

# **The Philosophical Exigencies of Christian Religion**

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## **Part I**

### **The Christian Sense**

Introduction [on the need for a philosophy of the Christian spirit]

Is it possible, is it legitimate, is it good to study, from the viewpoint of philosophy, the Christian spirit?

Let us see first the objections that arise against such an endeavor. Is it not to do violence to this spirit to seem to bring it down to theoretical and critical perspectives of a purely human order, with the appearance of assimilating it to other properly rational doctrines, as a history of the stoic spirit would be? Moreover, doesn't this term, "Christian spirit", create some equivocation between two meanings, one relative to a speculative and dogmatic interpretation (such as an exposé of the spinozist spirit), the other reduced to applications that proceed from the "genius of Christianity", to repeat Chateaubriand's title? Besides, do we not risk, whether we follow either one of these orientations, to break up the mysterious unity of a life whose supernatural character seems to depend on the indissoluble unity and solidarity of doctrinal truths and practical precepts?

What makes our scruples worse, is that attempts by historians, exegetes, philosophers to study this Christian spirit from a scientific and rational point of view have given the appearance of denaturing this spirit, at times by trespassing into it to render a false account of the supernatural, and at other times by letting that odor

evaporate that St. Paul says surpasses all human perception. Hence do we not have to leave to those who are “more than man”, according to the expression of Descartes, a study that seems justifiable and salutary only from a properly religious or even theological point of view, not to say mystical? Even more so, does not the Gospel warn us that these things remain hidden from the curious to be revealed only to the simple and the little ones?

Finally, we come to an objection that is more actual, more radical still, the one that echoed through a recent Conference of Catholic professors: “There is no Christian spirit; there is the human spirit that is universal, and there is the historical fact of the Revelation; there is the person of Christ who commands with authority, whose deep reasons we have no business poking into, because these teachings surpass our human way of knowing just as his action escapes our science and our conscience.”

Having many times been questioned myself on the Christian spirit, and especially having been frequently questioned on what Harnack, in his famous book, calls “the essence of Christianity”, I have come to observe an extreme diversity, I do not mean just of ignorances and falsifications, but even of favorable and learned conceptions and interpretations: everyone who reflects in the least personal way on this problem comes up with a judgment that hardly resembles most of the vague or banal ideas the multitude is satisfied with. Is that another reason to avoid the inquiry that I had undertaken more than forty years ago, since it seems almost impossible to bring the infinite perspectives of Christian thought and life back to a

center? Or else, on the contrary, is it one more stimulus to search for clarity, for an ordinance, for a harmonious unity, among so many dissonant conceptions?

None of the objections we have just gone over seems decisive, and it would be possible, with the backing of sacred texts, of the highest authorities and of the most traditional examples, to establish that, without trampling on the supernatural order, it is legitimate, profitable, desirable to examine from three points of view the reasons, the meanings and the applications of the Christian spirit. For the Christian religion presents itself not as a creation superimposed on nature, but as an elevation, an assumption, a transfiguration, a grace that makes use of normal faculties, fortifies them without destroying them, rests on rational foundations and perfects without suppressing. Moreover, if it is true that the mysteries of faith remain impenetrable to our intellectual insight, just as the life of grace as such remains unconscious, still mysteries and grace bring with them a light that shines in what we know and in our conscience. Saint Thomas, as jealous as he is to maintain the inaccessibility of revealed truths, nevertheless indicates that they are not unthinkable and that meditation on them is "*fructuosissima*"; similarly there are psychological states that, in an anonymous but real and observable way, express (as Cardinal Deschamps remarks) the presence of the divine order in the life of persons and of peoples. And therein lies a very precious study that reveals, in the human species, the divine spirit of Christianity. Finally, what there is in us is not duality, there is unity of destiny. In the historical and concrete state that is ours, the [first] Vatican Council teaches that there is no separate philosophy, that the problem of religion strikes persons and peoples with an undeniable force; and, by reason of this

very universal vocation of humanity, the Council declares Revelation to be necessary for reason: also necessary are the attention Revelation calls for on our part, along with the examination and the adherence that should result from it. Hence, it is a task that is not only permitted, but is in a sense required, that consists in applying as completely to the study of the Christian spirit this verse of Scripture: *qui elucidant me vitam aeternam habebunt*. Rather than discussing the diverse objections, we shall see them disappear little by little in the course of a study that is entirely positive and direct.

Might not the difficulties we encounter the moment we try to define the Christian spirit lie in that it is wider than any purely notional definition than all simply human comprehension? Pascal said: "Contradiction is a bad mark for truth." The contradictory sense perpetrated against this text, for being very widespread, is nonetheless certain: Pascal has in mind by it that, in the concrete order and better still in the things of God, it is not enough that two assertions clash to justify excluding one or the other. Antithetical with regard to the understanding, they can be complementary for a higher wisdom, as they are solidary in the deeper life of souls. Has it not often been noted that the Gospel seems to advance precepts opposed to one another, bringing war and peace, gentleness and harshness, mortification and joy? Moreover, to respond to the question: how to understand the Christian spirit, the method that is offered us consists in examining the antagonistic traits, to see if they can be brought into some accord, to discover the viewpoint that not only gets rid of the false superficial oppositions, but manifests the reciprocal dependence of truths and of practices that, far from excluding one another, call for

one another, vivify one another and fecundate one another mutually. It is Pascal once more who said: we understand an author, only if we have joined together all the most embarrassing texts in order to reduce them to a coherent and even a single view.

Let us then go back over the theses that at the beginning had been thought of as contradicting one another. First of all, it seemed that there were in tradition itself two interpretations that led us to a dilemma between two conceptions where all too often people have claimed to show incompatibility. From one side, we are told that Christianity perfects nature, that it is rooted deep into its most intimate fibers, that there is, according to the word of Tertullian, in everyman “a naturally Christian soul”. And in the book *The Calirvoyance of Rome*, one of the authors, who had done most to denounce the naturalist and immanentist error, writes that nature could not have its complete finality without a supernatural coronation that gives it its supreme meaning and its providential significance.—From another side, people have incessantly reminded us that the supernatural order is entirely gratuitous, that God could have created man in his present state, where he finds himself, without calling him to a higher vocation, and that any formula appearing to imply a postulate, an exigency of our nature regarding the supernatural undermines a faith that remains essentially a free gift of God.

At first sight, we do not see any way of uniting these two tendencies; and, in fact, under the abstract form according to which we have just presented them in isolation from one another, they are incompatible. But there are new efforts attempting more and more usefully to bring together under a wider light these two fragments that an

abyss of obscurity seemed to keep separated. It seemed that we could not completely abandon either one or the other of these aspects and that nevertheless we could not see any way of safeguarding both of them. To succeed in that, there had to be a concurrence of many initiatives, historical, philosophical, theological. Abandoned texts had to be explored; it has been shown that, even in St. Thomas notably, there is a fitting sense that can be attributed to the diverse passages where he treats of the natural desire to see God and of the normal failure of such an aspiration. Little by little the effort of analysis has discerned the bearing of the *desiderium naturale* and of the meaning we must give to the word *frustra* designating the impossibility of the sought after, but metaphysically inaccessible vision, except by grace and by adoption. The critique of texts was thus connecting to the metaphysical and moral investigations in such a way that, through some theological progress, we came to understand finally that the supernatural is neither a creation *ex nihilo*, without any preparation in the aspirations of the spiritual being, nor an arbitrary superstition, and not any more an exigency whose nature turn into a sort of congenital right. None of this is true, even though each one of these aspects expresses a specious appearance. What makes the solidarity and the beauty of the catholic thesis on this fundamental point, is this alliance of the two gifts: that of the rational nature, prepared to receive and to taste, --and the gift of supernatural grace coming to fulfill in an unforeseen way the expectation of the spiritual nature, without reason by itself ever being able to discover and to attain the term of a destiny that renders man "*consors divinae naturae*". That is how far we have to go to unite in infinite charity the oppositions that remain insurmountable as long as we

remain in the lower regions of abstraction. Thereby we can also resolve the conflict, so painful to many human consciences, between the liberality and the severity in the divine work of Christianity. On one side, everything is presented as an effusion of more than maternal goodness, of infinite condescendence, of sacrifice going all the way to the cross of Christ. And then, on the other hand, we are shown the terrible reprisals, not just of a justice that punishes faults, but of an inflexible exigency with regard to those who limit themselves in refusing liberalities that are entirely gratuitous. So that man seems quite right in being stunned, irritated, as we see so frequently, before a religion that does not allow him to just be himself and that obliges him to accept, to utilize a gift allegedly generously gratuitous and that appears terribly burdensome since one does not have the right to pass it up without falling short.

In the study of the Christian spirit perhaps the greatest difficulty to overcome is the one that results from the unreal character, so to speak, that Catholic dogmas have exhibited even among many of the faithful. Due to the effort of habit that dulls the mind, due to the development of a science that is either too notional or too focused on purely utilitarian applications, contemporary spirits have turned away from invisible and concrete truths that generations of solid and practical faith have lived by. Very few *realize* (in the sense Newman gave to this word) the historical and permanent sense of the Christian mysteries; whence a sort of nebulous atmosphere that envelops them, without their being denied, but without anyone looking on them with the attention that gives them depth, that would understand their exigency as that of a presence coming to bear on our adherence and on our action. Very often,

among intellectuals, those who call themselves faithful and intend to be faithful, cut their beliefs short in conversations with those who are strangers to their faith: a tacit half-concession makes them avoid literal formulations, formal adherences, the attitude that should result from a truly complete and effective confession of faith regarding the most essential dogmas that are at the same time the most embarrassing at times before unbelievers, as they were already with the contemporaries of St. Paul.

Now that is a disposition or, if one prefers, a temptation against which we must be on guard. Two dangers threaten us constantly. One consists in looking for idealized meanings, less brutal interpretations, symbolic forms where unbelievers could themselves find charming allegories and as it were enchanting myths. But if one were to let oneself go down this incline, there would be an inevitable slipping toward a sublimation that would make the authentic reality of the only true Christianity evaporate. Nevertheless the other danger, symmetrical to the first, is hardly less deleterious and menacing. In reacting against the deleterious idealization, many fall back on a pure and simple literalism or latch on only to the container of the facts, the formulas, the rites, the traditional precepts, as if it were a question of ancestral custom or of a magical practice to be preserved without putting one's soul and all of one's entire life into it.

Between these two deformations of the Christian spirit, what would be the fitting attitude to define and to justify? What is the proper and truly unique mark of Christianity is the coincidence of historical reality and of dogmatic truth. The facts remain posited in the positive order in what is most singular, most personal, most



apparently contingent about them; everything is incarnated in accounts that bear on beings of flesh and bones, on events humbly enmeshed in the course of this world that passes. But at the same time these authentic data serve as support or even as substance for divine interventions, for supernaturally and eternally acting causes: the virginal conception, the redemptive value of the cross, the fact of the resurrection are not parables, and their historical reality, which is a matter of faith, requires not only that they be accepted as facts taken literally like other facts of the phenomenal order, or as symbols analogous to other mythological and moral teachings; they are constitutive of an intrinsic truth whose dogmatic value is absolute. In this sense we can say that the letter of the facts is at once the living spirit, the incarnate reality without which neither the letter nor the spirit would remain what they must be. In short, in the presence of these fundamental dogmas, we must always preserve the most indissoluble union in the twofold belief in the letter of the facts and in the divine spirit of which they are the envelope, the bearer and the authentic manifestation. We can therefore conclude that we must take the letter literally, because the true letter is such only by the spirit and the spirit itself remains spirit only if taken absolutely literally.

How far we are then from the fading attitude wherein contemporary thought is satisfied and takes refuge when faced with categorical teachings. We will be able to call ourselves Christians only on this twofold condition: that we accept as historical certitudes certain facts what we can call dogmatic, even where the proofs do not pertain to the critique of texts and testimonies: and, on the other hand, that we try to understand the intimate sense, the vital exigencies, the transfigurative character

of these doctrinal truths that never fall into a state of speculative mysteries, but that must pass into us as principles of spiritual vivification and of transformative union.

We shall not examine the questions relative to the proofs and to the integration of the facts on which is grounded Christianity and what is called positive theology. Nor is our role to organize the ensemble of truths to be believed in, nor to go over in the least into the terrain of dogmatic theology. Our task is altogether different. It must consist in justifying the formula according to which human meditation and the philosophical study of naturally inaccessible mysteries is nevertheless fruitful, very illuminating, quite appropriate for showing the conveniences as well as the speculative and practical coherences of the faith. This is a rational task that calls for intelligence, having recourse as well to the experience built up through the exercise of moral and religious life as to the concatenation of truths that support one another and call for one another. This is indeed the ensemble, made of nuances and of clarity, of spiritual tact and of intellectual ordinance, that we can call the Christian spirit. It is in fact of a unique character, as are the equilibrium and the coincidences we have just been indicating, unique above all by the more than human origin of its development, for which consequently no purely exterior effort of natural thought can substitute.

Will it ever be possible to restore a truly Christian vitality and to bring back anew one of these epochs like the one Comte called “organic”, one of those centuries where some spiritual equilibrium can be found between science and the life of the soul, between the general orientation of mores and the frank and integral profession of religion, in the face of such widespread incredulity even among the faithful who,

from their infancy, breathe an atmosphere that evacuates or destroys the vigor of faith? We have to hope so, but above all we must strive to provide this benefit, as desirable for the happiness of individuals and of peoples as it is favorable for the eternal destinies of human persons: but under what form and at what price is such a renovation conceivable, when spirits have become more conscious of critical exigencies, of individual initiatives, of ethnic diversity, of the legitimate originality of traditions and of various civilizations? What can be said is that spiritual unanimity, if it becomes once again possible, will not be as impersonal, as passive, as homogeneous as it may have been in the middle ages, when so many of the problems that have since split us apart were not raised nor even suspected. To these new conditions that we cannot suppress must therefore correspond new methods, a more profound and more reflective way of coming to what is necessary in doctrinal unity, to what is free in accidental forms and to what is unifying thanks to a mutual understanding of the diversities that, far from hindering, serve better to enhance and to love union in charity.

With regard to the basic ground of the teaching that is the indispensable principle of the Catholic unity, how are we to conceive the possibility of bringing so many spirits who are estranged or hostile to our faith to resume contact with questions that presently seem to them obsolete, chimerical or even contrary to the ideal of civilization they are pursuing? This is where our task, as difficult as it is, appears possible and salutary. Without this effort to reintegrate this Christian solution into the dominant preoccupations and to show that it alone responds to all the exigencies of what has been called modern consciousness and of rational and of

moral speculation, we would be unable to veritably revivify all these spirits that think themselves in possession of a response to the sense of life and to the exigencies of thought. What we are therefore looking for principally here, from the philosophical point of view, is the *raison d'être* for the Catholic solution, by showing the ties through which it relates to all the problems left in suspense by the most robust initiatives of our actual civilization. Regarding the objection according to which there are no more Catholics, or almost none, who are truly conscious of their faith, of the difficulties it presents, of the consequences it entails, we must answer by showing that on the contrary the more we become conscious of these difficulties, of its exigencies, the more we perceive the roots it has in universal reality, in man as he is, in society such as the most modern discoveries make it, roots that come from the Christian *sursum* itself.

It has been said that in the already long history of humanity there have appeared, intermittently, four or five periods that can be likened to a fever of growth, in so far as transformative inventions of ideas and mores seem to coalesce around some privileged moment of this history. From the prehistoric era, the use of fire, of arms, of metals gave rise to prodigious initiatives where already on many decisive scores the genius of invention makes itself known. More numerous still discoveries are multiplied at stages we can identify either at the early ages of oriental civilizations, or at the epoch of the Hellenic and the Latin splendor, or at the time of the Renaissance, or during the intense surge of the scientific and industrial transformations of the last century. But it has been remarked also that such periods are ordinarily followed by a sort of concentration, an effort in the renewal of

spiritual values more or less upset by the changes in the material, political and social orders that result from inventions seemingly most foreign to the problems of consciences. Perhaps it would be fitting for us, who have come through so many upsetting crises and who remain ever in full and rapid transformations and upheavals, to hope that the hour is coming for us to see come forth, in another order, not only spiritual restorations, but new instaurations: *instaurare*, that is not simply to redo the past, but to keep up the constant progress of life, to sow tradition anew and to realize the ambition that the [First] Vatican Council took from Vincent de Lérins speaking of a growth of truth better and better known and understood, ever the same *in eodem sensu*, but ever susceptible of being explained and practiced more broadly.

In an enterprise such as this, there is no room for modernism of any kind: on the contrary, we want to justify the most positive assertions of Christian dogma literally. But for these assertions to penetrate consciences such as those formed by our critical sciences, what must be explored are not only the extrinsic arguments, but, if we may say so, the intrinsic meaning of these truths presented for us to adhere to, *rationabile obsequium*, while being careful not to commit against this text the all too frequent counter-interpretation. What St. Paul means, what he requires, is not submission without illumination, arrived at by a deduction that would impose the fact or the formula to be believed; on the contrary, what the original text entails, is an intelligent assent, a justification that no doubt does not in any way suppress its mysterious and supernatural character, but that renders it a value that is assimilatable and nutritive for the spirit no less than for the will. In this sense, all of

Christianity is higher than reason, but nowhere is it contrary to reason; and reason, without transgressing on the mystery of grace, finds in it nevertheless a light in facing certain problems that it can and must raise, but that it cannot and must not resolve itself. For humanity to live more by Christ, it is therefore good to show it ever more to what point it needs Him. Not that we therefore have to speculate on a state of nature that, in fact, has never existed historically and that is no more than a fictitious entity, possible to be sure, but apart from the authentic conditions wherein the activity of men and of peoples is deployed; we have to take ourselves as we are and to make our belief rest on all the foundations that render it both obligatory and salutary.

If anyone wants an example of the penetrations thanks to which ancient truth receives a new luster, we could choose this or that dogma, to all appearances quite remote from our human experience and without any roots in our thought, without any influence on our will, as if it were a matter of an *x* to be admitted without our knowing either its *raison d'être*, or its usefulness for us. In his pragmatism, William James cites as a dogma quite lacking in any philosophical interest, and hence absolutely indifferent in his view, the Trinity or again the Resurrection. But what a profound illusion that is! Through a really penetrating analysis of thought in ourselves and of the life of our spirit, we are led to discover that the very mystery of our intelligence has its origin in this supreme mystery of unity in Trinity, and that the history of the world, from the *fiat lux* all the way to the consummation of the heavenly City, is set in motion, is oriented by what Christian theology and philosophy have said of the creative design: *omnia intendunt assimilari*

*Deo*. To bring all that out radically is therefore to tie nature and man back to their roots and to make them bear their true fruit, which is final union with God; but, on the other hand, it is also to enable us to understand better how the supernatural and quite gratuitous gift of grace has prepared in us the points of insertion, so that, within us, it is not a stranger or an intruder. In this regard, the many efforts of immanentist doctrines have provoked a more explicit consciousness of the supernatural order, but also of the condescendence with which, without being confused with it, it descends into nature, stimulates it, perfects it: a view that sheds light on the very touchy point among many philosophers who are always afraid of repression by religion of the energies and the ascensions of human nature under a yoke that would be truly imposed from the outside and be humiliating for reason and freedom.

Let us take also the fact of the Resurrection, which will allow us to indicate the sorting out to be effected among the ever numerous affirmations or negations surrounding this dogma, which St. Paul speaks of as the keystone in the arch of faith. Let us consider first the fact in itself and in its modalities, in order to see afterwards in what precisely it fundamentally concerns our own history, all of our being, present and future.—In the recent debates, some have seen fit to interpret the Resurrection in a spiritual sense, allowing that on the night of Easter the body of the Afflicted One remained in the hands of the disciples, for whom the true sense of the mystery that had taken place was to let it be understood that the victorious Christ henceforth would have as His only and true organism the entire material universe and, better still, all the faithful who would receive in Him the Eucharistic incarnation

in their living flesh. That is one of the interpretations against which we have absolutely protested: it is according to the letter that, in order not to lose all the spirit, our faith must take the fact of the glorious arising from the tomb: Christ reappeared living and triumphant *in carne propria*.—But is that to say that we must hold ourselves to this brute fact, to see it only with our eyes of flesh, that it is enough to adhere to what could be called in the modern style an exceptional “incidental fact”, and that we are lacking in faith when we examine the new modalities of the life of the Risen One or the characters of the proofs He offers Himself of a physical fact the bearing of which has essentially a supra-sensible character? It has often been remarked that the risen Christ, in letting His material presence be observed, reveals it only to his disciples, intermittently, without allowing anything else to be touched but his wounds, as Pascal notes. Thus it is that the material fact, as real and as consistent as it is as grounding the spiritual sense, calls for being completed, vivified and recognized in a higher order than that of banal history. Saint Matthew expressly declares that, among the witnesses of the Risen One, some believed and some did not, notwithstanding the evidence for all of the corporal presence of Christ. Thomas Aquinas vigorously takes note of the teaching to be drawn from the verification by Thomas Didymus of the wounds of the Savior: *hominem vidit, Deum credens confessus est*. We can indeed observe humanity in flesh and bones; but to recognize the divinity, that is not something only for the senses, only for animal perception, only for positive science, nor even for reasoning alone, but for concrete intelligence, for rightness of soul, for the religious sense that is the most complete and the highest form of reason.



Yet that is not all. It is not enough, to exhaust the content of the Christian spirit, to join the historic truth to the spiritual interpretation, to the ideal value of the facts divinely interpreted; it is necessary also that the invisible realities be understood and admitted as having still much more than the force of an example, than the reality of a teaching, than the value of an ideal we would have to adhere to speculatively and to conform to practically: to restrict ourselves only to this would be to open the door to an entirely subjective symbolism, to a simple moralism that would at the most deserve the name of Christian religiosity, but would not in any way yet be Catholic realism. What then is this essential element that it is sovereignly important to integrate into the living unity of the Christian spirit?—Quite simply it is the properly supernatural efficacy of the divine action, of grace, without which we would believe ourselves only capable, so to speak, of thinking the Christ without living from the very life and the light of Christ. It is not an idealist interpretation or a sentimental effusion—whatever generosity one might otherwise put into it, as we find with so many Protestants—that constitutes this spirit essentially, which is ours only to serve as a docile receptacle, one as it were permeable to the truly supernatural operation, to the truly efficacious and substantial reality of Christ and the Holy Spirit, under the veil of unconsciousness, but with the reality of an effective presence.

With this example—which helps us to understand that Christ cannot be said to be risen except by being something else than a man external to other men, and by being something else than a God external to our present humanity, as a purely transcendent idea would be: we are led to go beyond the objections as well as

superficial and timorous interpretations: as we were told earlier, the Risen One has, in some sense, the entire universe, the total humanity as its glorified body; but this must be understood, not as if it were a question of a purely ideal extension that would depend on the imitative activity of believers in it: it is a question literally of the living person of the incarnate Word, who authentically acts in each one of the beings called to form the mystical body that takes its nourishment from His life, His spirit, His charity.

We see thus in what sense the difficulties raised against Christianity can and must serve to sharpen, to broaden, to increase our intelligence of the riches of Christianity. The difficulties that bother so many of our contemporaries often depend on the incomplete, superficial, falsely literal or falsely spiritual way in which is presented the living and harmonious organism of faith. How then, following these samples that serve to suggest the complexity of this faith, which is still accessible to the simple, must we order the general outline of our study?

### **1) Establish the authenticity of the Christian facts.**

A first task will consist in establishing the authenticity of the Christian facts in what is positively historical about them. This means defining the legitimate role of the critical method, for some eliminate it too much in accepting parasitic facts, without seeing that instead of fortifying they compromise the most indispensable and the most salutary certitudes; others, on the opposite side, have the pretense of restricting the historical certitude of Christian facts only to those that satisfy all the common exigencies of what they call "historicity", without any preoccupation for the

exceptional characters, for the experiential and moral confirmations that Christian life and tradition can bring to events overflowing the habitual conditions falling under critical scrutiny. From the very beginning then we have two obstacles to steer between: that of a pious credulity, that of an unjustified exigency with the pretense of reducing the Christian fact to the purely external side of its appearance in a point of duration and space, by assimilating it to phenomena of the most banal order, which by hypothesis this fact, as Cournot noted, “is not a fact like the others”. Fustel de Coulanges once said to me that that is where the historian must beware of being “philosopher”; and as I showed astonishment at this preventive distinction, the great historian began faulting philosophers for their bad habit of reducing everything to generalities (without any suspicion that there could be a philosophy of the concrete and of the singular); whereas in his eyes the historian must always keep alive in himself what he named the sense of the unique, of what is always different, of what never happens twice. Let us apply to Christian history this excellent golden rule so few have the heroism of conforming themselves to with total impartiality and freedom of spirit.

## **2) Examine the course of dogmatic teaching.**

On the basis of facts, some solidly established, others affirmed from a still historical viewpoint, though still uncontrolled or uncontrollable by the usual methods of the historical sciences, we shall then examine the course that makes up dogmatic teaching. There we find in fact a singular mélange of sensible realities, of intellectual conceptions, of moral interpretations, of ritual precepts, of sacramental

acts whose progressively developed harmony has to be understood in the very perspective where these many lines, at times apparently divergent, form a combination where some claim to find a composite style, deviations and even contradictions, going as far as to oppose the primitive spirit to what they name the ulterior deformations of the Christian spirit.

Very delicate task, very essential, ever actual, and particularly opportune at a time not only when schism and heresy have broken the unity of the Church, but also when, in the Church itself, there are those who have claimed to find, amid the opposed camps, those they call the better Catholics, whereas there can be only one Catholicism, without any need (as Saint Augustine had said and as Benedict XV has repeated) of any epithet, laudative, restrictive or integrist, for designating a spirit whose name already means that it is one and universal. The difficulty to resolve here will then be first to discern the antagonistic tendencies that have more or less clashed over time in the course of Christian history, to look for their origin, their reasons for being and their risks: at that point we shall be able to arrive more effectively at more than a simple conciliation, at a compromise or at a synthesis, for what is fitting is less a spirit of concession than a sense of unity in diversity itself. Indeed if the different nations within humanity have to justly accept oppositions of interest and of ideal to be realized, while practicing reciprocal mutual aid and affection, how much more, in the family of Christ, must there be room for a beautiful variety that, far from preventing, enriches and makes more meritorious the most profound unanimity.



### **3) The proofs of credibility**

Then we shall also scrutinize the reasons for believing, the proofs of credibility in their widest extension. For our contemporaries this is no longer a question of taking arguments from the physical world and from material realities: these two foundations, which remain solid, need to be strengthened against critical undercutting and completed by other arguments our contemporaries are more attracted to, because they give more attention to and have more confidence with regard to human facts, to psychological and social data, to experimental truths and to inductive methods, all things that ancients had no suspicion of or that had no scientific value or objective bearing in their eyes, but that today have more convincing authority and a more decisive influence on spirits. Thus the domain of credibility has been broadened and now takes into account the interior life and properly human data, without falling thereby under the accusation of being variable, arbitrary, subjective, as if our nature were not something regulated, something fundamental, with laws and a solidity we can call objective, inasmuch as the subject itself is indeed something universally valid and substantially true. The Christian spirit penetrates all this; hence it is normal that from it all we would have some light and some nourishing conclusions to draw; that is the field of what has been called the integral apologetic of credibility, the one that brings to light all the rational supports, all the justifications and the verifications of faith, insofar as this faith can be studied in its preambles, in its accompaniments, in its manifestations and its consequences visible from outside in the intellectual order.

#### **4) What remains mysterious and what becomes thereby proof of a new kind**

Can the philosophical study of the Christian sense go further without transgressing on the mystery where the supernatural order dwells inviolably, ever inaccessible to the direct view of consciousness?—It does not seem so at first. And yet there has been traditionally a sort of negative study that consists in drawing from the mystery itself something to respond to the highest exigencies of the religious sense. How often it has been said that false would be a religion that would entail no mystery and would place God at the disposal of our eyes and our hands. But perhaps it is possible to go further and to focus, if we can speak thus, on the contours of the mysterious abyss that no look can fathom in itself, but whose edges have discernible lineaments or else are like lips serving to proclaim the needs of the soul and the exigencies of the highest truth.

We have in this way been able to examine the states and the life of mystics under an aspect that is still philosophical and thus, thanks to observation as well as to reason, to determine the phases of the spiritual life, the aspirations that serve as supports for the graces of illumination and union. For the supernatural is not a creation *ex nihilo*; it is an elevation, a transfiguration of our natural faculties under the motion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit; it is thus legitimate to analyze what in our human faculties is thus elevated, transformable, as a preparation in which we can and must cooperate. De Rémuzat used to say that the habitual exercise of our intelligence is possible only because there are in us “faculties unknown or hardly opened up”. Well, that is the field of investigation that offers itself for a study that is

still hesitant, no doubt, but that may be instructive and pregnant for the philosopher who takes advantage of the testimonies furnished by the true mystics. Besides, all the study of thought leads us to this conclusion, that, through all the avenues of our intelligence as of our will, we are led to the edge of a real abyss that is not exterior to us, but that resides in our inmost selves, in what some call, with Tauler, the depth of the soul, in what has frequently been called, with Francis de Sales, the fine point of the spirit. Always we are, so to speak, separated within ourselves and from ourselves by this mystery of our origins and our destiny: Saint Augustine used to remark appropriately that to go from ourselves to ourselves, from our apparent ego all the way to our fully possessed reality, we must pass through God. There is no complete philosophy if this problem is masked over; and Deschamps insisted on what he called the philosophical truth par excellence, the affirmation of a question that arises invincibly in every conscience and the inability of reason to define and to resolve this problem of problems.

We see thereby how we have to excavate within ourselves the place where the supernatural solution will come to fill the abyss. Let no one say then that it is ridiculous and useless to put so much effort into indicating such an emptiness, into proving such a hole: the acknowledgement of this impossibility the philosopher finds himself in of completing himself, of tying thought and life into one another, is on the contrary the highest service reason can render; and the Christian spirit, which has no greater enemy than the false sufficiency of egoistic autonomy, has no better auxiliary than this sense of mystery and of humility. God, says Scripture, loves empty vases in which to spread Himself. And it is already a beautiful role to



have to shape and to purify these vases of nature and of man that are to contain the divine presence.

### **5) Proof drawn from the real union of these apparently heterogeneous elements**

At this point, have we not reached all of what we can reasonably say of the Christian mystery and of this accord within it of the most positive proofs with the most repressive and the most negative purifications? No, there remains one last task, the one most rarely undertaken and yet perhaps the most recompensing: the task of showing that so many disparate elements, so many aspects, historical, mystical, intellectual, can cohere, unite in one truly simple life that surpasses all justification and remains accessible to the most humble, even to the most ignorant. There are not in man many levels, and the Christian in man does not dwell on a terrace that would leave the natural affairs and faculties in their free state on the lower levels. The Scholastics said with good reason that there are not, in a composite being, however diverse its faculties, many substantial forms: there is only the highest form that somehow digests all the others by penetrating them with its unique vitality.

There is the dominant trait, the incomparable beauty of the Christian spirit, in that, without setting aside, without mutilating the most diverse powers of the “human composite”, it animates the whole man, body and soul, with an inspiration everywhere supernatural and that is thereby only more humanizing. This is one of the points on which it is important to redress many erroneous judgments. Too

readily do we accept the caricature some “saintly folks” paint of the Christian spirit, as if, by having more we could dispense with what is less. To be sure, sanctity can do without genius, and subtleties of the divine spirit often do without protocol niceties; but, as Newman said, Christians who are often treated as the rejects of humanity and find themselves among the lesser folks, are nonetheless, according to his emphatic English expression, *gentlemen*, each in their social status, which means that the refinements of conscience are reflected in acts and in words even among the most rough hewn and least educated. The complete study of the Christian spirit from the philosophical viewpoint that must be ours to its end will therefore strive to trace what there is that is common among all the souls that really live of this spirit and are ready to commune in a charity that is not make-believe and that manages to love in those who appear the most coarse the highest culture of the human soul.

In Christian language, this center where human knowledge never penetrates directly is often called “the heart”, as in the hymn of Pentecost in which the Holy Spirit is called *lumen cordium*; and in the Office of the Sacred Heart, the first words that designated the newly constituted Mass are these: *cogitationes cordis*. It is important to note that this is not about an affective life, a simple sensibility, the intuition of the soul warmed by love; it is about a secret presence of the divine gifts that, invisible in themselves, are illuminating without ever being illuminated; and in the word *heart*, we must understand what remains hidden between the folds of the soul, where our personal look and egoistic affections have no access. In *La Pensée*, we saw that in effect, we could not by any avenue of knowledge or will arrive at interior unity; there remains in us a place accessible and destined only for God. If

God is not admitted by us to occupy this center and to make unity in us, then we have damnation, with disunion of parts, the intestinal discord that divides being like fire disintegrates bodies.