

CHAPTER I

THE WEST

When we speak of the West, or of Western culture, we usually mean the culture developed by the Western European countries and the United States of America. This definition is acceptable, but we must take into account that there are countries on the Eastern half of the world—Japan, for instance—where the Western lifestyle predominates in certain spheres. Also, the most typically Western culture is more clearly manifested in some social strata, and not in others within the same country, as is the case in Latin America.

Western society is the most protean of all those known. The abundance of subcultures is impressive. There is, thus, a great diversity of political, religious and economic thought. That is why speaking of the West as something typical almost always leads us to error. Several peoples in the world have become Westernized; the *ethos* of Latin America is far more similar to what we might call Western than to its indigenous culture. Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Taiwan and other isolated countries of the main geographical bloc might also be classified as Western. For our purposes, and with the suitable exceptions, I will characterize the West in two words: democracy (capitalism) and Christianity. Evidently we must exclude Japan from Christianity, and the communist regimes and Latin American military governments from democracy.

It is also difficult to define the East, or Eastern culture. It is generally understood by the latter that of the Asiatic peoples from India to the Far East, including the Arab countries to some degree, identifying it with a contemplative, less materi-

alistic lifestyle and by a greater attachment to tradition. And in speaking of politics we confront yet another difficulty: the Soviet Union and East Germany, for example, used to be classified as Eastern, and capitalist democracies as Western, even though communism never identified with anything which could be considered Eastern, not even in its origins, and formerly communist countries were very Western in other aspects. Keeping all of that in mind, the distinction is useful and must not cause confusion.

For various reasons, which we will consider elsewhere, the messengers of death and destruction have found a willing audience in those who do not understand what Western culture is and means, and how it works. Problems exist, such as the terrible threat which the destruction of the family is already posing. But on the other hand, if something characterizes the West it is the underlying cultural strength and vigor which is little appreciated by those who think that nothing works, that the societies where they were born and raised are worth nothing. This phenomenon has brought about desertion, deculturization, and the rejection of the crucial value that interests us here and which democracy and Christianity uphold: individualism. Those who never find themselves, who have no expectations from the future, the weak-spirited, the insecure and the confused, make up this army of deserters, pessimistic and ominous. I must make it clear, however, that I refer to the total event, not to each particular instance, often devoid of evil intention and deserving only of compassion.

Certain deserters of the Western faith abandon it out of disillusionment with its *materialism*. If that were their point of view, it is not clear why they often abandon their religion. This is a special group, mostly unrelated to the political and ideological deserters who have really turned militant against democracy, but it is also a group which undermines the solidarity needed for defense, since it is prone to be sympathetic to any socialist scheme, which it deems humanitarian. They cannot tolerate talk of economic progress, and see Western man as lacking in moral values, to which they attribute war and other problems. They fail to observe, however, that their neighbors in the East live in glass houses. They admire

Hindus, and Easterners in general, excessively. They forget the terrible struggles for power which devastated India after its independence. They forget the problems with Pakistan, and the many instances when Bengalis and Sikhs have perished over religious differences. These are things of the past in Western countries. The West seems to have an edge on decadence and common criminals. The cruelties unleashed by the communists in wars over Vietnam and Cambodia, however, have no parallel in modern Western history. And the way the Hindus put it into practice, the caste system is second only to communism as the most unjust and humiliating insult to human dignity ever conceived. Compared specifically to the US and Western Europe, the corruption of the ruling classes, and the disregard for the welfare of the people seem to plague the East more than the West. Of course there is peace in the ashrams, but there is more to the East than ashrams. And let us also consider China and its recent revolution, with deaths in the tens of millions, a thing of the past in the most typical Western countries. It seems patent that this reflects more of a humanistic than of a simple civic advancement.

Neither Europe nor the United States of America have been free of war, such as the Second World War. But it is clear that this conflict did not reflect any generalized vice of society but the biases of extremist groups. Surely the same explanation holds true for similar events in the East, so I merely try to prevent others from idealizing another culture to the detriment of our values. The important thing is to understand that, at the very least, the West is no worse, and that it is better to fight for the real values that it has than to attempt to substitute them for others. I understand that there are truth-seekers and not deserters who do not reject the inherited values, but merely adopt a different, idiosyncratically-bound, lifestyle.

It is of utmost importance to consider, from a cultural point of view, what the West has meant to the world: consummate artists, great geniuses, great inventions, great changes, great revolutions, contributions perhaps without parallel in the rest of the world. The great Christian mystics have nothing to envy others, and the Western philosophers are as influential as any. Where has another Da Vinci been born? Where a painter like Dali or a genius like Einstein? Who discovered electricity?

Who travels to the moon and who has traversed the seas? Who has advanced the world? The great technological advancements which might bring the masses relief from poverty, where are they developed if not in the West? Who has elevated the social status of the women? Where, if not in the West, did the two great libertarian struggles of modern man—the US Declaration of Independence and the French Revolution—originate? Where the play of ideas and the fighting spirit of individualism if not in the West? There is no lack of legendary heroes in the West, but even above them towers the most pathetically illuminating personality ever known to the human race: Jesus Christ.

I am not placing Christ or Christianity above other great men and religions either; I am saying that His is the most moving example and the most expeditious for sating the soul, because in Him both doctrine and praxis emphasize love and the value of faith more than the annihilation of the ego (which actually must only transcend its lower drives) and other aspects of the path to redemption. We must always be mindful of the particular sensitivities of each culture to divine or esoteric revelation, which root in the same basic spiritual disposition. The Buddhist Eightfold Path, for example, is also based on a distinct loving fiber; and some Oriental ways of elevating and healing the individual soul are often the initial step for being able to love and to forgive. Christianity is said to be rooted and structured in the Oriental mindframe, perhaps too sweeping a concept given the eclectic nature of Western culture. The East, on the other hand, gives us its contribution, magnificent to be sure, in the power of the mind over the body. The industrialized West has, at least officially, neglected this, partly because obscurantism, and partly because of the pseudo-scientism which prevailed until well into the last century. Despite this neglect, it has been far from lacking, and still is. We would not know where to place our indigenous roots, but we can remember the esoteric movements, the great gnostic, the occult sects, the spiritualism and the sorcery as part of the rich Western (lay) tradition in the most fascinating matters of supraconsciousness and related states.

The East has managed a greater integration of daily life with philosophy and religion, and has advanced farther in the

encounter with our true self. The West is beginning to move again in this direction, however, and it seems that this time it will go the full length. It may even offer innovative explanations of the above mentioned phenomena, bringing them into the realm of science. The West may travel to and populate the stars, and bring physics and metaphysics together. Many books can be written about the defects of Western culture, but many more about its virtues. Summing up, an incredibly vast culture, the most creative in the world, and one which must in no way be underestimated. And there is more. The West means much more, infinitely more, and especially in these historic times, the hope of freedom for all men.

The leader and some of its challenges

There is no doubt that only great men could have forged a great nation, and that a decisive step in the advance to the realization of the full individual was taken with the US Declaration of Independence. The truly libertarian values, such as the right to the pursuit of happiness, preceded even the concepts of the French Revolution. The protagonists of independence etched in their political constitution the principles of nomocratic right as supporting pillars for the realization of the American dream. These were *the old Americans*: courageous, just, devoted to an honorable peace, dreamers, men of faith, and titanic defenders of freedom. Many do not give these great historical figures the importance they deserve, tending to be substituted by weak-spirited groupings—some of them prone to senseless violence—far from possessing that great faith, wisdom and resolve. There is a lack of gratitude toward those who bequeathed the modern political enlightenment, and a tendency to diminish their actions and ideas, only because they did not implant socialism in the burgeoning empire; the French Revolution is similarly criticized. These attitudes, part and consequence of an ideological attack against the West, should serve to identify the enemies of freedom rather than to inculcate and develop feelings of guilt. The American dream was one of liberty and justice, of creating a country where everyone could feel a full individual and truly the object of rights, a country where immigrants would find

the promised land. It was capitalist philosophy, and not anything else, which caught fire in men and took the country to the top. It was the recognition of full individual rights, which made subsequent generations great and free. This clear and vibrant philosophy does not touch a chord in many today because it is not half-hearted but combative. I must say that any general judgement I make here is only paradigmatic. Each person is a world in him or herself, and may possess, in the overall reckoning, values more worthy than ours.

The great North American values have been manifested above all in the attitude toward the vanquished. The conduct of the United States of America towards Germany and Japan at the end of the Second World War was exemplary. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to rest on one's laurels. Each historical period faces a different challenge, and there is never an end to challenges. Two hundred years ago, the United States of America confronted the task of creating the necessary economic and legal infrastructures for development. This was fully achieved. Today it confronts the enormous challenge of keeping its identity and preventing the extinction of freedom. The common, ordinary modern American must work hard to make his way in the midst of vast competition, and has little time to think about the historical challenges which have arisen. Most tend to hold on in their hearts to the values they have inherited, but are being exposed to merciless ideological bombardment. The function of the average American in the US is to produce, leaving the setting of policies on every field to a series of elites. The problem arises because elites do not function properly when their power does not come from the basis of aristocratic status and prerogatives. On the one hand, they must resort to demagoguery, while on the other they tend to utilize underhanded maneuvers to further their goals. For their part, majorities are not prepared when important decisions must be made and tend to be easy targets of propaganda.

The US is the society of subcultures. We may consider any human group a subculture which is more or less numerous and is characterized by possessing values or customs and by pursuing goals which differ from those of the majority which contains them, tending to parallel and persist indefinitely as a different lifestyle. The term generally refers to racial and reli-

gious minorities, but here we would like to extend the concept to certain groups which share a special well-defined ideology or conviction, representing what we could call an idiosyncratic tangential expression of the main cultural traits more than just differing viewpoints or psychological dispositions. Thus, I do not mean to include political parties, guilds, specific ideologies, or circumstantially dissident groupings within subcultures.¹ Subcultural phenomena do not have to be counterproductive. Quite the contrary, many can actually enrich the cultural trove. The most important racial subculture in the United States is that of the blacks. The days of slavery are long gone, and blacks do not yet have the social status that they deserve. Still, I think that one of the best ways to overcome such a situation lies precisely in reencountering thoroughly with their cultural roots.

There are subcultural groups, such as secret or illegal societies, which are of no ideological importance. The same cannot be said, however, for *machista* and feminist groups, which I deem subcultural because of their power to alter the fundamental *ethos*. We will have to say more about the former later. On the other hand, the feminist subculture has such positive characteristics as promoting the integral development of women and the end of any discrimination against them.² But there are some tendencies within it—such as the fad of single parenthood, of course, a goal alien to the mainstream—in tandem with irresponsibility, selfishness, and lack of tolerance, in women as well as in men, which may give substance to one of the greatest threats ever confronted by the institution of the family. Obviously, there are necessary and appropriate sociocultural changes, but these must not entail the disintegration of useful institutions. It is true that eventually another type of family might work, but that is not what is happening. What children are observing is the breaking of the most basic link of human solidarity, which did not occur before with other types of family. This cannot be good for the psychological development of those still immature and dependent, and must affect their spiritual integrity. In that way—and by widening the gap with those attached to the traditional family—the feminist movement can be used geopolitically to weaken the West.

Subculture must not be confused with fashion-related grouping. Fashion entails a certain change in preferences specially in the field of esthetics—which tends to be temporary and does not depend on any ideological factors. In some cases, however, fashions end up acquiring certain structural norms which serve them as a basis for enduring, at least with a reduced number of followers, and for developing some ideological cohesion and, as a global phenomenon, even an ethical code. We can no longer speak of fashion in these cases, but of a kind of subculture instead. Perhaps it is rather a conviction or a common basic attitude which extends throughout a fashion, the latter serving as praxis to agglutinate these attitudes. On the other hand, pseudo-conviction³ and better communications, more than anything else, have been influential in achieving the social crystallization of fashions. Fashion is not harmful in itself; but in the West it has become integrated as a cultural trait. A culture of fashion seems to be developing as an important standard of values, becoming an influential parameter for the judgment of anything, including fundamental traditional standards. Fashion is no longer a passing thing, but is accepted as a way of life and is integrated to society as an institution, with its visible body represented by the media and those alienated by it. Unfortunately, it offers nothing genuinely fulfilling. It gives rise to the *in-individual* whose personality is dictated by what propaganda makes popular—the *other-directed* of North American sociologists—an event which is totally counterproductive to the development of a healthy personality. There is a constant search for banalities to fill what in reality is an empty life. The cult of comfort and material things often comes together with this culture of fashion. Fashions succeed one another, but the individual is never freed from the search for the latest one, and in this he spends and wastes his life. There then ensue the corruption of customs, the loss of moral standards, and eventually the destruction of the useful institutions. The vicious cycle may lead to the creation of a superficial society interested only in living for the moment, and unprepared to fight and confront the historic challenges of the time. Such a society may reach the point of internal chaos, creating a generation of dissatisfied, insecure and low-level fulfilled human beings.

Until recently, the judicial branch in the US had been able to annul laws opposed to natural law. This has been lost in part because *the new morality* demands laws which comply with the new convictions of modern society. These convictions—they are that in name only—are nothing but fashion, superficiality, pseudo-conviction, and a reflection of the loss of true values. New morality claims to be *open*, but the tolerance or pluralism it shows is not the product of understanding and benevolence but of self-indulgence and amorality. Since education and the tendencies of large groups are powerful—they can make the factual seem rational—great maturity is needed in order to remain a full individual. Still, a significant number of today's youth reject all of the above, and (although often unaware of it themselves) possess fundamentalist values and deep faith. From the joint action of various phenomena emerges the subculture of the deserter, a cause of social fission on more than one occasion, and of the decadence of certain segments of the population.

Because they cause dangerous cracks which threaten the unity of society, some phenomena deserve separate discussion; some are more provoked than spontaneous, and I therefore call them assaults. There is, for example, a moral assault purposefully aimed at destroying ethical and family values; not much more needs to be said about this. There is an assault on the Christian faith and on faith in general, and an ideological assault on capitalism; we will discuss these soon. Fortunately, many hold on to their principles, and they are the ones who move the world forward. The anti-natural ideology will only be able to triumph when it destroys the pillars which support the faith of the West.⁴

Notes

¹A very important phenomenon of this type was the hippie subculture, one of the most worrisome happenings to occur in Western culture. In itself, the hippie subculture began as a humanistic movement, and we must recognize that there were among its members people of great spiritual worth. I have nothing against them in that sense, because as individuals most had good intentions and some correct ideals. Besides, they were not despots or anything of the kind. But as a movement, the mainstream of their subculture fell into idleness, an attitude of surrender, ideological desertion, the lack of a fighting spirit, and the negation of recognition of the work of their

ancestors. Fortunately, this subcultural phenomenon has lost ideological strength, but tends to persist in diverse new forms with a much reduced following. Fortunately, also, many others have rejoined society.

²We should mention, however, that the feeling of self-realization is a mental one, that educating the children is self-realizing, and that housework must not be underestimated. The movement must not be led down the wrong path. Women have never been displaced in Western culture by the fact that their obligations to society have not been the same as those of men. Having equal rights does not mean being assigned the same responsibilities. I am not proposing a strict and fixed assignation of labors, but the natural differences between the sexes determine different roles even in animals, and so it has occurred naturally and spontaneously between men and women throughout the centuries. Here I speak in the context of the way that our culture has perceived how social functions or roles differ or should be assigned depending on sex, not to actual instances of discrimination against women. However, more on this at another time perhaps.

But nothing is worse than justifying routine and widespread abortion. Abortion is a reflection of other social ills, certainly, and these must be combatted as a first step, but neither can society condone it without justifiable reason and legalize it. As always, the proponents of new rights deny the fundamental ones, in this case, the right to life. But pro-choice advocates see in the defense of life a denial of freedom, and discrimination against women, when the matter is really one that concerns the whole of society. Granting a woman the right to kill a human being with the excuse that it is her body, is no different from extending that right to the products of her body: adults! Choice must be exercised before a life is engendered. If I mention this here, it is because it has an indirect bearing on the matter which concerns us: every widespread deviation from what is natural tends to weaken the faith and the will of the people. On the other hand, if it has the support of the state, it indicates a deterioration of the system of government.

³Pseudo-conviction is a psycho-social phenomenon in which the individual starts by putting on an act and then becomes the act, never showing his true face, and ending up believing in the role he represents. Affectation is a normal adolescent phenomenon, derived from the tendency to develop a distinct identity. In later stages of life, it is a sign of immaturity, where such a tendency is not directed to the proper channel: developing full psychological individuality and fully expressing individual talents. And attitudes are adopted for the sake of *being in* which generally need to be anti-establishment if they are to be attractive. It is possible that many rebel against parental authority; others just seem to be swept by the current. Pseudo-conviction is based on accepting another personality or ideology which substitutes that of the individual. The affected person is not faking, he has simply convinced himself.

The above constitutes the spiritual and the psychological ground in a culture dominated by fashion. Intellectuals, for example, usually pose as leftists; they convince themselves that capitalism has failed and become pseudo-humanized. Others pretend to be anti-traditionalists: some psychiatrists enjoy seeing how moral categories fall and are substituted by others, as if we were dealing with clothes or car models. What humanity has guarded as a treasure is not valued by those who should be most concerned about conserving it. These *in* psychiatrists, as one of my professors well put it, "go cruising between medicine and pornographic literature." They hope that

writing a daring book will lead them to fame overnight; they offer magic formulas for happiness, and contribute together with other factors to the disintegration of the family. The epistemological explanation of all the above is the substitution of the objective determinants of certain value-notions by subjective ones, that is, the fabrication of an anti-concept. Many sociologists see in this alterity or the work of *the Other* (an alter-ego of another person or group). Were that a simple form of exterior conditioning, I may agree with its metaphoric use, but there are often implied here reifications and notions such as that man is not himself but *Other*. Ontologically, man is identical with his own essence, and metaphysically any individual is an entity which is distinct from every other one. Thus, his psychological surrendering or alienation of his pristine nature will always work through his own existential moments and being. We must never forget that, for any man, the others are but referents for his own psycho-spiritual determinations and powers. In the last instance, sociology is reducible to psychology. Thus, it is here where the work must start, by promoting man's full individuality.

⁴One special assault I would like to refer to is somewhat paradoxical, since it generates from the same defenders of individual freedoms. We have referred to this in several places as the mercantilist or liberal conception of capitalist values. To my knowledge, this has never happened before. Although the selfish pursuit of profit, the lack of concern for others, and taking unfair advantage are to be found everywhere in history, only in the modern times we face an ideological justification for those negative dispositions, even identifying them as freedom. This thought seems to be expanding by the process of economic globalization, pervading even cultures up to now respectful of nomocratic traditions. Economic theory is suited for realizing practical values, but social and humanistic values cannot be reduced to the former. What the advocates of unrestricted market practices will attain is at least a further discredit of capitalism, with all its dire consequences.