

Masculine Public Order and the Oral Transmission of Tradition

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" 'If Athens shall appear great to you,' said Pericles, 'consider then that her glories were purchased by valiant men, and by men who learned their duty.' That is the source of all greatness in all societies, and it is the key to progress in our own time."

Robert Kennedy, in Capetown, South Africa, 1966

The "pattern of association" which underlies both the most sustained ecclesial form of Christianity-the Catholic Church and the most vigorous of the Protestant nations-America is a public brotherhood of duty and love patterned after the relationship of Christ and the apostles. Both the American nation and the Catholic Church are public communities which are sustained through history by fraternities of duty. Both are built on masculine traditions shaping a group identity by a) remembering sacrificial acts which founded and sustained the group, b) binding in a common identity and honor code of law and c) continuing a communal mission by performing the duties which define membership and offices of authority.

Men who perform the prescribed duties are ordered in a trans-temporal tradition with men of the past who have done their duty in service to the group's basic narrative. The narrative binds the group in memory and mission. The group becomes the repository of shared public memory and the instrument of carrying out its mission. Masculine love can be the prescriptive command of the Gospel or the sacrificial covenant of loyalty defining the civic commitment. These are the ordered ways in which men love their neighbor. This is the pattern of association taught by Christ's apostolic formulation.

Only at the founding of a Church or country is there an original covenant. The generations who follow the founding do not remake the original covenant but inherit a basic text already fundamentally scripted. The sacred goods of church or nation are preserved and extended by defining the nature of the group who will receive, preserve and externally witness to the tradition. The male group treats the corporate identity as a female to be gratefully loved like a mother, and protected like an innocent beauty in need of defense against external enemies who would attack and other foes who might slander. Tradition is as integrally defined by the protective group

which holds the collective memory and continues the binding duties as it is by the sacred goods which are passed along.

The Catholic Church arises from a relationship between Christ and His apostles. The commemorative Eucharist evokes the presence of Christ and recalls his central sacrifice which drew the community into a new life in Him as the Savior of the world. The Twelve were meant to represent the new Israel—all tribes now reunited forming the basis of the new Jerusalem. Catholics have maintained that the present relationships of pope and bishops and bishop and priests in each diocese form an unbroken link with the original Twelve. The present day clergy are given the duty to faithfully transmit what has been understood as the Christian narrative and to enact “the permanent actualization of the active presence of the Lord Jesus in his people, realized by the Holy Spirit and expressed in the Church through the apostolic ministry and fraternal communion.” (**Pope Benedict XVI Wed audiences on nature of the Church**) This power to actualize the presence of Christ with his apostles is then shared with baptized members of the Faith who live the sacramental life in the apostolic community. All of this structures the church in an anticipatory posture awaiting the culminating event in Salvation History. Christ’s presence, historically known in Palestine, sacramentally known in the Eucharist, will be completely realized in this Second Coming when Jesus will gather the faithful and then all of creation under his Kingship.

The American covenant which constituted a new people rests on a military agreement of the adult males to protect the group. As John Adams said in 1818, “The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. It was in the hearts and minds of the people ; a change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations.” Most importantly the masculine protective obligation became firmly entrenched in the brotherhood of arms represented by state militias rather than duty to the crown. The American polity always understood itself as a limited military covenant serving other covenants and contracts of free worship, marriage and private property, and free work associations. The military covenant may demand a man’s life but it is only a fence encircling something more sacred than itself. Men form a military circle so that inside the watchtowers a family is safe at home, a man’s labor is his own, and a congregation worships in peace. Men swear their lives to protect a kind of order that admits civic friendship is not the final order of human relationships. This acceptance of limitations by a secular state admits its own nature is limited to a certain age (saecula) which is not eternity. Secular does not mean “atheist”—secular is a concept of

temporal limitation which arises from men cognizant of an eternal God and the fallibility of men in crafting political covenants.

The agreement to perform communal military duty is the hallmark of American citizenship. It was regulated state by state in the militias recognized in the Second Amendment. This military identity was once limited by racial exclusions and was in fact often defined as civilization's barrier against Indians. Today there are no color barriers. There remains, however, an unbroken tradition that the military obligation which binds the nation is the duty of all adult males to defend the local community, the state and the nation. Some women may join the military if they choose, but all men must join when they are called. This communal obligation is rarely mentioned by the great theorists of social bonding at Ivy League campuses where the military is effectively barred from recruiting. Ingratitude breeds blindness as theorists write whole books about civic associations without mentioning the fundamental anthropology of democracy—the acceptance of male territorial military duty which extends beyond kinship to the social group. (Many Catholic critics of America's Protestant -Enlightenment origins put on airs of disgust about the autonomous individuals who built America on the false premise of social contract theory. These offended communitarians display their own impoverished and demilitarized memories. They forget that Lexington and Concord were a hearty form of old style male civil unions called militias.) The communal actions of Lexington and Concord preceded the pen of Jefferson by more than a year. The Declaration of Independence signed as a blood covenant of honor can be properly interpreted only when original intent grants as much weight to the actions of these military compacts as the words which explained them. Just as secularists have written out of our national founding the communitarian religious nature of most American Protestant churches so have academics (conservative and liberal, religious and secular alike) forgotten the military compacts that enacted our national separation from Great Britain. This ignorance of the military roots of the founding can be directly traced to the emasculated social life of academia. The WWII veteran and first Catholic American president John Kennedy had no such blind spot.

"We in this country, in this generation, are -- by destiny rather than choice -- the watchmen on the walls of world freedom. We ask, therefore that we may be worthy of our strength with wisdom and restraint, and that we may achieve in our time the ancient vision of 'peace on earth, good will

toward men.' That must always be our goal, and the righteousness of our cause must always underlie our strength. For as was written long ago: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain''

- Remarks prepared for delivery by JFK at the Trade Mart in Dallas, Texas, November 22, 1963

A public tradition is not just an idea but a living presence—a shared communion of duty and posture that gives public bodies their structural lattice. Priests promise to be alert and awake for the Second Coming as surely as they promise to “never forget” and celebrate the sacrificial meal which commemorates Christ’s death. Whenever Catholics gather to remember the central event of Salvation history, they are gathered together by a male in the priestly brotherhood. These men sacrifice marriage to give witness to the binding truth that eternal life comes from sacramental union with Christ.

Soldiers likewise promise not to forget that the nation has a history of fallen heroes who fought enemies in the past. The military posture of the soldier is a promise to our fallen dead and our potential enemies that between the nation and her foes there are still watchmen. While our enemies take on different masks through history, the watchmen share a common circumcision of duty.

The American day of recalling the blood sacrifice which sustains our common life is of course Memorial Day. The public character of this day is often lost in the family centered festivities of the weekend holiday. Remembering the blood sacrifice of soldiers overwhelmingly male and young is now often diluted in a general lament for the dead. The May 30 date has been moved to the weekend to tie it to family and not inconvenience the marketplace with a mid-week Sabbath of Remembrance. This domestication of Memorial Day privatizes the grief of the families of soldiers and depletes its national significance by mixing it with the deaths of others by more “natural causes.” It may be that the only way to properly remember these public deaths will be in gatherings of males who share the duty that compelled those men to their ultimate sacrifice. The day could conscript our memory to compel a public vow of that sacred masculine duty which is necessary for our tradition to endure and the national mission to be carried forth.

Both Catholics and Americans remember their duty to the larger group by enacting their core narratives on a local stage (diocese for Catholics and town or city for Americans). This local public manifestation of the larger group is a living public reminder of the duties which define the groups. Both Catholics and Americans consecrate some sacred space, enshrine sacred symbols, and establish sacred times when the community is called out to remember together. There is no common life without a demarcation of sacred goods which must be protected by the group.

The importance of a physical gathering of males to solidify shared memory and express group solidarity seems deeply wired in us and consonant with the anthropological insight that religion and patriotism are elemental loyalties that constitute man's social nature. This should be self evident to anyone who honestly looks at a world map of nations and the structure of the major monotheistic religions. When the neurosciences soon confirm this understanding of male neural spatial and memory grouping it will not surprise religious patriots who found these truths long ago by accepting their own religious and political traditions. This implies that church unity and a rebirth of civic duty are fostered by all male gatherings with oral presentations evoking memory, mission and sacrifice to solidify communal identity. Forgetting this elemental truth in post WWI Germany allowed the pacification and domestication of Christianity which opened a cultural void in Germany filled by the quasi bio-religious rallies of the Nazis.

The way the male group is solidified in its shared memory, articulation of mission and integration of individuals into group identity is by ritual and battle as well as oral remembrances and articulations of group mission or identity. The willingness to risk personal death solidifies group identity. This is usually war or police work in civic life and martyrdom in religion. The drama of male sports teams is a ritualistic presentation of the ever present danger and struggle (the agon) that continually threaten civic and religious communal life. Oral presentations which appeal to hearing and are received as a group are significantly more formative of group identity than written messages which appeal to sight and are received by group members as reading individuals. Traditions heard in public gatherings of the group can never be replaced by individuals reading-- even the most evocative and sacred of literature. The Catholic tradition fulfills this in the daily and weekly celebration of the Mass. In the American tradition the inaugural address, military funeral orations, battlefield orders, Fourth of July and

Memorial Day orations are all group encounters with the basic narrative and traditions of sacrifice which shape the communal identity. All of these events are received differently when received by adult males as a coherent group not divided into familial subgroups. If social gatherings include families, a good speaker can still aim his rhetoric to the men in the group to evoke the brotherhood of male duty which defines the group's core tradition.

These are fundamental truths largely forgotten in a culture emasculated in its public form. However these truths are so in concordance with human nature and so resonating in the traditions of Christianity and America that the reemergence of male public order will be loudly cheered and appreciated throughout the church and republic. Women will be the loudest (and prettiest) of the cheerleaders. Today's confused young males will be the principal beneficiaries of articulating the communal religious and political duties which define their maturation process to manhood. All of this will depend on the patriarchs doing their duty. It is the older males who must reconstitute the masculine public order which forms the biological nexus of both Church and country. It is the breakdown of this male socialization nexus that is the primary cause of soaring prison rates, urban crime and national fragmentation.

This great disruption of the natural order of Church and national life need not endure. We can once again sing the hymn that our nation be "crowned with brotherhood" and pray with the psalmist: "Behold how good and joyous it is to have brothers in union with one another." (Psalm 133:1)