

Necessity of a Paradigm Shift

—From the Civilization of Power to that of Life—

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“Man, the child of Mother Earth, would not be able to survive the crime of matricide if he were to commit it. The penalty for this would be self-annihilation” said Arnold J. Toynbee. (*Mankind and Mother Earth*)

In spite of the effort of UN system and that of national and international communities, the global environment is being destroyed; one hundred species disappear from this planet every day, and two billion people will presumably lack drinking-water in the near future.

What we are facing now is a fundamental crisis. This crisis is not so much financial or economic as one might imagine but it is in fact a crisis of Civilization. Here we must realize that the drain of resources and desertification of our planet have been caused by the desertification of the human spirit. In the Garden of Eden, there were two trees; the ‘tree of life’ and the ‘tree of knowledge.’ Human history can be regarded as the process in which man after eating the fruit of knowledge has gradually forgotten the first tree: the tree of life.

The “Message from Tokyo” written and adopted by the participants of the symposium “Science and Culture: a Common Path for the Future,” jointly organized by UNESCO and UN University in September 1995, states the following:

“Mechanistic science, which reached its peak in the last century (19th century), sought to separate the dispassionate observer from the object of inquiry. This led to a concept of blind progress that favored a materialistic view of civilization. Thus, today we can identify two competing ideologies: a technological concept of ‘progress’ through standardization (globalization) of civilization, as opposed to a preservation of cultural identities and values through respect for diversity. Behind these powerful ideas is the untested belief that ‘science’ and ‘culture and tradition’ are incompatible with each other and separated by an unbridgeable gulf...”

It continues,

“We believe that this apparent incompatibility is due to the fact that for the

past 300 years — only about one ten-thousandth of human existence — Western science has moved away from earlier more *holistic view* of nature. This movement in science was characterized by a mechanistic and *value-free view* of nature that produced material, technological abundance, but led to increasing specialization and compartmentalization.”

Furthermore,

“During the twentieth century, on the basis of empirical findings, leading scientists — not theologians or philosophers — began to reverse the assumptions of the previous three centuries. This reversal was led by the originators of quantum physics who found that there exists in the universe an order of wholeness that is akin to those occurring in the earlier views that science had abandoned.”

Finally, the Tokyo message announces the arrival of a new era of enlightenment in which human reason advances to a holistic view of the Universe.

“A core characteristic of this new enlightenment is an appreciation of a fresh approach to *Unity in diversity*. Natural and social scientists have long held an idea that first took hold in the visual arts: that the whole is greater than, and different from, the sum of its parts. According to this idea, new attributes emerge as components come together in the special arrangements that signify the whole. But science has now uncovered the existence of a totally different holistic aspect of the Universe. This new holism recognizes the *enfoldment of the whole in its ‘parts’ and the distribution of the ‘parts’ over the whole.*”

This statement made by people at the forefront of science is of great importance. The last sentence in the above citation demonstrates that their view of the Universe is akin to the Islamic concept of “*Tawhid*,” in which the One appears in everything and is thus reflected in all beings. Moreover, this worldview is also similar to the concept of “*Mandala*,” i.e. the cosmography of Mahayana Buddhism that originated in the first century at the crossroads of civilizations, namely in the Gandhara region and spread through Silk-Roads on land and sea up to China, Korea, and Japan.

We recognize in this view on universe “interconnectedness” rather than separation. We also recognize that this is not an exceptional form but a representation of a worldview shared by almost all civilizations. It is in this tradition that we must seek our answers to the challenges of today, i.e. the climate change and the global ecological crisis.

“The desertification now affects one-third of the world’s landmass, which means 4 billion hectares. At the end of the 20th century, almost 1 billion people in 110 countries were threatened by encroaching deserts — the figure might well

double by 2050, when two billion could be affected” says Koiichiro Matsuura, Former Director General of UNESCO, in the anthology “*Making peace with the Earth*” (UNESCO, 2007). He also calls our attention to the fact that we are witnessing an extinction of species at a rate a hundred times greater than normal. By 2100, 50 percent of all species could be extinct, despite the fact that biodiversity is essential to the life-production cycle.

Here we must remember the very important affirmation of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001), which clearly pointed out that “cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature” (Art. 1). This means that no nation can survive without the existence of others. An essential feature of civilizations is dialogue, i.e. cross-fertilization. Each civilization is the product of countless encounters with others.

However, there was a period where the word “civilization” was regarded and pronounced as a singular concept, and was synonymous with Western civilization. This view of human history appeared in the 19th century in the newly-formed European Nation-States, just after the industrial revolution and along with the rise of colonialism. In this case, “civilization” meant having power and techniques, and ‘*having*’ was posited as superior to ‘*being*.’ This concept of civilization is nothing but what created the ‘culture of war’ that the world witnessed in the 19th and 20th centuries. And it is the same concept which is embodied in Colonization.

In addition, the domination of this idea of civilization over the rest resulted in the current environmental crisis, for it was based on nothing else than the exploitation of natural resources in parallel with the exploitation of man by man.

This concept of civilization has been reinforced in North America and, since the second half of the 20th century, the money market fundamentalism, i.e., the utmost realization of culture of ‘having,’ under the name of “freedom,” came to dominate the world to the extent that globalization can be equated with Americanization.

Since culture represents a system of values, we are now facing a serious problem of ‘unifying various world cultures into one.’ UNESCO recently reported that 2800 languages are on the verge of extinction. If cultural diversity is lost in the world, what we will see next is not merely the extinction of smaller cultures, but the very decline of humankind itself in parallel with the disappearance of biodiversity.

To save our most precious common heritage, the Earth, the one and only habitat of humankind, what we should do today is to reconsider this paradigm of civilization that was born 300 years ago (only one ten-thousandth of human

existence, as I mentioned earlier) and has dominated our spirit. It has given utmost supremacy to only one human capacity, 'reason,' while neglecting all other capacities, such as sensibility and spirituality. This could be called "*paternal culture.*" It is our urgent duty to recover the wholeness of human nature and restore the balance among all human capacities; rationality, sensitivity and spirituality. This means rediscovery of "*maternal culture.*" Therefore, this new enlightenment refers to a human reason which sees the invisible in resonance with sensibility and spirituality rooted in cultural traditions not of the West but from the rest of the world, namely in Asia, Middle-East and Africa. In the depths of each tradition we shall find something common — shared values which can be called '*transversal values.*' In fact, the West too did have the same values in the past when the Great Mother (*Magna Mater*) did live on that part of the world.

Today we must build a world of 'mutual respect,' which means more than tolerance; a world of *co-viventia* — 'living-together' in its deepest sense. We can find the answers to the challenges of today by reflecting on our traditions that gave supremacy not to knowledge (Scientia) but to wisdom (Sophia). We will thus see the one world interconnected and diverse, the unity in diversity.

"Only those who see the invisible are able to realize the impossible". said Federico. Mayor then Director general of UNESCO at the symposium "Science and Culture; Common Path for Future" held in Tokyo in 1995.

What we must do now is to rediscover the first tree in the Garden of Eden: the 'tree of life' that could be found in almost all civilizations. In certain civilizations, this tree was also called 'Magna Mater.' This approach requires a paradigm conversion — the shift of values from "civilization of power" to "civilization of life," from "universal" to "transversal," from "paternal culture" to "maternal culture," from "supremacy of reason" to "holistic view of universe and human being."

The most important is the Balance.

Should this paradigm shift not be realized by the end of 21st century, the Earth's life might come to an end. For, as Mahatma Gandhi maintained, "The world has sufficient resources for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed."

A civilized person is the one who knows oneself, and tries to learn from others", the one who knows and respects the difference of cultures; the one who seeks the transversal values of humanity found in all these cultures.

(Keywords: Mother, Earth, Culture, Holistic, UNESCO, Life)