

## An Introduction of Sorts ...

Europe at the end of the Middle Ages was a closed shell. One God, one language, one religion, one social system. But outside the frontiers of Europe there always hummed an aura of the fabulous. The Alexander legends, the works of Marco Polo, the works of the ancient poets like Virgil maintained a spark of the "romantic," the "incredible."

Then the New World, America, was discovered. At first they believed it was under the control of the devil and the explorations were a combination of mercantilistic curiosity and religious crusade. Europe split wide open. The New World (or worlds because, after all, we're talking of Africa and the Far East as well) changed every neat concept in the European consciousness. In South America, especially, the Spaniards were confounded. These were barbarians, these people ... so ran the story. They were infidels, devil worshippers. And the Spaniards were Crusaders, bringers of Christ to the heathen. They really saw themselves that way.

From the beginning, though, it was not merely an encounter between Christ and Devil, but between Technology and non-Technology, between an industrializing and a non-industrial culture, between the Indians who lived in a myth-centered world and the Spaniards who lived half in myth and half in greed. The early Aztec codices make the Spanish out to be gods -- saw them and their horses as centaurs.

Christ, in this context, becomes a battle, a war god -- conquest means not only destruction and pillage, but the annihilation of all traces of the former Indian gods. The early chroniclers describe in great detail the customs of the Aztecs and Incas and Mayas. Within a decade there was nothing left to describe. Today, going through the ruins, through Monte Alban, Palenque, Chichan Itza, Pisco, Cuzco, Chan-Chan, from Mexico all the way to Lake Titicaca in Bolivia, you can only marvel at what the Spaniards must have destroyed. A great deal has been written recently on the mystiques of the Aztecs and Incas, and what emerges are cultures dominated by "spirit," by worship, by a genuine other-worldliness, a permeability between "this" and the "other" world.

Once the Spaniards had conquered the Indians, they began to quarrel among themselves and civil wars broke out. The influx of gold into Spain caused a fatal inflation and by the seventeenth century Spain itself was an empty desert. In both North and South America, though, the Indians were destroyed -- in South America physically by making them semi-slaves on farms and in mines, in North America by relegating them to reservations, mis-translating their names, mis-representing their ideals.

In North America in the nineteenth century the Ghost-Dance religion began, led by an Indian named Wovoka. He believed that by dancing a certain magical dance wearing magical shirts that the old days could be revived. However, those



who thought that the ghost-dance shirts were impervious to bullets soon found out that magic didn't work against steel and the ghost-dance religion became a children's game.

Now in South America the Indian is still outside of the "civilization." It is difficult to say how many Indians in Bolivia and Peru don't speak Spanish, but it is often said that 70% of the population of Bolivia and Peru speak Aymara and Quechua. In Ecuador, Chile, Columbia, the Indian is still stepped on, semi-enslaved. In the U.S. he is outside the fringe of society, "subsidized" by the U.S. government, still exploited and/or ignored.

That is what Western Man did to the Non-Western World in America. He did or is trying to do the same to the Non-Western World in the Far East, the Middle-East, Africa, wherever he can.

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About the title. From a conversation I had one night with Dukardo Hinestrosa, the Columbian Nadaista. He invented the collection title for Ediciones de la Frontera: *Pez sin Escamas* (Scaleless Fish). The Centaurs, of course, in the early CODICES are the Spanish on horses. The Aztecs depict man and horse as one animal. The Headless part I took as a symbolic meaning to refer to the fact that until the Spanish began the conquest of the New World (after the expulsion of the Moors, which significantly ended in 1492) they were "headless" in the sense that they had no more purpose. The New World conquest gave them purpose again. The Spanish historian Americo Castro and others, for example, see the conquest of America as an extension of the reconquest of Spain.

-- July 23, 1968, Providence, Rhode Island

THERE IS NOTHING NEW ABOUT WHAT WE ARE DOING IN VIET NAM. IT'S THE SAME THING WE DID TO THE AMERICAN INDIAN, THE SAME THING THAT THE SPANISH DID TO THE INCAS, AZTECS AND MAYAS -- THE SAME THING THAT ALL THE OCCIDENT HAS DONE TO ALL THE NON-OCCIDENTAL WORLD.