



# **Museum 2000**

**Confirmation or Challenge?**



## MODERNITY'S PRIEST, CULTURAL APOLOGIST OR FRIEND? Reflections on Being a Servant of the Civitas in the Age of Pluralism and Amnesia

*"Creation's Mystery"*

*There is in all things an invisible fecundity,  
a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden  
wholeness; an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a  
silence that is a fount of action and joy.*

*This rises up in wordless gentleness and flows out to  
me from the unseen roots of all created being,  
beckoning me tenderly, saluting me with indescrib-  
able humility.*

*Thomas Merton on the Hagia Sophia*

We have an opportunity to move from a position which has claimed the public space of our museums as neutral territory or territory solely for the expression of a dominant cultural view, to one in which the remarkable multi-voiced character of modern pluralistic society is present. This requires new working relationships forged in the demands of friendship and hospitality, a depth and breadth of scholarship of a new order, and a much more textured regard for the nature of interpretive work in public institutions. On the basis of my own work in many fields of meaning, I am inclined to share the view my mentor, Mircea Eliade, expressed so often during his years of teaching at the University of Chicago. We are on the verge of a new humanism<sup>1</sup> based, perhaps for the first time, on a regard for the specific gifts of the religious life present as a form of consciousness and as specific worlds of meaning animating the life of the many human communities that we are called to serve. We contribute to this new humanism both by taking the sense of ultimate reality at the heart of culture seriously and by

sounding a cautionary note when the ultimate is turned by literalists, by either of the co-dependent twins – religious fundamentalists or secular fundamentalists – into absolutism of one form or another.<sup>2</sup> Are we modernity's priest, cultural apologist or friend? Where do we stand? Are we within the temple or standing in the *profanum*, the outer court of the temple? Where are the temple and the *profanum* in our brave but frightened new city?

I come to these questions as the child of immigrants in Alberta, a province of Canada, where approximately 4.6% of the population considered itself Aboriginal (North American Indian, Métis, and Inuit) in the 1996 census, and where most of our population of 2,669,195 people (1996 census) have never tended the graves of either their parents or grandparents. I come from a part of Canada where the memory of this place is thin indeed and where the thick layers of memory are bound to other places and other times. It is a place of "new times" and often of "separate worlds" with little or no place, or perhaps it is more precise to say a fledgling place, within the context of Canada's civil culture.

When I began my work in 1972 as the first curator in Alberta attending to the cultural memory, living tradition, historical experience, and sense of place of what is now close to 100 distinct cultural communities, museums were in their infancy and there were no collections reflecting any of these communities. Collections associated with the Native people existed, but they were acquired largely by museum workers whom I understand as modernity's priests, for whom the only thing that is sacred is the new. It



was precisely this positivist frame of mind, reducing people to populations, that led several generations of anthropologists to a preoccupation with the exotic for the exotic, precisely when it was archaic, provided new opportunities for modern society.<sup>3</sup> In our museum they had been joined by historians who attended, largely in a passive way, to the dominant world of commerce, agriculture, and industry that developed throughout the twentieth century in Alberta and their work shows little or no regard for the meaning of those artefacts within the life of the community and no ear for the human story swirling around them. I recall that during the first few years of my work I was asked only one question about the peculiar work I seemed to be engaged in, work with peculiar peoples, immigrants and religious folk. How long would it take to acquire representative collections? The little interest shown in work with cultural and religious communities seemed to be grounded in what I quietly came to call the "soviet cultural policy of Alberta." I used this phrase because the question implied the acquisition of representative artefacts colonized by the single story of immigration and a sense of the "other", a folkloric vision at best. Artefacts were understood as the distinctive feature of a museum's work. A concern for cultural memory and living tradition was poorly understood and the result was to strip the subject from the object and, thus, to colonize the memory and tradition of cultures in the service of our new culture of amnesia. This was the ethos of Alberta until very recently, so it is not surprising that it was also the ethos of our major cultural agencies.

I was also one of the "other," the son of immigrants from Norway, and had a religious formation rooted in values that transcend those of status, class, and current notions of success. Often in those early days of my work I thought of Joseph in Egypt, informed by my favourite biblical story and the magnificent novel of Thomas Mann, *Joseph and His Brothers*<sup>4</sup>. Here was a myth for modern man, a story of truth beyond incident, showing how one might be sold into the "land of the dead" as Jacob had so often called Egypt when he talked to his sons, of how a dreamer and interpreter of dreams moves from prison to prison, until through a curious failure of nerve within the court's anointed priesthood and advisors, Joseph finds himself before the Pharaoh. It was a moment of crisis, of new times, and Joseph was a foreigner living, as our discussions call us to consider, in a separate world from "the deep well of the past" in which he had been formed. He had come to the public square of the culture of his

imprisonment. Joseph, the "right wrong one" as Thomas Mann calls him, since he was not the first born to his father's first love, "the right one," Rachel and had her magnificent eyes. Joseph stood before the Pharaoh and was asked to interpret Pharaoh's dream. Perhaps you know the story and how this ironic trickster understood the deep but unconscious desire of the Pharaoh, made it known to him in a way he could digest, and in so doing made it possible to harvest during the seven years of plenty and feed the people during the seven years of famine. With an ironic vision more suitable to the modern world he was a civil servant helping to save the *civitas* and provide the source of survival and new life for his own people who came as strangers, in desperation, into the midst of the "land of the dead." Joseph became the manager of general stores in Egypt, and is the only one of the great Patriarchal generation to be called a *Tzaddik*.<sup>5</sup> He drew deeply on the sources of meaning bequeathed him by his mother and father, and on that ground and with his ironic vision was able to interpret Pharaoh's dream and find a way in a strange land to feed citizen and stranger alike. Joseph speaks to me of our vocation in museums and its pathways in a pluralist society, in an age of amnesia.

When I came to the Provincial Museum of Alberta there were no collections or documentation on the various cultural communities that had built Alberta throughout the twentieth century and I was free to engage in field research pretty much anywhere. In each community I studied I was interested in understanding how they understood themselves in the past and present, in the meaning and play of meanings that shaped the identity of those I was coming to know. I wanted to understand the ground upon which they stood. As we worked together around my understanding they grew from neighbour to friend. The integrity of culture, the particular worlds of meaning nurtured by the cultural memory and living tradition of each community, and the texture of their historical experience has been my field of exploration. Through this work I have witnessed their struggle with a sense of place in our part of Canada.

My method, "how we do what we do" as Robert Coles<sup>6</sup> has called it, has been conversation in the midst of a living tradition. At table and altar, in the workplace and during festivals, at marriages and burials, I have sought to glimpse the play of meaning, the way "what is handed on" (as the word "tradition" denotes) is a language of meaning for the gifts and



the struggles of life.<sup>7</sup> The documentation of the living tradition, ritual, festival, and initiation, is a part of the conversation since my presence there gives us a common reference point and a shared, if not identical, experience. I have been taken by the hand and led into the world of tradition, cultural memory, and historical experience. Often we explored religious discipline and the ritual that we had experienced just hours before during the feast day. Our conversation moved into their world of memory and experience of the ritual in their homeland or as it had been discussed by their elders. Along with this exploration of the shape of ritual and discipline I sought the deep conversation on the meaning of the ritual, its echo and resonance, in their life experience. In each community I have sought out those men and women who are the bearers of local knowledge, who are formed by the living tradition.<sup>8</sup> I have avoided the cultural or ethnic politicians and gatekeepers because I learned early on that they had other agendas and saw me as useful to the extent that I might become an advocate for their agenda.<sup>9</sup> It is not that I eschew being an advocate. I have done such direct work and continue to do so, but the more important task does not lie there in our present context, but rather in the deeper layers of meaning our culture of amnesia has systematically ignored or denied.

**“The work that I consider important cannot be done solely out of a professional commitment with a set of technical skills. It requires a vocation and a moral standard that, at least in Canada, has not been part of the discussion around the formation of museum workers. I chose the word “formation” deliberately”**

The result of this work is a body of artefacts, recorded conversations, and historical and ethnographic photographs, all sources of knowledge on living communities in what is essentially a pluralist society. Along with extensive field notes my documentation seeks to bind story, reflection, and idea to the artefacts and photographs. Instead of stripping memory

from artefact and photograph I have given my attention to the meaning they have for the person, so that the documentation and the artefact or photograph are a cultural document and sit together with the recording of our deep conversation. Together we have explored the landscape of meaning central to their living community.

For some time now I have recommended to our funding agencies that they stop funding collections management, acquisition projects and communications projects that are the equivalent of the one night stands. When the proposed work is shaped to engage the play of meaning within the cultural community, when it engages the tradition in its own terms, and when the experience and understanding of the particular women and men involved is central to the work, then, and only then, is it worthy of support. Anything short of that simply reflects the latest stage in colonization.

The work that I consider important cannot be done solely out of a professional commitment with a set of technical skills. It requires a vocation and a moral standard that, at least in Canada, has not been part of the discussion around the formation of museum workers. I chose the word “formation” deliberately, for it has become apparent to me that in our context, one of the reasons museums have done so little serious work in our cultural communities is that museum education elevates a type of professional ideology that inhibits the students’ ability to engage the landscape of meaning. It is for this reason that I want to focus my remarks on the art of conversation.

#### THE ART OF DIALOGUE AND THE GHOSTS OF SEMBLANCE

Central to my work in cultural communities is conversation. There is something mildly disturbing about saying this, as if conversation were somehow exceptional, perhaps even a social form bound by the past with little real place in our world today. In work I have done with museum professionals in Canada over the last decade I have come to see that indeed this is the case and largely because our teaching, including many of the current theories and methods for anthropological work, has polluted students’ capacity for dialogue and friendship. For example, in North America we were infected in the mid twentieth century with a method of doing oral history, a method hatched at Columbia University, that refo-



cused the relationship of field researcher and field subject in two ways. First, researchers were not to be part of the conversation but neutral listeners and questioners. Second, oral testimony, like documents, was a way of getting at the facts, but, as all judges know, eyewitness accounts are the least reliable form of factual evidence. Conversation, on the other hand, is the only way of understanding the meaning of an event for the person with whom one is talking. Oral history pretended to do what documents do, and thus destroyed the purpose of conversation. These notions are deep within our academic culture and are finally being challenged, although not often, it seems to me, in ways that lead to fruitful encounter. I recall an incident many years ago when I returned home from a week of field research in a conservative Mennonite community in Duchess, Alberta. This community is engaged in a renaissance of spiritual discipline drawing on the New Testament and the teachings of the first generation of their tradition at the time of the Reformation. Our marathon conversations moved easily from deep dimensions of personal story and the existential meaning of spiritual discipline, their stance toward neighbour and the state, including a crisis they were facing with founding a school outside the definition of Alberta law.<sup>10</sup> Since I was seeking to understand how they understood their spiritual life and the world in which they live, each conversation was an unfolding for each of us. I arrived home from this journey early in the evening and went straight to a party in my neighbourhood attended largely by artists, scholars, and journalists, many known to me at least to some extent. Some four hours later, walking home under the northern lights that grace our sky during deep winter, I thought of how serious and open the conversations at Duchess had been, how revealing of my thought and theirs, and how much had come from the encounter itself. We had moments of being together. At the party that evening, I was largely among friends and colleagues yet, try as I might, in four hours I had not managed to touch on anything of significance. It was as if my friends and colleagues were ghosts talking to ghosts, were the image of oneself speaking to one's image of the other, and this among friends, from a similar social class living in the same place.

Martin Buber, the eminent philosopher of dialogue and what he calls the "interhuman," that which is "between man and man"<sup>11</sup> as the title of one of his books puts it, distinguished between two different types of human existence: "The one proceeds from

what one really is, the other from what one wishes to seem."<sup>12</sup> Let me linger on this a moment since I think it is central to deep and serious work within the human community, and most certainly to work within communities, like many of those I have come to know in Canada, whose religious and cultural life, despite immigration, grounds them in being and provides them with a language to diagnose the infection of wishing to seem to be something other than what one is. Buber gives us a simple but poignant illustration of the problem. He asks us to imagine two people, Peter and Paul, and to consider the list of different configurations that are involved: "First, there is Peter as he wishes to appear to Paul, and Paul as he wishes to appear to Peter. Then there is Peter as he really appears to Paul, Paul's image of Peter, which in general does not in the least coincide with what Peter wishes Paul to see; and similarly there is the reverse situation. Further, there is Peter as he appears to himself, and Paul as he appears to himself. Lastly, there are the bodily Peter and the bodily Paul," or as I would prefer to call them, the incarnate Peter and the incarnate Paul. "Two living beings and six ghostly appearances, which mingle in many ways in the conversation between the two." Then Buber asks the question I wish to ask and think through with you, because it is essential for the themes we are considering and for what we intend to do when we work with cultural communities in the age of pluralism: "Where is there room for any genuine inter-human life?"<sup>13</sup>

In the title and opening comments of this essay I suggested three ways of understanding our work: priest, advocate, friend. When we as servants of the *civitas* adopt the stance of modernity's priest or advocate we play with ghosts, with images, and with images of images, thus failing to meet face to face, in the beautiful phrase of the Psalmist, the reality of human beings we say are the subject of our concern and our work. Friendship is another matter, has a different foundation, a different *telos*. It begins in the partnership of encounter, in making present that which is personal and gives us pathways to an understanding of the cultural memory, living tradition, historical experience, and sense of place of those we are seeking to know.

The great Russian novelist Chekhov in *The Cherry Orchard* shows us a family in which the only use made of being together is to talk past one another. The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, exemplifying, I think, the central condition identified by



Julia Kristeva in her brilliant book *Strangers to Ourselves*,<sup>14</sup> has raised this condition to the level of a principle of existence, arguing that the walls between partners in conversation are simply impenetrable. The inner existence of the other is his own business, Sartre says, and there is no way heart may speak unto heart. Many post-modern thinkers<sup>15</sup> have run with Sartre's fatalism and built a theoretical fortress around the notion that all perspectives, being equal, are equally unavailable to the other. Instead of recognizing other perspectives leading to humility and openness, the fortress of relativism they have erected justifies the notion that conversation is futile. I oppose this position on the grounds that boundaries are also connections, ways cultures have of leading us to gates of entry and rivers that parallel our worlds and occasionally run through them.

How do we enter into conversation, into dialogue? I think we know more about this than we have been willing to acknowledge, so let me place it on the table for consideration. Martin Buber says that "the (...) chief presupposition for the rise of genuine dialogue is that each should regard his partner as the very one he [or she] is". I become aware of him, aware that he is different, essentially different from myself, in the definite, unique way which is peculiar to him, and I accept who I thus see, so that in full earnestness I can direct what I say to him as the person he is. Perhaps from time to time I must offer strict opposition to his view about the subject of our conversation. But I accept this person, the personal bearer of a conviction, in his definite being out of which his conviction has grown – even though I must try to show, bit by bit, the wrongness of this very conviction. I affirm the person I struggle with: I struggle with him as his partner, I confirm him as creature and as creation, I confirm him who is opposed to me as him who is over against me. It is true that it now depends on the other whether genuine dialogue, mutuality in speech arises between us. But if I thus give to the other who confronts me his legitimate standing as a man with whom I am ready to enter into dialogue, then I may trust him and suppose him to be also ready to deal with me as his partner.<sup>16</sup>

To be aware of a person is to seek to experience that person as a whole, without reduction or abstraction. One must seek to experience the "gift of the spirit" which shapes the personal life, "the dynamic center which stamps his every utterance, action, and attitude with the recognizable sign of uniqueness." This is impossible if the person remains a sep-

arated object of my contemplation or observation, if he or she is an informant for whatever good purpose because, "wholeness and its center do not let themselves be known to contemplation or observation. It is only possible when I step into an elemental relation with the other, that is, when he [or she] becomes present to me."<sup>17</sup>

If we want to do today's work and prepare tomorrow's with clear sight we must develop in ourselves and within the next generation the gift of "imagining the real" in the other. This gift is not the observation of the other, nor even the participatory observation of our best anthropologists,<sup>18</sup> but rather "a bold swinging – demanding the most intensive stirring of one's being – into the life of the other. This is the nature of all genuine imagining, only that here the realm of my action is not the all-possible, but the particular real person who confronts me, whom I can attempt to make present to myself ... in his wholeness, unity, and uniqueness and with his dynamic center which realizes all these things ever anew."<sup>19</sup>

## GENUINE DIALOGUE AND THE LANDSCAPE OF PRESENCE

What are the marks of genuine dialogue? In genuine dialogue the turning of each partner towards the other is first and foremost a turning to the being of another. If I move towards the other to understand her as the object of racism, as immigrant or refugee, as a representative of Iranian secularism, Japanese Buddhism, Romanian Orthodoxy, or as a Muslim woman haunted by fundamentalism and patriarchy, I have not turned towards a human being, rather I will have pre-determined all she has to say and colonized her in my mind and heart before we even begin to know each other. The other must be welcomed as a whole and a unique person, as the person she or he is. The moment of our coming together is a moment of hospitality, a welcoming, and thus, a moment in which the being of our partner is confirmed. All true turning to another person bears within it this confirmation and acceptance, what the ancients called "blessing." Curiously, and somewhat against the grain of modern thinking, this true turning does not mean approval. I may disagree with my partner on many matters, even those of the gravest nature, but in genuine dialogue I have affirmed her as a person, and it really does happen in both directions. In my work in communities that have experienced racism, communities of immigrants and refugees, I have been received as a part-



net, confirmed in my being, and thus blessed with friendship in and through what we have between us. The affirmation is mutual and occurs spontaneously when we do not prejudice our turning towards each other with presumptions.

**"If we want to do today's work and prepare tomorrow's with clear sight we must develop in ourselves and within the next generation the gift of "imagining the real" in the other."**

Secondly, if genuine dialogue is to arise, each person must bring himself or herself into it.<sup>20</sup> The method of oral history I mentioned earlier trained the field researcher to be a neutral interviewer and to see the field subject as informant. As a result, nothing is allowed to arise between these two human beings except what was imposed by the nature of the subject of their inquiry from the start. In the dialogue of which I speak, each partner, on each occasion, must make "the contribution of his [her] spirit without reduction and without shifting his ground."<sup>21</sup> In what Martin Buber calls "the great faithfulness" of genuine dialogue we must be prepared to speak to what is vital to our mind and heart because of our talking together. The conversation itself makes this demand, and if we withdraw, for reasons virtuous or otherwise, we spoil the climate of the conversation, dim its light, suggest it is not really a conversation between partners, and the dialogue fades from presence into propaganda.<sup>22</sup> Where the dialogical word, its avenues of exploration and unveiling, is genuine, it must be given its right and nothing withheld. Often we withhold that which calls to be said, telling ourselves it is the humble, considerate, proper thing to do, when actually we are withdrawing to our own high ground. The dialogical word needs to be spoken for it creates a larger commons: "To speak is both nature and work, something that grows and something that is made, and where it appears dialogically, in the climate of great faithfulness, it has to fulfil ever anew the unity of the two."<sup>23</sup> (See p. 262)

I discussed the ghosts of outward appearances, not grounded in what is real and at hand. When we are ruled by the thought of our own effect as speaker, letting that thought govern what we say, we destroy

the climate of dialogue. If I bring attention to my *I*, the dialogue fails, semblance rises in place of presence, and the authenticity of being cannot be seen or experienced for it has been replaced with a mask, the meaning of which has not been present in the conversation. However, when the dialogue is fulfilled in partners who turn towards each other, who express themselves without reserve, free of semblance, "there is brought into being a memorable common faithfulness which is to be found nowhere else. At such times ... the word arises in a substantial way between men [and women] who have been seized in their depths and opened out by the dynamic of an elemental togetherness. The interhuman opens out what otherwise remains unopened."<sup>24</sup>

#### OUR PECULIAR TYPE OF MODERNITY

The shape of modernity in our various societies has its distinctive features in Europe and North America, indeed it has played out in different ways in my own country, Canada, and in our giant neighbour to the south, the United States of America. We come to our brave new world in particular ways, but there are, I think, certain features of our modernity that are rooted in the common experiment of liberal democracies in creating a civil society since the Enlightenment. Perhaps there are more similarities in these central features in Europe and North America than differences. I leave it for you to judge. I take note of them in Canada.

In our educational system since the 1950s we have deliberately and thoroughly exorcised and bracketed much of the cultural memory and tradition of the West, and its attachment to Jerusalem and Athens, that frame the world of meaning and value. The exception is the civil values of individualism, instrumental reason, and the ultimate values of progress and democracy. Unquestionably, we needed to move from the implicit Protestant and Catholic denominational perspectives which framed education prior to the 1950s in Canada. However, the choice we made to expunge the sources of these worlds of meaning from our teaching left individualism, instrumental reason, and progress alone in the civil sphere. The new doctrine of tolerance assumed that ignorance of the sources of Western culture would lead to openness and acceptance of the new cultural communities that increasingly came to make up Canada.<sup>25</sup> We have tried to privatise the cultural dimension of a community and its religious sources,



and replace them with a civil ideology, a rather narrow set of values, but as a result we have reduced public life to a marketplace. We have transformed the many forms of value needed for the proper functioning of any household, including the household of society, to issues solely of global economic expediency. We seem even to have forgotten that "economy" actually means "household" with all its resources and capacity, not merely that of moveable capital.

So we have a naked public square, a creation largely of the political left and right. Both have conspired to render the discussion of meaning and the presence of cultural tradition mute. Both have idealised the individual as if he or she exists separate from community and has value only when freed from traditional frameworks of meaning. Both have idealised progress and expunged tradition. Both have placed the values and meaning of cultural traditions, including those of the dominant culture, in a suspicious light. As a result there have been no sources for a discussion of the complex issues facing us in the millennium. Discussion of family, for example, from both the left and the right is reduced to the frantic cries of single issue politics, to discussion of how we can grant cultural dignity reduced to issues of racism, to discussion of various other aspirations reduced to the corporate voice of self-interest.

A society which has lost its capacity to regard both the individual *and* the community, to appreciate instrumental reason *and* the human imagination as ways of knowing the world, and, to hold the appetite for progress in check with the sustaining values of tradition and tradition's protean ability to cultivate continuity, is destined, it seems to me, to prepare the landscape for various forms of corporate self-interest that verge on fascism. I am struck by how different these ultimate values that have come to dominate our liberal democratic society are from the ultimate values of traditional culture. Whether within the Cree or Blackfoot communities of ancient Western Canada, villages in Syria or those of my ancestors in Norway, the primary concern above all others was to pass on one's story and understanding of life to the next generation. Our culture of modernity is the only one I know of in which a systematic effort has been made *not* to do so, and, it was made out of virtue, the virtue of tolerance.

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Whatever the cultural condition of our civil society, we are working in "new times – separate worlds" as the theme of Museum 2000 suggests. It is a "new time" for our civil societies because of the age of pluralism. Many of the cultural communities under the civil canopies of European and North American countries struggle to move out of the "separate worlds" into which they are put by the circumstances of immigration or because the cultural tradition that animates their life has no place within the public square of our civil societies.<sup>26</sup> As modernity's priests we may work with these communities, seeking to distance them from the sources of their culture or to speak of these sources as artefacts of the past. As advocates we may work with them around social justice issues while continuing to ignore the layers of identity reflected in their cultural memory and living tradition. We are capable of more than either of these suggests. All that is necessary is friendship.

#### SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP AND THE FIELDS OF MEANING

"Living in, loving, and sanctifying our world wasn't granted us by some impersonal theory of being, or by the facts of history, or by natural phenomena, but by the existence of those uncanny centers of otherness – the faces, the faces to look at, to honour, to cherish."<sup>27</sup> Gregory the Great (born in Rome c. 540), said that a friend is the guardian of one's soul, *custos animi*.<sup>28</sup> *Custos animi* suggests the various elements that characterize spiritual friendship, two of which are a concern to us: responsibility for another person's well-being and ultimate salvation ("salvation" is simply the Greek word for "healing") and a knowledge of his or her inner life. Think of the work we do in museums and of the new citizens and strangers within our midst. Most museums have taken up a certain level of responsibility for the well-being of their patrons or local citizens, for



national patrimony or imperial fantasies. To care for the memory of a community is to engage in the healing of its collective soul if not its ultimate salvation. Museums worthy of the name are places of knowledge and, at their best, places where devoted women and men exercise a guardianship that extends into the deep waters of the inner life, the life of meaning. The women, men, and children whose life and self-understanding may be the subject of museum work have to become first and foremost friends with those engaged in this work. Friendship only occurs when one engages the field of meaning of another person, when one opens to it in hospitality and tenderness. Such friendship eschews sentimentality and has nothing to do with nostalgia or utopian dreaming. Rather it seeks the hidden aspiration, the yearning of the soul, even when this aspiration is masked with the ambition and anger that is the fruit of history's terrors. The Psalmist David expressed the cry of the human heart, a cry in young and old alike, born of longing to be known in the depth of one's being. It is a cry not confined to the biblical tradition from which I draw the words but one I have heard in virtually all the communities in which I have worked for almost three decades.

*When my spirit was fainting within me,  
then Thou knewest my paths.  
In this way wherein I have walked they hid for me  
a snare.  
I looked upon my right hand, and beheld,  
and there was none that did know me.  
Flight hath failed me,  
and there was none that watcheth out for my soul.* <sup>29</sup>

Whatever else we are called to do in our work in cultural communities in our age of pluralism, we are called to that guardianship of the soul, *custos animi*, that holds close the well-being of our partners in conversation and seeks to know the inner world of meaning that has shaped their lives and by so doing is coming daily to shape our common world. It is the grandest of vocations because it is so ordinary. It is the rarest of vocations because it asks so little of us: simply to turn towards the being of the other and open our particular and unique being to their particular and unique being. In so doing we will have friendship as the foundation upon which our work as civil servants, and our advocacy, where that too may be needed, may flourish. Our work will flourish because it is based, not on "semblance" but on the dialogue through which together we are made new and the public commons of our societies grow to include all who make our culture their home.

## Notes

1. For a discussion of this idea see "A New Humanism" in *The Quest, History and Meaning in Religion*, Mircea Eliade (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969):1-11.
2. The first nativist movements arose in Western Canada shortly after World War I. They were critical of Government immigration and settlement policy. Although they were immigrants themselves in many cases, usually white and Protestant, they argued that it was time to restrict immigration dramatically. The policy restricting immigration to White Protestant from American and the United Kingdom changed with a new policy in 1962. A similar movement has arisen in Denmark under the leadership of the Lutheran minister Soren Krarup and the Danish Folk Party. Reverend Krarup's argument that "Denmark is sufficient unto itself" accompanies a virulent critique of social justice and human rights movements. Many who are involved in the human rights movements have a virulent critique of the political voices proclaiming "Denmark's sufficiency unto itself." Often such debates are captured by fear on both sides and devolve into the squaring off between what becomes a secular fundamentalism and a religious fundamentalism. They capture the public square in ways that leave little room for the three hundred year struggle to develop a civil society. I have discussed this pattern in "The Secular Sources of Fundamentalism", *First Readings*, 1996.
3. Seeing the other as exotic is the curious way the Romantic heart of Modernism has remained interested in the past and in other cultures. It is not the only source of this interest but is the one that has perhaps been examined the least and thus been most effective in continuing to frame our understanding and discourse in museums. A recent illustrative example is discussed in "Life Among the Anthros", a review by Clifford Geertz of Patrick Tierney's book *Darkness in El Dorado: How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon*. The review is in *The New York Review of Books*, Volume XLVIII, Number 2, February 8, 2001: 18-22.
4. *Joseph and His Brothers*, Thomas Mann, translated from the German by H.T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966). The Biblical account is found in *Genesis* 30 and following.
5. Elie Wiesel says, "Among the ancestors, no other had a right to his surname: Tzaddik. Abraham was obedient, Issac was brave, Jacob was faithful. Only Joseph was just." See, "Joseph, or the Education of a Tzaddik", a chapter in *Messengers of God: Biblical*



- Portraits and Legends* (New York: Random House, 1976):139-173.
6. Robert Coles, *The Call of Service: A Witness to Idealism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993).
  7. With the thinning of cultural communities in our age of amnesia one of the threats to good work is to assume that cultural communities of immigrants and refugees have lost their tradition and are left, like many museum workers, with some dim heritage. This view correctly notes that our particular form of modernity has been devastating to living tradition while leading our intellectuals and museum professionals to reduce tradition to heritage. The great humanist scholar Jaroslav Pelikan has commented that tradition is the living faith of the dead while traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. It behooves museum workers to make this careful distinction so they may work appropriately within communities in which tradition may still be a vital and lively matter. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984) and Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).
  8. Local knowledge is the only sure ground upon which to establish a relationship with a new community and the research, documentation and relationships established through such work are the foundation for communication projects. The practice of entering the life of a new community simply to do an exhibition on some predetermined theme is the cultural equivalent of the "one night stand", and, of course, most communities come to know this very quickly. Ethnic politicians may encourage such premature communications projects for their own purposes. Responsible curators will help the community understand the value of long term deep work and will not pollute the museum's relationship to the community by such opportunism whatever the source of its suggestion. My instincts about this matter were affirmed and my knowledge of how to go about such enduring work deepened when I met Sune Jonsson whose work in northern Sweden is a model, second to none, for the care of one's own. Applying this method to the stranger and the new citizen is a short step. For a discussion of this pattern see my essay, "With Both Eyes Open: Collecting with Fidelity to Culture and Civilization", *Folklife Occasional Papers*, Provincial Museum of Alberta, 1991.
  9. Working with immigrant and minority communities I have been called as an expert witness in refugee hearings and legal trials, and to intervene with government officials on a great variety of matters. These requests are a normal part of a good working relationship with cultural communities.
  10. The court case "Regina verses Elmer Wiebe", February 1978, exonerated Mr. Wiebe and the Mennonite community and led to the rewriting of the *Alberta School Act*. I worked with the *Amicus Curiae*, William Pidruchney, assisting him in shaping the evidence and argument in this case.
  11. Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1965).
  12. *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy: Essays, Letters, and Dialogue*, edited by Judith Buber Agassi (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 76.
  13. *Ibid.*, 77.
  14. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, translated by Leo S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
  15. The philosophical bias that "we can know nothing of the world – either its existence or nonexistence – except our perceptions of it, was the sign of a moral crippling, in that it elevated the depreciation of others and the exaltation of self to the sole means of perception." I join Czeslaw Milosz in this consideration. See his *The Land of Ulro*, translated by Louis Iribarne (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985): page 35 and following.
  16. *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy: Essays, Letters, and Dialogue*, 79-80.
  17. *Ibid.*, 80.
  18. Clifford Geertz has moved anthropological theory onto firmer ground but even here we see the fault-lines I am endeavouring to point out. See T.M. Luhrmann's "The touch of the real", a review of Geertz's new book, *Available Light*, and of two critical studies of his theory and practice in *The Times Literary Supplement*, January 12, 2001, No 5102: 3-4.
  19. *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy: Essays, Letters, and Dialogue*, 81-82.
  20. The standard method of oral history has taught the interviewer to set aside their own perspectives, concerns and ultimately their own being. I see the layers of memory, tradition, place and experience that make up our identity as central to our capacity to approach the other. The love of one's own is the ground upon which we may stand and must stand if we are to open to the other and have their world of meaning and being open to us. The Canadian philosopher George Grant has discussed this notion of the love of one's own as the ground upon which we stand to love the good in *Technology & Empire* (Concord, Ontario: House of Anansi Press, 1969):



- 135-143, and *Technology & Justice* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1986):35-77.
21. *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy: Essays, Letters, and Dialogue*, 86.
  22. See George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).
  23. *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy: Essays, Letters, and Dialogue*, 86.
  24. *Ibid.*, 87.
  25. The Canadian philosopher George Grant among others writes eloquently of the sources of our age of genocide in precisely this type of modernity. Stripping the cultural memory from the life of the community, if the twentieth century is our witness, breeds inhumanity beyond compare. See his works cited above. Also see Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).
  26. Those who attended the Museum 2000 meetings in Stockholm in June 2001 noted how easily we fell to talking about the repatriation of African artefacts in Swedish collections and how skilfully we avoided speaking about women and men who have come from Africa to make their home in Sweden.
  27. Italo Mancini, *Tornino i volti* [Back to Faces] quoted in *Belief or Nonbelief? A Confrontation* by Umberto Eco and Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, translated by Minna Proctor (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2000), 52.
  28. Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship & Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1988), xv. McGuire discusses Gregory the Great's consideration of this theme and how friendship has been understood in the formative centuries of Christian culture. In conversation with him on my way to the Museum 2000 conference I asked how his work as a historian of medieval religious life was linked to his work on behalf of refugees in Denmark. He told me that he initially thought they were separate and as he opened to the refugee work he thought his historical studies would fade. Rather quickly he came to see that they were intimately connected each bringing texture and depth to the other.
  29. Psalm 141.