



## **Ragioni per credere oggi**

Giovanni Martinetti, s.j.

## **REASONS TO BELIEVE TODAY**

John Martinetti, s.j.

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## **Editor's Note**

This translation was done by Dr. Michael Carbery and revised by the editor. The book has met with extraordinary success in Europe and Asia and has been, at last count, translated into more than thirty languages. It has received universal acclaim by church and lay readers. It has also seen many editions and adaptations. The original is fully documented and extensively footnoted. Because most of the author's many sources and notes are cited from Italian translations, they have been omitted. Interested readers may refer to the original for full documentation.

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# Preface

## The apostle Thomas wanted to touch with his hand

When Einstein's wife was asked if she understood the theory of relativity "No," she answered, "but I know my husband and I am sure he can be trusted."

Christian faith is a keyhole through which we can glimpse the meaning of life and death, a path to reach the infinite. But this keyhole is not reliable if it is not supported by valid reasons to believe that God exists, that Christ is God's self-revelation, and that Christ can be trusted. Reasons to believe can be scientific, such as the analysis of biological evolution and the rationality of physical laws; philosophical, such as human aspiration to moral value and to be the very best; sociological, such as the moral deterioration of society after its practical departing from God; ethical, such as the necessary connection between faith in God and moral law valid for everybody; existential, such as the meaning that Christ gives to human life and the profound answer he offers to its major problems; historical, such as the proofs of the gospels' historicity, Jesus' marvelous personality, the conversions he brings about, and the shining figures of the saints and great Christians he has caused to rise up. But, in our opinion, not even the phenomenological signs should be disregarded, that is, the miracles where God's confirmation of Christ's revelation can be seen and certain paranormal phenomena that offer clues to the existence of the Spirit. In spite of these reasons, today there are many atheists, or people who behave as if they were so. Not because God is not revealed, but because people turn their backs. Some believers, unfortunately, by the way they live, convince others to turn away. But most often it is their way of believing that does who not attract others to faith. They believe in God the way children believe in fairy-tales or in Little Red Riding Hood. Thus the atheist and the skeptic feel at ease because they think they represent reasonableness (unlike the "emotional" believers). Accordingly, in the modern world we believe less than in the past, even if many valid reasons exist to believe more.

The great atheistic thinkers ( Feuerbach, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Sartre), were unwittingly very helpful to the faith; they therefore deserve our everlasting gratitude, for they eliminated all the rubbish, the false reasons and counterfeits of faith, and so smoothed the way for the great thinkers and believers of our century, who completed the task by discovering, clarifying, and consolidating the valid reasons. But most people have no time either to read the great thinkers who are believers or to do their own constructive research, although they do manage to find time to read almost anything, including the works of the great atheists. The most unexplored mine in the world is the one made up of the reasons to believe in what gives meaning to life. So believers, or many of them, are on the right side for a wrong reason: 'Faith,' they seem to think, 'even if compared with reason and the factual world, is mere hypothesis, with no deep, intrinsic basis in truth; it might be irrational, but it does give solace; since we want to believe in a good God and in heaven, we succeed in overcoming despair, in restraining immorality, and we are pushed towards human solidarity.'

These believers are like a man who keeps a bank account: it might be overdrawn, but he is afraid to check it, because considering it good makes him confident, and he can sleep. Meanwhile nonbelievers go on in their attitude and increase in number because the motives of believers are not really consistent. Priests often have no time to explain the reasons for faith to the faithful in clearcut

terms and to face a topic that might expose any number of complicated objections. Thus, in homilies, they find it easier to expose, even with profound concepts, what one "must believe," without ever mentioning the "insignificant" detail of why we must do so. It is like constructing beautiful buildings and houses, decorating them with exquisite taste, but forgetting to install the doors.

In Catholic theology, it is true, there are rational approaches to faith, but they are often third floor windows, rather than doors. This essay sets out to be one or more doors nonexperts can open, if they only try to turn the key. And since I am addressing a wide public, even if I draw information from remarkable scientific documentation and outstanding authors, I will use language, comparisons, and remarks from everyday life, in order to make reading less boring and perhaps even pleasant. I have been devoting myself to the subject of the reasons for faith for over thirty years and by now I should have almost become an expert.

I beg the reader not to be frightened off if this book, at first sight, seems long. The work needed for main entrances, and even service entrances, requires basements, so that people who want to buy a flat can check how solid the foundations are. We know how dark and undesirable such rooms can be, but I have tried my best to make them bright, welcoming, comfortable.

Here is the order we will follow. The *first* part will be dedicated to the problem: *does a Being we call God really exist?*

We will start with a panorama of the present historical moment in which the two systems that in different ways excluded God, eastern communism and Western excessive consumption, have matured and dropped their not too enticing fruits. Then we will pinpoint the serious question "about myself and the sense of my life" that no one who wants to remain a human being can neglect. We will show the need that a reasonable faith has to integrate intuition and reason, male and female values, objective and inner truths. We will point out that today a rediscovery of God is occurring among scientists, not, as in the past, for intimate reasons pertaining to the individual, but for a greater coherence with the recent improvements of science. In the biological field and in the branch of investigations about the origin of life, we will notice that Monod's chance theory is not accepted by many contemporary biologists and paleontologists because it starts from a very controversial postulate, whereas finalism is the most plausible hypothesis (even though it may not be not the proper place of experimental sciences to derive an Intelligence above nature from this alone). Chance and natural selection have produced living beings because they had as presuppositions finalist natural laws (physical and chemical laws oriented to life, needs of the living, instincts, innate wishes), laws that cannot but derive from an allorganizing Intelligence. We will see the substantial difference between living beings and any mechanism. Then Teilhard de Chardin will point out the direction of the way of evolution.

After putting the scientific field aside we will enter the inner and private one of substantial confidence in reality, the existential position which, as everyone recognizes, is necessary to live in a human way and which supposes the existence of a true God. We will review rapidly the area of modern philosophies, noting the historical failure of the atheistic ones and the resumption of the theistic ones. Then we will discuss, in an accessible manner, two philosophical ways to God. We will analyze the difference between faith in God and pantheism, noting a part of Hinduism which

seems to be closer to the latter. Our next consideration, on which we have to dwell somewhat longer, is the disturbing reality of suffering in the world. We hear say, 'If God exists there should not be so much innocent suffering.' We will see that many evils derive from human faults, from the abuse of free will, free will which God wants us to have because it is necessary for spiritual growth. Other sufferings coming from nature and chance, on the contrary, are spurs, always for moral evolution, both for individuals and for society. Therefore, they become fruitful if accepted in a certain way. We will have a look at reincarnation (does suffering derive from faults in previous lives?) and at Eastern meditation (a method to attain inner peace, but on certain conditions). And at this point we will assume that, without divine revelation, it is impossible to solve completely the problem of suffering and the meaning of life.

The second part answers the question whether Christ is knowable with historical certainty and whether He represents divine revelation. We discuss the progress of historical criticism of the gospels over the last 50 years. We see how Bultmann has demolished their historicity and how many of his disciples have proved them to be historically reliable. We contend that Christ's person is great enough to allow us to have moral certainty that He is God's main spokesperson, or rather, as He said in many ways, the Son of God, equal to His Father, become human to redeem religiously and morally those who want to follow Him. We show the difference between the remedy for suffering given by Buddha and the one offered by Christ. Then we move on to sociology and observe that in western societies economic welfare increases proportionally with the drop in spiritual welfare and moral values and we will identify the main cause of this macrophenomenon with increasing secularism, or practical atheism. Today many people do not admit sin or moral fault, above all if it is their own; by doing so they saw off the branch they're sitting on. Contemporary literature, with its existential emptiness, as well as psychoanalysis and United Nations statistics, confirm all that. We will try to show the fundamental importance of family stability for nourishing faith, as well as the importance of deep man-woman love, today so compromised by widespread sex; and inversely, we try to show the importance of faith to preserve everlasting love. Christ left us, not only a revelation, but also an authorized institute for its official interpretation, without which we fall into the chaos of private opinions and of sectarian beliefs. We will see the need, to be able to believe, to correct the false images of God. The darkness of most of the deeper contents of faith are today broken by beams of light from serious parapsychology and from recurrent rockets of miracles. And finally Woman remains for man the bridge towards God (the capital W is not casual and the reader will see why).

Above all, the reader will discover a kind of convergence of several scientific fields very far from one another, a kind of Glass Palace like the UN, where many representatives substantially agree, even in different ways of expression, about a resolution to be voted. It is not a question of making the biblical account agree with scientific data, because the data and the methodology of the scientific disciplines will be respected, insofar as only recognized scientists are asked to speak for their respective disciplines. The possible tenants of faith might find the rents too high, but, after visiting the various flats and detached houses, and still more after living there, they should become convinced that it would be worthwhile to call it home.

During meetings with young people, I continually get the impression that they are looking not only for an internal faith, but also for an external one as a check on the world of facts, satisfying not only the heart but also the intellect, a faith which, as a building is not only poetic but realistic, and not

only endowed with daring flights of design, but also has firm foundations. After all, isn't that what directs us to love one another in this world, and offers valid promises about God and the future world? Thomas the apostle, before believing, wanted to touch with his hand, and Christ allowed him to do so. Today Christ allows those seeking truth to touch with their hands. Not the whole edifice of faith but its foundations. "Blessed," said Jesus, "are those who possess the inner vision, so that they may believe without seeing with their eyes and touching with their hands." But, when inviting Thomas to touch, He wanted to say that, rather than not believing and so losing values the present and the heavenly life depend on, it is better to believe, like Thomas, having seen and touched.

## **Today the "Jesus Hypothesis" can be proved**

In the Fall of 1976 Vittorio Messori published a book after long and solitary research. Thus the *Ipotesi su Gesu* (Hypothesis about Jesus) affair exploded -- a million copies sold in Italy, translated into 17 languages, one of the most widely read and discussed books in the world. In 1982 "*Scommessa sulla Morte*" (*Wager on His Death*) and in 1987 *Inchiesta sul Cristianesimo* (*Inquiry about Christianity*) repeated the international success of the first.

People today hunger and thirst for values that give life meaning, but only provided that they are based on concrete facts, are expressed in plain but lively terms, accessible and, through advertizing, brought to the public awareness. Today most people believe only in dollars and in RU 486, or perhaps in the German mark and coke. Somehow, however, they realize they are suffocating. This is why we are going towards a civilization whose supreme result will be the few able to bear it.

Giovanni Martinetti, s.j.

# **PART I**

**DOES GOD EXIST?**

# CHAPTER 1

## THE PRESENT HISTORICAL MOMENT

*The great atheistic ideologies are ripening their fruits*

If you do not take into account "*The instructions and directions for use,*" you must not complain if the machine does not work. André Frossard writes that our grandfathers and fathers watched the first cars and airplanes with the joy of living in a world which science, technology, democracy, sexual revolution, and atheistic humanism had at last made beautiful and free, and with the pleasure of seeing "so many people marching towards the brotherly town," with the sun of the future in the background, "towards which a storm of prophecies pushed them."

Marx's Communism and Nietzsche's atheistic humanism promised that by rejecting God, humanity would become happy and free. Humanity would become God. Today the great lie has crumbled into pieces. "*Religion,*" Marx wrote, "is the effect and support of the pressure of capital on labor: once capitalism has fallen, religion will also fall, because by dissolving the old life relationships, the dissolution of old ideas keeps pace."

The other great western prophet, Friederich Nietzsche, begins thus the fifth book "*We the fearless*" of his *Gay Science*: "The most important among recent events -- that 'God is dead,' that faith in the Christian God has become unacceptable-already starts to throw its first shadows over Europe. . . . Its consequences are not sad or darkening at all for us, but rather like a new, hard to describe, kind of light, happiness, solace, cheering up, encouragement, dawn."

Well, the great changes in Eastern Europe, at the end of 1989 of which the fall of the Berlin wall is a symbol, showed the world that, instead of religion, communism itself collapsed. The Christian religion, fought and pursued for 2000 years by the most powerful means of compulsion and persuasion, still stands, while communism has suddenly collapsed, like a palace built only 70 years ago, but with no foundations.

What the Eastern Europeans wanted was to delete forever "the myth of a better world, a fairer society, a truer democracy -- which should have burst out of the communist fire. What the communist masters promised the masses was a lie or a mistake, and the events have fully proved it."

In Western democracies instead, more and more secularized, inspired by Nietzsche, Freud, and Sartre, the meaning of life and joy is decreasing as practical atheism is gradually increasing. It is like a flood where water overflows and makes the walls fall. Western thinkers and writers like Camus, Malraux, Moravia, Sagan, Ionesco, Diirrenmatt, Greene, de Beauvoir, Marcuse, Toffler, Cox, Delumeau, and Fromm denounce the terrible crisis of values of our technical civilization where to be human is to be but a gear in a machine that produces and wastes, to be a slave to drugs and corruption in a spiritual void. A famous sentence by Malraux sums it all up: "*The death of humanity followed the death of God.*"

In the days when communism began to fail, newspapers reported a survey on the crimes committed in Italy in the 80s. Murders increased terribly, as did attempted murders, thefts, robberies, and burglaries. Crimes against individuals increased enormously, reflecting the preeminent value

attributed to material goods. Similar growth is reported for drug consumption, AIDS, divorces, abortions, and suicides.

From 1971 to 1987 separations of married couples have tripled. Both secularism and modern atheism revolve around the great misunderstanding of freedom: "without god, humanity would be really free." Yes, by building a personal morality, we are free to be selfish, violent, unfair, greedy for pleasure, beastly, and able to destroy ourselves.

God is not humanity's master, as imagined by those who demolished faith. God is the ideal of Love and Freedom, an ideal made real. God is the only expert who can provide humanity with the know-how to realize these highest values authentically. God is not a tyrannical father for whom everything which is not forbidden is compulsory, but rather the author of the inner compass of what is human, always aiming at justice, and the route leading to it. In the collapse of the atheistic promises, God's words are valid: "I the Light: I have come into the world, so that whoever believes in me need not stay in the dark any more" ( Jn. 12.46).

It is true. Many Europeans, even if they appreciate the figure of Christ, do not think it worthy of 20th century people to cling to a half-mythical character and to a blind and gratuitous fideism. But is authentic Christian faith a sort of fideism? Even if many believers cannot explain the reasons for their faith, is a different faith possible, one reasonable and based on concrete facts? In this book, scores of remarkable thinkers and scientists will answer this question.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE BASIC QUESTIONS**

#### **The shipwrecked man, without papers, who had lost his memory**

A seriously wounded man, about 35 years old, awoke in a tourist class cabin on a great liner sailing towards unknown destinations. He had been picked up unconscious, while drifting on a sailing boat off the Azores. When he recovered his senses, to his surprise, he was on board a ship. He looked around in bewilderment. He had lost his memory: he could not remember his name, his job, his native place, his origin. He had no papers. He could speak English and some Spanish. However he could still reason. He asked where the ship was bound. Then he began to think of some notes he had found in his windbreaker.

"Who am I? Where am I from? Where was I going? Why was I off the Azores?" He felt close to a doctor who visited him and could remember some medical words. He liked a family from Argentina and was fond of their little daughter. Was he perhaps a doctor? Did he have a little daughter? Who am I? Where am I from? Where am I bound? Has life a meaning? Can our strong and deep spiritual aspirations be fulfilled? Is it possible for everyone? Not to know where one is bound is to be like modern people who have no enlightened faith, no basis in reasonable motives and objective facts.

## **The reason of the pieces and of the whole mechanism**

Do not lose your horse to chase a lizard. The meaning of life is a fundamental problem, primary to all the important things discussed in parliaments, newspapers, factories, or houses. One day we awoke on this huge "Shuttle" flying among galaxies, with a burden of hopes, dreams, and delusions. What is awaiting us at the end of the journey? Disintegration, or landing on an unknown planet? Are there reasons to believe our experiences will continue in new lands and will be, according to teachings of religions, based on the way we have administered the present ones?

Many other questions are more "urgent," easy, and, at first sight, more "practical": job, family, status, career, friendship, entertainment, health, and so on. But this is the most concrete topic, the one that concerns all of us, secretly seducing us and from which all our vital choices must depend.

Many people do not search thoroughly because of their superficial spirit: since they are taken up by immediate problems linked to the present, they prefer to pick wild fruit in the woods and play the rest of the time, rather than toiling in the fields to secure their future. When they are 20, they are too thoughtless; when they are 40, they are too busy; when they are 60, they are too tired; and when they are 80, it is too late.

Some, shaped by present materialism and agnosticism, think it naive and morbid to ask such lofty questions, because no grounded or reasonable answer exists, but only dogmatic solutions to be accepted blindly. This is not the case, as we shall see. Nobody is more morbid and naive than one who strives to discover the function of the parts and disregards the function of the whole machine.

Ecology is not only green

"People today live joyless in comfort. At the end of a long list of light, telephone, and gas bills, you can only glance at the bill from 'the funeral home' " ( Bruce Marshall). On the other hand, "life is not worth living if we are to waste it looking for greater comfort and a bigger income" ( Hans Urs von Balthasar). "We behave as if comfort were the main requirement, while we need something to give sense to our lives" ( François Mauriac). Since life is meaningless without justice and everlasting love, obviously the strongest interest should push us not to believe with sufficient reasons, but to search for sufficient reasons to believe.

Erich Fromm observes that for most people "industrial religion prevails today and makes human beings slaves to economy and to the machines they themselves have built with their own hands," slaves to "cybernetic religion," according to which they have transformed machinery into gods. Therefore not only water and air are polluted, but also consciences. Not only are the forests cut down, but, above all, human nature is contaminated and demotivated.

In the last decade some works have had a remarkable influence on the Western World, such as those by Frankl, Fromm, Cox, Marcuse, Delumeau, Solzenitsin, Toffler. They point out how today global dissatisfaction is more and more frequent. We meet it in fashionable boroughs and council houses, offices, schools, entertainment facilities.

It is not a depression caused by a serious misfortune or by a big failure, but by a *"tedium vitae,"* by disappointment and demotivation with no apparent reason. People who are not introverts, who plunge into the lively stream of activity, who are externally cheerful and sociable characters, are also afraid of being alone and facing the question they think has no answer: What is the meaning of life? Why does the hellish machinery of time yield friendship, beauty, health, love and then (quite often in a moment) destroy everything?

"Life's an enigma. Let us not think about it. Let's grasp good luck or anything pleasant, as long as it's there. Then. . . ." Which means life is meaningless. Imbued with the current agnosticism, they think an afterlife is absolutely groundless and mysterious, just like mermaids and winged lions, traceable to psychological need, just a value some wish to continue imagining for the sole reason that its perspective helps heal wounded hearts and greatly reduces the horror of annihilation.

As they always live on the verge of mental and spiritual depression, they easily fall into this state at the first hard knock in life. Where do anxiety, phobias, neurasthenia, all the entangled muddles psychiatrists cannot disentangle, the tensions, nervous breakdowns, insomnia, neurosis, anguish, desperation come from? What about suicides? Drugs? There is something much more serious than the alarming spread of drug addiction -- the total lack of values that our consumer society offers to youth.

We must admit we are living in a disappointed world. Even if incomes are higher and higher and sex freer and freer, people live in houses with no foundations, walk along roads with no destinations, and eat food that doesn't nourish. They perform, unconvincingly, the frenetic dance of life in the chaos of impressions staged by the eternal process of change in things.

*"Yes, man is disconsolate because in the continuously increasing masses we feel more and more lonely"* ( Franz Kafka). *"The end of man is anguish, the awareness of his fatality, from which all fears are born, even the fear of death"* ( André Malraux). *"Man is a useless passion"* ( Jean Paul Sartre), *"We fear our emptiness"* ( Cesare Pavese). *"It is a world where the fatality of a blind destiny and the slavery to instinctive passions are a burden"* ( Carlo Levi). Perhaps the true distress of the people of "developed countries" is the ignorance of the great goal for which we are destined.

### **Why should we believe in God and not only in humanity?**

"Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we bound for? What do we expect? What is expected of us?" With these universal human questions Ernst Bloch ( 1885-1977), a dissident Marxist philosopher, teaching in Leipzig and Tübingen begins his masterpiece: *The Principle of Hope*.

Are the answers Christian faith gives founded on facts and logic or are they to be blindly accepted? Is Christianity drawing to an end? Is it relevant to faith in God? Has religion still a future? Are morals possible even without religion? Is perhaps science sufficient? Is God essentially a human projection? ( Feuerbach), opium for people? ( Marx), vain relief of the vanquished? ( Nietzsche), an illusion for people still at a childish stage? ( Freud). Hasn't atheism been proved? Haven't even theologians abandoned the proofs of God's existence? Or are we to believe without reason?

Why should we believe in God and not simply in the human values of freedom, love, brotherhood and sisterhood? Why, besides relying on ourselves, should we trust in God? Besides work also in prayer, besides reason also in the Bible, besides our human life also in life-after-death? What does believing in God mean today?

These are not useless or curious questions, because they concern the essence of human life. We cannot be indifferent to them or claim to have no time to for them. These problems can be solved and need no particular philosophical skills, as countless ordinary people have discovered.

Philosophers, scientists, intellectuals and writers have, of course, stated the reasons why they believe. Philosophers such as Kant, Maine de Biran, Mazzini, Rosmini, Gioberti, Kierkegaard, Gratry, Ollé Lapruné, Boutroux, Blondel, Scheler, Bergson, Jaspers, Marcel, Chestov, Berjaev, Carlini, Guzzo, Lavelle, Le Senne, Maritain.

Scientists such as: Carrel, Einstein, Railegh, Severi, Fantappié, Marconi, Carl Gustav Jung, Teilhard de Chardin, Millikan, Eccles, Wald, Eigen, Kastler, Abdus Salam, Erikson, Frankl, Zichichi, Rubbia.

Writers such as: Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Bloy, Péguy, Claudel, Bernanos, Eliot, Chesterton, Mauriac, Solgenitsin, Graham Greene, Shusaku Endo, Okihito, Soloviev, Sigrud Undset, Papini, Ungaretti, Cronin, Frossard, Testori, Montherlant, Maximov, Pomilio, Singer, Roth, Ulivi, Chiusano.

*"The modern error, in my opinion,"* Jean Guitton writes, "is to think that this 'problem of God' only concerns faith, feeling, or speculation: it is also a problem proposed to reason."

So those who have solved their problems with an act of faith will benefit by realizing the logical motives behind it. Today, more than ever, atheism demands reasons for believing in God. If we wish to help those who have not yet reached faith and prevent ours from weakening, we must examine its foundations: not only feelings but also established facts; not only intuition but also reason.

### **Blaise Pascal and the reasons of the 'heart'**

Reason is at the origin of mathematics and experimental sciences and allows us to know the external world and to dominate it with technology. It helps us discover some fundamental truths about our nature and the meaning of life, through psychology, ethics, sociology, theoretical philosophy, scientific parapsychology, and fundamental theology.

Intuition is a global evaluation of things with no conscientious analysis of their single aspects and, as Pascal points out, by intuition we perceive truth also in the mathematical or scientific fields, preceding reason, showing reason the way to follow, consolidating its discoveries.

In the spiritual field, intuition is a source of moral and spiritual science where it is of great help to reason, to existential philosophy, the arts, to humanism, friendship, love, and faith. Intuition

introduces us into the deep knowledge of the human mind and above all our ego, the complex world of feelings and the noblest aspirations.

The first thinker to develop a theory of intuition, together with divine illumination, to achieve Christian faith, was Blaise Pascal. He did not have anything against reason he called "esprit de géométrie"; he was himself endowed with a keen intellect, and is remembered as a great mathematician, physicist, and engineer. Nevertheless, when in 1664 he was converted to a deep and enlightened faith, he observed that reason alone is not sufficient to attain it, and that rationalism prevents access to it. He had nothing against discursive reason, as long as it acts together with "esprit de finesse": spiritual intuition.

Spiritual intuition is called "feeling" or "heart" by Pascal, but it does not mean emotion. While the latter may be blind, the former can see. It sees, for instance, that honesty, freedom, justice, a particular act of justice, or freedom or honesty are particularly suitable to my spiritual nature and to any true person, even if they require hard sacrifice. We feel it immediately with no reasoning or scientific proofs, more clearly than if it were supported by such proofs, and sometimes the vision is followed by feelings. In this way intuitive faith can be called religious feeling.

As regards faith, intuition can "feel" that a particular doctrine is sublime, consistent with one's conscience, necessary to the practice of virtue and spiritual soundness, a source of peace and inner satisfaction, conforming one's own and other's spiritual experiences with the beauty of nature and the values of human life; it can cause spiritual progress, wisdom, and enlightening thoughts; it can explain the weighty and worrying existential problems of life, giving meaning to human life. Therefore doctrines must correspond, not only to our aspirations and to our conscience but also to the real world outside. In other words, intuition feels that what doctrines claim is true.

In this context, "the heart has its reasons, which reasoning doesn't know" can be seen in innumerable instances. "We know the truth, not only through reason, but also through heart. . . . From this knowledge of heart and instinct, reason must learn to base all its discursive activity."

The present crisis of moral values is therefore connected with the crisis of faith due to rationalism and to the decadence of spiritual intuition. To explain the value of intuition, Enrico Fermi, the scientist who won the Nobel Prize for physics in 1938, said that he always remembered with emotion, when, on a spring evening in Umbria, a peasant lying near him on the grass, looking at the starry sky exclaimed, "How beautiful! Yet some people say that God does not exist!" That peasant from Umbria, the famous scientist comments, could not read, but in his soul, preserved by an honest and hard life, there was a small corner where the light of God descended with a strength not very much less than that of the prophets and stronger perhaps than that of the philosophers.

### **You cannot fly with one wing**

A purely intuitive faith, which does not explicitly know the reasons for believing, is the commonest form, the most diffused among believers. As Jean Guitton writes: *"The Christians who can justify*

*their faith through reason are very few compared to the mass of believers.*" In simple, wholly unlearned people this can be understood.

In fact, intuitive faith has a moral certainty and validity. But even for people with average learning, who nowadays represent the majority in the western world, it is totally insufficient. It has two major drawbacks: first, it is more easily seized with the fear that its evidences are clearly subjective because it is unable to verify its inner truth by comparison with external truth. Second, it cannot dialogue with nonbelievers on matters of faith because they only believe in external facts and reason. The idea that faith is only emotionality and blind fideism is thus confirmed in them, and partly in the believers. In our opinion, those clergy and theologians who explain only the content and not the reasons for faith, make a serious mistake. They need to explain that reasoned faith is born from our deepest self, of common human experiences guided by external factors and by a God who is the origin of both the spirit and the external world, and, in both, God has left hints and traces of the divine presence.

For Pascal there are two excesses: one is to exclude reason and the other is to admit only reason. In fact, reasonable faith cannot be identified with the kind of rational certainty achieved with scientific proofs. Pascal assigns great importance to the fact that we often lack natural certainty, not only in religious questions but also in important everyday matters, and so we are often compelled to take steps while in doubt, or on the basis of unproven intuitions. "If we were to do nothing but wait for what is certain, we should do nothing in the religious field because it is not certain. But how many actions are undertaken in doubt: sea voyages, battles! Therefore should nothing be done, because nothing is certain? In religion there is more certainty than in believing we will see a tomorrow. Now, when we act for the future and for the uncertain, we act reasonably, because we must act for the uncertain, under the law of probability, which is proved."

This is what Kant calls 'practical reason,' through which he arrives at the existence of God and of life beyond death. "*In the question of God's existence or nonexistence,*" Hans Kiing writes, "not a judgement of pure reason but a decision of the whole person is required."

From Kant to the modern Wittgenstein, Carnap, Popper, and Kuhn, reason has been greatly discredited by some modern philosophers. Undoubtedly, those who tried to demolish it, have used the same intellectual tool; if, therefore, reason itself is so unreliable, their reasoning is not very valuable.

So detractors of reason defeat themselves more than reason. Reason may not be a goddess, as the French revolution and rationalists maintain, but neither is it so blind as some try to prove. Whenever we reason properly, we reach truth, not only in the field of physical phenomena, but also in moral, psychological, and social subjects. As a matter of fact, to make the norm "pure" reason, devoid of the completion of intuition, is to make the one-legged man the best runner, the one-winged bird the best flyer.

Reasonable faith keeps in touch with external facts and with science. Adorno rightly criticizes a religion and theology that ignores the findings of natural sciences. "Once religion . . . insisted that its truth held also in a cosmological sense it claimed it could not be separated from its concrete

material contents without damage. As soon as it leaves its material contents, it risks volatilizing into pure symbolism, which endangers its supposed truth."

Basic confidence in human reason derives, as Einstein observes, from the continuous observation that all natural laws are rational: they follow the same criteria as reason. "It is certain that at the basis of any delicate scientific work we find a conviction, similar to religious feeling, according to which the world is based on reason and can be understood.

## **The Tai-Chi and the reconciliation of the opposites**

Chinese culture is marked by the insatiable passion to harmonize opposites and the contraries. We Westerners, Leonardo Boff underlines, come from a tradition of exclusion. The two main principles are identity and contradiction. It would be useful to learn the dialectic of inclusion, in view of the crisis of the Western thought.

Chinese culture works on the principle of inclusion and of harmonization opposites: sky/earth, male/female, empty/full, sweet/sour, etc. The opposites are represented by the Tai-Chi symbol, a circle formed of two fish heads reproduced so that the end of one of the figures combines with the head of the other. The two opposites of Tai-Chi are Yin (female principle) and Yang (male principle) which must always unite and complete each other. I do not mean that Chinese thought fits perfectly, but starting from the above consideration, I would like to suggest that a reasonable faith is the synthesis of the male principle (rationality/science) with the female (intuition-affectivity).

This dialectical vision allows the construction of identity and unity of the open form because it includes its opposite, compelling human behavior to be communal and dynamic, always ready for new synthesis. Lao-Tse in the *Tao te ching*, the fundamental text of Taoism, says:

Tao (the way) is like an empty vessel  
from which yet you can draw  
and never fill.  
It has no bottom: it is the ancestor of everything.  
In it everything harsh is sweetened,  
all knots are untied,  
all reverberations subdued,  
all obstacles removed.  
It is a deep spring never drying up.

The human brain is composed of two hemispheres. Recent studies have discovered that the left hemisphere is used by the ego to carry on rational faculties and technical tasks; it is the dominant hemisphere, the one we use the most. In the right hemisphere, intuition, emotional faculty, and sentiment are most active; and it is the "feminine" in us that exploits it most. But only the person who harmoniously makes use of both hemispheres develops a complete personality, overcomes life obstacles better, reaches the only possible happiness and, if looking for God, reaches the most important goal in life: reasoned faith.

## **Vive la difference**

Psychologists such as Jung and Badouin observe that human life, in spite of the proclaimed equality of the sexes, is characterized by a predominance of the "male" mentality, the psychological stereotype of man. While in the past the "female" preserved her psychological femininity and, through love, influenced the "male" (even if she was externally dominated), today women tend toward equality with men, as they should, not only in work and in all personal rights, but also in ways of thinking and feeling. Women are moving toward psychological equality, instead of parity. Imbalance of head and heart cause serious crises of civilization.

*"In divine likeness God created man and woman"* ( Genesis1, 27). So the Bible presents a human being who is the image of God, as man-woman. The deep and lasting love between the two allows their union, their integration and intercommunication of interests and inclinations, their mutual psychological and spiritual completion.

But with the prevalence of the physical aspects of love created by our present permissiveness, deep love becomes too scanty, even void, and the spiritual completion of man and woman is lacking. Man and woman have lost the typical spiritual values that, united, would have made the image of God, and accordingly many find God less believable. Healing modern Western civilization means harmonizing and mutually integrating the moral and spiritual values of man and woman.

## **The techie and the poet**

Reason and intuition are like a technician and a poet: the former is practical but lacks feeling. The latter has wings but no practical sense. If they stand apart, on their own account, each of them lacks something fundamental to complete its personality.

Reason without spiritual intuition gives birth, in the present world, to rationalism, positivism, agnosticism, indifferentism, enormous scientific and technical development that, together with the lack of a true faith, produce moral underdevelopment and individual and social uneasiness.

A religious intuition ignorant of the reasons for believing is the source of fideism, which is faith as a private fact and opinion, as a strictly personal concern, as valid for me, but not for everyone, valid in my inner soul, but not in the practical field, a faith which to nonbelievers seems but a wish-to-believe devoid of objective basis.

Christ and his apostles preached reasonable faith: a) Based on exterior facts and on reasoning: "The works that my Father charged me with . . . bear witness of me" ( Jn. 5, 36; 10, 25; 14, 11). "So that you may know that the Son of man has the power to forgive your sins . . . . Arise, take up your bed and walk!" ( Mt. 9, Lk. 5, 24). "You know how to read the face of the earth and the sky but you cannot read the signs" ( Mt. 16, 2: Lk. 12, 54-57). "God's invisible perfections can be beheld with the intellect in the works he achieved [in nature]" ( Romans 1, 20).

b) Based on intuition and divine illumination (God offers to everyone searching with a sincere heart): "Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice" ( Jn. 18, 37). "Nobody can come to me unless the Father draws him" Jn. 6, 44). "Whoever has listened to the Father comes to me" ( Jn. 6, 45).

To approach God's kingdom through intuition but without reason is like an eye scanning the horizon and the far mountains without binoculars. Reason without intuition is an excellent pair of binoculars without eyes looking through them.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE AND FAITH**

#### **Is it true that nature does not show God' footprints?**

The reasons in favor of God's existence deduced from nature's organization and harmony were set aside by certain theologians, perhaps because they were frightened by Monod's and his followers' theories. Yet, nowadays they show new and sounder guarantees of authenticity and new motives to be of help to reason when dialoguing with faith. It is true that faith in the meaning of life shines forth more clearly today in both the intricate labyrinths of biology and scientific reasoning: nature's wonders, nowadays so greatly explored and discovered, are not scientific proofs, strictly speaking. Even the opinions of some scientists who deny nature's finality (casualists) are not sufficient reason to give up the external signs of faith, since such scientists have not demonstrated anything and only offered hypothetical objections that other scientists of the same calibre refuted.

A scientist who does not admit an intentional finality for complex and wonderful natural organisms often asserts, even explicitly, as main motive, the methodological principle, sacred to the nineteenth century science, that it cannot absolutely consider a cause beyond nature and not measurable as an explanation of natural facts. Yet, Albert Einstein said that a superior reason is revealed in the laws of nature. All rationality of both thought and human regulations is, in comparison, an absolute insignificant reflection." On the contrary, Jacques Monod affirms that the whole concert of nature is the result of errors and of casual false notes. He cannot help acknowledging spontaneously that a similar conception is really absurd. But the scientific method, he continues, compels us not to admit a question we have to answer with the word "God."

#### **God's rediscovery among scientists**

Since Monod spread casualism, certain theologians rather than discussing topics of biology and evolution "outdoors," prefer playing "indoors" only in the biblical field, where the scientist is usually incompetent and does not even want to enter. But it is neither a dialogue nor even a sincere quest for the truth when everyone retires into one's own kitchen garden without examining one's neighbor's products. Faith and science become two incommunicable worlds, "two parallel truths," and the average person is tempted to call the first "subjective" truth and the second "objective."

We noted how the Bible witnesses that God's existence can be known, first of all, through the harmony of nature, the harmony science studies. As regards God's revelation in nature it is not true that Jacques Monod has said the last word about science. There are today other scientists at his level who declare that his explanations on the origins and the developments of life need more explanation than the facts themselves they would like to explain. The weekly paper *Le Nouvel Observateur* made an enquiry among the French scientists and discovered that most of them believe in God. The

Giovanni Agnelli Foundation, published similar results for Italian scientists and the English astronomer Fred Hoyle, one of the most original thinkers of the twentieth century, asserts that "both the world and humanity at its center cannot be the result of chance and necessity, as Monod said. . . . The discovery of every new particle," he says, "call it 'W' or 'Z' as you will, shows unexpected architectures, mathematical harmonies of great beauty. The laws of physics reflect both an order and a coherence such as it is almost impossible not to think of a project."

For some decades, even referring to the greatest scientific discoveries of astrophysics and of the composition of the matter, the relationship between faith and science has been assuming new terms. Modern science admits the limits of its own method and its knowledge of reality and recognizes the possibility of other knowledge, not subject only to the experimental method. Therefore there will be new areas where faith and science can both dialogue with and complement each other, although they remain on different levels.

Gaspare Barbiellini Amidei, former Assistant Editor of *Corriere della Sera* and Professor of Sociology of Knowledge at Turin University, highlighted the relationship between faith and science centered on God's existence. One of his works, *God Rediscovery*, is entirely dedicated to these themes. In the seventh chapter, for instance, Professor Antonino Zichichi, one of the most important contemporary nuclear physicists, explains the composition of matter and, in a speech about the logic of the sub-elementary particles, concludes, "Whoever created the world, as Einstein said, could not have made a better choice."

Modern science does not take up a contentious attitude towards faith; in fact science itself, intent on discovering a total sense of the universe and of the laws of nature, seems to offer some traces towards the assertion of God's existence. We can cite in this connection a declaration by Arno Penzias, discoverer of the probable birth of the universe (Big Bang) and Nobel Prize winner for astrophysics in 1978. After reminding us that "there is never anything certain and definitive in science," he adds, "The true question I ask myself is: What is humanity and why should God care for us?"

In the two last centuries, dominated by rationalism, positivism, and materialism, the scientific theory tried to reduce the "pretense" to believe in God to folklore emotion. At the bottom of this struggle of modern atheism against religion, equivocally fed by scientific assumptions, there is by extrapolation the universal assumption that, if something hasn't been scientifically demonstrated, then it doesn't exist. Starting from the scientific assumption of verifiability, modern progress set out to turn God out from the palaces of history, closing to the mysterious tenant the door of intellectual knowledge. Today, on the contrary, as Barbellini notes, scientific knowledge itself and the more advanced fields of research laboratories do not look upon God as a conceptual obstacle to their method and to the contents of their investigation. Rather, God can become to science itself (this is Barbellini Amidei's basic thesis), a working hypothesis which helps to understand better and to decipher the sense of humanity and universe better: Thinking of God can help us understand humanity and the surrounding world.

"Those who believe in God, even in a context of reason and not of mere faith," writes Evandro Agazzi, Professor of Philosophy of Science, "can discover this advantage: they really can know, understand, and explain what unbelievers also know and believe and, besides that, can understand

certain dimensions of both life and human nature that unbelievers do not detect and which form the sense of life. Therefore, without any intellectual pride, but with clarity of perspective, we can say that the hypothesis of God's existence, although it is not operative within science, helps us to understand better what is beyond science and can give it a fuller meaning."

We can say more: since the beginning of the seventies there has been a trend we can call "inductive" in experimental science. It seems "to favor a certain way back to theocentrism." It is certainly a new and interesting phenomenon for modern culture, which goes under the name of "The Gnosis of Princeton." In science, in fact, we notice a "surprising tendency" to refer basic structures of laws and their discoveries to a "Superior Term," to either a Logos or "Superior Thought," that influences the world. "Rationality in the universe," the physicists, point out, could, as the physicist Olivier Costa de Beauregard asserted, "flow into eternity." Important researchers at Princeton, Pasadena, and other American centers of nuclear physics, studying this innate "rationality" in the cosmos, affirm that the structure of the universe postulates the existence of a Superior Rationality. "They are the first, after two centuries of positivism which denied all metaphysics and theology, to dare declare publicly that science leads them to a belief in a Mind Organizer of the world."

The famous physicist, Jn. Polkinghorne, Professor of Mathematical Physics at Cambridge University who became an Anglican Minister, in his book, *Science and Faith* points out that nowadays many theologians no longer dare to place, at the beginning of theology, the rational approach to God through the order of the universe, but they present the Transcendent only as a demand of the human spirit. "Nowadays natural theology (i.e., the quest for God through science) is not common among theologians. Besides, as regards modern science, contemporary theologians widely show a certain ignorance. Nowadays it seems that the scientist rather than the theologian is interested in exploring natural theology."

Paul Davies went as far as to write, "It may seem odd, but I feel that science paves the way to God with greater certainty than religion." Therefore we can say that theologians, who in this very moment are abandoning objective reason to deduce God's existence from phenomena, look like the besieged who hoist the white flag when the besiegers with the white flag, too, come to hand over their guns.

### **A fact has more authority than the Lord Mayor of London**

For most extrovert, "practical," shallow people, exclusively moral reasonings on the sense of life are assimilated and confused with the "abstruseness of metaphysics," looked upon as the most disappointing pastime. They appear to them as if they were castles in the air, very nice indeed, but which demand that we go down into the cellar to check the foundations. And these are given by facts. A fact, the English say, has more authority than the Lord Mayor of London. "God," Polkinghorne declares, "is not an easy abbreviation to speak exclusively of human needs. If we forget that God is the author of the great Book of the World, we sanction the divorce between reason and revelation."

"We live in a unique world," adds the Cambridge physicist-theologian, "and both science and theology explore different aspects of it. They can interact: theology by explaining the source of order and structure that science assumes and proves in its world investigation; science, through the

study of the conditions suitable to creation which must be satisfied by every description of the Creator and divine activity."

Finalism of nature and the meaning of life are topics that complement one other. The motives arising from the depths of consciousness prove that God is not primarily an explanation of interest only for the beginning of the universe and biology, but take root in human concrete life, and touch our feelings, thoughts, choices, actions -- the meaning of life itself. But nature's finalism is an objective confirmation. It is something touchable; like the painter's signature on every piece of art, it is the external and visible evidence that faith is not engendered by human need.

The data and the reasons of this chapter on biological finalism are taken mainly from two specialists who dedicated all their lives to this topic: Giovanni Blandino, Professor of Philosophy of Science at the Lateran Pontifical University in Rome and Vittorio Marcozzi, Professor of Science and Theology at the Gregorian Pontifical University. All I have done is to add quotations from several well-known scientists and some comments here and there which do not modify the substance.

If there is in the world something obviously outstanding that is not a human achievement, it is the high technology and fine art of living structures. As regards technology, living beings are -- or we should rather say, use -- highly regular structures, and do so with various types of regularity. The first type of regularity is morphological: the shape of living beings is the result of a complex of linear formations, regular surfaces, symmetrical parts, repetitions of similar structures (e.g., repetition of leafy, flowery cellular structures, eyes, lungs, limbs, etc.).

But the type of regularity that characterizes more closely living beings and which is not in inorganic natural structures, is functional regularity. This regularity is called objective finalism of the parts for the life of the whole organism. Finalism can be either objective or subjective (or intentional). We call objective finalism the unity of those structures (either mechanisms or living organisms) where each part fulfills a different function necessary or useful to attain a determined purpose. Subjective or intentional finalism, on the contrary, means the intention of reaching a determined purpose and the use of more or less suitable means to realize it.

We experience it directly either in our consciousness, or we know it through other people's witness. Lastly, we deduce it from certain people's behavior, or from structures where we note an objective finalism. Even putting aside for the moment the problem whether objective finalism in nature comes from intentional finalism and reveals a Creator's existence, we realize that it is largely present in living structures.

### **An automatic aluminum factory on the moon**

Even now while you are sitting reading without thinking in the least, in the dark and complex world of your organism, work is proceeding actively, planned economy goes on along its way with its technical problems, projects, attempts, failures, and successes, and every second, millions of new cells are generated to substitute for those that have already ended their work.

Cells are just a few microns (a thousandth of a millimeter) in size, and there are about  $32 \times 10^{12}$  in the human body. While they keep a certain substantial uniformity, they differ in various ways, all

depending on the specific functions they have. We have, thus, cells that secrete specific "juices" necessary to the organism, cells for contracting (muscular fibers), cells for conveying stimuli (nervous cells), cells to give consistency and support (cartilage and bone), etc.

The various activities that take place in a great industrial metropolis are like those in the complex work occurring in each cell, in a continuous process of manufacturing, storing, repairing, communicating, transporting, controlling and correcting work, waste disposal, administration, regulation of temperature and dosage of various substances.

Alfred Kastler, Nobel Prize for Physics in 1966, interviewed on what he thought of finalism in living beings, answered: "I would like to use a parable. Let's suppose that during one of the next moon flights, the unknown side of the moon is explored, i.e., the side we never see. Let us suppose the astronauts discover, by chance, an automatic factory which produces aluminum. Now, completely automated factories exist on Earth. On one side, they would see some excavators digging the soil and picking up the ore and on the other side aluminum bars coming out. They would find typical electrolysis apparatus, since aluminum is produced through electrolysis of an ore solution in cryolite. In other words, after examining the factory they would ascertain only normal physical phenomena perfectly explainable with the laws of causality. Should they perhaps conclude that chance created either such a factory, or some intelligent beings landed on the moon before them and made it?"

"Both these explanation are real. But I ask a question: would it be logical to think chance joined the molecules in such a way as to build such an automated factory? Nobody would accept this explanation. Well, in a human being we find an infinitely more complex system than an automated factory. It would seem absurd to assert than chance created such a being."

In every cell there are fifty-three billion protein molecules, 166 billion lipid molecules, 2900 billion "small molecules" among which glycidies, 250,000 billion water molecules and nucleic acids. Such substances are not amassed any old way, but form precise structures, each one of them with definite functions. The hyaloplasma contains RNA-messengers and RNA solubles, sugars, aminoacids, nucleosides, nucleotides, intermediate compounds and inorganic salts. It is a kind of deposit from which ribosomes, through RNA, draw and build up the various types of proteic substances. The nucleus and chromosomes create new cells to which they transmit, through DNA, all hereditary characteristics. Chondriomites produce the energy necessary for every process by means of ATE. Liposomes contain the necessary enzymes to dissolve determined substances.

"For each chemical reaction," Nobel Prize winner Francis Crick points out, "for each tiny step, in a chemical transformation, there is a special catalyst accelerating that step and only that one. Reactions occur at an extraordinary speed and, moreover, nature knows the rules of calculus better than we do." Notwithstanding such an amazing complexity and almost unimaginable reactive speed, coordination is astonishing. In fact, besides the unimaginable complexity of biological phenomena, what characterizes the phenomena of life, Alessandro L. Covàcs observes, is the high degree of coordination added.

## **The echo-systems**

Multicell organisms are made up of a number of organs, which are, for the multiple functions they have to carry out, enormously complex. They must solve the most difficult problems of chemistry, physics, engineering, mechanics, hydraulics, optics, etc. And they do so in a wonderful way by uniting and at the same time coordinating the various organs in the unity of the organism.

In animals, finalism of numerous apparatuses is completed by instincts, such as hunger. These instincts have their specific function for the life of the organism, i.e., they are means for its conservation. If the instinct of hunger did not exist the digestive organs could not carry out their task. In both animals and humans, there is a strict interdependence between vegetative and cognitive life: each is in function of the other. Vegetative life is necessary so that the cognitive can develop and vice-versa (in fact an animal dies if it is devoid of the use of its sensorial centers). There are, besides, ultra-individual finalisms, the purpose of which is life, not of the individual agent, but of others. The reproductive organs are a typical example. Two people, complementary agents, are needed for reproduction such that the simultaneous presence not only of their organs and instincts is necessary, but also their complements in the other sex.

Many forms of biological inter-individual correlations are possible. For instance, carnivores require herbivores and these in turn need vegetables. Both of them need vegetables because it is green plants that produce oxygen. Superior plants, then, require the existence of lower vegetables which fix either nitrogen or mineralize organic nitrogen.

These correlations are very general but there are even more examples of particular links: for instance, the relationship between plants subject to zoophilous pollination and marriage-maker animals carrying pollen. In all these cases the existence of certain living beings presumes the existence of specific others. The organs which form the former are not sufficient to maintain life, and require coexistence of the others.

## **Workers willing to do overtime**

We can see in living beings functions and actions which are regular as long the situation remains normal, but they change in response to changing circumstances, dangers, and extraordinary needs. For example, in the human organism white blood corpuscles circulate normally without any special activity. But if either microbes or harmful bacteria invade a part (e.g., a wound) the white corpuscles rush to the place and try to destroy the invaders, and succeed when they are not too numerous. Then, if the struggle is in doubt, special organs start producing white corpuscles in numbers adequate to the need in order to face danger.

In the case of a hemorrhage the organism makes use of other emergency measures. At first every blood vessel contracts and thus increases the relative value of the blood left, so that the arterial pressure is regulated and circulation can continue. The interstitial liquid in the connective tissue and muscles passes through the wall of the capillary vessels and penetrates into the circulatory system. Patients suffer intense thirst and the water they drink at once causes the blood plasm to reassume its previous volume. The spare red corpuscles come from the organs where they were stored. Finally

the bone marrow starts making cells more quickly and these go into the blood to restore its normal circulation.

Regeneration is a faculty all animals have to reshape a part removed from their body. We have already mentioned blood regeneration. The most common and wonderful phenomenon is cicatrization, which implies many changes of the normal activities of the organism. Broken bones join by means of cells coming from other parts, and also because of transformation of cells. Alexis Carrel, the famous Nobel Prize winner for anatomy asserts: "In a limb is broken by collision, a strip of muscle, near the broken bone, changes into cartilage. Cartilage runs along the bone in the still soft mass, joining the two broken extremities. And the continuity of the bone recovers by means of a substance of the same nature. For some weeks, necessary to regeneration, a long series of chemical, nervous, circulatory, and structural phenomena occur and intervene."

In short, while artificial devices could be compared to factories where each worker stands at the assembly line and always carries out the same work mechanically, a living being's devices consist of adaptable workers, who work for their own interest because they share in the advantages and are always ready either to do overtime or to change their work if the firm's welfare requires so.

The power of substitution is equally favorable to biological finalism. With this expression we mean that the capacity organisms, even higher organisms, have to restore a suppressed function, either thoroughly or in part, due to removal or injury of the organ by replacing another one or other parts of it. If, e.g., we remove a kidney, the remaining kidney at once increases its volume and weight so that the functional recovery is complete. The same thing happens with the lungs, pancreas, ductless glands. As the renowned neurosurgeon, Penfield, discovered and described, many functions of the brain which are regularly carried out by determined parts, if these are injured or removed, are taken over by other parts. Experience shows, writes George Cervos, neuropathologist at Berlin University, that cerebral locations are not at all inflexible; in fact, injured regions can be perfectly helped by regions left intact.

Physiological adaptation is the capacity of the living organism to react to external and internal causes trying to alter or subvert its equilibrium. Thus the living being adapts itself, with various methods and changes of functions, to cold, less oxygen in the mountains, excess of oxygen, lack of water and food, etc.

The organism is continuously injured by numberless agents which can cause serious troubles or even death, such as infectious bacteria, toxins, or substances foreign to the organism. It defends itself by means of various actions and by producing adequate reactions, e.g., coughing to expel foreign bodies, or reagents, e.g., the antiseptic power of lysozyme in the saliva, or hydrochloric acid in gastric acid. The bile, too, exerts an antiseptic action; if, notwithstanding such defence, some bacteria are absorbed by the bowels and reach the liver, here they are swallowed up by Kupffer's cells. We have already mentioned the blood's defence system by means of either leucocytes or white corpuscles. The organism has the power, still mysterious to us, to recognize alien substances belonging to other organisms and built up by others, and since they threaten its integrity, it expels them by means of substances made up ad hoc called antibodies.

## Casualists and finalists

What is the origin, we wonder, of this immense, boundless exhibition of technology and art that is nature? The original problem of living structures obviously involves that of finality. Once upon a time living beings did not exist. Now they exist in almost an inexhaustible variety of shapes and functions. We have to face the problem: how were they formed? With Charles Darwin and modern science we think the hypothesis of evolution is valid; we believe the single animal and vegetable species are not the immediate object of divine action, but the result of a long and toilsome evolution.

There are two basic types of theories on evolution:

a) Theories of oriented natural laws (Finalists). The central idea of these theories is that the production of such regular and functional structures as living beings cannot be attributed to mere chance, but to chance led by laws innate in matter, oriented or preferentially allowing the formation of increasingly more complex and perfect structure types. The essence of these theories is, therefore, anticausalism.

Several famous scientists in various biological fields, such as Alfred Kastler (Nobel Prize for Physics, 1966), Manfred Eigen (Nobel Prize for Physics, 1967), O. H. Schindewolf, Karl von Frisch (Nobel Prize for Medicine, 1973), G. Colosi, E. Guyénot, P. P. Grassé, J. Piveteau, P. Leonardi, J. Hurzeler and others, accept this explanation. What is important is that, not only biologists, but also paleontologists, such as Schindewolf, Leonardi, Piveteau, Hurzeler, Zoller, A. Remane, et al., who studied the order of the appearance of living beings, also accept this hypothesis. b) Theories of "chance and selection" (Casualists).

These theories explain the origin of life and the subsequent evolution fundamentally in the following terms. Let us suppose that, by chance, a first very simple structure able to reproduce is formed. The probability that once such an organism is formed (very simple compared with other living forms, but really extremely complex) is very unlikely in itself. But, granting time for the conditions of such a formation on Earth to be long enough, such an organism could have gradually been formed.

As soon as that first organism was formed, multiplication and evolution of life became inevitable. In various organisms derived from various casual agents, changes in genes, the carriers of hereditary characteristics, then occur with all probability. Many of these will be unfavorable, but some will be favorable. Then the descending heirs of favorable changes will inevitably prevail, in the struggle for life, over those heirs of unfavorable changes. The result is already an improving evolution. This continues endlessly and will produce organisms of many different species, all fit for life, as we can verify.

Renowned scientists such as E. Padoa, G. Montalenti, G. G. Simpson, J. Huxley, G. Heberer and Jacques Monod (Nobel Prize for Medicine, 1965), author of the very popular *Chance and Necessity*, accept this theory called either "synthetical" or casualist or Neo-Darwinism.

## **Manfred Eigen and the improbability of mere chance**

We call mere chance concomitance of various causes meeting in their action and producing an unusual effect, although their encounter and their production have not been foreseen and wanted by an intelligent being. Professor A. Cressy Morrison (former President of the Science Academy of New York), in 1944 in his book, *Man Does Not Stand Alone*, wrote: "We are still at the dawning of the scientific era, and all new knowledge reveals a clever Creator's work in a more obvious way.

"Let us suppose we put ten coins marked one to ten in our pocket and shuffled them well. Try to take them out in order from the first to the tenth, putting back each time the one taken out and shuffling it with the others. Mathematics tells us that the probability of taking out number one is one out of ten; to take out number one and two successively is one out of a hundred, to take out number one, two, and three sequentially is one out of a thousand and so on. The probability of taking out all the coins one after another, from number one to ten in sequence, is one out of ten billion."

By reasoning in the same way we can conclude that the conditions necessary for the existence of life on Earth are so numerous that they cannot exist in a suitable relationship merely by chance. It is very important for our problem to *distinguish mere chance from chance directed by finalist laws of nature, favoring the production and development of living structures*. We have mere chance when the phenomenon takes place, although there is no natural factor favoring its realization. To give an example out of evolution, we have mere chance when in a gambling house the number we bet comes out, given that the roulette is perfect and correct and does not tend to stop on certain numbers. On the contrary we verify oriented chance, when a phenomenon happens in a context where certain natural factors favor it. Going back to the previous example, chance would be oriented if the roulette were fixed: it often stops (by chance) on certain numbers.

Another instance of mere chance would be if, mixing up white and black balls in a box, two sections formed, one white and one black. Chance would be oriented if the two fields formed because, for instance, all the white little balls are magnetized. The mixing of the little balls would be casual but all "successful" combinations would remain.

According to the Neo-Darwinists, the first living molecule, DNA, capable of self-reproduction, originated by a purely casual combination of chemical elements. Manfred Eigen, Nobel Prize winner, explains that this idea does not satisfy the physicists, for statistical reasons. The simplest DNA gene is a chain of 300 amino acids, 300 positions, each of which can be occupied by four nucleotides. The probability that the only "right" molecule is formed among the myriads of chemically possible "wrong" combinations is one out of a number which is 72 followed by 108 zeroes, an "endless" number. If we filled the universe (diameter: 20 billion light years) with the smallest atom, hydrogen, compressed to the maximum, the total number of atoms would be 72 times less than that number.

The probability that life is due to mere chance, Eigen goes on, is, therefore, practically nil. The atoms necessary to the formation of the first molecule can be found at a distance of billions of lightyears and the duration of the whole universe is not enough for their meeting.

## **The laws of mere chance**

Mere chance has been studied by modern higher mathematics, and in statistical studies some laws continuously used were deduced from this study.

1. The first law of mere chance is irregularity.

By throwing up a little bunch of thin sticks in the air there is some probability that some of them will form a geometrical shape. But the probability geometrically decreases to become practically impossible as the shape is more complex and regular.

2. Mere chance is anti-unitary,

In mere chance we always notice the absolute lack of a plan that regulates and unifies all parts. On the contrary, we find a plan very clearly in the works of art or technology of an intelligent being. Even here, the more numerous the parts the closer the unity they form, so probability geometrically diminishes, to the extent of becoming practically nil, that they were put together by chance.

3. Mere chance is necessarily inconstant.

If chance had originated, by a "miracle of luck," a complicated assembly of parts aiming at the same goal, immediately afterward it would destroy it, because the preservative action favoring some lucky combination is absolutely contrary to its nature as a blind force, and even more so its repeated production, or series.

4. Mere chance is not gradual.

Casualists admit that it is extremely improbable that during the whole existence of the universe the sudden casual formation of a structure, as regular as that of a living cell, could have been verified, even once. However, they think that slow and gradual formation, influenced by selection, is possible and probable during the same period.

But the casualist assumption is not exact if it operates with mere chance, without natural finalist laws. It has been shown by the calculation of probability that it is more likely for an industrial complex to be created all of a sudden, by mere chance, than for simple machines to be formed gradually, avoid being destroyed at once, improve, become perfect, and produce more and more complicated and efficient devices until they form an industrial complex. In fact, gradualness supposes serial reproduction of miraculous cases more and more complex and all in sequence in the same line of progress. Therefore we can enunciate the fourth law of chance: mere chance is not gradual.

## **A microscopic computerized factory**

Life, although by far superior to a working assembly of devices, is characterized by the very high level of organization present in organisms. Inside each cell there are, as we saw, molecules carrying out precise tasks of every kind useful to a living being: containment, support, transformation of substances, transmission of messages, catalyzation (acceleration of chemical reactions), dosage, regulation, control, etc. The molecules carrying out the greater part of these delicate tasks are the proteins. In our body, alone, there are some 100,000 different types. Enzymes, hormones, antibodies, skin keratin, actin, and myosin, which allow the muscles to contract, are proteins.

All proteins have the same basic structure, i.e., they consist of less complex elements called amino acids. In nature only some twenty different amino acids exist but all the proteins can be obtained by varying their number and disposition. The amino acids are the same as the letters of the alphabet we use to write millions of completely different books. Or they are like elementary pieces to make robots fit for whatever sort of work, machines and electronic devices of every kind.

The cell is the same as a microscopic factory capable of manufacturing from time to time devices necessary to it and specialized in the manufacturing of a type of appliance which it exports when the organism requires.

The secret of life is hidden in this marketing capability by means of which the organism carries out market research and orders the suitable apparatus in the right quantity at the right moment, an extremely delicate task considering the complexity of the protein molecules.

The formulas of all protein molecules and the quantities and times of production are contained in the software of an enormous basic molecule present in every cell, deoxyribonucleic acid or DNA.

The information codified in DNA is requested, copied, transferred, read, and applied by special molecules (RNA) and allows the amino acids to assemble in the right sequence and make the protein needed at that very moment.

Not only that, but by transmitting a copy of this molecule (DNA is equivalent to a supercomputer) to the progeny, an organism can create another perfectly functioning organism capable of synthesizing proteins with needs and capacities similar to its own.

### **The reasonable faith of Planck and Einstein**

Calculations similar to those of Manfred Eigen, which exclude the casual formation of the first living cell, have been made by Max Perutz, (Nobel Prize for Chemistry, 1962). One protein molecule, for example, consisting of 539 amino acids arranged precisely according to their exact sequence, to be formed by mere chance, would require a much greater space than our universe, crammed with amino acids of all twenty existing types, synthesizing among themselves for thousands of billions of years.

Mere chance, then, as George Wald (Nobel Prize for Medicine, 1967) illustrates, would at once destroy any useful and functional combination: "Spontaneous dissolution is far more probable and proceeds much more rapidly than spontaneous synthesis. For instance, the union of amino acids one after the other, to form a protein, has little probability of being achieved, but their decomposition is much more probable, and therefore proceeds more rapidly. We are in a worse situation than Penelope waiting for Ulysses. Every night the patient Penelope used to undo work done during the day. But with amino acids, a night would have been sufficient to undo the work of a century."

But one protein molecule would be of no use, Wald goes on: "Proteins are a majestic formation, awfully complicated and endlessly various. Difficulties arise here. It is not enough for proteins to be

in the right amount and exact proportions: it is also necessary for them to settle in an exact configuration, exactly right."

Professor Jn. Tyler Bonner, famous biologist from Princeton University, studied plankton, microorganisms which are substantially the same as primeval seas, similar to primitive seaweed. Speaking of this tiny monocellular plant, he writes: "It offers us a picture of an exceptionally complex chemical factory, with many parts, many mechanisms, stabilizing checks. It can keep on endlessly, can replace, by synthesis, the missing parts, can grow and, besides, can also build up something equal to itself. It is obvious that its inner part has no devices, no wheels. It contains, on the contrary, an enormous quantity of protein molecules. It contains an average of about 200,000 billions. This baffling thought strikes the imagination so much that every purpose of scanning how this unity crammed with trillions of protein molecules works, seems to be out of our intellect's reach."

In each protein the order of the components is very rigid. Doctor Fredrick Sanger (Nobel Prize for Physics, 1958 and 1980), discoverer of insulin, one of the simplest proteins in the DNA sequence, writes: "It is enough to change the place of one of the 96 amino acids to make it inefficient; we get another protein which has nothing in common with insulin, and is, therefore, incapable of protecting that particular metabolism."

We saw that mere chance, without the spur of natural finalist laws, cannot prepare one protein molecule, and we noted through Max Perutz's mathematics that neither the entire space of the universe nor billions of years of its life would be enough. How can we claim that chance succeeds in giving the configuration to the million protein molecules necessary to primitive seaweed?

But what are proteins, even the most gigantic ones, compared with the DNA ribbon, with some billions of nucleotides? The discovery of DNA in 1954 by Crick and Watson was a hard blow for casualists. DNA, without which the primitive seaweed could not have reproduced, is the summit of natural prodigies and its casualist explanation is the peak of absurdity.

As Isaac Bashevis Singer (Nobel Prize for Literature, 1978) said: "Several materialistic thinkers attributed to the blind mechanism of evolution more miracles, improbable coincidences, and prodigies than all the world theologians could ever attribute to God."

Philosopher Étienne Gilson writes: "When asked why these organized beings exist, casualists answer: it is chance. Now, anyone can make a masterly stroke at billiards by chance, but when a billiard player does a series of a hundred, asserting that he did them by chance, this would be a poor explanation."

Albert Einstein, who also counted billions of years and players, declared: "Whoever is involved in scientific research cannot help being convinced that a Spirit reveals itself in what we call the laws of nature. A Spirit by far superior to human talent, in front of which human beings, with our modest powers, have to feel humble."

And the great Max Planck adds: "It is an unquestionable datum of physical research that the elementary bricks of the world do not lie one beside the other in isolated groups with no cohesion,

but they are tightly connected according to a unique plan, or, in other words, in all natural events reigns a universal law which can be known, to a certain extent, by us.

"Therefore nothing forbids us -- indeed our intellectual nature demands a unitary conception of the world -- to identify the two powers operating on every thing, yet full of mystery, i.e., the order of the scientific world and the God of religions."

### **Jacques Monod's contradictions**

Jacques Monod, in his book, *Le Hasard et la Nécessité*, published in 1970, gives a precise and clear summary of the latest discoveries of modern genetics and attempts a philosophical interpretation of them. But whereas his scientific data are fully worthy of respect, many philosophers and scientists point out that his philosophical interpretation is extremely weak.

His methodological starting point is "the principle of objectivity," a postulate of the scientific method, consisting in *a priori* and systematic refusal of any interpretation of phenomena in terms of finalism and "project."

"It [the principle of objectivity] should be understood," Pedro Dalle Nogare, Professor of Philosophical Anthropology, writes, "as a 'methodological' principle and not as an assertive principle, i.e., scientists as such, as they conduct observations, experiments, and research, must not be concerned with final causes, i.e., the finality of objects they study, but solely the immediate and nearest causes explaining the phenomena examined. They therefore can and must somehow disregard finality, but cannot deny it if it is proved by other ways, or if they cannot prove its nonexistence. In fact, the absence of intentional finalism in nature has not been absolutely proved, as Monod himself acknowledges: 'A mere postulate (the principle of objectivity), it will never be proved, since, obviously, it is inconceivable to think of an experiment capable of proving the nonexistence of a project, a pursued aim, in any point of nature.' "

Monod's error is that instead of leaving out finality [or "bracketing" it, as Husserl would say], as the principle of objectivity required when rightly understood, he denies it entirely. On the one hand he declares teleonomy (as he calls finality "for objective decency"), "a notion essential to the very definition of human beings, whereby they differ from the other beings in the universe." Then, on the other hand, he denies this "miracle" of teleonomy because it is contrary to the principle of objectivity. "In other words Monod means, on the one hand, that living beings display a wonderful finality, but, on the other hand, that the principle of objectivity forbids us to admit any finality." A rule of good reasoning is not to affirm anything beyond what is shown. The violation of this rule is called, using a modern term, extrapolation, which is exactly what Monod does.

It is worth mentioning in this connection the statement of François Jacob, his Nobel Prize co-winner, who writes: "Time and arithmetic forbid thinking evolution is solely the product of a succession of micro-events, a series of mutations which occurred by chance. To cast lots, one after the other, subunit by subunit, each of the hundred-thousand protein chains making up a mammal's body, would require a time by far exceeding the length attributed to the solar system."

Monod declares that natural selection alone drew all the music of the biosphere from a source of noise, but it is obvious that without instincts and their finalized needs, to be in tune with the music, the noises would not have become a symphony. Darwin wrote in *The Origin of Species* that by "rejecting what is bad and accumulating what is good, (natural selection) works . . . to the improvement of every organized being." But, without a need finalistically aiming at what we call "good," there can be neither rejection of "evil" nor accumulation of "good."

It is worth noting that Lévi-Strauss was brought by structuralist analysis to recognize the right to full scientific citizenship to the concept of finality in nature: "Structuralism is decidedly teleological; after long proscription by scientific thought still imbued with mechanistic theory and empiricism, structuralism gave finality back its due place by making it worthy of respect again."

Finality in nature is so undeniable that Monod, after turning it out of the door, was compelled to introduce it again through the window under another name (teleonomy). Kastler agrees with Jacob in commenting on Monod's negative attitude towards the evidence of finalism in nature with the following words: "He ( François Jacob) says that biologists are more or less in the same situation as a man courting a girl and annoyed about confessing it. The girl is finality. . . . To this hidden tie the concept of program now confers a legal configuration. . . . I think all that is true. In order not to speak of finality the word teleonomy is invented. Monod is forced to accept the existence of a teleonomy, i.e., a project, a program worked out by the evolution of living beings."

### **Vladimir Shcherbak and life brought by extraterrestrials**

In 1970 Professor Jacques Monod firmly declared that mere chance, operating for four and a half billion years, Earth's age, created the first living being and from it, with genetic mutations and natural selection, made all other living beings evolve. "This hypothesis," he said, "is the only conceivable one, since it is the only one compatible with reality, as observation and experience show us."

We do not obviously contest the famous scientist's data, but only the conclusions from his hypothesis about mere chance which enter the field of philosophy, where Monod honestly admits his little competence. As regards Bergson's thought he writes: "Prisoner of my logic and incapable of completing global intuitions, I feel incompetent."

Incompetent to discuss Bergson's philosophy, he nevertheless does not give up trying, Marc Oraison points out, as he does not stop discussing Teilhard de Chardin's biological philosophy, which, according to him, "does not deserve any consideration." While it is through philosophy that Bergson reaches the Intelligence which leads the biological evolution through philosophy, Teilhard gets there through philosophy and science.

Today many scientists acknowledge that the four and a half billion years Earth has existed, considering mathematical laws of mere chance, are ridiculously insufficient for the casual formation of even one protein molecule, as Perutz proved.

In February, 1989, Professor Vladimir Shcherbak, a researcher at the University of Alma-Ata in Kazakhstan, caused a sensation when he announced his hypothesis that the first monocellular living

being had been created and brought upon the Earth by extraterrestrials. With his hypothesis Shcherbak confirms what Francis Crick and Robert Watson have recently recognized: the biological processes at the basis of life are so complex that we cannot explain their origin on Earth through mere chance.

As Giovanni Blandino, Professor of Philosophy of Gnoseology and Science at the Lateran Pontifical University, explains, and as finalist scientists declare, four billion years were sufficient to produce living organisms only because chance needs to be led by natural laws that are steered to facilitate the gradual formation of biological structures.

Shcherbak turns to phantom extraterrestrials of whom no one has ever found traces. But even if they existed (casualism takes shelter in the unknown), finalist natural laws would still have been necessary to organize their hypothetical brain and body. Therefore the problem has merely been shifted and not solved, not even hypothetically.

Today most scientists think that about 15 billion years ago matter was compressed at a thousand degrees, and that certainly the possibility of life did not exist all over the universe. The hundreds of billions years necessary to form the first protein molecule of the hypothetical extraterrestrials are missing to mere chance. Just formed, it would have been immediately destroyed, always by mere chance.

On the contrary, millions of protein molecules and all of them in the right sequence, would have had to exist to form the first monocellular living being endowed with DNA and therefore capable of reproducing to generate the hypothetical extraterrestrials later.

### **Abdus Salam and the beauty of nature**

As we are compelled by mathematics to abandon the extraterrestrials and to go back to Earth, let's admit absurdly that mere chance formed the first single cell living being with DNA. How can we explain the appearance of complex organs in which there is coordinated coexistence of all different and complementary parts? Evolution without natural preferential laws, caused by only casual factors and natural selection, does not explain the appearance of functional organs.

An organ, in order for it to give some, however slight, supremacy in the struggle for life to the living being which possesses that organ, needs to function, even if only in a primitive and rudimentary way. This implies that all its essential parts are present simultaneously, and in the right position, right from the start.

This is why, if the beginning of a new organism in a living being were formed by chance, through genetic micromutation, it would disappear very soon thanks to chance itself, because it would not give the least biological superiority to that living being over its competition.

The essential parts of the organ would, by mere chance, have to appear at the same time, which is as improbable as the sudden appearance, by means of an earthquake, of a factory capable of working.

It is not enough. The marvelous beauty of nature, the symmetry and aesthetic value of the living structures are facts which should be neither forgotten nor undervalued. These facts cannot be called humanity's own creation, because those facts obviously show order, harmony, unity of multiple parts in the same structures outside us. Besides, they involve precise correlation of external realities and our internal aesthetic taste. We cannot say that beauty coincides with functionality, as we can observe in most parts of devices made by man. Therefore can we suppose that authentic, objective beauty was created by chance? Chance is disorder, chaotic composition. And, above all, elegance, symmetry, harmony of the shapes and colors do not give any practical superiority to the living being possessing them, so that its survival and the transmission of its qualities to progeny may be favored. As Nobel Prize winner Abdus Salam says, we can meet God, even in this reality of nature and beauty. Science, with its approach to a more intimate and deeper vision of natural beauty, can become a true and real "religious experience" urging us to overcome the rigid division of reality into "natural" and "supernatural."

### **Conditions for the formation and survival of life on Earth**

The necessary conditions for life on Earth are many and complex.

- a) The Earth spins on its own axis at a speed, at the Equator, of 1600 kph. If it spun at 160 kph, days and nights would be ten times longer: during the long day the scorching sun would burn vegetation, and during the long night every surviving shoot would be killed by the intense cold.
- b) The surface of the sun, source of our life, has a temperature of 5500 degrees and the Earth is far enough so that it warms us as much as we need and not too much. If it sent us only half of the present radiation we would die of cold, whereas we would roast if it sent us one and a half times the amount.
- c) The angle of the earth's axis,  $23.5^\circ$  from the vertical, gives us the seasons; if this inclination did not exist, the ocean vapors would move towards north and south creating icy continents.
- d) If the moon were, for instance, 80,000 km. from us instead of being at the distance it is now, the tides on Earth would submerge all continents twice a day and even mountains would be swept away by erosion.
- e) If oxygen were stored up in rocks, the earth's crust would be thicker by around three meters, but no form of life would be possible.
- f) If all carbon dioxide and oxygen were dissolved in the oceans, the water would be only one meter higher, but vegetable and animal life could not exist.

### **The anthroic principle**

An unmistakable sign of a Creative Intelligence who set up certain targets, and used the appropriate instruments to reach them, is the exact correspondence between results and means which leads to realization. Such a sign is visible in nature, not only in cellular and organic structures, with natural selection and evolution, but even in physical and chemical laws not subject to evolution. It is as though each piece of the immense mechanism of the atomic and infraatomic laws, every gear, spring, hinge, transmitter, valve, and bolt were marked, "FIL": "Finalized to Intelligent Life." Or it is as though, in an automated factory, the various robots were exclusively programmed to produce a certain type of car.

The "anthropic principle" was first suggested by Robert H. Dicke, of Princeton University, who observed that all physical and chemical laws are ordered with precision for the evolution and preservation of intelligent life in the cosmos. The anthropic principle was subsequently enunciated by Brandon Carter of Cambridge University as follows: "Cogito, ergo mundus talis est," i.e., the basic constants of Nature are chosen in such a way that there is self-consciousness in the Universe. Teilhard de Chardin arrived at similar conclusions starting from the study of biological evolution in the wider context of cosmic evolution. Professor Giuseppe Arcidiacono of Perugia University writes: "In the light of the anthropic principle we can understand better some important features of our universe," which we intend to examine:

- a) The speed of cosmic expansion: . . . . In our universe the expansion speed equals that of the escape, which made the condensation matter in galaxies and stars possible. If the expansion speed had been less than the escape, the Universe, after a phase of expansion, would have collapsed too soon for the appearance of life. Vice versa, if the expansion speed had been greater than the escape, matter would disperse before condensing into galaxies and stars.
- b) The value of the gravitational constant. Another important coincidence explainable by the anthropic principle is why gravitational force is so much weaker than electromagnetic force. If gravity had been stronger, our sun would have worn itself out a lot earlier before human beings appeared on Earth. Besides, the intensity of the gravitational force is strictly connected to the dimensions of the universe, to the cosmic speed, and to its age.
- c) The age of the universe and gravitation. The universe, due to its expansion, reduces density, and there is a strict bond between its quantity and its age. If the density of the universe had been greater, attraction would have stopped its expansion, causing its collapse, before life appeared. Vice versa, if matter had been less dense, the expansion would have been too rapid and the galaxies, the stars and the planets would not have formed.

Let us now examine some important "coincidences" in the fields of microphysics and astrophysics.

- a) The proportion between protons and neutrons. Shortly after the Big Bang, protons and neutrons were formed, but since the former were in more numerous number than the latter, only 20% of helium as opposed to hydrogen was formed. If, on the contrary, from the start we had had the same number of protons and neutrons, all the hydrogen would have been transformed into helium in a short time. But if the stars began from the phase of helium combustion, it would have taken only some hundred million years, instead of the billion years necessary to the formation of planets and the appearance of life. Besides, the planets would have lacked hydrogen, with consequently a shortage of water and chemical substances necessary to life.
- b) The intensity of the nuclear force. F. Dyson observed that the possibility of the formation of living being depends strictly on the intensity of nuclear forces. "If they were superior even by just a little, helium would have been formed rapidly and there would have been no stars, such as the sun, with emission of energy necessary to support life. By discovering these and other 'connections'

like those of the 'Swiss Railways,' the most recent scientific research reached the Anthropic Principle. Thus, after laboriously climbing the highest summit of knowledge, the scientists find themselves there calmly awaited and complimented by a group of theologians who had been sitting

there for centuries." "In its general structure," Nicola Dallaporta, Professor of Cosmology at Padua University writes, "the picture of the Big Bang . . . is accepted by a large majority of physicists today."

Extrapolations of this picture towards the future are less reliable. They foresee the universe either frozen because of expansion or burnt out because of contraction in a billion years time. The situation of the universe before the explosion and the slow present expansion is quite hypothetical. We are talking about a temperature in the region of a hundred billion degrees. On the contrary the theory that the universe spreads from a point marking the beginning of time, 15 billion years ago, when no type of biological life could exist, is extremely reliable.

It is not necessary to consider the Big Bang theory, the up-to-date version of the Creation narration, but since it is the more scientifically plausible theory, it is reasonable to take it into consideration and notice how it arrives, according to renowned astronomers and physicists, at the "Anthropic Principle" and Finalism.

"It is well known," Dallaporta writes, "that the basic laws of physics depend on: (a) certain fundamental constants: the speed of light, gravitational constant, Planck's constant, charge and mass of the electron, mass of the proton, constants of the strong and weak interactions, all endowed with accurately measured and well defined values; and (b) the fact that cosmology has a certain number *a priori* data, measured by us, such as Hubble's expansion constant of the cosmos, the lifetime of the stars and the universe, the age of the sun, of the Earth and so forth."

All these numbers, in fact, are the only possible among an infinity of others, so that life, and then human intelligence, could arise in the universe. A universe corresponding to different data would have been empty and uninhabited.

In a much shorter time than 5 billions years "heavy elements such as oxygen and carbon, essential both for the formation of the earth and the organic compounds which living matter consists of, would not have had the time to form in sufficient quantity in the starry nucleosynthesis. If the time had been longer, let us say a hundred billion years, stars such as the sun, as a consequence of evolution, would have become either red giants or white dwarfs absolutely unsuitable to nurture life on earth."

Even the physical constants of type (a) could not differ greatly from their measured value without denying the possibility of the formation of life. For instance, "if the constant of strong interaction which rules nuclear forces had been lesser by even a small percentage than what it is, the first composite nucleus, the deuteron, the union of a proton with a neutron, could not have been formed and helium and all the subsequent heavier nuclei such as carbon could not have been formed. If it had been higher, the diproton, a composite of the union of two protons would have been formed and that would have implied, at the time of the cosmic nucleus synthesis, the almost total conversion of hydrogen into helium. Thus in both cases, either through lack of carbon, or lack of hydrogen, the biological composites could not have formed."

To be faithful to the exclusion of finalism a certain number of physicists had to go back to the fanciful and fabulous hypothesis of an infinite number of universes "all equal for the kind of laws

which rule them, but with variable values of the basic constants in all possible ways. For all these other universes the constants would be such as not to allow the onset of life, whereas only in ours it can develop, since it is the only one which has the right constants."

"We have to ask ourselves," Dallaporta goes on, "how much the hypothesis of infinite universes is really a physical hypothesis or, on the contrary, wholly metaphysical, since it can never be checked or experienced. . . . And therefore, if to explain the verifications of the Anthropic Principle it is necessary to appeal to another metaphysics, is it not better to refuse the pseudometaphysics of infinite universes and return to true metaphysics? And this without ignoring that in humans, besides the intellectual category of causality there is also the category of finality. This, in turn, can easily suggest the idea that the basic constants have their values so that life had to spring from the cosmos, or the cosmos was formed as it is with the purpose that a thinking being could be generated in it."

### **A living being differs totally from a mechanism**

But of all the reasons quoted here in support of finalism, the strongest has still to be considered. It is the essential heterogeneity between material structures and instincts, machines and feelings, mechanisms and intelligence, devices and living beings.

The proteins, DNA and RNA, and even more the eye, ear, the nervous system, the circulatory system, and the brain, are extremely complex structures, as complicated as huge computers, i.e., they are devices; but they possess an essentially different reality. A machine or a computer can function; it can answer as it was programmed. But it has no feelings or needs, discomfort or pleasure; it cannot see; it cannot ask itself difficult questions; it cannot understand what it does or says. We all know, and the experts confirm it, that computers will never reach the psychological, conscious ego, feeling. Therefore there is an essential difference, an abyss between artificial machines and living beings. Even if mere chance had formed the first cell with DNA, it would always be a mechanism, not life, least of all a life capable of producing intelligence.

While in a device unity is extrinsic because the cooperation of the parts is, so to say, forced, i.e., imposed by an external will, in living structures it is felt as a need, as a good, because all the parts are permeated by a unifying principle. Therefore the unity of living structures is perfect and intrinsic, given by the vital principle, which is not a composite of parts, precisely because it unifies them; it is present completely in each and every one. Because of this we declare, with all philosophy, that the living being is much more than a device.

But the opposition of the casualists is too great to accept an explanation which comes from the sphere of natural causes. They prefer to think of a magician named chance who, blindfolded, pulls out handkerchiefs of various colors, live rabbits, lighted candles, and fluttering doves from the top hat of evolution and all without anyone having put them there.

Casualists are mechanists. Monod writes: "The great modern discovery is to have given a merely mechanical explanation of nature." Such mechanism is the logical consequence of casualism, because if living beings and human beings are products of mere chance, they cannot be anything else but devices.

## **A computer cannot feel pleasure**

Life, even in its lowest and most primitive forms, and much more in animals and humans, is something totally different from the functioning of a device. There is, as it were, an invisible director giving orders, ready to modify the behavior of all or some parts in order to provide the common necessities or to fight off assailants.

This is more obvious in animals, but it is also visible in plants, which have a life in continuity with that of animals. In the simplest living beings, too, we come across behavior entirely absent from even the most sophisticated apparatus invented in modern times after centuries of technical progress.

In animals there is something much different from the operation of a device: pleasure and apprehension, perception of its own good or evil, a sense knowledge supposing in some way an "interiority," a self capable of penetrating into its own interior life and autonomously evaluating information on what is happening inside and outside it. No computer imitating human intelligence is in any way close to the dignity of this soul, not to mention human rational intelligence, human feelings, ideas, intuitions, discoveries, spiritual satisfactions, free will and spiritual choices. All the great ancient and modern spiritualistic philosophers, thinkers, psychologists, people whom casualists do not seem to know, agree that the Spirit dwells at levels essentially different from and superior to sensation and instinct, and so vastly superior to the mechanist functioning of devices. Think for example of Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Pascal, Fichte, Kant, Hegel Schelling, Rosmini, Blondel, Leibniz, Spinoza, Bergson, Croce, Jaspers, Hartmann, Marcel, Heidegger, Horkheimer, Kierkegaard, Maritain, Mounier, Teilhard de Chardin, Jung, Adler, Frankl, and so many others.

## **Natural selection presumes natural finalistic laws**

Casualists assert that the structures of living beings were formed thanks to chance and natural selection. We finalists agree with this, while pointing out that natural selection includes and expresses many, if not all, preferential natural laws orientated always towards ever greater progress, laws that regulate the living beings' behavior. It is as though to say that evolution was realized by the chanceantichance binomial.

Natural selection requires above all a psychic "mechanism" of natural orientated and finalistic laws, i.e., an immaterial reality which is above any physical device: life, with its tendencies and instinct finalistically oriented.

Chance, indeed, has been able to form and perfect its refined apparatus through billions of years (cells, organs, apparatus, systems, eyes, ears, hearts, paws, fleeces, reproductive organs) only because living beings, even the primordial ones, were constantly compelled to look for their food, consume it, change it into their own substance, face adversities, adapt themselves to the mutations, fight against their foes, reproduce, dispute favorable conditions with their competitors, escape from events which could cause death. In a word, they were led by and orientated by the survival instinct. Precisely these natural laws (together with chance) and their tendency to create ever more functional structures, are what we finalists call biological finalism.

Therefore we have to recognize that natural selection and casual genetic microchanges could not function and make the biological organization of the living being advance, if there were not in the living being an urge orientated towards an end, an aim, an urge which presumes an Intelligence, who set itself a target and wanted to realize it. Such an urge could be called love of existence, a will to live, a taste for life and an impulse to fight to preserve it.

The principle moving every casual or artificial device is compulsion. On the contrary, the principle moving every living being is attraction. It is a form of unconscious trend toward more or less primitive forms of happiness and love, towards good, an unconscious tendency towards God who is the fullness of these values. Jacques Maritain writes: "Therefore we have to conclude that no agent would act, or tend towards its end, if it did not tend above all to the subsisting good. It is because of their motion towards God, the last transcendent End, and of the love by means of which each human being loves God in a natural way more than itself, that all agents in the world move towards their own end. Therefore, finally, it is necessary to refer to an Intelligence aiming at the ends where things and their nature tend."

### **Hans Driesch and the secret of life**

Natural selection has functioned for billions of years and keeps on making the structure of living beings improve because they are not only casual and fortuitous joinings of pieces, but have a center, a unifying "soul," with a desire and taste for living and an impulse to fight to keep on living. The difference between an artificial finalistic structure (a device) and a natural one (an organism) can be compared to the difference between a group of slaves and a strictly and affectively united family, a family of cells and organs working for its own welfare, welded by interest and by a kind of reciprocal love of the various parts for the "self" unifying them. One for all and all for one.

Living beings "love themselves"; they are "interiorities" in the sense of not being indifferent, as are artificial structures, to every other thing and to themselves. Living beings are centers and privileged objects of their activity and their tastes, including their children and their community. The parts of a computer, on the contrary, are slaves, not working for the group's interest, indifferent among themselves and towards the master they work for, disunited, lacking love and taste.

Vitalism, the opposite of mechanism, is the biological doctrine that asserts that vital processes are different from physical and chemical phenomena; it considers vital processes to be governed by autonomous and finalistic forces, different from those intervening in nonliving matter. On the contrary, mechanism declares that the organism, as a machine, is nothing more than the addition of its parts and its unity is the result of the sum of its physical and chemically elementary processes, all entirely subject to analysis by means of the methods and principles of the physical sciences.

The nineteenth century saw the triumph of mechanism among scientists: even sensation, vision, and human thought itself were considered by biologists as E. Haeckel, G. Moleschott, E. Le Dantec, J. Loeb, to be products of the chemical and physical activity of the cells, which, in turn were chemical machines. The cause of these positions of all scientists was the materialistic postulate of nineteenth century science, a postulate which still nowadays has a notable influence on many biological opinions and hypotheses.

By the end of the last century and the beginning of this, belief in scientific materialism was shaken and the solely chemical and physical interpretation of vital phenomena did not delay in making clear its failure. Above all, Berlin scientist Hans Driesch ( 1867- 1941) made a deep and thorough analysis of some of the most characteristic phenomena of life. This renowned biologist and philosopher, founder of experimental embryology, showed by means of his experiments that "no mechanism can provide an adequate reason for biological phenomena," and that, on the other hand, "an elementary, independent, vital, nonmaterial factor, different from the factors affecting phenomena of inorganic life, is working in organisms." Driesch's experiments and discoveries were criticized and corrected in some of their aspects, but these additions do not destroy but rather confirm the unquestioned experimental value of his ideas.

Besides Driesch, many other authors (such as E Alverdes, L. von Bertalariffy, A. Bizzarri, B. Durken, J.S. Haldane, J.C. Smuts, J.V. Uexkull, G. F. Wolff, W. Roux, and others), today state, in a more or less complete way, that life, and a fortiori thought, cannot be reduced to chemical and physical laws. Commenting on nineteenth century materialism, Mascall points out: "Even as scientists were certain that other people were only elaborate machines, their protocol contained a loophole for themselves." And Polkinghorne comments: "The reductionist program, in the end, is in difficulty because, of itself, it commits suicide. It reduces not only our experiences of beauty, moral duty, the religious dimension, into epiphenomenal rubbish, but also destroys rationality. Thought is replaced by nerve originated electrochemical events."

After recognizing the insufficiency of mechanism as an explanation for life, and then facing the instinctive refusal of biologists educated in the positive school to use metaphysical principles to escape positive investigation, some scientists tried to avoid the problem by recourse to the concept of "Holism," "biological unity' or "totality" ( *Ganzheitsbegriff*) as a fundamental and primitive fact which is not the result of chemical-physical processes of cells but which subordinates them to itself and directs them. Biological phenomena, as J.S. Haldane declares, are on a different level from the physical, and every attempt to reduce them to physical terms is useless.

A third group of phenomena, the psychological, can only be explained when we start from different postulates. Mechanists consider humans machines. "They arrived," Frossard writes, "at the idea that thought is an epiphenomenon (accessory to the chemical processes of the brain), somewhat similar to the steam of old locomotives. This kind of small mechanist train was in service for a very long time, but it has no longer many passengers, especially now that the electric train has replaced the steam engine. The problem was always the same: how does an epiphenomenon realize it is such?"

"What is," wonders Nobel physicist David Bohm, "that human faculty that allows us to detach from ourselves and from what surrounds us, that act of unconditioned perception, the foundation of which cannot be found in structures such as cells, molecules, atoms, and elementary particles?"

As Manfred Eigen affirms, when we speak of life, we no longer talk about matter. Life is "information," of which DNA and chemistry are only the material writing. The information of a Bach sonata, its meaning, is not in the written notes on the stave; these are only material supports. A Bach sonata "comes alive" in the special, fulminating relationship between the notes and the mind and heart of the musician who performs it. Biological life lives in a multidimensional space, which our three dimensional world belongs to, but of which it is only a simplified drawing, just as a

drawing of a house is a two dimensional version of a real three dimensional house. If living beings were devices, life would not have any meaning. Pleasure and well-being are the meaning of life for animals, as spiritual satisfaction and divine love are for us humans.

### **The vital principle is immaterial**

The reasons why philosophers and vitalist scientists think the vital principle is immaterial are based on the fact that the living being is a perfect unity. In any nonliving structure (machines or structures created by chance) each part is completely independent and indifferent toward the other parts. If it works together for a common purpose it is because it is forced by external circumstances or agents.

On the contrary, the living being, notwithstanding the very high number of cells forming it, is a natural unity, where the single parts, macro- and microscopic, lose their own autonomy and blend in with the great harmony of the whole. There is an interior instinct or impulse, led by a plan, by a natural finalistic law, assigning its duty to each part, to repair a damaged part, to satisfy an extraordinary need, or to change the assigned duties to certain parts.

This shows that the unifying principle we call the "Self" is completely present in each part at the same time. No material being or force can do that. Take vision: when we see something, the numerous parts of the object are united by the "self" and perceived not as multiplicity but as a single object. The "self" unites the other sensations of its body (seeing, hearing, smelling, etc.) and matches them with collections of past sensations (recollections) in a single, unique consciousness. By uniting all parts in sensations, the vital principle ( Driesch calls it entelechia, i.e., finality) is present, contemporarily and whole in each organ. It therefore has no nonextensive parts, and is immaterial in that sense.

### **Alfred Kastler and the idea of Creator**

In the past, science had an aversion for any kind of immaterial cause. An immaterial vital principle and a directing Mind behind the natural laws -- these are the two conclusions emerging with force and clarity, especially the second, from this analysis of the biological facts. But from another viewpoint it could seem that they are not so certain, since there are two contrary forms of scientific thought, the finalistic and the casualistic. Perhaps the game ends in a draw, or casualism might win because its supporters are more numerous.

But this consideration loses a lot of its strength if we remember that the vital principle and the Mind organizing natural laws collide with the nonscientific but prejudicial postulate that nineteenth century science made sacred and inviolable, a postulate many modern scientists are still afraid to abandon. This is the postulate that the cause of phenomena of this world must always and only be looked for in the field of material and experimental forces. They do not admit any collaboration between science and philosophy -- the latter is regarded as a poor relative of poetry.

We can say therefore that the finalist scientist is compelled to walk uphill all the time and must be resigned to losing face with several of his or her colleagues. If s/he does so, it is because s/he is forced by evidence. Finalism is like a relative whom the logical scientist, privately, cannot disown, but of whom s/he is publicly ashamed.

"The idea of a Creator," says Nobel laureate Alfred Kastler, "is not extraneous to me because I cannot, and no one can, understand the universe without finality. Undoubtedly this is not a scientific attitude and Monod would criticize me since he sees me abandoning the principle of 'objectivity.' In fact, causality is a scientific attitude. Scientists do not set out to explain phenomena, to answer the question 'why' but simply 'how.' The scientist only describes what happens."

The scientist loyal to this "professional" mentality cannot even consider the God hypothesis, because it tends to explain phenomena with the intervention of an entity not belonging to the physical plan. Therefore, above all in the past but still today, many scientists declare that they believe in God because of personal and moral reasons, out of a basic trust in the sense of life. These are reasons that do not annoy those colleagues who have made an agnostic choice, because they are subjective, without ties to verifiable reality and science, and so not binding for anyone.

But a new attitude is appearing in the scientific world: the idea of God deriving from science itself and Teilhard de Chardin and Einstein were precursors. As Barbiellini Amidei writes: I spoke to physicists, mathematicians, experts in computer science, neurophysiologists, astrophysicists. I asked them whether it is a question about nuclear particles, or artificial intelligence, or the difficult deciphering of that 'universe within the universe' that is the human brain, or the infinite numbers or endless distances of stars and galaxies: Scientists immersed in the complex questions about reality are more and more asking 'where is all this from and where is it all going?' There is desire, perhaps even a longing, for metaphysics, or for philosophy or religion. But very often it is expressed in gestures and words, not as a need, but as consciousness of God's rediscovery. To many scientists the hypothesis of God's existence seems today to be more reliable precisely by starting from the new knowledge of reality their researches and experiments provide."

### **Leaves fall without God's deciding which ones**

The two basic principles of the Bible and Christian doctrine in the matter we are considering are: creation of the universe, of living beings and humanity by God, and human knowledge of God even through reason. Both have been forgotten and put aside because they are denied by casualist scientists, and it seems to us that they must remain rightfully in the theological field, to be accepted by the modern believer as from the Bible and strongly and rationally supported by the issues discussed by casualist scientists.

The untenable third alternative to finalism and casualism would be creationism, which thought, by interpreting the Bible literally, that God created all living beings with a single operation and without evolution. Such a doctrine is neither held up by science, nor by the Bible, which never intended to set itself as science but as religious revelation. Creationism is *not* a reason to believe today.

Were we created by an Intelligence or by chance? Creationism answers: by Intelligence. Chance declares: by chance. The answer of finalism and the modern believer is: neither by one nor the other separately, but *by the collaboration of both*.

A human intelligence works by assembling the pieces and excluding chance as far as possible. Consequently it is very quick. Let's suppose it wants to form a nucleic acid: it will link up macromolecules. To form macromolecules it will join simpler molecules together, and so forth.

Everything develops, down to the smallest details, according to plan. Similarly, an engine builder makes the pieces and puts them together according to the drawing and the preestablished plan.

On the contrary, in nature it would be an anthropomorphism to see Creation and Providence as a project realized by God in each single combination or event. Chance, led by preferential laws, achieved now and again in the course of millions of years, together with endless failures, some useful fragments to form a functional structure. These fragments were selected and preserved thanks to finalistic laws.

Even in the government of the world it would not seem exact to say that what happens is God's will, in the sense that each single event was planned and decided by God.

Polkinghorne writes: "For someone like Donald McKay, the word 'chance' is merely an abbreviation for 'cause unknown.' He thinks, in fact, that everything is the development of a plan entirely controlled by God. Such a theory is indestructible as regards logic, but not quite convincing. Why did God choose to hide behind the appearance of casuality? Peacocke's perspective is more attractive, because he holds that, inside the divine plan, chance plays a positive role of exploration in the realization of potentialities."

We say that "no leaf falls without God's will," but leaves fall by chance. And misfortunes happen by chance, when they are due to human faults. Chance is a plot of natural events, and sometimes of human wills, converging to produce an unforeseeable human effect. On the contrary, God foresees and allows it, in most cases, in view of a final good. God does not plan or decide wars and other human unjust actions. Indeed, divine will wrote a finalistic law in human conscience prohibiting them, i.e., the natural law, to transform our moral instincts and passions.

Every time natural laws harm some particular person, other finalistic laws established by God start acting in the human soul, e.g., to struggle against evil, to seek compensatory spiritual goods to replace the material ones lost, to help the tendency of upright persons to aid the less fortunate. If we accept our fate on Earth with faith and even the sorrowful events of our own lives, we know we are conforming to God's will because, even if these events are produced against our wills by other people or by chance, it is God's will that we put up with them, and helped by grace, use them to reach the main aim of human life. The Bible teaches us that God gives spiritual support and interior reinforcement in proportion to the severity of the trial, by helping those who rely on God to draw from suffering spiritual progress leading them to far deeper and more lasting joys than those they would have in this transitory stage.

Our position is between McKay's and Peacocke's and is the one most theologians follow. God generally lets natural causes act. But when they are decisive events for a human being's spiritual life, God intervenes so that they follow a certain course, sometimes painful, but always for the final good of that person and all just persons. We can speak of a chance led by God's hands. But we will speak of this later on. Chance alone would lead us to chaos, but led by God it takes us home.

## **Dear Darwin, chance is not everything**

Chance and creation do not exclude each other. An example can illustrate our thought. In a city suburb a new district has just been inaugurated. However there are no shops. If a dictatorial authority ordered individual citizens to open them, establishing precise locations, times, and categories of goods to sell, the shops would appear at once according to the commands. We would have something analogous to creationism.

On the contrary, let us suppose that no one gives clear orders (shops must open by chance), there are no financial incentives for opening them (natural orientated laws are missing). Shops probably would never open and the inhabitants would have to go shopping at the nearest shopping center. This is casualism.

Let us imagine finally that City Hall does not give proper orders because they are well aware of commercial interests. Some months would elapse and the district would have all kinds of necessary goods and even some unnecessary products. Commercial interests are like natural oriented laws and natural selection, because they have an urge to live and a desire to live better; survival of the fittest is the golden rule. This is finalism.

As English biophysicist A.R. Peacocke thinks, it seems that God deliberately chose to use chance as a way of realizing the implicit potentialities in creation. "The gigantic lottery of the universe is used to cast lots from the enormous mass of possibilities and discover those which are valid together and capable of expressing God's purpose."

## **Chance is degraded to a common laborer**

Finalists hold that evolution was pushed forward by genetic changes appearing casually, and led by natural selection based on finalist laws. But the latest scientific discoveries seem to go still further and to be more finalist than finalists. Genetic mutations are not always casual: in certain cases they seem to be led by laws aiming at adapting creatures to unfavorable environmental variations.

"The changes in evolutionary biology," writes Pisa University Professor Lodovico Galleni, "are rapidly undermining some hypotheses necessary to the Darwinian interpretation of evolutionary phenomena." According to the need of living beings to adapt themselves to a new environment, we note changes in "transposons" (segments of DNA discovered in the 1940s by Barbara McClintock, Nobel Prize, 1983), from one part of the genome causing changes useful to the form and functioning of the organs of the living being. Or we can see the production, according to the need, of "extra copies" of a determined gene. "In a situation of stress," Galleni continues, "the organism answers by increasing genes by some hundredfold to permit the production of enzymes capable of overcoming the stress situation. . . . All this makes us think of a targeted response mechanism.

"The changes in evolutionary biology of these last years," Galleni concludes, reveal astonishing and unforeseen capacities in genome evolution, tending more and more to reduce the role of chance in the evolution hypothesis. Genome evolution following precise laws seems to be among the forces channelizing evolution." In this new view, chance, chief engineer or head, then deputy chief, has now been reduced to a lowly common laborer.

Nobel biophysicist Manfred Eigen, in his book *The Game*, formulates this thesis, nowadays widely shared by many biologists, contrary to Monod's mere chance. In fact, the subtitle "Natural laws guide Chance" sounds programmatic. Or, as Eigen himself writes in his preface to the German edition of Monod's book: "Even as the individual form owes its origin to chance, so also the process of selection and evolution is an inevitable necessity. Nothing more. But nothing less. Not merely pure chance."

As the Viennese biologist Rupert Riedl writes: "A God who only plays dice would be merely a gambler and none of the divine works would have any meaning." Einstein, too, was worried by this fact. *But a God who never plays dice would make a machine and none its works would be free.* "Then does God play dice?" Manfred Eigen wonders. "Surely! But following the rules of the game."

In short -- as Eigen himself said in Milan in 1987 -- farewell to the idea that life appeared in the inanimate world as an orphan daughter of chance, and to the idea that from the lowest, chaotic matter, the highest was born -- beauty, intelligence, and love. On the contrary, life was born in obedience to the rigor and splendor of a mathematical design. Evolution is music grown from freedom to complexity, from the first "solo" of the primordial bacterium to symphonic orchestra that is humanity.

Carlo Rubbia, 1986 Nobel physicist, declared in August of the same year, "Faced with the harmony and rationality of physical and biological laws, it is impossible not to admit an organizing Intelligence." "The era of positivism," Barbiellini Amidei concludes, "had a unitary but demeaning vision of reality: there is only matter; everything and every one is matter. We can reach a unitary and not demeaning vision by other routes. We can arrive there without the obsessions of materialism. We can get there in the realism of modern science, as in the realism of religion, in words, rites, and prayers."

### **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and the attraction to the Omega Point**

It is the special merit of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, scientist, philosopher, and theologian ( 1881-1955) to have discovered and described a constant direction in the evolution of matter and living beings, "a precise orientation and a privileged axis, a clearly oriented and ascending whole, from the simple atom to higher living beings."

The laws directing this wonderful ascending parable express themselves in the form of a continuing impulse towards, an oriented stimulus, a gravitation towards, an instinct to carry out particular actions, a need to attain particular purposes, specific wishes, and innate aspirations. They are like a computer programming software, in a the word, "need or natural attraction."

Even the direction towards which this need pushes can be summarized: the line of march is always towards a greater complexity-unity. "By the complexity of a thing . . . we mean the quality this thing has to be made of (1) a greater number of elements, (2) more strictly organized among themselves. Not only complication, but complication around a center. Thus evolution, the whole universe, and all human history show themselves to be a message developing in a unitary way, as a manifestation of a Great Thought."

The message of evolution is that all matter and reality are interiorly directed by a need for unity (an unconscious form of quasi-love) and, after the appearance of consciousness, from the necessity of an always greater physical and spiritual unity, making for a perfect, universal, perennial love. The way is checked slowly and gradually, by chance collaboration, starting from mere multiplicity (chaos) towards an always greater functionality, beauty, organization, and community spirit. In Teilhard de Chardin we can distinguish nine different stages which often imply quality leaps.

1) Vitalization of matter. In subatomic elements and atoms modern science discovers a special attraction, a "need" to join as particular molecules and later in appropriate macromolecules, called organic because they make up the tissue of living bodies. Physics is moved by a constant stimulus, oriented towards biology. Chance operates by favoring innumerable meetings of atoms and molecules of which the enormous majority are useless. Helped by directed stimulus, these originate the first monocellular living being.

In it, matter comes to a first degree of complexity-unity because the millions of protein molecules and the numerous parts of the cell cooperate for a unique purpose, i.e., the life of the cell itself. It is always need that stimulates the successive operations of the living being: the need to keep all parts together and functioning, to nourish with special substances, and to change them to recover lost energy; the need for a certain temperature; the instinct of self-preservation and defence; the tendency to adapt to the variations of external conditions, to repair and compensate for damaged functions; the urge to reproduce. All are natural and innate dispositions without which natural selection cannot work.

2) Organization of the living being. To satisfy better its need to survive and reproduce, in its struggle for life, the living being has a disposition to use certain microgenetic mutations occurring by chance and to transmit them to its descendants. This is not useful for the first formation of a member or an organ, because it would require the sudden and simultaneous appearance of thousands of genetic mutations all in the right sequence. On the contrary, it is useful to perfect organs or limbs already functioning, even if in a rudimentary way. "A horn has a selective value when well developed, but will its growth be favored by selection while it is just at its birth stage? Such examples are standard cases in favor of the existence of a factor, interior in orthogenesis, independent from selection."

Henceforth the first formation of the organs does not derive from slow evolution, but from sudden macro-mutations; here are new arguments against casualism, from the immediate appearance of the organs themselves. Such is the opinion of many famous paleontologists, who note that evolutionary transformations are demonstrated only in the sphere of each zoological family, whereas all the greater groups (Types, Classes, Orders) appear suddenly: in the Infracambrian (about 600 million years ago) all invertebrates; in the Ordovician (480 million years ago) the first fish; in the Triassic (190 million years ago) mammals. No preceding forms of fossils exist to which they can be reconnected.

The living being, already organized and with many organs, reaches a higher degree of complexity-unity than the single cell living being: all parts of each organ and all organs work together for the welfare of the whole organism.

3) Conscientization (Development of Consciousness). Always urged by the finalistic need to survive and reproduce, the living being forms sense organs for itself and with them perceives heat, scent, taste, and the shapes and colors of beings outside itself. Even here microgenetic mutations are not enough to create an organ, because even the most rudimentary is still extremely complicated and all its parts would have to be formed at the same time. But they help to perfect it. Sensation makes the living being progress towards complexity-unity because it allows the animal to feel its own unity and welfare (pleasure), to seek the conditions for its own survival and reproduction by means of the senses, and to join with its own kind by means of knowledge and mutual friendship.

4) Sexual reproduction. The oriented urge and the Intelligence directing it produce in the living being two different and complementary series of very complex organs and two complementary instincts for more efficient reproduction. So complexity-unity increases because the male and female reach deeper union of knowledge, friendship, collaboration, and love even if still in inferior and not higher conscious forms.

5) Hominization. The finalistic need of a life in continuous progress and the Intelligence propelling it move the living being to a higher degree of consciousness, a quality leap when compared with sense, essentially different and superior; i.e., human intelligence characterized by self-awareness, rationality, intuition, and aspiration to always greater perfection, which reveals the existence of the Spirit. When the Spirit is born, chance collaborates intensely in its development, because it produces, together with favorable circumstances, many natural adversities to physical life (drought, famine, flood, diseases, premature death, etc.) stimulating humanity to develop its own intuition, rationality, and constancy of will, thus creating science and technology to fight against suffering and death. Complexity-unity increases, taking humanity to incomparable degrees of knowledge, sympathy, friendship, and man-woman love far deeper and more authentic than that of other animals.

6) Socialization. Humans are spurred, by a finalist urge for a better life, to make collaboration agreements with their fellow humans. Thus agriculture, trade, industry, villages, tribes, kingdoms, laws, science, and technology progress, and states and democracies are born. Even here, chance, creating circumstances favorable to human life, but kindling dramatic or tragic situations, stimulates people to increasing solidarity and mutual help. It is obvious that complexity-unity is boosted by and with socialization. Although it is still dictated more by interest than by love, it leads humanity towards larger and deeper forms tending to flow into universal love.

7) Planctization. Socialization, Teilhard de Chardin continues, spreads on a worldwide scale because of the development of means of transportation and communication, causing a higher degree of complexity-unity). "The current totalization in the modern world," Teilhard writes, "is really the natural result and the development of basic groupings in the elaboration of organized matter. . . . First of all, vitalization of matter is bound to molecule grouping. Then hominization is connected to cell supergrouping. Finally, planetization of humankind is bound to close grouping of peoples: the unique hypercompressed, hypercentered, hyperconscious archmolecule."

8) Moral development. Right from the first steps of socialization the finalist need urging humanity did not involve only survival, reproduction, or material welfare. Since humanity is enlightened by the Spirit, spiritual needs and aspirations rise in us for greater justice, deeper truths about the sense

of life, inner freedom, and above all, towards authentic and universal brotherly and sisterly love. Chance, producing luck and misfortune, poverty and wealth, health and disease, long and short lives, strongly stimulates the thinking person to look for human moral values: friendship, family, work, social justice, solidarity, political freedom, and freedom of thought. In fact, these values repay somehow the precariousness of physical goods and offer deeper and more spiritual satisfaction.

Such values and common ideals unite humankind far more intimately and strongly than collaboration based on community of economic or technological interests: therefore the degree of complexity-unity increases with moral progress. "The unity of human community," Teilhard writes, "must be the unity between free people, i.e., a unity of harmony, friendship and everlasting love."

9) Religious development. But not even human moral values thoroughly satisfy the immense aspirations of the human Spirit. In fact, in this world the former are realized almost always in a limited and fragmentary way and, even in the best cases, end sadly with death. Therefore, the supreme need of the human Spirit, the deepest human aspiration, is the religious, a yearning for the Perfect, the absolutely ideal and infinite, complete and eternal justice, truth and love God.

Even here, chance and suffering have their part: chance forces us, in one way or another, to experience the lack and brevity of physical benefit and the absolute insufficiency of human moral values. Frustration and sorrow compel us, if we have not already done so before, to detach ourselves from earthly goods, and to seek the divine.

"It is precisely at this point," Teilhard writes, "that in the science of evolution (so that evolution can function in a hominized environment) the problem of God enters, the one who moves, orders, and consolidates evolution." This personal center, this ultimate pole of consciousness, God, which Teilhard calls the Omega Point, is necessary to ensure its development and success to evolution. "It is impossible to devote oneself to an anonymous world. Humankind cannot be loved in a human way unless the community's central point is a living Person. . . . The cause of the earth's unification is to be definitively sought neither in mere contemplation of truth nor just in desire roused by something, but in the common attraction exerted by the same Someone."

### **Summing up the preceding considerations**

Giovanni Blandino writes: "We know that it is quite according to the nature of an intelligent being to produce regular and constant realities, to engender functional finalisms (as in the living), trying besides to achieve the aim in the most elegant way (i.e., with high efficiency and relative simplicity). . . . In reality we note a constant universe, endowed with numerous regularities and finalisms, with an inexhaustible richness of shapes and ingenious solutions. The universe does not show only the activity of a second-rate intelligence, but of a great genius. Therefore reality is not as it should be if the casual hypothesis (negative criterion of 'casual improbability') were true. On the contrary, it is as it should be if the hypothesis of a creative Intelligence (positive criterion of intelligence) were true."

With these conclusions God does not remain "hidden" in what we still do not understand (the holes of science), but is shown in what has been scientifically ascertained, i.e., the unity of orientation of

evolution and the rationality of its laws. Beauty, which shines everywhere in nature, is thoroughly useless to the mechanism of evolution and natural selection, yet is also an unequivocal sign of intelligence -- a trademark stamped on each piece because it contains a correlation between a harmony of shapes, colors, sounds, etc., and the aesthetic need of the human spirit.

Teilhard de Chardin's arguments deduce God, not only as the cause of the world and the needs and aspirations which move the gigantic machine of evolution, but also and above all as the final aim toward which such needs and aspirations tend. Evolution, therefore, is like a train crossing a region unknown to us, stopping at various stations we can see. We did not see the departure station, but, since we know the intermediate ones, reason convinces us that the first had to exist. This is how we deduce God as cause of finalism and evolution.

As it crossed the region known to us, the train moves beyond the horizon, and even if we do not see the last station for which it is headed, we are compelled to think it exists. This is to deduce the existence of God as the final goal of the highest needs and natural aspirations of the human spirit.

We conclude, even if the facts and considerations presented here are not true scientific proofs and cannot offer mathematical certainty (since God is not subject to sense experience and is not verifiable by means of them), that it seems there are strong presumptive proofs reaching moral certainty that is the basis of a reasonable faith. Later on, the spiritual experience of God can occur which, even without achieving perfect vision, will consolidate certainty.

This is what Andrei Sacharov, world renowned physicist and 1975 Nobel laureate affirms; this promoter of perestrojka, who did so much to keep the light of reason kindled in the darkness of the totalitarian night, and who paid such a high price for his courage, said: "I cannot imagine the Universe and human life without a cause giving them sense, without a source of spiritual 'warmth' beyond matter and its laws. I think this feeling can be defined as religious."

### **Does science admit that the universe has a beginning?**

The American astronomer Edwin Powell Hubble ( 1889- 1953) discovered that the galaxies move away from each other at a speed proportional to their distance from us. He formulated the theory of the expansion of the universe, according to which the universe would expand under the thrust of a huge primeval explosion (Big Bang) occurring about 15 billion years ago. In the international scientific community today the theory of the Big Bang is considered the most plausible hypothesis for the origin of the universe; we could even consider it an upto-date version of the creation narrative, though not all scientists accept it. What some astronomers doubt is not the initial explosion and the period of 15 billion years, but the theories on the condition of matter before the explosion. However, everybody agrees that 15 billion years ago no type of biological life could exist in the universe. The origin of life is estimated at about 5 billion years ago and since then shows an evolutionary process without reverses or involutions.

Further, hydrogen is changed into helium and other elements in each star, and this change is an irreversible process, since hydrogen cannot be produced in significant amounts from the disintegration of other elements. Therefore if the universe had existed eternally, hydrogen would not exist any longer. The law of preservation of energy concerns the total amount of energy in all forms

the world contains: mechanical, chemical, electric, thermal, etc. Now, among all these forms, thermal is called degraded because it is no longer capable of turning itself entirely into other energy (law of entropy). "Hence we can deduce that (the universe) had a beginning. In fact, if, on the contrary, the universe had existed for all eternity, its energy would be changing for all eternity too. If that were so, all energy would have to be turned into thermal energy. Thus the temperature of the universe would be uniform and all activity would be impossible." Hence matter, or at least its present process of evolution, is not eternal and therefore requires a creative power to begin existing.

### **Scientific knowledge and faith: a divorced couple reconciled**

They lived together as husband and wife for centuries. Then they had many problems and quarrels and finally, in the last century, legal separation. Today some theologians advise them to start proceedings for a definitive divorce. But, on the contrary, some good feelings can be seen in both and signals of a certain mutual understanding are visible. Neither thinks of saying the same things of the other any longer (the famous agreements between science and the Bible) and even we do not think that science can show God's existence; rather we aim at sharing tasks between two disciplines which today feel the need of mutual collaboration.

The great plan of evolution outlined by Teilhard, summarized previously, is not a scientific proof of God's existence. Such proofs are always mathematical, quantitative, the result of merely rational, geometric thought. Here, since it is a question of Spirit, philosophical, qualitative reasonings are required, which science does not and cannot deal with, since they come from intuition and "esprit de finesse." Nevertheless, our reasoning seems to conclude in favor of the reasonableness of faith in God so that it is not thoroughly detached from phenomena and science, as God is not alien to what happens in the world of the senses.

The atomic physicist and philosopher Friedrich von Weizsäcker writes: "One thing only I would say to theologians, a thing they know and that others should know: they look for the unique truth capable of going deeper than the truth of science, which the atomic era stands on. They look for knowledge of human nature which is more deeply rooted than the rationality of modern age."

Secondly, science and faith discover a striking mutual complementarity. The American mathematician Warren Weaver writes in his book *Science and Imagination*: "I kept these two sparkling balls (science and faith) in the air, tossing them, one at a time. I thought mainly of science; but other times religion aroused deep commotion and joy in me. So I reached the age of 30; and it was only then that I began to wonder if my logical ideas about science were compatible with my instinctive convictions about religion. After much thought I am firmly convinced that religion and science are not enemies. I am sure that the perfect agreement between science and religion is achieved almost in the same way as a happy agreement is achieved in marriage, i.e., when each of the two parties devotes time and effort to understand the point of view of the other and when each has respect for the other. . . . Science is very useful to answer questions: How is this made? How can we learn to regulate it? How does fecundation of a cell take place? How can a plane fly? How far are stars from us? But if you ask the cause of things, the meaning of life and moral values, science keeps silent. . . . Here we face a distinction of the greatest importance, between science and religion. Religion, as opposed to science, tries to answer the 'why above all. Why should there be

bodily pain and sorrow of the soul? Why are there deformed and mentally abnormal children? What is the meaning and aim of life? Why should I be truthful, honest, altruistic? Is this important? Is anything important? Furthermore, while science keeps on trying to analyze the manner in which things, humans, and animals behave, it does not bother about what behavior is good or bad. It leaves this to philosophy, ethics, and religion. But in order to live a full and responsible life, we have to balance our interests and the aims of all those sources of strength which inspire, ennoble and regulate our lives: art, philosophy, science, and religion."

Professor Cesare Oliva, Lecturer-Researcher in Chemistry and Physics at the University of Milan, writes: "The validity of a scientific vision is judged exclusively by its ability to explain measurable phenomena and to foresee analogous ones. On the contrary, the validity of a metaphysical vision is exclusively assessed . . . by what it can offer about humankind's ultimate needs: the reason of our existence and of the supporting world, the reasons of our joys and sufferings. I do not think a materialistic metaphysics can do this, hence I do not think it is sound metaphysics."

I will end this chapter with the conclusive sentences of two famous contemporary authors: "The universe," writes Jean Guitton in *God and Science*, "seems to be built and regulated, with unimaginable precision, starting from some great constants. It is matter of invariable rules, which are calculable, however, without our being able to determine the reasons why nature chose a certain value rather than another. Then we have to suppose that whenever different figures than those of the 'mathematical miracle' on which our reality is based are used, the universe would have displayed absolute chaos: the untidy dance of atoms would join and separate after a while to drop again, unflinching, into their senseless whirls. And since cosmos refers to the image of an order, this order leads us, in turn, towards the existence of a Cause and Finality which are not related to it."

Sir John Eccles, one of today's greatest scientists, with honorary degrees from eleven universities, Nobel Prize for Medicine, 1963, declares in his work *Evolution of the Brain and Creation of the Ego*: "Since the materialistic solution fails to give an explanation of our uniqueness, I am compelled to assign oneness of the Ego or the Soul to a spiritual supernatural creation. An explanation in theological terms could be the following: each Soul is a new Divine creation assigned to the foetus during its development in some moment between fecundation and birth. It is the certainty of an interior nucleus of a unique individuality that makes 'Divine creation necessary. I admit that there is no other valid explanation; neither genetic oneness with its impossible lottery, nor the differentiations induced by the environment determine the uniqueness of individuals. They simply modify it. This conclusion is of inestimable theological meaning. It strengthens remarkably our faith in the human soul and in its miraculous origin by means of a divine creation. It is necessary to admit not only the transcendent God, the creator of the cosmos, the God Einstein believed in, but also the God to whom we owe our existence."

## CHAPTER 4

### BASIC TRUST

*If God exists, why do misfortunes happen?*

In the world vision suggested by Teilhard, matter and spirit, science and faith, world and God are united and harmonized; everything is unified, everything is explained in substantial accord with Christian faith and modern science. Teilhard's strength lies in his integrative ability: he leaves no element out, but he brings them all together in a dynamic and unitarian vision. From this point, many objections, which at first sight seem to contradict faith, can be answered. Why are so many children born deformed or mentally handicapped, and why are there so many similar atrocious events? Why is this world an indissoluble weaving of wonders and horrors, harmony and discord, order and chaos?

It is almost impossible to answer these questions if we think the world was entirely created and every single event decided and wanted by God. This God is denied by atheists: the invisible "puppeteer" who moves the strings of everyone's nature and history. "Success has been sent by God." "Misfortune was wanted by God." "Leaves do not fall if God does not want them to." "A God who makes children suffer . . ." On the contrary, it is possible to answer if we say that every single event is determined by chance *and* that God only aims at a final purpose for everyone.

From the evolutionist viewpoint we have suggested, God usually does not act through single decrees on single events of nature and even less of human history. Rather *God acts inside things and living beings by means of natural laws, inborn tendencies and wishes, leaving room to chance and free choice*. Natural tendencies and the persuasive action God exerts within human spirits aim at reaching a final harmony and happiness, at the end of the biological and spiritual evolution of every person. An evolutionary process is to be judged by the final product and not by the intermediate phases of manufacturing. The world has never stopped being created.

Chance, mistakes, and human faults collaborate with God's finalism in that they are corrected by the presence of oriented laws and of interior illumination that give precedence to a certain kind of solution. From this point of view, maintained by many modern thinkers, the evil of the world does not destroy the existence of a wise and good God, but only that of a wise and good God according to anthropomorphic standards. The problem, although difficult and above all obscure from an emotional point of view for those who are suffering at the moment, offers glimpses of light and is in no way definitively contrary to faith. Adverse natural events happen to the just and the wicked as the sun and rain; for the former, thanks to God's inner help, they become purification and progress, while for the latter they may be healing punishments because if humbly accepted they can lead to conversion.

#### **Butterfly wings are formed in the chrysalis**

Another important consideration stems from the theory of finalism, described before, which acts with chance. Feuerbach, Freud, and other nonbelievers have thought of qualifying faith in God by explaining that it is based solely on human need. We can answer that technology and the beauty of nature are tangible facts and arguments in favor of God, and not the only ones, independently of any

religious need. As concerns need, however, we observe that it is both an innate and natural aspiration as well as the primary aspiration. Therefore it is in some way a new objective reason in favor of God's existence.

The fact that this need is inborn and natural is proved by the fact that religion is present at all historical times and all over the world. That it is primary is seen when we compare it with the others: will to survive, need for food, reproduction, desire for a more comfortable life, for friendship, love, justice, truth, freedom. The aspiration to God is a wish for these latter values, but boundless and eternal.

Vittorio Marcozzi writes: "A natural tendency is but an aspiration, a motion towards something. But how can a natural motion and aspiration exist the essence of which consists precisely in tending towards something, if this 'something' is not there? If the object of a tendency did not exist, the natural tendency would not have formed. A vain, natural tendency, therefore, cannot be conceived. . . . Butterflies acquire the instinct to fly when still enclosed in the narrow chrysalis, but that instinct is formed purposely. . . . The embryo develops in the dark bed of a mother's womb and has organs that . . . only after birth will find the object of their tendencies . . . Migrating birds, obeying their instinct, set off along unknown tracts which doubtlessly will lead them to the destination felt in advance. All natural tendencies have an object, all instincts a goal. Humanity has a natural tendency to everlasting life and happiness that cannot be suppressed."

On the other hand, these tendencies cannot find their right object in this life. If we do not want to admit the absurd and suppose that only humanity has futile tendencies, unlike other living beings, we must conclude by admitting that these tendencies have their adequate object in God and in perfect love, communion with God, achieving perfection in a life beyond death.

### **God is not an insurer against accidents**

The theory of chance guided by finalistic laws explains scientific data in accordance with God's existence, but does it explain the gospel data concerning God's "fatherhood" equally well? Some might have perhaps felt that this theory leaves the whole ruling of the world to chance. What then, we may wonder, what is the role of providence? How valuable is prayer to free ourselves from bad luck? Does God take care of each of us, from such a viewpoint? We answer saying that the theory is, against a naive conception of religion, like a system of General Insurance against any type of misfortune, but, in our opinion, it is in full accordance with the gospel teaching and the Church's interpretation.

God takes care of each of us, first of all through natural laws, i.e., through the aspirations and the skills God instilled in us. Chance is a nonprearranged weaving of events caused by natural laws, but God foresaw their development for each of us and provided each of us with strength and skills to overcome the various conditions.

Secondly, God follows every creature, above all with the inner help of thoughts, feelings, and positive will infused in them. Prayer, as the gospel teaches, helps us mostly and primarily to gain the kingdom of heaven within us, i.e., to gain inner change and to develop skills in spiritual growth, allowing us to draw moral progress from the events we face.

Instead of a nurse-like Providence looking after its protege in an air-conditioned kindergarten, we have a survival-school Providence, which supplies the students with the necessary tools and throws them into a hard and splendid enterprise so that they can realize themselves, partly alone.

Sometimes God's intervention operates through natural laws, although rarely displaying physical phenomena produced by the paranormal powers of our spirit, such as faith healing. And not even miracles are to be excluded, i.e., God's direct intervention in a natural law as a self-revelation meant to help our faith. Many modern people agree that God exists, provided there are no divine self-manifestations, as André Frossard says. These modern believers would rather believe in "green beings" descending from UFOs, than in a God who appears through natural laws and miracles.

But the gospel speaks of miracles, which are signs for faith and which will be performed by those who believe as credentials for those who do not. The Church, sparingly and with great prudence, admits their presence also in our modern world. In July 1989, the 65th miracle of Lourdes was officially recognized by the Bishop of Catania and by the International Medical Board. But the miracle seems to have the primary aim of a sign. To relieve a single suffering creature, a strong inner help through prayer and the outer help of the charity of others seem to be more usual.

But then, from the scientific view of chance, finalism and natural law, Providence's and God's care for every creature is central for the believer, although it acts, above all, inside the human soul. Human beings received from nature, and receive from grace, sufficient abilities to dominate evil and overcome life's difficulties. The laws of nature must follow their course, as a rule. And through experience, whoever believes knows that when God welcomes us to that endless sweetness and transparency, and leads us to a glimpse of that world ruled by love, tragedy turns into drama, calamity into training, and disgrace into grace.

### **An inventor creates meaningful works**

The choice between biological casualism and finalism is linked with a wider and global choice, between nonsense and meaning of human life, between basic mistrust and trust. What do we mean by the words "meaning of life"? A speech is meaningful if it expresses something true in a logical way. A machine is meaningful if it meets a need, if it saves time and toil, if it does not cost more than it saves. An enterprise is meaningful when the necessary sacrifice and work is proportional to the result we hope to get from it. Human life is meaningful if all natural human needs, especially deeper needs, can be met for all of us, and when the sacrifice of some is repaid by the fulfillment of others we acknowledge as more important and superior.

Our deepest inborn need, which alone makes us different from animals, is our aspiration to the very best, to perfection, to the perfection of technology, yes, but above all to perfect truth, justice, and love. Such need made the extraordinary human evolution possible, our ever increasing superiority over the other living beings, the rise and development of civilization, human faith in science, art, family, social justice, and freedom.

Such need finds its utmost expression in authentic religious faith; it derives from the basic trust that human life has a meaning, i.e., that a reality corresponds to the need and human aspiration of human

beings towards justice and perfect love, towards truth and total beauty, towards peace and stable joy. A reality which can be reached by all persons of good will and not only the lucky ones.

There is a connection between biological finalism and the meaning of human life. Our existence, in fact, has a meaning or not according to the entity which produced us. If we are children of blind forces, such as physical-chemical causes, a true meaning cannot exist: obviously an irrational power cannot build meaningful works. But if an inventor-artist exists, the situation changes, as from night to day. It could be, or, better yet, it would be highly probable that our being is spiritually harmonious and that our spirit's need for the infinite corresponds to a real opportunity to fulfil this need.

An intelligence would not have created us without a reason, nor would the intelligence who gave us a thirst for justice and love have left us without adequate means to attain our supreme goal. It is therefore logical to think that even if individual persons are subject to chance and misfortune, God's intelligence granted us oriented forces allowing us to overcome difficulties and to draw advantages in order to reach a meaningful result. If nature is finalistically oriented, we may deduce that also human life must have a meaning. But also vice versa: if we feel and guess through physical and spiritual experiences that in spite of such sufferings human life must have a meaning, we are ready to recognize the value of the arguments in favor of biological finalism.

### **Two trains in opposite directions. Basic trust or mistrust?**

If, as already seen, everything in the nature of living beings moves for a finality, this applies to human life as well. And if the supreme innate human aspiration, as everyone can check, is perfect and stable justice, Truth and love,' by following the "instructions for use," all human beings will be able to reach, to a certain degree, full and everlasting satisfaction of all their needs and aspirations, among which the highest is stable bliss.

Two ways lead to these "naive and utopian" conclusions: finalism (more reasoning that stays close to scientific data), and basic trust (more intuition that connects with considerations of our own and others' lives). The choice between basic trust and mistrust can be compared to what happens in a great railway station where everyone must enter and choose a train. Only two lines are available, leaving every hour in opposite directions, leading to two territories where everything is diametrically opposed. There are many people who cannot make up their minds and are waiting at the station to see if any train is formed for intermediate directions, less radical and total. But then, as there is none, they must choose one of the two.

The first train is full of serene and confident people, but it is very uncomfortable, with hard seats or none at all. It runs through "naive and utopian" regions named stable man-woman love, family, moral education of the children, honesty in a corrupt world, commitment to work, social justice, freedom for everybody, science and technology allied with ethics and faith. It goes on through even more "unreal and chimerical" regions such as Return to the Golden Age, "Approach to Paradise Lost", "New Humanity", "Contemplative Prayer", "Chastity", "Detachment from Material Goods", "Committed Charity". Some of these places can only be reached by air. The final airport is named "Country of the Accomplished Ideals: God."

The second train has all technological comforts and sensorial satisfactions, at least in the beginning, and it is full of very practical and realistic people who "know how life is and how the world goes." In the first sections it touches regions named business, market laws, sexual needs, religious indifference, moral relativism, free love, science only, realism, overcoming of good and evil, of truth and falsehood. By air you proceed to: deconsecration of "false ideals," skepticism, cynicism, nihilism. The final airport is named: "City of pure technology and instincts: Hell".

### **Look at the ring-shaped cake and not just at the hole**

Strangely enough, "Utopians" who believe in ideals tend to reality, while "Realists" who only believe in physics express their opinion against the reality of things. The philosopher Peter Wust was the first to analyze the fundamental alternative between "original trust and mistrust." Owing to the strict connection between basic trust and moral ideals, he sees a tendency of will to truth and goodness in the former, while he identifies mistrust with a blindness more or less influenced by selfishness or bad will.

With Hans Kiing we do not feel like dividing human beings into sheep and goats so quickly, nor always and automatically labelling mistrust as being guilty. We admit, however, that there are people who emphasize theoretical difficulties against faith, to avoid the practical matter of living it, and who call in question the quality of the fruit because they have to climb the tree to pick them.

Küng summarized and developed the theme of basic trust. He analysed the fundamental choice in this way: "In basic mistrust, we utter a fundamental No, impossible however to keep coherently in practice, to the problematic reality of self and of the world, a No with which we shut ourselves off from reality. This basic negative attitude is equivalent to a nihilistic fixation on the nullity of reality and to an abyssal uncertainty about every human experience and behavior. Human beings are not per se inclined towards No: in us there is something opposed to a basically negative decision denying the meaning of life and the possibility of fulfilling human aspirations to truth, freedom, and justice. . . . We are free, free to say No: the temptation of skepticism and nihilism is authentic and serious. . . . It is rooted in the totally problematic nature of reality where evil is always mixed up with goodness and sometimes even prevails so that we are tempted to underline the former and to refuse trust in the victory of the latter.

"The No cannot be coherently kept up in practice; of course, someone may say the totality is absurd, and only the parts are reasonable. But it is not coherent to trust the single case when we are distrustful on principle. How can a single step, a means, be meaningful if the whole way is absurd? Whoever nihilistically chooses nothingness must in practice always run into debts with existence. . . . Even the most distrustful person must continuously rely on some remaining truth and honesty of others, on some meaning for their acting and living." Otherwise only suicide would be left to them.

"On the contrary, in basic trust we say a fundamental Yes, which can be coherently kept up in practice, to the problematic reality of himself and the world. It is a Yes through which one opens oneself to reality: this positive basic attitude means a fundamental anti-nihilistic certainty in every human experience and behavior, in spite of the persisting threat of the problematic nature of reality. Human beings naturally tend towards Yes: we are not indifferent before such a decision. Placed between chaos and cosmos, absurdity and intelligence, value and nonvalue, existence and

nothingness, I am pre-arranged: according to my nature I wish I could see, understand, aspire to, be successful, be happy. . . . Therefore without indulging in facile optimism, I utter a basic Yes to problematic reality. . . . The Yes can be coherently kept in practice while the No to reality falls into ever increasing contradictions. Yes can live on, amid so many snares. Distrust in the single case can be well reconciled with a basic trust in global reality. . . . Obviously basic trust cannot be kept without facing difficulties and doubts continuously, without being subject to the dangers of bitterness and disappointment, the whole of which can be overcome through constant fidelity to the fundamental decision taken. . . . In this sense basic trust means hope: not only this or that particular hope, but basic hope, that every disappointment can be overcome. This is the essential condition of a truly human life, the opposite of despair."

I may be pessimistic about the single case, about love, family or worldly justice, my work, this political regime, this century, human coherence, the success of this enterprise, happiness itself, my worldly life. But still I can basically trust that in God there is a final victory of goodness, and a possibility, for whoever repents of wickedness, to remedy one's life, even though with hard work.

### **André Malraux and God's death**

If God does not exist, all human moral values lose their basis, root and support. If we deny God and wish to be logical and coherent, we must necessarily accept basic distrust and nihilism. In his *Myth of Sisyphus* Camus theorizes the disconsolate vision of the existence of a modern atheist, trying to answer the fundamental question: is life worth living or not? "In a world suddenly deprived of illusions and light, one feels one is a foreigner and this exile is without relief because deprived of the memories of a lost fatherland and of the hope of a promised land."

The comparison, or rather the collision between the limitation of worldly values and the deep-seated desire for perfect values inborn in us, to feel ourselves transported by transient things while there is an overbearing need for the absolute in our hearts, to feel torn by sorrow and death, with an inextinguishable thirst for eternal Love: this is the absurd prison where contemporary atheism struggles. The Christian accepts both the divine and the human, but modern men and women want to choose either God or humanity. And they choose humanity in the name of "its own greatness."

"At the end of the 19th century," Malraux writes, "Nietzsche proclaimed: God is dead. Which means we must wait for humanity's kingdom . . . to make our human condition shine with human means. But what has been done up to now? To the tension towards God, humanity's tension towards itself, towards its overcoming, should have followed. But we must ascertain a flattening: a bourgeois life lying down in comfort and pleasure, an art of acquiescence, enclosed in nature, no longer of creation and of conquest. The death of humanity followed the death of God."

With mass secularization today, most people behave in an outwardly correct manner only when they think they cannot escape human and immediate sanctions. Moral principles without God are not compulsory because the conscience itself which creates them can modify or demolish them. And it is not fair because it brings consequences alike both for the honest and the wicked.

Alexander Solzenitsin writes: "At last we have got rid of the moral inheritance of the Christian centuries with their immense resources of piety and sacrifice, and the social systems have acquired

more and more definite materialistic connotations. In conclusion, we can say the Western world has defended human rights successfully and even widely, but meanwhile, in humankind, consciousness of our responsibility before God and society has faded away. In the last decades the legalistic selfishness of western philosophy has definitely prevailed and the world is in an intense spiritual crisis and in a blind political alley. Every technical success, including the cosmos, of so-called progress is no longer able to redeem the moral poverty which the twentieth century has plunged into." All this is a practical proof that without God we fall into nihilism, believing that human life is nil, contradictory, meaningless, and valueless.

### **A bottle with some liqueur**

On the one hand, life does not gratify human aspiration for the perfection of values. Every human being sooner or later is compelled to say: "I dreamed of a different love. Perfect friendship does not exist. What is wonderful soon becomes spoilt. There is no justice for anyone in this world. Democracy does not keep its promises. Socialism disappoints us." On the other hand, in this world we find "fragments" of meaning, bits of true values, portions of the meaning of life: some sincerity, honesty, beauty, friendship, some achievements in justice, some examples of true love, some moments of peace and true joy.

There is something but not everything. It is like finding a bottle of "Elixir of Joy," almost empty. For some it is only a disappointment because it is almost empty. For others it is very interesting because there is something in it. The former think: if it is not full it is as if there were nothing. The latter think: let's drink the little there is and be content with it; it is stupid to nourish dreams of perfection. On the contrary, those who have basic trust think: if there is some liqueur, it is clear that someone produces it somewhere. If we took we can find that someone. Meanwhile let us take what little there is and try to make this world progress. But let's not forget to find out where this partial value comes from and let's not give up the innate need to look for the absolute and the perfect.

We are like a boy born and brought up in dark and lonely places, without ever seeing the sun and colors, without ever listening to music, without true friends, without ever seeing a girl. His inborn aspirations lead him to have a foreboding that such realities exist, because he feels that nature deserves confidence. If thirst exists, somewhere there is also water. His reasonable hope is fed by glimpses of light he perceives, by pale colors he sees, by sounds he hears, by aspiring to someone so like yet unlike himself whom he has never seen, but he senses must be there.

Faith in God, and the underlying confidence from which it springs, is something like that. From samples it goes back to a manufacturing plant. From bits of sculpture we guess there must be an artist. From rivers and flowing streams we are brought to imagine the sea. From flakes of gold in the river we infer a vein of gold in the rocks upstream. Seeing some gleams among thick clouds we think of a great light source.

Basic distrust sees a ring-shaped cake as a hole and a zebra as a completely black animal. Intuitive faith or trust in reality observes instead that a zebra has white stripes, and, besides the hole, it sees above all a ring-shaped cake. And it thinks there must be a cook able to make other cakes and to give more to those who had too little of them. In conclusion even if it admits the evident and sometimes colossal deficiencies of this world, it finds that there is something positive and

wonderful, almost like a line of rose-tinted light glimmering in the East announcing the unimaginable splendor of dawn.

### **Ariadne's thread of life**

Basic trust answers Leibniz's question: Why is there something instead of nothing? Between the answer of the trustful and the basic distrustful, there is no equal value as if the scales balanced. The difference between the trays of the scale is immeasurable because "something" weighs infinitely more than "nothing," above all when this "something" is organized, has positive qualities, is of value, as in our instance. Something organized means intelligence; something beautiful, joyous, fair, loving presupposes an aesthetic, moral, benevolent source, a spiritual source.

If I cannot find anything good in a desert, I need not give any explanation; it is exactly what you expect; it is natural for a desert. But if I find some excellent wine in a demijohn, that small amount makes me reasonably think of a vineyard and of a vine dresser. According to distrust the demijohn is half empty; but the diffident have no right to deny the vine dresser, based on the nothingness of the empty part. There is no equality between the two halves of the demijohn. Something infinitely exceeds nothing.

You can rightly object that the full part is not enough for a month's journey in a desert or that the joys of human life are not equal to the worries and pains of most people, but nobody can deny that if we go to the address written on the demijohn, a great quantity of excellent wine can be bought.

A machine in which only some parts work while the remaining are out of use, can be of no value as regards yield, but it supports the basic belief that somewhere there is a workshop able to mend it or to make a new working machine.

"Basic belief," Hans Küng writes, "is not irrational at all. It depends on the type of choice. Is basic trust a choice between two equal possibilities? It is not: you are not making a choice between red and green or even black and white, between light and the lack of light, brightness and complete darkness! It is not even like the famous choice of Hercules at the crossroads. Here you must not choose between pleasure and virtue, inclination and duty but between existence and nothing."

Basic trust is Ariadne's thread which shows that life must have a meaning for everybody. Dag Hammarskøld, General Secretary of the United Nations and Nobel Prize winner in 1961, wrote at Whitsun 1961, four months before his death during a peace mission to the Congo border: "I do not know who or what asked the question. I do not know when it was asked. I do not even know whether I have answered it. But once I answered 'yes' to something or somebody. Since then I have been certain that existence has a meaning and therefore, submitting to it, my life has meaning. Since then I have known the meaning of 'Never look backwards . . . never worry about tomorrow.' Guided through the labyrinth of life by Ariadne's thread of the answer, I reached a place and a time where I got to know that the way leads to a triumph and the downfall to which it leads is a triumph. I got to know that the prize for life commitment is outrage and the deepest humiliation forms the utmost exaltation possible for humankind. Since then the word courage has lost its meaning, because I could be deprived of nothing."

Happiness therefore cannot be found in this world, but we may taste some sips. From these we may rightly hope to reach the spring, if we follow the right way to the source.

## CHAPTER 5 PHILOSOPHIES

### **Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche and the deification of humanity**

"To speak of God to modern people, within the schemes of contemporary culture," Giovanni Marchesi writes, "two widespread factors must not be neglected: atheism and religious apathy." How did we come to set God against humanity? What are the cultural but especially the philosophical factors determining the proposal of a radical denial of God which today declares human nature as a new absolute, wholly independent from God?

Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, and, above all, Nietzsche, are the most important authors of the passing from universal acceptance to the denial of God, at the same time affirming our "deification." "In the human 'sky the 'stars' that had marked the spiritual and cultural path of humankind are extinguishing; the earth alone, in human hands, is the object of our human vision, proclaiming that we are nearly adult,' 'of age,' and therefore no longer in need of external guardianship." Atheistic humanism repeats in various forms: "God must die if we are to live."

Yet, according to the biblical vision, humanity is placed in the middle of creation, appointed "master" and "lord" of it, and the relationship of obedience and availability to God's will is proposed only to lead us to the highest summits of glory and bliss to which God calls us. God became human, Christian revelation states, so that humankind could become divine.

We are not forbidden to fly, but rather advised not to fly without taking into account the necessary instructions for correct flight, given us by the "author of aerodynamics." For a human creature to become divine is not only legal, but it is the primary objective God wants. But it must be by God's rules, the "expert" on deity. We are not to become the god we imagine, but the true divinity, as God really is.

At the origin of modern anthropocentrism, seen as a safeguard of human dignity, we meet first a disciple of Hegel, L. Feuerbach, who wholly dissolves theology into anthropology. Humanity is "the beginning, the center, and the purpose of religion; God is but the revelation, the evolution of human beings. ... The task of the modern age is to realize and to humanize God, to transform and meld theology into anthropology. . . . Human consciousness of God is the consciousness humans have of themselves. God's knowledge is the knowledge human has of God."

For different reasons the three "masters of suspicion"- Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche -- are connected to Feuerbach. For the three of them, religion, above all Christianity, is "alienation" ( Marx),

"illusion" ( Freud), " the enemy of life" "( Nietzsche), from which we must be set free, given back to ourselves, to a new morality.

Karl Marx, who spiritually derives from the humanistic atheism of Feuerbach, gave worldwide diffusion to his teacher's thought and launched the new "gospel" which aimed at a new humanism based on atheism and communism. "Atheism is humanism mediated by the suppression of religion, and communism is humanism mediated by the suppression of private property." The task of practical criticism is to fight against "the topsy turvy world" (government and capitalistic society), of which religion, defined as "the opium of the people" in this context, would be "spiritual flavor" and "halo."

"With Karl Marx," Marchesi adds, "night falls on western metaphysics; the whole of reality is reduced to praxis. And religion? Marx thought it would die naturally, thanks to the social progress of communist society; his interpreters and followers subjected religion not only to criticism but also to violent persecution. However, it is by means of Marx's thought that atheism reached planetary expansion.

"But the utmost consequences," Marchesi goes on, "to which modern atheism is open, are summed up in Nietzsche's work and tragic end. . . . In his upsetting text, *Ecce Homo*, written on the threshold of his personal catastrophe as a sort of introduction and final summing up of his whole work, he says: 'I first discovered truth because I first felt falsehood as a lie and *I rejected it*.' By 'lie' Nietzsche does not want to cover only this or that particular aspect of religion with its historical forms of accomplishment but the very essence of Christianity.

"'Preeminent among recent events,' he wrote in *Gay Science*, 'is the fact that God is dead, that faith in the Christian God has become no longer acceptable; it already begins to throw its first shadows over Europe. At such news we feel enlightened by beams of a new dawn.'"

The radical denial of God is for Nietzsche the presupposition for the advent of the antigod, the superman, outlined in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. He advanced with hammer blows and he aimed at destroying the entire past. He also announced and contributed to paving the way towards terrible misfortunes that have upset our century (Nazi Germany). The final outcome of his efforts ended by ruining his mind.

"The philosophy of nothing," Marchesi continues, "as a nonsense of human existence, as an absurdity of life, has deeply influenced this modern age. But the final result is the dramatic experience of 'humanity's death,' immersed in a desperate solitude, since without God and the reference to the absolute foundation for our existence, we discover only the nonsense of life. . . . We inexorably flow into the dehumanization of existence, theorized by the atheistic and desperate existentialism of J.P. Sartre."

Paradoxically Nietzsche is, in the sphere of Christianity, a challenge and a provocation to Christians to live their faith more coherently, to speak more and more adequately about God, without reducing God's greatness to a mere instrument of solace. In fact, Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, thinking they were striking Christian faith, actually contributed to unmasking counterfeit expressions of faith and helped correct deviating interpretations. This explains why Christian authors such as Marcel,

Mounier, Maritain, Papini, Scheler, Guardini, and von Balthasar took a direct interest in Nietzsche, criticizing him, meanwhile catching the provocative sense present in his vision of "God's death." God's death is "a theory," Marchesi concludes, "that feels it can be fully realized as a wholly autonomous plan, but, by rejecting God, ends by disposing of humanity in a despotic way, as recent history dramatically witnesses." Atheism in a test tube. 70 years of experience by nations

We can judge how valid the doctrines of the great masters of atheism are from the world events of the past seventy years in all those countries that drew inspiration from them. Such events are the result of a sort of experiment carried out through social means of communication and school, not on single guinea pigs, but on all Western peoples for a whole generation and more.

Today everyone recognizes the twentieth century shame of Nazism, which obviously had its teacher in Nietzsche. Marxist communism oppressed freedom and human dignity over a longer period and on a still wider scale. Today, after Gorbachev's Perestrojka and Glasnost, even the Communists know it. Such a slavery and such bloodshed did not help to achieve an economic welfare that was even close to that of other European countries. So great a persecution of believers and such massive and organized atheistic propaganda did not succeed in destroying faith.

"If today," Solzenitsin writes, "I were asked to summarize the main reason for the ruinous revolution which swallowed up almost 60 millions of my fellow countrymen and women, I could but repeat: 'Human beings have forgotten God; that is the reason why it happened like that. Human consciousness, deprived of its divine dimension, shows limits which had a determining role in the enormous crimes of our century. . . .'"

The eddy of atheism and self-destruction is sucking in the twentieth century. This ruinous fall into the abyss has a number of aspects that do not depend on a political system, or on a particular level of economic and cultural development, or even on national characteristics. Indeed, our western, secularized, consumer civilization, even if far from Nazi and Stalinist ignominy, is seriously threatened by dehumanization. Today we know that the naive faith of nineteenth century science and technology, which should have made faith in God superfluous, was pointless and said nothing about the ultimate and conclusive problem: the values giving sense to life.

### **Augusto Del Noce and the two wagers**

Augusto Del Noce, Professor of Philosophy at the University La Sapienza in Rome (died 1989), wrote a powerful synthesis of the history of philosophy up to the present time. Human thought, he says, has divided into two great options or wagers after Descartes: rationalistic philosophy or religious philosophy. The former thinks of humanity as self-sufficient from God, with its own reason only, and holds that we can and must reach knowledge and life values. The latter thinks, with the Bible, that the world is good in itself, because created by God; but it was spoilt by sin, and therefore human reason needs to be complemented by God's revelation to reach truth and goodness.

This exclusive trust in a self-sufficient humanity reaches its apex in Marx, who requires that God not exist in order "to allow us to be fully realized as selfcreators (postulatory atheism)." In Marx such a theory of the self-sufficient subject, "in the awareness that a single individual, alone, does not dominate history, became a wager on social humanism. The wager in favor of God as saving

history was an alternative to social humanism, which changes the world and can do so above all because God is denied. . . . We have reached a Marxism which," according to Del Noce, "marks the high point of atheistic rationalism. Marxism, moreover, makes the optional character of the rationalistic proposal clear because it aims at being judged by the results. It is a wager that is not based on an abstract theory, but a practical project. Marxism, besides, does not wish to prove that God does not exist with rational reasons. Rather, it gives its opinion on the value or nonvalue (and for Marxism it is a nonvalue), of God's existence. . . . Marxism in our century has not only conquered many countries," according to Del Noce, "but has also defeated its bourgeois opponent, with its sociological materialistically based relativism, typical of the opulent society. . . . The fundamental options are therefore two: the religious and the rationalistic-atheistic and, since the conclusive and complete form of the latter has failed, it is unavoidable" for Del Noce, "to go back to the former."

### **Martin Heidegger and the quest for God**

The suspicion that Feuerbach, Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche had thrown on faith, thinking it an escape from reality and hard historical commitments, can now find confirmation in the practical attitude of many half-believers. But does this really correspond to the essence of Christianity? Or is it not rather a partial and historical version, due to human weakness and incoherence, of the infinitely richer Christian message? These masters of suspicion destroyed previous values, but they were unable to re-weave the cloth they had undone, weft by weft, so passionately. The different forms of totalitarianism that have upset the history of our century, the crisis of moral values, of the family, of the sense of life, the poisoning the present consumer civilization, are the accomplishment of the historical process destroying humanity, of which they made themselves the flag bearers.

The philosopher Martin Heidegger, through his long existential analysis, has sought the way to overcome the nihilism and atheism of the masters of suspicion. His thought is certainly open to the problem of God, but does he really and philosophically reach God? In his dark and complex way of expression, not even experts succeed in answering this problem. The distrust in reason that Heidegger derives from Kant and Hegel and the exclusion of Kierkegaard's intuition are, in our opinion, the explanation of this failure. Other contemporary philosophers reach God philosophically and clearly, joining the realism of Thomas Aquinas and his school, still alive in modern thought.

"While Heidegger," Giovanni Marchesi writes, "charges the whole western metaphysics with 'forgetfulness of being,' he did not notice that at least Thomas Aquinas had thought of 'being' in itself, philosophically advancing to God, the fullness of being. . . . But was Heidegger acquainted with true Thomist thought? His knowledge of scholastic philosophy seems to have been through Duns Scotus's concept of the 'univocal being,' so far from Thomas's. . . ."

"Pre-theology, which Heidegger explains, can be continued by Christian thinkers to give, in the light of Revelation, that full original content, passionately searched for by Heidegger in his basic question [the meaning of being]. But such completeness can only derive from an explicit opening to God, from a personal meeting with divine mystery, which is fullness of being, absolute foundation of human and worldly being, and the final sense of human history."

## **Immanuel Kant and distrust in reason**

A woman sitting on the sidewalk was groaning. "What is the matter?" a passerby murmured. The woman looked at him and said: "I happen to need your alms, because I am blind, deaf, and dumb since birth." Kant tries to prove through reason that reason is blind, deaf, and dumb because it cannot reach any truth beyond sense experience.

Realist and neoscholastic philosophers, besides the various arguments they bring in defense of reason, answer Kant that if what he wants to prove is true, then what he wants to prove is false. As a matter of fact he wishes to prove a philosophical thesis (not perceived by the senses), using the very reason he declares incapable of reaching truths above the senses. The philosopher who says he does not believe in the capability of reason, as a matter of fact believes in it, because he philosophizes and every philosophical thesis is above the senses.

But to tell the truth, realism shows that in many instances humans arrive at certainty even on truths unaccessible to senses, which can often be verified and which give us a direct experience of reasons capabilities in any case. Thus today even to defend reason we depend on a faith that is not purely subjective.

At a beginning of a series of lectures to Catholic students at Oxford, Father Thomas Corbishley stated that reason can know some extra-sense truths, among which God's existence. "Let us make it clear from the beginning," he said, "by stating that it is not absolutely necessary -- in fact it is impossible -- to claim the rights of reason directly. Any statement of mine necessarily justifies reasons supremacy. Whereas any statement by a skeptic, even if attacking reason, actually helps to admit its invulnerability."

There are truths of which everyone is certain, even though they cannot be experimentally confirmed. And exactly while I reach the certain conclusion of such reasoning, I perceive the ability of reason to know the truth. "If at any time I know that I know, the fact is absolutely certain that I know I can know." All the important decisions in life are made, by a wise person, on the basis of good probability and moral certitudes, experimental confirmation of which follows.

## **Thomas Aquinas and Realism**

Among the greatest philosophical currents two achieve the moral certitude of God's existence: realism of Thomist inspiration and existentialism of Augustinian inspiration. In the former, the observation of reality outside human existence prevails, and reason is said to be able to know and find God's traces in it. In the latter, inner human conscience is studied above all, and certain traces of God's presence are found in it.

Both currents crisscross the history of human thought and try to accept help from thinkers of their own century and to answer their critics. Criticism of reason's ability by Kant and modern idealism, for instance, compelled the realists to produce a critical epistemology and a critical realism capable of answering those objections.

Neoscholastic realism or modern essential Scholasticism distinguishes between experimental science (knowledge of phenomena and of their physical causes) and philosophy (knowledge through reason of facts and reality not accessible to senses). Also in the latter case the objective value of human knowledge is admitted and explained, keeping in mind Kant's criticism, of the psychological mechanism with which the essence of things is deduced from reality and kept intact in the idea.

Science, philosophy, and history provide a valid support for faith which demonstrates with moral certitude that God exists and that Christ is God's most splendid revelation. Faith goes beyond science, history, and philosophy by relying on Christ and adhering to his teachings, the sublimity of which it perceives through reason, but which it accepts also in the face of not clearly comprehensible instances.

The two great obstacles of human thought are avoided in Scholastic realism. The first obstacle is rationalism, which relies only on reason while rejecting the mysteries of faith, leading today to relativism, positivism, skepticism, nihilism. The second is fideism, which is led by faith alone, denying any cognitive value beyond phenomena and therefore giving up the inner harmony between reason and faith.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a great renaissance of Scholastic philosophy took place which purified it of all encrustation of old Scholastic philosophy and allowed it to confront Kant's criticism and to build up a gnoseology heedful of all aspects of cognitive facts. Great masters of Thomist thought have been at work in the first half of the twentieth century in many church and lay universities: the Gregorianum Pontifical University in Rome, the Catholic University of Milan, the Pontifical Lateran University, the Aloysianum at Gallarate, the Catholic Universities of Louvain (Belgium), Tübingen (Germany), Nijmegen (Holland), Innsbruck (Austria), Lyon, Toulouse, Strasbourg and Paris (France), Salamanca and Comillas (Spain), Washington, Georgetown, New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Saint Louis (U.S.), and many State Universities in Italy, for instance, Turin, Genoa, Milan, Palermo, Padua.

Here are the names of the best known masters of Scholastic and Neoscholastic philosophy: Thomas Aquinas (1193-1274), Albertus Magnus (1193-1280), Francisco de Vitoria (1492-1546), Pedro Soto (1495-1560), Domingo Bafiez (1528-1604), Luis de Molina (1536-1600), Francisco Suarez (1548-1617), Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), Athanasio Kircher (1601-1680), Luigi Taparelli D'Azeglio (1793-1862), Matteo Liberatore (1810-1892), Gaetano Sanseverino (1811-1865), Joseph Kleutgen (1811-1883), Tilmann Pesch (1836-1899), Konstantin Gutberlet (1837-1928), Salvatore Tongiorgi (1820-1863), Louis Billot (1846-1931), Albert Farges (1848-1926), Désiré Mercier (1851-1926), Antonin Sertillanges (1863-1948), Joseph Maréchal (1878-1944), Guido Mattiussi (1852-1925), Edith Stein (1891-1942), Jacques Maritain (1882-1973).

Among contemporary scholars we can mention: Charles Boyer, Paolo Dezza, and R. Garrigou-Lagrange (Rome), Joseph van Steenberghen and Louis De Raeymaecker (Louvain), Claude Trémontant (France), Olgiate, Masnovo and Vanni Rovighi (Milan), Gustavo Bontadini, Virgilio Melchiorre, Adriano Bausola, Ottobello and Righi (Genoa), Cornelio Fabro (Perugia), Carlo Giacon (Padua), M. Limbeck, K. Rahner, and A. Krempel (Germany), Bernard Lonergan (Toronto), N. Incardona and L. Jamarrone (Palermo), Michele Sciacca and Carlo Arata (Genoa),

Angel Luis Gonzalez, Tomas Alvira, Juan Sanguinetti, Alejandro Llano from the University of Navarra, and many others.

### **Walter Kasper: Today faith is the opposite of running away from the world**

Christian philosophy does not claim to find clearly demonstrable ways or absolute proofs of God's existence. Faith would be no longer faith. The ways to God, the Bible underlines, are expressed by the lives and testimony of great prophets, Christ, and past and present authentic Christians. But the Bible also shows the way of nature, the one followed by Neothomism. Without these ways, falling into despair or absolute indifference to life before or after, seems inevitable. God can today be expressed as the One whom we reach not only through philosophy, but, for most people, through a comprehensive intuition of life as a negation of the absurd and an affirmation of meaning.

God is the power allowing us to hope in the future of humankind, freeing us from the boredom of life, encouraging us to improve the world. Therefore faith is today the opposite of running away from the world: not only it does not decrease our struggles, but it inspires and supports them; not only is it not a surrogate, a consolation for disappointments, but it is a hope encouraging us to live a fuller life. And if it has found true authenticity again, it is also thanks to atheistic criticism that has separated the wheat from the chaff.

To introduce the essence of faith today we can limit ourselves to the decisive point: what attitude is more in accordance with the reality of human life: faith or its denial? Each person will be able to make a free choice, but faith seen like that will not be defined as far away from modern humanity's experiences and interests.

Philosophy, because it starts from external reality, cannot take advantage of a direct contact, of an inner experience of God, such as intuition offers and, even when it is convincing, gives a cold, abstract, far away image of the Supreme Being. In order to avoid thinking of faith as a subjective need, however, with no foundation in external reality, I will translate two of the philosophical ways to God into a simple and popularizing way for anyone who may not know philosophy.

### **A million dollars cannot come from an empty wallet**

Existential philosopher Martin Heidegger, in his book *Introduction to Metaphysics* begins with a question: "Why do things exist, why do I exist, why does the world exist rather than nothing?" Everybody agrees that if an event occurs there must be a cause, a *proportionate* cause. Any study, research, or discovery about the origin of a phenomenon whose origin is not directly experienced takes place with the help of the principle of sufficient reason.

To identify intelligent beings in interstellar space there is no need to see them. Intelligent radio broadcasts enunciating mathematic formulae, for instance, would be enough. Finding functioning alien objects would be enough. By observing their products we can get an idea of the intelligence and ways of living of past peoples, artists, and inventors whose names we do not even know.

Exploiting the principle of sufficient reason and their calculations, astronomers like Le Verrier discovered planets which could not even be seen with telescopes. Physicists like Rutherford

thoroughly studied the behavior of the atom, which has ever been seen, not even with the most powerful microscope. A cause does not necessarily have to be seen or touched. For instance, ultraviolet and infrared rays, gravity, radio waves, and nuclear radiation are all well known causes nobody has ever seen. It is enough to ascertain their effects. Reason makes us aware that the principle of sufficient reason has a value also beyond the material world; it also applies to spiritual facts. Any fact occurring must have a proportionate cause. Nothing comes from nothing.

### **Joseph Van Steenberghen and the way to God of great life values**

Joseph F. Van Steenberghen, former teacher of philosophy at the University of Louvain, describes this way to God. First stage: an external reality, caused by nothing and by nobody, must exist. It can be anything: matter, nature, universe, Spirit, God, or something else. We may not feel like looking into it, for the moment. But there must be something self-existing, something that exists without being created or being caused by another, otherwise none of the relative things would exist. We call this reality "Absolute Being" because, not being caused, it does not depend on others and it is free (*ab-solutum*) from all ties of receiving or depending.

It is absolutely impossible for us to *imagine* a being, or matter, that had no origin and extending its existence into inconceivable eternity, or rather into endless time (which is equally unimaginable). Nevertheless, *reason* requires it; we cannot *imagine* it but we can *reason* to it. If no being were eternal, all beings, with no exception, would be like those we have experienced that are caused and have their origin in time. But such a supposition, when examined more carefully, proves absurd. Everyone and everything would have received existence but without anyone giving it first. It would be as though a chain of people passed on buckets of water without anyone filling them first at a fountain.

Or it could be compared to an endless series of mirrors reflecting light, each one from the previous mirror, without a light source. It would be an endless sequence of telephone or television repeaters transmitting words and images without a speaker on the telephone or an initial telecamera. In a word, a chain of generated generators without a first source-generator is absurd. It is repugnant to reason; it makes no sense.

These examples make us realize the total and infinite difference between the absolute Being and the ones we see around us, including ourselves. In fact it is necessary to stop at a very first source of being: it did not receive existence as it itself is the source of existence. It does not have the explanation of its being in and from another because it has it in and of itself. It is the Wholly Other Being. If in eternity, before time, nothing had existed, not even the absolute Being, even now nothing would exist, "*because nothing comes from nothing*". Contingency requires something noncontingent as a condition for itself. Reason demands it as valid for any type of reality, not only for earthly phenomena.

*Second stage.* Noncaused Reality must possess all actually existing perfection which can be ascertained by us. Therefore noncaused Reality has always existed. It exists not because it was produced, like all realities we see around us, but because existing is part of its nature. This Reality is obviously the origin of everything, living beings, humankind. Therefore if it is the origin of everything, it is also the origin of the perfections of things, of living beings and humanity, the origin

of various natural beauties, various biological organizations of living bodies, abilities, powers, skills, intelligence, intuition, sensitivity, pleasure, joy, attachment to life, courage, devotion to others, trust, firmness, affection, friendship, love, honesty, sincerity, justice, tranquility, inner peace, humor, rich knowledge, experience of freedom, and so on.

Such Reality contained, at least potentially, these perfections, as a seed contains all the qualities of a plant and a child has the potential qualities to become an intelligent adult. From what cannot produce a certain reality, that reality has no origin.

Those who affirm that perfections arose by themselves in time from nothing, do not attribute any consistent reality to them. We agree that perfections in living beings develop through practice. This would not happen, however, if potentialities were not in them. But prime generating Reality did not contain the perfection of life and of human spirit only potentially. In fact a being only potentially containing a perfection presupposes that this potentiality was received from another being who had the potentiality already developed in itself.

Both potentiality and developed perfection are values, are something real. In adult humans, intelligence is a developed perfection; in a child, it is a potential; both are lacking in gas or in a stone. In a different way, potentiality is a reality as a gold mine is, or, better, it is even more real. If I have no gold mine, I cannot give it to myself or to others, nor can I make it or create it from nothing, even in a very long time. One can receive a potentiality through generation but only from a being that already has it, because nobody and nothing can give what they don't possess.

It is simply a myth, in the negative sense of myth as a merely gratuitous fairy tale, that potentialities came from nothing and then developed in time. Potentialities demand that the perfection they promise be already present in another being.

Beauty is intuition of harmony infused in matter. Technical organization is a series of ideas for achieving a definite aim by coordinating interrelated means to an intended end. Intelligence is the ability to become one with the nature of things, to grasp their essences. Patience contains the wish of something capable of acting and willing to wait a long time. Love is the gift of becoming one with someone else and with his or her goodness. And so on. Definitions will not be perfect, but they suggest that perfections and their potentialities are real and, like any reality, they cannot come from nothing, not even in billions of years. From no intelligence and love, nothing can come.

Therefore we can conclude that the potentialities and perfection we see today in the world were infused by the noncaused Reality which received nothing from anyone else as it has everything eminently, i.e., without the limitations of the created. It gave human beings the various potentialities and created conditions so that they developed in the long run.

Jacques Maritain sums it this up thus: "Since goodness, beauty, life, knowledge, love, being itself are in various degrees in things, necessarily, an utmost or maximum degree must exist somewhere for these values. . . . Anything good or beautiful is good or beautiful partially or through participation. Therefore it is not in itself the reason of its own goodness. . . . But whatever the considered cause, if its goodness is caused, it derives its goodness from something else. Also in this instance we must stop at a first cause which is good through essence or in itself."

## **Jacques Maritain and the way to God of moral conscience**

A philosophical way to God accessible to everybody is that of an upright moral choice. An honest person abstains from injuring another by bearing false witness, not because's/he would not benefit from it, nor because the falsehood could be found out, but simply because it is evil. "What is implicit in such an act?" Maritain wonders, "that human intelligence is well able to distinguish good from evil and knows good must be performed because it is good: a formal motive, surpassing the order of convenience and practical appetencies. . . .

"To do good for the sake of good, necessarily implies there is an ideal and compulsory order, a law of human actions transcending the factual order. . . . How could there be a law transcending the whole practical order if it did not depend on a reality superior to everything, in other words, Goodness itself. How could I go, engaging my whole being, towards conformity to this transcending law, if at the same time and even more deeply, I did not go towards this Goodness and I did not ordain my life to it, because it is the Good and my own Good at the same time?

"It is possible for humankind, in whom the above mentioned knowledge exists in a subconscious state, not only to ignore God in our conscious reason, but also, in this conscious reason to take a position against God's existence, owing to some misunderstanding or reasoning mistake, and to profess atheism. You may think you are an atheist, but you cannot be so in reality if you choose, and for as long as your choice, the way to goodness for the sake of goodness itself in your basic moral position."

## **To God through various philosophies**

Several philosophers and modern thinkers arrive at a knowledge of God by various paths (some more rational, some more intuitive).

*Immanuel Kant* ( 1724-1804). Though he denied the approach to the Transcendent through pure reason, Kant, and various others starting from his criticism, recognize that the moral law would have no foundation without God, without whom in fact it could not be a categorical imperative compulsory for humanity. And it would not even be a just law, because the wicked and the hero would meet the same destiny after death. Practical reason therefore leads the German philosopher to believe in postulates in order to make morality possible: free will, immortal soul, existence of a God rewarding human behavior according to justice.

*Marie-François Maine de Biran* ( 1766-1824). Inner sense tells us there is an Organizer of everything who makes us see God in universal order.

*Giuseppe Mazzini* ( 1805-1872). Selfishness hides God, while love of one's country and humankind reveals God. Without God materialism and selfishness are triumphant and any ideal wanes.

*Antonio Rosmini* ( 1797-1855). Everyone naturally perceives the Ideal Being. Moral Law is complete in God's love, who must be thoroughly loved as an Absolute Being.

*Vincenzo Gioberti* ( 1801-1852). Our mind perceives God directly and immediately and this intuition makes us reasoning beings. The presence of the perfect Being in the primary intuition makes us know other beings in their real essence, as their principle is in God.

*Søren Kierkegaard* ( 1813-1855). The leading figure of existentialism reaches God through introspection of his own spirit. In one's inner self one does not find proof of God but something more: one perceives God's words addressed to oneself as an individual.

*Alphonse Gratry* ( 1805-1872). To be human is to be endowed with an outer sense through which we perceive the reality of bodies and an inner sense through which we feel ourselves and our fellow humans. Lastly, we have a divine sense through which we find God in our souls when we admit we are inadequate.

*Leon Olléune* ( 1839-1898). This philosopher also recognizes the basic importance of serene and deep introspection, accompanied by practical search for all moral values. Really to act in this way is to recognize ourselves and to discover that the spring making us yearn and act is interior aspiration to the very best, to the infinite, to perfection, to God.

*Maurice Blondel* ( 1861-1949). He found a way to God particularly comprehensible to modern humanity, by showing that every human action tends to God even if such an aspiration is not explicitly perceived. The idea of the infinite allows us to measure everything and to find that it falls short of our desires. On the basis of psychology, Blondel proves that the Supernatural is neither impossible nor superfluous but rather the necessary complement to man.

*Etienne Boutroux* ( 1845-1921). Science has an impersonal, cold, objective vision of reality exterior to humanity. Life instead believes in values (social relations, art, morals, etc.). To choose and love a value, science is not enough: you must have faith in it. Faith, ideals, enthusiasm are the conditions for human actions, something which is absolutely necessary for us. They are also the elements of religion. Faith entails an ideal. An ideal entails God.

*Max Scheler* ( 1875-1928). Things and people can assume a spiritual value only if seen in a transcendent light. Without this value life would be meaningless and would not be worth living.

*Henri Bergson* ( 1859-1941). True consciousness is intuition, which consists of living things from their insides. Concepts, in fact, being fixed and crystallized, cannot give the whole reality, which is a perennial flux. God is endless life, the inexhaustible source of the flow of things. Life and experiences of Christian mystics are a manifestation of God.

*Karl Jaspers* ( 1883-1969). In the defeat of metaphysics, in the eternal contradictions of our own inner lives, we feel the presence of Someone transcending ourselves: human mystery is proof of God's existence.

*Jean-Paul Sartre* ( 1905-1980). As an atheist Sartre proves the need for God in his own way: he wants to become God: this is his basic wish, but his effort and his torment are vain. Being human is a useless passion; hence his human self and world bring nausea.

*Arthur James Balfour* ( 1848-1930). Religious faith, which must be considered an essential help to moral action, is founded on the testimony of conscience.

*Andrew Seth Pringle Pattison* ( 1856-1931). Interior experience reveals God's reality to humankind. God can be thought of as an "infinite experience" which partly reveals itself and is accomplished in human finite experience.

*Arnold Joseph Toynbee* ( 1889-1975). Christianity has a central function in preserving and improving civilization, because "civilizations have their reasons for existence by contributing to spiritual progress."

*Martin Heidegger* confirms that without God and eternity life is absurd. For him being in this world is like nothing because everything is doomed to finish with death. Hence existential anguish and the quest for God.

*Gabriel Marcel* ( 1889-1973). Philosophy is the inner experience lived. In it we realize we do not exhaust being in ourselves, but we share a superior Principle and in giving ourselves up in favor of God we open ourselves to the action of Love.

*Leon Chestov* ( 1866-1938). Speculative philosophy does not unveil the sense of life. Only God and faith make us penetrate it.

*Nikolas Berdyaev* ( 1864-1948). An authentic philosopher does not aim solely at knowing the structure of the universe, but at regenerating humankind. This is the philosopher expressing a religious experience, open to all reality.

*Louis Lavelle* ( 1883-1951). Through philosophic introspection humans acquire consciousness of the participation between ourselves and the Being from whom we endlessly originate. To acquire self-consciousness is to know God in ourselves.

*Renée Le Senne* ( 1882-1954). Values are the rules of human activity. We estimate values as we feel we are tending to an absolute Value: God. Spiritual health is faith in values and in the absolute Value.

*Jacques Maritain* ( 1882-1973). Ways to God are the experience acquired in choosing good and the testimony of God's friends, i.e., the mystics. Reexamination of the famous five ways of Thomas of Aquinas is made in the light of the achievements of modern science. Moreover Maritain introduces a sixth way intuitive experience, which constitutes a large part of speculation.

*Augusto Guzzo* (formerly Professor at the University of Turin): spirit is essentially the ethical guided by a universal and compulsory ideal, which we are not physically obliged to accomplish. In this ethical ideal we perceive God's existence and need.

*Luigi Pareyson* (former professor at the University of Turin): Philosophy can and must deal with God by adopting a thought form capable of penetrating the religious experience, clarifying its

largely human meaning and drawing universal meanings. The chief philosophical problem, evil, finds an answer only in Christ's person and suffering.

*Cornelio Fabro* (former professor at Perugia University): Sense and value of every truth finds its own ultimate foundation in the prime truth, which is identified with the Absolute and human spirit does not find peace until it rests in this supreme truth, i.e., in God.

*Angel Luis Gonzalez* (professor at the University of Navarra, Pamplona): Philosophical elaboration reaches out to God as to the prime cause of the universe, with all that such an affirmation implies, namely, the perfection and attributes which must be acknowledged to Divinity.

*Emmanuel Levinas* (former professor at the Sorbonne and one of the greatest contemporary philosophers): Ethics precedes metaphysics because our affective consciousness comprises a dual affectivity, first, nonintentional (our precognitive and prevolitional human solidarity with others), and, second, intentional (the face of the other whom we meet, and who speaks the moral law to us).

*Augusto Del Noce* (died 1989; former professor at the University of Rome): The history of modern philosophy is divided into two great trends: religious and atheistic. The latter finds its most complete and coherent expression in Marxism. The present collapse of Marxism as a philosophy suggests a return to the religious trend.

Also Karl Lüwith ( Germany), Paul Ricoeur (Sorbonne), Vittorio Mathieu ( Turin), Luigi Stefanini ( Padua), Teodorico Moretti Costanzi, Tina Manfredini and Maurizio Malaguti ( Bologna), Antonio Padovani ( Padua) and others arrive at God with their philosophy.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **HINDUISM AND PANTHEISM**

#### **If everything is God, nothing is God**

The ideologies which brought western society to the present crisis of values are based on pantheism and Atheism. Atheism and pantheism are close relatives. It is obvious that if the material world, with humanity in the center, is God, then God does not exist. According to Christ's revelation, humanity is destined by the Creator to share God's nature, by following God's instructions and achieving perfect communion of love with God. But we are quite far from being so now: and we can see it.

Several emerging sects today show a pantheistic tendency: "the Universe is God and I am part of it. To defeat suffering we must become conscious of our divine value. Everything is good. Sin does not exist."

Pantheism derives from the Greek "pan" meaning everything and "theos," God: Everything is God. The supreme value from which all the others derive is the Universe, Nature, Humankind. By this we mean a self-sufficient reality, having its explanation in itself, creating itself and its laws. It is therefore divine and needs no transcending Creator external to it.

Humanity, worshipper of nature and of itself, is the essence of idolatry, of every past and present heathenism: God-Sun, Goddess Earth, God of War, God as Sex, as Profit, as the Party, as Humanity. It is the essence of every sin: to establish myself as the supreme aim, the primary objective of my life. The Bible symbolizes it, on its first page, in the fruit of knowledge of good and evil, when it is put up to me to decide what is good and what is evil: "Your eyes will be opened and you will be as gods, knowing good and evil" ( Genesis3, 5).

Pantheism, Atheism, and Sin are like electrical appliances pretending to work without depending on a power source. They are television sets wanting to transmit images without being connected to a camera. They are humanity claiming to become God without the help and guide of the one who is really God.

### **An empty hat, from which rabbits come out. The contradictions of pantheism**

According to Christ's revelation, God created nature and humanity and both have been spoilt by human faults. God is *present* in nature and in us, but is neither of them. To worship a perfect Person who is *with* us, in a tottering house and ask for help us to restore it, is not the same as worshipping the tottering house.

We saw and upheld with reasons that universal history does not proceed in a casual way, but it is directed by "Anti-Chance," which is the God of religions. Pantheism holds that this "Anti-Chance" does not transcend the cosmos, but is identified with the cosmos itself. It must be borne in mind that this Anti-Chance which organized the first ultravirus and led it to Beethoven and Einstein, must at least reach the intellectual perfection of the latter.

The well-known philosopher Claude Trésmontant writes: "The organizing form leading matter to the level of organized and thinking matter is at least equal to the maximum result it achieves, i.e., it is at least as personal, conscious, and reflective as we are, since it generated us. This means we must at least grant it what is characteristic of ourselves: personality and reflection."According to pantheism, Trésmontant goes on, "the intelligence immanent in the world, the Absolute operating in it, is being formed in the world. It becomes what it does. Cosmogony is a theogony. The development of nature would be God's own development. The Absolute would be therefore incomplete at the beginning and would invent itself progressively. It would still not be aware of itself, at the level of pure matter, when not life yet, but it would become so, only by inventing humankind."In the above-mentioned work, Trésmontant shows pantheisms contradictions:

1. *The most deriving from the least.* According to pantheists, before giving origin to life and intelligence, God was pure matter. Forever, for endless billion epochs, it would have been so. But this implies the absurd idea that this matter began, with no cause and no goal, the process of its own evolution, in movement for billions of years, always in the same direction of progress and perfection, without any plan or the least idea of the goal to attain. It behaved in an

intelligent way, without being so. It has realized natural laws oriented to the formation of living beings, when it had not the least possibility of doing so. Matter would have given itself an immense wealth it did not possess and had not received from others. A cow receiving a degree or winning the Nobel Prize for physics, chemistry, and biology. Is this not perhaps a more unbelievable miracle than Creation?

"To say that matter itself is sufficient to answer for its own condition, its own development towards more complex stages, is to formulate a paralogism. It is like saying that the manifold is sufficient to explain the complex reasons in which it is integrated and brought. It is like pretending to explain the most with the least."

2. *Different and opposite intelligences.* The universe is not a unique being but it is composed of billions of different beings. Among those endowed with intelligence, some are honest and some are dishonest, some benevolent towards others and some wicked.

"Human intelligence, if it were really unique ruling the world, should reflect and repeat the unique mind and the unique thought of the unique cosmic intelligence. On the contrary, an enormous quantity of intelligences, greatly different from one another, free, absolutely irreducible to a common basic structure can be observed." Evil would be as much from God as love, goodness, or crime. Auschwitz would be as divine as Nazareth, torturers would be Godlike saints. Doubtlessly such a God does not deserve to be worshipped.

3. *A humdrum and conventional God.* At present, nature is endowed with intelligence, originality, and creativity, at least as much as humanity. According to pantheists, of course. Therefore it is astonishing that it has been behaving exactly as a machine for thousands of years, i.e., since we humans have been studying its laws. And it is scandalous that this intelligent and perfect being, so regular and law-abiding does not change behavior when its observance may be the same as causing a catastrophe. If it were a Person we should call it ferociously cruel and obtusely mundane, rather than divine. On the contrary, as a machine, it is a model worth admiring. Intelligence does exist, but in a God who created and endowed it with laws. Natural calamities are the clearest proof that nature is an automaton having a sense only in the perspective of general welfare, apart from single cases.

4. "Instincts are often very complex actions," Vittorio Marcozzi writes, "carried out with wonderful accuracy and perfection, in order to achieve a fixed goal, such as building a nest, procreation, protecting offspring, preserving life and one's own existence. ... All these instinctive operations, like vegetative life, are highly finalistic and cannot be explained if we do not admit an Intelligence. But Intelligence is not in Nature.

"In fact, if intelligence were in nature, that is, in the animal performing instinctive operations, it would depend on experience, while it comes before. ... This is evident also because most actions of this type are performed from birth, when there is no time for any experience."

Marcozzi introduces many examples from the life of animals and goes on: "Personal experience, fruit of personal intelligence, is not inherited. Instincts are inherited; therefore they are not fruit of

individual intelligence, not even of their ancestors. ... This reason should be sufficient to prove that intelligence is not in the animal, that is, in nature."

Furthermore, "instinctive operations are substantially the same, even in instances where they are wholly useless or harmful, though the animal has the physical possibility of adapting them. ... Therefore they are not the fruit of nature's intelligence, i.e., of the organisms performing them."

Another reason is that animals do not progress: "If instincts were the fruit of natural intelligence, i.e., innate in the organisms, we should conclude that such an intelligence is quite prodigious. In fact organisms can solve difficult problems that humanity solved only after thousands of years of research. Consider, for example, the very complex problems of anatomy, mathematics, engineering so naturally and elegantly solved by ammofili, Rynchites, and weaving spiders! ... Through such a wonderful intelligence great progress can be achieved, or at least improvements in our activities can be found. On the contrary all animals inferior to us, from the time they began to carry on their instinctive actions right up to the present time, have never discovered anything new, have not advanced by even a single step." Like any machine, nature is functional enough to hint at an intelligent cause, but repetitive enough and linked to strict laws to prove nature itself is not the cause.

### **Pantheism kills love**

In pantheism self-worship, self-love, self-guidance and self-redemption are in force. Humanity is not loved and does not love someone superior to itself. Humanity loves itself, humankind, and the universe. The true value is not God but the others. The human mind is not guided by a Superior Mind towards transcending bliss, but everyone, alone or together with the others, chooses one's supreme goal. If you fall into evil, there is no one to save you-you save yourself or are saved by others or not saved at all. Humankind is lonely, left to its own strengths. We are not helped to our feet by a Large Hand, but pull ourselves up by our own boot straps.

The huge problem of the suffering of innocents has not even a gleam of light in pantheism, because, according to it, evil is one of God's aspects, a "God" who is not very wise, powerful, or good at all, but rather seems to be like an impoverished creature. There is a reason why moderns accept pantheism, a reason a contemporary theologian, Claude Dagens, sums up: "We moderns wish to be free. Now a creator-God risks limiting or abolishing human freedom." By freedom we mean being without a Highway Code equal for everybody. In pantheism only self love (Ego-Ego) is important, instead of bipolar love (Ego-God), as there is no distinction between God and us. As nature is God, God causes catastrophes and tragedies. Crimes and dreadful events should always be imputed to God, to divine ignorance or wickedness. Also human mediocrity and selfishness belong to a God who has not morally developed yet. Of course, if we and the universe are to be recognized as the only true God, no wonder there are so many atheists.

### **Bhakti and charity**

If, as already seen, pure pantheism is equivalent to atheism, because it only sees the material universe and makes its God of it, there are, however, some forms of apparent pantheism that approach Christ's teaching. In Hinduism there is a clearly pantheistic current, thinking that God

(Brahman) is everything and everything is God: "In reality at the beginning this world was Brahman. He only knew himself. ... Therefore he became Everything... He who knows he is Brahman becomes this Everything." Other Hindus, on the other hand, following Ramanuja's teachings, think pantheism makes the worship of God impossible, because one cannot worship oneself. Therefore, they believe as we Christians do, that God and humanity are two distinct realities, even if love (bhakti) tends to make them one, so that we profit from all the good that comes from God.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* this tendency develops into a fully mature theism: total surrender of the individual Ego to the loving and almighty Lord. This holy book teaches the road of trustworthy faith (saddha) and of love that gives itself (bhakti). They free us from sin, help us reach peace of mind and lead us to the eternal peace of God. This reminds us of Peter's words: "So that you share the divine nature" (2 Peter 1, 4). Or, "The promise of an inheritance that can never be spoilt" (Peter 1, 4); "We will be like God because we will see God as S/He really is" (I Jn. 3, 2); "On that day you will understand that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you" (Jn. 14, 20).

"God is not the sea, but is in the sea, Shining like the moon in the water, Appearing as a white sail. Let the pure river Of Charity eternally running Flow into my heart. Dry up, my God, the muddied spring Of a Loveless faith." ( Antonio Machado Ruiz)

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **THE GREAT PROBLEM OF EVIL**

#### **The cosmic thriller**

Françoise Sagan narrates in *Avec mon meilleur souvenir* that in Lourdes at the age of fourteen, she was attending a morning Mass by chance. Next to her, sobbing, was a girl her age, bedridden and probably permanently so. The future writer felt "a repulsive feeling towards a God who allowed this." In other books Sagan remembers having seen a documentary on Dachau at about the same time. On discovering, after the misfortune of the innocent, wickedness and its horrible consequences, she decided to eliminate God from her existence.

A skeleton has been found in the closet of the universe since prehistoric times and a process that continues to the present was set in motion. All humankind takes part in it and splits into factions and parties, with debates and daily harangues. How can we justify the sufferings of those who undergo the consequences of evil, not done by them, innocent unhappiness, the mother losing her child in an earthquake, the handicapped born with damaged intelligence, deformed limbs, the fate of the blind, the deaf, and the dumb?

Some accuse God as the main culprit. Is God not omnipotent? Therefore, everything comes from God. No leaf falls against God's will. The atheist thinks that the only alibi that can save God is nonexistence. Evil, they say, comes from chance and misfortune, as good from chance and luck. In

the past many people resigned themselves saying that every evil derives from Eve's and Adam's sin, or from Pandora who opened the forbidden "box," or from Satan, or in Manichaeism, from the god of evil fighting an everlasting war against the God of goodness.

The Bible shows evil as coming from proud humankind's sin, from all who want to be god to themselves, i.e., self-sufficient and indifferent to the offering of divine supply. In the last fifty years biblical exegesis has proved that the narration of Genesis ("original" sin) sets out to be the symbolic description of human sin, above all, of idolatry, of what nowadays we call atheism and secularism that has always existed under different shapes and sizes.

Many people think evil is an inexplicable mystery, and they accept it with blind faith in God's justice and goodness, accompanied by the temptation of losing faith. On the contrary, according to us, evil *is* really a mystery, but when our mind's are at peace, through reflection and meditation on the gospel, we can guess some of the possible reasons inducing God to tolerate it, for the saints and the innocents, for Jesus Christ's becoming victim of it. It is not true that no leaf falls against God's will. We have justifiable reasons to think that many leaves fall without God directly wanting them to.

### **God concept after Auschwitz**

On November 1, 1755, there was an earthquake in Lisbon, half the city was destroyed, and 30,000 people died. A year after the calamity, Voltaire made that earthquake a philosophical problem in his famous "*Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne*" by considering it the clearest denial of Leibniz's optimism, then prevailing in Europe. We could, he wrote, no longer continue to affirm that this is the best of all possible worlds. The assertion that "everything is good" has to be removed from the present and projected into the future; "One day everything will be good. This is our hope; but that everything is already good here today, that is illusion." The only hope that remained for Voltaire was belief in divine providence made difficult by the observation of the unjust distribution of good and evil in the universe.

Luigi Pareyson, a famous contemporary philosopher, discusses the problem of evil thus: "If it were not enough for nature to display its cruel face to us, to impose a different way of conceiving the Divinity in the disaster of Lisbon, what can be said about the abyss of evil which humankind fell into in the course of the last war with horrors such as the Holocaust, when terrible sufferings were inflicted by humans upon humans with devilish wickedness? Excessive human sufferings were undergone in Lisbon; too much human wickedness was added in Auschwitz. Obviously that fault was entirely ours. But our protest still touches the Divinity. We ask with anguish: how could a good and merciful God allow such atrocities and witness them without intervening?"

In Isaac Bashevis Singer's stories, Jews who escaped the Holocaust often turn up and exclaim in a horrified way: "God does not exist" or "God is an assassin. But the matter is too complex," Pareyson goes on, "to let oneself slip into the easy solution of blasphemy or atheism."

An important philosopher, Hans Jonas, a disciple of Heidegger in Germany and of Whitehead in America, author of an ethics of responsibility, faces the problem of evil in which he faces the

problem as a Jew and philosopher. As a philosopher he vindicates the task of a philosophic theology facing the problem of evil in topical terms in its double aspect of fault and sorrow.

What God could allow the Holocaust? Jonas's reply starts from the "Argumentum Epicuri," which runs through the history of theology from Lactantius to Luther and the history of philosophy to Hume and Schopenhauer with different formulations. It is based on a dilemma: God cannot be good and, at the same time, omnipotent, because, faced with raging evil, God either can suppress it but does not want to, or wants to suppress it but cannot.

Since it seems impossible to question divine goodness, we can only deny or limit divine omnipotence. Finally, if God did not intervene at Auschwitz, it is because of not being almighty. . . . Whoever affirms God's existence and perhaps also whoever who doubts it, will find this denial of divine omnipotence alarming. But Jonas's thought is to be interpreted in its true meaning, consistent in thinking that God, by making humanity free, accepted a destiny of suffering. The very creative act itself is a sacrifice, because, to make room for human freedom, God limited and willingly narrowed divine freedom. ... Besides, we can call Divinity into question with our own freedom, accepting or refusing it, and God would not be God without accepting this risk and without willing to be exposed to human contest."

The limitation of divine omnipotence is found in this suffering. Divine power is not coercive, so that it is infallibly successful. It is persuasive, insofar as it recognizes human freedom and, while it proposes goodness, it is ready to receive evil. God does not "allow" evil, but rather suffers it: divine power is but "patience." God respects us even as sinners, with a discretion full of restraint, in the sense that, by recognizing our freedom, God allows us to be entirely responsible for our evil.

### **God, not author but victim of evil with us**

God is not omnipotent when striking wicked people with lightning or preventing disasters, but when helping the just to draw spiritual profit from the former and the latter. Jean Delumeau writes: "We have seen God's sign for a long time in the unusual, the extraordinary, and the miraculous. The development of science modified our way of looking. The orientation towards God ... is the endlessly complex functioning of natural processes.... Hence it is necessary to overturn the arguments of 'teachers of suspicion,' Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and their followers, who thought they could restrict or even suppress 'the space of the credible.' On the contrary, it has expanded immensely before our eyes." The ancients saw Divinity as *power*, ruling the world by punishing the wicked and rewarding the just in this life. Revelation was a real revolution, by suggesting the fundamental idea of God's humility.

Divine power seldom shows itself with sensational exceptions to the natural law. On the contrary, it continually works interiorly on behalf of believers with those hidden forces inserted in the spirit by it, which are trust, patience, tireless struggle against adversity, and solidarity towards the suffering.

"What was intuition in the Old Testament," Delumeau continues, "becomes constant affirmation in the New Testament: divine, humble, and fragile coincide now. The Son of man is born at night in a stable. ... He is almost killed by Herod's soldiers. Then he lives unknown for thirty years. ... The

overturning of God's habitual image comes to an end in the last sequences of Jesus' life, marked by the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday, his arrest, the death sentence of the divine Lamb...."

"To find God in the abandoned Crucified Christ requires a revolution in our idea of God," Moltmann writes. "The idea of a truth," notes Emmanuel Levinas, "which shows itself in humility, the idea of a persecuted truth, is the only possible form of transcendency (this means that a Jesus who had not been persecuted would not have been the transcendent God's Witness). ... Showing himself humble, as ally of the vanquished, of the poor, of the persecuted means not acting 'normally.'... Humility disturbs entirely.... Persecution and humiliation which it exposes itself to forms of truth."

"All the history of Revelation," François Varillon writes, "is the progressive conversion from a God seen as a power to a God worshipped as love." Dietrich Bonhoeffer characterizes the Christians' prayer in one of his poems written in prison:

"People go to a God who needs, whom they find poor, humiliated, without roof or bread whom they see stifled by sin, by weakness and by death. Christians stay by a God in who suffers."

Scandal for an omnipotent God who does not save martyrs from tortures has to be changed into admiration for a God who is a martyr, who forms in them, through an eternal and secret language, spiritual superhuman greatness which will produce an eternal communion between divinity and humanity. God is but Love, and can do only what Love can. God's attributes: omnipotence, wisdom, beauty, infinity, peace, joy even in sacrifice, are Loves's attributes when boundless.

### **Was the cosmic apparatus tampered with?**

Faith is like an investigation by Maigret: God's innocence, by allowing evil, still cannot be proved, but we have good clues for it. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "What I see convinces me to trust in my Creator for what I do not see." This sentence underscores the not blind and not completely seeing nature of faith. I see some good in the world: order and finality in the great lines of nature, virtue and serenity in one part of humankind, even in suffering innocents, beauty, loving motherhood and fatherhood ready for any sacrifice, deep love, heroism, charity, devotion to an ideal, quest for justice, moral law in all who do not suffocate it. All this inspires faith in my creator because positive values do not come from blind and casual forces but require a benevolent and righteous intelligence.

On the contrary, I do not always see the victory of justice and truth over fraud, selfishness, and arrogance in this world. Very often, the opposite is true. Virtue is not adequately rewarded by the satisfaction of good conscience, diseases torment and end the lives of young and innocent people, many dishonest individuals damage nice and sincere people with impunity. The balance of accounts I do not see, and it does not compel me to deny the existence of goodness and creative justice. Nonvalues can derive from blind and casual forces or by corrupted minds, distinct and opposed to the One who originated values. Evil does not have the same origin as good.

The sun is not the cause of light and darkness: the latter comes from its absence or from obstacles to its radiation. Disease does not derive from health, ignorance does not stem from a good teacher, nor

cold from fire. An external element intervenes in each of these examples: the person who goes away from light or puts a wall between; the pathogenic agent and someone who introduces it; the pupil who does not listen to the teacher; the person who does not light the fire or does not go near it.

The Creator allowed free choice to follow or suffocate the law of moral health, because there would be no human dignity, spiritual value, responsibility, true love, or personal virtue without such freedom. But abuse, vice, dishonesty, and wickedness can come from free choice, too. God informs, warns, and exhorts interiorly but does not compel. To accuse God of enormous blunders in creating the world is to start from a hypothesis which is not at all demonstrated, i.e., that it was not our grievous faults that ruined the world God had created for us. The most serious and prolonged sins cause consequences on DNA and genetic heredity and perhaps they can have negative effects even in external nature, as the well-documented physical phenomena of the poltergeist seem to suggest.

A mysterious power of the human psyche on physical laws which, naturally, can be carried out either in a good or a bad way, stems from them. It is more than possible for us to have thrown away the "Owner's Manual" after receiving the apparatus of life. Certainly, if human beings were only robots, automatons moved by unruly instincts, then evidently the responsibility for what happens in the world would be ascribed only to its Creator.

But things seem to be different: a human characteristic as philosophy declares and experience confirms, is to build up our own fate with free choice. It is precisely this that makes us different from other animals. The nonfunctioning computer does not always prove the inefficiency of the producing firm: it could have been tampered with. Also a stream is not always muddy because of its source. To create human beings takes a power superior to the them, but no such power is needed to murder them.

Moral law can be compared to those leaflets they give you when you buy an appliance or a piece of equipment: "Instructions for Use" or "Operator's Manual" or, for medicine, "Dosage." Is it then so unlikely that the faults of many of our ancestors ("original sin") added to our own personal faults, made the mechanisms of human nature explode? Is it not already visible to the naked eye that at least half the troubles afflicting us are our own creation? A wretched life caused by ambitions or thirst for profit, and soon we have nervous complaints, heart problems, liver complaints, mental diseases, wear and tear of modern life, premature deaths.

Then come insensitivity to other people's problems: discord, sorrows, bitterness, quarrels, betrayal, adulteries, murders. Guilty rashness yields disgraces of every kind. Abuse of food, smoking, etc., cause the many "fatalities of destiny." Eagerness for money and erotic pleasure results in a disintegrating society. Miserable social and political selfishness have us scowling at each other and ready to bite. And then there's AIDS.

Why should we not admit that human faults overturned the order wanted by the Creator, and that we are trapped in the meshes of perverse laws? We moderns assert our absolute independence when it is a matter of choosing the direction of march, but then make God responsible when we sink into the swamp. But divine wisdom lets us transgress the directions, walk into the swamp, so we may learn to follow the directions and reach home.

## **Struggle against evil the motor of human evolution**

Divine providence does not act by means of continuous miracles, as would be necessary if it wanted to exempt all innocent people from every disaster. It works by means of a continuous motive power inserted into the human soul: trust, courage, struggle against adversities, inspiration to help and to be helped. It does not exempt the just from suffering but it spurs them to overcome it, and thus to develop morally. Therefore we should not mix moral evil, i.e., disorders, calamities, and troubles self-induced by human faults in the same pot with adversities from nature. They are two totally different kinds of suffering. The former is painful and at the same time venomous and causes diseases and ailments in the core of the ego, the spirit, with serious, aftereffects even in the feeling and the body. The latter is only painful and torments the peripheral part (the body) and the middle (the feelings). But using the power God endowed us with stimulates our ascent towards spiritual perfection, preparing us to share the divine good.

Moral evil makes us descend; adversity incites us to go up. We have reached higher goals than other living beings in the hurdle race of evolution and won the trophies of reason, sovereignty over nature, solidarity, civilization, religion, moral virtue, heroism, science, technology, art, and democracy. All this because we have been endowed by the Creator with aspiration towards the best and because we have met not only favorable occasions but also very hard obstacles.

It is a fact: human intelligence has been sharpened gradually through millennia by trying to solve such "insoluble" problems as famine, drought, epidemics, weather, misfortunes of every kind. Science improved and developed above all when stimulated by urgent problems. Necessity sharpens the intellect. Necessity tempers and strengthens the will, if we use our motive power: perseverance, steadiness, and courage were born when facing obstacles which seemed insurmountable.

Moral sense awakened as consciousness of one's dignity began and was strengthened in the struggle against adversities or in the acquired capacity of bearing them philosophically and without giving up. Understanding for other people, mutual help, brotherly and sisterly love itself derived from experiences of past sorrows, or by facing it together.

What therefore is the meaning of suffering? To stimulate us to struggle with God's help and with divine strength, and to overcome sufferings gradually by changing us into increasingly spiritual and divine beings. Aspiration to the best is evolution's motor, and natural adversity is its fuel.

## **We develop when answering risks**

David J. Bartholomew, Professor of Mathematics and Statistics at the London School of Economics, recently published an exhaustive study on the arguments that use an apparently natural chance to destroy belief in God. He concludes that chance, piloted as it is by natural preferential laws orienting it towards determined goals, instead of denying the order and finality of the universe, on the contrary, makes us recognize the type of a world created by the God Christians believe in.

"Perhaps the most serious challenge," he writes, "to the Christian vision of God as a loving father, comes from undeserved suffering. Earthquakes and famine and all kinds of natural calamities are difficult accept from one who cares for each individual and wishes only their good. The strength of

this criticism is extenuated somehow if it is not necessary to see God's deliberate act in each single event. ... Jesus speaks of his Father in heaven who causes the sun to rise on the evil as well as good, and rain to fall alike on the honest and dishonest (Mt. 5,45). The neutrality of the climate which deals with everyone in the same way is an expression of the neutrality and impartiality characteristic of casual phenomena." The Jews who were Jesus' contemporaries thought individual tragedies should be directly attributed to God. Thus when a tower fell at Siloam killing eighteen innocent people, an explanation seemed necessary.

Jesus said clearly that they were not more guilty than the other people (Lk. 13, 4). The same was true for people massacred by Pilate (Lk. 13, 1-2) or to the paralyzed woman (Lk. 13, 16), the man born blind (Jn. 9, 3). In each of these cases Jesus denied that the event or circumstance was a deliberate act of punishment directed at a particular individual.

"We maintain that genuine chance is a presupposition of the effective freedom and human maturity, and that, since freedom is essential for that fuller life in God we are destined to, accidental events cannot be avoided. ... Casual events causing mutation in genes and therefore in the advancement of life, can cause deformity and suffering as well. In suffering there is an aspect of inevitability well expressed by Jesus' words. In fact this is something which must happen" (Mk. 13, 7; see also Mt. 18, 7).

The world vision we adopted allows us to think at the same time that God determines the end and the regularity of the macrouniverse and that an indeterminism exists on a microscopic scale, i.e., in single events.

"At the risk of insisting on this obvious point, we repeat that the problem of evil would be almost impossible to solve in a deterministic world, since God would be directly responsible for each single event.... Variety and uncertainty make a stimulating and challenging environment, giving full ground to human development, to the extent that individuals use their intelligence to react to the world they live in. Although God was considered responsible for each single detail, all things considered, God was not considered the one who directs each atom personally and each particle towards some pre-established goal.

"God's aims should rather be recognized in the global properties of casual processes. God chose to create a world of chance because it has the necessary properties to produce human beings capable of becoming God's friends. These beings are strengthened and tested by the challenges offered them by their surroundings until they pass to a fuller communion with God through death. Individuals are much like a pilot launched into the sky for the first time, subject to every kind of risk and developing life skills by facing them. They can keep contact with the control tower which can advise and instruct them, but it cannot change the weather or repair mechanical problems."

### **Ethics cannot be partial**

It is obvious that calamities strike indifferently both guilty and innocent people to stimulate and foster intellectual, technical, and moral progress. If tragedies struck only the dishonest and arrogant, instead of activating our latent skill to fight them, we would try to avoid dishonesty and arrogance.

But we would be roused to do so not for the sake of goodness in itself, or because of charity, but from selfishness and fear of calamities.

Trilussa's verse would come true: "Prudence more often than esteem advises you to be respectful" (of God's law). Thus we would remain at the lowest intellectual, civil, and moral level, at the level of a kindergarten child who avoids certain actions only to escape punishment. Eternal life or perdition are not a reward or a punishment awarded by a judge to human behavior, but the natural and intrinsic result of moral choices made and the continuation of a way of thinking and feeling already consolidated and become irreversible. Eternal life is universal love and union with God: love, peace, and joy derive from them. Damnation is lack of true love, separation from God, and the deep interior malaise coming from it.

On the contrary, a particular and physical protection in this world of the just and innocent and a sequence of misfortunes on the guilty, would be a reward and a punishment at a low level. Moral choice would become a profitable investment. Even a Mafia boss would consider God's law a "business," without much calculation. Neither would we choose God for God' sake, nor would we love our neighbors with authentic charity, but for the material advantages we could get. Goodness would not be its own reward; evil would not be punishment itself. We would not create our moral value, even considering the help of grace. We would not be fully free when facing moral choices.

Therefore "a genuine casualness is the presupposition of effective freedom and human maturity and, since freedom is essential for the fuller life in God we are destined to, casual events cannot be avoided...." Surely "it is not of great comfort to the sufferer to know that a statistical law requires someone to suffer. Insofar as this is true, suffering may be aggravated by the conviction that it has deliberately been inflicted. Bitterness shown sometimes towards God by those who think their sufferings are to be ascribed to God, makes sorrow bitter."

### **The suffering of children**

It is important to note that sorrow favors and stimulates the progress of research, not only in mankind generally, but also in individuals. It is the individual struck by misfortune who is compelled to activate intelligence and will to overcome the trial. It is still the individual who, when misfortune is irreparable, is roused and almost forced to deepen moral and religious values that up to then, in the best of cases, had not been fully appreciated.

Almost no one, without this necessity, would find the splendors of good giving sense to each human life. At the beginning we are urged to look for spiritual values almost as a surrogate for lost physical or affective ones. But later we find them more and more to be the true values, the only ones that give a thorough meaning to life. Thus relative evil changes into absolute good. But there is a case that does not seem to be justified: the suffering of children who cannot draw spiritual advantage for themselves. Their suffering is superficial, almost like that of an animal, since they are not yet fully self-aware.

Unconscious suffering, in our opinion, is far less painful, because it does not strike our most central part, which is the spirit. If we did not think, we would suffer a thousand times less. We would take things as they are: it is so and that is enough. A child's sorrow is not useless for others: it stirs

parents, acquaintances, and all humanity to search for means to relieve or cure it. It arouses spiritual values to understand and bear it. In the Christian view it is rewarded by the everlasting joy with God to which the child is destined.

In the general picture of the world, suffering is one of the components and, in this context, the child's sorrow is one of the elements. Suppressing it would mean continuous miracles while, as we see, God's action and government in the world are carried out through natural laws. Then the child's suffering would enter the sphere of solidarity with the rest of humankind.

## **Animal suffering**

In the natural plan, physical pain is not an enemy of life, but really, together with physical pleasure, its most powerful ally. Pleasure is the animal's driving force and automatic pilot. An animal would not know what is useful for itself, since it cannot reason. Pleasure indicates what are the useful actions to life: when it is time to eat, how much and what, when to drink, when and how to mate, to rest, to move, what heat to look for, etc. It also rouses it to do all that.

On the contrary, physical pain is an automatic defense mechanism, inducing the animal to escape when facing what would damage it and making it act to provide itself with what it needs. Physical pain is really an evil but relatively so. It has the greater good of the animal as its purpose. It is a mechanism in the machine that is the universe. What we said of animals can be applied to human beings in great part. If there were no pleasure or physical pain, humankind would have become extinct at the very beginning. And if there were no death, there would be no room on the globe.

Hence, I do not want to say that we can continue as tyrants making certain animals suffer as we often do. That would be considered a real sin before God. But suffering is another thing in the overall picture of nature: it is never without necessity, without remedy, or without a greater and wider good.

Today we seldom hear that animals were created by God for human pleasure alone, but indeed, even more than in the past, animals are used as objects, chained up or caged to guard property or for racing, for zoos, for hunting, for their flesh, their milk, their eggs, their fur, or their skin. We use them for experiments on illnesses or for vivisection, pursuing maximum profit and pleasure without any regard for their suffering and with no complaints from the general population.

Studies carried out by ethnologists such as Konrad Lorenz (Nobel Prize), Diane Fossey, Anne Rasa, Hope Ryden, Thomas Regan, et al., have confirmed that animals with a superior nervous system have primary needs, sensations, and feelings quite similar to us humans. Primary needs (eating, drinking, freedom of movement, socializing with their fellows, searching for food, or caring for one's young), if not satisfied, are felt as suffering or frustration. Since they are created by God, it is clear that God wants these needs to be satisfied as much as possible.

From this derives our duty not to deny without an absolute necessity the primary needs of any living creature capable of suffering. And this applies obviously not only to the more gifted sensate creatures (other humans) but also to those endowed with less (animals). Suffering is equally felt,

thus duty applies equally. The Bible confirms this. Many passages state: "You, Lord, love all living creatures and nothing created by you is despised" (Wis. 11, 24).

### **Faith counteracts the poison of sorrow**

While suffering diminishes some people's faith, in others suffering diminishes because of faith. The human spirit develops by fighting against the great adversities of life, and, when they are inevitable, by accepting them as part of a plan aiming at universal good. To accept unavoidable suffering peacefully an explicit faith in God as Christ revealed to us is necessary. Even though explicit faith is stronger and holds up far better, implicit faith is sufficient to fight against unavoidable suffering.

I call implicit faith in God the basic trust that we are spurred to find inside ourselves when facing the most appalling "misfortunes" of our earthly journey, if we do not want to be overcome and succumb. This is trust in oneself, in one's fellow creatures, in nature, in reality that in other moments appeared fundamentally good and favorable for the life of all people. Without faith we see only adversities, while with faith we see opportunities in each adversity.

This mental attitude, this hope in the organized system of the world and in the resources of humankind depends on a free choice and a desire to cultivate it. Faith is not something everyone is born with, but we are born with a rudimentary map allowing us to find faith. Fundamental trust contains faith implicitly but clearly, faith in a substantially benevolent "Mind" who planned and realized humanity and this world through slow evolution.

In fact chance is the brother of chaos. This latter is blind, inconstant, and absolutely extraneous to any finality or orientation towards good. We cannot have fundamental trust in a system organized by chance. Or to put it another way, chance does not organize any system. If suicides and the use of cocaine today increase before our eyes it is partly because we learn at school and in society that the origin of the world is chance. Trust in life is so much stronger and stimulates us so much more to fight against injustice and tragedies when we recognize more openly that there is a Mind working towards everyone's good at the beginning of the world and for the government of human life.

### **Faith begets reason**

The same identical misfortune is seen by a nonbeliever as an insult of fate and dreadful fatality. By the believer, however, it is seen as hard training to win the Cosmic Cup. In the course of millennia human reason grew, to fight disasters, famine, misery, diseases, epidemics, assaults from either beasts or foes, by more and more advanced technology, and by a deeper and deeper solidarity. Every time a public calamity or an individual misfortune takes place, people with faith in themselves and life and hence in the Divinity were compelled by that faith to look for remedies, to build defenses and systems to overcome circumstances, even when there was very little hope. Faith was a stimulus compelling them to use reason, and the more this was practiced, the more it consolidated and refined to become teachings ever more reasonable to children, so that they might continue their parents' progress.

Every discovery, invention, social and moral progress was preceded by faith. Faith is the basis of the very technology, science, and reason in the name of which many modern people try to destroy

faith itself. They seem to be builders intent in undermining the foundations of a skyscraper they are erecting. In fact, science has already started to work against humankind's survival and reason no longer has confidence in itself. "The psychopathologist," Erikson writes, "cannot help noticing that there are millions of people who cannot live without religion and that those who boast of not having any often go to therapy as children whistling in the dark."

As in the past, even nowadays the one who relies on logic ruling the world by natural laws oriented to the final good, is roused by obstacles to search for devices more and more efficacious to overcome them. The atheist luckily often trusts implicitly in a rational world, and therefore struggles against evil. But the atheist really coherent with atheism thinks that it is not worthwhile fighting, because everything is governed by blind chance, i.e., by luck and misfortune. Atheism is a world vision favorable to fatalism and, when evils are irreparable in this life, to despair.

"The yes to God," Hans Küng notes, "is equal to basic faith founded on reality: faith in God as radical basic trust... knows why it can have faith in reality.... We do not start from a demonstration or explanation in rationally cogent terms of God's existence to land on faith in a second moment. We deal rather with an interior rationality that can legitimate a fundamental certainty in application, on the basis of courageous trust in God's reality. Although exposed to the temptation of doubt, we experience the rationality of faith rooted in the ultimate identity, the ultimate fullness of sense and real value." Tragedy is changed into drama, fatality into adventure, misfortune into an ascending way towards grace for those who keep an eye on the divine goal we are destined to.

### **The believer trusts in life and knows why**

Faith is not only a struggle against hunger, unemployment, injustice, disease, and sudden death. If human life comes from a benevolent intelligence, the aspiration nature rouses in the spirit must be, before or after, satisfiable, starting from an aspiration to a total and everlasting Love with a capital "L" ("I give all myself to you," "I will love you forever"). A handicapped child, a young bride and mother who dies because of cancer, an earthquake destroying hundreds of families, lead implicit faith (basic faith that "we can remedy everything in this world, and that not every evil comes to harm us"), on a fatiguing quest. Whoever do not push implicit faith to become explicit, because unwilling to make an effort to investigate mystery, can lose even the little faith they have. On the contrary, if they set out on the mountain paths of investigation they can discover with immense amazement that Christ is not a consolatory surrogate as they thought, but a grand event enlightening life.

Yes, we can remedy everything, even death. Yes, no evil harms those who rely on God. Yes, there is conformity between deep aspirations created by nature and reality because human adventure does not conclude in this world. Authentic and constant happiness is the result of an evolutionary process of moral values, a process that starts in this world but goes on and finds its fulfillment in the supernatural life. The wicked too are struck by misfortune and are driven to impotent anger. But the innocent who suffer are spurred and urged to develop those values of trust, meditation, and discovery which form the central aim of existence.

## **We are the first production department**

The same price can be prohibitive or ridiculous according to whether we are asked for an ice cream cone or for a whole ice cream factory. Something similar happens if we are scandalized by certain tragic events when we only look at the short span of earthly life. In many human lives, long and multifaceted suffering appears to be and is an excessive price which does not succeed in counterbalancing the few and poor satisfactions we can enjoy here. The thought that this does not derive from God but from present and past human faults, from the necessary imperfection of matter, and from the need to stimulate human evolution is not a great source of consolation. Sorrow is justified only by a glorious and supernatural goal to be attained, but not to admit it is to recognize that life is absurd. A visitor enters a large automated factory, for instance, FIAT Tractors, and looks at the first enormous industrial shed where fuel and metal sheets are put in and waste and exhaust come out. If the visit is over without seeing other sheds, one could conclude that all those machines are senseless. One must at least suppose that there are other departments, where the finished product comes out. Whoever put aside the superior finality assigned to human life by God to be attained by gradual spiritual progress, necessarily discovers that life is senseless. Human suffering can only be explained if we admit a supernatural goal. We could only explain the irregularities of Uranus's orbit with the existence and attraction of a planet which in fact was invisible. The astronomer Urbain Le Verrier deduced its existence in 1846, calculated its the position, and in 1847 it was discovered by telescope. But Le Verrier could have also concluded that such irregularities were absurd and therefore physical laws have no universal value. As regards suffering, the argument of reasonable faith could be summarized as follows: we must be able to explain sorrow, even the most harmless and the most serious, in a perspective of trust in life. But we can only explain it if there is God and an afterlife. Therefore there is God and afterlife. On the contrary, innocent and grievous sorrow cannot be explained by the nonbeliever in a context of trust in life. It is simply unjust and absurd. But if life is unjust and absurd, it does not come from an Intelligence. Therefore God and afterlife do not exist.

## **The six principles which explain life**

It seems that human life, including sorrow, can be explained through some principles.

1. *Principle of the Primary Innate Objective.* Every human being comes into the world with a fundamental vocation or Primary Innate Objective substantially equal for everyone, because derived from our nature itself. It is recognizable in the higher function and aspiration of which everyone feels the capacity and ideal in oneself if one follows the "Instructions for Use." Everyone can ascertain and experience that a supreme aspiration and capacity is deep, universal, and perfect Love.

Total Love, "with all our heart, soul, and strength," bilateral, i.e., received and returned, is a love with a Person having all values at the highest degree, a love which, through that Person, opens to love friends, acquaintances, all humankind and living beings, even practically, a love which is both feeling and effective will and that lives forever, without flaws or weakening. This Love is the aim we come into the world for. All other goods must only be considered as a means to reach this Love. Heaven is not a place, but the perfection of this Love. "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: you must love your neighbor

as yourself" (Mt 22, 37).

2. *Principle of instrumental goods.* All other goods (health, human love, work, family, money, success, food, home, sports, friendship, amusements, science, art, etc.), must always be considered as instruments to reach absolute happiness, i.e., one's own Primary Innate Objective. That means they must be used in a way directly proportional to the degree they help us reach the Primary Objective and inversely proportional to the degree they do not. "No one can be the slave of two masters (Mt 6, 24).

3. *Principle of proportionality of interest.* The index of interest spurring us towards the fundamental values of life, i.e., towards the Primary Innate Objective, is inversely proportional to the index of interest we feel towards instrumental goods, if we consider them as absolute values. The more water flowing into canal B, the less there is in canal A.

4. *Principle of conditioning automatism.* Each interest is fostered by visual, auditory, and imaginative stimuli, arousing wishes and impulses. These increase in proportion to the number and intensity of the stimuli until they become ungovernable. The Ego's power to make decisions can control inner and outer life: (a) by removing the corresponding stimuli (nonstimulating tactics) (b) by developing alternative interests (promotional tactics).

5. *Principle of the turnover of basic perspectives.* If the subject does not keep instrumental interests under control, there is an overturning of the natural order: the Primary Innate Objective becomes instrumental or it is put aside. Instrumental goods are taken as Primary Objectives (idols), by provoking dissatisfaction in the deep ego.

6. *Principle of therapeutic suffering.* The loss or reduction of peripheral pleasures (pertaining to our body: health, economic goods, sense pleasures) or to the psyche (affective welfare, relational success), if accepted in view of the Primary Objective, exerts therapeutic action on the subject, by attenuating the attraction of finite instrumental goods and by favoring the concentration of the interest on the Primary Objective itself.

## **Primary school, high school, and university courses**

God does not cause accidents, but lets natural laws act. But when accidents take place, God tries to use them in view of the Primary Objective. God is like a football coach who would like the players not to score in their own goal or give away penalties, but if that happens God takes the opportunity to advise them to improve their game.

Suffering, like rain, falls impartially on saints, common people, and delinquents. It does not spare any categories. If the Creator allows it, it is because it is a school with many different levels in view of the Primary Objective. Suffering is considered by some God's punishment for those who are not admitted to high school (those who have very messy consciences). In fact, it is not, in a strict sense,

since it falls even on the just, but we can call it so because it shakes the wicked so that they may convert, while it stimulates the good to progress. It is a "medicinal" punishment, not aimed at vengeance but at a cure. The delinquent, too, who has not even a little faith, is compelled by tragedy to reflect on what transient goods he invested his capital in. Junior or Senior high school students are the great mass of lukewarm believers, more or less indifferent people, good people humanly speaking, but who do not give first place to the Primary Objective. Broadly speaking, they try to observe the moral law by avoiding the most grievous faults, but they observe it almost exclusively in its exterior aspects, and their interests and wishes are all directed to instrumental goods, which thus become the true and supreme aim of their life (family, earnings, health, love, success, culture, friends, etc.). They are God's clients, who use God to get earthly values, rather than using earthly values to reach God.

These people think prayer serves above all to "snatch" from God at least that minimum of welfare and immunity from problems that allows them to live while enjoying their idols. The dramatic or tragic emergency Providence can allow to entire their lives and which, scandalized, they call undeserved punishment, serves, after the moment of rebellion has elapsed, to instruct them experimentally to evaluate, as primary values those that are not only interchangeable instruments, and so to tend to the authentic one. The Stock Exchange slump in transient goods advises them to invest in a most highly valued and stable currency. "Our Lord strikes and cures," the Psalms say. This means that when their idols fall, lukewarm Christians receive the comfort of their consolation together with the help not to create others, if they accept the divine correction and appeal to God.

Finally there are normal university students, undergraduates with an "A" average and those doing graduate programs. They are the believers with a rich and deep faith who can dissociate the bitter and acid components of suffering, by synthesizing them into new compounds of interpersonal relations, since they have already assimilated the preceding lessons and stored grace. The calamitous situation which becomes collaboration with Christ's Passion to save the world, arrives even for them. The Holy Cross is never unbearable nor takes peace away from them, because they continuously experience the new life and the existential divine welfare reinstating all their interior ego. This is God's miracle, the greatest saints' authentic joy at the deepest sorrows.

It is in this light that we see Providence's action. The sacred books of religions, above all the Bible, think of divine providence as God's action to guide those, who ask for it and collaborate, through joys and adversities of this world, to stable communion of love with God and to the sharing of God's spiritual goods.

"At dawn! At night when everything is calm! Your Lord did not abandon you nor hate you, and the other life will be more beautiful than the first one, and will give you God and you will be happy. Did God not find you orphan and give you shelter? Did God not find you wandering and show you the way? Did God not find you poor and gave you plenty of goods? Therefore do not ill-treat the orphan! Therefore do not drive the beggars away! Tell everyone how good the Lord is" (Koran, *Sura*93). "Yahweh will always guide you" (Is 58, 11). "Yahweh lifts up the humble" (Ps... 147, 6). "God is able to help those who are tempted" (Hebrews2, 18). "Those who are guided by God's Spirit are God's children." (Romans 8, 14).

## God's walkie talkie

If God always permits free course to natural laws, what does Providence mean? What is the use of prayer? Such a question comes from those (and there are many among shallow believers) who see Providence always busy, when it does not let its mind wander, to prevent car crashes and to heal incurably sick people or to arrange a lottery win for God's devotees. And they think prayer can move and convince Providence to do so. On the contrary, prayer can make us understand whence God's river flows. It is the highest form of energy we can dispose of. Nobel Prize winner Alexis Carrel wrote that he experienced it every day after his conversion to faith.

We cannot forbid the birds of sorrow to fly over our heads, but we can prevent them from making their nest in our hair, and this is thanks to prayer. It does not help to adapt God to my will, but very often to adapt my will to God. It is the password to God's data bank that allows us to read the answer on the monitor. It is the on-board transceiver that indicates the position to the rescue helicopter if we crash and it allows us to call the control tower to make the necessary corrections to our route. Surely, it is not forbidden to ask for cures, a job, good grades, and other benefits. Sometimes the Lord will grant such effects through natural laws, if God understands that this can be useful to our spiritual progress. Not even miracles are excluded, although God keeps these rare exceptions to the rule as signals to help everyone's faith. But the real aim of prayer is to make us tune to God's wavelengths and make us intercept God's broadcasts. As it appears even from Solzenitsin's poem:

## Prayer

How easy it is to live with you, Lord!  
How easy to believe in you!  
When my muddled intellect withdraws or wanes,  
When the cleverest people  
Do not see beyond this evening  
And they do not know what to do tomorrow,  
You grant me the clear certainty  
That you exist and worry  
So that all ways leading to good  
May not be barred.  
On the crest of earthly glory  
I turn backwards astonished  
Looking at the way gone through  
From despair to this moment

When I was allowed to communicate  
A reflex of your rays to humankind.  
Give me what is necessary  
So that I may continuously reflect them.  
And for what I do not succeed in doing,  
I know that you choose  
Others to accomplish.

## **I cannot give you a pony now**

It is not a good idea to call the firemen to water the balcony geraniums. Prayer is the telephone exchange aiming not at transient goods (the geraniums), but at problems concerning the primary objective. "How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask" (Lk. 11, 13).

Prayer is useful to listen to God, more than to speak to God, more than to receive what is of interest to us superficially. "Ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you" Christ says, but these assents are to be understood in a far more splendid and marvelous way than generally understood.

The novelist Kathleen Norris writes: "The miraculous certainty that no prayer is unheard took possession of me gradually. The answer can seem a disappointment, even a humiliation. Prayer is often granted in a quite unexpected way, or when it has already been forgotten by those who addressed it. What was unbearable, became dear and just, anguish changed into serenity."

God answers us for what we meant to say, not for what we said. What we sought in our depth was a step forward towards true and definite happiness that still we did not suspect realizable in our superficial conscience. The first step is made towards spiritual strength, when each one succeeds in understanding that we cannot find the right path in life if we are alone or locked in our inner self. When we turn ourselves to the unique source, by invoking orientation and guidance; when prayer becomes a habit, a virtue; when, not only once but many times a day we ask God to make us understand divine love, to show us the way to follow in that moment and to infuse the yearning to follow it in us, then prayer is heard.

"When I was small," Margaret Blair Johnstone writes, "I asked for a pony for my birthday and I kept on asking my parents during the day, besides my night prayers. I never had the pony, but now I realize that I started then to get near something much more precious. When my father at last said to me: 'Listen, my child, it is better that you get things clear right now. I cannot give you a pony.' I answered: 'Perhaps a miracle will occur.' 'A miracle is something different than getting what you want,' father answered, 'sometimes a far greater miracle happens when we get nothing.'"

Every prayer is heard. God does not always give an affirmative answer. But God always answers. Many people give up praying because they have been disappointed, according to them. Perhaps, on some occasions they will have prayed for a dear person's health, to find strength to fight against a weakness, to find a job. They saw the beloved person die, they did not succeed in overcoming themselves, or another got the post they aimed at. "What is the use of prayer?," they say, "God did not listen to me." We often are not aware that the end of a disappointment, the freeing from a wrong conviction, are the best remedy, particularly for those who consider God as a Father Christmas who may be forced to give us what we want.

But what is prayer then? One of the definitions which help us to understand more is the one given by Clement of Alexandria "Prayer is a conversation with God." Conversation means dialogue: to speak with and to listen to. Few of us understand prayer because we do not make a dialogue of it.

We make a soliloquy of it. We present an ultimatum. The deepest despair can seize us with difficulty and hold us its grip for a long time if we feel the need to unburden to an understanding heart. This is the secret therapy offering itself to a distressed spirit which finds an adviser it relies on in its grief.

This is the reason why a brokenhearted person recovers by turning to a Counsellor "every heart is open to, every wish is revealed and every secret is open to." Above all because this Adviser is God who instilled in our spirit the supreme aspiration, where every other is contained and does not want anything else but to lead us to its fulfillment.

"Prayer is truly the sincere wish of the soul: and few among us get their miracle, because we do not understand what we desire more. And sometimes we do not even begin to understand it except when all our world falls apart and we are forced to consider life under a different aspect." Prayer thus understood is God's practical answer to the grieving innocent.

"When you are so sad that you cannot be more, Shout!  
And the tumultuous movement on Jacob's ladder  
Will shine on your so painful loss  
Planted between the Sky and Charing Cross,  
Yes, at night, oh soul, my daughter,  
Shout! Clinging to the Sky,  
To the hem of his habit  
And here is Jesus walking on the water  
Not of Genesareth but of Thames."

### **Let us hold suffering by the handle**

Whoever believes in God must explain sorrow. But whoever does not believe must explain all the rest (Dennis Prager). Whoever does not believe must not only explain all the astronomic, thermal, ecological, circulatory, respiratory, bone, muscular, nervous, metabolic, sexual, instinctive, and social mechanisms which function by interacting among themselves, but also aesthetic, intellectual and moral values, successful human personalities, heroes, benefactors of humankind and saints. And even many believers, struck by the most serious tragedies, not only remain serene and peaceful, but also use them as opportunities and spurs for wonderful spiritual progress. The most splendid moral beauties and divine bliss they attained, would not exist without the suffering of innocents and without the secret language God comforts and upholds them with.

Grief is a grindstone: it grinds you or polishes you; it depends on you. It is as a sharp knife: if you hold it by the blade it hurts you, but if you hold it by the handle you can cut bread. Misfortune is a heavy suitcase, but held by the handle you can carry it.

### **Difference between tenderness and love**

Troubles have different effects on people, as does heat, which makes butter sour and sweetens apples. Many think prayer helps us find a good job, win a lottery and not get on a plane that will

crash. But this ingenuous belief has no biblical foundation. God does not stop natural laws. This does not mean that, by means of some of them, God may not counteract others, freeing us from certain physical harm. But perhaps this is not always possible.

Prayer, above all, helps us communicate with God who instills courage in us to struggle against adversities and to accept inevitable misfortune peacefully, so that it may detach us from transient worldly goods and enrich us with values that will give us everlasting bliss. God sets grief-stricken hearts right, if you give God every piece. But it is not easy to explain how a loving God can tolerate, before setting them right, that God's children's hearts are grief-stricken. It would be necessary to see, as God sees them, the infinite horizons of the spiritual world, horizons towards which we do not feel any attraction while rooted to earthly goods.

Modern fathers and mothers are very tender towards their children: they do not like the idea that they can suffer or be compelled to make sacrifices. But the results of such an education are not encouraging. We cannot give children everything without giving them boredom and vice. The difference between tenderness and love is that the former tries to ensure that children do not suffer, while the latter yearns for their moral growth. And to grow morally it is necessary to suffer.

God could be compared to a rich father who notes, in his son, a leaning towards a comfortable and easy life, which would not allow him to exploit his remarkable talents. Therefore he makes his son look for a job outside his firm, without recommendations or protection, and wants him to provide for himself, without subsidies, advising and helping him morally, but letting him shift for himself among many difficulties.

### **The scandal of the big difference in talents**

The most difficult point to explain is not that innocent people suffer but that some innocent people suffer far more than others: there is no equality in destiny. Even in Christ's parable one received five talents and another received one. On one hand we see privileged people who can take advantage of a considerable biophysical and genetic heritage, an affectionate and resourceful educational action on the part of parents, a qualified intellectual, moral, and religious formation, valid friendships, a suitable job, a happy family, sufficient economic means, and a peaceful development in life. On the other hand we find people marked by strong hereditary traits to depression or determined weaknesses, people brought up in a family without love, no educational guidance in childhood, oppressed by authoritarianism, surrounded by an environment of crime or belonging to savage people, or affected by mental diseases or afflicted by misery or hunger, or sunk in total ignorance, or broken by continuous exhausting work, slaves oppressed by cruel masters or women treated by men as objects, and so forth.

The problem is more complicated because thousands of factors intersect, some of which are unknown to us. As we saw, human faults have a remarkable part not wanted by God, who must practice divine tolerance, balancing the accounts at the end.

But even in this world, it is not necessarily that all those who seem lucky are really happy: the exceptionally gifted described in the first category sometimes bear a burden of suffering, not inferior to the average people of the second.

There are corrective psychological mechanisms for the differences in levels of fortune so that one person is excessively worried about and loses sleep for a pebble under the mattress, whereas another sleeps soundly on the bare floor.

We can see only the external reactions, complaints, or physical depression about suffering, but we do not have LEDs, electronic sensors, pointer scales, or objective gauges for real grief. We know that certain people are more demonstrative about their state of anguish, react more than others for the same concrete fact, we know that people can suffer more or less according to the kind of sensitivity, character, faith, way of thinking, and the manner in which trouble is faced. A meter for suffering is absolutely undiscoverable.

Not having inner comparative data, it seems that the healthier position is to think that God sends cold according to the clothes, i.e., that God balances the inner to the gravity of the test, leaving the strict duty to those who have them, to give out clothes according to the cold. We are different in helping and integrating each other. Whoever do not have this fundamental trust in God, and in divine providence, are forced to rely on the fact that they will always be able to put an end to this life, as soon as misfortune threatens to crush them.

And we cannot deny that, when we feel we are crushed by misfortune, it is often a very arbitrary and subjective impression many people experience today even for silly things like an examination failed.

### **Convalescent courses after death**

If it is true that certain innocent people seem to suffer more than others, it is by no means certain that others are exempted forever from the necessary purification through sorrow. In fact, it is a question of innocent people, but not too innocent, who place the Primary Objective in the second or third place, after their idols. Even if their life proceeds without any dramatic and extraordinary suffering, according to the Catholic tradition and logic, a purification after death, called Purgatory or "Purificatorium," an after death purification awaits them.

The Primary Objective is a glorious and splendid goal amply justifying the fatigue and the requested sacrifices. It is participation in the very life of God. Christ says that it is a treasure hidden in a field worth selling everything for (Mt. 13, 44). The saints and coherent believers (who are few) accomplish this fatigue spontaneously controlling their instinct to love God and their fellows truly.

They are like self-employed workers who voluntarily make high payments to the National Health Insurance to have a good pension at the right time. They will not suffer a long Purgatory after death.

The innocents, not saints, who suffer more than the others in this world are employees whose contribution to the National Health is deducted from their salaries. They too, break away from their idols and will not need too much purification in Purgatory, if they try to accept their tribulations.

The innocent not saints, on the contrary, who suffer less in this world, are those workers who did not make voluntary payments and whose deductions have been insufficient. When they have to retire, they still have payments to make. They will do it in Purgatory.

All this is not to be understood according to a commercial logic "I pay to receive," but as an "ex gratia" payment, a gift of divine life on God's part, a gift, in fact, so high that it demands fatigue and sacrifice to be assimilated.

The comparison with students is perhaps clearer here. The saints and coherent believers are as those who always busied themselves with their studies and got very good results in their exams. They made sacrifices in this life: they do not need any Purgatory. The innocents not saints suffering more during earthly life, are those students who were compelled to study harder in the second and third term, after having got poor marks in the first. They managed to get a good grade at the end. They have already done Purgatory in this world. Last are the innocents not saints who did not make any sacrifices to improve, neither spontaneous nor imposed by necessity, are those who neglected to study during the year and will have to make up for the lost time during summer, or repeat the year.

Whoever listens to God's words and practices them is like a builder whose house is founded on rock: storms do not shake it and its strength derives intrinsically from its actions. Whoever does not listen to or realize the word, builds on sand. The partial or total fall of the house during a storm is not a punishment decree on God's part, is not a punishment coming from the outside, but the intrinsic and inevitable consequence of one's choices (Cf. Lk. 6, 47 ff.).

## **CHAPTER 8 REINCARNATION**

### **Where is more justice?**

Human destiny after death, as intrinsic and inevitable consequences of previous moral choices, is pointed out by Christianity, Islam, and Judaism: "God will repay all according to their works" (Romans 2,6; Peter 1,17; etc.), also by the Hindu and Buddhist doctrines of Karma and reincarnation, today accepted by many people also in Europe and in America. "Those who behave well in this world, will have a pleasant rebirth: they will become priests, warriors, or merchants. But those who behave badly will have a bad rebirth: they will become dogs, pigs or pariahs and outcasts." "As the soul (literally the "embodied") goes through childhood, youth, and old age and remains always the same, so it remains behind the changing of bodies." At first sight the doctrine of reincarnation helps to solve the problem of innocent grief and of scandalously unequal destinies in this world as well as or perhaps even better than the Bible doctrine so far dealt with. "How can it happen," Jn. Curt Ducasse wonders, "that some are born geniuses and some idiots? One beautiful and one ugly? One healthy and one deformed? The conception of rebirth on earth, perhaps after a spell spent by the individual in distilling, from the reminiscences of a life just passed away, all the wisdom one's reflective abilities were able to draw from it, would give us an opportunity to believe in worldly justice." Furthermore, "not even the best people are, when they die, in a state of moral and intellectual perfection needed to make them worthy to rise immediately to Heaven. . . . This is universally acknowledged and two solutions are put forth to find a remedy for it, broadly speaking. The former is that some extraordinary progress, absolutely beyond any possible appraisal in life, occurs at the moment of death. The latter and more likely solution is that the progress of gradual improvement can advance in us after the death of our present bodies (with reincarnation)." What is

the reason for the considerable differences in gifts, talents, abilities, health, welfare, and fortune and even inclination towards virtue or vice from the earliest years? The doctrine of reincarnation answers: everyone builds a destiny by oneself and through hard and painful lives expiates the vices of one's previous lives, whereas through lives full of welfare and inclination towards good one gathers the fruit of past moral efforts and prepares oneself for eternal Life. In reincarnation we find some basic ideas in agreement with Jesus' teaching:

- we are created by God for a great purpose,
- to attain divine bliss after death;
- to achieve it, we must advance, above all morally;
- our destiny after death is the intrinsic and inevitable consequence of our previous moral choices.

However, reincarnation is far from the gospels in that it helps instill contempt and laziness towards the disinherited, the disabled, the chronically ill, who would be expiating the serious faults of their previous lives and should not be prevented from doing so. In India the theory has created and maintains the unjust social system of castes. Reincarnation does not take into account the incidence of chance which science leads us to admit both in the creation and destiny of each of us. If, in their early earthly lives everybody had started from an identical point, equally endowed with good inclinations and hampered by bad inclinations, it would be fair for them today to be born further or nearer the goal in proportion to the distance already covered in previous lives. But since chance and luck have always had a dominant role in fate in this world, reincarnation only perpetuates the initial good or bad luck. Christ's doctrine is quite different from this point of view: God takes spiritual care above all of the poor, the despised, the unfortunate, the lowest. It means God wants to counterbalance an initial disadvantage on the way towards final happiness with interior influences against disadvantage created by chance and not directly wanted by God. According to Jesus' teaching, God is not a mere spectator, and we are the makers of our destinies, but only in proportion to the abilities we received. Christ does not show the ultimate goal of human existence as the fruit of an evolutionary process brought forward by us exclusively. It is true that according to the gospel, God urges those of us, who were endowed with talents to develop and to devote ourselves to others so that they may achieve lasting happiness, but such a demand is proportional to the gifts received: the servant who fully used the two talents is rewarded as much as the servant who exploited five (see Mt. 25, 14-30). The workers in the vineyard hired through no fault of their own for only an hour receive the same pay as the others (see Mt. 20, 1-16). In this picture we find the key to understanding the situation of those who could not follow the path to a satisfactory psychic, intellectual, and moral evolution in this world; they are the "poor," poor in economic goods, physical or mental health, poor in the length of their life and in gifts and skills to develop. If they did all they could, they immediately enter, without proceeding step by step, into existential reconstruction through God's direct intervention and communion with Christ's moral beauty. A good example is the "good thief" who, opening himself to Christ according to the limited abilities he had received in his life, heard Christ say: "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk. 23, 39-43). The well-known theologian, Walter Kasper, Bishop of Stuttgart, sums up the incompatibility between reincarnation theories and Christian faith:

- a) "The first reason derives from the biblical vision of time and history. . . . The Bible stresses God's unique and unrepeatable action in history. . . . To be wise, we must count the days (Ps. 81,12) and utilize time fully (Eph. 5,16; Col. 4,5) . . . because it is stated that we die once,

after which judgement comes" ( Heb. 9, 27 ff.). Life is not a noninvolved game; in life definitive decisions are to be taken."

The theory of reincarnation, in short, helps the strong tendency in humankind to engage seriously in fighting vice and sin, so we can make up for things in future lives.

b) The second reason concerns the Christian concept of the unity of soul and body. "The soul is the substantial form of the body, the body is the expression and real symbol of the soul. . . . Can the soul's or the person's identity still be safeguarded, if it appears in different bodily forms one after the other? Does it not mean a total devaluation of the body, thought of only as an external container which in the end we can simply peel off?" The reincarnation theory does not take into account that the body with its patrimony of memories, feelings, acquired ideas, and dominated and exploited tendencies, is forever an integral part of the human person, as is widely confirmed by science.

c) Lastly, "the doctrine of reincarnation is basically a doctrine of self-redemption, that is, of self-realization," while "the central message of the gospel is that our salvation is not only our task and fruit of our own care, but mainly a gift of God's grace. St. Paul often emphasizes that we are justified not through our works and achievements, but through faith in God's grace in Jesus Christ." As previously seen the gospels assign first place to God in the work of progressive salvation. It is true that also in the gospels and in Catholic theology, there is room for gradual moral and spiritual evolution helped by grace to be realized in this life and afterwards.

The Catholic theory of "Purgatory," deriving from the Scriptures by deduction, purified of the popular images which are not part of its substance, falls within this set of ideas. It is not limited to the concept of expiation or exclusive purification of sins, but it can be extended to any form of spiritual progress. In a stage of experiences following death we can no longer increase our merits, but we can get ready, through interpersonal relationships, joys, suffering, research and discoveries, repentance, prayer and practice of virtues so far lacking, for an "exam" of amends, i.e., to lead to an end that spiritual way they began during earthly life and brought forward, more or less.

All those who, owing to distress, ignorance, lack of mental or psychological health, faults of which they repented, could not spiritually evolve in this world, will find new conditions of serene life in after-death, when they will have positive experiences, discover, learn, and practice virtues and values which are presuppositions to take part in God's life as God's children.

The supporters of reincarnation also find followers, thanks to their hypothesis of evolution and of human and spiritual progress going on endlessly: bliss cannot be static. Such a perspective does not find obstacles in Christian revelation. With no need of accepting reincarnation, Catholic theology peacefully admits that in eternal life as the condition of peace, joy, and love, communion with God is stable and ultimate, and a continuous progress in human knowledge and in relationships with ourselves, others, and the universe, is possible.

Westerners not overly given to believe consider reincarnation as a hope. Nonchristian Asians see it as a condemnation: through yoga they see how much distress is brought about by sensory life and

how much freedom by spiritual life. Western and Eastern believers, through Christian meditation, view reincarnation as a condemnation from which Christ frees us.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **ORIENTAL MEDITATION**

#### **Yoga, zen, and Christian contemplative prayer**

An efficacious medicine to find peace in suffering consists of meditation and contemplative prayer. In this connection we observe that the spiritual restlessness of modern life urges today many people to look for inner quiet and psychic balance in various religious movements and meditation techniques of Hindu or Buddhist origin, such as yoga, zen, or "Transcendental Meditation."

Such techniques, Cardinal Ratzinger writes, can help Christians to prepare themselves for prayer and to reach the prayer of quiet (that is, wordless, abandoning self to God), but they leave Christianity when they are inspired by doctrines denying God's love, such as pantheism or reincarnation, and "are not acceptable when they degenerate into a cult of one's own body or identify the individual sensations each one experiences with the action of the Holy Spirit." On the other hand, they are in perfect accord with Christian meditation when they aim at overcoming passions and earthly desires to prepare to love God and neighbor.

Itivuttaka, a Buddhist text inspired to zen meditation says: "The desire kindling them, the hate stirring them, the blindness leading them astray, anger exacerbating them, hypocrisy corrupting them, vanity inebriating them, lead human beings on the wrong track. With perfect knowledge (of meditation) the wise give them up. After this giving up they will no longer return into the world."

Even if we grant a soothing value to Eastern techniques, we must keep in mind that Christian ascetic and mystical practice, and God collaborating with it, has for centuries produced, with similar methods, wonderful effects, not only of peace, but also of love and spiritual progress modern people should not ignore.

In our passion for exotic meditation, we behave like a young man who has never shown interest in saunas, of which his grandfather ran a center. Then, after a trip to Finland, he came home brimming with enthusiasm thinking he had discovered saunas. Important elements, both for nonchristians and Christians are the body's correct posture, mental and physical relaxation, very slow breathing. The exclusion of any thought, fantasy, or feeling by those who practice kriya-yoga, raja yoga, or zen is voluntary because its aim is to lose selfconsciousness and acquire awareness of the Universal Being of which ego would be part (loss of consciousness and awareness called "sarnadhi" for yoga and "satori" for zen).

The great masters of Christian mysticism teach how to meditate with thoughts, feelings, and spontaneous prayer on Christ's life, on the love God showed us through him, and on how to imitate

his virtues. In doing so, after some time, it is frequent for the believer to reach the prayer of quiet which is a spontaneous pause of thoughts and feelings and a rest in God. And this gives the soul peace, detaches it from earthly passions and strengthens it in holy love. There is some analogy with bhakti yoga (yoga of God's love, practiced by the nonpantheistic section of Hinduism).

In Christian mystic practice the complete loss of cerebral consciousness and the acquisition of the awareness of being one in love, with God and with all brothers and sisters united in God, is called "ecstasy"; it must not be sought voluntarily because it is a gift God grants when the soul is purified. "By meditating," yoga teaches, "I am consciousness itself (Brahma). With closed or halfclosed eyes, inner-turned glance, a yogin contemplates above the center placed between the eyebrows, the flashing form of the ineffable principle, made of reality, consciousness and joy. And he loses himself in him. The yogin must always have self-control, be set apart in solitude. The spirit must be ruled, with no wishes and no ties. One should prepare a solid seat in a pure environment, neither too high nor too low, covered with a cloth or with a skin. Sitting on this seat, one's spirit concentrated, after stopping any thought or sense activity, one should practice yoga to purify oneself. Impassible, body, head, and neck absolutely erect and still, one should stare at the tip of one's nose. Perfectly calm, free from any fear, faithful to chastity, mastering thought, spirit full of Brahma, one should be concentrated, strained toward Brahma. The yogin, who masters one's mind and always practices this exercise, wins rest, supreme peace having its seat in Brahma."

But is it necessary to look for bread at the other end of the earth, when we can find it even better round the corner? Perhaps we should look for spices to season it, in tropical countries. Teresa of Avila taught us that those who are faithful to meditation (she teaches the conditions) can expect to reach prayer of quiet within a short period, six months or a year. . . . In our Christian tradition we have simple methods, techniques to enter contemplative prayer, a prayer of quiet. One of the methods is from a very fashionable book nowadays: *The Cloud of Unknowing* by an unknown 14th century English writer.

The methods of prayer used by the Hesychast Christian monks (from the Greek "esychia" -- inner peace) of which St. John Climacus and the famous "Philocalia" speak, date back to the early Christian centuries. Speaking of the prayer of quiet (which is only the first step of Christian contemplative prayer), Teresa of Avila says: "The soul by now enters peace, or, better, God's divine presence makes it enter. . . . Then all faculties are resting and the soul knows, with a knowledge much clearer than that brought by external senses, that it is very close to God, so that if it rose slightly higher, it would be one with God in union. . . . It seems that nothing more could be wished. . . . Its faculties are at rest and dare not move, as it seems everything could hinder better loving. Nor are they so drowsy as not to be aware of God who is near."

### **Without Christ serious problems have no complete answer**

With these kinds of meditations we enter the deepest core of Christ's message and example: God is love and sharing, and takes on our grief to make a ladder of spiritual progress and deification. So, Christ and a divine revelation are necessary to give a more adequate answer to the basic problems: the meaning of life, the function of suffering, the way to break its deadly grip.

But, is perhaps Christ not a half mythical character, of whom we know very little from a historical point of view? What proofs did he give that his was a revelation coming from God? What is the difference between him and other great wise men and women? These are the questions we will try to answer in part II.

### **Faith is not fideism**

Faith is a picturesque castle, with bastions, drawbridges, embattlements, slender round towers soaring at various heights in the sky, surmounted by fluttering flags. But, before living in it, you must make sure it is not a special effect. Make sure the castle is built with stones and bricks and has solid foundations on real ground.

This seems not to be a problem for some believers: for them it is important only that faith has a reassuring look to cling to when faced with the anguish of death. Vittorio Messori writes: "Complex architectures are built on the gospels: but few go down into the cellar to see if there are real foundations. Few try to test if the corner stone on which their faith and their churches are said to rest is still solid."

Unfortunately many people today think faith is an arbitrary and optional choice, such as jogging or gardening, which only have natural inclination, feeling and an inner need as motivations: a strictly personal opinion, blind choice. Yes, this state of mind exists, but it is not faith: it is fideism. Fideism believes simply because it believes. Its motivations are only that Christianity is sublime poetry, fulfilling the needs of feeling.

Without underestimating such aspects, *reasonable* faith believes on the basis of concrete and ascertainable facts. We have already seen some. But the strongest, richest and most convincing is that the great figure of Christ is not mere poetry; it is also history.

Jesus is the solidest reason against atheism and, at the same time, against fideism. In fact he is God's main manifestation, sublime and verifiable, mysterious and tangible at the same time, beyond human capacities, and observable in history, both in the past and present time. It was not faith that created Christ, but Christ who created faith.

The unique and extraordinary nature of Jesus is written in believers' hearts only because, before that it had already been written in the number and quality, antiquity and historical reliability, of persons and writings witnessing him, in the limpidity and splendor of his personality, in the originality, power, and depth of his doctrine -- which could not be created by his disciples -- and in the spiritual and physical miracles he wrought and grand moral figures he has kindled in every century, including ours. All this has been proved by historians and biblical scholars, in the last fifty years, with new valid proofs. This is what we will see in the second part.

# **PART II**

**DOES GOD SPEAK TO US?**

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **HISTORICAL CRITICISM AND THE GOSPELS**

#### **Without Christ, God has no face. Why we need divine revelation**

The last achievement of reason, Pascal says, is where it recognizes that there are, above it, realities it cannot achieve. A hot-air balloon can bring us closer to the moon, but it cannot make us land on it. Reason, together with intuition, takes us nearer to God, allows us to discover God's existence, but it does not allow us to understand God's intentions. Why do we persist in wanting to get on the moon in a hot air balloon? And why must we renounce the moon if we could find the sense of our life in it? If there is no divine revelation, we are lost in the desert of doubt and ignorance about the most important realities: sorrow, sense of life, after life.

"Here we are, Annamariam" Van der Meer wrote before converting to faith, two poor solitary beings lost in the immensity. Look at these flowers: unintelligible this blossoming, is not it? Look at our hands: they are alive. We live. And we cannot penetrate the inmost sense of this word: life. I feel around me impenetrable darkness; still I want to see. Why am I not pleased with what is in front of me? Why does my spirit call for the infinite, the eternal?" Although it is true, as we showed in the first part, that reason can understand God's existence, without the demonstration and the acceptance of revelation it is perplexed and tormented by thousands of doubts. The reader will have experienced that reason, even when it goes hand in hand with intuition, does not thin out the thick fog to see clearly what are the reasons why God created us and placed us on the surface of this strange life.

Ask ten passersby and seven won't know of an authentic revelation, couldn't tell you why we are in the world. Reason does not shed enough light on the most exciting problem for common people who cannot devote much time to long and tiring research. And even for the majority of thinkers it is like a candle that cannot light up a whole landscape.

Pirandello represents truth in the figure of an unknowable woman, object of endless discussion and of contrary interpretations. When summoned, she arrives veiled and answers: "For me, I am the person they think I am." In the novel *Il fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal)* people are represented as wanderers in the darkness, each one of them with a little lantern (each one's own opinion). Some go here, others go there, some come back, others walk around. Whom have we to address? Is it not contradictory to believe in a deaf and dumb God who does not hear our requests for light or who does not want to answer us, and who does not allow us to know the goal and the means to use to attain it, when God created us for a Primary Objective? Many people today rely on the poor hot-air balloon of reason without difficulty, but they dare not enter "Christ's spaceship." They are against the "dogmatism" of faith. But, if I have good reasons to think certain affirmations are revealed by God, they are dogmas of faith, i.e., sure truths. Is it perhaps dogmatism to accept, as indisputable, truths revealed by science, or well witnessed by history, or ascertained in a good lawsuit? Well then, after seeing God's imprint in the universe and in human conscience, we wonder: perhaps God is revealed in a clearer way. We need clarity about this matter, proofs that God really

spoke. God is revealed in our interior, but only if we have already recognized God's voice in that of a great master of spiritual life.

An objective revelation outside us is needed, something accessible even to one who is not a mystic and is involved in the practical and immediate necessities of life.

We have to notice and underline that no great religious genius and founder of religion, except Christ, was ever declared to be God's son, equal to the Father, nor to bring humankind a revelation coming directly from God. Buddha, Ramanuja, Mahavira, Confucius, Lao-Tse did not claim to carry a message on the part of the creator, but simply a personal enlightenment. Moses was a prophet and announced a doctrine which had to prepare the future Messiah's definite one. Mohammed called himself a prophet and he was, but he derived his teaching from Moses and from the prophets of the old testament.

The great Jewish prophets foretold Christ. The great Christian saints followed him. Only Christ, unique among the great religious geniuses, announced an absolutely new message and definitive revelation on the part of his Father, and he alone declared himself God's Son, equal to his Father.

Without Christ we can arrive at what many people call "to believe in God," but it is an opinion, as Moravia says, which does not change anything in life; it is sphinx, an enigma, a faceless God. Christ reveals us God's face, of a noblesse and superhuman sublimity, far above images outlined by philosophers and thinkers of all times.

Even those who doubt Christ's divinity promote him with full marks for humanity, wisdom, depth of doctrine, and moral splendor of life. The great majority of nonbelievers themselves acknowledge that Christ is the highest among the famous masters of spiritual life as he who gave rise to the greatest saints. If there is a divine revelation it is therefore and above all to him we have to turn to.

What allows us to escape from fideism is that today it is possible to offer a true, historical, scientific demonstration that Christ's personality was not invented by faith. This chapter will seem slightly exacting and devoid of color, but it is worth making some effort to discover a treasure. The foundations are made of grey cement and have little of the aesthetic, but they hold up the inhabited flats.

### **The luck of living forty years after Bultmann**

"I remember," Jean Guitton writes, "that André Maurois sometimes took me aside to say to me: 'I think as Alain does, that is, I admire everything said in the gospels, and I detect in them a human and divine truth, but let them not force me to believe that it happened.' And I remember, as my old friend Couchoud, who had philosophized all his life on the gospels, said to me: 'I admit all the Creed, except sub Pontio Pilato.' He would have given his approval to all the dogmas on condition that they were revealed dogmas without any relationship with history. Why keep only the spiritual meaning of the gospels? Such is undoubtedly the idea of the majority of our contemporaries, and even, perhaps, secretly, that of some believers. . . . Well, I think that this way of seeing . . . is wrong. It would rouse horror in Paul, John, and the first apostles, the Church Fathers, the doctors and the saints, because an idea, an image, and a myth would take Jesus' place. . . . If a little criticism

removes Jesus' historicity, then criticism of criticism, i.e., the fullness of criticism, brings us back to it: research persuaded me of that."

It was just so, as Feuerbach, Freud, Sartre, and other atheistic thinkers allowed believers to unmask the false and unreasonable faith in God and to give sounder foundation to the reasonable and authentic one. Consider Jesus' teaching on resurrection. Lazarus's resurrection makes intelligible three important deeds related by all the gospels: the Jewish authorities' decision to condemn Jesus to death, after his popularity had grown so much after the resurrection; the anointing at Bethany explained as a sign of gratitude on the part of Mary, the sister of the man risen from the dead; Jesus' solemn entry into Jerusalem when many people came after hearing of such an extraordinary miracle.

### **Summing up of the internal criticism of the gospels**

The works of the RG ( *Redactionsgeschichte*, criticism of the gospels as edited) allow us to outline the particular contribution of each evangelist. The freedom of interpretation and the writing of the authors of the gospels is real, and verifiable. In fact, it seems moderate, motivated, and always faithful substantially to the handed down tradition.

The FG ( *Formgeschichte*, criticism of the gospel as a literary form) deserved to study the environment where this tradition was formed by providing for a rigorous method of literary analysis of the texts and a means to get to the vital situation which saw them rise (prayer, cult, missionary activity, catechesis, difficulties as regards Hebraism and paganism, the communities' development in religious and culturally differentiated environments). Therefore the present exegesis can trace the original context of many gospel passages and recognize the interpretations of the primitive church of the data going back to Jesus.

After all the checking, a stream of loyalty runs through all tradition: we notice attentive care in handing down the words and deeds of him who is considered to be the unique teacher, from Jesus' source until the last stage of the writing of the gospels. The proof of this fidelity, after the studies of the last thirty years, goes on on different levels: the works of the RG and FG on the literary level; the recent works of the historical criteriology applied to the gospels, on the historical level; the considerations on the nature and on the indications of the language's at a philosophical level; the prepaschal community's analysis and the primitive community's environment of life shown by the semantics, on the sociological level. These approaches made through the most varied disciplines bring everyone to the conclusion that knowledge of the historical Jesus through the gospels is fully realizable.

### **Christ resurrection and historicity**

Christ wrought miracles not to show off but as signs of his message's realization: as sick were cured and the dead arose, so humankind, grasping his offered hand, could emerge from desperate evils and to find the sense of life. But, among the miracles and signs, Christ spoke of one which would be the most important: with his resurrection he wanted to show in himself a victory prelude to death,

which he would bring to everyone who followed his way to God ( 1 Cor.15; 1 Thes. 4, 13 ff., etc.) The event did not arrive as a flash of lightning in a serene sky: Christ foretold his death, his resurrection, and the meaning of both on various occasions ( Mt. 12,40; 16,21; 17,22; 20, 17-19; Mk.8,31; 9,31; 10,34; Lk. 11,30; 18,33; Jn. 2,19-22, etc.).

The apostles' witness and the disciples' preaching of the first and successive centuries are all imbued with the resurrection as the central element of faith in Christ. They do not speak evasively of it, as a marginal episode, but they show it as the pivot, the corner stone, the point key of the *kerygma* (announcement) and give their blood and their life to confirm its reality.

Besides the narrations of the four evangelists, all the documents of the New Testament and the Christian writers, starting from the first century, insist upon Christ's resurrection as on a deed which happened really, not only symbolically; the disciples were witnesses for forty days, at first unbelievers, then flabbergasted, and at last convinced and until they numbered five hundred disciples ( 1Cor. 15, 11).

The feast of the anastasia (resurrection), became the most important of the Christian year since the first century; in fact the week day of the cult was shifted from Saturday to Sunday because of Christ's resurrection. Deep affection can, for a while, make a beloved dead person appear alive, but if the seeing person is not psychically ill, s/he realizes that that is an illusion or, at least, s/he has doubts about it.

Love is not such a powerful illusionist as to make one believe what is not there, without any shade of doubt and forever. People who see and listen to, contemporarily, with identical particulars, others who reason well and who, shortly after, show such an energy and intelligence as to go against the tide can interact so much that they make it change direction.

Even when the intensity of affection gives body to fantasies, it must necessarily be upheld by hope. The disciples did not hope in the resurrection, did not rely upon it, and, at the beginning, did not believe in it. The tangible effects were not dreams: the sepulchre was empty despite the guards and the enemy's interest in leaving the corpse, to show that he had not risen. Christ let himself be touched, ate with them, shared an extraordinary fishing experience.

The most tangible effect of the resurrection was the new spirit that since then constantly animated the apostles. They considered everything finished after Jesus' death. Their hopes had vanished. In the struggle against the Jewish and Roman authorities they would find themselves in conditions of mocking inferiority. But what followed is unbelievable, impossible, and contrary to all natural laws: Jesus' doctrine, which had received a lethal blow from its founder's death, started spreading out, although it was difficult to be believed and practised; and, although it was upheld only by poor fishermen lacking money, power, and culture, it conquered whole populations.

Wings arose, and a new, unanimous spirit of joy and trust lit up in the disciples a few days after the teacher's catastrophe, taking the place of despondency; and it was not a flash in the pan if it overcame the power of the Empire and the mystery religions, which were in full bloom. In the end it gave life to the greatest religious movement in human history.

## **The evolution of criticism after Bultmann**

From the sceptical movement it was, criticism takes more and more positions of trust towards the gospels as a source of knowledge of Jesus. The phenomenon of marked interest towards his life and his personality is typical of this turning point. The works of G. Bornkamm, O. Cullmann, W. Grundmann, N. Perrin, D. Flusser, H. Braun, K. Niederwimmer, J. Blank, H. Zimmermann, J. Dupont, P.E. Langevin, G.F. Ravasi, R. Fabris, B. Forte, A. Nisin, J. Klaussner, H. Zahrnt, G. Baumbach, G. Vermes, R. Aron, L. Sabourin, J. Guillet, E. Stauffer, and others are proof of it in recent years.

A positivist concept of history had made the gospels and their interpretation of the facts seem an alteration of the truth. Today the studies of G. Dilthey, H.I. Marrou, R. Aron, H.G. Gadamer, P. Ricoeur, on the sense and the real significance of history, showed that the evangelists, having assimilated with extreme respect and trust Jesus' doctrine and intentions, through the numberless instructions of the Twelve, and applying such a doctrine to the spiritual necessities of their community, realized the aim of history more deeply, and make us know Jesus' true face under more numerous points of view, and know how much force attaches to a blindly material and literal fidelity to his words and to the meaningless details of his life. The evangelists applied the message of Jesus himself, of an alive witness: the disciples, after absorbing the doctrine and receiving certainty of it from the master, must communicate it, under the apostolic group's supervision, more attentive to the substantial fidelity than the literal one.

External criticism continues to keep its weight after the latest studies: it shows that the attitude of the Church of the second and third century is that of absolute respect for the gospels due to an indisputable authority: the fact is proved by the use of the gospels as liturgical texts and as irrefutable reasons in the controversy against the heretics.

Thus we can conclude that the intense critical work of the last forty years was constructive: the convergence of the discovered reasons proves that the gospels bring us the historical Jesus, his authentic message, and the deeds of greatest importance of his earthly existence. Thus, we get not to the usual culprit, but to something absolutely new and decisive for the life of each one of us: a privileged view of history.

## **Confirmation from external criticism**

The following conclusions result from the historical studies of the first Christian centuries compared with the gospels. All the oldest Christian writers, without exception, and the heathens Celsus and Porphyrius, testify that it was common conviction in every church and, since the first century in every part of the Empire, that the gospels come from Jesus' direct disciples: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Irenaeus (130-202), bishop of Lyon in Gaul and martyr; Origen (185-253), scholar of a very broad culture and director of the "Didaskaléion" the first higher Christian School of Alexandria in Egypt; Justin (ca. 100-165), a converted philosopher and martyr in Rome; Papias (ca. 70-125), bishop of Gerapolis in Asia Minor; the Muratorian Canon, an official document of the Roman Church drawn up towards 190 and discovered by Muratori; Tertullian (150-235), jurist, scholar, and converted philosopher from Carthage; Theophilus, Tatian, Athenagoras, Aristides, and others.

The first Christians take pains to link to apostolic tradition and to keep it unchanged; this is well documented. Jean Guitton quotes Papias's words: I think that what we know from books has less weight than what we hear directly from the word which remained alive. I like to reread," Guitton comments, "this page from Papias, handed down by Eusebius from Caesarea one of the oldest documents of the ecclesiastic tradition. Papias, who lived at the beginning of the second century, says how he tried to frequent and question the apostles or those who had known them, because nothing was as worthwhile as the contact with the word remained alive. I understand it so well. He who founded life on a historical presence, time, day by day, removes more and more by fogging and darkening the memory, feels the need to go back to it. . . ."

No heretics of those days dreamed of doubting the authenticity of the gospels, although they would have been interested in doing it to uphold the apocryphal gospels and their own doctrines. "The gospels," Irenaeus writes, "are so solidly set that the heretics themselves are compelled to witness for them, all sectarians trying to prove their new doctrine with the gospels."

If the gospels had been lost, we could put them together again from the numberless citations of the first Christian writers, citations declaring the authority such documents enjoyed in every church of the first centuries. *The Twelve Apostles' Doctrine*, a book written in Syria about the year 90, quotes them 75 times; Herma (130-200 ca.), a Roman writer, 9 times; Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, disciple of the apostle John, martyred in Rome in 117, quotes them 13 times; Clement, bishop of Rome in 97, 18 times; Irenaeus 1819 times; Tertullian 7528 times; Origen, 17922 times, and so forth.

Other ancient writers confirm the gospels: Theophilus, bishop of Antioch in 169; Tatian, Syrian writer in the second century; Athenagoras, a converted Athenian philosopher who wrote "Apology for the Christians" addressed to Marcus Aurelius; Aristides, a converted philosopher who also wrote an "Apology for the Christians," presented to the Emperor Hadrian towards the year 120; Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna and martyr in 156: "Letter to Diognetes," etc.

The witnesses from whom the gospels are derived, i.e., the apostles and the first Palestinian disciples, are not thinkers able to create a new and profound doctrine, but workers (and the gospels witness it) used to managing themselves in real life (fishing, agricultural work, tax-office, trade, handicraft, medical profession), positive men, rather unbelievers, at first, to the miracles, not bent on visions or mysticism, tied to the Jewish traditional doctrines. It was hard for them to understand and accept the Master's new and deep doctrines, expressed by him in an original and sometimes paradoxical form; they very often did not understand. Their ignorance itself is more a guarantee than a disadvantage, when it is question of relating concrete facts happening in the sunlight together with a new doctrine where personal interpretations are not added.

Christ used short and incisive sentences, imaginative and original parables, in order to make an impression upon the mind and memory of the people and the disciples. Furthermore, he repeated these teachings from village to village, always in the presence of his disciples. Immediately after Christ's death and resurrection, the apostles began to impart the received teachings to the people, and, even before, Christ himself had instructed them about the method and contents. The people listened to the apostles as many of them had listened to Jesus himself, so that either the people or the apostles among them, controlled the doctrine. History accepts the witness of those who are near

the facts, even if they are disciples or admirers of the personage they speak of, provided their integrity earns them the benefit of the doubt.

Philosophers, thinkers, saints, political figures are evidently deeply known only by their disciples and collaborators, i.e., by those who live with them. Others see them only sometimes and perhaps are not very much interested in their doctrine and works. On the other hand, the disciples who appreciate and esteem them, draw stimulus precisely from these convictions, so as to observe them in their behavior, to listen to their teaching and, hence, to narrate their lives. For this reason, lives of great personages of old and modern thought have reached us through their disciples' writings.

Absence of fanaticism and shallow interests are required before we trust disciples: in the gospels we notice just this sobriety, this absence of hyperbole and exaggerations, this absence of low personal interests, as shown in reporting even aspects which could harm the teacher and the disciples themselves. The Acts of the Apostles and all the history of the Church of the first centuries show us the new spirit of love of truth and charity, of detachment from wealth and honors, of loyalty to Christ even to the point of the martyrdom that gives life to the newborn religion.

Mario Pomilio observes: "Sometimes the evangelists behave like people who do not understand an expression but do not dare modify it. . . . It is a case, I think, unique in the history of literature: authors usually overcome their personages, at least they bend them to themselves, subject them to their own intentions. On the contrary, in the case of the evangelists, it is Christ who overcomes them, places them in a humble attitude of listening, of aiming only at looking at what he has effectively said."

### **Have the written depositions been altered through the centuries?**

In the ancient world, no autograph of literary work resisted the destroying force of time. We know, therefore, all books issued before the year 1000 only through the copies written by hand by copyists. When copying, they possibly made mistakes, and, especially for the gospels, it is logical that people without scruples would feel tempted to add or take away or modify phrases or passages according to their own ideas.

Therefore it was necessary a very long and painstaking work to compare among them the thousand handwritten copies which have reached us, in order to eliminate all alterations introduced in the course of the centuries.

In fact, if a copyist in Syria had missed a line by mistake, or had deceitfully changed a phrase, the others from Asia Minor or Greece, Rome, Carthage, Gaul, or Anglia could not have missed the same line or changed the same phrase with equal words. The critical edition is compiled, i.e., the text is purified by all alterations of the amanuenses, through a long and minute comparison that various scholars do independently one from the other. It is obvious that much more certainty is obtained as more numerous, old, geographically diverse in origin are the copies that have reached our own days.

A total of some hundreds of handwritten copies of each one of the great classical writers of antiquity is extant, none before the seventh century after Christ. The history evidence for Christ is

far better documented. We possess 34,086 copies of the gospels and the apostles' letters, between codices written in Greek and versions in all ancient languages (Latin, Syriac, Arabian, Ethiopian, Armenian, ancient Slavic, ancient Gothic, Persian, etc.). Besides these, some hundreds of fragments of recently discovered papyri are extant and the numbers are increasing with new discoveries. To that we have to add many tens of thousands of quotations present in the Christian writers of the first three centuries. The most ancient codices go back to the third and fourth century and all papyri belong to the first and second century, and therefore very near the evangelists. Hence it is possible to go back to the original texts with certainty.

### **An extraordinary love of truth animates the new faith**

In 1976 was published *Hypothesis Concerning Jesus*, an inquiry by a journalist on the most decisive historical event, Jesus Christ. The style is lively and journalistic -- scholarly notes are excluded -- but these pages come to life from years of research, from surveys of the archeological excavations of the Middle-East, from meetings with international specialists. At the end of the inquiry it seems to the author that the most plausible hypothesis on Jesus is the one proposed by faith, namely, that reason advises us to bet on Jesus. The book had many editions and it was translated into all the main languages: it is the last best-seller on Jesus after Papini, Mauriac, Santucci, Guitton, and together with the Japanese Shusaku Endo.

The author makes us notice that it would be very queer that some impostors or hotheads took the trouble to inaugurate in humankind a new spirit of truth and love until then unknown, and still be more unbelievable would be the fact that they succeeded, and that since then this spirit continues to engender the most luminous figures in history up to our time.

The best proof of the veracity of the gospels is above all the apostles and the first Christians' lives. Living constantly with threats and dangers because of the faith they announced, detached from comforts and wealth, devoting all their being to the love of God and neighbor during contradictions, troubles, persecutions, and the supreme testimony of martyrdom, it would have to be a miracle for them to have invested their own lives in falsehood, a miracle they could not possibly produce.

Messori quotes a phrase of the philosopher Piero Martinetti: "Religion incarnated in Jesus is the deepest and most intense source of life in God for us. We must recognize in him the most excellent of religious personalities, whence even today a spiritual force which is unequalled in history can be derived in a more and more renewed shape. Is it from origins so much ambiguous and miserable that would come out, therefore, a message which in every age 'a spiritual force comes down to us, in an ever renewing way, unequalled in history?'"

The value of a tree is known from its fruits: liars and hotheads do not create such a sublime and deep teaching, one that fascinates everyone of high intelligence and inspires the noblest moral people to sacrifice everything and still to follow that teaching after twenty centuries. Traffickers in fraud do not live and die as heroes. If people outstanding in ordinary honesty, as were Christ's first witnesses, can be suspected of forgery, then the whole of human history tumbles down from the foundations, or rather, human life itself is undermined, because every activity in civilized society is based on the value of testimony.

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **THE FIGURE OF CHRIST**

#### **Ayer's rock in history**

A new life style appeared in the world with Christ, new ideals, a new moral sensitivity, a new relationship with God, a new freedom, a new way of loving others, a new interior force, new social connections, a new spirituality, a new history. He divided history into two parts: before and after him.

Jesus is an atypical intelligence, a special genius, a unique hero and saint. Like Ayer's Rock, in the middle of the great Australian desert, a mountain different from all the others in the world, with no surrounding hills, thus Christ shows himself, unique in history with the credentials of God's ambassador. When observed impartially, Christ is the strongest proof that God exists. Was Christ created by the beliefs of the early Christians? How could the early Christians create such a revolutionary novelty, which is still today a real force in the world?

Does an eagle in the Antarctic descend from penguins? Christ is so superior to the culture and ideas of his time that to create him a community of people, equally gigantic in the spiritual, intellectual and moral fields, would have been necessary. In a word, to explain a miracle without God's action, a thousand more would have to be created.

#### **Not only the evangelists are witnesses of Christ's life**

Another feature is to be taken into account: thousands of Jesus' contemporaries witness to the facts described in the gospels. It is true that they did not write about it, but they did something requiring even greater commitment: they were converted. Tacitus, the nonchristian writer, states that in 64 A.D., in Rome alone, the Christians were "an enormous multitude." And even in those times conversion to Christ meant likely martyrdom.

The gospels and the epistles spread all over the empire at a time when many men and women, who could tell of when they had met him and what he had said, were still alive and well. Legends and myths were popular in the Mediterranean area then (Dionysus, Dimetria, Isis, Cybel, Mithra), well adapted to the tastes of the market and to consumer demands. Precisely like the religious sects popular in our times, religions with human origin do not aim at inspiring people's superior desires but at fulfilling the ones people already feel. Every faith created by humans develops and spreads by tilling the fruitful plain of middle-to-low interest: paranormal phenomena, trance, clairvoyance, predicting the future, divine protection to obtain health, success in love and business, survival after death -- interests not too far above average morality.

Christ is the only one who introduces himself as an alpine guide towards a God living very high, in the highest spiritual spheres, much higher than our human earthly yearning. Only a saint of his calibre could create and live such a life. Myths, heresies, natural religions, sects are all rafts following the stream. Only Jesus and his most faithful disciples can be the tug going upstream towards the source.

Myths and legends do not offer dates and names of witnesses. The gospels and the epistles have instead details of time and place. Even if they had wished, they could not have sketched sham narrations, at the risk of not being believed and being openly contradicted by those who knew the truth. In fact they were published when witnesses were still living. Peter, in his first speech addressed to the Jerusalem crowd, could speak openly of "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved by God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as you yourselves also know" ( Acts 2,22).

Jesus never acted or spoke in the shadows: I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in the synagogue, and in the temple . . . in secret I have said nothing. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them: they know what I said." ( Jn. 18, 20-21)

Every convert in the earliest years is a living proof of the historicity and truth of the gospels. Every year, at Easter, thousands of Jews from all countries would arrive at and leave Jerusalem. In Palestine alone, and the surrounding regions which had frequent relations with Palestine, we find thousand of converted Jews and pagans since the earliest years. At the end of the century, Plinius Junior wrote to Emperor Hadrian, that certain regions in Asia Minor such as Bithinia were already mostly Christian.

Of course, the majority were not converted but we must point out that to become a Christian, then as now, meant choosing an upward path and risking property, family, life itself, besides. Therefore, it is very meaningful that so many people made such a choice.

From a historical point of view, no religion has spread so much even as it went against the stream. Therefore we do not merely consider the authors of the gospels reliable but their warrants also, those who answered for them, the many who bet their lives on the truth of the facts.

This faith, unlike others, showed precise facts and precise testimonies that would not tolerate being compared with mythologies. It claimed to rely on a real person and on historical reality. It had a rigorous discipline, unlike the others, a higher price for the something greater and more splendid that it offered. Therefore, the thousands of conversions, even officials, senators, philosophers, and proconsuls, are a phenomenon showing that the apostles' lives were convincing, their miracles probative, their words full of conviction, their virtues indicative of people so trustworthy as to risk everything.

To believe in Jesus does not only mean to believe in God, but to believe that Christ is God. Faith without Christ is faith in a God outside history, outside reality, an amorphous and faceless God, who offers no self-revelation, and who takes no interest in approaching those who seek it.

I only believe," Mauriac writes, "in what I touch, in what I see, in what merges in my substance; this is why I believe in Christ. . . . Must I confess it? If I had not known Christ, 'God' would have been a word devoid of sense for me. Except in the case of a very exceptional grace, I could not have imagined or thought of the Infinite Being. The God of philosophers and of scholars would have occupied no space in my moral life. It was necessary for God to plunge into humankind and at a definite historical moment, in a determined spot on the globe, for a human being made of flesh and blood to pronounce certain words, to perform certain deeds, so that I may fall on my knees."

And Jean Guitton concludes thus his masterpiece on Christ's historicity and personality: "Is there in our times a being, an idea, an existence truly capable of allowing humankind to unite and progress whatever their level, to repair their losses instantly? In my opinion, Jesus' story, enlightened by that of the previous ages and of the following twenty centuries, allows this question to be answered. Because we have lived almost all experiences, we have exhausted all denials: there is no other name which can be uttered to give twentieth-century humanity hope and joy."

## **Jesus' profile**

The greatest living novelist from Japan, Endo Shusaku, wished to write a life of Jesus for years and at the end of his work he writes: "I would like, one day, to write another book on Jesus' life with the experience gathered in my life. And once I have finished writing it, I would not lose the wish to rewrite Jesus' life again." The founder of Christianity had to be an extraordinary personality to arouse such a strong and lasting love for his person and to begin such a gigantic movement, innovating history through the centuries to the present time. And the reliable data of witnesses allow us to highlight his character and personality precisely.

He must have been attractive for the crowds to hasten to see him even from far away regions, for children to throw themselves into his arms fearlessly, and for a woman in the crowd to cry: "Blessed the womb which bore you and the breast that nursed you" ( Lk 11, 27).

It was his vivid and piercing glance that fascinated, both when he flashed his angry eyes ( Mk. 3, 5), when he surrounded people with love ( Mk. 3, 34), and when he stared at those he was addressing to make them understand his thought ( Mk. 10,23.27). His glance had to be limpid, transparent, and open. He himself said: "The lamp of the body is the eye; if your eye is sound your whole body will be filled with light" ( Mt. 6, 22).

Witnesses describe him not as frail and delicate, but vigorous and used to hard work. He was poor, living among people who worked with their hands, and he too earned his living with his hands, before transmitting the message.

He loved nature, as his delicate comparisons show. After a hard day's work he would willingly climb up a solitary hill, or late at night he would go in the silence of the shining waters of Lake Genesareth ( Mk. 4, 35; 6, 47).

His way of expression shows consciousness of his own mission and his strong determined character: "I have not come to call the just, but sinners. . . . The Son of Man has come to look for and save what was lost. . . . The son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve and give his life

as a ransom for many. . . . I have not come to suppress the Law and the Prophets, but make them perfect. . . ."

Christ is aware of his role from the very beginning and he never beats about the bush when opposed or confronting obstacles. He is a man with a clear will and of sure and determined action. His being can be summed up in the formula "Yes-No," for he cannot stand ambiguity and hypocrisy: "But let your communication be Yes or No for whatsoever is more than these comes from evil." ( Mt. 5, 37)

His will to purpose and his behavior reveal Christ as preeminently a leader. "Is it perhaps Jn. the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the ancient prophets?" ( Mt. 16, 14). He drives the sellers out of the Temple and nobody dares go against him. The world of feelings, where his speeches were born, is full of strong emotional vibrations, while there is no trace of weak sentimentalism. The same vigor and passionate ardor of feeling shines through many of his deeds: he does not love tricks, he is not weak, he reacts with extraordinary energy against everything adverse to God and the justice wanted by God. He never defends himself, never loses control of his actions, and is ready to bear the consequences of his strong and courageous words, even at the cost of his life.

### **Love for humankind**

Christ knows human weaknesses. His love for humankind is not at all an enthusiastic love seeing angels in human creatures. But as he loves us knowing what we are, pierces through the thick veils of appearances to the bottom of our hearts, and sees all the influences of environment, education, temperament, suffering, and poverty, all the difficulties and weakness in which we sinners struggle in our inner chaotic world.

Therefore he forbids every judgement or hasty condemnation: no one can truly establish how guilty another person is: "Do not judge and you will not be judged" ( Mt. 7,1). Therefore, he wishes to forgive "Not seven times, Peter, but seventy times seven times" ( Mt. 18,22).

Christ was never so sublime as in his terrible, torturing hours when he made his prayer "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" ( Lk. 23,34). This love, persisting in spite of everything, was so new and unique, so tender and ready to sacrifice, that it is forever engraved in human memory.

### **To give himself wholly to everyone**

Christ accomplished many miracles to prove that his doctrine came from God, but the main miracle was, and is, his love for humankind, his compassion for human suffering, compassion in the etymological meaning of "suffering with, suffering together."

What distinguishes his love from philanthropy of the wise and of the philosopher is the following: he is not content with teaching, but wants to suffer together; he does not simply notice and relieve his fellow creatures' distress, but wants to take it upon himself personally.

Christ's whole life is a continuous going out from himself to live in others. These are the sinners: not only does he welcome them, but he goes towards them: "Zacchaeus come down, hurry, because

I must stay at your house today" ( Lk. 19,5). He names the poorest among us and the disinherited and despised his sisters and brothers. He shares our destiny so intimately that he declares that whatever is done to the least of us is done to him ( Mt. 25, 40).

Through this close union with us, he feels driven in the holiest moment of his life to kneel in front of his poor disciples and to wash their feet. He did not come "to be served, but to serve." And when he consecrates bread and wine, this sentiment of solidarity becomes a wish to give himself to all of us to free us from distress and to place us in his mysterious inner joy. Then he utters those mysteriously powerful words: "Take and eat; this is my body. . . . Drink, all of you from this, for this is my blood which is to be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins" ( Mt. 26,26-28).

### **Up to tenderness**

Witnesses always stress his compassion and his love for humankind. This man who passionately aspired to a superhuman and extra-earthly purpose, did not think that he was lowering himself when he embraced children, when he cried for Lazarus's death and for his sisters' grief, when he quivered with compassion for the sobbing of the mother of Naim, when he showed interest in the lepers, the blind, the mendicants, when he shed tears in front of Jerusalem doomed to ruin.

He was moved when he saw the crowd reach him in the desert places where he retired to give the apostles special instructions: those people were looking for a guide, because nobody took care of them with unselfish love. He devotes himself to them in all his charity: "Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened and I will give you rest" ( Mt. 11,28).

Some people particularly moved him and evoked from him tender words and most touching parables (the good shepherd, the Samaritan, the prodigal son, the lost sheep): they were the sick and repentant sinners. He wants to heal the sick even if he is charged with violating the Sabbath. He wants to become a companion of the sinners to save them even if the "observers" are scandalized. Even in his agony on the cross he feels urged to tell the repentant criminal "Today you will be with me in paradise" ( Lk. 23,43). He lives in the divine but never forgets the misery of earthly reality. Moreover, he lives it so intensely that remedying it becomes the purpose of his life. Therefore his preaching assumes that warm, happy, and bright color and he himself calls it "the glad message, the gospel."

### **The theme of his life**

But so far we have not hinted at the vital core from which all these traits of Christ's personality derive: there is, in his life, a love polarizing all his thoughts and feelings, a predominant idea: love for the Divine Father. What makes Christ's love for his Father powerful and intimate is his recollection of him. Here we deeply penetrate into the mystery of his personality. Unlike all other religious geniuses, all the founders of religions, all the saints who drew inspiration from him, Christ never declared himself a sinner, or better yet, he clearly stated he was the Son of God in a different way from others and he knew his Father through direct experience: I come from the Father and have come into the world" ( Jn. 16,28). "I tell you most solemnly: before Abraham ever was, I am" ( Jn. 8,58). "You have not known the Father but I know him" ( Jn. 8,55). "Everything has been entrusted

to me by my Father, and no one knows the father except the son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" ( Mt. 11,27).

The secret joy springing and flowing as a stream in his spirit derives from his touch with his Father (see Lk. 10,21). In the end his life was sacrificed, his words were stern, but a flood of unutterable joy endlessly roared into the core of his soul -- his vision of the Father.

## **The Good News**

Christ certainly cannot be compared to someone, who, having a treasure, keeps it hidden and locked at home so as not to share it with others. On the contrary, he came on purpose into the world to open the door of life's meaning and welfare to everyone wandering and freezing in the iced expanses of selfishness and doubt, and to place his great wealth of happiness at everyone's disposal: "I call you friends . . . because I have made known everything I have learned from my Father" ( Jn. 15,15). "Father, I have made your name known to them so that the love with which you loved me may be in them" ( Jn. 17,26).

His whole teaching reflects and overflows with joy and life: "Rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven" ( Lk. 10,20). "I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full ( Jn. 10,10) . . . so that they may have in themselves my joy to the full" ( Jn. 17, 13).

Christ laid down the basis of humanism, the seed of what we call modern civilization, the foundation for the sense of equality, justice, and solidarity: "Insofar as you did this to one of the least of these, you did it to me" ( Mt. 25,40); "You know that among the pagans the rulers lorded over them and their great ones made their authority felt. This is not to happen among you; no, anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant" ( Mt. 20,25-26); "You have only one master, and you are all sisters and brothers" ( Mt. 23, 8).

But in Jesus there is something connecting other messages and bringing them to the top: the testimony he announced and lived that God is love and wants to communicate the wealth of divine life in a lasting and eternal way to those who open up to him. God acts in you and slowly transforms you if you listen to God's Word and meditate on it everyday (parable of the sower, etc.). To receive from God the ability to believe in this love and to live it (this is our salvation) you must perseveringly ask for it ( Lk. 11,11).

God loves you, forgets your past, and never tires of transforming and improving you, detaching you from money, sex, and greed if you try to cooperate with God every day ( Mt. 5 and 6). The union you will have begun on this earth with God will not end; it will not be destroyed by death: "Repayment will be made to you when the just rise again" ( Lk. 14,14); "Father and Son" means that in God there is no solitude, but a self-donation between Persons which is the essence of love.

God is Love, and gives you trust, peace, and courage; if you open up with faith you will overcome the unavoidable suffering of earthly life: "Come to me, all of you who labor and are overburdened and I will give you rest" ( Mt. 11,28); "What the spirit brings is love, joy, and peace" ( Gal. 5,22). "I am the vine, you are the branches. Remain in me, and I in you, and you will bear fruit in plenty" ( Jn. 15,5).

Faith in Jesus is trust, esteem, acceptance of his message; it is necessary because it is the first step towards opening up to God, to receive and reciprocate God's love. Even human friendship begins by believing in the other's good will: "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry; whoever believes in me will never thirst" ( Jn. 6,35). "Whoever believes in me will be saved" ( Mt. 16,16).

Here is the Good News: to those who welcome this announcement reality appears in its true light, proceeding from God, a positive, fundamentally good reality, a road towards a rising dawn. Despite evil created by our guilty mistakes, life has a meaning; it is worth living; there is a way out of all entangled situations. Whoever believes in the Good News has the secret for a serene basic trust, unsinkable in storms, the beginning of Salvation, a calm and deep joy and becoming younger with the progress of faith and love, a small helicopter able to take off above floods and fires. "Whoever listen to my words and believe in the one who sent me: they have passed from death to life" ( Jn. 5,24).

### **Who is Jesus?**

Jesus' position is like a messenger landing from a spacecraft bringing a magnificent piece of news, an unbelievable message, the exact place of a world of bliss and immortality at which everyone can arrive, provided they accept some rules and sacrifices. People are amazed and ask for guarantees! Who are you really? What are your credentials? What proofs can you give?

People have always had a vague and undetermined concept of God. It cannot be compared to other concepts, but is close to that of a mysterious Being pervading everything, perhaps intelligent and powerful, but insensible and cold, unable to love, not concerned with human history and even less with individuals' histories, as inaccessible as the emperors of ancient China, locked in their imperial palaces, with whom no common subject could hope to communicate. Modern people believe in God, it is true, but on condition, that God does not appear. They want a silent God, who is in a mist and far away. A close God, loving and speaking to us, annoys us. A God who shows the path to follow is too binding. A vanishing God: this is what they need!

Therefore they have a very lofty idea of Christ, but only as a man. They think of him as one of the greatest figures in history, the greatest rather, the unique herald of moral progress, the founder of humanism and of civilization. They are ready to praise him in a superlative way on condition that Christ does not speak in God's name and even worse (which is absurd) that he is not God or a direct manifestation of a God who wanted to approach us and to speak to us. But if Christ is not what he claimed to be, the gigantic stature nonbelievers attribute to him does not suit him; on the contrary, it turns gigantic stature into madness or lies.

Jesus clearly declared his mysterious divine origin. This an integral and necessary part of the Good News: God's love for us is shown in this, in approaching us as near as possible so that God becomes human, speaks to us in a human way, offers us true friendship on an equal basis, shows divine love, that is, saves us at the cost of Christ's own sacrifice. Love for God who is higher means sharing the poor and hard condition of us who are lower, in order to raise us gradually to share God's own perfection. Christ did not speak publicly of his divine origin at the beginning of his mission of announcing God's new kingdom. He wanted his actions to speak first. "Look at the facts," he said, "From the fruit you know the tree" ( Lk. 7,18.23).

He never wanted to be worshipped, but only to worship the Father. He declared himself a man wholly obedient to his Father. But meanwhile he explicitly claimed he shared all divine attributes with his Father. In other words he declared the same thing. Thus he was put to death, under the charge he himself confirmed during the trial, of claiming he really was God's Son, of God's same nature. "We have a law and according to that law he ought to die, because he has claimed to be the Son of God" ( Jn. 19,7).

And it was true: he really made himself God's Son and asserted his natural unity with his Father in some fifty different ways. "I am the Son of Man." This expression was well known to the Jews of his time: Daniel the prophet had spoken of the Son of Man, the Messiah, majestic and glorious on the clouds of heaven on the right hand of God: his power had to be eternal and his kingdom had never to end ( Dan. 7,13 ff.).

His own words prove that Jesus used the expression with this meaning, e.g., "The Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father and will reward all according to their deeds" ( Mt. 16,27). "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory; then too he will send the angels to gather his chosen from the four winds" ( Mk. 13,26-27); the law of Moses had been given by God and nothing was holier, but Christ openly said he had come to complete it: "It was said to the Elders . . . but I say to you . . ." ( Mt. 5,17 ff.).

A friend to everybody, he also loved those nobody loved; a companion in life and work, helpful to everybody, above all to the very poor, he did not appreciate honors. When the crowd wanted to make him king he disappeared (see Jn. 6,15 ff.). But at the same time he stated: "The Father and I are one" ( Jn. 10,30). "Before Abraham ever was, I am" ( Jn. 8,58). "Now Father, it is time for you to glorify me with that glory I had with you before the world ever was" ( Jn. 17,5).

The gospels witness with plenty of details the divine authority with which Jesus heals the sick, drives out devils, raises the dead with a simple command and, even more, forgives sins and reconciles sinners with God. They describe how he teaches, not on the basis of the Bible's authority but on his own and on what he has seen with his Father. They show how he grants the apostles power to perform miracles, to forgive sins, to save others in his name, and how he demands to be preferred to father, to mother . . . and even to their own life, as he had given the whole of himself.

Christ claims he is the king of God's kingdom, Lord, light of the world, the resurrection and the life. He says that those who see him, see the Father and those who believe in him will live forever. He promises he will be close to his disciples until the end of the world, he will support them in their martyrdom, he will give them eternal life.

The gospels are rich in testimony of such extremely clear statements by Christ. Christ died to witness the Good News that God became human to show us the meaning of life and to open the way so that we would reach God. "Then the high priest tore his garments and said: "He has blasphemed! What need of witnesses have we now? There! You have just heard the blasphemy! What is your opinion? They answered: 'He is guilty of death'" ( Mt. 26,65-66). So Christ accepted torture and death to witness that the Good News is authentic. Jesus was not only one of the greatest figures in history: either he was mad or he is God's Son.

## Christ left the world, while remaining in it

To judge from what happened after his death, Jesus does not appear to have been a madman. He changed many things on earth, and is still changing them. He divided history into two parts: before Christ and after Christ. He made civilization and morals move forward, to the extent people listened to him. He still has many things to tell modern people on the meaning of life.

In his novel denouncing the spread of drugs, *The Gallows* ( 1987), Lenin Prize winner Cingiz Ajtmatov makes Jesus one of the characters. "My approach to Jesus Christ," the Russian writer says, "goes back some 10 years, when I first began to realize the world's total vulnerability. The threat of a nuclear catastrophe impending on mankind has urged me towards a research which digressed into the spiritual field. So that I have come to the conclusion that from a moral point of view, Christ's figure is the 'datum-point' of every human action."

Pasternak did not think Jesus was a madman either: "Humankind does not live in nature," he writes in *Doctor Zivago*, "but in history and according to modern thinking, humanity was really founded by Christ and the gospels are its basis. But what is history? It is taking centuries to try, by degrees, to solve the problem of death and to overcome it in the future. To this goal infinite mathematics and electromagnetic waves were discovered, symphonies written. But you cannot advance in such a direction without a given thrust. For such discoveries you need spiritual equipment and, in this direction, all data are in the gospels. Here they are: first of all, love your neighbor, a supreme form of living energy, filling human hearts and needing to expand and to be spent. Then the essential reasons of modern people, without which we cannot be thought of, that is, individual freedom and life as a sacrifice. Keep it in mind: today it is still extraordinary new. Our ancestors did not possess history with such a meaning."

"Faith is the key to understand God's message, otherwise impenetrable" Malcolm Muggeridge says, "and it was to renew the reserves of faith in the world that Jesus was born that night at Bethlehem. . . . Jesus' story, his birth, his words and actions, and the way he left the world although he remained in it has been repeated, meditated, analyzed, and illustrated more than any other. In the course of the centuries the message of the gospels has inspired many of the noblest evidences of our civilization. . . . The goalpost to which Christ's words lead are endless . . . . And certainly his words must be considered immortal, if they have survived the critics, in the course of time, above all the modern ones. Therefore, either Jesus never was or he still exists. Although I am a typical representative of these confused times . . . I feel deeply that Jesus is still existing in our reality. For those like me, who are afraid of the sunset of western civilization and of the approaching dark age, the apparent collapse of faith is distressing. But then, suddenly, in the most unlikely places, we read Solzenitsin's pages and in the squalid slums of Calcutta a Mother Theresa with her Missionaries of Charity realizes Jesus' message of love. . . . I feel that the religion he gave the world is not a heap of principles and ideas, but an expression of a lived life."What then is faith? It is the assent of the will to what God reveals us through Christ, a firm assent owing to God's absolute reliability. It has various stages:

- a) From basic trust you pass to initial faith: for your intellect it is only likely that God exists and has been revealed and your will gives a first agreement;
- b) complete faith: intellect reaches moral certainty and will fully assents. Doubt is still possible

but you understand it is more right to consent to faith;

c) enlightened faith: while the experience of God is lasting (spiritual solace or, even better, mystical experience) doubt is no longer possible.

## **Jesus through the centuries**

Christ is still alive today: his words, his ideals, and his memory inspire and lead the whole existence of an admirable elite and offer modern society a beam which attenuates its darkness. But his own living person speaks to whoever opens to him and infuses, through the "telepathy" of prayer, the ever renewing miracle, inexplicable through human forces only, of the new way of thinking, loving, and acting he inaugurated. For all those who experience Christ, and they are numerous even today in the livelier part of the Church, Christianity is neither an idea, nor a system, nor a moral, but a Person.

Though miracles are an important evidence of Christ's identity and occur today and can be recognized, the strongest proof of his presence in the world is the phenomenon of holiness, from the lofty and dazzling degrees to the coherent and committed believers through a wide range of moral greatness. "What makes me surer in faith," Jean Guitton writes, "is that saints exist. . . . They are not essentially ascetics, although I have known some incomparable beings among them. They are neither philanthropists nor social reformers, although I still know nowadays souls belonging to this wonderful human species. . . . The apostle Paul, defined *agape* in terms of patience, sweetness, and good opinion of others, increasing hope, and so on. I think by it he tried to define what I call the 'holy element because a difficulty for those who received these rare and supreme gifts is to get over them, to reach purity of love, as far as pure love, humble adhesion to status duties, to simplicity, to divine humility. Now what I have observed during my whole life within the Catholic church is that it naturally gives birth to saints. The more I go on, the more I make comparisons with what happens elsewhere, both in other denominations and in moral and unselfish environments around me, the more it seems to me that from this point of view, the Church cannot be compared to others. . . . It is evident that the saints I am speaking of . . . have chosen Jesus' person as a model, as they perceived him, drawing inspiration from a gospel page. . . . All the saints can be regarded as a prism allowing us to know the enigmatic Unknown of the gospels. You cannot separate Jesus from the saints nor the saints from Jesus. The stream flowing from the former to the latter and vice versa seems to me a powerful and sweet confirmation of what I believe."

Quite a number of modern thinkers and writers are struck by the phenomenon of holiness, of which the Catholic church seems to be the greatest producer. "Our usual moral life," Maritain writes, "is so precarious, so frail in its texture and so threatened by our weakness that we naturally tend towards those who have found what we are so badly looking for and who show the way, towards the men Bergson defined as 'heroes of spiritual life,' and whose appeal he saw pass through humankind. . . . The fullness of a love superior to nature expressing with open wisdom and perfect freedom. From these elements Bergson recognized a supreme fulfillment of human life in the Christian mystics who, he thought, are the only ones who have overcome the last barriers."

The study of the lives of Christian mystics and revelations almost led Bergson, who was a Jew, to convert to Roman Catholicism and only his death prevented it. Among the saints, people know St.

Francis above all and fairly superficially, but if they read church history they would find out that in the course of centuries, Jesus, with their collaboration, has produced an endless series of moral masterpieces, of generous men and women, a huge gallery of spiritual beauties, each different from the other and all of them sharing some traits of his figure. Paul of Tarsus, Augustine of Hippo, Ambrose of Milan, Gregory of Nazianzus, Benedict of Nursia, Gregory the Great, John Chrysostom, Clare and Francis of Assisi, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hildegard of Bingen, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, Catherine of Siena, Dominic of Guzman, Gertrude of Helfta, Angela of Foligno, John of the Cross, John of God, Camillus de Lellis, Theresa of Avila, Vincent de Paul, Ignatius de Loyola, Magdalene de Pazzi, Francis de Sales, Philip Neri, John Bosco, the Little Flower, Gemma Galgani, Maximilian Kolbe, Leopold Mandic, Theresa Neumann, Charles de Foucauld . . . are only some of the names emerging from the immense starry sky of Catholic saints which is continuously enriched by new acknowledgments, official and unofficial. "A description of Christian life," Jean Delumeau writes, "however sociological and objective it tries to be, cannot undervalue this reality, evident for whoever can observe: a daily heroism is present in the Church -- beyond every distinction -- characterized by love, eagerness, patience, humility, of which many clergy and lay alike offer sure proofs. . . . Would the reader be astonished if I said I have met and known many saints, people who are always available, who constantly forget themselves to be at the service of others?"

"If work," Mother Theresa of Calcutta writes, "is to be judged from our point of view and only according to our standards, obviously we can do nothing. But we can do everything in Christ. This is the reason why this task has become possible, because we are convinced that it is He who works with us and through us in the poor and for the poor."

"I need only look around me," Delumeau goes on, "to find people admirable for their generosity, but, so discrete and natural that you can pass by them observing only a deep kindness and a great goodness. Obviously, not all of them are Christians, and above all I do not wish to attribute sanctity exclusively to Christianity, nor to any other religion. But among my acquaintances, most people I know above the average as regards their devotion, are Christians. Which seems normal to me. In fact Christianity offers them a model to imitate and a message of love to live. And they imitate this model and live this message."

## **Jesus is topical**

Mauriac sees Christ as "the greatest creator of personalities who has ever existed in the world." We have the experience that Christ is alive when he is welcomed inside us and exploits everything to "turn water into wine," transform our vices into virtues and to start us towards the perfection of deep love and peace which is the highest expression of every humanism. "As the magnet draws iron filings and, keeping them close to itself, magnetizes every particle of them, so He draws and keeps close to himself, harmonizes and makes our instincts, our wishes, our passions, our feelings and our thoughts divine. Through this variety, Christ rebuilds our soul into an immortal unity in his love."

"I must say," the great converted writer, Alfred Döblin, writes, "that his love, this superabundant love, is the thing that strikes us most and above all, of which we can find no other examples. But also the object, the main addressee of his love: the human being, that is, the whole of mankind. . . . Love does not act only through sweetness. Jesus does not approach people the way Socrates did,

with benevolent irony and great wisdom. He does not give teachings; he is not content to brighten our thoughts. Jesus acts. A radiant love, which can threaten, reject, foresee: the Lord in the full meaning of the expression."

"What is the essence of Christianity?" Hans Urs von Balthasar wonders. "This point can be found only in God's revelation, who is the absolute reference center. A God who reveals love, but who does not lose right or strength to become comprehensible for us . . . and to become a gift to us."

Christ is topical also in our century. In spite of the flood of materialism and atheism which covers modern thought, numerous outstanding thinkers and writers believe in Him, and in their essays and works claim the need for the society to follow Him, if it wants to be saved from self-destruction.

In the first half of the century we can mention: Bernanos, Bloy, Boll, Claudel, D'Amico, Unamuno, Eliot, Chesterton, Cronin, Fabri, Jacob, James, Von le Fort, Maritain, Mauriac, Marcel, Papini, Péguy, Negri, Thompson, Tecchi, Tolstoy, Undset, Ungaretti, Valverde, Weil. More recently, de Bourbon, Busset, Cesbron, Chiusano, Covi, Endo Shusaku, Doblin, Frossard, Julien Green, Graham Greene, Guitton, Marchall, Montherlant, Maximov, Muggeridge, D'Ormesson, Parassoli, Pomilio, Quoist, Rasputin, Rinser, Roth, Robinson, Santucci, Sinjavskij, Solzenitsin, Testori, Ulivi, Wiesel. The fact that some tepid Christians today embrace other religions, does not mean that Christ is less important. They do not abandon Him, because they cannot abandon a Master they have never known deeply nor followed seriously. No one moves from a house never lived in.

### **Christ and the meaning of life**

"If the mystery of evil," Delumeau writes, "torments me, that of Incarnation fills me with hope, because it teaches me that God came among us to help us defeat every wickedness. . . . Incarnation is for me the event giving sense to human history as it unfolds the divine plan regarding us. The Church has always claimed in the course of the centuries a saying, perhaps dating back to St. Irenaeus: 'God became human, so that humans could become divine.' For Christians, and I am happy to be one of them, Jesus crucified and resurrected is really present beside us, or better inside us, through the effect of the eucharistic mystery. . . . Thanks to all of this we are on the way towards a Kingdom of Peace. The Eucharist is the food of a people walking towards the light."

Nobody better than Papini expresses how actual Jesus is on the eve of twentyfirst century. "We need you, only you, nobody else. Only you who love us, can feel for us suffering the pity each of us feels for ourselves. Only you can feel how great, immeasurably great, the need of you there is in this world, in this hour of the world. . . . In no age as in ours have we felt the consuming thirst for supernatural salvation. In no time of the times we remember, has degradation been so degraded. Greed for excess has generated indigence of the necessary; the itch of pleasure, the torture of scratching, craving for freedom, worsening of fetters. . . . Everywhere a stirring chaos, a hopeless turmoil, a swarming stinking sultry air, a restlessness dissatisfied with everything and with its discontent. . . . The world practices only one religion, recognizing the Trinity of Wotan, Mammon, and Priapus; Force with a sword as its symbol and barracks as its temple; Wealth with gold as a symbol and the Stock Exchange as its temple; Flesh having the phallus as a symbol and a brothel as its temple. This is the religion reigning all over the earth, fiercely practiced through facts, if not always through words by all living beings. The former concept of family is crumbling; marriage is

destroyed by adultery and bigamy; offspring seem to be a malediction to many and are avoided through various frauds and voluntary abortions; fornication exceeds loyal loves; sodomy has its panegyrist and in its brothels; public and hidden prostitutes reign over a vast crowd of worn out and syphilitics. . . . The great experience is coming to an end. Those who move away from the gospels have found desolation and death. More than a promise and a threat have turned true. Now desperate, we only have the hope of your return. . . ."

## **Pills or transplants**

Some new theologians, putting aside the rational propaedeutics to faith, find it impossible to present the gospels in a plausible way to the nonbelieving world. As the reason-faith bridge has been demolished Christianity seems a mixture of myths created by human needs. The German Catholic thinker Robert Spaemann writes: "Historical development advances in a direction marked by a more and more implausible Christianity. . . . So let us put aside, we may be tempted to say, the indigestible rock of the Incarnation and let us present Christ solely as a moral model. The ethics of man-woman love is not accepted: then let us present only social ethics."

Cardinal Ratzinger said at the Bishops' Synod in 1990: "Today in the Church we live the temptation of making ourselves understood where there is no faith, which is humanly comprehensible and the bridge between faith in the Church and modern outlook is thought to be ethics. More or less everybody sees there is a need for ethics and therefore the Church is offered as a guarantee of morality, as an institution of morality, and they do not dare present the Mystery. . . . A comprehensible, but wrong reflection. In this way they are wearing out ethics itself."

The heresy of Pelagianism (the gospel reduced to morals), Ratzinger goes on, has been put forth again in the last decades, at first with Marxist version of Jesus which spread in the sixties and seventies, and now with the introduction of the church as a store full of moral values, fertilizer and spiritual supplements to capitalism.

But the specific element of Christianity is the Incarnation -- its cornerstone and key-factor. To delete or obscure it is like carrying out a space launch, with planners, technicians, launching ramp, rocket, and countdown, but with no propellant. Or it's like calling firemen to a major fire and using them only to water dahlias.

Some new theologians seem to feel that the best place to find a helping hand for humanity is only at the end of its arm, that the world just needs to change the oil and keep the car, and that, if the illness is serious, we must at least take pills. But Incarnation does not agree: we must collaborate, but the helping hand is God's; the world must keep the oil but change the car; the pills "let us love one another" are not sufficient: the sick must be hospitalized where Christ is the chief physician and the patient undergoes a heart transplant.

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **BUDDHA, CHRIST, AND SORROW**

#### **Buddha and the extinction of desire**

Is the best place to find a helping hand at the end of your arm? Better, God gives us a valid hand with prayer, but also wants us to use ours with meditation. Therefore we should not be upset with the intrusion of suffering in our life, while we have the chance of disarming its destructive power with meditation and prayer, i.e., capable of using its purifying power.

Gautama Buddha, too, today very highly regarded in Europe and North America taught the power of meditation to forestall or neutralize anguish. Among all his sermons "The Sermon at Benares" is famous and accepted even today by every faithful Buddhist, of whatever school, because it seems to reflect better Gautama's genuine thought. "What is sorrow? What is the origin of sorrow? What is the annihilation of sorrow? Birth is sorrow, old age is sorrow, disease is sorrow, death is sorrow; trouble, pain, despair are sorrow; not to get what you wish is sorrow. What is the origin of sorrow? It is this thirst of living nourished by satisfaction: it is the attachment to being and welfare. That is the origin of sorrow. But what is the annihilation of sorrow? It is the whole, total annihilation . . . the extinction, the denial of the thirst for living. But what is the way leading to the annihilation of sorrow? It is the holy path . . . , i.e., right knowledge, right word, right action, right life, right effort, right learning, right concentration."

#### **Christ and the gift of divine love**

But while Buddha teaches only the removal of sorrow through meditation and annihilation of every earthly desire, Christ offers us something more. To quench the eager and immoderate longings for money, sex, and honors is only the preparation, the emptying of the heart to fill it with love coming from God and offering lasting bliss, unalterable peace, fullness of the meaning of life. It is the path of the Primary Objective, the desire that abides in everybody's heart, a desire not to be quenched that Jesus offers to satisfy. "You must love the Lord your God . . . you must love your neighbor as yourself"; "Without me you cannot do anything." "I am the vine, you are the branches"; "So that they may have the fullness of my joy in themselves" ( Mt. 22,37; Jn. 15 5; 17,3).

The richest and least exploited mine in the world is meditation. "I will meditate your law. . . . I will meditate your prodigies," the Psalms repeat (119; 148) and Jesus often recommends to "keep God's word," that is, first meditate on it Lk. 8,15). "Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moths and worms destroy them and thieves can break in and steal; but store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moths nor worms destroy them. . . . Because where your treasure is your heart will be too" ( Mt. 6,19-21).

By meditating every day on the fact that everything passes, that even dearest affections are transient in this world, that time wears out everything, that finite values disappoint, the longing for earthly values fades and sorrow tends to mitigate when such goods are lacking. Meditating every day on God's love for me, Jesus reveals to me what longing for heavenly treasures tends to kindle, i.e.,

desire to share God's spiritual goods. But he alone is the one who makes our meditation really efficacious with his transforming power. Buddha taught spiritual sufficiency, the "do it yourself" to make the most of sorrow. Christ puts God on our team. The ocean of suffering is difficult to swim across, but if we try to swim to the lifeboat, the Lord gives us a place on his liner.

### **There are none so deaf as those who will not hear**

After Sartre, we often hear speak of "God's silence," the anguish of the just. But the atheists experience such a silence because, when God speaks, they change channels. Shallow believers are little better, possessed of a certain idea of providence and refusing to renounce it. In their thought, providence is divine intervention to set right human vicissitudes and to direct them towards the (earthly) well being of the just. "In such a way," Pomilius writes, "their petitions became torture and struggle; they implored a sign; they asked for an answer, for the Lord to break silence, to become present." God gives the just who abandon themselves to God a serenity even in this world, but a serenity different from what the shallow believers had hoped. These persons do not hear God's answer because they turn to God to ask for an explanation that agrees with their ideas, and then refuse any different solution. They do not address God to have an answer, but to have a certain answer."

"I looked for the Lord and God answered me, freeing me from every fear." The Bible is full of God's answers to the just asking for inspiration and comfort, and believers often experience them. But in order to avoid God's silence, we need to keep silence in our thoughts. If you always talk you cannot listen. Tribulation is like a broken coin of which we only find half. For one person it is a proof that the other half exists; whereas for the other it demonstrates that the mint does not exist.

Every day God transmits personal messages, especially to whoever is brokenhearted, but to catch them we need to tune in to God's wavelength. "Christ with closed eyes looks at us through the wounds of his side with eyelashes of blood" ( Ramon Gómez de la Serna).

### **God does not cause suffering but helps to make it productive**

Following the instructions for use, life is never so nice as to be to easily lived and it is never so hard to be unable to be lived. "Christ," wrote Tolstoy, "immediately warns his disciples that they will have to suffer for his doctrine and he begs them to be unshakable. But he does not say that, by following him, they will suffer more than in following the world: and he adds that the world's morals make for unhappiness whereas his disciples will find happiness."

A good father loves his children, a lady wrote to the weekly *Famiglia Cristiana*: "I can understand that in my case suffering served to make me approach the truth, but I wonder: if God is a good father, why do many innocent people have to suffer without reason?" "The question," the theologian Carlo Molari answers, "seems to suppose that the sufferings are sent by God. In reality this way of presenting things, even if it is very common, is not exact. We should not attribute to God the events of history and creation as if God were a natural efficient cause. Every event of history and creation has a created cause of its own, which follows certain laws. . . . The sufferings of innocent people and the difference of fate between 'lucky' and 'unlucky' are caused by the inevitable imperfections of matter, as the difference between rainy areas and arid ones, and above all, by human faults, such as

wars or oppression of the weak by the powerful. . . . God's action," Molari goes on, "is always creative and allows us to live even situations of suffering and injustice in a profitable and healthy way. Therefore we cannot say that God sends us sufferings, but rather that God offers to bear sufferings, even the unjust ones, in a positive way."

God's inner help is like a plant for recycling the solid urban waste contaminating a large city: it does not produce it, but uses it. Divine Providence, leaving us free, cannot forbid the disobedient pupil to draw crooked lines. But it helps the docile pupil to go straight over crooked lines.

"There are," Molari continues, "just sufferings, i.e., from the ordinary development of things, and there are unjust sufferings that should not exist. For instance, if you eat bad food and feel some pain, you cannot say that it is unjustified: it is the expression of a disorder which needs to be remedied. In these circumstances suffering sends a warning so that we may remedy. But the suffering of a person unjustly hated by others is unjust because hatred is not the right attitude to have. This suffering is absurd, and therefore has no intrinsic finality. It can be lived in a saving way, i.e., with love, and become an extraordinary means of human progress."

We need to trust in God. Only after the harvest can we judge whether the fatigue is worthwhile. The Jews in the desert complained of the lack of Egyptian onions, but they changed their opinion when they saw the Promised Land.

### **Giuseppe Ungaretti and God's answer to human sorrow**

If Mauriac looks through the abysses of the human heart to the last folds, with the psychological intensity he always brought to bear on such matters, he does so because he knows (as does Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*) that the existence of evil is an emotional topic that cannot be solved with reasoning alone by those enduring it. Each work of Mauriac reminds us somehow of the cry launched by Job against God. Job's question is not ignored: the writer formulates it clearly in *Adolescent of Once upon a Time*, his last novel: "Why is there evil? she (the mother) added weeping, without realizing that she had put the only question which could shake faith. . . . There is no other answer than this naked body nailed to the cross. . . ."

We know well that even the best reasons to justify the presence of evil are as consoling as is a learned lecture on nutrition for consoling the hungry. On the contrary, no fact is so effective to dissipate rebellion towards God and to show God's love than God's accepting suffering and death for us. It is the unequivocal sign that, after sin, there is no other way to attain the fullness of the divine life. The son of God entered history and did not choose the way to success. Jesus' unjust death was the result of human violence and resistance to the renewing message of the gospels. But Jesus lived that experience of unjust sorrow in such a loving way as to make it an event of universal salvation. Drawing from him, we become able to make even the most cruel and unjust suffering a saving event. Thanks to him, when everything becomes dark around us, we can look upwards and start to see the stars.

"I see now in the sad night, I learn,  
I know that hell opens on the earth  
according to the measure of how much

we evade, foolish,  
the purity of your passion.  
The quantity of sorrow  
causes a wound in your heart  
we go scattering on Earth.  
Your heart is the passionate seat  
of a not vain love.  
Christ, thoughtful throb,  
incarnate star, in human darkness  
Eternally immolating brother  
to set up again humanly human. . . ." (Ungaretti)

### **Mario Pomilio: God on the cross "deserves our forgiveness"**

On December 25, 1833, Henrietta Blondel, Alessandro Manzoni's wife, died. The event drove the writer into a state of dreadful anguish. The sorrow reached the apex when, eight months after, his first born daughter, Juliet, Massimo Azeglio's wife, died. Alessandro experienced "God's silence," "God's dumbness," in that period.

Mario Pomilio in the historical novel *Christmas of 1833*, penetrates into the depths of Manzoni's soul by reflecting faithfully his historical features and shows how the great Catholic writer experiences God's answer in praying. Then he understands that, "becoming human and taking on our suffering far beyond what Job suffered, the absent God became the present Christ, remedied the absurdity of divine inaccessibility, won justification and, at least, redeemed himself. The Lord could pronounce his forgiveness only after making himself forgiven on the cross. The victim's story is in itself God's story . . . because whenever an innocent person is called to suffer he recites the Passion. What am I saying, to recite? He is the Passion: not in the sense, well understood, that the Lord wants to renew his own sacrifice in him, as I have also by mistake thought at other times, but in the sense that it is He himself to be crucified with him. This unarmed God may seem despairing. And on the contrary what is there, pondering well on it, more consoling than this solidarity not of force and justice, but of compassion and love? And truly it is this, simply, my friend: God's cross wanted to be the sorrow of each one; and the sorrow of each one is God's cross."

## **CHAPTER 13**

### **SOCIOLOGY AND FAITH**

#### **The innate need of God**

Today everything is improving: housing, food, medicine, production methods, engines, computers, communications, welfare. Everything is improving, except people. In Brecht *Mr. Keuner's Stories* we read: "A man asked Mr. Keuner if there was a God. Mr. Keuner answered: I advise you to think if your behavior would change depending on the answer to this problem. Were it not modified, we could let the problem drop. If, instead, it were changed, I could only help you by saying you have already made up your mind: you need a God."

It is not correct to claim God's existence only because of my need. A God needed by an individual could be a morbid fancy, like an adult's needing a teddy bear to sleep. But if humanity, according to its nature, feels a wish and need of it, everything is different. In nature, need and inner aspiration are signs that what can fulfil them exists. If some species of bird feels a need for tropical climate, even without ever having seen it, it is a sign that such a climate exists. The same applies to human aspiration for friendship, for creation of technology, art, philosophy. It hints at the existence of innate human capabilities and external realities able to realize these values.

According to these observations, God's reality can be deduced also from this fact which can be observed and studied: every time and place has always shown the inner and natural need for faith and religion. Our times and modern industrialized countries show it clearly through malaise and the moral decadence of large segments of the population who have departed from God, more than through the revival of substantial fringes of qualified faith. Ethical, civil, social, political, familiar, demographic decadence. Increase in technique and levelling in conscience. Proliferation of comfort and disappearance of the meaning of life. Economical progress and moral regression. Much sex and little love. Increase in pleasure and lack of joy. All this is an indication, negative and at our cost, that also modern humanity needs God.

#### **Doctor, please give me a nice diagnosis**

For modern materialists, truth can be found only in ascertainable and measurable facts. Morals and religion, in their opinion, belong to the subjective sphere, which would be our human creation. We have seen that the "subjective" in morals and religion is the subject's individual internal knowledge. If we seek this knowledge in an intuitive and reasonable way, we reach a much more important and relevant truth, no less true than the scientific and experimental truths. In spite of this, morals and religion receive powerful confirmation even from facts which can be quantified. Sociological phenomena, partly measurable through statistics, are today the most convincing indictment against current materialism.

1) It is a fact that in the last century economic welfare has increased enormously together with all forms of permissiveness; western materialism has indicated and still indicates, in opposition to faith and the gospels, as the only source of happiness and true development for humanity: science,

education for everyone, better nutrition, information, leisure, fewer sacrifices and toil, freedom, and, as a root of all good, a continuous increase in production and yearly income. Therefore western humanity should have reached, in the last century, an incomparably higher degree of happiness and meaning of life.

2) As economic welfare increases, statistics and surveys show a continuous reduction in religious practice, prayer and meditation, the Christian way of thinking and living. It is so-called secularism. (By this we do not mean reducing the power and undue interference of the clergy in public life, but a lessening in the influence of faith in God and Christ on private life of most people and therefore also on public life and on laws.) True, most people still believe in a harmless and insignificant God, but provided this god does not give advice, or revelations or rules for living, "not related with the way of thinking of today's man. Modern people prefer sexual to spiritual revolution, put technology before theology, choose cruises rather than the Cross. . . .

Today people think faith is not very helpful, without thinking that a medicine not taken cannot be very helpful either. Most people are like patients who, fed up with the doctor who had been curing them for years with an efficacious but strict diet, have looked for another, more compliant doctor. The patients are now experiencing the first consequences.

### **No one wants to look in the face of someone who stabs you in the back**

3) Today the most dangerous hole is not to be found in the ozone layer, but in people's honesty. Facts show that loss of faith, or a tepid noncommitted assent to it, has produced fearful moral degradation in industrialized countries. People are always ready to defend their rights with anger, whereas they miserably fail in their duties. Today people's conscience is very sensitive. But only to money, of course. The values that many thinkers of the last century thought to substitute for religious faith -- Humanity, Science, Progress, Justice, Freedom, Work, Country, Family -- are today rootless trees without fruit and leaves.

4) Data show that today a deep dissatisfaction, an inner and existential discontent, an intense uneasiness, and a lack of meaning for life pervade the whole of humanity. This corresponds to the massive collapse of faith and of social, economical, sexual, familial, and social morals; it is a great crisis of values. All the above appear in increasing social phenomena as alcoholism, drug-addiction, unstable love and family, violence, fall in birth rate, mental illness and suicide. Today the "developed" civilizations are approaching the time when they deserve to disappear. Secularism is a boomerang: the serious social illnesses of the Western world are as much "God's punishment" as are the ailments and troubles of those who breathe heavily polluted air. The great truth we refuse to look in the face stabs us from behind.

### **Mountaineering is not forbidden**

Economic, scientific, and technological progress does not necessarily cause a weakening of faith and decay of moral values. We are not determined in an absolute and impassable way by the "tracks" of the social conditions in which we live, as historical materialism teaches and sociology treatises seem to suggest. If as individuals we want to and try with care, we can approach God and

virtue again, with the help of prayer and the community of faith even in a secularized and morally ill society such as ours.

The gospels strongly warn us against the seduction of riches (the high incomes in developed countries) which, though a good, if prayer and commitment to control instincts are lacking, becomes a noose for spiritual strangulation and a chain of oppression and domination over others (over "developing countries," for instance). It can be easily demonstrated that the drop in faith is not a necessary and automatic effect of economical progress and generalized education. In fact, sociological research reveals the present rebirth of a deep and strongly lived faith in minority segments of western population, which are obviously immersed in the same climate of material welfare and among whom education and scientific specialization are not lacking.

It is true also that welfare and permissiveness create a strong temptation to abandon a sense of duty and the faith on which it leans, but such a flood of seductions can still be overcome through family education, self-education of will, and, above all, the frequent use of grace. Education increases skepticism and doubt, already instilled by moral slackening, mainly because it very often looks up to the masters of agnosticism and materialism, leaving modern believing thinkers in the dark. But the mountains of doubt can be climbed with the instrument of a more complete and deep education.

### **Secularism and the crisis of values**

The sociologist Italo Vaccarini writes: "In the early phases of industrial society, secularization seemed to be linked to the scientific and technological infatuation set in action by industrialization, as well as to the uprooting of urban and wage-earning populations from the common context of rural environments. In advanced industrialized society, secularization seems to be linked above all, to a weakening of the tendency towards sacrifice of immediate pleasures, a weakening induced by the expansion of mass consumption and the spread of mass culture."

Lastly, in western civilizations, secularism seems to be connected to freedom as an ability to choose and live independently from the ethical bonds of behavior. Obviously, we add, people still like to "follow their conscience," but it is a conscience homogenized by mass media that graduated not from "God's universities," but in the low kitchens of mass opinion, which is much easier. This conscience gives different answers according to the phases of the moon and to visceral inclinations of the person to whom it belongs. The characteristic of modern western societies, Vaccarini states, is "anomie," that is, lack of moral rules valid for everybody, an anomie produced by departing from God for secularism.

He describes it in these terms: "From surveys on behavior, that is, from social and demographic indicators and from crime figures, as well as from attitudes and value trends in contemporary western societies, an essentially 'anomic' condition comes out, that is, lacking in generally shared moral references of these societies.

"1) Anomie of behavior. In comparison with previous phases of industrial society, the following phenomena are noted: an increase in illegitimate births and divorces, more frequent sexual experience before marriage, fewer marriages and a higher percentage of nuclear families (a couple with only one child), more abortions (made legal in recent years), generalized drug abuse,

increasing violence and terrorism, and increase in common violence, especially in the United States, outside usual time (night) and space (ghettoes) to involve underground stations, public parks.

"2) Anomie of attitudes. Work is no longer the main and most significant element of individual life work, and family -- both the original family and the one they wished to form -- tend to lose the values capable of organizing daily life normatively. . . . Even public institutions, political parties, government, etc., are less and less felt as values and have become objects of distrust. . . . Finally, in the emotional and sexual spheres, attitudes agree with behavior: various forms of sexual and familial deviation, abortion, suicide, light drug abuse and euthanasia tend to be legitimized as free demonstrations of individual subjectivity."

### **Alexander Solzenitsin and the diagnosis of the Western world**

If yesterday false notes could be heard in the orchestra of the western world because often the players did not look at the conductor's baton, today they hold every score to be against their freedom. We must plug our ears against the resulting noise and cacophony. The well known sociologist Pietro Scoppola points out that "secularism as a collective process of mind and habit seems to be like a leap into ethical darkness." Therefore secularism is a defeat, not only for the Church, but also for lay culture and for humanity in general: "The cultural hegemony of Gentile, Croce, and Gramsci belong to the past; nowadays, no new hegemony has appeared or is going to emerge." This ethical degradation breaks up vital worlds and bewilders the human subject, as shown by the spreading of a destructive and deadly culture among the youth, which has its emblem in drug abuse and frequent abortions. This state of crisis is not limited to a psychological level or to the private environment, but assails the social, political, and economical apparatus, jeopardizing its rational working.

"A secularism that has exhausted traditional values without substituting efficacious alternative ethical force, stresses the break up of social status, feeds individualism with no spirit of enterprise and risk, vindication with no sense of solidarity."

Alexander Solzenitsin sums up the moral and religious picture of the modern western world: "In imperceptible terms, through decades of slow erosion, the meaning of life in the western world has become merely the 'pursuit of happiness' (material happiness). The concepts of good and evil have been ridiculed and banished from common usage. They have been substituted by transitory political or class considerations. To appeal to eternal concepts or even to claim that evil creeps into human hearts even before stealing into a political system has become embarrassing. By abandoning its young generations to atheism, western civilizations continue to lose an increasing portion of their religious essence. . . . The West proves that human salvation is not in a wealth of material goods and in heaping riches.

"While serious threats hang over the world it may seem of little relevance that the main key to our being or not being is in individuals' hearts, in their choices between good or evil. Yet this is the sure key at our disposal. Social theories, so promising, have proved to be a failure and have left us in a blind alley. . . . Every attempt to escape the tragic situation of today's world will be vain, if we, repenting, do not turn our conscience to the universal creator once more. Life is not a search for material success, but the pursuit of spiritual growth. Our earthly life is but a transitory moment

towards something higher, only a step of a staircase. The laws of matter by themselves are not sufficient to explain life nor offer it a direction. . . . To the inconsiderate hopes of the last two centuries we can only oppose the pursuit of God's warm hand, which we have rejected so rashly and conceitedly. Only in this way our eyes will open to the errors of the unhappy twentieth century, and we will try to correct them."

"If you have planted a bramble," an oriental proverb says, "you cannot expect a jasmine bed to grow." Diagnoses similar to Solzenitsin's are being formulated by writers, thinkers, sociologists, Pope John Paul II, bishops, and theologians. God forbid that the western world, like an old hard drinker, would refuse to change its course, because, in that case, the alarming diagnoses and reserved prognosis will be followed by an autopsy. God forbid indeed! But the Bible teaches that in the world many things happen that God forbids.

### **To err is human, but if you keep on erring you will crash**

Industrialization was the occasion that put peasant culture and religiosity in crisis, provoking moral disorder, the break up of the family and migration into dehumanizing urban settings. It has made standardization easier, helped by conspicuous consumption and by the mass media. Standardization as the boredom of fragmented and repetitive work, is a tendency to a decline in the personal sense of responsibility, a tendency to conformism to current fashions and opinions. The well known psychoanalyst Erich Fromm analyses the situation in these terms: "By building the new industrial machine, we were so absorbed by our new task that it became our life's main goal. Our energies, once devoted to the search for God and eternal salvation, were now directed towards mastering nature and increasing material comfort.

"We gave up using production as a means for a better life and made a goal of it, a goal to which life was subordinated. In the process of an increasing separation of work from life, mechanization, and the enlargement of city and metropolis; we became part of the machine, instead of its master. We found that we were merchandise, an investment. Our goal was to become successful, that is, to sell ourselves on the market at the most favorable conditions. Our value as persons lies in the possibility of selling ourselves rather than in our human qualities of love and reason or in our artistic talents. Happiness is identified with consumerism of new and better commodities, with the passive reception of music, cinema, leisure, sex, alcohol, and cigarettes.

"As we only have a sense of ego deriving from conformism with the majority, we feel insecure, anxious, and dependent on others' approval. We are self-alienated, worshipping the products of our own hands; and the leaders we have chosen, as if they were above us, are rather manufactured by us. In a way we have gone backwards to where we were before the great human revolution which started in the second millennium before Christ." A saying claims: we learn through our mistakes, but it would be better to say that by keeping on making mistakes you go to rack and ruin. Perhaps the highest product of post-industrial civilization will be the people able to tolerate it. We admit that, for the masses, the previous centuries were times of scientific ignorance, short average life span, hunger, toil, striking social injustice, and rather crude ideas also in the moral and religious field. But, after so many calls and struggles for progress our times might have been better. Unnecessary goods are plentiful but the necessary ones are scarce. Today's ship is comfortable, wellfurnished and with good toilets. We eat well and there is a large dance hall where Cannes prize winning films are

shown. But the compass has been thrown into the sea. The Canadian theologian, René Latourelle outlines the spiritual (or inadequately spiritual) feature of humanity on the threshold of the twenty-first century, on the basis of observations by outstanding thinkers like Harvey Cox, Herbert Marcuse, Jean Delumeau, Alexander Solzenitsin, Eugene Ionesco, Alvin Toffler. They are factual data, still partial, but with a tendency to spread like wildfire.

- a) *Secularism*. A religious or indifference we share, at least officially, is the statement of "God's death" decreed by a group of intellectuals. But what we most frequently meet is the idea that God exists, but "on holiday" -- here but not really here and who does not intervene in human matters.
- b) *Moral degradation*. In such a perspective each individual today feels authorized to create a personal ethics. Each tries to justify rationally every new elimination of duties and every new increase of rights. The result is a vicious circle where moral decadence creates more inhuman life conditions and these tend to expand moral decadence.
- c) *Dependence on mass media* which "prevent us from looking for and finding ourselves. . . . Dialogue disappears: a television room is often a gathering of lonely people, one next to the other. Our eyes and ears are filled, but we no longer think, we flee from ourselves . . . it is impossible to come to ourselves." Mental levelling caused by overdoses of mass media today produces more heresies than all the Arians, Manicheans, Macedonians, Pelagians, Nestorians, Albigensians together. After all, they only mixed up ideas about God, but television acts in such a way that we cannot think of God. And then, some have so wide and open a mentality that the mass media dump loads of garbage there.
- d) *Increasing difference between affluent society and the third world*. Our times have two major threats: misery and war. Two interconnecting realities. In fact, how can you drive away the threat of war if you do not get rid of hunger and you do not soothe the anger and hatred caused by unequal conditions?
- e) *Incommunicability and anonymity*: In technological cities neighbors are rarely or quickly and superficially in touch. We live side by side without knowing one another. Persons are not important, but occupation, position, wealth.
- f) *Humans with electronic brains*: "In the age of computers, only tests, experiments, and calculations are considered. Human freedom, inviolability, mystery, and convictions are not interesting. Codified, reduced to file cards, we feed electronic brains with statistics. But paradoxically this calculating technique produces a science that conceives the 'human' as a mechanism to be disassembled."
- g) *The advertised human*: the values are: pleasure, comfort, income, youth, beauty, tenacity. While people need less advertising on how to stay young and more on how to grow up.
- h) *The one-dimensional human* or the producing agent. "In modern society productivity is the supreme value. . . . Production of items and destruction of people go on at the same rhythm." The development of a nation means being first in the world classification of gross national product, yearly rate of industrial production, investment indexes.
- i) *Conspicuous consumption*. Consumption flies over the essential to glide down

directly on the secondary. The highest values it prizes are the quotations for dollar, mark, yen, and the anatomical measurements of film stars. People live passing from posters and commercials extolling happiness produced by some coffee or beer, to posters and commercials exalting the taste for living generated by whiskeys, detergents, and cat food.

j) *Decadent art*. "Nobody can deny," Delumeau writes, "the evidence in our art of the concomitant eclipse of art and God. History shows a privileged relationship between art and religious feeling. At a level of civilization, if you give up God, you are led to give up beauty as well.

k) *Increasing ecological degradation*. The industrialized world is an automated society, programmed to create and satisfy more and more useless needs. At the same time, it creates more harmful air and water pollution, increasing plant and animal destruction in a process like the Sorcerer's Apprentice who can no longer stop despite the alarming predictions of scientists.

l) *Sex dependence*. Family and love, deteriorating and risky products, tend to be considered as a flash in the pan.

m) *Drug addiction*: its increase is the index of the loss of values that give life meaning. They are substituted by the pursuit of temporary asocial pleasure.

n) *Decadence of democracy*. Power groups, powerful and unified lobbies keep and shape public opinion, contend for increased incomes, impose their interests on peoples. Freedom means a wild, unrestrained use of money and goods under the sad and envious look of those who have less. People are ready for everything, for a handful of dollars. They think money may not be everything but you can buy the rest with it.

o) *Worship of the body*. It is the end result of the absolute value of sport, from the astronomical salaries of sports personalities, from spreading pornography.

p) *Language*: Why, in order to show how clever, tough, and modern boys and girls are, is their speech so full of crude and vulgar expressions. Are they fashionable because "they reflect real life"?

q) *Violence*. No wonder we have terrorism, spreading sexual crimes, and violence in stadiums: under our twentieth century coats the savage is still intact. There is no need for the supercaloric diet of violence that films and television make too available. To be satisfied inside we need a true ideal: Communism failed because it was a false ideal. Conspicuous Consumption is failing because it has no ideal at all.

## CHAPTER 14

### ETHICS AND MORAL DEGRADATION

#### **Emmanuel Levinas and the priority of responsibility over freedom**

Among the causes of the decline of our western civilization we spoke about "anomie," i.e., intolerance of moral laws binding for everybody. This coincides with the search for what is wrongly called "freedom." Today many people deny an ethical rule written in nature governing things and humankind. God does not exist for many modern Westerners, but has different ways not to exist. Some of them consider God a supreme wishy-washy character, who gave laws neither to nature nor to humans, who does not see and does nothing, as abstract an idea as that of being, without any connection or interest for human moral behavior. Others consider God inadmissible for human freedom and dignity.

In fact, if God existed and created us, s/he would have assigned us a finality and a natural law. Is it not perhaps contrary to our free nature to receive a finality and a law without any chance of discussing, modifying, or repealing them? Chance has no similar intolerable exigencies. What it did, can always be quietly undone. Therefore, chance is the creator-god of the atheist. Since it has neither finality nor law, it identifies itself with chaos when the world began and towards which its worshippers are hastily going back.

If everything began from pure chance and I am its child, it is clear that my conscience is "free" to create and modify the ethical law independently. "Free" conscience acts for two motives: the first is praiseworthy; the latter is the true one. "If there be no God, everything is permitted," as Dostoevsky wrote. If they asked too much, it would be stupid to impose sacrifices on me to keep a law I gave myself and can remove since it has no foundation in the nature itself of things.

Human dignity -- this is the central thesis of the atheist Sartre -- lies in limitless freedom by which we create moral values and gives sense to life. I am my freedom! You did not create me. I stopped belonging to you," replied Orestes to Jupiter in Sartre's play, *The Flies*. We note that Orestes is right when he says: "I am a man, Jupiter, and each man has to find his own way." It is true that human dignity lies in being entrusted to ourselves and in the fact that we will be as we project ourselves. We must realize ourselves and our freedom is achieved in this self-realization. But is human existence really indeterminate? Is our freedom truly boundless? Are we really the free inventors and creators of good and evil, of every value, of moral principles, and of the meaning of life?

Kierkegaard, a Christian thinker, raised the concept of choice of his own life to the dignity of fundamental philosophical concept characterizing human existence: "I choose the Absolute. But what is the Absolute? It is I in my eternal value." In the sense that, by choosing God and the law written by God in my conscience, I choose the divine value of my life. If I come from an Intelligence and my nature, my body, my psyche, and spirit are planned by it, for a primary and natural goal, I have the chance to be authentically free. Without the natural goal I am free only to choose among endless ways leading nowhere. On the contrary, with it I can choose among various ways leading to a very desirable goal.

Conscience then means observation and acknowledgment of the reality of my being, of others, and of the way of acting which realizes better the fulfillment of my supreme innate aspiration towards justice, truth, love, put in me by my Creator. If God exists, Sartre says, we would not be free, but conditioned by the moral law imposed by God. Sartre has simply overturned the reasoning of Pascal, Kierkegaard, Maritain, and other great spiritualistic thinkers. To be human, the spiritual philosophers say, is to be endowed with a necessitating orientation towards honesty and justice, orientation not given by oneself. This orientation does not come from education or from ancestors (who often have violated it with impunity), but from the very nature of things. Therefore, there exists a creative Conscience which orientated him. The great contemporary philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, starting from the premise that responsibility precedes freedom, reaches the opposite conclusion to the author of *Nausea*. We are made for authentic freedom, which we discover in the face of the other saying "Thou shalt not kill."

### **Werner Heisenberg and God as groundwork of ethics**

The facts outlined in the preceding chapter, "Sociology and Faith," seem to demonstrate that the solid groundwork of freedom and democracy lies with the conscious acceptance by all of three great principles that all religions and the greatest philosophers even contemporary, consider basic realities and which everybody experiences:

- every human being has free will;
- every human being has an elementary moral code, not created by us, that we cannot modify as we like, and whence we draw moral judgements from each single case;
- persons realize their own freedom, dignity, and value as persons following that code, whereas we degrade ourselves as persons when we transgress it. By denying free will, a moral law equal for everyone, and personal fault, we threaten and tend to destroy precisely that democracy that freedom meant to put at the top of values.

The "inventor" of the quantum theory and 1932 Nobel Prize recipient for Physics, Werner Heisenberg, declares: "When the way is no longer marked by ideals, as we lose our scale of values, we also lose the sense of our acting and suffering. So the last word can only be of denial and despair. Therefore, religion is the groundwork of ethics and this is in turn the premise for life. In fact, every day we have to take decisions; we have to know, or at least to perceive, the value by which we guide our actions."

By going back to the declarations on faith of great physicists such as Albert Einstein, Max Planck, and Niels Bohr, Heisenberg in the "First conversations on the relationship between natural science and religion" had taken a position against the usual discussions of the criticism of religion (projection, opium, illusion, etc.). He defined natural science as the "the groundwork of the technically functional acting, and religion the groundwork of ethics."

What characterizes the particular way of human being, notes philosopher Heidegger, is the fact that we cannot simply say that "s/he is there." S/he is not present, as a stone, or a tree, but "ex-ists"; that is, one projects oneself in freedom starting from one's own possibilities, realizing one's existence in the world and among others in this way. This implies the responsibility of one's own moral choices, the fault and the merit.

When we see the denial of free will on the part of psychological and sociological determinism, which sees the human person as a biological engine moved and necessitated by instincts, we must not forget that, on the contrary, current existentialist philosophy underlines individual responsibility.

The Jewish religion, Christianity, the Koran, and the sacred Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist books teach clearly that we determine our destiny with free choice. "When the sky breaks asunder," the Koran says, "when the stars scatter, when the seas boil, when the tombs overturn, each soul will know what it did and did not do." Then the consequences will be definitive, but already in this world we often experience the consequences of our own choices. There are some people who consider the fact that God gave them a compelling moral law an offence to their dignity and freedom, like seeing arrogance in road signals.

### **Is sin an anachronistic concept?**

Modern people assign the fault of all evil to external factors, to causes not deriving from our power to make decisions: the "system," government, obsolete laws, urban concentration, society, excessive rate of the technological, economic and social change, genetic inheritance, environment, education. But never the fault of individual responsibility and, above all, never of oneself. All these factors contribute, evidently, to create the situation we live in, and set the individual towards a certain type of behavior. But why should we not assign some of the merit or moral fault to the individual?

We have gone from the excess of guilt attributed in the past, to the modern excessive innocentism. Today we really recognize the fault, but in our inner self, we are all as robots programmed by DNA, environment, and society. If you want to, the Bible says, you can keep the commandments: to behave faithfully is within your power. . . . "We have life and death before us; whichever we like better, will be given to us" (*Ecclesiasticus* 15, 15-18). "We commit evil because of our fault," the sacred Buddhist books say, "we suffer because of our fault; we omit to do evil because of our merit; we are purified because of our merit."

Denying freedom is an easy excuse to avoid any effort to overcome our own instincts and always to follow the easiest way down. It is almost consoling to say, when we did not do our duty, that we could not help it. But most times we know that the alibi is a fiction. It is interesting to notice that we seldom allow other people to invoke it.

Jean Delumeau writes: "Sin has an extraordinary importance in the civilization we live in. It is Christianity which created the term 'sinner' (*peccator/peccatrix*) missing from classical Latin. The invitation to examination of conscience caused an unprecedented improvement in introspection, over a long period, entailed a sense of individual responsibility, developed morals based on intention, made people understand the gravity of certain omissions, generated creative tension and led to the elaboration, as a necessary compensation, of the concept of mitigating circumstances which are now part of our mental equipment." Delumeau notes excesses of authoritarian guilt of the past centuries, but he deplores the even still more harmful excess of our time which "almost seems to want to ignore individual sin and tends to accentuate the collective responsibilities of peoples, social classes, political systems." He quotes John Paul II who in Lourdes on August 14th, 1983, asked Christ to have mercy on those "who do not know any longer what sin is, or do not dare know

it any longer, as if this knowledge could alienate their freedom. . . . The sense of sin," the Pope went on to say, "has partly disappeared because we have lost a sense of God. . . . Consciences are obfuscated as at the moment of original sin and do not distinguish good from evil any longer." By acting so, modern people cut through, with care and diligence, the branch they are sitting on.

### **Why not call evil by its real name?**

Every now and then criminal or dishonest or dissolute or antisocial behavior (drugs, pornography, terrorism, violence, money greed, lack of sexual restraint, etc.) are discussed. The inadequate and superficial way these topics are faced strikes us as a symptom that the moral decline, after degenerating behavior, is damaging the very concept of good and evil. The word "sin" is out of fashion because it implies God and the moral law written in the human conscience: such a word "could offend the freedom of the interlocutor's opinions." The words "fault" and "evil" too, seem to be in disuse. In fact, they suppose that some forms of behavior are disordered and wrong or contrary to interior laws valid for everyone. They suppose that we can consciously and freely wish something that we recognizes to be evil. That is contrary to the modern dogma that stable and universal moral laws do not exist and that we are always just and in good faith, and one is criminal only by society's fault, according to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's dictum.

There are some who want to increase punishment for certain crimes that damage the rights of others more seriously, but they are regarded as sadistic and ignorant of psychology. Above all, precisely where the concept of evil is really important as an internal parameter of behavior, the notion has disappeared. We feel embarrassed to pronounce the word "evil" lest we be considered drastic and old-fashioned.

A vast range of alternatives has been invented: "It is a mistake," "it is stupid," "we are not able to understand it," "it is at the limit of the law" (they imply that everything which does not belong to the Criminal Code cannot be morally condemned), "it is an action done by a person incapable of understanding and wanting" (they suppose that harm cannot be done because of a deliberate choice), "we have a different concept of life" (everybody has the right to have personal opinions even about vice and virtue, about honesty and crime). "A society boasting of being beyond good and evil," the sociologist Francesco Alberoni writes in his best-seller, "promises only selfishness, injustice, and praise of force." When someone does not distinguish any longer between drinking arsenic and milk there is real reason to get worried.

Churchill used to say that if Saint George had lived today, he would be armed, not with spear and shield, but with flexible formulas. There would be panel discussions and television debates for and against the dragon, in the name of democracy and equality of all opinions, whereas the dragon reserved every right of action.

### **There is something worse than the spread of drugs**

"Freedom of conscience" is the bright star at which western humanity stares spellbound to guide our steps. Emptiness of values is the deep and hard ditch into which we fall. Every historical situation, either of progress or civil and cultural debasement, is stimulated by the preceding generation and the economic and social situations that exist and make it easy. These are indicated as causes by

sociologists and historians, but they would be called opportunities, occasions, and contributory causes facilitating and not necessitating. Only the seriously mentally ill are not responsible for their own actions. The true causes of human behavior, as the majority of great thinkers underlines, are the free choices of the individuals who decide if they have to follow either the descent or the ascent, the mass or the elite.

Even if we are partly conditioned by the fashionable and the easiest way, we are responsible for the guidance we give to our own lives, and even modern reality proves this. Consistent minorities of believers in God and in the moral law, supported by writers and thinkers of the same creed, try courageously to row against the current. Therefore, there is something worse than the spread of drugs and an organized life of crime, and it is the spread through the mass media, schools, and actions the fatal idea that each one can create one's own moral opinions and follow them. Or, that in the moral field any opinion is the same as another and no one has the right to condemn any other opinion.

The spread of such a program of life, taken in an absolute sense and without due distinctions, is even more criminal than drug trafficking, because it highlights crime, not in the one who does it but in the person who condemns it and sees fault not in the one who commits it, but in the one who fights it.

Our conscience must be free and we have to follow it, but let us keep in mind that it is a very delicate instrument that easily becomes clouded and functions and points out the direction to follow only when all instincts have been controlled. Each must apply oneself, when young and helped by educators, to form it through experience and the difficult exercise of self-control, comparison with the opinions and example of morally "good" people. Only then we can usefully follow our own consciences. After learning the Rules of the Road well and helped by the Driving School and after good, careful practice, we can rely on our own intuition.

### **Is each one free to invent one's own moral code?**

Conscience is the compass of human life and points to a North the same for everyone. If we demagnetize the needle, the navigator can turn the helm anywhere. But it is not an advantage. The English writer and philosopher C.S. Lewis pointed out that the mortal danger of destroying humanity lies in the destruction of the foundations of morals by undermining the evidence which interests all humankind, since the survival of humanity is founded on it.

He shows that evidence of this exists everywhere and summarizes the great cultures. He does not refer only to the ethical inheritance of the ancient Greeks as expressed by Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. They wanted to induce humanity to seize the rationality of being, when they asked for education in all matters essential to reason. Rather, he goes back even to early Hinduism and to its notion of Rata, meaning harmony among cosmic order, moral virtues, and ritual of the temple. Lewis underlines the doctrine of the Chinese Tao: Tao is nature, the path, the road, the way by which everything moves. . . . It is also the way everyone must follow by imitating the cosmic and supercosmic, basing all movement on this great model.

There are differences in details in this knowledge of great cultures, but the great common nature which shows is the original evidence of objective values asserting themselves in the essence of the world; there are types of behavior which are true and good, if they abide by the message of the Whole, whereas there are others which are always false, discordant with Being. The intuition of the necessary harmony of human being with the message of nature is common to all great cultures as are also the great moral imperatives.

C.S. Lewis stated this idea in clear terms: "What for practical motives I called Tao and other people call natural law, or handed down morals, or first principle of practical reason, or basic truths, is not a system of values; it is the unique source of all value judgements. If we reject it we reject every value. If we safeguard any values, we safeguard that too. The effort to refuse it and to substitute something new is a contradiction in itself."

### **The loudspeaker for the faint voice of conscience**

Cardinal Ratzinger notes that "as the concept or key of the new global orientation we can highlight the words 'conscience' and 'freedom,' which give moral lustre to changing behavior, which at first sight, would be simply classified as desertion of moral vigor and as lax conduct. . . . Under the term 'conscience' what is now intended is no longer conscience, with a higher science, but individual self-determination incapable of being regulated by anyone, by which the single individual decides what is moral for one in a particular situation. . . . The concept of 'rule' or, even worse, 'moral law' has become a negative reality, an indication coming from outside, which can perhaps carry orientating models, but cannot impose preeminent obligations in any way."

A person who believes in God knows that God is not outside us and does not compel us to do anything but to follow our deepest aspirations even if sometimes they are not conscious. Atheists like Sartre, who fought for "freedom" for all to create their own morals, uprooted and undermined not only religion but, with it, also the foundations of human society. Since the law impressed by God in our conscience has been abolished, only Civil and Criminal Codes of Law are left and they are not valid when no one sees you. In fact, human conscience has greed as its mother and predominant vice as its father in a world overcrowded with stimuli and attractions. Even a thief, if found out, will say that this job is a job like any other, in a corrupt society, and that it even performs a social task, to counterbalance riches unjustly acquired. Conscience often appraises the weight of facts with a thumb on the tray of the scale. Conscience is objective and even severe when it deals with others, but when it speaks to its master about awkward duties, its voice becomes so feeble that we cannot perceive it without a good loudspeaker.

### **Biological instincts and spiritual aspirations**

We could sum up common morality with this imperative: satisfy your material needs (that shout at us) only in function of the satisfaction of your spiritual needs (that only whisper deep in the background). Human needs are as a nightingale's nest with two cuckoo and two nightingale chicks: the bigger cuckoos screech and open their enormous beaks wider; they want everything for themselves and force the little nightingales to die of starvation if the mother nightingale does not pay attention and feed them too. Or they are like truckers, farm workers, and senior citizens. It is

not right that the rises in wages are always for those who shout louder and strike more. Let's take a look at our chief needs and inclinations:

*The survival instinct* is a true need and compels us to seek air, food, water, heat, clothing, housing, and other essentials. The abuse of this instinct is consumerism, greed for money, comfort, and luxury.

*The instinct to control others* is not a need and, as an inclination, is only in certain people, the ambitious and the authoritarian. When taken in a just measure it causes some more courageous and enterprising people to assume the command of their group with the majority's consent, and to lead it to work and defense. We have hyperdevelopment when someone puts ambition of power in first place, and still more when one commits injustices to conquer it.

*The instinct of defense* is the tendency-need kindling both anger and the impulse to struggle when oneself or one's family or group is attacked and endangered. The excess consists of overbearing action, nondefensive violence, or reaction disproportionate to the aggression.

*The instinct of reproduction* is mutual attraction between man and woman, urging them to unite with a constant and deep love so that they may psychologically enrich one another and form a whole, generate children, and educate them to a balanced satisfaction of all natural aspirations. It becomes need only when it is stimulated by thoughts or erotic visions: when such stimulations are not present, a tendency remains but this can be sublimated by normal friendship.

*The aspiration to moral values:* some of these values are needs, such as honesty, work, justice, friendship, and freedom, whereas others form a tendency, as science, art, family, etc.

*Aspiration to God:* it coincides with the need of justice, freedom, and friendship at a perfect stage, as they are not found in this world. For a certain time the need for God can be deceitfully satisfied by the human moral values, but after a time these disappoint and theoretic or practical atheism leaves us deeply dissatisfied.

### **If you plant a bramble, do not expect a rose**

There is an inversely proportional relation between the satisfaction of the biological instincts and the fulfillment of spiritual aspirations: the more interest, wish, and passion we allow the former, the less remains to nourish and satisfy the latter. This is why in the present wealth-obsessed society, the worship of profit, amusement, and sex (the god one and three of consumer society), is a river in flood. It occupies all the thoughts and feelings of people, whereas the aspirations to human ideals and God meanders along as a barely visible stream. It has a hard time keeping most people from serious crimes and only provided that the police are present everywhere and on the alert.

But since spiritual aspirations are not a fictitious need created by the ruling class of the past, but an innate and deep necessity, in fact the supreme finality and need of human life, the spiritual nature of humanity, devoid of its most essential good, takes revenge with the apprehension, uneasiness, and interior contamination we spoke of. How is it that comfort and spiritual discomfort grow together? If you plant a bramble do not expect a rosebush.

The Bible often talks about how going away from God punishes oneself: "Since my people have committed a double crime: they have abandoned me, the fountain of living water, only to dig cisterns for themselves, leaky cisterns that hold no water . . . your own wickedness punishes you and your rebellions castigate you. Acknowledge and see how wrong it is to have abandoned the Lord your God" (Jer. 2,13.19; see also Mt. 7, 24 ff., Gal. 5,22 ff., etc.).

In Buddhism and Hinduism we meet the concept of "Karma," which is of the greatest importance and refers to God in Hinduism. Karma in Sanskrit means action or fact (your "doing"). We deal with the universal law of action and its consequences in this and in future lives. Human beings inherit the Karma of their past and continue to produce other Karma, positive or negative, the effect of which will be felt later.

The true prize for those who seek God is to have God within themselves and to share interior harmony with God: you live in the heart of the one who is free from concupiscence, anger, infatuation, pride, disappointment, avarice, excitement, passion, hatred, hypocrisy, vanity, and deceit: in the heart of One who is dear to everyone, benign to everybody, always even-minded in joy and sorrow, in praise and blame; of one who says true and pleasant things and can distinguish between good and evil, of one who, awake or sleeping, took refuge in you and truly he has no other refuge but you" ( Tulsidas Sacred Book of Hinduism, 2, 10). The need for God is so deep and rooted in us that today, by repressing it, the society of comfort has become the society of spiritual discomfort.

### **First I shoot and then I paint the target**

An adolescent talking with another: "How can it be a true love if you have to have the approval of your parents?" In the same way Westerners wonder "How can I feel free if I must follow a law God imposes on me?" They do not reflect on the fact that the rules of ethic are not an arbitrary imposition, but a necessity rooted in our deepest aspirations. It is not freedom to choose to be envious, or quarrelsome, or hypocritical or greedy for money, sexually reckless, proud, arrogant, conceited, angry, violent, corrupt, a liar, false, selfish, a betrayer, lustful, lazy or even only something of the kind.

It is not true freedom to choose between evil and good without the discomfort of an inner compass pointing out the good, as it is not freedom to choose between a paté with truffles and a plate of arsenic, between a good and beautiful girl and a female hippopotamus or between the School of Engineering and hanging. Duty and moral obligation are not a weight and a useless bother as today many disciples of Sartre think, but simply the divine warning audible in the conscience of the one who keeps free from instincts. It informs you that this particular choice compromises radically any aspiration to justice and to love, latent within you.

Whoever tries to get rid of the uneasy voice of conscience, incapable of abolishing it completely, tries to adjust its imperatives to one's own way of living. It is like the boy who had many targets in his garden. He showed his friends and each had a bullet hole exactly in the middle. In fact, first he shot and then he painted the target. No one thinks obligatory traffic lights are contrary to real freedom, nor that the sanitary prohibitions are detrimental to citizen rights.

## **"My life belongs to me, does it not?"**

The answer was far too kind, when we consider that it came from a twentyyear old student who really would like to have told the teacher "Mind your own business. If I offend your rights, I will control myself. But do not speak to me about the health of my spirit or of my conscience, or even of my body! It is my business, is it not? The conscience is mine; the body is mine. My life belongs to me!"

Do you want to live as you like? Do you want to harm yourself as you like? LSD? Cocaine? Alcohol? Heroin? If I liked. I do not like, but if I liked it, why not? If I don't harm anyone. . . . And in the car, would you drive too fast without thinking of the danger? If I were on a solitary road without any passersby, there would be no evil, it seems to me. Do you understand what I want to say?

Today many young people reason like that. Life is worthless; parents worry needlessly. If the world were as sad and solitary as they think, without God, their life would belong to them to damage at their own pleasure. But since it was given to them by the Creator to attain wonderful and eternal values, of which they have only sometimes a foreboding, life belongs to them only to preserve it, defend it, and use it as a way towards divine bliss. Surely, if there is no God, everyone can do what they like, because in that case no one was created for a finality.

In fact, if God does not exist, why could I not harm even the health and life of other people? Why could I not do it, if I like, i.e., if I gain some large advantage and pleasure, and everything is hidden? If the business is remunerative and there are no police in sight, why should we be so scrupulous, since the others are not?

To be able to sleep at night and not feel the reproaches of conscience? But conscience is tameable: it gradually becomes hypersensitive to money or to easy love or to prestige; its skin becomes as thick as an elephant's for other people's situations, and it does not disturb any longer. The bosses of the cocaine cartel, for instance, think they have a very clean conscience despite the many murders to their account. Conscience is like a shirt: if we do not use it, it remains clean.

Max Horkheimer, sociologist and philosopher, founder of the Frankfurt school, notes that without faith in God, a faith, naturally, not merely in appearance, we have no unconditional meaning, no absolute truth, and morals become a question of fickle feeling, of personal taste or caprice. "Without God, an unconditional meaning is presumption. . . . Even eternal truth dies together with God. . . . Think," says Horkheimer in an interview, "of what Adorno and I wrote in *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. We say there: politics which does not involve a theology, is in the last analysis, speculation, although it may be clever."

Everything connected with morals, he also says, becomes theology in the last analysis. "It is not possible to deduce any moral politics from positivism. If we look at things according to science, hatred is no worse than love, notwithstanding all the differences of social function. There is no logical forceful motive, if no disadvantage happens to me in social life."

In fact, how is it possible to say that I must not hate when it is advantageous to me? Positivism does not find any absolute value that goes beyond the human, which makes a clear distinction between desire to help and longing for money, between goodness and cruelty, between yearning and donation of oneself. Even logic remains dumb: it recognizes no supremacy in moral behavior. Every attempt to base morals on material (worldly) values, instead of on a reference to an afterlife -- not even Kant contradicted that -- is an illusion."

Science explains many secondary realities but it is completely inarticulate when it comes to the meaning of life and moral values. "Who can say," writes Horkheimer, "which of these ideals is closer to the truth or its contrary? According to the typical intellectual of our time, one sole authority exists, science, understood as a classification of facts and calculation of probabilities. The statement that justice and freedom are in themselves better than injustice and oppression is scientifically nondemonstrable and useless. It is as meaningless as the statement that red is more beautiful than blue or eggs better than milk." When we rely only on science as a guidance of life, we can think if we wish, that we do not need the highway code when we drive a 50 ton truck. That is why the world is rushing towards a catastrophe.

## **CHAPTER 15**

### **CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND CRISIS OF VALUES**

#### **The spiritual disease Sartre calls nausea**

If you are looking for God, or better, if you are looking for your God in worldly gratifications, do not be surprised when life disappoints you: you are a shortsighted tortoise in love with a military helmet. Psychoanalyst and sociologist Erich Fromm writes: "In a wide sense there is no one who does not have religious needs; but in practice such needs appear in various ways-you can worship or venerate animals, trees, golden or stone idols, an invisible God, a saint, a devilish leader, even ancestors, your native country, class, party, money, success. From such religious forms, destruction or love, tyranny or solidarity can come; the power of reason can be increased or paralysed. Whoever practices them can be conscious of having a religion. . .or can be convinced of having none and think that devotion to worldly goals such as power, money, success is but a marked interest for what is practical and useful. . . . Therefore it is important to wonder, not whether one is religious or not, but what one's religion is: is it a religion that promotes development or paralyses it? . . . That the need for the sacred or holy, i.e., the religious, is innate in us, seems to be widely confirmed by the constant presence of religion in every stage of human history."

Psychoanalysis can provide another proof that, in a wide sense, religion is rooted in the very conditions of human existence. By observing and interpreting patients' thoughts and feelings psychoanalysts realize that when they begin to study neuroses, they are in fact studying religion. The first person who perceived the relationship between the former and the latter was obviously Freud, who, however, saw in religion a collective infantile neurosis of which humankind is victim. The terms of this definition can be changed completely, however, by interpreting neurosis as a

private form of religion, or better as a regression to primitive religious forms which can be compared with the recognized schemes of religious thought.

Unable to "let oneself live" without too many worries about one's deficiencies, the subject is not content with eating or drinking, sleeping, making love, and working. If it were so, we might have, after all, a proof that a religious attitude is not an inner part of human nature. But it is not so. Whoever cannot coordinate one's energies towards the highest part of oneself, canalizes them towards lower goals; if one cannot make up an image of the world and of one's role in it at least approximately correct, one will create a wholly illusory one, and will cling to it with the same firmness with which a religious person is faithful to dogmas. In truth, we do not live by bread alone. There is no choice whether to have a philosophy: although anyone can then choose a more or less noble or wretched, beneficial or ill-fated form of religion or philosophy.

### **"God's death" and contemporary literature**

Way back in 1835 Heinrich Heine rang "the little bell for the dying God." In 1848 Kierkegaard in his "Christian Speeches" wrote: "to kill God is the most horrible suicide." Nietzsche, instead of the "Good News" announces his "Gay Science" and thinks he has eliminated the problem of God from the world forever. For every generation someone knells for God. Then it stops. The bell ringers have died. But, besides bell ringers, the societies dismissing God are spiritually dead. It is clearly seen in the literature of our century.

Perplexity and obsession define the fundamental situation of human existence as it is described by Kafka, an author who became the prophet of the following generation of writers and the interpreter of an egocentered society. Kafka's God is so hidden that nobody knows of its existence. God might still only be the direction towards which humanity utters its cry.

The writers following Kafka (often referring to him) know God as the Absent, if they know God at all. The novel *Fiesta* by Ernest offers an example: God is reduced to a topic of conversation. It is no accident that *The Devil and the Good Lord* by Sartre harks back to Nietzsche and, at the same time, goes beyond Kafka, as the absent God is no longer sought, but is considered dead. "If God exists, we are nothing. God does not exist! Happiness, tears of joy! Alleluia! No more heaven! No more hell! Nothing but earth!"

Faith in humanity replaces faith in God. If heaven is empty we must provide for ourselves. To shelter in God is a mark of nonconfessed impotence and therefore self-deception, as Berthold Brecht explains in his drama *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

The effects of this spiritual revolution do not take long to appear. It is not true that God is hidden and silent: God speaks through facts and above all through the very significant fact of the growing inner uneasiness of today's people, in spite of the continuous progress of material values.

Loss of personality, impossibility to communicate, incapability of loving: these expressions give a deeper understanding of the literary genre which represents humanity today when we are compelled to descend into our ego and feel sick and bored with life, because we do not know the meaning and goal of existence.

In Samuel Beckett's novels and plays (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnameable*, *First Love*, *Waiting for Godot*, etc.) "humanity speaks from a desperate depth, with the voice of the lost speleologist who sees above, at an immeasurable height, a slight fissure where light cruel notes are playing" -- the meaning of an nonexistent or unreachable life.

In this connection the novel by Jean-Paul Sartre *Nausea* has an exemplary meaning. A man, Roquentin, dissects his life. It has become superfluous (*de trop*) for him: the wretched desperation of contemporary humanity is revealed. Roquentin only knows one thing: nausea is the ordinary state of mind. As in Sartre, also in Alberto Moravia a mysticism of "nothingness" can be found. The characters described by this author do not live their lives; they simply put up with them. Their experiences are indifference and alienation, described in their utmost consequences in the novel *Boredom*.

True, some contemporary writers describe more than the "ordinary" people; they also know thoughtful individuals able to ponder on reality and on the meaning of life, i.e., people who deal with these problems as they are tried by misfortune. But all common folk, sooner or later, can enter the latter category and then reasonable faith offers them trust and courage, while its lack annihilates them, as the novelists witness.

In novelists like Sagan and Moravia eroticism plays an important role, but it is raised to a program by the American Henry Miller who became the father of the beat generation. Miller and his partner roam around New York, in his autobiographical novel *Plexus*; they go from house to house creating debts, surrounded and followed by a crowd of perverted people, alcoholics, drug addicts, homosexuals, lesbians. . . . Guzzling and prostitution are the two poles between which their lives develop.

Ionesco too aims at describing the crude human disintegration and negation in modern society, the bitter inconsistency of that sad buffoonery that is life. "As the modern world is rotting, you can be a witness of the decomposition." This is the meaning of all the plays by Ionesco, starting from the best known, *The Rhinoceros*, where the main character Beranger is in a town infected with rhinocerotitis, whose inhabitants are transformed into rhinoceroses, symbols of the loss of human personality.

No text in contemporary literature confronts so radically the reader with the problem of the meaning of life as in the novels *Cancer Ward* by Solzenitsin and *Suspect* by Dürrenmatt. In the latter the protagonist says: "Human, what is human? I believe in two things, which are one and the same thing. . . . I believe in matter, which is strength and mass at the same time. . . matter needing no God, nor anything of the type, whose only and incomprehensible mystery is being. And I think that I am part of this matter, an atom, a mass, a molecule, and my being alive gives me a right to do what I like. I am a part and therefore a moment, a chance, just like life. There is no justice -- how could matter be just? There is only freedom. Freedom is the courage of crime, because it is crime itself. . . ." It is the faith of many moderns, but it is like a hurricane, after which not even a blade of grass is left.

## CHAPTER 16

### PSYCHOANALYSIS AND SOCIAL NEUROSIS

Adler, Jung, and Fromm offer a very positive evaluation of faith in God as part of the psychic health of the individual and society. But for them, influenced by positivism, this faith is a gift and not accessible by reason. They give their opinion on the function of faith in God, not on God's reality.

From this point of view, Viktor E. Frankl, born in Vienna in 1905 and often defined as the founder of the third Viennese school of psychotherapy (logotherapy) and particularly well-known in America, goes beyond Adler, Jung, and Fromm. "In his opinion, humanity is not dominated only by unconscious impulses ( Freud) or by unconscious psychic factors ( Jung), but is determined by something unconsciously spiritual or by unconscious spirituality. In daily practice the psychotherapist must confront problems about the meaning of human life -- something Freud neglected completely and Adler and Jung analyzed too quickly through psychology. But recovery can be achieved, i.e., the spiritual orientation human beings need for their behavior and good health, though not starting from the soul (psyche) but only moving from the spirit (logos)."

In the age of prudery and Victorian Puritanism the problem of repressed sexuality was rightly often put forward. "Es" (German for "it," often translated as the "Id," the unconscious or subconscious), then needed intensive analysis. Today, however, the "Ego" is again receiving attention. Social and cultural conditioning of most neuroses cannot be neglected. But shouldn't the problem of repressed religion be considered now?

"From the middle of this century, the problem of human identity is of primary importance: in this context, Erik Erikson *Childhood and Society* and Rollo May's *Man's Search for Himself* should be mentioned. On the basis of his clinical experience and that of his colleagues, May observed: "Our main problem in the middle decades of the twentieth century is emptiness; we cannot live for very long in a condition of emptiness. If we do not tend towards something, not only do we stagnate but our blocked potential is transformed into illness and despair and perhaps even self-destruction."

Some years later May wrote: "Cultural values that had made us conscious of our human identity had been swept away. . . . No! It is no longer repressed sexuality and a sense of guilt that creates the neuroses typical of our time but lack of direction, meaning, sense. In other words, emptiness and therefore repression of morality and religiousness."

Today more and more psychotherapists from a wide variety of schools complain about the "predominance of the pleasure principle accompanied by contemporary carelessness and repression of the spiritual and religious principles."

## CHAPTER 17

### STATISTICS AND CRIME

#### **Survey on faith in God in contemporary Europe**

The stress of modern life has worn and torn joy so much that very little remains. But the true cause is not industrialization or information science or incomes or the consumer boom. These are merely causes of increased temptation. Those whose faith was strongly rooted have not surrendered. The main difference between persons of faith and the indifferent is that the former renounce part of the accessory to possess the essential. The latter give up all the essential to try to have part of the accessory. "The religiously indifferent," writes Adriano Bausola, President of the Catholic University of Milan, "although admitting God's existence, do not acknowledge God as relevant for life. . . . They are characters apart. Militant atheists actively seek to defend the vision of a humanism entirely of this world which views even God as a rival. Believers, if coherent, base their whole life on God. Indifferent persons are distant from both positions." "If God exists, human life has a meaning and the essential task of life is to look for God to be in communion with God. Thus, indifference is the most unreasoned reasoning against religion. But it is also the hardest to refute. Most contemporary Westerners are indifferent. They are untouched by any argument because they already "believe in God." But they do not want to be guided by God. The dialogue between Dino and Cecilia in Moravia *La Noia (Boredom)* is instructive: "I cannot think of a day when I feel the need for religion. It's superfluous." "Superfluous?" "Yes, how can I explain it? If it exists, things are in a certain way. Nothing changes. Therefore, it is superfluous." Today's secularism is not atheism but indifference. A 1981 survey of the most industrialized nations of Europe (done by "European Value Systems Study Group") found that 87% of Europeans "believe in God." But those who actually practice their religion, i.e., do something with their religion so as not to be inconsistent, were 8% for the Protestants and 20-22% for Catholics. This is a third less than 30 years ago. Fr. Silvano Burgalassi, a sociologist of religion, says that religious interest among the young is lowest on a list of social values: human rights, struggle against poverty, personal freedom, ecology. If we complement these data with those from the 1980 United Nations "Demographic Yearbook," we could say that Europe is divided into three areas as regards secularism:

- 1) Lay area with a high rate of secularism ( France, Belgium, The Netherlands): 26% of the inhabitants claim they are not religious;
- 2) Protestant area with an average rate of secularism ( Britain, Protestant Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway): 9% of its inhabitants say they are not religious;
- 3) Catholic area with slightly lower rate of secularism (Catholic Germany, Ireland, Poland, Spain, Italy): 7% of the inhabitants declare they are not religious.

Between 1960 and 1980 a marked decrease in religious practice was noted in all these countries and, at the same time, an increase in murders, suicides, abortions, divorces, drug abuse, and, in recent years, AIDS.

## **Erich Fromm and collective alienation**

An indifferent person is like the parachutist who did not worry about the parachute opening since s/he found the trip enjoyable enough "as long as it lasts." "Our culture," Erich Fromm writes, "is perhaps the first wholly secularized in human history. We are not concerned with the meaning of life; we have put aside every awareness and worry about the basic problems of existence. We begin from the conviction that there is no other purpose than to invent life successfully and live without serious letdowns. . . . Most of us believe in God because we take it for granted that God exists. The others do not believe because they take for granted that God does not exist. It does not make much difference for the average person in our civilization to believe in God or not and this both from a psychological and religious point of view. In both cases, they care neither for God nor for the answer to the problem of their own existence."

Western nations "are developing into managerial societies whose well-fed and well-clothed inhabitants see their desires fulfilled and have none that cannot be met. They are like automatons who follow without being forced, who are led without leaders, who build machines that behave like humans and produce humans who behave like machines. These are people whose reason is decaying while intelligence is growing and thus creating people with the highest material powers without the wisdom to use them.

This alienation and automation lead to increasing madness. Life has no meaning; there is no joy, no faith, no reality. Everyone is "happy" but no one feels, thinks, or loves. In the nineteenth century the problem was "God is dead." In the twentieth century the problem is "humanity has died." In the nineteenth century inhumanity meant cruelty. In the twentieth it means schizoid alienation. In the past, the risk was for humans to become slaves. In the future, the risk is that they will become robots. It is true that robots do not rebel. But, according to human nature, they become "Golem," destroying themselves and their world because they can no longer bear the boredom of a meaningless life.

## **The ways of the world are all easy**

The effectiveness of a medicine, rather than from an analysis of its components, can be seen by comparing the effects it produces in the patients who use it properly with the clinical state of patients who do not use it or who have stopped using it. As Erich Fromm pointed out above, not only individuals but also a society can become psychically sick. Today many sociologists prefer to talk about a lack of adjustment in a growing number of subjects due to rapidly changing lifestyles. But it is equally true that well-adapted people who have achieved success today display deep spiritual dissatisfaction. But then social and cultural changes and problems of adjustment were not insignificant in the last century and the first half of this century. But if moral and religious values exist, even heroic sacrifices can be faced bravely. But the demotivated slip into neurosis.

"Mental health," continues Fromm, "is achieved if people develop until they reach full maturity in accordance with the laws and characteristics of human nature. Mental disease is a lack of development in this same sense. After an introduction like this, the yardstick for judging mental health will not be based on individual adjustment to a particular social system but must be universal, valid for everyone and capable of giving a satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence."

In the past 50 years a continuous correlation has been documented, year after year, between the decrease in religious practice and faith and the increase in certain phenomena that suggest society is undergoing a serious disease, a real decadence.

Here are some data from the United Nations "Demographic Yearbook' referring to Italy, two less secularized countries ( Ireland and Spain) and two countries where the secularization process is more advanced than in Italy ( France and the United States). The ratio is 1: 100,000 inhabitants per year.

	<b>Suicides</b>		<b>Murders</b>	
	<b>1960</b>	<b>1982</b>	<b>1960</b>	<b>1982</b>
Italy	6.3	7.4	1.5	1.9
Ireland	3.0	6.3	0.2	0.7
Spain	5.5	6.3	0.3	1.0
France	15.8	19.6	1.7	1.0
USA	10.6	12.2	4.7	10.5

"Quantitative growth is accompanied by increased crime aimed at taking people's property away violently. . . . Criminal prosecutions increased from 2,233,930 in 1988 to 2,274,095 in 1989. . . . The increase in crime is due to drugs, prostitution, robbery, and the increasingly wide-spread habit of obtaining wealth 'at any cost.'" Divorces in Italy, proof of the instability of marriage and family life and the cause of much harm to the education, and psychological and moral health of the children, increased from 10,600 in 1975 (approx.) to 11,800 in 1980, 18,000 in 1986 and 30,000 in 1988.

In Italy abbrtions have increased from 187,000 in 1979 to 224,000 in 1982. Drug abuse is increasing every year especially among young people. The increase in HIV seropositives and AIDS is another sign of spiritual disease induced by secularization. ISTAT's "Italian Demographic Yearbook' shows that murders in Italy increased by 51.5% between 1971 and 1987; crimes against property by 7%, robberies and kidnapping by 908.4%. Murders increased from 1096 in 1987 to 1432 in 1989. Suicides increased from 2326 in 1974 to 4305 in 1987 -- an increase of 90% in just 13 years.

Lack of faith, even if it has other psychological and social causes, often produces greater depression and makes life even more nonsensical as the following statistics seem to indicate. According to a study on the religious values of Europeans published by the *Economist* "The world of 1992" ( 1992, I, p. 453) the percentage of nonbelievers in the various countries was as follows: Sweden 62%, France 43%, Germany 36%, Britain 29%, Spain 19%, Italy 16%, Ireland 4%. The percentage of suicides (per 100,000 people) per year is fairly close to the above: France 20.8%, Sweden 18.3%, Germany 17.6%, Britain 8.4%, Italy 7.9%, Ireland 6.9%, Spain 6.5% ( 1989 United Nations Yearbook). We are killing God in our conscience and the higher suicide rate shows it. The ways of the world are easy, but drag us down to the bottom.

## **What does the increase in drug abuse mean?**

After demolishing religion as the "opium of the people," today opium is becoming the religion of the people. As Fromm rightly asserts, drugs are a madmaking form of religion. Humans are not content with the "values" of consumerism: to grow old working and earning good wages, eating and drinking, making love and enjoying sports, travel, hobbies, and leisure-time activities. We must tend towards an infinite spiritual value: God perceived from afar. This is the secret strength that has always pushed civilization forward. If society denies values and worships technology and economics (the most degraded form of religion), the spirit will either swim against the current or go mad.

In the long run, everyday facts, even in an affluent society, become banal and boring. Ideals, incomplete but still higher forms of religion, open up enthusiastic horizons. It was the attraction to God perceived from afar, that sustained people who worked hard for a brighter goal and who advanced wearily, fighting until they gave their lives. Though an incomplete form of religion, the aspiration towards the better drove people to invent the wheel, the loom, the electric motor, and the computer, to discover America and nuclear energy, to produce Michelangelo's sculptures and Beethoven's symphonies, Einstein's formulas and Blondel's philosophy, the American War of Independence and the Hungarian Revolution, campaigns for rights, justice, and democracy.

The higher forms of religion, where God is the closer force of attraction, are at the heart of heroic acts of spiritual and moral promotion, apostolate, and evangelization, civil and religious growth in primitive peoples, and masterpieces of moral beauty -- the heroes and heroines, missionaries, liberators, apostles, and saints. But if a materialistic society extinguishes all the stars, a sailor will hold the course by the lights of the ships being passed.

In previous centuries European trade with the tropical countries was in the spices and exotic products that flourished there. Today the drugs they produce are the temptation. Perhaps in other centuries the kind of spiritual emptiness we now know was then unknown. Cardinal Ratzinger writes: "The soul's thirst in the inner person makes drugs superfluous. Ernst Bloch adds an interesting thought. For Bloch, the real world is inadequate. The 'Hope Principle' means that we are energetically working against reality. We must overcome the actual world to create a better one. . . . I would say," Ratzinger continues, "that drugs are a sort of protest against facts, against reality. Those who take drugs refuse to resign themselves to the actual world. They are looking for a better one."

The "trip" that people try to make through drugs is a perverted form of mysticism, a perversion of the human need for the infinite, a refusal to go beyond immanence, an attempt to break through the barrier of one's own life and venture into the infinite. The patient, humble, ascetic adventure, the climber's approach with its short tiring steps towards God, has been replaced by the power, the magic key of drugs, and the religion of the technological. Drugs are the pseudo-mystics of a nonbelieving world that cannot free itself from the tormenting thought of paradise. Drugs are therefore an alarm signal that leads well off the right road. They reveal the emptiness in our society for which it has no instant remedy. But equally, they point towards an inner need of human beings asserted in a degenerate form if its right fulfillment cannot be reached."

The attempt to cover up this serious social disorder by interesting young people in work, love, and other nonsupreme values is like trying to lower a fever by cooling down the thermometer. We are not made for the "Country of Cocaine" but for the Promised Land and there are no young people who cannot discover this supreme desire in themselves, this inner basic trust to enter it. But education must show that we cannot reach the Promised Land without first crossing the desert. We need the relationship of mutual love with God that Christ brought into the world. We need this more than we need air and water. To live without it is not freedom and independence but madness and self-destruction. We have major confirmations of it in our century: the tragic destiny of Nazism, Marxism, materialism, the spiritual emptiness of the Western world, the threat of world suicide from pollution, the collapse of the family, epidemic drug addiction.

To refuse a moral law from God is to renounce being a part of the great cosmic plan. It means being outside natural law, moral law. It means denying the central importance of ecology, and human ecology, which causes more irreparable harm than deforestation and the extinction of many animal species. In his *Drama of Atheistic Humanism*, Henri de Lubac sums things up in these terms: "It is not true that we cannot organize the world without God as is sometimes said. What is especially true is that without God, we can only organize the world against ourselves."

## **CHAPTER 18**

### **DEMOCRACY AND ATHEISM**

#### **When the Western world denies its Christian roots it also denies freedom**

As the Western democracy exulted over the collapse of its main opponent in the world, Communism, our newspapers were full of news of murders and massive spread of drugs. Francis Fukuyama, a high official in the U.S. State Department, sees in the future "universalization of liberal western democracy, the final and exclusive way of governing humanity."

"But is it really so?" Maurizio Blondet asks: "In society, immorality, a feeling of weariness, precariousness, selfishness, solitude, and violence are becoming the order of the day." Governments and parliaments are more and more like market places where members and ministers represent special interest groups, loud minorities, power lobbies more than the people. In conclusion, if communism is dead, is Western democracy in good health?

"Can we Americans be good without God?" asks Glenn Tinder, Professor of Political Science at the University of Massachusetts asks. His answer: "The virtues of liberal democracy, which we Americans are rightly so proud of, as a firm belief in the equal dignity and the rights of everyone, have deep roots in Christianity. Today our society, more and more secularized, is cutting these roots. But without them will it still be able to be democratic and liberal?"

Glenn Tinder has devoted a book *The Political Meaning Christianity* to this second question. It is objected that "Christianity, as a faith, is a spiritual and private fact, a 'withdrawing from the world.'

Therefore, it is the exact opposite of politics which is public activity and acts in the world. . . . This is how we think today," Tinder admits, "but it is a mistake. According to Christianity, as opposed to oriental religions, God not only created the world but is deeply engaged in it. The idea that if we are in relationship with God we must disengage from the world, is in contrast with the Christian concept of God."

The result of this separation of faith and politics is precisely the kind of society we see around us. Tinder explains: If we take for granted that politics has become a wholly lay and secularized fact, it is inevitable that politics is also "without morals," that is, it has lost its moral purpose. It becomes a matter purely of pressure groups and personal ambitions. Government helps only the well organized lobbies and the influential. It is limited only when it is controlled by balances of power. Citizens who are not organized as lobbies have no say in anything.

Objectors reply: "to claim politics is based on Christianity is an attack against pluralism, tolerance, and freedom of thought. It is reactionary nostalgia, disguising some form of integralism." This does not bother Tinder: "Ironically, many of the undoubted virtues of American pluralism -- respect for the individual and belief in basic human equality -- are rooted in the union of political and spiritual elements typical of Christianity. Are laicists equally sure that those virtues and pluralism itself will survive without these roots?"

It is still to be demonstrated, they object, that pluralistic democracy does in fact derive from Christianity. Tinder replies, "Let us consider the core of Christianity, love. Christ prescribes this love as the highest model of human relationship. Obviously this love has nothing to do with friendship and even less with eroticism. It is not a sentiment we are naturally inclined towards. Its essence is sacrifice. God so loved the world. . . ."

Even if this demanding love has never been practiced in politics, not even during far more Christian times, it is the goal to which the Christian politician must tend. Its driving force is that everyone, even the least talented, is destined to reach divine bliss with its help. This means that we "must not be condemned without a fair trial, must be fed if hungry, and must be listened to when we speak. It is precisely here that the right to vote, a duty for every citizen in every democracy, has its roots. When democracy aims at defending the 'dignity of the individual' or the 'unlimited value of the human person,' it refers back to Christian love and repeats, perhaps unaware, concepts such as 'salvation and 'grace.' . . . The State must treat its subjects equally, despite all social, natural, or moral differences. Why should the State do this if not because, implicitly, it recognizes that the final judgement on everyone belongs to God alone?"

"I wonder to what degree," Tinder asks, "we are now living on the moral inheritance accumulated down the centuries by Christianity -- an inheritance we are now 'wasting' and no longer 'nourishing;' Perhaps, by now, this inheritance has been completely used up. Politicians, advertisers, concealed persuaders in newspapers and television continue to tell us that we have the right to buy what we want and live as we like. Equal rights and equal opportunity are now reduced to this! But this is no longer the freedom founded on the statement that I we are all one in Christ.' It is a form of nihilism - - people living according to their pleasure and convenience. I wonder whether this will lead to a change in the structure of society itself."

Or is it already changing? "Does not contemporary America," Blondet asks, "appear already too full of moral cynicism, emptiness, and vulgarity, injustice sanctioned, desperation lived in the indifference of the more fortunate? . . . Nihilism is evident in Nazi-like regimes," Tinder answers, "but there is banalized, mass nihilism and Nazism also when too many people live solely according to their convenience and pleasure."

"Democracy," Toynbee wrote, "is a page torn from the gospel." We cannot expect peaches or plums from a branch severed from the tree. Dead leaves are all we will get.

## **CHAPTER 19**

### **LOVE BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN, AND FAITH**

#### **Underestimation of natural morals and family degradation**

AIDS and drugs are only the tip of the iceberg. Let us limit for a moment our attention to a field of morals deriving from the finalism of nature -- human sexuality. It is the area most called into question and ignored in the contemporary Western world. Everyone deplores the use of drugs, criminality, violence, greed, thirst for power, because the consequences of such vices are more immediate and visible. On the contrary, sexual laxism receives a lot of indulgence and is considered a venial sin, or a natural need, or a necessary conforming to the times, or a sign of freedom from taboos and prejudices.

The abuse of sexuality is not punished by the Criminal Code: obviously it must only penalize the immediate and material damages caused against others and the violation of other people's freedom. The damages of sexual disorder, on the contrary, strike society in the long term: the possible partner, the possible children, and still more those who commit it or who freely take part in it. The damage is above all interior to these people: it cancels the aspiration to moral values and to God, enslaves the will, takes away the capacity for authentic and constant love, and crushes the chief institution society is based on: the family. As a consequence, today family and love between man and woman should be symbolized by a soap bubble more than by two united hearts, and Cupid should carry a sawed-off shotgun instead of a bow and arrow.

#### **The Church is a tug and not a raft**

Bruce Marshall in *The World, the Flesh, and Father Smith* says that one night Father Smith had a dream. A new Pope had been elected who had assumed the rather unusual name of Buster I. In his first English speech, broadcast to the whole world, he had solemnly declared that free love, given the present circumstances of human life, was to be considered a sin no longer, but on the contrary an important aspect of charity.

The fruits soon appeared. The same day the Catholic churches of the whole world were overflowing with new members who together with old churchgoers wanted to pronounce their profession of faith and pray for the new Pope's health. Anglicans, Lutherans, Orthodox had overcome their theological difficulties and had entered the Catholic Church. Turkey, Iran, India, China, Japan had sent

delegations to the Vatican to ask for new missionaries, atheism and secularization had melted away as snow in the fire, even Stalin's Soviet Union had opened an Embassy near the Holy See.

The Scottish novelist was right. The problems Westerners have with faith do not often come from the head but from other parts. The center of secularism (and sometimes of the theology of dissent) is not found so much in theological ideas, but above all in the rules of behavior, in the formulas for the space launch towards God. Modern people do not refuse the product, but the price to pay. The Church would have the green light and would be full of acclaiming people if only she turned a blind eye to the "trifles of morals" and allowed "freedom of conscience" in certain fields.

How come, ordinary people may wonder, such obstinacy, such an anachronistic medieval and puritan concept of sex, which drives away from the sacraments and from faith itself thousands of aspiring believers by a clergy that shows itself well-informed and modern in all other aspects of life? Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, gave an important speech on May 2nd, 1989, at the Presidents' Meeting of the Doctrinal Commissions of the European Bishops in Laxenburg (Vienna). He notes that there is some contestation, including by some theologians, against the praxis and the faith of the Church, primarily the denial of its teaching about contraception, abortion, divorce, genetic manipulation, homosexuality, adultery, and premarital sex.

All these themes "depend on a common human vision and on an idea of human freedom working in it. . . . Today we would have at last found freedom of conscience and therefore we are not willing to subject it to a set of rules imposed from outside" -- from God. The reason for such a position, even in many theologians, lies in the disappearance of the doctrine of creation from their theology. If nature is not created by God, but is the result of mere chance, it is logical that people refuse to consider it as a moral instance. The body is considered a possession of which each individual disposes according to what seems more useful for "quality of life."

Then we do not see why we should not separate at our own discretion: copulation from fecundity (contraception), pregnancy from the gift of life (abortion), erotic pleasure from the sacred contract of ongoing love (free love), the sacred contract of conjugal fidelity (adultery, divorce), physical love from sexual differentiation (homosexuality), copulation from conception (artificial conception), genetic inheritance from the child (genetic manipulation).

"Where this independence from God is fully accepted, in practice the difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality, between sexual intercourse outside and inside marriage becomes irrelevant." Today we nourish the real fear that humanity subjugate nature around us, but we are incapable of grasping the spiritual message coming from nature within us. We experience the rebellion of creation against arbitrary human power, but we do not want to recognize the limits and the rules of our behavior in the central point of creation itself. "That nature has a mathematical rationality became, so to say, tangible. But that even moral rationality is revealed in it is rejected as a metaphysical fancy. . . . Humanity's relationship with nature (which, therefore, is creation no longer), remains that of manipulation and it does not become one of listening. It remains a relationship of domination based on the presumption that rational calculation can be as clever as 'evolution' and thus make the world progress better than evolution did until now without human intervention."

A silent awareness that we need an alternative rises in many in the face of the alarming disorders of a permissive society. "But it can only be worked out if the doctrine of creation is reworked. . . . We have to show clearly that the world was created 'wisely' and that human greatness does not consist in a dwarf's pitiful autonomy who proclaims humanity to be master of nature," but in the fact that our being reveals the most splendid finality, the ascent towards the Perfect.

Among other things we forget that what is impossible to humanity alone becomes possible with a sufficient measure of prayer and grace. The theory of mere chance and independent conscience is more convenient, but it is not healthy. Even for the Church Magisterium it would be more comfortable to follow the ratings and avoid so many desertions. But the Church and the theologians cannot, for popularity's sake, replace the bitter medicine of faith with a placebo.

The Church, Chesterton said, is wanted by God for human salvation as a locomotive and not as a cart drawn by public opinion. God's people must be a motor boat sailing against the current of easy instincts and not a barge, full of people, that an impetuous current drags towards the waterfall.

### **Herbert Marcuse and sexual "freedom"**

The Bible makes us understand that there is analogy between prayer and a couple in love: the former is reality and the latter a symbol of it. Today the main cause of many people's distrust towards the Church is not the accusation, which is not longer topical, of favoring the rich and powerful, but it is the charge of excessive rigor and misunderstanding in the field of sexual morals. In fact, among the moral laws interpreted by the Church in sexual matter, in the name of Christ's global teaching, some seem quite clearly necessary for society, and even certain "secular" thinkers and sociologists admit it. But others seem to be almost wholly incomprehensible and impracticable to the majority. They are organic parts of a complex of revelation that only a close and serious examination of faith, through meditation, personal prayer, and Christian asceticism, can make clear and feasible. Now this close examination is necessary to reach the true God.

The shallow believer does not know how much sexuality is sacred and related to God and to the primary aim of existence, and does not realize enough that it is not a lubricant to work better, an amusement to make life more colorful and exciting, a hobby, or a sport where some "escapades" can be forgiven. Sexuality, as today several psychologists and sociologists acknowledge, is the most important psychological mechanism on which the psychic, spiritual, and also physical health of mankind and of the individual depend, and, above all, the life of that unreplaceable institution which is the family.

"Why is sexuality the primary constituent force of personality as to be the cause of development or of disorientation of the Ego? Sexuality is the natural background through which love affects the Ego. It wakes up the deep human potentialities or it sterilizes them only if it is supported by the gift of love or ruined by a selfish love. So human sexuality is the dynamism spiritualizing the whole ego, on condition that it is willing to let itself be permeated by a noble love."

"The sacred, according to Otto, is what is referred to the divine, or somehow connected with the order of divine things." Today atheists and those who believe little desecrate sex. Desecration of sex means its trivialization, its reduction to a manipulatable thing, wholly entrusted to free human

creativity. We want to use the machine without bothering about the manufacturer's Operating Instructions.

"This banalization is the consequence of a more general desecration, a crisis of values and certainties still in action and with unforeseeable results. Sexuality has always had a religious character, not least because it was regulated by moral laws. After calling religious certainties into question, custom had gradually given in, carried away by the crisis of all values." Contrary to the deceptive reduction of his thought typical in our culture, Freud does not think at all of the total liberation of sexuality. He knows that it would mark the end of civilization, besides degradation of sexuality itself. He tries only to make people be on the watch for certain kinds of repression traditional morals require and suggests the freeing and formative value of sublimation.

On the contrary, Marcuse dreams of a total liberation of the pleasure principle. According to Marcuse, technological progress and the possible kingdom of abundance took away any justification for sexual repression, which remains only in terms of the continuing domination of human over human, as an instrument of slavery and oppression. Marcuse hopes for a wholly free society starting from sexual freedom. Beautiful words behind which slavery, solitude, and the incapacity for deep and lasting love of people "sexually free" hides.

### **Who invented love?**

It seems obvious and accepted by everyone that the main sources of human affectivity are father-mother-child and man-woman love. They represent the great love, the powerful inspiration of beauty, poetry, music, laughter, play, dance, work, family, arts, and religion. Without the recurring spring of great love renewed at ever more spiritual and authentic levels, human existence would be dull and devoid of meaning, lacking in warmth, liveliness, and taste necessary to live it.

Great love, above all between man and woman in its ideal beginnings, projects the ego outside itself towards communion and absolute trust that kindles the intelligence, inspires creativity, backs action, establishes perseverance, creates virtues, favors sacrifice and together with it nourishes the joy of living. The contemplation of great love leads to belief in God, to understand something of God, to feel attracted by God. The invention of bipolar sexuality, is in the most original and artistic invention, an invention never losing its novelty and taste. It excludes, in the formation of the first living beings, blind casualty not guided by divine intentionality, and their being equated with physicochemical machines. Because pleasure, joy, beauty, sexuality, love in its various stages -- biological, sentimental, spiritual -- are realities of quite a different nature from physicochemical forces.

In the Christian view then, sexual bipolarity and life itself are clear marks of divine intervention, i.e., of an inventor who impressed the factory's brand and signature in the structure and feeling of living beings. God, in Christ's revelation, is pure spiritual love, unifying the three Persons in one Being, one Intelligence, one Will.

Firstly, the leitmotif of all creation is perceptible in each single living creature: the parts of the body are pervaded by a mysterious sympathy and collaboration: it is as if they loved each other, and this "love" makes them one being. In the second place, the prelude of the symphony is realized in the

sexuality of the lower living beings: it is attraction, pleasure, mutual help between two animals, male and female. Deep human love represents the overture: here the likeness of God is visible: man and woman tend to the gift of all their life and all their being forever, forming a single heart and soul.

But there is something more. In the Bible God offers divine love to the human creature, a degree of love in proportion to the opening to God on the part of the creature. To whoever is willing to accept and return it in mutual fidelity, rewards are proposed as between a good king and his affectionate subjects. Some devote themselves to him with generosity, and then he presents himself as a sincere friend and a provident father. But to those who are disposed to divine love, i.e., to limitless, total donation, the king offers a communion to be compared to that between a man and woman who devote their lives to each other.

### **The couple in love is a symbol of God**

During the blossoming and the flowering of the love between man and woman, human creatures are urged to look for perfect communion with one another. Their aspirations, consciously or not, seek a sort of absolute, infinite, and divine. Attitudes of enthusiasm, idealization of the other, total and eternal devotion, almost adoration, derive from it. But by the time the halo disappears both of them discover the difference between the infinite they dreamed of and the limits of reality.

Why are these disproportionate expectations, these disappointments, often so painful? Because, Christ answers, human nature is destined to sail forever on the endless oceans of total love of God. The request was not excessive: only the address was wrong.

Of course, God is above all pairs of opposites, including those of gender, and so is not marked by sexual differentiation, being neither male nor female, father or mother, but's/he is "an I-Thou relation" par excellence. The relationship between man and woman refers to God, because, the Bible says, it is in God's likeness. In fact, in proportion to the depth of their love, man and woman become one for the other, the occasion for opening towards the Above that surpasses both. The progressive discovery of the other's spiritual richness cannot satisfy them fully, because they are limited creatures whereas their spirit aims at beauty and radical love. Thus a path progressively opens for them leading to the encounter with the Source, i.e., with the one whose name is Love.

And it is here that the symbol of marital love is inserted, proposed by God to all creatures and taken again by Christ when he applied the name bridegroom to himself. Man and woman are God's images because they tend to identify themselves the one with the other, but the authentic beatifying identification is offered to each human person, outside the image, in the divine reality.

### **The barometer of true love indicates permanent marriage**

Besides the symbol and preparation of the relationship with God, love between man and woman is the hinge of aesthetic, social, moral, and spiritual values on earth, the base of the most important human institution: the family. And it is love with its characteristics that the moral laws and the health of the family depend on.

The most distinct characteristic of this love is its exclusive nature: I love you alone, you alone." Persons in love demand complete belonging to and with one another; the mere presence of a third offends, the mere idea that the loved person can feel a certain attraction for another person makes him/her violently jealous. In love the various emotions are wholly imprisoned in the environment of the loved person and little room is left for others.

Love creates ardent longing for the presence of the loved one -- the aspiration to live together -- and tends to show itself with kisses and caresses, with tender manifestations of affection which lead spontaneously to sexual intercourse if control is not exercised. When people fall in love, they tend towards the same interests: they like and refuse the same things; they want to share everything, to have everything in common.

Falling in love upholds the two hearts and both want this state of things to be eternal: "I love you forever!" They desire nothing else but to blend their existences in a common life as soon as possible. This natural orientation of love towards marriage is unmistakable: reciprocal fidelity, procreation and education of children, spiritual and mutual completion. If this attraction did not have marriage as an aim, why should it take over a person's heart so completely by excluding any other?

### **Françoise Sagan and soap-bubble-love**

The gospels set the sexual moral law in a context of stability of marriage and family. When the Pharisees ask Jesus if a man is allowed to repudiate his wife, he reminds them of the teaching in the passage on creation: "What God has united, no one must not divide" ( Mk. 10,9). And then: "He who divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another she is guilty of adultery, too" ( Mk. 10, 11-12).

Christ shows the way against the objection that it is impossible to resist the force of a new love: guard your senses to prevent it from happening. Therefore, he declares: "You have learnt how it was said: you must not commit adultery. But I say this to you: if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart" ( Mt. 5,27-28).

The severity of Christ and the Church as regards love and sex is not due to puritanism and misunderstanding of humanity, but, on the contrary, from deep knowledge of human nature: man and woman need, to grow humanly, religiously and morally, deep and constant love. Children must, if they are not to fall into vice, receive a solid moral education and grow with a psychically healthy personality. Their parents must love each other and the children lastingly. All this is achieved only with the indissolubility of the marital bond, which in turn bases itself on mutual love, controlling instincts and not giving in to new passions.

Today, by following the prevailing mentality of permissiveness, spontaneity and sensualism, love blooms and withers rapidly like mushrooms, catches fire and dries up like matches, and make true the bizarre modern statement: I love you deeply and want you to be my first wife." Today it is said "Love must be spontaneous and when it is present we must offer it no moral or religious restraint." But by doing so, it does not grow, does not become deep and giving, remains animal instinct, dies soon, and leaves behind loneliness.

Deep love is marked by a steady joy, above all if we know who makes it possible and towards what horizons it leads us. What it becomes as soon as we forget its origin, we understand when we walk past a theater ( André Fossard). Yes, the mainly erotic love of the modern people costs little, and is worth even less.

Françoise Sagan speaks about the existential solitude coming from the continuous death of these fanciful loves: "But these moments of joy, adhesion to life, end by making a kind of cover, a comfortable patchwork on the bare, weary, trembling body of our solitude. I pronounce the keyword: solitude." The failure of the family caused by modern sexual permissiveness is the chief cause of the crisis of values and the increase in murders, robberies, corruption, the use of drugs, neuroses.

Everybody understands the need for self-control as regards fear, anger, hatred, discouragement, sadness, the attraction and desire for things we like but which can harm us. But strangely we go on saying that this self-control must not be applied to another feeling which can also become the origin of endless errors, traumas, psychological troubles, and crimes. "Love must be free!" It is true: love must be free, but only when it is fidelity, i.e., (literally) keeping faith with love.

### **When and how we can test sexual love**

"Dear Abby," wrote a girl to the Agony Column of an important women's magazine, "I would like to know a boy of my age with a high ideal of love. Rosy." "Dear Rosy," the editor replied, "so would I. Abby." Two slogans were engraved in golden letters by the mass media upon the minds of young people: "When we love, it is not possible nor hygienic to test love" and "when we love and marry, there is always the remedy of divorce."

The reality of couples today confirms that when we do not test love and we get married, we often make mistakes. And divorce is often a remedy worse than the evil. On the contrary, the Church teaches us that love, as every other feeling, can be guided if we follow the indications of the gospels and psychology. In most cases, we can avoid a wrong marriage.

Even to know that marriage is, by God's will, indissoluble love, urges us to verify the passion accurately, before it kindles, to check that there is a true love based on authentic friendship, and to check one's own and the partner's temperament. After marriage, the unlawfulness of divorce urges us to accept the inevitable sacrifices and the faults of the spouse and to do one's best to maintain and deepen love, by repairing the cracks as soon as they appear.

In short, indissoluble love acts in such a way that young people, before getting married, should keep their eyes well open but afterwards they should turn a blind one. To test the feeling of love and lead it to form the happiest family one can, as in every important thing, we must not let ourselves go for what we like, but follow set rules of behavior.

We need above all to keep in mind that sexual attraction, in its urge, is blind; it acts outside reason and therefore must be led by reason. We can fall in love with a person already married, someone too old or too young, a rascal, a dishonest person, a hopeless drug addict, a girl who will never be a good wife for anyone, a boy who will never become a man or worthy husband. Love does not

analyze the qualities of the soul, or the other's character: it acts a little like anger or fear, which react instinctively. In similar cases sexual attraction must and can be removed from the unsuitable person before it becomes nearly irresistible and tends to falsify judgement. In fact it is not real love but only instinctive fascination, which is the absolute impossibility of building up a unity and working out an authentic assimilation. Briefly, if God puts limits on sex, it is to strengthen love.

### **Adler, Jung, Frankl and the origin of neurosis**

Our understanding of human compulsions assumed an absolutely new dimension after Freud's ideas began to spread on the influence of sexuality over personality. Nevertheless the schools of psychoanalysis after Freud showed widely that it is wrong to refer every human psychic need to sexual desire and libido. It is a prejudice to think there is no alternative between repression of sexual desires and fulfillment, so that whoever does not satisfy them physically or mentally, risks neurosis or other psychic unbalance. Freud himself thinks health, inner welfare, and self-realization can be obtained above all with sublimation, a psychic process by which physical or mental forms of sexual satisfaction are replaced by socially useful activities: art, science, work, human solidarity, friendship, where libido would act secretly.

Adler, Jung, Frankl, and other psychoanalysts ascertained that erotic desire is not an absolute and irreplaceable need like eating, breathing, sleeping. Friendship, helping others, social duty, heartfelt faith, religious activity can diminish it advantageously and replace it without any risk for health and existential welfare. In fact, such dynamisms, have in the love between man and woman, their common point of origin not in an identical level of personality (libido), but in a more general and deep need for interpersonal and affective communion with other individuals and with the ideal "You that is God." The feeling which is experienced in this kind of affectivity can be explained by a phenomenon called "affective transposition." This is the process through which the attraction or the inner pleasure felt or imagined in sexual love is communicated to characteristic elements of the spiritual life involving analogies with it at a more elevated level.

Our real unreplaceable needs, sources of neurosis if not satisfied, were deeply studied by these famous psychoanalysts. Alfred Adler ( 1870-1937) devoted himself above all to social needs and he opposed to neurosis, as an authentically normal situation, the concentration on the group, by means of the "sense of community," and on the task that from time to time the individual puts upon himself (self-realization, "will to perfection").

Carl Gustav Jung ( 1875-1961) studied the unconscious psychic needs (thought and truth, feelings and joy, sensations and external data, intuition and knowledge of one's authentic ego).

Viktor E. Frankl, founder of the "third Viennese current of psychotherapy," thinks humanity is not merely dominated by unconscious drives ( Freud) or by unconscious psychic factors, but is also determined by something unconsciously spiritual or by an unconscious spirituality. According to Frankl, the psychotherapist in daily practice must continually face also problems regarding the sense of human life. Neurosis can derive not only from repressed sexuality or from other repressed psychic factors but also, and today it often occurs, from repressed religiousness.

## **Rollo May and the criticism of narcissistic love**

Deep love is a delicate orchid and sex is its fertilizer. While the flower can grow without fertilizer, this latter cannot become beauty and the sense of life without the orchid. Today we call manure with the name of the flower. We are above all interested in the manure. Therefore, we are not astonished that we often find incommunicability in the place of love.

Famous psychoanalysts note that abstention from physical intercourse does not necessarily imply repression, or lack of life and joy connected with sexuality, and least of all, psychic derangement. In fact, unbalance exists if previously the instinct is stimulated with encounters or images or voluntary fancies, and then we expect to dominate it. It would be the same as if a lion-tamer wanted to keep the lion tranquil after making it smell blood.

The desire for love must not be repressed, but if, for reasonable purposes, we do not want or we cannot exert it on the physical level, we can advantageously sublimate it, by nourishing and living spiritual love given to various people, and it is the real flower giving sense to life. Therefore, it is not scientifically correct to speak of "irrepressible sexual needs."

Hypertrophy of the animal part of human nature engenders atrophy of the spirit: hence the incapability of loving and the supposed "silence of God." But a phenomenon somehow opposite is also true: the development of spiritual love, even without physical intercourse, engenders a joy invading feelings, the nervous system and the body.

In the harsh analysis of the American psychoanalyst Rollo May the myth of sexual revolution as human liberation collapses. The paradox of this famous sexual freedom, he says, is that broad-mindedness had not solved our problems at all. Neuroses increased, anguish and the sense of fault became gigantic, imposing a heavier burden on the individual.

According to a widespread conviction nowadays, feelings and emotions must be "expressed" or "vented" whenever we feel the need or the fancy to do it, and thus we find ourselves living in a depressing sexual chaos. Such a conviction "goes back to a kind of glandular hydraulics. . . and it is according to the current image of the body as a mechanical system. . . . Such a conviction is decidedly solipsistic and schizoid: in its light people appear as separate monads without any relationship uniting them to their similars. We can experience emotions and have sexual intercourse throughout our life without experiencing an authentic human relationship with the other person. The fact that many, if not the majority, of the members of our society, experience their emotions in this solipsistic way certainly does not diminish the horror of the situation we live in."

The quest for sex makes us lose the authentic love which is the way to divine Love, the primary objective we are created for. The end sex tends to is selfish satisfaction. On the contrary, love produces the gift of self and deep communion with the "you" preparing us for the beatifying union of love with God's you" and human brotherhood and sisterhood.

Today the spirit is weak because the flesh is strong. Love disappears because sex took its place and name. Families crumble and fall to pieces because uncontrolled senses long always for new

adventures and do not allow the development of deep love. Today people would like to reach the summit of that Love which is God, by bobsledding downhill all their life.

### **Do not wake the sleeping tiger**

Today Christians are compelled by the world to be what they profess thoroughly, called to make a radical choice between poverty in spirit and the cult of money, between chastity and hedonism, between heroism and heroin. We cannot hide from ourselves the enormous difficulty for believers to live the gospels in the world today and particularly with the sexual morals deriving from it. "Enormous" difficulty is a very relative term here, because we need to see what believers do, in what situations they find themselves, and with what divine armor they are protected. But it is certain that the difficulty of sexual morals is particularly serious because of the spread of vices connected with it and of the indifferent or positive judgement public opinion has of it.

In a world near moral self-destruction, believers following the Church are similar to Noah while he was building the ark and the neighbors laughed at him. The sky had become fearfully black, but they preferred to think it was one of the usual storms. More than difficulty of sexual morals we should speak of the impossibility for human forces, and not only today, but since time began, to succeed without grace. So also for sexual morals and priestly celibacy, for forgiveness of grievous offenses, acceptance of great misfortunes, readiness for martyrdom if necessary, and faith itself in the absence of absolute proofs and among the ups and downs of intuition in a skeptical and mocking environment.

Nevertheless, the power of God's grace is precisely shown (and all believers in intense prayer can experience it), in making inadequate causalities effective, in giving to David, a boy with a sling, victory over a gigantic and armor-plated warrior, in routing the army attacking Betulia by the blandishment of a young widow, in feeding thousands of people with five loaves and two fishes, in generating a people as numerous as the stars of the sky from an old and sterile Sarah. Human abilities are absolutely insufficient to realize what God orders us to do: it is as if God ordered us to swim across the Atlantic or to leap onto the moon with a ten meter run up. God wants us to use our own abilities, ridiculously insufficient as a sling against radio controlled missiles, because God adds what is missing to them. The main virtue here is not self-sufficiency but acknowledgment of one's own immense deficiencies and trust in the divine. "Put God's armor on, so as to be able to resist the devil's snares" ( Eph. 11).

But to be able to receive the transforming power of grace Christians know they have to do what they can, and in the first place to remove conditioning stimulations. "If your right eye should cause you to sin, tear it out" ( Mt. 5,29).

It is wise to build the dike not after but before a foreseeable flood happens. Each instinct is aroused by visual, auditory, and imaginative stimuli to act. By creating excitement in the hypothalamus, they grow in proportion to the number and intensity of the stimuli until they become irresistible. The decisional power can dominate feelings and behavior, not so much by repressing impulses when they become strong or irresistible, but by keeping them at a controllable level. We achieve this, as psychology teaches, by using a de-stimulating tactic, by removing stimulations, with a

transpositive tactic, by developing alternative interests and sublimating tactics, by channelling energy towards higher types of love and action.

Do not poke the sleeping tiger. This advice of elementary good sense is not kept by all those men and women who first give in and stimulate a rising and inappropriate love, and then when the tiger is well awakened and excited, would like it to go back to sleep and not rip their families to bits.

## **Bachelor dorm guards**

The German theologian Uta Ranke Heinemann published an essay about the attitude of the Catholic Church as regards women and sexuality which had a certain success "for the many (perhaps too many) provocations it contains." The book is well documented, written in a lively and journalistic style (unusual in theologians) and rightly denounces deficiencies and exaggerations of the past which the official Church recognized decades ago and is trying to correct.

But her evaluations, although they have some foundation, are radical, cursory, and generalized, taken out of the historical context they are set in. As Maria Cristina Bartolomei, a young and intelligent professor of philosophy at the State University of Milan comments, "the position of Uta Ranke Heinemann is radical and even concise, but it does not take into account the progress made in this field, either at the scientific level or at a level of the Church."

The theologian accuses the Catholic Church of "sex phobia," "moralistic aversion to pleasure" (sexual), "hostility to woman, marriage, and the body," the "domination of a caste of bachelors" who become "a bedroom watch and that "imposes its authority on an immature mass of mostly married people."

About the little regard in the past for women there is some truth. But these are not dogmas of faith taught by the Church as such, but the opinions of some theologians of diverse centuries reflecting the mentality of the times they lived in, opinions we find far less favorable to the woman by nonchristian people and likewise by Protestant people and the Orthodox of the bygone centuries. As history teaches, the Managers of the Institute authorized by Christ, while interpreting his explicit teaching, are assisted by the Holy Spirit according to his promise. But as regards everything else, they follow necessarily, like other individuals the evolution of times and they keep themselves at a level of the current public opinion or often, a step farther back, with the conservatives.

But even about the opinion on the woman, Ranke cites and underlines only the darker parts without ever remembering the good points, like a painter who sees in a leopard only spots and paints it all black. Vittorio Messori in "Avvenire," in the rubric "Vivaio" ( April, 1990), answering the theologian's essay, underlines the valid action of men and women of the Church of the Middle Ages for female advancement and improvement.

Ranke's tactics are the usual ones of the professional opponent: to declare, praise, and accept Christ's doctrine, while deploring that of his "unworthy" representatives who have adulterated it. If it is very true that there were men of the Church who were unworthy in their practical life (along with many of their contemporaries), the Catholic doctrine about celibacy and sexuality comes from Christ himself and was, let it be said with some exaggeration of the past, only kept by the Church.

That seems clear even from the fact that churchmen had absolutely no interest in declaring and preaching as a doctrine coming from God a teaching with which they themselves had so much difficulty and did not always succeed in practicing.

No one who is not mad creates a system of difficult laws and rules without necessity, and least of all imposes them on himself for all his life. If then such laws are handed down from century to century until today, only a divine origin can explain the fact. Ranke reports only the exaggerations of the sexual prohibitionist, pointing them out to the public mockery of a world that worships sex without alluding to the fact that contemporary society is morally sinking precisely because it has gone to the opposite extreme.

Chastity and celibacy for love agree with all the other (very unpopular) teachings of Christ: renunciation of, detachment from, and only instrumental use of instinctive and transient goods (wealth, sex, honors, power, work, amusement) to be able to concentrate affective potential toward God and towards our sisters and brothers. It is a fact that Christ himself, Mary, Paul, and many saints of history chose sacred celibacy and virginity for God's kingdom. As it is theologically provable, it was Christ himself who advised it to "those who can understand," i.e., who are interiorly called by God to realize it.

For whoever does not believe specifically all that Christ teaches, celibacy seems to be as absurd and incomprehensible as fidelity in marriage and other "idiocies" of revealed morals preparing humanity for the future life where "at the resurrection men and women do not marry; they are like the angels in heaven" ( Mt. 22, 30). In fact, it is a question of the price we have to pay to enter that reality of which human love is only a symbol, a price which is certainly high, but which seems to be excessive only to those who do not pray intensely to receive now an inner anticipation of such a reality.

### **Few customers in the clearance sale centers of the sacred**

The theologians of conformism with the world, by abolishing traditional severity in the family field, try to sell off Catholicity at clearance sale prices hoping to attract the indifferent. But strangely enough this "great promotional offer with end of season discounts" causes their centers to become even emptier and increase the number of buyers in the traditional shops where the price remained unaltered, rather high, but where real jewels can be bought. In other words, in the churches of "with it," "progressive" priests, the percentage of churchgoers is very low (8% in North Europe, more or less as in the Protestant churches) and priestly vocations are absent. Among the traditional Catholics (we do not speak of the followers of Lefebvre) churchgoers reach much higher numbers (20% and more) with a good number of young people and with some priestly and religious vocations.

The same event is witnessed by the numerous crowds, even of young people, who gather in the various cities visited by John Paul II. This shows that people feel the Divine only in the complete message of Christ and in the authentic interpretation of the Church, even if they are uncomfortable and tiresome, and precisely because they are going against the current when compared with the flow of today's world.

"The letters I received (when they heard about my conversion)," wrote Malcolm Muggeridge, "reveal the extraordinary spiritual hunger people of every class and condition suffer from. . . , which will never be satisfied by legalized abortion or by homosexuality, nor relieved by contraceptives or by the supremacy of the opinion of the 'majority.' The only means to satisfy it is the bread of life offered by Jesus with the promise that all those who ate it will be hungry no longer. That promise is still valid."

Thus, for those who believe in God's death, believe that God dies, but only within themselves. The salt of the gospels loses its taste when it is reduced to the level of a theoretical and inefficacious humanism that even atheism can create. A Christianity that can only say "Let us love one another and struggle for a more just world!" does not arouse any interest. It is a daily experience that without the complete Christ, such solidarity is only wordy and does not solve the basic problems of a humanity that needs God. As Dag Hammarskold, General Secretary of the United Nations, wrote in his Diary, "God does not die when abandoned by us, when we do not believe, but we then die by ceasing to be in communion with the deep source of our spirit."

"Going against the current," Delumeau writes, "in comparison with a civilization that trivializes and wastes sexuality, the Catholic Church pleads the cause of 'spiritual ecology.' And in this it is linked with a considerable number of young people and adults who desire the coming of a new culture, contrary to the modern one marked solely by the longing of possessing and enjoying. They seek a different way of living, and aspire towards a return to moral health. Therefore, Christians must not surrender to the prevailing laxism. . . . What the Holy Father cries out to humankind is that we are created in God's likeness. Nothing fully human can be solved by mere technology. Love belongs to mystery and must be approached with the infinite respect due to the human person. We are engaged in one of the most decisive battles of our time around marriage and love. The society of tomorrow depend on its results" ( John Paul II).

## **CHAPTER 20**

### **THE INSTITUTE AUTHORIZED BY CHRIST**

#### **Transcendent Telecommunication Installation Company**

All contemporary people have a very high concept of Christ: believers, weaker believers, and nonbelievers. On the contrary, many, particularly among the latter two categories, criticize the Church severely and go so far as to refuse its services or take no part in them. It is also true that there is a remarkable difference between Jesus and his disciples. The world criticizes the Church, not because it follows the Master, but because it follows him too little. And in this, as regards the way of living, they are sometimes right, and their accusations have some basis, above all in the past. But where they contradict themselves is the fact that, because of the Church that follows him too little, they feel authorized not to follow him at all.

We cannot believe in Christ and refuse the services of the Church: it would be like wanting water and refusing the water the mains guaranteed by the owner of the source itself. In fact, Christ wanted the apostles and bade them to preach to all people "to the end of time" ( Mt. 28, 20) and promised his help. Jesus never said that the apostles and their successors would always be faithful to him in how they lived, but only in teaching. Moreover, as regards action, the examples of weakness of the Church were evident from the beginning: "I tell you solemnly, this very night, before the cock crows, you will have disowned me three times" ( Mt. 26,34); but Christ at once added that Peter's faith would be helped so that he might strengthen his sisters and brothers: "But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail, and once you have recovered, you in your turn must strengthen your brothers and sisters" ( Lk. 22,32).

The gospel is a bottle of very good whiskey with many empty little glasses around it. But if we want to taste it, we need the corkscrew of the Church. Christ's doctrine is condensed in the gospels and in the apostles' epistles, but who wrote these works if not the Church? Who assured and assures the faithful that these works are authentic and inspired? Who watched over their faithful handing down and explanation if not the authority of the Institute authorized by Christ?

Jesus knew that these works would have endless different and even opposed interpretations, which could thwart his revelation; he instituted, therefore, a college of teachers and undertook to assist and guide them himself as regards the basic questions necessary to human salvation. The Church is the sole agent for importing and distributing telecommunication sets with God and for the techniques to install and use them.

That the word of God was present only in the Bible and not in the living teaching of the bishops together with the Pope was the principle assumed as the basis of their doctrines by Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli in the sixteenth century and it became a source of endless divisions against Christ's expressed will, so that today, outside the Catholic Church, the various systems of interpretation of the Bible are hundreds, each supported by a Church or a denomination separated from the others.

## **Living proofs of Christian truth**

In every generation someone tolls the death of the Church and invites everyone to the funeral, but it is the bell kneller's funeral that is celebrated. The Church is always new proof that Christ is alive: in fact, he has had many resurrections, historically and humanly unexplainable, starting from that of faith and enthusiasm of the apostles after the crucifixion, which would not have been possible if Jesus had not really risen.

The Holy Spirit's presence was promised by Christ to the Church for ever: "I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth whom the world can never receive since it neither sees nor knows God" ( Jn. 14, 16-17). The present revival of the Catholic faith in the world is so much more significant because it is realized, not in formulas watered down and adapted to the world, but according to Christ's complete and integral doctrine and way of life, first of all among young people, all signs of very good health. It shows that authentic faith is not incompatible with technology, science, democracy, and economic welfare and that, if most people put it aside, it is not because it is unsuitable to modern people: it is unsuitable only to that type of modern person who always chooses the easiest.

Mauriac wrote, "This big Catholic tree does not seem so nice unless it is really alive and, in spite of so many withered branches, it gurgles with juices and Christ's blood goes on circulating there, from the roots to the last smallest branch and to the tiniest leaf. Roman Catholicism without Christ would be an empty shell. On the contrary, even if a seaquake destroys temples and cloisters and the palaces of the organization nothing will be really destroyed since the Lamb of God will remain."

In each century, Christian and Catholic faith in particular gave birth to men and women who are living proofs of its truth. When in 1938 Graham Greene was sent to Mexico as a reporter of an important London newspaper, he was already a Catholic because of his marriage, but without conviction or commitment. The heroism of the Catholic Mexican people resisting persecution struck him strongly: "A faith rousing such witnesses," he wrote, "had to be taken seriously. I became interested in the life of an underground Church with an increasingly irresistible appeal and felt gradually a desire to deepen my knowledge of dogma, the necessity of changing my life."

### **The delayed action scandal**

"For a man indifferent to God, as I was," Frossard writes, "the quest for the meaning of life is mixed up with the abstruseness of metaphysics, seen as the most disappointing of pastimes. Having already decided in advance that God is an insoluble mystery, the indifferent person adds to the theoretical objections on the origin of the world, or in case of necessity, arguments based on the suffering of the innocents and the defects of the Church. But the need seldom occurs. . . . Anyhow, if they believed in the existence of truth, the priests would be the last to whom they would go to ask for it, and the Church, they know, for its misdeeds, the last place where to go and look for it."

In the last two centuries God has used people outside the Church to bring the Church back to the gospel. Yes, criticism because of the disloyalty of certain members of the Church to Christ was salutary and it is still a good thing. But first of all, we do not need to invent or inflate the misdeeds, since there are already enough documented, and in the second place criticism to the Church does not excuse us from entering and taking part in it.

The fact that in past centuries clergymen went astray, sometimes even seriously, from the Lord's teaching, is not a good reason to deprive oneself of the services of the present Church. The scandals occurred above all in those periods when the hierarchy of the Church, not to be dominated by kings in doctrinal and pastoral questions, acquired and maintained political sovereignty. We had thus, on one side, the independence of the teachings of the Church from alien interferences, and, on the other side, the serious disadvantages of men who had access to power as the successors of the apostles and used it for earthly interests. But not all of them were overcome by such interests: many of the bishops and popes were saints and, what counts more, doctrine and teaching century after century was substantially faithful to Christ.

Today we note the surprising phenomenon that, while in centuries when scandals were more consistent and numerous, people did not lose faith over it, now that the men of the Church are devoted to the spiritual ministry, as a general rule, people avoid it for the scandals of those former times. It is naturally a pretext. And it is boomerang and self-punishment. It is the same as if one deprived oneself of water at home today because the plumber of two centuries ago was in trouble with the police.

Christ, although he knew that only a part of the apostles' successors would be holy, said for all shepherds of souls: "Anyone who welcomes you, welcomes me and those who welcome me welcome the Father who sent me" ( Mt. 10,40). And still more: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes to the end of times" ( Mt. 28, 18-20). The charge regards teaching to the end of time, hence Christ remains even with the present successors of the apostles. There are several similar texts.

The quest for God brought Papini to see, beyond human miseries, even the superhuman greatness of the Church: "When I finished (the *History of Christ*), I felt the need to belong to the society founded by Christ. And among the innumerable churches calling themselves his faithful interpreters, I chose, not without inner contrasts and some repugnance now overcome, the Catholic, either because it really represents the main trunk of the tree planted by Jesus, but also because, in spite of the weaknesses and human faults of so many of its children, it is the one, according to my opinion, that offered humanity the most perfect conditions for total sublimation of our whole being and because it seemed to me that only in it flourished, in an abundant and radiant way, the type of hero I think the highest of: the saint."

Instead of speaking ill of someone who draws imperfect circles, try to draw a round one. It is what the saints did. And they bettered the world and themselves more than did their virulent critics. It is what Guittou wants to say: "Since I am inclined to criticize, I find in myself that defect described by Saint Paul consisting in seeing what goes bad. . . . But when I enter in myself again and I find my sound sense, I say to myself. Without the Church I would not be what I am. The reproaches I can reasonably make are nothing when compared with the benefits, they are not of the same order."

### **The Nobel Prizes of the saints**

The Church is a great hospital for sinners, but it has also nurses and doctors, even if the world is not interested in knowing them, preferring the scandals and the crime news, perhaps because reading the biographies of the saints would inspire the uncomfortable desire to become a little similar to them. But above all it is the Chief Physician who gives the hospital a good name.

For Bruce Marshall, the Church is an old galleon which, by shifting from one century to another, creaks a little. But the worms and the rust belong to us, not to God. On the contrary, the inexplicable fact that it still floats so well, after so many centuries, is due to God. "The connivance I note between the Church and God," Frossard writes, "can hold me back, not from evaluating the faults done in the centuries by people of the Church, but from taking a part for the whole, ponds for the Lake of Tiberias."

The saints of the Church are God's existence put into practice. And if we think of human weakness, we have to be astonished to see that they are so numerous. "I am surprised," Mauriac writes, "to see how so many people are scandalized by the human part of the Church: abuses, falls, denials. . . . For me the history of the Church more and more goes back to its saints; for me the mystery of the Church is a mystery more and more intertwined with the mystery of Jesus. For me it is sufficient that in the Church, because of the preaching and the sacraments, of which it has the sacred deposit,

the perfect union of God with Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Theresa of Avila, the Cur6 of Ars was achieved. On these definitive dogmas, on those rigorous morals, only on this ground and not elsewhere, I see that these boundless loves blossomed and that the mystical marriage is realized when the creatures sink finally into their Creator."

Those who say that God's thought is soul-destroying and takes us away from bettering the world, continues Frossard, express a foolishness which is the same as saying that the countless saints and Christian heroes who fought against injustice and lived for others would have been more sensitive to the social problems if they had prayed less.

## **The great rope**

Humanity is not able alone to carry out moral values and the sense of life if we do not join a source of divine energy, and present society is a proof of it. The Church is just a kind of electricity board that builds and repairs the installations connected to the power station.

"As the family," writes Carlo Carretto, "is the first great help and support of our first steps, so the Church is the help and support of all our steps, particularly in the fight against evil. . . . If I had little faith, the faith of others came towards me and if the little edifying examples were many, the great examples of the poor, simple men, women, and holy priests and religious were never failing." The holiness that the Church struggles to defend, strikes me, Frossard goes on, while its weaknesses assure me because they keep it nearer me.

The Catholic Church is conservative by nature because it received from Christ the mission to preserve the unity of the believers in him and the integrity of his doctrine along the centuries. It seems impossible to the Westerner that individuals subject to a hierarchy expressing itself with sound and indisputable definitions can ever be free and democratic, even if, strangely enough, they think they are free and democratic when they accept without discussing the data of history, physics, or sociology expressed by the experts. They do not think that the shepherds of the Church can be experts and that it is possible to show their dependence on a super-expert who promised to assist them to the end of time.

Nowadays we forget that not even theologians can install a good and independent launching pad. "Too many theologians," says John Paul II, "do not proclaim Christ's truth, but their theories." In an article in the Times, Richard Ostling shows that today the Papacy enjoys a moral authority superior to any other personality or institution throughout the world. And at the same time, behind the spectacular aspect of the Papacy, we are having a strong fight, a decisive fight for eight hundred million Catholics, which will affect, positively or negatively, the religious faith of others.

We have to keep Christ's message intact. It is threatened by manifold interpretations, not only of hundreds of Protestant denominations, but also by upheavals of division which are acting in various parts of the Catholic world. In every country, the integrity of Christ's teaching meets problems and different disruptive tendencies. Everyone, however, has a common element: the attempt to eliminate some uncomfortable basic point from the gospel to adjust to the predominant theories in that country.

In Latin America the Catholic hierarchy is divided on the increasing influence that a radical movement known as the theology of liberation is having on three hundred and twenty million Catholics in that subcontinent. John Paul II insists on the themes of poverty, human rights, and social justice in every speech; but the theology of liberation holds that the struggle for social and economic emancipation should be led by lay Christians, whereas the priests should devote themselves above all to the full announcement of the gospel.

In the United States the Pope and bishops closer to him arouse indignation for the rigid position taken as regards sexual ethics and especially about themes as abortion, homosexuality, birth control, ecclesiastic discipline, and women priests.

In Europe, as in the United States, the Pope and his collaborators have to face theological deviations whose interpretation of the basic teachings of the Bible differs from those of the Church of Rome.

In the Third World, especially in Africa and in India, there are problems of "inculturation," i.e., to adapt Catholic doctrine to local religions. John Paul II is for pluralism, but only when this does not touch the teachings clearly revealed by Christ and as such pointed out by the Fathers of the Church, the councils, and the popes. The pope's mission "is to serve the universal unity' of God's people about this know-how "necessary to salvation."

The Church is like a great rope of mountain climbing beginners who climb "God's K2," where a false step can be extremely risky. The venture is remotecontrolled by Christ who has already reached the summit, while the pope is the authorized director with the walkie-talkie. If the climbers intend to go their own way with their own group, the head guide declares he cannot assume the responsibility for the safety of the participants.

### **There is no need to measure the whole house**

In faith in Christ through the Church, as soon as we see the credibility of the whole, the single points, or dogmas, should not cause great difficulties, for it is not reasonable to examine them one by one by means of reason, expecting to clarify how they are possible. Centuries of studies would be required and above all a superhuman intelligence. The most obvious conquest of reason, Pascal says, is to admit that there exist many things which surmount it. Christ's resurrection, his presence in the Eucharist, Mary's virginity and motherhood, her assumption into heaven, the pope's infallibility (regarding only the solemn definitions "ex cathedra"), our final resurrection, are all dogmas (dogma = an assured truth because it was revealed by God) of which there is no need to know *how*.

God's omnipotence is sufficient to accomplish deeds mysterious to us as so many problems of physics and biology are mysterious to us too. It is sufficient for me to know that an enunciation was revealed by Christ and interpreted officially by the Church and set with all the others in the plan of God's love for humanity and the free participation of the latter to God's plan. When the foundations are checked at various points and made sure that they are solid, there is no need to test the entire building.

## **Believer but not a churchgoer?**

Charity is God's existence put into practice. But besides charity, daily prayer of the heart and weekly worship together with the brethren are needed. Without practice the asserted faith is an empty or false word. I think you are my mother, but I do not speak to you. I think you are my father, but I do not visit you. I think you are a great master, but I do not ask you to teach me. I think I have a great treasure, but I do not care about digging it out. I think this is the medicine for my illness, but I do not take it. I believe in natural systems of life, but I do not follow them. I believe in the driving school, but I start driving without going to it.

Believing without nourishing faith with God's words, the Eucharist, and participation in the life of the Christian community leads gradually to a more uncertain faith devoid of meaning which afterwards, in touch with the world, dies. A log, separated from the lighted fire, soon goes out. Believing without practicing is the same as believing in dinner without eating it.

## **Protests against the 'refrigerator' of the revealed word**

In an interview published with great effect in the Swiss newspaper, *Basler Zeitung*, theologian Hans Ming, now that the wind of democracy has struck the east European governments, stated: "It seems to me that the last bullheaded ones are in the Vatican, the last ones who have not noticed yet that the world does not put up with domineering and totalitarian systems any longer." Didn't Christ want a Church where only Peter and the apostles united with him are assisted by him to interpret his teaching with loyalty? The Church cannot be a democracy, not because this did not exist at the time of Christ (the Sanhedrin ruled the Jewish religion collectively), but because the Church keeps a deposit of divine revelation absolutely superior to human opinions, while every democracy depends on the changes in its human supporters.

In an absolutely unknown and mysterious field as the way leading to God, the saints and fervent Christians have always tried, not so much the thousand different opinions of various theologians, more or less affected by the fashionable theories of their century, but the sound explanation of those whom Christ promised his assistance to the end of time. The principle of a democratic Church was introduced by Luther, who denied that Peter's and the apostles' successors are the only authorized interpreters of the Bible, and declared that, on the contrary, everybody can interpret it with the help of the Holy Spirit (free soul-searching examination). This doctrine caused an incredible fragmentation of Christian Churches and doctrines which go back to Christ, and that is against his expressed will and the believers' spiritual interests. There are now hundreds of denominations or independent Christian churches and all with their own doctrines. Even the spread of atheism and indifferentism, in Protestant more than in the Catholic countries, seems to show the validity of the Catholic formula, the conservative way the Church has been acting since the first centuries.

A 1981 inquiry by the "European Value system" in nine Western European Countries points out that 22% of Catholics and 8% of Protestants attend Sunday services" and that "Catholics resist change better, that is, the named Catholic region is more attached to its own religious creed." Undoubtedly we have in common the substance with our Evangelical (or Protestants) and Orthodox brothers and sisters and now even with the followers of Lefebvre. But it is the way of dealing with it that divides us.

Christ is the Extraterrestrial of God who brought the DNA of a new humanity into our globe, where the delicate formula of our progressive divinization lies. The Orthodox brothers and sisters and Lefebvre's followers, ultraconservatives are the freezer; Protestants and the dissenting theologians, progressivists, the genetic manipulation; the Catholic Church, conservative, is the 'refrigerator.'

### **The passengers and the captain**

Right from the first centuries, the Fathers of the Church always applied this and other similar statements of Christ to the pope: "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosened in heaven" ( Mt. 16, 16-18).

In these words that every learned person acknowledges as word-for-word pronounced by Jesus, the pope's authority and mission are clear. Unity is necessary and Christ wants the edifice of the Church to be united because it is solidly founded on Peter's rock. There will be disruptive ferments (the gates of the underworld, i.e., the power of evil), but they will never hold out against that Church Christ considers his. The power of decision belongs to Peter, assisted by Christ himself to interpret his teaching: keys, to bind and loose, expressions of the time to indicate supreme authority. The unity of the Church was obviously not wanted by Christ only in Peter's time; henceforth Peter will have to have successors, invested with the same mission and authority.

The Second Vatican Council ( 1962-1965), together with a greater social conscience, recommended dialogue with the other noncatholic Christians, with other religions and nonbelievers, to communicate the spiritual riches the Catholics received and kept, and to receive the contribution of moral or religious values present in the other spiritual systems. Nevertheless, as regards the authority of the pope and the bishops united with him, the council declared that, in problems regarding faith and morals, the authentic interpretation of Christ's thought is found in them.

On the contrary, the "progressivist" theologians went from the precouncil excess of the Church's fault, to the opposite extreme where the Church has nothing to say and to give to the world, to the other religions, and to the separated brethren, but only to learn, and to abandon all its traditional doctrines, shown by the use of capital letters for the States, Nations, the Country, the Senate, Universities, etc. and the use of small letters for the church, pope, gospel, sacraments, sanctifying grace and, presently, I wonder, even god. How much humility! The council did not mean to authorize the ship's passengers, and not even the officers, to carry out their own opinions on the steering of the ship against the captain's route. Staying with the council does not mean at all to come to terms with the theories of the world.

### **The present revival of faith**

But if the Church has problems and difficulties today, we cannot deny that it is also going through a wonderful period of spiritual awakening and vitality. The historian Delumeau writes: "Our contemporaries. . . often have the impression that Christianity had its apogee so long ago -- in the Middle Ages or in the seventeenth century -- and that the curve of its destiny is now irreparably descending. This simplistic vision is based on an unsound postulate, i.e., that in the Christianity of

the olden days all the world was really Christian. It is historically more correct to replace the ascending and later descending curve with spikey lines to highlight a series of 'awakenings' along the generations." If the Council was the context in which some went astray, as we noted, it produced an authentic spring of faith in others. "It is true," Delumeau goes on, "that Western Christianity lost much in quantity. But did it not gain in quality, i.e., in inner life of its believers, and in generosity?"

Another historical error, increasingly seen today, is to make the crisis of faith start with the Second Vatican Council. It is obviously a difficult change. But I make mine the formula of the Canadian episcopate that seems to characterize the situation of Western Christianity well. "The reconstruction of an old house looks like a ruined house for a long time." I am convinced, with Pierre Dentin, that in the Christian people's heart, including the Westerner, new attention to the gospel is maturing and, with it, a Church detached from money and devoted to a welcoming and simple service, a minority but stimulating"

It is interesting to note that such a revival of faith -- spontaneous prayer, commitment to helping neighbors, interest in God's Word, joy, vocations to the priesthood and the religious life -- today is visible above all in "Movements" (Renewal in the Spirit, New Catechumenals, Communion and Liberation, Fireplace of Unity, Cursillos of Christianity, Communities of Christian Life, Light and Life, Community of Saint Giles, etc.), in communities spread in nations or even throughout the world, and characterized by a particular integrity of the doctrine and loyalty to the teaching. It is natural that good music cannot derive from each member of an orchestra playing what's/he likes, but from everyone following the composer's score and from everyone paying attention to the conductor's beat.

The Church wanted by Christ is still necessary to the modern world. If it has not always struggled in the past on the side of justice, it has at least safeguarded that faith which alone gives meaning to human life and makes us sisters and brothers. It gives us a face, we who no longer know whether we are the supreme crown of the universe or a miserable whirl of molecules. It shows us with the saints that we are God's children walking towards a community of true eternal love and not naked apes travelling towards a locus, a communal burial ground. The Church saved us from the chaos we have been victims of since, when it is not listened to by most people any longer. But even today, for whoever open their eyes, it is a tug to pull us towards the source, instead of being, as some would like, a raft to drag us towards the waterfall. The only windows cut in the wall of darkness surrounding us are those of its dogmas reasonably founded. The worn out pavement of tears of its cathedrals is the only way which is always open to joy. The Church is the only institution today which does not match its offerings to the results of market research, because God who guides it wants to lift humankind up and not let it go down according to its rating. Today the Church is perhaps the only functioning loudspeaker for the voice of a conscience become feeble.

## **CHAPTER 21**

### **DIABOLICAL POSSESSION**

#### **Diabolical possessions and Satanism**

When people stop believing in God, Chesterton observed, they might think they no longer believe in anything. But it is not so: when they give up believing in God, they are ready to believe in the first thing that come along, UFOs, gurus, spiritualist sessions, witches. They are also ready to worship Satan, saying "It's not true, but I believe it." Today nobody "officially" believes in the devil, but novels and films about Satan enjoy huge box-office success. People who think they are possessed by the devil are increasing in number, and groups of devil worshippers are regularly interviewed and describe their black masses on television.

"If in the past," writes theologian Luigi Sartori, "we committed the sin of 'ingenuousness' in suspecting that the devil is active in everything everywhere, we now risk the opposite extreme. To believers, God's word is authoritative. In it we find God as an experience of love and salvation but also the presence of an evil spirit in the world." On the basis of the Bible, the Church teaches that the devil really exists as a cause of temptation: spirits, created good by God, but who freely chose independence from and rebellion against God, separated from God and invite humanity to do the same. Diabolical possession is not equally clear. In the gospels we read of Christ freeing people possessed by the devil but we do not know for certain if and how many of them exist today. Above all, it is difficult to single them out because some phenomena of supposed possession are really psychic disorders (maniac-depressive psychosis, paranoia, schizophrenia, and, above all, hysteria). In some cases, paranormal phenomena may also be present (telepathy, clairvoyance, telekinesis).

Possession is very likely when the following elements are present at the same time: a) abnormal and violent aversion to God at the moment of possession; b) changing personality (the subject during possession has a wholly different personality than normal) and complete absence of symptoms of psychic disorders; c) parapsychological phenomena (xenoglossia, clairvoyance, telekinesis). In some instances the three elements coincide. God would allow possession as a consequence of some sins and spiritualistic sessions, or as a test to purify and induce prayer, or even as a manifestation of the existence of the tempter and of the power of grace to liberate humanity from it.

However, the devil's existence is not revealed primarily by possession but in the gospels and in what happens today in the world, in gas chambers, in gulags, in the disintegration of the family, in drug abuse, in the various mafias in the world, and in Satanism. The image of a devil with horns and cloven hoofs has been replaced with the pure satanic idea of liberation from God and it is on this that modern people have set their sights.

## CHAPTER 22

### THE NEW AGE OF AQUARIUS

#### **New age or the Supermarket of Mystery**

"Often you have to die to prove something," says Jacopo Belbo, one of the three main characters in Umberto Eco *The Pendulum of Foucault*. What does his death by hanging onto Foucault's pendulum prove? First of all that humanity, since it cannot resign itself to living without values in atheism and nihilism, and since it finds the road offered by Christ too difficult, fills time looking for hidden meanings, mysterious plans, esoteric escapes. But, in the long run, these also disappoint us bitterly. People are hungry for plans. If you offer them one, they throw themselves on it like a pack of wolves. You invent and they believe.

This phenomenon of a return to the sacred, but by following perverted ways, characterizes history as an ongoing motif. Today sects are swarming in the western world: mysterious irrationalism is again enchanting; demonomania and hieromania are polluting the atmosphere. The States, Canada, Latin America, and now Europe are seeing a real escalation and booming of sects: the church of Dr. Moon, Hare Krishna, Scientology, but above all, the New Age, prophets of the occult, alternative and unstructured religiousness.

In the new successful sects, of which New Age or Age of Aquarius is the most outstanding example, you breathe a syncretistic, individualistic air. Here there is room for everything: from communication with extraterrestrials to mystic ecologism, from transcendental meditation to the most improbable forms of self-healing and "healing prayer," and on to the wider esoteric issues and books of magic. "In America," writes Jean François Mayer, a leading expert in these phenomena, "this is called a 'cultic milieu,' i.e., an environment that breeds cults and where the ideology of the Age of Aquarius reigns. Here an immense crowd of people thirsting for experience, mystery, and the paranormal is stirring. Each customer, with some customizing, can create a private religion with the appropriate amounts of reincarnation, divination with Tarot, two teaspoonsful of ecology, four drops of astrology and zen and yoga to taste. While the great religions, from Catholicism to Islam, have a single door and an obligatory itinerary, with this new 'religiousness' you can enter through any of numerous doors. Everything can be sampled without obligation."

It is the type of religion the consumer society deserves, fit not to change, but to confirm its trends. The present wave of occultism, the editorial in the October 6, 1984, *Civiltà Cattolica* points out, is to be read as a mark of the times expressing a need, although aberrant and disfigured, to approach the divine. In particular, it is a need to approach, with the help of phenomena, signs and indications of credibility accessible to senses and within everyone's reach.

In its long history and in the sacred texts, the Church possesses a wide range of far more serious and convincing apparitions and miracles that we tend to ignore indiscriminately. But the most reliable of these could throw some light on the road followed by modern people so hampered in their faith by current materialism. As Mayer observes: "We must bear in mind that all these neomystical movements (sects) offer an experience of the sacred or a miracle, an inexplicable events such as

healings, apparitions, messages from other worlds. Their experience becomes almost the only criterion of truth. In the Church's traditions there is everything to answer this kind of need, an age-old knowledge of spiritual states, illuminations, and physical phenomena accompanying ascetical progress. Unfortunately, this wisdom was pushed to one side by theology reduced to an intellectualistic exercise that ignored the concrete needs of a spiritual life."

### **Jehovah's Witnesses and the postponed end of the world**

And then there are some sects that draw their inspiration from the Bible. Not only do they do without the Church and Christ's authorized teaching, but also without the serious scientific biblical studies fundamental for both Protestants and Catholics. They interpret the Bible so fecklessly that, according to common judgement, they cannot be called Christians.

Among the most battle-trained are Jehovah's Witnesses who, interpreting literally and quoting continuously some passages, manage to annul the contents of all the remaining parts of the Bible. They shut heaven to those who do not share their faith and stir up fear of a world about to end, but postpone this from year to year as their belief is proved groundless.

## **CHAPTER 23**

### **APPARITIONS**

#### **Apparitions of the Virgin Mary and Spiritual Renewal Communities**

Human need of the sacred finds a valid answer in reliable apparitions and in spiritual renewal movements. Presumed apparitions, especially of the Virgin Mary, are very frequent today, but most of them do not offer sufficient guarantees of authenticity. Others, approved by the Church as authentic, have given rise to important sanctuaries where millions of people go and, through prayer and receiving the sacrament of penance, produce positive and surprising changes in their lives.

Today a strong stream of conversion and renewal of life in Christ occurs during pilgrimages to Medjugorje. There is nothing new or sensational in Mary's messages but rather a renewing and a stressing of Jesus' main teachings. The numerous and vital spiritual renewal movements that sprang up after Vatican II deserve special mention. Today's Christian is not satisfied with an ecclesial life made up of Sunday masses merely "listened to," an obligation with cold and stereotyped (so they seem) prayers read from a book and a sermon often quite remote from today's way of thinking and today's problems. "We need a church," Carlo Carretto writes, "made of friendship, authentic contacts, mutual exchanges, little things . . . a church that harks back to the origins."

Oriental sects and the Jehovah's Witnesses have been so successful because they have the enthusiasm of the early Church. But we can find this also in young Catholic renewal movements approved by the Church. "No one tries," Carretto continues, "to change the Church if it gives them what they are looking and thirsting for: truth, love, friendship, communion. . . . If instead of a

Jehovah's Witness, we had met a "Focolarino," a neocatecumenal, a member of Catholic Action or Spiritual Renewal, or even a Boy Scout, things would have been different."

You "experience" these movements. First of all there is a sense of belonging to a community and it is a warm feeling. Then there is living, spontaneous, community prayer. Lastly there is joy, that visible feature of faith when it is alive and lived in common.

"The birth of these movements is a magnificent proof of the work of the Holy Spirit and one of the most effective means for fecundity for tomorrow's church. . . . The growth of these movements is enormous and demonstrates just how alive and well contemporary Christianity is. They are surely the answer to a need much felt. . . . If you have ever entered one of these communities," Carretto continues, "you do not feel like going and taking part in any other kind of liturgy, like the cold and indifferent services of the noncatechized, official, and stiff churchgoers. Or better, you will continue to go to church so as not to leave your parish, a cell of the people of God, but you will want to make it much more alive."

## **CHAPTER 24**

### **GOD IS NOT SO**

#### **When you meet a "hard" biblical expression**

Dear atheists, Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Sartre . . . ! We believers are very grateful to them. They are very useful to the cause of authentic faith because, even if they were blind in one eye and could not see the reasonable and well grounded facts of faith, they could see very well out of the other eye. They thus helped us unmask surrogates that were and are passed off as the genuine product. Atheists explain why faith is often seen in a bad light even by very respectable people. There are, in fact, many false images and masks of God in circulation and many believers are on the right side but for the wrong reasons. Several of these masks stem from a literal interpretation of the Bible. There is no heresy or falsehood (and the Jehovah's Witnesses are living proof of this), that cannot find a basis in some literal quotation from the bible that is not read in context and not compared with other passages.

No wonder that in a collection of about 70 books, written thousands of years ago in a far away country by many different authors, there will be expressions that, at first sight, hurt our feelings or seem to contradict the idea of God as a good Father and a fair judge as revealed by Christ.

This is another argument in favor of the need for the Church's teaching: the Bible can be obscure and lend itself to personal interpretation leading to all kinds of misunderstandings. An important principle to understand a Bible passage is its comparison with other passages from the Scriptures dealing with the same topic or, perhaps, using the same word in a different context. The semitic mentality and language of the time must be taken into consideration, as well as divine revelation, which was progressive and adapted itself to the level of understanding of the ancient Jews, gradually preparing them for the full light brought by Christ.

## False images of God

The love between man and woman greatly exaggerates the difference between a person and all others. God's love does not. All human beings, in their spiritual unconscious, are attracted to God like a duck to water or bees to nectar. But most people do not acquire consciousness of this and create a cold and hard image of God as if God were a selfish duke who, from the top of his castle, lords it over his hungry peasants.

"I have read," Guitton writes, "a thought in Valéry's *Carnets* but can no longer locate it. In substance it said: 'If God existed, if only I could believe in this existence, I would be eternally happy. I would not be interested in anything but God. I would feel surrounded by tenderness and protection. Worldly pleasures would be nothing. Death would be nothing. If I knew that God exists, if my life were but a postponement of my meeting God, even if this life were difficult, it would be as sweet as waiting a long time for a woman I love but whose arrival is absolutely certain. If God existed, nothing would be valuable in my eyes. If God existed, I feel I would be naturally good to everybody, like a new multimillionaire throwing bags of money everywhere for the simple pleasure of doing so. If

God existed, I feel my past faults would be absorbed by God and forgiven simply because I would recognize them as faults. . . . But God is not made known to us and for the world and also for those who believe in God, everything happens as if God did not exist.' "

Apart from the tenderness and protection which are not to be understood in a childish way, Valéry's image of God is correct. We know that God is made known to Jesus in this way. But ordinary believers do not seem to realize that; fortunately God does exist and all the happiness on the horizon is real. Unfortunately, many offensive images of God circulate and, perhaps, certain expressions used in sermons are partly to blame.

A good way to clean up a disfigured image is to apply to atheists. Religion, as the theologian Moltmann shows, received purifying contributions and creative impulses simply from the thought and action of those who wanted to destroy it. God seems to make use of nonbelievers to lead believers to a better way of believing.

The simplest and most effective method to clean soiled icons is to interpret any fact or expression in the light of Christ's central revelation: God is the ideal who is also reality. God is perfect Love and invites us to collaborate freely with God to be transformed and so enter God's family. God's nature is described by Whitehead, mathematician and philosopher, as an image of delicate care where nothing is ever lost, as indulgent wisdom and endless patience. God is seen as "the poet of the world" who realizes a "vision of truth, beauty, and goodness" to those who open up to God."

Faith is not only believing in God, but is also having a good opinion of God. There is no need to waste a lot of words correcting false images about God. Everyone will be able to do this when they meet a "scandalous" expression in the Bible. Later on, reading and meditating on other pages of the holy text, they will find other passages to counterbalance the previous one. If we look deeper into the matter, we will find that the interpretations of biblical scholars and the Church explain the reason of the former and the latter.

Here are some of the most common. God is a surrogate of what a parent is for a child. When we grow up "our impotence is lasting and so is our burning wish for a parent and for gods." God's (illusory) task would be to drive nature's terrors away, reconciling humanity with destiny and death, and so repay for all suffering and hardship arising from normal human life. In a word, this false image is of God as a surrogate for what is lacking in human life.

There are others: God as the projection of unfulfilled earthly wishes ( Feuerbach), the opium of the people, allowing them to bear the oppression of capitalism ( Marx), solace for the weak unable to assert themselves in life ( Nietzsche).

For others God is the dealer in earthly favors (health, love, family success), and prayer and the Mass are the money for the exchange. Or God is the master of the "big house" who imposes arbitrary rule over individual and group destiny and is angry with those who do not submit, threatening them with dreadful punishments. Or God is seen as an inflexible judge who, to expiate the world's sins, decrees his own son's sacrifice, agony, and death. More often than not atheism is dissatisfied theism, according to Teilhard de Chardin.

Some possible correctives: Instead of a God imposing moral law as a series of arbitrary prohibitions taking freedom away from humanity, let us see moral law as summed up in love and as the deepest and most authentic need of the human spirit indicating the way to lasting happiness.

Instead of a God condemning humanity to eternal torment (hell), we could note that in all religions, actions and moral choices in this life have positive or negative consequences in an afterlife proportional to the faults and merits. It is the law of proportionality between cause and effect. Hell is not a punishment threatened by an angry judge but a self-punishment by those who rejected justice, truth, and love consciously and so frequently that they reached the point of no return, namely, a firm and irreversible desire for evil and separation from God.

Instead of a God who, foreseeing the future enchains everyone in their destinies, we recognize not that "What God has foreseen is doomed to happen" but that God can also foresee that we choose freely. Neither seeing what happens nor foreseeing it eliminates freedom.

For a God who imposes that humans must not rebel against others injustices but be resigned and suffer them unprotesting, recall also that Christ struggled vigorously against injustice and the the Bible justifies the struggling, and even the violence, in cases of clear self-defence or to defend justice.

A widespread mistake is the God "whose inexorable justice claimed a human sacrifice, the son of God. This image is very widespread but completely false," says Cardinal Ratzinger. "The reality is much simpler," replies Delumeau, "God's Son came among his people but they did not welcome him." He did not come to be crucified. But, as he came disarmed among the wicked and knew he was risking his life, he accepted death so as not to betray his message."

Then there is God as the "Fairy Godmother" answering prayers for good health, good harvests, safe journeys, and so on. But this too does not correspond to God's true love for humanity. We have received sufficient gifts to be able to control nature and overcome the hardships of life (science,

technology, enterprise, courage in adversity, compensating benefits). Natural laws must follow their course. Prayer helps, above all, to overcome temptations, to be granted forgiveness for faults, to conquer despair and laziness and to arouse devotion, justice and love. And, lastly to discover the meaning of life.

In conclusion, what is this virtue of faith that makes us follow God and the word as proposed by Christ and his Church? Catholic theology explains that faith is supernatural: at the beginning, during life, and at the end of life, God's interior illumination urges humanity, supports us, and leads us to faith.

Faith is free because there are no absolute proofs but only signs and clues for the reason and intuitions for the spirit. Everyone is free to emphasize either the intuitions pointing towards belief or the equivocal signs leading to doubt. Furthermore, everyone is free to practice to a greater or lesser extent those moral virtues that assist spiritual intuition: basic trust, intellectual humility, and charity.

Lastly, faith is reasonable because the act of faith is entirely worthy of human intelligence. In short, if using reason alone to reach God is like using an old car to reach the moon, reason with the gospels and grace is like an fine old car used to reach the launching pad.

## **CHAPTER 25**

### **PARAPSYCHOLOGY AND FAITH**

#### **Unbelievable appearances of faith**

It should not surprise us that the atheist and the indifferent do not see sufficient reason to believe, and so they turn away from faith. But even a poor believer examining and substantially accepting the reasons for belief is left disconcerted and perplexed by elements of faith that are too distant from ordinary human experience. The real difficulty is a God who is not seen or heard, who has no body (and therefore, in our normal experience, is unreal). But this God, sees people and events all over the world and even our innermost thoughts, receives every prayer, all our messages and answers us interiorly. This God knows the future unknown to us and acts on matter creating or modifying it without physically touching it. Apparitions seem magic to us and fairylike, though they are often witnessed in the Bible, in the lives of the saints, and we frequently hear speak of them even in our times. But, above all, we must note an extreme reluctance for the modern mind, influenced by materialism, to believe in life after death.

"Nobody has come back from the afterlife"; this materialistic slogan has become an "undisputed truth." The many jokes about heaven and ghosts make anyone believing in apparitions ridiculous; many theologians are ready to deny them even without examining them. The presumed dogmatic lack of serious, documented, and verified apparitions induces many believers to a compelled and forced faith. They are in that spiritual attitude which could be summed up in the saying: "It is not

true, but I believe it," and which can be embodied in the inconsolable despair of such "believers" at the arrival of "eternal happiness," for them or for their dear ones.

### **High demand rate for the paranormal**

But along with skepticism about faith and the afterlife in present Western society, we observe a very lively interest and a vague and generalized credulity towards certain mysterious phenomena that appear to bring references or communications from another world. Many believers and theologians look with pity at the paranormal world, as one of the many aspects of modern spiritual bewilderment. Or better they take pains not to look at it: they even boast that they know nothing about it and they want to remain so. That is due to the fact that under the name of parapsychology they easily mix up with serious phenomena (which they do not know but have been studied and tested also in universities for a century), the most squalid cheats, commercial speculations and illusions the market offers to the thirst for the 'extraordinary' of superficial people: the esoteric, magic, astrology, chiromancy, occultism, and spiritualism, this last harmful even when authentic. The high current demand for this mixture is the dissipation of faith, the last breath of the spiritual (the sum to be carried forward after God has been subtracted) and a demonstration that the weaker that faith is in the Creator the stronger is belief in fetishes.

On the contrary, to separate the counterfeit from the good, there are many well documented facts that offer modern people good clues about life after death. These contradict the materialistic view of life and induce us to lift our eyes towards heaven. The special value of these phenomena, as a help to reasonable faith, is the fact that they are collected, studied, and brought to people's attention by scholars (also by some true scientists), who have never been in contact with the Church and who reciprocate the diffidence the Church showed towards them until fairly recently.

If it as if, on his return from China, Marco Polo told some hard to believe stories and later on another traveller from China, unknown to him, told the exact same stories. Parapsychology shows us the same events that appear unbelievable in faith but documents with earthly experience: people who without the intermediary of their bodies and therefore like God, angels, and saints, know distant facts (clairvoyance), read other people's minds (telepathy), receive and answer messages (telepathy again). They sometimes know the future (precognition), modify matter without physically touching it (telekinesis), go to distant places without their bodies, see what happens there, appear, reveal themselves, speak, act and then disappear (bilocation).

A life of faith is continuous reliance on powers similar to those studied in parapsychology even if the latter are weaker and clearly come from the spirit of human beings in this world while the former come from God, Christ, the Virgin, the saints, the angels, the demons, and the dead. Therefore, if such powers, on the basis of verifiable facts, can be proved as real in this present life and in people like us, there is no reason why we should deny them in the beings Christ has revealed to us.

That parapsychology is becoming a science is shown by the thousands of laboratory experiments conducted from the 1930s on by researchers at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, and in other universities, and at the School of Joseph Bank Rhine. They demonstrated the existence of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and telekinesis as extrasensory phenomena. These

experiments and conclusions were taken as valid by a number of scientists and university professors attending the International Congress of Parapsychology at Utrecht ( Holland) in 1953. Today, over 260 universities and centers study paranormal phenomena.

All currents and schools of parapsychology recognize that agents see, know, and act independently from their sense organs and brains. It is absolutely spiritual knowledge and vision that is free from organs, the body, space, and time. In these cases the human spirit leaves the space-time dimension that condition our body and our normal sense-cerebral cognition, to enter a spiritual dimension where past and future overlap and where events happening somewhere else appear as if in the same place.

Therefore, *a fortiori* God can see everything that is happening in various places and what people are thinking. God knows the future and is and has reality though God has no body or sense organs. In a book of mine I think I could prove, drawing from the school of Hornell Hart and Robert Crookall, that bilocation, if supported by valid objective proof, is a strong indication of other-world life. As a matter of fact, if in the present life the spirit can detach itself from the body and see and act outside it (as seems likely), we can think that it can also do this if the body is no longer functioning. The apparitions of saints to the sick, if followed by their instantaneous recovery from serious illness, are proof of this.

Here some of the outstanding scientists and researchers who have carried out serious research on and made major discoveries about parapsychology: William Crookes ( 1829-1919) famous English physicist. Curt J. Ducasse ( 1881-1969), Professor of Philosophy at Providence University (USA). Vladimir Bechterev ( 1857-1927), Professor of Psychiatry, St. Petersburg. William J. Crawford (1865-1920), Professor of Physics, Belfast. Sir William E Barrett ( 1844-1924) Professor of Physics at the International College, London. Gustave Geley ( 1865-1924), physician, Director of the Institut International de la Métapsychique, Paris. William Mackenzie ( 1877-1970), Professor of Philosophy, Geneva University. Jn. Bank Rhine ( 1895-1987), Professor of Parapsychology, Durham University (USA). Sir Oliver Lodge ( 1851-1940) Professor of Physics, Birmingham University (UK). William McDougall ( 1871-1938), Professor of Psychology, Harvard University (USA). Charles Richet ( 1895-1935), Professor at the Sorbonne, 1913 Nobel recipient for Medicine. Henry Sidgwick ( 1828-1900), Professor of Philosophy, Cambridge. Albert Schrenck Notzing ( 1862-1929), Professor of Philosophy, Munich University. Hans Bender, Professor of Parapsychology, Freiburg University. Rena Sudre, physician Director of the Institut International de la Métapsychique, Paris. Samuel Soal ( 1889-1966), Professor of Mathematics, London University. Willem Tenhaeff ( 1894-1980), Professor of Parapsychology, Utrecht University ( Holland). R.H. Thouless ( 1894-1975), Professor of Psychology, Cambridge University. J.C.F. Zoellner ( 1834-1882), Professor of Physics, Leipzig University. Leonid Vasiliev ( 1891-1966), Professor of Psychiatry, St. Petersburg. Charles T. Tart, Professor of Psychology, California University. Hornell Hart, Professor of Sociology, Durham University (USA). Robert Crookall, Professor of Zoology, Aberdeen University (UK). Andreas Resch, Professor of Parapsychology, the Lateran University, Rome.

## **The spiritual unconscious**

The twentieth century has been highlighted by the discovery of the unconscious. Human beings are dominated by unconscious drives and desires of a sexual nature ( Freud), by social drives (Adler), towards self-realization, individual and collective (Jung). More recently it has been discovered that the need for God and moral values reveals an unconscious of spiritual nature (Frankl, Erikson, Rollo May) supporting religious faith even when it cannot give the reasons for its convictions.

At this point I would like to formulate some hypotheses, still to be tested, but which, in my opinion, explain the facts with surprising precision. I know that to put theology side by side with psychoanalysis and parapsychology may sound strange to many experts of the first two and who know very little about the third or know only its quackish and false forms. I have been studying parapsychology for fifteen years -- the kind that is highlighted by serious research. I think this will help, with other scientific disciplines, to open a new and valid approach to a reasoned faith.

From studies on parapsychological phenomena the existence of a paranormal unconscious seems evident. In scientific parapsychology it is called the "Subliminal Ego" ( Myers and Tyrrel), "Cosmic Tank" ( William James) or "Universal Unconscious" ( Edward von Hartmann and others). This unconscious seems to be the human spirit itself which, when it becomes self-aware, realizes it is independent from space and time and in touch with other spirits, both human and superhuman. As long as the brain functions (the senses, reason, etc.), it is dormant. But when the faculties are suspended (as in hypnosis or a trance), perception of the paranormal unconscious can occur to consciousness and we have instances of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and so on.

Paranormal unconscious seems to be identified with the human spirit and therefore also with spiritual unconsciousness that permits faith in man. The only difference between the two seems to be the object the spirit is applied to: in faith by developing mystical phenomena, it knows God and divine messages. Through presentiment culminating in paranormal phenomena, it knows -- without the senses -the thoughts of other spirits or facts of this world distant in time and space.

It is then clear how faith has dark moments and others when it sees more clearly, also with no explicit reasoning. They are illuminations, conversions, intellectual visions which, like paranormal phenomena, cannot be foreseen or provoked at will. For faith, as well as for paranormal faculties, there are conditions favoring and others obstructing it. Silence, meditation, and abstention from a sensual and instinctive life assist both channels.

Some people are more and others less endowed with paranormal faculties (nobody is completely without them, as the experiments by Rhine at Durham University prove), even as faith is naturally easier for some people. Even the less gifted have some glimmers that they can develop.

In faith, as in paranormal unconsciousness, the best knowledge is achieved through intellectual vision, accompanied by a suspension of the faculties of the brain. This is called ecstasy when referred to God and trance in human things. Both strong faith and paranormal faculties arise from an awakening of the Spiritual unconsciousness or Spirit. This explains why most saints have paranormal faculties (reading the heart, clairvoyance, foretelling the future, bilocation) and also

mystical gifts. Obviously, faith, and even more mystical gifts that are communications with God, require a special grace and invitation by God, and this is not the case in paranormal phenomena.

Intuitive faith seems to derive from a weak, dark, and confused perception of what intellectual and mystic vision grants clearly and with absolute certainty. Likewise, in the paranormal field, the vague foreboding of a distant or future fact is the weak and dark perception of what clear telepathy, precognition, or clairvoyance show without any doubt.

The most importance difference between faith, spiritual unconscious, and paranormal unconscious is, above all, the fact that the former, having God as its object, requires an opening towards God (humility and trust) and a quest for moral virtues. The latter does not require this as it is directed towards earthly realities.

This hypothesis also explains how in intuitive faith (not in reasoned faith), we are sure and unsure at the same time. Spiritual unconscious, through intuitive faith, reaches a core of truth ("I feel somebody must be above us," "I feel Christianity is true") and, in a moment it sees it, it is sure. But then intuition stops and, as detailed knowledge or reasons for believing are missing, the rational part, the only active part remaining, is in trouble and cannot justify what it believes either to itself or to others. Thus dissatisfaction and confusion appear due to the separation of these two faculties -- part of our intellectual makeup that seem to see different or even contradictory things. It is as if a person, looking with one eye, sees particular objects and sees wholly different things with the other. Acquiring reasonable faith grants greater peace and certainty with both eyes open, uniting the two points of view and giving 3-dimensional vision.

### **A valid clue to life after death**

In the human brain and nervous system, physical and psychical activities develop in parallel and in mutual relationship. If the brain is damaged by traumas, lesions, aging cells, or atherosclerosis, the senses, memory, imagination, and reason itself all suffer and stop working normally. If the brain is treated with appropriate therapies, these faculties can begin to work again. Materialists conclude that since the brain and the nervous system are destroyed at death, the psyche (mind, thought, soul, spirit, whatever you like) also stops existing.

Today, in the light of more thorough studies of the paranormal, proof that a part of the soul (spiritual unconscious) is independent of the brain, is accessible to everyone. The philosophical reasons in favor of the spiritual nature and immortality of the soul given by many outstanding spiritualist philosophers, Christian and otherwise, remain valid. But the frequently stated phenomena of telepathy, clairvoyance, and bilocation offer an experimental proof that the spirit can understand and see independently from sense organs and the brain and even, in bilocation, outside the body.

It is logical that faculties connected with brain functions (senses, imagination, cerebral memory, reason), stop working when the brains stops functioning. But spiritual activity does not: it does not depend on the brain. Furthermore, when the faculties of the brain are working, the spirit necessarily "dozes" and only perceives forebodings and glimmers, vague religious, moral, social, philosophical, and aesthetical intuitions. Only when the activity of the brain decreases can the spirit acquire a little

vigor. Through suspension of these faculties, i.e., through ecstasy and similar states, the spirit becomes conscious, sees, knows, and acts. And all this completely independent of the senses and the brain.

A constant can be observed in both mystical and paranormal phenomena: the more extrasensory faculties are active and conscious, the more sensorial faculties are reduced or suspended. It follows that when brain activity and faculties cease altogether in death, the spirit can exercise those faculties, today called paranormal, normally and without hindrance. Without scientific parapsychology, great faith is necessary to believe in life after death without reincarnation. With it, life outside the human body is believable. Faith is still necessary to perceive the splendid goal that can be achieved outside the body.

## **CHAPTER 26**

### **MEDIUMISTIC PHENOMENA AND FAITH**

#### **Spiritualistic hypothesis and psychic hypothesis**

Another substantial confirmation of faith comes from mediumistic phenomena that are very fashionable today. They are undoubtedly a testimony, from a reliable source in the visible world, of an afterlife. Most people who approach mediumistic communication are induced by grief or their inability to resign themselves to the loss of a dear one or by curiosity about getting in touch with something mysterious or inexplicable or even, perhaps, who knows, with "spirits."

The most common methods are the "saucer game" and "automatic writing." Vaguely telepathic or precognitive messages can be obtained with both. "Great mediumship" is more unusual, where it is appearance of spirits who seize the medium's body and act through it. In these instances the medium speaks with a voice that is not its own, writes with a script very similar to that of the communicating dead person, draws or paints in the style of artists of other ages, plays musical instruments s/he cannot normally play, speaks languages s/he does not know. Or the presumed dead person seems to produce noises or sounds or speaks without being seen, or materializes or brings objects through walls and, lastly, may appear in visible form.

There are two currents of thought among specialists to explain these phenomena: the psychic current attributes them to the medium's paranormal faculties or those of the people at the seance. The spiritualistic current assigns them to the intervention of the dead, especially when psychic theory cannot explain the phenomena.

Most parapsychologists, true to the scientific principles of explaining everything with natural causes, belong to the first current. A minority supports the spiritualistic current but this includes outstanding personalities such as Tenhaeff, Thouless, and Ducasse, as well as important thinkers from the last century and the first half of this century. Both hypotheses, however, basically confirm what is most difficult for modern people but which the act of faith makes easier: the existence of an

invisible world. For the first hypothesis, the human spirit can know beyond the senses in some mysterious manner and leave the time/space dimensions that are the limits of matter. The second, the spiritualistic, believes that the spirit of the dead has similar though greater powers and can communicate with us.

### **Serious dangers for those who study mediumistic phenomena**

For Christian mystics, there is no great advantage in mystic phenomena (visions, miracles, bilocation, etc.). They can only be accepted if they occur spontaneously and they must be subjected to severe and lengthy testing to ensure they are not just illusions. Those who approach mediumistic phenomena out of curiosity or a desire to have new and different experiences, or even to soothe the sorrow of the death of a loved one, run serious risks. First of all, illusion. In most mediumistic sessions the so-called messages are just reflexes of the medium's psyche intercepting the participants' memories.

Another serious danger is psychic disassociation where the so-called secondary personalities emerge. Besides the danger of losing touch with reality, there is danger of dependence on and "invasion" by negative entities. "There are things," writes René Guenon, "that you cannot approach without harm when do not have the doctrinal directives to ensure that you will not get lost. This cannot be repeated often enough; especially in the mediumistic field this kind of reversal or radical change is one the most common and harmful effects of the powers under experiment. The number of people who have lost their minds during it are a clear proof of this."

A deepening spiritual life is far more helpful for getting into real and deep touch with a person who has died. Every human being's spirit united with God is closely linked with all the other spirits linked with God. This is a truth for us Christians and without any hint of pantheism. There is a type of communion called "the Communion of the Saints" and all of us sharing in this spiritual family receive a continuous flow of thoughts, feelings, virtues, and messages from related spirits linked by close friendship in life. This is a communion and a flow from which we benefit in proportion to our meditation, prayer and spiritual development. I am the vine and you the branches," Christ says: "remain in me and I in you." These and other similar revelations give us an idea of the mysterious but real way of communicating with our dead in God.

The Church warns us that it is rash to go beyond this inner communion, and to look for revelations from supposed spirits in mediumistic sessions who shout about the afterlife, God, and reincarnation. Often these are nothing other than the medium's own opinions. But even if we admit that in some cases there is a communicating spirit, how can we be sure that it not deceiving us? Perhaps it is giving us some correct and verifiable information to divert us from the way of Christ towards other directions that cannot be ascertained.

Some people make a religion of mediumistic communications. Perhaps they do not believe so much in Christ who offers so many guarantees of credibility and are thus ripe to fall into the first trap that appears. They are like people who are blindfolded and bring unknown people home, put their lives into their hands, and allow them to lead them. It is no wonder then that they come to regret this incredible credulity.

## CHAPTER 27

### MIRACLES

#### **Miracles and parapsychology: what is the boundary?**

During the National Meeting of the "Spiritual Renewal" Groups at Rimini, scores of sudden cures occur during spontaneous prayers led by Fr. Emiliano Tardiff. When asked by a journalist from *Il Giornale* ( May 11, 1988) about how the miracles occur during the prayer meetings, Fr. Tardiff answered: "They are not miracles. They would be if diseases defined as incurable were cured. In most instances, they are just recoveries."

Talking about instantly healed incurable diseases, theologian Franco Arduoso writes: "Science only states whether the fact can be explained or not according to its specific competence" (that is, if the disease was really incurable and if it is really and permanently healed). "It is up to the Church to speak of 'miracle' after listening to the opinions of the scientists and ascertaining that the extraordinary event is a religious event."

But what can science be really sure of? Is it not legitimate to suppose that some natural laws have yet to be discovered or reexamined? "Such a serious question," Arduoso answers, "explains why the miracles at Lourdes are acknowledged so cautiously." Likewise in the Process for the Canonization of Saints. "Medicine seems, although moving towards continuous discoveries, not to object too strongly to admitting the existence of an impassable limit for it." Such a limit, according to P. Daglio, a physician from Turin, consists in the "inability to bring back to normality cellular and histological structures that have reached an irreversible stage." In proven miracles, according to Daglio, "we are dealing with diseases, either initially incurable or at the irreversible stage, that is, incurability. Some of the patients were at death's door or death was just a matter of hours away.

René Latourelle in a recent essay on miracles writes: "As a matter of fact, the true nature of a miracle is dealt with correctly only when it is considered as 'an extraordinary event' and, at the same time, as 'a sign.' A miracle is a signifying prodigy." It is a sign of "divine love mercifully inclined to human needs and wounds." Above all, it is a sign to confirm the religious doctrine leading us to salvation. "A miracle," notes Latourelle, "is not against nature but superior to nature. It is a reasonable act, but in God's perspective."

Cures may be: a) instantaneous; b) from serious organic diseases (that is, not functional and not of nervous origin); c) from incurable diseases. In the opinion of experts in this field, which I share, miracles do not belong to the field of parapsychology. They do not happen in profane contexts -- only in the religious. They can be defined as events that surpass natural laws and can therefore be reasonably attributed to the intervention of God as external and objective foundations for religious faith.

Giovanni Blandino, a well-known expert on scientific matters and also a theologian, writes: "A miracle is a fact that can be observed as precisely detached from ordinary (profane) experience and occurring only in religious circumstances.

It is, therefore, correct to regard miracles as exceptions to the natural laws,' caused by God through an extraordinary intervention with the primary purpose of calling us to salvation in Christ. First of all, if God exists and is wise, free, and loving, it is neither contradictory nor inopportune for God occasionally to intervene directly and in an extraordinary way because of love for creatures but, at the same time, ensuring that the world continues along its normal course. . . . Experimental science establishes likely and approximate natural laws. But, if there is no reason to deny God's existence, science cannot have any reason to deny a possible modifying intervention by God. . . . There will always be materialistic scientists who deny this . . . but if they are willing to examine the data carefully, they will find it difficult to maintain their position."Blandino notes that in miracles there is a clear separation between the "miraculous" phenomena and the events of normal experience. Were it merely a question of a fortuitous concomitance of unknown material factors, we should be able to observe all the intermediate stages over time. But this does not happen. Then he points out that suggestion can have a remarkable influence on the course of functional diseases with a nervous origin, but it cannot instantly rebuild tissues irreparably damaged by serious organic diseases."Even in the Church today," he concludes, "miracles happen. This is very important because today's miracles can be documented in a way that was not possible 2000 years ago. This is due both to advances in scientific knowledge but also to our exact knowledge of the literary genre of today's doctors and scientists. . . . Contemporary miracles are a guarantee of the gospel miracles."Here are some examples taken from the canonization processes of some recent saints:

a) St. Maximilian Kolbe: Francesco Luciani Ranier, 66, dying from gangrene in his right leg caused by obliterating endoarthritis in multiple localizations: instantaneous and perfect healing on August 5, 1950, in the hospital at Porto San Giorgio ( Ancona); witnesses: 8 physicians including Professor Frugoni.

b) St. Gaspare Del Bufalo: Orsola Bono, 55: instantaneous and perfect cure of a malignant tumor of the abdomen with disappearance of the tumefaction of the abdomen after the apparition of and conversation with the saint (from Sezze, Latina) on the night of May 23, 1934. Witnesses: 11 physicians.

c) St. Antonio M. Pucci: Carla Pucci Cupisti, 60: instantaneous and perfect healing in Viareggio on April 25, 1953, from deforming arthritis in the right hip that made it impossible for her to walk. Witnesses: 6 physicians among whom Prof. Valdoni.

d) St. Antonio M. Pucci: José Barrientos Gomez, 16 run over by a 2 ton wagon; serious abdominal and pelvic lesions; dying. Perfectly cured on the night of March 14th, 1953, in Coyhaique hospital ( Chile). Witnesses: 4 people including 2 physicians.

e) St. John Ogilvie: John Fagan, 51. Instantaneous and perfect cure on March 6, 1967, in Glasgow ( Scotland) from a malignant and irreversible tumor of the stomach. Witnesses: several physicians.

f) Numerous other miraculous recoveries (including babies just a few months old) through the intercession of Pope John XXII. I will mention just one. It occurred on May 25, 1966 (three years after Pope John XXII died). The protagonist was a sister who is still working in the hospital at Benevento. Mother Caterina Capitani was dying at the Navy Hospital in Naples. She had hemorrhagic fistulous gastritis with varices, sclerotomy, complicated by peritonitis, and other serious problems. Pope John appeared to her and spoke with her. From that moment

she was perfectly cured. Members of the medical staff including Prof. Giuseppe Zannini, Prof. D'Avino, Bile, Gisonni, Vingiani, and Argo confirmed that this kind of instantaneous cure eliminates any question of suggestion or natural processes. Miracles are like rockets far away in the night. For those who are looking for the truth, they are sufficient to indicate the direction to take.

## **Sai Baba, his miracles and Christ's**

A reader wrote to *Famiglia Cristiana*: "Some time ago I watched a television program about Sai Baba, the famous Indian guru who performs miracles. What is the Church's opinion and what meaning does it attribute to these miracles, since Christ's miracles have been 'used' to prove his divinity? Is this a false Christ who, as the gospels say, would perform great prodigies to confound the elect?"

Pietro Rossano, theologian, answered this letter beginning with a short account of Sai Babd's life. He was born in the village of Puttaparti, near Bangalore (S. India) in 1926 and named Satya Narayana. Just 14 years old, he began to perform amazing things, such as multiplying candies and flowers, and declared that he was a reincarnation of Sai Baba, an itinerant and charismatic guru who died in 1918. His devotees worship him and listen to him as an "avatara," i.e., as a living manifestation of the Divine. Personally, he regards himself as Sai Baba. According to Hinduism, the whole universe is pervaded by a spiritual force, Brahma or God, of which human souls are a part. Brahma is the only true, stable and permanent reality while what appears to our senses is illusory and deceitful play. We all carry a spark of Brahma, "Atman" or soul, in ourselves, but some people are Brahma's avatara, i.e., his manifestation or visible incarnation.

"I am God," Sai Baba claims, "but you are too. Only you are not aware of it. There is no substantial difference between you and me." Sai Baba teaches that the five great roots of universal harmony in mankind are threatened today and we must resort to God to safeguard them. These great roots are: Sathya (truth), Dharma (honesty), Shanty (peace), Prema (love), Ahimsa (nonviolence).

As we have seen, the Hindu expression of the soul as a spark of God's essence can be interpreted in a Christian sense, i.e., all those who love God tend to become one with God. God is present in everyone and everything. Jesus himself said that those to whom God's word is addressed are Gods (in some way) (Jn. 10, 34).

As regards miracles, we must distinguish between extraordinary phenomena or prodigies and miracles in the strict sense. According to the teaching of the Bible and the Church, a prodigy or extraordinary phenomenon is not the monopoly of God or Christ. The Bible says: "Magicians did the same as Moses through their magic" (Ex. 8, 14); "False Christs and false prophets will do great prodigies (Mt. 24, 24); "Satan comes disguised as an angel of light" (2Cor. 11, 14). But it does not mean that nonchristian prodigies are always diabolical. They can be paranormal facts. Therefore, if prodigies are done even outside Christianity, where is the proof of or help to faith that Christian miracles claim to offer?

We answer that both paranormal and miraculous facts prove something important for modern people's faith: the existence of an intelligent force acting above and outside physics and chemistry,

space and time. Therefore, it is the denial, demonstrated by facts, of materialism which is the basis of today's lack of belief.

Often this force can be: 1) the spirit of a human being living in the world (a sensitive, a medium, guru, or saint). In certain instances it can be: 2) a benign extraterrestrial spirit (an angel, a recently deceased person), or: 3) a harmful extraterrestrial spirit (a devil or a dead person hostile to God). 4) Finally, certain extraordinary events that never occur in a profane or paranormal setting, but only in a religious context (instantaneous recoveries from serious organic diseases and authentic resurrections) are very likely to be attributed to the Divine Spirit. They are miracles in the strict meaning of the word. Any extraordinary fact, therefore, once the possibility of fraud or trickery has been excluded, is a preliminary help to faith.

The next question is how to know which of the four categories listed above is to be applied to any given phenomenon? Roughly speaking, we can say that when the goal is profane, a paranormal phenomenon implies production by a living human being not particularly close to God. When the goal is to increase love, trust, and obedience to God, the phenomenon is likely to be paranormal and comes from a saint or a living guru or a good extraterrestrial being. When the aim is to drive us away from God, the phenomenon is from a living human being or extraterrestrial spirit hostile to God.

A true miracle, in a theological sense, can happen only when the goals are religious and cures or resurrections, as stated before, occur. Sai Baba's miracles (and, in general, those of nonchristian religions) are to be considered paranormal events which also occur in mediumistic sessions or in the spontaneous phenomena of "sensitives." On the other hand, they can be of divine origin when cures or resurrections, as previously explained, occur. God's intervention can be thought of as a confirmation of the guru's teaching if s/he preaches God's existence, goodness and justice, the value of prayer and good moral behavior, or the afterlife. These are all truths that nonchristian religions share with the followers of Christ.

We cannot help mentioning that Sai Babd's most frequent "miracles" were not performed by the great saints, much less by Christ. They are frequently done by conjurers and sleight-of-hand artists as "apparent" phenomena. They are observed as "real" phenomena, as "apports" in mediumistic sessions. Sai Baba turns his right hand and immediately "vibhut" (a perfumed ash) appears, or a watch, a medal with his image, or a ring. He gives these objects to his audience as a sign of his protection. These, in my opinion, are paranormal phenomena.

Witnesses have also reported cures but these do not appear to have been checked as rigorously as a miracle at Lourdes or for the canonization of a saint. Once such proofs are available, the disease shown to be incurable and the cure instantaneous, we can speak about true miracles performed by God to confirm the common elements of all great religions.

Sai Baba says that he has not come to bring a new religion. "God is one," he says, "but we can worship God in many forms, pray in many ways and obey following many religions." But this does not mean that it is a matter of indifference whether we choose one or another or that there is none that puts love at the center and reveals God's will better. It only means that some basic truths are

common to all great religions and it is fundamentally important for modern people to begin to believe at least in these.

The Christian miracle is different from that of other religions in the type of phenomena (instant recovery from serious organic diseases), its goals, and the effects it produces (spiritual illumination and progress for the person cured and help towards belief for the others). Above all, a miracle is performed to convert many to God and change their way of living. The spirit performing the miracle can be identified by applying the criterion Christ gave to distinguish between true and false prophets: "You will be able to identify them by their fruits: can you pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? A sound tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a rotten tree bear good fruit" (Mr. 7, 16-18).

Sai Baba preaches love of God and neighbor, and that is very beautiful and true, but it was Christ who first preached it, making of it the core of everything and lived it until the supreme sacrifice. It was He who created so many saints, bringing this message and announcing the divine help to live it. Therefore, the Christian who discovers Sai Baba as a wonder is like the sailor who toured the world looking for treasure island and who, after discovering it, realized it was actually the island where he was born and had started from.

## **CHAPTER 28**

### **WOMAN AND FAITH**

#### **Woman as the bridge between man and God**

Femininity has a special spiritual mission deriving from its own nature. Many today claim that the psychological differences between men and women are due only to cultural factors and will disappear with perfect equality between the sexes. But this does not stand up if we think that motherhood, a woman's natural tendency towards wanting to look after babies, endows her with the qualities needed for this task and frames her feminine soul.

Therefore, we must admit that some psychological differences derive from the role that historically domineering man gave to woman, above all, here, presuming inferiority in leading and organizing, in politics, science, technology, and the arts. Other differences stem from nature and from God, who, in view of motherhood and child care, leads the girl, woman, future mother towards sweetness, delicacy, kindness, beauty, affection, fondness, and love, whereas, the boy, man, future father is guided towards courage, rationality, organization, struggle against obstacles, and other useful qualities for outdoor work. Our present society is declining rapidly because it is dominated by male cultural factors (technology, rationalism, excessive pursuit of wealth, love as sex). The woman, when not contaminated by the current mentality, through her intuition, her preference for deep and stable love, sisterhood, and religious faith, exerts her higher values and tasks to help men achieve higher their values and tasks.

We could say that today the authentic woman is an endangered species. But where she is present, she is the bridge between the human and God. Modern public opinion, created by a passé male-oriented culture, psychologically induces her to achieve a spiritual levelling with men rather than equal rights; to look for sex more than love, work and science more than having and educating children, rationalism more than faith, feminism and contentiousness more than the influence of the heart, equal thought and social duties more than equal dignity and complementary human mission, an outer and organizing priesthood more than that inner priesthood which she is the only one capable of achieving.

The ever increasing presence of women in philosophy, literature, journalism, law, sociology, politics, and theology, will be beneficial for the balanced development of our culture, too long a male monopoly, if she exerts her charisma rather than servilely copying men.

She has been ordained by God the creator with a priesthood natural to her, more interior and effective than that of the male priest. Without women capable of loving and of being loved deeply as wives, mothers, executives, or friends, without women capable of preaching above all with their hearts and lives, the meaning of existence and faith disappears, and with them also the ministers of faith. The woman is really the holy bridge to God, and owing to her calling, and not only when she generates human beings, but above all when, through divine love, she regenerates them interiorly.

### **Is faith feminine?**

The Bible seems masculine at first sight: Abraham, Moses, the prophets, David, Christ, the apostles. Women seem to count for very little. Eve leads Adam to sin and evil enters human history. Humanity is warned against the temptation that is woman. But if we read the Bible more carefully, we realize that it is much more complex and balanced. There are splendid pages exalting God-fearing women. Great women stand out as saviors of God's people: Deborah, Esther, Judith, and, above all, Mary, whose greatness and unique mission the Bible discloses as much superior to that of great kings, priests, prophets, and apostles.

We must bear in mind that divine revelation seeks to highlight only the general trends of human life and does not touch on the culture or the mentality of the people it writes about. It is a Jewish culture at a male dominated, patriarchal time. The Jews were originally a tribe of nomads and followed patriarchal traditions (authority belongs solely to the father, to the male). Farmer tribes tend to be matriarchal (authority is attributed to the mother, the female).

It is important to note here that male-female love, as seen within the Hebrew patriarchal culture, is taken in the Bible as a symbol of that strong and irrevocable attachment God wanted with every human creature who accepts God's love. The female condition in revelation and above all in the figure of the Hebrew wife, is a symbol of the universal human condition, i.e., of everyone, male and female alike.

Modern atheistic humanism considers humanity's dependence on God as an abasement of human dignity and freedom, but forgets that the Creator does not ask for slavish or servile obedience but familial respect and devotedness. It is made all the more acceptable by our knowing that the father's orders and advice direct us towards a path we cannot know, the road towards deification. They are

dictated only by love and a desire for human earthly and supernatural happiness. In addition, God asks us for the obedience of an ancient Hebrew wife who submits to her husband as to God, and who knows that he too, in his total and faithful love, lives only for her, to lead her to a glorious goal.

According to the Bible, the goal for which a human creature temporarily lives in this difficult world is to accept freely this divine love and choose to reciprocate it, with its sacrifices as a subject, son, daughter, or a friend or, above all, in total devotion as a loving husband or wife.

"As a young man marries a virgin, your Creator will marry you" (Isaiah, 62, 6). In the relationship between a human creature and God, male-female love is the best comparison to explain things. It is the most complete, giving, and free kind of relationship. It is dialogue, openness to each other, love for the other, humility, communion, sacrifice to help and save the other, eternal and mutual faithfulness, praise, joy, devotion, trust, sharing everything.

In God all riches are abundant. In vain a creature dreams of perfect human love. But God has the power to infuse this gradually, through dialogue and loving relationships, also in the future bride. It is not stormy or passionate but rather serene joy. There are no highs and lows. It is stable. It does not involve the body, but being; not the senses, but the person; not sentimentalism but love.

### **Is woman better equipped for Divine Love?**

Women seem to be better disposed than men for this kind of love that implies humility, trust, faith, obedience, receptiveness, the gift of self. And even more so if we take married love into account. We do not wish to claim an absolute privilege for women here. What makes it possible for a man and woman to have an effective relationship with God is not their sexual condition, but the gift of the Holy Spirit, equally granted to both. But, beginning from psychological aspects, we may wonder whether woman's condition has some inclinations and facilities she is called on to exert, both to her advantage and to support man's religious pursuits.

All religious sociological surveys show that women believe in God more than men do. She goes to church more, prays more, and attaches more importance to religion, prayer, charity than men do. She takes part in religious groups; she seeks a Christian meaning in life far more than men do. Men often emphasize things such as honesty, work, political commitment, natural virtues, personal prestige, social status. Women, in most cases, give more importance to things such as helping the suffering and spiritual love in all its aspects.

A faithful woman, unlike a religious man, has a strong emotional inclination towards a union with the divine in the deep trends of her female nature. As a matter of fact, sexuality pervades all woman's faculties as it does a man's as well. If a tendency towards sentimental and romantic love dominates her psyche, her spiritual nature, moved by grace, aspires to a deeper love, with tenderness and affection, with the being of beauty, greatness, and endless love.

"How dear must be to God woman's giving in love and in events greater than herself!. How dearer God must hold her silence, open to God who is coming! This is why Mary of Nazareth is the greatest of all men and women and is an example for all men and women" ( C. Carretto).

Russian theologian P. Evdokimove wrote: "The principle of human religion is expressed by woman. . . . Woman's soul comes nearer to the source, the origin, genesis. The Bible considers woman the core of human nature's spiritual receptivity." He goes on for two pages to describe woman's being and vocation and stresses that, in the Bible, woman "is the predestined meeting point between God and humanity," and concludes: "To protect the human world as a mother and purify it as a virgin, giving this world a soul, her own: this is the vocation of every religious woman, single or married."

### **Mutual man-woman completion**

A basic female instinct is the gift of self whereas for the male it is self-assertion. The former wants love, the latter justice. Feminine feeling embraces the individual, while masculine feeling is more universal (politics) and objective (science). The domain of masculine intellect is abstract and scientific thought, while the feminine goes to the essence of things through intuition. The feminine world is to understand, feel, pity, empathize. Women are biologically created to be mothers and psychologically created to be motherly. The masculine in us tends to organize, to master techniques, to overcome resistance and obstacles, to protect and guarantee the safety especially of women and children.

Men and women are equally suited when it comes to things religious. The feminine in us is better equipped to achieve supernatural perfection since it is passive and its main strength lies in the work of grace. The masculine is better prepared to attain ethical perfection since this is active and consists in perfect mastery over all actions and feelings through rationality.

The perfection of human creatures, therefore, lies in the integration of rational strength and intuitive affectivity. Without man, woman falls into sentimentalism. Without the feminine, man is frozen in avidity and pride in technical achievement. Kierkegaard notes in his diary: "An eminently male intellectual mind is immediately related to enormous selfishness. . . . In a certain way, women are better suited to religious service because it is typical of the female nature to give in. . . . An eminently male intellect plus the subjection of the female-this is true religiousness."

### **Affective identification between man and woman**

In the Bible, God's image is not referred to man as such or to woman as such but to man and woman forming a unity through deep and spiritual love. This is what that allows identification and intercommunication of interests and inclinations. "Like God he created them, male and female he created them" (Gen., 1, 27). It could be said that, as the divine wedding is offered to both, so inclination to is offered not to woman as such, but to man/woman mutually completing each other in spiritual love. Not necessarily in conjugal love, because affective identification occurs also in the love of mother and son, brother and sister, man-friend and woman-friend, woman saint and male devotee or the motherlyfilial relationship between Mary and those who rely on her.

Mary was full of grace (that is, full of God's love) in her earthly life. In this life she lived the spiritual falling in love with God described symbolically in the Song of Songs. In her glory, she lives it even more so. She is the beautiful bridge par excellence. The process of affective identification occurs gradually in those devoted to her. Her interests, choices, spirit, feeling are passed on to them.

Very often a man reaches deep love of Christ and God the father through affective identification with a woman of faith, with a woman saint or with a woman full of grace. This sheds an interesting light on the much debated question of the female priesthood. If she loves God intensely, the charismatic priesthood she has received will be far more interior than the love of a man. It is love of the church's soul, a priesthood that complements that of the organizing and institutional priest or the committed believer who, from certain points of view, is its body.

The saints and the Church have always seen in Mary the woman "par excellence, in love with God who became her son. "If Christ stated," writes Cardinal Suenens, 'He who sees me sees my father,' Mary could say analogically and in all due proportion, 'He who sees me sees my son.' It is not Mary who lives, but Jesus Christ, God, who lives in her. Mary's transformation in God exceeds St. Paul's and the other saints more than the sky rises above the earth."

The more a woman possesses positive feminine qualities (sweetness, delicacy, kind beauty, affectivity, pity, the gift of self, motherly sentiments, intuition), the more she attracts man. The more she loves God and is God's spiritual wife, the more she is able to infuse this love into the man who loves her and affectively identifies with her.

According to the gospels, Christian spirituality sees both conditions at the highest degree in Mary. She carries out the most effective and powerful spiritual mediation between Christ and mankind. Certain theologians accept Mary as an example but not as a Mediatrix. But since all good and pure Christian women, and above all, mothers, are mediatrixes towards God and, since all Christians mediate through prayer and the apostolate, if we wanted to make these theologians happy we could claim that all believers are mediators and mediatrixes except Mary. The gospels and the saints assure us that she is full of grace, i.e., of God's love. Therefore the true devotion of Catholics and Orthodox Christians to Mary is not to become adoration of her but rather to be led by a woman devoted to adoration.

## **The priesthood suits women**

After having explained the biblical story of creation, a catechist asked the children: "Why, do you suppose, God created woman after man?" A little girl raised her hand: "According to me," she answered, "the Lord, after having made man, thought: Perhaps, if I try again, I'll do things better. And so God created woman." Even though we do not affirm that woman is indeed a better result than man, we nevertheless sustain that her role is fundamental to the attainment by all humanity of the primary aim of life.

Today much discussion is heard about ministerial priesthood which women should also be able to exercise. Perhaps it would be better, for the moment, to consider and underline the priesthood proper to woman which till now has not been sufficiently understood.

In order to open God's door two different keys are necessary. The question is not whether both should be handled by the daughters of Eve, but which of the two is more appropriate to them: the "Petrine" (the key of Saint Peter) or the "Marian" (the key of Mary's spiritual motherhood). What we have already affirmed, i.e., that the feminine soul is more disposed to profound love than the masculine, is not a common assumption devoid of any empirical scientific foundation. All the major

psychologists, including female psychologists, consider as demonstrated that real personality differences exist between men and women, (for example, a greater tendency to aggressiveness in the first case and more intense affectivity in the latter) and that they arise not only from cultural causes, but also from biological factors which correspond to feelings and souls.

### **Man is inclined above all to efficiency, woman to love**

Psychological studies on feminine characteristics pertain to that woman whom Hélène Deutsch and other psychologists call "of the feminine type" and who represents the great majority of women, as "masculine type" is expressed in the majority of men. It is therefore verified that in both genders typical psychological characteristics are predominant. Carl Gustav Jung calls "anima" the set of female characteristics and to them he opposes "animus" for that of the man. The typical qualities of gender are a datum of nature, even if they are later modified by cultural factors.

Among the many attempts to systematize the differences between the two sexes ( H. Deutsch, A.H. Maslow, Anne Anastasi, Karen Horney, Jeanne Gessanges, C. Gilligan, P.J. Mills, H. Belenky, M. Briscoe), the attempt to refer differences between the sexual stereotypes to two scales of different and complementary values seems to offer rich promise. These scales are: the complex of efficiency and the complex of affectivity, usually personified by father and mother.

The feminine type of woman places loving and being loved at the core of her thoughts and of her life, while for man love can be classified, not certainly in the first place, but as together with many other interests. On the contrary for woman it is the essential element of her existence, especially during her youth. Woman in love appreciates above all the affective and sentimental aspect, while in man physical desire is prevalent.

Woman reveals greater "social benevolence": whereas the feminine tends to take a deeper interest in human relations, the masculine is more attracted by study of physical causalities and corresponding activities (sciences, technology, work). Women form groups based more on liking, while men's groups are based on common interests. Women are much less aggressive and therefore they are not so present in prisons for crimes of theft, fraud, and murder. As regards religion, where it forms a whole with politics, war, and nationalism ( Israel, Islam) men are more religious. This is also true in the Christian field, though not forbidden to women, organized action is usually more carried out by men. On the contrary in the love of God, subjection to divine will, in faith, trust, prayer, charity, in the depth of religious convictions, women predominant: feminine sensitivity, sociability and inclination to tenderness seem to favor them). Also female religiousness is different from the male - - the former is based more on prayer and faith, while the latter more often stresses man's effort, fulfillment of one's duty and on following one one's own conscience.

### **Woman's genius is the heart**

Prof. EX. Arnold, Rector of Tübingen University, validly outlines the nature and psychology of woman. Here are some of his significant results. It is not exact to say woman is passive: as male interest is directed to external world to mark it with his stamp, woman's attention is turned, above all, to her feelings and to those of other individuals.

The genders are also different in their moral and religious tendencies: there as well, it is the masculine that feels for self-assertion while the feminine tends toward self-transcendence. The fundamental tendency of the feminine type of woman is love as a gift of herself, while masculine type of man tends to selfassertion. The feminine centre of gravity is the *heart*, the soul, sentiment; she has a greater stock of love, greater affective power. On the contrary, man is more centered on the *head*, on reason.

Of course the frontiers of this classification are elastic and, on both sides, there are persons it does not cover. It is true, however, that the feminine world consists mainly of understanding, feeling, respecting, pitying, sympathizing while the masculine more often shows leaning for organization, technique, to fight resistance and obstacles, to protect and guarantee the existence of woman and child.

### **Studies by a woman on the differences between men and women**

The work of psychologist Carol Gilligan *In a Different Voice* has found large diffusion and approval. In it the author explains the results of her inquiry among the students of Harvard University, from which she concluded that there are two different and complementary ideas of ethics and maturity of personality. Here is an outline:

*Man*: Maturity coincides with independence of thought, with the ability of taking univocal decisions, with an independent and profitable work. Man stresses isolation of individuals, the separation and differences of persons, the priority of accomplishment, self-assertion, developing his own potential. Ethics of equal rights and of noninterference: equality of rights for everybody, relations with other people based on rules, law, and the universal principles of justice; right of everyone to do what he wants on condition that the rights of others are not harmed.

*Woman*: Maturity consists in her opening towards her neighbor, in establishing deep interpersonal relationships. Woman stresses reciprocity and interdependence of persons, their links and likenesses, the priority of relations with other people, ability to collaborate and improve human relations. Ethics of joint responsibility: Duty to help others, especially those in need; importance of deep affective bonds; relations subordinate to universal love; identification with the needs, ideas, and tastes of others.

Complementary Qualities: *Man*: Consciousness of himself as an individual who has his community, with ideas and wishes: development of the ego as different from other egos. *Woman*: Consciousness of herself as part of the human community, with partly common ideas and wishes; development of the ego as part of "us."

### **Masculine and feminine values in the personality of Christ**

It is interesting to observe that Christ -- like any human being -- in his human life united in himself masculine and feminine values. Since he did not have a human father but only a mother, we may think he identified himself affectively with her from his infancy. Psychologically Christ appears as a complete personality. Masculine characters are conspicuous in him: clarity of purpose and steadiness in pursuing them, awareness of self and strong determination, energy in action,

temperament of a leader and guide, indignation and courageous struggle against moral corruption that harms other people, importance given to justice, action, rewards, and punishment, self-control. But, on the other hand, feminine moral values also have importance for Him, or rather, it is precisely here that we find the originality that distinguishes Christianity from Judaism and from other religions. It is trusting in God more than in himself, humility, opening one's heart to God with faith, chastity, surrendering oneself to consider others as sisters and brothers, nonviolence, sweetness, in a word, love. God did not become a man, but human! Feminism, as an "ism," accepting the masculine ethical idea, asks for the Petrine priesthood as an equality of rights with men. On the contrary, women of faith having a feminine type remain in their special vocation, deepen their Marian ministry and perceive in the universal love of feminine origin the salvation of the world. It is not a humiliation to get ahead "only" with the values of the brightest part of the sky.

### **The "humble" virtues of the gospel**

According to the teaching and the example of Christ, the virtues that must be preeminent to reach God who is Love, are:

- faith or receptivity: it is God who is offered and works inside us if we believe in divine love and open our hearts to receive it;
- radical love of God, being detached from things and offering ourselves to God;
- love of our neighbors, pity and help, brotherly and sisterly love, moderation and forgiveness;
- docility to God, acceptance of God's will that guides us even in misfortune;
- poverty, that is, detachment from things in order to give our hearts to the deep love to all persons;
- humility, by which we recognize we are creatures and admit our weakness and sin;
- confidence in God's love, frequent prayer.

As can be seen, these are "humble" virtues that acknowledge the inability of a creature to arrive at God with only our own strength, and so we trust in God's help. Christ proclaims these virtues are more important than the "natural" ones, chiefly based on one's own reflection, self-control and strength of purposes. These virtues are also necessary but complement the first.

We note that the supernatural and receptive "humble" virtues required from man and woman to enter divine life, have analogies with the feelings and inclinations of woman when she is in love and towards the person she loves. In woman they have a basis in natural data. The receptive womb is the biological root of the feelings that prepare her to spiritual receptivity. The breast, that is an offering of herself to her own creature, makes woman the image of God as Mother, not just as Father, beyond gender, since God is Love giving the divine self.

There are also many women who might look like a pretty lamp-holder without a lamp, but the feminine mission consists in being both things. Without man, woman cannot exist: she needs his active and protective love that inspires her abandonment and the offering of herself. But man needs woman to identify himself affectively with this abandonment and gift. This is what allows both to enter the mystery of the divine nuptial. All this is magnificently proved also outside physical love.

## **Marian ministry suits women**

"The fact," Arnold concludes, "that a Woman Virgin and Mother has brought salvation to the world has the value of a deep symbol. . . . Woman, in the person of the Mother of God, is the very opposite of the man of modern secularized times who thinks he can be the savior of himself and so waits for human saviors. With the foolish desire to state the independence of human nature, he is bringing the world to ruin. . . . The Annunciation Virgin has shown to all times in the clearest way that no creature, however pure she may be, can bring salvation. Her 'Fiat' clearly shows that what is really creating cannot be received and conceived but from High."

Abandoning oneself without reserve, opening to the Spirit of God -- this is the highest form of femininity. Woman is inclined to make man, and so also the churchman, realize that if he does not love deeply, all his economic and organizing activism become for him the worst of heart diseases.

Hans Urs von Balthasar writes: "Today this fruitful dynamism of feminine values is loosening because Mariology has been removed from its true place. The fact that following the democratization of the Church, woman herself knocks insistently at the door of hierarchic offices" is of no help to improve the condition of woman (since to escape the rain she takes shelter under the gutter).

"The post-Council Church has largely lost its mystic aspect. It is a Church of permanent dialogue, organizations, meetings, synods, committees, debates, parties, pressure groups, functions, structures, reorganizations, sociological experiments, statistics: it is more than ever a Church of men rather than an entity where sex has no place and where woman conquers a position that is all the higher the more she is willing to become like the males."

We have considered in this book the cosmological way to God, author of the universe, but this leaves man cold towards a Creator that does not concern him at close quarters. We have examined the anthropological way from which we discover that only faith gives a sense to life and satisfies the deeper needs of the spirit. But it may be argued that this could be created by human projective needs. The third way is the aesthetic, as von Balthasar calls it, and this is related to the core of Christianity. It is the discovery through Christ's revelation of a love surpassing all our human spiritual needs. It arouses in those who contemplate it the rapture and evidence of a moral beauty that can only be divine. It is the most direct way to faith and, woman, better than man, has the means to discover and appreciate it in order to help man too to reach it.

## **Specific tasks and not equal rights are involved**

In debating the theme of female priesthood it is a not question of male predominance or of equal rights as current journalism could suggest, but only of God's mystery and plans leading to salvation through the Church. The masculine and the feminine bring complementary meanings and values to the revelation. They must be understood in the light of the "Petrine" and of the "Marian" principle, as John Paul II elucidated while speaking of woman's specific mission (Cf. *Mulieris dignitatem* n.27). The Marian profile, the Pope stated, is equal -- or even more fundamental and characteristic - - for the Church than the Apostolic and Petrine profile. The Marian dimension of the Church antecedes the Petrine, to which is complementary and strictly united."

Quoting Von Balthasar the Pope affirms the preeminence of Mary and, in her, of woman and of the female over the Petrine principle and therefore over man and the male: "Mary is the Queen of the Apostles but does not demand any apostolic powers. What she has is different and more" (*Mulieris dignitatem* n. 55). These "what" and "more" are explained by the great Swiss theologian when dealing with the theme of woman not from the sociological or cultural point of view but from the theological one. "The Church is in the first instance female, before receiving her male side, that is, the complementary hierarchic priesthood."

We must admit that the tendency to assign more importance to the hierarchical ministry in the praxis of the Catholic Church and the exclusion of Mariology in the Protestant, have impoverished and obscured the Marian principle expressed by women which the male priesthood must serve. One of the explanations of the unrest and claims supported by so many women of faith could be the century-old depiction of ministerial priesthood as the privilege, honor and service to God that most of all allows the saving of souls in cooperation with Christ.

This is not true. The Mass and the administration of the sacraments can be likened to the water supply. The priest is the container that receives the water from the source and allows those who want it to drink. It does not make much difference to the quenching of a thirst who holds the glass. Similarly even if a priest is poor in his faith and good deeds, through the sacrament God produces wonderful effects of spiritual transformation in proportion to the frame of mind of the receiver.

On the contrary the highest form of mediation to God and therefore of the priesthood is the ministry of the Word because the more it is felt and deeply lived by those who explain it, the more efficacious it becomes.

Today we see an ever increasing presence of women of faith who interpret the word at associations, Church movements, meetings, every kind of school curricula and theology courses. The essence of Christianity is love coming from God and it is conveyed to others above all through example and speech. Ritual formulas and acts connected with Sacraments are, on the contrary, the wrapper, undoubtedly necessary but in no way as important as the transforming strength of the Word. The Church is a firm of equipment to telecommunicate with God. Feminine capabilities are better suited to the planning and production departments while masculine capabilities are ideal for administration, advertising, and marketing. It is unlikely that the Church would take advantage of it if these special though different gifts are abolished.

## **CHAPTER 29**

### **EXPERIMENTAL FAITH**

#### **True, inside and out**

An archeologist had fallen into the deep ruined vault of an ancient Mayan temple he had just discovered. He was hurt and half buried under the debris in a dark labyrinth of shafts. After some moments of dizziness, reasoning on his knowledge of Mayan temples and the ground structure, he reached a sort of waterless well where high above he could see daylight. For days he tried to reach the top but in vain. He knew that nobody lived in or visited the area. Completely discouraged, he was quite out of ideas of what he could do. Suddenly he heard noises from way up at the top. As he did not know whether it was animals, people, the wind, or other causes, he shouted for help. At first he did not get any answer. Then he seemed to hear a voice repeating two or three times some words in an unknown language. So, there was somebody up there!

He continued to shout until suddenly he saw a rope coming down and it was tied around a bundle. When the rope touched the bottom, he opened the bundle and found some ripe fruit. When his strength was somewhat recovered, he shouted again and heard the same answer as before. He then tied the rope around his waist and finally felt himself being lifted and pulled slowly up towards the light. The shaft and the voice symbolize the pursuit of God through intuition and reason. The rope pulling man upward is experimental faith that generates peace, joy, justice, love, and changes life.

Waiting to solve all problems, objections, and unknown matters before believing is like waiting to live in order to solve all life's mysteries. The best way to get the wheel of faith, rusty from lack of use, turning, is to begin experimental research, i.e., a method similar to that used in science. Take a hypothesis as good and check out its effects. The results will be more persuasive than anything else.

In other words, we can try. We apply to God and ask for light. We try to listen for an interior answer. We accept those which can perhaps help us. Accept Jesus as your savior, open up to him, and ponder his words. When a product is good, a sample is better than any spiel by a salesperson. When you begin to have some proofs of God's love and answers to your needs, everything is different and things will become a lot clearer. If you try, you'll see that it works! It's like being on a river bank frightened to go into the water because you can't swim. Do you really want to learn how to swim? Then let someone push you and it's done. But if you don't jump, you'll never learn!

#### **Present temptations of a reduction in faith**

This acceptance of Jesus as my Master, after which I experience his action and my spiritual recovery, is the most amazing confirmation of the truth of the gospels. But, if I have normal critical powers, it must be preceded, accompanied and followed by confirmations from reason based on external facts.

Today many believers, following some theologians, are afraid of scientific and historical facts and are content with experimental faith. They declare reasoned faith as difficult and useless. This is not

the teaching of Christ. According to the teaching of the Church, reason permits us to know that God exists and is revealed in the Bible and in Jesus. To accept Christ's teaching, after ascertaining it, is reasonable faith. The Bible teaches that, through intellect, we can know God as really existing, even beyond spiritual needs, miracles, predictions proven true, and apparitions.

Therefore, reasonable faith and experiential faith are mutually accomplished like bird's wings. And, like deep and lasting human love, the gospel is not true because it is beautiful and transforms life, but rather changes life and is beautiful because it is true.

# CONCLUSION

## **The mysterious island and the absurd island**

Sartre claims that absurdity is the key to human existence. "The word absurdity is now being born under my pen. . . . I understood I had found the key to existence, the key to my nausea, to life itself." The world, according to Sartre, has no trace of God. "In *The Devil and the Good Lord*, Götz, leader of the peasants and main character of the drama, shouts: "I begged for, I struggled for a sign, I sent messages to heaven, but no answer came. . . . Can you see the emptiness above our heads? This emptiness is God." Modern people feel shipwrecked and cast up on a deserted island where we think we are alone and left to our own capacities, absurdly free under an empty sky.

Claudel, on the other hand, sees human existence as the *Mysterious Island* by Jules Verne: "Some shipwrecked people are cast onto a deserted island where they think they are alone and forsaken. Then, at crucial moments, they receive help but they don't know where from. They find a lighted fire, a box full of tools abandoned on the beach, a rope thrown from a cliff top. All the circumstances can be explained naturally and the more unrefined members of the group are happy with this help and do not wonder who is providing it. But Cyrus Smith, an engineer, is not happy with this state of affairs. We see him hanging from the end of rope ladder with a flashlight at the bottom of a well where he sees dark water from which now and again strange noises and suspicious movements come."

I also feel that there are enough footprints in the sand, but as they are scattered here and there among the bushes, only those who actively search for them, like Cyrus Smith, will find them. Götz looked for clues on the cliffs where he knew he would not find them. His final cry proves it: "God does not exist! Happiness, tears of joy! Alleluia! No more heaven! No more hell! Nothing else but earth!" If this were the case, we could say that atheism is the search for the absurdity of life while faith is an inquiry into its meaning and they find they want to find, ironically enough.

But most people are neither atheists nor believers. They neither take sides nor do they make inquiries. They seek only the trifling pleasures of the moment, soap bubbles or dreams that quickly vanish. They are always putting off waking up like a sleepy boy who vaguely hears the alarm clock but does not want to open his eyes.

Only the presentiment of love forces us to wake up and look for clues. "The normal process of faith," Frossard writes, "displays an initial difficulty that cold reason cannot overcome. It implies that we love in order to know, whereas reason wants to know before loving. Reason acts in a different way when we fall in love." Love knows through intuition even before it knows explicitly through reason. "Who said love is blind? It alone sees clearly where others see nothing."

In the course of this little book I have jotted down the location of the footprints on the sand, nails, pieces of cloth, words carved on tree trunks. Those who want to find Captain Nemo must go to the spot and find the clues and will then find others I have not mentioned. Obviously, these are not

absolute proofs but in any process of research, multiple clues and indications cannot be attributed to chance once a certain level has been reached.

In the last fifty years the fact that faith has been subjected to this kind of criticism, generating remarkable studies answering these criticisms and demonstrating its foundations, has become a form of discovery. It is a discovery that involves the very root of being, the basis, the substance, the very means of human life. Therefore, in its theoretical and practical importance, it is superior to the discoveries of atoms and of the unconscious, or the invention of television, the computer, spaceships, all of which have revolutionized the world in our century.

That Christian faith, which many still regard as a voluntary effort, a "will to believe," without any objective foundation and only for psychological needs, turns out to be rich in signs and objective verification, allowing reasonable credit to God which is in accordance with our rational nature. Intuition, prayer, life lived with moral values, interior, superrational, and complex vision of meanings -- all are still necessary. But, in the age when innumerable technical and scientific data seemed to make the way to a supernatural destiny harder to believers, other concrete and verifiable data are offered to them to smooth their way to transcendent values.

The reasonable faith of the apostle Thomas who touches with his hand, if it spread among "almost" believers, would not be of use only to reach higher goals in extraterrestrial Life, but it would also help improve the quality of the present one. It could build a dam against spreading corruption and the collapse of the family because the present crisis of values is based on the prejudice that the eternal bliss of the "Just" is a "consoling myth," an iridescent cloud of unreal hopes.

It would throw a bridge over the river of human loneliness. We might rejoice that, in our struggle not to do evil, we must not imagine ourselves as a colony of bacteria on a wet ball, lost in a nebula tail, nor must we regard the universe as lacking of a Guiding Intelligence, devoid of a final meaning, of every resource of eternal goodness supporting the goodness to which we aspire ( Harry Emerson Fosdick).

Reasonable faith is a door accessible to everyone. The reader may enter and taste -- a sample of the goods can be more convincing than all talks by the seller. Experiments show that a person with a reasonable faith is stronger than ninety-nine people who only have opinions. And that through faith, from the sort of dry thistle we are, God may cause fresh and beautiful roses to blossom.

Old age begins in the moment when you realize that nothing wonderful is waiting for you round the corner. For certain people, this occurs very early. But for those who have acquired reasonable faith, it never occurs.