

FOUR  
CULTURES  
OF THE  
WEST

JOHN W. O'MALLEY

THE BELKNAP PRESS OF  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

*Cambridge, Massachusetts*  
*London, England*

# Contents

INTRODUCTION	Athens and Jerusalem	I
CULTURE ONE	Prophecy and Reform	37
CULTURE TWO	The Academy and the Professions	77
CULTURE THREE	Poetry, Rhetoric, and the Common Good	127
CULTURE FOUR	Art and Performance	179
EPILOGUE	The Book of Our Experience	235
	Notes	241
	Further Reading	249
	Acknowledgments	255
	Index	257

## INTRODUCTION

# Athens and Jerusalem

**T**HIS BOOK IS about four phenomena in the history of the West. I call them cultures. In illustrating their characteristics I make large use of my specialty, the history of Christianity. I have written the book for anyone interested in either of those two histories, which for long periods were in fact almost indistinguishable from each other. I have written it, therefore, for specialists, for students, and for the general reader. Specialists will be familiar with the persons, issues, and movements I discuss, but I hope that my approach will stimulate them to think about these subjects in a new way. Students and the general reader may initially be bewildered by the swirl of names they encounter for the first time, or at least have never studied in any depth, but I believe they will profit from the book. Among other things, it provides a framework of interpretive categories. Moreover, the book is straightforward and iterative. Issues and persons keep reappearing, presented each time from a slightly different angle. If you miss them the first time, you will catch them the second or third. Educators, I think you, especially, will find the book worth reading.

The device I use for approaching my subject is a construct: four cultures. As the title indicates, the book is first and foremost about those cultures. With them I hold up for appreciation phenomena

deeply embedded in the history of the West, so deeply embedded, in fact, that we sometimes become oblivious to their import. These phenomena are with us still, though in radically transformed ways. The purpose of the book is to make us less oblivious of them and thus more appreciative.

The idea of four cultures began to surface in my mind many years ago while I was in Rome working on a book about sermons preached in the Sistine Chapel during the Renaissance. They then helped me sort out in a somewhat new way the tangle of issues raised by another area of my research, the Protestant-Catholic conflicts of the sixteenth century. In my book on the Sistine sermons I had to deal directly with the relationship between “the new learning” of humanism and its medieval antecedent (and sometimes enemy), Scholasticism. That relationship was in fact what my book was all about, as I traced the transformative effect that the introduction of humanist rhetoric had on the mood, aim, religious and cultural sensibilities, and even content of preaching, moving it from its medieval styles to a style quite different. I began to see something with startlingly new clarity: *how* things were said was just as important as *what* was said, even though the *how* and the *what* could never be neatly separated.

When I began to study the Reformation, I was struck by the same thing. In the famous debate between Erasmus and Luther on free will, the difference seemed to me more profound and far-reaching than their respective ideas on free will and grace. They talked in very different styles. *How* they spoke was as different as *what* they said. Did not this difference in style point to more profound differences? Were they not, while arguing from the same texts, working out of irreconcilable assumptions? Working, it increasingly began to seem to me, out of different cultures?

I was also interested in questions like these because my training as a Jesuit, very old-fashioned, had been a self-conscious replay and amalgam of the humanistic and Scholastic traditions as they were

embodied in educational programs. I was curious to understand better what had happened to me in the process. I knew there was something more involved than the facile explanation that humanist eloquence provided adornment for Scholastic content. Did not the latter also have form—or style? Did not the former have content? It was the style issue, however, that I increasingly saw as critical.

These were the origins of the book. Despite encouragement from friends and colleagues, I long hesitated to write it. I am fond of my cultures, but I am also aware of my limitations, and I am, like most historians, skeptical of grand schemes. I finally decided to go ahead with the project because I trusted readers to have the good sense to take it for what I intend it to be—not a pronouncement from on high but a stimulus to discussion and an invitation to reflection. It is an essay in the basic sense of that word—an attempt, a *sortie*.

I see the cultures originating, as to be expected, in the ancient Mediterranean world of “Athens and Jerusalem.” They consisted in (1) the culture of Isaiah and Jeremiah the prophets; (2) the culture of Plato and Aristotle the philosophers and scientists; (3) the culture of Homer and Isocrates, of Virgil and Cicero, the culture of poets and dramatists, of orators and statesmen; and finally, (4) the culture of Phidias, Polycletus, Praxiteles, and countless other artists, artisans, and architects, the culture of art and performance.

The cultures migrated through time and space from the Roman world of early Christianity into the Middle Ages. Between the eleventh and the sixteenth centuries, through a series of eureka-experiences, what we call renaissances and reformations, they achieved a new coherence and a new force that propelled them into the modern world.

I will describe these special moments in some detail and try to persuade you of their significance. Then I will give particular attention to the sixteenth century, when the cultures, by confronting

and doing battle with one another under the cover of religious polemics, made even more manifest their special traits. It is the century of towering protagonists—Luther, Erasmus, Michelangelo, and the theologians of the Council of Trent. It is the century that I know best, and it is the century that lies at the center of this book. I will swiftly move closer to the present without trying to do more than make a few observations about how the cultures, greatly modified of course and secularized, have fared particularly in North America. I invite readers to discern, if they feel so disposed, where in their own history and milieus the cultures have import and impact.

In the late second and early third century the fierce Christian apologist and polemicist Tertullian asked the question that provides the basic structure for the way I develop my theses about the cultures: What, he asked, has Athens to do with Jerusalem?<sup>1</sup> That is, what has human culture to do with the transcendent claims of Judaism and Christianity? Nothing at all, was Tertullian's answer. Others both before and after disagreed with him, affirming in either theory or action that Athens and Jerusalem were on some level compatible. Tertullian himself was far from consistent on the point, but he was certainly not the only person to give the same negative answer, often with similar inconsistencies.

My essay, then, is an attempt to trace both negative and affirmative answers to Tertullian's question. It is not, however, about "Christ and culture." It is not a theological interpretation of the history of the West. It makes use of religion to get into better focus certain aspects of Western history, certain modalities of Western intelligence, that have a stunningly long history stretching from ancient times until today.

The book, unfashionable in several ways, is in our postmodern era especially unfashionable in trying to sketch a Big Picture. My training in medieval philosophy alerted me early on to the problem of "universals," that is, of general concepts and their relation-

ship to concrete particulars, a problem of which modern philosophy in different terms has made us again acutely aware. From historians, moreover, Big Pictures win big criticism.

Though wary, I nonetheless have faith in the utility of the cultures. On one level the cultures are, to be sure, fictions, but on another they are sufficiently grounded in "what happened" to be more than fictions. They are in my opinion readily discernible in the past and the present, so that for many readers I will be doing little more than recalling them to mind or raising awareness of them by pointing out some of their manifestations. They are not exotic. To my knowledge, however, no one has proposed them in quite the way I do.

By relating the cultures to Tertullian's question, I am able to provide a road map through some areas of Western history. With such a question determining which roads get put on the map, I of course make religion the central highway. I present the cultures principally as they manifest themselves in the history of Christianity. Given my background, I could not write the book in any other way, nor would I want to. Recent international events have made devastatingly clear how important religion is as a force in the world and how we neglect studying it to our own peril.

I will, then, talk mostly about religious figures and movements, yet I will do so insofar as they are expressions of the "cultures." By that term I mean four large, self-validating configurations of symbols, values, temperaments, patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving, and patterns of discourse. I mean especially configurations of patterns of discourse and thus expressions of *style* in the profoundest sense of the word. *Le style, c'est l'homme même.*

As important as I believe the four cultures are, I do not call them *the* four cultures. They are capacious but not all-inclusive. They do not take account of Celtic or Germanic cultures. They take no account of what we today might call business culture, the culture of the marketplace and the stock exchange. They take no

account of legions of other things. Nor do they easily correlate with every important religious figure. I do not find an obvious place among the cultures, for instance, for Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of my own religious order. If you imagine Western civilization as a vast ocean, you might imagine the four cultures as four Gulf Streams flowing through it. The streams help us understand many phenomena, but they are not the ocean.

In the section that follows I give a thumbnail description of each of the cultures and in so doing almost perforce stress their differences, even their occasional hostility to one another. But for the most part the cultures tend to blend together, borrow from each other, and they have often supported one another almost to the point of being indistinguishable, seemingly unaware that there might be a level at which they were incommensurable. If the sixteenth century marked their most vicious confrontation, the following century manifested one of their most notable reconciliations. The cultures are rivals. They are also partners.

## Four Cultures

### I. PROPHETIC CULTURE

What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? In this book I take Jerusalem to stand for one aspect (only one) of the Judeo-Christian tradition: its insistence on the incomprehensibility, the transcendence, the utter otherness of God. I call this the prophetic culture. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways,” said Yahweh through Isaiah. Thus spoke the Holy One, who writes straight with crooked lines. “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” asked Paul. The reasonings of the philosophers are, in this Jerusalem, senseless babble. For Luther reason (Aristotle) was a whore that repelled him—he staked his claim on Scripture alone. For Kierkegaard there was no escaping the *Either/Or*.



This is the culture that must speak out. It is the culture of alienation, of protest, of standing apart because one can do no other. Here gather the Puritans and the Jansenists and all those given to crusades. Fundamentalists both religious and secular are comfortable here. This is the culture of the martyr (and the fanatic). It is the culture, above all, of the reformer decrying injustice and corruption in high places. It wills to transform a corrupt and unfaithful status quo into the genuine article. Throughout history justice has been its watchword, along with variants like righteousness and justification. Freedom is also one of its favorite words. This is the culture that makes the greatest purity claims and that unmasks as abomination what others welcome as the normal give-and-take of life. It cannot compromise. Rallies and protests, yes. The negotiating table, never!

If this culture must decry its times, it must also hold out promise of better times to come: “For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you and his glory will be seen upon you.” It is therefore the culture of great expectations, expectations that surpass anything that seems humanly possible. The Book of Revelation promised “a new heaven and a new earth.” Martin Luther King, Jr., held out a more circumscribed but seemingly just as unattainable eventuality: “I have a dream.”

This culture appeals to a higher standard, revealed to the few, hidden from the many. God wills it. In a post-Enlightenment, more secularized context the standard will take the form of an unquestionable First Principle, often in rights-language—the Right to Life or the Right to Choose. It will rally the oppressed: “Workers of the world, unite.” Freedom, no more chains.

Because the standard is beyond argument, this culture must state boldly, even shout its claims, as does the herald of both good and bad news. Its mode of discourse is the imperative: Repent! It finds form in manifestoes. It must sometimes make noise. Carrie Nation, campaigning against the evils of alcohol, described herself

as “a bulldog running along at the feet of Jesus, barking at what he doesn’t like.”

Prophets proclaim their message through the stark dichotomies of God/Satan, Christ/Anti-Christ, spirit/flesh, grace/free will, Good/Bad, patriot/traitor, capitalism/any-other-system, politically correct/politically incorrect. Choose, for between these extremes there is no common ground. This culture looks to the Jesus who said he had come to bring not peace but the sword and to set son against father and daughter against mother. The Anabaptists at Münster could not have taken this message more literally when in 1534 they proclaimed death by sword for all the ungodly.

Yet under its wings this culture also gathers the gentle like Dorothy Day, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Oscar Romero. The “Swiss Brethren,” Anabaptists of a stripe altogether different from the belligerents of Münster, looked to the Jesus who said his kingdom was not of this world, and they therefore abstained from this world as far as they could. Their proclamation took the form of withdrawal into an other-worldly world constructed for the purpose. They were prophets through their witness. Their very silence and passivity proclaimed their truth as loudly as words. Paradoxes like this are also characteristic of the prophetic style.

No matter what form the proclamation takes, the message demands conversion, reform, and utter commitment. Paul struck to the ground on his way to Damascus provides the paradigm for the altogether radical and sometimes instantaneous reversal of values that conversion effects, as the persecutor stepped forth as the apostle. This is the culture congenial for those whom William James described as “the twice-born.”

Pope Gregory VII (1073–1085), proposing a program to set medieval society on its head, provides a striking paradigm for the reformer wholly intent upon putting things right, no matter what the cost. Bound like the prophet “to cry aloud and spare not” (Isa. 58.11), Gregory feared he would fail in his mission if, like a

dumb dog, he was afraid to bark (Isa. 56.10). This urgency led him to take on the most powerful and prestigious figure of the day, the “Roman” (that is, the German) emperor. He found in the canonical legislation of the early church (genuine and forged) the standard, long lost from view, for the way things were supposed to be. He invoked ancient sources to justify his revolution. As is true of so many revolutions, Gregory fought this one in the name of a restoration of the good old days, unaware that because society had changed so radically from those days, what he proposed had, in its profoundest implications, never been heard of before.

The “Gregorian Reform” that bears his name, that great upheaval also known as the “Investiture Controversy,” is a specially defining moment for the prophetic culture in the West. Gregory and his entourage gave unwitting first form to that disruptive and strident peculiarity of Western Christianity that eventually spawned its secular counterparts: the idea that the church as an institution could, and under certain circumstances should, be redone to a degree and in a way that profoundly defied the status quo and received wisdom. From the past they reinvented, Gregory and his colleagues tried to construct the future.

By defining reform as institutional in its object and sweeping in its scope, they gave the prophetic culture an articulation in word and deed that it had not known before and that injected it in a new and especially forceful way into the subsequent history of the West. Much of that history could indeed be written under the rubrics of reforms and reformations.

In this culture the second defining figure for the West was Luther. He knew nothing about Gregory, yet their prophetic profiles are remarkably similar. Luther, however, rewrote the book on what it means to be a prophet simply by turning out to be a historical figure of mythic proportions in modern Western imagination. Everybody has heard of him. He made courage in fighting for systemic change perhaps the most distinctively Western of all the vir-

tues. Though some cannot abide him, he is the great hero of the modern West: "Here I stand. I can do no other." He transposed prophecy to a new key and made it a tune to be played *fortissimo*.

In broad outline this is what I mean by the prophetic culture, the culture of Jerusalem. For convenience I will call it culture one. The other three cultures belong to Athens.

What about Athens? I take it not so much as a metaphor for some generic "human culture" as pointing in the first instance to the Athens of real history. My Athens is a metaphor grounded in real time and place. I thus see it as standing for three areas of accomplishment in "the glory that was Greece" that had an incalculable impact on the West. As indicated, I see it as standing for a certain style of learning, then for oratory and literature, and finally for art and performance.

There is no need to stress how profoundly each of these achievements, including their Roman articulations, interacted with Christianity from the earliest centuries. Paul in his speech on the Areopagus, as reported in Acts 17, seems to provide warrant for thinking that aspects of Athens, the secular city, might have something to do with Jerusalem, the sacred city: What you, Athenians, "worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you."

## 2. ACADEMIC/PROFESSIONAL CULTURE

The culture of Plato and Aristotle, the culture of a certain style of learning, is the aspect of Athens with which many people today are familiar, at least on a superficial level. No historical survey in almost any discipline can omit mention of these two giants who rightly dominate Raphael's famous fresco, "The School of Athens." Platonism in its various manifestations infiltrated into the thought patterns of the West from antiquity into modern times to such an extent that they became one, almost indistinguishable. The writings of the Fathers of the Church evince this influence, and even

though Augustine repudiated “the Platonists,” he could hardly have been more deeply affected by them. In what follows I take Plato’s pervasiveness for granted. I also take for granted that other philosophers and thinkers from “the School of Athens” (and the School of Rome) influenced early Christians in important ways.

Aristotle emerged with startling brilliance with the translation into Latin of his full corpus in the High Middle Ages, after which he dominated the history of the sciences and other academic disciplines for centuries. More pertinent for us, the relationship of Athens to Jerusalem took on its medieval formulation as the relationship between “reason and revelation,” which was nothing other than an abstract formulation of the relationship between Aristotle (for the most part) and the Bible. Aristotle was appreciated not only for his works on logic, ethics, and metaphysics but also for those on animals, the heavenly bodies, and other natural phenomena—on “natural philosophy.” The relationship of Athens to Jerusalem could thus be expressed, anachronistically, as that between science and religion. Could this Athens and this Jerusalem at least in certain important aspects be reconciled, even though the former city was this-worldly, the latter other-worldly? Many practitioners in the medieval universities believed reconciliation was possible up to a point.

Here, however, I am interested not in how the relationship between Aristotle and the Bible was variously understood in the different “schools” or in the ideas and philosophical systems of Plato and Aristotle but in a certain style of learning and discoursing that they launched and that received its most rigorous, reflective, and aggressive form in the universities of the Middle Ages. That style is the analytical, questing and questioning, restless and relentless style in which we in academe are today immersed. It is the style of learning that is never satisfied, that is critical of every wisdom, that is insatiably eager to ask the further question, and that is ever ready to propose yet another perspective. It is the style of learning that is

almost by definition agonistic and contentious. It is the style that holds in highest honor sound argument.

Plato's Socrates probed, almost taunted, his interlocutors with questions that looked to a dispassionate analysis of the subject at issue. What is virtue? What is justice? But it was with Aristotle that the pursuit was carried forward into almost every branch of knowledge, with massive codification of observations about the physical world and of speculation about the soul and the metaphysical composition of the universe. Especially impressive were codifications of logic, dialectic, and rhetoric, that is, of the processes of human discourse and of reasoning themselves. Boethius transmitted to the Middle Ages in Latin translation half of Aristotle's works on logic, which were studied and appropriated long before the rest of the corpus became available. These works in particular grounded academic culture in its fundamental characteristic and great glory: reliance on solid evidence and close reasoning.

If the style of discourse of the prophetic culture is the shout, the proclamation, the lament, the command, the bark, the paradox, then the style of this culture is the logical, rigorous, left-brain discourse that moves to resolution. As in the prophetic culture, nothing soft is tolerated here. But whereas the former culture glories in dichotomies at the very highest level of generalization, such as good and bad, God and mammon, this culture glories in close examination of particulars that lead to precise distinctions formulated in sharply defined concepts. Such concepts form the basis for further questions, which put one on the road, perhaps, to understanding or constructing a whole system or synthesis.

Perhaps the greatest and most lasting institutional achievement of the Middle Ages was the creation of the university, which in its basic structures and ethos, despite many vicissitudes through eight centuries, has retained a remarkable identity. The university stimulated, produced, and provided a home for a style of learning that has persisted into the present and only gained strength and credi-

bility in the past hundred years. That is the style of the learned specialist, publicly certified, decked out with degrees, fluent in specialized vocabulary and in highly stylized methods of arguing. Whereas the Gregorian Reform is a great turning point in the history of prophetic culture, the recovery of Aristotle and the foundation of the universities is a momentous turning point here.

The discovery of the texts of Aristotle in the twelfth century helped stimulate the creation of the university, and Aristotle's works on logic and dialectics powerfully stimulated the development of the institution's intellectual style. The product was what we know as Scholasticism, that is, learning in the scholastic or academic manner, the learning of university folk. To pursue this learning one had to spend years "in the schools," which now had set curricula, approved textbooks, formal examinations, faculties organized according to disciplines or professions such as law and medicine, and finally, the public certification of degrees—Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Philosophy.

This culture differs radically from culture one in that it has had a massive institutional embodiment from the thirteenth century forward. From then onward it would be almost impossible to speak of this culture without speaking about the university or analogous institutions. It finds its most appropriate home in the classroom, the laboratory, the library, the think tank, the research institute, the closed meetings of learned societies. These are its cloisters.

Through the centuries the universities abandoned the ideas of Aristotle and other ancient thinkers that for centuries provided much of the content of academic discourse. But the culture the medieval Scholastics created out of them has only become more normative. This has of course not been a straight-line development since the thirteenth century. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and especially in the past fifty years since World War II, the universities have increasingly claimed for themselves the terri-

tory of traditional “high culture.” They have even claimed certain fields that society would once have considered low culture, for they have long offered degrees in business and agriculture.

This is academic culture, which I call culture two. The story of culture two might be called the triumph of the philosophers (“scientists”), and it is how we tend to read Western intellectual history—Descartes, Galileo, Kant, Freud, Einstein, Derrida. We read it as if Plato’s besting the Sophists in argument went unchallenged and led from that point, or at least from Aristotle, right into the astrophysicist’s laboratory. But there is another story, just as important but less familiar today.

### 3. HUMANISTIC CULTURE

This is the story of great literature and of the modes in which it was interpreted and studied. Recent generations have forgotten, or have never been told, that Plato and Aristotle lost the battle to educate the youth of the Greco-Roman world. It was won by persons like Isocrates who built upon foundations the Sophists had to a great extent laid. Cicero, Virgil, St. Ambrose, and St. Augustine were trained in the skills and ideals set forth not by Plato and Aristotle or the other philosophers of Athens but by those deriving from the other tradition based on literature. They had an education steeped in poetry, drama, history, and rhetoric (oratory)—what would come to be called a humanistic education. Of course after their formal schooling some of them became profoundly learned in the teaching of the Platonists, the Aristotelians, the Stoics, and others, but not so deeply as to lose their grounding in the culture in which they were brought up.

The literary culture persisted in eclectic and sometimes fragmented form into the Middle Ages, reaching a new climax in the twelfth century with St. Bernard and his Cistercian colleagues, just as the sister/rival culture of the universities was beginning to assert



itself. This was the culture serenely in possession in the West until the universities appeared.

It was this culture that the humanists of the Renaissance powerfully reinstated when they revived ancient literary genres and made literature the center of the curriculum. That reinstatement is the original reason for calling the period Renaissance. The Renaissance was the eureka-moment for culture three, as it now had a powerful foil against which to understand itself, the university. The implicit watchword for culture two was good argument. The quite explicit watchword for culture three was “good literature” (*bonae litterae*). By that expression the humanists meant the literary masterpieces of Greek and Latin antiquity, but by a curious symbiosis they and their contemporaries made some of the first lasting contributions to the great corpus of vernacular masterpieces that has continued to expand almost exponentially down to the present.

This literary culture prevailed in the Western world into the twentieth century largely because, as culture two did with the university, the humanists also created a powerful machine of indoctrination and propagation, the humanistic secondary school, which was variously known as the *Gymnasium*, the *Lycée*, the *Liceo*, the Public School (in England), the Grammar School or the Latin School, and, eventually, the Young Ladies’ Academy. It also prevailed because by the seventeenth century it had invaded and in some cases transformed the so-called Arts faculty of the universities. Like culture two, then, culture three for long periods of its history needs to be looked at in relationship to its institutional expressions.

The ideals held high in this culture were embodied and exemplified in literature, which begins with poetry. Homer was the schoolmaster of Greece. In poetry the reasons of the heart prevail, in a form of discourse that is more circular than linear. If culture two seeks clear-cut definition, this culture, at least in this particular aspect, glories in ambiguity, in rich layers of meaning. Whatever

Blake's "Sick Rose" is about, it is not primarily about a diseased plant. For Christians Scripture becomes a book in which each verse or section is happily laden with multiple senses, one as valid as the other. Dante self-consciously constructed the *Commedia* to yield a fourfold meaning.

Educators in this tradition often tended to a didactic approach to "good letters," but the better among them saw further that literature reflects the complexities of life and the murky darkness in which our choices must sometimes be made. It is a mirror held up to life that helps us make sense of our experience and sparks our moral imagination. Even as "the classics" became in recent centuries ever more relegated to specialists in Latin and Greek, the novel and the play assumed for the heirs of this tradition the status of wisdom literature. They gave aesthetic pleasure, but even as they did so they acted as gentle and persuasive invitations to look inward and to see ourselves and our dilemmas through other eyes. Huck Finn, Jim, Tom, and Aunt Polly reveal parts of ourselves.

In the educational program or *paideia* that propelled this cultural ideal, the other constitutive part besides poetry was rhetoric, that is, the art of public speaking. The orator, virtually synonymous with the statesman or politician, is concerned with contingencies. Is war required of us *now*, under *these* circumstances? He argues, therefore, from probabilities to attain a solution not certain but more likely of success than its alternatives. Like the poet, then, the statesman deals with ambiguities, very unlike the protagonist from culture two, who traditionally argued from principles to attain a truth certain and proved to be such; cultures two and three represent, thus, two different approaches to problem-solving. Like the prophet of culture one, the statesman of culture three wants to change society for the better, but to do so he seeks common ground and knows that to attain his end he must be astute in compromise. He does not shun the negotiating table. If the prophet

looks to the Jesus who came to bring the sword, the statesman looks to Jesus, Prince of Peace.

The basic values giving shape and coherence to this aspect of the culture were operative from the beginning and were often explicit. Isocrates, a younger contemporary of Plato, was much influenced by the Sophists. Basically a teacher of oratory, he was stung by Plato's criticisms. He responded by trying to make the Sophistic tradition intellectually and morally responsible. As an educator, he judged the education Plato envisaged as impractical, for it required most of the years of a man's life and also isolated him from the urgent concerns of society. It produced ivory-tower intellectuals, not the men of action that society needed, not men given to a life of service for the public good. The kind of learning that Aristotle later represented, especially in his "natural philosophy," was even further removed from life in the polis. It dealt not with human issues but with speculation about animals and the physical world.

Whereas the culture represented by Plato and Aristotle ends up pursuing with special zeal Truth, the culture represented by Isocrates and his followers is more intent upon the Good. The pursuit of Truth in the former culture leads to ever more little truths, whereas the latter placidly ruminates on a few fundamental values that hardly need arguing. Who would deny that love makes the world go around? Or who would deny that loyalty to family, friends, and country is admirable, that injustice is heinous, treachery worse?

This culture does not particularly prize "original thought" as such (it might even hold it suspect), but it does prize the wisdom that knows how to make old truths effective in new ways for the common good. "Mrs. Roosevelt was not a profound thinker," said one of her biographers, "nor was she very original in the philosophical positions she took. . . . She expanded on existing ideas and applied them to current issues. . . . Despite her pragmatism,

she lived all her life according to a set of absolute standards, which derived from principles of honesty and justice and the teachings of Christ. Social Christianity and a fundamental belief in democracy were the bases of her philosophy.<sup>22</sup> With patience and courage she chaired the committee that in 1948 produced the landmark United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Human issues dealt with in a human way was Isocrates's goal, and the human way was the way of human speech, that gift of the gods that distinguished human beings from animals. The burden of human speech was to convey the noble and uplifting ideals that bind society together and, by touching human affect, to kindle admiration for them and profound dedication. Eloquence was, then, a deep-seated value in this culture. But it was so because it was geared to the common good. At the center of culture there, therefore, was a moral imperative. Its schools looked as much to formation in upright character as to the acquisition of skills and knowledge. This culture is the culture of humane rumination and civic responsibility.

It might sometimes seem as though I am presuming that all great literary figures in the West, at least in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, were direct expressions of traditions traceable back to classical antiquity. Yet even for Petrarch, "the father of humanism," the dependency is clearest only for his Latin works, which nobody reads today. For Dante, and then for Shakespeare and others, direct dependency is even more tenuous. Nonetheless, the traditions of vernacular literature represented by Petrarch, Dante, and Shakespeare were in part shaped, sometimes profoundly, by the classical heritage.

This is, then, that "humanistic" culture that at least down to the middle of the last century formed most men and, after the seventeenth century, practically all women in the Western world who had the opportunity for formal schooling. The schooling did not in and of itself produce the great literature that is constitutive of

culture three, yet it was a crucial part of the circumstances that did. In the public sphere it produced windbags, just as culture two produced nerds. It also produced Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. It produced Winston Churchill, whose eloquence “marshaled the English language and sent it into battle.” Its greatest religious or theological expression in relatively recent times was in the documents of the Second Vatican Council held in 1962–1965.

#### 4. ARTISTIC CULTURE

This is the culture that expresses itself in ritual performance like coronation rites, graduation ceremonies, and Veterans’ Day parades. It is the culture of dance, painting, sculpture, music, and architecture—activities or products without which, it seems, ritual performance cannot happen. But these activities and products are not simply adjuncts to ritual. They have a reality of their own.

When Tertullian posed his question, he almost certainly was not thinking about how Jerusalem related to such realities. But a close relationship was inevitable, given the highly visual nature of the Greco-Roman matrix into which Christianity was born. The Roman Empire was a world of public rituals and public spectacles—chariot races, gladiatorial contests, street performers, religious rites. With the great majority of the population illiterate and not even speaking Greek and Latin, the languages of the cultural elite, the cohesion of the empire rested upon the power of images, especially imperial portraits, to communicate authority and responsibility. It was through material culture that the inhabitants of the empire imbibed the myth of Rome’s greatness and its sublime destiny. Through statuary, not a canonical scripture, they got to know the gods.

Into this intensely visual culture Christians were born, and of it they breathed all the days of their lives. In this situation Christianity itself would eventually be defined most strikingly through ma-

terial culture. It was this culture that would touch most Christians most directly, for it was inseparable from public Christian worship.

Tertullian probably saw no need to revisit the Decalogue's prohibition of graven images. Yet Christian belief that Jesus, for all the claims of transcendency made about him, walked and talked, suffered and died as a human being living in a certain time and place almost inevitably and rather soon led to depictions of him, at first only symbolically, as in the pelican or the shepherd. The icon would eventually follow.

But it was worship that provided the door for the culture of the artist to enter. As the Christian communities grew in size, they needed more space in which to gather for a worship at whose center was the Eucharistic meal, which was developing into formal and, relatively soon, elaborate liturgies. The material culture of the ancient world burst into the Christian communities, however, in the early fourth century with the conversion of Constantine. The enthusiasm with which the bishops accepted Constantine's massive building program in their favor and then took it up on their own is astounding. They seem not to have had second thoughts. With the great buildings came the arts to adorn them and to make the ceremonies consonant with their new and often magnificent settings. Building houses of worship even grander than Solomon's Temple became the ideal.

Of the four cultures the first three are cultures of words. Except for music, this culture is mute. It communicates, but not in words. Jesus prescribed that his followers perform certain actions such as baptizing and doing in memory of him what he did at the Last Supper. Christian teachers, reflecting on these actions, came to name them sacraments, a synonym here for sign or symbol. The sacraments belong, as Aquinas and others have said, "in the category of sign" (*in genere signi*). Even though words are integral to their proper administration, the words are void if not accompanied

by the appropriate action, such as the pouring of the water in baptism. The sacraments are *performed*.

The mass belongs preeminently in this culture, for it is essentially a mime. Although in Christian belief the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection is what is ultimately being celebrated, the action follows the pattern, highly ritualized, of the Last Supper: "Do this in memory of me." This means that, even more obviously than with the sacraments, the mass is a performance. It is "a sacred action" in which the props and techniques the performers use convey much of the meaning. I am referring to such things as the sacred vessels, vestments (costumes), incense, flowers, music, gestures, processions, and other movements (as almost a subdued dance), and of course words. The mass is thus play, for like play it takes us to another world, but it is play of the most serious kind, "deep play."

The words of the liturgy are unlike those in the other cultures for they are stylized for the sublimity of the occasion. They are not spontaneous. They are, for the most part, set and inviolable formulae, to be repeated time after time, age after age, without variation, as in a venerable drama. In their very invariability they paradoxically speak to the present moment. Even the homily delivered in the course of the liturgy is supposed to conform in style and ethos to the sacred action that is under way and of which it is a part.

The process by which the gatherings of the first Christians developed into highly formalized actions was gradual and obscure. In any case it led Christians to incorporate into their worship forms first developed outside Jerusalem, some of which would have been alien or even anathema to the worship of Jerusalem. Iconoclasm, which first flared up in an organized way in the East in the eighth century, erupted again in the West in the sixteenth, with cries of idolatry, paganism, and superstition hurled at those who venerated

images and who seemed to put trust in “ceremonies.” This was a defining moment for culture four. Not only did most Protestant groups attack the use of images and then often the images themselves, but they also abolished the Liturgy of the Hours and tended to strip the Eucharistic liturgy down to bare table and words, if not to abolish it altogether.

Catholics, once somewhat recovered from the shock, responded with an exuberant reassertion of the divinely sanctioned validity of “ceremonies” and images. They would henceforth pursue religious painting more self-consciously and deliberately, and they would promote church building and restoration in a newly programmatic way. Meanwhile, the new churches of the Reformation developed new forms of ritual and made use of some of the arts, especially music, in effective but usually quite different ways than did their Catholic counterparts.

This is culture four, a culture integral to the story of the West and a culture absolutely central to the story of Christianity. Yet art and performance are accorded little if any attention in “general” histories or even in traditional “church histories.” This is a bad distortion. In many European cities churches are usually the first public buildings that strike our attention, as with the cathedral in Cologne, and they often define the city center, as with the Duomo in Florence. It is culture four that Christians directly experienced every week of their lives, or even more often, as they gathered to worship. The other cultures may have touched them in various ways. This one was ever before them.

The origins and much of the subsequent history especially of cultures two and three are, no doubt, elitist. Culture two, which since the thirteenth century has been predominantly the culture of the university, required until quite recently too much time and too much money to be open to any but a select few, a negligible percentage of the population. Culture three was the culture of “the



gentleman” and then of the “gentle lady.” Yet, with culture two somewhat of a special case, all four by their very nature have wanted in some way to touch large numbers of people, down to the most humble, and they generally wanted to touch them in profound, life-altering ways.

In this book I am concerned with four cultures only in their peculiarly Euro-American manifestations. Other civilizations obviously have their counterparts in cultures three and four, in literature and art/performance. They may even have rough equivalents of culture one, though without the sharp contours shaped in the West by the Judeo-Christian tradition of prophecy, except when influenced by it, as in Islam. They surely have scientific and even “academic” traditions, although the universities as they eventually unfolded, no matter what their initial debt to Islamic institutions, became characteristic of the West in the complexity and sophistication of their organization and in the intellectual dynamism constitutive of their style. For culture two the universities became the relentless agents that made that culture’s Western embodiment distinctive.

I make my argument from case studies taken from Western Christianity. What about Byzantium, which was even more a direct heir to the four cultures? There the cultures do not display the same contours as in the West or the same relatively clear delineations from one another. Why?

I am not so foolish as to try to answer that question. Yet I will point out that with the infiltration of Germanic and other tribes into the Western part of the Roman Empire and the consequent transformation and even partial dissolution of institutions and traditions of culture, the West experienced a break and loss that the East did not (except, of course, in territories it altogether lost to Islam). The moments of special energy and self-definition of each of the cultures in the West happened with a eureka-experience when those institutions or traditions were rediscovered and then

necessarily reshaped by being introduced into an altogether different civilization. The Gregorians rediscovered the ancient legal texts, the Scholastics the texts of Greek science, logic, ethics, medicine, and metaphysics, the Italian humanists the texts of ancient literature and educational ideals. The artists of the Renaissance rediscovered or at least viewed with new eyes the sculpture and other artifacts of Roman antiquity. They then had to face the onslaught of the Iconoclasts, who believed they were restoring the good old days of imageless worship.

These recovered memories provoked in the West a sense of historical discontinuity, of a serious gap between past and present. Once upon a time something was, then it was not, now it must be brought back. The restorationist impulse generated energy. To this day a sense of unbroken continuity is characteristic of Greek Orthodoxy, for in that church they still speak the language of the New Testament and of the early councils of the church. In the West the contrast between the then and the now forced a much stronger sense of something lost and now found again. As that something was reinstated, it was transformed. Part of the transformation consisted in the cultures having a sharper differentiation from one another in the West.

### Partners and Rivals

At certain times and in certain situations, as I have indicated, that sense of sharp differentiation turned the cultures into rivals, sometimes on the conscious level, as in the debate between humanists and Scholastics in the sixteenth century. More than traces of that rivalry persist into the present in debates over the teaching of “the Humanities” and what they are supposed to accomplish in the face of scientific, professional, technological, and other “practical” training—indeed, in all the debates over the very purpose of education.

Even when the cultures live in peaceful coexistence with one another, each tends to understand the others on its own terms. Liturgy, for instance, belongs fundamentally in culture four, but the other three cultures can legitimately claim a part in it. More often, however, they try to take it captive and seize it for themselves. Culture one wants it as the bully pulpit, culture two as a classroom for instruction in orthodoxy, culture three as an expression of religious or religiously political solidarity within a given milieu. They understand it, in other words, through the lenses of their own culture, which means they misconstrue it. Liturgy thus provides an excellent example of how any given culture must distort the others into its own image and likeness, into its own value system, in order to make sense of it.

A more secular example can be found in the schools. Over the past hundred years the form and methods of culture two have gradually encroached upon the teaching of “the Humanities,” the traditional matter of culture three. Teachers of that matter must now be trained and certified in culture two. Over time the university has appropriated the stuff of culture three, transforming it into another set of academic disciplines. Culture two did this not out of ill will but simply because it had to act according to its own nature. When Shakespeare makes an appearance at a meeting of the Modern Language Association of America, he finds himself not being read and enjoyed or being admired for his humane wisdom, but analyzed, debated, and deconstructed.

If only the English and Americans spoke the same language, Churchill complained. Wittgenstein made essentially the same point: if a lion could talk we could not understand him. By speaking English the lion would create the illusion of speaking our language, yet all the time he would be speaking lion and nothing but lion. Whatever he said would reflect lion culture and be fully intelligible only in the lion’s lair. The theologians at the Council of Trent for the most part talked academic talk, the talk of culture

two, and they translated Luther into their own language. Erasmus talked humanistic or literary talk, the talk of culture three, and he did the same with Luther. When expressed in their most radical forms, the four cultures are incommensurable with one another. They are rivals. To embrace one is to shut out the others.

Yet paradoxically, at many points they meet and embrace. In a Renaissance madrigal the poetry (culture three) gives shape to the music (culture four). Some things seem to straddle two cultures—*Hamlet* can be read as literature, yet its fullest expression is in performance. The trivium of logic, rhetoric, and dialectics was for a long time a basic component in the programs of both culture two and culture three. The cultures are rivals, yes, but they are also siblings. Their boundaries are permeable. No wall separates one of these Gulf Streams from the others, or from the ocean itself.

There is another paradox about the cultures. Each of them is binary. Each has two aspects or manifestations, which can seem to be in opposition to each other. One aspect is more contemplative, the other more active. The prophetic culture manifests itself in both monk and militant. In culture two, the academician coexists with doctors, lawyers, and others who actively apply technical information. The poet and the orator, that is, the poet and the statesman/politician, are generators of culture three and its product: the poet in touch with his own feelings and the orator in touch with the feelings and needs of others. (But the epic poetry of Homer and Virgil correlates well with the public-person ideal.) Culture four is the culture of both painters and performers.

I think it is possible to identify some individuals as almost unequivocally belonging to one culture and having little affinity with the others. Erasmus belongs uncompromisingly in culture three, and he comes about as close as humanly possible to being a “pure type.” He showed little understanding of art or appreciation for it, he despised Scholastic learning (though he knew it better than he usually gets credit for), and he was shocked by Luther’s plain talk. The Trent folk as a collectivity belong substantially in

culture two, the Münster Anabaptists in culture one, along with individuals like Andreas Karlstadt and John Knox. I take it as axiomatic that the more fully individuals fit the definition of one culture the more intolerant they are of the other cultures or at least the more uncomprehending. In Italy I have met vacationing American academicians who looked at but did not see the works of art that surrounded them.

Relatively few people fit unambiguously into these categories. Some of the preachers in the Sistine Chapel during the Renaissance seemed equally adept at preaching in either the Scholastic or the humanistic style, a clue that they did not feel the incompatibility so obvious to Erasmus. Michelangelo belongs squarely in culture four, yet he wrote poetry of merit. Luther is one of the great prophetic figures in the history of the West, but he also pioneered changes in the mass that showed great sensitivity to its fourth-culture character.

The traditional "Father of Monasticism," St. Anthony the Abbot, belongs without qualification in culture one. Yet Benedictine monasticism, surely one of the most important Christian institutions in the Latin West, is not so easily categorized. Benedictines by definition renounce the world for the cloister, but in the cloister they center their lives on the liturgy, which they traditionally have enhanced with architecture and music of surpassing beauty. In the Middle Ages great abbots like those of Cluny, and even those of the austere Citeaux, knew their Cicero and Virgil. They governed, like the good public servants of culture three, and especially from the tenth to the thirteenth century assumed important leadership roles in society outside the monasteries. Monks have shown much less interest in the texts, approaches, and issues I identify with culture two, but the "Father of Scholasticism," St. Anselm, was a monk.

Thus most persons or phenomena manifest traits of all four cultures, but the question to be asked is, Which culture predominates? Better, Which culture structures the value system? What is

the center and starting point of the individual or the institution that then gives shape to the configuration?

Some important phenomena in the history of Christianity display a remarkable malleability and have allowed themselves to be shaped by each of the four cultures in turn. Approaches to the Bible provide the best example. For Luther the Bible consisted essentially in “threats and promises,” the basic pattern of discourse for culture one. For Scholastics like Aquinas it tended to be a database from which to draw ideas, whereas for culture three it was a book of spiritual inspiration and moral guidance. For artists it provided images expressive of profundities about human nature and its relationship to the divine.

Preaching, the first and fundamental Christian ministry, is another example. From the days of Origen in the late second century until the death of St. Bernard in the middle of the twelfth, preaching was directly or indirectly governed by the principles of grammar and rhetoric of culture three. The “homily,” the dominant form for this period, was essentially an adaptation of the exegetical techniques of the classical *grammaticus*, a commentary on the text that followed it almost word by word.

With the advent of Scholasticism, theory about preaching, now explicitly propounded and elaborated upon in the *Artes praedicandi*, moved to a large extent into culture two and made it into an exercise in understanding and proving a point. In the late Middle Ages when more and more preachers began to denounce the corruption of the church or the corrupt morals of society at large, preaching on a popular level took on characteristics of culture one.

Virtually all the preaching I have mentioned so far took place outside mass. In the papal curia and a few other locations the ancient tradition survived during the Middle Ages and Renaissance of preaching during mass right after the reading or chanting of the gospel passage for the day. In such cases preaching becomes part of

the liturgical action, so that it must to some extent conform to culture four.

## Cultures?

Before proceeding further I should be a little clearer about what I mean by that much-abused word *culture*. I intend it in its common-sense meaning, as when we speak of, say, Italian culture as distinct from American culture. In such a case we might be most immediately mindful of seemingly superficial differences in ways of looking at things, but we sense that a deeper difference in life-values is what underlies them. It is not an accident, for instance, that in even the humblest *trattoria* in Italy the meal is served with impeccable courtesy and grace.

I am tempted to let the matter rest at that. I notice that C. P. Snow in his book on “two cultures” never really defined what he meant by culture, and he got away with it. (Well, he did not altogether get away with it once the critics went to work.) He was content to speak in passing of traits, prejudices, and assumptions. I will try to do a little better by elaborating on the description I gave above. I do not aim, however, at using the word with the precision of an anthropologist or a sociologist.

By culture I understand a configuration. The elements within the configuration are forms, symbols, institutions, patterns of feeling, patterns of behavior, and the like. Among such elements in culture two, for instance, are lectures, examinations, academic gowns, and, most certainly, the diploma. Style of discourse is an especially important element in the configuration of any given culture, constitutive and revelatory of its design. Professors talk differently from poets. When taken together, the elements express a set of reciprocally dependent values and interpretations of reality. The artist has different priorities than the prophet. The different priorities suggest how the internal logic of the configuration makes it

self-validating to those living within it and resistant to other such configurations. Prophets sound unrealistic, even dangerously reckless, to the statesman. I use the word *configuration* because it indicates relationships and proportions. Values central to one culture may be found in another but not so centrally as to give it shape.

I have considered other words to capture what I am about—*traditions, styles, types, mind-sets, models, archetypes, paradigms, and value systems*. The last named has the advantage of indicating the core whence springs the internal coherence of my four realities, but it seems detached from their historical grounding. *Types, models, mind-sets, archetypes, and paradigms* have the same disadvantage, besides being just as overworked and pretentious as *cultures*. *Traditions* seems too flaccid. I see *style* as crucial to understanding them, as I hope to make clear, but in and of itself it does not convey the full sweep of what I intend. I will use all these words, but for better or worse, I settled on *cultures* for the primary designation.

I will pay special attention to styles of discourse because in ancient Athens cultures two and three confronted each other explicitly over this issue, and they did so again much more pointedly and protractedly in the sixteenth century. But I also pay attention to styles because they reveal, I believe, the genius of each culture and make the distinctions among them more palpable. In other words, I am writing more about *form* than about content. The two interact, of course, but insofar as the book deals more with *how* Luther spoke than with what he said, it differs from most other books that likewise indulge in a grand sweep of centuries. This is not an essay on the history of ideas, much less on the history of doctrine.

Style, sometimes misunderstood as merely an ornament of speech, an outer garment enclosing the thought, is in reality the ultimate expression of meaning. This is obviously true for poetry and great novels but just as true for the kind of texts with which we are



dealing. If we are to get at the deep reality of those texts, we must recognize their styles as constitutive of them. That is a basic premise on which I base this book. For the cultures, as for individuals, style is the manifestation of their personalities. The French got it right: *Le style, c'est l'homme même*. Style *is* the man/woman. How I am—mean or kind, manipulative or straightforward—tells you the kind of human being I am. Style is, moreover, the artist. We regard Michelangelo as a great artist not because of *what* he painted or sculpted, usually conventional subjects, but because of *how* he painted or sculpted those subjects—because of his style.

If the book is about style, it is therefore about rhetoric. Here I understand rhetoric to mean any effective style of communication, so that even culture four might be said to have a rhetoric. The word is often used that loosely. In this generalized sense Luther was an effective rhetorician, as was, in an entirely different way, Thomas Aquinas. The word is of course often used disparagingly, “mere rhetoric,” to mean insincere or vapid talk, a slur that has dogged it since the days of Socrates.

I will sometimes use rhetoric in its generalized sense but never in its disparaging sense. I will most often use it in its precise historical sense to mean the art of persuasion or, even more precisely, the art of oratory that traditionally was considered the culminating point of culture three. Although it is today rarely taught as such, it was a highly developed and sophisticated discipline. It was a subject that had norms and rules and principles, a subject that could be taught in school. It could be codified in textbooks, as with the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Quintilian's *Institutiones*, and the countless successors to such classics through the centuries. Closely related to dialectics, the traditional discipline of culture two, it differed from it as the art of winning consensus differs from the art of winning an argument. Each of these arts expresses and engenders styles of discourse that are related but significantly dif-

ferent. Each thus expresses and engenders significantly different styles of thinking and evaluating—what I call culture two (dialectics) and culture three (rhetoric).

I imagine the relationships among the four cultures in the form of a cylinder. Down the length of the cylinder I would list in parallel columns the names that best typify a given culture at different moments in the history of the West—Tertullian, Gregory VII, Luther, and so on, for culture one; then for culture two Aristotle, Boethius, and so forth. By moving my eye down the length of the columns I remind myself of the distinctiveness of the cultures and of the historical continuity within them. I am reminded of their sometimes isolation from their neighbors alongside them and even of their occasional hostility to them. If I run my eyes around the cylinder horizontally or even walk around it keeping my eyes at the same level, I see how the cultures are neighbors to one another, almost touch one another. They almost hold hands. In the cylinder the icon of culture four finds itself side-by-side with culture one. Graven image though the icon is, in its ineffability it powerfully expresses the transcendence that is so much a concern of culture one. The cultures meld into one another.

They took shape, after all, in the same Mediterranean matrix and lived there for centuries before expanding into northern Europe and, eventually, across the seas. Jerusalem knew Athens long before the time of the New Testament and had spiritual and intellectual commerce with her. Tertullian, the great naysayer to Athens, was a product of Hellenistic civilization, an identity he could not possibly shake. Paul wrote in Greek, not Hebrew.

Even though in my cylinder the cultures appear in parallel columns, they are not perfectly parallel realities. I treat culture, therefore, as an analogous concept, verified somewhat differently in each of the analogues. Culture four differs from the others in not using words and in thus being an easy prey for the others, some-

times seeming to be not much more than a mode of the others. Culture one is otherworldly, but no matter how otherworldly prophets might hope to be, they must live in the time and place of this world. Even the Amish and cloistered nuns reveal in their clothing and other ways the situation of their founding. When the prophetic culture in cases like these assumes an institutional form, it loses some of its edge and experiences a certain dissipation. Cultures two and three, on the contrary, came to their most effective epiphany and densest expressions in their institutional forms—the university and the humanistic secondary schools.

Culture one also differs from the others in that it is more discontinuous within itself. Continuity is of course not altogether absent, especially after Luther provided such a striking model for the prophet-reformer. It is not an accident that Martin Luther King, Jr., bore the name he did. But by definition this culture best manifests itself in brilliant flashes, in an intensity that cannot be maintained. The other three cultures have a continuous history, but culture one is almost by definition episodic. It is staccato, the others legato. This difference is reflected below in that I make no attempt to treat culture one as a narrative, as if one prophetic moment followed with some logic upon another. I skip from one prophet to another.

Even for the other cultures I use narrative principally to illustrate the character of the culture in question and to set the stage for particular expressions of it. In these cultures, too, I skip and choose, sometimes arbitrarily, and I blithely ignore major figures and phenomena. I provide a sampling of profiles or sometimes not much more than a series of snapshots. Although I describe a few landmarks in their historical development, I am not attempting to write the history of the cultures. I am interested in recurring patterns and their interrelationships.

The word *patterns* suggests abstractions. Though I might seem

to treat the cultures abstractly, they achieve reality only through the human beings who prophesy, prove, persuade, and love to parade. Sometime in their lives most human beings, we might assume, feel called upon or compelled to engage in every one of these activities. Consistency in engagement with one or the other of the activities is what produces the social phenomenon called culture. No culture without human agents. The four cultures are grounded in human beings, with their likes and dislikes, their fears and hopes—with their mothers and their fathers and their styles of upbringing.

Many of us seem to live in all four cultures at once, though one of them probably predominates over the others. But in that regard I am not even sure about myself, though I spend most of my waking hours in culture two. Some friends tell me I belong in culture three. I have on rare occasions participated in demonstrations and, shouting slogans, marched for causes I believed just. I perform liturgies, culture four, and I am deeply affected by them. Beyond liturgies I sometimes flee into that culture of beauty, dance, and play, and I find myself much at home there, satisfied. Affinities exist among the cultures because part of their reality is the reality of human temperaments and personalities. Temperaments and personalities do not admit of easy containment.

I get a better understanding of the four cultures, finally, by relating them, as already suggested, to those four great abstractions that medieval philosophers called the transcendentals: unity (*unum*), truth (*verum*), goodness (*bonum*), and beauty (*pulchrum*). I must admit stretching a bit to relate the first to the *unum*, but *unum* does suggest the horror of contamination by “the other” that drives culture one and suggests as well the integrity that is the central concern of that culture. The remaining transcendentals fit more neatly. Culture two is about truth. The creed of culture three channels energies either into action for the good of society or, in poetry,

novels, and drama, into tending to the life we live. Culture four—beauty.

### An Invitational Rhetoric

I must now answer a crucial question. If this book is about form, what is the form of the book? The most appropriate form, if objectivity is the primary value, would be one that is independent of the four forms with which it is concerned. But that is not possible. The book must stand in one of the cultures.

It is not a dance, concert, or painting, so culture four is excluded. I rule out culture one as patently inappropriate. Simply by assigning numbers to the cultures I might seem to favor the style of discourse of culture two, where, as I said, I spend most of my waking hours. I like to think the book is based on those culture-two hours. But I have cast it not in the form of that culture but in the form of culture three.

In its classical modality culture three has an endemic “weakness for general ideas.” You can hardly imagine ideas more general than the four cultures. That is the first clue to the culture in which the book stands. Culture three in its poetic dimension, furthermore, is happy with the ambiguity that allows a text to be read at several levels at once. In a modest way I think my essay can similarly be read, as, for instance, a way of looking at the sixteenth-century conflicts and as a way of looking at some contemporary issues—as a way, moreover, of looking at oneself. And, unlike culture two, culture three is appreciative of meanderings, asides, and loose ends—appreciative of what one does in an essay.

I can be more specific within culture three. In a loose way I have tried to adapt from the tradition of culture three the classical genre of the epideictic, a fancy word that indicates the “art of praise and blame.” It is the art of “ceremonial” rhetoric, which leads not to

action or decision but to appreciation and contemplation. It is in frequent use even today in commemorating important causes, events, anniversaries, or persons. We experience it in commencement addresses, speeches at ribbon-cutting events, eulogies at memorial services. We experience it in jingoistic political speeches.

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is an example of the epideictic genre at its best. In that speech Lincoln did not try to prove the war was just or to move his hearers to any action. He tried simply to raise appreciation for what was at stake and, at least by implication, to praise it as noble and worthy of the great cost. The mode of the genre, then, is not command or demonstration but invitation—an invitation to consider and to notice.

If small can be compared to great, I am aiming at something similar in this book. I am trying to set the cultures on the stage before your eyes. I want to hold them up for you to see so that you might admire them in all their brilliant plumage but also, in perhaps a more limited way, so that you see their neuroses and vanities. Through this genre I invite you to look at the cultures and consider them. I invite you to be generous with them, but at the same time I warn you not to let any one of them suborn you into thinking it is the whole show, which is what they like to do.