Foreword

Three kinds of progress are significant for culture: progress in knowledge and technology; progress in the socialisation of man; progress in spirituality. The last is the most important. – Dr. Albert Schweitzer

This quotation comes from Albert Schweitzer’s last book, published in 1965, the year of his death in an essay entitled Ethical Culture where he offers final reflections on the implications of his ethic of reverence for life, which contains within it affirmation of both the universe and life. It includes an elemental sense of responsibility and is demonstrated in acts of universal love, which Schweitzer characterises as the ethics of Jesus reinforced by reason. Later in the same book, he returns to progress in fundamentals, which he defines as becoming more finely and deeply human. In this sense, the phronesis or practical wisdom of Aristotle can play an important role in reminding us of the primacy of moral virtues.

Recently, this has been strongly brought into education by the work on character and virtues of the Jubilee Centre in the University of Birmingham (www.jubileecentre.ac.uk). The UK government has placed considerable emphasis on notions such as resilience, determination and perseverance, which the Centre defines as performative virtues in its characterisation of four types of virtue: moral, intellectual, civic and performative. They make the case that moral virtues must underlie the other three categories, especially the performative, otherwise one is in danger of developing resilient fraudsters or determined criminals. Phronesis is equally about sound judgement and doing the right thing when faced with moral dilemmas.

As this book relates, our modern world is a meeting point between unity and diversity. I say unity advisedly, although it can be confused with uniformity, as is the tendency in authoritarian movements where uniformity is imposed from above. The history of monotheism is associated with dogmatic certainty and an accompanying intolerance of differences and divergence. The authorities define orthodoxy over and against heresy, so there is only one correct view. I currently live in the south-west of France near Montsegur, where the Cathars and indeed Occitan culture in general (think of the troubadours) were eliminated in the mid-13th century by the Albigensian Crusade, which gave rise to the Inquisition in hunting down heresy. The same tendency still exists, even within modern science and medicine, with mainstream and alternative views.

The last 50 years have seen considerable progress in interfaith dialogue, but this is arguably not enough, as Ravi Ravindra has suggested with his felicitous phrase ‘inter-pilgrim dialogue’ as a replacement for interfaith dialogue that derives from more fixed positions. The pilgrim is on a common human journey and can exchange ideas and experience. One can see the connection with the later work of Gadamer in relating truth with the good in terms of dialogue and community with others. This requires a certain humility and deep listening so as to empathise with the other and understand the multiplicity of mindsets in the world today.
The process also requires an integration of mind and heart, of left and right hemisphere thinking as Iain McGilchrist suggests in his seminal work *The Master and His Emissary*. This is a dialectic of wholeness, of what Jung calls individuation as we move away from a sense of isolation and separation towards the Self, the deeper Centre. Individuals recognise the universal within themselves and in the other, the metaphysical basis of the Golden Rule. This is our deeper common identity beyond our cultural differences. These are important, but the universal beneath is still more important than its individual expression. In this way the universal expresses itself in the individual and the individual is an expression of the universal. Faith is articulated in practical wisdom and ethical behaviour as we recall our common humanity and the shared future that we are co-creating.

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