

WHAT THE WEST HAS LEARNED FROM THE EAST IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Among the changes of the influence of foreign cultural pressures in Western civilisation in the second half of the twentieth century, two deserve special attention: the birth and rapid development of pacifism and the evolution of the cosmovital ideas. Both of these shifts should be traced to the influences of the East, and more precisely, to the cultural tradition of India. Ahimsa, the strict injunction against the use of violence or infliction of injury, constitutes an integral part of the ancient tradition of India. This principle is proclaimed by Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. The Asian respect for life complements an emerging ecological sensitivity condemning the industrial devastation of the natural environment and destruction of whole species.

INTRODUCTION

In the second half of the twentieth century, monumental changes occurred in Western culture, both in the sphere of values and cultural norms, as in the field of ideas and symbolic consciousness.¹ Some of these changes were of an *endogenous* nature and were simply the result of an internal transformation in Western civilisation, while other changes were the creation of *diffusion*, i.e., the influence of foreign cultural pressures. Among the changes of diffusion, two deserve special attention due to their far-reaching effects: the birth and rapid development of an ideology of “fighting without violence,” which significantly transformed the political culture of Europe and North America in the 1960s and 1970s, and the evolution of a western attitude towards nature in general and the animal world in particular. Both of these shifts should be traced to the influences of the East, and more precisely, to

¹ The discussions in this work will be based on a twofold concept of culture which can be represented schematically via the following diagram:

CULTURE $\frac{\text{system of ideas, signs, and symbols}}{\text{system of values, norms, and sanctions}}$

Culture seen this way constitutes an abstract-sensual reality, or ideal-material reality, comprising two mutually interconnected structures: the system of values, norms, and sanctions as well as the system of ideas, signs, and symbols. The changes to which this text refers to penetrate both these structures and, as such, are of a systemic — and not partial or superficial nature.

the cultural tradition of India. Both of these changes also affected the Christian worldview and meant the rejection of a way of thinking dominating in the West for the past dozen or more centuries.

In the last quarter of the past century, pacifist and ecological movements took root in Europe and the United States so deeply that, in the end, they had become organic products of Western civilisation. Nonetheless, they never were such. The Christian faith — the axionormative foundation of European culture — for centuries justified aggression and violence not only in social life, but also in relations between man and nature, all in the name of higher goals. The development of pacifism and ecological sensitivity in Europe and America should thus be assigned not so much to an internal evolution in Atlantic civilisation, but to external influences — specifically Asian ideas — which, transformed and adapted to the new context, in time became components of contemporary Western culture.

CHRISTIANITY AND VIOLENCE

The Biblical God is cruel and vengeful. Without scruples he resorts to violence in realising his purposes. He condemned mankind to a terrible flood, turned Sodom and Gomorra into ash with fire and brimstone, murdered the firstborn of Egypt starting with the heirs of the pharaohs and ending with the “firstborn son of the slave by the mill (*Exodus* 11: 5, 29),” and handed the people of Israel over into Babylonian captivity, “sparing neither youths, nor virgins, nor elders (*II Chronicles* 36: 17).” Violence and destruction are not only attributes of past actions of Jehovah, but also the axis of future ones. According to the prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the ultimate triumph of good over evil, the constitution of Heaven on Earth is to be preceded by a global cosmic catastrophe which, acting as a sign of the immanent coming of the Messiah, will swallow the world whole. The ground will slide out from under mankind’s feet, mountains will smoke, stars will fall from the skies and turn into dust, the oceans will boil and steam, and a gigantic fire will complete the destruction of the world.

The Church — just like the Biblical God — also unscrupulously resorted to violence and physical force aiming to fulfil its goals. From 381 AD, it methodically persecuted other religions of the Roman Empire with a brutality which greatly exceeded that which it had experienced itself under the reigns of Decius and Decollation. The bestial thirteenth century crusade against the Catharists in the south of France arouses shock and amazement to this day. The papal legate’s reply to the question of how to differentiate the Catholics from the heretics — “kill them all; God will recognise his

own” — eloquently illustrates the mentality of the clergy at that time. The Christianisation of medieval Europe was accompanied by genocide — the indigenous Prussian tribes, Slavic Polabians, and other ethnic groups who resisted evangelisation were decimated and wiped off the face of the Earth. Violence was also an instrument of spreading the Good News in Latin America, horrifyingly expressed in the novel by the Spanish Dominican, Bartolome de Las Casas, *A Brief Account of the Annihilation of the Indians* (1552). At the same time, torture and burning at the stake were popular methods of the Holy Inquisition which was to protect the doctrinal purity of the Catholic faith.

In the first half of the sixteenth century, radical factions of the Reformation, not waiting for the end of the world, undertook on their own attempts to realise the Kingdom of God on Earth. The most spectacular of these was religious dictatorship in Münster — a city belonging to the local bishop and overtaken by force by radical Anabaptists. The Münster commonalty revealed in all its dismal splendour the constituent traits of future social revolutions, whose theatre was soon to become modern Europe: a progressive alienation of political leaders aiming at all costs to realise their sublime ideals and the development of police terror which, in the name of protecting the highest values, quickly transforms into a fanatical violence attacking all without exception.

In the third chapter of his excellent monograph, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, Alexis de Tocqueville, with his talent for perspicacity, noted that “the French Revolution followed the lines of a religious revolution (Tocqueville, 1955: 10)”. Tocqueville, it seems, had in mind two key characteristics of the 1789 revolution: the universalistic nature of its ideology as well as the veritably religious fanaticism of the revolutionaries who easily reached for physical violence as a means of realising their lofty aims. The Christian religion formed in Europe a belief in the moral value of violence. Knowledge stemming from the Bible and centuries of the Church’s functioning firmly planted a conviction in the West that terror is a creative force, capable of multiplying the sum of good in the world. In this sense, Alexis de Tocqueville was right when he treated the French Revolution as a secular manifestation of a Christian way of thinking. In this sense, both fascism and communism were also social projects arising out of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The organic connection between Christianity and the anti-religious totalitarianisms of the twentieth century was accurately pointed out by Leszek Kolakowski. He notes that “Christianity created the first European models of the totalitarian state,” and it was probably unique in human history in

not only practising but also openly declaring the principle according to which what we see as white should be called black, if that is what the authorities demand. According to St. Ignatius' famous formula: 'We have to conform to the Catholic Church in such a way that if something it has defined as black appears white to our eyes, we have to call it black' (Kolakowski, 1989: 98)." The fathers of Western totalitarianism were, hence, not Trotsky, Lenin, Hitler, nor Mussolini, but rather St. Augustine and Ignatius Loyola. Neither Bolsheviks nor fascists created the ideology legitimising violence; they only reached for ready-made Christian models and expanded upon them *ad extremum*.

Catholics, the Orthodox, and Protestants have on their conscience an ocean of violent acts committed in the name of religious values. For centuries, Christian churches professed the principle that noble purposes (the salvation of souls, the spreading of the Gospel, the defence of the one true faith, etc.) justify the despicable means applied to achieve them. This way of thinking was later taken up by nationalists, communists, and fascists, thanks to whom violence became a legitimate means by which to realise not only religious values, but also national and socialist ideals. As a consequence, Europe plunged itself into two nightmarish wars in the twentieth century, together lasting nearly a decade, and constructed the two most murderous political systems human history has ever known.

AHIMSA AND STRUGGLE WITHOUT VIOLENCE

Ahimsa — the strict injunction against the use of violence or infliction of injury — constitutes an integral part of the ancient tradition of India. This principle is proclaimed by Hinduism, Buddhism, and, above all, Jainism. The Sanskrit motto *ahimsa paramo dharmah* ("*ahimsa* is the highest duty") is known throughout the entire Indian subcontinent and is understood as a ban against killing, causing bodily harm, infliction of pain, or the commission of any evil. The sanction applies not only to people, but also to every living thing.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a Hindu lawyer from South Africa, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, referred to the tradition of *ahimsa* in acting against the racial discrimination imposed upon coloured people by the colonial British administration. The broadly understood standard of *ahimsa* was translated by Gandhi into two concrete recommendations: 1) the postulate of defending the weakest against aggression on the part of the strongest, and thus an active opposition to evil, and 2) the postulate of not harming one's opponents. Both of these rules taken together comprised the

ideology of non-violent battle whose essence meant mass demonstrations, strikes, rallies, marches, manifestations, resignation from public function, non-payment of taxes, and boycotting of elections, schools, courts, and other public and private institutions.

In contrast to Christian Europe, the idea of non-violent battle is an organic element of the tradition of India where, from time immemorial, it was a popular means of vindicating one's rights by the less powerful side in a conflict. In accordance with the custom known as *dharna*, the injured party should sit before the home of his oppressor and fast until the latter compensated him for the wrong committed. Hunger strikes sometimes led to death, but more often to success. There were also cases of mass *dharna*. For instance, in 1824, in response to the appeal of several influential Brahmins, 300,000 people left their homes and sat in silence on the Benares plains to protest against the new taxes imposed upon them by the local government. After a few days of this peaceful protest, constituting an excellent example of non-violent struggle, which Mahatma Gandhi would advocate to all oppressed people a century later, the unjust tax was annulled.

The idea of non-violent confrontation was not Gandhi's original idea. Gandhi did, however, transform it into a coherent worldview and articulated a political programme which could serve the realisation of not only temporary and immediate, but also complex and far-reaching aims. Gandhi made *ahimsa* a tool for mass struggle which could be applied by entire social classes, and ethnic and/or religious groups. He shaped it into — in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru — the “equivalent of a war not arousing any moral opposition.” Mahatma Gandhi demanded renouncement of revenge by the oppressed. The act of revenge, he taught, did not eliminate the wrong which had arisen, but only added a new one. Battle with one's oppressor should thus be conducted in such a way as to not cause him any harm and, moreover, with respect for his dignity. Therefore, this must be a fight not only without violence, but also without hate.

“The world is sick of armed rebellions,” Gandhi wrote in 1925, simultaneously stressing that violence and terror are *never* capable of creating even the least bit of good (Gandhi, 1927: 905, 907). Christianity in general, and Catholics in particular, believed — and to some extent still do — that unscrupulous means may, in certain situations, serve the realisation of noble purposes and are then morally justified. Mahatma Gandhi decisively rejected such thinking and, in accordance with the law of *karma*, often repeated that a morally wrong act always leads to bad results, while good means always create good ones.

Gandhi rejected hate as an effective means of mobilising the masses to act.

But that is not all. He also attempted to make non-violent behaviour the only acceptable means of defending one's own interests. He demanded of the strong freewill abandonment of physical force, while of the weak he demanded the forsaking of violence out of a moral conviction, and not out of a cool calculation of the balance of power. Though not renouncing active resistance, Mahatma Gandhi permitted only those means which would prevent an opponent's suffering, and which would therefore serve permanent conflict resolution as well as a conciliatory arrangement of future relations between heretofore enemies. Thus non-violent struggle, as Gandhi saw it, is not only a noble means of achieving goals, but also an efficient method of building social harmony and permanent peace.

RECEPTION OF GANDHIAN IDEOLOGY IN THE WEST

Traditional Christian pacifism, associated with the practice of the first followers of Jesus, was marginalized by the Medieval Church. It then returned to Western civilisation by the Anabaptists during the Reformation, and has survived until the present day in the United States in the churches of the Mennonites and the Amish who choose to live in isolation in social ghettos. This pacifism was not oriented towards the achievement of political purposes, but towards defence of an archaic religious organisation via segregation from the "bad influences" of the changing external environment. Alongside the separative pacifism of the Mennonites and the Amish, a persuasive pacifism also appeared in the United States, characteristic of the Quakers and Baptists who engaged in public campaigns on behalf of world peace. This pacifism took the form of sending petitions to the government, the propagation of pacifist ideas, educational activity, and the organisation of peace congresses — none of which attained significant success in this area.

In the 1950s, however, a new form of pacifism appeared in the United States — activist pacifism, which asserted the necessity of deep social reforms and structural changes. In contrast to the traditional forms, this one constituted a radical movement, destabilising the political system, resorting oftentimes to drastic measures which were seen as being against the law and the binding legal standards of the day. Non-payment of taxes, destruction of documents, acts of civil disobedience, sit-down strikes, boycotts and similar behaviour helped active pacifists go beyond the set patterns of protest without resorting to violence and thus effectively and holistically transforming the social order.

The beginning of activist pacifism in the West was the Alabama bus boycott, aimed against racial segregation and organised in 1956 by the

African-American leader, Martin Luther King, in accordance with the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. Years later, Reverend King would recall, “The whole Gandhian concept of *satyagraha*² was profoundly significant to me. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my scepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time that the Gandhian method of non-violence, is one of the most potent weapons available to an oppressed people in their struggle for freedom (King, 1963: 138).” Some years earlier the pastor had explained the relationship between Christianity and satyagraha in one short statement: “Christ furnished the spirit and motivation while Gandhi furnished the method (King, 1958: 81).” In other words, Martin Luther King ultimately understood that the righteous ideas of the Sermon on the Mount could serve as inspiration for a pacifist attitude. However, they were not in the least bit capable of improving the miserable situation of the Black population of the Southern states in America. In order to attain this second goal, Mahatma Gandhi and his Indian wisdom would be required.

The French philosopher and originator of Catholic personalism, Jacques Maritain, was among the first to recognise the turning point constituted by the peaceful African-American protests initiated by King. “At this point I would like to pay my tribute of admiration to the coloured people of Montgomery, Alabama, and their spiritual leader, Reverend Martin Luther King. They gave, in the famous bus boycott of 1956, an example whose historic importance may be considerable — the most striking example as yet seen in this country of a possible use, in the Occident, of Gandhian methods of non-violence (Maritain, 1958: 51).” Maritain’s prediction turned out to be prophetic. After the success of the Blacks in the South, the Indian ideology of non-violent dissent spilled out far and wide across America.

February 1960 in Greensboro, North Carolina, marked the start of a campaign against the segregation of African-Americans in public bars and restaurants. Protesters occupied spaces reserved for Whites, and picketed and boycotted segregated establishments. The movement quickly spread in the South and won the support of students at the most prestigious American universities such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Brown, and universities in Chicago, Indiana, Wisconsin, Colorado, and Berkeley. These protests were accompanied by the spirit of Gandhi whose strategy was deemed the solely admissible form of battle in a democratic society. Pamphlets with the motto “Remember Love and Non-Violence” floated

² *Satya* means truth which is love; *graha* means power. Thus, *satya graha* is the same as the power of truth, or the power of love.

among the student population.

Spontaneous acts of protest against racial segregation in America swiftly transmuted into organised political activism synchronised nation-wide by mass civic organisations such as the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee established in 1960, and the Civil Rights Movement. A few years later, following in the footsteps of anti-racist demonstrations, massive political protests against the Vietnam War erupted at universities; in 1965 they engulfed over 800 campuses. Concurrently, three young Americans undertook a shocking form of protest heretofore unknown in the West — they committed public self-immolation to demonstrate their dissent against the war. The latter half of the 1960s brought an avalanche of desertions from the armed forces, acts of public draft-card burning, and other acts of civil disobedience.

A widespread and active pacifist movement also emerged in Great Britain. In 1958, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was founded which organised, among other things, an annual 85 kilometer protest march from London to Aldermaston. In 1962, over 20,000 persons took part in this protest. The police arrested about 1,000 protesters, to include the elderly Bertrand Russell. He was subsequently sentenced to two months in prison for organising an “illegal demonstration.” The following year, however, some 40,000 people went to Aldermaston, and Easter Marches became a popular form of pacifist protest taken up by youth in other countries, including Germany, France, Holland, and Scandinavia. Paralleling the anti-nuclear activities, the second half of the 60s brought an increase in peaceful protests in Europe against the American intervention in Vietnam. These, in turn, quickly transformed into a broader counterculture movement attacking the political institutions of the West and their policies with regards to communism and Third World countries. With time this movement would lead to profound cultural changes and, partially converted into political parties, ultimately became a key component of Western European establishment.

During the 1970s, peaceful forms of political battle appeared as well in Central Europe, where they were directed against communist dictatorships controlled by the USSR. 1976 brought the Committee for the Defence of Workers in Poland, and, a few months later, *Karta 77* in Czechoslovakia. Both these organisations associated themselves *expressis verbis* with the ideas of Gandhi, defending by peaceful means human rights and personal freedom, constantly assaulted by the socialist regimes in this region. Some years later, the fight for democracy and independence of the Central European nations would enter its final and decisive phase. As a consequence of wide-

spread strikes in Baltic Coast port cities, Solidarity was born in 1980 — a powerful, 10 million members strong organisation of intelligentsia and workers, which set as its goal the gradual deconstruction of the oppressive political system imposed upon Poland by the Red Army after World War II. Solidarity's non-violent battle was astonishingly effective. After just under a decade of a difficult struggle with the international communist system, Poland became a sovereign and democratic country on the basis of the Round Table agreements elaborated and signed by former political prisoners and the ruling regime. Within a few months, the Velvet Revolution in Prague ended the socialist system in Czechoslovakia and brought Vaclav Havel to power, the Berlin Wall fell, and the entire totalitarian Soviet system throughout Central Europe collapsed.

THE MECHANISM OF RECEPTION OF GANDHIAN IDEOLOGY

Developing a strategy of non-violent struggle, Gandhi referred to ancient Indian religious concepts: truth (*satya*), duty (*dharma*), avoidance of harm (*ahimsa*), and suffering (*topas*). How was it then possible for a political programme arising out of the spirit of Asian tradition to bear such great success in the West, winning the hearts and minds of Black American citizens and American students, Bertrand Russell and the youth of Western Europe, as well as the intelligentsia and workers of Poland and Czechoslovakia? Three factors — it seems — could explain the rapid assimilation of Gandhian ideas in the European cultural sphere: activism, relativism, and pragmatism.

The Hindu principle of *ahimsa*, as Gandhi interpreted it, became an absolute directive to actively fight human injustice. No one, taught Gandhi, can be indifferent to the misery of his fellow men because the essence of morality is the elimination of evil and the proliferation of good. Therefore, Gandhi resolutely rejected the quietistic ideal of man running through the Hindu tradition and replaced it with optimistic activism. Of all the classical Indian literature, Mahatma Gandhi most highly regarded the Bhagavad Gita, which declares the superiority of action over escapism. Mahatma once said, "If I had the chance to face Buddha, I would not hesitate to ask him why he did not preach the gospel of work instead of the gospel of contemplation (Gandhi, 1957: 91)." This type of thinking³ was recognisable to the

³ Gandhi drew criticism precisely for this from Hindu leaders who defended traditional religious beliefs. One of these, Gupta Sen, even accused Mahatma Gandhi of unfamiliarity with the classical literature, with the exceptions of the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad Gita* (see G. Sen, *Ganghiji ki nam khuli citthi*, Calcutta 1942, p. 12). The first President of the Republic of India, Jawaharlal Nehru emphasised on various occasions that the understanding of *ahimsa*

Christian culture, its Protestant version in particular, which stressed change and perfection of the world as a religious duty of man and as a continuation of the Divine act of creation.

Justifying *satyagraha* on a philosophical level, Gandhi referred to the Hindu belief that only relative, fragmentary, and uncertain truth is available to the human mind. This conviction provided him with epistemological arguments on behalf of the rejection of violence. Because each party in a conflict may be in possession of some partial truth, and since no one is the bearer of the absolute truth,⁴ no social subjects could reach for radical means of defence of their views because those opinions would always be doubtful. The relativism of Gandhi was in direct opposition to the doctrinal certainty of Christianity (which, in the past, had constantly reached for radical means precisely for this reason), but it fitted perfectly the scholarly worldview and rational spirit, progressively more rooted in the West since the Enlightenment.

A programme advocating non-violent battle became attractive for people in the West for at least one more reason — its pragmatism. The emphasis which Gandhi put on the efficiency of the pacifist strategy of action was in every respect in accord with instrumental rationality, which was a key trait of modern European culture. The Hindu leader was convinced that by applying the principle of *ahimsa* one could achieve any good and valuable aim. In his 1940 appeal *To every Briton* he wrote: “I have been practising the principle of non-violence with scientific precision uninterruptedly for fifty years. I do not know a single case where it failed (Tendulkar, 1953: 366).” Indeed, Mahatma Gandhi accurately diagnosed the political-economic system of complex, industrial societies whose functioning required not so much the passive obedience of their citizens as the active and volunteered Cupertino of numerous specialised individuals and professional groups. A boycott of the system, or even refusal to fulfil routine tasks — neither of which demanded particular heroism — could (inasmuch as it was enacted on a mass scale) effectively paralyse the convoluted state apparatus, and turn out to be a powerful means of placing pressure on local and national governments of which not only the Indians under British occupation, but also the Blacks of the American South, and members of Solidarity in Poland all became convinced.

which Gandhi had developed fundamentally differed from that of the original religious version.

⁴ For this reason Gandhi commanded equal respect for all religions and called for “peaceful coexistence” in India of the Hindu, Islamic, Sikh, and Christian faithful.

CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOCENTRISM

European culture is a *par excellence* activist culture emphasising practical activity. More than this, its unique feature is the presumption that man occupies a distinguished position in the world, a conviction contrasting with the cosmovital conception of unity, so characteristic of the great cultures of the East. These two distinctive features — activism and anthropocentrism — have a common origin. “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth,” the *Book of Genesis* (1: 28-29) states about our first ancestors. The Bible raised supremacy over the world to the rank of a moral norm and a religious dictate for each believer. “Even if you were to find this land filled with all possible good, do not say: we will sit and we will not sow. On the contrary, think about sowing (*Wajikra Rabba*, 25),” the Talmud teaches.

These two, mutually reinforcing, ideas of Judaism — anthropocentrism and activism — also inspired European Christian culture throughout the centuries, constituting Europe’s driving force despite revivals of mystic and millenarian movements, and despite Franciscanism and Romanticism. One of the most important documents of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council declares: “Throughout the course of the centuries, men have laboured to better the circumstances of their lives through a monumental amount of individual and collective effort. To believers, this point is settled: considered in itself, this human activity accords with God’s will.” For man, “created to God’s image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness (II Vatican Ecumenical Council III: 34).” So, while the civilisations of the East inherently bore the ideas of a positive identification of man and the universe — or, as Marcel Granet says, a “good understanding (Granet, 1934: 589).” — European culture shaped an attitude of domination and supremacy. The psalmist writes of man:

“Yet you have made him little less than God,
and crowned him with glory and honour.
You have given him domination over the
works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,

the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the sea.”
(Ps 8: 5-8).

This radically anthropocentric viewpoint undoubtedly set in motion a human battle with opposing forces for it endowed man's undertakings with the character of a mission. On the other hand — in contrast with metempsychotic trends, such as Orphism or Hinduism, which dictate an equal respect for both animal and human life — it brutalised man's attitude towards nature. This brutalisation is embodied most conspicuously in the thought which the biblical God expresses in his speech to Adam and which He repeats more ruthlessly when addressing Noah: “The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered (Genesis 9: 2-3).” At the same time, in the East, a philosophy was developing whose essence could most succinctly be expressed in the words of William Blake: “For everything that lives is Holy.”

The spreading of Christianity, however paradoxical this may sound, has led to the desacralisation of the world. For the Greeks, as Tales would say, all things were pervaded by deities: groves, meadows, rivers and fields. Other great religions, including Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and other primitive beliefs, also contained elements of pantheism and the relevant customs.⁵ The Judeo-Christian conception of deity — monistic and transcendent — dispossessed the world of all divine features, transforming it into the sphere of *profanum*. This sphere could then be subjected to man's unlimited rule. To put this in yet another way, the Greek notion of cosmos as a homogeneous and all-encompassing entity, was split in Christian thought into two separate and diametric components: *civitas Dei* and *civitas terrena*, the world of God and the world of man.

There is no other word which could better articulate the fundamental features of the Greek worldview than the concept of *cosmos*. Cosmos means “order” or “orderliness” of the world, republic, household, or individual life. It is a term conveying a positive appraisal, praise, and even admiration. Strictly speaking, the cosmos — or more simply, the universe — as the high-

⁵ Smohalla, an Indian prophet of the Umatilla tribe, refused to till the soil, like Mongols practising Lamaism or members of some Hindu factions. He defended his antiagricultural stance by saying: “You ask me to plough the ground? Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom? You ask me to dig for stone? Shall I dig under her skin for her bones? You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it, and be rich like white men! But how dare I cut off my mother's hair? (Money, 1896, 721).”

est and perfect order of the whole, was considered by Greeks to be the origin of any and all order whose internal principle was reason (*logos*) and external principle, beauty. Hence it is not strange that Stoic monism led to a complete identification of all that was cosmic with all that was divine. Plato wrote in *Timajos* (30b) that “the world is alive and endowed with a soul and reason.” Nor is it unusual that the Roman moralist Cicero saw “the imitation of the heavenly order in the course and stability of one’s life (*Cato Major*, XXI, 77)” as an unattainable ethical ideal. Moreover, the Greek word “piety” (*eusebeia*) simply means a “correct relationship” — between a husband and wife, children and their parents, mortals and the gods, and man and the world.

Romano Guardini states that “the character of Antiquity contained a deeply rooted desire to adhere to what had already been established (Guardini, 1950: 13).” This prescriptive conservatism of the Hellenes ensued from the conviction that Nature — being an embodiment of beauty, harmony and order — is perfect. Furthermore, the philosophies of the ancient Greeks did not place man in a position of supremacy over the world. Aristotle taught that, among the various entities, there were some, e.g., stars, whose nature was far more divine than man’s (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b). How, then, was man to rule over them? Christian tradition destroyed the Greek cosmos. The rational nature of the Hellenes was degraded to sinful materiality, devoid of immanent significance and autonomous value. Man, made in the image of God as the shining achievement of all creation, became its lord and master. Only man could endow every living thing with its appropriate meaning.

Francis Bacon declared that the movement of the stars serve man to measure time and mark location; that meteors allow him to predict the weather, temperature and other phenomena in the sky; that the wind is a source of energy in sailing, working wind-mills and other devices; that plants and animals provide him with clothes, medicines and various tools to improve his work. He concludes that “if man were to vanish from this earth, everything would grope aimlessly in the space, and the whole world would resemble a broom whose twigs have scattered for want of binding (*De augmentis*, VII, II).” Immanuel Kant reasoned similarly: “Without man, all of creation would be a mere wasteland, gratuitous and without a final purpose (Kant, 1987: 331).” For nature, in accordance with the conceptual system of the West, is meaningful only when it is interpreted as a manifestation of something else; theologically as *ars Dei*, a work of God, and practically as *regnum hominis*, the domain of man.

EASTERN CONCEPTS OF THE WORLD

The attitude towards nature of the followers of Hinduism is put forth concisely in the words of a prayer voiced by them at the October 1986 meeting of the great religions of the world in Assisi:

“We beg for peace in the sky,
for peace in the sky and on earth,
for peace in the depth of the sea,
for peace in grass and plants,
for peace in the divine,
We beg for peace for all the creation.”

Indian civilisation is permeated with an ecological ethics and deep sympathy with all things living on this lowly earth, filled to the brim with pain and sorrow. Respect for everything that exists stems from two fundamental beliefs rooted in the religion and mentality of the Hindi: the law of *karman* and the principle of *ahimsa*. The law of *karman* is strictly connected with the idea of the wandering soul known as the cycle of reincarnation, *sansara*. According to this concept, after death, the soul returns to earth an infinite number of times and appears subsequently in various beings until ultimately reaching release and liberation. It is *karman* — the sum of deeds committed in the previous incarnation — which determines if the soul will next take on the form of a human, animal, or some plant. Therefore, any and all life is on par with all other life since it constitutes the real or potential of human life.

The principle of *ahimsa*, present in Indian culture for over 2,500 years, states that no animal or living thing can be killed, harmed, or maltreated. *Ahimsa* is most often associated with vegetarianism, but it also means an active empathy with regards to everything that is alive, and a sense of an organic connection to all beings, which could be expressed, for instance, in the building of a hospital for sick animals. An extreme version of the *ahimsa* principle is the Jainist trait which commands them to cover their mouths and strain water so as not to accidentally swallow an insect or other tiny creature, to sweep the road before them so as not to accidentally step on a bug, and, above all, not to undertake work in any area which could in any way hurt an animal.

Buddhism is yet another Asian religion which proclaims the uncompromising equality of all living things and bids the liberation of all beings from suffering. In the eighth century, Indian Buddhism mixed with the local

beliefs of Tibetans, leading to the appearance of Lamaism, which in time reached Mongolia and Siberia. Lama monks wore shoes with turned up toes so as not to harm their Mother Earth, and the highest leader of the Tibetan faith, the Dalai Lama, is recognised as the successive incarnation of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara — the “Lord looking down with mercy upon all living things.”

A few thousand kilometers to the east of Tibet, in the Japanese archipelago, Zen Buddhism was born in the twelfth century as an extension of the Chinese contemplative practices, *ch’an*. In accordance with the experience of Zen, the world is not outside man, but man is, quite simply, the world - just as is every living thing. Therefore, when man damages his environment, he simultaneously injures himself. The world does not exist for the benefit of man or for his egoistic purposes. The world — as Zen teaches — exists for every being which possesses an autonomous significance in and of itself. Even a drop of water or a blade of grass has an absolute value, and interference in the existence of one or the other should not take place without real necessity.

RECEPTION OF COSMOVITAL IDEAS IN THE WEST

In the mid twentieth century, various currents of Asian culture began to rapidly penetrate America. One can separate two basic phases in this process: first an interest in the philosophy and literature of the East, and next a fascination with its spirituality and mystical thought, which quickly called to life new religious communities reaching for Eastern forms of meditative practice. Zen Buddhism, the synthesis of three traditions: Indian, Chinese, and Japanese, was an important element in the inroads made by Asian cultures into the West. It is marked by an amazing logic, directness, and internal simplicity, thanks to which, by the end of the 1940s, it had already found many followers amongst young people bored with the barrenness of traditional Western ideologies. Among the first devotees of Zen were also artists, scholars, and intellectuals.

The American occupation of Japan greatly facilitated the diffusion of Asian cultural content. Americans practised Zen in the monasteries of the Archipelago, while monks of the Land of the Cherry Blossom gave numerous lectures on the subject of Buddhism at universities in the United States. Intellectuals, including Erich Fromm, Alan Watts, and Philip Kapleau, came to listen. Joining these university professors were writers and poets of the Beatnik movement — Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gary Snyder, and Gregory Corso. They, in turn, launched a powerful coun-

terculture movement which, for over a quarter of a century, comprised an unsettling challenge for the traditional American way of life — and also made its way to the European continent.

The significance of Buddhism in America was further strengthened after the annexation of Tibet by Communist China in 1959, which gave rise to a massive emigration wave of Lama monks from hitherto rather unreachable corners of the Roof of the World, to India and the West. Here they influenced a notable segment of the youth population, proclaiming a philosophy of respect for all living things and the supremacy of spiritual values over the material. New Buddhist and Yoga centers were established on the East and West coasts. Concurrently, the Hare Krishna movement was propagating vegetarianism, Hindu music, a new lifestyle and expression of one's personality with increasing success; thus creating a favourable climate for the expansion of Buddhism and related religions.

The 1960s were a particularly stormy period in the flowering of the counterculture movement, which more and more clearly radicalised politically and became the force behind street demonstrations and student sit-down strikes. One of the most popular theorists of the counterculture, Theodore Roszak, wrote that what differentiated the youth protests of the 60s from previous outbursts of rebellion was the unprecedented leaning towards occultism, mysticism, and spiritualism. In 1968, Roszak ascertained that the West had already entered the post-Christian era and that the numerous contestations referring to Zen, tantric, Hindu, Sufi, shamanist, and theosophist traditions comprised a reaction to the ideological domination of oppressive churches and the antihumanist, scientific-technological worldview (Roszak, 1970: 165-67).

Counterculture contemplative practice and studies of Asian religions aimed to imbue the "hard" Western civilisation with the "soft" Eastern spirituality embodied in Taoism, Buddhism, and the Vedic tradition. In other words, the quest of the youth movements was an attempt to overcome not only the dualistic Christian worldview which placed man against nature, but also the materialistic-mechanistic way of thinking about the world initiated in seventeenth century Europe. It was thus a way of trying to resacralise the Cosmos or, to put it differently, to re-enchant the world which had been deprived of its holiness by both the anti-pantheistic faiths of the West as well as by the naturalist paradigm of European science.⁶

⁶ Western ecological movements drew their inspiration not only from Asian thought, but also from pre-Christian beliefs, which can be well exemplified by the "Day of Earth", referring to the cult of the Greek goddess Gaia. The pagan cults, however, do not have sufficient intellectual strength to inspire a new cosmocentric ethic of industrial society, which is taking shape

The cosmovital Eastern ideas which reached the West from Asia in ever-broadening streams, began to capture the imaginations of a small fragment of Western society. It was, however, a fragment of great weight and significance: the intellectual and cultural elites as well as the student youth who naturally transmuted in time into the adult political decision-makers, capable of influencing public opinion and shaping law and public institutions. This process of the transformation of rebels recently rejecting the bourgeois culture into a section of the political establishment of the West was especially marked in Europe. In 1973, the first ecological party was founded in Great Britain, and was subsequently followed by similar ones in Austria, Belgium, Holland, Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia. During the next decade, representatives of Green parties made it into the parliaments of European countries, and sometimes even into coalition governments. On the other side of the Atlantic, Americans and Canadians founded the international organisation Greenpeace in 1971, whose aim was to fight for environmental protection via peaceful means. This organisation now has offices in 24 countries and has over 5 million members.

THE MECHANISM OF RECEPTION OF THE COSMOVITAL IDEAS

Buddhism, yoga, Taoist practices and other Asian religious movements manifested themselves in the technologically advanced societies of the West in the second half of the twentieth century, during a deep civilisational crisis evoked by the traumatic experiences of the Second World War. They took root in Europe and America in the 1960s thanks to the speedy progress of the counterculture movement. The rebellious youth, rejecting the egoistic middle-class worldview, found itself in a conceptual void which it was neither able to fill in with social welfare state programmes, nor with the values declared by the traditional Churches. The philosophy and religions of the East provided new and promising replies to old questions on the relationship between morality and politics, society and nature, and the individual and the world. Just as Gandhi's pacifism resonated with the fresh memories of the painful consequences of war and the fear of a nuclear holocaust of mankind, so the Asian respect for any and all life complemented an emerging ecological sensitivity condemning the industrial devastation of the natural environment and destruction of whole species which had inhabited the Earth for hundreds of thousands of years.

mostly under the overwhelming influence of Asian religion in general, and Buddhism in particular.

Western societies — more accurately, their elites — facing a burgeoning and disturbing ecological threat, suddenly became aware of a truth known always in the East: man constitutes but an organic element of nature. They reached for Asian concepts so as to describe this fact which could not be expressed in the language of Christian anthropocentrism. As Leszek Kolakowski noticed, “the pantheistic concept of the world, even maintained extremely idealistically, was always a drastic insult to the Christian God because the doctrinal power of Christianity did not lie in its spiritualism but in dualism, in the opposition between the world created and the Creator existing beyond the world (Kolakowski, 1958: 130).”

Dualism was and is the supreme principle of Christianity: the dualism of the Creator and the created, *sacrum* and *profanum*, spirit and matter, and man and nature. Out of the grounding of Christianity no ecological ethics could grow. Quite the contrary, ecological ethics, based on the principle of an equality of all living things, demands the rejection of Christianity, as Christianity perceives a divine element in nature only incidentally and indirectly, as the presence of God in history. The cosmovital Eastern spirituality — less dogmatised than Christianity, Judaism, or Islam — asserts the principle of universal sympathy and love extended to all living things, speaks of the sanctity permeating the entire world, and proclaims the autonomous value of everything which exists. This is an immanent, not transcendent spirituality — a cosmocentric, not anthropocentric spirituality.

During the 1970s and 1980s, a fundamental change in the Western culture’s perception of nature came into view and a tendency to think of the world in cosmocentric terms appeared. This tendency was the result of two different factors: a comprehension of the ecological crisis as a dire threat to the quality of human life, and the autonomous development of an ecological ethics. With regard to the first of these, the cosmocentric point of view does not ultimately conflict with the traditional Western worldview. This is because it is accepted for purely instrumental reasons, as the optimal means of protecting human interests in this world marked by copious cataclysms generated by civilisation. With regards to the second, however, cosmocentrism reflects an entirely new ethical sensitivity, shaped to a great degree under the influence of Eastern religious ideas - an opening up of mankind towards the non-human world and recognition of its autonomous worth and eminence.⁷

⁷ Respect for nature took root in the West thanks to the influence of the high culture of Asian countries. Their folk culture, however, abounds in examples of cruelty to animals. In Vietnam and Laos, the foreign visitor can see live frogs with their legs sewn together, a live turtle slung over a fisherman’s shoulder with a rope strung through its shell, live turkeys and

The duality of the contemporary cosmocentrism of the West can be illustrated clearly on the basis of two legal acts of a pan-European validity: The Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats of September 1979, and the European Convention for the Protection of Vertebrate Animals used for Experimental and Scientific Purposes of March 1986. The first of these mandates environmental protection because it recognises that “wild flora and fauna constitute a natural heritage of aesthetic, scientific, cultural, recreational, economic and intrinsic value that needs to be preserved and handed on to future generations (*Preamble*).” The second, on the other hand, stresses that “man has a moral obligation to respect all animals and to have due consideration for their capacity for suffering and memory (*Preamble*).” The former way of thinking constitutes a secular variant of Christian anthropocentrism. The latter, in turn, does not stem from Western tradition, but is a modified version of the *ahimsa* principle which, after years of counterculture incubation, has broken out onto the level of European institutions⁸ and has become obligatory law.

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chickens carried upside down by their feet, and small creatures kept in terribly tight metal cages. Cruelty to animals is also not uncommon in China and Japan despite their long-lasting Buddhist background.

⁸ Serving as further examples of Western ecological ethics translated into legal language are three other Council of Europe documents: the March 1976 European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes; the May 1979 European Convention for the Protection of Animals for Slaughter; and the November 1987 European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals. Moreover, in June 2002, Germany — as a first country of the European Union — recognised in the amendment to the constitution “protection of animals as one of the aims of the state.” Ten years earlier, a similar regulation was ratified by the Swiss parliament that put into the federal constitution “the guarantee of dignity of all creatures.”

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