

The Human Margin (Part 2)

by
Frithjof Schuon

Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol. 5, No. 4. (Autumn, 1971) © World Wisdom, Inc.
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Editor's note: The following is from an updated translation of the essay, approved by the estate of Frithjof Schuon. The essay is still divided into the same two parts, in consecutive issues, as it originally appeared in the journal.

It is very tempting to attribute to the human margin, which develops in the shadow of divine inspirations, the seeming naiveties found in holy Scriptures; it goes without saying that there is no connection between the two, unless this margin is to be understood in a transposed and wholly different sense, as we shall propose later; but it is obviously no such transposition that modern critics have in mind when they believe it possible to draw arguments against the sacred Books from the apparent scientific errors found in them. Now the facts—assumed to be naïve—in the Book of Genesis, for instance, prove, not that the Bible is mistaken, but that man is not to know more, and this for the simple reason that he cannot bear it; certainly, no knowledge is harmful in itself, and in the nature of things there are always men capable of integrating spiritually all possible knowledge; but for the average man, only the knowledge provided by elementary experience, universal and age-old, hence normal, is bearable, as the history of these last centuries clearly proves. It is a fact not only that scientific man—whose possibility was outlined in classical Greece and developed in the modern West—loses religion as he plunges into physical science, but that by the same token he closes himself to the infinite dimension of supra-sensorial knowledge—the very knowledge that gives meaning to life.

Paradise is presented in the Scriptures as being situated “up above”, “in heaven”, because the celestial vault is the only height that can be grasped empirically or sensorially; for analogous reasons, hell is “down below”, “underneath the earth”, in darkness, heaviness, imprisonment. Similarly, for the Asiatics, samsaric rebirths—when they are neither heavenly nor infernal—take place “on earth”, that is, on the only level that can be grasped empirically; what matters for Revelation is the effectiveness of the symbolism and not the indefinite knowledge of insignificant facts. Now it is true that no fact is totally insignificant as such, otherwise it would not exist; but the countless facts that elude man’s normal

experience and that scientism accumulates in our consciousness and also in our life, are spiritually intelligible only for those who have no need of them.

Ancient man was highly sensitive to the intentions inherent in symbolic expressions, as is proven, on the one hand, by the effectiveness of these expressions for many centuries and, on the other, by the fact that ancient man was by any standard a perfectly intelligent being; when he was told the story of Adam and Eve, he grasped so clearly what the story was about—the evidence is in fact dazzling—that he did not dream of wondering either “why” or “how”; for we carry the story of Paradise and of the Fall in our soul and in our very flesh. And similarly for all eschatological symbolism: the “eternity” of the hereafter denotes above all a contrast in relation to the here-below, namely, a dimension of absoluteness standing in opposition to our world of fleeting, and hence “vain”, contingencies; this is what matters, and nothing else, and this is the divine intention of the image; in transmigrationist symbolisms, on the contrary, this “vanity” extends also to the hereafter, to some degree at least and by reason of a profound difference in perspective; here too no one is concerned with the “why” or the “how” from the moment that the striking intention of the symbol has been seized as it were in one’s own flesh.

In the man marked by scientism, the intuition for underlying intentions has vanished, and not only that: scientism, which is axiomatically closed to the supra-sensorial dimensions of the Real, has furnished man with a crass ignorance and, as a consequence, has falsified his imagination. The modernist mentality wants to reduce angels, demons, miracles—in a word, all phenomena that are non-material and that cannot be explained in material terms—to something purely “subjective” and “psychological”, when there is not the slightest connection here, unless it is the fact that the psychic is also made—but objectively so—of an extra-material substance; a contemporary theologian, when speaking of the Ascension, mockingly asked, “And where does this cosmic journey end?”, a comment that serves as a measure for the degree of self-satisfied idiocy of a certain type of mentality that wants to be “of our times”. It would be easy to explain why Christ “was taken up” into the air and what the meaning is of the “cloud” that hid him from sight,¹ and also why it has been said that Christ “will come after the same fashion”; each detail corresponds to a precise reality, which can be easily understood in the light of traditional cosmologies; the key lies in the fact that the passage from one cosmic degree to another is heralded in the lower degree by modalities that are both “technical” and symbolic and which therefore reflect, in their way, the higher state; and this takes place according to an order of succession inherent in the nature of things.

Whatever the case may be, the deficiency of modern science is essentially related to the question of universal causality; it will no doubt be objected that science is not concerned with philosophical causality but with phenomena, and this is false, for all of evolutionism is nothing but a hypertrophy imagined as a result of denying the real causes; and this materialist negation as well as its evolutionist compensation pertains to philosophy and not to science.

From an altogether different point of view, it must be said that progressivists are not completely mistaken in thinking that there is something in religion that no longer works; the individualistic and sentimental argumentation with which traditional piety operates has all but lost its ability to grip consciences, and this is not simply because modern man is irreligious, but because normal religious arguments—not being able to go deep enough into the core of things and in fact not having had to do so previously—are somewhat blunted, psychologically speaking, and fail to satisfy certain needs for causality. It is a paradoxical phenomenon that human societies, if on the one hand they degenerate over time, also accumulate on the other experiences as they age, even if these experiences are mixed with errors; this is what any “pastoral”, anxious to be effective, should take into account, not by seeking new directives from common error, but on the contrary by making use of arguments taken from a higher order, an order that is intellectual and not sentimental; by such means, some, at least, would be saved—and a far greater number than might be supposed—whereas with the scientific and demagogic “pastoral”, no one is saved.

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The notion of the “human margin” can be understood in a higher sense which is free from all psychological and earthly connotations; in this case, we are entering into an altogether new dimension which one must be careful not to confuse with the vicissitudes of thought. What we want to say is that this notion can apply equally to the divine order and to the level of the Logos, inasmuch as certain human divergences are providentially prefigured in the Divine Intelligence; in this case, it is a matter, not of a superfluity of divergences, deriving in fact from human weakness, but of adaptations willed by Divine Mercy. No doubt there is not a total difference of principle here, but there is an eminent difference of dimension, similar to the difference between the square and the cube, or between whiteness and light.

When it is said that religious differences are no more than differences in formulation, this may be provisionally sufficient for those who are convinced in advance and in the abstract, but it is not sufficient the moment one has to enter concretely into details, for one also needs to know why these formulations are manifested as so many mutually incompatible affirmations, and not simply as differences in style. It is not enough to tell oneself that the various traditional doctrines express “points of view”, and therefore different “aspects” of the One Truth; one needs to know that it is necessarily thus, and that it is impossible that things would be otherwise, for expression could never be exhaustive, while providing a perfectly sufficient key for total Truth. The same applies to physical experience: it is impossible to give of a landscape a description whose validity would be exclusive, for no one can see the landscape in all of its aspects at the same time, and no vision can prevent the existence and validity of other visions that are equally possible.

For man, the historical facts upon which his religion is established proves its exclusive validity precisely because they are facts, and thus realities; for God, these same facts have no value beyond that of a symbolist and logical demonstration, and are therefore replaceable with other facts just as a demonstration or a symbol is replaceable—though not without sufficient reason—with another demonstration or another symbol: the essential content is always the same truth, at once heavenly and salvific, but approachable in different ways since no angle of vision is the only one possible. This is what is indicated by the contradictions contained in the holy Scriptures, and also, to a lesser degree certainly, by the divergences in the visions of the saints.

Every religious belief is founded on a point of view from which this belief alone seems sublime and irrefutable; not to be of this persuasion appears not only as the worst of perversities, for it is to oppose God, but also as the worst of absurdities, for it is not to see that two plus two equal four. Everyone in the West knows what grounds there are for the sentiment that Christianity is true; but it is far less known why other religions resist that sentiment. Christianity in its immediate and literal expression—not in its essence, which is necessarily universal and hence polyvalent—is unquestionably directed toward sinners, those “who have need of the physician”; its point of departure is sin,² just as that of Buddhism is suffering. In Islam as in Hinduism—the most ancient religion and the most recent paradoxically meet in some features—the point of departure is man as such; the Christian perspective—whose literality, when seen from the outside, is the best “piece of evidence”—will thus appear as limited to a single aspect of man and of human nature, an aspect that is certainly real, but neither unique nor exhaustive. The marvels, whatever they may be, are not of a kind to invalidate this conviction, since it refers to the nature of things and that nothing phenomenal can take precedence over the Truth.

However it is not separative diversity that matters, but unanimity, and it would be of little avail to speak of the first without bearing in mind the second. If by “science” one means a knowledge with respect to real things—whether these can be directly controlled or not—and not exclusively a knowledge determined by such a program or such a method, narrowly limiting and philosophically abusive, then religion will be the science of total hierarchy, equilibrium, and of the rhythms operating on a cosmic scale; it gives account of both the exteriorizing Manifestation and the interiorizing Attraction of God, and it is alone to do so and to be able to do so *a priori* and spontaneously.

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There can be no doubt that the Epistles of the New Testament are divinely inspired, but they are so to the second degree, which is to say that they do not pertain to direct Revelation like the words of Jesus and Mary or like the Psalms; and this explains why there can be in this secondary inspiration a new differentiation in degree depending on whether the Spirit speaks or whether it lets man almost entirely be the one who speaks; now man is in this case a saint, but he is not the Holy Spirit. The apostle recognizes this himself by specifying, when giving certain counsels, that he does so on his own and not under the influence of the Paraclete. “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord.” Here it is clearly the Spirit who is speaking. “Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful.” Here it is man who is speaking. And likewise: “To the rest speak I, not the Lord.” And again: “She is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 7:10,12,25,40).

We find ourselves here in the presence of the “human margin”, but it contains yet another degree: following the apostle, who gives his counsel, Roman theologians intervene, belatedly deducing—not without unrealistic idealism and in fact confusing asceticism with morality—the rule of celibacy for all priests,³ a measure that goes hand in hand with placing too outward a motivation on the sacrament of marriage, thus forgetting the spiritual aspects of sexuality.⁴ The result, positively, was the flowering of specific type of sanctity and, negatively, an accumulation of tensions that were the cause of all kinds of disequilibrium, culminating in the Renaissance and in its repercussions; this is not to say that the morally unrealistic and spiritually narrow angelism of a certain type of Christianity was the sole cause for the

subsequent naturalist explosions, but it strongly contributed to them and is suffering the consequences today in its own flesh.

Generally speaking, when it is simply the nature of things that is being considered, but without thereby underestimating theological intentions or mystical values, one has the impression that Christianity—inasmuch as it is based on the consciousness of sin and on the sinful nature of man—has a need for sin and even creates it, in some measure, through an appropriate moral theology, when one takes account of the fact that, in such a perspective, sin is sexuality.⁵ In other traditional perspectives, sexuality, in itself neutral, becomes intrinsically positive through a certain spiritual conditioning: obviously, sin is always the harmful and forbidden act, whether sexual or not; but it is also, more fundamentally, profane distraction in itself, pleasure for the sake of pleasure, hence forgetfulness of God and worldly exteriorization.⁶ Piety, whether it excludes nature-as-sin or includes nature-as-sacrament, is not without a certain monotony; the guarantee of salvation lies essentially in the fixation of the heart in the consciousness of God, with all that this entails depending on circumstances and vocations, and whatever the supports in the natural order may be.

It is well-known that Judaism, which grants David and Solomon hundreds of spouses, and that Islam, which grants nine to its Prophet, are far from sharing the Pauline perspective; in general, Christian theologians have no plausible explanation for Semitic polygamy—though inadmissible opinions are not lacking⁷—which indicates that there is a dimension here which escapes, not every Westerner, certainly, but the characteristic and thus average perspective that has dominated the West for many centuries. Highly effective as it is on its level, this unilateral vision of natural things brings in its wake very unfortunate misinterpretations concerning not only Islam—which in any case is hardly surprising—but also the old Biblical world.

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The Mosaic Law has been given for all of time, right until the end of the world; nothing can be added to it, nothing taken away. This is the thesis of Judaism, and it is irrefutable. Nonetheless, Christianity has practically speaking abolished the Law, since according to it “the Spirit giveth life, the

letter killeth”; this amounts to saying—since Christianity is, in its turn, intrinsically orthodox—that the thesis of Judaism has unconditional import only in the dimension that it represents, which is religious legalism.⁸ The negation, by Christians, of the esoteric dimension is strictly speaking an inconsistency, since without the esoteric point of view Christianity would be inconceivable; if there is no esoterism, the argument of Judaism takes on absolute import and Christianity is the transgression that it appears to be from the Jewish point of view. Moreover, if the Spirit “giveth life” and the letter “killeth”, this concerns only Judaism: if the “letter” of Judaism can become quite relative from a certain spiritual point of view, then the “letter” of Christianity falls under the same law, all the more since the “Spirit” that vivifies “bloweth where It listeth”, which opens the door, not only to a Christian gnosis, but also to the acceptance in principle of non-Christian religions. Christianity was born of the distinction between form, which by definition is relative, and essence, which alone is absolute; if Christianity abolishes this distinction in favor of its own form, it robs itself, as it were, of the whole reason for its existence.

Without these subtle truths of principle, the Christian contradiction with regard to Judaism remains unintelligible, at least if one is aware, as one should be, of the argument of Judaism; but these truths obviously do not account for all of the concrete reality of Christianity which, being a religion, cannot possibly put into doubt its “letter” or its form on pain of abolishing itself. What needs to be specified is that the Christic message has a character of esoterism inasmuch as it is a perspective of inwardness or essentialization; but this message nonetheless is clad in an exoteric form owing to its voluntaristic and thus *de facto* individualistic character and the dogmatizing tendency that results from its urge to expand, or from the necessity for this expansion.

If on the one hand Christ is the founder of a world religion, he is on the other a Jewish prophet sent to Israel and addressing himself to it; in this second aspect—mentioned in fact by the Koran—Jesus has the function of a regenerator: he is the great prophet of inwardness, and as such he should have been accepted by Israel as Isaiah was;⁹ however, this acceptance presupposed a spiritual suppleness more fitting of India than Judea. In theory, Judeo-Christianity ought to have perpetuated itself within the fold of Judaism—in parallel to its role as a world religion—as an esoteric community not unlike that of the Essenes; in practice, various aspects of the human margin precluded this possibility of principle.

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Genesis relates how God “repented” when He saw the corruption of mankind: “And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth and it grieved Him at His heart”;¹⁰ in an analogous manner, there is something akin to a “divine repentance” from one Revelation to another, in the sense that God manifests an aspect of Truth that corrects, not the aspect manifested previously, but human insistence on that aspect, or the unilateral development given by the human receptacle to an aspect which, in itself, is far less limited.

The characteristic—and inevitable—mistake of all exoterism is to attribute a human subjectivity to God and consequently to believe that any divine manifestation refers to the same divine “I”, and thus to the same limitation. This is to fail to realize that the Ego that speaks and legislates in Revelations is no more than a manifestation of the Divine Subject and not the Subject Itself; in other words, one must distinguish in God—always from the point of view of Revelation—first of all the one and essential Word, and then the manifestations or actualizations of this Word with regard to particular human receptacles. The divine “I” that speaks to men—and of necessity to a “particular collectivity of men”—could never be the Divine Subject in a direct and absolute sense; it is an adaptation of this “I” to a human vessel and, as a result, takes on something of the nature of this vessel, failing which all contact between God and man would be impossible and failing which it would be absurd to admit that any Revelation, Hebrew, Arabic, or other, could be word-for-word of divine origin.

God cannot contradict Himself, certainly; but this axiomatic truth concerns essential, unlimited, and formless Truth, the only one that counts *in divinis*; relative enunciations may perfectly well contradict themselves from one Revelation to another—exactly as human subjects or material forms mutually exclude and contradict one another—so long as essential Truth is safeguarded, and made as effective as possible. The particular divine “I” of a Revelation is not situated in the Divine Principle Itself; it is the projection, or emanation, of the Absolute Subject and is identified with the “Spirit of God”, that is, with the cosmic Center of which it could be said that it is “neither divine nor non-divine”; this revelation-giving “I” “is God” in virtue of the ray attaching it directly to its Source, but it is not God in an absolute way, for it is impossible that the Absolute as such would start speaking in a human language and say human things. This is the meaning of the doctrine of the “descent” of the Koran by successive stages, and this is what accounts for discussions concerning whether it is “created” or “uncreated”, or in what way and in what respect it is or is not so; but this does not open the door to any naturalism, or to any humanism, for the earthly wording of a sacred scripture, while being determined from a certain point of view by human contingencies, remains divine through its heavenly origin and also through its as it were theurgic substance.

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When approaching Islam, a particularly serious difficulty is the accusation—leveled by Muslims against Jews and Christians—of “falsification of the Scriptures”; this accusation is aimed chiefly at what Islam considers to be a lack of due receptivity toward the totality of the Revelation, which is *a priori* as if suspended between God and man, its manifestation being determined by the human receptacle. Since Jewish and Christian theologies, when seen from the point of view of Islam, contain restrictive crystallizations, Islam will present these restrictions of perspective as “falsifications”, in which case the “Scripture” is implicitly considered in its non-manifested and still heavenly totality.

Islam would readily accept the concepts of “Chosen People” and “God-Man” in a compensatory metaphysical context that would re-establish the equilibrium of total Truth; however, such a context, precisely, would appear to Jews and Christians as a nullification of their respective positions. Once again it must be emphasized here that every revealed and traditional symbolism is a key for the totality; but this does not abolish the distinction between spiritual forms opening more particularly onto a path either of works, or of love, or of gnosis, in other words, onto a path that is fundamentally determined by one or the other of these elements, although none of these determinations need have an exclusive character. In the economy of Revelation, spiritual opportunity, depending on its human receptacles, requires limitations and therefore negations; more specifically, it is necessary sometimes to deny things on the plane of formal expression, without ever having to call into question essential Truth.¹¹

The “falsification of the Scriptures”—which Islam reproaches the two earlier monotheisms for—may also be reduced to a simple question of interpretation; thus Ibn Taymiyyah, Hanbalite protagonist of an extreme literalism, reproaches Jews and Christians for having falsified the meaning of several passages in their Scriptures—the meaning and not the text itself. A given spiritual mentality may feel the need to fix dogmatically, and to develop theologically and liturgically, a specific aspect of the truth to the detriment of another that may be more important, though not absolutely indispensable; we have in mind here Talmudic speculations and the vicissitudes of trinitarian theology, and also the factors that provoked the Christian schisms and the split between Sunnite and Chiite Islam.¹²

We do not intend, with these rather general interpretations, to settle the whole problem of the divergences between the Bible and Koran. We shall simply add that Muslims think it strange that the Bible should attribute the golden calf to Aaron without drawing any consequences from this, and that it should make grave accusations against both David and Solomon; or again that it says that the hand of Moses became leprous, by way of a sign, when he withdrew it from his bosom, when according to the Koran it was made luminous “without any hurt”.¹³

Certain religious theses, polemical in their tone, may seem unjust or crude; but they conceal under the very excess of their appearance a “divine point of view” that goes beyond dogmatism as such. Moreover, the reproach of “falsification of the Scriptures” can have for its aim the liberty that Revelation sometimes takes with words: an example is the manner in which some passages of the Old Testament are reproduced in the New; there is no doubt that in the eyes of the rabbis these are genuine falsifications,¹⁴ when in fact, in cases of this kind, the same idea is divinely “re-thought” in relation to a new human receptacle.¹⁵

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To return to the Muslim point of view, the core of the issue is this: if we start with the idea that “Scripture” is the “uncreated Koran” that is with God, thus the Divine Word Itself or the Logos, vessel of all truth, then these Revelations, which are adapted in their expression to a particular collective human receptacle—for “water takes on the color of its container”, as Junayd said—are, extrinsically, restrictions in relation to the uncreated Word; therefore, they “falsify” it in some fashion, if we can make use of this term here to highlight an analogy; hence the “falsification” considered by the Muslim reproach is above all, from the point of view of totality and universality, a restriction of perspective and a limitation.

There are three aspects to be distinguished in Revelation: namely, first, the eternal Word in God; secondly, its specification—on the archangelic plane—in view of a particular human receptacle; thirdly, its manifestation on earth and in time according to circumstances that are providential, surely, but human and earthly nonetheless.¹⁶ The second, or intermediary, degree presents two aspects, one essential and the other specific: thus the Koran, having descended to the seventh Heaven, remains on the one hand Divine

Word, absolute and undifferentiated, and becomes on the other hand a specific Divine Order or particular Message. It is at the third degree that the Koran pours out into the human language and manifests its intentions of perspective, equilibrium, and salvation by means of human contingencies that determine a particular expression; the heavenly Koran, and with all the more reason the Divine Word in the absolute sense, does not speak of this or that name or incident; but it contains the intention which, on earth, can express itself through the most diverse human facts. In order to understand the nature of the Koran and the meaning of its discontinuities—but not those due to mere contingencies in compilation—it is necessary always to keep in mind these three degrees, which are intimately interwoven in the verbal crystallization of the Book and yet are recognizable by the sudden changes in level.

It results from what we have just said, not only that the revealed Book contains three degrees that are as it were hypostatic, but also, at the earthly degree, that this Book could be other than what it is; the events and words themselves have nothing absolute about them, otherwise contingency would not be contingency. The Logos in God could be compared to a formless and uncolored substance, and the Logos “descended” into the archangelic world to a religious perspective that is still superhumanly unarticulated; in which case, earthly manifestation would be comparable to the dispersion of a heavenly substance into earthly coagulations, formed by the social setting and circumstances, which however would not affect this heavenly substance nor its divine essence. Or again: if we compare the eternal Word of God to gold as such, and a particular heavenly specification of this Word to a particular mass of gold, it will be readily seen that all the forms that can derive from this mass will in no wise affect either the weight or the nature of the metal.

This doctrine of the three hypostatic degrees of the Divine Word allows us to understand the principle of “abrogation” (*naskh*), which manifests in all sacred Scripture at the level of language, even if no practical consequences are drawn from it; now if there were no human margin, no abrogation would be possible.

Another principle, connected to the same doctrine, is that of “personal revelation”, which is also directly divine, but given to a saint who has no prophetic mandate properly speaking. It is true that every spiritual truth necessarily derives from the heavenly prototype of the Book, but it does so in a manner altogether different than in the case of the “personal revelation” we have in mind here, where the wording is received, not through mere inspiration as is the case of some writings of saints and sages, but through revelation in the true sense, that is to say, in virtue of a direct divine action. A famous case is that of the Bhagavad-Gita which should logically be part of secondary inspiration (*smriti*) since it belongs to the

Mahabharata, but which in fact is considered as one of the Upanishads, and thus as pertaining directly to heavenly inspiration (*shruti*); another case, found in Islam this time, is that of the chapter on Adam which Ibn Arabi declared as being derived from Divine revelation—in the manner of the Koran—and which indeed is a masterpiece from the point of view of both its form and content. Once the sage becomes, by the effect of a very special election, “his own prophet”, he is thereby “his own law”; this election is at the same time a “heavenly adoption”, manifested by objective signs, but of so super-eminent an order that it would be vain to hope that there could be here a spiritual degree accessible by efforts and by virtue of natural gifts. Be that as it may, it is understandable that the quality of “prophecy” (*nubuwwah*) could have been attributed to some Sufis; it is not in this case a “legislating” prophecy, but one that is nonetheless “radiant” in one way or another.¹⁷ The objective and polyvalent revelation is repeated somehow in a particular human microcosm, not in the sense of a general and obvious analogy—every intellection being a “revelation”—but in virtue of an altogether particular possibility and of a participation, outside of time, in the “descent”, or rather “reception”, of the uncreated Book.

¹ It was not a cloud made of oxygen and hydrogen, but an extra-material substance that had become visible in order to receive the body that was about to penetrate into the higher cosmos. The “chariot of fire” of Elijah has the same meaning, as does the “sphere of light” observed during certain apparitions of the Virgin. All of this has absolutely nothing to do with fairy tales, nor above all with “depth psychology”.

² Apart from the fact that the notion itself of sin is susceptible to being transposed onto a higher plane—sin being then identified with the existential disequilibrium that the empirical ego represents or with a particular aspect of the ego—the Gospels contain many a saying which goes beyond the moral alternative and whose universal import is readily understandable; nevertheless, the Christian religion as such is based, practically speaking, on the notion of sin.

³ Whereas the Orthodox, who are no less Christian, did not draw such a conclusion. Until the tenth century, most Catholic priests were married; Gregory VII, renewing the anathemas of Nicolas II and Alexander II, finally managed to impose sacerdotal celibacy after violent resistance which went as far as riots and the mistreatment of bishops and pontifical legates.

⁴ “So that they shall no longer be two, but of one flesh”, declares the Gospel, placing the emphasis on the mystery of union—symbolized in a certain fashion by the miracle of Cana—and not on the two Pauline motivations, namely, the appeasing of the flesh and procreation, reserved for those who are incapable of abstaining. If it is important to avoid the pitfall of a moral automatism that is both prudish and hypocritical, it is even more important to reject the opposite pitfall, that of a loose sexualism, naturist and vitalist, and which, because of its insolent and desecrating casualness, is contrary to man’s spiritual dignity. Sexuality is sacred, or else it is subhuman.

⁵ Quintessentially, but not theologically. The Church is not Manichean: it blesses marriage, but marriage is considered to be both a lesser good and a lesser evil, which justifies—when looking at things in depth—the association of ideas with the notion of “sin”.

⁶ There are religious authorities, in whom a complex of complicity toward the Renaissance is combined with a complex of inferiority toward the world of science, show an astonishing indulgence for profane distractions which they term “innocent”. Scientific progress, and the irreversible turmoil resulting from it, is fine, so long as one doesn’t lose one’s faith; to jump in the water, is fine, so long as one doesn’t get wet.

⁷ It is inadmissible for instance to attribute to the author of the Psalms an insurmountable weakness of the flesh and to attribute the opposite virtue to any and every priest.

⁸ We have been assured that there could be no question in Judaism of practicing prescriptions mentally or of making up for them in some way in a word, of interiorizing practices become impracticable and that all the rules remain obligatory without exception. Yet it seems to us that a religion could never prescribe what is impossible; the very fact that an observance is really impossible proves that it can be compensated for, even apart from all question of esoterism.

⁹ Christ, paraphrasing Isaiah, expresses himself thus: “This people honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:8-9). And likewise: “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” (Matt. 15:3).

¹⁰ “If so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings” (Jer. 26:3). Likewise: “And God repented of the evil that he had said the he would do unto them” (Jon. 3:10), and other passages of this kind.

¹¹ The ostracism between confessions is repeated within the same orthodoxy: when St Benedict condemns outright the Sarabaites and gyrovague monks, he does so above all in the name of a methodological and disciplinary perspective, for it is impossible to accept that the situation of these monks—some living in their houses and others wandering—did not correspond to real vocations, despite all the real abuses, though occurring more or less in the later stages. An analogous remark could apply to quietism—to cite but this one example—whose abuses in the seventeenth century do not invalidate the principle of quietude.

¹² The suppression of all gnosis, the condemnation of Origen, and then the immense success of Arianism—not to mention the excessive influence of that two-edged sword of Aristotelianism—in a Christianity that was still relatively young, proves how difficult assimilation was for a human receptacle that was both too heterogeneous and too narrow.

¹³ When one reads the predictions of Christ concerning the latter times, one is struck by the fact that they refer in part to the ruin of Jerusalem, though distinctions between the various applications are not to be found in the speech itself; as is seen already in ancient prophecies predicting the advent of Christ, it happens in fact that prophetic language compounds two or more completely different, but obviously analogous orders; now analogy is a certain mode of identity, metaphysically and “divinely” speaking. There are similar coincidences—or cumulations—in the prophecies of Isaiah concerning Cyrus, the liberator of Israel (44:28, 45:1-6, and 63:1-3), if one applies them to the Prophet of Islam as do Muslims, basing themselves on the fact that the name of Cyrus—*Kôresh* in Hebrew—evokes that of *Quraysh*, the name of the tribe of Muhammad. We shall note that in Persian the name Cyrus, *Kurush*, means “sun”, whereas in Elamite *kurash* means “shepherd”, a meaning taken up by Isaiah; now both meanings equally suit the founder of Islam, who was first a shepherd before becoming a sun for a whole sector of the world.

¹⁴ And Christian theologians would doubtless be of the same opinion as the rabbis if it were a question of a non-Christian Scripture.

¹⁵ The divergences between the Hebrew text and the Septuagint translation occasion the same remark. According to St Augustine, the Septuagint translators benefited in their turn from the revelational breath, and the divergences between their translation and the Hebrew text had in each case a meaning implicitly contained in the original.

¹⁶ This doctrine is moreover to be found in the theory of the “three bodies of the Buddha”: “earthly” (*nirmâna-kâya*), “heavenly” (*sambhoga-kâya*), and “divine” (*dharmakâya*).

¹⁷ According to a *hadîth*, no woman was ever a prophet, but it is only a question here of legislating prophecy, this would seem obvious; thus there is no reason for thinking, Islamically speaking, that the term “prophetess” (*nabiyah*) could not suit the Virgin Maryam and should be replaced by the turn of phrase “of a prophetic nature” (*nabawiyah*), nor that the eulogistic form “upon her be Peace” (*‘alayhâ as-Salâm*) should be replaced in her case by the formula, attributed to ordinary saints, “may God be satisfied with him or her” (*radhiya ‘Llâhu ‘anhu* or *‘anhâ*); this all the more obvious in that, from the point of view of cosmic manifestation, Mary eminently surpasses all the saints.