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Raymond J. Jirran

A. *Introduction*

In the last section, the student considered chaos in the ancient world. In this section, the student begins what may be considered the rise of the West. Thoughts turn to what made the West unique. The course goal for this particular topic is **to evaluate how progress can occur in an apparently disorderly way**. This topic offers the fundamental interpretation of Western civilization found in these lectures.¹ The full title of this topic is The Making of Western Europe.

B. *Uniqueness*

1. Cultural

The geographical and sociological base of Asian civilization persistently tended to expand, although at varying rates of speed. The West differed in that it expanded, collapsed, and then expanded as never before. The West also differed in that so many other developed civilizations were nearby.

Elements of the classical, Byzantine, and Muslim civilizations lay easily within reach of the European "Wild West" of the Eleventh Century. See "Map 6.1 Invasions, Fourth through Sixth Centuries," on page 172 in the seventh edition of Chambers.² Note: Frankish Empire at 486, areas conquered by Clovis, Franks, Vandals, Visigoths, Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Britons. Western Europe directly inherited a society in which nearly all the overburden of civilized institutions had crumbled into agrarian simplicity. Moreover, the universal truth claims of the Roman Catholic Church, together with the military political success that Frankish arms soon enjoyed on every frontier, gave Western Europeans a secure sense of balance between slavish imitation and absolute rejection of what their more civilized neighbors had to offer. A society remarkably open to change emerged, sure of itself, interested in the wonders of the civilized world, and eager to seize wealth, fame, and learning. Within a period of two or three centuries, Europe rose to a level of civilization comparable with that of any other part of the world. The date for reaching that level is approximately 1500.

2. Geographic

More than any other factor, geography puts civilization into its environment. Europe had unique, important, geographical advantages which the technical developments of the early Middle Ages from about 500 to 900 A.D., brought into play for the first time. Broad and fertile plains cultivated by the moldboard plow, an indented coastline, numerous navigable rivers used by ships capable of withstanding the dangers of the Atlantic wind and tide, and an abundance of timber and of metals, especially of iron, all contributed essential elements to the relatively abrupt rise of Western Europe. See the plow illustrated on page 186 in the seventh edition of Chambers.³ Only in what was mid-Soviet Russia was any land in Europe more than 500 miles from the sea.⁴

3. Incompatible Inseparables

The barbarian inheritance, from the remote Bronze Age invasions of the second millennium B.C. and from the more immediate Germanic and steppe invasions of the first millennium A.D., made European society more thoroughly war-like than any other civilized society on the globe, excepting the Japanese. Note "Map 7.3 Partition of the Frankish Empire" on page 229.⁵ See "Map 7.4

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Invasions of Southern Europe, Ninth through Tenth Centuries" on page 229 in the seventh edition of Chambers.⁶ Note: the Saracens and Magyars. See "Map 7.5 Invasions of Northern Europe, Eighth through Ninth Centuries" on page 231 in the seventh edition of Chambers. Note: Vikings, Novgorod, Volga River, and Santiago.⁷

The Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian inheritance provided the fundamental intellectual frame for the political elaboration of high medieval and older European civilization. This inheritance was shot through with inseparable incompatibilities: Europeans confronted unresolvable tensions (1) between the supremacy of the territorial state as the "natural" unit of human society and the claim of the church to govern human souls. There were also tensions (2) between faith and reason, value and fact, morality and science, each claiming to be the path to truth, and (3) between naturalism and symbolism or empiricism and aesthetics and (4) between violence and law, and (5) between the vernacular, or language as spoken by the people, and Latin, or language as spoken by the intellectual specialist. These inseparable contrarities were built into the very foundation of European society and have been neither escaped nor permanently resolved by anyone accepting Western civilization. Identifying truth with God and God with truth has legitimated the insights resulting from trying to resolve the inseparable contrarities. These insights, in turn, have given the West her predominance in the current scheme.

C. Medieval Manorialism and Feudalism

During the Middle Ages, two basic European systems took hold. Manorialism was the economic and social system by which Europe fed herself. Feudalism was the political and social system by which Europe protected herself.

D. Conclusion

In this lesson the student has seen that what appears to make Western civilization so great was her constant dissatisfaction with herself and her continual striving to adjust herself to various aspects of cultural lag. One translation of Romans 6:19 makes the point. "Just as you used to put your members slavishly at the disposal of impurity and iniquity, which led to anarchy, so now put them slavishly at the disposal of uprightness, which leads to holiness."⁸ In the West uprightness represents an alignment of truth and politics. Lack of that alignment results in chaos. In other words, chaos can result from new truths disturbing the status quo. In the West, such truths are not to be denied, but rather to be embraced. With such an understanding, the student is more able to evaluate how progress can occur in an apparently disorderly way.

Supplement

E. Uniqueness

Incompatible Inseparables (continued)

Quite possibly, Western civilization incorporated into its structure a wider variety of incompatible elements than did any other civilization of the world. The prolonged and restless growth of the West, repeatedly rejecting its own potentially "classical" formulations, may have been related to the contrarities built so deeply into its structure. Coming late to the scene and inheriting such incompatibles, the high civilization of the Far West has not yet come to rest but has renewed itself

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many times over. No other civilized society can make such a claim that it has exerted such drastic influence all around the world as has the West. In this incorporation of such a variety of incompatible elements, far more than in any particular intellectual, institutional, or technological expression, lies the real uniqueness of Western civilization. At least that is how the professor saw things in the 1992 revision. In the 1999 revision the professor is taking the stance that there is a particular intellectual and institutional expression wherein lies the real uniqueness of Western civilization. That expression lies in the determination that the West assumes that truth will determine politics always at all times and under all circumstances, despite the fact that politics all too often determines what is accepted as true.

It was only with the May 30, 1992 revision that Dr. Jirran was able to telescope the incompatible inseparables into the value-laded thesis that Western civilization is designed to let truth determine politics, rather than politics, truth. The West has gained pre-eminence by deliberately placing truth before politics. To the knowledge of Dr. Jirran, no other civilization and no other professor either recognizes the dichotomy or resolves the dichotomy in favor of truth.

In the 1999 revision the professor intends to develop further the thesis that the incompatible inseparables are resolved politically as a matter of expediency. As evidence and understanding of truth shifts, so does Western politics. In the 1992 revision the professor was not as convinced that the resolution of the tension between truth and politics applied to the church as well as to the state. This is not a matter of the Church having the truth and the state the politics; both have both. Because the Church can rely on the state to provide order, the Church can have less of a concern with politics and more of a concern with truth. Because the state can rely on the Church to provide truth, the state, in the West, can have less of a concern with truth and more of a concern with politics.

In the United States this is interesting because the state invests far more resources into truth, by way of education, than does the Church. The whole notion of academic freedom and tenure are about protecting professors from politics. Academic freedom and tenure do not mean that professors cannot be relieved of their positions, but only that in order to relieve professors of their positions due process must be exercised. In other words, professors enjoy some protection from retaliation because what they teach may not be acceptable to the status quo, whatever that status quo may be.

F. Medieval Manorialism and Feudalism (Continued)

On page 240 of the seventh edition, Chambers comments that "the manor . . . was a fundamental unit of economic, political, and social organization."⁹ While Chambers is correct in so far as he goes, this lecture takes a broader, more comparative view. Chambers is considering manorialism in and of itself. The lecture considers manorialism in its relationship to feudalism. Politically, Europe was a vast collection of fiefs--the basic political cells of society--each held by a vassal from his lord. Economically, Europe was a mosaic of agricultural units called manors, each one of which was held as a fief or part of a fief. Chambers is correct to observe that manors were not characteristic of all of Europe.¹⁰ That type of government in which political power is exercised locally by private individuals, rather than by agents of a centralized state, is feudal.

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The economic manorial system supported the political feudal system. The position of the knight at the top of the economic system, as lord of the manor, gave him the means to sustain and equip himself to play his part in the feudal, political, and military system. Europe had become so closed down that it was maintained only at the level of the lowest common denominator.

Unlike the self-contained economies of colonial America, Europe always had a market economy. The forces of supply and demand, for example, made Charlemagne employ families of fishers. For example Charlemagne's son was able to give thirty-two families on the Weser River to an abbey in 832.¹¹ The Weser River is located on the inside front cover of Chambers between the Elbe and Rhine Rivers.

A shift is occurring in the way historians approach their work in general and in the way they approach the middle ages in particular. The professor likes to explain things in the light of Black History. To figure out what happened in United States Black History, historians have learned not to take texts at face value. In other words, documents are regarded as texts to be deconstructed from the environment in which they were produced, rather than uncontested sources of truth.¹²

Some historians regard such relativizing as destroying the very foundations of knowledge, especially historical knowledge. The professor regards such relativizing as essential for understanding those for whom history was never written in the first place. Two more points need to be made. First, this shift in historiography has been taking place from the 1970s on. Second, this shift has caused a refocusing of attention from the normal to the contested.¹³ That shift, in part, is represented by this comment on Weser River fishermen.

Slavery is important for understanding the relationship of the West to the rest of the world. Slavery as experienced in the U. S., whereby families were broken up with impunity, was the worst known. By tracing the development of language, one can infer the development of society as a whole. "Serfdom" is a compromise term, which "servitude" does not save. Servitude was owed by various social classes. The point is the serf, villein, peasant, and slave, all as service, reflected a variety of subordinations used by the West to increase her strength. The served and the server both participated.¹⁴ On page 257 in the seventh edition, Chambers notes that William the Conqueror changed all peasants to serfs, the while slaves remained slaves.

Old English had nearly 150 terms concerning the slave trade, servile labor, and the institutional aspects of slavery. The scholar is reminded of the fact that Eskimos have sixty words for snow. The point is that that for which there are many words is important to society.¹⁵

How and why slavery disappeared on the continent is hotly debated. There is no doubt that a large portion of English were slaves in Anglo-Saxon England, between the time of Alfred the Great and the Domesday Book, 872-1125. At the time of the Domesday Book between ten and thirty percent were still enslaved. In the last decades of the Anglo-Saxon era the difference between slavery and serfdom became blurred. By 1130 slavery ceased to exist in England, however that happened.¹⁶

Slavery persisted longer in England than elsewhere in the West. The key was land. Once slaves had land, they were no longer slaves. At least the end of slavery was in sight with land ownership. The Norman Conquest accelerated a process rather than provided a dramatic change.¹⁷

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How does the work-ethic fit into this? The peon serves to survive; the noble to be free. All, however, serve.

G. The Horse

As farming became more efficient, the horse became more important. While oxen did not work as well as horses, neither did they eat as much. The picture, therefore, on page 220 of the fifth edition, depicts oxen. Scholars used to think that the Romans lacked a horse collar which would not choke the horse. Today we know that that was not true.¹⁸ The professor observes that the documentation for the immediately prior footnote is 1991 and that the fifth edition was published in 1991, the sixth in 1995, and the seventh in 1999. The professor does not know what, if any, relationship exists between the footnote and the change in editions.

H. Question

Dr. Jirran likes to offer the following exercise: Important geographic advantage which technical developments of the early Middle Ages brought into play for the first time in Western Europe: (a) Polar climate; (b) Tropical climate; (c) Barren soil; (d) Navigable rivers; (e) Oil resources. The correct response is (d) Navigable rivers. The point is that Africa does not have such rivers and that other areas of the globe lack such rivers in such abundance.

Although the readings lead in the opposite direction, barren soil had been put to use before the Middle Ages.

I. Organization

The New Cambridge Medieval History (CMH), Volume II: C. 700—c.900 follows an order similar to the professor's, beginning with Political Developments. The material is presented as exceedingly diverse, a diversity the professor recognizes as arising basically from various Christian peoples attempting to align truth with politics. One way to understand the diversity is to begin with France and work out. This section of the course ends with Topic Twenty-eight, Medieval France, to do just that.¹⁹

The *CMH* continues with Government and Institutions. The professor is using the same topics as headings in Topic 29, Review. The *CMH* does not recognize a relationship between truth and politics. The reviewer, Richard E. Sullivan, states the perception well, referring to “. . . the create and diverse ways in which educational, intellectual, religious, and artistic traditions were adapted to fit a new historical situation, a cultural feat which played a major role in determining the intellectual and artistic future of Europe.”²⁰ Sullivan concludes by referring to the *CMH* as “. . . the successful effort to illuminate and thus eliminate the last Dark Age.”²¹

J. Conclusion

The incompatible inseparables cause disruption first in perceptions of truth, then in realities of politics. The perceptions and the realities are what this second section of the course, Politicization, is about. Medieval politics bring a new order out of the chaos left by the ancient world. As the medieval order is established, the leisure resulting therefrom permits a further conceptualization of what might come, a prelude to modern times.

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Comments on the Seventh Edition of Chambers, pages 0168-0178

In the opinion of the professor, Chambers is the most scholarly textbook on the market. Chambers well represents mainstream thinking in the history profession. The professor, however, disagrees in many significant ways with mainstream thinking. These disagreements are set forth in the following comments.

Page Column
Paragraph
Line

0169 3rd and 2nd last “. . . fifth through the eighth centuries . . . the horse collar. . .”

From the 1991 fifth to the 1999 seventh edition, Chambers has changed. In the fifth edition page 220, column 2, last four lines, Chambers has, “Northern Europeans did not develop a collar and harness that made efficient use of the horse as a draft animal until the ninth century.” In the 1995 sixth edition Chambers has the same sentence on page 159, column 2, paragraph 2, lines 10-12. In the seventh edition on page 186 column 2, paragraph 2 Chambers clarifies what happened.

0172 1 1 4 “. . . the Rhine River . . . “

“Map 6.1 Invasions, Fourth through Sixth Centuries” on page 172 does not identify the Rhine River. From the dotted green line and the 406 date appearing on the map, one might wonder whether the Meuse River was the Rhine. The Rhine River does appear but is not labeled. The Rhine River was the river crossed before crossing the Meuse.

0172 1 1 5 “. . . Gaul . . . “

“Map 6.1 Invasions, Fourth through Sixth Centuries” on page 172 does not identify Gaul. See “Map 5.3 The Eastern and Western Empires in 395” for the Diocese of Gaul.

0172 2 2 3rd last “. . . Rhone and Saone rivers . . .”

These rivers do not appear on “Map 6.1 Invasions, Fourth through Sixth Centuries” on page 172. They may be found on the inside front cover “Physiography of Europe” map in southern France.

0173 1 3 10th last “. . . Salian . . . Franks . . .”

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These Franks have later importance in regal politics as found on page 373 and the note on page 829.

0173 2 2 2nd last “. . . Provence. . .”

Provence is also mentioned and developed in the seventh edition on page 354 column 1, paragraph 3, line 4 as located in southern France.

0173 2 3 1 “. . . military force . . .”

Military force is a form of politics, politics determining truth. The professor suggests that Clovis was no better for the Church than Constantine in the struggle to insist that truth determine politics, rather than the other way around.

0176 1 2 9, ff. “. . . the Germans also determined truth . . . simply fight. . .”

This looks like politics determining truth to the professor.

0176 2 4 4 “. . . Thor. . .”

The professor has already expressed concern about the treatment of Germans on page 20 and 42.

0175 1 1 3 “. . . Tacitus. . .”

The professor is uncomfortable that Chambers does not comment on biases Tacitus may have. The professor thinks that Tacitus may have an anti-Germanic bias which continues to influence historiography.

Endnotes

¹William H. McNeil, The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

²See "Map 6.3, Frankish Empire under Charlemagne," on page 238 in the fifth edition of Chambers; "Map 6.2 Frankish Empire under Charlemagne," on page 170 in the sixth edition of Chambers. This map is omitted from the seventh edition. "Map 6.1 Invasions, Fourth through Sixth Centuries," is on page 172 in the seventh edition of Chambers

³ See the plow illustrated on page 220 in the sixth edition; 186 in the seventh.

⁴Chambers seemed to be getting squeamish beginning with the fourth edition. The third edition labeled the map "Barbarian Invasions . . ." The term barbarian does have a proper meaning and does apply to this map. The larger problem lies in what scholarship has done to German history. Taking the meaning out of the word "barbarian" is not the answer. The diligent student may wish to consult Karl F. Morrison, review of Walter Goffart, Rome's Fall and After in The Catholic Historical Review, Vol. 76, No. 4 (September 1990), pages 820-822 as cited in footnote 4 in Topic 12 Roman Withering.

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⁵ "Map 6.4 Partition of the Frankish Empire" on page 241 of the sixth edition is "Map 7.3 on page 229 of the seventh edition of Chambers.

⁶ "Map 6.5 Invasions 8th-10th Centuries" on page 243 of the sixth edition is omitted from the seventh. Note: Vikings, Novgorod, Volga River, Santiago, Monte Cassino and the Saracens and Magyars.

⁷ Monte Cassino, appearing on page 213 in the sixth edition "Map 6.5 Invasions 4th—6th Centuries" does not appear on "Map 7.5 Invasions of Northern Europe, Eighth through Ninth Centuries" on page 231 in the seventh edition of Chambers "

⁸ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S. J., *The Anchor Bible: Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), page 444.

⁹ On page 226 of the fifth edition Chambers comments that "the manor should be thought of as a fundamental unit of economic, political, and social organization." In the sixth edition on page 160, Chambers simply states that "the manor . . . was, therefore, a fundamental unit of economic, political, and social organization." In the seventh edition on page 240 Chambers uses the same sentence which in the sixth edition ended a paragraph, to begin a paragraph.

¹⁰ Seventh edition of Chambers, page 240, column 1, last paragraph.

¹¹ Richard C. Hoffman, "Economic Development and Aquatic Ecosystems in Medieval Europe," in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 3 (June 1996), page 654.

¹² Paul Freeman and Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "Medievalisms Old and New: The Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 3 (June 1998), page 697.

¹³ Paul Freeman and Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "Medievalisms Old and New: The Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 3 (June 1998), page 697.

¹⁴ See Theodore Evergates, review of William Chester Jordan, From Servitude to Freedom: Manumission in the Senonias in the Thirteenth Century in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 92, No. 1 (February 1987), pp. 115-6. For more on indentured servitude see Paul A. Gilje, review of Sharon V. Salinger, "To Serve Well and Faithfully": Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800 in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 95, No. 5 (December 1990), page 1622.

¹⁵ Paul Freeman, review of David A. E. Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Mediaeval England: From the Reign of Alfred until the Twelfth Century* in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 2 (April 1997), page 435.

¹⁶ Paul Freeman, review of David A. E. Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Mediaeval England: From the Reign of Alfred until the Twelfth Century* in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 2 (April 1997), page 436.

¹⁷ Paul Freeman, review of David A. E. Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Mediaeval England: From the Reign of Alfred until the Twelfth Century* in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 2 (April 1997), page 435.

¹⁸ Letters to the editor from R. P. Bird and A. Trevor Hodge, *Scientific American*, Volume 264, No. 6 (June 1991), page 11. Hodge refers to the basic scholarship as J. Spruytte in Etudes Experimentales sur l'Attelage (Paris, Crepin-Leblond, 1977).

¹⁹ Richard E. Sullivan, review of *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume II: C.700—c.900, edited by Rosamond McKitterick in *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (January ?? 1994), pages 302-305.

²⁰ Richard E. Sullivan, review of *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume II: C.700—c.900, edited by Rosamond McKitterick in *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (January ?? 1994), pages 304.

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²¹ Richard E. Sullivan, review of *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume II: C.700—c.900, edited by Rosamond McKitterick in *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (January ?? 1994), pages 305.