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CHAPTER 1

The Wound of Duality

Duo sunt in homine.

("There are two [natures] in man.")
(Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II.2, q. 26, art. 4)

We are attracted to what resembles us most: this is the foundation of the spiritual path; the essence of our return to God is the idea of the divine in man returning to the Divine, or, to quote Plotinus, "the return of the one to the One". Hence ideally, we are attracted to the Good and to Truth like a flower's seed beneath the sod is attracted to the sun to bloom and thus to realize its celestial essence. The whole basis of spiritual realization is the doctrine of identity, of like being attracted to Like, or of the Divine One and All repossessing Itself of that which It really never lost. This is the vertical and essential perspective, that of pure ontology, or that of our supra-individual core. However, seen from the perspective of the individual, it is also true—though not equally so—that we are attracted to what is opposite to us because the individual is a fragment and therefore seeks completion in his missing portion, so to speak, a classic example of this being the love between a man and a woman. However what is much less obvious is that, owing to the Fall, far from being attracted we can also be repelled by what most corresponds to us archetypally, as the medieval motif of the "loathsome bride" illustrates, or the drama of the soul, unwilling to give up its illusory freedom, fleeing the Spirit. And finally, and fatefully, as unenlightened beings we are often attracted, to what is most harmful to us, whether out of perversity or pride—though these are really two sides of the same coin. Indeed, realism obliges us to note that if we are attracted to what resembles us, this qualification—"resembles us"—can mean many things outside of spiritual union, because until we know who we truly are we may be attracted to what resembles us in our ignorance, passion, individualism, or any other number of spurious selves that we acquire through inheritance—or karma—as well as through our individual choices, the intricacies of human circumstances being endless. This is the doctrine of transmigration of the soul enduring what Hindus and Buddhists term the *samsara* or the unceasing cycle of suffering through births and deaths and rebirths as the ego, heedless of the divine gate to liberation, wanders from deluded attachment to deluded attachment. Thus, before yielding to what attracts us the most, we need vitally to ask what is our true self: is it our

idiosyncratic and perishable individuality vainly fretting on the revolving rim of Eternity or is it the immortal Self glowing in the depths of our heart? Discerning between the two is the wager of human existence.

In the wake of the proverbial Fall, man's mind and heart have become separated to the point of operating at cross purposes. In most men, the mental individual, nurtured by passions and the illusion of being real in his own right, usurps the throne of the heart belonging to the Divine Self who, now as a monarch in exile, suppressed or banished from consciousness to the outermost fringes of our daily awareness—when not murdered[1]—, lives in exile in our own soul, treacherously bereft of authority and respect.[2] It is this separation between mind and heart that not only is the wound of our duality but is also the cause of all the mischief of individualism posturing as our true nature; we shall dwell on this, all the more as the solution most often proposed, especially in much of so-called New Age spirituality, is to depreciate the mind in favor of the heart, a fool's errand if there ever was one.

Man is intelligence. And intelligence is the capacity to know the Real—mind, heart, and soul. That notwithstanding, it has become popular to celebrate a return to the heart at the expense of ostracizing the mind, a classic instance of "throwing out the baby with the bath water", because the problem with the mind is not the mind, obviously, but cerebralism or a hyper-mental way of viewing reality. In the West, the roots of this distortion can be traced in part to the legacy of many centuries of encroaching rationalism and scientism. What is needed, however, is not a banishing of the mind—something impossible to do without the risk of fatal damage to intelligence—but rather a profound reforming of the mind so that it can be restored to its legitimate role as the mirror of Truth, by contrast to the heart which is the seat of subjective or innermost being. But spiritual seekers today are often quick to be excited about a spirituality that engages feelings and emotions, and combines this with a kind of hazy "feel-good" kaleidoscope of intuitions about God and mankind in which thinking is rejected as a troublesome interloper. Their slogan might be: "Perish the mind, long live the heart!" Or: "Forget logic, what is needed is love."

Meanwhile, the mind, repudiated in its noble role as a guardian and interpreter of the Truth, leaves the heart—now essentially defenseless—to

1 Strictly speaking, the Self cannot be slain, quite obviously, but the individual ego, in an act of spiritual suicide, can behave in a manner that severs his link to the Self.

2 This is the masterful theme of several of Shakespeare's plays, among which *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar*. Also, in several of the plays, there is a faithful servant—the symbol of humility and virtue as well as of wisdom disregarded—who accompanies the ruler in exile and helps save the day for his rightful restoration.

sink into directionless subjectivity,[3] allowing the soul in turn to be exposed to a riot of personalistic impressions that can range from mindlessly sweet to the most eccentric when not Luciferian of individualistic extravagances. In a word, rejecting the mind and relying exclusively on the heart risks exposing us to the most sentimental or arbitrary of subjectivisms—or worse—for it is all too easy to declare ecstatically, "I have embraced my heart, now I can live free from the mind at last" when one has never taken the time to learn how to think; but the unexamined life, as Socrates reminds us, is not worth living. He who wishes to free himself from thinking should at least learn how to think first, so as to grant himself the opportunity of making an intelligent decision grounded in sound logic, as opposed to following eccentric intuitions, no matter how compelling. *Distrust thine own self*, should be a rule of existence for the yet unreformed soul. But what can one say? The thrill of committing impulsively to "love" seems to be a favorite cure-all of those who do not want to think, when in fact it is the "knowing soul" that comes closest to Divinity, for intelligence is the highest attribute of man, but provided it be added that virtue in turn is the truest proof of intelligence because true knowledge always leads to the good and to the beautiful, otherwise it is mere cerebralism, precisely. Indeed, knowledge and being are of one substance: to know is to be and, likewise, to be is to know—mind and heart being the twin poles of divine consciousness. Conversely, the refusal to know,[4] or to mistake our personal feelings and intuitions for knowledge, is to take our own subjectivity as the measure of the universe.

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One of the classic traps of New Age spirituality is to confuse the psychic with the spiritual, when the psychic is simply the realm of the non-material

3 Saint Ignatius of Loyola, in his "Spiritual Exercises" says that the "evil spirit", when attempting to waylay the soul, avoids the mind—which is made for Truth—to focus on both the imagination and on the senses. The danger the saint (and former soldier knight) has in mind is a classic pitfall for the soul which, flattered by the stimulation of its natural wishes and desires, falls for illusion like a fly in a spider's web. Meanwhile, always according to Ignatius, the "good spirit" addresses conscience and reason, and this gives us an important clue about the psychology of the individual soul in search of the Divine. Schuon refers to this as follows: "The tempter serpent, which is the cosmic genius of this movement [towards exteriorization], cannot act directly on the intelligence and so must seduce the will, Eve" (*Understanding Islam* [Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2011], p. 154). And "Eve" is the soul—or the heart, but the "heart" serving here as the core of our subjectivity, and not the heart-intellect which by definition is infallible since it is situated outside of duality, precisely.

4 However there is also the idea of "unknowing" dear to mystics, an idea resting on poverty of soul; this will be explored in the next chapter.

but not the realm of the Spirit proper. However, so long as the soul is still separated from the Spirit it will go through countless rebirths, or even to hell, because the psychic domain covers all the realms outside of Heaven; therefore to equate the psychic with the spiritual simply because it belongs to the supra-sensible realm is simplistic.[5] However, people who have psychic openings, such as experiencing auras or auditions not to mention dreams or clairvoyance, can be so impressed by the experiences enabled by these fissures in their consciousness that they readily mistake such phenomena for spiritual insights when all they betoken is a type of mediumistic opening, if not a mental disequilibrium, but surely not a faculty superior to intelligence proper; indeed, no medium or spiritualist was made more intelligent by his psychic openings. True spiritual insights, for their part, are always characterized by their clarity, beauty, and simplicity, by their intelligence in fact.[6]

5 That said, the spiritual realm can, at its nethermost limit, overlap the psychic realm because Heaven as the abode of the blessed, or of sanctified souls, has different levels; the psychic (the soul) when transfigured by the Divine, becomes then a luminous part of the Divine's radiation, its obscuring tendency having been converted into luminescence and beauty. Borrowing from the Vedantic doctrine of the *gunas*, one could clarify this by saying that the spirit realm is pure *sattva* (light), whereas the psychic is pure *rajas* (heat), but with an ascending dimension that opens onto *sattva* and a descending one that opens onto *tamas* (darkness). The difficulty comes from the fact that the *gunas* interpenetrate each other but without *sattva* (Spirit) ever becoming contaminated by the lower two *gunas* since they derive their essence (or energy) from *sattva*. This is as much as to say that Spirit is *in* everything without being *part* of everything. Strictly speaking, however, some will object that *sattva* is part of *Prakriti* (the realm of manifestation) and therefore that only *Purusha* is spirit, or that the spirit realm is non-manifest. Our response is that such lines of demarcation cannot always be rigidly set; all that one can say is that the spirit realm is clearly different from the psychic, but that the psychic can reflect the spirit since nothing can truly exist outside of the Spirit (capitalized); in that sense, *sattva* is a reflection of the spiritual in the manifest, or the part in manifestation which is identified in substance with the spirit, otherwise there would be no connection between these two realms. Beyond that, God knows best. "Srimati Kunti said: O Krishna, I offer my obeisances unto You because You are the original personality and are unaffected by the qualities of the material world. You are existing both within and without everything, yet You are invisible to all" (*Srimad Bhagavatam* 1.8.18).

6 Moreover, they do not go counter to common sense, unless the recipient is something of a dreamer to start with. Traditionally, the Roman Catholic Church has always been extremely cautious about assessing any such kind of out-of-body experiences, and rightfully so, because they very often are no more than a psychic form of individualism, not to mention the risk of the individual becoming a vessel for psychic powers or forces whose true nature and origin he has no clue of. Moreover, such fissures sometimes are the aftermath caused by a life and death circumstance or a serious accident from which the body has not fully been able to heal. True, sometimes such fissures can serve exceptionally as a breach in our five senses opening onto Heaven; however this is a complex issue about which more will be said in the chapter "The Forbidden Door".

To elaborate: without the objective check that intellectual discernment provides, the pole of the heart can become the source of an exalted subjectivism. Indeed, how do we know, when heeding the popular injunction "Follow thy heart", that we are not merely following our ego? Owing to the inversion of poles in fallen man—which orthodox spiritual conversion is meant to right—the heart has become passive (or frozen and monolithic) and the mind active (or agitated and scattered), whereas in their normal state it is the heart that is active and the mind passive inasmuch as the mind operates as a cooling moon to the heart's radiant sun. As the seat of the divine Intellect, the heart sees because it is, and the mind, in turn, reflects the heart's being; but in fallen man, the heart is captured by the restless and faithless mind and becomes in turn emotionally adulterous, latching on to this or that passion or whim offered ceaselessly by the mind's unstable and roving sense of opportunity when adrift, that is when unmoored from the Truth.

Bending to the rigor of Truth requires, initially, a sacrifice, discipline, and even a measure of heroism, for Truth requires giving up (*kenosis* or "self-emptying") what we think is "our-self" and this can be agony for the ego. What the ego does not (yet) know is that its cherished individuality is only a make-believe self born from the delusion of mistaking the personal world it happens to exist in as reality, or as a *de facto* absolute reality; and this "personal world" can be both outward and inward. The question becomes then: does an individual want the Truth, and consent to the self-domination this presupposes, or does he seek pure experience, and the self-indulgence this presupposes; or, is personal experience for this person the measure of Reality?

For those infatuated with impressions, sensations, imaginings, the summons to knowledge may feel like the death of their existence, because the sobriety that comes with the objectivity of renunciation and self-mortification seems to interfere with the freedom of just existing and without thinking too much. And yet no one is born to the Spirit who has not died first to the goad of the flesh and fled the fairground of the ego. All true spirituality is premised on that alchemy: first the *nigrido*, or blackening or the eliminating—ultimate mortification (*katharsis*)—then the *albedo*, the whitening or the transfigurating (*theoria* or enlightenment). In Sufism, the *qabd* or contraction precedes the *bast* or expansion. However, it is worth specifying that the difficulty stems from the ego's initial unwillingness, or unpreparedness, to see beyond itself, for "ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels" (2 Cor. 6:12), namely the contraction is really on man's side, not God's, for there is no narrowness in his Love.

Be that as it may, the approach to the One entails—for man—a denial of self, as well as a certain holy monotony because this aloneness, and emptiness, is a preliminary condition for our solemn choice of the One over the many as symbolized by the world and its multiplicity of temptations. In other words, to choose the One is, at the outset, to give up the illusory richness of the soul or of the world (they are twins). As the Sufi Junayd noted, only an empty glass can be filled; quite simply, we must first become empty for God, the sole Fullness there is. At the same time, to choose the One is also to renounce the false richness of the soul's multiplicity, so that God can then give of His manifold riches; the equation is to sacrifice finite multiplicity for the Infinite. Can such a state of poverty, or aridity, last a lifetime? Possibly, for what matters is the Hereafter and God may require that a soul prove the sincerity of its conviction that the Hereafter is the sole Real; therefore, to do so it may be forced to give up everything it has on earth and to persevere despite this deprivation, all the while feeding only on the oxygen of faith—"lovest thou me more than these?" (John 21:15). Such is the path of *sannyasa* in Hinduism, where the renunciate gives up even his social identity and all legal rights, reckoning himself henceforth of the dead. And yet, who is to say that such a desert, such desolation, is any the less spiritual than the path of ecstasy? While rigor and renunciation normally mark the beginning of the spiritual path, sometimes it is a consequence of a vision born out of an immortal love. "It is not I who have left the world", a Sufi once said, "but the world that has left me."[7] In either case, though, there is renunciation.

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Intelligence is the prerogative of the human individual as created in the image of God, just as wisdom is the prerogative of the sage; so one could say that to be human is to be intelligent, or that one cannot be fully human without being intelligent and, ultimately, wise. More essentially, what defines man is the gift of the heart-intellect, and by the term "Intellect" (*intellectus*) we do not mean just the mind or intellectuality, which is really only its functional aspect, but an actual divine faculty residing in what can be termed the "Holy of Holies" within every individual, which is a godlike essence, or the very trace of Godhead Itself residing in each human being. As such, the Intellect is transpersonal and therefore—reflecting God—is objective, immutable, and deathless, as well as wise; it is like perfect or total consciousness, which is thereby also perfect awareness, perfect wisdom,

7 Quoted from memory.

and perfect love. Most men are not directly aware of this divine faculty except when it surfaces, usually in the form of the promptings of one's conscience. But, when confronted with Truth, the heart-intellect responds with the assent of certitude that, once felt, is undeniable and utterly profound, as well as inherently unerring.[8]

What fervent advocates of the pole "heart" ignore—although in some way correctly sense—is that, in primordial man or man of the Golden Age, the heart as a divine faculty was one before becoming polarized into heart and mind, subsequent to the Fall which occurred with the loss of innocence—derived from the sense of original oneness—coming in the wake of the choice between good and evil; in other words, the choice of evil, which is really the choice of duality and by extension of outwardness, and therefore the choice opening the gate to the possibility of evil, was not available before Adam's consciousness shifted from pure contemplation to discursive reasoning. Before the Fall, man saw things in God; after the Fall he could see them both inside and outside of God—or see them as separate from God—and therefore he could see them as an end in themselves, or as objects of his passionate needs and not just as symbols of the Divine. And he saw himself as separate from God, and this separation culminates in alienation, albeit without ever reaching a point of absolute separation since the Absolute encompasses everything, which brings to mind also the mystery of the *bodhisattva* wishing to save all beings down to the last blade of grass: the *bodhisattva* embodies this very truth of the "Absolute encompassing all".

In itself the polarization between heart and mind means that the heart-intellect has at once a subjective and an objective dimension, non-dividable, which in man corresponds to the twin poles of Truth and Love, really the two poles defining God: Truth = the Absolute and Love = the Infinite. Hence, if God is both Truth and Being, both Light and Warmth, then these dimensions must be mirrored in man inasmuch as he is true image of God. Hence, to dismiss the mind is to risk blinding oneself, because man is born both to know and to love, both to see and to be, and indeed in seeing he becomes, just as in knowing truly he cannot but love; "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind", Christ said, blending the duality of love and knowledge, and not just "with all thy heart".[9] The discernment of spirits is as precious a gift as can be imagined, and to disregard it is to forfeit finally everything that makes man a man as true image of the Creator.

8 Or, as we heard a Hindu sage say, "It is the guru in us that recognizes the guruness of the guru."

9 Likewise, Saint Peter can say: "Gird up the loins of your mind" (1 Pet. 1:13).

Yet seen from an essential viewpoint, the mind is finally but a projection of the heart itself—the heart having in addition to its dimension of "being" a dimension of "vital knowledge"—whence the temptation to defer exclusively to the heart or to extol the heart's seeming superiority, all the more as it is the seat of intimate bonding or of union, a locus free from all division and separation or of alien otherness. In that sense, the heart can be said to be superior to the mind, that is to say, so long as the heart is not reduced simply to being the seat of emotions and feelings. In man there is an alchemical reciprocity between these two poles of Consciousness-Being so that the jewel-like mind, once enlightened, quickens the heart which is otherwise dormant and (in profane man) hardened in egoic self-centeredness; and conversely: once the mind is cleansed—and centered in Truth—it can reflect the heart's light which, like a sun, is supernally aglow even beneath the layer of ice accrued since the Fall. In a certain sense, heart and mind correspond analogically to man's dimensions of depth and height, or those of immanence and transcendence: ontological depth of being rejoining the Self and transcendent height of detachment from the ego-self (and the world) rejoining God's majestic "otherness" or loftiness.

The oneness of the mind and heart polarity is well captured by the great Rhenish mystic Meister Eckhart's declaring that "height and depth are one", so that through depth man rises or is lifted up to God just as in being lifted up he becomes deeply interiorized, for "the kingdom of Heaven is within you".

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What the preciousness, as well as the gravity, of the human state entails is without a doubt the most important question to answer for those who care to lead a purposeful life. When the nature of man is considered nowadays it is too often in a secular light that over-emphasizes his psycho-physical existence while separating him from a true cosmological context which alone can situate why man has the type of all-embracing intelligence he has and the capacity for infinite love. It is of course too easy to focus on man's earthly wellbeing, because this is always a quick way to assess the apparent usefulness of any precepts, psychological or otherwise. But considered in the light of man's immortality, to assign the here-below concrete existential priority over the Hereafter does him a serious injustice because in trying to ensure his earthly well-being man often trades his soul in the bargain. This conflict comes from ignoring in what manner the wound of duality determines that man has both an outward and an inward dimension, which are respectively his temporal nature and his intemporal essence; in other words, there is an outward man and an inward man.

To illustrate an aspect of this conflict, we are told that charity must be action-oriented and socially concrete, and not deal with spiritual abstractions that are not of obvious and immediate material benefit to man; by this terrestrial logic, a good priest should then spend his entire time helping the poor and not waste his energy praying "selfishly" in some hallowed solitude, while shelterless wretches are shivering and starving. This is easy to say and an all too typical human reflex when one has, firstly, no idea of the nature of prayer and its efficacy; secondly, no sense that God is really the author of any meaningful action; thirdly, that man's works are inherently meaningless for God, who wants our hearts and not human achievements; and fourthly, that solving suffering does not necessarily cure the root of impiety, which is precisely a central cause for suffering in the first place.[10] And this is moreover easy to say when one does not understand the nature of *karma*, or that saving a soul is not the same as saving a person from suffering; in fact these two things can be mutually exclusive in the sense that abridging some suffering may also accidentally abort a soul's reflex to seek divine help. But these, finally, are imponderables that man cannot solve offhand except to be mindful of maintaining a balance between social charity and prayerfulness, although never forgetting the primacy of prayer over everything else; and by "prayer", should be meant not just personal prayer, but solemn ritual prayer, and also the prayer of the heart where this applies, or *japa* as is known in Hinduism. Indeed, to understand man is to understand that the relationship between creation and Creator centers on the nature of man as a "bridge" (*pontifex*) between Heaven and earth, and this bridge is not just man's theocratic essence but luminous prayer; clearly other disciplines, which focus on the psychology of an individual, on the sociology of a population, or on the anthropology of a race, deal with secondary issues compared to this supreme dimension. "Religion" (Latin *religere*) means, by implication, to bind Heaven and earth, whence the analogy of man as *pontifex*.

Now, in defining man, it may help to refer to him in a nomadic context, that is to say to describe him in a setting that is free from a whole cultural warp that can obscure the essential stakes facing him as he stands before Eternity. For those convinced of progressivism, it may be difficult to grasp that nomadic man is not progressing, nor ever has, or that he is not even the progenitor of modern man. He is not progressing either socially or

10 In *The Way of a Pilgrim* (New York: HarperOne, 1954), the wandering mendicant mentions that "Many people reason quite the wrong way round about prayer, thinking that good actions and all sorts of preliminary measures render us capable of prayer. But quite the reverse is the case; it is prayer which bears fruit in good works and all the virtues" (p. 8). If consciousness is the essence of being, than deep prayer is the most vital of acts.

genetically because, in the face of Eternity and beneath the stars circling him above, he does not need to; in fact, part of the nobility of his character results directly from the very scarcity of resources he must contend with, not in their abundance and even less in their refinement, unless it is through craftsmanship, but not in their utilitarian sophistication.[11] Thus, all things being equal, nomadic man is not inferior—morally and spiritually—to the most technologically advanced city-dweller, often quite to the contrary. Be that as it may, he is still man as such standing before God, his Creator, facing the need not just to survive but to save his soul, and, more importantly, to fulfill his role as Heaven's delegate on earth. Importantly also, when discussing nomadic peoples, the assumption is that they existed in an environment identical to the kind of wild nature we know of today, when in fact there is reason to believe that nature was more transparently spiritual in earlier cycles (what the Hindus refer to as *yugas*), matter not having reached the harsh density we know of today.

To survive, nomadic or intemporal man needs of course to be intelligent and brave and stalwart and generous while being efficient at ensuring his livelihood and that of his tribe; to save his soul, he needs to pray to God and to lead a life of virtue, and for this his earthly tribulations provide exactly the moral lever he needs to transcend himself;[12] and to fulfill his role as Heaven's delegate, he needs to be a contemplative and a sage; these three sets of requirements are enough to create a whole moral culture that calls for no improving if ethics is the ultimate touchstone in such evaluations. No complicated sociology, no complicated psychoanalysis, no complicated

11 There are many examples of a primitive tribe given access to more so-called advanced tools which ended up ruining their lifestyle. However, when a natural improvement (as opposed to an artificial one) became available, such as the horse to the Plains Indians, this enhanced the tribe's cultural and religious qualities. That said, we are not celebrating the nomadic lifestyle against that of city dwellers since both have divine archetypes. This point will be addressed more fully in the chapter "Kingdoms and Nations".

12 In referring to nomads, we are far from suggesting that they are always an ideal model of man because there are considerable degrees of quality between different nomadic peoples, and barbarity is always a risk for any human society forced to contend directly with the raw elements. But certainly the Tuaregs (or the Blue Men of the desert), the Masai on the African plains, and the ancient Plains Indians in general rank among some of the nobler human possibilities imaginable and one should be able to acknowledge that they lacked nothing of the integral nobility that defines man at his best, all degeneracy notwithstanding. And one can also picture the elite human quality of Abrahamic nomadism; nor can we forget the grandiose symbiosis of Mongol nomadism's meeting with the ancient Chinese, Hindu, and Islamic civilizations which it revitalized. We will also note that Christianity derived its original spiritual impetus from the Desert Fathers, the "wilderness" spirit of which was periodically renewed in the very midst of Western's civilization's growth, notably with the Cistercian order of monks, as well as with Saint Bruno's Carthusians.

philosophical theories or chemical testings are required to grasp what this man is and what he must do to fulfill the vocation of being a human being. And yet, this man—the nomad—has been subjected to every dissection cerebral "experts" can dream of in trying to assess man's progress from alleged stone-age brutishness to cyber-age brilliance, although these experts do not suspect that far from truly beholding this man, they are finally only examining themselves in a bizarrely inverted mirror-game of projections and assumptions born both from their obsession with material parameters and, correspondingly, from their ignorance of the laws of Heaven, and therefore getting nowhere because they are missing the central point of this nomad as a creature of God standing proudly and simply under the same immemorial sun, living in sacred time and not in historical time.

It should be specified, however, that in speaking of this man, we have prototypically in mind primordial man who, before the advent of the great city cultures, lived in the majestic immensity of space—time being for him a modality of space because sacredly circular and not linear, and centered on the myth of the eternal return of life and on the cycle of the seasons that rotated around a timeless axis set in Eternity.[13] In that sense, time was for him perennially renewed and refreshed and not the cause of permanent change—either up or down—along with the temptation of a linear or promethean opportunity at radical progress, a prospect as extravagant as it is vain. Space was for him a fertile cradle, a womb, as well as a holy tomb, circled by the sun and the stars, and not a collapsible or corruptible framework for both the grandiosity and folly of Western adventurism to come. His life was governed therefore by a sacred center and not by the tantalizing mirage of indefinite progress.

To seize what primordial man was in his spiritual essence, inasmuch as we can do so principially, provides us a means for understanding who we are in our timelessness; for this primordial or timeless man is in principle accessible to all men of all epochs and civilizations once we have stripped the individual of his cultural and temporal constructs. But the leading modern disciplines covering the study of man—in some way this is a contradiction in terms[14]—, such as psychology and anthropology, cannot evaluate this primordial being properly since their methodology is beholden to the educational superstructure men are raised with in the modern world,

13 As Schuon has written: "The whole existence of the peoples of antiquity, and of traditional peoples in general, is dominated by two presiding ideas, the idea of Center and the idea of Origin" (*Light on the Ancient Worlds* [Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006], p. 1).

14 The study of man arose in proportion to man's loss of normalcy. Yet, at the same time, this loss of normalcy compromises the very premises of such a study.

no matter how hard their proponents try to free themselves from such a bias. And the reason they cannot do so finally comes down to the fact that, firstly, man cannot be appreciated perfectly in the abstract, because the very artificiality of such an approach distorts the process; and, secondly, man cannot be properly appreciated outside of spirituality without dismissing the paradigm of man being made in the likeness of his Creator.

Thus to take an example, again from the nomadic realm: when an American Indian raises the sacred pipe heavenward and invokes the Great Spirit, there is no need to analyze this in complicated detail; what we see him doing is what he is doing. At the same time, the profounder meaning of what amounts in effect to a Eucharistic act is forever hidden from the curiosity of profane eyes; it opens onto the mystery of Godhead and the sacredness of creation, and its mystery will not yield to the most probing scientific analysis or other; but it can reveal itself to a contemplative and pure soul. "And God saw that it was good", we read about the creation in Genesis, and it is that seeing, with the wise heart and not with the virtuosic mind alone, that is called for to appreciate the "good" God mentions. In a word, anthropologists are faced with two realities when examining the example of the ritual of the calumet: on the one hand, there is the outward material fact of the sacred pipe itself as inherited by an ethnic group born to an ancient tradition, and all the other material facts of a ritual celebrated in a particular geographic area with its particular cultural nexus of influences—and this is the field where anthropologists excel[15]—and then, on

15 We would in principle like to admire the brilliant work of a Durkheim or a Lévy-Strauss, who both made an apparently gallant attempt to understand "primitive" man free from civilizational prejudices. However, anthropology itself, by definition, is a civilizational prejudice otherwise there would be no need for such a discipline. Perhaps the most radical handicap in this discipline is the materialistic psychologism which cannot break free from the idea of rituals being encoded in a deterministic manner in the collective brain of primitive peoples, a theory that amounts to inverting reality because no consideration is given instead to the idea of a Heaven-bestowed gift coming either through a godlike race of ancestors or through direct revelation, as in the case of the White Buffalo Woman for the Sioux Indians; in other words, no one seems to be able to ask what caused the brain to be so-called "encoded" in the first place, leaving aside the repelling nature of such organic speculations, to say nothing of the patronizing implications of submitting noble natives to a kind of cultural pathogenic autopsy. Moreover, on a different plane, when Durkheim laudably declares there are no "wrong religions"—with reference to totemist cultures—what he fails to see is that not all ancient cultures are of equal quality either spiritually, esthetically, or culturally speaking, starting with the totemist cultures themselves which as a matter of fact are very far from being representative of archetypal man because they are more animistic (or psychic) than based on the Spirit. For us this is a crucial distinction that cannot be overstated. In other words, a true assessment of a people requires a vertical notion of hierarchy and not just a horizontal or "egalitarian" comparison of similarities and differences; the vertical dimension entails discernment and a scale of values, otherwise we have mere

the other hand, there is the nature of the symbol and of the sacrament themselves and these must be considered independently from the coloring and shaping of the collectivity interpreting them. This is where misunderstandings occur, in the isthmus separating priest and symbol or man and Heaven, or outwardness and inwardness: too often these two dimensions, spiritual and material—namely that of pure vertical spirituality and that of the horizontal projection of the spiritual into a collectivity—are confused; and this confusion, which eventually leads to an over-humanization of the Divine, can only be to the detriment of the essential nature of the sacrament itself or of its fundamental metaphysical and spiritual import, which in itself is free from all social sedimentations or cultural accretions, and therefore can never be defined in purely sociological terms.

The same conjunction—and opposition—between outward (or human) significance and inner (or divine) mystery applies to any meeting between man and God, that for instance of the Catholic priest presiding over the mystery of transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, or that of a Hindu priest presiding over the *agnihotra*, the ancient Vedic fire ritual; all these rituals are done on the basis of an understanding that man's heart is really an altar where the Divine Presence abides. How can this be explained or described to an analytic, let alone, scientific mind? The invisibility of these mysteries to the senses, and to a probing secular mind, do not make them the less real; quite to the contrary, for it is their ineffable essence that gives the outward ritual all of its significance and that ineffability is precisely what eludes a merely profane examination. The root cause for this misunderstanding is always the same: a hyper-cerebralized mind that has lost touch with the wisdom of the heart.

Furthermore, to analyze traditional man—and in fact man as such—whether through an anthropological or psychoanalytical prism or through what could be termed "artificial knowledge", is to forget that psychology, along with other modern constructs such as sociology, economics, demographics, and the like, applies only partially to man's full nature because modern psychology and other such disciplines are born from preoccupations that reflect the accidental predicament of man in the modern world;

horizontal observation which allows for all kinds of analogies to be made between what are in fact very uneven cultures and belief systems, resulting in analogies that may not apply or may even be absurd. But this vertical dimension of intelligence, operating on the basis of a hierarchy, as mentioned, is stigmatized as being judgmental, when it is in fact another victim of the leveling democratism of modern thinking that tries to translate even the most sacred of mysteries into notions explainable to profane man, or reduces them to quasi-pragmatic cults involving issues such as comfort and discomfort, fear and security, and so on to explain what constitutes the extraordinary cosmic or heroic grandeur of a tradition.

or else they are shaped by predominantly modern problems and therefore do not apply to man's intemporal self, or to any trans-historical human norm.[16] They are modern inventions premised on the purported superiority of the modern world. Now, to know, as the Hindus did, that a human being has *chakras* (subtle or etheric energy centers) and *nadis* (or nerve networks), or meridians as Chinese medicine does, is legitimate because it is an objective and hence descriptive knowledge free from artificial mental constructs and presuppositions; and it is legitimate because this knowledge is not divorced from the spiritual cosmos that explains it.

At the extreme, it can be conceded that to gain knowledge of the exact functioning of a physical body's organs—a culminating expertise of modern medicine—is an achievement still lying within the realm of what can be termed "legitimate" knowledge. However, to then extrapolate the material concreteness of this knowledge in a manner that ends up denying the soul, not to mention the Spirit, or simply to reduce man to a physical frame of reference shorn of its symbolistic implications, is to leave out everything that gives meaning to man's human genius. There are in essence two problems here: firstly that of a knowledge that actually ends up obstructing knowledge, due to its hyper-complexity and artificiality, and secondly that of a knowledge exceeding its sensible or epistemological boundaries. Thus, by way of illustration, a science, such as molecular biology, as it gains in complexity, ends up compromising not only human common sense but possibly also useful criteria pertaining to all human beings inasmuch as this new knowledge produces a self-validating view of the world where man is seen increasingly as some kind of cellular machine-like complex and no longer as the embodiment of the Spirit. Were that not enough, the notion of the Spirit itself may become the object of forensic biology's for-

16 To illustrate the problem we can take our pick from among any number of indigestible neologisms such as "hypergnosis" (as if "gnosis" did not suffice), "contextualism", "deconstructionism", "protoanalysis", "psychocalisthenics", "psychoalchemy", and so on, hybrid terms born from the blending of modern science with loose strands of ancient wisdom, yielding a twisted amalgam of tortured cerebralism, sometimes with pseudo-esoteric extensions. Not that such novel disciplines do not have their possible insights, but new knowledge, no matter how complex and detailed, cannot begin to exhaust the dimension of Infinity; rather, it can only "thicken the plot". Therefore, man—if wise—ultimately has to rely on symbols to define Reality in lieu of interminable scientific speculations, because a symbol's non-discursive nature has a synthetic completeness about it that can answer all relevant human questions. Hence when creation is defined by symbols such as the spiral, the cross, or the circle, this tells us more about the fundamental nature of Reality than any philosophical treatise or laboratory demonstration, because these symbols capture principial schemes. In the end, it is contemplation, not analysis, that can grasp Reality in its timeless depth, because Reality is Being and therefore man can know it only inasmuch as he resembles it in his own being—body, soul, and spirit.

ays, in which case the notion of the Spirit as a truly supra-material instance loses all meaning. The point of these remarks is to situate in what way man ends up creating the tools that correspond to his mentality, a mentality that, in its increasingly secular state, is determined by increasingly non-essential circumstances, when in fact instead of having Reality serve our non-spiritual preconceptions of the universe it is we who should conform as much as possible to Reality as such, not the other way round; and this was in fact the entire perspective of traditional civilizations.

In practical terms, if one wants to understand the psychology of an American Indian or that of a samurai or of a medieval knight—each of whose ethos was based on prowess, honor, and fearless contempt for death—this endeavor requires, in addition to scholarly documentation, a special brand of nobility and self-transcendence on the part of the modern observer; otherwise, this observer, bred in a humanistic environment, is likely to recoil at the ease with which ancient men could apparently face death or deliver it; and, in recoiling, this observer then jeopardizes whatever real insight he could have had. Needless to say, in pointing this out we are not extolling violence but highlighting an ethos of pure bravery and spirituality without which it becomes impossible to understand ancient man. Too often nowadays objectivity is confused with a kind of sterility of attitude, in which all emotion is excluded, as a pre-condition for all investigation, whereas to understand the cosmos requires an impartial mind in addition to a vivid sense of grandeur. In other words, emotion is not necessarily subjective: to admire what is admirable—provided of course that it is admirable—or to love what is lovable—with the same proviso—is certainly not less "objective" than to analyze it with cerebral indifference; in fact, this "indifference" can be more of an emotional choice than might be suspected because indifference before what is lovable is not objectivity but either hardness of heart or mediocrity of temperament. Objectivity and indifference, in other words, are not synonymous; however, objectivity and impartiality are so, though impartiality need not be indifferent to be impartial. Similarly, lucidity is not just a state of dispassionate awareness, but one of intense awareness coming from both the intelligence and the emotions inasmuch as the latter do not distort the object, because emotion is actually a form of perception in that it amplifies the qualitative implications of the object being examined; what matters is to direct emotion, not to extinguish it. And contemplation is not less important than analysis, to say the least, for nothing can be understood through the mind alone: the heart perceives a sphere where the mind grasps a circle only.

* * *

It may now seem bold, if not presumptuous, in an age dependent on measurements and statistics, to seek to describe man's inner dimension which eludes all such calibration; while we cannot measure this dimension empirically, we can grasp conceptually, if not intuitively, that man is not just the product of his natural environment, but above all the product of his supernatural origin. As alluded to above, man is situated at the intersection of two axes, a horizontal one and a vertical one. The horizontal axis can be equated with everything that constitutes man's outward circumstances as well as his human heredity, whereas the vertical axis not only bisects this horizontal plane—as the warp does the weft in a weaving—but also completely transcends it while engaging everything that constitutes man's immortal or trans-individual essence because the horizontal dimension (or time and space, and the matter they encompass) is not a self-sufficient plane: it requires a vertical dimension situated outside of time and space to hold it together as well as to animate it.[17] What this entails humanly speaking is that man's end lies above himself; his vertical station—or erectness of posture—unique to him among all creatures, is like a visible trace of that axis, just as his intelligence is meant to look at reality from on high, unlike that of animals which is basically locked in the plane of reality they happen to be part of.[18] So, by contrast to science's search for the truth in the realm of the visible, the palpable, and the weighable, the challenge for man is that the more invisible a plane of reality is the more important it actually is. Thus, we read in the Koran: "Glory be to Him Who created all the sexual pairs, of that which the earth groweth, and of themselves, and *of that which they know not*!" ("Ya Sin", 36:36) [italics ours].

The paradox in our modern world for anyone accepting the notion of the Divine is that allowance must be made for the influence of the supernatural within the natural and this creates an apparent conflict of a mutually exclusive choice between reason and faith, an absurd dichotomy in itself

17 It may seem like a contradiction to affirm that the horizontal plane requires a dimension *outside* of time and space, because where would this "outside" be? Now, this "outside" is really a figurative way of referring to a dimension—or dimensions—that cannot be expressed in our human space-time constructs. However, one can infer that the "space" we know is but one aspect of the pole Infinity and therefore one can infer other dimensions that are symbolically equivalent to our terrestrial space, these being related to the principle of breadth, or of totality, inherent to the Absolute even if they do not correspond to what we know as geographic space, not to mention interstellar space.

18 In compensation, animals, from the shamanistic perspective, embody pure attributes of the Spirit which operate as their medicine. What they lack is total, comprehensive, and objective intelligence—which, unlike man, prevents them from revolting against their Creator—but not a messenger-like dimension that can serve even the Celestial, allowing them thus to be occasional emissaries of the Great Spirit.

but one that has dogged Western culture, in particular, since the advent of the Renaissance, and one that constitutes another legacy of the wound of duality. Here is the seemingly impossible alternative, that few men know how to reconcile: either one tries to be perfectly "logical"—in the material sense of the term—basing then all of one's thinking on proofs taken from the visible universe around us, leaving all the rest to "superstition" so-called, or else one suspends one's rational logic and believes uncritically in the invisible—uncritically, because for the pietist to think in logical or rational terms about the Divinity is unbefitting of humility and even quasi sacrilegious—but without being able to explain this invisible or to prove anything in terms that a rationalist mind can accept. The problem with the second position, that of blind faith, is that it can foster a sense of helplessness before the Sublime which, it is piously alleged, our human faculties are not meant to grasp; now, for an empirical mind, the perspective of uncritical faith amounts to a forfeiting of our powers of reason which are after all legitimate otherwise why would God have endowed man with intelligence? We sympathize but only up to a point, because reason without faith is like trying to think about ultimate Reality under the lock and key of the five senses.

For the pure rationalist the difference between the supra-rational and the irrational is not at all obvious, all the more when those who resort to the supra-rational (or the miraculous) feel they have license to think irrationally—which in actual fact is not to think at all. It is certainly to be deplored that those who defer with dogmatic awe to the supernatural often dismiss logic and intelligence completely, doing so out of a mistaken notion of humility that prompts them (correctly) to reject the "wisdom of the world"—with which they equate reason—but that also predisposes them (incorrectly) to believe gullibly in almost anything gilded by the notion of Heaven or God, whence their sublimistic inclinations, on the one hand, and their humilitarianism, on the other. As a result, believers are liable to slip into a kind of devotional foolishness that the enemies of religion pounce on as proof of the absurdity of the Divine.[19] Or these enemies conclude,

19 One example, among countless, of irrational faith is the phenomenon of speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*), which does real discredit to the dignity and intelligence of the Spirit, as well as being harmful to intelligence as such. This practice has been disavowed by many of the Church's most important saints, among which a Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Saint Bernard. Although the possibility of this phenomenon existed at the very beginning of the primitive Church, when we are told the separation between the supernatural and the natural was less rigid, it disappeared as a possibility almost immediately; even the Desert Fathers, who could perform miracles, apparently did not practice it. This is not to say that instances of it cannot occur, since it is a possibility, but the overwhelming number of people who claim access to it are fantasizing if not pulling

condescendingly, that believers are people who are inherently "insecure" when faith is actually the only avenue open to man separated from God, leaving aside the fact that in essence faith is a form of veiled "intellection", and therefore "intelligent" in its own way, and certainly more so than a pure rationalism fancying it can solve everything through empirical logic.

Now, it should be easy enough to demonstrate that the mysteries of Being can only yield to rational verification up to a point, beyond which one must appeal to metaphysical logic and to intellective faith, not to mention that our human limitations oblige us ultimately to depend on Divine Grace if we are to understand anything at all. Just as man cannot create life, he cannot produce enlightenment, for the source of both life and enlightenment belong to a transcendent order of reality; no man can approach the Real purely by his own means or purely on his own initiative. It is here, moreover, that a childlike sense of the wonder of the universe can lead to intuitions not accessible to a skeptical mind. Thus to accept certain essential articles of faith, for example those in Christianity requiring belief in the virgin birth of Christ, of his death and resurrection, and of the Blessed Virgin's assumption call for beliefs that seem to defy all earthly logic, but that do not defy the miracle of creation itself which is really the greatest miracle of all, at least in the sense that it is unexplainable without spirituality. Moreover, it is not illogical to believe that the supernatural can enter into the natural since the natural is really but a diminished or darkened or more solidified supernatural, and not vice-versa as New Age evolutionism supposes in positing that the supernatural is somehow born of the natural;[20] in other words, life would not be self-sustaining were it not for the animating principle of the Spirit within it, as should be clear from the fate of decomposition that meets all composed bodies.

To return briefly to the example of the Indian holding the sacred pipe, one will readily grant that studying the actual components of each ritual may be of some cultural interest; but ultimately these rituals cannot be di-

the wool over the eyes of the unsuspecting. No wonder, then, that excursions into this kind of verbal prolixity, which is usually gibberish or worse, gives religion a bad name; in fact, gibberish ends up destroying the very notion of the Word itself, the most lucid theophany there is.

20 Thus we find a new theology emphasizing that Christ was not wonderful because of his divineness but because of the perfection of his humanity, Heaven forfend! The next step in this type of fake theology (à la Bishop Shelby Spong's "New Christianity for a New World") is, of course, to divinize man himself, namely to divinize his *earthly* humanity and thus to divinize mankind and earth, as if there were not a cosmically insuperable isthmus separating earth from Heaven principially and forever—but an isthmus that the sanctified heart overcomes because, in fact, this heart is heaven-born to start with.

vorced from their alchemical goal which is the purification of man's heart and—through universal spiritual solidarity—the purification of all of creation; man, as true priest, prays with all of creation—as seen in the Lakota formula, *mitakuye oyasin*, "we are all related". That said, before the advent of the modern world, no one would have thought of analyzing these rituals for the simple reason that to isolate them from their theurgic purpose would not have occurred to anyone; rituals were part of traditional man's daily life, equal or more to sustaining himself with food.[21] The scientific mind, however, tends to break apart what should not be separated, and in so doing, perpetuates the break between Heaven and earth; and what is more, doing it by using artificial frames of reference that do not really apply to the subject matter. Thus, for example, to analyze the Middle Ages or ancient Japan, or any traditional society, through a socio-economic prism, especially one based on some kind of socialistic if not proto-Marxist notion of the affluent and dispossessed, or of oppression and exploitation, while ignoring in the process everything that constitutes a sacred traditional civilization, is an exercise in futility especially considering that affluence was never a factor of man's greatness but only a subsidiary effect.[22]

Examining the question of the modern supremacy of the rational mind and its limitations, it is no coincidence that Heaven chose an "unlettered prophet" for the last great revelation, that of Islam: Muhammad is the *nabi 'l-ummi* (the "unlettered prophet), the "unletteredness" referring to that virginity of soul not burdened with worldly knowledge; there is a direct analogy here with the Blessed Virgin in Christianity: both the Virgin and the Prophet of Islam receive the announcement of their revelation, the divine Child for the former and the divine Word for the latter, from the archangel Gabriel.[23] And likewise in Christianity, with regard to learning, there is the spiritual treatise called *The Cloud of Unknowing* explaining the manner of approaching the Divine through unknowing, a theme at the core of John Scotus Eriugena's *agnosia* and Meister Eckhart's unlearning.

21 "In the life of the Indian there was only one inevitable duty—the duty of prayer—the daily recognition of the Unseen and Eternal. His daily devotions were more necessary to him than daily food" (Charles Eastman, *The Soul of the Indian*[Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980], p. 45). That is to say, for an Indian, praying was like breathing.

22 The founders of the various Caliphate dynasties, for instance, whether Umayyad, Abbasid, or Ottoman, and who brought human civilization to an undreamt of apogee of glory, were born in the austerity of the desert.

23 Or the Logos as man for the one and the Logos as Principle (or Word) for the other. Thus, in a certain special sense, one might say that the Prophet of Islam had a "Marial substance", spiritually speaking, while being a statesman and legislator intellectually. That the Archangel Gabriel appeared to both prophets is far from being a coincidence.

Similarly, the famous alchemical adage declares: "The sum of knowledge is to know nothing" (*summa scientia nihil scire*). Spiritual unlearning, however, cannot be undertaken on the basis of ignorance—this is all too obvious—otherwise fools would be wise men; thus any serious spiritual seeker must first learn what he must unlearn and not just what he must learn; some foundational training in *recta ratio* ("correct reasoning") of the Scholastics is indispensable for this.

However difficult it may be to look at man totally objectively or dispassionately or non-sentimentally, and to do so without projecting one's own subjectivity onto him, or projecting onto him the massive and finally profane assumptions of the secular epoch we happen to live in, we must not forget this: there is a transpersonal and intemporal core in each man, the divine Intellect, or Spirit, that knows everything already and forever because it is the uncreated trace of Godhead in man without which he could not exist even for an instant; and this trace of Godhead in man is like the microcosmic prophet or *avatara*, the divine model every man and woman carries immanently in himself or herself which is radically one with the essence of Reality. To have a personal premonition of this is a calling to sanctity, a calling to union with God. Ultimately, there can be no true knowledge unless founded on the premise of unity, namely on the Oneness of the Real that we can only grasp ontologically. Hence, even if "objective" knowledge necessarily presupposes a duality, this duality is not meant to be a chasm, even less a wound, if understood as being the twin poles of a single axis situated in one Reality. Were it not for this sacred unity, both underlying and transcending all divisions, no duality would exist, even for an instant.

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