

## HEALING THE WORLD'S CULTURAL CRISIS

### 1. The cultural crisis in Europe

It has been repeatedly asserted that Europe is nowadays experiencing a cultural crisis. Such a cultural crisis itself may be defined as the result of a shift from traditional world humanist values towards a new category of values related to the technological revolution (time, efficiency, and so on). Actually, these values are nothing very new: the value of effectiveness in time, for instance, known as *kairos* in classical antiquity, has merely been given a new twist. For some players in particular, new values affecting cultural development are seen as emerging from the shift from an old to a new socialist economic order.

The crisis may also be defined as a shift in the search for *models*. Such models are principally rationalizations of values; are sources of *derived* values. There has been a tendency to identify models, paradigms and theoretical systematic and synthetic forms with concrete instances corresponding more or less to concrete aims in face of actual concrete needs. These models are manifestly suited to the dynamism and mental activity characteristic of modern business. Progress has even been described as equivalent to adventure.

The traditional European model is however being challenged both by a European model, and by models from outside Europe, for example from Japan and America. Geopolitics enters into what had been cultural considerations of a purely Eurocentric kind. Traditional unicentric models have moreover to be replaced by polycentric models, and this entails a restructuring of the concepts which we have been used to. The new functional relations can be thought of in terms of opposition and complementarity between general models from Europe or elsewhere, and specific European models based on various criteria such as geopolitical (e.g. East-West; North-South) or purely socio-cultural features. This also has to do with the problems of the younger generation. We had to look for greater justice, while still maintaining complete personal freedom and respect for the human being. This raises two further issues: the ritual exclusion of women from almost every active public cultural role; and the marginalization of certain groups, whose presence has proved to be an important cultural asset.

To return to the idea of polycentricity; Europe can undoubtedly draw further inspiration for its future by looking closely at those of its constituent elements that are due to influences from outside Europe, in the recent or remote past. Among these will be some that can help Europe decentralize and assimilate, so as to re-evaluate those of its cultural products for exposure outside Europe that are destined to impinge on, enrich, and renew non-European traditions. This counterpoint of European and non-European culture also has something to teach us about the interchange of cultural values within Europe itself. As has been emphasized, the main task from now on is not just to look for values, but to look for them in their deepest and broadest sense. We need not just answers to our problems, but permanent solutions.

The crisis in world culture is mainly due to the shift from a prehistoric to an historical period, which means that it has acquired such awareness that cultural integration is a necessity. This integration will be complete only when part of a dialectical process emer-





ging from the opposition between diversity and unity of cultural values within the present model of the organization and formation of Europe, as an entity and as a value in the round.

## 2. Towards a dialogue between cultures

One cannot speak of civilization without distinguishing it from culture. The two notions are complementary, defining the various aspects of social and personal life. «Civilization» is the term found mostly in authors writing in the French tradition, and «culture» is the term found mostly in authors writing in the German tradition. This is not to say that the lines of demarcation between the two terms are crystal clear or easily conceptualized. Generally speaking, civilization is the sum of behaviours and acts relating to the material outcome of social activity, whereas culture is the need to create the moral and intellectual goods of which the life of the spirit consists.

Originally, culture meant a methodical tillage of the soil, to obtain better crops than there would be if things were left to Mother Nature, hence, an opposition between «nature» and «culture». In our own day, culture means the tillage of human intellectual and moral potential so as to obtain better intellectual and spiritual creation (in religion, art, and philosophy) whereas civilization implies the production of better material goods. Technology, the means to continuously improve the quality of products («civilization»), may also exert a certain influence on cultural creation.

Cultural creation helps a society to tighten up its structure and strengthen the links between its members. It is relevant that in ancient Rome the word *religio* originally meant the cultural bond between the members of a given society. The essence of this bond was shared reference to supernatural forces and, at the same time, a common language and iconography in the art of a particular religious cult. These shared elements helped (and still help) to create and maintain the bonds between the members of society.

There has never been any society that did not have its religion, and consequently its art. Even in the early years of atheist Soviet society with its Marxist inspiration, a cult of personality arose to take the place of the cult of a divine being. It is true that art finally cut loose from its origins in magic and religion. Even today, however, it still retains a magical and quasi religious atmosphere that it communicates to the beholder. All rhythm, for instance, imposes, its own order upon the apparent everyday disorder of social life and behaviour. It is axiomatic for ethnologists such as Frazer, Lévy-Bruhl and Lévi-Strauss that cultural creation is essential to social life.

The tendency of what we call «globalization» is to impose one sole model of civilization on the world, thus reducing human to a single dimension. Multiplicity of cultures, by contrast, ensures human multidimensionality, in other words the great spiritual wealth that human beings accumulate. This is why dialogue between cultures is more than ever necessary. It helps to ensure the growth of a society's cultural wealth by infusing it with new elements. These in turn strengthen it and make it more able to tolerate, understand, and engage with foreign cultures, and this acts to unite humankind without the risk of impoverishing the human spirit.

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