses our perception.

Behind the bright wall of water, things seem unreal, as if from another world.

Everything moves almost unnoticeably according to a silent choreography. A frozen state, an imaginary snapshot as if everything has just been swept away by the flood. The captured distance to our own presence enables us to observe from the outside – to observe the foreign? Or the foreign observing itself?

5. COMPETITION OR THE BATTLE OF CULTURES

Throughout history, at all times and in all places, there has been cultural and religious **missionary activity**. Even the ancient Greek tragedies describe the Greeks' influence on the so-called barbarians.

Without any missionary efforts, without the desire to assimilate other ethnic groups, it is very unlikely that any form of religion could have developed in significance and size across regions. However, it was usually the power of the sword rather than the word that was used to convince people of the right faith and spread it.

The RING questions, both from a historical and contemporary perspective, the moral justification of the concept of missionary activity and whether the means used to achieve this were appropriate.

For human beings to live together in a society, it is without doubt necessary that the individual must submit to the conventions of some sort of ethical system, which enables them to differentiate between right and wrong, good and bad, and that their fellow members of society are expected to stick to these rules too.

Anything else would erode peace within that society, assuming that 'peaceful coexistence' is our highest priority.

Because we believe that these internalised values are right, the human psyche is offended by wrongdoing and is always ready to fight against any perceived injustice. In this sense, it seems almost desirable to establish a canon of values that is valid everywhere throughout human society.

The mission/missionary work can in fact be a useful tool to adjust value systems in a society and to help us to live together more harmoniously.

Providing that only peaceful means based on persuasion are used, missionary work can be a legitimate means of forming opinions and moral education.

Despite our hopes to live together harmoniously, we must however assume that in our globalised world a number of cultural communities, coherent in themselves, are coming into contact with each other, often resulting in conflicts of ideas about how to live.

These cultural communities have always gone through their own, long-winding historical process of polishing, shaping and refining. In that sense, we must recognise that each of these different attitudes to life has a right to exist within their existing structures.

No community can compare their own convictions with those of another. Economic arguments alone are not enough to one view precedence over all the others.

Instead, we can only identify binding guidelines for the future through a respectful discourse that values each side equally, guidelines that all the different cultural identities would willingly follow.

In light of current events especially,⁽⁸⁾ we need to realise that hegemonic claims, oppression or large-scale interventions in the conflict of interests between cultures can cause huge damage.

We must accept that in our global diversity of values there must be a place for every outlook that is prepared to coexist peacefully with neighbours!

Note 1)

Golden rule: "Treat others as you wish to be treated", willingness to help, community solidarity, respect for life and other people's property.

Note 2)

The Vandals in North Africa, the Visigoths in Spain and southern Gaul, the Ostrogoths, the Lombards in Italy, the Burgundians and Franks in northern Galicia, the Anglos and Saxons in England, the Alemanni and Saxons north of the Alps.

Note 3)

Dioceses in Bavaria: Salzburg, Freising, Regensburg, Passau - in Franconia: Eichstätt - in Hessen: Büraburg - in Thuringia: Erfurt, Würzburg.

Note 4)

Army commanders and the highest ranking officials in the Merovingian court.

Note 5)

732 Battle of Tours and Poitiers:

The Frankish army, supported by its Saxon and Lombard allies, under the command of Charles Martel managed to stop the Arabs' advance from Spain and to force them back over the Pyrenees.

Had the Franks been defeated, Islamic expansion into Western Europe would probably have been unstoppable.

Even now, people in the Islamic world believe that they almost succeeded in completely conquering Christian Western culture.

Note 6)

743 "Concilium Germanicum" synod for Austrasia, eastern France

744 Synode of Soisson for Newstrasia, western France.

Note 7)

Cf. the fundamental tendency of life to evolve p. XXX / "The Fatal Gene" (Utopia.Genealogica).

Note 8)

The Afghanistan War from 2001 to today, the Iraq War 2003, the current war against ISIS, the Syrian War, the Ukrainian conflict, the conflict in the South China Sea.