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4. IDEOLOGICAL OBSTACLES TO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

"That which is 'below' cannot worship that which is 'above', if that which is 'left' does not honor that which is 'right'. Our relationship with God includes our relationship with God's reflection on the earthly plane" (Frithjof Schuon). In other words, our "vertical" relationship with God (prayer, remembrance) is impaired to the extent that our "horizontal" relationship with God's reflections on earth (truth, justice, virtue, beauty) is insufficient.

Lack of discrimination (mental acuity) and lack of imagination in fallen man ensure that imperfections in the "horizontal" relationship are commonplace. For example, one should not have wrong views on such a thing as politics. One must either, in a genuinely dispassionate and non-bitter manner, remain totally detached from having a political opinion or, alternatively, one must have right views! These views (apart from being based on sufficient information) must be "traditional" and "conservative"—but not of course in a political party sense. Not everyone has the possibility of acquiring sufficient information and, when this is the case, one must either completely abstain from having a political opinion, or else develop a sound intuition or "instinct" for what is right. This is easier said than done, on the one hand, because habit, poor imagination, insufficient information, mental lethargy and unconscious passion paralyze objective thinking (resulting, most commonly, in flagrant "double standards") and, on the other, because our upbringing inevitably took place not merely in an ambience of "democracy", but in the presence of the ideas of *marxism*, *psychoanalysis*, and *evolutionism* (or *progressivism*), and it is more difficult to escape from the pervasive influence of these ideas than one might think. Furthermore, because of "poor thinking" (due to the causes just mentioned), there is also the possibility of an unhealthy reaction to these modern ideas *par en bas* ("by the downward path"). This indeed is the case of the various contemporary "fundamentalisms".

Not in practical political terms, but ideally, and in the last analysis, conservatism is "inwardness" (or depth) and socialism is "outwardness" (or superficiality). It is the distinction between quality and quantity. The terms "conservatism" and "socialism" are used here merely as symbols for two opposing tendencies. It will easily be seen that,

while today there is much "socialism" (and pseudo-conservatism), there is little "conservatism" in the true and traditional sense.

Furthermore, there exists, in the modern world, a plethora of overtly fallacious ideologies, the espousal of any one of which fatally impairs one's "vertical" relationship with God. For example, one cannot follow a spiritual way and at the same time be a humanist, a socialist, a feminist, a nationalist, a nazi, a communist, or a zionist. The motivating force behind all of these "-isms" is, on the one hand, an impulse towards innovation and experiment and, on the other, a desire for the security and feeling of strength that can be obtained from collectivism. They are above all vain searchings for solutions at a purely outward and superficial level.

It may be helpful to have recourse to the Hindu cosmological theory of the three *gunas* or "cosmic tendencies"; these are: *sattva* (the upward tendency), *rajas* (the expansive tendency), and *tamas* (the downward tendency). Using these terms one can say that "conservatism" is sattvic and "socialism" is tamasic. *Rajas* (the expansive tendency or "passion") can be allied to either one or the other. Let us briefly consider these "-isms" one by one:

Humanism is placing the Second Commandment (to love one's neighbor) before the First Commandment (to love God), and then to omit the First Commandment altogether. Fundamentally, it is to place man's ego (singular or collective) above God.

Socialism (a form of humanism) means putting our faith in a quantitative collectivity rather than in a qualitative principle. It is the natural without the supernatural.

Feminism means following "Eve" rather than "Mary". Eve was the one who said "the serpent told me to do it"; Mary was the one who "bruised the serpent's head with her heel". Following Eve (the "below") means listening to the sweet and seductive song of the sirens—which however ultimately leads to disaster and sorrow. Following Mary (the "above") means at first effort, with all the hardness and clarity of a diamond, but ultimately leads to liberation and joy. "I am black, but beautiful" (Song of Solomon, 1, 5). (*See also p. 67.*)

Nationalism—as Peter Townsend and others have pointed out—is collective egoism, and as such, it is no more beautiful than individual egoism. It is to derive vulgar pleasure from narcissism and xenophobia. Once again, one has to say that it is a stupidity as well as an evil. Linked with nationalism are "separatism" (to the extent that it is illegitimate), communalism, and "patriotism". As regards separatism: the so-called principle of "self-determination" is always debatable,

and especially so when it is pushed to the extreme. "Communalism" is the British term for ethnic and/or denominational strife. Today it is ubiquitous, and worse than ever.

As regards patriotism: a naive and simple patriotism is natural to man. The man of the mountains loves mountains and mountain people. Those who live on the sea coasts are often fishermen: they love the dangerous and courageous life of sea-fishing, and they love the fisher folk. Today, however, what is called "patriotism" is all too frequently synonymous with nationalism, and there are few things more shaming. It should be obvious that it is illusory to think that one can or should have feelings of "patriotism" towards an immense secular (or falsely religious) and heterogeneous collectivity—a collectivity which, in any case (with its ubiquitous pornography, rock music, and drug taking), is fundamentally degenerate. The worst thing of all (and it is widespread) is the linking of this "patriotism" with religion: "God and country." It is completely overlooked that, in the Decalogue, Almighty God says: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." This also means: "Thou shalt not create gods who are equal to Me." "For the Lord thy God is a jealous God; Him only shalt thou serve." The Muslims say: "Thou shalt not 'associate' anything with Allah."

Nazism is humanism in Babylonian and draconian mode. It is a vain, vulgar, and violent striving after a greatness without God.

Communism is atheism—cruelly and systematically enforced. Its primary goal is the extirpation of religion. This is accompanied by the deadly hand of a centrally controlled economy. In the Russia (or rather the "USSR") of the 20s and 30s, the deliberately brutal implementation of this bureaucratic inefficiency led to the death of tens of thousands of people. There is a multitude of harrowing accounts of the religious persecution of Christianity (in the European sector) and of Islam (in the central Asian countries).

Zionism is the parody of a Biblical prophecy. It is communalism, materialism, and socialism. It is not a love of the Hebrew prophets, such as, for example:

Moses:	"Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one."
Esdras:	"Great is the Truth and it shall prevail."
Micah:	"What does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."
David:	"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."
Solomon:	"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

These great Prophets (all of whom prophesied or hinted at the coming of the Messiah) constitute Judaism. As traditional Jews have often pointed out, Zionism is a desacralization of the religion of Judaism. It is not religious, but secular.

In condemning secularism and extolling religion, it is nevertheless important to remember that what today is called "religion" is often the worst parody of all. Alas, I am not only thinking of the cults and the "new age"! The numerous pseudo-religious ideologies of today, rather misleadingly called "fundamentalisms" (and starting with "the religious right"—or at least a large portion thereof—in North America), are far indeed from the inspired teachings of the great Prophets, Christian or other. There are few, if any, purely "religious" political parties in the West, but there are quite a number in Asian and North African countries. The trouble with these "religious" parties is that they are not religious—quite the contrary! They invariably combine a superficial religious formalism with a modern psychology and an avid espousal of modern technology. To have a religion truly involves having a normal psychology and a modicum of spiritual intuition. For true religion implies depth, not surface. It is personal, and not *a priori* collective. It aims at salvation, not at a spirit-less—and in any case unrealizable—utopia. It is a typically modern paradox that, in several countries, political parties which call themselves "secular" are distinctly better than parties which claim for themselves the epithet "religious".

All of the modern "-isms" are characterized by stupidity, vulgarity, superficiality, and collectivism. Many have also involved massive cruelty—both according to the explicit words of their founders (Hitler and Lenin, for example) and in actual practice. In brief, all of the above "-isms" are modalities of the underlying lie of atheism. They represent the usurpation of quality by quantity, of profundity by superficiality, and finally of God by unregenerate man.

The spirit of the Vatican II Council of 1960-1965 is an ideology that is strictly analogous to the "-isms" castigated above; it is one that is hostile to all religion; and so are the "Islamic republic" of Khomeini in Iran and the "Islamic revolution" of Qadhâfî in Libya.

Nothing said above is intended to be an exoneration of industrialism (or industrialist capitalism), which also has its share of many of the negative characteristics mentioned.

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It is necessary also to mention the "ideology" of world-wide terrorism, for example, in Northern Ireland (Protestants against Catholics and vice versa), in former Yugoslavia (Orthodox against Catholics, and Orthodox against Muslims), in the Middle East (Muslim suicide bombers against Zionist settlers), in Sudan (Muslims against Muslims—also Muslims against Christians), in Iraq (Shi'is against Sunnis and vice versa), in Pakistan (Muslims against other Muslims for a variety of reasons), in the Punjab (Sikhs against Hindus), in Kashmir (Hindus against Muslims), in Sri Lanka (Hindus against Buddhists and vice versa), in Burma (Buddhists against Christians). And so on. Nothing could be further from the Will of God, and the way of the angels.

The essential evil of the terrorists is their claim to be carrying out their nefarious acts in the name of their religion. True, in many cases, there is an underlying injustice against which one may reasonably be indignant. But given the extreme evil of the terrorists' means, their claim to be acting in the name of God is the ultimate blasphemy. In such cases, the means gravely compromise the end. A defining characteristic of terrorists—one that is obvious, and yet often overlooked—is their self-granted "autonomy"; they are in most cases "irregulars", acting beyond the control of their respective government and community, and in disobedience to them. All of the above has the result that the terrorists fatally undermine the cause which they allegedly support.

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The arrogant choice of, as it were, "Eve" rather than "Mary", of the shallow rather than the deep, of the false rather than the true, of the quantitative rather than the qualitative, of the "politically correct" rather than justice, of "new age" religion (easy) rather than authentic religion (hard)—and many other analogous choices—have contributed massively, in the last few decades and even in the last few years, to the accelerating descent of the world.

Ideological obstacles to the spiritual life

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