

CHAPTER ONE

FROM SHATTERED CULTURE TOWARD transculture

THE CHRISTIAN ORIGIN OF MODERN SCIENCE

Modern science, and even modernity itself, began in Europe in 1632, with the publication of Galileo's book *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*.¹

The identity of modern science is, of course, crucial for Europe. Its past identity has many embodiments: the Greek, Roman, and Christian legacies; the Reformation; the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment; the modern messianisms (communism and nazism); and psychoanalysis. This contradictory relationship between the unity and diversity of its identity is both an asset and a challenge.

There is one often-neglected aspect that nevertheless seems important when trying to decipher the future identity of Europe: the birth of modern science there, in Europe, at the time of its great founders—Galileo, Newton, and Kepler. Of course, other civilizations—Greek, Egyptian, Sumerian, Mayan, Arabian, and Chinese—made crucial contributions to science in its general meaning. For example, the Chinese civilization had everything necessary to give birth to modern science—theoretical thinking and technology—but the historical fact is that it did not do so. The point is that the Chinese vision of the cosmos forbade them to accept fragmentation and separation.

Joseph Needham asked in his famous book *Chinese Science and the Occident*: “why is modern science, as a mathematization of the hypotheses regarding nature, with all its implications in the field of advanced technology, only rapidly increasing in the West, in the era of Galileo?”²

The search for the most intimate resorts, of the thinking style and of the imaginary that leads to a certain worldview typical of a certain era, is indispensable for a rigorous approach to Joseph Needham's question. Europe's cultural and spiritual environment contained the germ of modern science.

This is the premise that led me in 1988 to formulate the hypothesis of the *Christian origin of modern science* in my book *Science, Meaning, & Evolution: The Cosmology of Jacob Boehme*.³

According to my analysis, the dogmas of the Christian Trinity and the Incarnation, which permeated the cultural and spiritual environment of Galileo's time, accompanied by an important technological development, enabled the formulation of the methodology of modern science. The fact that Christianity was the dominating religion in Europe was also an important historical aspect.

After the publication of my book, I discovered a short study by Alexandre Kojève (1902–1968) entitled “L'origine chrétienne de la science moderne.”⁴ Kojève, a known neo-Marxist French philosopher of Russian origin, cannot be remotely suspected of sympathy toward Christianity. The main argument of his study, which was published in 1964, is based uniquely on the dogma of the Incarnation.

Kojève starts by acknowledging the birth of mathematical physics in Western Europe in the sixteenth century. For Kojève, pagan theology represents the theory of the double transcendence of God: “The *Theos* of ‘classic’ paganism . . . is not only beyond the world where the pagan lives. This *Theos* is irremediably beyond the *Beyond* that the pagan may, at some point, access after his death.”⁵ Double transcendence is the conception of an unsurpassable wall that does not allow us to conceive perfection in our world, perfection that is, nevertheless, assumed by the laws of physics. According to Kojève, this perfection is ensured by mathematical physics, “Therefore, for pagans like Plato and Aristotle, as for all civilized Greeks who are therefore likely to pursue the sciences, looking for a science like modern *mathematical physics* would be not only madness, but a huge scandal—as, indeed, for the Jewish people.”⁶ As for the obvious reproach regarding the conflict between the founders of modern science and the Catholic Church, Kojève responded with justification: “What these scientists are fighting against is scholasticism in its most advanced stage; that is, the Aristotelianism portrayed in its pagan authenticity, whose incompatibility with Christian theology had been clearly observed and indicated by the first precursors of the philosophy of modern times.”⁷ Furthermore, Kojève reviewed the Christian dogmas of God's uniqueness, of *ex nihilo* creation, of the Trinity and the Incarnation, in order to conclude for the preeminence of the latter dogma, that of the Incarnation, in the birth of modern science. He eliminated the first two dogmas simply because they were also found elsewhere, namely in Judaism and Islamism. He also removed the dogma of the Trinity because, wrote Kojève, “it rather incites ‘mystical’ introspection or metaphysical speculations than a careful observation of a body of phenomena and of their experimental manipulations.”⁸ What remained was the dogma of the Incarnation, about which Kojève wrote: “Indeed, what is the Incarnation, if not the oppor-

tunity for God to be effectively present in the temporal world, in which we live ourselves, yet without decaying from his absolute perfection?"⁹ For Kojève, Copernicus "lifted to Heaven the body of Christ, revived by the entire terrestrial world where Jesus died, after having been born here. But whatever this heaven might have been for the faithful Christians, it was but a 'mathematical' or a mathematizable sky for all the savants of the era."¹⁰

Kojève's theses could seduce an important medieval literature specialist such as Alexandre Leupin. In his book *Fiction et Incarnation*,¹¹ published in 1993, Leupin showed that the pagan-Christian epistemological rupture introduced a new conception about language and a new regime of truth and fiction. Christian epistemology requires a realism of language and concepts. Language structure is not caught in an infinite loop, closed on itself. It opens toward reality, toward meaning. It refers to an event of reality. Leupin operates seductive conjunctions: concept/divine truth, experience/life of Christ, event/writing. The contradictory pair God-out-of-the-world/God-from-this-world is foundational for modern science, which is characterized by another contradictory pair: mathematics/scientific experiment. Leupin says: "Biblical writing is co-substantially the story of the thing (*res gestae*) and the thing itself, the unthinkable identity, which places the entire medieval writing, whatever its nature, under the absolute sign of the impossible. At the same time holding the experience and being the experience itself, the truth and the representation of the truth, the testamentary 'anti-writing' promotes writing to a dignity that is unrelated to the values that had been attributed to it by pagan antiquity."¹²

Of course, Kojève's theses were violently criticized by the American philosopher Steven Louis Goldman,¹³ who accused him of having assigned the paternity for the mathematical physics to Christianity.

Kojève is, in fact, right and wrong at the same time.

He was certainly right when he stressed the importance of the dogma of the Incarnation for the birth of modern science.

But he was wrong in first reducing modern science to mathematical physics.

Modern science is defined by its *methodology*, which was formulated by Galileo in the form of three postulates that are still valid today (see chapter 3):

1. The existence of universal laws of mathematical nature.
2. The discovery of these laws through scientific experimentation.
3. The perfect reproducibility of experimental results.

A careful examination of these postulates shows that mathematics certainly plays an important role, although not an exclusive one. Mathematics

is at the same time an artificial language, different from familiar language, but also, according to Galileo, expressed by Salvio, a common language between God and humans.¹⁴ If the first postulate and, perhaps, the third have some relation with the dogma of the Incarnation, this is not obvious for the second postulate, which introduces a *third* term in the human being–God relationship: nature.

Kojève was also wrong in having neglected the role of the dogma of the Trinity in the birth of modern science. It is certainly wrong to reduce this dogma to an “incitement towards mystical introspection” and to “meta-physical speculations.” As shown in a study conducted in collaboration with Catholic priest Thierry Magnin, philosopher and poet Michel Camus, and historian of religion Karen-Claire Voss,¹⁵ the dogma of the Trinity operates with a different logic from that of classical logic—the logic of the included middle, studied by Stéphane Lupasco (1900–1988).¹⁶ This logic is an extraordinary tool for analysis and inference and is necessary for pondering the harmonious coexistence of the opposites. It is not accidental that the logic of the included middle is the one that solves all the paradoxes of quantum mechanics and quantum physics as well as the one that can give a rational explanation of Christian texts.¹⁷

In this context, the example of Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), whom Hegel called “the first German philosopher” and whose work has exerted an undeniable influence on Newton, Novalis, Schlegel, Goethe, Fichte, Schelling, and Karl Marx, is very significant.

In order to explain the world, Boehme invented a septenary typology inspired directly by the dogmas of the Incarnation and the Trinity. The dogma of the Trinity consists of three terms that in turn have a ternary structure. Thus, Boehme obtains a structure with nine elements, two of which are discontinuities (*Fiat*, in Bohme’s language). If the ternary (associated with the dogma of the Trinity) concerns the inner dynamics of each system, the septenary (associated with the dogma of the Incarnation) is the foundation of the manifestation of all processes.¹⁸

The hypothesis of the Christian origin of modern science opens an interesting path to a new vision of what the roots and the future of Europe are. If Christianity is really the origin of modern science, it is very hard to believe that science has nothing in common with culture and spirituality. It is like saying that a baby has nothing in common with his or her mother. The fact that many scientists are atheist or agnostic is irrelevant in this context. Science itself is one thing; scientists are another thing. A given scientist is the conscious side of science and the historical movement and evolution of science are its subconscious part, like two sides of the same coin.

DO SCIENCE AND CULTURE HAVE SOMETHING IN COMMON?

At the beginning of human history, science and culture were inseparable. They were animated by the same questions, those about the meaning of the universe and the meaning of life.

In the Renaissance, those ties were not yet broken. As its name indicates, the first university was dedicated to studying the universal. The universal was embodied in those who would make their stamp on the history of knowledge. Gerolamo Cardano (1501–1576), the inventor of imaginary numbers and of the suspension system that bears his name, was a mathematician, a doctor, and an astrologer: the same person who established the horoscope of Christ was the author of the first systematic exposition of the calculus of probabilities.¹⁹ Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) was both an astronomer and an astrologer.²⁰ Isaac Newton (1643–1727) was simultaneously a physicist, a theologian, and an alchemist. He was as captivated by the Trinity as by geometry, and he spent more time in his alchemical laboratory than in the elaboration of his *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*.²¹ The founders of modern science had nothing in common with the stereotypical image of a scientist. Paradoxically, the scientist is forced, in spite of himself, to become a high priest of truth, an embodiment of rigor and objectivity. The complexity of the birth of modern science and of modernity itself helps us to understand the subsequent complexity of our own time.

The germ of the split between science and meaning, between subject and object, was certainly present in the seventeenth century, when the methodology of modern science was formulated, but it did not become full-blown until the nineteenth century, when the disciplinary big bang took flight.

In our time, the split was consummated. Science and culture have nothing more in common. This is why one speaks of science *and* culture. Every self-respecting government has a minister of culture and a minister of science. Every self-respecting international higher educational institution has a Department of Culture and a Department of Sciences. Those who try to cross the frontiers discover the risks of such an adventure. Science does not have access to the nobility of culture, and culture does not have access to the prestige of science.

In Europe, within science, one distinguishes the exact sciences from the human sciences, as if the exact sciences were inhuman (or subhuman) and the human sciences inexact (or non-exact). Anglo-Saxon terminology is still worse: one speaks of hard sciences and soft sciences. We will pass over the sexual connotation of these terms in order to explore their meaning. What are at stake are the ideas of definition, rigor, and objectiv-

ity, which convey the sense of exactitude (or of “hardness”). According to classical thought, the only exact definition is a mathematical definition, the only rigor worthy of its name is mathematical rigor, and the only objectivity is that corresponding to a rigorous mathematical formalism. The “softness” of the human sciences attests to their lack of respect for these three key ideas, which formed a paradigm of simplicity over the course of several centuries. What could be softer, more complex, than a human subject? The exclusion of the subject is therefore a logical consequence. “The death of the human being” coincides with the complete separation of science and culture.

One understands the indignant cries unleashed by the concept of two cultures—scientific and humanist culture—introduced some decades ago by C. P. Snow, a novelist and a scientist.²² The emperor wore no clothes. The comfort of the owners of the spheres of knowledge was threatened and their conscience was put to the test. Conforming to Snow, science is certainly part of culture, but this scientific culture is completely separated from humanist culture. For him, the two cultures are perceived as antagonists. The split between the two cultures is first of all a split between values. The values of scientists are not the same as the values of humanists. Each world—the scientific world and the humanist world—is hermetically shut on itself.

Of course, the analysis made by Snow was oversimplified and even superficial. In fact, as will be shown in this book, science and culture have always interacted. Visions on what nature is established by science at a given epoch penetrated the imagination of the people living in that epoch. This interaction even leads to great artistic works. Take, as exemplary cases, the interaction between surrealism and modern physics or the interaction of antitheater and quantum physics, cases which will be described in chapters 12 through 14. It is true that, at the institutional level, science was considered as the only way to truth, in contradiction to what really happened on the social level.

Time has passed since 1959, when C. P. Snow forged the expression “the two cultures.” The marriage between fundamental science and technology is now accomplished, generating *the technoscientific culture* that drives the huge irrational force of globalization, centered on the economy, which in turn could erase all differences between cultures and even between religions. Part of humanistic culture has already been absorbed in the technoscientific culture. In the face of this new monolithic culture, there is the *spiritual culture*, which is in fact a constellation of a huge variety of cultures, religions, and spiritual communities, sometimes contradictory but still united through a common belief in the two natures of the human being—on one side, the psyche, biological, and psychical nature, and on the other side, the transcendental nature.

Scientists, active participants in the technoscientific culture, have a great responsibility: to avoid the disintegration of spiritual culture resulting from the unbridled development of technoscience, whose probable outcome will be the disappearance of our human species. There are more and more links between technoscientific culture and spiritual culture at the present time. It is only if we question the space between, across, and beyond disciplines that one has a chance to establish links between the two postmodern cultures, integrating both science and wisdom. Transdisciplinarity can offer a methodological foundation for a dialogue between the technoscientific culture and the spiritual culture.²³ This fact is present in many books and articles published in the last decades.

In fact, it is spirituality that links the two cultures. The spiritual dimension was completely absent from C. P. Snow's famous pamphlet.

In any case, the debate created by the concept of "two cultures" has been beneficial, because it has imparted a sense of danger induced by their split: it has exposed the extreme masculinization of our world, with all the dangers this implies for our individual and social life. The expression "two cultures" is not rigorous, but it is a good metaphor for something deep and real.

In recent times, the signs of reconciliation between the two cultures have begun multiplying, above all in the dialogue between science and art, the fundamental axis of a dialogue between scientific culture and humanist culture.

One stage has been passed through by the interdisciplinary rapprochement between science and art. Here, too, the initiatives are numerous and fertile. The acceleration of this rapprochement has an unprecedented rhythm, which is produced before our eyes, thanks to the informatics explosion. There is today a new kind of art, which was created by transferring computer methods to the realm of art. The most spectacular example may be art that uses the incredible information circulating on the Internet as if it were a kind of new "substance." Information rediscovers its original meaning of "in-formation": to create form, ceaselessly changing new forms, arising out of the collective imagination of artists. The interconnectivity of computer networks allows such connections between artists, who come together in real time on the Internet in order to create together, in text, song, and image, a world that arises from somewhere else. This "somewhere else" is found in the inner worlds of artists trying to harmonize, to discover together whatever it is that connects them with creation. These experimental researches constitute the germ of a genuine transdisciplinarity in action.

The encounter between different levels of reality of the subject and of the object (a key notion that will be defined in chapter 8) engenders different levels of representation. Images corresponding to a certain level of

representation have a different quality than images associated with another level of representation, because each quality is associated with a certain level of reality. Each level of representation appears like a veritable wall, apparently unassailable because of its relation to the images engendered by another level of representation. These levels of representation of the tangible world are therefore connected with the levels of reality in the being of the creator, the scientist, or the artist. True artistic creation arises in the moment, bridging several levels at the same time, engendering a *transperception*. True scientific creation arises in the moment, bridging several levels of representation at the same time, engendering *transrepresentation*. Transperception permits a global, nondifferentiated understanding of the totality of levels. The surprising similarities between moments of scientific and artistic creation are thus explained, as brilliantly demonstrated by the great mathematician Jacques Hadamard.²⁴

If multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity reinforce the dialogue between the two artificially antagonistic cultures, transdisciplinarity permits us to envisage the reconciliation of the two artificially antagonistic cultures—the scientific culture and the humanist culture—by virtue of their overlapping within the open unity of cosmopolitan culture.

THE TRANSCULTURAL AND THE MIRROR OF THE OTHER

To contemplate twentieth-century culture is at once disconcerting, paradoxical, and fascinating.

Since time immemorial, immense treasures of wisdom and knowledge have been accumulating, and still human beings continue to kill each other.

It is true that the treasures of one culture are virtually incommunicable to another. There are even more cultures than there are languages, and the number of languages on our planet is already legion. This is a formidable obstacle to authentic communication and communion between human beings, brought together by our destiny on one and the same Earth. One can translate from one language to another, but translations are forced into merely apparent perfection at the cost of making more or less gross approximations. In the future, one might imagine the appearance of a super-computer, a kind of universal dictionary capable of furnishing us with a translation of the meaning of the words in one language into the words of any other language, with the same meaning. But a similar translation, be it partial or general, between different cultures is inconceivable, because cultures emerge from *the silence between the words*, and this silence cannot be translated. No matter what their emotional weight, the words of everyday life are primarily addressed to the intellect, the instrument granted to human beings for survival. But cultures emerge from the totality of human beings

forming a community in a particular geographic and historical area—all their feelings, hopes, beliefs, and questions.

Prodigious advances in methods of transportation and communication have brought about an intermingling of cultures. Today one finds more Buddhists in California than in Tibet and more computers in Japan than in France. This cultural intermingling is chaotic. The proof: the innumerable difficulties concomitant with the integration of different cultural minorities into various countries in the world. Under what banner could this phantasmagoric integration be performed? No Esperanto, no matter how computerized it might be, can ever promise a translation between cultures. Paradoxically, today everything is open and closed at the same time.

The overwhelming advance of technoscience has served only to deepen the abyss between cultures. The nineteenth-century hope for a single culture in a worldwide society, founded on the happiness brought about by science, crumbled a long time ago. In its stead, we have witnessed an institutional separation between science and culture on the one hand and a cultural fragmentation within each and every culture on the other.

The separation between science and culture engendered the myth of a separation between East and West: the East as the repository of wisdom and knowledge of the human being and the West as the repository of science and knowledge of nature. This separation, at once geographic and spiritual, is artificial, because, as Henry Corbin has stated, the Orient is a facet of the Occident and the Occident is a facet of the Orient.²⁵ In each human being, the Orient of wisdom (the affective) and the Occident of science (the effective) are potentially reunited. But like all myths, that of the separation of the wisdom of the East and the science of the West is partly true, because modern science really was born in the West. And, in fact, it is true that the spread of the Western lifestyle throughout our planet is associated with the destabilization of traditional cultures. On account of its economic strength, the West has a great responsibility: to avoid the cultural disintegration resulting from the unbridled development of technoscience. Today one has to take the science of the West and the wisdom of the East and only then try to build a new civilization facing all the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Cultural fragmentation is felt in the heart of every culture. The disciplinary big bang has its equivalent in the big bang of cultural modes. As the inevitable result of the loss of frames of reference in an increasingly complex world, one mode of thought is swept away by the next with ever-increasing speed, as Suzy Gablik described in her best seller *Has Modernism Failed?*²⁶ Before long, through the intervention of computers, the speed of change in cultural modes may reach the speed of light. However, although thanks to scientific methodology, the disciplinary fragmentation within sci-

ence leads to more or less stable territories, those of cultural modes remain the domain of ephemera. Culture today appears more and more like some kind of monstrous rolling garbage can, in which strange defenses against the terror of nonmeaning proliferate. Of course, as always, the new is hidden in the old, and it is slowly but surely being born. This still formless mixture of the new with the old is fascinating, because beyond all the different cultural modes, a new cultural way of being is taking shape.

In spite of its chaotic appearance, modernity leads to a rapprochement between cultures. With infinitely more intensity than in previous times, modernity brings about a resurgence of the need to unite being with the world. The potential for the birth of a culture of hope is precisely as powerful as the potential for self-destruction engendered by the abyss of nonmeaning.

The multicultural shows that the dialogue between different cultures is enriching, even if its goal is not real communication between cultures. As an example, the study of Chinese and Islamic civilizations is certainly fruitful for deepening the comprehension of European culture. The multicultural helps us discover the face of our own culture in the mirror of another culture.

The intercultural is clearly assisted by the growth of transportation and communication and by economic globalization. A deepening discovery of hitherto badly known or unknown cultures makes unsuspected potentialities burst forth from our own culture. The influence of African art contributed to the appearance of Cubism—an eloquent example. The face of the Other permits us to know our own face better.

Obviously, the multicultural and the intercultural by themselves do not ensure the kind of communication between all cultures that presupposes a universal language founded on shared values, but they certainly constitute important steps toward the act of transcultural communication.

The *transcultural* designates the opening of all cultures to that which cuts through them and transcends them.

The reality of an opening like this is proven, for example, by the research that has been led in Paris for almost half a century by director Peter Brook with his company, Centre International de Créations Théâtrales.²⁷ The actors are of different nationalities and thus are themselves immersed in different cultures. Nevertheless, during a performance, they reveal qualities that cross and transcend cultures, using a wide range of material from *The Mahabharata* to *The Tempest*, from *The Conference of the Birds* to *Carmen*. The popular success of these performances in different countries of the world shows us that a transcultural approach can be as accessible to audiences as their own culture.

The perception of that which crosses and transcends cultures is, first of all, an experience that cannot be reduced to the merely theoretical yet is rich with teachings for our own life and for our action in the world. It

indicates that no one culture constitutes a privileged place from which one can judge other cultures. Each culture is the actualization of a potentiality of the human being in a specific place on earth and at a specific moment in history. Different places on earth and different moments in history actualize different potentialities of the human being, that is, different cultures. It is the open totality of the human being that constitutes the place-without-place of that which crosses and transcends cultures.

The perception of the transcultural is, first of all, an experience, because it concerns the silence of different actualizations. The space between the levels of reality is the space of this silence. It is the equivalent, in interior space, of that which is called the *quantum vacuum* in exterior space. It is a full silence, structured in levels. There are as many levels of silence as there are correlations between levels of perception and levels of reality. And beyond all these levels of silence, there is another quality of silence, that place-without-place that the poet and philosopher Michel Camus calls "our luminous ignorance."²⁸ This nucleus of silence appears to us as an unknowable because it is the unfathomable well of knowledge, but this unknowable is luminous because it illumines the very structure of knowledge. The levels of silence and the levels of our luminous ignorance determine our lucidity. If there is a universal language, it goes beyond words, because it concerns the silence between the words and the unfathomable silence that is expressed by each word. Universal language is not a language that can be captured in a dictionary; it is the experience of the totality of our being, reunited at last beyond all its myriad forms. It is, by its very nature, a *translanguage*.

Human beings are the same on the physical level: they are constituted by the same matter, above and beyond their various physical appearances. Human beings are also the same from the biological point of view: the same genes engender different skin colors, different facial expressions, our qualities, and our faults. The transcultural suggests that *human beings are also the same from the spiritual point of view*, beyond the enormous differences that exist between various cultures. The transcultural is expressed by simultaneously reading all of the levels of silence, across a multitude of cultures. "The rest is silence," as in the last words of Hamlet.

It is the Subject who forges *translanguage*, an organic language that captures the spontaneity of the world beyond the infernal chain of abstraction after abstraction. The event of being is just as spontaneous and sudden as a quantum event. It is the sequence of events of being that constitutes true actuality, which, alas, does not receive any attention from our mass media. Yet, these events are what constitute the nucleus of true communication.

That which is found in the center of the transcultural is the problem of *time*. Time is the measure of change of different processes. As a result, time is always thought of in the past or in the future. It is the domain of

the Object. In contrast, time that is experienced in the spontaneity of an event of being, the present instant, is unthinkable. As Saint Augustine and Charles Sanders Peirce once observed, the present moment is a point in time in which no thought can occur, no detail can be separated.

The present moment is *living time*. It concerns the Subject; more precisely, it concerns that which links the Subject to the Object. The present instant is, strictly speaking, a non-time, an experience of relation between Subject and Object; thus, it contains potentially within itself the past and the future, the total flow of information and the total flow of consciousness, which cross the levels of reality. The present time is truly the origin of the future and the origin of the past. Different cultures, present and future, develop in the time of history, which is the time of change in the state of being of peoples and of nations. The transcultural concerns the time present in *transhistory*, a notion introduced by Mircea Eliade, which concerns the unthinkable and epiphany.²⁹

The *transcultural* is the necessary condition for the existence of culture. The complex plurality of cultures and the open unity of the transcultural coexist in the cosmopolitan vision. The transcultural is the spearhead of cosmopolitan culture. Different cultures are the different facets of the human being. In a recent book, Christian Moraru gave multiple references and descriptions of this fact by analyzing the American narrative as manifested in literature.³⁰ The multicultural allows the interpretation of one culture by another culture, the intercultural permits the fertilization of one culture by another, and the transcultural ensures the translation of one culture into various other cultures, by deciphering meaning that links them and simultaneously goes beyond them.

THE TRANSRELIGIOUS ATTITUDE AND THE PRESENCE OF THE SACRED

The problem of the sacred, understood as the presence of something of irreducibly real in the world, is unavoidable for any rational approach to knowledge. One can deny or affirm the presence of the sacred in the world and in ourselves, but in view of elaborating a coherent discourse on Reality, one is always obliged to refer to it.

The sacred is that which connects. The sacred links, as indicated by the etymological root of the word *religion* (*religare*—"to bind together again"), but such ability is not, in and of itself, an attribute of just one religion.

Mircea Eliade once stated in an interview: "The sacred does not imply belief in God, in gods, or spirits. It is . . . the experience of a reality and the

source of the consciousness of existing in the world.”³¹ The sacred is first of all an experience; it is transmitted by a feeling—the “religious” feeling—of that which links beings and things and, in consequence, induces in the very depths of the human being an absolute respect for others, to whom he or she is linked by their all sharing a common life on one and the same Earth. *Homo religious* always existed and will exist forever, in spite of the contortions of historical events. It is interesting that the notion of the sacred is now the subject of violent debates in academic circles.³²

The abolition of the sacred led to the abomination of Auschwitz and to 25 million deaths under the Stalinist system. The absolute respect for others has been replaced by the pseudosacralization of a race or of a new human being embodied by dictators elevated to the rank of divinities.

The origin of totalitarianism is found in the abolition of the sacred. Although it is the experience of the irreducibly real, the sacred is actually, as Mircea Eliade repeatedly asserted, an essential element in the structure of consciousness and not simply a stage in the history of consciousness. When this element is violated, disfigured, or mutilated, history becomes criminal. In this context, the etymology of the word *sacred* is highly instructive. This word comes from the Latin *sacer*, which is to say, “that which cannot be touched without soiling” but also, “that which cannot be touched without being soiled.” *Sacer* designates the guilty, those who are consecrated to the infernal gods. At the same time, because of its Indo-European root *sak*, *sacred* is linked to *sanctus*, holy. This double meaning of *sacer*—sacred and evil—is the double meaning of history itself, with its contortions and its contradictions that give the impression that history is a tale of madmen.

In 1955, André Malraux was quoted by a Danish newspaper as saying: “With psychoanalysis, our century rediscovered the demons in man—the endeavor which awaits us is now is rediscovering the gods.”³³ It is paradoxical and significant that the most desacralized period in history has generated one of the most profound reflections on the question of the sacred. The unavoidable problem of the sacred runs through the work of many diverse twentieth-century thinkers and authors, as well as through that of scientifically minded artists and poets, from masters of thinking to masters of living.

The sacred permits the encounter between the ascending movement and the descending movement of information and consciousness through the levels of reality. This encounter is the irreplaceable condition of our freedom and of our responsibility. In this sense, the sacred appears as the ultimate source of our values. It is the space of unity between time and non-time, causal and acausal.

There is an open unity of questioning in the multiplicity of answers, because the sacred is the question.

One way or another, different religions, as well as agnostic and atheist currents, are defined in terms of the question of the sacred. Experience of the sacred is the source of a *transreligious attitude*. The cosmopolitan inhabitant of the world is neither religious nor irreligious; he or she is transreligious. It is the transreligious attitude emerging from lived transdisciplinarity that permits us to learn to know and appreciate the specificity of religious and irreligious traditions that are foreign to us, to better perceive the common structures on which they are based, and thus to arrive at a transreligious vision of the world.

The transreligious attitude is not in contradiction with any religious tradition or with any agnostic or atheistic current to the extent that these traditions and currents recognize the presence of the sacred. In fact, the presence of the sacred is our transpresence in the world. If it were widespread, the transreligious attitude would make all religious wars impossible.

At its extreme point, *the transcultural opens onto the transreligious*. Through a curious historical coincidence, the discovery of the Venus of Lespugue occurred in 1922, just two years after the scandal of Brancusi's Princess X, a sculpture banned from the Salon des Indépendants due to accusations of obscenity.³⁴ Astonished art lovers discovered the shocking resemblance between a Paleolithic sculpture and that of the most innovative artists of the era, who would be later recognized as the founder of modern sculpture. Like the unknown sculptor of Venus de Lespugue, Brancusi tried to make the invisible—the essence of movement—visible. Working in the context of their own cultures, each of these artists attempted to respond to the question of the sacred by making the invisible visible. In spite of the millennia separating the two creators, the forms that issued from their interior beings had a striking resemblance.

The transreligious attitude is not simply a utopian project—it is engraved in the very depths of our being. Through the transcultural, which leads to the transreligious, the war of cultures—an increasingly present menace in our time—has no more reason to be. If the transcultural and transreligious attitudes were to find their proper place in modernity, the war of civilizations could not take place.

Of course, the contrary neoatheistic attitude is also present. The great postmodern thinker George Steiner stresses that the barbarity of the twentieth century is without precedent in human history. Quoting Samuel Beckett (“He doesn’t exist, the bastard!”) and Bertrand Russell (“It isn’t nice of Him not to give us news”), George Steiner expresses his own deep belief in the value of a future atheistic civilization.³⁵ The fascination of postmodern humanists with technoscience is troubling.

The transcultural characterizes the work of the great Arab poet Adonis in what he calls the *mysticism of art*: a movement toward the hidden face

of Reality, a living experience, a perpetual travel toward the heart of the world, a unification of contradictories, the infinity and the unknown as aspiration, freedom from any philosophic or religious system.³⁶ It is also close to what which the great Christian theologian and philosopher Raimon Panikkar calls the *intrareligious dialogue*: a dialogue that occurs in the heart of any human being.³⁷