

NECESSARY CLARIFICATIONS



ARTICLES OF RENE GUENON

BERSERKER

BOOKS



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: "Spiritual Knowledge and Profane 'Culture'" (2 February 1934). Reproduces (without the Masonic references) the article "Connaissance initiatique et «culture» profane" previously published in *Le Voile d'Isis*, Paris, June 1933. Reprinted by the author, with the same title, in *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter XXXIII, Paris, 1945.

Chapter 2: "On 'traditional' teaching and the meaning of symbols" (2 March 1934). Article that includes, with variations, a lecture by René Guénon at the Thebab 347 Lodge, to which the author belonged: "L'Enseignement Initiatique" ("Initiatic Teaching"). First published in *Le Symbolisme*, Paris, January 1913. Later published with variations in the December 1933 issue of *Le Voile d'Isis* and compiled in *Articles et Comptes Rendus I*, Paris, 2002. Rewritten by the author for chapter XXXI: "L'Enseignement initiatique" of *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, Paris, 1946.

Chapter 3: "The Meaning of 'Folklore'" (16 March 1934) (Signed r. g.). The entire article is only part of the one published by René Guénon in March 1934 in *Le Voile d'Isis*, entitled "Le Saint Graal" ("The Holy Grail"), compiled in *Aperçus sur l'ésotérisme chrétien*, Paris, 1954.

Chapter 4: "Two myths: civilisation and progress" (18 April 1934) (Signed "Ignitus"). Contains almost the entirety of the first part of the chapter "Civilisation et progrès" ("Civilisation and Progress") from *Orient et Occident*, Paris, 1924.

Chapter 5: "The Myth of Progress" (2 May 1934) (Signed "Ignitus"). Contains almost the entirety of the second part of the chapter "Civilisation et progrès" ("Civilisation and Progress") from *Orient et Occident*, Paris, 1924.

Chapter 6: "What the 'religion' of a philosopher boils down to" (1 June 1934). Reproduction of the article "La 'Religion' d'un Philosophe", *Voile d'Isis*, January 1934, but somewhat abridged. The original French has been compiled in *Articles et Comptes Rendus I*. The author reworked the text to form chapter XXXIII: "L'intuitionnisme contemporain" ("Contemporary Intuitionism") of *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, Paris, 1945.

Chapter 7: "The Moralistic-Sentimental Myth" (16 June 1934) (Signed "Ignitus"). It contains almost the entirety of the third part of the chapter "Civilisation and Progress" from *Orient et Occident*.

Chapter 8: "The Superstition of 'Science'" (1 July 1934) (Signed "Ignitus"). Contains part of the chapter "La superstition de la Science" ("The Superstition of Science") from *Orient et Occident*

Chapter 9: "Modern Scientism and Traditional Knowledge" (19 July 1934) (Signed "Ignitus"). Contains part of the chapter "La superstition de la Science" from *Orient et Occident*.

Chapter 10: "The Superstition of 'Vulgarisation'" (2 August 1934) (Signed "Ignitus"). Contains part of the chapter "The Superstition of Science" from *Orient et Occident*.

Chapter 11: "The Superstition of 'Life'" (24 August 1934) (Signed "Ignitus"). Contains part of the chapter "La superstition de la Vie" ("The Superstition of Life"), published in *Orient et Occident*, Paris, 1924.

Chapter 12: "Necessary Clarifications: Two Sciences" (17 October 1934). Based on the article "Du pré tendu *empirisme* des Anciens" ("On the Supposed *Empiricism* of the Ancients"), *Voile d'Isis*, July 1934. Compiled in *Mélanges*, Paris, 1976.

Chapter 13: "The problem of 'principles'" (16 November 1934) ("Ignitus"). Contains part of the chapter "L'accord sur les principes" ("The agreement on principles"), from *Orient et Occident*.

Chapter 14: "The problem of the constitution of the elite" (18 January 1935). Contains part of the chapter "Constitution et rôle de l'élite" ("Constitution and role of the elite") from *Orient et Occident*.

Chapter 15: "Orientations: the end of a world" (10 May 1935). Contains almost the entire prologue to *La Crise du Monde moderne*, Paris, 1927.

Chapter 16: "On the traditional conception of the arts" (9 July 1935) ("Ignitus"). Contains almost the entire article "L'initiation et les métiers" ("Initiation and the professions"), *Voile d'Isis*, Paris, March 1934. Reprinted in *Mélanges*, Paris, 1976.

Chapter 17: "Critique of Individualism" (17 September 1935). Contains part of Chapter V: "L'individualisme" ("Individualism") from *La Crise du Monde moderne*.

Chapter 18: "Tradition and Traditionalism" (17 November 1936). This is an abridged version of the article published in *Études Traditionnelles*, October 1936: "Tradition et traditionalisme" ("Tradition and Traditionalism"); later compiled in *Articles et Comptes Rendus I*. It was reworked by the author to form chapter XXXI of *Le Règne de la Quantité*, with the same title.

Chapter 19: "On the dangers of the 'spiritual'" (27 April 1937). Rewritten by the author to form chapter XXXV: "La confusion du psychique et du spirituel" ("The confusion of the psychic with the spiritual") of *Le Règne de la Quantité*.

Chapter 20: "On the Sense of Proportion" (15 February 1939). Published almost identically in *Etudes Traditionnelles*: "Le sens des proportions," Paris, December 1937. Later collected in *Mélanges*, Paris, 1976.

Chapter 21: "Explorations on the Other Shore" (31 March 1939). Reproduces with slight variations the article "A propos du animisme et de chamanisme" ("On Animism and Shamanism"), published in *Études Traditionnelles*, March 1937, and

later compiled in *Articles et Comptes Rendus I*. Rewritten by the author for chapter XXVI: "Shamanism and Witchcraft" of *Le Règne de la Quantité*, Paris, 1945.

Chapter 22: "Secret War" (18 April 1939). Rewritten by the author for chapter XXVII: "Résidus psychiques" ("Psychic Residues") of *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, Paris, 1945.

Chapter 23: "Beyond the 'Mental' Plane" (16 July 1939). Reproduces with variations the article "Les limites du mental" ("The Limits of the Mental"), published in *Le Voile d'Isis*, October 1930, and revisited by the author for chapter XXXII: "Les limites du mental" in *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, Paris, 1945.

Chapter 24: "On 'Psychoanalytic' Perversion" (19 December 1939). Reproduces, with minor variations, the article "L'erreur du 'psychologisme'" ("The Error of 'Psychologism'"), published in *Études Traditionnelles*, January and February 1938, and compiled in *Articles et Comptes Rendus I*. Rewritten by the author for chapter XXXIV: "Les méfaits de la psychanalyse" ("The Excesses of Psychoanalysis") of *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, Paris, 1945.

Chapter 25: "On Spiritual Authority" (15 February 1940). Contains, with some additions, most of chapter IX: "La Loi Immuable" ("The Immutable Law") from *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel*, Paris, 1929.

Unless otherwise stated, the articles are signed by René Guénon. Addenda

Addenda and notes are additions by the translator, except for one note that is indicated as such.

* * * * *

Contents:

Introductory note

- 1.- Spiritual knowledge and secular 'culture' (2 February 1934)
- 2.- On 'traditional' teaching and the meaning of symbols (2 March 1934)
- 3.- The meaning of folklore (16 March 1934)
- 4.- Two myths: civilisation and progress (18 April 1934)
- 5.- The myth of progress (2 May 1934)
- 6.- Where the 'religion' of a philosopher is reduced to (1 June 1934)
- 7.- The moralistic-sentimental myth (16 June 1934)
- 8.- The Superstition of 'Science' (1 July 1934)
- 9.- Modern scientism and traditional knowledge (19 July 1934)
- 10.- The superstition of 'vulgarisation' (2 August 1934)
- 11.- The superstition of 'life' (24 August 1934)
- 12.- Necessary clarifications: two sciences (17 October 1934)
- 13.- The problem of 'principles' (16 November 1934)
- 14.- The problem of the constitution of the élites (18 January 1935)

- 15.- Orientations: the end of a world (10 May 1935)
- 16.- On the traditional conception of the arts (9 July 1935)
- 17.- Critique of individualism (17 September 1935)
- 18.- Tradition and traditionalism (17 November 1936)
- 19.- On the dangers of the 'spiritual' (27 April 1937)
- 20.- On the sense of proportion (15 February 1939)
- 21.- Explorations on the other side (31 March 1939)
- 22.- Secret War (18 April 1939)
- 23.- Beyond the 'Mental' Plane (16 July 1939)
- 24.- On 'Psychoanalytic' Perversion (19 December 1939)
- 25.- On Spiritual Authority (15 February 1940).

1.- SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE AND PROFANE 'CULTURE'*

For anyone who wishes to attain a higher point of view, it is essential to avoid any confusion between true spiritual knowledge and all that is external instruction and profane knowledge, which, in reality, is completely unrelated to the former. This point cannot be emphasised enough: it is necessary to put an end to the prejudice that what has been agreed to call "culture", in the profane sense, has any value, even as preparation, with regard to true spiritual knowledge, which in reality cannot have any point of contact with it.

In principle, it is purely and simply a matter of an absence of relationship: profane instruction, at whatever level it may be considered, cannot serve spiritual knowledge in any way, and is not even incompatible with it; from this point of view, it appears only as something different, in the same way as the skill acquired in a manual trade, or the "physical culture" so fashionable today. Fundamentally, all of this is of the same order for those who take the point of view that interests us; but the danger is to be caught up in the deceptive appearances of a supposed 'intellectuality' that has nothing to do with pure, true, traditional 'intellectuality'; the constant abuse of the word 'intellectual' by our contemporaries is enough to prove that such a danger is all too real.

Among other drawbacks, there is often a tendency to want to bring together or mix things of a totally different order. On more than one occasion we have pointed out, in this regard, the vanity of all attempts to establish any link or comparison between modern, secular science and traditional knowledge. Some, in this sense, even go so far as to claim to find in the former "confirmations" of the latter, as if the latter, which rests on immutable principles, could derive the slightest benefit from an accidental and external conformity with some of the hypothetical and necessarily mutable results of this uncertain and hesitant research that moderns take pleasure in adorning with the name of "science"!

But it is not this aspect of the question that we wish to emphasise here, nor even the danger that may arise when exaggerated importance is attached to such inferior knowledge and all one's activity is devoted to it to the detriment of higher knowledge, the possibility of which will thus end up being totally unknown or ignored. It is too well known that this is the case for the vast majority of our contemporaries; and for them, the problem of a relationship with spiritual or traditional knowledge no longer arises, since they do not even suspect the existence of such knowledge. But even without going to such extremes, secular education can very often be considered, in fact if not in principle, an obstacle to the acquisition of true knowledge, that is, precisely the opposite of effective preparation, and this for several reasons, which we must explain in a little more detail.

First of all, secular education imposes certain mental habits that can be more or less difficult to break later on. It is all too easy to see how the limitations and even distortions that are the ordinary consequence of university education are often irremediable, and in order to escape entirely from this unfortunate influence, special dispositions are required, which can only be exceptional.

We are speaking here in general terms, and we will not dwell on certain more specific drawbacks, such as the restriction of perspective that inevitably results from 'specialisation'; what is essential to emphasise is that profane knowledge in itself, as we have said, is simply indifferent, but the methods by which it is instilled are the very negation of those that open the way to spiritual knowledge.

Secondly, we must take into account, as an obstacle that is by no means negligible, that kind of infatuation so often caused by a pretended knowledge, which in many people is all the more pronounced the more elementary, inferior and incomplete that knowledge is. On the other hand, even without departing from the profane point of view and the contingencies of 'ordinary life', the ravages of primary education in this regard are easily recognised by all those who are not blinded by certain preconceived ideas. It is evident that, between two ignorant people, the one who realises that he does not know is in a much more favourable position for

* "Spiritual knowledge and secular 'culture'" (2 February 1934). Reproduces (without the Masonic references) the article "Initiatic knowledge and secular 'culture'" previously published in *Le Voile d'Isis*, Paris, June 1933.

acquisition of knowledge than someone who believes they know something; the natural possibilities of the former are intact, so to speak, while those of the latter are "inhibited" and can no longer develop freely. Furthermore, even if we assume that both individuals have the same level of goodwill, it would still remain the case that one of them would first have to rid themselves of the false ideas that obstruct their mind, while the other would at least be spared this preliminary and negative work, which represents one of the meanings of what some traditions referred to as the 'purification of metals' to be transmuted.

In this way, we can easily explain a fact that we have often observed in so-called 'cultured' people. We know what is commonly meant by this word: it is not even a question of a solid education, albeit limited and inferior in scope, but rather a special "tinge" about all kinds of things, an education that is above all "literary", in any case purely bookish and verbal, which allows one to speak with confidence about everything, even that which one is completely ignorant of, and is likely to delude those who, seduced by these brilliant appearances, do not realise that they only mask nothingness. On another level, this culture generally produces effects very similar to those we recalled earlier with regard to primary education. Certainly, there may be exceptions, and it may happen that those who have received such a "culture" are gifted with natural dispositions good enough to appreciate it at its true value and not be "manipulated"; but we are not exaggerating in the least when we say that, apart from such exceptions, the vast majority of "cultured" people must be placed among those whose mental state is the least favourable to true knowledge. In this regard, there is a kind of resistance in them, often unconscious, perhaps even deliberate. Even those who do not formally deny, *a priori*, everything that is truly spiritual and transcendental in nature, show at least in this respect a complete lack of interest, and it even happens that they flaunt their ignorance of such things, as if this were, in their eyes, one of the signs of the superiority conferred on them by such culture! Do not think that we have the slightest intention of caricaturing; we are simply saying exactly what we have seen on more than one occasion, not only in the West, but also in the East, where, moreover, this type of "cultured" man is of little importance, having appeared only as a product of a certain more or less "Westernised" education. The conclusion to be drawn is that people of this kind are simply among the uninitiated, the least apt to receive higher knowledge, and that it would be perfectly irrational to take their opinion into account in the slightest, even if only to try to adapt the presentation of certain ideas to them. Moreover, it should be added that concern for 'public opinion' is generally the hallmark of those who are destined to have no real principles and no real knowledge.

On this occasion, we must further clarify a point that is closely related to these considerations: knowledge derived exclusively from books has nothing in common with spiritual knowledge, even when considered in its purely theoretical form. This may already be evident from what we have said, since all book learning is unquestionably part of the most external education; if we insist on this point, it is because one could fall into error in the case of books whose content is of a spiritual nature. Those who read such books in the manner of 'cultured' people, or even those who study them in the manner of scholars and according to profane methods, will not thereby be close to true knowledge, since they bring with them dispositions that do not allow them to penetrate their real meaning or assimilate it to any degree. The example of Orientalists, with their total lack of understanding, is a clear illustration of what we are saying. Very different is the case of those who, taking these same books as "supports" for their inner work, according to the function for which they are essentially intended, know how to see beyond the words and find in them an opportunity and a point of support for the development of their own possibilities. This, as will be easily understood, has nothing in common with bookish study, even though books are its starting point. Filling the memory with verbal notions does not constitute even a shadow of real knowledge.

Only the penetration of the spirit hidden beneath the outer forms counts, a penetration that presupposes that the being has the corresponding possibilities within itself, since all true knowledge is identification; and without this "qualification," inherent in the very nature of such a being, the highest expression of spiritual knowledge, insofar as it is susceptible to expression, and the traditional sacred writings themselves, will be nothing more than "dead letters."

2.- ON "TRADITIONAL" TEACHING AND THE MEANING OF SYMBOLS*

It seems that, in general, there is a lack of appreciation of what traditional teaching should be, or what essentially characterises it, differentiating it essentially from profane teaching.

Many, in this matter, consider things too superficially, dwelling on external appearances, and thus see nothing else worthy of observation than the use of symbolism, whose *raison d'être*—one might even say necessity—they do not understand at all, and which, under such conditions, they can undoubtedly find only strange and at least useless. Apart from that, they assume that initiatory doctrine is, in essence, nothing more than a philosophy like any other, slightly different in its method, but nothing more, since their mentality is such that they are incapable of conceiving of anything else. Now, it is perhaps preferable to deny the value of such teaching altogether, which amounts to ignoring it pure and simple, rather than to belittle it in this way and present in its name and in its place the expression of any particular opinions, more or less coordinated, on all sorts of things that are in reality neither 'traditional' spirituality in themselves nor in the way they are treated.

Traditional teaching

If, as we have already emphasised in our previous article on this page, traditional teaching is neither an extension of secular teaching, as some would have it, nor its antithesis, as others maintain, and if it constitutes neither a philosophical system nor a specialised science, one may ask what it is, for it is not enough to have said what it is not; it is still necessary, if not to give a definition proper, which is perhaps impossible, at least to try to make people understand what its nature consists of. And to make its nature understood, at least to the extent that this can be done, is to explain at the same time, and for that very reason, why it is not possible to define it without distorting it, and also why people are generally, and in a certain sense necessarily, mistaken about its true character. This, the constant use of symbolism in the transmission of this teaching, of which it forms the basis, could nevertheless, for anyone who reflects a little, suffice to give a glimpse of it, since it is simply logical to admit, even without going into the depths of things, that a mode of expression entirely different from ordinary language must have been created to express, at least in its origin, ideas equally different from those expressed by the latter, and conceptions that cannot be fully translated into words, for which a less limited, more universal language is necessary, because they themselves are of a more universal order.

But if the conceptions of traditional spirituality are different from profane conceptions, it is above all because they come from a different mentality than the latter, from which they differ less in their object than in the point of view from which they approach it. Now, if this is the essential distinction between the two orders of conceptions, it is easy to admit that, on the one hand, everything that can be considered from the profane point of view can also be considered from the 'traditional' point of view, but in an entirely different way and with a different understanding, while, on the other hand, there are things that completely escape the profane domain and are specific to the traditional domain, since the latter is not subject to the same limitations as the former.

Symbolism

That symbolism, which is like the sensible form of all traditional teaching, is in fact and in reality a more universal language than vulgar languages, cannot be doubted for a single moment if one considers only that every symbol is susceptible to multiple interpretations,

* "Sull'insegnamento «tradizionale» e sul senso dei simboli" (2 March 1934). Article that includes, with variations, a lecture by René Guénon at the Thebah 347 Lodge, to which he belonged: "L'Enseignement Initiatique" ("Initiatic Teaching"). First published in *Le Symbolisme*, Paris, January 1913. Later published with variations in the December 1933 issue of *Le Voile d'Ilsis* and compiled in *Articles et Comptes Rendus I*. This latter version was translated into Italian in *La Tradizione e le tradizioni*, Mediterranee, Rome, 2003. This text was reworked by the author for chapter XXXI: "L'Enseignement initiatique" of *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*.

not contradictory to each other, but rather complementary, and all equally true even though they come from different points of view. And if this is so, then that symbol is the synthetic and schematic representation of a whole set of ideas and concepts that each person can grasp according to their own mental abilities and to the extent that they are prepared for their understanding. And so, for those who manage to penetrate its profound meaning, the symbol can convey much more than anything that can be expressed in words. This shows the necessity of symbolism: it is the only means of transmitting all that is inexpressible, which constitutes the domain of effective but transcendent spiritual knowledge, or rather, of planting the seeds of such concepts in the intellect of those who aspire to such knowledge, who must then bring them from potential to actuality, developing and elaborating them through their own personal work, because no one can do anything more than prepare them for it, outlining for them, through appropriate formulas, the plan that they will then have to carry out themselves in order to gain effective possession of the content of traditional knowledge that they have received from outside only in symbolic form.

But if such a form, which is only valid as the basis and support for the effective realisation of transcendent spiritual knowledge, is the only one that can be given from outside, at least it can be preserved and transmitted even by those who do not understand its meaning or scope. It is sufficient for the symbols to be preserved intact so that they are always capable of awakening, in those who are capable of it, all the conceptions of which they represent the synthesis. This derives from something that, in the great traditions, subsists and resides far beyond all the rituals and all the sensible forms that are in use for external and symbolic transmission: which does not prevent these forms from having, especially in the early stages of preparation, their necessary function and their own value, since they do nothing more than translate the fundamental symbols into *gestures*, taking this term in the broadest sense, and thus bring the traditional teaching to *life*, in a certain way, for those to whom it is presented. Although the expression of an idea in a vital way is, after all, nothing more than a symbol like any other. And if every process of acquiring spiritual knowledge presents in its different phases a correspondence, either with individual human life or with the whole of earthly life, it is because one can consider vital evolution itself, whether particular or general, as the development of a plan analogous to that which those who tend towards traditional spiritual knowledge must carry out in order to realise themselves in the complete expansion of all the powers of their being. These are always and in all cases plans that correspond to the same synthetic conception, so that they are identical in principle, and although they are all different and indefinitely varied in their realisation, they proceed from a single ideal archetype, from a universal plan drawn up by a cosmic Force or Will.

Cosmic Will

Every being, whether individual or collective, tends, consciously or unconsciously, to carry out within itself, with the means appropriate to its particular nature, the plan of that Will, and to contribute to it, according to its function in the cosmic whole, to the total realisation of that same plan; which is, in short, nothing more than the *universalisation of its own personal realisation*. It is at the precise point in its evolution that a being truly becomes aware of this purpose, when it begins to participate in 'traditional' spirituality: which, once it has become aware of itself, must lead it, according to its personal path, to that integral realisation which is accomplished, not in the isolated development of certain special and more or less extraordinary faculties, *but in the complete, harmonious and hierarchical development of all the possibilities virtually implicit in the essence of that being*.

Thus, traditional instruction, viewed in its universality, must comprise, as so many applications, in indefinite variety, of the same transcendent principle, all the particular paths of realisation, not only of each category of beings, but also of each individual being; and, comprising them all thus within itself, it totalises and synthesises them in the absolute unity of the universal Way. In particular, it can be said that just as no two individuals are identical, so there are no two paths of realisation that are absolutely similar, even from an external and ritualistic point of view, and even more so from the point of view of inner work. The unity and immutability of the principle in no way require the uniformity and immovability, which are in any case unattainable, of external forms, and this allows, in the practical application that must be made to the transmission and expression of traditional teaching, *the reconciliation of the two notions, so often mistakenly opposed, of tradition and progress*, but without recognising the latter as having more than a purely relative character. Only the

external translation of traditional teaching and its assimilation by this or that individual are susceptible to modification, and not this teaching considered in itself; in reality, to the extent that such translation is possible, it must necessarily take relativities into account, while what it expresses is independent of them in the ideal universality of its essence, and obviously cannot be a question of progress from a point of view that encompasses all possibilities in the simultaneity of a single synthesis.

Now, this being established, how far can a traditional teaching go when it seeks to move from the first preparatory stages and the external forms most closely related to them? Under what conditions can it occur, what must it be like in order to fulfil its assigned role and effectively assist those who participate in it in their inner work, assuming only that they are themselves capable of reaping the fruits?

How are these conditions realised within the various organisations of a 'traditional' nature? Finally, what do the hierarchies relating to such organisations actually correspond to in the real acquisition of transcendent knowledge? Here is a group of questions that cannot be dealt with in a few words, and which all deserve to be developed at length, without, however, doing so providing anything more than a topic for reflection and meditation, without the vain pretension of exhausting a subject that extends and deepens more and more as it is studied, precisely because it opens up truly unlimited conceptual horizons to those who study it with the required spiritual dispositions.

3.- THE MEANING OF "FOLKLORE" *

* "Significato del «folk-lore»" (16 March 1934) (Signed r. g.). The entire article is only part of the one published by René Guénon in March 1934 in *Le Voile d'Isis*, entitled "Le Saint Graal" ("The

The conception of *folklore*, as it is commonly understood, rests on a radically false idea, namely, that it is a "popular creation," a spontaneous product of the masses. The close relationship between this view and democratic prejudices is immediately apparent. As has been rightly said, "the profound interest that all so-called popular traditions present lies above all in the fact that they are not at all popular in origin". We would add that, as in almost all cases, these are traditional elements in the true sense of the term, although perhaps distorted, diminished or fragmentary, and things that have real symbolic value, all of which, far from being of popular origin, are not even of simply human origin. What may be "popular" is only the fact of "survival", when these elements belong to traditional forms that have disappeared; and in this respect, the term *folklore* takes on a meaning very close to that of "paganism", taking into account only the etymological value of the latter, without any polemical or offensive intention.

The people thus preserve, without understanding them, remnants of ancient traditions, sometimes even from a past so distant that it would be impossible to determine and which, for that reason, must be relegated to the obscure realm of 'prehistory'; In this respect, it has the function of a kind of more or less 'subconscious' collective memory, the content of which has clearly come from elsewhere. It is an essentially 'lunar' function, and it is noteworthy that, according to the traditional doctrine of astral correspondences, the popular masses correspond effectively to the Moon, which clearly indicates their passive nature, incapable of initiative or spontaneity. What may seem more surprising is that, when we get to the bottom of things, we find that when it is preserved in this way, it contains above all, in a more or less veiled form, a considerable amount of esoteric data, that is, data referring to a plane of transcendent knowledge, but precisely the one that is least popular by its very nature. And this fact suggests an explanation in itself, which we will limit ourselves to indicating in a few words. When a traditional form is about to die out, its representatives may well voluntarily entrust to that collective memory, which we have just mentioned, what would otherwise have been irretrievably lost. It is, in short, the only way to save what can still be saved to a certain extent. At the same time, the natural incomprehension of the masses is a sufficient guarantee that what was esoteric in nature will not be lost, but will remain only as a kind of testimony to the past for those who, in another era, will be able to understand it.

As far as symbolism is concerned, we cannot repeat often enough that every true symbol carries within itself multiple meanings, and this from its very origin, since it is not constituted by virtue of a human convention, but by virtue of the 'laws of correspondence' that connect all worlds to each other. And if some see these meanings and others do not, or only partially, that does not mean that they are not really contained there, and the whole difference refers to the 'intellectual horizon' of each person. However one may think of it from a profane point of view, symbolism is an exact science, not a digression where individual fantasies can run free.

In this vein, we also do not believe in the "inventions of poets," to which so many are willing to reduce almost everything. Such inventions, far from addressing the essential, merely conceal it, voluntarily or not, enveloping it in the misleading appearances of some kind of "fiction": and perhaps they conceal it too well, since, when they become too invasive, it becomes almost impossible to discover the deep and original meaning. And was it not among the Greeks that symbolism degenerated into 'mythology'? This danger is to be feared above all when the poet himself is unaware of the real value of symbols, for it is clear that such a case may well arise. The analogue of the 'donkey carrying relics' applies here as it does to so many other things. And the poet, then, will have a role similar to that of the profane, conservative and transmitting people in their ignorance of those higher, 'esoteric' facts we spoke of earlier.

Holy Grail"), later compiled in *Aperçus sur l'esotérisme chrétien*, Paris, 1954.

4.- TWO MYTHS: CIVILISATION AND PROGRESS*

* "Due miti: civiltà e progresso" (18 April 1934) (Signed "Ignitus"). "Two myths: civilisation and progress" (18 April 1934) (Signed "Ignitus"). Contains almost the entirety of the first part of the chapter

Modern Western civilisation appears in human history as a true anomaly: among all those we know more or less completely, this civilisation is the only one that developed in a purely material sense, and this monstrous development, whose beginning coincides with what has been agreed to call the Renaissance, has been accompanied, as was inevitable, by a corresponding intellectual regression; we do not say equivalent because these are two orders of things between which there could be no common measure. This regression has reached such a point that Westerners today no longer know what pure intellectuality can be, since they do not even suspect that such a thing can exist: hence their disdain, not only for Eastern civilisations, but also for the European Middle Ages, whose spirit also completely escapes them. How can we make people understand the value of purely speculative knowledge when, for them, intelligence is nothing more than a means of acting on matter and bending it to practical ends, and when science, in the restricted sense in which they understand it, is valuable above all insofar as it can be applied to industry? We are not exaggerating in the slightest: one need only look around to realise that this is the mentality of the vast majority of our contemporaries; and an examination of philosophy since Bacon and Descartes can only confirm these observations. We need only recall that Descartes limited intelligence to reason, that he assigned as the sole function of what he believed he was in a position to call metaphysics that of serving as the foundation of physics, which in turn was essentially destined, in his thinking, to prepare the ground for the constitution of the applied sciences, mechanics, medicine and morality, the ultimate goal of human knowledge as he conceived it; are not the trends he asserted the same ones that characterise, at first glance, the development of the modern world?

Western deviations

Denying or ignoring all pure and supra-rational knowledge meant opening the way that would logically lead, on the one hand, to positivism and *agnosticism*, which take advantage of the narrowest limitations of intelligence and its object, and, on the other hand, to all *sentimentalist* and *voluntarist* theories that strive to seek in the infra-rational what reason cannot give them. Indeed, those who today want to react against rationalism do not cease to accept the identification of the whole of intelligence with reason, and believe that reason is nothing more than a totally practical faculty, incapable of leaving the domain of matter. Bergson wrote: "Intelligence, considered in what appears to be its original course, is the faculty of manufacturing artificial objects, in particular tools for making tools (*sic*), and of varying their manufacture indefinitely." He continues: "Intelligence, even when it no longer operates on raw matter, follows the habits it has acquired in that operation: it applies forms that are the same as those of unorganised matter. It is made for this kind of work. Only this kind of work satisfies it fully. And this is what it expresses when it says that only in this way does it achieve distinction and clarity". In these last features, it is easy to recognise that it is not intelligence itself that is being questioned, but simply its Cartesian conception, which is very different. And the "new philosophy", as its adherents say, replaces the *superstition of reason* with another, even cruder in some of its aspects, which is the *superstition of life*.

Rationalism, powerless to rise to absolute truth, at least allowed relative truth to survive; contemporary *intuitionism* reduces this truth to the level of being nothing more than a representation of sensible reality, in all its inconsistency and constant change; Finally, *pragmatism* ends up doing away with the very notion of truth by identifying it with that of *utility*, which leads to its pure and simple suppression. If we have simplified things to some extent, we have not distorted them at all, and whatever the intermediate stages may have been, the fundamental trends are those we have just described. pragmatists, in reaching their conclusion, show themselves to be the most authentic representatives of modern Western thought: what does truth matter in a world whose aspirations, being solely material and sentimental, and not intellectual, find their total satisfaction in industry and morality, two areas in which any possibility of conceiving of

"Civilisation et progrès" ("Civilisation and Progress") from *Orient et Occident*, Paris, 1924.

truth? Certainly, this extreme has not been reached in one fell swoop, and many Europeans will protest that they are not yet in such a situation; but here we are thinking above all of Americans, who are, if we may use the expression, at a more "advanced" stage of the same civilisation: both mentally and geographically, America today is truly the "*Far West*", and *Europe will undoubtedly follow, if nothing comes to halt the development of the consequences implicit in the current state of affairs.*

The 'civilisation par excellence'

But perhaps the most extraordinary thing is the claim to make this *abnormal civilisation* the very model of all civilisations, to consider it as the "civilisation" par excellence, and even as the only one worthy of the name. Complementing this illusion is the belief in 'progress', considered in no less absolute terms and naturally identified, in essence, with the material development that absorbs all the activity of modern Westerners. It is curious to note how certain ideas spread and quickly become accepted, even though they clearly do not correspond to the general trends of a given environment and era. This is the case with these ideas of "civilisation" and "progress" that so many people willingly consider universal and necessary, *when in reality they are the result of a very recent invention* that, even today, at least three-quarters of humanity insists on ignoring and disregarding. Jacques Bainville pointed out that "while the verb 'to civilise' already has the meaning we assign to it among the good authors of the 18th century, the noun 'civilisation' is only found among the economists of the period immediately preceding the (French) Revolution. *Thus, the word civilisation is less than a century and a half old...* Even in ancient times, there was no term to express what we understand by civilisation. If this word were given to translate a Latin subject, the young student would find himself in quite a quandary... The life of words is not independent of the life of ideas. The word civilisation, which our ancestors did without, perhaps because they had the concrete thing, spread in the 19th century under the influence of new ideas. Scientific discoveries, the development of industry, trade, prosperity and well-being had created a kind of enthusiasm and even a certain prophetic spirit. The concept of indefinite progress, which appeared in the second half of the 18th century, helped to convince the human race that it had entered a new era, that of absolute civilisation... 'Civilisation' was then the degree of development and perfection that European nations had reached in the 19th century. This term, understood by all, even though it was not defined by anyone, encompassed both material and moral progress, which were mutually inclusive and inseparably linked. Civilisation was, in short, Europe; it was a diploma that the European world awarded itself.

This is exactly what we think, and we have quoted this passage, even though it is a little long, to show that we are not the only ones to do so.

So these two ideas of "civilisation" and "progress", which are very closely associated, date back only to the second half of the 18th century, that is, to the period which, among other things, also saw the birth of materialism; and they were propagated and popularised mainly by the socialist dreamers of the early 19th century. It must be agreed that the history of ideas sometimes allows us to make quite surprising discoveries and to reduce certain fantasies to their true value. This would be possible above all if it were done and studied properly, if it were not, as ordinary history is, falsified by biased interpretations or limited to works of simple erudition, to insignificant research on questions of detail. True history can be dangerous to certain political interests, and we have the right to ask ourselves whether this is not the reason why certain methods in this field are officially imposed to the exclusion of all others: *consciously or unconsciously, anything that would allow us to see many things clearly is dismissed a priori*, and this is how 'public opinion' is formed.

But, returning to the two ideas we have just referred to, we must point out that, in assigning them such a close origin, we are taking into account only this absolute meaning, which we consider illusory, and which is the one most commonly assigned to them today. As for the *relative* meaning to which these same words are susceptible, that is a different matter, and since that meaning is very legitimate, it cannot be said that in this case we are dealing with ideas that were born at a specific moment in time. Thus, we too readily recognise that there are multiple and diverse "civilisations"; it would be quite difficult

It is impossible to define precisely this complex set of elements that constitute what we call civilisation, but nevertheless everyone knows quite well what is meant by it. Nor do we think it necessary to try to encapsulate the general characteristics of all civilisations or the particular characteristics of a given civilisation in a rigid formula; this is a somewhat artificial procedure, and we are very wary of the narrow frameworks that the systematic mind is so fond of. Just as there are 'civilisations', there are also, in the course of the development of each of them, or of certain more or less restricted periods of that development, 'progresses' that act, not in an entirely indiscriminate manner, but within a defined sphere; This is, in short, just another way of saying that a civilisation develops in a certain sense, in a certain direction, but just as there is progress, there are also regressions, and sometimes both occur simultaneously in different areas. Therefore, we insist, all this is highly *relative*. If one tries to take the same words in an absolute sense, they do not correspond to any reality, and it is precisely then that they represent these new ideas that are less than two centuries old and are restricted solely to the West.

Certainly, 'Progress' and 'Civilisation' can have an excellent effect in certain phrases that are as empty as they are declamatory, very appropriate for impressing the crowd, for whom words serve less to express thought than to make up for its absence; in this sense, it plays one of the most important roles in the arsenal of formulas that contemporary "leaders" use to accomplish the singular work of collective suggestion without which the specifically modern mentality could not survive for too long. In this regard, we believe that the surprising analogy between the action of *the orator* and that of *the hypnotist* (and that of *the tamer* belongs equally to the same order) has never been sufficiently emphasised; let us point out in passing that this subject is worthy of the attention of psychologists. Undoubtedly, the power of words has been exercised to a greater or lesser extent in times other than our own, but there are no examples comparable to this gigantic collective hallucination through which a whole section of humanity came to take the most vain chimeras as incontrovertible realities, and among the idols of the modern spirit, those we now denounce are perhaps the most pernicious of all.

For this reason, the next article will be devoted to exhausting all the further aspects of what we can precisely call the *superstition of progress*, which constitutes one of the fundamental points that oppose the understanding of any normal, that is, traditional, form of civilisation, including those of the best of the East.

5.- THE MYTH OF PROGRESS*

In our previous article¹ we discussed these modern idols that are the ideas of 'Civilisation' and 'Progress'. It is worth returning to the genesis of the latter. If you like, for the sake of precision, we say that it is the idea of indefinite progress, to leave out of the question specific and limited advances, whose existence we do not wish to dispute at all.

It is probably in Pascal that we can find the first trace of this idea, applied, moreover, to a single point of view: the passage in which he compares humanity to "*the same man who always subsists and learns continuously over the course of centuries*" is well known, and where he demonstrates this anti-traditional spirit that constitutes one of the peculiarities of the modern West, declaring that "*those we call ancient were truly new in all things*" and that, consequently, their opinions carry very little weight. In this sense, Pascal had at least one precursor, since Bacon, with the same intention, had already said: *Antiquitas saeculi, juventus mundi*.

It is easy to see the unconscious sophism on which such a conception is based: this sophism consists in assuming that humanity as a whole follows a continuous and linear development; this is an eminently "simplistic" view that contradicts all known facts. Indeed, history shows us, in all eras, civilisations that are independent of one another, and often even divergent, some of which are born and develop while others decline and die or are abruptly annihilated in some cataclysm; and new civilisations do not always inherit the legacy of the old ones. Who would seriously argue, for example, that modern Westerners have benefited, even indirectly, from most of the knowledge accumulated by the Chaldeans or the Egyptians, not to mention civilisations whose names have not even survived to the present day? Moreover, there is no need to go so far back in time, since there are the sciences that were cultivated in the European Middle Ages and of which we have no idea today. If we wish to preserve the representation of the 'collective man' considered by Pascal (who rather inappropriately calls him 'universal man'), we must then say that, if there are periods in which he learns, there are others in which he forgets, or that, as *he learns* certain things, he forgets others; but the reality is even more complex, since there are, as there always have been, simultaneous civilisations that do not interpenetrate and are mutually ignorant of each other: such is today, more than ever, the situation of Western civilisation with regard to Eastern civilisations. Ultimately, the origin of the illusion expressed by Pascal is simply this: since the Renaissance, Westerners have adopted the habit of considering themselves exclusively as the heirs and continuators of Greco-Roman antiquity, and of systematically disregarding or ignoring everything else.

The humanity of which Pascal speaks begins with the Greeks, continues with the Romans, then there is a discontinuity in its existence corresponding to the Middle Ages, which he, like all men of the 17th century, can see as nothing more than a period of slumber; and finally comes the Renaissance, that is, the awakening of that humanity which, from that moment on, will be composed of all the European peoples. It is a strange error, denoting a singularly limited mental horizon, to take the part for the whole, and its influence can be seen in more than one domain: psychologists, for example, ordinarily limit their observations to a single type of humanity, the modern Westerner, and abusively extend the results thus obtained to claim that they are, without exception, the characteristics of man in general.

It is essential to note that Pascal still considered only intellectual progress, within the limits of his own conception of intellectuality in his time; it was towards the end of the 18th century that Turgot and Condorcet introduced the idea of progress extended to all areas of activity, and this idea was so far from being generally accepted that Voltaire took it upon himself to ridicule it. We cannot give here a complete history of the various modifications that this same idea underwent during the 19th century, nor of the pseudo-scientific complications that were added to it when, under the name of *evolution*, it was applied not only to humanity but to all living beings. The

* "Il mito del progresso" (2 May 1934) (Signed "Ignitus"). Contains almost the entirety of the second part of the chapter "Civilisation and Progress" from *Orient et Occident*, Paris, 1924.

¹ *Ignitus*, "Two Myths: Civilisation and Progress", 18 April 1934.

Evolutionism, despite many more or less important differences of opinion, has become a veritable official dogma; it is taught as a law that cannot be discussed, when in reality it is nothing more than the most gratuitous and ill-founded of all hypotheses, and even more so when it comes to the concept of human progress, which appears, in contrast to that law, as nothing more than a simple particular case.

Nothing would be easier, for example, than to show the confusions on which rests the fanciful theory to which Comte has given the name "law of three stages", the main one being to suppose that the sole object of all possible knowledge is the explanation of natural phenomena; Like Bacon and Pascal, he compared the ancients to children, while others, in more recent times, have preferred to liken them to savages, whom they call "primitive", whereas we consider them rather to be the degenerate remnants of older civilisations. On the other hand, some, unable to do anything but note that there are highs and lows in what they know of human history, have ended up talking about a "rhythm of progress"; it would perhaps be simpler and more logical, in these circumstances, not to speak of progress at all, but since modern dogma must be safeguarded at all costs, it is assumed that "progress" exists, even if only as the final result of all partial advances and all regressions. Such restrictions and discrepancies should be a matter for reflection, but very few seem to realise this; the different schools cannot agree among themselves, but it is understood that progress and evolution must be accepted, without which probably no one could claim the status of 'civilised'.

If we then inquire into the branches of supposed progress to which, more than anything else, the thinking of our contemporaries seems to be reduced, we realise that they boil down to two: material progress and *moral* progress, which are the only ones that Jacques Bainville mentioned as being included in the current idea of 'civilisation', and we think he was right. Certainly, some also speak of 'intellectual progress', but for them this expression is essentially synonymous with 'scientific progress' and applies above all to the development of the experimental sciences and their applications. *We see here the reappearance of that degradation of intelligence that identifies it with the most restricted and inferior of all its uses, action on matter oriented solely towards practical utility.* And, to tell the truth, most Westerners today cannot conceive of intelligence as anything else; for them, it is reduced not only to reason in the Cartesian sense, but to its most insignificant part, to its most elementary operations, to that which remains always in close relation to the sensible world, which they have made the sole and exclusive field of their activity. For those who know that there is something more and persist in giving words their true meaning in our time, it is not a question of 'intellectual progress', but rather of decline, or better still, intellectual decline; and since there are incompatible paths of development, it is precisely there that we find the rescue of "material progress", the only one whose existence over the last few centuries constitutes a real fact: scientific progress, if you like, but in an extremely limited sense, and, strictly speaking, industrial progress rather than scientific progress.

Material development and pure intellectuality are in fact oriented in opposite directions; whoever delves into one necessarily distances themselves from the other; note, on the other hand, that here we say *intellectuality* and not *rationality*, since the domain of reason is only an intermediary, in a way, between that of the senses and that of the higher intellect: if reason receives a reflection of the latter, even when it denies it and believes itself to be the highest faculty of the human being, it always derives its notions by elaborating on sensory data. We mean that general ideas, the proper object of reason, and therefore of science itself, which is the work of reason, although they do not belong to the sensible order, nevertheless proceed from the particular reality perceived by the senses. It can be said that it is beyond the sensible, but not that it is *above it*. Only the *universal*, the object of pure intellect, is transcendent, in relation to which the general also re-enters purely and simply into the realm of the individual. Therein lies the fundamental distinction between *metaphysical knowledge* and *scientific knowledge*, as it proceeds from the traditional point of view. If we recall it here briefly, without the possibility of expounding on its various developments, it is because the total absence of the former and the disorderly unfolding of the latter constitute the most striking characteristics of Western civilisation in its current state.

Having clarified our point of view on the concept of 'material progress' or pseudo-intellectual progress, we reserve the right to discuss the counterpart to this myth, namely 'moral progress', in the next article.

6.- WHAT THE "RELIGION" OF A PHILOSOPHER BOILS DOWN TO(*)

We are not in the habit of paying attention to manifestations of secular "thought". Thus, we would certainly not have read Henri Bergson's latest book, *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*), and we would have been even less inclined to discuss it if it had not been pointed out to us that it dealt with matters that do not normally fall within the scope of a philosopher.

First of all, as far as religion is concerned, the origins of Bergson's thesis are not at all mysterious and are, in fact, quite simple. It is well known that all modern theories on this subject have in common the tendency to reduce religion to something purely human, which amounts to denying it, consciously or unconsciously, since it means refusing to take into account what constitutes its essence, which is precisely a 'non-human' element. These theories can be reduced to two types: the 'psychological' type, which seeks to explain religion through the nature of the human individual, and the 'sociological' type, which sees religion as an exclusively social phenomenon, the product of a kind of 'collective consciousness' that dominates and imposes itself on individuals. Bergson's originality lies in his attempt to combine both types of explanation: instead of considering them as more or less mutually exclusive, as their respective supporters tend to do, he accepts them simultaneously, although he refers to different things that he designates with the same word 'religion'. In reality, the 'two sources' that, according to him, religion possesses are nothing more than this.

For him, there are therefore two types of religions, one *static* and the other *dynamic*, which he also refers to, somewhat strangely, as *closed religion* and *open religion*. The former is social in nature and the latter psychological, and naturally his preferences lean towards the latter, which he considers to be the superior form of religion. We say "naturally" because it is perfectly obvious that, in a "philosophy of becoming" such as Bergson's, this could not fail to be the case. Indeed, such a philosophy does not admit any immutable principle, which is tantamount to the very denial of all metaphysics. Placing all reality in change, it considers that, whether in doctrines or in their external forms, what does not change does not correspond to anything real and even prevents man from understanding reality as it conceives it. One might object: but with the denial of all "immutable principles" and all "eternal truths," one must logically strip not only metaphysics but also religion of all value. And this is precisely what happens, for religion, in the true sense of the word, is precisely what Bergson calls 'static religion', in which he sees nothing more than a completely imaginary 'fabrication'. And as for his 'dynamic religion', it is in reality not a religion at all.

This supposed "dynamic religion" does not truly possess any of the characteristic elements that make up the very definition of religion: there are no dogmas, as these are immutable and, as Bergson says, "fixed". There are no rites, for the same reason and also because of their social nature. Both must be abandoned to "static religion". As for morality, Bergson has begun by marginalising it, as if it were something foreign to religion as he understands it. So then, there is nothing left, or at least only a vague "religiousness", a kind of confused aspiration towards an indeterminate "ideal" that is ultimately quite close to that of modernists and liberal Protestants. It is this 'religiousness' that Bergson considers to be a superior religion, with the conviction that he is thus 'sublimating' religion, when in reality he has merely emptied it of all its content, since there is obviously nothing in it that is compatible with his conceptions. For the rest, this is undoubtedly the best result that can be deduced from a psychological theory, since there has never been a case where a theory of this type has been able to go further than "religious sentiment" which, let us repeat once again, is not religion.

"Dynamic religion", according to Bergson, finds its highest expression in "mysticism", considered in its worst aspect, since it only exalts it for what it has of

* "Dove si riduce la «religione» di un filosofo" (1 June 1934). Reproduction of the article "La «Religion» d'un Philosophe", *Voile d'isis*, January 1934, but somewhat abridged. The original French has been compiled in *Articles et Comptes Rendus I*. The author reworked the text to form chapter XXXIII: "L'intuitionnisme contemporain" ("Contemporary Intuitionism") of *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, Paris, 1945.

"individual", that is, vague, inconsistent and, to a certain extent, "anarchic". What pleases him about mystics - let's be clear about this - is their tendency to "digress"... As for what forms the basis of mysticism, that is, whether we like it or not, its belonging to a "static religion", Bergson finds it manifestly contemptible. It is curious that a 'non-Christian' philosopher should end up considering the mysticism of Christian mystics to be complete 'mysticism'. To tell the truth, he forgets a little too much that they are Christians before they are mystics. To justify them as Christians, he abusively reduces the origins of Christianity to mysticism and, in order to establish a kind of continuity between it and Judaism, ends up transforming the Hebrew prophets into "mystics". Evidently, Bergson has not the slightest idea of the nature of the prophets' mission and the nature of their inspiration... Now, if Christian mysticism, however distorted the idea of it may be, is therefore for Bergson the very prototype of all mysticism, the reason for this is easily understandable: for there is, in fact, no other mysticism than Christian mysticism, and perhaps mysticism itself is, at bottom, something specifically Christian. But this escapes Bergson, who strives to discover 'sketches of future mysticism' where completely different things are at stake. Especially on India, there are some pages that show an unprecedented lack of understanding. There are also the Greek mysteries, and here the incursion is reduced to a terrible play on words. For the rest, Bergson is forced to confess that 'most of the Mysteries had nothing mystical about them'. But then why does he continue to refer to them with the term 'mysticism'? He forms the most 'profane' idea possible of what these Mysteries were. Ignorant of everything concerning ancient initiation, how could he have understood that both in the Hellenic mysteries and in India there was something that was originally in no way religious and that moreover leads incomparably further than his "mysticism" and than authentic mysticism itself?

If we return to the concept of 'static religion', we see how Bergson confidently accepts all the rumours that the famous 'sociological school' spreads about its alleged origins, even the least credible ones: 'magic', 'totemism', "taboo," "mana," "animal worship," "spirit worship," "primitive mentality"—in short, nothing is missing from the conventional jargon... What might perhaps belong properly to Bergson is the part attributed in all this to a supposed 'storytelling function', which seems to us much more 'storytelling' in truth than what it should initially explain. Nevertheless, it is necessary to imagine some theory that allows us to deny outright any real basis for what has been agreed to call 'superstitions'. A 'civilised' philosopher, and what is more, a '20th-century' philosopher, obviously considers that any other attitude would be unworthy of him!

We will focus on just one point, that concerning 'magic'. This seems to be a great solution for many theorists who do not really know what it is, but who nevertheless persevere in their efforts to make it the origin of religion and science. This is not exactly Bergson's position. He believes that magic and religion are related, but that there is nothing in common between magic and science. It is true that he subsequently demonstrates several oscillations. But in any case, it must be stated that magic has absolutely nothing to do with religion, and, taken in its proper sense, not in a transposed meaning, it is not at the origin of all sciences, but is simply a particular science among others and, more precisely, an experimental science. However, Bergson is fully convinced that there could be no other sciences than those listed in modern 'classifications', established from the most strictly secular point of view imaginable. Speaking of "magical operations" with the confidence of someone who has never witnessed them, he writes this astonishing sentence: "If primitive intelligence had begun here by conceiving certain principles, it would very soon have surrendered to experience, which would have proved their falsity." We admire the intrepidity with which this philosopher, locked in his study, denies *a priori* everything that does not fit into the general framework of his theories. How can he believe that men have been so stupid as to have repeated indefinitely, even without "principles", "operations" that would never succeed? And what would he say if, on the contrary, 'experience' proved the 'falsehood' of his own assertions? It is clear that he cannot even imagine such a thing being possible: so great is the power of preconceived ideas in him and his fellow men that they do not doubt for a moment that the world is strictly limited to what fits into their conceptions.

Now, something particularly remarkable is happening: magic is taking cruel revenge on Mr Bergson's denials. Reappearing in our day in its lowest and most rudimentary form, under the guise of 'psychic science', it manages to get him to accept it without recognising it, and not only as something real, but also as a factor destined to play a role of capital importance for the future of his 'dynamic religion'! There is no exaggeration here whatsoever. Bergson speaks of

"survival" in the same way as a vulgar spiritualist and believes in an "experimental deepening" that should allow us to "conclude with the possibility and even the probability of the survival of the soul", although it cannot be said whether it is "for a certain time or forever". However, this annoying restriction does not prevent him from proclaiming in a perfectly dithyrambic tone: "It would take no more than this to turn into a living and working reality a belief in the hereafter that seems to be found in most men but which is almost always verbal, abstract and ineffective... In fact, if we were sure, absolutely sure of our survival after death, we could think of nothing else." Now, ancient magic was more "scientific" and did not harbour such pretensions. For some of its most elementary phenomena to give rise to these interpretations, it was necessary to wait until the invention of spiritualism, which, incidentally, could only have been born out of the deviation of the modern spirit. And in fact, it is precisely the spiritist theory, plain and simple, that Bergson, like William James before him, accepts with such "joy" that it "dwarfs any other pleasure": which also gives us an idea of the degree of discernment he is capable of. In terms of 'superstition', nothing better could be found! And since the book ends this way, there could certainly be no better proof of the nullity that lies behind this whole philosophy.

7.- THE MORALISTIC-SENTIMENTAL MYTH*

If we move from the concept of "material progress", which we have criticised in previous articles published in this fortnightly magazine, to that of "moral progress", we see that it represents the other predominant element of the modern mentality, namely *sentimentality*; and the presence of this element will not cause us to change the judgement we have made in saying that Western civilisation, *in our time*, is totally material.

We are well aware that some people seek to oppose the dominance of sentiment to that of matter, to make the development of one a kind of counterweight to the invasion of the other, and to take as their ideal as stable an equilibrium as possible between these two complementary elements. Such is, perhaps, at heart, the thinking of the 'intuitionists' who, by indissolubly associating intelligence with matter, attempt to free themselves from it with the help of a rather ill-defined instinct; such is, even more certainly, that of the pragmatists, for whom the notion of 'utility', intended to replace that of truth, presents itself both from a material and a moral point of view; and here too we see to what extent pragmatism expresses the special tendencies of the modern world, and especially of the Anglo-Saxon world, which constitutes its most typical fraction.

In reality, materiality and sentimentality, far from being opposed, cannot exist without each other, and both acquire their most extreme development when combined; we have proof of this in America, where, as R. Guénon has pointed out in his studies on theosophy and spiritualism, the worst pseudo-mystical extravagances arise and spread with incredible ease, while industrialism and the passion for 'business' are driven to a degree that borders on madness; when things reach this point, it is no longer a balance that is established between the two tendencies, but rather two imbalances that add to each other and, instead of compensating each other, aggravate each other. The reason for this phenomenon is easy to grasp: where intellectuality is reduced to a minimum, it is absolutely natural for sentimentality to assume primacy. On the other hand, sentimentality is itself very close to the material order. There is nothing in the entire psychic domain that is more dependent on the organism than sentimentality, and, whatever one may think, it is feeling, not intelligence, that appears to be linked to matter. Even if it is no longer inorganic matter, to which reason applies, but living matter, it is always a question of sensible things. It is decidedly impossible for the modern mentality and the philosophers who represent it to break free from this limitation. Strictly speaking, if one maintains that there is a duality of tendencies, one must relate one to matter and the other to 'life', and this distinction can indeed serve to classify, in a fairly satisfactory manner, the great superstitions of our age. But, we repeat, all this belongs to the same order and cannot really be dissociated; these things are situated on the same plane and are not hierarchically superimposed. Thus, the 'moralism' of our contemporaries is nothing more than the necessary complement to their practical materialism. And it would be perfectly illusory to try to exalt one at the expense of the other, since, being necessarily interdependent, they develop simultaneously and in the same direction, which is that of what has been agreed to call 'civilisation'.

And this is how "moral progress" has, almost constantly, as much as "material progress", such a considerable place in the concerns of our contemporaries. We have in no way denied the existence of 'material progress', but only its importance; what we maintain is that it is not worth the losses it causes in the intellectual sphere and that, in order to hold a different view, it is necessary to ignore true intellectuality altogether. Now, what should we think of the reality of "moral progress"? This is a question that cannot be seriously discussed because, in this sentimental domain, everything is merely a matter of individual appreciation and preference. Each person will call "progress" whatever is in accordance with their own dispositions and, ultimately, no one opinion should be given more weight than another. Those whose tendencies are in harmony with those of their era can only be satisfied with the current state of affairs, and this is what they express in their own way when they say that this era is in a state of progress with respect to those that preceded it.

* "Il mito moralistico-sentimentale" (16 June 1934) (Signed "Ignitus"). It contains almost the entirety of the third part of the chapter "Civilisation and Progress" from *Orient et Occident*.

But often this satisfaction of their sentimental aspirations is only relative, because events do not always unfold according to their wishes, and so they assume that 'progress' will continue in the course of future eras. Sometimes events conspire to disprove those who are convinced of the current reality of 'moral progress', according to the most common conceptions of it. But, in most cases, they insist on forgetting the lessons of experience. Such is the example of those incorrigible dreamers who, with each new war, never fail to prophesy that it will be the last.

Deep down, belief in indefinite progress is nothing more than the most naive and crude form of "optimism"; whatever its manifestations, it is always sentimental in essence, even when it comes to "material progress". There is a reality beneath the supposed 'moral progress', or if you prefer, it maintains the illusion of it; it is the very development of sentimentality which, leaving aside all value judgements, exists effectively in the modern world, as indisputably as that of industry and commerce. This development, excessive and abnormal in our view, cannot fail to appear as progress to those who place sentimentality above all else. It may be said that, in speaking of simple preferences as we did at the time, we have taken the liberty of refuting them in advance. But this is not the case; what we said then applies to sentiment and only to sentiment, in its variations from one individual to another. But if it is a question of placing sentiment, considered in general, in its proper place in relation to intelligence, that is a different matter, because there is a necessary hierarchy that must be observed. The modern world has properly reversed the natural relationships between the different orders. We insist on the diminution of the intellectual order (and even the absence of pure intellectuality), the exaggeration of the material order and that of the sentimental order. All this has an internal connection, and in this way, current Western civilisation is an anomaly, not to say a monstrosity.

This is how things appear when considered without prejudice. And this is how they are seen by the most qualified representatives of Eastern civilisations, who do not take sides in any case, because such an attitude is always sentimental and not intellectual, whereas their point of view is purely intellectual. If Westerners find it difficult to understand this attitude, it is because they are prey to an irresistible tendency to judge others according to their own particular way of being and to attribute their own concerns to them, just as they attribute their own ways of thinking to them without even realising that others may exist. Hence their complete lack of understanding of all the conceptions of the traditional East. The reverse, however, is *not* true. When they have the opportunity and are willing to make the effort, Easterners have no difficulty in penetrating and understanding the specific knowledge of the West, although, in general, at least until recently, they were not tempted to engage in this task, which would put them at risk of losing sight of or neglecting, in any case, and for the sake of things considered insignificant from a traditional point of view, what constitutes the essential for them. Western science is analysis and dispersion; Eastern knowledge, as to a certain extent that of the ancient West, is synthesis and concentration. We will have occasion to return to this in other writings. In any case, what Westerners call civilisation would be considered rather barbaric by others, precisely because it lacks the essential, that is, a principle of higher order. The only impression, for example, that mechanical inventions made on most Easterners, at least until yesterday, was one of profound repulsion: all this undoubtedly seemed more troubling than advantageous to them, and if they are forced to accept certain necessities of the present age, according to the idea of the best among them, it is with the hope of getting rid of them sooner or later.

What Westerners call progress is, for Easterners, nothing more than change and instability; and the need for change, so characteristic of the modern era, is, in their eyes, a sign of manifest inferiority. Those who have reached a state of equilibrium no longer feel this need, just as those who know cease to seek. Under such conditions, it is undoubtedly difficult to understand one another, since the same facts give rise to diametrically opposed interpretations on both sides. What would happen if Easterners also wanted to follow the example of Westerners and, using the same means as them, impose their way of seeing things? However, history assures us that there is no danger in this regard. Nothing is more contrary to their nature than propaganda, and such concerns are completely foreign to them. Without preaching 'freedom', Easterners let others think what they want, and they are even completely indifferent to what others think of them. All they ask, deep down – and perhaps it can still be said that they still ask – is to be left alone. But Westerners have not accepted this: it is they – let us not forget – who have gone looking for their own means and behaved in such a way that even the most peaceful men

have every right to feel exasperated. And the spirit of conquest has been disguised with 'moralistic' pretexts and in the name of 'freedom' and 'civilisation', which has sought to constrain the whole world to follow the fall of the desacralised and materialised West.

Under these conditions, the problem of the future is clear. Since it is the Western mentality that has strayed, only by returning to a normal state will understanding be possible: the West must then renounce its claim to represent 'Civilisation' – which has never existed – and resume its rightful place among 'Civilisations'.

After this, we must deal with the "superstition of science" and the relationship between true science and "scientism".

8.- THE SUPERSTITION OF 'SCIENCE' *

Modern Western civilisation claims, among other things, to be eminently 'scientific': it would be useful to clarify to some extent how this word is understood, but this is not usually done because it is one of those words to which our contemporaries seem to attribute a kind of mysterious power regardless of its meaning. "Science" with a capital S, like "Progress", "Civilisation", "Law", "Justice" and "Freedom", is still one of those entities that it is better not to try to define and which risk losing all their prestige as soon as they are examined from a slightly closer perspective. All the supposed "achievements" of which the modern world is so proud are thus reduced to grand words behind which there is nothing, or at least nothing very important: collective suggestion, we have said, an illusion which, because it is shared by so many individuals and persists as it does, *cannot be spontaneous*. Perhaps one day we will try to clarify this aspect of the question in some way. However, this is not what concerns us most at the moment; we are merely noting that the West today *believes* in the ideas we have just mentioned, if they can be called ideas, however such a belief came about.

Rather than true ideas, these are true idols, divinities of a kind of "secular religion" that is not clearly defined, of course, and cannot be, but that nonetheless has a very real existence; it is not a religion in the true sense of the word, but rather something that seeks to replace it and should rather be called a "counter-religion".

The origin of this state of affairs dates back to the very beginning of the modern era, when the anti-traditional spirit manifested itself immediately by proclaiming 'free inquiry', that is, the denial of any principle superior to individual opinions in matters of doctrine. The result of this process was inevitably intellectual anarchy: hence the indefinite multiplicity of religious and pseudo-religious sects, of philosophical systems that aim above all at originality, of scientific theories as ephemeral as they are pretentious; an implausible chaos that nevertheless implies a certain unity, since there is a specifically modern spirit from which all this proceeds, but a unity that is ultimately absolutely negative, since it constitutes, strictly speaking, an absence of principle that translates into that indifference to truth and error which, since the 18th century, has been called "tolerance". Let us be clearly understood: we do not seek to challenge the practical tolerance exercised towards individuals, but only theoretical tolerance, which seeks to be exercised with regard to ideas and to recognise them all as having the same rights, which should logically imply radical scepticism. On the other hand, we cannot fail to note that, like all propagandists, the apostles of tolerance are very often, in fact, the most intolerant of men. There is, in fact, a singular irony: those who wanted to destroy all dogmas have created for their own use, not a new dogma, but a caricature of dogma that they have imposed on the Western world in general. Thus, under the pretext of 'emancipation of thought', the most chimerical beliefs ever seen have been established in the form of various idols, some of the main ones of which we have just listed.

Of all the superstitions preached by those who constantly rail against "superstition," that of *science* and *reason* is the only one that, at first glance, does not seem to be based on sentimentality. But there is sometimes a rationalism that is nothing more than sentimentality in disguise, as evidenced by the passion its supporters place in it and the hatred they show towards anything that contradicts their tendencies or exceeds their comprehension. In the 18th century, there was an antagonism between the rationalism of the encyclopaedists and the sentimentalism of Rousseau: and yet both served equally in the preparation of the revolutionary movement, which proves that both were part of the negative unity of the anti-traditional spirit. Ultimately, it seems that one of the great skills of certain "leaders" of the modern mindset is to favour one or the other of the two tendencies in question according to the opportunity, to establish a kind of balance between them through a game of equilibrium. This skill, moreover, may not always be conscious, and we do not intend to question the sincerity of any scientist or philosopher:

* "La superstizione della 'scienza'" (1 July 1934) (Signed "Ignitus"). Contains part of the chapter "La superstition de la *Science*" ("The Superstition of *Science*") from *Orient et Occident*

but these are often nothing more than apparent "leaders" and may even be led or influenced without realising it at all. Furthermore, the use made of their ideas does not always correspond to their own intentions. Given the state of intellectual anarchy in which the West has plunged itself, everything happens as if the aim were to extract from the disorder itself, and from everything that is stirred up in the chaos, all the advantage possible for the realisation of a rigorously determined plan.

Now, if we dissociate the two main tendencies of the modern mentality in order to examine them more closely, and momentarily abandon sentimentality, we may ask ourselves the following question: what exactly is this 'science' with which the West is so infatuated? A Hindu, summarising extremely concisely what all Easterners who have had the opportunity to learn about it think of it, has characterised it very fairly with these words: *Western science is ignorant knowledge*. The juxtaposition of these two terms is not a contradiction, and this is what it means: it is, if you like, a knowledge that possesses a certain degree of reality, since it is valid and effective in a certain relative domain; but it is a knowledge that is irremediably limited, ignorant of the essential, a knowledge that lacks true principles. Science, as our contemporaries conceive it, is solely the study of the phenomena of the sensible world, and this study is undertaken and directed in such a way that it cannot, we insist, be related to any principle of a higher order. By resolutely ignoring everything that transcends it, it thus becomes fully independent in its domain, that is true, but the independence of which it boasts is only made possible by its very limitation. Worse still, it even goes so far as to deny what it ignores, because that is the only way not to acknowledge such ignorance, or, if it does not dare to formally deny that anything can exist that does not fall within its domain, it at least denies that it can be known by any means, which in practice leads us to the same conclusion, and it claims to encompass all possible knowledge.

By virtue of an almost unconscious bias, "scientismists" imagine, along with Auguste Comte, that man has never sought any other object of knowledge than an explanation of natural phenomena. We say unconscious bias for they are clearly incapable of understanding that one can go further, and it is not this that we reproach them for, but only their claim to deny others the possession or use of faculties that they themselves lack: they would be almost like blind people who deny, if not the existence of light, at least the sense of sight for the sole reason that they are deprived of it. To assert that there is not simply the 'unknown', but the 'unknowable', is to make an intellectual disease a limit that no one can cross, which has never been seen anywhere; just as it had never been seen that men would make an affirmation of ignorance into a programme and a profession of faith, and openly take it as the label of a supposed doctrine, under the name of 'agnosticism'. And those who are in such a position, note this, are not and do not want to be sceptics; if they were, there would be a certain logic in their attitude that could make it excusable; but they are, on the contrary, the most enthusiastic believers in "science" and the most fervent admirers of "reason". In short, if modern people, or at least some of them, come to recognise their ignorance, it is only on the condition that no one else has the right to know what they themselves do not know, manifesting that spirit of denial so characteristic of the modern world.

Moreover, philosophy has finally come to be seen as "not an instrument for extending knowledge, but a discipline for limiting it" (Kant), which is to say that the main function of philosophers is to impose on everyone the narrow limits of their own understanding; and for this reason, modern philosophy ended up almost entirely replacing knowledge itself with "criticism" or "theory of knowledge". In this respect, philosophy and science are no longer distinguishable; both are animated by the same spirit, which we call not scientific spirit, but "scientificistic" spirit.

We must briefly emphasise this distinction. What we want to point out is that we see nothing wrong in the development of certain sciences, even if we find the importance attributed to them excessive. It is only very relative knowledge, but knowledge nonetheless, and it is legitimate for everyone to apply their intellectual activity to objects proportionate to their own abilities and the means at their disposal. What we condemn is the sectarianism of those who refuse to admit that anything can exist outside of these sciences and claim that all speculation, in order to be valid, must be subject to the special methods used by these same sciences: as if these methods, which are appropriate for the study of certain specific objects, should be universally applicable. Moreover, it is not necessary to leave their domain: these 'scientismists' would be very surprised if they were told that in the very field to which they apply themselves, there are a multitude of things that could not be achieved with their methods and that,

nevertheless, may constitute the object of sciences totally different from those they know, but no less real and often more interesting in various respects. It would seem that moderns have arbitrarily taken, in the domain of scientific knowledge, a certain number of portions that they have insisted on studying to the exclusion of all the rest, acting as if the rest did not exist. And, as for the particular sciences that they have cultivated in this way, it is absolutely natural, and should cause no surprise or admiration, that they have given them much greater development than would have been given to them by men who did not attach the same importance to them, who often did not even concern themselves with them, and who in any case were occupied with very different things that seemed more serious to them.

Here, we refer above all to the considerable development of the experimental sciences, a field in which the modern West clearly excels, and in which no one thinks of contesting its superiority, which Easterners, on the other hand, find unenviable. However, we are not afraid to assert that what the modern West has no idea about is precisely the sciences, even the experimental ones. Such sciences exist in the East, among those we call "traditional sciences"; they also existed in the West in the Middle Ages, and their characteristics were similar. And these sciences, some of which also give rise to practical applications of undeniable effectiveness, proceed by means of research that is totally foreign to European scholars of our day. This is not the appropriate place to elaborate on the subject, but we must at least explain, in a future article, why we say that certain scientific knowledge has a "traditional" basis and in what sense. On the other hand, this does not necessarily lead to a clearer understanding of what Western science lacks, nor of the path that can lead to integration, assuming that a new, spiritually revolutionary European generation becomes capable of inner rebirth once again.

9.- MODERN SCIENTIFICISM AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE*

We have already had occasion to say that one of the specific characteristics of modern Western science is its claim to complete independence and autonomy; a claim that can only be sustained if all knowledge of a higher order than scientific knowledge is systematically ignored. What stands above science in the necessary hierarchy of knowledge is *metaphysics*, understood as pure and transcendent intellectual knowledge, whereas science is, by definition, nothing more than rational knowledge: metaphysics, however, is essentially supra-rational, and, as we understand it, it is either that or it is nothing at all. Now, rationalism consists not in simply affirming that reason is valid to some extent, which is contested only by sceptics, but in maintaining that there is nothing above it and that, consequently, there is no knowledge possible beyond scientific knowledge. Thus, rationalism necessarily implies the denial of metaphysics.

Almost all modern philosophers are rationalists; and those who are not end up in sentimentalism or voluntarism, which is no less anti-metaphysical, because if something other than reason is admitted in that case, it is sought *below* it rather than *above* it. Under such conditions, if a modern philosopher claims to do metaphysics, we can be sure that what he calls this has nothing in common with true metaphysics. We cannot give these things any other name than 'pseudo-metaphysics', and if, on occasion, some valuable considerations are found in their field, they are in reality related to the pure and simple scientific order. Therefore, a complete absence of metaphysical knowledge, a denial of all knowledge other than scientific knowledge, and an arbitrary limitation of scientific knowledge itself to certain particular domains to the exclusion of others, such are the general characteristics of properly modern thought. This is the degree of intellectual decline that the West has reached since it departed from the paths that are normal for the rest of humanity.

Metaphysics is the knowledge of the principles of universal order on which all things necessarily depend, directly or indirectly. In the absence of metaphysics, all knowledge that subsists in any order then truly lacks principle and, if it gains some degree of independence, it loses much more in scope and depth. For this reason, Western science is, if we may use the expression, absolutely superficial; by dispersing itself in the indefinite multiplicity of fragmentary knowledge, by losing itself in the innumerable details of facts, it learns nothing about the true nature of things, which it declares inaccessible in order to justify its impotence in this regard; moreover, its interest is much more practical than speculative. If at any time there are attempts to unify this eminently analytical knowledge, they are purely fictitious and rest only on more or less random hypotheses: that is why they collapse one after another and it seems impossible for any scientific theory of a certain breadth to last more than half a century at most. Moreover, the Western idea that synthesis is the result and conclusion of analysis is radically false. The truth is that, through analysis, one can never arrive at a synthesis worthy of the name. It is in the nature of analysis to be able to continue indefinitely, without any progress being made in acquiring an overview of the field in question. And it is even more ineffective in establishing a connection with higher-order principles. The analytical nature of modern science results in the ever-increasing proliferation of 'specialities'. This 'specialisation', so extolled by certain sociologists under the name of 'division of labour', is undoubtedly the best means of acquiring that *intellectual myopia* which seems to be part of the qualifications required of the perfect 'scientist', and without which, on the other hand, 'scientism' itself would have no *raison d'être*. On the other hand, when "specialists" are taken out of their field, they generally display incredible naivety. The most gratuitous hypotheses, such as evolution, for example, then take on the appearance of "laws" and are taken as proven. And if their success is only temporary, they are set aside and another is immediately found that will be accepted just as easily. In short, by ignoring principles and refusing to relate to them, science deprives itself of both the highest guarantee it can receive and the surest direction it can be given. Nothing of value remains in it except detailed knowledge, and as soon as it attempts to rise to a higher level, it becomes doubtful and hesitant.

* "Modern Scientism and Traditional Knowledge" (19 July 1934). (Signed "Ignitus"). Contains part of the chapter "The Superstition of Science" from *Orient et Occident*.

When we said that the sciences, including the experimental sciences, in the East and in the ancient West, had a traditional basis, we meant that, contrary to what happens in the modern world, they are always linked to certain principles; these were never lost sight of, and even the study of contingent things seemed worthwhile only insofar as they are consequences and external manifestations of something that is of another order. Undoubtedly, metaphysical knowledge and scientific knowledge remained profoundly different, but there was no absolute discontinuity between them, as can be seen when considering the current state of scientific knowledge among Westerners. To take an example from the West itself, consider the distance that separates the view of ancient and medieval cosmology from that of *physics* as understood by modern scientists: never before the present era was the study of the sensible world considered self-sufficient. Science applied to this changing and transitory multiplicity would never have been judged truly worthy of the name of knowledge if a means had not been found to link it to some degree with something stable and permanent. The ancient conception, which always remained that of the Orientals, considered any science valid not in itself but insofar as, according to its particular modality, it expressed and represented in a certain order of things a reflection of the higher, immutable truth in which everything that possesses any reality necessarily participates. And since the characteristics of this truth were somehow embodied in the idea of *tradition*, all science thus appeared as an extension of traditional doctrine itself, as one of its applications, secondary and contingent, no doubt, accessory and non-essential, constituting inferior knowledge, if you will, but true knowledge nonetheless, since it retained a relationship with knowledge par excellence, that of the purely intellectual order.

Such a conception, as can be seen, could not at any price accommodate itself to the crude naturalism of fact that confines our contemporaries to the domain of contingencies and even, more precisely, to a narrow portion of this domain. And in such conditions, there is only one thing that can explain the boundless admiration and superstitious respect with which this science is regarded: *the fact that it is in perfect harmony with the needs of a purely material civilisation*. Indeed, it is not disinterested speculation that stirs certain minds whose concerns are entirely focused on the external world; it is the applications to which science gives rise, in its primarily practical and utilitarian nature, and it is above all thanks to mechanical inventions that the "scientific" spirit has developed so much.

It is these inventions that have aroused, since the beginning of the 19th century, a veritable frenzy of enthusiasm, because they seemed to have as their objective the increase of bodily well-being, which is manifestly the main aspiration of the modern world; and, on the other hand, without realising it, they created even more new needs that could not be satisfied; thus, once this path was taken, it seems impossible to stop, because there is always a need for something new.

But, be that as it may, it is these applications, confused with science itself, that have fundamentally cemented its credibility and prestige. Such confusion, which could only arise among people ignorant of what pure speculation is, even in the scientific realm, has become so commonplace that, nowadays, if you open any publication, you will find what should strictly be called 'industry' designated by the name 'science'. The "wise man" in the minds of most people is the engineer, the inventor or the machine builder. As for scientific theories, they have been favoured by this state of mind even though they have not given rise to it.

Regarding the supposed experimental verification of scientific hypotheses, it must be clear that it is always possible to find many theories through which the facts can be explained equally well. Certain hypotheses can be eliminated when they are found to contradict certain facts, but those that remain are always mere hypotheses and nothing more. However, for some people who accept only raw facts and have no other criterion of truth than "experience" understood solely as the verification of sensible phenomena, it is inadmissible to go further or proceed in any other way, and in that case there are only two possible attitudes: either to recognise the hypothetical nature of scientific theories and renounce any certainty beyond simple sensory evidence, or to ignore this hypothetical nature and believe blindly in everything that is taught in the name of "science".

The first attitude, undoubtedly more intelligent than the second (taking into account the limits of "scientific" intelligence), is that of certain scholars who, less naive than others, refuse to be victims of their own hypotheses or those of their colleagues. They thus arrive, with regard to everything that does not

depends on immediate practice, on a kind of more or less complete scepticism or at least a certain probabilism; it is "agnosticism", which does not apply only to what transcends the scientific domain, but extends to the scientific order itself. However, the second attitude, which can be called dogmatic, is maintained with varying degrees of sincerity by other scholars, but above all by those who feel compelled to adopt an assertive tone for teaching purposes. Always appearing sure of oneself and of what one says, concealing difficulties and uncertainties, and never stating anything in a hesitant manner are, in fact, the easiest ways to be taken seriously and to acquire authority when dealing with a generally incompetent and incapable audience, whether addressing one's students or attempting to popularise one's work. This same attitude is naturally assumed—and this time in an unquestionably sincere way—by those who receive such teaching, and it is also that of what has come to be called "the general public," and the "scientific" spirit can be observed in all its fullness, with its character of blind belief, among semi-educated men, in environments where the mentality often described as "elementary" reigns, even though it is not the exclusive heritage of the level of education that receives this designation. What we propose to look at in relation to this is the superstition of so-called *popularisation*.

10.- THE SUPERSTITION OF 'POPULARISATION' *

At the end of our last article¹, on this page we used the word "*vulgarisation*". This is an entirely unique element of modern civilisation and can be seen as one of the main factors in the state of mind we are trying to describe at this moment. It is one of the forms taken by that strange *need for propaganda* that animates the Western spirit and can only be explained by the preponderant influence of sentimental elements.

Indeed, there is a world of difference between simply presenting the truth as it is understood, with no other concern than to avoid distorting it, and forcibly attempting to make others share one's own convictions. Propaganda and vulgarisation are only possible to the detriment of the truth: attempting to make it "accessible to everyone" and make it available to all indiscriminately necessarily implies diminishing and distorting it, since it is impossible to admit that all men are equally capable of understanding anything. It is not a question of more or less extensive education, it is a question of "*intellectual horizon*", and that is something that cannot be changed, that is inherent in the very nature of each human individual.

The chimerical prejudice of 'equality' clashes with the most incontrovertible facts, both in the intellectual and physical realms; it is the denial of all natural hierarchy and the descent of all knowledge to the level of the limited understanding of the common people.

Regardless of what some may say, the establishment of any kind of *elite* is incompatible with the democratic ideal. What this ideal demands is the provision of a strictly identical education to individuals who are unequally gifted and differ greatly in aptitude and temperament. Despite everything, it is impossible to prevent such an education from producing highly variable results, but this is contrary to the intentions of those who have instituted it. In any case, such an education system is certainly the most imperfect of all, and the indiscriminate dissemination of any knowledge is always more harmful than useful, as it can generally lead to nothing but disorder and anarchy.

Such dissemination is opposed by traditional teaching methods, where there will always be greater certainty of the real drawbacks of 'compulsory education' than of its supposed benefits. The knowledge available to the Western public, however insignificant, is further diminished in popular works, which expose only its inferior aspects, falsifying them in order to simplify them. And these works complacently insist on the most fantastic hypotheses, boldly considering them to be proven truths and accompanying them with the inept declamations that are so pleasing to the masses. *A half-baked science, acquired through such reading, or through teaching whose elements are taken entirely from manuals of identical value, is harmful in a different way than pure and simple ignorance.* It is better to know nothing at all than to have one's mind filled with false ideas, often ineradicable, especially when they have been instilled from an early age. The ignorant person at least retains the possibility of learning if he finds the opportunity to do so; he may possess a certain natural "common sense" which, combined with the awareness he commonly has of his incompetence, is enough to prevent him from committing a good number of follies. The man who has received a half-baked education, on the other hand, almost always has a distorted mentality, and what he thinks he knows gives him such self-importance that he imagines he can talk about everything indiscriminately; he does so badly and backwards, but with greater ease the more incompetent he is: everything seems so simple to those who know nothing!

On the other hand, even leaving aside the drawbacks of vulgarisation itself, and considering Western science as a whole and in its most authentic aspects, the claim made by the representatives of that science that they can teach it to everyone without reservation is also a sign of obvious mediocrity. From the "traditional" point of view, something whose study requires no particular qualification cannot be of great value and cannot contain anything truly profound; indeed, Western science is totally external and superficial; to characterise it, rather than speaking of 'ignorant knowledge', we would prefer, in practically the same sense, to speak of '*profane knowledge*'.

In this respect, as in others, philosophy is not truly distinct from science: it has sometimes been defined as 'human wisdom'; this is true, but with the proviso

* "La superstizione della «vulgarizzazione»" (2 August 1934) (Signed "Ignitus"). Contains part of the chapter "The Superstition of Science" from *Orient et Occident*.

¹ "Modern Scientism and Traditional Knowledge" (19 July 1934). In *Diorama*, 1 July 1934.

To insist that *it is nothing more than that*, purely human wisdom, in the most limited sense of the word, which does not appeal to any element of a higher order than reason, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, we would also call it "profane wisdom", but that leads us to say that, in essence, it is not wisdom at all, but merely its illusory appearance. We will not dwell here on the consequences of this "profane" character of all modern Western knowledge; but, to show even more clearly the extent to which this knowledge is superficial and fictitious, we will point out that the methods of instruction in use *have the effect of putting memory almost entirely in the place of intelligence*. What is asked of students, at all levels of education, is that *they accumulate* knowledge rather than *assimilate* it. This applies above all to subjects whose study requires no understanding: facts replace ideas, and erudition is commonly taken for real science. To promote or discredit this or that branch of knowledge or this or that method, it is enough to proclaim that it is or is not 'scientific'. Those that are officially considered "scientific methods" are the most unintelligent procedures of scholarship, the most exclusive of everything that is not the search for facts for their own sake, even in their most insignificant details; and, it is worth noting, it is the "literati" who abuse this designation the most. The prestige of this "scientific" label, even though it is in reality nothing more than a label, constitutes in truth the triumph of the scientific spirit par excellence, and given the respect that the use of a simple word imposes on the masses (including the so-called "intellectuals"), are we not right to call it "superstition of science"?

Uniformitarian mania

Naturally, scientific propaganda is not only practised internally, in the form of "compulsory education" and popularisation. It also serves externally, like all other forms of Western proselytism. In every region where Europeans have settled, they have sought to spread the supposed "benefits of education", always using the same methods, without attempting the slightest adaptation and without asking themselves whether some other form of education already exists there; anything that does not come from them must be considered null and void, as if it had never taken place, and "equality" does not allow different peoples and races to have their own mentality; moreover, the main "benefit" that those who impose this education expect from it is probably, at all times and in all places, the destruction of the traditional spirit. The "equality" so dear to Westerners is reduced, moreover, from the moment they leave their sphere, to mere uniformity; the rest of what the term implies is not an exportable commodity and concerns only the relations of Westerners among themselves, for they believe themselves to be incomparably superior to all other men, among whom they make no distinction: the most barbarous blacks and the most cultured Orientals are treated in almost the same way. Likewise, Europeans generally limit themselves to teaching the most rudimentary of their knowledge. It is not difficult to imagine how they must be regarded by Orientals, who, in their adherence to the traditional spirit, considered the most elevated aspects of this knowledge to be remarkable, above all, for their restriction and for showing obvious signs of rather crude naivety. As peoples who have their own civilisation are rather resistant to this much-praised instruction, while peoples without culture endure it much more docilely, Westerners may well judge the latter to be superior to the former: or, within a foreign civilisation, they may consider only those who are apparently ready to betray it to be worthy, as is already beginning to be the case even in the "modernised" East. They reserve at least relative esteem for those they consider capable of "rising" to their level, even if only after several centuries of "compulsory" and elementary education. Unfortunately, what Westerners call "rising" there are those who, as far as they are concerned, would call "lowering". This is what anyone who has the power to take on a "traditional" point of view in a living way thinks, in order to oppose the vanity of a deviant world and to expose it in its entirety as the only basis for truly reconstructive action.

11.- THE SUPERSTITION OF "LIFE" *

Among other things, modern people reproach Eastern civilisations for their *fixedness* and *stability*, which they see as a denial of progress, and indeed it is, we readily admit; but to see this as a defect, one must believe in progress. For us, this character indicates that these civilisations share in the immutability of the principles on which they are based, and this is one of the essential aspects of the idea of *tradition*; precisely because it lacks principle, modern civilisation is eminently changeable.

On the other hand, it is not necessary to believe that the stability we are talking about excludes all modification, which would be an exaggeration, but rather that it reduces modification to nothing more than an adaptation to circumstances whereby the principles are not affected in any way and which, on the contrary, can be strictly deduced from them, insofar as they are considered, not in themselves, but with a view to a specific application; and that is why, in addition to metaphysics, which is nevertheless sufficient in itself as knowledge of principles, there exists the set of "traditional sciences" that encompass the order of contingent existences, including social institutions. Nor should *inmutability* be confused with *immobility*. Errors of this kind are frequent among moderns, because they are generally incapable of separating conception from imagination, and because their minds cannot detach themselves from sensory representations. The *immutable* is not the opposite of change *but that which is superior to it*, just as the 'supra-rational' is by no means irrational; we must be wary of the tendency to order things according to artificial oppositions and antitheses, by virtue of an interpretation that is both simplistic and systematising, which stems above all from an inability to go further and resolve apparent contrasts in the harmonious unity of a true synthesis.

Westerners, and especially modern Westerners, appear to be essentially changeable and fickle, devoted to continuous movement and incessant agitation without aspiring to escape from them. *Their state is, in short, that of a being who cannot find their balance but, unable to do so, refuses to admit that it is possible or even desirable, and even experiences vanity based on their own impotence.* This change in which he finds himself trapped and in which he takes pleasure, which he does not demand to lead him towards any goal, because he has come to love it for its own sake: this is, in essence, what Westerners call 'progress'; almost as if it were enough to march in any direction to advance with certainty. But he does not even think about where he is going. And dispersion into multiplicity is the inevitable consequence of this change without beginning or end.

Now, the need for external activity taken to such an extreme and the taste for effort for its own sake, regardless of the results that may be obtained from it, are not natural in man, at least in normal man according to the idea that has always been held of him everywhere. But such a situation has become somewhat natural for Westerners, perhaps as a result of habit, which Aristotle says is like second nature, but above all because of the atrophy of the higher faculties of the being, necessarily correlated with the intensive development of the lower faculties.

In the intellectual realm itself, or rather in what remains of it, there is a strange phenomenon that is nothing more than a particular case of the state of mind we have just described: *it is the passion for searching taken as an end in itself*, without any concern for reaching any kind of solution. While other men seek in order to find and to know, modern Westerners seek for the sake of seeking; the evangelical expression *quaerite et invenietis* is a dead letter for them in the full force of the expression, since they call precisely "death" everything that constitutes a definitive result, just as they call "life" what is nothing more than sterile agitation. This unhealthy taste for searching, a true "mental restlessness" without end and without exit, is particularly evident in modern philosophy, most of which represents nothing more than a series of utterly artificial problems that exist only because they are poorly posed, that arise and persist only by virtue of carefully maintained misunderstandings; problems that are truly insoluble, given the way they are formulated, but which no one tends to solve, and whose sole *raison d'être* is to feed indefinitely controversies and discussions that lead nowhere and should lead nowhere.

* "La superstizione della 'vita'" (24 August 1934) Signed "Ignitus". Contains part of the chapter "La superstition de la Vie" ("The Superstition of Life"), published in *Orient e Occident*, Paris, 1924.

To replace knowledge with the search (and we have already pointed out in this regard the notable abuse of "theories of knowledge") is simply to renounce the very object of intelligence, and it is easy to understand that, under these conditions, some have finally come to suppress the very notion of truth, since truth can only be conceived as the goal to be reached, and they do not want a goal for their search; such a thing could not then be something intellectual, even taking intelligence in its broadest sense and not in its highest and purest sense, and if we have been able to speak of the "*passion* for searching," it is because it is, in effect, an invasion of *sentimentality* into domains where it should remain foreign, and we are already very far from anything that can refer to a pure intellectual order.

We have already had occasion to show that rationalism and sentimentality are the two terms of an alternative from which modern Westerners seem unable to escape and by means of which they remain confined to the sensible world. When Bergson says that intelligence has matter as its natural object, he is mistaken in calling intelligence what he wants to talk about and shows how unknown the truly intellectual is to him; but he is right, in essence, if by this erroneous designation he means the lowest part of intelligence or, more precisely, the use that is commonly made of it in the West today. As for Bergson himself, what he essentially refers to is *life*. It is worth noting the part that the 'vital impulse' plays in his theories and the meaning he gives to the so-called perception of 'pure duration'. But '*life*', whatever value is attributed to it, is inextricably linked to matter, and it is always the same world, considered either according to an 'organicist' or 'vitalist' conception or according to a 'mechanistic' conception.

Only when the vital element is given precedence over the material element in the constitution of the world, it is natural that feeling should take precedence over self-styled intelligence; intuitionists with their "*torsion d'esprit*", pragmatists, with their "inner experience", simply appeal to the dark powers of instinct and feeling, which they consider to be the very foundation of being, and when they reach the end of their thinking, or rather their tendency, they end up like William James, finally proclaiming the supremacy of the subconscious, by virtue of the most incredible subversion of the natural order that the history of ideas has ever recorded.

Life, considered in itself, is always change, incessant modification. It is therefore understandable that it exerts such a fascination on the spirit of modern civilisation, in which change is also the most striking feature, which appears at first glance, even if we limit ourselves to a totally superficial examination. When one falls into a state of seclusion in the realm of life and the conceptions directly related to it, one cannot know anything that escapes change, anything of the transcendent and immutable order that is that of universal principles; there could then be no possible metaphysical knowledge, and we always return to this observation, as an inevitable consequence of each of the characteristics of the West today. Here we prefer to say *change* rather than *movement*, because the former of these two terms is broader than the latter: movement is nothing more than the physical or, rather, mechanical modality of change, and there are conceptions that consider another modality, to which they reserve the more properly "vital" character, to the exclusion of movement understood in the ordinary sense, that is, as a simple change of position. Furthermore, we should not exaggerate certain oppositions, which are only such from a restricted point of view. Be that as it may, a conception that presents itself as a "philosophy of life" is necessarily, for that very reason, a "philosophy of becoming"; we mean that it is enclosed in becoming and cannot escape it (becoming and change are synonymous), which leads it to situate all reality in this becoming and to deny that there is anything outside or beyond it: which, once again, amounts to a partial denial of metaphysics.

As is evident, this is the case with *evolutionism* in all its forms, from the most mechanistic conceptions, including crude "transformism", to some theories of the Bergsonian kind. Nothing other than becoming can find a place in them, and in fact, they consider it only in a more or less restricted portion. Evolution is ultimately nothing more than change, with the addition of an illusion regarding the meaning and quality of that change. Evolution and progress are one and the same thing, but today the former of these two words is usually preferred because it is considered more "scientific"; evolutionism is a kind of product of the two great modern superstitions, that of *science* and that of *life*, and what explains its success is

Precisely that rationalism and sentimentalism find their satisfaction in it. The varying proportions in which these two tendencies are combined are given in the diversity of forms that this theory takes. Evolutionists impose change everywhere, even on God himself. This is how Bergson represents God as "*a centre from which worlds emerge, and which is not a thing but a continuity of emergence*"; and he expressly adds: "*God, thus defined, has done nothing complete; he is incessant life, action, freedom*".

Thus, these ideas of life and action are becoming a real obsession among our contemporaries and are being transported here to a domain that would like to be speculative. This conception of a *God who becomes*, immanent and not transcendent, and also that of a truth that 'becomes', which is nothing more than a kind of ideal limit, with nothing actually realised, are by no means exceptional in modern thought. The pragmatists, who have adopted the idea of a "limited God" for fundamentally "moralistic" reasons, are not its first inventors; for that which is said to evolve must necessarily be conceived as limited. Pragmatism, by its very name, is presented above all as a "philosophy of action." Its more or less recognised postulate is that man has no needs other than those of a practical nature, needs that are both material and emotional; this therefore means the abolition of intellectuality; but if this is so, why insist on elaborating theories? This is rather poorly understood. And, like scepticism, from which it differs only in the aspect of action, pragmatism, if it wanted to be consistent with itself, should limit itself to a simple mental attitude, which it cannot try to justify logically without contradicting itself. But it is undoubtedly very difficult to maintain such strict reserve. However intellectually decadent man may be, he cannot prevent himself from reasoning, even if only to deny reason. Pragmatists, on the other hand, do not deny it as sceptics do, but seek to reduce it to a purely practical use; by appearing after those who have sought to reduce all intelligence to reason, but without denying it a theoretical use, they constitute a further step in the decline. There is also a point on which the pragmatists' denial goes further than that of the pure sceptics; the latter do not deny that truth exists outside of us, but only that we can attain it; the pragmatists, in imitation of some Greek sophists (who at least probably did not take themselves seriously), go so far as to suppress truth itself.

In its place, therefore, we find the superstition of becoming, the superstition of action, and the superstition of life, in the aspects already considered, which we will exhaust in our next writing.

12.- NECESSARY CLARIFICATIONS: TWO SCIENCES*

* "Precisazioni necessarie: due scienze" (17 October 1934). Based on the article "Du prétendu empirisme des Anciens" ("On the supposed empiricism of the Ancients"), *Voile d'Isis*, July 1934. Compiled

The fundamental difference between the nature of the sciences of the Ancients and those of the Moderns has already been explained here on several other occasions; this difference exists between traditional sciences and profane sciences. But so many errors have been spread about this that it is never superfluous to insist on it. Thus, it is often stated, almost as a matter of course, that the science of the Ancients was purely "empirical," which is basically equivalent to saying that it was not a true science, but only a kind of completely practical and utilitarian knowledge.

However, it is easy to see that, on the contrary, concerns of this kind have never occupied as much space as they have among moderns and that, without going any further, even in so-called classical antiquity, everything related to experimentation was considered by the ancients to be capable only of constituting knowledge of a fairly inferior degree. It is difficult to see how this can be reconciled with the preceding statements and, by a singular inconsistency, precisely those who formulate it almost never fail to reproach the ancients for their contempt for experience.

The source of the error in question, as with many others, is the evolutionary or progressive conception. According to this conception, all knowledge is said to have begun in a rudimentary state, from which it gradually developed and elevated itself. A kind of crude primitive simplicity is postulated which, properly understood, cannot be verified, and everything is supposed to arise from below, almost as if it were not contradictory to admit that the superior can be extracted from the inferior.

This conception is not simply any old error, but rather constitutes a "counter-truth." We mean to say that it goes precisely in the opposite direction of the truth, with a strange inversion that is very characteristic of the modern spirit. It is true, however, that from the beginning there has been a kind of degradation, a continuous "descent" from spirituality to materiality, that is, from the higher to the lower, manifesting itself in all areas of human activity: and from there, in fairly recent times, the profane sciences have been born, alien to any transcendent principle and justified solely by the practical applications to which they give rise, since that is what modern man is primarily interested in, not in pure knowledge; Hence, when speaking of the Ancients, as we have just pointed out, he does nothing but attribute to them his own tendencies, since he cannot conceive that they could have been different, and even less that there could exist sciences completely different, in object and method, from those cultivated exclusively by himself. This same error also implies 'empiricism' as a philosophical theory, that is, the idea – itself quite modern – that all knowledge derives entirely from experience, and more precisely from sensory experience. Ultimately, these are nothing more than variations on the conception that everything comes from below. It is clear that, apart from such a preconceived idea, there is no reason to suppose that the first state of all knowledge must have been empirical. Such a convergence between the two meanings of the same word is certainly not accidental, and we can say that it is the philosophical 'empiricism' of the Moderns that leads them to attribute a *de facto* 'empiricism' to the Ancients. Now we must confess that we have never been able to understand the very possibility of such a conception, so contrary does it seem to all evidence. That there is knowledge that does not come from the senses is purely a fact. But that the Moderns, who claim to base themselves solely on facts, are unaware of this or willingly deny it when it does not agree with their theories. In short, the existence of this 'empiricist' conception simply proves, among those who have put it forward and who accept it, the complete disappearance of certain faculties of a supersensible order, starting, of course, with pure intellectual intuition.

The sciences, as understood by moderns, that is, the profane sciences, presuppose, in effect, nothing more than a rational elaboration of sensory data. Therefore, they are properly "empirical" at their starting point; and it could be said that moderns unduly confuse this starting point of their sciences with the origin of *all* science. However, even in their sciences, there are still, at times, more or less altered vestiges of ancient knowledge, the real nature of which escapes them. Here we are thinking above all of the mathematical sciences, whose essential notions cannot be extracted from sensory experience; the efforts of certain philosophers to explain empirically the origin of such notions are sometimes irresistibly comical! And if anyone wishes to protest when we speak of losses or alterations, we would ask them to compare, for example, traditional number theory with profane arithmetic: this would make it easy to understand what we mean.

in *Mélanges*, Paris, 1976.

On the other hand, most profane sciences owe their origin solely to fragments or, one might say, to the residues of misunderstood traditional sciences: elsewhere we have cited as particularly characteristic the example of chemistry, which arose not from alchemy, but from the denaturalisation it suffered at the hands of the "blowers", that is, the profane who, ignoring the true meaning of the symbols of that science, took them in a crudely material sense.

We have also cited the case of astronomy, which represents only the material part of ancient astrology, completely isolated from what constituted its "spirit", and which has been irretrievably lost to moderns, who naively repeat that astronomy was discovered, in a totally empirical way, by "Chaldean shepherds", and do not realise that the very name Chaldeans actually designated a priestly caste!

One could multiply examples of the same kind, comparing sacred cosmogonies and modern theories about "nebulae" or related hypotheses, or also, on another level, showing the degeneration of medicine with respect to its ancient dignity as a priestly art, and so on and so forth.

The conclusion would always be the same: laymen have illegitimately seized fragments of knowledge whose scope and meaning they could not understand, and with them they have formed sciences that claim to be independent.

Modern science, born in this situation, is, strictly speaking, nothing more than a science of the ignorant. Traditional sciences – as Ignitus has aptly pointed out on this page – are essentially characterised by their connection to transcendent principles on which they strictly depend, as more or less contingent applications, which is exactly the opposite of 'empiricism'. But principles necessarily escape the uninitiated, and for this reason, even if they are modern scientists, they cannot ultimately be anything other than 'empiricists'. After the degeneration we mentioned earlier, not all men are equally qualified for all knowledge, so there are necessarily 'uninitiated' people. But in order for their truncated and distorted science to be taken seriously and presented as something it is not, it has been necessary for true knowledge to disappear, along with the organisations responsible for preserving and transmitting it. And that is precisely what has happened over the last few centuries.

Let us add that, from the way in which modern people view the sciences of the ancients, there is a clear rejection of any "superhuman" element, which is the basis of the anti-traditional spirit and which, taken as a whole, is nothing more than the direct consequence of profane ignorance. Not only is everything reduced to purely human proportions, but because of the general subversion inherent in the evolutionary conception, the subhuman ends up being transported to the origins.

And what is most serious is that, in the eyes of our contemporaries, all this seems to be self-evident, and ideas of this kind are stated as if they were completely indisputable, presenting the most unfounded hypotheses as "facts".

Such considerations could also help to understand why it is absolutely futile to seek agreement between traditional knowledge and profane knowledge, and why the former does not have to ask the latter for confirmation of which it has no need whatsoever. We insist on this because we know how widespread this view is among those who have some idea of traditional doctrines, but an 'external' idea, so to speak, which is insufficient to lead them to their profound nature and prevent them from being deluded by the deceptive prestige of modern science and its practical applications. By placing things that are in no way comparable on the same level, they not only waste time and effort, but also run the risk of straying and misleading others with false conceptions of all kinds: and not only the many varieties of theosophy, but also certain twists and claims of a modernising scholasticism, tell us that such a danger is all too real.

13.- THE PROBLEM OF "PRINCIPLES"

When we want to talk about *principles* to our contemporaries, we should not expect them to understand without difficulty, since most of them are totally ignorant of what they are, even if they do not doubt their existence. Obviously, they also talk about principles, and even too much, but always to apply the term to that which it least corresponds to.

Thus, in our time, scientific laws that are slightly more general than others are called "principles", when in reality they are exactly the opposite, since they are inductive conclusions and results, and that is when they are not mere hypotheses.

Thus, even more commonly, this name is given to moral conceptions that are not even ideas, but rather the expression of certain sentimental aspirations, or to political theories, often equally sentimental in nature, such as the famous "principle of nationalities," which has contributed to unimaginable chaos in Europe. Do we not commonly speak of "revolutionary principles", as if this were not a contradiction in terms? When a word is abused to such an extent, it means that its true meaning has been completely forgotten. This case is very similar to that of the word "tradition", applied, as we noted in another article, to any purely external custom, however banal and insignificant it may be. And, to take another example, if Westerners had retained the religious sense of their ancestors, would they not avoid using expressions such as "religion of the race", "religion of science", "religion of work" and others like them for any purpose?

These are not minor linguistic oversights, but real symptoms of the confusion that is widespread throughout the modern world. People no longer know how to distinguish between the most different points of view and domains, between those that should remain more completely separate. And language, in short, does nothing more than represent the state of minds. Since, on the other hand, there is a correspondence between mentality and institutions, the reasons for this confusion are also the reasons why people fall into the fantasy that anyone can fulfil any function. Democratic egalitarianism is nothing more than the consequence and manifestation, in the social order, of intellectual anarchy. Westerners today are truly, in every sense, men "without caste," in the Hindu sense of the term, and even "without family," in the sense understood by the Chinese. They are on the verge of completely losing what constitutes the foundation and essence of all true civilisation.

These considerations bring us precisely to our starting point: modern civilisation suffers from a lack of principles, and it suffers from this in all areas. It is like a decapitated organism that continues to live an intense and disordered life; and sociologists, who are so fond of likening communities to organisms (often in a totally unjustified way), should reflect a little on the scope of this comparison.

With pure intellectuality suppressed, each particular domain ends up being considered independent. One usurps the other, everything mixes and becomes confused in an inextricable chaos. Natural relationships are reversed, what should be subordinate asserts itself as autonomous, all hierarchy is abolished in the name of a chimerical equality, both in the mental and social order. And, since equality is impossible in practice, false hierarchies arise in which anything is placed first: science, industry, morality, politics or finance, in the absence of the only thing that could and should normally be granted supremacy, that is, we insist on this, in the absence of true principles. We should not be quick to speak of exaggeration in the face of such a panorama: rather, we must make the effort to examine sincerely the direction in which things tend and always proceed in large part in the so-called 'civilised' countries, and, if one is not blinded by prejudice, it is easy to see that it is as we describe it and, moreover, as we understand it when we say that modern Western civilisation, unlike any other, is not a 'traditional' civilisation.

What we call traditional civilisation is a civilisation based on principles in the true sense of the word, that is, where the intellectual order dominates all others, where everything proceeds directly or indirectly from it, whether in science or institutions.

* "Il problema dei «principii»" (16 November 1934) ("Ignitus"). Contains part of the chapter "L'accord sur les principes" ("The agreement on principles") from *Orient et Occident*.

social institutions, are ultimately nothing more than contingent, secondary and subordinate applications of purely intellectual truths.

Thus, a return to tradition or a return to principles are in reality one and the same thing. But obviously, we must begin by restoring knowledge of the principles where it has been lost, before thinking about applying them. A traditional civilisation cannot be reconstituted as a whole if we do not possess from the outset the basic and fundamental data that must govern it. To attempt to proceed otherwise is to reintroduce confusion precisely where we intend to eliminate it and to fail to understand what tradition is in its essence. Such is the case with all the inventors of pseudo-traditions to whom we have referred above. And if we insist on such obvious things, it is because the state of the modern mentality compels us to do so, for we know only too well how difficult it is to prevent it from reversing normal relationships. Even the most well-intentioned people, if they possess any trait of this mentality, even in spite of themselves and despite declaring themselves its adversaries, might be tempted to start at the end, which would have no other motive than to give in to that singular vertigo of speed that has taken hold of the entire West, or to immediately arrive at those visible and tangible results that mean everything to modern people; to such an extent that their spirit, from looking so much to the outside, has become incapable of apprehending anything else.

That is why we repeat so often, at the risk of seeming tedious, that one must first and foremost situate oneself in the realm of pure intellectuality, and that nothing of value will ever be achieved if one does not begin there, and that everything related to that realm, even if it does not fall within the orbit of the senses, has formidable consequences according to modalities different from those of everything that depends solely on a contingent order. One must only be careful not to confuse the purely intellectual with the rational, the universal with the general, and metaphysical knowledge with scientific knowledge. And with this we return to the thread of ideas already developed in our previous series of articles.

When we speak of principles in an absolute way and without any specification, or of purely intellectual truths, we are always referring exclusively to the universal order. This is the domain of metaphysical knowledge, knowledge that is supra-individual and supra-rational in itself, intuitive and non-discursive, and independent of all relativity. We must also add that the intellectual intuition by which such knowledge is obtained has absolutely nothing in common with those intuitions of an infrarational order – whether sentimental, instinctive, purely sensitive, or "mystical" – which are the only ones that dominate so many contemporary currents.

Naturally, the conception of metaphysical truths must be distinguished from their formulation, where discursive reason can intervene at a successive level to express, as far as possible, truths that vastly exceed its domain and scope and which, because of their universality, any symbolic or verbal form can never give more than an incomplete, imperfect and inadequate translation, more appropriate for providing a "support" to the conception than for effectively expressing what is proper to it, which is, for the most part, inexpressible and incomunicable, and which can only be apprehended with a direct and personal "assent" of the spirit. Let us finally remember that if we stick to the term 'metaphysics', it is only because it is the most appropriate of all those available to us in Western languages. And if philosophers have come to apply it to very different things, the confusion is attributable to them and not to us, since the meaning in which we understand it is only in accordance with its etymological derivation, and this confusion, due to their total ignorance of true metaphysics, is absolutely analogous to those we pointed out earlier.

Knowledge of the principles is strictly the same for all those who possess it, since mental differences can only refer to the individual, and therefore contingent, order, and do not reach the pure metaphysical domain. Certainly, each person will express what they have understood in their own way, but those who have truly understood will always know how to recognise the one truth among the diversity of expressions, and this inevitable diversity will therefore never be a cause of discord. Only, in order to see through the multiple forms what they veil rather than express, it is necessary to possess that true intellectuality which has become so completely foreign to the modern Western world. One cannot believe how futile and miserable all philosophical discussions then appear, which refer to words rather than ideas, even when ideas are not entirely absent.

As far as truths of a contingent nature are concerned, the multiplicity of individual points of view that apply can give rise to real differences, which are not necessarily contradictions. The error of systematic minds is not to recognise that their own point of view is to declare false everything that cannot be traced back to them. However, if the

differences are real, albeit reconcilable, agreement cannot be established at once, since everyone finds it somewhat difficult to put themselves in the other's position, their mental constitution not lending itself to this without repugnance. In the realm of first principles, however, nothing of the sort occurs, and this explains the apparent paradox presented by the fact that the higher something is in any tradition, the more easily it can be understood and assimilated, regardless of race or era, and with the sole condition of sufficient comprehension; it is, in reality, the most free from all contingency.

In modern Western civilisation, on the contrary, only contingent things are considered, and this is done in a truly disorderly manner, because there is a lack of direction that only a purely intellectual doctrine, which nothing else can replace, can provide. Obviously, it is not a question of contesting the results that are nevertheless arrived at in this way, nor of denying them all relative value. But if the results are valid when taken in isolation, the whole can only produce an impression of disorder and anarchy, of the dispersion of quality into quantity and of relativity, which, starting from the sciences, ends up being transposed to all domains of human activity.

The sole cause of all this disorder is ignorance of principles. If pure intellectual knowledge is restored, everything else can return to normal. Order can be restored in all domains, the definitive can be established in place of the provisional, all vain hypotheses can be eliminated, the fragmentary results of analysis can be clarified through synthesis, and by relocating these results within the whole of a body of knowledge worthy of the name, they can be given, even if they occupy only a subordinate rank, a scope incomparably higher than that which they can currently claim. Now, what applies to the cognitive order also applies analogously to the social and, ultimately, the political order. Reconnecting with true metaphysics is the decisive problem for both. But since nothing can arise from nothing, this problem refers to the question of where truly metaphysical knowledge still exists. Even if only in a latent state.

14.- THE PROBLEM OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE ELITE*

In the articles published on this page, we have already discussed on several occasions what we call the intellectual *elite*. And the reader will easily understand that what we mean by this has nothing in common with what, in the modern world, is sometimes referred to by the same name. The most eminent scholars and philosophers in their fields may not be qualified in any way to be part of this *elite*. In fact, it is likely that they are not, because of the mental habits they have acquired, the many prejudices that are inseparable from them, and above all, the intellectual myopia that is their most common consequence. There may always be exceptions, but one should not count on them too much. In general, there are more resources in an ignorant person than in someone who has specialised in an essentially limited field of study and has suffered the deformation inherent in a certain type of education. The ignorant person may have within themselves the potential for understanding, but they have simply lacked the opportunity to develop it, and this case may become increasingly frequent as the way in which Western education is distributed becomes more flawed.

The aptitudes we consider when we speak of the *elite*, because they belong to the realm of pure intellectuality, cannot be determined by any external criteria, and there are issues here that have nothing to do with "secular" education. In certain Eastern countries, there are people who, without knowing how to read or write, nevertheless attain a very high level in the intellectual *elite*. On the other hand, we must not exaggerate in either direction. The fact that two things are independent does not mean that they are incompatible. And if, mainly in the Western world, "profane" or external education can provide some additional means of action, it would be a real mistake to disregard it more than necessary. The fact is that certain studies can only be undertaken with impunity once, after acquiring the unwavering inner direction we have referred to, one is definitively immunised against any mental distortion. When this point has been reached, there is no longer any danger to fear, for one always knows where one is going: one can tackle any field without running the risk of getting lost in it or lingering longer than is desirable, since one knows in advance its exact scope. But before reaching this point, great efforts are often required, and it is then, at least under current conditions, that the greatest precautions are necessary to avoid any confusion. The same dangers do not exist in a 'traditional' civilisation, where those who are truly intellectually gifted find every facility for developing their abilities. In today's world, on the contrary, they can find nothing but obstacles, often insurmountable, and it is only thanks to quite exceptional circumstances that they can break out of the frameworks imposed by both mental and social limitations.

In our time, the intellectual *elite*, as we understand it, in terms of both quality and power, can be said to be almost non-existent. Certainly, there are scattered individuals who could be part of it, but they are all too aware of the mental gulf that separates them from those around them. In such conditions, one is truly tempted to withdraw into oneself, rather than risk encountering general indifference or even provoking hostile reactions by expressing certain ideas. However, if one is convinced of the need for certain changes, it is necessary to start doing something in this direction and give at least those who are capable of it (for there must be some, despite everything) the opportunity to develop their latent faculties.

The first difficulty consists in finding those who are qualified and who may not harbour any suspicion about their own possibilities; the second difficulty would be to immediately make a selection and discard those who might believe themselves to be qualified without actually being so. All these problems do not arise where there is organised traditional teaching, which everyone can receive according to their own capacity and to the precise degree that they are capable of obtaining. There are, in fact, certain means of determining exactly the range within which the intellectual possibilities of a given individual can extend, but this is a practical, technical aspect that we cannot deal with here. We only wish to give an idea of some of the difficulties that would have to be overcome in order to arrive at the beginning of an organisation, at a constitution, even if only

* "Il problema de la costituzione della élite" (The problem of the constitution of the elite). (18 January 1935). Contains part of the chapter "Constitution et rôle de l'élite" (Constitution and role of the elite) from *Orient et Occident*.

embryonic constitution of the *elite*. The only thing that can be achieved until further notice is to give the potential members of the future *elite* some degree of self-awareness, and this can only be done by expounding certain ideas which, when they reach those who are capable of understanding them, will show them the existence of what they did not know and at the same time give them a glimpse of the possibility of going further.

Everything related to the metaphysical order is, in itself, capable of opening up unlimited horizons to those who truly conceive it. This is not hyperbole or a figure of speech, but must be understood literally, as an immediate consequence of the very universality of the principles. Those who hear talk especially of metaphysical studies, and of things that remain exclusively in the realm of pure intellectuality, cannot in principle suspect all that arises from them. Moreover, for this reason, those who want to approach this domain without possessing the qualifications required to reach at least the first degrees of true comprehension spontaneously withdraw from the moment they are forced to undertake serious and effective work. True mysteries defend themselves against all profane curiosity; their very nature protects them against all attacks of human foolishness, as well as against certain powers of illusion that can be described as 'diabolical', leaving everyone free to assign to this word whatever meanings they please, whether literal or figurative.

Since we have come to talk about the organisation of the *elite*, we must point out, in this regard, an error that we have very often had occasion to observe. Many people, upon hearing the word 'organisation', immediately imagine that it is something comparable to the formation of any group or association. This is absolutely wrong, and those who conceive such ideas prove that they understand neither the meaning nor the scope of the question. Just as true metaphysics cannot be confined to the formulas of a particular system or theory, the intellectual *elite* cannot accommodate itself to the forms of any "society" with all its externalities. It is something very different and not a matter of contingencies of that kind. And let it not be said that, in order to begin, to form the first nucleus in some way, it is necessary to consider an organisation of this kind; that would be a terrible starting point and would lead to nothing but failure. In fact, this form of 'society' is not only useless in such cases, but would also be extremely dangerous because of the deviations that would inevitably occur. However rigorous the selection process, it would be very difficult to prevent, especially at the beginning and in such an unprepared environment, the introduction of certain elements whose incomprehension would be enough to compromise everything. And it is also foreseeable that such groups would run the risk of being seduced by the prospect of immediate social action, perhaps even political action in the most limited sense of the term, which would be the worst of all eventualities and the opposite of what is desired. There are too many examples of such deviations. How many associations that could have played a very important role (if not purely intellectual, then at least on a level bordering on intellectuality) if they had followed the line that had been laid out for them at the outset, have not taken long to degenerate to the point of acting in opposition to their original direction, whose signs they nevertheless continue to bear, signs that are still clearly visible to those who know how to understand them! This is how, since the 16th century, what could have been saved from the legacy left by the Middle Ages has been completely lost. And let us not mention the rest: petty ambitions, personal rivalries and other causes of dissension that inevitably arise in groups thus constituted, especially if one takes due note of Western individualism. All this shows quite clearly what should not be done. Perhaps it is not as clear what should be done, and this is natural since, given the point at which we find ourselves, no one could say with any certainty how the *elite* will be constituted, assuming that it will ever be constituted. Be that as it may, the East, for example in the traditional aspects of its greatest civilisations, already shows us that the most powerful organisations, those that truly work at the deepest level, are in no way 'societies' in the European sense of the term. Sometimes, under their influence, more or less external "societies" or leading groups are formed with a specific and defined objective in mind, but these societies or groups, which are always temporary, disappear once they have fulfilled the function assigned to them. The external society is then nothing more than an accidental manifestation of the pre-existing internal organisation, which, in all its essential aspects, is always absolutely independent of the former. The *elite* must not involve themselves in struggles which, whatever their importance, are necessarily foreign to their own domain. Their social function can only be indirect, but this makes it more effective because, in order to truly direct what is happening, it is necessary not to be drawn into the sphere of the movement.

This is, therefore, exactly the opposite of the plan that would be followed by those who initially wanted to form external societies or ruling groups. These may be the effect and not the cause, and they could have no use or real *raison d'être* unless – in accordance with the Thomist maxim: 'To act, one must be' – the *elite* already existed and, in truth, was internally organised in such a way as to reliably prevent any deviation.

Firstly, the *elite* must adhere to a purely intellectual point of view and, therefore, must work for itself, since its members will receive from the development itself an immediate benefit destined to become a permanent and inalienable acquisition. But at the same time, and with this very thing, although less directly, it will also work for the general public, and the consequences of its action will penetrate more or less quickly into the remaining domains, including that of social applications, because it is impossible for an endeavour such as this to be carried out in any environment without producing, sooner or later, considerable changes in it. Furthermore, mental currents are subject to perfectly defined laws, and knowledge of these laws allows for action that is very different in its effectiveness from that which is typical of the use of totally empirical means. But here, in order to arrive at the application and carry it out in its entirety, it must be possible to rely on a strongly constituted organisation. This does not mean that partial and already appreciable results cannot be obtained before this has been achieved. However defective and incomplete the means at our disposal may be, we must nevertheless begin by putting them into action as they are, without which we will never be able to acquire more perfect ones. We must add that the smallest thing accomplished in harmonious accordance with the order of principles virtually carries within itself possibilities whose expansion is capable of determining the most prodigious consequences, and this in all domains, as its repercussions spread according to their hierarchical distribution and by way of indefinite progression.

It is thus, and always assuming that nothing abruptly interrupts such an action, that a qualitative transformation can gradually take place in the body of Western civilisation and the individual parts that compose it, until it is brought back to normality, that is, to forms of true order, to a hierarchical system from above, perfectly dominated by the transcendent power of the spirit.

15.- GUIDELINES: END OF A WORLD*

That we can speak of a crisis in the modern world, taking the word "crisis" in its most common sense, is something that many no longer doubt, and, in this respect at least, a fairly significant change has taken place: under the very action of events, some illusions are beginning to dissipate, and, for our part, we can only welcome this, since there is, despite everything, a rather favourable symptom, a sign of a possible correction in contemporary thinking. Thus, the belief in indefinite "progress", which until recently was still considered a kind of intangible and indisputable dogma, is no longer so widely accepted; some people are beginning to glimpse, more or less vaguely, more or less confusedly, that Western civilisation, instead of continuing to develop in the same direction, could one day come to a halt, or even capsize entirely in some cataclysm. Perhaps they do not see clearly where the danger lies, and the chimerical or childish fears they sometimes express are sufficient proof of the persistence of many errors in their minds. But, in any case, it is something that they realise there is a danger, even if they feel it more than truly understand it.

Therefore, if it is said that the modern world is in crisis, what is most commonly meant by this is that it has reached a critical point, or, in other words, that a more or less profound transformation is imminent in the short term, whether gradual or forced, more or less abrupt, with or without a 'catastrophe'; a change of direction will inevitably have to take place. This view is fair, and corresponds in part to what we ourselves think: but only in part, because, taking a more general view, *for us it is the whole of the modern era as a whole that represents a period of crisis for the world*. It seems, moreover, that we are approaching the dénouement, and this is what makes the abnormal nature of this state of affairs, which has lasted for several centuries but whose consequences had not yet been as visible as they are now, more possible today than ever before. This is also why events are unfolding at the accelerated pace to which we referred earlier; no doubt this may continue for some time yet, but not indefinitely.

However, the word 'crisis' itself contains other meanings that make it even more apt to express what we mean. Its etymology, often lost sight of in common usage, but to which it is necessary to refer when one wishes to restore a term to its full meaning and original value, makes it partially synonymous with 'judgement' and 'discrimination'. The phase that can truly be called 'critical', in any order of things, is the one that immediately leads to a favourable or unfavourable solution, the one where a decision is made, one way or another. It is therefore at this point that it is possible to pass judgement on the results obtained, weigh up the pros and cons, classify these results as positive or negative, and thus see which way the balance ultimately tips. It is understood that we do not in any way claim to be able to establish such a classification in a comprehensive manner, which would in any case be premature. We can only contribute, as far as our means allow, to making those who are capable of it aware of some of the results that already seem well defined, thus preparing, even if only partially and indirectly, the elements that will later serve as a basis for a future 'judgement', from which a new period in the history of human civilisation on Earth will begin.

Some of the expressions we have just used will undoubtedly evoke, in certain people, the idea of what is called the 'final judgement', and, to tell the truth, not without reason: whether it is understood literally or symbolically, or both at the same time (since they are in no way mutually exclusive), that matters little here, and this is neither the place nor the time to explain ourselves fully on this point. In any case, weighing the "pros" and "cons," the discrimination between positive and negative results, which we spoke of earlier, may certainly bring to mind the division of the "chosen" and the "damned" into two groups that are henceforth immutably fixed; even if this is only an analogy, it must be recognised that it is at least a valid and well-founded analogy, in accordance with the very nature of things; and this still requires some explanation.

It is certainly no coincidence that so many minds today are obsessed with the idea of the 'end of the world'. This is regrettable in many respects, given the extravagances to which

* "Orientamenti: fine di un mondo" (10 May 1935). Contains almost the entire prologue to *La Crise du Monde moderne*, Paris, 1927.

this misunderstood idea gives rise, the "messianic" ramblings that are its consequence in various media, all these manifestations arising from the mental imbalance of our age, only aggravate this same disorder in proportions that are by no means negligible; but, in the end, that does not mean that we can dispense with taking it into account. The most comfortable attitude, when faced with things of this kind, is certainly to dismiss them outright without further examination, treating them as insignificant errors or delusions. However, we believe that, even if they are indeed errors, it is better to seek the reasons that caused them and the more or less distorted truth that may nevertheless be contained in them.

If one considers things in this way, one easily perceives that such concern about the 'end of the world' is closely related to the state of general unease in which we now live: the dark premonition of something that is indeed about to end, stirring uncontrollably in some imaginations, naturally produces disordered representations in them, most often crudely materialised, which, in turn, translate outwardly into the extravagances to which we have just alluded. This explanation is not an excuse for them: or, at least, if those who involuntarily fall into error can be excused because they are predisposed to it by a state of mind for which they are not responsible, that could never be a reason to excuse the error itself.

That is not all: a purely 'psychological' explanation of the idea of the 'end of the world' and its current manifestations, however accurate it may be, cannot be entirely sufficient for us. To stop there would mean allowing ourselves to be influenced by one of those modern illusions that we fight against at every opportunity. Some, as we said, feel confusedly the imminent end of something whose nature and scope they cannot define exactly. It must be admitted that in this they have a fairly real perception, albeit vague and subject to misinterpretation or imaginative distortion, since, whatever that end may be, the crisis that must inevitably lead to it is quite visible, and since a multitude of unambiguous and easily verifiable signs all lead in a consistent manner to the same conclusion. Undoubtedly, that end is not the 'end of the world' in the total sense in which some people understand it, but it is at least the end of a world; and if what must end is Western civilisation in its current form, it is understandable that those who are accustomed to seeing nothing outside of it, to considering it as "civilisation" without epithet, easily believe that everything will end with it, and that if it disappears, it will truly be the "end of the world".

To put things into perspective, we will therefore say that it does indeed seem that we are truly approaching the end of a world, that is, the end of an era or a historical cycle. There have been many events of this kind in the past, and there will undoubtedly be others in the future; events of unequal importance, moreover, depending on whether they end more or less extensive periods. In the present state of the world, we must assume that the change that is to take place will be very general in scope, and that, whatever form it takes, we do not intend to define it.

In our works, we have already had occasion to refer quite frequently to "cyclical laws". It would perhaps be difficult to give a complete exposition of these laws in a form easily accessible to modern minds, but at least it is necessary to know something about them if one wants to form a true idea of what the present epoch is and what it represents exactly in the whole of universal history. First of all, it would be necessary to show that the characteristics of this era are indeed those that traditional doctrines have always indicated for the cyclical period to which it corresponds; and that would also show that what is anomaly and disorder from a certain point of view is nevertheless a necessary element of a larger order, an inevitable consequence of the laws that govern the development of all manifestation.

Moreover, let us say right away that there is no reason to be content with passively suffering the confusion and darkness that seem to be momentarily triumphing in many aspects of the contemporary world, for if that were the case, we would have no choice but to remain silent. On the contrary, it exhorts us to work as hard as we can to prepare for the end of this 'dark age', whose more or less imminent, if not entirely imminent, end is already hinted at by many signs. And it is reasonable to consider things in this way, since all equilibrium is the result of the simultaneous action of two opposing tendencies. If one or the other were to cease to act entirely, the balance would never be restored, and there would be a definitive collapse. But this assumption is chimerical, since the two terms of an opposition, as such, have no meaning except in relation to each other, and, whatever the appearances may be, one can be sure that all partial and transitory imbalances ultimately contribute to the achievement of total balance.

16.- ON THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPTION OF THE ARTS *

We have often had occasion to say that the profane conception of the sciences and the arts, as it predominates today in the West, is something very modern and implies a degeneration in relation to a previous state in which both had a completely different character. The same can also be said of the trades; and, on the other hand, the distinction between the arts and the trades is itself specifically modern, as if it had arisen from this profane deviation and only made sense in relation to it. For the ancients, the *artifex* was, indifferently, one who practised an art as one practises a craft; but, to tell the truth, he was neither the artist nor the craftsman in the sense that these words have today. The *artifex* had something of both, because, at least originally, his activity was linked to principles belonging to a much deeper order.

In every traditional civilisation, in fact, all human activity, whatever it may be, is always considered to derive essentially from principles, resulting, so to speak, in its being 'transformed', and instead of being reduced to what it is from the point of view of simple outward manifestation (which is ultimately the profane point of view), it is integrated into tradition and constitutes, for those who perform it, a means of effectively participating in that tradition. If, for example, we consider a civilisation such as Islamic or medieval Christian civilisation, it is easy to see the 'religious' character of the most ordinary acts of existence. In such cases, religion is not something that occupies a separate place, unrelated to everything else, as is the case for modern Westerners (at least for those who still consent to admit a religion). On the contrary, it deeply permeated the entire existence of human beings, or rather, everything that constitutes this existence, and in particular social life, is encompassed within its domain, so that, under such conditions, nothing can really exist that is "secular", except for those who, for one reason or another, are outside the tradition, and whose case then represents a mere anomaly. And if we then move on to a deeper point of view, we find in traditional civilisations, almost without exception, the existence of an 'initiation' linked to the trades and taking them as a basis. This means that these trades were still susceptible to a higher meaning and presented the value of a gateway to the spiritual world.

This can be better understood through the Hindu notion of *svadharma*, which refers to the fulfilment by each being of an activity in accordance with their own nature. In contrast to this idea is the "profane" point of view. According to the latter, any man can take up any profession, as if this profession were something purely external to him, without any real connection to who he truly is and what makes him himself and not someone else. In the traditional conception, on the contrary, each person must normally perform the function for which he is destined by his own nature and cannot perform another without causing a serious disorder, which will have repercussions on the entire social organisation of which he is a part. Not only that, but if such disorder were to become widespread, it would have an effect on the cosmic environment itself, since all things are linked together according to rigorous correspondences. Without dwelling further on this last point, we will note that the opposition between the two conceptions can, at least in a certain respect, be reduced to the opposition between a 'qualitative' point of view and a 'quantitative' point of view. In the traditional conception, it is the essential qualities of beings that determine their activity. In the profane conception, individuals are no longer considered as anything other than interchangeable 'units', as if they were devoid of any qualities of their own.

This latter conception, which clearly depends on modern ideas of "equality" and "uniformity," can logically only lead to the exercise of a purely "mechanical" activity, in which nothing properly human survives; and that is, in fact, what we can observe in our own day. It also follows that the "mechanical" trades of modern times, being only a product of profane deviation, have very little to offer of the possibilities we are discussing here, and, to tell the truth, could not be considered trades if we wish to preserve the traditional meaning of the word, which is the only one that interests us at this moment.

* "Sulla concezione tradizionale delle arti" (9 July 1935) ("Ignitus"). It contains almost the entire article "L'Initiation et les métiers" ("Initiation and the Trades"), *Voile d'Isis*, Paris, March 1934. Compiled in *Mélanges*, Paris, 1976.

If the trade is something of man himself and almost a manifestation or expansion of his own nature, it is easy to understand that it could serve as the basis for "an initiation," and even that it is, in most cases, the most suitable thing that exists for this purpose. Indeed, if by "initiation" we mean an action essentially aimed at transcending the ordinary possibilities of the human individual, it is no less true that such an action can only take this individual as he is as its starting point; hence the diversity of paths—that is, in short, of the means used as "supports"—in accordance with the differences in individual natures; these differences intervene less and less as the being advances on its path. The means thus employed can only be effective if they correspond to the very nature of the beings to which they are applied; and, as it is necessary to proceed from the outside to the inside, it is necessary to base oneself on the activities through which this nature manifests itself in the external world. But it is obvious that such activity can only play such a role when it truly reflects inner nature. Therefore, there is a real question of "qualification" in the technical sense of the term; and, under normal conditions, this "qualification" should always be required for the exercise of the profession itself. This also expresses the fundamental difference that separates traditional teaching from profane teaching: what is simply "learned" from the outside is of no importance here; what matters is to "awaken" the latent possibilities that the being carries within itself (and this is, in essence, the true meaning of Platonic "reminiscence").

It can also be understood from these last considerations that spirituality, which takes a profession as its "support", will at the same time and almost inversely have an impact on the practice of this profession itself. Indeed, those who have fully realised the inner possibilities of their nature, of which their professional activity is only an outward expression, will from then on consciously fulfil what was previously only a very "instinctive" consequence of their nature; and thus, if spiritual knowledge is, for them, born of their profession, the latter will in turn become the field of application of that knowledge from which it can no longer be separated. There will then be a perfect correspondence between the inner and the outer, and the work produced will be no longer just an expression to a certain degree and in a more or less superficial form, but the truly adequate expression of the person who conceived and executed it, which will constitute a "masterpiece" in the true sense of the word.

All this, as can be clearly seen, is very far from the supposed unconscious, or subconscious if you will, "inspiration" in which moderns want to see the mark of the true artist, considering him superior to the craftsman, according to the highly questionable distinction they are accustomed to making. *Whether artist or craftsman, those who act under such "inspiration" are in any case nothing more than laymen;* they undoubtedly show that they have some potential, but until they become fully aware of it, even if they achieve what has come to be called "genius", nothing will change in them. Unable to exercise control over these possibilities, their achievements will only be, in a sense, accidental, which is also commonly recognised by saying that "inspiration" is sometimes lacking. All that can be conceded, in comparing the case we are dealing with to one involving true knowledge, is that the work which, consciously or unconsciously, truly arises from the nature of the person executing it, will never give the impression of a more or less painful effort that always entails some imperfection, because it is something abnormal. On the contrary, it will derive its very perfection from its conformity with nature, which will also imply, immediately and, so to speak, necessarily, its exact adaptation to the purpose for which it is intended.

If we consider the history of humanity as taught by traditional doctrines, in accordance with cyclical laws, we must say that, at its origin, it naturally possessed possibilities corresponding to all functions, before any distinction between them. These functions only became differentiated at a later stage, which was already inferior to the 'primordial state', but in which each human being, despite having only certain possibilities, still spontaneously had an effective awareness of those possibilities. It was only during a period of greater obscurity that this awareness was lost. From then on, a certain spiritual discipline became necessary to enable man to rediscover, together with this awareness, the original state inherent in him: that which the ancients understood by the word "initiation", which today has become a source of so much misunderstanding, given the false ideas it attracts, in connection with the various occult and theosophical deviations, a veritable plague on the modern world. And in order to make the purpose of such spiritual discipline possible, the idea of a transmission was proposed that goes back, through an

unbroken chain, to the state that is to be restored, and thus, by degrees, to the "primordial state" itself. Thus, all ancient art had a sacred tradition, which meant the presence of an element that was, at its core, supernatural, a "spiritual influence" communicated regularly, which, according to a symbolic representation, came from certain divinities, spiritual entities that had introduced men to the "secret" of the arts that corresponded to each of them. This was how the idea of a spiritual knowledge of one's own nature was expressed, after a reconnection, through multiple differentiations and adaptations, to supra-individual orders of existence, and contacts were established so that each person, in their hierarchical position and according to their measure, explaining their own possibilities, creating, building, faithfully developing a social activity according to an interest in no way altered by material motives, could have the awareness of effectively contributing to the realisation of a universal plan and at the same time live the value of a ritual in every act.

17.- CRITIQUE OF INDIVIDUALISM*

What we understand by 'individualism' is the denial of any principle superior to individuality and, consequently, the general reduction of civilisation to purely human elements. In essence, it is the same thing that, in the Renaissance, was designated under the name of 'humanism', and it is also what characterises what can properly be called the 'profane spirit' or 'anti-traditional spirit'.

It is true that this spirit is not new. There have been other periods in history when it has manifested itself to a greater or lesser extent, but always in a limited and aberrant way, and it had never spread to an entire civilisation as it has done in the West over the last few centuries. What has never been seen before is a civilisation built entirely on something purely negative, on what could be called an absence of principles. And it is precisely this that gives the modern world its abnormal character, making it a kind of monstrosity that can only be explained if it is considered to correspond to the end of a cyclical period.

It is precisely individualism, as we have just defined it, that is the determining cause of the current decline of the West, because it is in a sense the driving force behind the exclusive development of humanity's lowest possibilities, those whose expansion does not require the intervention of any superhuman element, and which can only unfold fully in the absence of such an element, because they are at the opposite extreme of all spirituality and true intellectuality.

Individualism implies first of all the denial of intellectual intuition, insofar as this is essentially a supra-individual faculty; consequently, it also implies the denial of those forms of knowledge that constitute the proper domain of such intuition, that is, metaphysics, understood in its true sense. That is why everything that modern philosophers designate under this same name of metaphysics, when they admit something they call that, has absolutely nothing in common with true metaphysics: they are nothing more than rational constructions or imaginative hypotheses, and therefore completely individual conceptions, most of which, moreover, do not go beyond what the ancients called "physics", that is, the order of "nature".

And even when these speculations raise issues that could effectively lead to the metaphysical order, the way in which such issues are treated and considered results in nothing more than a "pseudo-metaphysics" and makes any real and valid solution impossible. Moreover, it even seems that, for philosophers, it is always a question of raising 'problems', even if they are artificial and illusory, rather than solving them, which is one aspect of the disordered need for research for research's sake, that is, of the most vain agitation, both in the mental and physical order. For these same philosophers, it is above all a question of giving their name to a 'system', that is, to a strictly limited and delimited set of theories, which is effectively theirs, which is nothing more than their own work; hence the desire to *be original at all costs*, even if the truth must be sacrificed to that originality. For the renown of a philosopher, it is better to invent a new error than to repeat a truth that has already been expressed by others. This form of individualism, to which so many "systems" that are contradictory to each other, if not in themselves, are indebted, is also found in modern "scholars" and artists; but it is perhaps in philosophers that the intellectual anarchy that is its inevitable consequence can be seen most clearly.

In a traditional civilisation, it is almost inconceivable that a man should claim ownership of an idea, and in any case, if he does so, he thereby forfeits all credit and authority, since he thus reduces it to nothing more than a kind of fantasy with no real significance. If an idea is true, it belongs equally to all those who are capable of understanding it. If it is false, there is no reason to boast of having invented it. A true idea cannot be 'new', since truth is not a product of the human spirit; it exists independently of us, and we only have to know it. Outside of this knowledge, there can be nothing but error. And here it can be pointed out that the kind of individualism we have just discussed is the source of illusions concerning the role of 'great men', or those who believe themselves to be such: 'genius', understood in the 'profane' sense, is in reality very little, and could in no way make up for the lack of true knowledge.

* "Critica dell'individualismo" (17 September 1935). Contains part of Chapter V: "L'individualisme" ("Individualism") from *La Crise du Monde moderne*.

Having discussed philosophy, we will point out, without going into detail, some of the consequences of individualism in this domain. The first of these was to place reason above all else, to make this purely human and relative faculty the highest form of intelligence, or even to reduce intelligence as a whole to reason. This is what constitutes "rationalism," whose true founder was Descartes.

This denial of pure intelligence, moreover, was only a first step. Reason itself was soon to be increasingly reduced to a primarily practical role, as applications took precedence over sciences that could still have a certain speculative character.

But that is not all: individualism inevitably entails *naturalism*, since everything that lies beyond nature is, for that very reason, beyond the reach of the individual as such. Naturalism or the denial of metaphysics are one and the same thing, and since intellectual intuition is unknown, metaphysics is no longer possible. But on this point, while some nevertheless persisted in constructing some kind of 'pseudo-metaphysics', others more frankly recognised this impossibility. Hence *relativism* in all its forms, from Kantian 'criticism' to Comtean 'positivism'. Since reason itself is completely relative and can only be validly applied to an equally relative domain, it is obviously true that 'relativism' is the only logical conclusion of 'rationalism'.

The latter, on the other hand, was bound to destroy itself. From a traditional point of view, 'nature' and 'becoming' are in fact synonymous. Nature is everything that becomes, which is incapable of participating in the stability of perfect and complete essences. A coherent naturalism can therefore only lead to one or other of the "philosophies of becoming" that are so characteristic of the modern world, which has been repeatedly criticised in this *Diorama*, and the most typical of which has been "evolutionism". Now, it is precisely evolutionism that ultimately rebelled against rationalism, reproaching reason for not being able to apply itself adequately to what is change and pure multiplicity, for not being able to enclose the complex multiplicity of sensible things within its preconceived schemes.

And such is indeed the position taken, whether by that form of "evolutionism" which is Bergsonian "intuitionism", or by the various "philosophies of life", which all present a united front against rationalism, without, it should be understood, having the slightest metaphysical character. On the contrary: if these tendencies rightly criticise rationalism, they fall even lower by appealing to fundamentally sub-rational faculties, to confused vital sensations mixed with imagination and feelings. What is quite significant is that here we no longer speak of *truth*, but only of "reality": a reality reduced exclusively to the sensible order alone, and conceived as something essentially mobile and unstable. With such theories, intelligence is truly reduced to its lowest level, and reason itself is no longer accepted except insofar as it is applied to working with matter for industrial uses or to forging myths for social use.

After that, there is only one step left to take, namely the total negation of intelligence and the replacement of "truth" with "utility". This is what pragmatism has done, which, if as a philosophical doctrine of William James is quite modest and irrelevant, is nonetheless extremely significant as a symptom, as an expression of very real and general attitudes of the time. And if one wants to get to the bottom of it, one has only to refer to the latest philosophies, which end up invoking nothing less than the subhuman, the 'subconscious' or 'unconscious', the libido and the various 'complexes' of the subterranean psyche, conceived as the true centre and source of life of the entire human being. This constitutes a complete reversal of any normal hierarchy.

Here, in broad strokes, is the path that "profane" philosophy, left to its own devices, was bound to follow and has indeed followed, in attempting to limit all knowledge to its own horizon. As long as a higher knowledge existed, nothing of the sort could occur, since philosophy was at least regarded as something that respected what it did not know and could not deny. But when this higher knowledge disappeared, its denial, which corresponded to the state of affairs, soon became theory, and this is where all modern philosophy comes from.

But enough about philosophy, to which we should not attribute excessive importance, whatever place it seems to occupy in the modern world. From our point of view, it is interesting above all because it expresses, in a clearly defined form, the tendencies of this or that moment. These tendencies are not created by philosophy at all (another

superstition of the "humanist" interpretation of history) and, if it can be said that it directs them to a certain extent, this is only subordinately and at a later stage.

Thus, it is true that all modern philosophy has its origin in Descartes: but the influence that this thinker exerted on his own era first, and on those that followed, and which was not limited solely to the philosophical domain, would not have been possible if his conceptions had not corresponded to pre-existing tendencies, which were in short those of the generality of his contemporaries. The 'modern' spirit recognised itself in Cartesianism and, through it, became more clearly aware of itself than it had been until then. *Every important historical movement is always much more a result than a true starting point*: it is not something spontaneous, but the product of a whole latent and diffuse process. If a man like Descartes is particularly representative of the modern deviation, he is nevertheless not the only one nor the first responsible, and it would be necessary to go back much further to find the roots of this deviation. Similarly, the Renaissance and the Reformation, which are most often considered the first great manifestations of the modern spirit, rather than causing a break with tradition, brought that break to completion. For us, the beginning of this break dates back to ^{the 14th} century, and it is then, and not one or two centuries later, that modern times must in fact be said to have begun.

It is on this break with tradition that we must still insist, in order to be able to analyse other aspects of individualism, since opposition to the traditional spirit, denial of tradition and individualism are different expressions for indicating one and the same thing.

¹Translator's note: The Italian original states *XVI secolo*, undoubtedly by mistake. In *La Crise du Monde moderne* it appears as *XIV secolo*.

18.- TRADITION AND TRADITIONALISM*

The abuse of certain words, diverted from their true meaning, is one of the symptoms of the intellectual confusion of our age, which we have often had occasion to denounce. We return to the subject here only to warn, in particular, against any illegitimate use of the very idea of "tradition" by those who would like to unduly assimilate what it implies to their own conceptions in one domain or another. This is not, of course, to doubt anyone's good faith, for in many cases it may be a matter of pure and simple misunderstanding. But at the same time, we are forced to ask ourselves whether such misinterpretations and unintentional misunderstandings do not serve certain "plans" too well, so that it is legitimate to wonder whether their growing spread is not due to some of these "suggestions" that dominate the modern mentality and which, precisely, always tend towards the destruction of everything that is tradition in the true sense of the word.

Reactions and falsifications

Let us explain ourselves fully on this point. The modern mentality itself, in all that characterises it – as we have shown in some of our works – is, in essence, nothing more than the product of a vast collective suggestion which, through action exercised over several centuries, has determined the formation and progressive development of the anti-traditional spirit, where all the distinctive features of this mentality are ultimately summarised. However, no matter how powerful and skilful such suggestion may be, there may come a time when the existing state of disorder and imbalance becomes so obvious that some people cannot help but finally notice it, thus running the risk of a "reaction" that compromises the result itself. It seems that things have now reached precisely this point, and this is where the 'falsification' of the traditional idea intervenes, with great effectiveness, to divert this 'reaction' from its intended goal.

This falsification is made possible only by the fact that the very idea of true tradition in the modern Western world has been lost to such an extent that those who aspire to rediscover it no longer know which way to turn and are willing to accept the false ideas presented to them in its place and under its name. These same people have realised, at least to some extent, that they had been deceived by the openly anti-traditional, individualistic, rationalist and democratic suggestions of recent times and that the beliefs thus imposed on them were only errors and illusions. This is already something in the sense of the "reaction" we were talking about, but, taken as a whole, all this is still only negative. Hence, when we read the increasingly frequent writings in which the most truthful criticisms of the current "civilisation" can be found, we realise that the means considered to remedy the evils thus denounced can be said to be strangely disproportionate and insignificant, even childish: nothing that testifies to the slightest knowledge of a deeper order. At this stage, the effort, however laudable and meritorious it may be, can be diverted into "activities" which, in their own way and whatever their appearances may be, will ultimately only contribute to increasing the disorder and confusion characteristic of this "civilisation" in whose "rectification" they are supposed to be involved.

"Traditionalism"

The people we are talking about can be called "traditionalists," taking this term in its legitimate sense: in effect, they are those who only show a kind of tendency or aspiration towards tradition, without any real knowledge of it. This allows us to measure the distance that separates the "traditionalist" spirit from the authentic traditional spirit, which, on the contrary, essentially implies such knowledge. In short, the "traditionalist" is nothing more than a simple "researcher," which is why he always runs the risk of going astray, not being in possession of the principles that alone could offer him infallible guidance. And this danger will be all the greater in that, on his way, he will encounter, like so many other traps,

* "Tradizione e tradizionalismo" (17 November 1936). This is an abridged version of the article published in *Études Traditionnelles*, October 1936: "Tradition et traditionalisme" ("Tradition and Traditionalism"); later collected in *Articles et Comptes Rendus I*. Italian translation in *La Tradizione e le tradizioni*. It was reworked by the author to form chapter XXXI of *Le Règne de la Quantité*, with the same title.

all those false ideas aroused by the power of illusion, which shows a keen interest in preventing him from reaching the true goal of his quest. For it is clear that this power can only maintain itself and continue to exert its influence on condition that any restoration of the traditional idea becomes impossible: it is therefore equally important for it to divert research tending towards traditional knowledge, to the same degree as research which, by referring to the real origins and causes of modern deviation, would be likely to reveal some aspect of its own nature or its means of influence; in this case, it faces two needs that are to some extent complementary to each other and which, in essence, could be considered as the two aspects, one positive and the other negative, of the same essential requirement for the domination of this force of illusion and denial.

Any illegitimate use of the word 'tradition' can, to one degree or another, serve this purpose, starting with the most vulgar of all, which makes it synonymous with 'custom' or 'usage' and thus causes confusion between tradition and the most base human affairs, completely devoid of any profound meaning. There are, however, other more subtle and, for that very reason, more dangerous distortions; moreover, they all have as their common denominator the fact that they reduce the idea of tradition to a purely human level, whereas – as we have often shown – nothing can be truly traditional if it does not involve an element of a supra-human order. This is the essential point, which to a certain extent constitutes the very definition of tradition and everything related to it; of course, this is also the point that must be prevented from being recognised at all costs in order to maintain the modern mentality in its illusions. On the other hand, it suffices to see to what extent all those who claim to be 'historians' of religions and other forms of tradition strive above all to explain them by the intervention of purely human factors – psychological, social or other, depending on the school of thought – and to leave nothing that transcends such factors; so that those who believe in the value of such destructive 'criticism', presenting themselves, moreover, with the blessings of 'science', are quite prepared to confuse tradition with anything, since in the idea that has been instilled in them, there is effectively nothing that can truly distinguish it from anything that is devoid of any traditional character.

False traditions

Given the impossibility of classifying as traditional that which belongs to a purely human order, there cannot be, for example, a 'scientific tradition' in the modern and profane sense of the word; nor, of course, can there be a "political tradition," at least where all traditional social organisation is secular, materialistic, contingent, and devoid of connection with a higher principle, as is the case in the decadence of the modern West. Nevertheless, these are some of the expressions of the genre that are used today and constitute so many adulterations of the concept of tradition; it is clear that if the "traditionalist" minds we referred to earlier can be led to divert their activity to one or another of these contingent domains and to limit all their efforts to them, their aspirations will thereby be "neutralised", becoming perfectly harmless even when they are not used, behind their backs, in a sense completely opposite to their intentions. It also happens that the name "tradition" is applied to things that, given their very nature, are perfectly contrary to it: one can thus speak of "humanist tradition", when humanism, as its very name indicates, is the very negation of the superhuman, which is at the very root of the modern spirit in all its forms. And we should not be surprised in these circumstances if one day we hear talk of a 'secular tradition' or a 'revolutionary tradition'! Given the degree of mental confusion reached by the vast majority of our contemporaries, the association of the most manifestly contradictory words no longer seems to present anything that might shock them or even induce them to reflect...

Paralysed reactions

This leads us to another important observation: when some people, realising the most visible forms of modern disorder, want to "react" in one way or another, is not the best way to paralyse this need for "reaction" to direct it towards one of the earlier and less "advanced" stages of the same deviation, where such disorder was not yet

so manifest and presented itself, if I may say so, in more acceptable guises? It is not enough to declare oneself sincerely "anti-modern", as every "traditionalist" of good intention should normally do, for this does not mean that one is less affected, without realising it, by modern ideas in some more or less attenuated form and, for that very reason, more difficult to discern, even though they always correspond in fact to one or another of the stages that these ideas have gone through along the entire path leading to the current critical point. No "concession" is possible here, not even an involuntary or unconscious one, because, from its starting point to its current results, everything is linked in an iron chain.

In this regard, we would add the following: the work that aims to prevent the 'reaction' from being anything more than a return to a lesser disorder, concealing its nature and passing it off as 'order', is exactly in line with the action carried out, on the other hand, in the sense of bringing the modern spirit into the very heart of what may still remain in the West of traditional organisations; the same effect of 'neutralising' forces whose opposition might be feared is achieved in both cases.

Reserved attitudes

Faced with all the more or less incoherent things that are currently being stirred up and fought over, faced with all the external "movements", in this state of affairs, a fundamentally reserved attitude is therefore required from a traditional point of view, if one does not want to be the instrument of underground influences by getting involved in struggles desired and directed invisibly by those who would least appear to be doing so. We will not repeat what we have already said repeatedly, and also in these columns, about the true role of an intellectual elite, about its means of action and defence, about the irresistible forces it could attract, if regularly constituted, by referring not to myths and suggestions, but to true principles.

Although with regard to this last expression, could we not repeat what we have said about 'tradition', noting that today we talk about 'principles' as never before, applying this appeal more or less indiscriminately to what least deserves it and sometimes even to what implies the negation of every true principle? This new abusive use of a term is considerably significant in terms of the varieties of "falsification" of language already observed, in general, with regard to the traditional idea, and it is not without interest to insist on this in a forthcoming article, which will at the same time offer us the opportunity to warn even more explicitly—if not the representatives of the true traditional spirit, who have no need of it—at least the "traditionalists" against some of the many dangers of deviation to which their efforts are exposed.

19.- ON THE DANGERS OF THE 'SPIRITUAL' *

* "Sui pericoli dello «spirituale»" (27 April 1937). Rewritten by the author to form chapter XXXV: "La confusion du psychique et du spirituel" ("The confusion of the psychic with the spiritual") of *Le Règne de la*

One of the most pernicious tendencies in certain Western circles is to confuse the psychic realm with the spiritual realm: and to propagate such confusion means to push many minds, eager to reconnect with spirituality, down paths along which they are destined to become instruments of dark and destructive forces.

Confusions

To avoid any misunderstanding, it is worth pointing out that, in our opinion, no development of a being's potential, even at a very low level, can be considered 'evil' in itself. It all depends on how it is used, and, above all, we must consider whether this development is taken as an end in itself or, on the contrary, as a simple means to achieve a higher goal. Indeed, depending on the circumstances of each particular case, anything can serve as an opportunity and a basis for those who embark on the path that will lead them to 'spiritual' fulfilment. However, on the other hand, anything can become both an obstacle and a support if the being stops at it and allows himself to be deluded and led astray by certain appearances of "realisation" that have no value in themselves and are results—if one can speak of results—that are completely accidental and contingent. The most gross example of such an error is that relating to possibilities of a purely physical and physiological nature. Here we refer to those who have introduced into the West certain practices related to Hindu yoga, that is, special forms of asceticism linked to physical exercises (for example, breathing); practices of which these people are totally ignorant in their true sense and which they consider to be a kind of "physical culture" or particular therapy. This error is, however, the least serious and the least dangerous, since its consequences are limited: the only risk is that, with "practices" carried out recklessly and without control, one may obtain a result totally opposite to that sought, and ruin one's health while believing one is acting to improve it. In this regard, this fact interests us only because it reveals a deviation in the use of such 'practices', which are in reality intended for other purposes, far removed from this physiological domain, and whose natural repercussions are nothing more than a simple 'accident', to which no importance should be attached.

However, it should be added that these same "practices", unbeknownst to the ignorant person who undertakes them as if they were simple "gymnastics", can have repercussions in the psychic domain, that is, in the order of the more subtle forces of the human individual, which considerably increases the danger. Thus, without realising it, the door may be opened to a series of "influences" of all kinds, against whose influence one is usually all the more defenceless because one does not even suspect their existence and is even more incapable of discerning their true nature. But so far, there is at least no pretence of 'spirituality', whereas things are very different for those who strive to concentrate their consciousness on the lower extensions of human individuality, mistakenly taking them for higher stages, simply because these fall outside the zone to which the activity of ordinary man is generally limited. And it is on the second case that we wish to develop some considerations.

Superstition of "phenomena"

In this regard, the basis of the error is almost always the attraction to the "phenomenon." Those who behave in this way want to obtain results that are "sensible," which they consider to be a "realisation": this means that everything that is truly spiritual escapes them. Let us be clear, this is not at all a question of denying the reality of the "phenomena" in question: they are, after all, too real, and we can say that, precisely for this reason, they are all the more dangerous. What we question is their value and interest, which is precisely where the illusion lies. If, after all, this were merely a waste of time and effort, the harm would not be too great; but, in general, those who become attached to such things are subsequently unable to free themselves from them and move on. In Eastern traditions, they are well aware of the case of individuals who, having become mere producers of "phenomena", will never attain the slightest spirituality.

Quantity.

But there is still more: in this case, a kind of reverse development may occur, which not only fails to contribute any valid acquisition, but also gradually distances the being from spiritual realisation until it is definitively lost in these inferior extensions of its individuality to which we referred earlier and through which it can only come into contact with the subhuman. Their situation then loses all possible way out, or rather, there is only one solution, namely the "disintegration" of the conscious being.

So far, we have referred to a semi-technical field, into which all those who are led astray by the occultist and theosophist falsification of certain traditional teachings and who engage in their own practices venture. But the same can be said for a much broader range of modern attitudes and tendencies, which similarly take on the appearance of 'spiritualism'. In this regard, all precautions are insufficient when invoking the "subconscious," "instinct," "intuition," and also a more or less indeterminate "life force"—in short, all the vague or obscure things made fashionable by so-called modern irrationalism—which lead more or less directly to contact with the lower states. All the more reason why we must guard ourselves with extreme vigilance against anything that induces the being to "merge" – as we might say, to "dissolve" – into a kind of "cosmic consciousness" that excludes all transcendence and therefore all effective spirituality. This is the ultimate consequence of all the anti-metaphysical errors designated by terms such as 'pantheism', 'immanentalism' and 'naturalism', which, moreover, remain closely connected; it is a consequence from which many would recoil if they truly knew what they were talking about. This effectively means taking spirituality "backwards" in the literal sense, replacing it with what is strictly speaking its inverse, as it inevitably leads to its definitive loss: and this is what "Satanism" properly speaking consists of. Whether it is conscious or unconscious makes little difference to the results. And it should not be forgotten that the "unconscious Satanism" of some, more numerous than ever in this age of intellectual disorder, is, in essence, nothing more than an instrument at the service of the "conscious Satanism" of those who, so to speak, wage a hidden struggle against the surviving spiritual and traditional possibilities of the West.

We have sometimes had occasion to point out the symbolism of a 'voyage' that must be made across the Ocean, representative of the 'psychic' and 'vital' realm, whose crossing must be accomplished by avoiding all its dangers in order to reach the goal: but what can be said of one who throws himself into the middle of this Ocean with no other aspiration than to drown in it? This is exactly what the supposed "fusion" with a "cosmic consciousness" means, which, in reality, is nothing more than the confused and undifferentiated set of all psychic influences, which, despite what some may imagine, certainly have nothing in common with "psychic influences," influences which, despite what some may imagine, certainly have nothing in common with "spiritual influences."

Those who make such a fatal mistake ignore the distinction that exists in the realm of symbolism between the "higher waters" and the "lower waters": instead of rising towards the Ocean above, they sink into the abysses of the Ocean below; instead of concentrating all their powers to direct them towards transcendence, which is the only thing that can be called "spiritual" and which alone can fortify the human personality with stable margins, they scatter them in the indefinitely changing and elusive diversity of fantasy forms, sensations and dark influences, without suspecting that they have taken as the fullness of "life" what, in reality, is only the realm of death.

20.- ON THE SENSE OF PROPORTION*

We often find ourselves, observing the confusion that reigns in our era in all areas, insisting on the need to escape it by putting everything in its place, according to the exact relationship that it has with others, based on its nature and importance.

Confusion

This is something that most of our contemporaries no longer know how to do, and therefore they no longer have any idea of a true hierarchy. This idea, which is in a way at the basis of all traditional civilisation, is, for this very reason, one of the most particularly attacked by the forces of subversion, to which we owe the creation of the so-called 'modern spirit'. This is how mental disorder prevails everywhere today, even among those who claim to be 'traditionalists'; in particular, the sense of proportion is strangely lacking, to such an extent that it is commonplace not only to take as essential what is most contingent or even most insignificant, but also to place the normal and the abnormal, the legitimate and the illegitimate, on an equal footing, as if the one and the other were, so to speak, equivalent and had the same right to existence.

A fairly characteristic example of this state of affairs is provided by a "neo-Thomist" philosopher 'who, in a recent article, declares that in "sacred civilisations" (we would prefer to say traditional), such as Islamic civilisation or medieval Christian civilisation, "the notion of holy war could have meaning", but that it "loses all meaning" in "secular civilisations" such as today's, "where the temporal element is more clearly differentiated from the spiritual, and, having become totally autonomous, has only an instrumental role in relation to the sacred". Does this way of expressing oneself not seem to indicate that one is not far from seeing this as "progress", or that, at least, it is considered to be something that has been definitively achieved and that there is no going back on it? Furthermore, we would like to be given at least one other example of "profane civilisations", as we ourselves do not know of a single one apart from the modern one, which, precisely because it is such, represents nothing more than an anomaly. The plural seems to have been used deliberately in order to establish a parallel or, as we said, an equivalence between this 'secular type' and the 'sacred type', which is that of every normal civilisation without exception.

It is obvious that, if it were merely a matter of confirming a state of fact, this would not give rise to any objection; but there is truly a gulf between simply confirming this state of affairs and accepting it as a legitimate form of civilisation in the same way as the one it negates.

That the notion of "holy war" is inapplicable in the present circumstances may be a fact that corresponds, to a large extent, to the truth; but this does not mean that this notion no longer has any meaning, for the "intrinsic value of an idea", and especially of a traditional idea such as this, being entirely independent of contingencies and having no relation whatsoever to what is called "historical reality", belongs to a very different order of reality. To make the value of an idea, that is, in short, its very truth (for, since it is an idea, we do not see how its value could be anything else), depend on the vicissitudes of human events, is characteristic of this "historicism" whose error we have denounced on other occasions, and which is nothing more than one of the forms of modern "relativism"; that a "traditionalist" philosopher should share this view is something disturbingly significant! And if he accepts the secular point of view as being as valid as the traditional point of view, instead of seeing it for the degeneration that it really is, what else can he possibly say about the all-too-famous "tolerance", an attitude that is quite specifically

* "Sul senso delle proporzioni" (15 February 1939). Published almost identically in *Etudes Traditionnelles: "Le sens des proportions"*, Paris, December 1937. Later collected in *Mélanges*, Paris, 1976.

¹Translator's note: The author appears to be referring to the neo-Thomist Jacques Maritain, who was ambassador of the French Republic to the Vatican.

modern and secular as well, and which consists, as we know, in granting the same rights to any error as to the truth?

We have dwelled a little on this example because it is truly very characteristic of a certain mentality; but, let it be understood, one could easily find a large number of others, in a more or less similar vein. The same tendencies are linked, in short, to the undue importance attributed to the secular sciences by the more or less authoritative (but in any case poorly qualified) representatives of traditional doctrines, who go so far as to constantly strive to "accommodate" the latter to the more or less hypothetical and always provisional results of those sciences, as if there could be a common denominator between them, and as if they were things situated on the same level. Such an attitude, whose weakness is particularly noticeable in religious "apologetics," shows, among those who believe they must adopt it, a very singular ignorance of the value, we would even say of the dignity, of doctrines that they imagine they are defending in this way, while they are doing nothing more than debasing and diminishing them; and they are thus insensibly and unconsciously drawn into the worst compromises, thus entering with their heads bowed into the trap set for them by those who aim only to destroy everything that has a traditional character, and who know very well what they are doing by pushing them into this terrain of vain profane discussion. Only by maintaining the transcendence of tradition in an absolute manner can it be left (or rather kept) inaccessible to any attack by its enemies, who should not be allowed to be treated as "adversaries"; but, in the absence of a sense of proportion, who still understands that today?

Frequent illusions

We have spoken of concessions made to the scientific point of view, in the sense understood by the modern world: but the all too frequent illusions about the value and scope of the philosophical point of view also imply an error of perspective of the same kind, since that point of view, by definition, is no less profane than the other. One should be able to content oneself with smiling at the pretensions of those who want to introduce purely human 'systems', products of simple individual thought, in parallel or in opposition to traditional doctrines, which are essentially supra-human, if they did not, in many cases, succeed in having those pretensions taken seriously. If the consequences of this are perhaps less serious, it is only because philosophy has no more influence on the general mentality of our age than profane science; but even there, it would be a great mistake, since the danger does not appear so immediately, to conclude that it is non-existent or negligible. Moreover, even if there were no other result in this regard than to "neutralise" the efforts of many "traditionalists" by diverting them into a domain from which there is no real benefit to be gained with a view to restoring the traditional spirit, it is still a victory for the enemy; the reflections we have already made on another occasion, in relation to certain political and social illusions, would equally apply in such a case.

From this philosophical point of view, it also sometimes happens – let us say in passing – that things take a rather amusing turn: we refer to the "reactions" of certain lovers of this type of discussion when they rarely find themselves in the presence of someone who formally refuses to follow them on that ground, and to the astonishment mixed with spite, even rage, they feel when they realise that all their arguments fall on deaf ears: to which they can resign themselves all the less because they are obviously incapable of understanding the reasons for it. We have even dealt with people who tried to force us to grant the small constructions of their own individual fantasy an interest that we should reserve exclusively for traditional truths alone; naturally, we could only oppose them *with a categorical refusal*, which led to truly indescribable fits of rage; so it is not only a sense of proportion that is lacking, but also a sense of the ridiculous!

Limited horizons

But let us return to more serious matters. Since we are dealing here with errors of perspective, we will point out one more that, to tell the truth, is of a very different order, for it occurs in the traditional domain itself; and it is, in short, nothing more than a particular case of the difficulty.

that men generally have in admitting what goes beyond their own point of view. That some, even the majority, have their horizons limited to a single traditional form, or even to a particular aspect of this form, and are therefore confined to a point of view that could be described as more or less narrowly 'local', is perfectly legitimate in itself, and moreover totally inevitable; but what is, on the contrary, totally unacceptable is that they imagine that this same viewpoint, with all its inherent limitations, must also be that of everyone without exception, including those who have become aware of the essential unity of all traditions.

We, against those who show such incomprehension, whoever they may be, must maintain, in the most unyielding manner, the right of those who have risen to a higher level, whose perspective is necessarily very different. That they bow before what they are, at least for the moment, incapable of understanding, and that they do not meddle in anything that is not within their competence, is basically all we ask of such people. We readily acknowledge, moreover, that their limited point of view is not without certain advantages, firstly because it allows them to stick to something quite simple intellectually and be satisfied with it, and secondly because, given the totally "local" position in which they have entrenched themselves, they are unlikely to be bothered by anyone, which prevents them from having to face hostile forces that they would be unable to resist.

21.- EXPLORATIONS ON THE OTHER SIDE*

The idea that there are purely 'material' things is a completely modern conception, the meaning of which, moreover, remains indeterminate, since the very notion of matter as it is currently understood is very unclear and there is nothing in traditional doctrines that truly corresponds to it.

But, deep down, it is possible to understand what it is about without getting bogged down in all the complications of the special doctrines of physicists: it is, in fact, the simple idea that there are beings and things that are only corporeal and whose existence and constitution do not imply any element of a different order. It is then easy to see that such an idea is directly linked to the 'profane' point of view, as affirmed in modern science.

These sciences are essentially characterised by the absence of any reference to higher-order principles. Similarly, the phenomena they study are conceived as devoid of such a relationship, and it could even be said that this is a condition for science to be appropriate to its object, since if it were to admit that things are otherwise, it would have to recognise that the true nature of this object escapes it.

"Subtle" forces

Perhaps it is precisely for this reason that "scientism" has insisted on discrediting any conception different from this one, presenting it as a "superstition" emanating from the imagination of "primitives," who for them are nothing more than savages or men with childish minds, as the theories of "evolutionists" assert. So, whether it is pure incomprehension on their part or deliberate bias, they succeed in giving these races a caricatured image that makes such an assessment seem justified in the eyes of those who take them at their word, that is, the vast majority of our contemporaries. We refer here in particular to the theories of what ethnologists have come to call 'animism'.

The corporeal world cannot in any way be considered a self-sufficient whole, nor something isolated within the universal manifestation. On the contrary, it proceeds directly from a more subtle reality, in which it has, so to speak, its immediate principle and through which it is integrated into a spiritual world. If this were not the case, its existence could be nothing more than a pure and simple illusion, a kind of phantasmagoria with nothing behind it. Under such conditions, there can be nothing in the corporeal world whose existence does not ultimately rest on elements of a 'subtle' order and, beyond these, on a principle that could be called 'spiritual', in the absence of which no manifestation would be possible.

Limiting ourselves now to the consideration of the subtle elements that must thus be present everywhere in this world, we can say that they correspond to everything that constitutes the 'psychic' order in human beings. By means of a perfectly natural extension of the concept, which does not imply any "anthropomorphism" but only a legitimate analogy, we can therefore call them "psychic" or also "animic", since these two words, if we refer to their original meaning, according to their Greek and Latin derivation respectively, are essentially synonymous. From this we can deduce that, despite all appearances, there can be no truly 'inanimate' objects; and, on the other hand, this is the reason why 'life' is one of the conditions to which all corporeal existence is subject without exception. This is also why no one has been able to satisfactorily define the distinction between the 'living' and the 'non-living', because this problem, like so many others in modern philosophy and science, is insoluble insofar as there is truly no reason to raise it.

Therefore, if one so wishes, this way of looking at things can be called 'animism', provided that this word is understood to mean nothing more and nothing less than the affirmation of the 'animistic' elements that it contains. It is otherwise evident that such a conception is 'primitive'.

* "Esplorazioni sull'altra sponda" (31 March 1939). Reproduces with slight variations the article "A propos du animisme et de chamanisme" ("On Animism and Shamanism"), published in *Études Traditionnelles*, March 1937, and collected in *Articles et Comptes Rendus I*. Italian translation in *La Tradizione e le tradizioni*. Re-written by the author for chapter XXVI: "Chamanismo y brujería" (Shamanism and Witchcraft) of *Le Règne de la Quantité*, Paris, 1945.

in the sense of being fundamentally true, which is almost exactly the opposite of what "evolutionists" mean when they describe it in this way.

At the same time and for the same reason, this conception is necessarily common to all traditional doctrines; therefore, we could also say that it is 'normal', while the opposite idea, that of 'inanimate' things, represents a true anomaly, as is the case with all specifically modern ideas. However, we must realise that this is not a matter of "personifying" natural forces, and even less of worshipping them, as claimed by those who consider "animism" to be nothing more than a "primitive religion". In reality, these are considerations that depend solely on the field of cosmology and can find their application in various traditional sciences, outside of any 'superstition' or 'religion'. It is obvious, however, that when it comes to 'psychic' elements inherent in things, or forces of this order that are expressed and manifested through them, all of this is completely devoid of any 'spiritual' character; the confusion between the two fields is also entirely modern and is undoubtedly linked to the idea of turning what is science in the strictest sense of the word into "religion".

Primitivism and degeneration

Now, it should be noted that ethnologists often consider forms to be 'primitive' that are, on the contrary, degenerative to one degree or another. It is true, however, that quite often they do not belong to as low a level as suggested by their interpretations; but, be that as it may, this explains why animism, which is ultimately only one particular aspect of a much broader doctrine, has been chosen to characterise the latter in its entirety.

Indeed, in cases of degeneration, what naturally disappears is the upper part of the doctrine, that is, its metaphysical and properly spiritual side. Consequently, what was originally limited to a secondary role, that is, the cosmological and 'psychic' side to which animism and its applications belong, assumes a preponderant importance. The rest, even if it still subsists to a certain extent, can easily escape a superficial observer, all the more so since this observer, ignorant of the profound significance of rites and symbols, proves incapable of recognising in them what depends on a higher order, and believes he can explain everything in terms of 'magic' and even, at times, pure and simple 'witchcraft'.

A very clear example of what we have just indicated can be found in a case such as "shamanism", which is generally considered to be one of the typical forms of "animism". This term, of rather uncertain origin, strictly refers to the set of traditional doctrines and practices of certain Mongolian peoples of Siberia, but some extend it to everything that has more or less similar characteristics. For many, shamanism is almost synonymous with witchcraft, which is certainly inaccurate: this word seems to have undergone a deviation in the opposite direction to that of "fetishism", which etymologically does indeed mean witchcraft, but which has been applied to practices that have very little to do with it. In this regard, we should point out that the distinction that some have sought to establish between 'shamanism' and 'fetishism', considered as two varieties of 'animism', is perhaps not as clear or as important as they think. Whether we are dealing with human beings, as in the case of shamanism, or with objects of any kind, as in the second case, which serve above all as 'supports' or 'condensers' – if we may use that expression – for certain subtle influences, it is a simple difference in 'technical' modalities which, in short, does not refer to anything essential.

The condensers of "influences"

If we now consider shamanism itself, we notice the existence of a highly developed cosmology that could give rise to comparisons with truly traditional points of view. At the same time, we can also find rituals similar to some of those belonging to higher traditions: some, for example, are remarkably reminiscent of the *Vedic* ritual, and others come directly from the primordial tradition, such as those in which the symbols of the tree and the swan play the leading role. Therefore, there can be no doubt about the presence in this collection of a series of things that, at least in their origins, constituted a traditional form that was as regular as it was normal. On the other hand, a certain 'transmission' of the powers necessary for the exercise of the functions of 'shaman' has been preserved to the present day: however, when we see that

the shaman devotes his activity to the lower traditional sciences, such as magic or divination, one may suspect that a very tangible degeneration is taking place here, and it is perfectly legitimate to wonder whether this might not constitute a real deviation.

In this regard, there are some rather disturbing signs. "Shamans" distinguish the influences with which they work into two categories, some beneficial and others malevolent, and since there is obviously nothing to fear from the former, they concern themselves almost exclusively with the latter. At least, this seems to be the most frequent case, for it may happen that "shamanism" comprises a series of quite varied forms, among which a distinction must be made. On the other hand, it is by no means a 'cult' paid to such evil influences, which would be a kind of conscious 'Satanism', as has sometimes been mistakenly assumed; it is simply a matter of preventing them from exerting a pernicious influence, of neutralising or diverting their action. Moreover, in general, it is not at all plausible that true "satanism" could be professed by an entire people. No less true is the constant contact, so to speak, with such inferior psychic forces, which are among the most dangerous, first for the "shaman" himself, as can be understood, and then also from another point of view of more general and less "localised" interest.

For it may indeed happen that some, operating more consciously and with greater knowledge, which does not mean that they are of a higher order, *use these same forces for completely different purposes*, behind the backs of the "shamans" or of all those who, *with various evocations, act like them* and play no other role than that of simple instruments for the accumulation of the forces in question at certain points. We know that, for this purpose, there are a certain number of 'deposits' of dark influences in the world, whose distribution is certainly not at all 'fortuitous' and which lend themselves all too well to the plans of secret forces tending to promote all kinds of subversion and spiritual destruction.

22.- SECRET WAR*

In our previous *Diorama* article, we pointed out that it is characteristic of a complete, traditional view of the world, beyond corporeal reality and before the strictly spiritual, to have an intermediate order of 'subtle' forces and influences. We also discussed what should be thought about certain conceptions attributed by ethnologists to 'primitive' peoples. We also discussed 'shamanism' and, on this occasion, we alluded to the possible use of certain forces, in cases of this type, by powers focused on subversion and traditional destruction.

Psychic residues

We believe it is appropriate to clarify this idea now, which will allow us to enter into a set of problems that may be of more immediate interest to the readers of this page. Indeed, it may come as a surprise that the vestiges of what was originally an authentic tradition, in certain cases, lend themselves to a true and proper act of "subversion." Such a case can be compared to that of the psychic remains left behind by a human being when they pass, through death, to another state, which, abandoned from that moment on by the 'spirit', can be used in any way. Spiritualism and magic essentially have to do with residues of this kind. Whether used consciously by a 'magician' or unconsciously by spiritualists, who naively believe they are dealing with the souls of the deceased, the more or less evil effects that may result from this obviously have nothing to do with the quality of the being to whom these elements previously belonged. They are now nothing more than a special category of forces, neither material nor spiritual, which we call *wandering influences*, psychic residues that, at most, retain only the illusory appearance of that being. What must be taken into account in order to understand this similarity is that spiritual influences in the proper sense, that is, transcendent, must find a certain number of appropriate "supports" in order to come into action in our world, first in the psychic order and then in the corporeal order, so that something analogous to what the human being presents in the hierarchy of his elements occurs here.

If such influences are subsequently withdrawn, for whatever reason, their former corporeal 'supports', whether places or objects, may remain charged with psychic elements, which will be all the stronger and more persistent the more powerful the spiritual element that made use of them. It follows logically that the case of important traditional centres, extinct for some time, is ultimately the most dangerous in this respect, either because simple recklessness provokes violent reactions from the psychic "conglomerates" that remain, or, above all, when it comes to people who take possession of these residues to manipulate them at will and obtain results in accordance with their designs.

Use of residues

The first of the two cases we have just mentioned is sufficient to explain, at least in part, the harmful nature of certain vestiges of vanished civilisations when they are unearthed by people who, like modern archaeologists, are ignorant of everything relating to these matters and therefore behave in a truly reckless manner. This does not mean that other types of things cannot sometimes occur. An ancient civilisation may have degenerated in its final period, and its remains will then bear the mark of this fact in the form of psychic influences of the lowest order. It may also happen that, even apart from any degenerative process such as that described above, there are places or objects specially prepared to prevent any possible violation: since such precautions are not in themselves illegitimate, although attaching too much importance to them is not a favourable sign, as it proves the existence of concerns that are far removed from pure spirituality, and perhaps even a certain ignorance of the power that resides in it, without the need to resort to such aids.

But, apart from all this, the remaining psychic influences, deprived of the "spirit" that previously directed them and thus reduced to a kind of "larval" state (the larvae

* "Guerra Segreta" (18 April 1939). Rewritten by the author for chapter XXVII: "Résidus psychiques" ("Psychic Residues") of *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, Paris, 1945.

formerly considered precisely as psychic residues of the dead), can react perfectly well on their own to any provocation, however involuntary, in a more or less disorderly manner, and which, in any case, has no connection whatsoever with the intentions of those who previously used them for very different actions: as, in another order of things, more or less occurs with the incoherent manifestations of the "psychic corpses" that sometimes intervene in séances and whose behaviour has no connection whatsoever with what, in any circumstance, the individuals who constitute the vestiges and whose posthumous "identity" they approximately reflect could or would have wanted to do, much to the astonishment of the naive who seriously believe they are dealing with the "spirits" of the dead.

Therefore, the influences in question can often be sufficiently harmful simply because they have been left to their own devices; this is due simply to the very nature of these forces of the "intermediate world," and no one can prevent this from happening, just as no one can prevent physical, corporeal forces from causing accidents in certain cases, for which no human will can be held responsible.

On the other hand, these same influences are available to those who know how to capture them, as is also the case with physical forces. It is therefore natural that both can serve the most diverse and even opposing purposes, depending on the intentions of those who have taken possession of them and direct them. And if they belong to the dark forces, it is evident that they will be used in a completely different way from that in which they might originally have been used by the qualified representatives of a regular tradition.

Semi-extinct traditions

Everything we have said so far applies to the vestiges left by a completely extinct tradition. But, parallel to this case, it is worth considering another: that of an ancient traditional civilisation that survives, so to speak, itself, to the extent that its degeneration has been carried to such an extent that the "spirit" will have ended up withdrawing definitively: certain types of knowledge, which in themselves have nothing "spiritual" about them and depend only on the order of contingent applications, may continue to be transmitted, especially the most inferior ones; but, naturally, they will then be susceptible to all kinds of deviations, since they too represent nothing more than mere "residues" of another kind, the pure doctrine on which they normally depended having disappeared. In such a case of 'survival', the psychic influences previously brought into action by the representatives of the tradition may be 'captured' again, even outside the scope of their apparent but henceforth illegitimate successors. Those who truly wish to use them through these latter will thus have the advantage of counting, as unconscious instruments of the action they intend to exercise, not only on a series of supposedly 'inanimate' objects, but also on living men who can equally serve as 'supports' for such influences, and whose current existence naturally confers on them a much greater 'vitality'. This was precisely the point we were referring to when considering an example such as 'shamanism', although, of course, with the reservation that such meanings cannot be applied indiscriminately to everything that one wishes to classify with this rather conventional designation.

Secret war

A tradition that has deviated to the point of making such abuses possible is truly dead as such, to the same extent as one for which there is no visible continuation. If it were still alive, however slightly, such "subversion", which is ultimately nothing more than a reversal of what remains in order to use it in an anti-traditional sense by definition, could obviously not occur in any way. It should be added, however, that even before things reached that point, and from the moment that traditional organisations are diminished and weakened to the point of being incapable of adequate resistance, more or less direct agents of subversion can infiltrate them and work to hasten the moment when such "subversion" becomes possible. It is not clear that they will succeed in all cases, for anything that still retains some life can be revived; but if death ensues in the meantime, the enemy will already be in the square, so to speak, and will be perfectly willing to take advantage of it and use the 'corpse' of such tradition for its own ends. The representatives of everything in the

the West still possesses an authentic traditional character, in our opinion, would do well to pay close attention to manoeuvres of this kind, now that there is still time, *since, all around them, the threatening signs constituting "infiltrations" of this kind are clearly visible to those who know how to recognise them.*

Another consideration that is not without importance is the following: if every dark force has an interest in taking over the sites that were once the seat of ancient spiritual centres, as often as it can, it is not only because of the psychic influences that accumulate there and remain "available" to a certain extent; it is also because of the particular location of these places, since it is evident that they were not chosen arbitrarily for the role assigned to them at one time or another and with respect to one traditional form or another. The "sacred geography" whose knowledge determines such a choice is, like any other traditional science of a contingent nature, susceptible to being diverted from its legitimate use and applied in reverse. If a point is "privileged" to serve the emission and direction of certain psychic influences when these constitute the vehicle of spiritual action, it will be no less so when these same psychic influences are used in a completely different way for purposes contrary to all spirituality. This danger of the misuse of certain knowledge, of which we have the opportunity to consider a particularly clear example, explains—let us say in passing—a large number of reservations that are perfectly natural in a normal civilisation, but which modern people prove perfectly incapable of understanding, since they generally attribute to a determined will the fact of "monopolising" such knowledge, which in reality is nothing more than a measure intended to prevent its abuse as far as possible. On the other hand, and to tell the truth, this measure loses its effectiveness if the organisations that hold such knowledge allow a number of unqualified individuals to penetrate their ranks, and even, as we have just said, agents of subversion, one of whose most immediate objectives will then be precisely to understand such knowledge.

In any case, whether it be the places themselves, the influences that remain linked to them, or knowledge of the type we have just mentioned, we can recall the old adage that says: '*corruptio optimi pessima*'.

And it is precisely "corruption" that we are talking about, even in the most literal sense of the word, since the "residues" in question, as we have already said, are in this case comparable to the products of the decomposition of what was once a living being. In short, it is a kind of "necromancy" that acts on psychic remains different from those of human individuals and is certainly no less dangerous than the other, since it has much more extensive possibilities for action than those of vulgar witchcraft. The world of traditions and forces, on which the destiny of civilisation depends, everything of which historical events and visible changes are but the effect, such is the field in which such sinister manoeuvres unfold; and it must be said that our contemporaries are blind, having no suspicion of this war, even though they are the first to suffer its destructive effects.

23.- BEYOND THE 'MENTAL' PLANE *

In our writings, as well as in those of the various contributors to this special page, we have always emphasised one point, namely the inadequacy of the 'mental' element with regard to truly spiritual knowledge. This point has not always been properly understood, and also because of the questions asked by some readers, it is good that we explain ourselves more precisely in this regard.

Reason, inspiration, revelation

As a premise, we will say that we prefer to adopt the expression "mental element" rather than any other, because it corresponds to the Sanskrit term *manas*, to which it is etymologically linked by its root. The term *manas*, in turn, designates the set of all cognitive faculties specifically characteristic of man (who, for this reason, is called in various languages by words that have the same root—for example, *man* or Mensch). Of such cognitive capacity, naturally, the main one is reason.

We will not dwell here on the distinction between reason and pure, supra-individual intellect, a distinction which, at least theoretically, has been recognised by certain philosophers, such as Aristotle and the Scholastics, who, however, do not seem to have been able to draw all the consequences from it. We will only say that metaphysical or spiritual knowledge, being of a universal order, would be impossible by definition for all of us if there were not a faculty of the same order and dignity, and therefore transcendent in relation to the individual. And we call this faculty *intellectual intuition*.

In the spiritual realm, all knowledge is essentially an identification, an assimilation into the thing known. Therefore, it is evident that the individual, as such, cannot attain knowledge of what lies beyond the individual domain, which would be a contradiction in terms. This knowledge is possible only because the being that is a human individual in a particular contingent state of manifestation is also something else at the same time. It would be absurd to say that man, as man and by his human means, can surpass himself; but the being that appears in this world as the species man is, in reality, something completely different because of the permanent and immutable principle that constitutes him in his deepest essence.

And all truly spiritual knowledge results from a consciously established communication with higher states, which purely individual modalities of self-awareness leave outside the zone to which the "I" itself refers. Understood in their true sense and disregarding the abuse that has sometimes been made of them, terms such as "inspiration" and "revelation" refer to nothing other than such communication.

The symbol and the realisation

Direct knowledge of the transcendent order, with the absolute certainty that this implies, is obviously in itself incommunicable and inexpressible; any expression, being necessarily formal by definition, and consequently individual, is therefore inadequate and can only offer, in a certain sense, a reflection in the human order.

This reflection may help some beings to actually attain this knowledge, awakening in them the higher faculties: but it could in no way dispense them from doing personally what no one can do for them. It is only a "support" for their inner work. And this is the function of symbols, which are the most appropriate means of expression for spiritual teaching. And this may also be the function of common language itself, which, when referring to truths of this order, takes on a purely symbolic value.

* "Al di là del piano mentale" (16 July 1939). Reproduces with variations the article "Les limites du mental" ("The Limits of the Mental"), published in *Le Voile d'isis*, October 1930, and taken up again by the author for chapter XXXII: "Les limites du mental" of *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, Paris, 1945.

However, since human language is, by its very nature, linked to the exercise of rational faculty, it follows that everything that is expressed or translated by means of this language necessarily takes the form of "reasoning". But it must be understood that there can only be a purely apparent and external similarity, a similarity of form and not of substance, between common reasoning, concerning things in the individual domain, and that which is intended to reflect, as far as possible, something of the truths of the supra-individual order. It must be realised that those who, through the study of any dialectical exposition, attain a theoretical knowledge of some truths of the latter order, do not yet have any real "realised" knowledge, for which such theory can constitute nothing more than a simple preparation.

This theoretical preparation, however indispensable it may be in fact, once certain exceptional cases are excluded, has only a contingent and occasional value. As long as we stick to it, we cannot speak of transcendent or "traditional" knowledge, even at the most elementary level. If there were nothing else, there would be nothing here but the analogue, on a higher level, of what philosophy is in any other "speculation" of the same kind, for such purely theoretical knowledge touches only the "mental" element, while effective knowledge is accomplished through the "spirit" and the "soul".

This is also the reason why even simple "mystics", in the sense that this word has generally assumed in the Western world, while not exceeding the limits of the individual domain, are nevertheless undoubtedly superior not only to philosophers, but even to theologians, for the smallest piece of effective knowledge is incomparably more valuable than all the reasoning that comes from the mental faculty. To be precise, however, we will say that this superiority of mystics refers only to their inner state; it may be that, lacking theoretical preparation, they are incapable of expressing any knowledge in an intelligible form. On the other hand, the realisation of these mystics can only be fragmentary and incomplete: but, all things considered, it is all that remains in terms of realisation in the case of a civilisation that does not have a regular tradition, containing the doctrine in a living state.

Reflections and true knowledge

As long as knowledge is verified solely through the mental element, it is nothing more than simple "reflexive" knowledge, like that of the shadows seen by the prisoners in Plato's symbolic cave, and therefore indirect and completely external knowledge. To move from shadow to reality, to grasp it directly in itself, is to move from the "external" to the "internal". This journey involves renouncing the mental element, that is, all "discursive" faculties, which henceforth become powerless, since they cannot cross the limits imposed on them by their very nature. Only what we have called "intellectual intuition" can lead beyond such limits.

Using traditional symbolism, we can say that the centre of knowledge must then be transferred from the "brain" to the "heart"; for this transfer, all speculation and dialectics could obviously be of no use: and only now is it possible to really speak of higher knowledge. It should be noted that this symbolism should not lead anyone to believe that this is a transition to a world of feelings, emotions and confused sensations, a world which, it must be said firmly and rigorously, has an equally "individual" and "human" character, and is therefore equally distant from knowledge, since we are dealing here with the same mental element: since, when speaking of the "heart", too many moderns are led to this erroneous interpretation. Not so the ancients, who saw in the "heart" the seat of the "solar" element in man, the point at which the transition to the supra-individual states of knowledge mentioned above can take place.

The point at which higher knowledge begins, in any case, is then situated far beyond where everything that may be relatively valid in the theories of philosophers ends. Between one thing and another there is a veritable abyss, which, as has been said, can only be overcome by freeing oneself from the mental element and renouncing it, so to speak, except to later reassume it as an instrument of contingent expression. Those who cling to reasoning remain prisoners of forms, that is, of the limitations by which the individual state is defined, the purely human mode of appearance of being. Thus, they will never go beyond that which, in the most general and 'external' sense, is phenomenon. Meanwhile, we must recognise the need to use the mental instrument wherever

it concerns this external and human order (for which none of our words should serve as an incentive for "irrationalism," fantasising and rambling where, on the contrary, it is necessary to think precisely and clearly), at the same time, one must recognise the impediment and limitation that this means where true spiritual knowledge is concerned.

The passage from the "external" to the "internal" is also the passage from "multiplicity" to unity, from the circumference to the centre, to the single point from which it is possible for the human being, restored to the prerogatives of the "primordial state", to rise to higher states and, through the total realisation of his true essence, transcend time. Those who realise the truth of themselves in these terms participate in the unconditioned state, and, without the slightest exaggeration, it can be said that they no longer have anything in common with all those who develop their possibilities in the closed realm of the human mental and individual world, however high their virtues and qualifications may be in relation to that realm. Based on these considerations, the idea to which we have so often returned in our works and in these very articles may become clearer, namely, that the capacity for intellectual intuition and the effective existence of an elite that possesses it constitute the indispensable condition for any true form of spiritual authority and hierarchical order: any other type of authority and hierarchy is, for that very reason, necessarily revocable and contingent.

24.- ON 'PSYCHOANALYTICAL' PERVERSION *

By the term 'psychologism' we mean the tendency to systematically refer all kinds of phenomena to psychological explanations. This tendency is not entirely new in the Western world. It is, in essence, nothing more than a particular case of 'humanism', understood, in the true sense of the word, as the reduction of all things to purely human elements.

But that is not all. This 'psychologism' implies a very restricted conception of the human individual and their possibilities, since 'classical' psychology limited itself to considering some of the most external and superficial manifestations of the 'mental' element. This, incidentally, is the reason why we always differentiate between the two terms 'psychological' and 'psychic', reserving the latter for its etymological meaning, which is incomparably broader, since it can encompass all the subtle elements of individuality, whereas only a truly tiny portion of these fall within the 'psychological' domain.

Under such conditions, it is not surprising that explanations drawn from psychology and purporting to apply to things that are in no way within its competence, such as religion, for example, are most often truly childish in character. But the term "childish" should not lead us to think that they are entirely harmless: for they have their place among the efforts made by the anti-traditional spirit to destroy the notion of any supra-human reality.

But today, there is something else to consider: the situation is no longer simply as we have just indicated, but has worsened significantly following the invasion of the *subconscious* into psychology, which, extending its domain in a certain sense, but only at the lowest level, risks mixing everything it touches with the worst manifestations of the lowest psyche.

In this regard, we will make a more general observation. There are misguided 'traditionalists' who rejoice thoughtlessly when they see modern science breaking out of the narrow confines in which its conceptions were previously enclosed and taking a less 'materialistic' attitude than it had in the last century. What they fail to realise is that this is in fact a new stage in the perfectly logical development of the plan according to which the progressive deviation of the modern world is being fulfilled. Materialism has played its part here, but now the pure and simple negation it represents is insufficient. It has served effectively to prevent man from accessing higher possibilities, but it could not unleash the lower forces, which are the only ones that can drive the work of disorder and dissolution to its final point. The materialistic attitude, by its very limitation, still presents only an equally limited danger: its "thickness," if one may say so, shelters those who adhere to it from certain subtle influences and gives them an immunity quite comparable to that of the mollusc that remains strictly enclosed in its shell. But if an opening is made at the bottom of this shell—which here represents the set of conventionally accepted scientific conceptions—as we said in connection with the new trends in psychology, these destructive tendencies will immediately penetrate it, and all the more easily since, after the negative work accomplished in the preceding phase, no element of a higher order will be able to intervene to oppose their action.

The materialist and subversive phase

One could even say that the period of materialism constitutes nothing more than a kind of theoretical preparation, while the period of lower psychism that follows it involves an active phase that develops into a reversal of true spiritual realisation. There is much more than a question of vocabulary in the fact, already very significant in itself, that the

* "Sulla perversione «psicanalitica»". (19 December 1939). Reproduces, with slight variations, the article "L'erreur du 'psychologisme'" ("The error of 'psychologism'"), published in *Études Traditionnelles*, January and February 1938, and collected in *Articles et Comptes Rendus I*. Italian translation in *La Tradizione e le tradizioni*. Rewritten by the author for chapter XXXIV: "Les méfaits de la psychanalyse" ("The excesses of psychoanalysis") of *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, Paris, 1945.

Contemporary psychology considers only the "subconscious" and never the "supraconscious," which should logically be its correlative. Although those who use such terminology may not realise it, there is an expression of an extension that operates only downward. Some even adopt, as a synonym or equivalent of "subconscious," the term "unconscious," which, taken literally, would seem to refer to an even lower level, but which, in truth, corresponds more or less to the same order of things. If what is at stake were truly unconscious, we do not even see how it would be possible to talk about it, especially in psychological terms. Be that as it may, what is still worthy of observation is the strange illusion by virtue of which psychologists come to consider certain states as much more 'profound' the lower they are. Is there not already an indication here of a tendency to oppose spirituality, which alone can truly be called profound, since only it touches the very beginning and centre of being?

Let us also note that, by appealing to the "subconscious," psychology gradually tends to converge with "metapsychics," in which, by an at least extravagant coincidence, some "spiritualists" today place hopes as unjustified as those inspired by the new orientation of ordinary science. And, to the same extent, the "science of the subconscious" also inevitably approaches spiritualism and other more or less similar questions that are ultimately based on the same obscure elements of the lower psyche. Given this direction, the "supraconscious" remains more completely foreign and closed to it than ever; and when it encounters something related to it, instead of acknowledging its ignorance in this regard, it attempts to annex it by simply assimilating it into the "subconscious". Here we find again this confusion of the psychic with the spiritual, to which we have already drawn attention, aggravated even further by the fact that it occurs with what is lowest in the psychic domain; therein lies the "subversion" to which we alluded at the beginning.

This 'subversive', not to say 'satanic', character appears with particular clarity in psychoanalytic interpretations of symbols. It is true that psychologists of earlier schools had often attempted to explain symbolism in their own way and reduce it to the measure of their own conceptions. In such cases, if the symbols were true, traditional symbols, the explanations, drawn from purely human elements, ignored what constituted their essence. But if they were truly human things, it was not a case of symbolism, and the very use of this term betrayed the error committed with regard to the very nature of the subject matter to be interpreted.

Subhuman psychism

This applies equally to the considerations to which psychoanalysts devote themselves, with the difference that then one must speak not only of the human, but also, and to a large extent, of the 'subhuman'. Therefore, on this occasion we are faced not with simple degradation, but with complete subversion: moreover, all subversion, even when it is due—at least immediately—only to incomprehension and ignorance, is always in itself properly 'satanic'.

Moreover, the generally ignoble and repugnant nature of psychoanalytic interpretations constitutes a perfectly unambiguous 'sign' in this regard. And what is even more significant from our point of view is that the same 'sign' is found precisely in some of the manifestations of spiritualism: certainly, it would take a good deal of goodwill, not to say complete blindness, not to see here more than a mere 'coincidence'. Naturally, in most cases, psychoanalysts may be as unaware as spiritualists of what really lies beneath all this; however, both seem equally "driven" by a subversive will that in both cases uses elements of the same order, if not exactly identical, a will that, whatever the entities in which it is embodied, is certainly perfectly conscious, at least among these, responding to intentions that are very different from what those who are merely unconscious instruments of its action can imagine.

The underworld of the soul

Under such conditions, it is evident that the main use of psychoanalysis, which is its therapeutic application, must necessarily be considerably dangerous for those who submit to it, and even for those who practise it, since these matters belong to the type that cannot be

managed with impunity. It would not be an exaggeration to see in these practices one of the most characteristic means put into action in order to exacerbate as much as possible the imbalance of the modern world. Those who practise these methods are undoubtedly convinced of the beneficial nature of the results obtained. But it is precisely this illusion that makes their spread possible, thus revealing the difference between the intentions of these "practitioners" and the guiding will of the enterprise of which they are merely blind collaborators.

In reality, psychoanalysis can only achieve an approximation of the level of clear consciousness of *all the content of such "depths" of the self, which constitute what is properly called the subconscious*. On the other hand, this self is already psychologically weak by hypothesis since, if this were not the case, it would in no way feel the need to resort to this type of treatment. This makes it all the more incapable of resisting the onslaught of this "subversion" and runs the risk of sinking irretrievably into the chaos of dark forces recklessly unleashed; so that, even if it manages to escape them, it will at least retain, throughout its life, a mark that will be like an indelible "stain" on it.

We know that certain people will object by invoking the similarity to the 'descent into hell' spoken of in the ancient Mysteries, where it was the preparatory phase for the supernatural realisation of the personality. But such an assimilation is completely wrong, since their respective objectives have nothing in common, as, moreover, is the case with the conditions of the subject in both cases. Perhaps one could only speak of a kind of profane parody, which would suffice to confer on what is at stake a rather disturbing character of 'falsification'. The truth is that this 'descent into Hell', which is not followed by any 'ascent', is nothing more than a 'fall into the mire', to use the same term as some ancient Mysteries: as is well known, this "quagmire" actually existed on the road to Eleusis, and those who fell into it were considered profane individuals who aspired to initiation without being properly qualified to receive it, thus becoming victims of their own imprudence. During the "descent into Hell", the being definitively exhausts certain lower possibilities in order to subsequently rise to higher states; on the contrary, in the "fall into the quagmire", the lower possibilities take hold of him, dominate him and end up submerging him completely.

The "sacraments of the devil"

We have just referred to "falsification". This impression is reinforced by other observations, such as the denaturalisation of symbolism that has already been pointed out and which, moreover, tends to extend to everything that essentially involves superhuman elements, as demonstrated by the attitude taken towards doctrines of a metaphysical and even initiatory nature. One can point, for example, to Jung's interpretation of the Taoist text entitled *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, and Silberer's interpretation of hermetic symbols.

But that is not all, and there is something else that is perhaps even more noteworthy in this regard: the requirement imposed on anyone who aspires to practise psychoanalysis professionally to have undergone psychoanalysis themselves beforehand. First and foremost, this implies recognition of the fact that the individual who has undergone this operation is never the same again, or rather, as we said before, that it leaves an indelible mark on them, just like initiation, albeit in the opposite sense, since instead of spiritual development, it is a development of the lower psyche. On the other hand, there is a clear imitation of a spiritual and almost traditional transmission here: however, given the different nature of the influences involved and the fact that an effective result is nevertheless produced that does not allow the thing to be considered as reduced to a simple simulacrum without any influence, in reality this transmission would be more comparable to that practised in a field such as magic and witchcraft itself.

There is also a rather obscure point regarding the very origin of this transmission: since it is obviously impossible to give others what one does not possess oneself, and since the discovery of psychoanalysis is very recent, one may wonder: who conferred on the first psychoanalysts the "powers" they transmit to their disciples, and who was able to "psychoanalyse" them in the first place? This question, which arises quite naturally, at least for anyone capable of reflection, is probably very indiscreet and it is highly unlikely that a satisfactory answer will ever be found; but this is not essential in order to recognise, in such psychic transmission, another truly sinister "sign" if we consider the associations to which it gives rise: in this respect, psychoanalysis bears a worrying resemblance to what we might well call the "sacraments of the devil".

25.- ON SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY*

The teachings of all traditional doctrines are unanimous in affirming the supremacy of the spiritual over the temporal and in considering as normal and legitimate only a social organisation in which this supremacy is recognised and translated into the relations between the powers corresponding to both domains.

On the other hand, history clearly shows us that ignorance of this hierarchical order always and everywhere entails the same consequences: social imbalance, confusion of roles, domination by the lower elements, and also intellectual degeneration, forgetfulness of transcendent principles, first, and then, falling from one decline to another, until the denial of all true knowledge. The doctrine, which allows us to foresee that everything must inevitably happen in this way, does not in itself require such *a posteriori* confirmation. If, in our works, we have frequently illustrated it with historical examples, it is so that our contemporaries, who are so attentive to "facts", may at least draw from such examples the incentive to reflect seriously and be led above all by this path to recognise the truth of the doctrine. And if this truth were recognised even by only a small group, that would already constitute an important result, since it would be the starting point for a change of direction capable of leading to a restoration of the normal order. And this restoration, whatever its paths and modalities may be, will necessarily take place sooner or later: something that is worth clarifying.

Limits of disorder

Temporal power, we have said, concerns the world of action and change. However, since change does not possess its own principle, it must receive its law from a higher principle, through which it is integrated into the universal order. If, on the contrary, it seeks to become independent of any higher principle, it thereby assumes the character of pure and simple disorder. Disorder is, in essence, the same as imbalance, and in the human realm, imbalance manifests itself in what is called injustice, for there is an identity between the concepts of justice, order, balance, and harmony, if not to say, more precisely, that they are but different aspects of one and the same thing, considered in different and multiple ways according to the realms in which it manifests itself.

The idea that justice is made up of the sum of all injustices is characteristic of Far Eastern doctrine; in the total order, all disorder is compensated for by another disorder. This is why the revolution that eliminated secularised and absolutist royalty is both a logical consequence and a punishment, that is, a compensation for the previous revolt of this same royalty against spiritual authority. The law is denied from the moment the very principle from which it emanates is denied; but its deniers have not really been able to suppress it, and it thus turns against them; in this way, disorder must finally enter into order, to which nothing could oppose itself, if only in appearance and in a totally illusory form.

It may be objected that the revolution, through which the lower social classes have supplanted the secularised royalty and the warrior aristocracy linked to it, is nothing more than an aggravation of disorder, and this is certainly true if only the immediate aspects are considered; but it is precisely this very aggravation that prevents disorder from perpetuating itself indefinitely. If temporal power did not lose its stability by ignoring its subordination to spiritual authority, there would be no reason for disorder to cease at a certain point once it had been introduced into the social organisation. The fact is that every time disorder is accentuated, the movement accelerates, as another step is taken in the direction of pure change and 'instantaneity'. Therefore, the lower the order of the prevailing social elements, the less lasting their dominance. Like everything that has only a negative existence, disorder destroys itself: it is in its own excess that the remedy for the most desperate cases can be found, since the increasing speed of change will necessarily come to an end; and, in the face of the current crisis,

* "Sull'autorità spirituale" (15 February 1940). It contains, with some additions, most of Chapter IX: "La Loi Immuable" ("The Immutable Law") from *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel*, Paris, 1929.

Are not many beginning to feel, more or less vaguely, that things cannot go on like this indefinitely?

A cycle is coming to an end

Even if, given the state of much of the contemporary world, a "rectification" were not possible without some sudden and tragic event, this would not be a sufficient reason not to consider such problems; Otherwise, would this not be another way of showing the neglect of those immutable principles which are beyond all the vicissitudes of the temporal world and which, consequently, cannot be altered by any contingency? We have often had occasion to show that humanity has never been as far removed from its primordial and normal state as it is today. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the end of one cycle coincides with the beginning of another. Also, in the symbolic visions contained in the Apocalypse, it is at the extreme limit of disorder, almost at the apparent destruction of the 'outer world', that the advent of the 'heavenly Jerusalem' must take place, which represents, for a new period of human history, the analogue of the 'earthly paradise' of the primordial state lost by humanity, which will end at that very moment. The similarity between the characteristics of the modern era and those indicated by traditional doctrines for the final phase of the so-called "dark age" – Kali-Yuga – allows us to think, without too much error, that this eventuality should not be ruled out at all.

If such predictions seem too bold for those who do not have sufficient traditional data to support them, we can at least recall examples from the past. Thus, we can refer to the end of Buddhism in India, which disappeared completely just when it seemed to be definitively established, and the victory, on the contrary, of traditional Brahmanical orthodoxy after a kind of eclipse that lasted several centuries. This is what inevitably happens to everything that is based solely on the contingent and the transitory; this is how disorder is annulled and order is ultimately restored. Even if disorder sometimes seems to triumph, this triumph can only be temporary and all the more ephemeral the greater the disorder itself has been.

This is undoubtedly how things will turn out, sooner or later, and perhaps sooner than one might suppose, in the Western world, where disorder, especially in the spiritual realm, has now reached an unprecedented degree. Here too, it is appropriate to wait for the end. And above all, if, as in our case, we take the point of view of spiritual realities, we can wait calmly and for as long as necessary, since such realities belong to the realm of the immutable and the eternal. The feverish anxiety so characteristic of our age proves that, deep down, our contemporaries always remain in the temporal viewpoint, even when they believe they have overcome it, and, despite the pretensions of some in this regard, they hardly know what pure spirituality is.

Touchstones

Moreover, among those who strive to react against modern 'materialism', how many are capable of conceiving of this spirituality outside of any particular form, and more particularly outside of a religious form, and of extracting the principles from any application to contingent circumstances?

Among those who set themselves up as defenders of spiritual authority, how many suspect what this authority may be in its pure state, as we said earlier, and truly realise what its essential functions are, without dwelling on external appearances, without reducing everything to a simple question of rites, the deeper reasons for which are, moreover, totally misunderstood, or of "jurisprudence", which is something absolutely temporal? Among those who would like to attempt a restoration of intellectuality, how many are there who do not reduce it to the level of a simple "philosophy," understood this time in the usual, secular, and "profane" sense of the word, and who understand that, in their essence and in their profound reality, intellectuality and spirituality are one and the same thing under two different names? Among those who have nevertheless retained something of the traditional spirit – and we are speaking only of these, since they are the only ones whose thinking can carry any weight for us – how many are there who consider truth for its own sake, in an entirely disinterested way, independent of any sentimental concern, any party or school passion, any desire for domination or proselytism?

Among those who, in order to escape the social chaos in which the Western world is embroiled, understand that it is necessary above all to denounce the vanity of 'democratic' and 'egalitarian' illusions, how many have a notion of a true hierarchy, essentially based on the differences inherent in the very nature of human beings and on the degrees of knowledge they have actually attained?

Among those who declare themselves opponents of "individualism," how many are aware of a reality that transcends individuals?

We raise all these questions here to allow all those who wish to reflect on them to find an explanation for the futility of certain efforts, despite the excellent intentions that undoubtedly motivate those who undertake them, and also for all the discussions and misunderstandings that are evident in so many conflicts and controversies today. All this must be very clear if we want to proceed with truly reconstructive action. "*Patiens quia aeterna*," spiritual authority sometimes says, and rightly so, not because any of the external forms it may take is eternal, for all forms are merely contingent and transitory, but because, in itself, in its true essence, it participates in the eternity and immutability of principles.

And this is why, wherever forces, following a dark but nevertheless very precise instinct, have risen up against the most acute and visible forms of evil afflicting the modern world, taking this authority as their true point of reference, we can be sure that, whatever the appearances and vicissitudes of the conflicts, it will be up to them alone to have the last word.

ADDENDUM

"As the realm of politics is totally foreign to us, we formally refuse to be associated with any consequences of this order that might be drawn from our writings, in any sense whatsoever, and that, consequently, assuming that such a circumstance should arise, we will undoubtedly be no more responsible for it, in the eyes of any person of good faith and sound judgement, than we are for certain phrases that have sometimes been gratuitously attributed to us by the fertile imagination of Mr. Paul Le Cour."

From René Guénon's review in the February 1936 issue of *Atlantis*. Compiled in René Guénon, *Comptes Rendus*, Éditions Traditionnelles, Paris, 1973.

* * * * *

"Perhaps all this is a futile effort, given the mentality of these people, but it is equally possible that something will reach some people who are capable of understanding."

From the letter to Julius Evola dated 27 January 1934 regarding his participation in the Second Fascist Regime of Cremona. Quoted in Pietro Nutrizio, "Political Implications in the Work of René Guénon?" Article published in issue no. 39 (July-August 1973) of the *Rivista di Studi Tradizionali* of Turin.

* * * * *

As for the 'Iron Guard', what you tell me does not seem entirely reassuring; I am always suspicious of certain 'revelations' and 'missions' (I have seen too many things of that kind); and I do not think that any 'external' movement in Europe today can really be based on traditional principles. I think it best to stay as far away as possible from all such activities, which can only be uselessly dangerous."

From R. Guénon's letter to Vasile Lovinescu dated 28 August 1936. Published in the now defunct *Symbolos*, no. 17-18, Guatemala, 1999. Facsimile of the original in: *Lettere a Vasile Lovinescu*, All Insegna del Vetro, Parma, 1996.

BERSERKER
BOOKS

