

Society, the Younger Generation and the Challenge of the Future

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In this difficult time, the theme of future generations is increasingly the subject of debate. Millennials, now in their twenties and thirties, are the first generation to fear a worse future than previous generations, yet the prevailing focus seems to be on "what to do" or "how to proceed" to address the problem. Remaining in the background instead is the fundamental question that should be addressed to understand what to do, namely, why and how have we reached this point? What is the problem? What lies ahead with this crisis where the solution seems to constantly slip out of hand? [1].

It is precisely the cultural model that has characterized this long period of history that leads to a pragmatic attitude in the face of problems. Indeed, the prevailing notion is that it is sufficient to think about what to do, without ever questioning what it is and the result is that definitive solutions are never found because the cultural model is unable to respond to the problems society creates.

The more economists have a hand in economics, the more complex it becomes. The more social science scholars deal with family problems, the more fragile the family becomes. The more political scholars get involved in political reforms, the more they become insolvent. The more you want to stop crime, the more aggressive it becomes. The greater the number of graduates, the lower the average cultural level for understanding the problems [2]. Unfortunately, we could carry on and would obtain the same answers and arrive at the same disappointing conclusion. The social and cultural models that have long characterized our history and our time have collapsed and lead to a crisis that has had a major economic impact but is rooted in a model of society that is no longer able to respond to the problems of social coexistence imposed by the globalization phenomenon that affects everyone [3]. The technical culture has developed imposingly but absolutely asymmetrically to the evolution of the social systems that have become ancillary to the former [4].

"The first step in this direction consists in as wide, as deep, and as prompt a realization as possible of the extraordinary character of the contemporary crisis of our culture and society. It is high time to realize that this is not one of the ordinary crises which happen [sic] almost every decade, but one of the greatest transitions in human history from one culture to another. An adequate realization of the immense magnitude of the change now upon us is a necessary condition for determining the adequacy of measures and means to alleviate the magnitude of the pending catastrophe". These were the considerations of Pitirim Sorokin in his work "The crisis of our age" in which with incredible precision he foreshadowed where we would find ourselves today [4,5].

The crisis is thus fundamentally a crisis of declining values that has led to an overly materialistic, utilitarian and individualistic interpretation of the means and factors of production, generating a society unable to hear and listen to people's problems, young people in particular [6].

Let us clarify the meaning of this thought and the path that has led us to this difficult situation, even if we will not discover anything because we are dealing with human nature, which has never changed from how the Greek tragedians splendidly described it [7,8].

Starting with Genesis, as we find in the Old Testament, man has always had to face the mystery and pain of his existence and over

time the relationship with the natural world has been articulated as a relationship with an immanent entity that man has tried to confront to understand what the "truth" is. The relationship with the deities, first with Genesis and then with Greek mythology, was marked by a confrontation in which man believed being or becoming all-powerful; consider in addition to Genesis, the myths of Icarus, Sisyphus and Prometheus [9,10].

Over time, the relationship with nature became more harmonious and was called "Mother Nature" for the values it inspired, representing a binding rule for all knowledge and every action that is natural and hence the sense of validity of existence. This intimate relationship broke down to the extent that technical knowledge, technology applied to the study of all human activities, took on an independent and dominant dimension in steering society, the life and value system in the modern world [6]. This thrust for change increasingly altered the relationship with the natural world that became subject to the dominion of man who sees it as a means to endlessly satisfy his needs and desires [6].

This socio-cultural and value model that spread over the past two centuries is anchored in the field of speculation – with Kant's self-criticism and German Idealism – and has significantly accelerated in the last 30-40 years [7,8]. The implosion of the Soviet empire embodied in the fall of the Berlin wall developed the idea that the strongly liberal cultural and economic model is the solution to all ills and handed the US, the expressive power of this model, the world's baton and the feeling of eternal omnipotence. At that point, technical-rational knowledge, typical of the American socio-cultural model, assumed the dominant role of absolute and self-referential values, subordinating the development and judgment of the individual and society as a whole to it [11]. The relationship with nature is no longer direct but is intermediated by calculation and technique, rendering it sterile. Man knows much more today than what he is able to see or feel with his senses, designing and implementing things that he can no longer feel and thereby increasing the detachment from the natural world that contributes to increasing the coldness of heart and the difficulty of having real interpersonal relationships with others.

Man is thus in danger of no longer being able to feel and to experience personally, but tends to transform his work into the organization of means and their control and becoming impersonal: a non-human man in a non-social society.

Economics and finance have increasingly taken the role of the

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ends and not the means and defining the rules and the direction of the social systems, moving from technical knowledge to moral knowledge. Similarly, the cultural invasiveness of this quantitative-rational type model has increasingly led to seeing man as a set of chemical actions and reactions and no longer as a set of emotional actions and reactions -a thermodynamic machine and not a person. In this cultural model, man and society must adapt to the rules and not vice versa up to affirming that good rules make a good man but the reality is just the opposite because man was born before the rules.

The Nobel Prizes for the technical disciplines (medicine, physics, economics) are emblematic and have over the last 50 years been awarded to the American technical culture, and in contrast, failing to receive a single Nobel Prize in literature (at least until this year, even if Bob Dylan would seem to be a particular case): I. Singer and S. Bellow had European roots and Morrison is an expression of the black marginalization culture [5,6,12]. It would seem that the establishment of a technical culture is antagonistic to a humanistic culture because the former took on the role of value in its own right. In fact, despite Stiglitz's warning of the flop of the rational approach, the Academy of Sciences awarded the Nobel Prize in economics to two American scholars for the rational approach to economics and finance [10].

The single thought linked to a single principle of truth, the rational-technical and sensationalist, has resulted in producing an Alexandrian type culture, culture for culture and formula for formula, up to stifling creative thinking, the only type that carries human society forward, giving way to the free association of ideas.

The idea that the models have in themselves moral value has led to their absolute use in the practical sphere in such a way that reality adapts to these. Yet, reality shows in deeds and facts that it cannot be subject to this study model, as is the case today, where a steady move away from reality is occurring and these models are increasingly unable to explain it.

The crisis is ultimately the first true and profound defeat of the cultural model that prompted the US in the wake of the illusions to consider a form of omnipotence; but defeat can be useful if leading to thinking about the errors made and the causes that led to these; after all, this is the challenge of this great nation.

Paradoxically, man has created a means (economics and finance) which he continues to maintain ever more independent from himself and in satisfying his needs always creates new and more sophisticated and personalized needs. Yet economics and finance must maintain a sense, their activities must have a measurement criterion, a hierarchy of values, an awareness of which needs should be considered right and which wrong. This requires a proper economy of living, otherwise an infinite system of desires forms that affirms man's absolute freedom to satisfy them. However, as the resources are fewer than the desires, the more one has, the more one wants, and this leads to a relentless struggle between men and groups to increasingly appropriate the values needed to satisfy desires definable in material goods. The implementation of this model of society, strongly oriented to the short-term material satisfaction of needs, could only be realized by usurping others, the struggle between people and groups intensifying up to causing the collapse of society. This is the point in history in which we find ourselves [9].

Precisely the drive towards this form of antagonism has generated a form of aggressive competition that leads to a perennial clash between people and groups. This competition is driven not by a desire to affirm

a better society but by the fear of others, the fear of being dominated, and is driven by a destructive and suicidal impulse.

The crisis cannot be solved through external mechanistic measures (the rules) but only by considering how to reorient from within society the behaviour and value system towards a more transcendent dimension.

In this perspective, we must consider some paths to follow:

- Restore the family to a central position, which is an investment and not an expense; it is within the family that values are formed and those that will enter society.

- Restore the role of women to a central position. In a strongly individualistic society, they are able to bring back the true meaning of giving because they are genetically its bearers.

- Restore youngsters to a central position and enable more contact with the artisan and rural world where solidarity is more easily accomplished; rethink the school curricula in a more humanistic way (Italy has the best grammar education system in the world and we are destroying it in the pursuit of technical schools).

- Refocus on the idea of planning the future of our territories while respecting their ancient traditions and not giving in to the lure of development models that have not worked in other realities.

- Rediscover pride in our traditions and our history, drawing on the wisdom of the generations who have gone before.

- Refocus on generosity, concern for others and service understood as the expression of the power of one who "feels responsible for life - for everything that is called living: man, people, culture, order of the country and the earth, the power of service that wants earthly things to become righteous" [6].

This is the only way we can once again, all together without discrimination, look to a better future, and build a society that includes and not a society that excludes. We can appropriately conclude with a thought that A. Toynbee wrote in 1947 (*Civilisation on Trial*) [4]:

"There is nothing to prevent our Western Civilization from following historical precedent, if it chooses, by committing social suicide. But we are not doomed to make history repeat itself; it is open to us through our own efforts, to give history, in our case, some new unprecedented turn. As human beings, we are endowed with freedom of choice, and we cannot shuffle off our responsibility upon the shoulders of God or nature. We must shoulder it ourselves. It is our responsibility."

Let it be a Christmas of reconciliation and reflection in the attempt to think once more of a righteous society.

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