



Why Cultural Heritage Matters is a co-production of the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML) and Twin Cities Public Television (TPT). This 30-minute program highlights the reasons why preserving the knowledge of the past is important for the understanding of our future. This guide, prepared by HMML, offers suggestions for continuing the conversation after viewing the program.

Discussion Ideas...

On Getting Started:

- ❖ After viewing the program, start the conversation by asking, “What struck you in the conversation between Fred de Sam Lazaro and Fr. Columba Stewart?”

On Listening:

- ❖ At the beginning of the video, Governor Tim Walz shared a quote from Fr. Columba’s 2019 Jefferson Lecture on the Humanities: *“We are at a great risk of losing the capacity to listen and therefore losing our ability to understand. The terrain for rational discourse has shrunk to a narrow strip between camps. In such times as these, we must dig deeply into our respective stores of wisdom and offer whatever we find for the sake of mutual understanding. The only possible basis for reconciliation is the resolve to move forward for the common good.”* Governor Walz ended simply with, *“Wise words.”*
 - ◆ What advice or encouragement do you have for increasing the capacity to listen in ourselves and in our children?
 - ◆ Think about the links between *listening*, *stores of wisdom*, and *mutual understanding*; How does one shape the others? What happens when any one is removed? What evidence have you seen in the current global situation where all three have effectively worked together for the common good?
- ❖ Fr. Columba is a Benedictine monk from Saint John’s Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota. His community, like all other Benedictines around the world, follow the *Rule* (meaning way of life) of *Saint Benedict*. This guide for living a daily life in Christ begins, “Listen carefully...with the ear of your heart.”

- ◆ What qualities or characteristics describe listening carefully? What does it mean to listen with the ear of your heart? Who in your life embodies this quality today? In the world?
- ◆ The general rule today seems to begin, “Listen selectively...” Do you agree? What impact has this had on our ability to define, agree on, or work toward the *common good*?
- ◆ Is there a difference between *listening* and *hearing*?

On Understanding the Past:

“Can we find a way to navigate those choppy waters with our existing political institutions, economic institutions, and our Constitution... or are we going to find that the situation has become such that those institutions can’t work anymore? I think we still have time before it gets that far, but I think this makes it important for us then to look at these lessons of the past, and say, well, what happened in France in the 18th century, what happened in Europe in the 1930s, could that happen here? What did they think might be possible in their countries? The only way to step back from that kind of situation is to gain a historical perspective, find ways to listen to the voices of the other, disagree vehemently, but disagree with ground rules for what the debate will be like and what the process will be for making decisions afterward, because if we lose that, we have lost it all” Fr.

Columba Stewart.

- ❖ The enemies of Jesus were not the Pharisees, it was the rigid beliefs and ideas of the Pharisees that caused the conflict; nothing has changed. The chasms between right and left, conservative and liberal, Christians and Muslims, etc., are conflicts of belief.
 - ◆ What *conflicts of belief* from the past should we study and research to help us understand where we are today? What voices from the past should we listen to today?
 - ◆ Are there any challenges today that our ancestors did not face?
 - ◆ The world has been dealing with inequality since humanity began. What past conflicts of inequality best parallel those we are still dealing with today?
 - ◆ “Hindsight is 20/20.” Is there any ancient wisdom we have ignored that could have altered the challenges we face today?
 - ◆ What are effective ground rules for disagreeing vehemently without vilifying the *other*?
- ❖ There seems to be a growing trend of consumer interest in genealogy and ancestry – demonstrated by the dozens of companies offering consumer DNA testing products (23andme and ancestry.com among them) – and the PBS series *Finding Your Roots*, that is marketed as a quest to “get into the DNA of American culture.”
 - ◆ Do you see this as a trend that bodes well for deepening an interest in cultural heritage and cultural understanding? If so, in what way? Or, is it a fad that will have no lasting mark? Is a written and preserved history akin to the cultural “DNA” of a people?

- ❖ Below is a 17th century *Book of Hours* manuscript from the Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand, Lebanon.



Manuscript eaten by bookworms. *Al-Sawā'iyah* (Horologion or *Book of Hours*), MS. Balamand 26, folios 121v-122r. Arabic, 17th century. 15 x 10 cm. ©2005 The Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand, Lebanon and the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Saint John's University, Collegeville, MN, USA.

- ◆ Even if you cannot read the content, what does just looking at this manuscript tell you about the people who wrote it? What did they value? What did they understand? What were they trying to preserve for the future? What will the things we leave behind say about us? What of our written culture is worth preserving today?
- ◆ Learn more about *what's inside a manuscript* by watching the short video found at the following link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tOaqcrjiLA&feature=emb_title
- ◆ Given we can't all participate in projects in Timbuktu or Ethiopia what can we do to enhance cultural and intellectual appreciation in our realms?

On Fundamentalism:

- ❖ *“The common enemy for all of us, whatever our national identity or whatever our religious affiliation – if we even have one – is that kind of intolerance that can’t bear the idea that there are significant texts, significant voices that are different from their own.”* Fr. Columba Stewart.

There is no more difficult human task than changing one's beliefs. Ideas/thoughts that become beliefs govern one's life and future thoughts and ideas.

- ◆ When your beliefs are challenged, how do you react?
 - ◆ Think of one of our own firmly held convictions or opinions. What would it take to convince you to change your mind?
 - ◆ How do you interact with those who do not believe something you *know* to be true?
 - ◆ What *is* truth? Does intolerance shape *truth*?
 - ◆ Fundamentalism is often associated with holding on to the past. How is holding on to the past different from learning from the past?
 - ◆ How do you prevent yourself from becoming “encamped” in an idea or point of view?
- ❖ The greatest teachers are often the ones who help you overcome your current misconceptions and teach you to see beyond the limits of your beliefs.
 - ◆ Who have been the teachers in your life that have challenged you? Throughout history, who have been society’s greatest teachers?
- ❖ *“In my solitude, I have seen many things clearly that were not true.”* Antonio Machado, Spanish poet, from *Proverbs and Songs*.
 - ◆ Discuss this quote considering our current situation.
- ❖ Isolation - physical, intellectual, or informational - is a breeding ground for fundamentalism.
 - ◆ As our world isolates itself to deal with the pandemic, how can we/you avoid falling into the trap of ideology?

On the Current Situation:

- ❖ *“Sometimes I wonder what’s going to happen when technology as we know it collapses... Is it going to take a shock like that to make people return to that place where I think all of us find sanity and meaning which is our own local community?”* Spoken by Fr. Columba Stewart in November 2019, weeks before the pandemic outbreak.
 - ◆ How has the current situation influenced your understanding of community? What, during this time of isolation and quarantine, is keeping you sane? What change do you hope comes out of all this chaos?

- ❖ What connections do you see between HMML’s global preservation work in cultural heritage and areas of need right here in the USA - and more locally in the Twin Cities (or your community)? In Minnesota (or your state)?

On Trust:

- ❖ “Everybody trusted Walter Cronkite! It did not matter if you were Democratic or Republican, or where you lived. You turned on the news, and there was Walter Cronkite, and if he said it, you believed it. That seems about a million years ago.” Fr. Columba Stewart.
 - ◆ Who are the “Walter Cronkites” of today? Is it possible to have a *national voice of trust* today? Who are the voices you trust and why?

On Hope:

- ❖ Fred de Sam Lazaro brings the conversation to a close by recalling a quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu, “*I am a prisoner of hope.*”
 - ◆ What have you experienced that might make you a prisoner of hope?
 - ◆ What can the collective *wisdom of the ages* tell us about hope today?
 - ◆ Archbishop Tutu’s full quote is, “*I am not an optimist. I am a prisoner of hope.*” Why did he make the distinction between the two? Are optimism and hope different?
 - ◆ What role does faith play in hope? Are faith and hope interdependent?
- ❖ “*Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.*” Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

“*Return to your fortress, O you prisoners of hope.*” (Zachariah 9:12)

- ◆ These quotes imply that to have hope you must have darkness. Is despair integral to hope? You may experience despair without hope, but can you have hope without despair?
- ❖ HMML works to preserve the knowledge of the past for the understanding of the future. What is hopeful about HMML’s work?

By availing ourselves of the opportunity to learn from the wisdom and the errors of ancient civilizations and other cultures, we plant the seeds of hope that centuries from now others will learn from the wonderful insights and egregious errors of today.

Invite others to join you in the conversation and view the program on-line at <https://www.tpt.org/why-cultural-heritage-matters/>

Learn more about HMML at www.hmml.org. Contact HMML at hmml@hmml.org or 320.363.3514