ESCHATOLOGY, COSMOLOGY AND THE FORMATION OF VISIONS*

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1. Where do visions come from?

Yes, where do visions of desirable societies come from? Even if we may be born with some kind of deep structure for social grammars[1] as we - possibly - are for lingustic grammars,[2] this would only set a very general framework for permissible visions within which a vast range of permutations would be possible. We learn visions, as we learn languages, out of social experience: but in doing so we are not tabula rasa. For that reason we may also build on elements we learn, and create visions, or more precisely: create visions that are "correct", within the range of the permissible. And here there may be two levels at work: a range of permissible visions within a given human group, or a range for humankind as a whole.

We may develop some kind of consciousness about what is "permissible", however - but in so doing also be able to go one step further, creating visions that somehow are against the rules. There is a shock effect here, and that is what really creative writers of science fiction know and build upon. By creating a tension between what the author knows to be permissible within the group he addresses himself to and his imagery he tickles their imagination, stretches it. Like the author who tampers with a natural language, introducing more than neo-logisms, getting at the syntax itself, he knows there is a limit to how far he can go - he is only stretching the range of the permissible, not doing totally away with any permissibility concept.

In the field of visions of desirable societies the deep structure regulating the formation of visions in a given group is what I refer to as the social cosmology[3] of that group - its deep ideology and its manifestations in the social formations. Thus, some element of idea of progress

would be seen as belonging to the Western cosmology - found both in the liberal ideas of accumulation and growth, and the Marxist idea of discontinuous transitions in the Stufengang. A vision not promising any kind of progress, not only into the vision - that is trivial, that is what utopias are all about - but within the visions, will not be well received in the West. That is, it can be used for ritual purposes as a message from a totally different reality precisely because it is extra-paradigmatic. I suggest this is what has happened to Christian eschatology: there is neither a promise of progress within hell (to the better, but also to the worse; it is so static); nor any promise of progress within heaven. Promotion in a medieval hierarchy of angels is individualistic, and this is intra-paradigmatic to the West. But it is not the same as social progress of heaven as such; heaven is being, eternal. In this extra-paradigmatic element there is a source of tension skillfully drawn upon by the churches. Because it is weird it is also awe-inspiring, tickling deeper layers of the social awareness, like science fiction does.

The "social cosmology" is the code, a relatively constant feature of a group. It would vary from nation to nation and from class to class and is to these entities what "personality" is to the person. It helps us not only in predicting, but also understanding, especially if we are capable of grasping deeper-lying aspects of the personality/cosmology. Some of this digging into the deeper recesses can be done through introspection, some can best be seen from the outside as a contrast to images of one's own personality/cosmology. The best approach would be to combine intro- and extraspection. As we have, so far, no empirical extra-humans - extra-terrestrial or not - capable of doing this kind of job, together with us, for homo sapiens as such, we are surprisingly poor in insight into human beings in general. Moses, the Buddha, Christ and Mohammed and others revealed their insights, but not in dialogue. We see variations and contrasts better than we see the

general human code or programme. For that reason there is probably little to say about what might steer the range of human visions, whereas there may be something to say about, for instance, oriental vs. occidental visions. The question is where to look, and that brings us back to our opening question: where do visions come from?

In the absence of a general theory or even a satisfactory typology I shall just focus on two obvious sources of utopian visions: the nation, and the class. The nation - as opposed to the "country" or the "state"; territory and a special organization within that territory respectively - is culturally defined by the idiom and the myths it shares. The myths may be secular, sacred or both - the golden past/future in this life, or relating to the after-life. Customarily, we refer to the totality of myths concerning the transcendental and its relation to this life as religion in general, and I shall refer to the part concerning the "last events" and life in after-life as eschatology. I am interested in it as a source of visions of desirable societies. Even if nobody may believe the positive eschatology (heaven, paradise) to be realised in this life, nor the negative eschatology (hell) for that matter - it will nevertheless colour our visions, and for at least three reasons.

First, they may be obvious projection screens for our mundane hopes and fears, and for that reason reveal collective mentalities. Eschatologies are rich reservoirs of ideas for desirable (and undesirable) societies in this world. In other words, they may be seen as formulations of goals and anti-goals.

Second, eschatologies (tend) to have built into them a punishment-reward principle. They may not be so dichotomous as the Western heaven/hell idea; but the general idea that behaviour in this life conditions one's after-life (whether here, or there, or elsewhere) is widespread. It may be seen as a revolt against the injustices of this world: the rascal who steps

unpunished into his grave, the good person who suffers hardship and ignominy to the bitter end. Any eschatology based on some kind of correlation between one's quality in this life and one's quality in the after-life, so to speak, will set these matters right - régler les comptes - at least over time (that time-span may be considerable, though). As Christian eschatology is so dichotomous it may be argued that there is no real measure of proportionality involved: if your individual merits budget does not add up sufficiently to make you pass you are lost, and there is no appeal, no second chance. The obvious strategy would be to do the same as students working for a pass-fail exam: to find out how one can just make it, as there is no reward for the over-achievers and total loss for the under-achiever.(4)

The system is unjust. Too much depends on too little, but it is a very powerful image. The point to be made, however, is that it should serve as a basis for deriving another type of goal by asking: what is the social formation, here in this life, that would make it possible for as many as possible to pass? For instance, without temptations that would lead one astray? In principle this should yield a vision of a desirable society. One concrete source for that type of vision would be to study the social formation in which the founder of that particular religion was living and achieving his works, since, at least, it brought forth Him (it tends to be a he, not a she). Several major religions in the world today came into being in the "golden century" (sixth and fifth century B.C.), the coming millennium saw the birth of Christianity and Islam, both derived from the much older Judaism (like Buddhism and its contemporary, Jainism, derived from the much older Hinduism). This would focus on social formations after agriculture and the first city-based civilizations, but certainly much before industrialism. In liberal social thought these formations would have primary and tertiary sectors, not secondary sectors; in marxist thought they would be slave-based/serf-based formations, perhaps with some pre-capitalist features; neither primitive communism nor capitalism, leaving alone socialism. In either vision

a focus of this kind would be retrogressive: "romantic", pastoral/bucolic to the liberal; like it was given a clear implementation in some of the economically self-reliant monastic orders; and utterly exploitative to the marxist, with the monks as a rising class of intellectuals, land-owners, parasites. It would be counter-paradigmatic as it would not fit the ideas of progress of either of them. Liberals would talk about the low growth rates, the diseconomies of small-scale self-reliance and the insufficiency of institutional guarantees to regulate competition, the countervailing forces on which liberalism is based, not only in the economic field but also in the field of religion and culture in general. The exclusiveness of Western religions would be unacceptable to (modern) Western liberal thought. And the marxist would see religion, of course rightly, as a way of justifying exploitation and "the necessity of a ruling and an oppressed class", but holding out a reward in the after-life as a compensation for injustices suffered in this world: the famous "opium of the people."(5)

There is, however, a more imaginative way of applying the good idea of searching for the social formation in this life that would make it possible for as many as possible to obtain the salvation they believe in. It does not necessarily lead to the formation of visions of <u>desirable</u> societies, though. Take the idea of accumulating merits through good deeds, particularly through <u>sacrifice</u>. I am not thinking of sacrifice in isolation, like the self-flagellating hermit; but of sacrifice presumably to help others out of their misery, through gifts, by sharing their condition, by devoting one's life "unto this last".

There are several assumptions here. One of them is that there is some kind of zero-sum game at work: <u>for anybody else to raise somebody else (I) have to sacrifice; if I sacrifice it must necessarily be good for somebody</u>. Both ways the doctrine is highly dubious if the reasons for the misery are mainly structural and a structural change may be called for. This may call

for sacrifice, but the individual gift (of things, of comfort, of oneself) to other persons works against such structural change. The persistent wish to do so would make one suspect that there are other motives at work, viz., that of personal accumulation of merit for the after-life. It may even be for this life, an hypothesis that would look more plausible the more the person performs the sacrifice conspicuously, with witnesses around (contrary to the norm of serving, not being seen).(6)

The second assumption is, however, even more problematic: for good works/deeds to be exercised there has to be misery around. Capitalism and Christianity, business and mission, were parts of the Western onslaught on the non-Western world; the former guaranteed the production and steady reproduction of the misery on which the latter could work for accumulation of Christian merit.(7) This is important, for if the condition for being a good Christian in this life is that somebody else suffers, even materially, then the vision of a desirable society from this point of view is a vertical, exploitative-even to the point of widespread misery at the bottom (widespread to produce enough objects for good deeds) - social order. Moreover, only those above the material and/or spiritual bottom would have resources convertible to merit. Hence, one would have to look for religions where the search for salvation is compatible with a more horizontal social formation; unless, that is, verticality and exploitation and misery should be a part of the positive vision. In short, a search for religions where deeper, including sexual, love on an equal basis rather than "sacrifice" would lead to salvation.(8)

Third, the eschatologies may work indirectly. Their deep structure becomes part of the social cosmology, and through that set of unquestioned assumptions they will surface in other shapes and colors. Why is there so little agriculture and industry in the liberal and marxist utopias - why is it automated away in either, in favor of a vast tertiary sector, differentiated in all kinds of ways, but not directly materially productive, as material production is automated?

It must have something to do with the absence of any mention of material production in the Christian eternal paradise, with its focus on non-material pursuits. In other words, eschatologies are of basic importance in the process of the formation of visions. They are not only direct carriers of goals, they also influence, indirectly, the goal-setting of the non-believer in that eschatology; and those non-believers may be found inside and outside those religions in which the eschatology is embedded, and inside or outside (the churches that are) the institutional carriers of those religions.

The conclusion from this is clear: to disregard eschatologies in particular, and religion in general, in their role in the formation of visions is untenable. Only to focus on this source is equally untenable, and that leads us to turn to the second answer to the question put at the beginning. Of course, there are also other answers under the category "nation", particularly the myths of golden past and future, not to mention the golden past recreated in the future, but that is outside the scope of the present paper.

Visions can have their origin in the class formation of that society. The dominant classes will tend to be carriers of the national myths, including the distorted version of eschatologies to which they will at least pay lip service as long as they serve their vested interests. The dominated classes are certainly not necessarily anti-religious, but they may interpret the message differently. Thus, popular Christianity will always differ from that of the elites and the theologians. People may be more interested in the second point just mentioned about the role of eschatologies: how can societies be transformed so that everybody is given a fair chance? The dominant classes may respond to this by shaping the criteria so that no transformation is necessary, eg., by proclaiming that "faith is all you need" (Protestantism?), and you can believe from any position in society; or by proclaiming "ritual is all you need" (Catholicism?), which then becomes (like in a welfare state) a question of building a dense network

of institutions (churches, mosques, temples; places of worship in general) accessible to all. The more the religion would emphasize faith and worship wherever you are (like in Protestant Christianity) the more could it also avoid social transformations, leaving alone social transcendence. The fight over interpretation of religious texts is therefore, of course, often a more or less thinly veiled class struggle.

For this and other reasons liberation visions would have to be heterodox from the point of view of dominant religion (as was original Christianity), but not necessarily a- or anti-religious, and certainly not outside the cosmology that has been shaped, partly, by that religion. The visions will tend either to stress social justice in this life, meaning more accessibility to positions of power and privilege by those who are dominated; or they will stress themes of equality and equity in this life, meaning more sharing of power and privilege. The first type is preferable to the second from the dominant point of view as verticality is maintained; it may be transforming but not transcending. It should be mentioned that there is also the third possibility, that the last shall be the first; verticality with the roles reversed (Mt. 25). From this perspective one can start talking about the visions of slaves, serfs, workers; of peasants; of children and women and the aged; of the downtrodden everywhere.

However, even if nation and class are two different generators of visions they are certainly not mutually exclusive. The cosmology of a nation, not to mention of a civilization, would cut across class borders. Ideologies may differ, hardly cosmologies. On the contrary, it may even be postulated that the dominated would be more pure in their deep internalization of that cosmology: the elites are the ones who may have their doubts, and also sufficient consciousness about the constraints put on them by the cosmology to explore its perimeters and go beyond. They have the resources to risk such experiments. The dominated are more likely to develop visions

that actually are very conservative in the sense of being faithful to deep culture, however radical they may be in their consequences in terms of social upheaval and redistribution.

Hence, one more argument for trying to understand better how the eschatology may work through the cosmology in producing visions. According to some recent data,[9] whatever their worth, there are close to one billion Christians in the world, above 700 million Muslims, and 15 millions Jews - giving not too far from 2 billion for the Western religions. Then there is, "in the middle", above 500 million Hindus. And of the Eastern religions there are above a quarter billion Buddhists, 200 million Confucian/Taoists, and above 50 million Shintoists. This adds up to two thirds of humanity, which ought to be rather difficult to neglect in any discussion of goals and processes of development, even if the religious labels often stick rather shallowly to the person.

2. Eschatology and Utopia: some hypotheses

In an earlier paper[10] I have formulated three requirements for good visions:[11]

- they should be process visions, not only structural visions
- they should be relational visions, not only absolutist
- they should have contradictions built into them as visions

To spell out: a vision that only gives the structure of the final society, the utopia, without also a vision of a process leading to it is not very useful. Or, one step further: visions of a process, in the good direction, are more important than detailed visions of the final result, given the dialectic nature of human society. It should be added that by "process" here is not meant a sudden jump from the present (lamentable) world to utopia; that is not process, only an apocalypse. Thus, the concept of a revolution, to be useful, has to be liberated from extreme apocalyptic discontinuity and be seen, in the marxist sense, as a process; the new society anticipated in concrete actions, enacted in liberated zones and so on, and the

old society, as anyone will admit, continuing to linger on, but marginalized (or so one hopes) by the new one.

Further, the vision has to be compatible with other visions; it has to relate to them, not be absolutist in the sense that nothing else exists in the world. And it has to have contradictions, there has to be something bad also in the good society, an explicit attention has to be given to the yin/yang aspect of reality. Restated the way it was stated above: there have to be processes not only to the vision as utopia, but also processes within the utopia: otherwise it simply becomes meaningless as a part of live reality. It should be noticed that this is not the Western assumption that the process has to be in the form of progress. It is merely a question of equipping the utopia with life. The other two conditions or criteria give to utopias a historical and geographical context; they tie the vision to the real world and refuse to deal with visions that are islands, isolated in time and space from social reality.

The problem is now how this relates to eschatologies; to what extent do various eschatologies mirror one or the other horn of the dilemmas we have formulated above - with clear indications of what would be the more felicitous choice? If something meaningful can be said about this it clearly would also constitute a basis for evaluating eschatologies. In so doing it is contrary to the trend of cultural relativism, more or less stating that all cultures or, in casu, religions, are equally good. In the trivial sense that they are all good in the eyes of the believer this may be correct, if we assume equality of that subjective utility. However, we do not live in that kind of a world, divided into neat, culturally watertight compartments. We live in a world of interaction, penetration and counterpenetration, a world of at least potential dialogue des civilisations, and a world of efforts to dominate. Many people, perhaps most, are under cross-pressure from various religions, including secularism which we for our purpose simply define as denial of or inattention to any possible life after death, any

after-life. Many peoples, perhaps most, have had this cross-pressure as a part of their history; sometimes resulting in victories of one over the other, in a patchwork of religious borders reflecting stalemates in past or present history; sometimes in the possibility of co-existence of two or more religious systems of belief inside the same persons as is the case in considerable parts of the Orient, probably also in Africa and in parts of Africa. Not to take a stand on this is implicitly to leave it to the balance of power, and that means not only power of conviction or of the belief system, but of the institutions and even states that are carriers of the religions. Hence, cultural relativism will tend also to be the position of the cultural and political coward.

Our basic stand taken here is at least simple and clear-cut: by and large oriental eschatologies constitute a much better basis for the formation of visions than do occidental eschatologies. The criteria underlying the word "better" are then the three mentioned at the outset. And as to occident/orient: the three Kitab, Old Testament religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam (the Saturday-, Sunday- and Friday-religions) are classified as occidental. This does not imply any blindness to the tremendous difference between the "far west" among them, Protestant Christendom and the "east in the west" among them, probably shiite islam with its strong admiture of sufism. It is the similarities that interest us here, and they are strong and particularly clear in the eschatologies, making cosmologies similar enough - in my view - to talk about a Western cosmology spanning that gap. In short, the concept "occidental" should not be confused with a map of Europe (with Soviet Union and North America). This may be fruitful politically, but not sufficient culturally.

On the oriental side the differences are much more pronounced. Not only is there the difference between Hinduism and the "reformists", the individualizing, hinanyana (theravada) Buddhism of South Asia (Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Kampuchea, Laos) and the more collectivist mahayana

Buddhism of Central and East Asia (Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam - the version in Tibet usually called "lamaism"). There is also the difference between these with some kind of after-life problematique (although very complex in Buddhism, and different from the transmigration in Hinduism), and Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism that are sometimes referred to as secular religions (one might also place Buddhism in the same category). However, the classification as religion may still be justified, for reasons to be explored later.

I am actually ambivalent about how to place Hinduism: occident or orient or in-between, and have chosen the latter for reasons that also will become more clear. Cosmologically it does not fit so clearly either. Actually, that applies to all work of this kind: it goes without saying that these are crude classifications but it is hoped that they nevertheless can shed some light on very important problems. Let it only at the end be noticed that so far left out is the entire category called "animatism", and with that much of Africa, Indian (indigenous) America, and the Pacific.

Let us then specify our general stand in terms of the three criteria of evaluation, painting with a very broad brush indeed.

(1) Occidental eschatologies are more structural, oriental eschatologies more process-oriented.

The point is obvious; it rests on the fundamental difference between the discontinuous transition the occidental soul undergoes when it leaves its abode in this world, the body, after death to proceed to heaven or hell (admittedly, in Catholicism via purgatory, that introduces more of a process, but only in the transcendental) and the oriental (including Hindu) concept of transmigration. A masterly short description of the difference:[12]

"The Judeo-Christian is afraid the soul is not immortal but wants it to be. The Hindu-Buddhist is afraid that the soul is immortal

and wants it not to be".

The occidental soul is tested in this life, in a split-second of eternity, under tremendous pressure. It is equipped with a free will and can make the right choice. Based on the choices, in thought and/or action, judgment is passed on that soul. Transmigration offers a second, a third, any number of more chances in this world and, consequently, is compatible with a view of a process towards enlightenment. This process is not linear, there is no built-in assumption of transmigration through a succession of ever higher stages. One can lead lives of ever higher value, but this depends on the karma.

To this it may be retorted that it only differs from occidental thought in terms of time perspective. The Christian also wants to lead a life of ever higher value, but in this one life, as he/she progresses through ever higher levels as practising Christian, thereby coming closer to God (and similarly for Judaism and Islam). For early Christianity the focus on one life only can possibly be understood in the light of the image of an imminent acopalypse. This, in turn, may have become archetypical in Western thought: the idea of impending crisis, of the hurry, things have to be done now, including very basic changes (such as conversion, the individual level parallel to revolution at the social level). Moreover, the time span referred to is that of the single individual, this generation - thereby enhancing the significance of the individual life span. The individual is cut off from the preceding generation (that did not live under the same pressure of impending crisis) and the succeeding generation (for which everything will be different, catharsis rather than crisis). Original sin constitutes a link between generations in Christian thought - the individual can be liberated through acceptance of Christ, and only that way.

This is correct, but does not strike at the root of our argument. As

a paradigm the Christian vision does not lead to a process. The time span is simply too short, too close to the apocalyptic to yield a realistic model of processes in general. Interestingly enough, it is marxism rather than the church-supporting liberalism that has picked up this time cosmology, probably from Christianity, however indirectly. Or, more precisely: fundamentalist marxism is compatible with fundamentalist Christianity; liberalism with its forcus on very slow continuous evolution (or no change at all) is compatible with the Christian church as it emerged under Constantin the Great and Theodosius. What we are searching for in a religion is a basic time cosmology, relating to this life but directed towards a (desirable) after-life, with a time span sufficient to be a realistic model for social processes even of la longue durée.(13) This is what is found in the doctrine of transmigration, although it may be objected that the time perspective before nirvana is attained is too long, measured in eons. This is no doubt true from the point of view of a Western time perspective; and it is interesting to reflect on how social time in occident and orient are related to the time span needed for the soul to attain salvation (meaning heavenly immortality in the occident; extinction, Aufhebung, Erlöschung in the orient).

What about Chinese thought in this connection?(14) The Chinese have tended to be materialists, not spiritualists, not interested in concepts of soul, after-life, transcendentalism, mysticism. There is a concept of heaven, but it stands for a set of causal laws in a two-tiered universe (Plato long before Plato) rather than for anything supernatural. And yet there is a quite clear idea of vision, although it is secular and strictly speaking should not be seen as an eschatology: "-- some golden age in the past. Some early dynasty was selected for emulation and to it all the virtues of man and society were attributed. It is the mythical part of their long history - the part which antedates definite knowledge - which has supplied the ideal. It can never be disproved, and if it can never be proved it may still serve as inspiration in the present".(15)

Taoism can be seen as a revolt against this, a "small is beautiful":

"There is a kingdom which is small and sparsely populated.
There are numerous implements, but no one uses them.
The people love their lives and no one wants to move afar.
Boats and carriages are available, but no one rides them.
Fine weapons are in their possession, but no one uses them. --
They enjoy fine delicacies and are handsome in their dress.
They are happy with their residences and pleased with their traditions.
Although the next state is within sight, and the sounds of
cocks crowing and dogs barking are heard,
The people live their whole lives without traveling to and fro!"

(From Chang Chung-yan, Tao: A New Way of Thinking, New York 1975, ch 80)

An image of local self-reliance, or rather autarchy? Or, Switzerland in the past? Confucius had a less modest Golden Age![16] "a country administered perfectly by philosopher-kings who had been set up as models of conduct and approved by the common people; a period of plenty in which no citizen wanted for anything and all were happy; an idealized state, with good laws and proper justice for all". Sufficiently close to conceptions of paradise found other places, although it refers, in the thoughts of Confucius to the dynasty in Western China under King Wen, Wu and the Duke of Chou.

More importantly, Chinese thought prescribes a process, a way of living and of organizing society that will lead towards a recreation of the Golden Past, through adherence to moral precepts. The basic principle, as is general in oriental thought, is balance, proportion, the golden mean, restraint, the middle way. That this ties in with the yin/yang thinking of the much older I Ching goes without saying. These are cosmic forces,[17] the yin (female, darkness, softness and inactivity) and the yang (male, light, hardness and activity); producing physical and social developments from their interplay. To the Chinese these are forces and principles that can be understood, they are not supernatural - they are knowable. It is interesting to note the rather clear sexual interpretation: how natural, how right and how beautiful to see love and the creation of new life as a basic paradigm for understanding the laws of the universe! Around this a very positive vision could emerge.

But the Chinese also tended to emphasize the family, as a diachronic line tying any individual to an endless line of ancestors and descendants. The cult of ancestors and the duty to produce sons constitute links and chains in which the individual becomes but one element. That chain becomes more real than the individual; in the occident the individual more real than the chain. And this is, of course, where the after-life comes in: the more reality that chain attains the more will it serve eschatological functions. One might even speculate that it takes on transmigratory aspects: one is transmitted through the chain. Although the Chinese would not believe in a soul that migrates from one body down the chain to the next there is something of the ancestors that live in the invididual at the same time as there is something of the individual that lives on in the descendants.

Such images are compatible with the materialism or rather a-spiritualism of China and of the West. But the impoverished West lost faith in Christianity and the eternal soul about the same time as kinship waned in significance making the individual very lonely, with promise of after-life neither here, nor there - unless he/she belongs to the elites capable of leading sufficiently non-substituable lives to enter into the memories of the past for future generations. Thus, an atheist intellectual may seek after-life in footnote references to him or her, possibly a poor substitute for eternal bliss in the Kingdom of Heaven. This, incidentally, also serves to throw some doubts on the efforts of the current communist dynasty in the Kingdom of the Middle to eradicate family and ancestor allegiance.(18)

Finally, the Chinese penchant for vertical relations to government and bureaucracy should also be mentioned; more in line with Confucianism than with the Taoist focus on the small, isolated community.

(2) Occidental eschatologies are more absolutist, oriental eschatologies more relational in their orientation.

This follows partly from the same explanatory basis as above, the

transmigration assumption, partly from the notion that the Western religions see themselves as world religions, as universal religions. This is clear in Christianity and clear in Islam: when neither is a true world religion today (they are minority religions, but nos. 1 and 2, though) it is certainly not because they have not been trying, but because their spread has been checked, partly by each other through a long succession of wars that one should not assume has come to an end, partly by others. This is not found in Judaism as it is not a proselytizing religion, but based on the assumption of a special relationship to Jahve - maybe one does not even want to share that special relationship with too many others?

And it is not found in the oriental religions; "the eastern quest is inward-bound, the western outward-bound".(19) That Buddhism has spread from where it was found is not any proof to the contrary. It might have been expelled by the high castes of the Hindu system (Brahmanism) because of its apparent lack of concern for caste; it might spread by its own quality, not at the tip of the sword. And the secular religions, Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism, are limited to their national homes - on the other hand, the Chinese are a transnational movement in the sense of being a nation found many places in the world.

The upshot of all this is that Christianity and Islam not only are exclusive in the sense of seeing other religions as inferior and their adherents as potential converts, but in the sense that their paradigm for the after-life, their eschatology, is seen as the only valid one. This contrasts with the oriental ability to practise, probably also enjoy, co-existence of religions and eschatologies, and not only in the sense of seeing their parallel existence in the world as something normal that does not have to be overcome, ending with a victory for one or the other, but also in the sense that their eschatologies do not exclude each other. The logical conclusion of this, the possibility of multiple religious affiliation and adherence, is drawn by very many in the East; and not only by the best known

combination, the Shinto-Buddhist combination for so many Japanese (with a certain division of labor in the direction of using Shinto for the joyous and Buddhism for the mournful circumstances in life). Chinese combinations are even much more syncretic.(20)

Transmigration ties in with this in a very important manner: under transmigration (relinking of consciousness) one might also come back in another religion! But then there must be some kind of fundamental compatibility (as also with non-human forms of life in which the restless soul may find its abode). From that follows the view Hinduism and Buddhism tend to develop of themselves, not only as compatible with other religions but as an expression of deep human characteristics, longings and potentials in the sense that everybody is a Hindu/-Buddhist even without knowing it. This does not mean that being a Hindu/Buddhist is to be higher than others,(21) only that it in a sense also comprises the others and is conscious of that. It is possible to be a Hindu/Buddhist in a Christian shape, for instance, but then presumably with some mellowing of certain intolerant occidental positions in that connection?

This simultaneous validity of religions also carries in its wake a simultaneous validity of models of the after-life; which spelled out means a very pluralistic conception of society, at least potentially. It should be pointed out that this is not the usual liberal concept of cultural pluralism, mutual tolerance of belief systems in a regulated market for the competition for non-believers, but a <u>structural pluralism</u> where several social structures may co-exist within the same social formation.(22) Or, to be more precise: it would predispose for that kind of pluralism; it would not come as a totally alien element if it should appear on the political agenda. In an exclusive, universalizing religion this would be outside the realm of the normal and natural: and even more so as the occidental religions are all monotheistic with Jahve/God/Allah on top; the latter two even potentially of an absolutist, singularist world state.(23)

(3) Occidental eschatologies will tend to be more contradiction-free, oriental eschatologies richer in built-in contradictions.

Western thought in general is built around the principle of freedom from contradictions (-(A & -A)); mathematics is a formal game where everything is permitted in terms of positing primitive terms and axioms, then defining new terms and deducing theorems, as long as one cannot deduce, correctly, a theorem and its negation. Christian eternal paradise has the same characteristic: the basic theme is harmony, as members of God, of one family. Harmony is ensured, it seems, through an impressive hierarchical construction not very different from bureaucratic and corporate structures in the contemporary world. There is no contradiction between needs and available satisfiers, partly because material needs are no longer present in the type of Christianity to which the dead are ethereal, not corporeal; partly because the non-material needs are satisfied. Islam paradise ideas seem to be different and so explicitly so: one hears less about the non-material needs, very much about the material ones, and they are abundantly satisfied; the dead being corporeal, not ethereal (which does not mean soulless). Christianity is more ambiguous.(24)

In oriental thought the contradictions are ever present. First, the lines drawn between heaven and hell (if there are such conceptions) are never clear; the gods are not only good, the devils not only bad. Second, the contradiction between dark and light (I hesitate in saying good and bad, that sounds very Western already) continues in the after-life, it is not resolved. Nowhere is this seen so clearly as in Taoism with its insistence on yin/yang contradiction as an eternally valid principle. Although very general it predisposes the believer to conceive of reality in such terms and hence to see contradictions more clearly, admit their existence and not be afraid of them. But in the Confucian system it is hard to discover any inclination towards seeing social reality in terms of contradictions; it sounds more like Christian paradise that Golden Age of his, in fact very similar. And something of the same might apply to Shintoism.

Thus, the occidental eschatologies will predispose the person who has internalized them, homo occidentalis, to conceive of the future, in his visions - however vague - as something completed, ready-made, like absolute scientific truth. Once come into being its perfection would justify efforts to consolidate it against internal and external enemies. In a coming world state, an almost inescapable Western vision, all enemies would be internal and hence, possibly, subject not only to war as a way of dealing with them, but also to administrative elimination, eg., as mentally insane,[25] not having seen the light, not having understood that they, not the society are imperfect. Not to obey the government would be not to obey God.[26] Contradictions will be denied as fictions of the imperfect mind, or as remnants of the pre-existing, non-perfect order, soon to wither away - for instance when the few imperfect ones still among us are dead.

Further, the hypothesis would be that this type of thinking would not only apply to Western visions in the big, the world state, but also the visions in the small, the utopia. That they tend to have an island character in time and space has been pointed out by many. But they will also tend to be missionary. If Truth has been found it is not merely a right, but also a duty to spread it, in practice if not in theory ultimately also with aggressive means. This aggressiveness emanating from the West is today not so much expressed in direct violence as in structural violence, and the major carrier of it is the whole non-territorial system of international organizations, governmental and non-governmental, profit (the TNCs) and non-profit. In these the West extends visions already built into social structures in the West to the whole world, apparently asking but in fact demanding that the West is taken as a model for other societies by creating "opposite numbers", corresponding ministries, associations and chapters, enterprises and daughter companies, and regarding it as perfectly normal that the West, through a process of homology is replicating itself all over the world.[27]

3. Three eschatologies: Viking, Christian and Muslim

Let us then turn to a very quick look at how the after-life is organized in some eschatologies - having selected for this purpose only three: the Viking (Old Nordic); the Christian, and Islam. The latter two are clearly occidental, the former was non-West in the sense of being "barbarian", pagan. All school children in the Nordic countries read about them, but are also supposed to share the textbook's (and occasionally the teacher's) delight that these superstitious ideas about the after-life were finally overcome and that Christianity triumphed over the pagans.

First one word about the negative visions, the types of hell envisaged. Temperature plays a considerable role, and it goes without saying that the Viking (Nordic) hell is as filled with ice and snow and cold winds as the Christian/Muslim (West Asia) hells are boiling hot. Basic problems in day-to-day life are writ large, extrapolated, and put into the other place - no doubt an efficient way of communicating. Correspondingly, the positive visions have all agreeable, temperate climates - particularly explicit in the many beautiful references in the Quran to paradise as a perfect garden.(28)

(1) Viking eschatology.(29) This is a complex one and there is a tendency, which will also be found in this presentation, to emphasize those features that are more recognizable, meaning Western. Thus, in old Nordic mythology the dead could have several souls and several bodies, and not only were there highly contradictory descriptions of paradise and hell, but there was also a hell inside hell (Niflhel in Hel) for those who die in hell - an icily cold place, incidentally. There was much circulation in after-life, highly complex itineraries. In short, there was process, there was pluralism and contradiction. But in all of this there is also the standard Nordic paradise, Asgard, Valhal, where Odin is lord. What does it look like?

A fantastic, enormous Viking hall, with 640 doors, each one so large

that 960 men could enter and exit side by side. Inside fabulous eating and drinking, some sort of permanent party, would be the order of the day. They are served by valkyrier, beautiful girls, bacon from the pig, galte (male pig) Saehrimmer, boiled every day and equally alive (and ready to be boiled) next morning. And they are served mjod (beer) from the goat Heidrun, like the drinking horn occasionally used also inexhaustible as a supply.

The rest of the time the inhabitants spend fighting. It looks as if dying in battle is a condition for salvation, for coming to Valhall; and those who do, einherjene, continue the battle in the life thereafter. But this means that friend and enemy in this life somehow are reconciled in the thereafter. They may continue fighting and kill each other every day outside that hall, repeating - presumably with some variations - the event that brought them there. But at dusk they rise, healthy and in a good mood for the party. Enjoying the valkyrier, and not only for serving food and mjod, certainly belonged to the picture. This was very much a man's place;[30] underlined further by the lordship of the male Odin, whereas Hel is ruled by a woman of the same name.

(2) Christian eschatology.[31] Here is one theological description:

> "Trinitarianism regards God not as a monad, but as a perfect society, and finds in the nature of the Godhead itself the heavenly archetype of the family and of the state. The idea of the Church and of the communion of saints is therefore of the essence of Christianity. Religion, from the Christian standpoint, is man's approach to God as a member of a brotherhood, a family of God, a holy Church, in whose fellowship his spiritual life is nourished and perfected. Christianity makes men members one of another, puts in their mouths a social prayer (' Our Father', not 'My Father'), helps them on their way by social worship and social sacraments, and teaches them to regard the service of man as one with the service of God. Heaven, therefore, as realizing the social ideal, is continually represented in the NT as a perfect society, city or state. All war, violence and danger from enemies external and internal will have ceased, and therefore the gates of the city "shall in no wise be shut by day', 'for there shall be no night there'. Heaven will be 'a sinless society - -."

However, not only worship is going on in heaven. "Thus, since heaven is a state or city, there will be a scope for faculties of government or administration there." Moreover, "there will be great scope for the artistic

faculties. In heaven there will be beautiful architecture and craftsmanship, beautiful poetry and beautiful music, both vocal and instrumental, or at least some higher reality corresponding to these. Of the cultivation of science and philosophy in heaven we have already spoken -".(32)

Christianity uses a distinction between time and eternity, between becoming and being, between process and structure in our terms. Heaven is eternity, being, structure. This has profound implications: in heaven one is no longer constrained to piecemeal comprehension of things, one at a time, ordered in temporal succession. Everything is "grasped in a single intuition", 'seeing all things -- as God sees them, 'sub specie aeternitatis! i.e. entire and complete, in all their mutual relations, in one undivided and indivisible mental act. Partial knowledge will be replaced, not indeed by omniscience, but by complete and adequate knowledge of all things - -. There will be a similar unification of the emotional and affective life so that all the affections and emotions will be felt at once".(33)

Some words about the angels(34) since they carried the image of life in heaven in a very detailed way. According to Augustin they were incorporeal, "invisibilis, sensibilis, rationalis, intellectualis, immortalis". They were the civil servants of Paradise. but there were also fallen angels (as there are corrupt bureaucrats) the most famous among them being Satan- who by free will become demons and, consequently, civil servants in hell They were organized in impressive hierarchies, often in nine orders (like salary scales for civil servants). Like demons they have two abodes, both there and here (the demons are both torturers of the damned and are "in the air" where they try to "incite men to evil". But then each person also had a guardian angel, "who specially protected him against evil", and "chief among the good spirits were, of course, the archangels - sometimes, four, sometimes seven".

Fundamentally, basically, however, Christian paradise is a "glorious sanctuary in which God's servants worship Him unceasingly with inward purity of heart, and with the outward expression of a magnificent ritual".(36)

(3) Muslim eschatology.(37) Again very different, much more material, an ideal vision of life in this world, not a vision of transcendental life as entirely different. For one thing, the inhabitants are corporeal, not ethereal. They enter through a cleansing ritual also known to Muslims in this life (eg., after intercourse), and as a result their bodies are soft and mellow, smelling like a date. They enter the red hyacinth gate and the basic image, as mentioned, is that of paradise as the perfect garden. The huris embrace them - "you are mine, you are my love, you will not be dissatisfied". In fact, the women grow ever more beautiful, they are "younging", not aging. And each man has the "force" of one hundred men to eat, to drink, to love. The women become virgins again, and there is no problem of depletion of the resources for all these pleasures, all the delights of the senses. The water is ever plentiful, the branches of the trees embrace them and render their fruits. And the way they are dressed: each one has 70 robes, each one changing color 70 times per hour . . .

As far as I can understand the social organization is simple, almost class-less; but there is the hierarchy of angels and dijins. There is worship, but not the emphasis on intellectual and artistic pursuits so one-sidedly emphasized in Christianity. Above all there is plenty for the highest level of human delight, material and non-material; all of it like the Quran, the kitab, the only thing on earth that cannot be depleted, never reduced by reading - - - .

(4) Conclusion

We stop at this point, not moving further East or South, among other reasons because Hinduism is extremely complex, because the Nirvana concepts do not offer much in terms of concrete visions of desirable societies in this world, because the Confucian, Taoist and Shinto images in a sense are

too concrete, and because of total ignorance of the eschatologies of people living under other forms of religious guidance. In his very impressive Death and Eternal Life[38] John Hick mentions one example:

> "In the Kimbunda country of South-West Africa, souls live on in "Kalunga", the world where it is a day when it is night here; and with plenty of food and drink and women to serve them, and hunting and dancing for pastime, they lead a life that seems a corrected additon of this." (39)

Definitely more like the Viking and Muslim visions, less like the Christian one!

But then he goes on to describe the Hebrew sheol and the Greek hades and we are given entirely negative visions: "At death the body descends into erebus, or hades, where, whilst recognizable and still bearing its earthly name, it persists as a depleted, joyless entity, a mere bloodless shadow of its former embodied self"[40]. And "sheol was thought of as a vast underground cavern or pit - probably the tribal burial place magnified into a dark subterranean world - where the dead exist or persist -- out of the land of the living and out of the ongoing life of the nation in its convenant relationship with Yahweh"[41]. So the Greeks would try to enjoy life here, and the Jews, perhaps, developed an essentially pessimistic view - - -

We let this do for the purpose of making the point already made: an understanding of eschatologies is indispensable, both as a source of prediction and understanding of how nations behave, and as a sourse of prescription, of insight for visions of desirable societies - never alone, but together with other sources.

N O T E S

Paper prepared for the meeting on "Dialogue of Civilizations", Visions of Desirable Societies sub-project of the Goals, Processes and Indicators of Development project of the United Nations University; organized by the World Future Studies Federation and the Centro de Estudios Economicos y Sociales del Tercer Mundo, CEESTEM, México, 25-28 May 1979. I have been working on these matters since I was Visiting Professor at the University of Essex at the end of the 1960s, as a part of general interest in utopias, and am very much indebted to discussions with the students, particularly Patrick Healey. Per Håkon Christiansen provided useful assistance at the International Peace Research Institute. I am also grateful to my GPID colleagues Gilbert Rist and Monica Wemegah, and to Ludvig Jönsson.

1. See Johan Galtung, "Feudal systems, structural violence and the structural theory of revolutions", Essays in Peace Research, ch. 7, vol. III, Ejlers, Copenhagen, 1978 for one formulation, from 1969, of this.

2. Noam Chomsky.

3. See Johan Galtung, "Social Cosmology and Western Civilization", papers, Chair in Conflict and Peace Research, University of Oslo, 1980. For a short version, see Galtung, Heiestad, Rudeng, "On the Last 2,500 Years of Western History", chapter 12, vol. XIII of The New Cambridge Modern History,, Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 318-61, particularly pp. 329-42.

4. It may be objected that this is not true Christianity, that one does not accumulate merits, and that there is no reward-punishment dimension. It is faith, and faith alone in Christ that counts. We are born with original sin without the faith in Christ we would go to hell, "not for what we have done, but for what we are" (I am indebted to Monica Wemegah for this formulation , and the reference to John 3:18ff). Through faith in Christ we are given the gift of grace in spite of all - and there is no question of over-achieving - as expressed in the famous parable of the talent: in Matthew, 25:14ff. To this my answer would be that we choose, out of free will, to have faith in Christ, to accept Him, and that there certainly is a punishment-reward dimension as damnation in hell vs. eternal bliss depends on that choice. Moreover, how can the Christian be sure that he really has faith in Christ, has accepted Him? What about the nagging doubts, both about Christ and about one's own faith and acceptance? Where is that signal from Christ saying, unambiguously, "your faith is deep enough, you have given yourself to Me - -". True or not true Christianity, my contention is that at the popular level there is an agony related to the doubt, as expressed many places in this paper.

5. Marx has interesting formulations:

"The basis of irreligious criticism is this: Man makes religion; religion does not make man. Religion is indeed man's self-consciousness and self-awareness so long as he has not found himself or has lost himself again. But man is not an abstract being, squatting outside the world. Man is the the human world, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion which is an inverted world consciousness, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual point d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, its general basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human being inasmuch as the human being possesses no true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly a struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion. Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." ("Contributions to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of

Right", from Karl Marx, Early Writings, T. Bottomore, ed., London, C.A. Watts & Co. Ltd., 1963, pp. 43-44 - Marx's article is from 1844.)

6. To repeat the argument from footnote 4 above: with nagging doubts about the status of one's faith the search for more indisputable, and also more intersubjective criteria must start whether this is correct Christianity or not - anything else would be almost superhuman. Not everybody will have the "inner certainty" in community with Christ that would more than substitute for any intersubjective criteria.

7. The basic form of merit here is not necessarily the good deed, but to fulfill the missionary command so clearly formulated in the final verses of the gospel according to Matthew (28:18-20). It is a question of spreading the happy tidings that there is salvation through faith (in Christ). But that raises the question of what happens to those who have never heard of Christ so that they have had no chance of rejecting him. If they are in for eternal damnation the thought system is cruel indeed, and the task of the missionary very urgent. If they are given neither hell nor heaven the task of the missionary becomes more ambiguous. For what if he tells them of the possibility of salvation through faith and they nevertheless reject it? There are very many indications both in OT and NT as to what will happen to them, eg Thessalonians 1:7-10, "They /who refuse to accept God's plan to save them through our Lord Jesus Christ/ will be punished in everlasting hell, forever separated from the face of the Lord, never to see the glory of his power when he comes to receive praise and admiration because of all he has done for his people, his saints. And you will be with him, because you believed God's word which we gave you". If the pagan is left to himself without the Word, but risks this faith if he rejects "God's word which we gave to you" - does the missionary not run the risk of condemning many people to eternal damnation? Such powers should not be in the hands of the missionary, though - hence the first interpretation would probably be more easily accepted.

8. Tantric Buddhism might come close to this.

9. See Magda and John McHale, Children in the World, Washington 1979, p 26.

10. See "On Alpha and Beta and Their Many Combinations", Proceedings of the Visions of Desirable Societies meeting, Mexico 5-8 April 1978.

11. It should be emphasized that these are criteria for good visions, how visions should be; not criteria referring to how desirable the societies depicted are.

12. See the very useful Understanding Oriental Philosophy, by James K. Feibleman, Mentor books, 1977: p. 224.

13. The whole Annales school of French historical studies is based on this, that there are conjunctures, long trends, not only events.

14. This is mainly taken from Feibleman, op. cit., Part Two, especially Chapter XXX, "Some General Observations on Chinese Philosophy".

15. ibid., p. 173.

16. ibid., p. 89

17. ibid., p. 86

18. See Johan Galtung and Fumiko Nishimura, Learning From the Chinese People, Oslo 1975, chapter 8.

19. Feibleman, op. cit., p. 224; the eastern quest may be said to be more

concerned with one's own salvation, the West with that of others.

20. "The spirit of the West does not seem able to comprehend how a good and pious man can at the same time be a Confucian, a Buddhist, a Taoist and a Christian. European Christians believe this to be wrong and impossible; but thousands of Chinese Christians live it." From Thomas Ohm, Asia Looks at Western Christianity, Nelson, London, 1959, p.28.

21. "All religions are only potentialities. Therefore none must rise above the others, Christianity not excepted." Ohm, op.cit., p. 31.

22. For a discussion of this difference, see Johan Galtung, "Structural Pluralism and the Future of Human Society; Proceedings of the Second World Future Studies Conference, Kodansha, Tokyo, 1971.

23. See Johan Galtung, Social Cosmology and the Concept of Peace, Papers, Chair in Conflict and Peace Research, University of Oslo, 1978, for a discussion similar to that of this paper, but focussing on visions of peace.

24. The general idea that most people have is probably that the soul, liberated from the decaying body, goes to heaven if saved. This also ties in with the classical Greek idea of the soul as finer, better than the body. On the other hand, the Articles of Faith talk of resurrectio carnis, and in the Revelation 7:15-17 there is reference to material basic needs: "The one sitting on the throne will shelter them; they will never be hungry again, nor thirsty, and they will be fully protected from the scorching noonday heat. For the Lamb standing in front of the throne will feed them and be their shepherd and lead them to the springs of the water of life. And God will wipe their tears away." On the other hand, this may also be metaphorical and non-material - like "the springs of the water of life". But then Revelation, ch. 21 can also be seen as a very concrete description. In comparison to the very earthy descriptions of after-life given in Viking and Muslim eschatologies, the Christian after-life stands out as more ethereal: see the descriptions later in the paper, esp. the reference to time.

25. The Inquisition and the Soviet use of psychiatry would come to mind as obvious examples.

26. It is interesting to watch how the Islamic Republic of Khomeini's Iran seems to be developing in exactly this direction.

27. For a discussion of this, see Johan Galtung, The True Worlds, The Free Press, New York 1979, chap. 7.1.

28. For the garden theme there is a beautiful piece by Elise Boulding, "Images of Peace in Human History", prepared for UNESCO 1975.

29. My description is based on S. Aage Bay, Bonde og Viking. Samfundsliv og Tro i Nordens Vikingetid, Copenhagen, Reitzel, 1954, pp. 54-6

30. The women came to another section of Asgard, Folkvang (Bay, op.cit. p. 54).

31. My description is based on the article "State of the Dead (Christian)" in Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethnics, Vol. II, Edinburgh 1920, pp. 835f.

32. Ibid., p. 835

33. Ibid., p. 836

34. Op.cit., p. 580; article on "Demons and Spirits (Christian)".

35. Ibid., p. 584

36. Op.cit., p. 835. For a fascinating discussion of "the other place" and its waning significance in Christian thought. See D. P. Walker, The Decline of Hell. Seventeenth Century Discussions of Eternal Torment, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964.

37. My description is based on the article "Djanna" (garden) in Handwörterbuch des Islam, Leiden, 1941, pp. 111 f and, of course, the Quran, e.g. 57 sura.

38. New York, Harper and Row, 1976.

39. Ibid., p. 56

40. Ibid., p. 58 Also see Plato's Phaidon, last chapter.

41. Ibid., p. 59