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Geo-Political Diversity
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Introduction

Geography is a predeterminant of human destiny. Through the ages, the history of different peoples and races has been shaped by their environment – the climate, the terrain, water resources, etc., influence racial characteristics which become the roots of distinct cultures. It is no chance that the earliest civilizations were founded in the riverbeds and valleys of the Nile, the Euphrates, the Indus and the Yangtze, which became cradles of highly developed cultures; whereas, hilltops and mountains were chosen in areas of dense forest. The sacred centres of the Mayas and the Incas rise above the dense vegetation of the Amazon and equatorial America. These ancient civilizations vanished and the people who now inhabit the valleys of the Pharaohs, or the sites of ancient Babylon and Mesopotamia have no real links with these early cultures. Only in India and China have the lines of continuity been maintained by a strong oral tradition and the preservation of the cultural boundaries.

Culture denotes the essence of civilizations. Like race, language and religion, it is a group manifestation and consists of these three elements as well as some others. In an increasingly global society, while ideology, governance, business, education etc., are becoming trans-national, culture remains distinctive and even more divisive. Hence for smooth interaction between nations and peoples, an awareness of the variations in cultures makes for better understanding and better relationships. But, to understand different cultures, we must go to their respective roots – and these are embedded in religion.

A Tour D’Horizon of cultural variations

Europe

Let us start with Europe. It is a patchwork of various distinct cultures, bound by the glue of Christianity. It's distinct features are:

• A common heritage of Judeo-Christian values.
• Graeco-Roman laws.
• Renaissance humanism, empiricism and liberalism.

Till the dawn of the modern age (1600 AD), the Church was an all-pervasive influence in the life of the people, and yet the Church also has been divisive. The first separation of the Church of Rome from the Eastern Orthodox part, came in the second half of the fifteenth century, surprisingly, by an order of Sultan Mehmet II, then ruler of the Ottoman Empire, after he conquered the Byzantine capital in 1453. He freed the East Orthodox Church, from obedience to Rome and granted independence by a decree.

The Reformation, which started in different years in England, Germany and Switzerland etc., was a product of the 16th century. What emerges today out of these divisions within the Church are distinctly different cultures which divide Protestant northern Europe (Scandinavia, Germany, Denmark, The Netherlands and Britain) from Latin Europe (France, Spain, Portugal, Italy as well as Celtic Ireland) and the Central European Catholic countries (Poland, Hungary, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia) from Eastern Europe (Russia, Greece, Rumania, Bulgaria, Serbia and the former Slav and Caucasian Republics of the old Soviet Union) who belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Language and race have also contributed to these cultural variations. Some Eastern European countries use the Cyrillic script while the rest of the European languages spring from Latin. Race also plays a part. While the blanket definition for European is White Caucasian, there are distinct characteristics, moulded by climate and environment:

• The Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic races with very fair complexion, blonde hair and blue eyes.
• The Latin races with a Celtic streak – more swarthy, darker hair and sharper facial features.
• The Slavs with colouration which is fair or dark, but very distinctive features – high cheek bones derived from their Central Asian ancestors etc.

This by no means implies that there is no melange of races or religion within the countries. Indeed there is. Germany and The Netherlands, while primarily Reformist, have Catholic majorities in the south.

Today, when Europe has embarked upon this unique experiment of unification, it is amazing how often and strongly cultural differences assert themselves. At the core of Europe-building is this constant tension between national identities versus European unity. It is foremost when enlargement of the Union is under consideration. When the European Community was first enlarged in 1973 by the admission of Britain, Denmark and Ireland, France reluctantly conceded because President Pompidou was secretly worried about Chancellor Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik and chose enlargement westwards rather