

To Refuse or To Accept Revelation

Many Koranic stories present to us, with even more insistence than the Bible, the following motif: the prophets preach and the people reject the message; God punishes them for this rejection; and He rewards those men who believe.

The objection of agnostics and other skeptics could not be more facile: the people are psychologically excusable for not accepting the Messages; the pagan Arabs had the right, humanly and even traditionally, to believe in the reality of their divinities and in the efficacy of their idols; they had no reason for believing the Prophets as opposed to their traditions and their customs. Even miracles, assuming they occur, cannot constitute a proof, given the wonders of magic. It is true that the moderns deny these wonders as well as miracles, but we mention the argument nevertheless since, in the opinion of the moderns, miracles would prove nothing “if they existed,” since they can be imitated.¹ Similarly, it has been said over and over that the Pharisees had no reason for accepting the message of Christ, that on the contrary they had reasons for not accepting it; this is partly true and partly false, taking into account on the one hand the intrinsic orthodoxy of Mosaism and on the other hand the prophetic quality of the Christ.

As concerns the pagan Arabs, the excuse of the moderns — easy enough on the part of people who believe in nothing and who are unaware of the plenary nature of man—this excuse, we say, does not take into account the following factor: if the majority of Meccans and Bedouins obstinately held on to their customs, this was not *a priori* for sincere and logical reasons, but fundamentally because their so-called religion, which did not even teach them the indispensable eschatological truths, on the contrary flattered their passionate attachment to the here-below and their inordinate and even exclusive love for earthly goods.² And it is precisely this attachment and this love which prevented them from admitting from the outset that the Prophet was no ordinary man and that the doctrine of Divine Unity and human immortality deserved at the very least the highest consideration; and thus from intuiting that this Message is inscribed in the very substance of the heart.

In the face of the Message of Truth, man could not legitimately pose the question of credibility if he were not himself a form of truth, hence of conformity to the True. One cannot examine validly the Truth in respect of error, nor the sacred in respect of the profane; one cannot judge the Message outside of a disposition which anticipates It and which manifests the deiform and therefore primordial nature of man. The religions differ in the way they envisage and express the two fundamental truths, namely God and immortality, but not in their unanimous function of detaching man from the here-below and from the ego in order to lead him towards the here-after and the Divine. If some so-called psychologists agree with the ancient pagans, it is because they recognize themselves in them; they understand the situation of these pagans as little as they understand their own.

¹ Which is not the case, rigorously speaking, for the miracle requires a context which in reality makes it inimitable, otherwise it would have no reason for existing; besides, magic is far from being able to counterfeit all miracles, so much so that the argument in question is exceedingly weak.

² “When Our verses (the Koran) are recited before him (the pagan Arab), he says: fables of the ancients!” (*Sura of the Pen*, 15). This information, which the Koran furnishes repeatedly, proves that the religion of the pagan Arabs was a heresy with respect to their own traditions, which the pagans rejected precisely as being “fables of the ancients” (*al-awwalin* = “the primordial ones”). Numerous passages in the Koran similarly point out that the Arabs believed neither in the immortality of the soul nor in resurrection, whereas their ancestors did believe in them.

The man for whom the Message is providentially destined³ must recognize in it what is best in himself; he cannot escape intellectually and morally the truth of this call any more than he can escape existentially the reality of his heart.

In all of these considerations, it is a question *a priori* of the confrontation between the founders of religion or their direct delegates and men adhering either to outright paganisms or to religions that are debilitated or disfigured, at least sporadically; it is not a question in principle of the confrontation between Apostles and Pythagorean initiates, for example, nor between civilizationist missionaries and primitive tribes, to say nothing of the absurd and shameful clash between the *conquistadores* and the Indians of Peru and Mexico. However, even within these contexts, which to say the least are problematical — in different ways — there are always cases where the authentic and legitimate confrontation repeats itself: there always and everywhere have been saints who preach, and in their wake, pagans who convert independently of any constraint.⁴ In summary, our intention is to speak of divine Messages, not of human amalgams which veil the reason for their existence.

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If nascent Islam had to deal with a massive paganism, such was not the case with Christianity, which at its beginning was confronted with a religion valid in itself, but nonetheless decadent in more than one respect.⁵ In every religion there are two domains: firstly that which must be, and which consequently cannot not be; secondly that which may or may not be, and which consequently does not necessarily have to be; heresy is that which cannot be and which consequently is incompatible with the essential intention of the religion. The first domain is that of dogma; the second is that of interpretation and elaboration. Mosaic law clearly pertains to that which must be; a great number of rabbinical speculations, interpretations and regulations pertain no less clearly to that which may or may not be, hence to that which could be otherwise; which is to say, to that which, while remaining formally on the plane of orthodoxy, is determined by human tendencies, whether legitimately or abusively.⁶ Thus in principle, there are two orthodoxies, one that is impeccable and one that is problematical, or more precisely one that is evident or at least highly plausible and another that is born of the concern to “dot one’s i’s” and to “split hairs.”

Now Christ blames *a priori* the moral mentality of the Pharisees,⁷ then their problematic interpretations of the Law, but he also abolishes, *a posteriori* and by way of consequence, the

³ If in a certain respect a given Message addresses itself to given men, in another respect and in principle it addresses itself to man as such and, in consequence and in a concrete manner, to a given individual situated outside the providential area of expansion of the Message, with the help of destiny. On the one hand: “They that are whole need not a physician”; but on the other hand: “Go ye therefore, and preach to all nations.”

⁴ It is known that most of the Red Indians were Christianized by force; even so, an Indian follower of the ancient religion told us that the Sermon on the Mount is the most beautiful discourse there is. Many Indians see no objection to practicing both religions: the old one because it seems evident to them, and the new one because of the irresistible character of Christ.

⁵ Cf. our article “The Human Margin” in *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Summer and Autumn 1971 issues.

⁶ Which led Jesus to speak of “human prescriptions” even though they were “traditional.”

⁷ Even from the point of view of the most orthodox Judaism, no one has the possibility of affirming peremptorily that the “scribes and Pharisees” did not deserve the reproaches of Christ, although one is indeed obliged to admit that their ancestors deserved the Babylonian captivity. The brahmins at the time of the Buddha were quite decadent, and the Hindus in principle have no difficulty in admitting it, without however feeling obliged to condemn the brahmanic caste or *a fortiori* Brahmanism.

Law itself; or rather, he means to give the Law a new and more interiorized form, more demanding although less burdensome, by means of the Sacraments; therefore in his intention there is renewal and not abolition. In the case of the Pharisaic prescriptions, Christ acts as Doctor of the Law; in the case of Mosaic orthodoxy, he acts on the contrary as law-giving Prophet; he is thus independent of a given orthodoxy or a given “form,” but not of orthodoxy as such, not of the “spirit.”

A very grave factor in the Judaism of that epoch was the doctrinal schism between Pharisees and Sadducees, or rather the element of heterodoxy which created this situation. The Pharisees adhered to interpreting the Torah according to a casuistry pushed to extremes, and in a manner that favored formalism and outwardness, in some respects even superficiality; but at the same time they had the merit of making the religion accessible to the people. The Sadducees on the contrary, who came largely from among the priests and the aristocrats, adhered above all to the cult of the Temple and opposed the exegesis of the Pharisees, which in their opinion was too free and too complex, while themselves professing grave heresies on the subject of eschatology. The fact that they rejected the hermeneutical oral Tradition — the Mishnah⁸ — and that they denied the immortality of the soul,⁹ the resurrection of the body and the existence of angels — this fact takes on all the more gravity in that the Sadducees held authority in the Temple; now the contradictory combination of these two facts shows precisely that the situation of Judaism in the face of Christ was not that of a perfectly homogeneous and fully orthodox religion, and that the nascent Church was clearly aware of this, to say the least.

Pure and simple logic is one thing, scriptural and semantic, or possibly moralistic, logic is another; the first operates on the basis of realities and concepts, and the second on the basis of words, then sentiments, even of self-interest. The contemporaries of Christ appear to have known or practiced rather the second type of logic, which alone can explain the unfathomable inconsequence, on the part of the Sadducees, of following a religious Law without believing in the hereafter, and the no less extraordinary illogicality of the Pharisees in tolerating the Sadducees in the Temple.¹⁰ Before accusing Jesus of the sin of heresy, the “doctors of the Law” would have done well to come to an agreement on their own orthodoxy¹¹ and since they were not in agreement, it appears that, even from their own point of view, they had much to learn from Christ, and in this sense he remains, in principle, a Master within the very framework of Judaism.¹² Within this framework, moreover, there was a third group, the Essenes, who were

⁸ The *a priori* oral character of this Tradition does not preclude its being fixed in books later, any more than this fixation preclude its being transmitted orally.

⁹ The negation of immortality finds no support, of course, in the Torah. Quite the contrary: “And Enoch walked with God, and was seen no more: because God took him” (*Genesis* 5:24). “And no man hath known of his sepulcher (of Moses) until this present day” (*Deuteronomy* 34:6). “Samuel said to Saul: Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?” (*I Samuel* 28:15). “As they went on, walking and talking together behold a fiery chariot and fiery horses parted them both asunder: and Elias went up by a whirlwind into Heaven” (*II Kings* 2:11).

¹⁰ Tolerating them for the simple reason that they too were faithful to the letter of the Torah, even while denying eschatology because the Torah doesn’t speak of it, and even though the Torah presupposes it essentially, on pain of being absurd. Besides, this silence or this ellipsis — rather relative — of the Torah does not prevent the Mishnah from being explicit; and to reject the Mishnah — as the Sadducees did — is to reject the Torah as well.

¹¹ When Christ permits his disciples to not wash their hands before meals, he is making no innovation; he is in agreement with the Sadducees who reject this practice as having been invented by the Pharisees.

¹² If a Judaizing Christianity is possible, a Christianizing Judaism is equally possible: there are in fact practicing Jews who accept Jesus as a prophet of Israel, attributing the Christic doctrine to a *de facto* uncomprehended esoterism, and without forgetting that the invectives uttered by the Jewish Prophets prefigure those of Christ. “Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed” (*Isaiah* 10:1)

without doubt the ancestors of the Kabbalists and who were remarkably close to the spirit of Jesus; but despite this they did not become Christians, which evokes, theoretically at least, the saying in the Gospel: "They that are whole need not a physician."

A remark that imposes itself in this context is the following: to accuse the Jews of "deicide" is just as absurd as to claim that they cannot be blamed for the death of Jesus, since only a minority was responsible for it. On the one hand — apart from the fact that God could not be the victim of a homicide — the Jews obviously did not acknowledge that Jesus is God; on the other hand, what matters is not the question of knowing which individuals condemned Jesus, but the fact that the majority of Jews are traditionally in agreement that he was justly condemned, which from the Christian point of view constitutes a co-responsibility; not to mention the views of the Talmud, which in any case one cannot ask the Christians to take lightly. We are the first to admit that Mosaism had the right to survive—the advent of Islam is, paradoxically, an indirect proof of this — but it is necessary to see the facts as they are, whatever conclusions one believes should be drawn from them. One thing is certain, and it is that one cannot be saved by hatred of anyone; one is saved by the love of God, even if this love be accompanied by some outward injustice owing to a pardonable lack of understanding—an injustice placed in parentheses and not determinative.

Subjectively, one can turn away from a religious message for two reasons, one positive and one negative: one can turn away from it out of love for the truth — the truth in a given form — but again, one can refuse it out of hatred of true spirituality, of inwardness and of asceticism, hence out of a kind of worldliness; this was the case with a great number of contemporaries of Jesus, who believed that they had established between God and themselves a *modus vivendi* well protected by formal rectitude, whereas in reality God likes to shatter and to renew forms or the husks of things; for He wants our hearts and is not content with our actions alone. It is upon this aspect that Christ strongly insisted; too strongly in the opinion of the "orthodox," but not too strongly from the point of view of the real needs of men.

In any case, even if Europe had had no need of Christ, Israel would have needed Jesus. The Buddha rejected the Veda, yet the Brahmanists accepted him as an *Avatara*; Christ did not reject the Torah, and the Mosaists could all the more easily — or with less difficulty — have accepted him as a Prophet. In fact, Christianity seems to have done Judaism a service indirectly, just as Buddhism did for Brahmanism; not in the sense of a doctrinal influence of course, but in the sense that the new Revelation "catalyzed" the old ones and allowed them to become once again fully themselves, no doubt with some additional emphases.

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As with Judaism and as with every religion, Christianity comprises a domain of things which may or may not be; in Saint Paul we see the first signs of this, which later become more apparent with the Fathers, the councils and the great theologians. The schism between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches demonstrates moreover, if one acknowledges the legitimacy of each of these denominational positions, that what is in question here is the domain of the possible and not of the necessary.

"For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (*Jeremiah* 2:13). The fact that such sayings are addressed to the contemporaries of the ancient Prophets does not in any way prevent them from also being applied in a particular way to the contemporaries of Christ, and in a general way to men of every epoch and origin.

Saint Paul inaugurated the “de-Judaization” of Christianity;¹³ now one could conceive of a Christianity faithful to at least the fundamental prescriptions of Moses, and this Christianity has existed in fact. Certainly the “Europeanization” of Christianity was providential in a positive sense — which is indicated by the role of the Holy Spirit promised by Christ—but it was providential only in view of the extra-Judaic radiation of the new religion;¹⁴ in principle Christianity could have remained a Jewish, hence “Judaized” esoterism. However: to say that the Christian message was destined to become a religion is to say that it had to become independent of the religion that constituted its original ambience; in this case, therefore, there is much more of necessity than there is of simple possibility. One cannot say as much of later theological and legal “crystallizations”; for if the apostolic epoch benefited from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to an “eminent degree, the following epochs pertain more and more to the “human margin”: the assistance of the Holy Spirit is not absent, for it is guaranteed, but it is indirect and largely takes account of human “temperaments,” on the basis of what has been acquired and what is immutable.

With the problem of the papacy for example, we are in the domain of what we could call a “relative orthodoxy,” which concedes to man the right to “points of view,” hence to options relatively justified but in principle replaceable. No doubt, the papacy is necessary or inevitable in the Latin and Latinized world; but the fact remains that the quality of prophet and emperor which the pope attributes to himself in practice, is at the very least a two-edged sword; thus the Greeks were not mistaken in deeming these two functions to be ill-suited to the vicar of Saint Peter, and history is there to corroborate to a great extent their view.¹⁵

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We have pointed out above, that in the case of the pagan Arabs, their reasons for resisting the new Message were of a profane and passional, not spiritual, order. In the case of the ancient Europeans, who are also classed as “pagans” — though with far less justification— their reasons for refusal were partly positive and partly negative: positive to the extent that they were founded on traditional and intellectual values — which could not have been the case with the ancient Arabs¹⁶ — and negative to the extent that, on the contrary, they resulted from the love of the

¹³ The excessively unilateral interpretation of the “Old Law,” as well as the misinterpretation of sexuality, derive from the Epistles and not from the Gospel. It was a question of bringing about the triumph, on the one hand of a perspective of *bhakti*, and on the other hand of a morality more penitential than social, and more idealistic than realistic.

¹⁴ This is to say that the intervention of the Paraclete would not have been necessary had Providence not foreseen the primarily occidental expansion of Christianity.

¹⁵ For the Greeks, the words of Christ to Peter near the Lake of Tiberias have primarily the meaning of a “rehabilitation” after the three denials, which appears moreover to follow from the divine Master’s three previous questions; it is also permissible to think that this rehabilitation at the same time effaced the shadow left by the *retro Satan* which Christ hurled at Peter on the threshold of the Passion. No one contests the fact that Peter benefited by a certain pre-eminence; nonetheless, the “beloved disciple” and the adopted son of Mary was John, and the great organizer of the nascent Church was Paul, which indicates that this pre-eminence of Peter had nothing absolute about it; it cannot in any case justify the abuses of the papacy, the major consequences of which are the Renaissance, the Lutheran reaction, and in our times the seizing of the Church by the modernists.

¹⁶ Except for the “pure” (*hanif, hunafâ*), who had preserved intact the monotheism of Abraham and Ishmael; they accepted Islam without resistance. As for Arab polytheism, one must not lose sight of the fact that it had no traditional basis, and that on the contrary it was nothing but a syncretism of borrowed divinities, and that certain idols even had an altogether historical and empirical origin.

here-below, hence from worldliness in all its forms. The resistance of the philosophers to Christianity was negative when their point of view was rationalist, profane and worldly, but it was positive when their point of view was truly sapiential; the two points of view often being curiously mingled due to the ambiguity of the ambience.¹⁷ If we may have recourse in this context to the Hindu notions of *bhakti and jnâna*, we would say that in the clash between nascent Christianity and the Greco-Roman world, a *bhakti* at the height of its vitality encountered *ajnâna* in full decadence; on the whole at least and excepting the initiatic mysteries and Neoplatonism.

As for Aristotelianism, we can limit ourselves here to the following consideration: on the one hand the Stagirite teaches the art of thinking correctly, but on the other hand he also induces one to think too much, to the detriment of intuition. Assuredly, the syllogism is useful, but on the express condition that it be necessary; that it not be superimposed as a systematic luxury upon a cognitive capacity which it smothers and the impossibility of which it seems to postulate implicitly. It is as if, through groping continually, one no longer knew how to see, or as if the possession of an art compelled its being used, even abusively; or again, as if thought were there for logic, rather than logic for thought.

Nonetheless the Semites and the Semiticized peoples, who are voluntarists by vocation or by formation, that is, who are impulsive types more prone to inspiration from above than to intellection *ab intra*, had need of the Greeks to learn if not how to think, at least how to express themselves and sometimes even how to reason. The Semitic writer readily lets himself be carried away by his subject to the point of losing sight of the elementary homogeneity of the subject matter being treated as well as of the homogeneity of its treatment, all the more so in that he thinks largely by associations of ideas and by discontinuous intuitions; now the correct character of thought—or let us say simply of logic—is often the guarantor of good inspirations, by virtue of the principle of affinities and on condition, of course, that the logic has sufficient data at its disposal and that it goes hand in hand with the gift of intellection.

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In the opinion of all unbelievers, it is the absurdities contained in the sacred Scriptures which primarily stand in the way of the credibility of the Message; although we have more than once had occasion to speak of this error due to an ignorant and hasty reading, we cannot refrain from returning to it again in this context. First of all, it is necessary to envisage a Scripture in its totality and not be hypnotized, with perfect myopia, by a fragmentary difficulty, which after all is the perspective of the devil, who disparages a mountain because of a fissure and, conversely, praises an evil because of an inevitable particle of good. When Scripture is envisaged in its totality it imparts its global value and its supernatural character to whomever is not blinded by any prejudice and who has been able to preserve intact the normally human sensibility for the majestic and the sacred. No doubt, the majesty of the Biblical or Vedic style can be imitated, and profane literature offers us some more or less successful examples of this; but what cannot be imitated is the depth of the meanings and the theurgic radiation of divinely inspired Texts.

Then, in order to judge Scriptural passages that are at first sight problematical, one would have to become acquainted with the traditional commentaries; for the Torah it is the rabbinical and kabalistic interpretations which resolve its material as well as moral enigmas. In many cases however, it is not necessary to have recourse to the insights of the commentators, since the real meaning is so obviously in the nature of things; in the story of Jacob and Esau for example, it

¹⁷ The ambiguity of Stoicism is characteristic in this respect.

suffices to know certain laws concerning the play of *Mâyâ* to be able to eliminate the stumbling-block. The unadvised reader finds it strange, to say the least, that Jacob, at the instigation of Rebecca but also of his own will, deceives Isaac his father by posing as Esau; in reality there was no immoral initiative but a conflict of planes: a particular divine Will ran counter to a social situation. For even though Esau was the eldest, he was visibly unworthy of his birthright, which he sold unbeknownst to his father; if there was deceit, it was above all here. In saying “I am Esau,” Jacob meant, “I am what Esau ought to be, but could not and would not be”; hence, “I am the true Esau.” If there is a fault it is also on the part of Isaac, who had an all but blind preference for his elder son despite the disqualification of the latter;¹⁸ in the end, Isaac recognized Jacob’s priority, Jacob and Esau were reconciled, and God sanctioned the situation, which proves that Jacob and his mother were right.¹⁹ In the opinion of the rabbis, Jacob nevertheless had to expiate the appearance of fraud by all that he had to suffer later on, above all from his own sons; in this, his case is similar to that of Solomon, who also had to expiate apparent faults while being irreproachable, esoterically speaking.²⁰

In reading in Genesis that “Cain knew his wife,” many “critical minds” have wondered where she came from, since the only existing woman in that epoch was Eve; and they have concluded, hastily to say the least, and without hampering themselves with any sense of proportion whatever, that the Bible is not worth taking seriously nor, in consequence, is religion. In reality it is a question of an ellipsis, frequent in sacred Scriptures; in most cases it is either the oral tradition or the inspired commentary, or again a foreign but parallel tradition, which provides the key to the enigma. In the case of Cain’s wife it is the Arab tradition which resolves the difficulty, and it is moreover possible that the latter coincides with some Jewish tradition: Cain and Abel were each born with a twin sister; Abel was stronger and more virtuous than Cain, but Cain’s sister was more beautiful than Abel’s. Now for this reason Cain desired to marry his own twin sister, but since the principle of blood relations demands that the choice of a partner be the most distant one, Abel offered—in the name of God—his twin sister to Cain; Cain refused, and for that reason Abel conceived the idea of a trial: if God would not accept Cain’s offering, Cain would have to submit; what happened is well known. We will add that this story, far from being an awkward fable, is on the contrary, crystalline in its symbolism by reason of the geometry of compensatory relationships which it presents.

Another scriptural difficulty is the following, drawn from the Koran this time: “And We (*Allâh*) bestowed upon him (upon Abraham) Isaac and Jacob, and each of them We guided (*hadaynâ = hudâ*); and Noah did We guide aforetime; and of his seed (Abraham’s): David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron; thus do We reward those who realize the

¹⁸ This preference could have been motivated either by a particular quality of Esau—precious in the eyes of Isaac for reasons of complementarity—or simply by the law of primogeniture, sacred to the ancient Semites; in this latter case, the attitude of Isaac would be analogous to that of Abu Bakr’s denying Fâtimah the right to her inheritance, for legal reasons and contrary to certain rights of another order.

¹⁹ Before blessing Jacob, Isaac said: “See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed” (*Genesis 27:27*). According to the Zohar, the reference here is not to the smell of Esau’s garment but to the perfume of the spiritual or paradisaical garment of Jacob, and that is why Isaac blessed him; this perfume revealed the “true son,” whatever might have been his name.

²⁰ The Bible, whose perspective is above all legalistic since it is moral, reproaches Solomon for having constructed temples for the divinities of his foreign wives, but it adds nonetheless that Solomon “slept with his fathers,” a formula which is also used in speaking of David and which refers to posthumous Beatitude. It would be contradictory, to say the least, to doubt the salvation of an author whose writings are included in the Bible; if there are differences of opinion on the subject of Solomon, it is because of a conflict of levels and not because of an ambiguity situated on one and the same plane.

good (???? = *ihsân*). And Zechariah and John (the Baptist) and Jesus and Elias, each one of them was among the poles of sanctity (*sálihân = sulh*);²¹ likewise, Ishmael and Elishah and Jonah and Lot; and to each of these We have bestowed excellence above the entire world (*faddalnâ = fadl*)” (*Surah Al-An’âm*, 84-86). The unforewarned reader will undoubtedly be shocked by the appearance of anachronism and also of tautological platitude; now it is important to know that the laudatory expressions have here a particular function of classification; and as for the apparent anachronisms it is a question in this text, precisely, of typological categories and not of chronology. The common notions of “guidance” (*hudâ*),²² “right action” (*ihsân*),²³ “piety” (*sulh*) and “favor” (*fadl*)²⁴ assume in this context special significations which take all quality of pleonasm away from them, but which we have no need to pursue further in connection with these personages;²⁵ it suffices to illustrate, with the aid of this Koranic example, the general point that scriptural expressions appearing unimportant, even absurd, conceal a precise and plausible meaning.

But such subtleties of expression are a small matter compared with the dogmatic ellipsisms contained in sacred Scriptures. *Credibile quia ineptum est*,²⁶ as Tertullian said; this is to say that the apparent ineptness is often the measure of the supernatural; or it is the measure of the ellipsis of the expression, hence of the superabundance of implicit and partially inexpressible meanings. Let us mention as an example the eternity of an afterlife either blissful or woeful: firstly the idea that something which has a beginning could have no end, and then the idea that a limited cause could have an unlimited consequence. Both conceptions are ellipses, and we could point out and explain the links that have been passed over in silence — we have done this on other occasions — but what is important here is to point out that these ideas suggest, in an adequate and efficacious manner, man’s position between contingency and the Absolute; and also to recall that eschatological dogmas are directed to moral and existential intuition rather than to reason or common sense.

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But apparent absurdity is found not only in a particular religious text, it manifests also and even above all, by the dogmatic contradictions separating the religions. Certainly, God cannot contradict Himself in essence, but He can appear to contradict Himself within forms and levels;

²¹ The literal meaning is “reconciling and appeasing piety,” but since it is a question of Prophets we have permitted ourselves to comment while translating, for it goes without saying that in certain cases the quality of the substantive determines the interpretation of the adjective. Besides, in more than one passage in the Koran the adjectives defining piety have as their function, not to convince us needlessly that the Prophets were pious, but on the contrary to lend the prestige of the Prophets to these notions.

²² The meaning here is that of “primordial guidance,” or at least “original” or “initial” guidance from the point of view of Semitic monotheism.

²³ *Ihsân* comprises the subjective meaning of “sincerity” — to act as if we were seeing God, He who sees us—and the objective meaning of “action productive of good”; with David and Solomon this good is the founding of Jewish royalty and the construction of the Temple. If these two Kings were named before personages who preceded them it is perhaps because of their mystical and esoteric eminence, manifested by the Psalms and the Song of Songs.

²⁴ The term “favor” here takes on the particular meaning of “success” or “glory” after providential tribulations.

²⁵ It is not to be forgotten that the Koran presupposes not only the Biblical texts but also the Arab and Talmudic traditions; and sometimes these traditions more so than the Bible.

²⁶ Later rendered as: *Credo quia absurdum*. Quite curiously, the Shinto commentator Motoori Norinaga has expressed himself in an analogous manner: “Who would have invented such a ridiculous and unbelievable story if it were not true?”

the phenomenon of multiple subjectivity is contradictory, but subjectivity in itself cannot be so, and the same holds true for certain scriptural passages or for the religions themselves. The plurality of religions is no more contradictory than the plurality of individuals: in Revelation, God makes Himself as it were an individual in order to address the individual; homogeneity in relation to other Revelations is inward and not outward. If humanity were not diverse, a single Divine individualization would suffice; but man is diverse not only from the point of view of ethnic temperaments, but also from that of spiritual possibilities; the diverse combinations of these two things make possible and necessary the diversity of Revelations.

What is “historical fact” for Christianity in particular and the Bible in general, becomes “symbol” in Islam, at least to a great extent if not always; the fundamental Message of Islam uses Christian facts like stones for a new building, the stones changing function according to their new use. It cannot be emphasized enough that in every religion there are elements which are to be taken literally and others which are symbolic and which have through their new interpretation — evidently slanted but intrinsically valid — a didactic and regulatory function for the souls of the faithful. In short, the principial and archetypal Model of “myth” — or of “religious imagery” — is invariable: it is the Logos who shines in the darkness; who at first is uncomprehended and who then triumphs; who is uncomprehended because darkness is darkness, and who triumphs because Light is Light. And it is always the Logos, from the moment that his trajectory enters the realm of human diversity, who gives rise by polarization to the diverse religious systems; human diversity combining then with the divine Infinitude, hence with inexhaustible Possibility.

In this order of ideas, the question may arise of knowing to what extent a believer has the right or the duty to recognize the spiritual worth or even the full validity of the other religions. In principle and *a priori*, no such obligation could exist, for each religion possesses within itself everything man needs; but in fact and in the context of inescapable experiences, this question in the final analysis cannot but arise. Leaving aside intuition on the one hand, and the imponderables of grace on the other, the first argument in favor of the validity of foreign religions is the irrefutable character of their intrinsic content: every religion has its axioms which, from its vantage point, are metaphysically, spiritually and humanly evident. To understand the religious phenomenon is to understand this quasi-ontological autonomy; no doubt, it can be attacked from without, but this could not weaken the internal logic of the religious system, nor the graces which corroborate that logic or that sacramental symbolism.

The proof that “our” religion is not the only true one is furnished, not only by what we can grasp of the intrinsic truth of other religions, but also by the simple fact of their presence and their power;²⁷ how can it be explained that God, if He wished to save the world by means of a single religion, should have permitted the existence of so many other religions which bar its way, and which do so all the more effectively and irrevocably, precisely, because they comprise in substance the same contents as the religion considered as “ours”?

It is a fact of common experience that men, even while becoming acquainted with foreign doctrines, or even above all when so doing, consider it perfectly logical to reason in terms of the doctrine in which they have grown up; one finds it altogether natural for French believers to reason ingeniously in terms of Catholicism, and to find it logically irresistible, while Greek or

²⁷ It is to this aspect that the argument of Gamaliel refers: if this argument, accorded so much importance by Christians, is not false, then it also applies to Islam, which came forth out of nothing and imposed itself in a miraculously short time on a large portion of the world. Nevertheless, this argument could not be used in favor of the modern errors which, precisely, are not religions, and which have no need of any celestial aid to “sail before the wind.”

Russian believers do the same in terms of Orthodoxy; and for all of them to reason in terms of their hereditary conviction even while being perfectly well aware of the positions — usually if not always just as plausible—of those whom they consider to be heretics. Human subjectivity, even on the plane of logic, identifies itself with the ideological ambience in which it was formed; whence the quasi-innate prejudices that determine for good or ill religious reasonings, and whence also a lack of imagination, excusable or inexcusable as the case may be, in short, a deep-seated incapacity to put oneself in the place of subjectivities rooted in other ambiances.²⁸ All of this is clearly founded on the exclusivism of religion; men have no eschatological interest — or believe they have none — in challenging this exclusivism, quite the contrary. However this “instinct of self-preservation” has nothing to do with pure intelligence nor with the total truth; and it remains to be seen on what chord of our spirit we place the accent, or upon what chord God wishes to place it.²⁹

* * *

The foundation of the “logical subjectivism” of believers lies in what we may term “religious solipsism”; and this is inevitable for two major reasons. Firstly, every religious Message is a Message of the Absolute; this character of Absoluteness penetrates the entire Message and confers upon it its quality of uniqueness. God speaks for the Inward and is not preoccupied with the outward as such; He proclaims “the Religion” in a form adapted to given human possibilities; He does not engage in “comparative religion.” Secondly, the average man is not disposed to grasp this character of Absoluteness if it is not suggested by the uniqueness of its expression; and God will not compromise this understanding by specifications stressing what is outward and relative, thus foreign to that which is the reason for the existence of the Message. But this could in no way bind esoterism: on the one hand because it is not a religious Message and derives from the Intellect more than from Revelation, and on the other hand because it is addressed to men who have no need of a suggestion of uniqueness and exclusivity, at the level of expression, in order to grasp the character of Absoluteness in sacred enunciations.

All of this should serve to make it clear that we are as far as can be from approving a gratuitous and sentimentalist “ecumenism,” which does not distinguish between truth and error and which results in religious indifference and the cult of man. What in reality one has to understand, is that the undeniable presence of transcendent truth, of the sacred and the supernatural, in religions other than that of our birth, ought to lead us, not in the least to doubt the Absolute

²⁸ One cannot reproach a Massignon with this, whose conciliatory thesis on the subject of Islam would be perfectly utilizable in the framework of Christian theology, at least as an optional interpretation. Outside the Semitic world, we see more than one case of “rehabilitation” — or of integration — of foreign elements by a given traditional world: Hinduism cannot fully accept the Buddha without ruining itself, but it takes note of the fact that the Buddha was one of the great *Avataras* and accords him the veneration due to one of his rank, even while presenting awkward explanations concerning his role. In a manner at once analogous and different, the Shinto divinities became *Bodhisattvas*, sometimes through their own intervention, in dreams or visions or by way of oracles.

²⁹ Let us not forget that theology comprises necessarily, or nearly so, elements of universality: even while being obliged to affirm that there is “no salvation outside the Church,” it admits nonetheless that Christ can save whom he will, and that there are everywhere souls which belong “invisibly” to the one and only Church. The Moslems — not to mention other Orientals — have analogous reasonings, *mutatis mutandis*.

character proper to our religion, but simply to acknowledge the inherence of the Absolute in other doctrinal and sacramental symbols which manifest and communicate It by definition, but which also by definition — since they belong to the formal order — are relative and limited, despite their quality of uniqueness. This latter quality is necessary, as we have said, inasmuch as it testifies to the Absolute, but is merely indicative from the point of view of the Absolute in itself, which manifests Itself necessarily by uniqueness, yet just as necessarily— in virtue of Its Infinitude—by the diversity of forms.

All of these considerations raise the following questions, which we have already answered in one way or another: how can a man, who observes that his religion of birth or adoption is visibly incapable of saving the whole of humanity, still believe that it is the only saving religion? And how can a man, who moreover observes the existence of other religions, powerfully established and having the same claim, persist in believing that God, sincerely desirous of saving the world, should have found no other means of doing so than by instituting one sole religion, strongly colored by particular ethnic and historical features — as it must necessarily be — and doomed in advance to failure as regards the goal in question? Finally, why is it that in the vast majority of cases the adherent of a given religion or denomination remains unmoved by the arguments of another given religion or denomination, even when he has studied it as much as it can be studied?

Doubtless, these questions do not arise *a priori*, but in the end they arise after centuries of experience. And the fact that these questions arise and that they compromise to a great extent the religion which, clearly, has no adequate means of answering them, — this fact, we say, shows that they arise legitimately and providentially, and that in the religions there is, to the very extent of their exclusivism, an aspect of insufficiency, normal no doubt but nonetheless detrimental in the final analysis.

The divine origin and the majesty of the religions implies that they must contain all truth and all answers; and there, precisely, lies the mystery and the role of esoterism. When the religious phenomenon, hard-pressed as it were by a badly interpreted experience, appears to be at the end of its resources, esoterism springs forth from the very depths of this phenomenon to show that Heaven cannot contradict itself; that a given religion in reality sums up all religions and that all religion is to be found in a given religion, because Truth is one. In other words: the contrast between the absolute character of Revelation and its aspect of relativity constitutes indirectly one more proof— along with the direct and historical proofs — both of the reality and the necessity of the esoteric dimension proper to all religion; so much so that the religions, at the very moment when they seem to be defeated by experience, affirm themselves victoriously on every level by their very essence.

Religious divergences make us think of the contradictions between the visions of the mystics, even though there is no common measure between the two, except that in both cases there is an intrinsic underlying truth: one mystic paints a rather despairing picture of purgatory, while another insists on a joy of hope which reigns there, each perspective being supported by imagery that portrays it concretely; the symbolism is combined with an isolating fragmentariness and a one-sided sentimentalism. As in the case of the religions, the formal contradictions of mystical imagery do not invalidate the integral truth, whose aspects they accentuate in terms of a particular perspective of fear or love; but we do not need to have recourse to esoterism here to bring out the truth; theology provides it in distinguishing at the outset between the contents of belief, according to whether they are necessary, recommended, or simply possible.

* * *

Christianity is founded upon the unique Incarnation and the unique Redemption; and then, by way of consequence and in an all but exclusive manner, upon sacrifice and sacramental life. That is, it is founded upon the uniqueness of the Christ and his gifts, and upon the sacrificial character of his personality and his life; these elements, together with the sacrificial and sacramental piety that they require, are considered to be the sole conditions and guarantees of salvation, although one admits, when hard pressed, that they may act in an underlying fashion framework of another religion.

Islam for its part founds itself upon the Truth that has always been and the Faith that has always been: on the one hand upon the immutable Reality of God—Unity, Omniscience, Omnipotence, Mercy—and on the invariability of His ways, and on the other hand upon the inalienable constants of the theomorphic nature of man; by way of consequence, man's attitude will be obedience:

either in conformity with nature, or sacrificial. The Truth of God and the quality of Faith, together with the obediential piety and the operative sincerity that they require, are considered to be the sole conditions and guarantees of salvation, although it is admitted on the margin that they may act in an underlying fashion in the framework of another religion.

From these differences of perspective, the divergences of application of the notion of the “best” inevitably result, and thereby also the dissonances of certain symbolisms, to the very extent that they are contingent.

* * *

Here we could bring in a consideration — although its substance is known to our regular readers — which is quite particular but characteristic of interdenominational misunderstandings: according to a common idea, all the more tenacious in that its content is materially and psychologically impossible, Muslim asceticism is Christian, even Buddhist, in origin, as if the ambiguity of earthly pleasures could escape a perspective as concerned with the nature of things as is Islam. The apparent contradiction in the moral comportment of Muslims is not in their philosophy, it is in things themselves; if Islam on the one hand recognizes the positive quality of sexuality, on the other hand it is aware of the danger involved in pleasure as such, the two points of view coexisting and interweaving in practice as well as in theory. On the one hand, the Sufi turns away from earthly beauty, as if he were saying: “Since this is not God, it is not beauty; God alone possesses it.” Yet on the other hand he contemplates and accepts beauty: “Since this is beauty and nothing else, it can only be that of God, even here.” Everything lies in balancing both attitudes: to accept beauty or any other value “in the Name of God” and without excess, and conjointly with certain refusals which reinforce the right to this acceptance. The classical definition of good as being situated between two contrary excesses, here finds its full meaning, in the sense that there is added to this wisely acquired good a vertical dimension, that of Heaven which blesses and attracts, or which sanctifies and reintegrates. Assuredly, earthly gardens can cause us to forget the celestial Garden and to “let go of the prey for its shadow”; but in reality — and it is here that contemplative “recollection” neutralizes seduction and outwardness — the earthly garden is Paradise veiled.

* * *

Believing only what one “sees”: this prejudice, as crude as it is common, leads us to insert a parenthesis here. Wanting to believe only what they see, scientists condemn themselves to seeing only what they believe; logic for them is their desire not to see what they do not want to believe. Scientism in fact is less interested in the real as such — which necessarily goes beyond our limitations — than in what is non-contradictory, therefore in what is logical, or more precisely, in what is empirically logical; thus in what is logical *de facto* according to a given experience, and not in what is logical *de jure* in accordance with the nature of things. In reality the “planimetric” recording of perceptions and the elimination of the apparently contradictory only too often give the measure of a given ignorance, even of a given stupidity; the pedants of “exact science” are moreover incapable of evaluating what is implied by the existential paradoxes in which we live, beginning with the phenomenon, contradictory in practice, of subjectivity. Subjectivity is intrinsically unique while being extrinsically multiple; now if the spectacle of a host of subjectivities other than our own causes us no great perplexity, how can it be explained “scientifically” — that is, avoiding or eliminating all contradiction — that “I alone” am “I”? So-called “exact” science can find no reason whatever for this apparent absurdity, any more than it can for that other logical and empirical contradiction which is the limitlessness of space, time and the other existential categories. Whether we like it or not, we live surrounded by mysteries, which logically and existentially lead us towards transcendence.

Even if the “scientists” could observe the non-contradiction of all possible objective phenomena, there still would remain the contradictory enigma of the scission between the objective universe and the observing subject, not to mention the “scientifically” insoluble problem of that flagrant contradiction which is the empirical uniqueness of a particular subject, to which problem we have just alluded; and even if we limit ourselves to the objective world, of which the limitlessness precisely constitutes a contradiction since it is inconceivable according to empirical logic, how can we believe for an instant that the day will finally come when we can put it into a homogeneous and exhaustive system? And how can we fail to see the fundamental and inevitable contradiction between scientific logic — which is moreover intrinsically deficient since it lacks sufficient data — and the infinity and complexity of the real, which scientism sets itself out to explore, to exhaust and to catalogue? The fundamental contradiction of scientism is to want to explain the real without the help of that first science which is metaphysics, hence not to know that only the science of the Absolute gives meaning and discipline to the science of the relative; and not to know at the same stroke that the science of the relative, when it is deprived of this help, can only lead to suicide, beginning with that of the intelligence, then with that of the human, and in the end, with that of humanity. The absurdity of scientism is the contradiction between the finite and the Infinite, that is, the impossibility of reducing the latter to the former, and the incapacity to integrate the former into the latter; and also the inability to understand that an erudition which cuts itself off from initial Unity can lead only to the innumerable, hence to the indefinite, to shattering and no nothingness.

If therefore the scientific method, or the conceptual system (*die Weltanschauung*) resulting from it, claims to have the privilege of excluding contradictions, it goes without saying that it accuses methods or systems which in its opinion are extrascientific, of the defect of accepting what is contradictory; as if there could exist a human and traditional thought which accepts the contradictory *de jure* and not only *de facto*, and as if what is contradictory in religion — supposing that it is not merely in the minds of the scientists — did not imply the consciousness of an underlying non-contradiction, known by God alone! What is the significance of the theological opinion that the human mind has limits, and what is the meaning of the mysteries

inasmuch as they are supposed to transcend reason, if not that man is incapable of perceiving the total and homogeneous reality behind the contradictions at which his shortsightedness stops? Recourse to the Divine authority of Revelation means nothing other than that, and this is so evident that one would like to excuse oneself for pointing it out.

The man who wishes to know the visible — to know it both in entirety and in depth — is obliged for that very reason to know the Invisible, on pain of absurdity and ineffectualness; to know it according to the principles which the very nature of the Invisible imposes on the human mind; hence to know it by being aware that the solution to the contradictions of the objective world is found only in the transpersonal essence of the subject, namely in the pure Intellect.

Besides—and this is another question altogether— how can the adepts of a scientism which sets out to reduce total Reality to a clockwork, fail to see that the absurd— not simply as an appearance of the unknown, but insofar as it is a manifestation of the indefinite and thereby of the unintelligible as such — is an integral part of the mirrorings of *Mâyâ*, and thereby of the economy of the Universe? One of the most difficult things, morally, is to concede the metaphysical right of existence to what is existentially absurd; not in theory alone, but upon concrete contact with absurdity, which is nearly the victory over the dragon. Now before wishing to abolish the absurd that is merely apparent, it is necessary to acknowledge the ineluctable presence of the absurd as such, which could not possibly be reabsorbed into the intelligible save in its function of being a necessary element in the equilibrium of things. For Reality does not limit itself to revealing its aspects of geometry. It also likes to conceal itself and to play hide-and-seek; it would be astonishing if it consented to unveil itself totally to mathematical minds; if it could consent to this it would not be *Mâyâ*. Man is contingent and he is condemned to contingency, and contingency implies by definition the insoluble and the absurd.

Everything here is a question of causality: there are phenomena which seem absurd to us so long as we are ignorant of their causes, or because we are ignorant of these; and there are other phenomena which are absurd in themselves and which have no other cause than the cosmic necessity for that which has no necessity. Likewise there are possibilities which have no function other than to manifest the impossible, to the extent precisely that this is still possible; and it is possible at least in a symbolic way, which is sufficiently clear to manifest the intention of impossibility or absurdity.

* * *

A proof often advanced in favor of religion, but rarely understood to its full extent, is the argument of the moral efficacy of divine Legislation: what does human society become, in fact, if it is deprived of a Law founded upon the authority of God? Unbelievers, who as a general rule have but a highly restricted and partially false idea of human nature — otherwise they would not be unbelievers — will answer that it suffices to replace the religious Law with a civil Law founded upon the common interest; now the opinion of the “free thinkers” concerning the public good depends upon their scale of values, hence upon their idea of man and thereby of the meaning of life. But what has been instituted by an individual can always be abolished by another individual; philosophies change with tastes, they follow the downward slope of history, because as soon as man is detached from his reason for existence rooted in God, he can only slide downwards, in conformity with the law of gravity which is valid for the human order as well as for the physical order, notwithstanding the periodic renewal effected by the religions, the

sages and the saints.³⁰

Now the fact that the Divine Law, insofar as it is fundamental and thereby universal,³¹ is definitively the only efficacious one — to the degree that a Law can and must be so—this fact shows that it is a Message of Truth; it alone is incontestable and irreplaceable. To be sure, the contemporary world still possesses codes and civil laws but, even so, for the general mentality there is less and less an authority which is such “by right,” and not merely “in fact.”³² Moreover, the Law is made to protect not only society, but also the individual prone to offense; if on the one hand the “secular arm” inspires fear to the degree that badly intentioned men feel threatened by it, on the other hand these same men without the fear of God, lack an intrinsic motive to check their inclinations. The threat of human justice is uncertain, hence relative; that of the divine Justice is absolute; for strictly speaking it is possible to escape men, but certainly not God.

In summary: an indirect proof of God, is that without Divinity there is no authority, and without authority there is no efficacy; this is to say that the religious Message imposes itself—apart from its other imperatives — because without it no moral and social life is possible, except for a brief period which, without admitting it, still lives off the residues of a disavowed heritage. And this brings us to another extrinsic proof *a contrario* of God, although it is fundamentally the same: it is a fact of experience that, on the whole, the common man, who is not disciplined by social necessity and who, precisely, is only disciplined by religion and piety, degenerates in his behavior when he no longer has religion containing and penetrating him; and experience proves that the disappearance of faith and of morals brings about that of personal dignity and of private life, which in fact have meaning and value only if man possesses an immortal soul. It is hardly necessary to recall here that believing peasants and artisans are often of an aristocratic nature, and that they are so through religion; without forgetting that aristocracy in itself, namely nobility of sentiment and comportment and the tendency to control and transcend oneself, derives from spirituality and draws its principles from it, consciously or unconsciously.

What the people need in order to find meaning in life, hence the possibility of earthly happiness, is religion and the crafts: religion because every man has need of it, and the crafts because they allow man to manifest his personality and to realize his vocation in the framework of a sapiential symbolism; every man loves intelligible work and work well done.³³ Now industrialism has robbed the people of both things: on the one hand of religion, denied by scientism from which industry derives, and rendered implausible by the inhuman character of the ambience of machinery; and on the other hand of the crafts, replaced precisely by machines; so much so, that in spite of all the “social doctrines” of the Church and the nationalistic bourgeoisie,

³⁰ The dreamers of the XVIIIth century, unaware of being hereditarily influenced by Christianity and imbued with ancient civism and freemasonic idealism, imagined that man is reasonable and that human reason coincides with their ideology; the latter being, to say the least, fragmentary and rendered inoperative in advance by the subversive cult of man. What they did not foresee is that once man is detached from divine Authority, he does not in any way feel obliged to submit to human authority; as soon as he knows himself to be independent of all authority other than his own, nothing prevents him from inventing morals conformed to his errors and his vices and in their turn clad in a veil of rationality, at least to the extent that euphemisms still seem useful to him.

³¹ There are revealed prescriptions which have in view not the nature of man—as does the Decalogue, notably—but given particular conditions or circumstances.

³² For this same mentality, morals are something merely subjective, and, in consequence, transgression is an entirely relative thing; now a judiciary apparatus is rendered all but impotent in a society which no longer believes that a crime is a crime, and which in this way contributes to the psychoanalization of justice and the abolition of public security.

³³ Along with work, and the religion which sanctifies it, the people also have need of a wisdom; this is what Richelieu did not understand when he set himself against the guilds.

there is nothing left for the people which can give meaning to their life and make them happy. The classic contradiction of traditional Catholicism is to want to maintain the social hierarchy, which is theoretically correct, while accepting whole-heartedly — as an acquisition of “Christian civilization” which in fact has long been abolished — the scientism and the machinism that in fact compromise this hierarchy by cutting the people off, in practice, from humanity. The converse error is founded on the same cult of technology, with the difference that it is detrimental to the bourgeoisie rather than to the common people and that it aims at reducing the entire society to mechanistic inhumanity while on the other hand presenting it with an “opium” made of bitterness and frigidity which kills the very organ of happiness; for to be happy it is necessary to be a child, happiness being made of gratitude and trust, humanly speaking. The machine is opposed to man, consequently it is also opposed to God; in a world where it poses as norm, it abolishes both the human and the divine. The logical solution to the problem would be the return — which in fact has become impossible without a divine intervention — to the crafts and at the same time to religion,³⁴ and thereby to an ambience which is not opposed to what gives meaning to life; an ambience which, by not falsifying our sense of the real, does not make implausible what is evident. One of the greatest successes of the devil was to create around man surroundings in which God and immortality appear unbelievable.³⁵

* * *

There are attenuating circumstances for doubt when man finds himself torn between the bad examples given in the name of religion and his own instinct for the primordial religion — torn without having a discernment that is sufficient to put everything in its proper place. A workman once told us that he felt close to God in virgin nature and not in a church, and one of Tolstoy’s characters said in a story: “Where are there baptismal fonts as great as the ocean?” There is here a sensibility both for the universality of truth and for the sacred character of nature, but this cannot make us lose sight of the fact that persistence in such simplifications, which easily turn into narcissism, has no excuse in the final analysis; for man is made to transcend himself, and he ought to have this impulse even as a plant that turns towards the sun. One sensibility calls forth another, one must not stop halfway.

There is, in the man of a “believing” or elect nature, a legacy of the lost Paradise, and this is the instinct for the transcendent and the sense of the sacred; it is on the one hand the disposition to believe in the miraculous, and on the other hand the need to venerate and to adore. To this two-fold predisposition must normally be added a twofold detachment, one in regard to the world and earthly life, and the other in regard to the ego, its dreams and its pretensions. The problem of the credibility of the religious Messages can be resolved only by starting from these facts, which are normative because they result from man’s deformity.

“Abram believed in Yahweh; and Yahweh counted it to him for righteousness” (*Genesis*,

³⁴ This is what a Gandhi tried to realize, heroically but without results other than a good example and all sorts of initiatives that remained partial and local. As for the Church, the objection will no doubt be raised that it could not compromise itself by opposing that irreversible phenomenon which is industrialism; we would reply first of all that the truth has precedence over any consideration of opportuneness or of “irreversibility,” and then, that the Church could always have affirmed its doctrinal position, to all intents and purposes, without having to be unrealistic on the level of facts; it could moreover have opted, with perfect logic and in accord with its entire past, for the monarchist and traditional right-wing which upheld it by definition, without having to compromise itself, in the eyes of some, with the ambiguous “right-wing” born in the XIXth century in the shadow of the machine.

³⁵ And this certainly is not, in spite of all illusions, “Christian civilization.”

15:6): that is, Abraham's faith here was a merit because its object was something humanly impossible; the same is true for Mary's faith at the time of the Annunciation. The unbeliever by nature is not inclined to consider possible what is contrary to nature and consequently to reason; not to reason in itself, but to reason inasmuch as it does not possess the information which would allow it to understand the laws of the supernatural. There are three possible attitudes or reactions with regard to the supernatural: refusal, acceptance and perplexity; the classic image of the latter being the attitude of the Apostle Thomas. "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed" (*John*, 20:29): those who, before seeing, are predisposed to believe.³⁶ The unbeliever, on earth, believes only what he sees; the believer, in Heaven, sees all that he believes.

* * *

We are always astonished by the fact that unbelievers and even certain believers are strangely insensitive to the direct language of the sacred Messages: that they do not perceive from the very first that the Psalms, the Gospel, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita could only come from Heaven, and that—from the point of view of credibility—the spiritual perfume of these Books dispenses with all theological analysis as well as with all historical research.³⁷ Personally, even if we were neither metaphysician nor esoterist, we would be a believer without the least difficulty; we would be convinced at the outset upon contact with the sacred in all its forms. We would believe in God and immortality because their evidence appears in the very form of the Message; since, to learn what God is, is to recall what we are.

A point of view which is readily lost sight of— if one has even thought of it — when defending those who refuse the celestial Messages, is precisely the very appearance of the Messengers; now, to paraphrase or to cite some well-known formulas, "he who has seen the Prophet has seen God"; "God became man in order that man might become God." One has to have a very hardened heart not to be able to see this upon contact with such beings; and it is above all this hardness of heart that is culpable, far more than ideological scruples.

The combination of sanctity and beauty which characterizes the Messengers of Heaven is transmitted so to speak from the human theophanies to the sacred art which perpetuates it: the essentially intelligent and profound beauty of this art testifies to the truth which inspires it; it could not in any case be reduced to a human invention as regards the essential of its message. Sacred art is Heaven descended to earth, rather than earth reaching towards Heaven.³⁸

A line of thought close to this one which we have just presented is the following, and we have made note of it more than once: if men were stupid enough to believe for millennia in the

³⁶ For the Koran, *faith* (*imân*) consists in "believing in what is hidden" (*yu'minûna bil-ghayb*) (*Sura of the Cow*, 2).

³⁷ How, in reading the life and writings of a Hônen Shônin could one doubt the validity of the Amidist tradition and the sanctity of this personage? A tradition and a faith which produce such fruits, generously and for centuries, can only be supernatural.

³⁸ Within the framework of Christian art, the second image is nevertheless applicable to late Gothic art, in a relative manner and without abolishing the first. Let us point out at this opportunity that the spiritual criterion that is beauty cannot apply to the neo-pagan art that poisoned Europe in the XVIth century and that expresses the fatal marriage between religion and humanist civilizationism. No doubt, neither the cold and anthropolatrous gigantism of the Renaissance nor the morbid inflatedness of the Baroque prove anything against Catholicism in itself, but what they certainly prove is on the one hand that a religion which supports this language and expresses itself through it cannot have the monopoly of the absolute and exclusive Truth, and on the other hand that Catholicism, by this amalgam, exposed itself finally to being its victim; not in a total manner, which is excluded in advance, but nevertheless in an extremely serious manner. The humanization of the art—*a priori* divine—prefigured that of the religion, at least of the official religion.

divine, the supernatural, immortality—assuming these are illusions — it is impossible that one fine day they became intelligent enough to be aware of their errors; that they became intelligent, no one knowing why, and without any decisive moral acquisition to corroborate this miracle. And similarly: if men like Christ believed in the supernatural, it is impossible that men like the Encyclopedists were right not to believe in it.

Skeptical rationalism and titanisque naturalism are the two great abuses of intelligence, which violate pure intellectuality as well as the sense of the sacred;³⁹ it is through this propensity that thinkers “are wise in their own eyes” and end by “calling evil good, and good evil” and by “putting darkness for light, and light for darkness” (*Isaiah*, 5:20 and 21); they are also the ones who, on the plane of life or experience, “make bitter what is sweet,” namely the love of the eternal God, and “sweet what is bitter,” namely the illusion of the evanescent world.

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One cannot understand the meaning of the divine Message without knowing the nature of the human receptacle; he who understands man, understands all the supernatural and cannot help but accept it. Now man is made to contemplate the Absolute starting from contingency; the Absolute is conscious of Itself in Itself, but it also wishes to be conscious of Itself starting from an other than Itself; this indirect vision is a possibility necessarily included in the Infinitude belonging to the Absolute. In consequence, it could not be realized; it is necessary that there be a world, beings, men. To contemplate the Absolute starting from the contingent, is correlatively to see things in God and to see God in things, in such manner that they do not take us away from God and that on the contrary they bring us nearer to Him; this is the reason for the existence of man, and from it ensue existential rights as well as spiritual duties. Man in principle has the right to the satisfaction of his elementary needs and to the enjoyment of a congenial ambience, but he has this right only in view of his vocation of knowing God, whence derives his duty to practice the disciplines that contribute directly or indirectly to this knowledge.

The worth of man lies in his consciousness of the Absolute, and consequently in the integrality and depth of this consciousness; having lost sight of it by plunging himself into the world of phenomena viewed as such — this is prefigured by the fall of the first couple — man needs to be reminded of it by the celestial Message. Fundamentally, this Message comes from “himself,” not of course from his empirical “I” but from his immanent Ipseity, which is that of God and without which there would be no “I,” whether human, angelic, or any other; the credibility of the Message results from the fact that it is what we are, both within ourselves and beyond ourselves. In the depths of transcendence is immanence, and in the depths of immanence, transcendence.

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³⁹ By a curious and inevitable backlash, the abuse of intelligence is always accompanied by some inconsequentiality and some blindness: on the plane of art for example, it is inconsequential to copy nature when one is condemned in advance to stop halfway, for in painting, one can realize neither total perspective nor movement, any more than one can realize the latter in sculpture, without mentioning the impossibility of imitating the living appearance of surfaces. Similarly in philosophy: by forgetting that thought is there to furnish keys, and by wanting to exhaust all the knowable by thought alone, one ends by no longer knowing how to think at all; and likewise for science, which out of principle bypasses everything essential, as is proved moreover by its dismal results. Some persons will term our doctrine “dogmatic” and “naïve,” which for us is a compliment.

It has been said that, if nothing can logically oblige a people to believe what a Prophet preaches to them, nothing can oblige the Prophet himself to believe what God reveals or seems to reveal to him; the lack of credibility would be the same in the one case as in the other. Now, apart from the fact that in order to be able to assess the matter it would be necessary either to be a Prophet or to hear a Prophet preach, the opinion in question sins through a flagrant ignorance concerning the phenomenon of Revelation and that of faith, then through begging the question by positing that there is no God; for if God is real, He necessarily finds a way to make Himself heard and make Himself accepted.

The fundamental solution to the problem of the credibility of religious axioms, and consequently the quintessence of the proofs of God, lies in the ontological correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm that is, in the fact that the microcosm necessarily repeats the macrocosm; in other words, the subjective dimension, taken in its totality, coincides with the objective dimension, to which, precisely, the religious and metaphysical truths pertain. What counts is to actualize this coincidence, and that is done, in principle or *de facto*, by Revelation, which awakens, if not always direct Intellection, at least that indirect Intellection which is Faith; *credo ut intelligam*.

All that we can know, we bear within ourselves, hence that is what we are; and that is why we can know it. We could symbolize this mystery by a circle comprising four poles: the lower pole would represent the human subject insofar as it is cut off from the object; the upper pole on the contrary would represent absolute In-Itselfness which is neither subject nor object or which is both at once, or the one within the other. The right half of the circle would be the objective world, and the left half, subjective depth; in the center of each half, thus halfway towards In-Itselfness, would be situated respectively the absolute Object and the absolute Subject, or in other words, In-Itselfness indirectly perceived or lived either as object or as subject. Now the circle is always the same Real; and that is why it is just as absurd to say that God does not exist since we have no objective perception of Him, as it is to say that He is absolutely unknowable because He is absolutely transcendent. For this transcendence, in the final analysis, is our own Essence and the foundation of our immortality.

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The religious phenomenon is reducible in the final analysis to a manifestation, both intellectual and volitive, of the relationship between the Principle and Its manifestation, or in other words, between the divine Substance and cosmic accidentality, or between *Atmâ* and *Samsâra*; and as this relationship comprises diverse aspects, the religious phenomenon is diversified in accordance with these aspects or these possibilities.

Every religion in effect presents itself as a “myth” referring to a given “archetype,” and thereby, but secondarily, to all archetypes; all these aspects are linked, but one alone determines the very form of the myth. If the Amidist perspective recalls the Christian perspective, that is because, within the framework of Buddhism, it refers more particularly to the archetype which determines Christianity; it is not because it was influenced by the latter, apart from the historical impossibility of this hypothesis. The average man is incapable, not of conceiving the archetypes, no doubt, but of being interested in them; he has need of a myth which humanizes and dramatizes the archetype and which triggers the corresponding reactions of will and sensibility;

that is, the average man, or collective man, has need of a god who resembles him.⁴⁰

The Taoist *Yin- Yang* is an adequate image of the fundamental relationship between the Absolute and the contingent, God and the world, or God and man: the white part of the figure represents God, and the black part, man. The black dot in the white part is “man in God” — man principally prefigured in the divine order — or the relative in the Absolute, if this paradox is permissible, or the divine Word which in fact prefigures the human phenomenon; if cosmic manifestation were not anticipated within the principial order, no world would be possible, nor any relationship between the world and God. Inversely and complementarily, the white dot in the black part of the *Yin- Yang* is the “human God,” the “Man-God,” which refers to the mystery of Immanence and to that of Theophany, hence also to that of Intercession and Redemption, or of the as it were “respiratory” reciprocity between earth and Heaven; if the latter were not present in the former, existence would vanish into nothingness, it would be impossible *a priori*. Herein lies the whole play of *Mâyâ* with its modes, degrees, cycles, diversity and alternations.

On the one hand, the Principle alone is, manifestation —the world—is not; on the other hand, manifestation is real — or “riot unreal” — by the fact, precisely, that it manifests, projects or prolongs the Principle; the latter being absolute, hence for that very reason infinite, It requires in virtue of this infinitude, the projection of Itself in the “other than Itself.” On the one hand, the Principle has a tendency to “punish” or to “destroy” manifestation because the latter, as contingency, is not the Principle, or because it tends to be the Principle illusorily and with a luciferian intention; in short, because “God alone is”; on the other hand, the Principle “loves” manifestation and “remembers” that it is Its own, that manifestation is not “other than It,” and it is within this ontological perspective that is to be situated the mystery of Revelation, Intercession, Redemption. It is thus that the relationships between the Principle and manifestation give rise to diverse archetypes of which the religions are the mythical crystallizations and which are predisposed so as to set into motion the will and the sensibility of given men and given human collectivities.

But the archetypes of the objective, macrocosmic and transcendent order are also those of the subjective, microcosmic and immanent order, the human Intellect coinciding, beyond the individuality, with the universal Intellect; so much so that the revealed myth, even while coming in fact from the exterior and from the “Lord,” comes in principle also from “ourselves,” from the interior and from the “Self.” This is to say that the acceptance of the religious Message coincides, in principle and in depth, with the acceptance of what we are, in ourselves yet at the same time beyond ourselves; for there where immanence is, there is also the transcendence of the Immanent.

To believe in God is to become again what we are; to become it to the very extent that we believe and that believing becomes being.

⁴⁰ Personal and dramatic in the case of Christianity; impersonal and serene in the case of Buddhism; the one being reflected sporadically in the other. We cite these two examples because of their disparity. Let us add that Arianism is a kind of interference, within Christianity, of the possibility-archetype of Islam, whereas inversely Shiism appears, within Islam, as an archetypal interference of Christian dramatism.