

CLASS and CULTURE

In every turn there is a pause, slight and momentary, in which the commitment to the original purpose is resolved. There is no turning back.

The “tumult and shouting”*of 2020 will not die with the turn of the calendar. Janus is a two-faced god. COVID may well persist for yet a while, the effects much longer. Feral politicians will intensify their howls of “ambition, distraction, uglification, and derision.”** And the media-based chattering class will go on carping about all the social classes beneath them: “working class,” “leisure class,” political class,” “privileged class,” “ruling class,” “underclass,” and “classes” within class, all the time gleefully lamenting the fractures along the faultline of our society.

Quite surprisingly, they have hit on something very important. If we listen carefully we might hear the breaking of our nation, the echo of the disintegration of our common humanity.

Class has always been the predicament of education. Even its most liberal-minded proponents have not been able to reconcile the ideas. Thomas Jefferson’s idea of democracy, hence education, maintained the heredity-based class order of Britain, with an educated citizenry making the most of their lot in life. Thomas Mann rather ambiguously proclaimed education as the “great equalizer,” but of the “conditions” of society – not its citizens. Even James Conant Bryant, along with 12 eminent scholars, stipulated in the “Red Book,” That “equal education does not mean education for all in the sense of universal education,” and recommended “special” education that “leads to the student’s competence in some occupation.”

When we ask teachers and administrators whether current education *reflects* or *reinforces* the traditional class system, the answer is always, “yes.” When we ask which is the greater evil, the answer is...well, you already know. They assume, and rightly so, the three-tier social order based on wealth, each carrying life-critical implications – boundaries, expectations, respect, status, and prospects of personal fulfillment.

If education were true to its nominal definition and our humanity, it would reject out-of-hand those pernicious demarcations and return to the pre-rationalistic concept of social order. That is, class as defined by “Way of Life” based on the individual’s free choice and exercise one of the inherent human attributes: body, soul, and spirit. Although all are present in each person constituting a holistic, triune being, and because it is impossible for them to exist in perfect, equal proportionality since they are not quantitatively measurable, one attribute will naturally become the dominant expression of a person’s character. Therefore, the three domains as three “classes:”

- Those whose existence is of, by, and for the body and its situational impulses. Their life is given to instant gratification, defiant symbolism, heartless brutism. Fatalism is their way of life.
- Those whose minds have been so conditioned that their lives are dominated by the science of the age. They live in a fictive world of their own making in which reality is the inverse, sometimes perverse, of that which is real. Delusion is their way of life.
- Those who by their inherent nature and through their own will live beyond the material, temporal world in a spiritual realm partaking of the divine. They live in the presence of truth and beauty: Truth of universal, absolute moral principles, and the beauty of symmetry, proportion, and harmony. Their way of life is joy.

Each is easily observable. No research is required, no scientific analysis needed. Only common sense.

“Way of life” is the culture of any society or nation – or not, depending on whether it recognizes and honors its own prevailing attribute. At one time we did and tried to make the best of it. “Melting pot,” “assimilation,” “one nation under God” were the touchstones of “The American Way.” Our national motto proclaims the noble intent. *Pluribus* is the predicate; *unum*, the object. The voguish catch-phrase, “diversity and inclusion,” a logical contradiction, is a far cry from the founders’ ideal.

Late we realize that unless the prevailing attribute is spiritual, there can be no context, no criteria, for examining a way of life. There is no center to hold. Things fall apart. The culture turns to the effortless barbarism of perpetual class conflict.

You might think that education would be paying attention.

*With a nod to Rudyard Kipling

**With apologies to Lewis Carroll

[The Cambrian Program, **CLASS: The Social Order and Education**, is available virtually or in-person. Please visit our website www.thecambriangroup.org]