

Preface

When Victor Hugo said “greater than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come,” it was not a cultural age he had in mind. Nevertheless, there is mounting evidence to indicate that a cultural age is truly “an idea whose time has come.”

Hence this book. It is designed to show why a cultural age is necessary and how it might be achieved, as well as the way my thoughts on this matter have evolved over many years. In order to do this, a number of articles and chapters from books I have written on this subject are reproduced here. It is hoped that they make a compelling case for a cultural age and the many benefits that can be derived from it.

While I didn’t realize it at the time, the education I received in the arts when I was young was the ideal preparation for someone who seemed destined to spend the bulk of his life wrestling with the complexities of culture and making the case for a cultural age. This is due to the intimate connection between culture and the arts, and the fact that the arts act as a “gateway to culture” in many ways. Recently, I have even begun to wonder if the arts might provide the centrepiece for a cultural age in much the same way that science provides the centrepiece for the current economic age.

When I taught economics in the 1960s, I found myself thinking about the need for a new kind of age very often. This was because I felt a much broader perspective was required on the world situation—a perspective that included all human activities as well as the natural environment in public and private planning, policy, and decision-making. Could culture provide this perspective? Years later, I learned that many cultural scholars have viewed culture in holistic terms, and there has been a strong bond between culture and nature dating back to classical times.

My first real foray into this area occurred in 1975 when an article of mine—“Towards a New World Order: The Age of Culture”—was published in UNESCO’s journal *Cultures*. This was reinforced when Jack Fobes,

Deputy Director-General of UNESCO at the time, ordered a special printing of the article for distribution to delegates attending a Roundtable on Cultural and Intellectual Cooperation and the New International Economic Order, organized by UNESCO. It was reinforced even more when Guy Métraux, editor of *Cultures*, asked me to write a second article—"The Age of Culture: Prospects and Implications"—for publication in *Cultures* later in 1975.

These events, which happened in rapid succession, were a defining factor in my life. They convinced me that I should spend the rest of my life trying to broaden and deepen knowledge and understanding of culture and making the case for a cultural age.

This was not possible, however, without learning much more about culture than I knew at that time. Fortunately, an opportunity to do this opened up when I went to the University of Toronto in the early 1980s to teach courses in arts administration and cultural policy and act as coordinator for two new cooperative programs being developed there in arts administration and international development. Whenever I had some spare time, I would head off to the Bladen Library to read about culture and what cultural scholars had to say about it.

What I discovered there amazed me. I learned that cultural scholars have had an enormous amount to say about culture and its actual and potential role in the world. The problem was that their thoughts on this subject were spread across many disciplines—the arts, humanities, history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, ecology, and biology—rather than located in a single place. This was because of the incredible amount of complexity that exists in the world and culture's capacity for helping us to understand and deal with this complexity.

What amazed me even more was that when I pulled all the contributions of cultural scholars together and looked at them collectively, I found that all the ingredients were there to make a compelling case for a cultural age. This was true not only with regard to the nature and meaning of culture, but also for the impact culture has on every aspect of the world situation and human condition, from the individual and institutional level to the municipal, regional, national, and international level.

I also became aware of something else. There was a very different way of seeing the world and valuing things in the world contained in the thoughts and ideas of cultural scholars. I began to refer to this as "the cultural way of looking at the world" or a "cultural worldview" (as Federico Mayor has noted in his Foreword) because it included all human activities

and the natural environment in its purview. It also placed a great deal of emphasis on humanity's greatest, wisest, and most inspiring achievements and ideals, thereby making it possible to predicate the case for a cultural age on the contributions of countless cultural scholars and practitioners rather than wishful thinking on my part.

This ultimately led to the publication of a book called *Culture: Beacon of the Future*. Published in 1998, this book was designed to present my findings on culture up to that point in my life, make the case for a holistic understanding of culture in general and cultures in particular, and demonstrate the crucial importance of culture and cultures in the development of people, communities, countries, the state, the world system, and a cultural age. The title of the book was chosen deliberately to emphasize that there are risks as well as rewards to be experienced when dealing with culture. Hence the need to warn of possible danger and institute the necessary safeguards as well as illuminate a vital, viable, and safe path to the future.

Once *Culture: Beacon of the Future* was out and circulating, I turned my attention to a cultural age in earnest. This led to the publication of a number of articles relevant to this matter, as noted in the appendix and posted on the World Culture Project website, as well as a second book, *Revolution or Renaissance: Making the Transition from an Economic Age to a Cultural Age*. This book was published in 2008, and was intended to show that a cultural age should constitute the next step in global development and human affairs because it possesses the potential to deal with the world situation in broader, deeper, and more fundamental terms.

At the heart of this book was a problem that had bothered me for years and still bothers me today. It is this. How can we create an age that makes it possible for *all* people and *all* countries to enjoy reasonable standards of living and a decent quality of life without straining the globe's fragile ecosystems, scarce resources, and finite carrying capacity to the breaking point?

I believe that a cultural age can do this, but only if we can create a more effective balance between the material and non-material dimensions of life and realize much more caring, sharing, compassion, and cooperation in the world. The distinguished Dutch cultural historian, Johan Huizinga, gave us an inkling of what is required to do this when, following his examination of numerous cultures throughout the world, he declared that "the realities of economic life, of power, of technology, of everything

conducive to man's material well-being, must be balanced by strongly developed spiritual, intellectual, moral, and aesthetic values." Such a balance, in my view, is the key to a cultural age, as well as to achieving a great deal more harmony, stability, sustainability, equality, and well-being in the world.

Clearly we have only scratched the surface of the rich potential that culture possesses to create the conditions for a better world. This is especially important now that developments in communications technology have made it possible for people in all parts of the world to tap into humanity's greatest historical and contemporary accomplishments in every field of cultural endeavour, as well as to express their own thoughts, creativity, and ideas, and share them with others throughout the world.

In effect, that is what I have attempted to do in this book. I have tried to draw on the insights and ideas of countless generations of cultural scholars and practitioners, and blend them with my own personal, professional, and often profound experiences with culture and cultures over the years.

It is my hope that this approach—and this book—will prove helpful in generating fruitful discussion on why a cultural age is so desperately needed at this time and what is most essential to achieve in such an age. This is imperative now that culture has become a powerful force in the world and we are standing on the threshold of a whole new era in global development and human affairs.

D. Paul Schafer

2014