

THE RELATIONS OF EAST AND WEST

AN ADDRESS BY
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By the West I mean the countries and peoples rooted in the Western European tradition. This would comprise Western Europe, the Western Hemisphere, and the British non-Asiatic Dominions. The Atlantic Community is a suggestive phrase, but it refers only to the effective political core of the West. What characterizes the West is a certain general unity and continuity of tradition determined essentially by Greece, Rome, Christianity, and the varying presuppositions of that type of democracy which sprang from Anglo-Saxon experience and from the French Revolution.

It is not my aim this evening to work out in detail the complex unity of culture which justifies our subsuming these diverse peoples under one term: the West. But I suggest for your consideration that four factors must enter into this unity: the existence of free and independent centres of learning and research; the existence of free and independent Churches, namely, the recognition of the two realms, the secular and the religious; a certain fundamental conception as to what constitutes the authority of government, namely, that such authority arises from the will of the people periodically expressed in free and popular elections; and a certain fundamental conception as to the relationship between government and material wealth, namely, that it does not belong to the essence of government to monopolize all means of production, but that these means are and should be in varying degrees in the hands of private individuals or groups. The West then is characterized by a certain view of truth, of God, of government, and of wealth, and the unity of the Western tradition consists in the fact that this view can be shown to go back, in a continuous manner, to people who lived some twenty-five or thirty centuries ago in Greece and Palestine. The essence of this view is, on the one hand, the subordination of man to God, and, on the other, the recognition of the ultimacy of the individual human person.

The term "the East" has become ambiguous. There is the traditional sense whereby you speak of India and China as the East. The Moslem world is also referred to as "the East" in this general traditional acceptance, although it can be shown that this world occupies a somewhat middle position. Popular usage has recently fastened on what it calls "the East-West conflict," meaning here by "the East" the Soviet or Soviet-controlled world. This is of course an unauthentic employment of the term, arising no doubt because when you speak of "the West" in an ultimate confrontation the thing that immediately and readily contrasts

with it, for the purposes of some vulgar slogan, is “the East.” The Soviet world is complex and cannot be reduced purely to Communism, but Communism certainly is its peculiar spiritual stamp. Now Communism is not “Eastern,” partly because Karl Marx is the product of German idealism, French materialism, and British industrialism; partly because the highest products of “the East” did not worship matter and the economic process as much as Marx and his disciples did. The so-called “East-West conflict,” then, is not a conflict between the traditional West and the traditional East, but between the West and an heretical offshoot arising from it. It is a tension within the Western idea itself, a tension therefore for which the West itself is responsible. That Communism takes full advantage of Western weakness everywhere, whether in the West or in the East, does not make it “Eastern,” any more than a son rebelling against his father and trying to undermine him in every way by enlisting the support of foreigners becomes thereby himself a foreigner. If the whole world were Communized tomorrow, or Westernized tomorrow, there would still be a fundamental polarization between the East and the West; and it is not inconceivable, although at present seemingly far-off, for a Slavic Communism to ally itself with a non-Communist West if the Far East should one day become too threatening. A similar alliance against a common enemy, arising this time in the bosom of the West, is a recent memorable event.

The traditional East is characterized by a different conception of God, of the human mind, and of man’s relation to government from that of the West. In the attitude towards wealth, the difference is not as radical; that is why it is possible to set up a parallelism between the present economy of the East and the mediaeval feudal economy of the West. The difference between East and West in these ultimate matters may be indicated by saying that whereas the West is unthinkable apart from Greece and Christianity, Greece and Christianity do not enter into the constitution of the East. Apart from Islam, there is no belief in the East in a special revelation and a transcendent God, and even in Islam the revelation of Mohammed posits itself all of a sudden, without adequate regard for the Hebrew-Christian tradition which preceded it and in which it claims it is grounded. In contradistinction to the Graeco-Christian tradition of the West, there is in the East a fusion of the orders of being; there is no adequate faith in the ability of reason to grasp distinction and difference; everything is continuous with everything else: God with the universe – in fact God is the universe – man with God, man with the animals, life with matter, the past with the future, fiction with truth. The result is that man – as to his origin, his powers, his state, and his destiny – is exceedingly ambiguous.

To complete this rapid preliminary characterization, I would like to say a word about Marxism. Metaphysically, there is in Marxism radical atheism, thoroughgoing economic determinism, absolute moral relativism, an unmitigated cynicism concerning man’s freedom and his inner, personal, spiritual worth, a fundamental denial of objective truth and of reason’s ability to grasp it, and therefore a rejection of anything transcendent, other, above

this entire sad show. Politically, Communism preaches the dynamic view that government – at least at “this stage” – must be absolutely ruthless, and therefore its “representative” or “democratic” character can only be imposed from above. Socially, no independent societies, or groups, or organizations, or institutions, are allowed; not even the family is permitted its proper autonomy. Economically, all means of production are concentrated in the hands of the state. Communism, then, subordinates everything – man, matter, mind – to the exigencies of a militant idea held and propagated by a militant party.

When we speak of East and West, therefore, we must distinguish four structures: the traditional West, the traditional East, the intermediate East – viz., Islam-and the unauthentic East – which is incidentally also an unauthentic West – viz., Marxist Communism. In my present account as to the relations between East and West, the East is understood in only its traditional and its intermediate meanings.



The crisis in the relations between East and West has been increasingly deepening. The East is vigorously asserting itself vis-a-vis the West. This is due to its own inner awakening, to the general material as well as moral weakening of the West, and to the fact that the two offshoots of Europe, the American offshoot and the Communist offshoot, have both conspired – though in entirely different ways – to loosen Europe’s hold upon the East. I propose not so much to examine the causes of the present crisis as to determine its precise character; for we can never determine the causes of a thing except after we have fully taken in what that thing is in itself.

Two things characterize the political situation as between East and West. On the one hand, there is the desire of Eastern peoples and countries to be free and independent. The old colonialism seems to be dead for good; people will no longer tolerate being ruled by foreigners; they demand that they rule themselves, that they develop their own systems and institutions according to their own genius. On the other hand, it follows from this craving for independence and self-determination that the emerging states, in the full exercise of their freedom, cannot accept treating with other states on any basis of inferiority. Independence without equality – in some sense at least – is a mockery. Consequently, in any partnership, in any international association, the Eastern states insist on absolute juridical and moral equality. This is of course the principle of sovereign equality enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, and given effect to in practice by the right of each member of the United Nations, no matter how big or how small, to one vote in the General Assembly.

Independence itself is grounded in the multiplicity of cultures. There are distinct peoples and outlooks requiring that they have a place in the overall harmony of things, that their

ultimate evaluation of life and the universe be respected. At the same time, it can be shown that certain outlooks cannot be independent, either by reason of their derivative origin and history or by reason of their inability under the strenuous conditions of modern existence to hold their own. In these instances independence becomes a myth: to be sure, a very useful and necessary and constructive myth, but a myth all the same.

The question therefore arises: in an essentially unequal world – unequal materially, economically, culturally, existentially – how can a modicum of respectability and truth be assigned to this myth of independence and equality? In what sense, for instance, is Lebanon or Luxembourg or Belgium or even France independent, and in what sense are they “equal,” say, to the United States?

This is the question of international order. In present-day international order equality is reconciled with essential inequality, and the myth with the reality of independence, by three devices: the setting up of sovereign internal administrations with all the paraphernalia of independence, including above all foreign representation; the formation of blocs or fronts or camps or regional groupings; and membership in the United Nations. In this way self-respect is interwoven with the necessity of submerging oneself in a wider coordination.

But a myth remains a myth no matter how ingeniously you contrive to lend it respectability. The emerging East cannot be fully independent. For its economic development, it needs external economic and technical assistance; for its security, it needs some understanding with the outside world either that its neutrality – if it chooses that path – shall be respected, or that it receive adequate military protection; for the machinery of administration, it must import ideas and methods from abroad; and even for strengthening itself intellectually and spiritually so as to become more truly independent, it must depend upon free interaction with centres of science, learning, and reflection that exist almost entirely outside its borders. This essential dependence – at least for some time to come – of the East upon the West, whether the Atlantic West or the Communist West, results in continuing political tension, either by reason of rivalry between Communist and non-Communist forces in the East, or by reason of the persistence of a natural suspicion and rebellion of a dependent East against that upon which it must needs continue to depend. Political tension is then of the essence, and can only be surmounted by something higher and deeper.

In a world that has magically shrunk, nationalism, no matter how self-confident at first, reveals itself in due course as essentially limited. It seeks a wider fellowship. Coming to the East at this crucial moment when nationalism is thus revealing its limitations, the supra-nationalism of Communism exerts a special lure. Entirely apart from its economic promise, and entirely apart from the affinity that may exist between Communist totalitarianism and

certain aspects of the Eastern character, the mere fact that Communism is an international movement promising an association of races and nations and cultures within a supranational whole seems to provide, at least formally, the necessary element for overcoming and absorbing nationalism. There does not seem to be so far an equally strong Western universal lure; Western nationalist, cultural and racial exclusivism is no match, in the struggle for the heart and mind of Asia, for the universalism and inclusivism of Russian Communism.



We see now how the political crisis in the relations between East and West is pretty deep and therefore is not going to end tomorrow. Economically, the crisis is rooted in the disparity of scientific attainment between East and West. The tremendous economic power of the West is the result of the cumulative Western scientific tradition that goes back for thousands of years to the ancient Greeks and Egyptians. The standard of living of the average American is at least twenty times the standard of living of the average inhabitant of Asia. But if you compare the cumulative thickness of scientific tradition in East and West, you will find the average American at least twenty times as rooted in science and knowledge as the average Asian. The Eastern world little knows how much it misses by not having absorbed the great Greek genius of patiently, freely, thirstingly, infinitely, joyfully theorizing about nature. Not until Asia sharply distinguishes between scientific theory and irresponsible imagination, and not until the mind of the East is humbly and faithfully controlled by the object, can the East know and master the secrets of nature.

The East can never attain the economic plenty of the West except after it appropriates Western scientific culture. But the price of this appropriation whereby the East shall attain mastery over nature is nothing less than a prolonged discipline for generations in the methods and ways of science. And the effect of this discipline, once it has really brought about scientific equality between East and West, is going to be a wholesale clearing up of the mind and spirit of the East. Whole empires of feeling and fantasy and prejudice and poetry are going to crash, and the recent political tremors shall pale to insignificance when compared to the great internal convulsions of the spirit that the coming scientific revolution is certainly going to provoke.

Diverse methods have been suggested for helping the East meet the challenge of nature. The local governments are everywhere encouraged to work out schemes of development which might be financed by some international agency such as the World Bank. Local capital is becoming increasingly alive to the possibilities of investment. Foreign capital is flowing,

but not at the required rate; and there is room for more political and economic understanding that will facilitate the flow of such capital. The United Nations has its own development agency, but it has practically negligible funds compared to the vast and urgent needs of Asia and Africa. All Western powers with responsibilities in the East are bestirring themselves in diverse ways to meet the challenge. The Commonwealth developed the so-called "Colombo Plan" which has great potentialities for Asia. In the United States there is the concept of Point Four whereby the American taxpayer undertakes to help the underdeveloped countries to develop themselves.

It can be shown that economically, strategically, and politically, you need these countries just as much as they need you. It can also be shown that the material magnitude of the need, so far as the underdeveloped countries are concerned, is one hundred times that at present envisaged by Point Four assistance, and that it is perfectly possible for you to meet this need. What is required is depth of vision, wise statesmanship, a knowledge of the hopeless interdependence of the modern world.

But the West will only be deluding itself if it supposes that it can assist the East economically without at the same time taking active and responsible interest in its political and social conditions. Without radical social and political reform, to the end that man enjoy some freedom, realize some human dignity, participate in some social justice, rest upon some security, Western economic assistance will simply pour itself into a rat-hole. The one new fact in the history of the East is the awakening of the masses, whereby governments must – as never before – take into account the wishes of their people. For technical and economic assistance to be truly efficacious, its benefits must substantially and visibly percolate to the people.

As regards this question of nature and how to penetrate and exploit its resources, we are here face to face with one ultimate question: the relationship between two types of mind – that determined by science and industry, and that determined by agriculture and sheer raw material. Now agricultural and raw material mentality can never attain the strength and progressiveness of the industrial mind, and where the two come critically together, the industrial mind will always dominate. The question therefore arises: are certain cultures of the East forever doomed to the agricultural and raw material outlook? Be that as it may, one thing is certain: until and unless these cultures are scientifically and industrially determined, there will always be political and economic inequality, and therefore tension, between these cultures of the East and the Western world. The tremendous fact of demographic multiplication in Asia is going to aggravate this tension. Population in that continent is increasing so fast by reason of improved and improving hygiene and decreasing infant mortality that before the end of this century certain already overpopulated countries are going to double in population. Is there any doubt that the problems and pressures that this phenomenon alone is going to generate shall increase international tension? I cannot possibly overemphasize the critical importance of population problems in the decades immediately before us.

There are three levels of possibility leading ultimately to a ruthless either-or. (1) Either the East is going to remain in its eternal slumber, dreaming its pleasant dreams in blissful isolation from the rest of the world, or it is going to wake up and take hold of its own possibilities. I exclude the first alternative as absolutely impossible in the modern world. Then the East must step forth into the responsibilities of participation. (2) But if it must wake up, then it will either stand on its feet alone or with the aid of external agencies. Again I exclude the first possibility, for the East does not have the requisite science and technology with which to develop itself. The East therefore must seek external aid. (3) And here comes the final either-or: the East can develop itself either as friend of the Communist world or as friend of the Western world – that is to say, it can seek the active assistance either of the one or of the other in its effort at complete self-realization. This choice is forced upon the East precisely because these two worlds have not yet come to a final settlement. Any expectation on the part of the East (or of some of its leaders) that it can play off these two worlds on each other, or that it can use their knowledge and technique without regard for their interest, is pure illusion.

There are then three reasons why, economically, the tension between East and West is deep and is likely to continue for a long time to come. (1) Everybody today knows what everybody else has and has not. When the East fully realizes the conditions of economic and social retardation under which it suffers, it is not going to be happy. A feeling of envy and profound injustice – whether or not justified – is going to be a permanent cause of strain in the relations between East and West. (2) The fact that this economic inferiority cannot be righted without Western science and technology is going painfully to bring home to the East its essential existential dependence upon the West. (3) Communism is almost infinitely resourceful in poisoning any normal relationship between East and West.

IV

Deeper in my opinion than anything economic or political is the misunderstanding in the order of the spirit between East and West. And first I take up the intellectual crisis.

The problem is whether there is a meeting of minds on fundamental issues. Shallow people often assert that East and West would understand each other as soon as the East has developed itself, as soon, that is, as the East has extensively applied science and technology to the exploitation of nature. But science and technology were mighty in Germany, and science and technology are worshipped today in the Soviet Union. Unless the mind and the will are touched, science and technology alone, far from improving, are certain to acerbate international relations.

Again, pathologically shallow people imagine that all you have to do to establish friendship and understanding between East and West is to spread democracy: let only the people govern

themselves and all will be well. But it is possible to have wars and misunderstandings between democracies, and whole peoples may still hate and despise one another. The form of government is important, but it is not decisive when it comes to fundamental attitudes of the spirit.

Science understands and orders nature, and government regulates the external relations among men. There may be complete identity of view in science and in government, and still peace and rest may be utterly lacking.

Only a universal, true view of the final things – of man and history, of freedom and matter and truth – which will include both East and West in its comprehension can bring about a firm association of peace between them. What has happened is that, overwhelmed by the multiplicity of things in the East, the West has lost faith in the universal. The result has been a perfectly well-meaning tolerance which expresses nevertheless only half the truth: it loses itself in respecting others without making sufficiently sure of its own grounds of respect. The East will not respect only those who respect it: the East requires that those who respect it be sure also of what is truly respectable in themselves.

The law of nature is the only ground on which, intellectually, East and West may meet. But this requires the recovery by the West of its own faith in truth, in the universality of reason, and in the ability of reason to grasp the objective truth. So long as Freudianism and relativism dominate the Western spirit, it is hopeless to expect real understanding, which is the fruit of reason, between East and West.

What now is this law of nature? It is the view that man – whether Western man or Eastern man – has a certain inherent stable nature which can be fully discovered by reason and research. Just as any natural object, such as an apple or a star or sodium chloride, has its own peculiar nature which docilely yields to rational investigation, so man, being also a natural object, has his own special character which is fully transparent to the disciplined mind. On the basis of this universal human nature understanding and cooperation may be urged.

That man by nature is endowed with reason and conscience; that he has an inalienable dignity and therefore must be respected; that he should never be treated as a means only; that there is a profound sense in which all men are equal; that there is also another sense in which there is structure, difference, distinction, hierarchy, discrimination according to individual worth; that we are free by nature – free to think, to seek, to find, to proclaim the truth, and free also to rebel against error; that the family is the natural group unit of society with a peculiar sanctity of its own; that human life is sacred, and therefore all manner of slavery is wrong; that law and the enforcement of law should not be arbitrary; that man must have some voice in his government; that our rights are naturally limited by our duties;

that incitement to hatred between peoples and races is wrong; and that there are minimum economic, social and cultural enjoyments without which man's humanity would suffer – this complex structure of human nature is not something I have just fabricated, nor something whose importance is questionable because so much of it is commonplace, but something drawn from the deepest persuasions of the finest minds in the Western heritage. It is there at the base of your life and literature and law and philosophy and religion. The modern accretions of subjectivism and voluntarism and evolutionism and anti-intellectualism have only to be dusted off for this basic core of truth about man to reveal itself in all its shining splendor. Whether or not they were discursively aware of it, the founders of this country acted and legislated on the presuppositions of the natural law. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the American Bill of Rights, are unintelligible except as an attempt at articulating a basic human nature, more or less clearly perceived.

Unless the West comes to the East with its deepest and most authentic convictions unashamedly held, practised, and proclaimed, then let me tell you in all frankness; the East is not going to be impressed by the West. Is it possible to hope for a bold, ringing message, not new, not fantastic, but articulating what is already fully present in the West, though varyingly hidden or obscure? Despite the recalcitrance of all that is material, potential, primitive, the East thirsts for nothing more than for this message: a message not of money and machines, but of spirit and truth.

An interesting example of the subjectivism which I believe to be at the base of most of our ills is a recent book on the meeting of East and West. The author elaborates ingenious theories which seem to give him peace. But whatever else he may be talking about, it can be mathematically demonstrated that he is not talking about the meeting of East and West. And wherever and however East and West meet or have met, the instance of their meeting this author does not say a single word about. I am of course referring to the Near East. This is the obvious objective meeting-place, both in time and in space, of East and West. It is here, and here more than anywhere else, that East and West met and mingled and clashed and attempted a settlement. For pray tell me: where else did they really, or as critically, meet – except perhaps if it be in the brain of our author? But this is the deadly bane of subjectivism: that writers imagine that by their private aesthetic or logical theories they touch the truth. I prefer the sternest report on the humblest fact, such as a snail or the sufferings of an existing person, to all the constructions of the subjectivists, which today are and tomorrow vanish into nothingness.

The question at once arises: in this historical meeting-place, was there a fundamental platform, a basic outlook, on which East and West really met? The answer is Aristotle, who is at once at the base of Moslem thought and of Western thought. It is true that the great line of Moslem philosophers, to whom Aristotle was the undisputed voice of reason, did

not penetrate and transform Moslem life and literature; it is also true that modern Western philosophy is a rebellion against Aristotle. But to the extent both of these facts are true, there is an estrangement between East and West in the Near East; and to the extent Aristotle functions in the Moslem and Western outlooks, there is a meeting-ground between them. Nothing is more striking to the student of these matters than that for hundreds of years in the Middle Ages thinkers both in the Near and Middle East and in Europe were in general thinking very much alike. I believe this fact has tremendous objective implications for the present and the future.

Aristotle stood for the universal, and for the sure touch of reason. To him man is perfectly at home in the universe, and man's mind is naturally suited to understand and absorb it. There is structure, order, distinction, strict difference. Being orders itself in levels and types, and on every level it is absolutely lucid to the searching mind. As between levels, the mind for the most part apprehends by analogy. The soul, says Aristotle, is potentially all things. No greater dictum of the certainty of the knowledge of truth by man was ever formulated in history. Nature, reason, man – this was the great trinity of Aristotle which impressed itself so deeply upon East and West alike. The intellectual crisis in the West, whereby there is despair of truth, and especially of the truth of nature and man, is a primary cause of the crisis between East and West today. For when reason and truth are despaired of, what is there to bind men together?

Now reason and nature are wonderful things, but without love they are nothing. The real question therefore is the crisis of love.

There is a withering away of the spirit, a contraction in the order of love. There is fear, shrewd calculation, lack of trust. People are not outreaching towards one another.

Who really loves the East? – that is the question. Not the romanticists who, by losing themselves in the “mystery and charm and wonder of the Orient,” lose their own souls. Nor the sentimentalists who, being sentimentally moved by what they call “the poverty and privation of the East,” prescribe all sorts of tricks for what they call “the alleviation of misery” – always making sure that they keep at a safe distance themselves. Nor certainly the anti-Communists who have only one use for the East: to employ it in the fight against Communism. Love is made up of different stuff altogether.

Nor is it certain the Eastern leaders themselves know what love for their own people really means. Love cannot aim at control and rule, but at liberation and freedom. Love does not use and exploit; it serves and shares. Nor is it enough in matters of love to be a well-meaning idealist. Without submitting to something true, real, above both ruler and ruled, something which makes and remakes, the leaders of the East cannot love their people.

He alone loves the East who, being sure himself of the truth, which is God, endeavors, in all humility, to see the peoples of the East as God Himself sees them. He alone loves the East who has a sure vision of all of us as potential children of God.

Nothing is easier than sentiment and romance; but love, true love, can only come from above.

Love, if it is not going to be sentiment, can only relate itself to its object through suffering and sacrifice grounded in the certainty of the truth. Those who approach the East not knowing themselves what they are after, obviously cannot suffer for the East. Only those who identify themselves with the East, because they love it, not indeed for what it is, but for what it might and ought to be under God, shall eventually redeem it.

You in the West cannot, in your dealings with the East, wash your hands of Jesus Christ. He will not let you go, and in the eyes of the East, whatever else you are, Christ is already counted to you. Let Him therefore be counted for justice and truth and righteousness. He loves East and West most who, despite all his weaknesses, loves Jesus Christ first.

If it is not you therefore, it will be your children, and if it is not your children, it will be their children, who, committing at once themselves and the East to Christ, shall labor, in all patience and understanding, to bring about the day of the full knowledge of Christ. The West will never know peace until it realizes this its highest vocation. And he does not know the truth who has any doubt as to love's ultimate victory.

The spiritual crisis between East and West is in the end nothing other than whether the West is worthy of Jesus Christ, and whether there is a place for Jesus Christ in the East. Once in the classical meeting-place of East and West there was no place for Him in the inn. The question remains: is that the last word?