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12/21/2011

## The Rabbi, The Pope and “Chindia”

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KISHORE MAHBUBANI

**Are Judeo-Christian values an antidote to the economic crisis? Can Europe and Asia, now competing for primacy, become partners rather than rivals?**

LISA PALMIERI BILLIG  
ROME

**In Mario Monti's introduction to the Italian edition of Singapore diplomat Kishore Mahbubani's book "The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East"** (in Italian, "Nuovo emisfero asiatico: l'irresistibile ascesa dell'Est"), Italy's premier, who was formerly the

European President of the Trilateral Commission and President of Bocconi University, states that among leaders of the emerging nations there is "a widely held belief that the present global shift is merely the reparation of a historical anomaly. During most of the history of humanity, Asia's share in the

production of wealth has been greater than that of Europe. The period of Western affluence is only three – four centuries old, and what is happening today is merely a return to the norm."

Mahbubani, in a recent presentation of his research to the Foreign Press Association (Stampa Estera) in Rome, called the brief period of Western domination "a historical aberration" which is now "coming to an end." **By 2050, with the rise again of Asia, China will be Number One economically and politically, and India Number Two."**

He foresees a future of peace in Asia's return to world power, because he believes China and India will tend to co-operate rather than compete, as this will be in their common interest. "There will be a shift of power without the danger of war" he says, "a global governance in which we will all be intertwined." The author predicts that Asia's new Middle Class – approximately 500 million today, will have grown to 1.75 billion by 2050 – "presenting enormous business opportunities to the West."

According to Mahbubani, Asia's comeback is based on "seven pillars of wisdom" learned from the West. In brief these are: 1) a free market economy without ideology, 2) investment in science and technology (while the West is disinvesting), 3) pragmatism that outweighs and disintegrates ethnic/religious racism, 4) meritocracy ("Asia has the largest pool of brains, heretofore unused and now being used"), 5) culture, 6) the rule of law, 7) universal education. "The eighth pillar" he says, "is democracy. "But", he warns, "do not lecture Asians on how to manage society. The rise of Asia will be a roller coaster. We too believe in human rights. But the change will be gradual."

He recalled an episode in which a western human rights organization denounced a Chinese factory that employed child labor. Their action caused the factory to close down, but when the NGO group returned a year later they found the children had been abandoned and were now employed as street prostitutes in order to stave off starvation. Reforms must take place from within the social context, the author stated. **Mahbubani also pointed out that the USA was founded on "liberty and justice for all" in 1776, "but it took 90 years to end slavery, 150 years to extend voting rights to women, and 200 to Afro-Americans."**

This glimpse into a preponderant Asian world view might well represent a challenge to western religious leaders concerned with the economic, social, political and ethical consequences of the present crisis. The loss of moral values and unbridled capitalism of a secular, consumerist **society have been singled out by Benedict XVIth, along with many religious leaders, as partial causes for the looming threat of massive poverty now hovering over the West.**

A Jewish leader recently expressed similar views in Rome. On December 12, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, after an audience with Pope Ratzinger, delivered a speech at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome entitled, "Has Europe Lost its Soul?"

Many of his points were congruent with the thoughts expressed by Benedict XVIth.

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He refers to a recent book, "Civilization" by Chinese Scholar Niall Ferguson, "in which the author tells of how the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences was given the task of discovering how the West, having lagged behind China for centuries, eventually overtook it and established itself in a position of world pre-eminence." Ferguson concluded that it was "the Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life" that "made possible the emergence of capitalism and then the successful transition to democratic politics. We don't have any doubt about this" he said.

Rabbi Sacks supports his thesis with the words of yet another economic historian, David Landes, author of "The Wealth and Poverty of Nations". "Landes pointed out that China was technologically far in advance of the West until the 15th century. The Chinese had invented the wheelbarrow, the compass, paper, printing, gunpowder, porcelain, spinning machines for weaving textiles and blast furnaces for producing iron. Yet they never developed a market economy, the rise of science, an industrial revolution or sustained economic growth. The Harvard historian too concluded that it was the Judeo-Christian heritage that the West had and China lacked."

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