

Jeremy Cripps:
Celebrating European Diversity: Interpretations in Religion, Language, Culture, and Education

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Jeremy Cripps

Abstract

This chapter celebrates that “most happy and prosperous” period of European integration which occurred in the first century under the Antonines. What led to the decline and fall of that Roman celebration and where lies the potential for a future “most happy and prosperous” celebration of our diversity in Europe? Four key areas where our diversity may lead to full integration are identified as they were seen to be the foundations of the Antonine period of peace and prosperity throughout the then expanding Roman Empire. The benefits of diversity particularly for the European Union have been identified by many academics over time. The process of European Integration continues to foster the idea that: “we have the ability to achieve, if we master the necessary goodwill, a common global society blessed with a shared culture of peace that is nourished by the ethnic, national and local diversities that enrich our lives” (Mahnaz, 2002). So the achievement of a broad range of diversity has to become an accepted part of the growth outlook for our European community. It is the role of the international university community, particularly those with a liberal arts focus to play a leading role in the move toward diversity. We must become leaders in the recognition of the importance of diversity in strengthening current and future aspirations for peace and development. This paper therefore reflects upon the success of the Antonine period of peace and prosperity and carefully considers the four key areas and the foundation that they may provide as a benchmark for a better and more successful integration across the European continent than is today available.

Keywords: Diversity, European integration, a single language, liberal arts education, theological rancor, cross-cultural tolerance.

“If a man were called upon to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus.”
(Gibbon, 2003)

There is little question that European diversity is not a new innovation, the idea of celebrating unity among people has been and is with us in many ways for many years, even though we may have too often preferred to identify differences rather than look for unifying interpretations, for positive recognition of differences and thus the potential for mutual appreciation of the richness of choice. The unification of people, often by force, has been a traditional form of consolidating a nation’s military victories for as long as there has been war. For unity to be celebrated history suggests there is a better path.

Probably the early masters of European diversity were the Romans, whose Empire was in their time the largest ever known to mankind. Describing reasons for the initial prosperity of the Roman Empire in the Age of the Antonines (Birley, 1965) Edward Gibbons, noted:

- the lack “of theological rancor;”
- the adoption of a single language;
- cross-cultural tolerance from employment in the “exercitus” (the armed forces),
- and from organized liberal arts education, the “aspiring genius” of adapting to “virtue and merit;” wherever they were found in the Empire.

Once European diversity was celebrated. The “aspiring genius” was to adopt virtue and merit for their own sake wherever they were found “among slaves or strangers, enemies or Barbarians.” There was then, in the Age of the Antonines, a time when the human race; asserted the “independent dignity of reason”; was governed “under the guidance of virtue and wisdom;” and “was most happy and prosperous” (Gibbon, 2003).

The decline and fall of Rome, “the long decay” (Durant, 1993) was caused, was authored, by many interrelated events. Among the principal causes explored by Edward Gibbon were:

- religious and other quarrels which promoted division and which continued after the Fall of the Roman Empire (Heather, 2011) were to lead eventually, through ignorance and irrational dogma to

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genocide by the Inquisition (Lea, 2013), to the prosecution of opponents of antisocial religious bigots and even today to a continuing refusal by religious fanatics to adhere to the tolerance required by the founders of the religion they claim to follow;

- the adoption of vernacular corruptions of the Roman language which contributed to misunderstanding and restricted communication. As Oscar Wilde (1887) noted, even when the language is thought to be the same, great countries may be “divided by a common language”;
- how the sanctity of service was “degraded by personal vices” and the implications of biological diversity raised barriers not only between races, but even between the sexes;
- and the operation of “prejudice and interest,” the “preference for imagination over sense” and the appearance of “profound ignorance.” In this way groups asserted modes of individual behavior far beyond the idea espoused by St Ambrose in his advice to St Augustine that: “Si fueris Romae, Romano vivito more; si fueris alibi, vivito sicut ibi” (Titelman, 1996).

A Wider Celebration

The purpose of this paper is to examine ways in which we might learn from the decline and fall from times “most happy and prosperous “ and, adjusting our behavior accordingly, might better celebrate European diversity. This requires fundamental change so that we begin, more conscientiously, to focus on being in a world where many more of us can be happy and prosperous than the casualties from war and inhumanity presently allow. The focus will be to review how much better our interpretations of four areas of human behavior ought to be. So the focus will dwell on how European interpretations on religion might be more tolerant: on the power and probabilities of fewer languages: on the prospect of a greater respect for dignity at the expense of hypocrisy: and the opportunities provided by continuous improvement in understanding the benefits to be enjoyed by an educated people. In part the purpose is to better understand the successes and the mistakes in human history; the success that celebrated European diversity and the decay that broke apart the celebration; and, to identify one road that might again lead us to better celebrate European diversity.

Interpretations and Religion

Interpretations of God begin with the need for certainty in our everyday behavior. Avoidance of uncertainty about the future is a basic feature of our everyday. We look to insurance, employ superstition, and adhere to certain beliefs as we confront what Hofstede called “the second dimension of national culture” (Hofstede, 2001) the need for uncertainty avoidance.

An early example of our ability to tolerate religious compromise began, ever so long ago, with our recognition of the Sabbath. The Sabbath, a universal day of ceasing (Living words, 2015) to work, is a day for rest. But the origin of this seventh day activity is uncertain (Richmond, 1956). The interpretation of this date by religious authorities as a day of worship rather than a day for “ceasing to work” is an early manifestation of the power in human relations, of politics, but of a special form of politics which goes under the universal term religion. So, in the Christian world, the days are named after the North European Pagan Gods (Tiw, Wodin, Thor, Freya) or their Roman equivalent (Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus) combined with the visible planets (Sun, Moon and Saturn) and their origins, whether they celebrate days of work and days of ceasing to work are lost to us.

Edward Gibbon writes of religious toleration in early Antonine Rome noting: “The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful” (Gibbon, op. cit.). And this toleration produced not only mutual indulgence, but even a certain religious concord.

Territorially extensive though the Antonine Roman Empire was, the diverse elements rarely came together except in indirect or direct service to the Empire. Transport was reserved for trade and the military and rarely for tourism and travel. In any case, in the context of service to the Empire, arguments about religion were seen to serve no positive purpose.

Yet, as the Empire grew, the centralized administration gradually gave way to devolution and in turn the devolution allowed religions to come together and the supporters of the religions, like too many modern football hooligans, as victims of “the British disease,” were prepared “to bury internal differences to battle it out with foreign fans and police on the pavements of European cities” (Asser, 2000). Then, as too often now, the attention of the armed forces changed from maintaining borders to reducing internal revolt.

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And the sequence of religious rancor and religious intolerance grew in contrast to the universal teaching of tolerations espoused by religions. The secular acceptance of other gods was suddenly intolerable. Religious “fundamentalists” asserted doctrinal messages based on second hand derivations of the oral history of Prophets (Slick, 2015; and Kathir, 2015). And how those powerful in religion made us mourn (Burns, 1965); how society too often and wrongly depended on their interpretation of the meaning of their Holy Books. Thus religious diversity was continuously handicapped by the intellectual weakness of religious leaders, their lack of humanity or, as Burns wrote, their inhumanity (Reid, 2010), upon their so often incorrect understanding of the potential benefits to be gained from everyday activity with which they insisted their community collectively might not conform.

The extraordinary growth of the European economy during the last 300 years has also seen an acceleration of the coming together of the world’s diverse elements. And yet it seems to be a myth that: “Europe has matured out of its religious past and into a permanent secular future” (Malone, 2005) as so many issues from the recent murders of a secular film maker and cartoonists, the ban on headscarves in France, significant post immigration civil unrest, may be leading the way to a new, albeit political, spiritualism.

Interpretations in Language

Nicholas Wade writing in the *New York Times* hypothesized that “in the beginning, there was one people, perhaps no more than 2,000 strong, who had acquired an amazing gift, the faculty for complex language” (Greenberg, 2000). As their descendants adapted to European geographical diversity, their developing languages derived from a single ancient mother tongue until: “speaking 5,000 languages,” they reached many stages where they were actually unable to communicate with each other.

European diversity most recently has seen a reduction in the number of languages so that in the process more of the world’s peoples can communicate together. “English is the universal language on the Internet” (Korpela, 2013). English has become the major language of the world, “the language of business and government; ... the language of maritime communication and international air traffic control” (Kitao, 2000). English is also the language of much international popular culture, particularly, as catalysts, music and the cinema which extend the language throughout the world.

The process has happened as native dialects, like the Leicestershire language (Evan, 2013) in England lost out to the importance of understanding about the dangers threatening people. BBC radio in England over the period of the Second World War saw better use for a standard version of “Queen’s English” (Queen’s, 2015) which could readily be understood by the majority of the radio and television audience. Richard Dimbleby (MBC, 2015), BBC commentator on the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1953 was, by many, considered to articulate the standard pronunciation and phraseology for “Queen’s English.” I know for that is the English I was taught.

The process has accelerated with the growth of the Internet as a source for research, as a tool for education, as an important marketing medium, as a generator of international, of European trade, and then as a focus for entertainment, for skills and crafts and hobbies and most recently for crowd sourcing social media.

Language, an example of Hofstede’s first dimension of national culture, provides an opportunity to reduce “power distance” (Hofstede, p. 17). Language can help move the elitist society to a more pluralist society. This process has been noted by Thomas Friedman as “one of the ten forces that flattened the world” (p. 57). Friedman quotes one of Bill Gates’s early mottoes to give every individual “IAYF” (Friedman, 2005), that is information (in English) at your fingertips. Internet connectivity, workflow software, uploading, outsourcing, are other forces of language which are helping the process of flattening the world, reducing power distance, and providing a wealth of future opportunities to celebrate the Europeanization of communications.

Now in Europe there are “24 official and working” languages (European Commission, 2015). As an unfortunate result European nations do not have to provide national data which is easily translated into other “official and working” languages. We know that “a large number of official languages hinders communication and imposes substantial financial and legal costs” (Fidrmuc et al, 2007).

A unified language system identifies the great powers past, present, and perhaps future. This unifies a legal system when the language can be easily understood and uniformly applied. These features, together with a single currency identify the essential elements on which a strong economy may build. In modern Europe, in contrast to Antonine Rome, only one of these elements have yet been adopted and the others are essential to provide the synergy that European Union integration needs.

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Interpretations about Culture

European Diversity was celebrated in literature as in Cicero's descriptions of how the leaders of community groups "turned in two or more directions" (Cicero, 55 BC). Which direction to take depended on the interpreter. The different religious directions, in their so many forms, were reconciled under the Antonines in the interests of reason and piety; challenged; and compromised. Perhaps no better example of the application of reason and the employment of compromise may be found than at the Council of Nicea (Davis, 1988).

This "religious harmony of the ancient world" (Gibbon, p. 238) declined as "the sullen obstinacy" and the "peculiar rites and unsocial manners" of so-called "religious" sects demonstrated the third dimension of Hofstede's national culture, the unfortunate clash as individualism is opposed to collectivism (Hofstede, p. 209 et seq.). Since then we have seen, almost universally from religions, an inability to accept what some call the "golden rule" and others the "ethic of reciprocity" (Religious Tolerance, 2015).

Briefly, as Socrates is said to have observed we should: "not do to others that which would anger us if others did it to you" (Virtue Science, 2015). As wolves are gregarious and tigers are solitary (Hofstede, p. 205), so human societies display different degrees of acceptable collectivism and acceptable individualism. Over a broad range of issues we seem unable to avoid those who insist on collective action interacting often brutally with those who insist on individualism.

The range of issues is large and frequently associated with other than the basic features of "sullen obstinacy," "peculiar rites" and "unsocial manners." Cloaked under interpretations by social, political, and religious leaders, the fundamental rules of tolerance found in the New Testament (Matthew, 7.1), the Hadith (Nawawi, 2015), and the Talmud (Talmud, Shabbat 3id), are cast aside in favor of the Papal Bull, the Fatwa, and the threat of excommunication which, at least for rational man, demonstrate the inability of too many collectivists to accept the rights of the individual.

The hypocrisy of the failing leaders, inevitably provides examples for their followers which identify (for those who wish to celebrate Europeanization) the need for European leaders to be transparent and accountable. This is an issue today not half a mile from here in Skopje. Transparency here refers to the provision of information that is "accessible, visible and understandable" (Van

Gruening, 2003). Accountability means the justification of actions and the taking of responsibility for those actions.

The problems between the competing interests of those who believe in individual choice, and those who support a collective choice seem to cause most of our social friction and the political actions of both sides seem keen on avoiding either justification for their proposals or accountability for the actions they take.

Those who believe in collectivism continue to offer challenges to those who prefer individualism. This was beautifully illustrated by Wilfred Thesiger in *Arabian Sands*. He noted that: "All that is best in the Arabs has come to them from the desert: their deep religious instinct, which has found expression in Islam; their sense of fellowship, which binds them as members of one faith; their pride of race; their generosity and sense of hospitality; their dignity and the regard which they have for the dignity of others as fellow human beings; their humor, their courage, their patience, the language which they speak and their passionate love of poetry. But the Arabs are a race which produces its best only under conditions of extreme hardship and deteriorate progressively as living conditions become easier" (Thesiger, 1959).

And we watch this clash between the collectivism from those who have come in from the desert and the individualism from the traders in the souk, play out in a rich naturally endowed environment no more unusually than in so many other societies where the division of wealth depends on historical interpretations of rights to the fatally non-specific yet inalienable rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (Declaration of Independence, 1776) which we find so difficult to share. As we are seeing in the coming 2016 United States Presidential contest even the notion of basic healthcare is considered by the collectivist as a "right", by the individualist as a privilege which is as yet, in the richest Society in the World, unavailable to millions.

In Europe 50 civil society organizations have urged European leaders to keep a promise made: "to define a position on mutual accountability and transparency" (Publishwhatyoufind, 2015). In 1997, the EU enacted the Convention against corruption involving officials (Europa, 2015). However only a year ago we heard from the BBC that "corruption across the EU is 'breathhtaking' and it costs the EU economy at least 120 billion euros annually" (Malmstrom, 2014) and this was confirmed by the European Commission itself (Santa, 2014).

Education

The fourth dimension along which Hofstede found nations differed systematically is the way we educate our children about gender and gender roles (Hofstede, p. 297 et seq.). Here we note the role that liberal arts education has played in our understanding of ways in which we can celebrate European diversity. What began with Plato at the “akademeia” (Dillon, 2005) was more specifically written down by Cicero as the Trivium and the Quadrivium as the skills necessary for the children of freemen to gain success in their future career, that is the liberal arts (Cicero, op. cit.). This education format has as its purpose famously: “to open the mind, correct it, to refine it, to establish it to know, and to digest, to rule, to use knowledge, and to give the mind power over its own faculties” (Newman, 1966).

So the liberal arts tradition in education has focused on blending the male desirables, advancement, earnings, training, and keeping up-to-date with the female desirables of friendliness, security, health and welfare, and cooperation (Hofstede, p. 281). The combination of these ideas for civilization requires that young people, regardless of gender, strive after the same societal deliverables. This target, and the potential for liberal arts education, is demonstrated most particularly in government where polls from the societies which are “most happy and prosperous” identify the provision of health, education, and welfare benefits, are most generous and the standard of living recognized by the world organizations as highest (UNDP, 2014).

Where the genders in government most nearly reflect the gender diversity of a country’s population, we find the best current provision of nations “most happy and prosperous” (UNDP, 2015). For there still is a glass ceiling (Sargent, 1981) and increasingly visible barriers to young women or minorities in our world and fortunately we are learning that when we can celebrate their diversity we are on our way to celebrating an eventual European diversity.

In our world we can still stand in the water with Heraclitus and watch the water change (Graham, 211), and we need to prepare our children for the coming changes. Our minds have seen the telephone move from the land line to the iPod; calculation from comptometers to programmable hand held calculators; recordings from 78 rpm shellac discs to MP3; and global internet streaming. How we must prepare our children for the changes we will not see. We should always remember the advice of Imam Ali to: “bring up your children other than the way you were brought up yourselves, for they were born for

times other than yours" (Al-Amily, 2005). For yes, "the times are changing" (Dylan, 1964).

Here is a philosophy that can transcend genders and the other divisions caused by race, sex, religion, national origin, physical disability, and even age. We have the tutors for our education, we just fail too often to follow their lead. Ibn Khaldun wrote beautifully that: "God distinguished man from all other animals by an ability to think which He made the beginning of human perfection and the end of man's noble superiority over existing things" (Ibn Khaldun, 1377). Then this tutorial, from what we too often refer to as the "Dark Ages" (Ameer and Thompson, 1999), ought to help us to be more conscious of how we "see through a glass darkly" and remain too often unwilling to come "face to face" (Corinthians, 13.12) with reality.

Khaldun writes about our perceptions, about our ability to be sensitive to situations and to have a second sense "which provides us with the ideas and the behavior needed in dealing" with our neighbors. This he called our "experimental intellect" (Ibn Khaldun, p. 334). This is an element of our intellect we fail to use too often. So we resolve too many issues like men, instead of being educated and working on situations without preconditions. And this is because the very preconditions upon which we might insist, demonstrate our unwillingness to approach situations with experimental intellect. There is a fear of change, and therefore "all existing institutions have to make special efforts to be receptive to change and be able to change" (Drucker, 1999).

The Europeanization of business, the development of the internet, e-business, blogs and social networking sites, recognize the changing streams of activity in business. They are transforming the concept of European diversity into something that is achievable. There is a force taking the world forward into an environment of a common language, a tolerance and understanding of diversity, and making partnerships in change. This is, as Drucker wrote: "the basis for continuing relationships."

The catalysts for this change are education and travel. Education, because the change leader is a knowledge worker who seeks familiarity with the diversity he will encounter in business. Travel, because the change leader tests theoretical knowledge against the market within which the change leaders must operate. "Long distance information does not replace face-to-face relationships" (Drucker, op. cit.) in business or in social life. Long distance information exposes people to the culture and values of others. Once having been exposed to these differences, return to our former state becomes

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impossible. Because good education requires critical thought, the facts teach us that there are other views and they may have as much credence as our own.

While changed business conditions, the widening arc of European travel and education in general has assisted this growth to European diversity, the liberal arts format of education has the potential to take the movement into new more inhabitable dimensions. Why? Because liberal arts education encourages the development of the complete person and challenges students to take a broader view of life (Zakaria, 2015).

Conclusion

Writing in 2003, Nobel Economics Laureate Joseph Stiglitz concluded that: “Globalization today is not working for many of the world’s poor ... for much of the environment ... for the Global economy” (Stiglitz, 2003). Since then we have witnessed poverty crises in Zimbabwe, Myanmar, and countries “on the periphery of the capitalist system” (World Bank, 1990). Since then we have discovered “compelling evidence of a rapid deterioration in the European environment” (McCarthy, 2008). Since then, particularly as this paper is written, we have been witness to a European economy “sinking in a maelstrom of financial turmoil” (IMF, 2008).

Like Stiglitz, the author believes that: “Europeanization can be reshaped to realize its potential for good” (Stiglitz, p. 215). International Institutions can most certainly be reshaped. Current failures need to be analyzed so that we better understand why the current strategic directions employed by government have failed, and failed so far so badly.

One change of strategy is to learn from the successful operations of non-governmental organizations who, in spite of operating in a period of failing Europeanization, have managed to initiate progress in the attainment of Europeanization’s potential for good. Here the emphasis is on civil society on integration and the remarkable achievements that have been achieved this century. We should be studying “the remarkable declines in global poverty” (World Bank, 1990) and how to overcome the many challenges that remain. At the university level our students are remarkably unaware of the last century of societal achievements that have been made. “Global poverty is on the decline, but almost no-one believes it” (Barna, 2014). Somehow this kind of knowledge and the contribution it may make to integration is not included in the knowledge we consider every day.

We need to study the changes that are taking place and the reasons why they are taking place. In this way we have the ability to focus our attention on the changes that are needed to take place if we are to achieve the idea of European Integration. We can again achieve “the peace and harmony” of the Antonines. That was accomplished long ago and if we can take advantage of the knowledge we have gained since then, we might see such integration accomplished even in our lifetime.

“The good of other times let people state;
I think it lucky I was born so late.”
(Mozley, 1985)

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