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THE SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL UNITY OF EUROPE AND THE MISSION OF EUROPEANS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The European Round Table Discussion, organised jointly by the Council of Europe on the initiative of its Committee of Cultural Experts and by the Italian Government, was held at Rome from 13th to 16th October, 1953.

At the opening meeting, presided over by M. de MENTHON, President of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, M. Alcide de GASPERI introduced the theme of the discussions: "The spiritual and cultural problem of Europe, considered in its historical unity and the means of expressing this unity in contemporary terms". M. PELLA, Prime Minister of Italy, conveyed the greetings of his country and wished the members of the Round Table a warm welcome. Finally M. de MENTHON spoke on the philosophic and political importance of the discussions which were to take place.

The members of the Round Table were as follows: Professor Arnold TOYNBEE (United Kingdom), M. Robert SCHUMAN (France), M. van KLEFFENS (Netherlands), Professor LOFSTEDT (Sweden), Professor KOGON (German Federal Republic) and M. Alcide de GASPERI (Italy).

Fifteen well-known publicists took part in the Conference: M. Luc HOMMEL (Belgium), Professor ROSS (Denmark), M. Guy de CARMOY (France), M. FRIEDLANDER (German Federal Republic), M. COTSARIDAS (Greece), M. GUDMUNDSSON (Iceland), Miss CHINNEIDE (Ireland), M. PIOVENE (Italy), Professor HESS (Luxembourg), Professor SCHLICHTING (Netherlands), M. OFTEDAL (Norway), M. BECKER (Saar), M. LINDER (Sweden), M. YALMAN (Turkey), and Mr. CLARK (United Kingdom).

The discussions took place on 13th, 14th and 15th October at the Villa Aldobrandini, in the centre of Rome, under the

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chairmanship of M. Denis de ROUGEMONT, Swiss author and Principal of the European Cultural Centre.

On 16th October the conference closed by a ceremonial meeting at the Capitol, at which the participants were the guests of the Municipality of Rome.

On 16th October, the fifteen publicists held two meetings for the purpose of discussing how to give publicity to the work of the Round Table and to the European cause in general.

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The proceedings of a symposium of this kind do not lend themselves to the adoption of conclusions on which a vote can be taken. Furthermore, although the members of the conference met under the auspices of the Council of Europe, the Council could not in any way be committed by their views.

It was decided, however, to draft a text which, without committing either the Council of Europe or any of the participants individually, would be a short but faithful summary of their work. The text which follows is the summary which met with the approval of all the 21 members of the Round Table and the Chairman.

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The essential aim of the Round Table was to discuss the spiritual and cultural problem of Europe considered in its historic unity, and to examine how the idea of European unity might be spread in Europe and throughout the world.

Europeans must understand the origins of their present difficulties if they are to succeed in overcoming them. The European Round Table Discussion therefore endeavoured to examine the situation and to lay down some guiding principles.

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Europe forms an historic unity whose destiny has been transformed within a short space of time. European expansion between the XVth century and the beginning of the XXth led not only to the discovery of the whole world and to its conquest by European civilisation but to the founding of a new world inspired by the ideologies and techniques of Europe. Up to the beginning of the XXth century the predominance of the main European States could not be disputed by any State outside Europe.

It was only after a long fratricidal war - a virtual Thirty Years' War - which rent asunder the community of European peoples, that States outside Europe acquired a dominant position.

To-day, in the middle of the XXth century, Western Europe is no more than a bridge-head buttressed by the power of America on the fringe of a hostile continent.

Contemporary Europe is not only politically amputated, it is also spiritually divided.

The gradual emancipation of thought, which for a long time made for cultural progress, has for some centuries past brought about a cleavage first between faith and reason and then between the spirit and the act. Thus the new world created by Europe in its own image received no spiritual message from it because Europe lacked a faith at the moment of its greatest political and material expansion.

The absence of a message capable of giving meaning to human life, and the rapidity of technological progress has led to a veritable disruption of the private, working and political lives of individuals.

With the advance of specialisation, the analytical spirit has triumphed over the synthetic; the creative faculty of the individual becomes atrophied; the level of general culture falls; men grow less and less capable of foreseeing and so anticipating the social effects of scientific discoveries and their application in industry.

Thus the individual is no longer master of the world in which he lives and is without guidance in his conduct. He doubts; he flounders; and he is an easy prey to totalitarian ideologies, materialist pseudo-religions which divest him of his personality.

If the spiritual vacuum of contemporary Europe is to be filled, faith and reason must again make common cause, for neither can transform alone the deeply divided society of to-day in which the individual is unable to develop his potentialities to the full.

This requires real tolerance, more than mere indifference or a precarious truce, a tolerance which consists in a sincere search for a common scale of values.

Since its material supremacy is now a thing of the past, Europe's mission is to foster in the modern world a regenerated society, in which faith would be allied to tolerance. Such a society would not be exclusive. Europe belongs to a larger family of free nations and must rise to full consciousness of its mission as a unifying factor in the world.

The ethics of the free peoples start from the principle that the individual is the essential instrument of social progress. Collectivism can play only an auxiliary part in social intercourse. Europe must therefore oppose any form of secular religion which puts the State above the individual.

A regenerated society, European in conception, must therefore rest on the nexus of relations between free individuals; it must not be a conglomerate of individuals crushed by the omnipotence of the State.

To draw up a code of moral values adapted to the exigencies of the contemporary world, Europeans must, in face of the common danger, share the aspirations of faith and the principles of democracy. If this common moral heritage is to be productive, it must be clearly defined and put within the reach of all. Thus each individual will be able to take in full consciousness the decisions demanded by his private and civic life and his work; he will be able to recover the sense of responsibility which lies at the root of any free and progressive society.

The spread of such a civic morality, acceptable both to believers and to rationalists, to Christians and non-Christians alike, will be fostered by the adoption of specifically European institutions. Conversely, it will strengthen the attachment of Europeans to these new institutions, the need for which is both economic and political.

Europe has lost a great part of its possessions and assets overseas. It will be obliged to change the nature of its relations with the peoples placed under its tutelage, by progressing towards association and an equality of rights.

Moreover, in its present divided state Europe cannot set in motion those large units of production which, by lowering costs, would enable it to draw the maximum profit from modern technique.

Only an internal economic union would enable Europe to compensate itself for the impoverishment resulting from the change in its relations with the rest of the world. Without this internal reform, the living standards of its peoples will inevitably decline.

In present circumstances, economic union raises in a new form the problem of political sovereignty.

The traditional conception of the absolute sovereignty of nation states was conceived and developed when European expansion was at its greatest. Today the political and military decisions by which Europe is bound and its future to a large extent determined are no longer entirely within the hands of the European States, which, though they retain the trappings of sovereignty, have lost much of its substance. In order that they may gradually recover their true sovereignty, certain European States have been led to form supra-national communities with specific objectives.

These communities are not absolute. Because their aims are clearly defined, the personality and traditions of each country are left intact. The unity achieved in certain fields respects internal diversity.

Nor are these communities exclusive. The unions of a new type which are being planned in Europe are open to other States; they take their place in the wider framework of the Atlantic Community; their interests are those of all the peoples who enjoy free institutions.

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Europe's mission cannot end with the decline of its political supremacy in the world. Today that mission is spiritual in nature. It is for Europe to give meaning to contemporary life and thus to acquire a leading moral position.

But this it cannot do unless it achieves a certain material independence.

In order to fulfil this great mission, Europeans must change their way of thinking and beware of the hardening of the arteries which accompanies success and persists after failure.

They must fight against the narrow nationalism which paralyses their politics, the shortsighted protectionism which impoverishes their economy, and the barren isolationism which atrophies their culture.

Europe's hour need not sound unless Europeans allow it to sound.