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2. MEANING BEHIND THE ABSURD

Space and time are the two fundamental conditions of our existence, but neither is unchanging, and this is particularly evident, as well as profoundly disturbing, to modern man.

For most of this century, it has been a commonplace to say that "the world is getting smaller". This has shown itself in two ways: modern communications on the one hand, and massive migrations on the other. These phenomena have given us the experience of having as "neighbors" peoples of whose very existence we may previously have been unaware. As a result of this, we now know concretely that, despite the seeming invincibility of modern uniformity (humanistic, skeptical, and amorphous), cultural plurality is still far from having been extinguished. It is notorious, however, that the foreign cultures and unfamiliar psychologies that now crowd in on us are in general badly understood. This is not helped by the fact that most cultures and psychologies—including both our own and the unfamiliar ones that cause us problems—have long since passed their prime, and frequently are no longer true to themselves, having assimilated, and been deformed by, many ugly modern poisons.

If "space" has unquestionably become smaller, "time" has unquestionably become more menacing. "Life is a dream" (*la vida es sueño*): Calderón's words remain true, but perhaps today they should be translated as "life is a nightmare", for this is exactly what life has become for vast numbers of people on our globe. Following the two world wars (affecting principally the "developed" countries), there have been, in all parts of the "third world", endless wars, revolutions, and repressions of the most cruel kind. This warfare (from 1914 onwards) is quite unprecedented, in the sense that in it modern science for the first time began, unmistakably and frighteningly, to reveal its true colors; as did, at the same time and equally frighteningly, the totally confused, bankrupt, and post-moral *Zeitgeist* or "spirit of the time". Both phenomena (and they are continuing and becoming worse) have been received by those who have most fully experienced them with inexpressible horror, incomprehension, and despair. They strike horror because, besides being evil, they are absurd.

If there is a universal truth, a perennial wisdom, a sacred science (as the ancient wisdom-systems, the world religions, and even the tribal cultures all combine to suggest), what bearing does this have, theore-

tically and practically, on the absurd anarchy and anarchic absurdity of these latter times? The received viewpoint is that traditional philosophies and religions are of historical and psychological interest only; but since (among other things) these ancient traditions can frequently be seen to combine homely wisdom and lofty subtlety, is it possible that they can be viewed alternatively as signposts to a deeper and more qualitative reality, of such a nature as might help to explain—and even counter—the manifestly superficial and quantitative state of absurdity which, in modern times, has made possible such unprecedented terror and despair throughout so many parts of the world?

Let there be no mistake about it: despite every setback, the received religion of our time is still an amalgam of evolutionism, progressivism, scientism, and psychologism. Unfortunately, the horrors resulting therefrom are dealt with simply by further doses of the same: and so the structures of society, and of "normalcy", are destroyed and consumed in an unending vicious spiral.

That the official religion is as described is proved by what happens if one shows any serious opposition to any of its elements: truly fundamental "heresy" of this kind provokes from the modernists a vituperation and vilification as savage and impassioned as anything that ever stemmed from religious bigotry in ages past. For the majority (who believe staunchly in the received religion) a business-like attack on evolutionism, progressivism, scientism, or psychologism is perceived as an attempt to fundamentally undermine their world, and they react with a corresponding violence and emotion.

In stark contrast to today's received religion are all the ancient religions (namely, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and native American religion) in their historic and pre-modern forms, in other words, in a pre-Freudian, pre-Marxist, and pre-Darwinist context. It is therefore of paramount importance to study the intellectual contents of these religions (and what these contents mean) and to explore how this meaning can be applied to the interpretation—and handling—of current cruelties and absurdities. Our approach to such a study must be, not experimental and empirical, but consciously "Platonic". And this bespeaks a "Platonism" which is explanatory, peace-giving, and saving.

The central intellectual characteristic of the specifically modern age is what one might call the "abolition of the Absolute". (That the resulting vacuum is subsequently filled with all sorts of false "absolutes" is another question).

The "false prophets" of the 19th and early 20th centuries (three of them—Freud, Marx, Darwin—have just been mentioned) are still very much with us, but they have been discussed to satiety for many decades. In any case, there are two other "false prophets", dominating the second half of the 20th century, who, far from being seen in their true colors, are widely regarded as angels of light. I refer here to Carl Jung and Teilhard de Chardin. Freud is obviously pretty gross. Jung, to many, appears to be the friend of religion. For this very reason, the great spokesman of the "traditionalist" school, René Guénon, called Jung worse than Freud. In "Tradition and the Unconscious" (chapter 7 of *Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science*), Guénon says that Freud had "a clearly satanic character", but that this was nevertheless "still limited to a certain extent by his materialistic attitude". Referring to Jung, however, Guénon speaks of "false spirituality" and of a "much more subtle confusion".

Traditionally (i.e. according to Eckhart, Ibn 'Arabî, and other classical masters of gnosis), man is made up of three elements, namely Spirit (or Intellect), soul, and body. (*Please see the upper table on p. 46*.)

The Spirit, although "created" is supra-formal or universal, and directly touched by the Divine. It is the only supra-individual, "archetypal", or objective element in man's constitution. Spirit and Intellect are two sides of the same coin, the latter pertaining to Truth (or doctrine) and the former to Being (or spiritual realization). The soul, on the other hand, is formal and individual. The Spirit is therefore the "measure" of the soul; the soul can never be the "measure" of the Spirit. Jung's error, in a nutshell, is his complete confusion of Spirit and soul, which in practice amounts to an "abolition" of the Spirit.[1] This is the "abolition of the Absolute" with a vengeance!

As for the second "wolf in sheep's clothing", Teilhard de Chardin, his "ghost" may be said to have been the architect of the Second Vatican Council, and his is the most strident voice to date of the doctrines of materialism, evolutionism, and progressivism. Titus Burckhardt commented on his central thesis as follows:

[1] Amongst the soul's faculties are: mind (or reason), will, affect (or sentiment), imagination, and memory. (*Please see the lower table on p. 46*.) In everyday parlance, "Intellect" is often misleadingly used to signify mind or reason. In traditional metaphysics, it is correctly used in the transcendent sense in which (as indicated above) it is virtually synonymous with "Spirit". There is no impenetrable barrier between mind (or reason) and Intellect: the relationship of the latter to the former is like the relationship of the pinnacle of a cone to its circumferential base.

> Man possesses the capacity for objectivity, and it is on the basis of this that he makes judgements and assertions. If this capacity be no more than a phase in an on-going evolution—which, seen as a whole, is to be compared to a curve or a spiral—then this phase cannot step out of the whole and say: I am part of a spiral. Anything that such an evolution-bound faculty could conceive or express would also be subject to evolution. It would thus lack any absolute character, and this is why it is completely incapable of satisfying the basic logical requirements of a normal man.

It is because of the anti-Platonic, anti-Aristotelian, and anti-Thomistic character of the modern age, that one can say that its chief intellectual characteristic is the "abolition of the Absolute". Quite simply, it is an age of "nominalism", existentialism, and error, in which relativism and subjectivism run riot, with catastrophic results for both the individual and society. The only antidote to the relative and the subjective is the absolute and the objective, and it is precisely these that are the contents of traditional philosophy or "perennial wisdom" (*sophia perennis*) which says of itself: "From the beginning, and before the creation of the world, was I created, and unto the world to come, I shall not cease to be" (*Ecclesiasticus*, 24, 14). Using the term "esoterism" (seen as the "total truth") as synonymous for *sophia perennis*, Frithjof Schuon summarily rejects subjectivism and relativism, and describes man's true position, as follows:

> The prerogative of the human state is objectivity, the essential content of which is the Absolute. There is no *knowledge* without objectivity of the intelligence, no *freedom* without objectivity of the will, and no *nobility* without objectivity of the soul. Esoterism seeks to realize pure and direct objectivity; this is its reason for being.

Thus true "esoterism" is the only key to knowledge, freedom, and nobility; it is the only source of the objective and the absolute, and the only antidote to error. Esoterism, as understood here, is identical with traditional philosophy (i.e. Platonism, Thomism, or any other venerable wisdom-system). It is not the enemy of revealed religion, as those familiar only with the many contemporary pseudo-esoterisms have found reason to suppose. Schuon continues: "Just as rationalism can remove faith, so esoterism can restore it."

Faced with an already centuries-old deviation from absolute and objective truths and values, mocked and threatened by the shallowness, ugliness, cruelty, and absurdity of so much of the modern world,

a deep study of the belief systems and wisdom-systems of the past offers us a solid way of hope, reassurance, and release.

Meaning Behind the Absurd

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