

The Human Margin (Part 1)

by
Frithjof Schuon

Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol. 5, No. 3. (Summer, 1971) © World Wisdom, Inc.
www.studiesincomparativereligion.com

Editor's note: The following is from an updated translation of the essay, approved by the estate of Frithjof Schuon. The essay is still divided into the same two parts, in consecutive issues, as it originally appeared in the journal.

Christ, in rejecting some rabbinical prescriptions as “human” and not “divine”, shows that according to the measures of God, there is a sector which, while being orthodox and traditional, is nonetheless human in a certain way; the divine influence, in other words, is total only for Scripture and the essential consequences of the Revelation, and it always allows for a “human margin” where it exerts itself only in an indirect fashion, yielding to ethnic or cultural factors. The speculations of exoterism pertain largely to this sector or margin; orthodoxy is, on the one hand, homogeneous and indivisible and, on the other, contains degrees of absoluteness or relativity. We should therefore not be too scandalized at the anathemas which Dyophysites, Monophysites, Aphthartodocetae, Phthartolatrae, Agnoetae, Aktistetae, and Ktistolatrae hurl at one another over the question of knowing whether Christ is of an incorruptible substance or whether, on the contrary, his body was similar to other bodies, or if there was in the soul of Christ a measure of human ignorance, or if the body of Christ is uncreated while being visible, or if on the contrary it was created, and so on and so forth.¹

What is surprising in most cases, and in different degrees, is this vehement desire to become fixated on questions that hold no crucial importance, and the incapacity to allow for a certain measure of latitude on matters which, precisely, Revelation did not deem it indispensable to specify; yet it would have been enough, from the mystical as well as from the dogmatic point of view, to admit that Christ, as the living form of God, would have to display in his humanity supernatural prerogatives that it would be vain to enumerate, while, being incontestably human, he would have certain limitations as is proven by the incident of the fig tree, whose sterility he did not discern from afar. The question of the *filioque* is a patent example of this tendency to unnecessary precisions, and of a dogmatization that produces a plethora of divisions and anathemas.

One fact that inevitably imposes itself, when considering ideas along these lines, is that fallen or post-Edenic man is a quasi-fragmentary being; thus we must face the fact that the holiness of a man does not prevent him from being a poor logician or from having an outlook that is more sentimental than intellectual, and that, in spite of this, he have the calling to be a teacher, not out of pretension, certainly, but out of “zeal for the house of the Lord”. Inspiration by the Holy Spirit does not mean that It is to replace human intelligence and free it from all its natural limitations, for that would be Revelation; inspiration simply means that the Spirit guides man in accordance with the divine intention and on the basis of the capacities of the human receptacle. Were this not so, there would be no theological elaboration, nor any divergences within orthodoxy, and the first Church Father would have written a theological treatise that would have been unique, exhaustive, and definitive; there would never have been either a Thomas Aquinas or a Gregory Palamas. As to the rest, there are men who are inspired by the Holy Spirit because they are saints and inasmuch as they are, whereas there are others who are saints because they are inspired by the Holy Spirit and inasmuch as they are.

*

* *

The most ordinary examples of the “human margin” conceded by Heaven to traditions are provided by the scissions found within the intrinsically orthodox religions; and this has nothing at all to do with the question of heterodoxy, because intrinsic heresies are situated precisely outside the margin in question. It is a fact that collective human thought is not able to conceive easily of the fluctuations between different points of view, on the one hand, and the aspects to which they correspond, on the other hand, or between different modes of the subjective and the objective; consequently, there are polarizations and scissions which, however inevitable and providential they may be, are nonetheless dangerous imperfections. Heaven allows man to be what he is, but such condescension or patience is not to be understood as a full approbation on the part of God.

Regarding the question of ecclesiology, the most ancient Christian texts sometimes uphold the Latin thesis and sometimes the Greek; as a result, the ideal, or rather the normal situation, would be an Orthodox Church recognizing a pope who was not totally autocratic, but in spiritual communion with all of the bishops or patriarchs; this would then be a pope without *filioque*, but having nonetheless the right,

in theology, liturgy, and other domains, to certain particularities that are opportune or even necessary in a Latin and Germanic setting. The present-day disorders in the Roman Church—of a gravity without precedent—prove that the Latin conception of the Church is theologically narrow and juridically excessive; were it not so, such disorders would be inconceivable.² Besides, there seems to be something tragically insoluble in the very structure of Christianity: grant total supremacy to the pontiff, and he will become a worldly and conquering caesar; grant supremacy to the emperor, and he will make of the pontiff his pawn and tool.³ But one must admit that we have here a vicious circle, traces of which are to be found wherever there are men.

*

* *

The “fathomless mystery” of the theologians is sometimes no more than the expression of a metaphysical insufficiency, unless it refers to the obviously unfathomable Divine Subjectivity: this is mysterious for objectifying and separative thought in the way the optic nerve is for vision, but there is absolutely nothing mysterious about the impossibility of the eye to perceive the optic nerve. Very often the thesis of a “mystery” is either a gratuitous affirmation meant to veil a theological contradiction, or purely and simply a truism if we understand what thought is and what its clear limits are.

The whole drama of theologies is the incompatibility of their simplifying sublimism with the idea of *Mâyâ* at the divine degree, or of divine Relativity; because of this, they are constrained to offset the deadlocks of their fundamental voluntarism with “providential” philosophical expedients, which are “providential” insofar as they are psychologically opportune for a particular collectivity. One of the greatest difficulties of Sufism is that the highest metaphysics is inextricably mixed with theology, which tarnishes it with its habitual confusions concerning “All-Mightiness”; unless one admits that it is on the contrary sapience which, in this case, deepens theology by inculcating into it some liberating flashes of insights.⁴

Theologies, by taking upon themselves the contradiction of being sentimental metaphysics, are condemned to a squaring of the circle; they are oblivious to the differentiation of things into aspects and points of view, and consequently they operate with arbitrarily rigid elements whose antinomies can be

solved only beyond this artificial rigidity; moreover, they operate with sentimental tendencies, which is described as “thinking piously”.⁵ In Christianity, there is the purpose to admit some differentiation within Unity and the equally imperious purpose not to admit that this amounts to any differentiation in practice—the Hypostases being “no more than relations”—as if one were attempting to force the three dimensions of space into a single one; in Islam, a stubborn unitarianism runs up against the existence of the world and its diversity, whereas there would be no conflict if the unitarianism were metaphysical, hence transparent and supple, as its nature requires. In Christianity, there is a certain dispersion in the object of worship: God, the Persons, Christ, the Eucharist, the Sacred Heart; in Islam, there is on the contrary an excess of centralization on a level where it should not apply: to admit no other cause outside of God, to want to depend upon Him alone, even against the direct evidence of facts, when these facts in no way prevent everything from depending on God, and when it would suffice to be aware of this to be in conformity with the truth. There is a zeal that readily replaces thought with virtue, and virtue with heroism; in saying this, we are well aware that a devotional attitude is normal, and thus normative, and that there is no balanced intellectuality without it; but everything needs to be put in its proper place, and this has become particularly difficult for the passional humanity of the “age of iron”. What matters to be understood, is that a soul filled with piety is capable of thinking with detachment, in perfect harmony with piety and not in opposition to it, all the more as the instinct of worship is profound in the very measure that truth permeates it.⁶

For extreme trinitarianism, God is certainly One, but He is so only in being Three, and there is no God-as-One except within and through the Trinity; the God who is One without the Trinity, or independently of any question of hypostatic deployment, is not the true God, Unity being meaningless without this deployment. Now this is where the full gravity of trinitarianism becomes manifest: there are Christians--though, as a matter of fact, in disagreement with the impression of most theologians--who are incapable of seeing any value whatsoever in Islam; from their point of view, Islam and atheism are equivalent; if they do not level the same reproach at Judaism, it is for the sole reason that they project onto it their trinitarianism as an axiomatic implication. Because of this, the Muslim reproach of “tritheism” is justified; he who is unable, on the strength of his trinitarianism, to see that the Koran speaks of the God of Abraham—even supposing that it does so imperfectly—and that Muslims worship God and not something else, truly deserves such a reproach. Christ, in speaking of the supreme Commandment or in teaching the Lord’s Prayer, did not speak of the Trinity, any more than did the God of the Sinai, who deemed it sufficient to define Himself in these words: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord”.

As we have had occasion to remark more than once, trinitarianism is a conception of God that is determined by the mystery of divine manifestation: if we seek the prefiguration of this mystery in God, we discern the Trinity. This idea, when applied to any religion, whether monotheistic or not, presents itself as follows: the Essence has become form in order that the form may become Essence; each Revelation is a humanization of the Divine in view of the deification of the human.

*

* *

Judaism and Islam make the following objections to trinitarianism: you say that the Son is begotten and that he is God; now God is not begotten, He is absolute. You say that the Holy Spirit emanates and that it is delegated and that it is God; now God does not emanate from anything, nor is He sent. And you say that the Father is God and that he begets; now God creates but He does not beget, otherwise there would be two Gods. Moreover, how can the Son and the Spirit each be identical with God without being identical with each other?

A Christian might respond to these objections by saying that in Judaism as well as in Islam, Divine Mercy is not identical with Divine Vengeance but that both are identical with God; Jews and Muslims will reply that there is in this a serious nuance, for while Mercy and Vengeance are indeed divine, it would be false to affirm that God can be reduced to one or the other.⁷ The equation is only relative, and therein lies the root of the problem: Judaism and Islam admit in a certain sense relativity *in divinis* by making a distinction between the Essence and the attributes, the qualities and the functions, whereas Christianity, at least at the theological level, seems to want to reduce everything to absoluteness, whence the problematical ellipses of trinitarian theology.

“I am in the Father, and the Father is in me”: this is the identity of essence. But “my Father is greater than I”: this is the difference in degree within Principial Reality, namely that is yet uncreated or metacosmic. The meaning of an absolute equation has been ascribed to the first phrase, while the second has been relativized; instead of combining both phrases to explain the one in terms of the other, the second phrase has been arbitrarily attributed to human nature alone.

We have cited the following argument: God creates but does not beget, otherwise there would be two Gods. We shall now specify: “does not beget” unless one admits the notion of *Mâyâ*, for this notion allows one to understand that the hiatus between Creator and creature is necessarily prefigured *in divinis* by the differentiation between the Absolute as such and the Absolute that is relativized with respect to a dimension of Its infinitude; but this difference, precisely, is real only from the standpoint of Relativity. For the Vedantins, the separation between the Absolute (*Paramâtmâ*) and the Relative (*Mâyâ = Īshvara*) is as strict as is, for the Semites, the separation between the Creator and the creature; but by compensation, there is an aspect that allows the created to be linked to the Uncreated, for nothing that exists can be other than a manifestation of the Principle or an objectification of the Self; “everything is *Âtmâ*”.⁸

In other terms, there is *Âtmâ* and there is *Mâyâ*; but there is also *Âtmâ* as *Mâyâ*, and this is the personal Divinity, manifesting and acting; and conversely, there is also *Mâyâ* as *Âtmâ*, and this is the total Universe under its aspect of reality both one and polyvalent. In this case, the world will be the divine aspect of “Universal Man” (*Vaishvânara*) or, in Sufism, the aspect “the Outward” (*Zâhir*); this moreover is the profoundest meaning of the Far-Eastern *Yin-Yang*. And it is this doctrine that permits one to say that the *Avatâra* was “created before creation”: in other words, before being able to create the world, it is necessary for God “to create Himself” *in divinis*, if one may put it thus—the word “create” having here a higher and transposed meaning, which is precisely that of *Mâyâ*.⁹

The distinction between the human and divine natures reflects or symbolizes the distinction, within the divine nature itself, between inequality with regard to the Father and equality, or between relativity and absoluteness; on the other hand, this principial distinction is also affirmed on the level of human nature in which one dimension is marked by earthly contingency whereas the other is near-divine, whence the Monophysite interpretation. It is not surprising that this combination of three polarities—man and God, earthly man and divine man, hypostatic God and essential God—that this combination or this complexity would give rise to the diversity of opinions, either orthodox or heretical depending on the case, which we alluded to above; it is the fundamental polarity of *Âtmâ-Mâyâ* which is repeated or reverberates in countless modalities, of which the most important for man is the confrontation between God and the world. The Prologue to the Gospel of St John enunciates this polarity as applied to Christ by juxtaposing two affirmations: *Et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum*: the dimension of subordination, then the dimension of equality or identity.

All of Arianism, without knowing it, can be explained by the concern to account for the principle of relativity *in divinis*, hence of *Mâyâ*: if Arius teaches that the Son, without having been created “in time” like the rest of creation—for time begins only with creation—is nonetheless “drawn out of nothingness”, but that the Son is Divine in the sense that he is the principle of cosmic creation, hence of creation as such, he wishes to say that the Word, while being Divine, nonetheless has an aspect of relativity. It is true that Arius spoils his thesis with some aberrant speculations concerning the person of Christ; yet one has to acknowledge that there is in his doctrine a correct and profound intuition, though it is awkwardly formulated in terms typical of Semitic and creationist anthropomorphism. Instead of rejecting Arianism altogether, one could have appropriated its positive theological intention, that of divine Relativity, which is the prototype for cosmic limitation: the Word is neither wholly other than the Absolute, as Arius maintains, nor wholly—or in all cases—identical to the Absolute, as the Homousiasts maintain; if ever there was a need for antinomism in metaphysical dialectics, it is here. The very expansion and tenacity of Arianism, in an epoch so close to the origin, proves that there was more to it than a mere human error; thus the Council of Nicaea marks, not the victory of truth as such, but the victory of the most important truth to the detriment of essential metaphysical nuances; there is no doubt that dogmatic theology must simplify, but a unilateral and fragmentary view is what it is: in the measure that its content requires multi-dimensional explanations, it cannot but give rise to disequilibria.

Be that as it may, it must be admitted that the theological formulation of the Trinity constitutes, in a given milieu, a providential form destined not only to transmit the mystery while protecting it, but also to provide by its very paradox a point of reference for the doctrine as a totality, and hence necessarily multi-dimensional.

*

* *

It is necessary to make a distinction between metaphysical knowledge and the capacity to express it: Greeks and especially Hindus have long possessed the instrument of dialectic, for it corresponds to their sense of objectivity,¹⁰ whereas it was missing among the early Semites, as well as for nascent Islam; however, it goes without saying that this has no bearing on the degree of wisdom of particular individuals, all the more as the profoundest metaphysics can be found in a condensed form in various Biblical and

Koranic sayings or in various sayings of saints who drew their inspiration from these Scriptures, early on and outside of any possible Hellenist influence. These remarks, and still more our preceding considerations about the metaphysics underlying theologies, prompt us to return to some fundamental facts of the *sophia perennis*, at the risk both of straying from our subject and of repeating things that have already been said. It is always a question of the notions of absoluteness and relativity, which are so important or so fateful in the context of the “human margin”.

The Islamic Testimony that “there is no divinity save the One Divinity” has first of all, metaphysically speaking, the objective meaning of a discernment, that is, of a separation between the Real and the illusory or between the Absolute and the relative; it also has the subjective meaning of a spiritual distinction between the worldly outward and the divine Inward, in which case the objective and transcendent Divinity appears as immanent and therefore subjective, but subjective in a transpersonal sense, the subject being, not the human ego, but the Intellect in its purity, with the purified ego being no more than the means of access. In order to be total, the doctrine still has need of a unitive dimension, expressed in Islam through the second Testimony: to say that “the Praised (Muhammad) is the Messenger of the (sole) Divinity” means that the relative, inasmuch as it manifests the Absolute directly, is not other than the Absolute; and according to the subjective application, one will say that the outward, the world, is not other than the Inward, the Self.¹¹

If the relative, however, can have this aspect of absoluteness that reintegrates it into the Absolute—for the Universe cannot rest on a radical duality—it is because the relative must be prefigured in the Absolute Itself; *Mâyâ* has its origin in *Âtmâ*, otherwise the subsequent relationship between God and the world would be inconceivable. It is for this reason that Creation as a whole, while being on the one hand separate from the Creator, is on the other hand a prolongation of Him and a “divine aspect”: this is what is expressed by the divine Name “the Apparent” (*Az-Zâhir*) by opposition to the “Hidden” (*Al-Bâtin*), and this is what permits some Sufis to affirm that “all is God”, in conformity with the Koranic verse: “Wheresoever ye turn, there is the Face of God”. One particular manifestation of the relative reintegrated into the Absolute, or more exactly the Absolute manifested as relative, is the Logos, the Prophet; another is the Heart, the place of the inward and transmuting theophany.

The relationship of identity is expressed in the most direct manner possible by quintessential Christianity: the Son is united to the Father; Christ is God. That man, who is relative, could be identified with God, who is the Absolute, presupposes that relativity have an aspect of absoluteness and that therefore relativity be prefigured *in divinis*: whence the doctrine of the Word; “God became man that man

might become God”: the Absolute comprises relativity and thus relativity can be reintegrated into the Absolute; the Patristic formula just paraphrased thus signifies, on the one hand, that the human Logos directly manifests the Absolute and, on the other, that man can be reintegrated into the Absolute by uniting with the human Logos, in and through whom he is virtually identified with this Absolute.

The objection that Paradise is not the Absolute and that in no religion is man meant to become God literally in no wise compromises what we have just outlined; for it is not a question of a transmutation of the individual as such into the divine Essence, but to begin with an “adoption” of man by God: man is then situated on the divine axis; he is open in his innermost self to the Infinite, he “wears a crown of uncreated light”. There is no common measure between his spiritual secret, the mystery of identity or absoluteness, and the existence—or subsistence—of the individual form, though the one does not preclude the other; man remains man notwithstanding the reality of absoluteness penetrating him. *Nirvāna* did not destroy the Buddha: it made him immortal; otherwise it would never be possible to speak of a human manifestation of the Logos. If God can “become man”, it is because there is no possible concurrence between the divine and the human.

God and the world: each of these terms comprises the polarization into absoluteness and relativity, and the two terms themselves represent this polarization. There is in God the Essence together with the Attributes and their shared Life; and in the world there is Heaven, which serves as the Absolute, and earth, which represents the relative as such. Here, as *in divinis*, the Holy Spirit is the unifying Life.

The theological equation between the Uncreated and the Absolute, on the one hand, and between the created and the relative, on the other, is altogether insufficient: for if it is true that the created pertains by definition to relativity, it is false to admit that the Uncreated pertains by the same token to Absoluteness; it is the Essence alone that is the pure Absolute, though it is clear that divine Relativity serves as the Absolute in relation to the created. The manifested Logos also has this aspect or function, though without being able to be the “absolutely Absolute”; if Christ addresses a prayer to his Father, it is not only by reason of his human nature, it is also by reason of the relativity of the uncreated Logos. If the Son were merely an abstract “relationship of origin”, it would be impossible for him to assume the nature of man.

The dogma of the Trinity existed before trinitarian theology; the latter pertains to the “human margin” and the former to Revelation. The dogma lays down metaphysical facts; theology, by combining them, make them Western.

*

* * *

A religion is not limited by what it includes, but by what it excludes; doubtless, this exclusion does not harm the most profound content of religion—for each religion is inherently a totality—but it will take revenge all the more surely on this intermediary level that we call the “human margin” and which is the arena of theological speculations and of moral and mystical ardors. It is certainly not pure metaphysics or esoterism that should compel us to pretend that a flagrant contradiction is not a contradiction; all that wisdom permits—or, rather, obliges—us to do is to acknowledge that outward contradictions can conceal an intrinsic compatibility or identity, which in fact amounts to saying that each of the contradictory theses contains a truth and, thereby, an aspect of total truth and a means of access to it.

When one religion places the human Logos of another religion in hell, or one confession does the same with the saints of another confession, it is too much to maintain, on the pretext that the essential truth is one, that there is no flagrant contradiction in this, and that such a contradiction is not by definition a serious infirmity on its own level; all that one can propose, by way of mitigating circumstance, is that the level in question is not an essential one for the tradition which is mistaken and that, as a result, the error does not inevitably impair essential spirituality, all the more so in that contemplatives are not necessarily preoccupied with the extrinsic anathemas of their religion; and one could also maintain that the people who are the object of these anathemas become negative symbols, so that there is merely an error in attribution and not in the idea as such; hence the error is one of fact and not of principle.

As for ordinary theological ostracisms—whether of the West or of the East—there is a profound wisdom in the fables of Aesop and Pilpay; the story of the fox and the grapes which were too high for him to reach, and which he therefore declared to be sour, is repeated in all sectors of human existence. In the name of wisdom, one reviles the wisdom of one’s neighbor to console oneself—or to take revenge—for not having discovered it oneself: some eminent theologians have had no qualms in associating the inner voice of Socrates with the devil and in declaring diabolic all the wisdom of the Greeks—a gratuitous luxury, to say the least, seeing that Christianity, even in its Eastern branches, finally could not quite renounce from appealing to this wisdom.

In the enclosed space of theology, there are two openings: gnosis and liturgy. The opening of gnosis toward the Unlimited is immediately clear; but one also needs to know that the formal language of the sacred, whether it be the language of sanctuaries or of nature, is like the complement or prolongation of sapience. For beauty, like pure truth, is calm and generous; it is disinterested and free from passional suffocations and disputes over words; and one of the reasons for sacred art—as paradoxical as this may seem—is to speak to the intelligence of the sage as also to the imagination of the simple man, satisfying both sensibilities at the same time and nourishing them according to their needs.

*

* *

There are dialectical excesses which are not to be found in divine language; but human language does not recoil from such audacities, which leads one to conclude that man must find in them some purpose or that his zeal is thereby satisfied. We have read in a Buddhist text: follow a master, even if he leads you into hell; an analogous expression is found in Muslim texts: be happy with God's Will, even if it destines you for the eternal fire. Literally, such expressions are contradictory, for the sufficient reason for having a master is that he should lead you to Heaven, and happiness in God and through Him coincides with salvation; but these expressions nonetheless have some meaning, and even obviously so, otherwise they would not exist in spiritual contexts. What is at stake is the perfect detachment of the ego; the absurdity of the image guarantees the effectiveness of the shock. One must act "as if the situation were so", though it could not be so; and the purpose of this is only to obtain a radical inner attitude which, from the point of view of sentimental voluntarism, would be difficult to obtain by other means. This last explanation provides the key to the enigma; voluntarist mysticism frequently operates by means of expedients, catapult-arguments, or surgical violence, for no other reason than that, at this level, pure and simple truth appears as an inoperative abstraction. For the "gnostic" or the "pneumatic", the effect is the reverse: indifferent to exaggerations and to other types of pressure tactics, he is immediately receptive to the truth as such, because it is the truth and because the truth is what convinces and attracts him.

However, it is true that there is not a strict separation between the two languages: gnosis also may use absurd formulations, but it does so by way of ellipses or as catalysts, and in presupposing intellectual intuition; thus when it is said that the sage "is Brahma", an impact-image is proposed to isolate—in view

of highlighting it—a relationship that is metaphysically essential and humanly decisive, but not phenomenologically exhaustive since there are other relationships.

The dialectic of the Sufis can readily be likened to a “dance of the seven veils”: in starting with the idea that nothing should be shared that might be neglected, misused, desecrated, and then scorned, and that it is essential to preserve a balance between doctrinal knowledge and methodical realization, this dialectic likes to envelop spiritual truths in abstruse complications; to accept them, or to accept their existence, we need only know the motive behind them.

A consideration which might not be out of place here is the following: one must react against the abusive opinion that attributes to sanctity as such—not to a particular type of sanctity—every imaginable quality and, consequently, all possible wisdom; in this way, the “wisdom of the saints”—no matter what saints—has been opposed to metaphysics as such, which is merely a matter of “natural intelligence”, it is claimed. Now the phenomenon of sanctity consists of two things: the exclusiveness, on the one hand, and the intensity, on the other, of thought and will in view of the transcendent and of the next world, or of “God” and “Paradise”. Thus sanctity, in its most general meaning, is essentially a matter of exclusivity and intensity on the basis of a religious credo; and it is on these two supernaturally inspired qualities that the gift of miracles depends. In the case of wisdom, it is the depth and scope of intellectual knowledge that determines the exclusivity and intensity of the spiritual behavior, though both modes of perfection can meet and interpenetrate; there is no incompatibility, nor strict separation here, for if on the one hand “the Spirit bloweth where it listeth”, on the other man always remains man.

*

* *

The human margin, needless to say, does not deploy itself on the doctrinal or dialectical level only, and we have already alluded to this when discussing the rabbinical exaggerations stigmatized by Christ. Similar in kind are some excessive practices that are consecrated or tolerated by tradition, notably in Hinduism, where particular opinions or attitudes, while not in general being totally unintelligible, are definitely disproportionate, to the point of being actually superstitious. These things can be explained, on the one hand, by the constant scruple of preserving the tradition in its original state of purity—in which

case abuses are opposed to other abuses—and, on the other, by a certain totalitarianism typical of human nature; the concern for purity is obviously combined with the recognition that collectivities need a language that is precise, thus incisive and in practice immoderate, otherwise teachings fade and disappear.

Yet perhaps there is in some of these excesses a realism that tends to want exhaust negative possibilities within the framework of tradition itself, as is somewhat the case of sacred Scriptures which contain wisely providential imperfections, or in sacred art where monsters are found next to divinities, or demons side by side with angels, in order to reduce to a minimum, by a kind of preventive and disciplined anticipation, the inevitable reactions of the powers of darkness.

*

* *

If there are variations, or even divergences, that are legitimate or spiritually and traditionally permissible, it is finally because there are three fundamental human types together with their diverse combinations: the passional, the sentimental, the intellectual.¹² Every man is a “self” placed in the “world”; this world contains “forms”, and the “self” contains “desires”. Now the great question is to know how a man, depending on his nature, senses or interprets at the outset these four facts of human existence; for it is this spontaneous conception that marks his spiritual type.

For the passional man, the contingent facts of existence, the world and the self with their contents, men and things, good deeds and sins, have something practically absolute about them; God appears to him as a kind of abstraction, a background that is not *a priori* relevant. Passion dominates him and plunges him into the world of appearances;¹³ thus his path is first and foremost a penitential one: he either redeems himself through violent asceticism or sacrifices himself in some holy war, or in servitude offered to God. The passional man can never be an intellectual in the full sense of the word; the doctrine that applies to him is made up of threats and promises, and of the metaphysical and eschatological minimum required by an intelligence mixed with passion.

For the man of the intellectual type, on the contrary, the contingent facts of existence appear at the outset as they are, in a near transparent mode: before asking “what do I want”, he will ask “what is the world” and “what am I”, which from the beginning determines a certain detachment with regard to forms

and desires. It is true that he can be subject to attachments in relation to the heavenly realities shining through their earthly reflections; the most contemplative child can become strongly attached to things that, in the human desert he may be surrounded with, appear to him as memories of a paradise both lost and immanent. Be that as it may, for the fundamentally contemplative man, it is the invisible that is reality, whereas “life is a dream” (*la vida es sueño*); brute passion is replaced in him by the Platonic sense for beauty.

The third type is the emotional man, who might also be called the musical type; he is an intermediary possibility, for he can tend toward the passional type as well as toward the intellectual type, and in fact is reflected in both of them.¹⁴ It is love and hope that constitute in him the dominant and operative element; he will readily place the accent on devotional manifestations, with a predilection for musical liturgy. This is the spirituality of happiness, yet also that of nostalgia.

All this amounts to saying that there are three fundamental ways of transcending terrestrial *Mâyâ*: firstly, the penitential crushing of the ego; secondly, the conversion of passional energy into celestial music; and thirdly, intellectual penetration which turns illusion to ashes, or which brings it back to its quintessence.

These three modes or these three human types, needless to say, give rise to various combinations, made even more complex by the intervening influence of ethnic, cultural, and other factors; thus we need to take into account not just the three types insofar as they characterize different individuals, but also their presence in the same individual, and even, in a certain way, in every individual.¹⁵ What interests us here, however, is not the complexity of the human being, but differences between men: it is the diversity of spiritual gifts, and especially the fragmentation of primordial man, that makes necessary the play of veiling and unveiling that constitutes traditional thinking.

¹ Worthy of note is the following divergence concerning the Blessed Virgin: was Mary *a priori* free from the capacity to sin, or was she without sin out of the superabundance of her virtue? In other words, was she impeccable owing to the absolute holiness of her nature or was she holy in virtue of the absolute impeccability of her intelligence and will? Those who maintain the first thesis seek to avoid attributing to Mary an imperfection of substance; those of the second seek to avoid depriving her of the perfection of merit; both parties, however, seem to lose sight of the fact that at the level of the Blessed Virgin the alternative becomes wholly meaningless. The Immaculate Conception—attributed to Mary also by Muslim tradition—comprises by its very nature all meritorious attitude, somewhat as a substance synthesizes all of its possible accidents; and, conversely, perfect impeccability—which is excluded in the case of ordinary man—is *ipso facto* equivalent to the absence of “original sin”.

² Moreover, the advent of Protestantism in the Latin West contains the same proof. Psychologically—not doctrinally—Protestantism in fact repeats, though clearly in a much more extreme form, the protest of Arianism which contained, in spite of everything, a bit of truth and an element of equilibrium.

³ Most paradoxically, the one does not prevent the other. This is what has happened in the Latin West, where the papacy became the prey finally, not of the emperor of course, but of politics and consequently of democracy since democracy determines politics. Since the French Revolution, the Church has been substantially at the mercy, so to speak, of secularizing republics—including pseudo-monarchies that are in fact republican—for it is their ideology that decides who is worthy to be a bishop; and owing to a particularly favorable historical juncture, politics has succeeded in pumping into the mold of the Church human material that is heterogeneous to the Church. The last Council was ideo-political and not theological; its illegitimacy results from the fact that it was determined, not by concrete situations evaluated from the point of view of theology, but by ideo-political abstractions opposed to theology, or more specifically by the democratism of the world operating monstrously in the role of Holy Spirit. “Humility” and “charity”, manipulated as suits the occasion and henceforth one-sided, are there to ensure the success of the enterprise.

⁴ The deterioration in question is detectable, not only on the speculative plane, but also on the operative plane, where the volitive element too often confers a somewhat violent tone on the method, in the stead of a more intellectual alchemy; this produces accidental ruptures, for the gates of Heaven cannot be breached with unintelligent excesses, however heroic they may be. There needs to be a balance between the quantitative and the qualitative, the volitive and the intellectual, something that moralizing vulgarization readily loses sight of. Moreover, it is this vulgarization that brings about the imagery of extravagant marvels and, by repercussion, the equally unfortunate depreciation of true miracles.

⁵ The Councils would sometimes degenerate into brawls, which is not very metaphysical, but is better than laxity toward manifest error on the pretext of “charity” or “humility”.

⁶ Vedantin texts confirm this, and so-called monotheistic theologies clearly contain sectors that attest to the same quality.

⁷ Mercy is God, but God is not Mercy only. Nonetheless, God is much more directly Mercy—the verb “to be” indicating an identity of essence and not just an equation as such—than He is Vengeance, which is extrinsic and conditional, whereas Mercy is intrinsic, and thus unconditional, without therefore being identified with Absoluteness as such.

⁸ Had philosophical pantheism taken into consideration this aspect of things—which is not the case since it has no knowledge of the degrees of reality and transcendence—it would be legitimate as a synthetic or inclusive perspective. In the polemics between theologians, these two kinds of pantheism are readily confused.

⁹ For Parmenides, pure Being coincides with pure Knowledge; all the rest is “opinion”, *doxa*, which is not unrelated to the notion of *Mâyâ*, though with the reservation that, in Vedantin terms, the Being of Parmenides is not completely outside of *Mâyâ*, but is identified with its summit, *Īshvara*. In parallel with their cult of Perfection, the Greeks have always had a certain fear of the Infinite, which is clearly visible even in their architecture: though the Parthenon has true grandeur, it expresses the religion of the finite and rational Perfect, which opposes itself to virgin nature by confusing the unlimited with the chaotic, the Infinite with the irrational.

¹⁰ As to Far-Easterners, they are contemplative, but symbolists and not logicians; they are above all visual in their outlook. The purely Mongol traditions are those of Fu-Hsi with its Taoist and Confucian branches, then Shinto, without forgetting the various Far-Eastern and Siberian shamanisms; but the Mongol soul has also set its imprint on Buddhism, which has thus become partially representative of the spiritual genius of the Yellow Race, notably in the case of Zen, and, in a more general way, in all of sacred art.

¹¹ The fundamental Testimony, or the First *Shahâdah*, contains a negative part, which rejects false divinities, and a positive part, which affirms the true God: the first is the “negation”, the *nafy*, and the second, the “strengthening”, the *ithbât*; this is the distinction between *Mâyâ* and *Ātmâ*. The Second *Shahâdah*, that of the Prophet, adds that *Mâyâ* is not other than *Ātmâ*, in its “not unreal” substance.

¹² The trivialization of certain terms obliges us to specify that we use the words “sentimental” and “intellectual” in their proper and neutral meaning, without applying to “sentimental” the pejorative and to “intellectual” the profane and banal nuances that conventional language lends them. “Sentimental” is that which pertains to sentiment, whether base or lofty, stupid or intelligent, worldly or sacral; “intellectual” is that which pertains to the intellect, whether doctrinal or methodical, discriminating or contemplative. Thus the term “intellectual” does not have the same

ambivalence as the term “sentimental”, for the simple reason that sentiment is a horizontal and ambiguous faculty, whereas the intellect—not just intelligence or reason alone—is by definition a vertical and ascending faculty.

¹³ Moreover, be it said in passing, this is the role of a large part of “culture”: to pull man into the blind alleys of poisonous dreams and mental passions; to draw him insidiously away from the “one thing necessary”; to make him lose the taste for Heaven. The great novels of the nineteenth century, notably, exist for that purpose; they are the modern and centrifugal substitute for the Golden Legend and the romances of Chivalry.

¹⁴ The purely profane mode is, in this case, individualist lyrical poetry; it is in principle less harmful than the novel—provided it is authentic and natural and neither decadent nor subversive—first because its mode of expression is brief and then because it can be inspired by a cosmic beauty that transcends the poet’s individuality; the case of music is analogous.

¹⁵ The types in question, which refer to the ternary “fear”, “love”, “knowledge”, hardly coincide with the three types of gnosticism: the hylic, the psychic, the pneumatic. The hylic is never a spiritual type; the passionate is always a psychic type, whereas the sentimental can be a pneumatic, but is more normally to be found in the psychic category.