

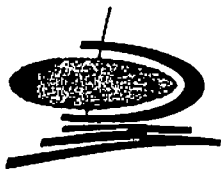
**WORLD STUDENT** has grown out of an awareness that certain inadequacies impair the benefit to be derived from overseas education. While home hospitality and social activities are on the increase, intellectual interchange has not kept pace. International students, on the whole, have not come to a meeting of minds with students from the United States, or even with their fellow visitors.

With the encouragement of experts in the field of intercultural exchange, the members of the Maryknoll International Student Committee have undertaken to publish a magazine that will help to answer the need for an intellectual dialogue among the students of the world. By emphasizing the spiritual values that underlie Western civilization, **WORLD STUDENT** seeks to encourage in the international student an appreciation for these values. It also provides the visiting student with an opportunity to share the ideals and insights of his culture with the people of his host country.

**WORLD STUDENT** is published four times a year by the Maryknoll International Student Committee, Maryknoll, New York. Annual subscription one dollar. Articles should be about 1500 words in length. Application to mail at second-class postage rates is pending at Maryknoll, New York.

## WORLD STUDENT

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## INTERVIEW

With  
Christopher  
Dawson



Christopher Dawson is perhaps the supreme master of cultural history today. In this interview he shares with us the sweep and sureness of his grasp of the forces that have molded the changing pattern of world civilization.

- Q.** *Mr. Dawson, we should like to question you about certain problems that confront today's world. In a recent book Frank Moraes, editor of *The Times of India*, says that the cleavage between East and West stems from the latter's achievement and experience in scientific and technological fields; that it is not mainly attributable to differences of religion, culture, and social outlook. Having studied both cultures intensively, do you agree that culture and religion hold a less important place today at the base of Eastern and Western differences?*
- A.** Yes, I think that is broadly true. I think all the civilizations of the East are now launched on the same path which the Western civilizations have followed, but the differences between us today are largely due to the rivalry in the desire of the eastern cultures to catch up in economic and scientific developments with the West, rather than in religious or racial causes.

**Q.** *Referring to the struggle in Asia between Democracy and Com-*

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Christopher Dawson is now Charles Chauncey Stillman Professor of Roman Catholic Studies at the Harvard Divinity School. His latest book is *The Movement of World Revolution*.

munist Mr. Moraes strongly urges Mr. Nehru to do something to strengthen the moral resistance of India. If Nehru fails, "he will have failed not only India but it may be humanity." This points up the "spiritual vacuum" of a "secularized civilization" which you mention in "The Movement of World Revolution." Do you feel that Asian cultures can persist indefinitely in this state of secularization?

A. All the Asian culture today are in a state of transition and by definition, I think, they cannot remain where they are.

Q. Do you feel that the great world religions of Asia are dying under the impact of secularization of life there?

A. No, I think it is too strong to say that. I do not doubt they are very strongly weakened by it, but there still is life in them. It differs, of course, in the different civilizations. I think the inherent strength of Islam is still very strong. China, of course, is a case apart and India is very difficult to speak of, owing to the extraordinary differences in the religious development of the continent. I feel that if an atomic war were to come and the great cities were destroyed and the directing classes in our civilization were to disappear, that the life of India would go on just as it has always gone on, and the religious traditions would still be strong. The changes are confined to a relatively small educated minority.

Q. Does the opposition to Christianity in certain parts of Asia reflect any revival of fervor in the traditional religions of those sections?

A. On the whole, no. I think in most cases the opposition to Christianity is due to the influence of Communism in some parts of Asia and to the force of Nationalism in others. And it is true that Nationalism can give a sort of artificial flip-up to the traditional religious feelings of particular peoples, but it is not a very important or powerful factor in the situation, I think, though there are some cases, like the recent things we have heard about Buddhism in Ceylon where the present state of things has caused the old religions to adopt an attitude of political activism, so that Buddhist Monks are leading political agitations. But there I think it possible that the influence of Communism is not entirely absent.

Q. In your Gifford Lectures (delivered to the University of Edinburgh, 1947) on "Religion and Culture," you held that religion is the

basis of all true culture. Would you deny that a totally secularized state, such as Communist China, can have a true humanistic culture?

A. I think the case of China is an extremely difficult one because there is a very ancient secularist tradition in China in addition to the religious tradition and there is a strong humanist tradition, more so perhaps than in any culture except our own and that of the Greeks. But at the same time I feel that the acute secularization of culture in China is hostile to this humanism as well as to religion. There is, I think, undoubtedly a certain inhumanity or anti-humanism in these extreme forms of totalitarian secularism.

Q. The seeds of totalitarian materialism were already present in the Chinese culture?

A. Well, as I said, there is a very ancient element of totalitarianism and even materialism in the Chinese tradition going back to the 3rd century B.C. And consequently the new developments in China are not such a complete reversal of the country's religious traditions as in Russia. Yet at the same time they are a complete reversal with many of the features of Chinese culture, especially the tradition of the family. It is very hard to see how far a tradition so deeply imbedded in a culture as the moral culture of Confucianism can be entirely blotted out by a political revolution.

Q. How can we account for the remarkable success of total Communism in China, whereas the peoples of Eastern Europe (e.g. Hungary) have shown a deep-seated defiance to doctrinaire Marxist Communization?

A. I do not think the cases are comparable. After all, in Hungary the recent Communist Regime has been the result of foreign conquest; whereas in China Communism is the solution the Chinese revolutionaries have found for their internal problems. And also, I think in China there is an historical pattern or a revolutionary pattern by which, when a dynasty has become discredited, there would be a complete changeover - what the Confucianist used to call the "Mandate of Heaven" changed. I think also, of course, that Communism in China has answered the needs of the situation in practical matters. It fitted in with the Chinese need for an anti-foreign reaction, and at the same time it gave them a basis of an economic reconstruction which was very much needed.

**Q.** *Would you say that Asia may well be accepting a Western Materialism which better elements in the West have rejected?*

**A.** I think it is difficult to speak of that because Communism has been accepted in East and West indifferently, so to speak, according to the circumstances of the nation. And apart from Communism, I think there was always a tendency among the intelligentsia in oriental countries to adopt the popular, last fashion of individual thought in the West. I remember an Indian friend of mine at Oxford years ago telling me that when he was a young student in India in the later years of the 19th Century, students regarded Herbert Spencer as the last word in Philosophy and how his portrait used to be taken to the schoolrooms and garlanded with marigolds and almost treated with religious veneration.

**Q.** *Is there any force at work in Asia and Africa which can counteract this movement?*

**A.** I think it is impossible to say yet. We do not know what is under the surface. Our knowledge is superficial over here in the West. I think that Nationalism is clearly just as strong a force in the East as Communism and some aspects of Nationalism are definitely hostile to Communism and more favorable to religion. For example, if the Tibetans were free to express their innate feelings, there is no doubt that there would be a very strong Lamaist-Buddhist reaction, at the present moment, anti-Communist and anti-Chinese. At least, that is my impression.

**Q.** *The following is a quotation from The Movement of World Revolution. Would you care to comment on it in reference to international students in the United States:*

*"This is not a metaphysical age, and in the East no less than in the West men are more interested in subsistence and co-existence than in essence and existence. Yet they still seek spiritual nourishment. There is a general sense of frustration and bewilderment and a need for a common purpose and a common hope. Up to a point the new political and national movements supply this, but not permanently and not for everyone. The deeper spiritual needs of mankind must always remain, unless we can accept George Orwells' nightmare alternative of a completely dehumanized civilization."*

*In this context, do you see any significant trends towards concerns*

*deeper than political and national ones among the leaders of the emerging nations? Or must we wait until the day when the reaction against Western political power, economic privilege and racial prejudice has died down?*

**A.** I think it has often been remarked that a revolutionary movement, when it is underway, before it is successful, appeals to an element in the religious feelings of people. It is not a purely materialistic thing. It has a certain spiritual appeal. When a revolution has succeeded, when it becomes the ruling social system of the country, that is no longer the case. And then, I think, there is an opportunity for religion to reassert its inherent power. In addition to that, of course, we must remember that in India some of the leaders of Nationalism have been profoundly religious men, like Mr. Gandhi. And I think the Gandhian influence on the modern Indian National movement must not be forgotten.

**Q.** *Mr. Dawson, you state in the introduction to The Revolt of Asia that the Nationalist reaction in the newly developing nations may easily become reactionary or destructive. In extreme cases, especially in Africa, it may lead to a reaction against civilization itself. On what do you base your observation?*

**A.** Well, I was largely thinking of the Mau Mau revolt in East Africa where there was such a very strong barbaric element joined with a modern Nationalist movement. And, I think, in Africa one must remember that Nationalism means a return to the historic traditions of the people and in the case of Africa those traditions are pagan and what we should call barbaric. No doubt Africans would put it in a different way. They would say that their civilization is a very much higher thing than we have ever recognized. And to a certain extent that may be true. Yet at the same time there are these barbaric currents which are apt to reassert themselves in times of revolution. And that is why I think it is very important that the African revolution should not be a violent one, but should be conducted as peacefully on all sides as possible.

**Q.** *Sir, we believe that many students, from a feeling of indifference or cultural superiority, ignore the cultural traditions of the West while they are studying abroad. Do you have any recommendations to students now in the West regarding the things to look for in order to gain a true understanding of their host nation?*

A. Yes, I think that is very important. Of course, if a student is in Europe simply to learn what he can of engineering, you cannot expect him to make a deep study of Western culture. But if a man is interested in the humanities, or if he is studying philosophy, I think it is of very great importance that he should try to go below the traditions of the West. And that can be done in various ways. Perhaps the easiest way for a student is through the study of literature. I think that in the case of India, the students of English gained a great deal from the study of English classical literature. For it widened their experience and gave them a new dimension of culture, so to speak. It is only when cultures touch on the deeper humanities, or deeper spiritual levels, that the contact is really fruitful.



Freedom, independence, respect, equality, fellowship – these spring from the inmost soul of the Western tradition; and the question is how much the West can be existentially true to them. And there is in the faithful observance of these things all that is needed, and more, to meet the challenge of Communism.

– Dr. Charles Habia Malik,  
President of the UN General Assembly