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Metaphysical certainty is not God, though it contains something of Him. This is why Sufis accompany even their certainties with this formula: “And God is more wise” (*wa ’Llahu a’lam*).

The cult of intelligence and mental passion distances man from truth: intelligence narrows as soon as man puts his trust in it alone; mental passion chases away intellectual intuition just as the wind blows out the light of a candle.

Monomania of the mind, with the unconscious pretension, prejudice, insatiability, and haste that are its concomitants, is incompatible with sanctity; indeed sanctity introduces into the flux of thought an element of humility and charity, hence of calm and generosity; far from interfering with the spiritual momentum or the sometimes violent force of truth, this element delivers the mind from the vexations of passions, guaranteeing both the integrity of thought and the purity of inspiration.

According to the Sufis mental passion must be ranked as one of the associations with Satan, like other forms of passional “idolatry”; it cannot directly have God for its object; if God were its direct object, it would lose its specifically negative characteristics. Furthermore it does not contain within itself any principle of repose, for it excludes all consciousness of its own destitution.

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We must beware of two things: first of replacing God—in practice if not in theory—with the functions and products of the Intellect or considering Him only in connection with this faculty; second of putting the “mechanical” factors of spirituality in place of human values—the virtues—or considering virtues only in relation to their “technical” utility, not their beauty.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> According to Eckhart’s conception, the sufficient reason for the virtues is not primarily their extrinsic usefulness but their beauty.

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Intelligence has only one nature, luminosity; but it has diverse functions, different modes of working that appear as so many particular intelligences. Intelligence with a “logical”, “mathematical”—one might say “abstract”—quality is insufficient for reaching all aspects of the real; it is impossible to insist too often on the importance of the “visual” or “aesthetic” function of the intellective faculty. Everything in reality resembles an interplay of alternatives between what is determined in advance—starting from principles—and what is incalculable and in some way unforeseeable, and we must come to know this by concrete “assimilation”, not abstract “discernment”.<sup>2</sup>

In reflecting upon formal elements it would be a serious disadvantage to be deprived of this aesthetic function of the Intellect. A religion is revealed not only by its doctrine but also by its general form, which has its own characteristic beauty and is reflected everywhere, from “mythology” to art. Sacred art expresses the Real in relation to a particular spiritual vision. Aesthetic intelligence sees manifestations of the Spirit in the same way the eye sees flowers or jewels: for example, in order to understand Buddhism in depth—if one is not born a Buddhist—it is not enough to study its doctrine; it is also necessary to penetrate the language of Buddhist beauty as it appears in the sacramental image of the Buddha or in such features as the “Flower Sermon”.<sup>3</sup>

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The aesthetic function of intelligence—if we may call it that for lack of a better term—enters not only into the form of every spiritual

<sup>2</sup> This is the perspective of Chaitanya and Ramakrishna, who would fall into ecstasy (*samādhi*) on seeing a beautiful animal. In Sufism similar examples of “spiritual aesthetics” are to be found in Omar ibn al-Farid and Jalal al-Din Rumi.

<sup>3</sup> Without saying a word the Buddha lifted a flower, and this gesture was the origin of Zen. Let us recall here that the Buddhas save not only by their teaching but also by their superhuman beauty, which is perpetuated—in a manner half concrete, half abstract—in sacramental images.

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manifestation but also into the process of its manifestation: truth must be enunciated not only with a sense of proportion but also according to a certain rhythm. One cannot speak of sacred things in just any manner, nor can one speak of them without moderation.

Every manifestation has laws the intelligence must observe when manifesting itself, or else truth will suffer.

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The Intellect is not cerebral nor is it specifically human or angelic; all beings “possess” it. If gold is not lead, this is because it “knows” the Divine better; its “knowledge” is in its very form, and this amounts to saying that the form does not belong to it in its own right since matter cannot know. Nonetheless we can say that the rose differs from the water lily by its intellectual particularity, by its “way of knowing”, and thus by its mode of intelligence. Beings have intelligence in their forms to the extent they are “peripheral” or “passive” and in their essences to the extent they are “central”, “active”, “conscious”.

A noble animal or a lovely flower is “intellectually” superior to a man who is base.

God reveals Himself to the plant in the form of the light of the sun. The plant irresistibly turns itself toward the light; it could not be atheistic or impious.

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The infallible “instinct” of animals is a lower “intellect”; man’s Intellect may be called a higher “instinct”. Reason stands in a certain sense between instinct and Intellect and owes its misfortunes to the fact that it constitutes a sort of “Luciferian” duplication of the divine Intelligence, the only intelligence there is.

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Knowledge of facts depends upon contingencies, which cannot enter into principal knowledge. The plane of facts is in certain respects

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opposed to that of principles in the sense that it includes modes and imponderables that are at the opposite extreme from the wholly mathematical rigor of universal laws; at least this is so in appearance, for it goes without saying that universal principles do not contradict themselves; even beneath the veil of the inexhaustible diversity of what is possible, their immutability can always be discerned, provided the intelligence finds itself in suitable circumstances.

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Although the Intellect is, so to speak, sovereign and infallible on its own ground, it can exercise its discernment on the level of facts only in a conditional manner; moreover God may intervene on this level with particular and at times unpredictable manifestations of His will, and this is something principial knowledge can verify only *a posteriori*.

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Hidden causes—whether cosmic or human—must be acknowledged wherever their intervention results from the nature of things, but not for the sake of satisfying a postulate whose metaphysical basis and practical bearing have been lost from view. When we see a waterfall, we have no reason for thinking it is moved by a magical force, even when a saint is drowned in it. The fact that there are some men who produce evil more consciously than others does not authorize us in thinking that all human evil is a conscious production with regard to its scope and repercussions and still less that every work having a negative aspect was undertaken for the sake of this aspect. Human evil is intentional in relation to its immediate object but not in relation to its cosmic significance; if this were not the case, evil would end up being dissolved in knowledge. If Voltaire had foreseen the ills of the twentieth century, he would have become a Carthusian.

A true principle always corresponds to a necessity, and on the other hand it never excludes a possibility; every postulate is false if it does not refer to a necessity that is divine, natural, traditional, or spiritual—according to the case or point of view—or if it excludes some possibility inherent in the order with which it is concerned.

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From another angle the principal truth of a postulate must not be confused with some particular factual application even when this represents a relative norm. Reality is differentiated, comprising diverse combinations; one can never escape the necessity of a direct insight into the spiritual or cosmic factors whose nature one seeks to define.

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What is better in principle does not always appear so in fact; the virtuous act of a simple and ignorant man may have a secret quality that makes it more pleasing to God—not more than metaphysics in itself, certainly, but more than the soul of some particular metaphysician.

In a general way the plane of facts has a tendency to escape the determinism of principles, and this is because of the limitlessness of universal Possibility. This truth provides a safeguard against illusions and creates an atmosphere of circumspect humility, which alone allows us to concern ourselves with wisdom fruitfully and with impunity.

When a fact seems to contradict a principle, it is actually manifesting another principle, which of necessity corroborates the first and is therefore an aspect of it.

To interpret facts in relation to principles is quite a different thing from distorting them in order to adjust them to preconceived conceptions.

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The Biblical idea of “justice” sums up the fundamental qualities of a man centered on God. This justice is made of intelligence and generosity: the primordial object of intelligence is Divinity, and the object of generosity is man, the neighbor.

Generosity may be a matter of sentiment just as intelligence may be a matter of thought, but intelligence unaccompanied by generosity becomes fallible, and generosity lacking in intelligence becomes arbitrary. True knowledge does not dry up the soul, and true charity does not dissolve truth.

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What is human must never be confused with what is spiritual: one who finds that he is the receptacle of the Spirit of truth should never forget that the receptacle is not the Spirit. It is true that the Spirit may burn and consume the recipient, but only if he is not closed to the influx of Light. “God alone is good.”

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In order to be protected against unconscious presumption, a man may begin with the idea that the human recipient is bad, the Spirit alone being good. But he may also begin with the idea that the recipient is whatever he pleases—“good” or “bad” or both at once—and that the Spirit alone is real, or truly the “Self”.

The unconscious presumption of an intelligent man often has its occasional cause in the unintelligence of other people, which he is bound to observe and from which he is bound to suffer. But he must never forget that the one-eyed man is king among the blind.

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The spontaneous manifestation of truth implies an aspect of incorruptibility and an aspect of generosity: without the first truth is engulfed and finally dissolved in some absurdity or other, and without the second it loses the grace that nourishes it and ends by giving rise to error.

It could also be said that truth includes an aspect of self-respect and an aspect of humility.

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Doctrine, in relation to which individuals are of no account, must not be confused with doctrinal functions involving the individual substance. Light is colorless in itself, but it may be transmitted through a crystal that is more or less transparent or through a crystal that is either white or colored.

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Strictly speaking, doctrinal knowledge is independent of the individual. But its actualization is not independent of the human capacity to act as a vehicle for it; he who possesses truth must nonetheless merit it even though it is a free gift. Truth is immutable in itself, but in us it lives because we live.

If we want truth to live in us, we must live in it.

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Knowledge saves only on condition that it engages all that we are: only when it constitutes a path that works and transforms and wounds our nature as the plough wounds the soil.

This means that intelligence and metaphysical certainty alone do not save and do not of themselves prevent titanic falls. This explains the psychological and other precautions with which every tradition protects the gift of doctrine.

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When metaphysical knowledge is effective it produces love and destroys presumption. It produces love: that is, the spontaneous directing of the will toward God and the perception of “myself”—and of God—in the neighbor.

It destroys presumption: for knowledge does not allow a man to overestimate himself or underestimate others; by reducing to ashes all that is not God, it orders all things.

Everything Saint Paul says about charity concerns effective wisdom, for this wisdom is love; he opposes it to theory to the extent this theory is considered a human concept. The Apostle desires that truth should be contemplated with our whole being, and he calls this totality of contemplation “love”.

Metaphysical knowledge is sacred. It is the property of sacred things to require of man all that he is.

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Intelligence, as soon as it distinguishes, perceives proportions—if one may put it this way. The spiritual man integrates these proportions into his will, his soul, his life.

All defects are disproportions; they are errors that are lived. To be spiritual means not to deny with one's "being" what is affirmed with one's "knowledge", that is, what is accepted by intelligence.

Truth lived: incorruptibility and generosity.

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Since ignorance is all that we are and not merely our thinking, knowledge will also be all that we are to the extent our existential modalities are by their nature able to participate in truth.

Human nature contains obscurities that no intellectual certainty could *ipso facto* eliminate.

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The knowledge man enjoys—or can enjoy—is at once animal, human, and divine: animal insofar as man knows through the senses; human when he knows by reason; and divine in the contemplative activity of the Intellect. Now man cannot be divine without first being human; the Intellect, in the direct and higher meaning of the word—for the reason and senses are also, though indirectly, derived from the Intellect—cannot be actualized in a being that does not possess what is supplied by reason in the human domain. In the same way the uncreated Intellect, of which Meister Eckhart speaks, is not accessible to man without the created Intellect, which far from being identical with the rational faculty is as it were its center and secret, the fine point turned toward the infinite Light.

Man knows through the senses, brain, and heart, which correspond respectively to his animality, humanity, and divinity.

Reason is like air, without which fire—intellection—cannot manifest itself discursively, but which can extinguish this same fire.



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One must distinguish between intellectuality and intellectualism: intellectualism appears as an end in itself; it is an intelligence contented with its multiple visions of the true and forgetful that it is not alone in the world and that life is passing; it practically makes itself God. The intellectualist acts as if he had concluded a security pact with the Eternal.

Intellectualism cannot fail to engender errors. It confers self-complacency and abolishes fear of God; it introduces a sort of worldliness into the intellectual domain. Its good side is that it may speak of truth; its bad side is the manner in which it speaks of it. It replaces the virtues it lacks by sophistries; it lays claim to everything but is in fact ineffectual.

In intellectualism a capacity to understand the most difficult things readily goes hand in hand with an inability to understand the simplest things.

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Pure intellectuality is as serene as a summer sky—with a serenity that is at once infinitely incorruptible and infinitely generous.

Intellectualism, which “dries up the heart”, has no connection with intellectuality.

The incorruptibility—or inviolability—of truth involves neither contempt nor avarice.

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What is the certitude possessed by man? On the plane of ideas it may be perfect, but on the plane of life it rarely pierces through illusion.

Everything is ephemeral; every man must die. No one is unaware of this, and no one knows it.

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A man may have a completely illusory interest in adopting the most transcendent ideas and readily believe himself to be superior to someone else who, not having this interest—perhaps because he is too intelligent or noble to have it—is sincere enough not to adopt them, though he may all the same be better able to understand them than the one who does adopt them. Man does not always accept truth because he understands it; often he believes he understands it because he wants to accept it.

People often discuss truths, whereas they should limit themselves to discussing tastes and tendencies.

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It is possible to speak of “intellectual pride”—although there is a contradiction in this expression<sup>4</sup>—when a man imputes disproportionate virtues and rights to his intelligence and when acuteness of intelligence provokes in the mind a passional activity contrary to contemplation, cutting it off from the remembrance of God.

Acuteness of intelligence is a blessing only when it is balanced by greatness and gentleness of soul; it should not appear as a disruption of equilibrium, an excess splitting a man in two. A gift of nature requires complementary qualities permitting its harmonious manifestation; otherwise there is a risk of the light becoming mingled with darkness.

<sup>4</sup> Strictly speaking, we should call this “intellectualist pride”.