

HOW THE WEST WAS LOST

ALEXANDER BOOT

With a Foreword by
Dr Theodore Dalrymple

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FOREWORD

However prosperous we grow, however long-lived, there are certain questions that gnaw at, or just below, our consciousness. How should we live? What is life for? What is the basis of morality? The fact that contemporary man has no satisfying answer to these fundamental questions accounts for the fact that, material progress notwithstanding, we do not experience life as any better than our forefathers experienced it.

On the contrary, says the author of this highly original book. It is not merely our experience but our conduct that has deteriorated. When mankind loses its belief in a transcendent authority superior to itself, it begins to worship itself: and no self-worshipper, whether individual, national or collective, is very attractive. Indeed, self-worshippers are dangerous, for they recognize no limits to the power of their reason and will. This is an extremely important argument even for those who have no religious belief, and Mr Boot puts it more unflinchingly, more courageously, than anyone else. It helps to explain the radical egotism that seems to be so marked a feature of modern society (an egotism without real individuality), and why people are unable to tolerate even minor frustrations gracefully or countenance checks to the satisfaction of their whims.

He tells us that the advent of self-worship happened during the Enlightenment. Thus the terrible and unprecedented slaughters of

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the last century were not a contradiction, but a consummation of the Enlightenment, brought about by people who believed that they could reason their way to utopia. It is one of the great virtues of this book that it seamlessly connects philosophy, politics and psychology. The author understands, as most people do not, that the way people behave is profoundly affected, even determined, by their philosophical outlook and their answer to the fundamental questions of human existence to which I have already referred. This is so even when they do not realize it themselves. In fact, no man can live without a philosophy, whether implicit or explicit.

The author does not confine himself to political or sociological matters. For him, culture – in its traditional sense, which is to say high culture – is the most important of all man's activities. And he points out that the greatest achievement of Western civilization in the arts, certainly in music and painting, preceded the Enlightenment. This is despite the fact that the populations of pre-Enlightenment societies were, by our standards, small, poor, unhealthy and what our current governors would no doubt call 'under-resourced.' (Florence in its heyday had a population considerably smaller than modern Croydon's, and was, moreover, subject to war, famine and epidemic. But few, I suppose, would dissent from the proposition that Florence contributed rather more to our cultural inheritance than has, or will, Croydon.) It is highly unlikely that any of our artistic productions will command much admiration or even antiquarian interest in three hundred years' time.

Mr Boot's explanation for the startling observation that our wealthy, healthy and technologically sophisticated society has produced nothing in the arts that can remotely compare with Shakespeare, Velazquez or Bach, is simple: pre-Enlightenment man's culture (in Europe) was entirely Judeo-Christian not only in origin but in sensibility. This meant that supreme artists such as Bach were not glorifying themselves, as present-day artists usually do, but God.

Not everyone will agree with all of Mr Boot's judgements or

arguments. But he raises very powerfully the fundamental questions of human existence in an age that, despite its manifold shortcomings, is philosophically complacent. We think that the Victorians suffered from shibboleths: Mr Boot demonstrates that we are even more unreflecting. Compared with us, Mr Podsnap was a radical sceptic. Mr Boot rouses us from our philosophical torpor and self-satisfaction.

Dr Theodore Dalrymple

PREFACE

When my son Max was still a boy, he often was on the receiving end of the kind of ideas you will find in this book. Once, no doubt wishing to divert my didactic zeal elsewhere, he said, ‘Dad, why don’t you just write a book about this?’ I promised I would, soon. Little did I know that in the time it would take me to act on my promise Max would grow up and write his own books. Looking back, it is easy to see why. As nothing in life exists in isolation, separate ideas on various outrages of modernity can only enliven a dinner party or, at a pinch, make a reasonable magazine piece. But unless they all come together as a cohesive analysis *ab omnibus*, truth will not emerge. Too many things will remain unexplained; too many questions will go unanswered. So one cannot just sit down and write such a book. It has to be lived – and living takes time.

I have set out to answer – or at least to ask – many of the key questions of modernity. Such as, ‘Is the West still Western?’ ‘Does our present have anything to do with our past?’ ‘Why do so many people hate tradition even when paying lip service to it?’ ‘By gaining wealth, have we in the West lost something more important?’ The conclusion I reach is that vogue commentators are right: there is such a thing as a clash of civilizations. Where I diverge from the fashion of today is in my belief that, first, the

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clash has already taken place and the West has lost; and second, that the vanquishing civilization, rather than coming from a remote continent, grew to maturity within the West itself. How did this come about? This question is interlinked with many others, and, as you read this book, the links will come into focus. But, to see them clearly, few intellectual stones could be left unturned, and then a liveable house had to be built out of the stones. The immediate inspiration for this synthetic method comes from Spengler, but its roots go back to Plato who saw links where others did not; for example: 'the forms and rhythms of music never change without also causing a change in the crucial political structures and trends.' Obviously, building a case *ab omnibus* gives one many entries into the core of the issue; and, if the issue is as vast as modernity, breadth is as essential as depth. The disadvantage of this method is that it gives so many more targets to any compulsive sniper. Anticipating every possible cheap shot (no writer will ever admit vulnerability to any other kind) is hard, but at least some will have to be aimed at my peripatetic background.

English is not the only language in which I could have written this book as, apart from England, I have lived in four countries. Two of these, Russia and the USA, are treated in this book as the champions of what I shall describe as, respectively, the 'nihilist' and the 'philistine' wings of modernity. For 12 years or so the Soviet Union shared the nihilist burden with Nazi Germany, a partner as hideous but less influential both in its lasting impact and its geographical and temporal spread. It is for this, and not any personal reason, that I allocate more space to the Soviets than to the Nazis when analysing the nihilist horrors of modernity. This of course runs against the grain of the emotional consensus in the West, where many will happily sport Soviet lapel pins but not, outside the loony fringe and the less mature members of the British Royal family, Nazi insignia.

My book is non-partisan in that I feel loyalty only to the truth and not to any political cause, much less to any party. Thus, I

shall often disagree emphatically with iconic figures not only on the left but also on the right. For instance, unlike Hayek, I treat socialism as a natural consequence of liberalism, not its denial; unlike Chesterton, I am not unequivocal in my praise of the scholastics; and unlike Tocqueville's, my admiration for democracy in America is not without some, rather narrow, limits. In short, readers of any persuasion will be exposed to a certain amount of bloody-mindedness which, however, will always relate to the book's central theme.

Truth-seeking can lead one in all sorts of directions. In this case, it made me question not just this or that facet of modernity but its fundamental premises. Communicating this in an anodyne manner that would offend nobody is impossible. Like it or not, modernity has left an imprint on us all, and people do not take lightly to having their axioms rejected. So, some will consider this book to be sharply polemical or even deliberately provocative, an effect as inevitable as it is unintended. One can only hope that even those readers will find the book not only infuriating but also stimulating, helping them to ponder their own ideas more deeply even if they ultimately do not change them.

A London *Times* columnist recently pronounced that only people who hold modern views are fit for a public office. Mercifully, I am not running for one; but if I were, this book would disqualify me not just on its content but also on its language. In these pages I shall treat political correctness as a symptom, not the disease. But I, along with many others, find this symptom to be particularly painful. Reading sentences like 'A partner has a right to their share of the estate' sends blood rushing to my head, and if I myself used such grammar no anti-hypertensive would work. So, consistently and unapologetically, I follow singular antecedents with singular pronouns; and if the gender of the antecedent is not specified I apply the ancient law of 'man embraces woman', which, in my view, has never been repealed. Similarly, I use the word 'man' in the compound terms denoting social and cultural types, as in 'Western man' and

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‘Modern man’ (or ‘Westman’ and ‘Modman’, the central concepts of this book). I hope that even readers who are less rigorous in these matters will not find such usage offensive.

Books that are radical of approach and melancholy of tone are notoriously hard to publish. So I am forever grateful to Iradj Bagherzade of I.B.Tauris for having seen the merit of my effort, especially since his own ideas are very different from mine. Such fairness is hard to find in our politicized world. Also, Iradj’s editorial comments have made the book’s style leaner and its content more sound – no writer could have asked for more. Thanks should also go to Dr Theodore Dalrymple, even though I failed to get in a word before him yet again. Many of my illustrative examples are based on his pioneering – and impeccably stylish – social commentary, shared with me both through various publications and privately. And of course I must thank my wife, the wonderful pianist Penelope Blackie, who inspired the book, lived it with me and kept me straight on many important points. Some men have all the luck.

PART 1

EXPOSITION

THE MAKING OF WESTERN MAN

Western man was born in the East. This paradoxical fact alone suggests that, though his geographic habitat was mostly coextensive with Western countries, geography was not what made this type of man Western.

He was brought to life by an earth-shattering event that took place 2000 years ago at the eastern outskirts of *Pax Romana*, in a plain Galilean barn. Whether we believe that event to be the Incarnation, as Christians do, or simply the birth of a remarkable man does not matter in the context of this narrative. What matters is that after the birth of Jesus Christ it was as impossible for the world to remain the same as it had been for the Hebrews to stay pagan after Moses.

The event caught people unawares though it was not exactly unheralded – various Hebrew prophets had shared some vague premonitions with their contemporaries. Yet vague those premonitions were, and they hardly had more than a parochial effect: the Romans neither counted years in a descending order in the

run-up to the Nativity nor started from zero after it. Caesar did not foresee the cataclysm awaiting Rome; Tiberius was probably unaware it had occurred.

But once the upheaval arrived, and its true scale became apparent, it could no longer be ignored. People had to come to terms with the idea of a God who, while remaining the infinitely remote deity of the Hebrews, revealed an aspect of himself as a man, showing that absolute good can exist in a man's flesh, not just as an abstract ideal. The words in which the evangelists conveyed his message were simple, so simple that they were destined to remain largely misunderstood. The Christ of the New Testament spoke like God and died suffering like a man, leaving the world to ponder the words he left behind.

People weaned on a steady diet of Hellenic thought found it hard to come to terms with Christianity. Whatever else they may have believed in, at the heart of their being lay belief in reason, the supreme part of Plato's tripartite soul. But the new religion maintained that truth lay so much higher than reason that it was for ever to remain outside its reach. How then was God to be understood? Look within you, said the Gospels. This is where the Kingdom of God is to be found. All else is at best derivative, at worst meaningless. Man was thus beseeched to embark on a lifetime of introspection, intense to the point of being painful. That entreaty came as a shock to Hellenic men brought up to look outwards, to seek truth in civic rectitude and the perfection of both human and man-made form. The shock caused structural damage to the Hellenic world. Cracks appeared and out of them emerged Western man, the sociocultural type that dominated life in the erstwhile *Pax Romana* for the next 16 to 17 centuries. This book will refer to this type as 'Westman' so as to de-emphasize its coincidental geographic aspect.

As any other human type, Westman is defined by a common element shared by a large number of individuals regardless of how different they are in other respects. All successful human types and

societies have such a common element, acting as a social and cultural adhesive. If we attempted an exercise in taxonomy, Westman could be classified as ‘a unique sociocultural type whose founding animus came from an all-consuming, introspective need to understand Christ’s message, to express this understanding by every means, mostly artistic, and to fashion a society that would encourage and reward a life-long spiritual quest – this ultimately irrespective of the intensity of faith.’

Though eventually Westman’s habitat spread over Europe and later to America, it was never limited to those locations. Conversely, not all inhabitants of Western countries could ever be described as Westmen. Indeed, by its very nature this sociocultural type was always in a minority, albeit a dominant one. ‘Sociocultural’ may not sound very mellifluous, but it does describe the essence of Westman accurately, for it was through culture that Westmen tried to gain and then to express their understanding of God. St Augustine’s uniquely Westman definition of culture as ‘faith seeking understanding’ set the terms and implicitly raised culture to a status it had never enjoyed before.

Westman’s culture was multifaceted, and in due course we shall see that at different times he relied on some facets more than on others. Theology came first, with architecture overlapping with it for a while only to take a prominent role later, which role it was to cede to painting and later to music. All of it was underpinned by philosophy and its offshoot, literature, which eventually went its own way. All together they combined to refine – and largely to create – a new way of thinking, feeling and looking at the world. Westman grew to maturity as a direct result.

We shall also see that Westman was a sociocultural, rather than merely cultural, type because he had to create a society that would allow various facets of his culture to cast their illuminating glitter unimpeded by external and internal obstacles. Derivative from this argument is the distinction between culture and civilization that will be drawn later. The argument will go so far as to state

that Westman civilization and culture were not as organically intertwined as they had been in the Hellenic world. Westman's civilization, though created to cocoon his culture, ended up having the opposite effect. That goes a long way towards explaining the modern history of the West.

THE METHOD IN THE MADNESS OF MODERNITY

And an explanation is sorely needed for without it things do not make much sense. Unless, of course, we accept the improbable view that in the last two hundred years Westman went mad.

For no apparent reason, he began to lay waste everything it had taken him agonizing centuries to create. The first to go was his religion, for a millennium or so the seat of learning, bedrock of civic virtue, guardian of public morals, inspiration behind great thought and ineffable beauty; then came the turn of his culture, a tireless source of delight and a sure-footed guide to soaring spiritual heights; and then tumbled his civilization that had delivered a society freer of tyranny than ever before or since, produced unprecedented advances in the sciences, begun to bring about widespread prosperity. This too was destroyed.

That such destruction has taken place needs no further proof than the history of our time. Without getting into what might be construed as a matter of opinion, let us just consider that more people, by an order of magnitude, were killed in the twentieth century than in all the other centuries of known history combined. Barring the possibility of a sudden outbreak of pandemic sadism, violence on such a scale can only be a symptom, not the disease. What happened in front of our fathers' eyes was a shredding of the social, political and cultural fabric of Western society, not just a demonstration of advances in killing efficiency.

The disaster was interwoven into a century of what is commonly believed to be the paragon of progress. This is a composite belief, one that encompasses every axiomatic assumption of

modernity. Casting a glance around him, a modern man sees progress everywhere he looks. Call him 'progressive' rather than 'modern' and he will accept the new designation as his just due. When the presumption of progress is compromised by the murderous twentieth century, then no smaller modern assumption can be safe. We have to question them all before attempting an exegesis. Nothing short of merciless scepticism will do; complacency will leave too much unexplained.

Quick explanations of the mayhem, especially those based solely on scientific advances or other material factors, are inadequate. Moreover, they trivialize the tragedy by tearing it off its moral underpinnings. The carnage seen in the past 100 years has been so cataclysmic, accounting for over 300 million violent deaths (some historians offer somewhat lower, some much higher estimates), half of them in the Christian world, that it cannot be explained away by better homicidal technology and increasing supply of cannon fodder. After all, many – perhaps as many as half – of those deaths were caused by low-tech executions, torture and artificial famines, expedients long within Westman's reach. But while he often did horrible things in the past, somehow Westman refrained from unrestrained violence on a global scale. The unsavoury Spanish inquisitors, for example, are variously estimated to have carried out between 10,000 and 30,000 executions during the three-and-a-half centuries they were in business, which seems a low figure by the standards of a monthly Cheka quota or the annual output of an Auschwitz. While every unjust death is morally as deplorable as any other, numbers – especially when they creep into hundreds of millions – do matter at the level of political, social and cultural history.

Why did the carnage spin out of control? How, for example, was it possible for the Bolsheviks to cordon off vast areas in the late autumn, take all food away from the people inside the cordon, and then move in with bulldozers in the spring to clear away millions of frozen corpses? How could the Nazis shoot so

many people that even the SS men could no longer stomach the ravines flowing with blood and had to switch to gas? The answer may lie in the bias of the mass murders in the twentieth century: whatever the explicit justification was, many of them were carried out neither to pursue a geopolitical interest nor to settle a princely quarrel, but rather to advance an ideology. The targets were often whole groups of people irrespective of any individual wrongdoing. However, what makes the twentieth century unique in this respect is the limitless scale of such murderous activity, its span both in length and in width. It is the scale that cries out for an explanation, not ideological murder as such. For the twentieth century cannot boast exclusive rights to killing large numbers of recalcitrant folk for didactic reasons. In pre-modern times horrific murders were committed, among others, by Albigensian crusaders and Spanish conquistadors, American colonists and British Empire builders. And at its historical *début* during the French Revolution, modern ideology, armed with the rather basic guillotine, musket, sabre and rope, ran up a score that looks respectable even by the standards of our technologically advanced age.

That ideological massacre, like most subsequent ones, followed a rabid assault on religion, which is a point that has been made many times by many great men: Burke, de Maistre, de Tocqueville and Dostoyevsky spring to mind. Still, the point is worth making in the context of this essay, as the destruction of religion, since then completed, has had a devastating effect on both the culture and civilization of Westman. Religion, for all the misdeeds committed by it or in its name, was the foundation on which Westman culture and civilization had been erected. Destroy the foundation, and down comes the whole structure with a big thud.

A short walk through any great European city will provide sufficient evidence for this observation: Westman, the creator of a great culture, is nowhere in evidence. It is as if he has degenerated in every faculty, except those involved in keeping him fed, clothed and entertained; in fact, ever since the destruction of religion,

Westman's material acumen has been growing in inverse proportion to his ability to maintain his culture and civilization. For example, crime in most Western cities has shot up in the postwar years – at exactly the time when the West has grown rich beyond any level ever imagined in the past. The same period, incidentally, is characterized by a precipitous dip in church attendance. This statistic, like most such data, is interesting primarily for its predictability. We shall delve deeper into this in due course, but for the time being suffice it to say that evidence of Westman's madness is not hard to find. In fact, it more or less finds us wherever we go.

But is it really madness? A spontaneous onslaught of emotional instability, turning the formerly prudent and urbane Westman into a suicidal and homicidal barbarian, is one possible explanation of the mess we see around us. But until scientists provide evidence of a pandemic nature of madness, this explanation will remain improbable. Yet, an explanation is needed and the more comprehensive, the better: The last couple of centuries have been too different from the previous dozen to be passed up without some comment on the difference. And there have been many such comments. The problems of the West were anticipated by the giants mentioned earlier; and as the sores festered they were noticed and described by Nietzsche, Spengler, Weber, Ortega y Gasset and James Burnham, to name just a few.

But in describing Westman's collapse, they all overlooked an important fact that has since then become evident: it was not one type undergoing a crisis, but a different breed altogether taking over (only Ortega came close to this conclusion). The situation was even more serious than they thought: at some point in the past Westman had curled up and died. That is, he stopped being the dominant force in the west, having been replaced in that role by a new sociocultural type: modern man. For the sake of brevity, and also to emphasize the sociocultural rather than purely temporal aspect of the new breed, we shall be referring to him as

Modman. If we tried to classify this type in the same way as we previously classified Westman, the definition would run along these lines: ‘A sociocultural type whose intuitive two-pronged animus comes from a desire to destroy the spiritual and cultural essence of Westman heritage, while at the same time magnifying the material gains that were incidental to that heritage.’

THE UNFASHIONABLE THINKING BEHIND THIS BOOK

‘Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point.’
(B. Pascal)

In this book I attempt to support the validity of the above definition by describing and analysing Modman. Even though this type, in rapidly growing numbers, has been with us for at least a quarter of a millennium, Modman – as opposed to modern Westman – has largely escaped the nets cast by taxonomists and sociologists, who have so far failed to classify him and trace his evolution back to the time when he first joined life’s fauna. In a way they are not to blame for this oversight. Modman’s natural habitat is roughly coextensive with Western countries and, as he resembles his predecessor Westman in many superficial characteristics, the two are mixed up as a matter of course. Thus scholars such as Ortega y Gasset may have thought they were commenting on Westman gone awry, while their object was in fact his conqueror. Ortega described the difference between the traditional society and one run by what he called ‘the mass man’. But he saw a continuum, however lamentable – overlooking the fact that the emerging society and the one it had emerged from had nothing in common whatsoever.

Through no fault of his own Ortega was suffering from limited hindsight: Modmen may have existed for two centuries by the time *The Revolt of the Masses* was published in 1930, but they had not yet won their final victory. They still had to be coy, stressing their similarities with Westmen and trying to mask the

differences. As a result, both Spengler and Ortega – and certainly the thinkers who preceded them – had to rely on prophecy to describe what hindsight has by now turned into a topic for reportage: Modman as conqueror. For it was in the second half of the twentieth century that the new species succeeded in mopping up the last vestiges of Westman's resistance.

Indeed, unlike Westman and his own predecessor, Hellenic man, the two species have nothing in common. As the book unfolds, we shall see that, if anything, they are mutually exclusive opposites, with the Modman sociocultural type born out of a widespread urge to do away with Westman and everything he stood for. In that task Modman has succeeded so thoroughly that Westman is now dead as a social and cultural force. His socio-cultural loins have gone dry.

Since in Westman the balance of good and evil generally – though far from always – swung towards the former, he created more than he destroyed. He was not so much an iconoclast as a synthesizer, one not only ready to discard what he deemed useless in other cultures, but also willing to keep what he found useful. Modman, however, found nothing worth keeping in Westman's world. All of it was equally abhorrent to him.

Though Westman is now dead as a driving force, isolated throwback specimens of the breed still can be found here and there, usually trying to stay out of harm's way by impersonating Modmen. But deep down they are aware of the short distance separating them from the taxidermist's good offices. As these holdouts cast furtive looks at the scattered fragments of their existence, their eyes mist over, and they drop a tear for the grandeur they once created but are no longer able to reproduce or even to protect. It is indeed worth lamenting: possibly no other civilization, and certainly no other culture, has produced such a record of sustained achievement in every area of man's spiritual life. However, a lament would be misplaced unless we agree that (a) the people who have taken over Westman's world are not

themselves new Westmen, or at least that (b) Westman may still be alive physically but dead in some other, more important, ways.

These ways can be traced back to the soul, an aspect of man that Darwin never quite got around to describing, one responsible for the part of life that has nothing to do with physical survival or the passing on of genes. Even though the soul is a somewhat nebulous concept that does not pass the positivist test of being either provable or disprovable, people of most religions or none always have accepted its existence in some form. The forms of course differ, so Plato, St Augustine, Rousseau and a New Age guru would not have accepted one another's definitions. But for the purposes of this essay, the broadest of definitions would suffice: the soul is man's inner metaphysical self.

It is by his soul that Westman is circumscribed. This statement is not at odds with the philosophy of Hegel who saw history as a dialectical self-expression of Absolute Spirit, for which we can use the warmer term 'soul'. Whatever the terminology, the system of thought on which this book is based attaches little importance to the corporeality of Westman, his physical shell, his geographic location or his race, toys he played with, ways in which he fed or treated himself. All these are variously interesting only as an antithesis, a backdrop of what Westman was not that gives a blinding prominence to what he was. It is not the outer trappings of his life that distinguish Westman from, say, Eastern man. In fact, Asia has shown that the West can no longer claim exclusive possession of comfort made possible by a semblance of democracy. What sets Westman apart from other historical types, such as his predecessor Hellenic man and his nemesis Modman, is not his body but his soul. That soul has been destroyed or at least marginalized. And, for many reasons we shall discuss later, Westman cannot live at the margins of society.

An essay on Westman has to have the Judaeo-Christian religion as a frame of reference. However, religion will be here treated as a matter of fact rather than an article of faith. For even atheists

cannot deny that the God of Israel, Abraham and Jacob has had a demonstrable influence on Westman's life. We may doubt at a weak moment that God exists, but that does not matter, for enough people in history have believed in him with sufficient fervour to do many great, and quite a few rotten, deeds in his name. By the same token, enough people throughout history have undone those great deeds, and outdone the rotten ones, by illogically attacking God who according to them does not exist. In either case, religion has shaped Western culture and, as a consequence, civilization. It is thus a fact of Western life whether we like it or not. Religion can take its rightful place as the first bead in the string of other facts that move an argument along – even if it does not act as the whole argument in itself.

Other frames of reference have to be based on Westman culture, born largely out of his religion, and his civilization that in turn came out of the culture the way Eve came out of Adam's rib. All these shared a common destiny: together they lived and together they died. For they, just like human nature, had in them the seeds of both grandeur and paucity, and there was death always implicit in their lives. Their life and death are again demonstrable physical facts, and thankfully so: these days it is difficult to argue a point on rhetoric alone.

Reliance on physical fact rather than metaphysical inspiration parallels the victory Modman's rational mind has won over Westman's intuitive soul, leaving Westman dead on the battlefield. But it was a hollow victory, akin to an insect causing its own death by stinging a foe. Without the warmth of a metaphysical soul, reason is a cold-spermed warlock, capable of destruction but unable to procreate. Or perhaps the reason that defeated the Western soul was not real reason at all but an awful mask used to disguise evil. Anyone who does not think reason can be falsified so thoroughly must believe that Marx was above all interested in economics, Lenin in agrarian reform and Hitler in improving the lot of the Germans.

Inspiration relates to reason as philosophy relates to double-entry accounting. The latter is useful, but it is the former that is capable of approaching the truth. Inspiration is linked to what Burke called prejudice and what we today are more likely to call intuition. In cultural matters, as in faith, intuition is a more productive epistemological tool than reason. Reason is limited by coherently enunciated thought that in turn is limited by language, our tool for coherent enunciation. Intuition, on the other hand, can perhaps be described as non-verbal thought. As such, it is – in any human terms – limitless.

Contrary to the modern view of education, knowledge has more to do with recognition than with accumulation. Because of the danger of producing what Berkeley called ‘a mind ... debauched by learning’, intuitive knowledge must set limits to learning, accepting whatever rings true, rejecting anything that does not. Real knowledge is thus more about reduction than expansion – the narrowing rather than broadening of one’s horizons. Of course, to make it knowledge, as opposed to obscurantism, one must first study a multitude of options and only then, following Michelangelo’s advice, chip away everything extraneous. This does not change the basic assumption that, unless ruthless discrimination is applied to information and ideas, no knowledge will emerge from simple accumulation of data. And discrimination has to come from both verbal and non-verbal thought, reason and intuition.

Since the early Middle Ages theologians and philosophers have been struggling with the role reason plays in acquiring the ultimate knowledge, the realization that God exists. The most direct route to such knowledge starts with revelation, and faith thus arrived at is both purer and surer than any other. But revelation does not come from within. It is a gift in the literal sense: something presented by an external donor. Most religious thinkers realized this, as they were aware of the dim future awaiting Christianity had it had to rely only on such gifted

communicants to swell its ranks. In addition, many of those thinkers were not beneficiaries of the revelatory largesse themselves. Naturally, they had to look for other paths leading to the ultimate knowledge, and hence their belief that reason could take one almost all the way.

Reason can indeed go far on the road to the truth – once intuition compels one to embark on the right journey. Reason can lead us in all kinds of directions, not all of them praiseworthy. An intelligent pervert, for instance, can easily chart a plausible course to justifying necrophilia (for example, being victimless, it increases the amount of joy in the world), but to want to do so he has to be a pervert to begin with. The rational mechanism has to be set off by intuitive predisposition. On a different plane, a man can arrive at accepting God by reason, but only if his mind is pushed that way by intuitive need. He has to want to become a believer irrespective of reason, for reason to do its job.

The same applies to other forms of knowledge as well. It is possible, for example, to learn the intellectual aspects of music. But to start making the required effort one has to like music, respond to it emotionally, consider it important. Again intuition comes first. Intellect is at its best when justifying a conviction that already resides in the realm of intuition. In that sense, perhaps one can say that, wittingly or unwittingly, any rationalization is post-rationalization.

All intellectual attitudes may have been latently political to Thomas Mann, but we can delve deeper to find that all cultural, as well as political and intellectual, attitudes are latently intuitive. Reason, of course, has to move in later to claim its slice of the epistemological pie, but it only gets crumbs off intuition's table. Thus, in common with Westman's faith, his culture is inspiration made flesh by post-rationalization. Or, to repeat St Augustine, culture is faith looking for understanding. Without the foundation of intuition, reason is nothing but a weather vane sensitive to the way the wind is blowing. That is why changing one's opinions is

an easy matter; and even convictions can be remodelled with relative ease, as shown by all those ex-communist conservatives.

Intuitive assumptions are the building blocks of culture, which in turn is the most reliable – or at any rate the most visible – manifestation of the soul. It is in the realm of intuition, and not necessarily enunciated ideas, that Westman differs culturally from other human types. Western music, for example, appeals mainly to intuitive perception. It could not have become the most significant expression of Western culture unless most listeners had similar, or at any rate compatible, intuitive assumptions. Western music caters to this predisposition by conveying the dramatic inner tension of our soul. In the absence of such drama, our music would be meaningless, as it sounds meaningless to oriental people who tend to look for harmony and serenity in their music, not soul-wrenching drama. Spengler observes that all Western music appears to be marching tunes to the Chinese. Conversely, Westerners cannot tell apart the sad and merry bits in Chinese music.

Exactly where intuition comes from is difficult to say. Both nature and nurture must act as tributaries, but which delivers what into the mainstream is unclear. Nature contributes through intelligence and temperament, one suspects mostly the latter. Nurture acts, again to use Burkean terms, through prescription, which is truth passed on by previous generations; and presumption, which is inference from the common experience of mankind. When intuition and reason are in harmony they can create an ability to distinguish between virtuous and evil, right and wrong, good and bad. When they clash the two can only destroy. The conflict between them, with reason emerging victorious, did occur and it was a curious combination of parricide and suicide. It was the former, for reason had been once a child of intuition and formed a familial unity with it. It was the latter, for Westman died as a result.

Even though religion is crucial, for the purposes of this essay it

is a process, not the result. It is the foundation of the pre-Enlightenment, morally absolutist system of thought used throughout this book. Such thinking has to trespass upon religion's property and must be reconciled with it, if only to apply for right of way. And property it is, for science, having first played a part in the development of the Western soul and then in its demise, has lost interest in it. Though it too often starts with an intuitive hypothesis, modern science is ultimately concerned with things that are describable by physical facts, and the soul is not one of them. This clear signposting of its intellectual holdings is a laudable aspect of science, and it would be even more welcome if for the last couple of centuries so many scientists had not been trying to convince us that no territory beyond those signposts exists. Since in doing so science became linked with some methods, not all of them strictly academic, that are associated with the more unsavoury political practices of Modman, it is hard not to feel some antipathy towards the type that will be described later as the 'totalitarian scientist'. Indeed, for those who cherish Westman heritage this antipathy tends to extend to post-Enlightenment modernity in general, both in its cultural and temporal meanings. In the latter meaning, modernity is the time when Westman died; in the former, it is the cause of his death. In the absence of a comparable spiritual attainment, it is difficult to view modernity solely with admiration for the trinket-laden riches it has delivered.

The pre-Enlightenment system of thought mentioned earlier is based on the belief that most things in life are reducible to the underlying moral choice, which is mostly intuitive and has little to do with a rational weighing of pros and cons. This system is quite a versatile tool, lending itself to thinking on such diverse subjects as music, literature, painting, education, politics, philosophy, foreign policy, history, education, architecture, theology. That the same system of thought can be applied, in however a rudimentary way, to all these fields should mean that they have an element on

which they all overlap. And so they have: they are all glints on various facets of moral choice. The facets refract moral choice, distorting it and sometimes obscuring its presence at the core of everything that happens in the world. But it is there all right, shining through.

However arcane the object of study, if we ponder human behaviour with the benefit of pre-Enlightenment, which is to say Judaeo-Christian, thought, then it must be reducible to the dichotomy of good and evil implanted into human nature from without – and the choice between the two that comes from within. Even in the middle of a drawn-out enquiry into, say, a revolution of centuries ago, it should be possible to stop and remind oneself that history is made by people who are similar to us, irrespective of the differences in the outer trappings of our lives. Just like us, they faced moral choices every day. Just like us, they got some of them right and most of them wrong. The difference lay in their ability to attenuate the consequences of the bad decisions, while enhancing the effect of the good ones. A peek into the human soul can remove some of the veil of mystery that time has draped around history. This never-ending reference to the moral traits of human character as it is, rather than as we may think it ought to be, is the basis of the taxonomy in which ‘Westman’ and ‘Modman’ are all-important definitions.

Applying absolute standards of good and evil to human behaviour was common fare before the Enlightenment, as was a general distrust of reason or, at any rate, of rationalism. Supra-rational tools were in the popular domain then, but they have since been discarded. Previous title to them has thus been rendered invalid, and so anyone can pick them up, dust them off and claim them for his own. But he would do so at his peril. For using pre-Enlightenment thinking to analyse the post-Enlightenment world is a risky undertaking. A superior system can comprehend an inferior one, but not vice versa. If a cognitive methodology based on intuitive assumptions fails to produce the desired result, with

no understanding emerging at the other end, the explanation may lie in a faulty set of premises. If one is led into too many blind alleys, it is not just one's conclusions that are in danger, but one's whole set of assumptions. And Nietzsche, for one, showed through his own tragic life that unresolved contradictions can destroy even a great man. He thus issued a grave warning to us mere mortals. Still, seeking truth is impossible without taking risks, so even a coward takes them, especially if he likes the odds.

This book is one such risky endeavour. The underlying methodology will be tested against various aspects of history and modern life, as many as are necessary and a reader can stand, to see if it is adequate to achieve clarity. If it is, then the prize can be glittering, a theory of modernity explaining most of the key events and personages. If it is not, then both the methodology and its wielder will die in the attempt – the latter one hopes only figuratively.

A willingness to apply the same way of thinking to every aspect of life has to have at its foundation the belief that most things are interlinked. They are, although the connections are seldom as straightforward as chain links clasped together in sequence. That this is so can be demonstrated using any starting point at all. Let us say we wish to consider how traffic congestion in London could be eased. We start from the observation that London traffic is bearable during school holidays and impossible at other times, a situation that did not exist a generation ago. Obviously, more parents drive their children to school these days, whereas before they must have sent their offspring to their daily ordeals by public transport. Why have they stopped doing so? It is partly because modernity has spread affluence so wide that most people can own cars. It is partly because this wealth has encouraged sybaritic tendencies in both children and parents. And it is partly because it is no longer safe for children to travel alone. So before we can begin to solve traffic congestion we must first consider a whole raft of problems encroaching on the issues of legality and punish-

ment, public duty and personal responsibility. And, should we wish to follow the thread further, we shall reach the domain of morality, its relation to religion, politics, economics, philosophy and – ultimately – human nature. *En route*, few parts of our existence will be bypassed as we continue a meandering journey that started with a small step: trying to do something about London's traffic.

Tugging at another string, we observe that modern life brings about centralization run riot. For example, Britain's commercial activity and consequently jobs are concentrated in the Greater London area, attracting almost a third of the country's workforce, a situation that is not uncommon in Europe. Within the capital, commercial, political and financial activities are disproportionately concentrated within a three-mile radius from the centre, again not an unusual setup. The demise of small local government, small local businesses and small local shops under the onslaught of corporatist megalomania thus makes the traffic problem in central London much worse, with congestion charges offering at best a temporary relief.

Then again, road works seem to be extremely widespread in London. In the last 17 years, for example, the entire 2.5-mile length of the King's Road, one of London's important thoroughfares, seems not to have been free from road works for a single day. Last year there were over 150 road works in London, with some other western European capitals not far behind. A cynic may not believe that every one of those jobs was strictly necessary. A realist would suspect that the local council's budget is in need of spending, the unions are in need of mollifying and, spiced up with a dollop of corruption, a 'jobs for the boys' mindset may emerge that is expressed via the endless rat-tat-tat of pneumatic drills.

So far we have unravelled only a few strings of, to repeat, a trivial problem, yet these slippery threads have already led us to a point where we begin to question the conventions, institutions and fashions of modernity – a point where we try to understand how people who are normally good at solving practical problems can

be prepared to override that ability for the sake of silly incidentals. Thus, we have allowed London transport to carry us to the destination that is human nature.

And so every aspect of life should be reducible in such a manner. For at the core of the infinite relativities of outside life lies the finite dichotomy of absolute good and evil inside us. The world reflects the clash between them, with the good struggling to create reminders of the beauty of life, and the evil trying to destroy every such reminder. When one is alert to their existence, telling them apart is seldom difficult; telling which practical manifestation comes from which is easier still. The balance of good and evil within a man's soul pushes him towards choices that can be right or wrong – in the same way in which his hormonal balance can push him towards either aggression or docility. His innate qualities thus have to give a bias to his life. But they do not determine it: the will to make the right choice remains free. Even though exercising it is sometimes difficult, it is never impossible.

History, too, gives bias to human behaviour. His time has to influence a man's thoughts and actions – but not nearly so much as a man's thoughts and actions influence his time. It is people who make history, not vice versa; no matter how much pressure history may exert, free will is capable of overcoming it. This belief in biased as opposed to determined choice can be extended to society, an aggregate of men and women. Society too has, what Durkheim, a founding father of sociology, called 'collective consciousness', largely the sum of its parts. That is why societies, like individuals, tend to respond to certain provocations in a certain way. However, belief in causality is a far cry from determinism, a desire to aver that because things happen they were bound to happen. This can more accurately be stated in a different way: because things happen, there is something in human nature that made them likely to happen under the circumstances. But there could also have been enough in human nature to prevent

them from happening. As, one hopes, there still is enough left there to undo them.

THE BIRTH OF WESTMAN

‘Credibile quia ineptum, certum quia impossibile.’

(Tertullian)

The soul is a religious, or in any case metaphysical, concept. When religion is treated only as a matter of fact, it would be illogical to hang an argument on the peg of a concept seen as an article of faith. Putting its faith-related immortality aside for the time being, let us note that the soul is a fact to observant people simply because the products of the soul are there for all to see, and these cannot be attributed to any other source.

Sherlock Holmes pointed out to the hapless Dr Watson that when he had exhausted all possibilities but one then the remaining possibility, no matter how absurd, had to be the answer. Using this logic, Chartres cathedral, Zurbarán’s St Francis and Bach’s fugues could only have come from the metaphysical soul, as the inspiration behind them cannot be traced back to any other source. Simply a combination of a well-trained mind and well-practised technique would not explain the startling difference between our three examples and, say, Westminster Abbey, Murillo’s self-portrait and Handel’s Messiah. Yet they were all created at roughly the same times by similarly competent men.

Philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Kant pondered the relationship between the inner essence of a thing, ‘thing in itself’, and its outer, visible properties, those that make it a physical fact. The soul as a ‘thing in itself’ is too vast a subject to live as a subsidiary theme in this book. However, setting a more modest task, it is possible to talk about the visible properties of the soul, describing it not as the sum of what it is but the totality of what it does. When such an approach is adopted to describe anything, the

most succinct description would be one that concentrates on the exclusive properties of the thing, omitting those it shares with many others. Thus, an aeroplane is a manmade object that flies, not a means of transporting large numbers of people; and a football is a leather balloon kicked in a popular game, not a hermetically sealed sphere. In both cases, the second part of the description is true but unnecessary. It could also be misleading if we fail to make the first part clear to begin with.

The most visible part of Westman's soul is its ability to produce culture. Some hidden, but doubtless real, tectonic plates smash together with astounding force, and tremors of sublime creations are sent out into the universe: a Bach chorale shaking the rickety house of philistine complacency to its foundation, a Dürer portrait knocking the roof off, a Shakespeare sonnet scattering the now useless stones. We may not know what the tectonic plates are, how or why they have clapped together, but we can see the signs of the devastation, with the shadow of the soul soaring over the ruins. There may be other ways to describe the soul, for example by its quest for God, which is a more seminal property. But the urgent and universal need to perceive God, whether gratefully acknowledged or regrettably denied, is not a property of the soul. It is the soul as a thing in itself, or almost that. As such, it lies too deep for this essay to dig. The ability to create culture, on the other hand, is on the surface, visible to the naked eye. For all practical purposes, this can suffice.

If we arbitrarily reduce the soul to its demonstrable aspect we can equate it with culture. Sandwiched in history between Hellenic and Modern men, Westman is defined by his soul revealed through culture. A simple equation then leads to a workable conclusion: Westman equals Western soul, which in turn equals Western culture, the centrepiece of a triptych preceded by religion and followed by civilization. Therefore, in practical terms, Westman equals Western culture. Logically imperfect as this conclusion is, it is good enough to act as a working

hypothesis since it lends itself to empirical proof. Thus, a cursory comparison of Westman's culture and that of his immediate predecessor, Hellenic man, gives us a few insights that go beyond mere aesthetics.

The first insight can be triggered by a simple question. Was the Venus de Milo beautiful? The statue of her is perfect, but what about the model? What was she like as a woman? Flirtatious or detached? Brilliant or stupid? Profound or flighty? Did she light up every room she was in or turn it into a chamber of sorrow? We do not know. All we can do is admire the perfect marble form of the statue's body. If we tried to peek into the substance beyond the form, our eyes would limply slide off the polished stone. There is no substance. The form is all there is.

Or look at the sightless busts of ancient Greeks and Romans, as Spengler suggested. Presumably, all the models had eyes, the window to the soul. Then why are we looking at the solidly filled eye sockets? Even assuming that the eyes were originally painted onto the stone and then lost to the erosion of time, or were made up of implanted jewels eventually lost to theft, we still have to wonder why the artists selected such a flimsy medium. Donatello and Michelangelo did demonstrate that it was possible to sculpt eyes in eternally durable stone. So why did their Hellenic ancestors merely apply some dye as an afterthought? It could be that Hellenic artists were not interested in the soul and therefore did not need to show windows through which it could be seen. It even could be that Hellenic man had no soul to look into, which is more or less the view taken by J. Jaynes in his *Bicameral Mind*. More likely, the artists were interested in the form only because their culture did not call for introspection. Their idea of beauty was skin deep.

The concept of the soul was neither alien nor central to Hellenic antiquity. Immortality was important only to some philosophy, Plato's and Aristotle's most prominently, but neither thinker saw the soul as an exclusively human property. Even before Plato,

Orphic mysteries had involved immortality of the soul as the foundation of belief in life after death. 'The souls of all are immortal; those of the virtuous are divine' became a widespread notion in the Hellenic world, even though it was opposed by the Stoics. But there, particularly in Rome, it led not to the genesis of a new culture but to the doctrine of consecration whereby the souls of all dead emperors were declared divine. In some ways consecration eased the subsequent transition to Western religion – it anticipated the idea of God-man. In other ways it led to the Romans seeing Christianity as a threat, since it deified a man other than the emperor.

Plato and especially Aristotle went on to have a greater impact in our times than in their own. For it was not so much theoretical philosophy as practical ethics that lay at the core of the Hellenic world, the Socratic belief that virtue is the source of happiness, defined as joyous life in this world. Happiness was one reward for virtue; health and physical perfection, another. Hence all those immaculate discus throwers whose sound bodies bespoke sound minds. Westman's suffering soul was not just incomprehensible but abhorrent to Hellenic men. On the other hand, their insistence on sending ethical messages mostly through formal perfection and harmony is alien to us.

It is with the disappointment of Westman throwbacks that we look at, say, the busts of Roman emperors, trying in vain to find a flicker of expression beyond their chiselled features. Had we not read Tacitus, Pliny or Gibbon, we would not realize that Tiberius was a greater man than Titus, Claudius a kinder one than Caligula, or Vespasian the only straight one among the lot of them. By contrast, let us look at Zurbarán's St Francis or St Catherine, any of Velázquez's portraits of Philip IV, any late Rembrandt self-portrait or, if we stay with sculpture, Michelangelo's slaves. No contemporary of these artists would have looked merely at the combinations of colours and shapes. Their first glance would have captured, respectively, mystic

transport, sagacity growing with age, tragic depth and fury. Their second would perhaps have revealed despair, diminishing sensuality, fear of death, resignation. Glance by glance, Western viewers would have unveiled what the Western artists really depicted: their subjects' souls.

This points at one critical distinction between the Hellenic and Western cultures, one that goes far beyond art. The former treats form in a what-you-see-is-what-you-get way. For the latter, the form is only a shell that contains the real meaning. The Hellenic body that held no secrets was replaced by the Western soul that was not only a mystery, but an unsolvable one at that. Thus, the streamlined façade of a Greek temple is the whole book, while the elaborate façade of a Gothic cathedral is only the table of contents. This points at a crucial paradox: conveying the soul in any genre of art requires a more intricate technique than it takes to convey formal beauty alone. That is why Western artists with the greatest souls, such as Bach, Velázquez or Shakespeare, also commanded the greatest technique. If an artist is given the ability to approach the truth, he also is given the means of doing so – and, usually, the other way around. Hindsight often helps us to reassess the significance of artists who used to be acclaimed as simple-minded virtuosos in their lifetime. Applying this optically perfect instrument, we realize that either those artists were not as simple-minded as all that, or not so virtuosic. For example, many musicians will now agree that Chopin explored greater depths of piano technique than Liszt, the less intricate spirit but in their time the more celebrated technician. Chopin needed the greater means for he was out to achieve a higher purpose.

Born at the time of Christ, Westman began to grow up towards the beginning of the second millennium AD. The time between Tiberius and a century or two after Constantine was what it took to get rid of most vestiges of Hellenic polytheism and get accustomed to the idea of a god in whose image man was believed to be made. Westman also used that time to come to terms with

the idea of reaching out to his soul by artistic means, something that had not been encouraged before. To do so, he had to mitigate his rigid monotheism that was at odds with such expression, and this could only be achieved by reconciling himself to some aspects of Hellenic creativity. This process must have been as painful as it was long, for during that time the Western soul, if not exactly silent, was often as incoherent as befitted a child. It was, however, a self-assertive infant, aggressive and cruel in a childish sort of way.

Expansive self-assertiveness is another feature that distinguishes Westman from his predecessor. Hellenic man may not have looked inwards very much, but neither did he look too far outwards. His politics was contained within one city, often within the agora, one square within the city. The concept of a world outside his own was alien to him; he was sometimes an acquisitive conqueror but seldom an inquisitive explorer. The Caesarean idea of a country, as opposed to the polis, came to Hellenic man only in his old age when he was already too feeble to enforce it with sustained vigour.

His narrow view was applied not only to space but also to time. A Hellenic man was not exactly ignorant of history; he simply did not see how it affected his life. He would not have understood a Buddhist arguing that any human life is but a link connecting the generations past and present, a view that would not unduly upset a Westman. Hannibal's exploits would have meant less to, say, Caesar than they do to a modern historian who is two millennia further away. This Hellenic synchrophilia was best expressed by Thucydides who began his history of the Peloponnesian War by saying that nothing of any interest whatsoever had occurred before his time (circa 400 BC): *'after looking back into it as far as I can, all the evidence leads me to conclude that these periods were not great periods either in warfare or in anything else,'* was how Thucydides put it. Thus, he leapfrogged some civilizations (Egypt, Babylon and Persia to name just a few, not to mention

Judaea) that any Western historian would have deemed worthy of at least a cursory mention.

All this is not to pass judgement. What is important here is not that Westman was better than any previous human type but that he was different. As a matter of fact, Hellenic man had many endearing characteristics that went missing in Westman. His emphasis on ethics as the crux of philosophy and theology made Hellenic man selective in his methods. For him the end did not always justify the means, and there was no heavenly redemption for beastliness in this life. That is why Hellenic societies achieved arguably a greater civic virtue than Westman ever did. For civic virtue has to be based on tolerance, which was not always Westman's most obvious characteristic.

Hellenic men respected the gods of strangers as much as they venerated their own multiple gods, and anyone who offended any god was their enemy. At the same time, anyone who respected any god was their friend, and Hellenic men felt no compulsion to proselytize. As they proved in the Punic Wars, they were ready to die defending their city from those whose ways were unacceptable to them. But they would not fight merely to impose their ways on those who were happy with their own. Hellenic thinkers were not bashful in sharing their views with others, but they did not really care if others got to share their views. Socrates, if Plato is to be believed, spent more time teaching his disciples a cognitive methodology than leading them to any conclusions. He taught them how, not what, to think, which proved to be his undoing. For, left to think for themselves, his pupils went astray, and their mentor had to take the blame. But Socrates did not create Socratism, and Plato would have been astonished to find that centuries after his death people began to talk about Neo-Platonism. Hellenic men seldom saw schools of thought for individual thinkers; the Academy and the Lyceum were schools in the purely educational sense of the word.

Not so Westman. His newly acquired monotheism was becom-

ing fused with a new expansiveness. Good and evil were to him absolute, as were truth and falsehood: his truth, the other man's falsehood. If there was only one God, then those who believed in other gods (not believing in any was not mooted as a possibility at the time) had to be persuaded otherwise for their own good. In that sense, St Paul was the first Westman, which may explain the violence of his clash with James and other apostles who were Hellenic men by residual culture, if already not by conviction. Monotheism alone does not explain Paul's outward mobility, for the Jews were as monotheistic as he was, and yet they were more concerned with shielding their God from outsiders than helping outsiders see the light. They were not Westmen.

Judaism did attract proselytes but most of them had not been actively encouraged to join any of the broad networks of Jewish communities. Usually they joined of their own accord, attracted perhaps not so much by the Jews' God as by their social stability. Proselytes often wavered in their religious beliefs, as converts tend to do after the initial outburst of neophyte zeal. Later, it was those Jewish proselytes who were drawn to Christianity in droves, not so much the ethnic Hebrews of Judaea among whom the apostles made little headway. This partly explains why Paul's mission was so much more successful than James's. The former operated at the soft periphery of Judaism, the latter tried to strike at the centre and died in the attempt.

Christianity is a complex religion, and it is hard to agree with Spengler who maintained that the apostolic and crusading versions of it were two different religions, similarities of dogma and ritual notwithstanding. More plausible seems to be the view that the crusaders acted upon their exaggerated sensitivity to one strain in Christianity, perhaps to the detriment of others. But they did not invent the strain; it was there to begin with. Expansiveness was to Westman what insularity was to Hellenic man: not so much a matter of self-acknowledged belief as a vague yet powerful longing. It subsisted not on reason but on intuition.

WESTMAN'S YOUTH

Starting from the first millennium AD Western culture was demanding that God be sought at increasingly remote distances. Westman still did not possess a concept of infinity, but felt an intuitive need to find a spatial expression of his understanding of God – hence the apostles' peregrinations and, later, the Crusades. The Gothic cathedral, with its towers pointing at a fathomless sky, was an expression of the same need by different means. The height reached by the Gothic tower played the same role as Corinth converted by Paul, the Saracen lands conquered by the mediaeval crusader or the new lands discovered by the Elizabethan explorer. Though working towards their goal in the company of others, the builder, the warrior and the adventurer were each making an individual statement. The statement made by Hellenic men was collective; the former came from a restless soul, the latter from a satisfied mind. The former was theological, the latter ethical.

Hellenic men found safety in numbers; conformity was to them the highest civic and intellectual virtue. Their 'I' was part of a 'we', meaningless if made to fend for itself. In that sense, it is Oriental man rather than Westman who is today's heir to Hellenic heritage. This, of course, is another paradox. Western religion whose ethics are defined by the Golden Rule and love of not only the neighbour but even of the enemy, produces individualism; whereas the selfish agnosticism of Oriental man produces collectivism. Collectivism is a virtue to the Orient but not to the Occident. That is why it never would have crossed a Westman's mind to admire the communal spirit behind today's industrial practices in the east, as many Modmen profess to admire it. A wry smile would have been a Westman's sole reaction to the sight of Japanese workers starting the day by collective aerobics and a rendition of the company song. A Westman would have sensed that he was looking at something alien, and a thought of emulation would never have crossed his mind – regardless of the success of the oriental economy. Modmen, having suppressed Westman within their domain, have no such compunctions. They

would try anything for material gain and, if they could enforce it, Detroit and Dagenham assembly workers would be saluting the Ford flag even as we speak. Mercifully, Modmen cannot enforce anything quite so ludicrous yet.

For Westmen, perdition could sometimes be collective but salvation was always individual. It was inevitable that, as Westmen were beginning to feel not just in their mind but in their bone marrow that they had a free choice between good and evil, that choices made by their free will could either save or destroy their soul, they would become even more introspective. Their respect for themselves and others like them continued to grow until they reached the logical apex of believing in the sovereignty of the individual, his supremacy over collective aspirations.

While we are piling up paradoxes, here is another. Because Westmen's individualism leads to respect for the individuality of others, and because at the core of their individuality lies belief in a power that is beyond man, they are political pluralists. They will neither attempt to impose nor agree to accept the political tyranny of a giant omnipotent state. Modmen, on the other hand, are not metaphysical individualists but materialistic egotists. That is why they think it desirable that all individual beings be rolled into one, that of a state. Thus, loss of respect for the individual soul is spiritually reductionist. The collective is smaller than the individual.

Free individual choice between good and bad is the basis of Western culture as much as the choice between good and evil is the bedrock of Western religion. The two fused together to define – and refine – Westman's soul, while sovereignty of the individual became the backbone of his body politic, his civilization. But, unlike those perfect Greek statues, this body contained the very human soul of Westman, and so it reflected not only its grandeur but also its foibles. As time has shown, these were in fact congenital defects.

The foibles reflected human nature with its dual potential for good and evil. Westmen tried in vain to exorcise the evil within

them, externalizing it in the shape of the variously named Satan, the Devil, Beelzebub or Lucifer. But evil has a life-long lease in the human soul, which it never quite forfeits no matter to what lengths we go to push it outside. Here is yet another paradox: while good and evil live overlapping lives in the soul, the latter is naturally gregarious, while the former is a born loner. Good is often happy to forgo the physical in favour of the metaphysical; evil demands its pound of physical flesh no matter what. Good tends to see the outside, if it sees it at all, as an arena for self-expression. For evil it is an opportunity for conquest.

It was mostly, though not exclusively, evil that made Westmen expansive; it was mostly, though not exclusively, good that made them introspective. The Scripture points at this conclusion: Christ, the externalized good of Westmen's beliefs, states unequivocally that his kingdom is not of this world, relinquishing the worldly crown to Satan, described elsewhere as the prince of this world. Could it be that, in this sense, Christ's statement that the meek would inherit the earth was also a prophecy of gloom? This prophecy is widely seen as establishing the supremacy of faith over reason, or even as a political attack on the Pharisees. But few things in the Scripture are clear-cut, and a different reading is often possible. Meekness, of the spiritual kind that is, can indeed produce worldly riches, and it is certainly not an obstacle in the way of their acquisition – as a strong spirit can be, and almost invariably is.

LOOKING OUT BY LOOKING IN

'Inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in Te, Domine.'

(St Augustine)

'*The kingdom of God is within you*'. If one had to express the essence of Westman in a sentence, no other set of words would come close. It explains why, as Westmen grew more introspective, their culture grew

more intricate. They knew intuitively that God lived inside them. No other proof was necessary until much later, when the existence of God became a point of debate. But at any time in history a Westman could have agreed, though not without reservations, with Kant's statement that the starry sky above him and the moral law inside him were all the proof he needed: God without and his kingdom within.

Westmen accepted this idea because they had to mitigate the externalized God of the Old Testament, an attempt that led to an inevitable compromise with Hellenic man. Kant borrowed this thought from Aristotle who was the first to search for God by contemplating the subjective feeling within his soul and the objective stars whose glitter reflected eternity. What for Aristotle, and later for the Stoics who developed this thought, was prophetic longing for a higher God than their contemporaneous deities was for Kant an attempt to deny the supremacy of Westman's God over human morality. God, to Kant, was a function of morality, not vice versa. Kant's meiotic humanism was characteristic of his time, whereas Aristotle's similar idea was ahead of his own. Westmen who lived between the two men went further than either. Their certitude of God's existence had room for the Aristotelian-Kantian idea only as shorthand for something much greater. But, for all practical purposes, it was useful shorthand.

Certitude requires expression, for it is in our nature to hold understanding to the test of criticism. It is also in human nature to think out loud, making sure an idea can survive articulation. That is why, though culture may have grown out of Westman's desire to express his understanding of God, it – in the manner of a bright child opening his parents' eyes to new twists of fancy – also refined that understanding. This means that at every stage in Westman's life his culture had to be adequate to expressing his current understanding. As the substance of the culture developed, so did the form.

At the beginning, Westmen's understanding of God was simple and so it required only elementary forms. Westman still had not

travelled sufficiently far in time from the Scripture whose idea was simplicity itself. 'The kingdom of God is within you' was a thought so simple that it required a genius to understand. Moreover, no genius other than the Jesus of the Gospels has ever managed to find such unaffected words. The rest of mankind had to encumber the message until the words lost any link with the original truth and began to live a life of their own.

The Scripture exhausted the divine capacity of language in the same way in which Bach later exhausted the divine capacity of contrapuntal music. St John tells us that 'In the beginning was the Word'. However, he omits to tell us that the original Word rendered all subsequent words woefully inadequate: in a brightly lit room, the light cast by a match is unnoticeable. It was precisely because of the omnipotent Word that was at the beginning, not in spite of it, that music rather than literature has become the ultimate expression of Westman. There were men after Christ who found beautiful words to express God, as there were men after Bach who wrote beautiful counterpoint. But in spite of the success – more accurately, because of the ultimate failure – of such men, the need for new forms became ever so more pressing.

Because of the near divine role assumed by culture in Westman's world, we cannot regard Western culture as a self-contained repast stewed in its own juice and served separately from other aspects of life. Before such a view could become utterable, Westman had to die and be replaced by Modman. Had a sci-fi time machine made it possible for Stravinsky to share his pet view of music expressing nothing but music itself with the likes of Palestrina, Lasso or Schütz, never mind Bach, the older artists would have thought they were dealing with a madman. Had Wilde tried to convince Dr Johnson that there is no such thing as moral or immoral art, he would have been told he knew not what he was talking about. And even Ortega would have got in hot water had Velázquez been able to read Ortega's purely formal analysis of him and Goya.

The culture of Westmen was intertwined with the way they viewed the world, and at no moment was it inadequate to their spiritual needs. That is why it is wrong to describe the pre-Renaissance centuries as culturally backward simply because Westmen had not yet got around to painting pictures of plump babies sucking rosy-cheeked breasts. God within Westmen was at that time most clearly expressed through architecture, and he was still a new God, one who had not yet escaped into infinity. He was contained within the space of high, but not infinitely high, vaults propped up by flying buttresses, and the sacrifice of his son was symbolized by cruciform transepts. The Romanesque or Gothic cathedral was not only an aesthetic expression of God, but it was also a place where God lived so he could stay close to man. The beauty and grandeur of the cathedral, its perfect proportions and rich adornment were thus meant to reflect the perfection of God. Both painting and music were at the time mere aspects of architecture, with the former acting as interior decoration, and the latter as accompaniment to words of devotion. But then the house became too small; God was running out of space. Architecture had gone as high as it could go, so now it had to step down and give way to new forms more conducive to new understanding. Once the summit has been reached, down is the only way to go, and no post-Gothic architecture has ever achieved the same grandeur and technical mastery. This in spite of all those computer-generated models behind which our contemporary architects hide the salient truth: the genre has been exhausted. Epigones like Pugin tried – more in form than in substance – to go back to the Gothic summit from time to time, to find it is only climbable once. At best they have succeeded in creating witty pastiches, such as Gaudi's *Sagrada Familia* in Barcelona.

Apart from a natural desire to seek new forms, there were more fundamental impulses that later drove Modmen away from Gothic architecture and, especially, what it represented. Correctly understanding that the old style was merely a shell containing the old

content, Modmen transferred onto the shell their venomous feelings about the content – with predictable results. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the time when Modman was finding his feet, thousands of Romanesque and Gothic buildings were defaced or destroyed in Europe, and more than half of all Paris churches. Some were later restored at a time when Modmen no longer perceived Western culture as dangerous and could safely relegate it to the level of tourist attraction. Most were lost forever, and many of those that survive still bear the stigmata of Modmen's fury: empty niches stripped of statues, smashed stained glass, scarred façades.

As with all falls, artistic decline has gravity-assisted acceleration built in. The greater the distance travelled from the peak, the more visible is the decline. Having fallen from the Gothic summit, it took several centuries of incremental plummeting before architecture crashed into the dung heap of the Canary Wharf, Centre Pompidou or Tribeca, buildings that fail not only in aesthetics and spirituality but also in functionality, being devilishly hard to heat, ventilate and indeed navigate. It is testimony to the height of the peak that the decline took so long.

After architecture had been found wanting, painting got its chance. This is, of course, a crude way of describing that transition, and it survives here only for brevity's sake. Whenever one talks about history, it is important to remember that periods do not replace one another the way images pop up in the slots of a one-armed bandit. The moment one begins to look upon historical continuity in a mechanistic way, something Bergson, Whitehead and Spengler (not to mention assorted Marxists) were guilty of, one forfeits a measure of credibility. A telltale sign of such a mechanistic approach is an author's preoccupation with chronological tables in which different epochs are juxtaposed so as to demonstrate parallel trends. Whenever we see such tables, a warning signal should go off inside our heads, telling us to be on guard. History may have its winners and losers but it is not a

knockout contest. The losers do not just drop out never to be heard from again. If a cultural trend is dominant in a certain period, other trends cannot be automatically presumed to be non-existent at the same time. Thus, although Modman replaced Westman as the dominant social force, as the latter had replaced Hellenic man, each replacement took centuries, with much overlapping in between. Modman overlapped with Westman for roughly a quarter of a millennium, which is how long it took for his victory to become irreversible. Westman overlapped with Hellenic man for even longer than that and only eventually achieved historical dominance by reaching a compromise with his predecessor. In our example, painting, too, overlapped with architecture and took two centuries, the fourteenth and fifteenth, to come to the fore.

Expanded use of perspective gave Westmen a link between their individualism and the urge to look outwards – a marriage between the keenly felt living God in their souls and the disembodied Old Testament God who was drifting farther and farther away. Perspective placed the artist at the vantage point of individual vision and created an illusion of endlessness. At the same time, the newly refined art of portraiture added another illusion, that of an ability not just to feel but also to see the God within. But illusions they were, at least to some extent, for the physicality of the painting was getting in the way. It took too much suspension of disbelief to perceive the painter's vision as infinite, to forget that the seemingly endless perspective had to end at the wall behind the canvas. And the human face merely hinted at God, stating that a mystery existed without attempting to solve it. Physics interfered with metaphysics in the same way in which the body has to interfere with the soul. This interference pointed at a conflict already existing and presaged the cataclysmic conflict yet to come.

For perspective is not reality but make-believe. It is not so much the ultimate, scientific arrangement of space as a statement of belief in the exclusive truth of a scientific arrangement. In other

words, perspective fakes reality to make it agree with a set of scientific principles that, as Westman was growing feebler, were taking on an ever-greater importance. Extended use of perspective also reflected an increasing shift from theocentrism to anthropocentrism. Westman's introspection at some point began to overstep the line separating God as the starting point of vision, giving rise to the arrogance of believing that man himself was at the centre of the visual – and therefore philosophical – universe.

To believe that the 'invention' of perspective represented progress compared with mediaeval art is naïve. More accurate would be an understanding that acceptance, rather than invention, of perspective reflected Westmen's growing anthropocentric arrogance. For, by the time the Renaissance arrived, perspective was old hat. Dürer acknowledged as much by stating in the introduction to his book that a reader familiar with Euclidean geometry needed to read no further. Quite apart from Euclid, we must not think that Hellenic and mediaeval artists could have failed to notice that lines of vision converged as they travelled away from the eye. They were perfectly aware of this, and acted on that knowledge extensively – but not in high art. Perspective was known in ancient Greece, but there it was used in applied arts only. For example, the stage sets for Aeschylus's plays in the fifth century BC were executed in perspective. The Greeks accepted this: unlike real art, theatre to them was frivolous. The truth lay elsewhere, so why not accept the self-evident falsehood of perspective in the backdrop?

Mediaeval painters also knew perspective and yet chose not to use it. They saw perspective as a fake that was unworthy of their higher purpose. Instead, mediaeval, particularly Byzantine, paintings relied extensively on reverse perspective wherein parallel lines drifted further apart as they moved away – or else converged as they moved towards the artist. Thus, the further from the artist's eye a figure was, the larger it got, especially if it was a divine personage. This corresponded to the perception of the figure of

God as the most remote and yet by far the largest of all – large beyond any human understanding. Mediaeval artists did not regard themselves as God-surrogates. Their paintings were an exercise in prostrate humility, not arrogant self-assertion. When that began to change, the use of perspective grew. Characteristically, it was mostly mediocre painters who were the first to rely on perspective dogmatically. The real ones, while acknowledging the existence of perspective, often complemented this plane of vision with others, where the rules of conventional single-point perspective no longer applied.

Even if we look at the evolution of just one artist, some interesting observations can be made. For example, Giotto, widely seen as the first ‘modern’ painter, started life as an agnostic wag, a Whistler of the late Middle Age. During that period, Giotto used perspective extensively, though not with the same unswerving devotion that characterized most Renaissance painters. As he grew older, however, Giotto became a deeper, more spiritual man. Amusing his friend Dante by bawdy epigrams was no longer enough; more and more he searched for the meaning of life. In the process, Giotto’s use of perspective began to decline; his vision was no longer that of a self-satisfied man. He was now attempting to understand how God might view man rather than the other way around.

The Renaissance and the period immediately after it was the swan song of painting, and it was so because of the growing secularization of art – hinted at by the universal use of perspective. As often happens with swan songs, the sound was so much more beautiful for being a dirge: painting was on the way out as the principal expression of Westman’s soul. However, the greatest artists of the Renaissance and post-Renaissance periods, such as Michelangelo and Rembrandt, continued to defy the soulless, scientific constraints of perspective. Their vision would not be squeezed into a proto-Modman straightjacket.

The Spanish masters, particularly El Greco and Zurbarán, treated perspective as they treated a colour in their palettes: one of

many. Walking through the Prado, one is transfixed by a Zurbarán painting depicting the artist as a minor saint struck by a vision of St Peter nailed to the cross upside down. Despite being in the background, Peter is noticeably larger than the saint who is in the foreground. To emphasize the hagiographic pecking order, the artist shows the minor saint in three-quarters from the back. Yet, not just his praying figure, but the barely shown face, convey the impression of passionate spirituality. At the same time, the crucified St Peter dominates the canvas not just by being its centrepiece but also by ‘violating’ every known law of perspective.

Rational arguments in favour of the scientific and therefore more ‘realistic’ nature of perspective compared with the vision of the mediaeval masters are as misplaced as arguments in favour of atheism. ‘Obviously,’ clamours a Modman convinced of his scientific rectitude, ‘when a Sienese master, such as Duccio, shows three walls of a palace at the same time, he demonstrates his ignorance of the laws of perspective. It is impossible to see three walls at the same time.’ The answer may be that, yes, naturally it is impossible to see three walls at once. But likewise it is impossible to see two walls at once, or even one. What is possible to see at once is a tiny fragment of one facet, and arguably even that fragment is not seen ‘at once’. What Duccio is thus showing is not a naturalistic depiction of a building, but the image of it that the artist sees in his mind’s eye. The painter seems to hint that God would see the building this way, and it would be blasphemous for a mere mortal to argue. Since Duccio is a greater artist than, say, Canaletto, his vision of a Sienese palazzo presenting three facets at once is in the higher sense of the word more real than Canaletto’s picture-book depictions of Venetian palaces. A Westman’s vision is spiritual, not just optic.

Verticality in music is a rough parallel of perspective in painting. One dominant voice, presumably the composer’s, relegating all others into the background again may be a misrepresentation of the workings of the higher inner voice. The assumption is that,

just as it is self-evidently impossible for the human eye to see both covers of a closed book at the same time, so it is impossible for the human ear to hear several voices at once. The counter-argument could run along the same lines as above: of course it is impossible. What is possible, however, is for an artist to weave multiple voices into the fabric of a seemingly horizontal aural canvas of spiritual infinity. And, as with painting, one can learn a lot by contemplating great artists who find themselves at the watershed of two different visions of the world, one inspired by faith from the start, the other initially driven by humanism. What Giotto was in painting Bach was in music. But, although both were straddling the line of demarcation between the old and the new, Giotto looked mostly ahead, while Bach looked mostly backwards. At the beginning of his career, Giotto was thus the first modern, which is to say humanist, artist. On the other hand, Bach was the last of the great composers who subjugated their personality to God's and their art to God's glory. Giotto was the beginning, Bach the end. And just as a tree bears fruit after its seasonal peak, so did Westman deliver ultimate greatness towards the end of his life.

Painting reached its peak in the seventeenth century when the art of Spanish, Flemish and Dutch baroque had taken over from the Italian Renaissance, having first learned from it. The painting of that period was largely a response to the pseudoreligiosity of the Renaissance. For most of the Renaissance painters, religious subjects were merely an excuse to paint bodies, faces or landscapes. However, not any young woman breast-feeding a baby is the Virgin, and not any three men or two men and a bird are the Trinity. The more human did divine figures appear to be, the nearer was God moving to man. Towards the end of the Renaissance, the distance had got so short as to be imperceptible, a relationship familiar to students of Hellenic antiquity but abhorrent to men of faith who were still not extinct.

The Reformation, with its steadfast rejection of graven images,

had increased the visible distance between God and man. God's likeness could no longer be depicted but only suggested. Man may have been created in God's image, but it was only the soul and not the body whose divine lineage could be expressed pictorially. The Reformation had thus set new terms, and art had to respond. The response could be positive, as in Holland, or negative, as in the Spain of the Counter-Reformation. One way or the other, the cultural terms of the Reformation now were universally accepted even by those who fought it every step of the way.

Culture, still linked with theology, was helped in its understanding of God by the mathematics of Newton and Leibnitz, who saw their work as an extension of faith. After their discovery of calculus relegated the geometry of Euclid to the status of museum exhibit, artists could no longer proceed without an aspect of infinity in their work. The great Dutchmen and Spaniards of the seventeenth century took on the task, attacked Euclidean perspective whenever they could and elevated painting as high as it could go. But the collapse painting suffered in the very next century proved that the distance from the peak to the ground was not as great as in the case of architecture. Yet the effect of the fall even from the lower height was shattering. A walk through any museum shows this instantly. Wandering, for example, through the National Gallery in London, we leave Vermeer's women, Rembrandt's self-portraits, Velázquez's king and Zurbarán's saints only to immerse ourselves in the tepid spittle of Boucher and Greuze. And even the better Chardin, Fragonard and Watteau still appear small next to the giants we left behind. The sage, sad eyes of Philip IV follow us as we walk away; and is it a dirge we hear coming out of Vermeer's virginals?

Growing to maturity during the greatest age of painting was its successor, contrapuntal music. After Gothic architecture had tried to conquer one dimension of God's creation, space, music tried to conquer the other, time. And music was at least as successful although time seems to be more difficult to tame.

Just as a Gothic cathedral achieves its spiritual purpose by an aesthetic arrangement of space, music is an aesthetic ordering of time. Unlike architecture, European music is Westman's exclusive property, the musical exploits of both Hellenic man before and Modman after him presenting an anthropological more than cultural interest. It is telling that, though Guido d'Arezzo had introduced universal musical notation centuries before music came to the fore, this happened at a time when Westman began to realize that in the long run music would serve him better spiritually than any other medium – and when music was therefore becoming more intricate than scoreless singing of single thematic lines could handle. Cometh the hour, cometh the man.

Until Aristotle, Hellenic men simply had not come to grips with time; they had not even had the concept of an hour and told the time of day by the length of shadows. Naturally, they could not find the confidence to try to conquer what they had so recently learned. If we take the theological view, God was jealous in granting access to time, his most mysterious creation outside man himself. It was as if God realized that mastery of this dimension would lead man to more understanding than was good for him. Even when God did reveal time he insisted on keeping the control of it firmly in his own hands, only ever offering short leases to great composers.

So far we have not discussed language and the rich literary culture it has produced in Westman's domain. The reason for this omission is simple: when we want to describe an entity that is different from others, we concentrate on the characteristics peculiar to it. If one were asked to describe a bird, for example, the description would focus on the bird's ability to fly, not on it having two legs. Language is a key formative factor in the history of man, but not specifically of Westman. Were a more ambitious writer to undertake the task of composing the formative history of man, language would merit the longest chapter. It is conceivable that the gift of verbal, which is to say abstract, thinking was what

instantly turned beast into man. Language, spoken, written or even poetic, is the ultimate instrument of reason, so closely intertwined with it that to all intents and purposes they are difficult to tell apart. But the aim of this essay is more modest: it is simply to show why and how Modman stepped over Westman's body on the way to his victory. And he did so – at least initially – mostly by attacking the indigenous properties of Western culture, of which language is not one.

Westman is unique, but not in every respect. Not only biologically but also in many cultural and social aspects he is no different from his predecessor, Hellenic man. The way he uses language is one such aspect. It is not his reason that makes Westman unique, it is his soul. And for the soul, reason is a ground-floor employee – it is certainly not what makes it Western. That is why literature and language can here function only in a subsidiary capacity, mainly as support points. It is not the particular but the cosmic in man that made him Western. It is not language but music that is his exclusive property.

Poetry, the only art besides music that by controlling rhythm tries to control time, finds its task even more difficult because it is weighed down by the ever-present semantic anchor of language. The same particularizing anchor inexorably pulls poetry back to its Hellenic antecedents. For Hellenic men poetry was a perfect art, able to convey the ethical wisdom of philosophers with the formal excellence of sculptors. And so it was they rather than Westmen who set the standards. Sculpture and poetry are both more Hellenic than Western arts, and no Western poet can become a real master without studying, and widely emulating, classical models. Western poetry owes Virgil, Horace and Ovid so much as to owe them almost everything, sculpture's debt to classicism is only marginally smaller, architecture's smaller still, painting's minimal, and music's practically non-existent. Listing these arts in reverse order, we get a descending scale of Westman's ownership. Trying to 'Westernize' poetry, modernist poets such as

Valéry, Cummings and Khlebnikov attempted to rid it of its semantic, and Hellenic, chains. Though their efforts were interesting, they were not successful, flying as they did in the face of their genre's inherent limitations. Literature is there to say things succinctly and out loud. However hard it tries not to do so, it has to impose the writer's view and hold back a great deal of the reader's own imagination. Our perception of even poetry cannot be completely divorced from reason, even though the more esoteric verse gets, the more likely is the reader to read his own imagination into it, thus approaching – though never quite reaching – the height he has to scale to perceive music.

Music, on the other hand, guides by suggesting. Like faith, it is not without, but within us, waiting to be released. A performance can therefore unshackle the inner resources of a listener's imagination and lead him towards an intuitive, non-verbal understanding that is his own and not necessarily the artist's. In fact, one can say that music lives in the same compartment of the soul as faith, while literature bypasses this area either wholly, as does prose, or at least to a large extent, as does even great poetry. If we are seeking the kingdom of God within us, then a physical stimulus without us can act not just as a help but also as a distraction. Paintings, sculptures or books are all such distractions in that they exist objectively, quite apart from the site where the ultimate kingdom is located. Music, on the other hand, not just appeals to man's inner self but also actually lives there. That is why, whatever their explicit intent, even secular music is always implicitly metaphysical, while literature is implicitly materialistic – even when dealing with metaphysical subjects. No great composer would have countenanced Thomas Mann's view of all intellectual attitudes being latently political (which is to say transient), a view that even Goethe and Dostoyevsky might have accepted.

Since the Word that was in the beginning was to overshadow any subsequent word, man had to search for a prophet who could illuminate a non-verbal path to intuitive understanding. Palestrina

and Monteverdi, along with Dutch and Flemish polyphonists like Lasso and Sweelinck, and England's Byrd, Gibbon and Tallis, were showing throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the possibilities resident in vocal polyphony. At the same time, their beautiful music also showed the limitations of vocal polyphony in achieving the underlying aim of music as felt by Westmen; indeed, the limitations of all vocal compositions in which words demand equal time with music. The presence, solo or accompanied, of the human voice – in the capacity of enunciator of words and not merely as the original and perhaps perfect musical instrument – had a restricting effect. It was the crutch of anthropomorphism on which Westmen were no longer able to lean, an attempt to contain the uncontainable God of his beliefs within rational limits.

'Westmen' is the operative word here; for Hellenic men, as exemplified by Socrates and Plato, had different thoughts on this matter. For those thinkers, music appealed to the baser passions of man, not to the higher faculty that they regarded reason to be. To become a high art, music therefore needed the ennobling effect of words in the same way in which man's Eros needed the mitigating effect of philosophy. Consistent as that view was with the ethos of Hellenic man, for Westmen it was unacceptable. That is why throughout the seventeenth century, Western composers, such as Schütz, tried to break away from the voice, to think exclusively in instrumental terms. But Schütz's music was more accomplished than sublime; he was hardly the prophet Westman was seeking. And then the search was over. In 1685 Bach was born.

THE ULTIMATE HEIGHT OF WESTMAN'S SOUL

Prophets become truly appreciated only when their prophecies begin to come true. Bach was no exception. Working as he did in the eighteenth century, this greatest of Westmen was initially pushed

aside by juvenile Modman pounding his way onto the world's stage. Everything about Bach was hostile to the new breed, and he could even be regarded as dangerous at a time when Modmen still had not gained total control. That is why Bach had to be neutralized.

As his technical mastery was unassailable, the only option open to Modmen was to stigmatize Bach as an anachronism. While culture in general and music in particular had long since become something appreciated only by few, Bach's music had to be shown up by the adolescent Modmen as strictly esoteric, a how-to guide for musicians. Though Bach's music was studied, for a century after his death it was seldom played. That Modmen were beginning to run the show is evident from the fact that Bach's sons, composers of modest inspiration, were in the late eighteenth century regarded as his musical superiors by the general public. To Modmen, who swear by progress, newer means better. The syllogism applied by Modmen ran as follows: Bach's sons wrote in a new idiom while their father used musical forms as he found them (though revolutionizing them in the process). Ergo, the progressive sons were better. In fact, only one of them, Wilhelm Friedemann, was sensitive enough to know what his father was.

This is not to diminish the significance of C. P. E. and J. C. Bach as conduits between their father and Haydn, and as important contributors to the development of the sonata form (or forms, as Charles Rosen would have it). But it was Haydn, Mozart and particularly Beethoven who breathed inspiration into the form, not C. P. E. or any of his brothers. In general, it is hard to think of a single example of genius sprouting in two consecutive generations of the same family; whoever allots greatness tries not to be too unfair. Biologists describe this tendency as 'regression to the mean', which makes it sound more scientific but no less just.

Modmen, with their congenital egalitarianism, have to see genius as a quirk of nature or, worse still, a product of the environment. They cannot accept that some people can be

superior to them in every respect. Pushkin pointed out this trend when commenting on the sly gossip about Byron making the rounds in St Petersburg:

The crowd greedily reads confessions, memoirs, etc., because in its baseness it rejoices at the abasement of the high, at the weakness of the strong. It is in rapture at the disclosure of anything loathsome. 'He is small like us; he is loathsome like us!' You are lying, you scoundrels: he's small and he's loathsome, but not the way you are - differently.

Modmen routinely depict geniuses as idiot savants, chaps who, though no smarter than anyone, just happen to have this unconscious knack for mastering the techniques required to create things. Allegedly limited in every way other than in their narrow area of expertise, stupid geniuses are not even supposed to be aware of how they do what they do, or why.

Nothing can be further from the truth. Men like Bach, in as much as there ever have been men like Bach, know exactly what they are and what they are doing. Sometimes, however, they have to hide this for tactical reasons, as an attempt to survive in a hostile world run by belligerent mediocrities. Mozart in particular was a past master of such deception, catering to philistines' preconceptions at every turn. Even though he was, apart from his music, one of the brightest men in Vienna (as any reader of his letters will confirm), Mozart often would try to appear less threatening by playing the buffoon. In that subterfuge he failed with his contemporaries: the adolescent Modmen still had not been so completely blinded by their own smugness as to fail to see through Mozart's ploy. It is only after their final victory that Modmen lost the shrewdness needed to flush out their enemies. They have become too complacent to doubt they are at least equal to anybody. That is why someone like the author of *Amadeus* is ready to swallow the bait Mozart tossed to him over two

centuries, and why the better wool-pullers among Westman hold-outs still manage to avoid forcible re-education.

Bach did not stoop to diversionary tactics, apart from writing fawning letters to aristocratic patrons, and even there he might have been genuinely eager to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. He was too busy writing his music, with many scores carrying the disclaimer that 'the glory is God's'. More than just a disclaimer, it was a statement of intent. Bach clearly saw his music as a means of breaking through the barriers blocking man's path to God, even such symbolic ones as instrumentation or words. He created the greatest vocal music ever written by treating the voice as just another instrument and using words as building blocks of musical phrasing more than carriers of semantic meaning.

Albert Schweitzer showed that for Bach certain musical devices always corresponded to the same emotions and were sufficient for expressing them. That is why a Bach cantata will always sound better in German than in English even to those who have no German at all. After all, if Bach used words primarily for musical phrasing, then surely they depend on the cadences of the original language more than they do on the inconsequential semantics. Schweitzer, a great scholar of Bach's music, makes this observation but fails to arrive at the logical conclusion that Bach did not need words at all. If he could convey the same meaning by sheer musical phrasing, then words were redundant. This conclusion was reached by Philipp Spitta, another important Bach scholar. He shows how even in the recitatives '*the musical spirit predominated in Bach over the dramatic*' and that words were '*only the medium of utterance: the instrument best fitted to the purpose here aimed at*'. Bach's urge was to go forward to musical self-sufficiency, not back to music as accompaniment to words.

He strove to elevate instrumental music so that it would be able to soar not only above words but also beyond specific instruments. String, hammer or vocal chords were to Bach mere incidentals, things he happened to have handy when music came

to him and he had to put it into a form that others could comprehend. That is why one cringes every time yet another modern critic carries on about the impurity of playing Bach on the piano. It is typical of Modmen that they should miss the mighty forest of music for the puny tree of an instrument. The medium may be the message to McLuhan, but to Bach his media were almost incidental. He used them much in the same way we use cars, as a means of getting to a destination. To be sure, he revolutionized the writing for just about every instrument that existed at the time, and some that did not, such as the modern piano. But what Bach was after transcended mechanical devices.

It also transcended sectarian boundaries. A devout Lutheran in his private life, Bach was ecumenical in his music, as likely to express his devotion in a Catholic mass as in Protestant liturgical music. Of course, as Schweitzer observes with his sterling erudition, Bach's musical ecumenicalism was facilitated by Luther. Luther, an artist himself, saw something that Calvin missed: that an abrupt and total transition from Latin to the vernacular would destroy the aesthetics of liturgy and by doing so would damage the sacred meaning of it. Schweitzer uses this observation to score a few points for Lutheranism. It also could have been possible to suggest that both the aesthetic and spiritual success of Protestantism were in inverse relationship to its remoteness from Catholicism. The more elements of Westman's tradition were allowed to survive, the better – which is why so many people fail at the childish game of trying to name ten great Swiss. No such problem with the Germans.

As if to prove that instruments did not matter, Bach would transcribe the same pieces for keyboard today, violin tomorrow, flute the day after. And his crowning achievement, *The Art of Fugue*, the only work in which he encoded his own name B-A-C-H, mysteriously was written for no instrument in particular, being playable by a string ensemble, orchestra, organ, harpsichord, or piano. By way of an aside, it is not surprising that the glory of

God, as reflected through history's greatest composer, inspired possibly the greatest instrumentalist. Being a true disciple of Bach, Glenn Gould always evaded answers to interviewers' questions about piano technique. I have never been interested in the piano as such, the great pianist would say (slightly tongue in cheek), much to his listeners' consternation. Modmen, after all, have reverted to Hellenic formalism – but without the Hellenic ability to make the form divinely beautiful. 'How' again has become more important than 'what', but this time with neither succeeding.

One can observe how, after Bach, vocal music becomes more and more trivialized. For example, it is partly because of his use of a vocal element that the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony never quite succeeds in being entirely convincing. Powerful vocal pieces by Schubert, Brahms, Mahler and perhaps a few others were offset by a massive outpouring of operatic, and increasingly more operettic, banality so popular with the neonatal Modmen. Opera in general and Italian opera in particular is closer to operetta than to serious music. It is more in the nature of music's PR department than of music itself. Even though we may want to exempt bits and pieces of Mozart's and Wagner's operas from this observation, deep down it is hard to argue either with Gould, who believed that Mozart's affection for opera was a millstone around his musical neck, or with the wit who described Wagner as 'the Puccini of music'.

Music already possesses enough drama of its own not to have to rely on the verbal drama of a libretto. The dramatic potential of the spirit is better revealed in the slow movement of Mozart's Piano Concerto, K488, than in all his operas combined. If we accept this, then words – when they are more than just sounds – subtract from music rather than add anything to it. As if to emphasize the incompatibility of the two genres, great vocal pieces seldom use great poetry.* Schubert's *Winterreise*, perhaps the greatest vocal cycle this side of Bach's *Passions*, remains music of

* Bach used the Gospels, but then normal rules cannot be applied to him.

genius even if one does not understand the German words. But any attempt to read Müller's cheesy verses without the music is likely to disappoint. Conversely, whenever Schubert uses Goethe's poems, the results are not always so sublime. Likewise, Tchaikovsky's extensive use of Pushkin's words often has the effect of drowning superb poetry in banal music. Interestingly, whenever someone tried to draw Liszt into an argument about Wagner, he would simply sit down at the piano and play his arrangements of Wagner's music. However, he did not sing along as he played.

Spengler argued that all modern music came out of the first chord of *Tristan*, the formal part of modern music at any rate, and one can see his point. But seeing the point does not necessarily mean agreeing with it. For Wagner, with his larger than life Modman personality and ability to shock with both musical and extramusical statements, started a fashion that was still going strong at Spengler's time. And fashion tends to throw a fog around things, thus sometimes making them appear bigger than they are. Subsequent writers on musical matters, such as Rosen, have been able to see Wagner with more detachment. Now he tends to be regarded not so much as the starting point as a stage along the way. His own indebtedness to composers such as Chopin and – specifically in that *Tristan* chord – Liszt has been noted, as was his insignificant influence on such giants of the twentieth century as Prokofiev and Bartók.

Wagner's music was modern, which is not in these pages a term of praise. Modern means, among other things, politicized, for Modmen think that most things, from the food we eat to the transportation we use, from the books we read to the type of fuel we favour, have a political dimension. Science, for example, has been seen largely as an extension of politics for at least a century and a half, with such celebrated figures as Darwin and Einstein adding much impetus to this trend. Characteristically, Bertrand Russell would apply political metaphors to science: 'In Newton's theory of the solar system,' he wrote, 'the sun seems like a

monarch whose behests the planets have to obey. In Einstein's world there is more individualism and less government than in Newton's.' Wagner was an early proponent of pagan ideas communicated by musical means. So, even without reading much of his philosophy, one could deduce what it was simply by listening not only to Wagner's operas but to his instrumental music as well. Wagner was aware of this and did not mind it at all. Tellingly, he described himself as a dramatist first and a musician a distant second, something that Mozart, much as he loved opera, would never have said about himself. Therefore, while Mozart's extra-musical views, interesting though they are, can be dismissed as irrelevant, Wagner's cannot be. There is undeniably more (or less, depending on one's point of view) to Wagner's music than music, and certainly more than an attempt to show how far tonality can be bent without breaking. Good or bad, its provenance in Western culture is more debatable than its technical links with the music before and after. Jumping backwards, Wagner leapfrogged Western culture, landing in the middle of Germany's pagan past.* This could not go unpunished musically, as it did not go unpunished philosophically. In our search for formative influences in Western music, we could do better looking to Bach than to Wagner.

Unshackled by Bach, instrumental music soared and, thanks to the height of the peak he had scaled, took longer than any other art to come down to earth. Great music was written throughout the nineteenth century, and even the first half of the twentieth produced composers of genius. Apart from Austria, these mostly came from Russia and Eastern Europe where musical development was retarded, and a lot of lost ground had to be gained. However, the fact that Prokofiev and Shostakovich were savagely persecuted in one core modern country (Russia) and Bartók almost starved to death in the other (the USA) is a useful illustration of the low

* 'No true German can be a Christian,' according to General Ludendorff, who was attuned to the latent paganism of his contemporaneous Germany of the early twentieth century.

esteem in which Modmen hold spiritual elevation. Having said that, Prokofiev and Shostakovich may have died before their time because of inhuman political stress, but at least they did not perish scratching a frozen garbage heap in search of food like Mandelstam; dangling off a hook like Tsvetayeva; of hunger like Rozanov; or from a Cheka bullet like Gumilyov, Babel, Pilniak and many others. Being more esoteric than literature, music finds it easier to protest its innocence. Interestingly, it is hard to think offhand of a single great composer who died a violent death. This is not coincidental: music is too closely linked with things that are not of this world to be subject to the same worldly tendencies. For a related reason, music managed to survive for a while the demise of faith and the attendant subsidence in the foundations of culture. Since the divine message of instrumental music is suggested rather than articulated, it reaches only the few remaining Westmen, and they are unlikely to take umbrage. Music can thus hide behind the camouflage of secular entertainment at a time when any overt link with God would assign it to the same bin into which all other uncool things are discarded. But truth to tell, music can be either secular or great, but never both. Whatever its manifest intent, great music ineluctably follows the path charted by Bach.

MODERN CIVILIZATION AGAINST WESTERN CULTURE

Westman culture demanded a civilization in which it could thrive. Civilization is the opposite of militarization not just linguistically but also in essence. It is a method of running civic affairs without any group having to resort to arbitrary force. All lasting human societies need some semblance of civilization, and they generally end up acquiring one, if not without at first having to overcome certain difficulties and to dispose of some bloody-minded elements. In creating his civilization, however, Westman ran into the kind of difficulties that were inherently his. By their very nature his culture and the

civilization derived from it were like two electrodes. Sparks were bound to fly where they abutted. The danger of a brush fire was always there.

While Western culture thrives on esoteric exclusivity, a civilization cannot last unless it includes all, or at least most, members of society. Some may drive it, some may sleep in the back seat, but they all must be inside. Consequently, since culture is – uniquely – the engine of Westman civilization, the two have to be equally gregarious to stay in sync, as culture’s exclusivity can reduce those excluded to the role of resentful pariahs seeking revenge. Since Western culture cannot help being exclusive, and Western civilization being the opposite of that, the two are a contradiction in more than just terms.

Because Westman civilization had no option but to reflect culture faithfully, this civilization more or less had to mirror the culture’s pattern of disfranchisement. Unfortunately, culture’s meat is civilization’s poison and vice versa. Carrying Western culture to the masses was impossible as this was bound to corrupt both, something that even most of the political egalitarians realized back in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Keeping the two separate was the only way. But since the masses are by definition more numerous, their exclusion could be sustained only by concentrating political, financial and military power in the same few hands that moulded culture. This amounts to a working definition of an aristocratic society, which – whatever we may think of its fairness – was the only social arrangement able to provide the fertile soil in which Westman culture could grow and, consequently, Westman could live.

An aristocratic civilization is indeed a prerequisite for Western culture. However, this observation must be qualified as aristocracy never has been undiluted. No political arrangement can exist in its pure form without degenerating into something unsavoury. Following Aristotle, Machiavelli argued in his *Discourses* that, when their purity is intransigently maintained, a

principality turns into a tyranny, an aristocracy into an oligarchy and a democracy into anarchy. For a political arrangement to last, and for liberty to thrive, a state must combine the elements of all three known forms of government. That is why the synthetic constitution of Lycurgus in Sparta lasted longer than the purely democratic constitution of Solon in Athens. A division of power, in which none of the estates feels the need to usurp the total power, is thus a proven guarantor of social longevity.

But it does not guarantee the longevity of culture, something Machiavelli forgot to mention. Though he gave us many political insights, he suffered from the disadvantage of never having met Modman. In Machiavelli's time, a just political system could promote lasting cooperation among the estates, for they were all united in their desire to make the system work. The aristocracy led the way, but none of the estates felt collective enmity towards another until the balance was upset, making one of the estates feel hard done by. But Modman, born some three centuries after the Florentine, is a unique historical type. Dislike of estates other than his own is not something Modman developed as a result of a provocation but something he was born with, indeed the force behind his birth. Modman is programmed to negate every other culture and human type. Therefore, a constitutional balance can only go so far in our times. In such a balance, while Westmen would keep their end of the bargain, Modmen would constantly seek a strategic advantage. Thus, the English constitution, which came closer than any other to the Aristotelian and Machiavellian ideal of political balance, was doomed the moment Modman made his entry. The democratic part of the triad was becoming disproportionately strong as Modmen correctly singled it out as one they could own. The power of the aristocracy was waning *pari passu*, with culture following suit.

This is not to say it was primarily aristocrats who created Western culture. Nearer the truth would be an observation that the hierarchical structure of Western society made both a functional

aristocracy and a creative elite possible. Sensing this, the latter did not mind paying obsequious tribute to the former. Looking backwards from the vantage point of modernity, we may think that, say, Bach must have felt humiliated by having to write self-deprecating letters to Teutonic chieftains whose names mean nothing to us now. He probably did not. On the contrary, he was affirming the natural order of things, the only one under which the *St Matthew Passion* could have been created. Bach's letters were more self-asserting than they were self-effacing.

'In the deepest devotion,' writes Bach, 'I lay before your Kingly Majesty the accompanying trifling work, proof of the science I have attained in music, with the very humble petition that you will graciously regard it not according to the poorness of the composition, but according to your world-renowned clemency.' Considering that the 'trifling work' in question was the *B Minor Mass*, we today find it hard not to cringe at either Bach's obsequiousness or the social conditions that made it necessary. However, we ought to remind ourselves that our own, supposedly more advanced, social conditions have so far failed to produce anything approaching such an achievement. Egalitarian democracy is more likely to deliver itself of something like *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Quite apart from any spiritual considerations, one reason for this is the way culture is financed. However much some may deplore this, true Westman culture is created for few by fewer. Consequently, it cannot be sustained by box-office receipts. If it is, culture has to possess more mass appeal than it can afford to have without selling its soul to the highest bidder, who inevitably turns out to be the devil. In this sense, culture is like a commercial product: the higher the volume, the cheaper it gets. Today's classical music scene is a prime example of a Faustian transaction. Record companies are cutting back on classical recordings, a development only partly masked by an abundance of 'easy listening' releases of things like *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* arranged

for electric instruments, which also fall into the rubric of classical music. The situation is every bit as dire as described by the influential critic Norman Lebrecht in his book *Who Killed Classical Music?* ‘Ticket sales have tumbled, record revenue has shrivelled, major players have lost their independence, state and business funds have dried up and artists who might formerly have looked forward to an independent career have gone begging for wage packets in the ranks of orchestras, themselves threatened with extinction.’ Add to this the preponderance of baroque orchestras playing their original instruments with the opposite of originality, and finally consider the domination of the concert scene by jet-lagged, mass-produced, mechanically proficient automatons, and it becomes clear what kind of trouble we are in. Even a mere half a century ago, such soulless musicianship would have been met by stony silence punctuated by a few perfunctory claps. Today it elicits hysterical ovations whose decibel level is unaffected by, for example, the player having an off day, with even his technique not working properly.

But let us not be beastly to today’s audiences. Instead, let us go down on our knees and worship them. For these are the last audiences ever. The history of classical music, the quintessence of Western culture, is at an end. This is not doom saying, but merely an observation. To make it, we need to see the percentage of children at a typical classical concert in the West. That percentage, in round numbers, is nought. Without using focus-group research, one can, more reliably, resort to an empirical observation of the age breakdown at any recital: old and middle-aged people about 50 per cent, those in their thirties and forties 30 per cent, musicians and music students 20 per cent, children next to zero. This observation is amply supported by statistics. For example, a comprehensive study by the US National Endowment for Arts shows that for those born between 1946 and 1965 attendance at classical concerts was significantly lower than for older generations. And the next younger generation attended such concerts

even less frequently than the 'baby boomers'. Moreover, their attendance did not increase as they grew older.

Naturally, most concert goers acquire the habit early in life, having been dragged kicking and screaming away from footie and into concert halls by parents with Western cultural ambitions. That is why, even one paltry generation ago, children were amply represented in any concert hall. Most grown-ups one sees in the halls today are the erstwhile babes who gradually stopped kicking and screaming and started listening. Since most music lovers begin to love music as children, and since children these days demonstrably do not love music, few are going to flock to Wigmore Hall or Salle Pleyel when the old people depart for that great Green Room in the sky. So next time we find ourselves at a concert sitting next to a mature gentleman who is about to clap between sonata movements, let us shake his hand. As a practical measure, this will save him from embarrassment. As a gesture, it will be our way of saying goodbye to moribund grandeur.

The whole scene is a reminder of the kind of culture a box office can finance. When it comes to opera and ballet, it cannot finance even that – witness the plight of London's Covent Garden that at the time of this writing is unable to make ends meet even with lavish infusions of public money and ticket prices reaching £200 or more. Literature is another example. While the aristocratic time of Elizabeth I produced many forgotten and forgettable writers, it also gave us Shakespeare, Marlowe and Sidney, something the modern time of Elizabeth II has so far failed to deliver, as if trying to prove that great literature cannot be written for the express purpose of making millions. Given the inadequacy of the free-market option, aristocratic patronage is the only answer. This can be direct, as in the case of Bach, Haydn or Mozart, or indirect, as in the case of Alexandr Pushkin. Coming from an impoverished aristocratic family, the poet financed a lavish lifestyle by the sales of his books, thus becoming the first professional writer in Russia. Yet not one of Pushkin's books ever

sold more than 500 copies in his lifetime. A simple calculation will show that in today's terms the books must have been priced at an equivalent of at least £500 each for his royalties to amount to a serious income. Each sale thus represented not a free-market transaction but veiled patronage, in the same sense in which the price of admission to a £1000 dinner has little to do with the cost of the food. This is yet another demonstration of the benefit Westman culture derives from an aristocratic society in which those who are capable of appreciating real culture also happen to be by and large the same people who can afford to pay for it.

That is why, for Westman to survive, it is not enough to have a cultured elite – this elite must be able to finance culture. The elite also has to have plenty of leisure time on its hands, for successful patronage relies on this commodity as much as on money. To remain rich and idle at the same time, the elite has to have the political power to keep the internal barbarian at bay, and the military power to bring to bear should he ever get out of hand. All this adds up to a sketchy but usable description of aristocratic society.

Of course, rationally speaking, there is nothing wrong with aristocracy. The noblemen of the past often showed a greater ability, or at least willingness, to act in society's interests than do the bureaucratic democrats of today. However, we are not always, and never merely, rational. We are as likely, more so if you take the Christian view, to act out of instinctive envy and spite as out of forgiveness and humility. Evil pours naturally out of us but we need to make an effort to bring good out, which is why hatred is more common than love. By the same token, remaining in a state of internal barbarism was the easy option for most people. The opposite of that would have required a life-long effort, which alone could buy access to Westman culture for someone who did not imbibe it from birth. Although this difficult option was always available even in the most exclusive of times, the social return for such Herculean labour always was uncertain. That is why it usually was undertaken only by those for whom ascending to

Western culture was a labour of love: people who would catch a glimpse of the West across a castle moat or hear an echo of it through a concert-hall door. Those chosen few would be moved enough to want to belong, a desire springing not from hubris but from a latent spiritual need. Alas, no generation has ever been able to boast more than a handful of such people. Today, now Westman has been routed and his values are regarded as risibly obsolete, it would not be an exaggeration to say that few are making a serious effort to become culturally Western. Social pressure these days is vectored downwards, not upwards.

As the individual became more sovereign in religious matters, especially with the advent of the Reformation, an increasing number of individuals became dissatisfied with secular exclusion. They were no longer happy to accept on faith that the aristocrats were acting in their interests. They wanted to uphold their own interests, and those had to be strictly materialistic, what with metaphysical culture being off-limits for most. The people were becoming restless, and sooner or later their greater numbers would tell. Thus, the coexistence of Westman culture and civilization was never destined to remain peaceful for ever. The potential for conflict was there from the start as the aristocracy could protect its cultural domain only by relying on coercion, thereby militarizing its civilization. This contradiction was more than just an oxymoron. It was the guillotine waiting to happen.

By contrast, Hellenic man knew no contradiction between culture and civilization. The two were roughly coextensive, covering more or less the same groups of people. The nature of Hellenic culture was such that it held few secrets. All Athenian Greeks were equally able to admire a statue, even if they were not equally capable of appreciating the fine technical points. Aristophanes's satires or Euripides's tragedies seemed neither enigmatic nor irrelevant to any Athenian citizen of average intelligence. Hellenic artistic creations often were breathtakingly beautiful and devilishly clever, but both their beauty and cleverness lay not far

beneath the surface. To Westmen this does not necessarily appear to be so. Many have felt that the beauty of, say, the Acropolis is divine in origin, appealing directly to the Western God within us. However, the Acropolis did not have such an effect on the good citizens of Athens who to the last had an Olympus full of gods busily copulating with women. And those gods, even when on the verge of being reduced to a single God, did not have a direct spiritual link with the people. So Westmen must be looking at Hellenic beauty through the prism of their own notions. This is why a good grain of salt is a useful accompaniment to any art course in which the Renaissance, neo-classicism, or any other Western trend is depicted as a direct borrowing from the Hellenic world. Western artists and architects took from Hellenic man what they needed so as to be Western at the time – and ignored the rest. Donatello and Michelangelo did not give sightless eyes to their sculptures; as far as Palladio was concerned the Ionic column might never have existed; Raphael may have used advanced technique to humanize his Sistine Madonna along neo-classicist lines, but she still remained his vision of the Western mother of Christ.

COMETH THE NEW MAN

Since the religion of Hellenic man did not exclude anyone, neither his civilization nor his culture could fail to be all-inclusive. Whatever distinctions of class, learning or intelligence existed among Hellenic men paled into insignificance when compared with the parity inherent in citizenship. Outlanders were a different matter; they were barbarians, those from the vast elsewhere beyond the polis. That is precisely what the term meant; it was more descriptive than pejorative. But all citizens of a polis could be presumed to have a cultural commonality, and their views were expected to be compatible, if not necessarily the same. As long as they remained loyal citizens, they could hold any opinions they

chose or pray to any Gods they fancied – society did not feel in the least threatened. There was, however, an important proviso, as Socrates and some others had to find out the hard way.

Diversity was tolerated, indeed encouraged, as long as it stayed within a broad but by no means endless band. In that respect Hellenic society resembled a pack of wolves. Wolves can treat other species with violence but they never attack other wolves. Fights among them are ceremonial, lacking the sanguinary outcome one normally expects in a battle between men. However, the situation changes instantly when one of them contracts a contagious disease that threatens the whole pack. The pack then unites against the carrier and dispatches it to kingdom come.

By asserting the supremacy of the individual over the mob, the proto-Westman Socrates and his disciple Alcibiades suffered a similar fate. The mob felt threatened, and rightly so. Westmen, wittingly or unwittingly, are hostile to both Hellenic and Modman values, however hard they profess to be reviving the former or upholding the latter. Socrates, the first and surely best-known victim of democracy, drank his hemlock while Alcibiades had to run for his life from Athens to an ostensibly less tolerant Sparta. Socrates's more famous disciple Aristotle also had to flee Athens one step ahead of the hemlock cup. But such niggling irritations apart, Hellenic society, like a pack of wolves, had to fear the threat of extinction only from outsiders. No internal threat was present, or certainly none that those Hellenic men could not stamp out faster than they could say hemlock. The only internal danger, one that eventually brought Hellenic man down, was ageing accompanied by the slackening of will and erosion of the resolve needed to resist an outside threat. But the threat did come from the outside.

Not so the threat to Westman. His culture was such that most citizens of his own 'polis' were automatically cast in the role of internal barbarians. Westman's Attilas and Alarics were just as much out to get him as the nemesis of Hellenic man, but they were

wrapped in an equivalent of togas rather than animal skins. That is why their hostility was more difficult to detect, although ultimately as impossible to resist.

Western religion, in its pre-Reformation shape, was esoteric as well. Its universality was owed to the emotional power of its message to the world; reason was excommunicated. The Neo-Platonist and Aristotelian infusions of the Middle Ages partly rehabilitated reason, but that affected an average Christian only indirectly, through subtle changes in liturgical rhetoric. The Scripture was inaccessible to most Christians, if for no other than linguistic reasons, what with the teaching of Hebrew, Greek and Latin being controlled by the very priests who had a vested interest in particularism. A moat was dug around the clerical estate with its secrets, and trespassers were prosecuted with relentless firmness. Although vernacular Gospels had circulated in tiny numbers before, a serious attempt to produce and disseminate a vernacular Bible was a burning offence in England as recently as the sixteenth century. This should emphasize that the Church had no intention of engaging people's minds and removing its own mediation between man and God. In view of later events, this reluctance was nothing short of prescient.

Reason is an inadequate tool to apply to the mystery of God. That even Aquinas ultimately failed in his attempt to reconcile reason with faith testifies to the parallel but never quite intersecting nature of the two planes. Perhaps some revision is in order of the role played by the pagan infusions Christianity received in the thirteenth century courtesy of St Thomas and others. Later we shall approach this from another angle; for now let us acknowledge that in the Middle Ages Plato and especially Aristotle, using Aquinas as an axe, carved a niche for themselves in the history of Western thought. Had they remained in the niche, Westman would possibly have died in infancy or else developed into a species not even remotely resembling Westman as we know him. But that species might have ended up being less

self-destructive than Westman, more resilient spiritually in the face of the barbarian threat.

St Anselm's ontological argument and Aquinas's similar five 'ways', his attempt to prove God's existence by applying sequential Aristotelian logic, are examples of reason impressive in itself but misapplied, like a square of chocolate dipped into a glass of Meursault to ruin both. The two were best kept separate, and then perhaps fewer people today would believe that reason and faith are enemies. For all the grandeur of St Thomas, one can argue that his has not been an unequivocally positive influence, and neither is it certain that Hellenic thought in general ought to have any other than antiquarian value for Westmen. Hellenic creativity is a different matter altogether, and later chapters will argue that the greatest achievement of the Middle Ages was to reconcile this creativity with Judaeo-Christian monotheism, thus opening the floodgates of Western culture. While St Thomas's inchoate rationalism may have widened, or perhaps even created, the invisible cracks in the religious foundations of Western culture, this is offset – in some minds at any rate – by his very visible contribution to the culture itself. That Aquinas's influence was at the same time life-giving and destructive is a paradox, but then the history of Westman is full of them.

Any sociocultural type is a biological organism going through the same phases as any other: birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, maturity, middle age, old age and then death. If so, then Westman would have died sooner or later anyway, even if St Thomas had not pushed the button for a six-century life cycle. Without him, however, they would not have been such glorious six centuries. Aquinas may have given Westman a way of trading a little longevity for a lot of intensity, and if we acknowledge this, then our assessment of St Thomas should depend on the relative importance we attach to these two aspects of human life. In a way, Aquinas demystified God by shortening the distance between the ineffable and the perceivable. Thanks largely to him, Westmen

were encouraged in their efforts to find God through daily spiritual toil. The toil gave us the glory that is Western culture. But in the end it may have cost Western God his life, in the Nietzschean sense.

Because of the contribution made by scholastic thinkers in general and Aquinas in particular, Chesterton regards the thirteenth century as more pivotal than even the eighteenth. On his own, unflinchingly Catholic, terms he is right: it is hard to deny that as a result of the thirteenth century culture assumed its central role in the history of the West and went on to blossom into testimony to the greatness of Westman. On the other hand, we must not forget that the thirteenth century also was an admission of failure. It is religion and not culture that ideally should lead the way. Culture gravitates towards the humanistic middle ground, away from the extremes at which man looks for either God or the devil. Culture may symbolize these extremes or even reflect them credibly (witness Bach). But it never quite overlaps with them. Religion in general, and certainly Westman's religion, is both ontological and eschatological. Culture is neither. Unlike religion, culture demands a cocoon of civilization, for without it culture cannot survive. On the other hand, Westman's creed not only does not have a burning need for civilization but is doctrinally contemptuous of it as civilization is all about making life on earth more palatable. Religion, however, codifies a kingdom that is not of this world. The post-Thomistic prominence of culture and civilization thus equates a failure of religion. Had Christianity been able to satisfy the cravings of Westman's spirit by itself, culture would have been superfluous – there would have been no vacuum to fill. We do not know if Aquinas realized this at the time but, titan that he was, he possibly did. If so, we should admire him for admitting defeat but negotiating passable terms of surrender.

St Francis also borrowed some aspects of Aristotle, striking an unwitting blow from which Westman never quite recovered. It

was logical for the pagan Aristotle to believe that plants and animals also had both a physical and metaphysical aspect. Monistic unity of man and nature follows from polytheistic beliefs. But Westman is a theocentric and anthropocentric type; to remain Western he has to believe that man's position in God's design is unique. St Francis's preaching to animals that were, according to him, as much God's creatures as man was not Western. In the eyes of the Church it was also heretical, and it was a miracle comparable to St Francis's stigmata that he (though not many of his less fortunate followers) was spared a walk to the pyre. That he was canonized at all shows how unsure of itself the Church was becoming.

When the mind begins to act as the principal conduit of God or, more perilously, his judge, religion has no chance of surviving as a social force. For, while it can withstand enquiry, it cannot survive vulgarization. And the mind with its verbal tools always becomes vulgar when it overreaches. If someone has never heard a Bach fugue, no amount of commentary will ever approach the effect the music would have in its normal context. Even something as trivial as, say, the taste of avocado is inexplicable in words. Anyone trying to apply words to the task of explaining either the fugue or the fruit, having first sampled them properly, will see how vulgar language can become out of its natural sphere. It is logical that the most complex feeling of all, faith, should suffer from obsessive reasoning to the greatest extent. When, a few centuries after Aquinas, Westman realized he was no longer prepared to keep reason at a respectful distance from God, he became a vulgarian. That is another way of saying that he stopped being Westman.

The culture Western religion produced was one contiguous secret, inaccessible to neophyte and infidel alike. That this particularism was mostly unwitting, Gnostic substrands notwithstanding, did not make it any less real or, to those excluded, any less infuriating; people, even when they are generally good, do not like to be excluded and hate to be patronized. When they are

generally not good, when the evil within them has overcome the good, they tend to express such negative feelings in the form of revenge. Desire for revenge seethes under the surface, growing in intensity and only waiting for the physical strength to catch up; the more people are excluded and the stronger they get, the more certain the revenge and the more sanguinary its form. Nietzsche described this craving as 'slave morality'. While Westman (or 'master', to use Nietzsche's term) asserts himself by creation, his slavish opponent seeks fulfilment in destruction. Westman becomes what he is by shouting a resounding 'Yes' to the glory of God within him. Modman becomes what he is by hissing a vindictive 'No' at everything Western, beginning with God.

This leads to yet another seeming paradox: as the culture of Westman grew more sublime and consequently more exclusive, he himself became more vulnerable and his existence ever more precarious. But if we agree that culture had become by default the essence of Westman, the source of his historical strength, then the paradox becomes almost impossible to bear: as Westman grew stronger, he was growing weaker.