

# Conclusion

## The Spirituality of Work and the Body Social

WE HAVE come now to the end of our enquiry, which is certainly not to say that all has been said that could be said; there are other social functions and other occupations that could also be envisaged *in divinis*. But, to begin with, the subject is new, never before, to the best of our knowledge, having been treated in a systematic fashion and as a whole. We are therefore not in a position to profit from the findings of those who, in going before us, would have opened up the way. Next, we have only included in our examination the occupations of which the symbolism is justified by explicit references to Scripture, which for us is an elementary concern of intellectual prudence when treating a subject belonging, albeit indirectly, to the doctrinal domain. Finally, we think that the examples dealt with are sufficient for our purpose, which was solely to expound the initial foundations for a spirituality of work.

To conclude, what remains is to examine the consequences flowing from the principles we have examined, as they bear upon the domains of individual and social life.

The fundamental guiding principle in our reflections implies that our daily work is a continuation of creation and consequently has its archetype in God, in Divine Activity. It is therefore legitimate to relate the different skills to God, and this is even a veritable necessity, and the only way of correctly conceiving and practicing them.

In fact, our professional activity, which occupies the greater part of our time, is thereby envisaged *sub specie aeternitas*, which in turn allows us to share in the spiritualization of skills and occupations,

that is, the active life, by integrating them into the contemplative life, which is the vision of God. In his occupation, when correctly understood, man seeks to express God by means of his work, while at the same time being well aware that the occupation is not an end in itself. He knows that in his occupation, he approaches an image of God, but also that God is not fixed in this image or role. At the end of the inward journey, God 'shatters the occupations,' as He shatters every symbol, finally, to reveal the Ineffable. Referring skills to divine archetypes allows all those who practice them not only to 'offer' their work to God, which goes without saying, but to 'sacralize' it to its very core, thanks to the symbol which endows it with the spiritual influence issuing from its archetype. In these conditions, there is no longer any possibility of divorce between an action that is accomplished, which, in itself, appears more or less neutral from a spiritual point of view, and the spiritual intention with which it is performed. Symbolism already integrates action spiritually, but that is not all; it essentially serves to maintain the right attitude of soul and spirit during the course of the work. In fact, it is not only the actions and tools of a trade that need to be sacralized, but action itself, man's entire active life at its source. Indeed, it is said that 'one should pray without ceasing,' prayer in all its forms being an expression of the contemplative life, itself the very goal of human life. Consequently, action, which entirely fills human life, should also become contemplative after a certain fashion.

All normal civilizations have thought and said as much in one way or another. The clearest and most detailed expression of this teaching is that transmitted to us from India in the narrative of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. The latter untiringly reminds us, from beginning to end, that God is the sole Agent, that all our acts should be referred to Him and that, consequently, our attitude should be one of *detachment*. It is upon this teaching that the spirituality of *Karma Yoga*, the Yoga of Action, is founded. We need to be *detached* from the goals and results of our actions; we should not act with the goal in mind and in view of our interest or our pleasure: above all we should act to accomplish all that doing the will of God requires. Obviously it is not a question of despising the pleasure or interest engendered by an act, but only of according them second place.

This basic doctrine, which underlies the spiritual method of *Karma Yoga* is, of course, also that of Christian spirituality, as of every method authentically having in view the 'sacralization of work', the sanctification of our actions and therefore, in the final count, of our life. This, in Christianity, is called the spirituality of the 'active life', as opposed to the spirituality of the 'contemplative life', traditionally symbolized by Martha and Mary, the two sisters of Lazarus.

Marco Pallis has correctly defined the conception of the active life in his small book mentioned in our preface. There he writes that, 'for the act to be effective it must be performed not for its own sake, but in the name of the All-giver and in imitation, on the relative plane, of the archetype of All-giving on the universal plane.'<sup>1</sup> If in fact action as such distracts from the essential, which is contemplation, it is necessary to find a means of transforming it in some measure into contemplation, which is life in the continual presence of God. In sum, it is a question of *sanctifying*, or better, *sacralizing* action. Now this sacralization can only be effectively realized through a gesture or a word, which integrates the action, itself initially of the purely human order, into the divine order. This gesture, which is nearly always accompanied with a word, is called a *rite*.

What needs to be thoroughly understood, however, is that this is not just any gesture or word. At issue here is a gesture or word of non-human origin, one that is transmitted by a sacred tradition, and which, by that very fact, vehicles a 'spiritual influence' and establishes contact with the divine world. Most of the time, the rite consists in saying one is going to act 'in the Name of God'. 'And whatsoever ye do in word or deed,' says St Paul, 'do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him' (Col. 3:17). In the same way, the Muslim is invited, before commencing any activity whatsoever, to pronounce a similar formula: *Bismillah*, 'In the Name of God'.

This formula, 'in the Name of God', is full of meaning. It implies, in fact, that we recognize God as the sole source of both the energy enabling us to do what we are doing and the gift that we receive. In doing so, we become, as St Paul further says, 'laborers together with

1. *The Way and the Mountain*, p47.

God' (1 Cor 3:9 and 10:31). In the same sense, the ancient Greeks used to say *syn theo prattein*, 'to work with God'; an expression used by Proclus in the fourth century CE as an invitation at the beginning of his commentaries on Plato's *Dialogues*, but also, eight centuries earlier, and in a very different context, by Xenophon in his *Economics*, a treatise on domestic management.

A very good example of the ritual formula 'In the Name of God' sacralizing an action can be found in the saying of grace at the beginning of a meal. By doing so, one reinstates the very material, but necessary, act of eating within the great reality of universal life, that work of the Holy Spirit at the level of the visible world. This small domestic liturgy is incorporated into the great Liturgy. In fact, the Divine Activity, through the Liturgy, the Eucharistic Liturgy above all, integrates all human activity, harmonizing it with that of God. What is more, this Eucharistic Liturgy, in its cosmic aspect, realizes the redemptive integration of the cosmos and, in principle, re-establishes order in nature, which, according to St Paul, 'is actually groaning.' For the Christian, the Great Liturgy should become the model and sanctifying instrument of his whole active life. In that regard, a prayer from the Roman Missal can be of use, for it says everything: 'Let Thy Grace, Lord, inspire our actions and support them to the end, that all our works may find their source and fulfilment in Thee.' In its conciseness, this vigorous text, which one is tempted to describe as struck after the fashion of a medal, perfectly expresses the whole of the spirituality of the active life. It unfolds, in fact, according to the movement of the divine cycle: that which comes to man from God returns to Him, at the same time leading the human subject back with itself. And this is all the more remarkable, in that we are dealing here with a 'Post Communion', that is, a prayer recited at the end of the Divine Liturgy asking God for grace to respond to what is precisely one of the fruits of this liturgy, or the Mass. Because the Mass is for the Christian the means of sanctifying his whole life, *including his active life*.

Moreover, the idea of the divine origin of the act, thus conceived, should be kept in mind throughout its accomplishment, such that it aims at the goal, which is God, instead of returning to itself, and so avoids the human subject's returning to his ego. Such is the function

## *Divine Craftsmanship*

of the symbol. It is the tool linking the material to the spiritual, and in a way constitutes the bridge permitting circulation between them. The symbol perpetuates and radiates the "blessing" of the rite for the whole duration of the act.

When faithful to its mission, the craft guild in a traditional society ensures this sanctification of work for its members, through its particular conception, symbols, and rites, joined to the central rite of the Christian tradition.

And this leads us to recall briefly how such a society was actually organized. This conception, however, is an idea so utterly strange to the modern mentality, that what we are going to say will surprise and astonish some. This is why we wish to dwell a little more upon it and show, at least in outline, in what a traditional social community based on this symbolism consists.

To do so, we shall start by recapitulating the 'occupations of God' we have studied. We saw Him successively as scribe, physician, warrior, potter, weaver, architect, carpenter, shepherd, mariner, fisherman, hunter, gardener, farmer and wine-grower. We have deliberately arranged these occupations in their logical or rather hierarchical order. In fact, the occupations of scribe and physician are, as we said, attached to the priestly function, as the bearing of arms is to the royal, whereas all the others belong to the functions reserved to the people properly so-called: the merchants, artisans, and peasants.

What emerges is a grouping in accordance with the three 'castes' that constitute the natural social hierarchy: the Priesthood, the Monarchy, and the People. In effect, the Priesthood encompasses everything relating to the teaching of doctrine and of the sciences, subject in their entirety to Revealed Doctrine, and to worship. The Monarchy, which derives its legitimacy from the Priesthood while remaining autonomous in its sphere, is the legislative, administrative, judicial, and military function. The People, with all their intermediate bodies, also hierarchically ordered, have as their function the more or less material work necessary to the life of society.

The word 'caste' will perhaps offend certain readers, for it currently has a bad reputation. Let us explain its use. We are not here to defend the caste system, such as it might exist in this or that country

and in sometimes very complicated circumstances, and which can in certain cases be criticized. But, on the other hand, we are keen to affirm that, in principle, the system of castes or of hierarchical orders, which does not necessarily mean that they are closed, is not only legitimate, but is even the only legitimate one. This is obvious if we take the trouble to remember that caste, in itself, denotes nothing but social function, determined on the one hand by the natural needs of the community, and on the other by the particular nature of the individual 'called' to this or that occupation. The castes, in a very general sense, are therefore integral parts of a natural society. And this is so much so that when, by some constitutional artifice, they are suppressed, it is not long before they reappear in another form. Compared to the first, the new form is in general much degraded, for the old hierarchy, based on the relative values of functions and services, now finds itself replaced by the most monstrous pseudo-hierarchy founded on money, or in a more general way, on 'economics'.

But let us return to the traditional system of castes. On the social plane, it is the reflection of the different divine activities *ad extra*, therefore a reflection of the Logos considered as the *First Born*, that is to say Archetype, of *Creation*.

This is expressed very well in figurative form by the Hindu myth of the origin of castes.<sup>2</sup> We learn that when Brahma created man he created him fourfold: there were originally four men. First, there was Brahman, who emerged from the mouth of Brahma and was given the Vedas, or Scriptures, so that he could teach and perform the rites. Next, Kshatriya issued from the right hand of God; his role was to defend his brother so that the latter could peacefully apply himself to devotion. Third, was Vaishya, who came forth from the right thigh to work and so feed his two elder brothers. Finally, Shudra appeared from the right foot; his job was to serve the first three. In the other versions of the myth, these four men are the sons of Purusha, who, in the Hindu tradition, corresponds to

2. The myth appears in different forms in the *Purusha-sukta* of the Rig-Veda (x, 90), the *Vishnu-Purana* (1, 6), and above all the *Laws of Manu* (*Manava-dharma-shastra*, 1, 31).

## Divine Craftsmanship

Universal Man or the Creator-Logos; this second version is in fact more exact.

The first caste, that of the 'clergy and scholars', represents contemplation, knowledge, and spiritual authority. The second embraces action in its highest form, that is, the government of men, which is temporal power. The third is devoted to the more material activity of the exploitation of the world, that is, economic, artisanal, and agricultural activity; finally, to the last caste are reserved the least noble activities, the servile and purely material and mechanical tasks. The purpose of the symbolic localization of these four castes in the four tiers of the body of Brahma—mouth, hand, thigh, and foot—is to help reveal the hierarchy. However, the fact that these four castes all issue from one and the same divine body teaches that they are all to some degree reflections of divine activities.

If, for the purposes of explanation, we have used the Hindu system, this is certainly not out of a taste for the exotic, which has nothing to do with this sort of question. It is simply because this system, its principles perfectly modeled on the natural order, helps with both the general understanding of the caste system in itself and its justification. In particular, it enables us to shed light on the social organization of Christianity, which, in the Middle Ages and particularly up to the revolution of 1789, was comparable to it.

This organization comprised three 'orders': the Clergy and Scholars, the Nobility and Knights, and the People, the latter including the fourth Hindu caste, the *shudras*, which changes nothing essential in the system.<sup>3</sup> By conforming to the universal and immemorial tradition, this organization permitted, within the bounds of earthly possibility, the realization of a normal social and political order.

In order to grasp the profound meaning and nature of this, let us compare the scheme of the Hindu castes with that of the social functions in their hierarchic order. We have seen that occupations are divided according to the three fundamental castes, the Priesthood, the Monarchy, and the People. Since, in a certain way, these occupations have their archetype in God himself, this amounts to

3. After a certain fashion, but only after a certain fashion, it was the *serfs* who corresponded to the *shudras*.

saying that the different social functions reflecting the divine functions, have, in a way, 'emerged' from God, like the four original men—the 'fathers' of the castes—from the body of Brahma. In Christian terms, this means that we can consider all these functions as contained 'eminently' in God, and that the *body social* is a reflection of the *Body of Christ*.

And this indeed was the way it was understood in Christianity. This social order was founded on the dogma of the Mystical Body, which corresponds *mutatis mutandis* to the teaching that sees the castes as emerging from the body of Brahma. Thus, society was conceived to be a *body*, in the full sense of the word, a fact that is often lost to sight; a multiple body, analogous to its model, the Mystical Body, Archetype of Creation, Universal Man, or again, the Pleroma. Symbolically, the Priesthood, or the hierarchic Church, corresponds to the head of Christ; the Monarchy and Knights to His arms; and the People and economic functions to His abdomen and lower limbs.

The quasi-sacramental image of this social order appeared in the seating arrangements of the faithful inside the basilica or cathedral, itself an architectural image of the Pleroma. At great feasts, the Bishop, representing the spiritual authority, sat in the choir (the head), the King and Nobles at the entrance to the choir and filling the transept (the arms), and the People in the nave, with the master artisans—the social authorities—at their head.<sup>4</sup>

Thus an organic order existed, an organism at once temporal and spiritual, a prolongation or reflection on the social plane of the Heavenly Jerusalem, which is the fulfillment of the Pleroma.<sup>5</sup> It was a normally living and breathing organism: the impulse from the spiritual caste descended and circulated through, and thanks to, the subordinate orders, which, like 'relays', placed the sacred truths and values from the head within the reach of everyone, these truths alone having the ability to order all contingent activities to eternal salvation, the essential goal and final end of temporal society.

4. L. Lallemand, *La Vocation de l'Occident* (1947), p.200.

5. Significant, in this regard, is the designation of the king as 'Lieutenant of God' and 'Vicar Temporal of Christ'.



### *Divine Craftsmanship*

Clearly, it is at the level of these 'relays' that the symbolism of the occupations played its role, symbolism that, in some measure, conveyed spiritual grace on the plane of action.

Such is the model of every society worthy of the name. In its hierarchy founded on the natural order, an order ready to receive supernatural illumination, it knows nothing, to be sure, of egalitarian and libertarian myths. Nevertheless, it guarantees to the extent humanly possible, not only true equity, which consists in each finding within his own order the means of self-realization, but true freedom, which consists in determining the means of attaining the spiritual end of man in his passage through this world. Social subversion is born, precisely, in the overturning of this authentic hierarchy and its replacement with a false one of a materialist nature.

Any restoration of society and work which does not start from these principles—intangible as they are, and whatever their adaptation to the present conditions of the world, certainly different from those of days gone by—is bound to fail. We hope some day to show this in a more specialized study. In fact, the present book which, as we said at the beginning, is only intended to be a collection of preliminary reflections, logically demands two lines of development, one bearing upon the spirituality of the active life and the other upon the restoration of a sacred sociology and politics. God willing, they shall be undertaken.