PAUL MUS

Buddhism and World Order

AT THE Conference on Conditions of World Order,* held in Bellagio, Italy, Raymond Aron enumerated several possible meanings of the term "world order." He suggested that the seminar concern itself with one of them, half descriptive and half normative—"order as the minimum condition for coexistence"—rather than with the purely normative one—"order as the conditions for the good life." The latter would too easily have been interpreted to mean "the good life as the condition for world order," which would have resulted in each participant supporting his own conception of that life. This, according to Professor Aron, could lead "only to platitudes or to acrimonious reproduction of the conflicts of values that exist in the world."

Under that cautious guidance, we avoided such dangers and reached substantial agreement "on the importance of the nuclear stalemate and on the continuing dynamics of development as the bases of world order." In contrast with this basic agreement, the seminar "reflected quite well the present state of affairs" in that it flatly disagreed "on the extent to which the new forms of interdependence would create not only the 'minimum conditions of coexistence,' but also a genuine community of values and of power" as a prerequisite to the endorsement of these conditions.

The quotation from an ancient Chinese author, Mo-ti, selected by Professor F. S. C. Northrop as an epigraph for his book, *The Meeting of East and West* (1946), still retains its relevance: "Where standards differ, there will be opposition. But how can the standards in the world be unified?"

What can a philologist hope to contribute to the kinds of issues

* Stanley Hoffmann's resumé of the conference appeared in the Spring 1966 issue of *Dædalus*.

raised at our Bellagio meeting? A letter from the Editor of *Dædalus* specified the initial intention. He wrote:

> In a world in which we increasingly think of people only in economic terms . . . we ought to realize that there are other criteria for categorizing them also. Not the least of these criteria is the one provided by religion. . . . The existence of certain religions in the East is as important a factor in determining the attitude of these people as any other single factor. We in the West tend to ignore such factors and to think that what really separates one society from another is simply the level of economic development. It is well to be reminded that such categories as *developed* and *underdeveloped* are not the only important ones.

The obvious advantage of convening a seminar on "The Conditions of World Order" essentially among political scientists and economists, some of the latter "in charge of economic planning in their respective countries," East as well as West, was that the procedure, directed by a thinker and debater of Raymond Aron's class, simply could not have gone astray. It was a professional matter for that group of participants. The fact that eminent natural scientists were also invited to the conference to advise or arbitrate from the point of view of the latest scientific methods did not raise any problems and helped us to make our way toward the solution of a few.

With all the diffidence that befits a layman confronted with such technicalities, I must confess that to my mind the term "world order" seems to imply, besides planning, a broader inquiry which considers the appeal of such planning to the interested parties, that is, to the vast intercontinental areas markedly differentiated—as Mr. Graubard rightly observed—not only by their economic development, but also by deeply diverging trends in their conception of the world as a whole. In its widest implication, I would take the term not in any abstract sense but in a definite sense, what linguists call a *pregnant* sense, connoting, in the present case, some model of an order and also ways of implementing it.

I am thus at one with Stanley Hoffmann when he admits that our seminar reflected serious misgivings in this matter. Wherever planners do not secure or are denied solid ground on which to pursue the application of their propositions, planning reminds us of Aristophanes' satire of the great Socrates. In the light of what was to follow, one may think that the author of *The Clouds* unintentionally passed judgment not so much on the Sage of Sages as on those, including himself, who did not recognize him as such: History took charge of carrying out the sentence. The lesson is thus that a *plan*

for world order, no matter how well-devised and realistic, may not even constitute a step toward world order if it provokes a sufficient amount of opposition—even unfounded opposition.

Religions, especially in Asia, represent, even today, more than "folkloristic residues," as they were tellingly described in one of our sessions. Moreover, no great Asian religion, whether Hinduism, Buddhism, or the popular Chinese mixture of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddism, may be categorized among "single factors." For these traditions, world order is not, as it is for us, a matter to which they may sometimes turn their attention. It is not, according to Professor Northrop's penetrating analysis, a *postulation,* a prospective and provisional scheme which we formulate, check against experience, and more or less successfully try to improve upon. It asserts itself as an autonomous, continual, and all-embracing process in which we find and may more effectively insert ourselves. The total, not the individual, comes first—a mode of thinking coinciding with Durkheim's much discussed but fundamentally sound description of society as an organic whole rather than as a mechanical addition of parts and circumstances.

Many centuries before the Stoics elaborated the idea of world order along lines still largely accepted by the Western world—though in a quite different spirit because of the penetration of Christian values—world order was generally conceived, throughout a wide cultural area extending from Egypt to China, not as a more or less direct religious preoccupation. On the contrary, it was religion itself, in its highest and impersonal expression, reflected on earth and personalized in a Pharaoh, a King of Kings, a Son of Heaven, or a King of the Wheel.

This can be seen, for instance, in Joseph Needham's suggestive *aperçu* of the Chinese version of the Pattern of Patterns:

> The highest spiritual being known and worshipped was never a Creator in the sense of the Hebrews and the Greeks. . . . The Chinese world-view depended upon a totally different line of thought. The harmonious cooperation of all beings arose not from the orders of a superior authority external to themselves, but from the fact that they were all parts in a hierarchy of wholes forming a cosmic pattern and what they obeyed were the internal dictates of their own nature.

Under various formulations, this high level of temporal and religious organization seems to retain, though with obvious differences, something of a previous, more primitive period, when divine powers may have been less directly conceived as personal figures.

The outcome is often called Asian pantheism—a term which should be accepted only with the reservation that, as in the previous stage, the site was more divine than the genius, often theriomorphic and especially ophidian, that haunted it. In the same spirit, now, the total image of the world and of world order remains more divine than the pantheism it accommodates.

Such considerations will not be easy to reconcile with the notion so deeply embedded in our religious traditions that God has meant our surroundings to be, in the last resort, a Valley of Sorrow through which we gain a new life in the hereafter, once this world of ours comes to its end and final judgment is pronounced on us according to whether we have or have not succeeded in redeeming ourselves from its iniquities. Such a world is much more closely connected with the notion of an ordeal than of an order. However, many Westerners would not endorse such ideas today. Among those who would endorse them, many would not be fanatical about them, as was true in previous times. This is why Raymond Aron thought it possible to ask us to forget our personal and often irreconcilable conceptions of "the good life."

But, from another point of view, would it not be possible for our modern world, insofar as it is not totally satisfied with Newton's understanding of the laws of nature as given by a personal God and Creator, to find inspiration in the descriptive, naturalistic, and rational principles underlying China's classical philosophy? It is well known that such was the feeling of certain of our eighteenth-century thinkers, even though the interval was one of at least two thousand years, and of a society half a planet away. Joseph Needham's illuminating study, *Human Laws and Laws of Nature in China and the West,* Professor F. S. C. Northrop's *The Meeting of East and West,* and the collective volume published under his general editorship, *Ideological Differences and World Order,* give a sufficient idea of how large the gap remains.

The comparative approach may occasionally lead to suggestive conclusions, even though our current documentation on ancient and medieval Asian institutions derives mainly from religious or purely literary sources. Professor Needham's analysis of the Chinese cosmic pattern could, for example, help us to discern on our own side some very special stresses and trends during the Nazi venture—that most devastating attempt of ours at an authoritarian ordering of the world. Although lip service was paid to a God of its own, the Nazi machinery did not work fundamentally through divine com-

mand or through rational principles, but through the fanatical application of a pattern—the Pattern of Patterns, that of the "tall, blond, dolichocephalic Aryan race"—established, much more emotively than in the Chinese system, as the supreme reference. This earth had already been given a foretaste of its reign during an Aryan semi-mythical Golden Age. It was to be reestablished, and this time for thousands of years. The prophecy was somewhat curiously echoed each morning, though in quite different cultural surroundings and with different racial connotations, in the greetings of the Japanese to their emperor and the dynasty: *Banzai*, "Ten thousand years!" East and West thus demonstrated their ability, if not to meet, at least to build between themselves the two extremities of an axle uniting either the most or the least commendable elements in both—a factor to be kept in mind when planning for world order.

Asian Order and the Westerners' Inroads

China, as early at least as Ch'in Shih Haun-ti, had built herself more than just theoretically into a self-contained and self-assertive world. Is it not symptomatic of that "Middle Kingdom" that the Dutch Sinologist De Groot should have summed up his elaborate interpretation of the popular Chinese syncretism of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism in the specific term *Universism*? In a less centralized but equally effective way, India, culturally, reached a similar position. In the eyes not only of her own "teeming millions" but also of her Southeast cultural dependencies, India became not just a large part of the world but the central expression of a world order. As already indicated by the famous message of Prince Shōtoku to the Sui Emperor, Yang-ti: "The Emperor of the Rising Sun to the Emperor of the Setting Sun . . ." (607 A.D.), the Japanese line long followed the same direction, although it was somewhat distorted, for a while, by its connection—without adequate ethical compensation—with modern Western power concepts.

How, then, can we expect such cosmic, self-vindicating systems, still powerful at the popular level, to put aside their traditional assertions about themselves in order to adopt our own set of values? This would be a self-denial unlikely to appeal to them since it would mean their joining us, under our leadership, in our desperate endeavors to establish some minimum of world order in the teeth of an impending destruction. The Afro-Asian nations see the present situation as proof that our system leads to destruction far more

directly than to order. Are we, in the West, sufficiently aware that if the Russo-Japanese War offered evidence to Asians that they might emulate the West, the First World War (not to mention the Second) came as a warning that they ought not to do so? Something else had to be found: a Western-sponsored United Nations Organization may not be in a position to overcome this handicap; it will look dangerously like a stopgap.

We have not fully realized the implications of the fact that the major Asian civilizations view world history as essentially cyclical. In contrast with our own Western conception of an open, indefinite progression, they recognize progress and regress—that is, an alternation, at the cosmic level, of general improvement and deterioration of world order, bringing us periodically back where we began, thus to start all over again.

As a result, each of these different traditions considers that the Golden Age existed when their own patterns of thought and collective as well as private behavior were naturally followed all over the world. The notion that things could have been otherwise does not even arise. Degenerescence—whatever be its final reason—began when an increasing number of people went astray. This is a view which Westerners often do not understand, but which it is essential for us to know. How can the Asian civilizations fail to hold us and our activities responsible for the ever deeper obscurity of this Iron Age, where the leading powers in the world appear to have lost their bearings so that we not only openly expect—and dread—Armageddon, but prepare for it with all our might?

The first Asian impulse, a distinctly conservative one, would be to go back to its own traditions. This mood derives its strength partly from the preceding considerations, partly from the belief in transmigration—always so difficult for us to grasp—according to which Westerners and all that they represent and bring with them, *problems* rather than *solutions,* do not belong in the East at all. If they did, they would have been reborn there as natives.

This does not mean that belief in *karma* and transmigration discourages travel and communications—quite the contrary. In the usual, flexible, and highly pragmatic application of the doctrine, the contacts between the local people and visitors, sailors, traders, temporary guests, or even colonizers show that there must be enough in common in their respective retributions for these people to meet in the East. However, in contrast with the case of the natives destined by their merits and demerits to be born there and

nowhere else, the force that brings alien elements to their countries operates peripherally; they will *come* but they do not *belong* there.

In good doctrine, to hear of Burma, or Cambodia, or Viet-Nam, then go there, and finally be born there, but as an alien, constitutes a regular progression. As these are Buddhist countries where one may get acquainted with the Master's teaching and his church, this progression allows the classification of the corresponding "destinies" as an escalation of rewards. But, as a Vietnamese friend told me once very seriously, to be entitled to a share in the administration and, consequently, in the revenue of the country, a person must wait until karmic retribution has moved one step further, making him a Burmese, Cambodian, or Vietnamese, as the case may be, by right of birth. Otherwise, there will be a perversion of the world order and commensurate punishment. "Why are you in a hurry?" asked my friend. "You are already so close to us, you and some of your compatriots. It *must* come!"

I confess that such speculations are a far cry from our quiet and productive Bellagio meeting; but perhaps this is one reason that a brief mention of them should find a place here. The road to international peace will *also* have to pass by Mandalay and Bangkok, by Phnom Penh and Saigon.

The age of Western colonial domination has come to an end. Since my early years in Viet-Nam and for nearly half a century, the Vietnamese never ceased to expect the final French withdrawal and to speculate on the time it would take. They considered it a natural and inescapable issue. They had reason to know: With the Chinese, occupation went on, once, for eleven centuries, time enough to build up two or three local Joans of Arc. This is not a country where the spirit of resistance wears off easily.

All this suggests that we should pay attention to the steady propaganda that feeds the newly liberated nations with the fear that colonization is not over, that a less overt but no less efficient form of neo-colonialism has taken its place. The criterion of transmigration, so remote from our usual way of thinking, is destined to play a not inconsiderable role in the opinions that the Southeast Asian masses form of the situation at home and abroad. Twenty years after the event, I see little to change in the conclusion of a report sent to General de Gaulle after a clandestine contact, in his name, with the Indochinese "underground" under the Japanese occupation: "nothing will grow any more in Viet-Nam except on the deepest local roots."

This is certainly not to say that Viet-Nam, Cambodia, Laos, or their sister-nations of the culturally "Anglicized" half of Indochina will fall back on their old customs and superstitions, as may happen at first in some backward areas. The world is moving; they know it, and do not want to lag behind. They will need to be equal participants this time in the common venture. Token industrialization, screening their role as essentially purveyors of raw materials, will never do. To go to Tokyo and visit exhibitions displaying German, French, English, and American counterfeits or allegedly "inferior" copies of Japanese cameras, recorders, binoculars, and the like is to see what Asian industrialism can be. I would not say that such a goal is near for the Southeast Asian nations; nor do they believe it. But whoever does not understand that industrialism is at least one of their goals, and why it is, will find them difficult to handle. It is natural that they are sensitive about the management of their internal affairs. They will go abroad and learn, but the time of the foreign adviser is over.

To say this, of course, is to enter on highly controversial ground, and the objections can easily be anticipated. First, a question: "Does it apply to Northern Viet-Nam too, with its Russian and Chinese advisers and technicians?" Yes, given time, for we have to take into account that circumstances and perhaps a better understanding of the local psychological conditions have allowed the "obtrusion" to be lighter and less self-assertive there. But the more forcible exception will be that, in view of all that is at stake in Viet-Nam, with the prospect of an escalation of American expeditionary forces from two hundred to four or even six hundred thousand men in the near future, and the issuance of official statements suggesting that "We are reaching the stage when we shall not lose any more"—the whole picture of Vietnamese sensitivity to karmic interference of Westerners and their expectations may sound obsolete and somewhat childish.

One ought not, however, to regard as negligible the liminal and often subliminal approach of the Asian masses to this kind of situation. If they are to be expected eventually to shoulder a sizable share of the program devised for them, they must first of all be made to feel at home in it, to become aware, in terms closer to their way of thinking, that they belong in it. But how can they experience such a feeling and awareness if they do not initiate the program themselves? Is this a vicious circle? If so, the first step should be to recognize it as such.

Buddhist Concern in This World: Historical Background

Since the Geneva Agreement of 1954, which marked the end of the Colonial period in what was once called French Indochina, many new political factors have come to the fore in the whole of Southeast Asia. None has taken our experts more by surprise than the role played in many tense circumstances by the various schools of Buddhism in Mahāyānist Viet-Nam, as well as in the countries of Theravāda obedience, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Burma, all of which claimed Ceylon as their religious metropolis. Although Buddhism there was recognized as having deep roots, governing peoples' lives and behavior, it was reputed to be non-political.

I have attempted to explain elsewhere that this erroneous assessment of the political influence of the Doctrine of the Elders (Theravāda) derives from data, texts, translations, and exegesis mainly established through the sustained activity of the Pali Text Society, first in Ceylon and later in Burma. The British Raj had put an end to the local Buddhist dynasties in these two countries in 1802 and 1885 respectively. In both cases, this left a kind of rump Buddhist society deprived of the vitally important support of the faith which the temporal authority is canonically in charge of. This temporal Buddhism was based on the commemoration and cult of the Master, with the Church, for its part, entrusted with the perpetuation of his teachings.

No critical account seems to have been taken of this grave mutilation. Our vision is of a Southern Buddhist monasticism that has turned its back to the world in quest of an egoistic, personal salvation, to be fulfilled in a monastic career extending over several lives, in accordance with the basic belief in transmigration.

When viewed in this manner, Buddhism becomes a complete enigma. How was it possible for a religion so lamely equipped doctrinally to conquer half the world? In his well known book on *The Religion of India,* Max Weber, noting that the Buddha's teaching gave birth to "one of the great missionary religions on earth," inserts this mystified comment:

> This must seem baffling. Viewed rationally, there is no motive to be discovered which should have destined Buddhism for this. What could cause a monk who was seeking only his own salvation and therefore was utterly self-dependent to trouble himself with saving the souls of others?

According to Hermann Oldenberg, our most authoritative ex-

pert, "princes and nobles, Brahmans and merchants, we find among those who 'took their refuge in Buddha, the Law and the Order,' i.e., who made their profession as lay believers; the wealthy and the aristocrat, it seems . . . exceeded the poor." Were such people attracted by "the giddiness of annihilation" and by the final negation of self and soul, fading away in the unfathomable vacuity of Nirvana?

Oldenberg asserts that the belief in transmigration had put the last touch to the dreadful picture of the condition that the thought of India, exposed to the woes of a tropical climate, was convulsing itself into. Elaborating on the vedic hymns, most of which concerned, according to him, the legacy of happier times, Oldenberg says that the ritualists

> on all sides . . . descried gloomy formless powers, either openly displayed or veiled in mysterious symbols, contending with each other and like harassing enemies, preparing *contretemps* for human destiny. The tyranny of death also is enhanced in the estimation of the dismal mystic of this age; the power of death over men is not spent with the one blow which he inflicts. It soon comes to be averred that this power over him, who is not wise enough to save himself by the use of the right words and the right offerings, extends even into the world beyond and death cuts short his life yonder again and again; we soon meet the conception of a multiplicity of death-powers of whom some pursue men in the worlds on this side and others in the worlds beyond.

Thus, even death, the supreme recourse of the unfortunate in case of extreme misery, failed the degenerate and endarkened scions of the "tall, blond, dolichocephalic" race that so valiantly had entered the country a few centuries earlier.

In fact, and quite apart from such mistaken ideas of ours, the philosophy and *Weltanschauung* of the Vedas, reflecting the impact of the Indo-European tribes in India, had very strong positive characteristics. To the variegated and at first disconcerting appearance of the Indian world and its denizens, they opposed, as a deliberate counterweight, the massive unity of an ideal world. This world was bolstered by endless sacrifices, the soul and repository of which were to be found in the vedic texts. The epitome of Indo-European traditions and values thus became the cultural program of the invaders. In the course of the centuries, it had to cope with indigenous and mixed traditions and products, such as the belief in local spirits and gods and, above all, transmigration. The outcome was Hinduism, in which the positive values, previously built on sacrifice (*yajña*),

were transferred to a more personal devotion (*bhakti*) to a personalized cosmic power, Ishvara "The Lord." Ishvara was seen as the Lord of the Universe and, pantheistically, as that universe itself. The self (*ātman*) of the devotee, once built on his sacrificial achievements (*karma*), was now more and more authenticated by, and at the same time finally reabsorbed in, the omnipresence and omnipotence of these Ishvaras (Shiva and Vishnu). The world, in such a perspective, tended to become a mere picture, an illusion (*māyā*), supreme religious values being everywhere. For the initiate, it was a refuge from the real world and its problems.

This is precisely what the Buddhist revelation sweeps out: the whole mental construction is shattered and with it the prestige and profits which the Brahmans derived from it. At the same time, it becomes less surprising that the new doctrine should have rejected the notion of the person (*ātman*), and yet presented itself, to all objective assessment, as the most rigorous "personalism." It builds each individual entirely on himself and his own actions, without ritual alibis or escapes by atonement. Thus, the conventional self of the Hinduistic rites and devotion was definitively eliminated, leaving everyone to face his own responsibilities: "none but the doer of the deed will reap the fruit of the deed." It was a reformation of a kind. The days of the indulgences were past.

The real innovation was to reject final identification with the obscure and unpredictable notion of the cosmic total and to assert that the truth of the transient substantive "states" (*beings*) lay in their very transience, determined by their moral—instead of their ritual—actions (*karma*). Hence the interest shown by early, basic Buddhism in the temporal world. For these early Buddhists, there was (in contrast with the Brahmanical views) no other world on which to rely in order to reach liberation from this one. It is the way in which we handle this world of ours, reducing its beings and finally our being into ways and means of action (*karma*), that leads, thanks to the Buddha's illuminating disclosures, to the "way out" (*nirvana*).

Cosmic Law and World Order: The Burmese Experiment

But was this sufficient to justify a temporal Buddhism, which was overseen by faithful kings and tended to maintain and develop not only order, but prosperity and even abundance in this world—a remarkable anticipation of our "continuing dynamics of development" as the basis for world order? How can such an anticipation

of our concept of the Welfare State, with which the historical Maurya king, Ashoka (3rd century B.C.), has been especially credited, be reconciled with the strict doctrine of personal action and retribution, clear of all indulgences, recourses to "others," and alibis?

What is a king, but a figurehead in the inexorable, though not fatal, process of transmigration, in which everyone may count on his own actions, and on nothing else whatsoever, to improve his future conditions?

Professor Emanuel Sarkisyanz, in his remarkable exposition of *The Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution,* has found solid reasons for denouncing local attempts at re-enacting the great Maurya king's *saga* as tragically inconsistent with the ethics and teachings of the Master. Under the pretext of emulating Ashoka, whose glory is to have replaced the drum and weapons of war by the weapons and drum of the Law—the sound of which was the signal of his moral conquests—Burmese historical sovereigns ended in a bath of blood their unfruitful attempts to extend their power over their neighbors. One of them went so far as to boast of having built pyramids of heads. If the Buddhist Cosmic Law is, as canonically described, a peaceful, all-embracing ordering of the world, what has it to do with such cruel and unfortunately too authentic stories?

The notion of cosmic law can be derived from several sources in which the proportion of observation and positive verification, in contrast to pure theorizing, varies greatly. The Brahmanical sacrificial approach of pre-Buddhistic times, centering essentially on the typical Aryan family and its head (*pati*), was related to the ultimate abstract power of the sacrificial formula (brahman), in harmony with the seasons of the year. However, the Buddhist mode of salvation took into consideration a finally impersonal sequence of actions and retributions (*karmaphala*), which was mistaken by "unawakened" (lit. "childish") minds for a "self" or "soul" (*ātman*).

In early Vedic times, the ritualistic approach, with its extensive and strict pattern of sacrificial procedures (*karma*) which covered and authenticated all actions and circumstances of human life, could harmoniously organize that society to meet the short-range interests and elements of routine existence. They developed a hand-to-mouth, autarkic economy. There were, of course, occasional wars against the aborigines, the results of which, as the outcome demonstrates, were usually favorable.

But as soon as we transpose the problem from the simple, comparatively uneventful schedule of a *grihapati*'s life, ancient-style, to what befalls a kingdom, its population, and its cities, especially during the uncertain and agitated centuries that followed the advent of Buddhism, an oversimplified and ritualistic conception of cosmic law and world order can no longer work satisfactorily.

Max Weber, following Oldenberg, appears to strike the right note when he stresses the fact that "rural surroundings, cattle and pasture were characteristic of the ancient Brahmanical teachers and schools, at least in the early times of the Upanishads, whereas the city and the urban palace with its elephant-riding kings were characteristic of Buddha's time." This applies, of course, to Hinduized India as well as to Buddha's time.

Wars, invasions, and political and religious revolutions obscured what had been, for a while, a clear and somewhat monotonous conception of world order as the frame of a prosperous "Aryan" life. The final effect was that all Indian religions from then on had to accommodate themselves to a more intricate, more rhythmic, and broader vision of the world—the theory of the recurrent ages—which might well have originated in the Middle East in connection with early astrology and astronomy. It told of a vanished Golden Age. The turn taken by contemporary history, especially in Northern India, thus announced the cataclysmic approach of an end of the world. Early Buddhism associated these ideas with belief in a gradual recession of the Buddha's teaching, leading to the disappearance of the Doctrine of the Church. It found comfort, however, in the expectation of a new Golden Age, to be brought back to earth by the coming of a new Buddha, Maitreya. Though evidently unfounded scientifically, this way of thinking comes remarkably close to what we would call the graph of a periodic phenomenon—in this case, the phenomenon of phenomena, that is, the phenomenon of the world or worlds as a whole.

If such a graph were known with perfect accuracy, we would be able to predict effectively the turn that our lives and the world's affairs would be expected to take. However, no Indian system has ever claimed this degree of accuracy, least of all Buddhism. It was essential to its doctrine not to submit to any fatalistic predestination: the act (*karma*) was to build the world in accordance with the full responsibility of the actors.

Thus, the Buddhists, in the pangs of the present Iron Age, were bound to attach ever greater importance, just to be able to see ahead

of themselves, to the exact position of our world as shown on its graph. This made sense of the royal power, of its social activities, its attempts at a peaceful conquest of the earth, establishing a Welfare State that would take charge of the entire world, an ideal nearly attained by Ashoka. Such a reign was a check and, in the case of success, a signal: It meant that the Buddha to come was not indefinitely deferring his coming. There might still be many centuries to wait, but a turning point must have already been reached as things seemed to be improving instead of growing worse. The psychological value of such speculations is not to be slighted. We have recently had ample occasion to appreciate the deep impression made on the Buddhist world by the conviction that we have reached, with the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's birth, the precise point when we could consider ourselves halfway between his "revelation" and his expected successor, Maitreya.

The West cannot remain indifferent to the fact that so many millions of our contemporary "fellow men" look in that direction in their expectation of an oncoming world order.

The massacres perpetrated by the Buddhist kings who tried to emulate the Maurya Emperor thus make more sense—if a dire and forbidding one. They should be understood as a kind of test or ordeal. Such wars were initiated as a check of the point reached by world affairs on the graph of the ages of the world. The history and, even more clearly, the legend of Ashoka's reign established the pattern of such an experiment. Whatever his final relation to the oncoming Buddha, a point which, in the present state of our documentation, cannot be clearly assessed, after a bloody beginning, a moment had come when—because of his past merits and the accumulated merits of all men and of his contemporaries—the latter spontaneously turned to him and submitted to his sway without further resistance. Such is evidently the signal that the Burmese conquerors sought—and that finally did not come.

There would be great profit in reading Professor Sarkisyanz's remarkable book in the light of such preconceptions, still alive among the masses. This would make it easier to understand why U Nu, commonly taken in 1960 to be the impersonation of the King of the Wheel (*cakravartin*) that forebodes the coming of the Buddha, or even as the "incarnation" of the Buddha himself, should have been quasi-unanimously borne to power, and nevertheless failed in the eyes of his fellow countrymen and found little support among them against General Ne Win, when the latter deposed

him in 1962. U Nu had remained short of the expected "signal": bringing around the Communists to his charisma. This political or, more accurately, cosmic test had, to all appearances, failed.

Conclusion

Relying largely on Professor Sarkisyanz's admirable analysis of the Buddhistic backgrounds of the Burmese crisis, I have tried to show how difficult it is for Westerners to comprehend a vision of the world and world order which is neither *normative* nor purely *objective*, but, shall we say, *prospective*. Still deeply affected by their traditionally half-Buddhistic, half-folkloristic approach to such problems, the masses bet heavily on what they imagine will or might happen—their stakes being themselves. The closest analogy with our modern methodology would be Claude Bernard's famous *Expérience pour voir*. U Nu has been given precisely that chance and has not lived up to it—his achievements as well as his failure offer a remarkable illustration of both sides of the question.

Thus, far from considering "lay" Buddhism, Ashokan style, as a mere pragmatic accretion to the Theravāda faith, a closer study of its intimate connection with the doctrine will help to reconstruct a more human and convincing picture of both the social and political expansion of the Southern School and the eventual grounds for its reconciliation on such matters with the much more open and active leanings of the Mahāyānist or Northern School which prevails in Central and Eastern Asia, Viet-Nam included.

If, before the arrival and interference of the Westerners, a kind of political, quasi-national Buddhism was established on authentic Theravāda and Mahāyāna values, it would seem possible to build, at least between the various Indochinese denominations, a new covenant on that strong and lasting foundation: the Buddha's message.