

Afterword
- David Goa

Some ten years or so into my work at the Provincial of Alberta Museum (now the Royal Alberta Museum), having arrived through a beautiful spring morning in the wake of a sun-up refreshing rain, I walked to the main door of the then-fresh Manitoba sandstone building. The words of the American poet, e.e. cummings came to mind: “walking forward into the past, walking backward into the future . . .” I thought, just for a moment, they should be chiseled over the doorway of the museum. Many years later, the second millennial year of the birth of Jesus Christ, I listened as Jaroslav Pelikan spoke of the words carved over the entrance of the great library at Alexandria in his Henry Marshall Tory Lecture at the University of Alberta, “For the healing of the soul.”

I met Andrew Bingham at All Saints of North America Orthodox monastery. He was in his later teens eager to think and talk together and our conversations unfolded; they continue to this day. A year and a half ago, as he was finishing his doctoral dissertation, he suggested we spend some time in conversation and that we think together about “walking forward into the past” and, by implication, how I may have come to think about the “healing of the soul”, the soul of the person, culture, and our fragile civil life. Those days of conversation brought a flood of gratitude, a heightened sense of how the echoes of the past have come to ring a new note (or is it an enlarged note?) in how life has unfolded. Gratitude and grace ... to say nothing of the gravity that lingers in the shadows. Fragility and wonder and just how eternal matters are present in the many and varied particular encounters in the everyday.

Memoirs are by their very nature incomplete, partial, a thinking again, remembering that configures the body of one’s life in ways that pull forward matters long unremembered. I am grateful to my young friend Andrew whose gentle spirit and keen mind opened our easy conversation. The words I first heard in the synagogue — words of thanksgiving for “having come to this day” — echo in my word of thanksgiving for the friendship of a young man and say as much as can be said.

Over the last two months I have listened to these conversations twice following the fine work my son Gregory has done bringing the audio into a clear form. Hearing what was said and what was not said after it lay unnoticed gestating for nine months has brought several matters to mind. Hearing oneself while speaking is one thing. Listening to what one said is quite another. All conversations remake us. All listening makes new yet again. I am particularly struck by how intimate it has been to get to know several of my teachers through their books and their enduring impact on my thinking. In several cases, that of Paul Tillich and Mircea Eliade particularly, my time face to face was minimal, but the impression and the way they embodied the tradition has grown large throughout my life and work.

And regarding the matters not spoken, matters too intimate for public words, there are many and one can only hope word will be there if time arises. The presence of those of whom I have not spoken or only spoken briefly — of the first order SD, DRD, and AEA — are too deep for words.

All that has been takes on new texture and light in those who come as mysteries beyond measure and in whom the future unfolds, the nearest and dearest for us blessed to be parents. So it is for me. Those four loved more than all the world, Kirsten Esengo, Birte Hannah, Simeon Gustav, Samuel Gregory, who before they were born were beyond my knowing and the moment after the world was new reflected by their singular presence, the nearby ones.

As Titu Maiorescu used to say: "And how much more would remain to be said!"