

We now live in a world where the word 'tradition' seems to be an outdated idea. We simply ignore the past, totally ignorant of the future but happily living in the present. The recent demolition of statues in some parts of the world is a clear sign of this phenomenon. It is only when some influential figures pass away do people suddenly realize their absence means a tremendous loss. Yet now ask a teenager about Mother Teresa of Kolkata: he or she is unlikely to know very little of what she has contributed to the world that they should still remember her. In other words, the traditions of influential figures no longer live on.

When tradition lives on long enough, it becomes wisdom. That is why we hardly attribute wisdom to young people. They may be clever and intelligent but not wise. The sage is an elderly person who is the guardian of the living tradition.

There are all kinds of tradition, such as cultural tradition, political tradition, tribal tradition and economic tradition, etc. Not all these traditions turn out to be wisdom because when it becomes dysfunctional, it becomes a destructive force.

The Holy Scriptures tell us there is a divine tradition. It begins with God and passes on to the people of Israel through the patriarch. In the Old Testament, there are five different classes of person whom God used in revealing Himself to Israel: 1. prophets, 2. priests, 3. rulers, 4. lawgivers, and 5. wise men. A person can unite two or more of these functions. Samuel – priest and prophet. Solomon – ruler and wise man. Moses may be said to have had all five functions.

In the course of its passing on, that is, when it became written records, it became divine wisdom also.

However, when it comes to Jesus, the divine tradition and wisdom take on a new dimension. Jesus called Israel's God 'Father'. There were things about his Father that, for some reason, only he seemed to know, and only he could tell. In this sense Matthew 11:25-27 is remarkable.

The Gospel story is about a messianic vocation and what we learn from it is that Jesus seemed to be thinking that he took on this messianic vocation for Israel and for the world but at the same time he also seemed to realize, according to his knowledge of scripture, only Israel's God can do such a thing. And, if we believe at the baptism Jesus was confirmed of this vocation, the possibility of Jesus having a particular intimacy with the one he called 'Father' is not something only later generations added into Christian doctrine.

Most respected religions of the world and cultures have stories about the wisdom of the sage including Buddhism and Confucius teaching. According to Judaism, God gave wisdom to those who feared him, especially to those who devoted themselves to learning the Torah and tried to understand every fine point. Such tradition put ordinary Jews out of reach of wisdom. Once I heard of a well-known quantum physicist remark that there were probably less than 100 people in the world who could truly understand Einstein's Theory of Relativity. In Jesus' time there would have been less than 100 who would be regarded as wise in Judaism.

My father had passed away long time ago but interestingly my daughter and nephew chide me that I often mention their grandfather to them, whom they have sadly never met. I would say to them how my father would have reacted in such and such situation. Or he would have given such and such advice if we had asked him. I suppose the reason why I keep telling them about their grandfather is that, as a Chinese proverb says, when you drink water think of its source. I want them to know that my father had tremendous influence upon me. For better or for worse I became what I am but I want them to know they can see their grandfather's shadow in my thinking and behaviour.

But Jesus made a very bold declaration. To be wise, you need not be a scholar of the Torah. You just need to be a little child. Jesus had come to know his Father the way a son does; not by studying books about him, but by living in his presence, listen for his voice, and learning from him as an apprentice does from a master, by watching and imitating. In carrying out his vocation Jesus discovered the ordinary people – the poor, the sinners, the outcast were discovering

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more of God, simply by following him. They were wiser than the rabbis and scribes.

*All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*

The word Apocalypse in our modern context speaks of something dramatic, sudden and earth-shattering. Hence, some people would use this word to describe the present pandemic. They even point to the Book of Revelation in which the fourth seal of chapter 6 mentions 'plague' as though it refers specifically to our present pandemic. Christians, however, know its original meaning. It means 'unveil' the truth about God. It is hard to see how the COVID-19 unveils the truth of God. I dare not say I know. Yet in Matthew 11:25-27 we have an apocalypse that deserves utter attention. It has been unveiled to us by the man who calls God 'Father' – how to be wise. Truly amazing!

Divine tradition, Divine Wisdom and Apocalypse all converge in the person of Jesus, the Son Man. It is indeed his prerogative to possess them, but he wants to share it with anyone who is willing to follow him to call God, 'Abba, Father.'