

On the Patriarchal Contamination of Religions and Psychotherapy as a Tool for Peace, Listening and Liberation

I replied to the invitation to participate in this Parliament of Religions by submitting a proposal : “Psychotherapy as an Instrument for Dialogue, Peace, and Liberation”. The essence of what I say shall hold coherence with the intrinsically ecumenical orientation that has been my characteristic trademark since many years back, even before I actually knew the use for such word.

My first book – “The One Quest” – published in 1970, had influence in California during a time when it was still not a platitude to say that all spiritual traditions share a common core. I delved into the transcendental unity of religions, and undertook a comparative methodology of their practices more than their ideas. Indeed, this had the effect of permeating my surrounding context and, just as when one looks in the mirror, I became aware of a personal feature, that was to be preserved later in all of my works: In my life I’ve been an integrator, a synthesizer! I believe that originally this sprang from having a good sense of smell for things that exude truth: I’ve never wanted to do without one aspect, by selecting another. I’d had the experience, in my teens, of having friends who did not understand each other, but who were actually great people, and I believe that the experience my life gave me, proved early training in attempting to reconcile internally what outside, was apparently irreconcilable.

Thus, by being a person of an integrative orientation, I would say that it has been a platitude to assert that religions have more to bring them together than to hold them apart: each one asks of us that we be good persons and that, for instance, we give life a contemplative dimension. Despite thinking this, I must say that the topic of this Congress did not fill me with enthusiasm. The intention of talking to understand each other better, and in this way help inter-religious comprehension, in our increasingly interconnected contemporary world, where so much dialogue has already taken place, and much has already been achieved, did not make me imagine that still more would change, with a few days of extra dialogue. I suppose that for the sages of each spiritual trend, the matter is already quite clear – and certainly the fanatical are not the ones to heed a calling such as the one of this Parliament.

When invited to participate in the cultural forum of this Parliament, my wish was to contribute to the discussions dealing with education, for I

believe that it is easier to prevent than to cure. The process of swimming against the current and of saving one's own soul when one has fallen from paradise is extremely difficult, and few are able to accomplish this – as we are reminded by the famous saying that few are chosen though many are called. But we can help children not to fall so completely from paradise, that they develop such an impermeable ego, during their estrangement, that they utterly forget who they really are. And it is actually not that difficult to accompany their process.

In view of the notorious lack of interest in regard to this important issue, I'm even more distrustful of the rhetoric of unity, mutual understanding and peace. It reminds me of when we speak about democracy in a world so scarcely democratic. It sometimes seems to me, that we talk about peace, so that people may come to accept injustice without any question whatsoever, as when powerful nations preach disarmament—only that the disarmament is of others. In fact, in the face of problems, is it not more about “seeking peace” to preserve the status quo of those who claim justice?

My proposal then has been to bring psychotherapy to the realm of religious dialogue and to propose viewing it as an activity with a spiritual dimension that has not been sufficiently taken into consideration. The question is that the idea of what is, or is not “religion”, is marked by the past twenty centuries, and is far from covering the whole spectrum of spirituality. Hence, I believe that psychotherapy, which we mainly associate with self-knowledge, should also be an important voice of the Dionysian spirit in our time – a new incarnation of that religion that existed in Greece before the time of the Olympians.

Greece was greatly influenced by the spirit of Dionysius, no matter how marginal and persecuted this god was to be, and only at the end of his mythical story, would he finally be admitted to Olympus. There is something about this myth which sounds so familiar to us nowadays - it is precisely at the very end- where “he comes to sit at the right of the father”, Zeus. Indeed the evangelists intentionally, or with great inspiration, alluded to this same ancient myth when they spoke of God who becomes human, dies and is reborn. Dionysius also goes down in history as the inventor of wine, and we know that the ancient Greeks identified him with Shiva (since when Alexander the Great took his armies to India, the initiates of Eleusis acknowledged the initiates of Shivaism as brothers).

The Dionysian spirit seems to me like something quite necessary in our time, and I share what Nietzsche stated in this regard. In his times, things were not as fossilized as they are today, but he felt that the petrified spirit of Christianity still needed an injection of the Dionysian spirit – the

spirit of freedom, of spontaneity and of surrender; it entailed the recovery of faith in Nature, both external and internal. And all of that, which we now more than ever need, is present in psychotherapy; this psychotherapy, which is a channel of that faith, I propose in fact, that we now understand it as a “faith in organismic self-regulation” – This is to offer an approximate translation into Western language of what the Chinese refer to as “flowing with the Tao”. It may be because we are rediscovering the Tao and its spontaneous order that current scientific discoveries have caught our interest so much, for they indicate how chaos is a source of order, all the way from the numeric world to the structure of the Universe – since what holds true in the physical-chemical world is analogous to an order that has not been voluntarily imposed and this arises out of freedom in the human world as well.

Actually psychotherapy not only entails the return of that which is Dionysian, but also the return of a shamanistic spirit. In the ancient cultures, the vocation of a priest, was evident in the activity of the healer and was not something separated from mysticism or from education. These three paths have taken seemingly quite different twists in our compartmentalized culture, but seem to be converging in our current times: psychotherapy is becoming spiritualized, and spirituality is becoming psychologized; we would wish for both to become increasingly more relevant to education, since otherwise education would become increasingly irrelevant to our need for personal and social growth.

To return to my point, dialogue among religions would not be sufficiently ecumenical if this apparently non-spiritual movement -psychotherapy-, were not duly considered. It might appear to be antireligious in some of its manifestations, but is not at all antireligious at its core, rather psychotherapy is anti-patriarchal –and consequently stands against the criminalization of instinct– a feature of civilized life that we have come to confuse with religion itself. We need to heal this millenary criminalization of the instincts, to reverse this twist of humankind against Nature herself. Freud described this condition of oppression or internal persecution by showing the mind as a scene of chronic conflict between a persecuting superego and an oppressed inner child of sorts. Psychotherapy is against that which is against nature: the implicit counterrevolution to an intrinsic pathology of civilization. Thus this strange promise entails that the spirit of this new pathway, fruit of a Western genius, may become amalgamated with the spirit of the ancient pathways. So goes my proposal to the representatives of the contemporary world (of religious thinkers?)- That they may contemplate the possibility

that psychotherapy, now on brink of becoming of age, has reached sufficient maturity to be admitted to the Olympus of the venerable ancient religions. Is there somebody here who disagrees with the fact that “something smells rotten” in the world?

We may not deny that there are indeed huge problems: the problem of injustice, the problem of nationalism, the problem of the environment, the problem of overpopulation, that of the complexity itself of all these problems ... indeed, enormous problems that are well worth our while to attempt to thoroughly understand and want to solve. But the usual way of dealing with such issues is socio-political and economic, and we neglect the inner aspect. We have forgotten to show how emerging from collective problems are issues such as ignorance, arrogance, the exaggerated intensity of our desires, as well as other problems of psychological origin. One of my interests, and corresponding contributions, has been to show that there exists what we could very well call “the capital sins of society”, which are but the extension of the essential problems of the individual mind. Just as the Fathers of the Desert wanted to allude to something that is at the top, at the head or the very source of all evil, with the concept of capital sin, so also in the social sphere, we may point to certain basic pathologies that are the root of all others. For instance; the repressive character of civilization. All civilizations have been repressive, that is, police-based, and this has been inseparable from instituting a State. This to us seems quite reasonable, but it is contaminated by something that is neither simply practical or moral, rather it echos moralism, which is quite immoral. There are persons who moralize in order to lower the other, to make him or her inferior and to tell him or her what he/she has to do, and we all know that when one wants to kick somebody in the face, all we need is to convince ourselves and to convince others that we are dealing with an evil person, or a dangerous demon - somebody not quite human, as the blacks were to the white Americans in the days of slavery. Thus, when people wish to attack one another, they first condemn the other, in order to feel they have the right to do so. Moralism is always a psychological force at the service of oppression, and it seems to me that it was Nietzsche who began to grasp this before Freud translated the notion of compulsive morality into his concept of the superego. Now Nietzsche, of whom Freud said: “the one person in history who had gained the most knowledge about himself” - had a conventionally good mother who turned out to be oppressive, but he was keen enough to free himself from her subtle tyranny on his inner world, while at the same time being able to understand the phenomenon of false compassion and paternalism as an instrument of superiority over another in the outer world.

Nowadays it is psychotherapy that can comprehend what conventional consciousness is not able to grasp: that moral is one thing, but that the conditioned feeling of obligation is quite another. It can be said that the mind of the European man (not only of the contemporary European man, but rather since a long time ago) is a “Freudian” mind: in whose fundamental structure there is a split which entails the rejection of oneself, with guilt and the fear of condemnation.

I do not believe we will get very far in solving the problems that afflict us if we disregard their inner dimension. For instance, violence is not something we should understand as a genetic trait of the homo sapiens that derives necessarily from the need to survive, or to eat, as reflected in the saying that the big fish eats the little fish. We find in the vast majority of people this inner violence, and we feel so accustomed to it that some even think it is intrinsic to human nature. Nonetheless, those of us who endeavor to help others to become better persons, know that people begin to heal from this violence, to the extent they leave their discomfort behind. One that walks with others through the transformation process understands to what extent violence is born of frustration- an expression of neurosis- it is a shift against life that comes from the fact that we are not really living.

Our evils began when Man invented war and slavery, and Archaeology tells us the latter did not exist before the Bronze Age; they did not exist before what we call civilization.

Ever since Bachoffen we know that there was a matristical period in the history of our Indoeuropean and Semitic ancestors that was later on followed by the well known political dominance of men over women. We may easily conclude that from this period onwards there was lack of balance between aggression and tenderness – complementary traits of our psychic life—, as well as an unbalance between the drive to conquer and the drive to cultivate, between exploitation and cultivation. From then on, such matters not only reflect the masculine predominance over the feminine in our inner life, and even in our brains.

The fact that we are tricerebrate beings, is something we now know thanks to recent research on brain evolution, although Gurdjieff, (who was a great influence in my life) had already predicted it, and spoke of tricerebrate beings, even before neurophysiology could demonstrate such a claim. We know that we have a reptilian instinctive brain which we may conceive as our creature part; we have a brain we share with mammals, which are the animals that establish an important link with their mothers, and we may assert that it is from them that we have inherited our empathic condition, which allows us to see others as

ourselves. But, as Arthur Koestler stated some decades ago (in a book co-authored by A. Toynbee), our greatest problem is that we have disconnected our instinctive brain from our most recently evolved brain, which leaves us in the condition of imperfect animals, since our rational mind cannot fill the void that instinct left behind, when dealing with something as complex as life.

Various cultures show how their founding myths are anti-instinctive myths.

In the book of Genesis we can see this quite clearly: The serpent is the demon. Although there are some prior depictions of the serpent alongside the Tree of Paradise that portray it rather as an extension of Nature, its embodiment- there is also a Hittite image, in which the serpent offers a piece of fruit to the first couple, to convey the idea of the gift of continuity existing between the organismic wisdom of the animal and vegetable world that ultimately leads into human life).

If this idea that our evil, is actually the patriarchal spirit, then we should think that the evil of civilization is not something that was added to civilization itself, a product or perversion of civilization, but rather that civilization itself now suffers a crisis of obsolescence. This patriarchal structure of society, its excessive violence and above all, its excessive hegemonic spirit, (all intrinsic), comes to be diagnosed at last and bears the virtue of suggesting different alternatives to the ones nowadays being considered.

If we are tricerebrate beings trying to live precariously with just one brain- if we are attempting to live by reason, by ideology and by economic computations when we see that life needs to be lived by heart, but also by gut and instinct- if we are pathetically limping along in our educated incompleteness, and from one generation to another trying to domesticate human life – then we may conclude that what we call education, (a way society has of conveying what it deems to be its values), is actually an arrogant transmission of its pathologies and its vices. And if this is so, how can religions help in the healing process? How can they save us from these great evils if they themselves are contaminated with the patriarchal spirit?

But Shamanism has not always been contaminated with the patriarchal spirit: Shamans are self-realized , and thus complete beings. A Shaman is someone who ‘masters fire’, that is, someone who has found himself and has integrated his inner reptile. And a Shaman is also a living person, who is able to heal since he possesses this mastery.

The Taoists are not patriarchal since, by inventing esotericism, they saved themselves from the dominant culture (and the ancient Chinese culture was patriarchal), by making themselves invisible. Taoism is the most modest,

most secret religion. There is of course a Taoism that describes the surface, but the hidden part is greater, whereby Taoism has attuned with life, with Nature, with the human body, and with the energies that mysteriously flow beyond the meagerly controlling “Ego”.

Buddhism arose in the patriarchal society of ancient India with its cast system, and we may say that original Buddhism shows patriarchal traits in its intellectualism and its ascetic emphasis, but was able to save itself from greater patriarchal contamination through its monasticism; the original Buddhist attitude was monastic: to seek truth in a secluded life. I know of no other religion with such a record of peaceful cleanliness compared to all that we are dubbing patriarchal —beginning with the spirit of dominance and the spirit of fanaticism.

The same cannot be said about religions in the Western world, however. It would seem that patriarchal contamination of religion was something that began with the Egyptians and would later be inherited by Moses...

The Jewish religion, which gave rise to Christianity, and later on to Islam, may be described as an inspired initiative on the part of Moses to transform a mystery cult into popular religion.

Ever since Freud suggested that Moses had been initiated into the Egyptian mysteries, we have gained better knowledge of the history of Akhnaton, who attempted to suppress popular polytheism in Egypt. His endeavours however, were defeated by the priests who tried to extinguish his memory. For as in ancient Greece, there existed also in Egypt, a popular religion with its cult practices, but parallel to it, stood the religion of the initiates, (to the point where the very same priests of the popular religion were also initiates of the mysteries, who possessed in-depth knowledge of the supreme reality that lay beyond the concepts, their names or portrayals).

There are those who believe that Moses wanted to do what Akhnaton could not accomplish. The question was: if, while being driven by an authentic vocation to be universally accepted and hoping that what could be grasped through an entire lifetime devoted to the development of consciousness, was what was needed to create a popular religion out of the mysteries.

It could only be possible by turning religion into law.

“You have to believe!”. What a great turning point this entailed: “

It has been part of the culture in which we have grown up, and after so many centuries of Christianity, whose spirit so greatly influenced the period, we have come to accept the ‘normality’ of the Holy Commandments expressed in the authoritarian; “Thou shall not kill”, “Thou shall not steal”, and so on. When compared to the ever important and sacrosanct

content of The Commandments, such details of form would seem to be a mere stylistic matter. But as McLuhan used to say, “The means is the message”.

There is a particular gesture and an attitude to all of this, and it is my belief that it has brought about great consequences.

The same can also be said about the doctrine of the Chosen People: far from being a simple peculiar trait, it has had enormous historical repercussions for those peoples who did not want to feel less chosen. The Nazi movement was one born out of envy; there is even sufficient data to suppose that Hitler, who had a Jewish grandfather who beat him, may have developed an envious and vengeful character which became the contextual framework, both pejorative and competitive, for his racial hatred. His statement that the Aryans were a superior race predestined for a great mission emerged from this model. And history is full of nations and religions that share a similar superior, arrogant and potentially hegemonic spirit —each of them convinced they are more correct than the others.

This very same authoritarianism of the original religions, which emerged with the invention of the State, would thus lead the way to the establishment of orthodoxies and to an “imperialist” competition for supremacy. So much so that in their work on archaic civilizations, anthropologists are cynical today, and consider religious phenomenon to be mainly the expression of the rationalization of power.

“The opium of the peoples”, as Marx used to say when referring to this service rendered to the established order, thereby suggesting that just as in the enthusiasm of an opium dream, beautiful religious ideals estrange the mind.

Needless to say, Christianity inherited the combative and conquering spirit of its precedent, Judaism. We have many examples ; The Crusades, the conquest of Mexico and the Indios, the enslaving of the Africans. On the other hand, we can also say that anti-Semitism is intrinsic to historical Christianity, (comparably so to the “anti-Egyptianism” of the Jewish religion) They are all variations on a theme and speak of that sense of superiority of the so-called civilized over the so-called barbarians: “We the predestined over... the others”, who shall be persecuted for being different.

Bernard Shaw used to say that Christianity is more like a religion of Barabbas, than the religion of Jesus Christ, and compares its history to that of a hoodlum who takes power and under the banner of a king goes on to commit atrocities under the protection of its prestige and authority.

In such a way has historical Christianity been able to use Christian rhetoric —although ,sadly, no government has taken up very seriously the

philosophy that suggests we “Turn the other cheek”.

On the other hand, it is even more evident that Islam has been violent. Since the origins of Islam it’ similarity to the Jewish outlook ,as described in the book of Exodus (the journey of the Chosen People to the Promised Land),speaks of how the prophets insist that no women or children be left alive, thereby completely exterminating all the infidels they find in their way. The difference is that for the Islamic, conversion was preferred to a dead body: when the sword was put to the neck of the infidel, he was given the option to convert his faith.

And lastly, when we reach modern secular society, there is not great difference between the ancient doctrine of a Holy war and the modern practice of a Just war! It also goes without saying that our penal system is anything by merciful or Christian; it is not even constructive, since the population of it’s inmates is rising all the time.As for for the punitiveness of the system, it brings about extremely destructive consequences for the people and their settings, aside from considerable expenses for the country.

With this, I am not suggesting that the struggle for justice is illegitimate; rather, I am setting forth the idea that such a struggle has been historically embedded in a patriarchal context that is becoming obsolete, and that what was appropriate at one stage in our evolution is not necessarily an ideal we should cling on to now. Personally speaking, it seems to me that when the time comes for dialogue between religions, no topic is more interesting than the respective merits of the Christian philosophy’s lack of resistance before evil, and the Islamic philosophy of fighting for justice —the philosophies of ‘the other cheek’ and of the jihad - but I also think that the severity of justice and the leniency of compassion are two complementary features of human nature, and that individual maturity is to reach a centre of balance between them.

However, we would be fooling ourselves if we said that our problem is one of religious dialogue, for nowadays we use this term as a screen for something quite different— our wars are driven by other interests! It has also been said,that the main war of current times is one between “good” terrorists and “bad” terrorists, one that insists on giving a religious dimension to something that is not religious.

But neither is this my topic,for the idea that both good and bad terrorists constitute an expression of the same hegemonic spirit; that different cultures harbor the same evil, the very same spirit of violent patriarchal domination that has been part of civilized life for some 6,000 years or so, but contribute to my considerations on what is intrinsic to civilization

itself.

Rather now it is time for me to explain why I think that something as apparently insignificant as psychotherapy may help in dealing with such a gigantic problem.

Something has occurred to contemporary consciousness since Nietzsche and since Freud, and the fact is, in our own eyes, we have become more transparent. There are certain things from the past that reach us, certain old movies that make us smile, if not downright indulge in laughter. Sometimes there are aspects that seem to be so outdated, all because contemporary consciousness has left a certain kind of hypocrisy and affectation behind.

We can now see very clearly that religions are a complex of many things. There is in each and every one, a central core, a pearl so to say —its mystical message, closely connected to spiritual knowledge and spiritual methodology. But this pearl has been embedded in a shell; a moralist enclosure, a political enclosure, a doctrinarian enclosure, a social enclosure. If in the organization of this encounter, this Parliament of Religions, the idea of contributing to the state of world affairs has been considered, I feel that little can be expected from dialogue between blind men leading other blind men. Rather let there be a sort of renewal of the religious spirit, through which we may choose to distill actual spiritual content, rather let us leave aside the patriarchal historic contamination of hubris, arrogance, and the spirit of domination and conquest, for that proselytical fanatical element is not intrinsically religious, but is rather it's cultural contamination.

Why do I think that psychotherapy offers a hopeful voice in this dialogue? If the foundation of our patriarchal mind is to turn against the instincts, I know of no other religion aside from what we call "psychotherapy" to vindicate our animal nature, which is nothing more, after all, than the nature of a child born into the world. No love exists in itself, without the love that each of us feels for the inner creature in our inner world – and this is a simple creature that knows about pleasure and pain. As long as the criminalization of pleasure, (the lack of balance between duty and of pleasure) is perpetuated, and as long as we do not rescue the dignity of the human body in order to reach emotional recovery, we will not be able to counterweigh the implicitly repressive and excessively austere aspects of religious life.

Austerity and asceticism are a means; asceticism is a great universal resource of all religions but, like celibacy, was originally intended as a way of transforming sexual energy. For there was the implication that

sexuality could contaminate the purity of a person with a religious vocation. The history of celibacy is quite a complicated matter, which I will not elaborate on, but what I do want to say is that the repressive spirit is present not only in civilization, but in the very same religion that intends to lead civilization. Now the religions could find something they lack in psychotherapy —which is the acknowledgement that love begins at home, that without love for oneself, there will neither be a place for “wellbeing”, from which love for others flows.

We may describe the patriarchal condition as one of repressed instinct and falsified love. The guts have been desecrated, and though the heart seems to be there, actually it is not, as was so clearly visible during the very Christian times of the witch hunts, when the “witches” were taken to the pyre with the, supposedly compassionate intention that their souls might be saved. Augustine of Hippo, a proclaimed Saint, contributed very much to this attitude, and quite profound was the religious vocation of this prominent philosophical talent of the Fourth Century! However in our times of psychological culture it is hard not to realize how his sexual neurosis left its mark not only on his notion of original sin, but on Christian culture as well. Saint Augustine was a precursor of the so-called Holy Inquisition, since he was convinced that in order to save souls, it was sometimes necessary to strip them of their bodies (on the pyre) and most surely his influence would not have been as far-reaching had it not been for his great eloquence and controversial zeal. But it seems to me that this well-intentioned God seeker and defender of Church dogmas, was not that much of a saint, but rather that he incarnated an ideal of sanctity proclaimed by the orthodoxy of his time.

My title for this conference anticipates ideas I have not yet revealed; though, how psychotherapy can help in matters concerning peace is self-explanatory —since it clearly contributes to solving internal conflicts, it also helps us to detach from obsolete destructive behavior, and learn to live in the present. On the other hand, everything that contributes to emotional health and everything that may help to go from an agitated state of destructive emotion to a loving state is a useful instrument for peace.

Also obvious is the fact that psychotherapy is an instrument for dialogue, since it is an art of listening. Bion, one of the more original psychoanalysts, stated that the art of psychoanalysis was to be one of “listening without desire and without memory”, and one of the most important ideas of humanistic psychotherapy has been that of healing through

encounter— that is, because of the dialogical nature of its practice more than because of its theories or techniques-

It is my expectation therefore that by having been accepted as a speaker in this Parliament of Religions, not as a representative of one of the religions as such, but rather as a representative of “the religion of psychotherapy” I may be used as a precedent, to continue considering the idea that the inclusion of psychotherapy is relevant to the new ecumenism. The spiritualization of psychotherapy is already taking place in a certain way, not only do we see that psychotherapy increasingly turns towards the sky, but that religious life turns more towards the details of psychic life. We also see that therapeutic matters are beginning to become part of the vocational training of religious people, and transpersonal matters a part in the training of psychologists. This for me is a good omen, since if in the therapeutic training of religious people there is sufficient therapeutic experience, this would be greatly beneficial for our current times of obsolescent patriarchal religiosity.

Like yoga or Taoist alchemy, psychotherapy is a path that does not resemble what we call religion; however, it is unquestionably a path for development. If we consider it a way to repair interpersonal relationships by affording it the dignity it deserves for its contribution, (to improve life through self-knowledge instead of by moral precepts); if we acknowledge that psychotherapy is something new in that it achieves success in making interpersonal relationships more authentic and more loving through insight- then, I feel we will not only be doing ourselves a favor, but we would also be doing therapy a favor- for it is beginning to disappear.

We may say that psychotherapy conquered the world when, midway during the Twentieth Century, it conquered the market. Although psychotherapy was not popular in the religious world, and was always seen more as a hazard, it eventually prevailed quite openly in the the therapeutic revolution of the Sixties, (though not without the Vatican perceive it as a form of dangerous competition). But we see today that medicine wants to save time by resorting to medical drugs rather than use the talking cure, and so established psychiatry no longer has the time to listen to people converse about their experiences. Psychiatry prefers drugs or Prozac to self-knowledge, as Aldous Huxley had already conceived in his book *A Brave New World*. And thus, we see to what extent most people are becoming increasingly poorer, and working longer hours. It is not only more difficult for them to have access to psychotherapy because of its economic cost, but also because of their lack of time and to sheer fatigue.

It is as if psychotherapy were disappearing from the institutional world as

it becomes a part of the culture itself. But a more beneficial institutional world could rescue psychotherapy, by transferring it from the medical world to the religious one. For it can, like religion, take us beyond what used to be called sin, and nowadays we prefer to dub the psychopathology of our emotional or personality disorders.