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Text of Remarks

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Western and Eastern Approaches to Integral Ecology

My topic is Western and Eastern Approaches to Integral Ecology. Let me preface my remarks with two quotes from a poet who knew both West and East quite personally, Rudyard Kipling:

*Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the
earth!*

*Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,
Where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a man can raise a thirst;
For the temple-bells are callin', an' it's there that I would be
By the old Moulmein Pagoda, looking lazy at the sea;*

Pope Francis has challenged us to integrate our ways of living and thinking for the common good of our home and all its residents.

Does this mean we need to combine West and East to experience in thought and deed an integral human ecology?

Let me first provide a rough but practical distinction between the West and the East as these cultures approach integration and systems thinking.

For the West, I choose to limit its stand towards reality to an essence: a certain form of rationality which began with the Greeks. I have in mind Plato's demand

that reason govern the person and subject the passions to its rules for analysis. This is Aristotle's understanding too, though he spoke of both scientific knowledge and practical wisdom as the two principal means by which our reason guides us in decision-making. The foundation for this deification of reason, I suggest, was in the certainty provided by Greek intellectual innovations in mathematics and geometry, which were replicated in the intellectual discipline of logical thinking.

I jump from there to the French Enlightenment's privileging of rationality and its parallel veneration of the scientific method for understanding our world as what is quintessentially "Western".

Third, I note the extension of this Enlightenment Rationality by Nietzsche to the extreme of nihilism where rationality can be used to criticize and de-construct any proposition and any value, leaving us with only the Will to Power as an absolute.

The Will to Power, of course, seeks to dominate and does not tolerate being integrated with anything outside its chosen domain of control. This I suggest is the font of the technocracy and the anthropocentrism which in *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis rightfully exposes as dangerously misleading.

The Western way with the mind finds security in separation by definitions, in the logic associated with words, in compartmentalization, in individuation, in analysis of innumerable disparate facts, in separation of mind from body, of "is" from "ought", of humanity from the divine (though Kant tried to create a substitute for this separation with his Categorical Imperative).

Next, I separate from this presentation of "Western" epistemology and metaphysics the Abrahamic religions. I suggest they stand on a different footing of belief. The Abrahamic tradition places humanity in a covenanted relationship with God so that we become his agents and stewards. Saint John Paul II wrote of our being "co-creators" with God of the world through our work, really our various vocations. *Laudato Si'* affirms our stewardship obligations to care for what is created by God, both natural and social.

The Old Testament in Ezekiel 34 speaks of God wanting to remove his flock from the bad stewardship of the shepherds of Israel who fed themselves and not the flock. Jesus in his ministry gave us the ideal of the Good Shepherd. The Qur'an teaches that the God of Abraham created us to be *Khalifa*, or stewards of his creation, and gave us everything we have, own, use, and appreciate as an "amanah" or trust to be used wisely in his regard.

For quintessential Eastern wisdom I select from China three texts: the Confucian *Doctrine of the Mean*, the *Tao Te Jing* and the *Yi Jing*. Here the texts point us to integration of understanding around a mean or a balance of factors, facts, and forces. These texts do not speak of separated absolutes and provide no space for arrogant, domineering power. Rather the human effort is to align, to flow, to be harmonious, to extend the ego widely, encompassing others and all our circumstances.

I would add to this Chinese approach from Buddhism the advice given by the Buddha in his first sermon to bring the Dharma into ourselves. The word Dharma as used by the Buddha in that sermon refers to a capacity to hold ourselves sustainably going forward with our feet firmly placed one step after another on the ground of reality. Our integrated persona of mind, heart, and soul can do this through thoughts, understandings, focused concentration, words, actions and vocations which are integrated one with the other to give us ease and confidence. By placing us in the Dharma and the Dharma in us, Buddhism sees all of existence as a “dependent co-arising.”

Then, from Japan I would not overlook the naturalism which is Shinto. Under Shinto with its acceptances of many powers, called the Kami, in all things, we are to bring a “clean” mind, free of selfishness and individual hubris, to any meeting of ourselves and the Kami. This frame of reference leads to the Japanese social practice of *giri-ninjo*, or mutual dependencies.

Let me conclude with an observation that the 17 SDGs and their 169 sub-goals reflect the Western technosphere and the rational approach of experts and the division of labor into various separate tasks each with their own goal. The implementation process for the SDGs is rational, compartmentalized, bureaucratic, with annual reports on achievement, focused on data and finance.

Does the process have a heart or a soul? Is it really an integrated ecology? Does it need supplementation with a spiritual awareness?

The call of *Laudato Si'*, let me suggest, is to integrate this Western action paradigm with a different one which draws on Eastern understandings of the human person as living always in mental and emotional partnership with reality.

To follow the recommendation of my CRT colleague John Dalla Costa, this integrated could be considered a “shared” ethic, with integration not being understood as dogmatic and an absolute oneness solid and unyielding but as an colloidal suspension where the amalgam is a harmonious dance of moving parts.

The Abrahamic religions can, perhaps, inspire and broker this integration through insight, discernment, and then objectification of our stewardship responsibilities.