

Culture's Importance – I

December 16, 2017

"When I hear the word 'culture,' I reach for my gun," is a famous quote (often attributed to Reichsmarchall Göring, but coming actually from a Berlin play of 1933), which may be taken to mean that culture is not the ultimate source of the values often attributed to it. Often the word serves as a fig-leaf to cover over the West's deep-down apostasy by a shameful but long-standing hypocrisy, to which some gun-owners may be instinctively tempted to put a violent end. One American of our own time who realizes that culture depends on religion or its absence is Ron Austin, who has written in December's issue of the magazine *First Things* an article on pop culture, arguing that it is neither pop, nor culture.

Austin is a veteran Hollywood writer-producer who spent nearly half a century producing pop culture, mostly for television. He is a member of the American Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, but also a Fellow at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley, California, which gives him at least a handle on the true dimensions of "culture." For instance towards the beginning of his article he writes, "The key to understanding modernity and its ultimate failure lies in the many failed efforts to find replacements for religious faith It was the mass media fostering a "pop culture" that was the most influential and powerful substitute for a meaningful world-view" Pop culture, says Austin, is an idol . . . as such it is phony . . . it is neither pop nor culture.

Austin defines "pop" as belonging rather to the people than to any elite. He admits that pop culture has considerable popular appeal today, but he says it is synthetic and industrial in nature, deriving as it does from no natural or organic way of life, so it is not truly popular. "Culture" is difficult to define, but he takes it to mean a way of life with shared

values and with the means to express it. Culture in this sense can only grow organically like a tree, at nature's speed which cannot be forced, and it requires a shared memory with a sense of the past, a continuity of meaning, goals and standards. But "pop culture" erases the past. Therefore it is no true culture. Austin recalls the decades of his own life from this point of view.

In the 1950's and 1960's he remembers a growing alienation from the past in which the mass media played a crucial part. In the 1970's a counter-culture of fragmentation and narcissism grew, with more entertainment than ever, and with it an increasing detachment from reality. The medium itself was becoming the message, and morality was based on subjective emotion, which the media packaged as a product for profit. Entertainment replaced thought or analysis. If not fatal, the disease was highly contagious. In the 1980's the attempt to restore past values failed in the USA, Europe and Russia. In the 1990's some false hopes came to an end, but the mass of consumers were more fragmented than ever.

However, in the 2010's the Catholic Faith does give Austin some hope. True culture depends on human beings being human, he says, and humans have for true models Our Lord and Our Lady. True culture will be replanted, and the Light will return.

Austin is on the track of the real problem, even if his treatment of the problem and of its solution is relatively lightweight. It is today's total environment, or culture, which is so dangerous for souls and their salvation. It has become totally normal either to disbelieve in God, or if one believes in Him, not to take Him seriously. The past has little to tell us (except the Six Million, of course). Immorality is unimportant. There is no such thing as an order of nature to be respected. Technology saves. Freedom is all. And this sickness is highly contagious, because it is so "liberating." Heaven help us!

Kyrie eleison.

P.S. As a minor resort to the elite culture of yesteryear, in the true sense of the word, a session of Mozart parallel to the "Beethoven Blast" of two years ago will be held here in Broadstairs, from Friday, February 23rd to Sunday, February the 25th, of next year. Details will follow.