

Vatican by Maria Cristina Fiocchi

Europe's task to keep the peace

Giovanni Cavalcoli, a Dominican father active in the Roman Curia, says we must revive classical cultural values.

Forty cardinals, bishops, and representatives of religious orders from East and West were invited by the Pope to a meeting to prepare the special assembly of bishops to be held in 1991. The meeting at the Vatican from June 5-7 touched upon, according to an official Vatican press release, "vitally timely topics, such as the description of the situation and expectations, the theme and the date of the future special Synod, its preparation, the criteria for election of the Synodal Fathers, and the presence of observers from other Christian churches."

This occurred, the press release went on, "in a spirit of deep communion and unity with the churches which have come out of long decades of oppression, whose representatives have offered impressive witness of personal sufferings and those of the community for the Gospel."

We asked Father Giovanni Cavalcoli, a Dominican priest, to comment for our readers on this extraordinary event. He is active at the Roman Curia and has already published numerous writings on the role of Europe.

Father Cavalcoli said, "We have before us a great historical prospect from various standpoints: the construction of a united Europe and the edification of a European Church which will be able to recover with greater strength and sharpness . . . the Christian values, the values of faith which are at the origin of Europe."

He pointed out, "The times are quite favorable, both because of the crisis of communism and because of

the existence of spiritual ferment all over Europe. I think it will be a matter of getting European Christianity's 'two lungs' to breathe together, as the Holy Father likes to put it." He warned that "we must be quick to supply aid," to Eastern Europe, "including economic aid, because we stand before a grand spiritual rebirth, recognized even by the Communists," but great poverty of means.

Father Cavalcoli contrasted the "strong spirituality" in the East, "tested by countless sufferings," to the spread in the West of "a certain secularism . . . a certain sympathy for Marxism which has something paradoxical in it." Western Christianity shows signs of becoming "decadent, enfeebled, slack, a bit skeptical," he noted, with the faith "considered as one opinion among others."

"Now, too, there is the risk, which the Pope exposed, that the entry of freedom to the East may open the doors to the infiltration of negative and decadent elements from the West." Already, he said, "all kinds of cults, above all from the U.S., are coming in, and they are loaded with money. The Synod convoked by the Holy Father is for us believers a sign of great hope for such dangers to be allayed."

Cavalcoli believes that "no continent has as much potential as Europe to offer a Christian-inspired culture to the world. There is the need, in my view, for a recovery of the Greco-Roman culture which has been somewhat downgraded in these last post-Council decades. Of course, before Vatican II

there were nationalist-type exaggerations. But after the Council, a kind of self-wounding process took place. Now we must recover the most authentic humanistic values of the Greco-Roman tradition, so that the peoples outside Europe may also be inspired by these universal values without fearing extraneous superimpositions."

Father Cavalcoli observed that common origins in the Enlightenment, shared by Soviet Marxism and American liberalism, are shaping the "new cultural climate which is becoming hegemonic at a world level" in the "U.S.-U.S.S.R. dialogue." Taking an "historicist" view of everything, this "new liberal-socialist Russian American ideology" makes the error of "relativizing truths and religious and moral values," he warned.

We asked him what he thought of the persistent talk of a New Yalta—a new dividing up of the world between the two great powers.

"The basis upon which it rests is very fragile," he replied. "I don't think it is capable of guaranteeing a truly serene future on the international level. This is also the Holy Father's viewpoint, which I fully share, and I refer to the Pope's calling upon the responsibilities of Europe, a Europe which can rediscover its own Christian roots. This recovery of Christian roots, in the Pope's intentions, is not a kind of historical-narcissistic revisitation, but an awareness of Europe's role in a task of great responsibility: maintaining and assuring peace in the world. The Pope considers Europe as the determining factor. Today peace cannot be guaranteed by these East-West treaties, although they have their value, so much as by a more active, decisive presence of Europe. May the voice of Europe also be heard by the great powers!"