

# Sacred and Profane.

## Essential ambiguity and vital necessity of the Sacred.

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### Abstract

In a situation in which the market economy is regarded as so important and decisive as to induce the emergence of a market society, the notion of the «sacred» becomes essential. The market is perfectly legitimate as a forum of negotiations, but it has a purely instrumental value. A market society is a *contradiction in terminis*. Only the concept of the Sacred, despite its ambiguity, can preserve and enhance the final values on which a society is built (justice, love, human recognition, interpersonal dialogue).

**Keywords:** market; sacred versus profane; interaction; dialogue.

### The crisis of scientific rationality

In its reductive meaning, scientific rationality has defeated itself. Having accurately defined the field of research with the purpose of confirming its own certainties, and by eliminating as mere superstitions or irrational residues and knowledge which did not seem to it open to precise measurement or purely quantitative verification, scientific rationality has ended up by undergoing a drastic impoverishment. It has finished by being technically perfect and humanly deprived of meaning. It has no longer either the courage or, perhaps, the ability or imagination to pose the basic questions. With a neurotic obsessiveness, it restricts itself to checking the internal correctness of its own operations. It decides through procedure. Thus, science has lapsed into scientism. Rationalistic reason has burnt its bridges with the everyday. In the name of absolute rationalism it has ceased to be reasonable. It has been turned into a new dogmatism.

However, daily life continues. Questions and disquiets multiply. The twenty-first century is just beginning. Signs are awaited. Christ's lapidary phrase, almost contemptuous, comes to mind: «This generation looks for a sign... There will be no other sign given save that of Jonah». It is probable that the twentieth century, the century of technique, of the controlled splitting of the atom and of the moon-landing, will be remembered as the age of astrology, of meta-scientific mysteries, and life beyond life.

Contrary to what the enlightenment and its not-always-aware modern followers believed, the gap between rational and irrational has not only not been broadened, but has in fact become uncertain. This is not so much the unexpected result of a «dialectics of enlightenment», about which Horkheimer and Adorno wrote. It is rather

the increasing awareness that not everything which is empirically unverifiable is necessarily pure superstition, and that, moreover, superstition itself refers to a world of traditional knowledge, of customary behaviour and of need for existential significance legitimated by a double basic function: psychological assurance and cognitive data as a technique of survival.

The awareness cannot be said to be satisfied by the notion prevailing today of the crisis of classical scientific rationality. This, in fact, is another «internal» conception of the crisis. In other words, scientific rationality is believed to be in crisis because it is no longer able, if it ever was, to dispense «laws» with universal validity, necessary and necessitating, according to a rigorous causal schema, and thus able to explain exhaustively the phenomena being explored. In the framework of this argument, the theory of relativity and the principle of indeterminacy are the essential reference points. Nor are we dealing with the «crisis» of European sciences theorized by Edmund Husserl. It is true that «the debate on physical science» between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, discussed under the rubric of «the crisis of the sciences», marks the crisis of the traditional image according to which scientific theories are destined to explain natural phenomena through schemes of a logical and compelling nature in conformity with the so-called «natural laws of thought». There was insistence on saying that the principles of physical theory «must be defined and justified in terms of *rational evidence* [...]. By putting in question the abstract and *a priori* schemas, relativistic theory has restored many degrees of freedom to intellectual conduct and the scientific imagination»<sup>1</sup>.

However, the question goes beyond the republic of scholars. It concerns average opinion. It has a social value in the real sense. It had been presumed that with the unstoppable progress of the sciences, the division between culture as reality and rational acquisition, and religion as the area of mystery and the «sacred» must be considered exhausted and that between religion and culture there must thus necessarily open a breach; and that furthermore, as a direct consequence, with the march of progress and the ever renewed victories of science, the sacred should now be considered definitively in decline, near to death and victim of an irreversible eclipse.

### **The supposed eclipse of the sacred**

In view of the available data, never has a «scientific» prediction seemed so hasty<sup>2</sup>. Not only are we *not* dealing with an eclipse of the sacred, but it is, rather, rationalistic reason which has entered into deep crisis and is demonstrating probably

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<sup>1</sup> See *Crisi della ragione*, Ed. A. Gargani, Turin, Einaudi, 1979, pp. 23-24 (emphasis in original).

<sup>2</sup> I should like to refer to the critical questions posed in my «The Paradox of Sacred and the Destiny of Reason», in *Social Research*, Spring 1981. For a fuller examination see the introduction to F. Ferrarotti, G. De Lutiis, M. I. Maciotti and L. Catucci, *Forme del sacro in un'epoca di crisi*, Naples, Liguori, 1979.

insurmountable limits. If the scope of research should not be unduly restricted on the basis of the «ethnocentric syndrome» referred to earlier, it appears that neither the sacred, nor religion understood as the structure established for its «administration», can be said to be in crisis or in «eclipse». Rather, the opposite is true. However, in this regard the doubts, expressed by careful observers of the religious phenomenon in the contemporary world, concerning the somewhat improvised, not to say extempore, character of many modern theories about the so-called «revival» of the sacred are to be taken seriously<sup>3</sup>.

It is undeniable that many socio-psychological and anthropologico-cultural studies appear affected by what I call the herd instinct; that is to say, they operate and are developed not on the basis of a profound, problematic core which thus *necessitates* them as obligatory and not chance movements, but rather they obey the cultural fashions of the moment and their capricious excitability, more sensitive to the commercial needs of the market than to those of a precise theoretical framework. It so happened that in the current intellectual debate – both on the rigorous conceptual level of the specialized reviews and on the more catchy one of the dailies and weeklies – the dilemma was many times confronted: crisis or revival of the sacred? Which of these two theories is confirmed by the facts?

In reality, neither the one nor the other. The famous cry of alarm concerning a supposed eclipse of the sacred in industrial civilization has been shown to be one as evocative as it is groundless. The sacred does not return, but for the simple reason that it was never eclipsed; indeed it was and remained at the centre of the legitimating support of various forms of power – political, social, cultural, and economic<sup>4</sup>. It is a fact of great importance which should be noted and explored, that what happened accompanying modern, greater mobility, both vertical and horizontal, in large human groups, is a profound evolution of the values which as a motivating framework govern social behaviour. Alarm over the supposed crisis of the sacred according to this analytical perspective appears as the defensive and extra-scientific reaction of those social groups which, faced with the growth of new forms of religion, in particular as personal

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<sup>3</sup> See F. Gentiloni in *Il Manifesto*, 22 february 1979; in opposition see, among others, R. Peretta, «Il sacro ritorna, ma è diverso», *Il Lavoro*, 5 September 1979.

<sup>4</sup> See in this respect I. Magli, *Logica del sacro e logica del potere*, in *Forme evolutive dei valori*, ed. F. Ferrarotti, Milan, Angeli, 1982. «Only if we gather together all the phenomena which are usually assigned to the area of the sacred (and also many which do not seem to belong there) into a closely related and significant whole of 'power', and further attempt to understand what power is from this point of view, can we finally identify how vast is the context of sacredness, infiltrating into all aspects of life in society, the connecting thread of all features of a culture, heavily coercive for all individuals. Why has this fact [...] escaped us till now? [...] I think the answer is to be found in two main factors: 1) never having looked at culture really as a *global model* [...]; 2) always having assumed – even scholars who felt themselves and announced themselves to be 'lay' – that the Christian religion was a nature quite different from any other religion. This assumption originated in the fact – anyway quite evident – that Christianity, however lay the scholars were, still continued to belong to their cultural world and thus, as European, had necessarily to be different, superior to all the other cultural worlds», pp. 22-23 (emphasis in original).

religiosity and non-institutionalized community, glimpse the decline of religion as bureaucratized ritualism and power structure<sup>5</sup>.

The phenomenon of the persistence of the sacred and the social function of religion deserves a more in-depth examination. From the first publication of some studies on Weber<sup>6</sup>, I have tried to set down the strong points but also the weakness and limits of classical rationalism in terms both of Enlightenment reason and of the Marxist approach. In this perspective, Weber naturally emerges in his tortured striving, at one Calvinist and neo-stoic, as the ideal witness of the crisis of the European consciousness, intrinsically linked in its own historical formation to a rational calculation aimed at the exorcism of what is not reducible to a mathematically demonstrable quantity and therefore logically constricted to confine itself to the internal checking of its own operations (technico-formal rationality according to the schema of the means-end relationship). It has or cannot have anything to say, meanwhile, about its own ends, their desirability or undesirability; that is to say, about the collective aims of social action in which, in specific historic contexts, human co-existence is present (substantial rationality). Missing this basic distinction has led even careful and methodologically well-endowed analysts to believe that with the progress of technology, and the modernization and industrialization of society, the sacred would tend to narrow its area and enter a phase of eclipse.

We have already noted that the analytical and interpretative mistake was here linked to a double perspective which was severely limiting: a) in the first place, there was a tendency to make «sacred» and «religious», or the sacred and its administrative-hierocratic apparatus, coincide; b) in the second place, there was a tendency to equate church religion with religiosity in the personal sense and as an intimate, subjective experience.

This necessarily meant, as a hermeneutic consequence, that if external religious practice in the sense of the empirically observable frequency of observing the sacraments, etc., was in decline, one had to deduce that the sacred was in crisis, while one could reasonably hypothesize that it was precisely the decline of «external» religious practice which indicated a powerful emergence of a self-managed, or at least different, sacred.

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<sup>5</sup> It is easy from this point of view to understand the anxiety – more pastoral and organizational than cognitive in the scientific sense – which marks the thesis of the ‘eclipse of the sacred’, as well as its typical concern an preoccupation with religious observance and its basic empirical indices, such as attendance at the sacraments, the number of vocations, religious as opposed to civil marriages, and so on. These are, moreover, quite legitimate concerns for those responsible for the care of souls, with pastoral functions, to whom we owe in the first place studies on pastoral theology, disguised or duly presented as studies in the ‘sociology of religion’. See, for all these, the excellent work by P. Schmitt-Eglin, *Le mécanisme de la déchristianisation. Recherche pastorale sur le peuple des campagnes*, Paris, Eds. Alsatia, 1952. A certain surprise is aroused rather by the fact that scholars, such as Sabino Acquaviva and Gustavo Guizzardi among others, tend to give a scientific mantle to worthy, legitimate concerns, which are still wholly extra-scientific.

<sup>6</sup> F. Ferrarotti, *Max Weber e il destino della ragione*; Bari, Laterza, 1965, published in English as *Max Weber and the Destiny of Reason* (M. E. Sharpe, 1982); F. Ferrarotti et al., *Culturologia del sacro e del profano*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1966.

## The theory of secularization

This analytical and interpretative error found its most unrelenting expression in the theory of secularization. The theory is of obvious Weberian ancestry, but it is curious that the term «secularized» should be found in Weber only once, when he is concerned with the consequences of the centralization of religion in the Temple of Jerusalem. Weber's influence on the formulation of the concept of secularization should rather be looked for in his analyses of the process of laicization of the «profession», its evolution from religious vocation to civil practice, more or less qualified if also «sanctified» by the methodical life; and further in the process of routinization of «charisma», which from being «an affluence of grace» and a «special quality» that splits the continuity of the existing situation by beginning a new phase and a new legitimacy, tends to cool down, as it were, by freezing into a bureaucratic structure regulated by the impersonal norm and by a «charisma» no longer personal but rather official.

It is probable that Weber's position has been misunderstood by contemporary authors concerned with the theory of secularization. What in Weber is presented as globally interrelated and dynamically developing, as an *ensemble* of aspects of social activity, which interact and reciprocally condition themselves so as to not legitimate any priority for economics over ethics, or ethics over economics (to limit ourselves to a summary and crude characterization), in the more hasty commentators seems fragmented. For them the sense of that contextual globalness is irremediably lost and we have fallen to the common fallacy of affected historicism. In other words, historical development, especially in modern Europe since the Enlightenment, if not the Reformation, and later with the genesis and the progressive affirmation of industrial capitalism, has been simplicistically conceived as a unilinear sequences of stages or levels rigorously set out according to a *diachronic* schema for which, from the beginning of rational calculation and the subsequent crisis of the medieval world dominated by the Church, step by step one would necessarily have to pass to rationalization and thus to the fall of artisan and peasant world, thence to urbanization and in general to modernization, to the division of labour and the specialization of tasks, to an increasingly exaggerated technicization, to the autonomization of the more important social institutions, rejection of all transcendence and the decline of the sacred and the influence of religion and the churches on society.

It is scarcely necessary to note that this conception amounts to a basic distortion of Weber's position, which does not appear reducible to a simplified historicist schema, given that it is open and logically tied to a conception of history as «historic life» in the broadest sense. Contrary to what someone of his recent interpreters believe, it is true that for Weber the process of social rationalization is a global social process that involves the «disenchantment of the world», but this is not to understood to mean that the modern world is by definition «desacralized».

Probably at the root of the theory of secularization there are confusions both linguistic and substantive, of a certain seriousness. Further, as we have already stressed, one should note that, if erroneous conclusions are to be avoided, the perspective of analysis should be maintained in terms basically broader than the normal Eurocentric outlook. One should look with care, systematically, at what happens on other continents and in other cultures – without expecting each time a startling event like the mass suicide at the People's Temple in Guyana, which in any case, although it took place in the jungle of Guyana, began in the State of California. Then one notes that the «God Boom» in different forms is in full development. This boom is so strong that it rapidly arrived at paradox. From Nietzsche onwards it has been stated with some facility that «God is dead», but God is so little dead that there is impulsively growing a huge, interconnected «theology of the death of God».

It is a fact that terms and concepts tend irrespectively to equate themselves and in reality hide differences and even radical contrasts by means of an elusive convergence. Religion, the sacred, and the divine do not point to the same realities. They move on different levels and obey incompatible logics. In its hierocratic form, religion is the expression of the administration of the sacred. The sacred is contrasted to the profane, but it does not necessarily have need of the divine. One might say that the more religion gains as a structure of power and centre of economic interests and socio-political influence, the more the area of the sacred contracts. The field of the religious and the field of the sacred do not necessarily coincide. With good evidence, one probably could maintain that when the need, or the «hunger», for the sacred increases, then organized religion declines. The paradox is that *organized religion is intimately desacralizing* and that the pure experience of the sacred, even in its relation with the divine, is blocked rather than helped by the religious hierocracy. One would need hypothetically to conclude that there is not an eclipse of the sacred but of religion, more precisely of church religion.

### **Hunger for the sacred**

The authors of the thesis of the eclipse of the sacred have failed to perceive a phenomenon of primary importance which today has world dimensions and moves through different creeds and religions: the «hunger» for the sacred. What lies behind this hunger? What is the deep meaning of the growing «need for religion», which many today speak of, having recourse to an imprecise and misleading formula?

The explanation of the religious phenomenon provided for us by Enlightenment rationalism and nineteenth century paleo-positivism explains nothing because it lacks the very object of explanation. In any case, it is no longer sufficient. Aside from any historiographical canon, whether apologetic or iconoclastic, we must turn to the classics in order critically to re-appropriate their teaching. The relations between

reason, scientific rationality, and subjectivity must be re-explored, and therewith the concept of religion and of experience of the sacred as an individual and social fact from Luther to Hegel, Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Freud, up to the most recent currents of «social Christianity». Undoubtedly there are deficiencies and crudities which must be analysed, understood, and called by their right name.

For example, the concept Marx adopts for the religious phenomenon, from his doctoral dissertation, to «The Jewish Question», and after, is no longer acceptable in its entirety. Religion is not only by itself a superstructure, nor are we only dealing with a residuum of superstition to be eliminated by revolution and the consequent profound transformation of economic and social relations as Marx wished, or little by little by trusting in time and the diffusion of scientific mental habits as the «free spirits» of the lay bourgeoisie believe.

In the sacred there is a collective tension which analysis cannot neglect or leave aside. The criticism of the sacred in scientific terms is insufficient and contradictory at the same time: it is insufficient because it reduces the problem to the purely psychological dimensions of faith as credulity; it is contradictory because it proposes to criticize an object whose existence or importance it denies on principle. There is no doubt that the sacred should be demystified. Precisely for this reason, however, it cannot be denied on principle.

From this point of view, the theory of secularization is a step backwards. It transforms the future perspective into a tearful act of nostalgia. It weeps for the disappearance of the sacred and does not realize that it has it under its own eyes. It does not recognize this because the sacred today loves the mask – as does everything which is deep and at the same time dangerous and vital for man.

### **Scientism as neo-dogmatism and hence as a betrayal of science**

The recognition of the constitutive and founding element of the sacred does not necessarily involve the devaluation of specialist scientific knowledge. However, it passes through the demystification of scientism, an attitude which amounts to the crude deification of science. It is the projection and also the consequence of an archaic characterological structure which needs to kneel before the Prince and pushes to their extreme consequences the new attitudes and mental habits which scientific investigation requires. Not content with modifying the system of the deductive and *a priori* reasonings of classical tradition, scientism makes idols of them and freezes them into fetishes. This would not be possible in purely conceptual terms. We are not dealing with an operation of redirection which is purely intellectual and cultural. Society is called in question.

The process of deification of science, which from the sixteenth century onwards proceeded within European society, but which already took its first steps in the early Middle Ages, does not correspond to any special illumination of individual scholars shut up in their cells. In the first place it responds to a question, as compelling as it is significant, of the society which is being transformed. The correlated crisis in the fall of traditional criteria, the new horizons opened by the contacts and paths of communications with other unknown continents, the lessening of the basic legitimacy of the powers which, believing themselves eternal, had made themselves exclusive in social terms, had a first reduced and then literally undermined the ancient legitimating presuppositions of important political and social decisions. Once tradition as a source of legitimacy had fallen, to whom could one turn? Where to find a new basis of consensus? Where could one identify a new instrument of self-hearing and self-direction for societies which had for some obscure reason decided to turn their backs on the past and were so adventurous or so imprudent as to enter onto the paths of modernization on a vast scale?

Here emerge the cultural foundations of modern industrial societies. It would be too easy to maintain that everything began with some happy mechanical invention, whether the clock as Lewis Mumford believes, or the steam engine according to most people's opinion. It has been fully demonstrated that from the point of view of technical knowledge, classical antiquity could already have begun the process of industrialization on a large scale. If this did not happen it is due to the fact that the quantitative abundance of consumer goods was not important. Not only this. The practical application of inventions and theoretical discoveries was generally believed to be dishonourable: it bore the mark of manual contamination. Only a society which had lost its sense of direction, its external and higher parameters or its constellation of transcendental values – whether we are concerned with Zeus's Olympus or Saint Augustine's City of God is of little importance – and a society which was so proud as to think it could express its own basic values by itself, immanently, and on the basis of absolute self-sufficiency, could discern in science and technology, understood as applied science, the new form and at the same time the fundamental base of its justification and orientation.

It is said, moreover with good arguments, that the cultivation of science was an act of homage to God, insofar as it permitted and deepened the study of nature, which was God's own creation. Newton considered God as the Supreme Architect. He is the *pantocrator*, the creator and guarantor of the cosmic order. However, this argument, if it is satisfying from the point of view of abstract theory or in the heat of the scholastic theological discussion, does not manage to explain the new, emerging conception of truth which is no longer expressible as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, but rather was acquiring an essentially operational value. The new scientific truth could no longer be

reduced to truth as «revelation» or *alethèia* in the classical sense, nor yet as «reflection» or the «fitting of intellect into reality», in the manner of scholastic philosophy and of Aristotelian-Thomist realism. The truth of modern science is not limited to recording or reflecting. It is not satisfied with fitting itself to natural processes by providing them with a kind of negative copy. It proposes to imitate nature and at the same time to invade it, exploit it, and if necessary recreate it by running the risk of *denaturalizing* it.

### **The humility of the scientist as a tactic**

Modern science is thus not the reflection of nature but rather its reinvention and in some cases its violation. The humility of the scientist as regards nature is an apparent one – a tactical attitude, almost a technique to disarm the adversary and take him by surprise. It is humility which is preparing the triumph, the truce which precedes the final attack and victory. «*Natura non nisi parendo vincitur*», Bacon said, condensing in a single phrase the whole program of modern scientific research, from Galileo to nuclear fission. The power of modern science is there. Its apparent inevitability and the roots of its power, both organizational and intellectual, roost and root themselves in this context. The greatness of a thinker such as Comte – and, before him, though less clearly, Saint-Simon – lies in having understood the connection between science and society through time, the social vocation of science, apparently extra-scientific and-political, and its tendency to function as a new base of the legitimacy of the social system and inter-individual consensus.

It is no surprise that the utilitarian principle in the England of the seventeenth century should emerge as an important mainspring and often a decisive factor in scientific progress. Rarely does science appear as itself. It does not permit its real nature as an autonomous and self-propelling movement to leak out; it does not allow that its hubris be revealed in all its potency. As Merton has made clear, the science of origins does not renounce its apparently vicarious, if not ancillary, function. The sanctification of science found an unexpected reinforcement in the Puritan ethic, which was based on utilitarianism and on the idea that all knowledge should be evaluated, contrary to the wisdom of the classics, on the basis of its utility. In fact, it was thought, everything which helps to make the life of man happier and less hard is good in the eyes of God. Naturally – and on this point the utilitarian and Victorian moralities were logical to the point of cruelty – this is to be understood as applying only for all those who deserve it or who pay for their welfare and their «good standing in the community» through methodical daily labour, zeal in undertaking their professional duties, and total dedication to their duty. In this context, science becomes the principal instrument of God. In the *Christian Directory*, which was to be so important for Max Weber's research into the sociology of religion, Richard Baxter seems to have had no doubt in this regard:

Grace will be more clear and comprehensible if you persevere and succeed in your efforts. [...] For true love towards God and towards man, properly that of a heavenly spirit and a holy life, offers itself a marked pleasure and delights whoever gives himself to it: as if a man should find satisfaction in his own culture and his own wisdom by reading some excellent book and meditating on it, or discovering mysterious masterpieces of art or of science, this gives him more satisfaction through the very action itself than does the simple affirmation of his culture in general. What joy do the discoverers of the nautical chart, of magnetic attraction, of the printing-press, of cannons, find in their inventions! What pleasure did Galileo find in his telescopes, in finding irregularities and shadows on the moon; the Medicean planets, the sixty-two rings of Saturn, the changes of Venus, the stars of the Milky Way, etc., etc.

We are already in the dithyrambic mode, which we shall find in authors and in books as disparate and distant as the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* of Marx and Engels and *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* of C. P. Snow.

Today there is an obvious fact which, understandably, Baxter missed. There is in scientific activity an unforeseen consequence to which we can perhaps point as the idealization of precision, the *myth of quantified exactitude*. It is true that the utilitarian principle, and the puritanical morality which backed it up, historically have helped science and its development by seeing in it primarily an instrument «for the greater glory of God». However, one must immediately add that the mental habits inculcated by the practice of scientific research and the prevailing mentality which makes its application possible on a vast scale in daily social life tended to stress the basic self-sufficiency of scientific reasoning and the autonomy, not needful of external justifications, of what Veblen was to call «the discipline of the machine».

Science, which initially seemed to accept with good grace an instrumental function, did not delay in presenting itself as an end in itself on the basis of a strictly endogenous logic of development. Once the external criteria of judgement had fallen, science became scientism: a public procedure insofar as it was a basis of social consensus – but ethically neutral, available, not averse to selling itself to the highest bidder or whoever might furnish the material needs for carrying out research independently of ends, satisfied with watching over and controlling the internal correctness of its own operations.

### **Science and power**

The perfection of science in its scientific version is thus formal and untouchable from within. It is a perfection without a goal. However, in proposing the despairing objective of an impossible neutrality, science leaves its followers disarmed before the powerful of the day. As has been nicely observed,

Before the State, the man of science is today harmless, naturally subordinated. In the history of modern science, no heroic acts are recorded. Compare Galileo with Bruno in face of danger. Leonardo already served the Princes with his war machines. The scientist often claims to live for knowledge. The reality is more modest. We are concerned with the search for a corner in which to feel safe, a defensive attitude in an individual of little aggressiveness. It is now late to hope for a reversal of these things. What was obvious for the ancients has not yet occurred to modern scientists: that one must keep knowledge destined to the few quiet, but the formulas and abstract, dangerous formulations capable of fatal developments, damaging in their application, must be evaluated ahead of time and in all their implications by those who have discovered them, and consequently must be jealously withdrawn and hidden from publicity. Greek science did not arrive at a great technological development because *it did not want to reach one*. By keeping quiet, science makes the State afraid and is respected by it. The State can live, fight, and be powerful only with the means offered it by culture: it knows this perfectly. The tribal chief is viscerally dependent on the witch-doctor.<sup>7</sup>

By standing in his hide-out, the man of science hopes to preserve the minimal conditions – those margins of non renounceable freedom for the pursuit of his research. To this end he is ready to proclaim his «value-freedom», referring to the term *Wertfreiheit*, which Weber certainly used, but only in order to prevent certain colleagues from distributing from University chairs their personal opinions as though they were scientific conclusions and hence intersubjectively binding. In the majority of cases, rather, value-freedom becomes the screen for a *quietum servitium* in which science seems wholly divorced from conscience. The apparent political and social neutrality of the scientist, his boasted moral indifference, can have a very high price.

Proof of this statement is not hard to find. It abounds even in recent history, from the biological and genetic theories, scientifically untenable but imposed politically, of Lysenko, the protégé of Stalin, to the brutal use of science on the part of the Nazis. According to the Nazi former President of the Danzig Senate, Hermann Rauschning, it is reported that Hitler

believed science to be a social conquest which could be measured only in terms of its impact on the community. The objectivity of science was only a slogan invented by professors to protect their interests; the idea of disinterested science was absurd. On the contrary, Hitler argued that what was called the crisis of science was simply the fact that those gentlemen grasped by themselves, with their objectivity and autonomy, that they had gone off-track. The simple question which precedes every scientific undertaking is: who and what wants to know something? Who wants to orientate himself in the world which surrounds him? It necessarily follows that there can only be a science of a certain type of humanity and a specific era. There is very probably a Nordic science and a national-socialist science, destined to confront liberal-Judaic science which in fact does not anywhere fulfil its function but is now in the process of cancelling itself out on its own.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See G. Colli, *Dopo Nietzsche*, Milan, Adelphi, 1974 (my emphasis).

<sup>8</sup> See A. D. Beyerchen, *Gli scienziati sotto Hitler*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1981, p. 145.

## **Against scientific dogmatism: the return to science as a problematic human undertaking.**

It is curious, on the other hand, how precisely the impossible neutrality which the scientist claims for himself, and which can throw him at the first opportunity into the arms of tyranny, should be at the basis of the process of his canonization. As the scientist prohibits himself from having values and recognizing that scientific research is none other than a human enterprise, necessarily subject to the imperatives and ethical responsibilities of any human enterprise, it is here that the scientist comes out as a kind of lay saint, hero of abnegation if not of the democratic spirit.

I have elsewhere drawn attention to this kind of «sanctity», which, however, suggested to thinkers such as Nietzsche the sense of a fundamental affinity with the virtues of the mule who trots straight on, undaunted, on the edge of the ravine, and who does not suffer from giddiness, probably because he has no imagination. The technocratic ideology, which functions as a presupposition for the sanctity of the man of science, is still widespread today, notwithstanding the disastrous consequences of a science reduced to technico-specialist competence, which conceives itself as without moral significance.

One can express the essence of this ideology in a few remarks. The scientist is rational because he believes, as the ultimate test of truth, in the cause-effect nexus. He does not, as Veblen remarks with his characteristic ambivalence, need a «natural» law or any other-wordly design in order to «gratify his sense of substance». In other words, he does not need a mythical, animistic or anthropomorphic – in any case pre- if not *irrational* and *indemonstrable* – network which might in not purely mechanical and quantitative terms justify in his eyes (terms, that is, which would be susceptible to precise measurement) the flux of experience, and the (in the last resort) chance series of events. The scientist is thus free as regards emotional prejudices and the cultural idiosyncrasies linked to specific historical contexts. He is «open», by definition, to the new and the different. He has an experimental attitude, a flexible one, which favours interpersonal agreement, promotes understanding. One might say that he is «naturally» democratic and «social», not infected by any political or cultural chauvinism, able to agree with his subordinates, optimistic, and ready to recognize the merits of his colleagues, and so forth.

Snow's tone is frankly rhapsodic when he contrasts the missionary of the past in the technically backward countries with those whom he considers as today's missionaries: the technicians and the scientists.

Many Europeans, from St. Francis Xavier to Schweitzer, dedicated their life to the Asians and the Africans, nobly but paternally. These are not the Europeans that the Asians and the Africans will welcome with joy under present-day conditions. They want men

who will mix with them as colleagues, who will offer what they know, perform a clear technical task, and will then go away. By good luck, we are dealing with an attitude which is easy for scientists. They are in fact freer than the majority of people of racist sentiments. Their very culture in their human relations is democratic. In their internal climate the breeze of equality hits you in the face. At times without regard, as it does in Norway.<sup>9</sup>

The Norwegian breeze aside, Antonio Gramsci says nothing different, but indeed attributes to technical education in the specialist sense a primacy still more decisive. «In the modern world, technical education strictly linked to even the most primitive and unqualified industrial labour, ought to form the basis of the new type of intellectual»<sup>10</sup>. With greater caution, Veblen speaks in all his books of the «discipline of the machine» and of the sense of circumscribed and empirically verifiable «factuality» which seemed to constitute the attitude of the engineer or the organizer of production, never to be confused with the typical parasite, the business manager or *brasseur d'affaires*, interested not in the increase of production through the best combination of production factors, but rather in making money off people's backs by profiting from the cycles of the economic situation. In truth no one, engineers and writers included, has the future up his sleeve. It is certain that the future does not depend on simple scientific development. Probably it depends on the capacity of critical global evaluation – that is on an integrated humanistic and scientific culture in which science may rediscover its function as regards the meaning of man without pretending to do this exhaustively.

The scientific claim is clearly inadmissible. In fact, it reduces all knowledge to a single, scientific knowledge, seen as a «stipulated» knowledge on the basis of methodological rules accepted as valid by a given scientific community. At the same time, it forces one to accept that to know means to measure and that moreover what is not exactly measurable or quantifiable is not knowable. Hence the intemporality of science. For the technocratic ideology and for the scientism to which it relates as to its base, science properly has no history. It presents itself as the final, necessary and necessitating result of successive discoveries which give rise to the accumulation of the partial results, gradually achieved on the basis of the principle of self-correctability.

There is no doubt that self-correctability of specific scientific explanations when faced with new data exposed by research is the essential characteristic of the scientific argument and its process. However, scientific explanation does not live in a historical void nor in social isolation. One cannot ignore the fact, without falling into a disembodied and unreal notion of science, that there are also schools, teachers, loyalties, and betrayals by disciples – a whole, various, multiple world of economic and

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<sup>9</sup> See C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1961, pp. 50-51.

<sup>10</sup> A. Gramsci, *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*, Turin, Einaudi, 1965, p. 7.

political interests which influence science and condition the directions of research. The evolution of science and scientific thoughts is not reducible to a series of stages simply tied to new discoveries and their internal logic, to «turn-about», to new «paradigms», to use the term of Thomas Kuhn, which is not without ambiguity. The progress of science is not so smooth and «logical» as the scientists would like to have it believed. There is also a history of extra scientific interests, of struggle, of plots, of power, and of blood.

The evolution of science and of its critical self-awareness passes through three basic phases, which I shall allow myself briefly to indicate:

- a) the phase of ingenuous idealization of science as dispenser of «divine» knowledge and the source of «laws», acritically seen as propositions with universal validity, necessary and necessitating;
- b) the phase of science as problematic undertaking, no longer the source of an absolute knowledge, but able at the most to arrive at the formulation of tendential uniformities and generalizations endowed with a probabilistic validity;
- c) the phase in which the scientific explanation tends to be presented as a purely causal and conditional explanation, endowed with a character which is basically operational, in which research, rather than fitting itself to reality or reflecting real processes, tends to present itself as an active, controlled intervention into reality.

It is above all in this last phase that the cult of quantitative decision, and the «quantophobia» which follows from this, reveal fairly cruelly their limits and in particular demonstrate those neo-dogmatic aspects which run the risk of making science itself, as a whole, useless, by denying its basic preconditions. The usefulness which critical reflection on the sacred brings to the discussion of science is in the sense decisive. Outside and beyond any dogmatic temptation, it insists on the return of science as the ability of man to place himself in a problematic relation with himself, with other men, and with the universe.

The arrogance of the quantomaniacs does not recognize the virtue of equilibrium. They call themselves «tough-minded» as against the sentimentalism of those who hold to values and do not believe it is possible to restrict the context of human knowledge to the point where it coincides with simple quantitative measurement. Whoever dares to leave the mortgage of the purely quantitative criterion is stamped as soft-minded. In reality, even with a dispassionate examination of the question, it seems difficult to resist the temptation of applying to the quantomaniacs the definition of the *idiot savant qui sait tout mais qui ne comprend rien*. From Quetelet to the present, the attempt to apply mathematical reasoning and instruments to

the study of social phenomena is an attempt which deserves respect: «At a certain point, towards the end of the nineteenth century – writes Viennese ex-socialist Paul Lazarsfeld – quantification takes on its modern function in the field of sociology – that of translating ideas into empirical operations and seeking among the variables thus created some recurrent relationships. A whole series of historical studies on specific techniques will be necessary to clarify this general tendency»<sup>11</sup>.

This is perfectly understandable and acceptable. What one cannot accept is the unmerited narrowing of the concept of methodology to the point of eliminating from it concepts to make room for the specific techniques of enquiry. Still worse: the mathematico-statistical instrument is stood on its head as regards its functions, and from an instrument takes on the role of central support of sociological analysis. Lazarsfeld, put to the test, states that he is not concerned about the metaphysical foundations of his work. Good. However, the doubt arises, as Sorokin never tired of emphasizing<sup>12</sup>, that the theory of knowledge implicit in its research did not go much beyond a crude gnosiological objectivism, if not an unwarily critical ingenuous realism.

Even more acute, however, is C. Wright Mills's criticism. Taken up with the concern to measure social phenomena precisely, and thus concentrating on the methodological-formal aspects of their work, Lazarsfeld and his followers put on one side the great classical tradition of sociological research: they are ignorant of, or put in subordinate order, the basic problems, and elide the historical dimension of social facts. In other words, it does not much matter to them what one ought to analyse and study as long as one studies and analyses it on the basis of specific procedures and by making use of specific instruments of measurement. Naturally, this leads Lazarsfeld and his followers, including the most recent ones, to a sovereign indifference in the face of the objects of research. Their relative historical importance, their level of social decisiveness, so as to make them social scientists ready to dedicate themselves to any theme so long as one finds a customer prepared to pay expenses. An item is an item. From the decision to buy a certain brand of cigarettes to the decision to start a war or, more simply, to change jobs<sup>13</sup>. Scientistic value-freedom still finds today, in the pale followers of quantomania (which in the work of Lazarsfeld had its most recent splendour) its defenders and representatives. Their unconfessed, but logically implicit, ideal is that human beings should flatten themselves out, but above all that they not

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<sup>11</sup> See P. F. Lazarsfeld, «Notes on the History of Quantification in Sociology», in *Quantification*, ed. H. Woolf, New York, 1961 (see in Italian P. F. Lazarsfeld, *Metodologia e ricerca sociologica*, ed. V. Capecchi, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1967, p. 108).

<sup>12</sup> Especially P. Sorokin, *Mode e utopie della sociologia moderna e scienze collegate*, Florence, Giunti-Barbera, 1965.

<sup>13</sup> See C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, New York, 1969, esp. Chapter 3, «Abstract Empiricism», pp. 50-75. For this group of problems see to my *Trattato di sociologia*, Turin, UTET, 1972, Chapter 4, pp. 323-334

speak, that they give up their characteristic and damnable unpredictability so as not to disturb the calculator<sup>14</sup>.

### Satan's army

We owe the most systematic and complete theoretical elaboration of the number, the locations, the quality and the orders, the science and the power of devils to Thomas Aquinas. The diabolical skills are multiple – the ability to unleash storms or the power of winds, to construct bridges and fortifications, and above all to tempt human beings. The privileged areas in the tempting activity of Satan's army are pride and lust.

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It is not surprising that it is precisely the ascetics, and generally monks, who were the chosen victims of diabolic forces. However, one should note that the close connection between the figure of the Devil and the sexual sphere is reinforced by stories and legends relating to the loves and the children of the Devil. Not content with «possession», demons were said to have attempted in every way to couple with earthly women and produce children. This intention gave rise to many disputes on the part of theologians and experts on the real possibility of such coupling. According to St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure, the procedure was complex. The Devil, himself without sperm, would first have had to have procured it, as a «succubus», so as afterwards to mate as an «incubus» with a woman. Other theologians have hypothesized a concrete amorous passion on the part of certain devils for certain women, possibly eventuating in the dissemination of a peculiarly cold sperm. Through the centuries there have been famous pacts with the Devil, as in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* or Goethe's *Faust*, but there are also serious defeats for the Devil at the hands of saints like Bernard of Chiaravalle or even of those who were supposed to be his children, such as Luther. Meanwhile, in the progressive rhetoric of ingenuous rationalism, Satan and his court were taken as a symbol of scientific progress and of the rebellion against all tyrannies, or as the «avenging force of reason» to use the phrase of Carducci in the famous *Hymn to Satan*.

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<sup>14</sup> In Italy there was a celebrated case of «rethinking» which should be noted here. It is an exemplary one, that of Vittorio Capecchi who went from Lazarsfeld's rarified, mathematicizing pseudo-neutrality to the explicit, scientifically controlled social commitment of the review *Inchiesta*. For a recent examination of the current commonplaces of «quantophrenic» scientism in use in the social sciences, see F. M. Battisti, *Sociologia matematica*, Rome, Casa del Libro, 1982.

## Demonology

Is the myth of Satan, Prince of Darkness and King of Evil, a thing of the past? It is true that certain contemporary interpretations tend to see Satan as defeated by modern neuropathology and above all psychoanalysis. However, this is perhaps a premature optimism. There is no doubt that the idea of diabolical possession and the related one of exorcism appear seriously weakened, but it is perhaps too early to regard them as completely dissolved.

After several decades, certain questions are outstanding concerning the correctness – or not – of so much optimism about the supposed linear development of this process. The predictions of Mary, appearing at Fatima to three young shepherds, directly concern devilry in connection with high ecclesiastical hierarchies. The Virgin is supposed to have said, «Satan will walk in the midst of their ranks and in Rome there will be great changes». Lucia dos Santos remembers the swathe of light emanating from Our Lady's hands, and the vision which was displayed before their eyes:

[...] and we saw, as it were, a great sea of fire and immersed in this, black and burnt, demons and souls in human form, like transparent embers which then, drawn upwards by the flames let off by the souls themselves, together with clouds of smoke, fell back again on all sides as sparks into the great fires with neither weight nor balance, with cries and lamentations of pain and desperation which were horrifying or made one tremble from terror. The demons were marked by their horrible, disgusting forms, as terrifying, unknown animals, but they were transparent, like black coals in the embers.<sup>15</sup>

Fatima is even today widely celebrated. There are many faithful who study the revelations related to the «third secret», not yet placed in the public domain, which Mary was supposed then to have revealed. While there are priests who admit that there are too many pathological states that have been confused with possession by the Devil, and also who want to forget (but how is it possible?) the victims of this collective psychosis, women for the most part, is it not also perhaps true that cases of exorcism are found also in our times? That in the capital of Italy Father Gabriele has been at his work for decades is a known fact which at various times has ended up in the national press. In his view there is no lack of devils around. Indeed, there are devils present in such numbers that daily they take this energy and persecute him even beyond the specific moment of exorcism. De Lutiis notes that exponents of traditional Catholicism have actually suggested that Vatican II was inspired by Satan, and in particular quotes Carlo Di Muzio. In *Letters from the Other Shore*, this writer states that

The Devil never lost a word, a gesture, a decision, a difficulty, anything in the Council. Grotesque and majestic, despicable and magnificent, scarlet and dazzling, the Devil watched from a distance the old Pope on the morning of 26 January 1959, at the

<sup>15</sup> See G. De Lutiis, *L'industria del santino*, Rimini, Guaraldi, 1973. De Lutiis reports at length on the Fatima case, referring to this and other pieces of evidence in this regard.

Basilica of St. Paul's Without Walls, when John XXIII announced the Ecumenical Council. From that moment on, the path of the Council was also his path. Mysteriously present everywhere, he always tried to realize his most cunning strategy.<sup>16</sup>

But, if I am not mistaken, did not this very text perhaps have a «preface» by Cardinal Luigi Traglia, formerly Vicegerent of Rome and thus the Vicar of the Pope in his diocese?

It seems problematic, then, to reduce the problem to a few terrified peasants who might come from the countryside to consult Father Gabriele (coming from the villages already studied by Ernesto De Martino in his time), as indeed there have been various attempts to make us believe. Besides, even if we were dealing with a small number of humble people – which in any event is contradicted by the facts – the problem of the matrices of belief in Satan would remain open, especially the problem of the overcoming of forms of emargination and alienation which at least in certain periods and in specific contexts have been and are the substratum of this phenomenon.

### **Witches and magic**

A historical rereading is essential for the understanding of the various forms that belief in magic has taken, the preconditions which accompanied its development, and the social deficiencies with which, still today, it is predominantly linked. Now it is possible to recognize our relative good luck that there have been periods in which these beliefs were reflected in certainly more vicious behaviour. The works of Franco Cardini help to define the terms for a better understanding in this respect. He bases the study of magic in a perspective of «long time-periods», which are «internally mapped by sudden changes, crises and multiple breaks»<sup>17</sup>. Cardini notes that it is not magic in itself which should be considered negative, but the type of use which is made of it, and that wizards and witches are for the most part to be seen as emarginated people who suggest other, if not in fact alternative, morals and values regarding the dominant power and the framework proposed and accepted by the generality of those belonging to a particular society. Hence comes the idea of recourse to the Devil, a pact with the Devil. This interpretation finds an obvious and considerable confirmation in the studies of burnings, whose victims were supposed witches charged with relations with the Evil One. In a recent study Serena Foglia deals with the history of witchcraft and follows the path of its sufferings and deaths. And again, one finds a framework of aberrant dismissals and problems of madness and perversion on the part of the judges, especially raging during the quite sumptuous and schismatic sixteenth century. One of the aspects of demonomania which according to Serena Foglia should be enumerated

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>17</sup> See F. Cardini, *Magia, stregoneria, superstizioni nell'Occidente medievale*, Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1979, p. 3.

among the most dramatic should be sought in the divergence to be seen between imagination and reality<sup>18</sup>.

As a result of three centuries of persecution, one can point a very high number of victims, for the most part women (one might speak of genocide), and furthermore a significant penetration of Satanism within the Church. Prostitutes, single women – experts in medicinal herbs easier to obtain and cheaper than official medicines, who possibly turned to drugs and hallucinogens – become the predestined victims of distorted mentalities who charge them with supernatural powers like flying, power over the elements, and so forth (powers which, in other contexts, have been accepted in the great saints) and who scrutinize their every word, distorting its meaning, or accuse them for their subsequent protracted silence.

Among the first to discuss this collective madness, to put in doubt the correctness and credibility of certain trials and accusations, we find the voice of the Sire of Bergerac. Cyrano de Bergerac in fact asks himself why these witches – in his view, actually poor, ignorant, terrorized peasant women, unable to defend themselves – should have accepted pacts of damnation with the Devil, their presumed Master, obtaining their whole reward hunger and poverty in life and abandonment at the stake at the moment of death. Who, then, is the witch? According to Serena Foglia:

In different social contexts the witch can be [...] considered as belonging to a rival faction; a dangerous deviant from the group; an internal enemy; a being who, for some deep-rooted imperfection, is not accepted as an integral member of the group; the representative of an enemy external to the community itself.<sup>19</sup>

The analysis of belief in witches and their protector, the Devil, for Foglia refers to a dimension which is not only individual but also of the community, in which an essential role is played by the accusers. It thus refers back to the interactions which are created between those who believe they are suffering from sorcery and those who believe they are creating it. More contestable in my view is the social framework dealt with.

It follows that belief in witches flourishes in those societies in which social interaction is intense, and where the roles of the members are fluid and elastic. Where, on the other hand, this interaction is scarce or spread out, and roles are more precisely defined, the belief disappears.

In fact, it would remain to be explained how it is that the phenomenon has been present in agricultural societies in which the roles were decidedly established and in the majority of cases ascribed.

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<sup>18</sup> S. Foglia, *Il libro delle streghe*, Milan, Rusconi, 1981.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

At any rate, the division between the imaginary and the real, and above all sexual phobia, are for Foglia at the basis of this double schizophrenia in which the man (hence normally the judge) projects on the woman as temptress his own contemptuous and distorted sexuality, while the woman is said to accept the role of «temptress» so as to obtain a certain power, however mediated and uncertain. Certainly the weight of the sex-fearing morality of the Church played a notable role in the formation of certain tendencies and beliefs. And if the Devil in some way was its beneficiary, many, especially women, have paid the price for it. Hence social emargination, differentness, and a sex-fearing morality are the motives which seem to accompany through the centuries belief in the Devil and Satanism.

Further witness in this regard is provided by the studies of Alfonso M. Di Nola, who has recently returned to the discussion, first with an interesting introduction to certain studies carried out by some of his collaborators in Tuscany<sup>20</sup>, and thereafter with a text, *The Devil*, with the significant subtitle *The Démoniac Syndrome as a Threat to Humanity*<sup>21</sup>. Previously, in his *Inquest on the Devil*, Di Nola linked the persistence of the diabolical syndrome to a closed society in which evil becomes a «destructive and disruptive force», in which a certain obsolescence of certainties and guarantees prevails: to some extent, an «anomic» society. He firmly relates this phenomenon to the petit bourgeois strata, which is an interesting attribution inasmuch as we have in general been accustomed to relate it to strata of the subproletariat.

Returning to this theme in *The Devil*, this historian of religion presents a stimulating reconstruction of the Devil in history – in Judaism, in the New Testament, and finally in the Middle Ages. At this point, we pause at possession and exorcisms. It is during the Middle Ages in fact – and in this he is in agreement with the majority of historical interpretations – that «the practice of exorcism took on an exceptional importance both in relation to the extent of the unhealthy conditions which were attributed to diabolical possession and as a result of the frequent phenomena of collective hysteria and supposed possession»<sup>22</sup>. Di Nola dwells again on certain combinations: between the Devil and the witches, the Devil and popular culture. The latter often links him to violent death, brings him close to the use of certain plants, and expresses its respect or fear or amusement in this regard by way of proverbs and so forth. Regarding the persistence of the phenomenon in the contemporary world, he notes how

the recent Satanic churches which have emerged in the United States by way of the trial of Manson and his followers, and which from time to time appear on the daily news, have quite precise historical precedents. Their position should historically be interpreted as originating in specific ideological *couches* which tend to emarginate movements and

<sup>20</sup> See A. M. Di Nola, *Inchiesta sul diavolo*, Roma, Laterza, 1979.

<sup>21</sup> See A. M. Di Nola, *The Démoniac Syndrome as a Threat to Humanity*, Roma, Scipioni Editore, 1980.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

currents which contest the model or which, especially in modern times, express serious difficulties of the individual and collective conscience and attempt to experience at a non-elitist level abnormal situations of relations with imaginary worlds of power.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, for example, at the time of Leo XIII and the conflicts with Masonry, the basic reason for the conflict and the demonic conception which at that time the Church had of Masonry should be sought in the tendency on the part of the Church to repress the libertarian attitudes encouraged by Masonry. Continuing his observations, he excludes any basic change in the world of the «subaltern nonurban periphery» in which the demonic tradition had performed a precise and well-founded role. At present «the Devil appears [...] as the mythical seat of a decline in the quality of life impoverished in its essential values»; it becomes a «risky ideological situation» in whose context there still seems space for a personalization of the Devil, with the evident risk of a reconfirmation of the «taste for the demonic» as a moment of the total alienation of the Christian and as a traumatizing exposure of the layman to new possibilities of emargination.

### The persona of the exorcist

In fact, the reassuring message which emerges, along with others, from Herbert Haag's book *Belief in the Devil*<sup>24</sup>, seems now widely dismissed and discounted. Beyond the messages of the last Popes (which of necessity reflected their times, at least in part) and the statements of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued in the institutional Catholic environment, even on the fringes of the Churches, both in urban and in agricultural contexts, belief in the Devil seems to be a reality not yet defeated. At times this appears with the customary and traditional characteristics, at other times with elements of a renewed, sinister fascination. The latter seems to occur more often in an educated, urban environment. In this respect, Malachi Martin's book *At the Hand of Satana* is indicative. This is not a scholarly work, but evidence from within the Catholic world<sup>25</sup>. As a believer, Martin places himself with an internal perspective of concern and understanding for a phenomenon nonetheless accepted. In particular, he is concerned about the figure and work of exorcists, demonstrating his full understanding and worry as regards the risks they come up against, precisely because of their activity, from ills both physical and spiritual in type in an obsessive crescendo which calls into question psycho-physical elements as well as faith. The author attempts, from the examples provided, to establish the image of the «figure» of the exorcist. This is most often someone who for a long time has dedicated himself to parish pastoral work and the care of souls; rarer is the instance of the theologian and the scholar. Often middle-aged, ordained some decades past, he is marked by a

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>24</sup> See H. Haag, *La credenza nel diavolo*, ed. A. Gecchelin, Milan, Mondadori, 1976.

<sup>25</sup> M. Martin, *In mano a Satana, cinque vite possedute dal demonio*, Milan, Sperling & Kupfer, 1978.

certain common sense and a certain balance. Daily behaviour and religious conviction would be characteristic traits, especially as scrutinized in the choice of exorcists (even if the recent rule which enlarges the range of possible priests involved has perhaps helped to produce some changes).

Martin thus passes on the study of certain «cases», trying to find in them a passage more or less similar and able to be checked. The phases which thus characterize exorcisms – at least for a major part – would seem to be linked to a «presence» which makes itself felt increasingly sharply until arriving at a «breaking point». The phases during which one hears the «voice» are especially unbearable: this often puts forth the deepest thoughts and facts concerning the one who is possessed, and at times the exorcist himself, until the real «encounter», which may entail considerable violence, including physical, and at best an «expulsion». Martin's book is pervaded by the theme of the risks connected with these practices, risks which are said to involve whoever is in some way present and involved. In fact, at times the presence of Satan is said to have been frighteningly revealed to some inexperienced helpers of the exorcist; blameworthy for not having noticed the climate of tension created and having spoken, reacting on their own behalf and not only in the name of Jesus Christ; blameworthy, perhaps, for not having tolerated silently the harsh, diabolical revelation of their most secret sins. Exorcism would seem to have been tremendously dangerous, obviously, for the possessed, because at times the spirit settled in him might wish for the death of the body nurturing him, so as not to be forced to abandon it; and naturally it is dangerous for the exorcist, who impersonates the enemy in that he acts with the power conferred on him by the Church.

The cases chosen from among the many one could cite as examples are particularly interesting. In fact, we are dealing with cases which emerged following spiritual temptations. In this way, little by little, possession would have begun. There are doubts, perhaps emerging following studies of philosophy, or derived from scientific attitudes in the anthropological field. In one of these cases the negative reference is to Teilhard de Chardin. Through the breaches opened by scientism and false reasoning there is said to have appeared a progressive insinuation of the «Kingdom» with all its propositions and deceptions. Naturally, the openings may be related to various aspects. Thus the Devil can take advantage of typical features of contemporary disquiet, of the desire to experience abnormal attitudes such as bisexuality or trans-sexuality, or could infiltrate through attempts at penetration into the world of the unknowable, profiting from the arrogance produced by supposed conquests and discoveries in this regard. There is the case of the university professor who is supposed to have tried to return to preceding lives, to dominate and manage paranormal gifts such as second-sight, telepathy, trips outside the body, and similar things. It is pointless to say that in the text the theme of possession stands out as frightening, immediate reality, operative and threatening.

If, moreover, one abandons the educated environment to which Martin refers, the persistence of the phenomenon of Satanism seems obvious. There is a trace of it in the most recent studies on certain contemporary religious groups and phenomena.

Maria Maciotti notes how the theme of the Devil, understood as the persistence and personification of evil, is present in the messages which certain persons who believe themselves endowed with particular charisms are said to make use of, and which become the «jellying-point» of extra-liturgical cults<sup>26</sup>. One of the cases examined is that of Sister Floriana<sup>27</sup>. Here, in the diary entries of the Sister, as in the «messages» for which she is supposed to be the go-between, Satan always finds room, and in various guises: as persecutor of the Sister herself, tortured and persecuted for the good that she does, because he hopes to break her will and drive her away from the paths of the Lord; or again, as a cause of the perversion of the contemporary world and hence as the mediated cause of the disturbance which is said to be spreading among the clergy and the ecclesiastical hierarchies. As an example of this, certain quotations reported here can be cited: «Do not yield for an instant to tiredness and the Devil who torments you...»; «These were two days and two nights which simple words cannot describe. I seemed to have been trampled on. With continual effort I could undertake the most necessary duties»; «God allows that His creation be often molested and tormented, even physically, by the Devil»; «O Lord, you allowed hard days. With your grace I went onward, offering you every step. My whole body seems trampled and every movement means sharp pains. All this is nothing, thinking of grave sins...». Moreover, it is reported that the Devil did not restrict himself to the persecution of the Sister. His prey was the «beings elevated in dignity in the [...] Church», as «few from the outside recognize such decay. Everything seems a success, the apostolate [...] Everything built without Me! Fearful void, the triumph of Satan!» Previously the Lord requested pilgrimages and penitence. «Now the pride of the Evil One has invaded the Earth and the curse of My Son lies heavily on poor humanity».

Naturally, this is not a unique case, and similar points can be found, with elements of greater immediacy and crudeness, in the messages attributed to Enzo Alocci, who works at Porto Santo Stefano. In his statements, the evil present in the world is decidedly identified with Satan, defined variously as «The Beast», «The Hungry Beast», «The Infernal Beast», «The Infernal Protector», and so forth. Especially feared are «Satan's rage» and «the great infernal dragons». The correlation between the presence of Satan and earthly catastrophes, past or future, is a constant feature. The following remark may be indicative. Mary is speaking, and it is 16 September 1968: «I ask you only to love each other, to pray and be faithful to your Heavenly Father and to remove yourself from all dangers, as Satan is traducing so many souls and so

<sup>26</sup> See F. Ferrarotti et al., cit., *Studi sulla produzione del sacro*, vol. I.

<sup>27</sup> See esp. *ibid.*, pp. 195-197 (the terms and phrases used date from 1964-1971).

many ruinations could worsen – wars, famine, illness, fierce storms and earthquakes, bringing the world to destruction»<sup>28</sup>. Everything will go well if we follow the directions of the Madonna. If not, the consequences will be terrible. «You will become beasts like the Devil, and you will be defeated by him alone and dragged into the abyss forever. Now I bless you, son. Pray and make them pray for whoever lives and rules in the service of the Devil» (9 July 1976).

In general the persecutions of the Devil are supposed to have two privileged targets. First, the men of God, the charismatics, the persons who through their sufferings witness in the name of the Lord. In these cases the persecutions can be physical, as demonstrated in the two cases referred to, or also spiritual. The Devil raises doubts and feelings of unworthiness in people close to God, and takes away their tranquillity. For example, in the case of Maria Simma, renown for an ability to communicate with souls in Purgatory, the Devil is supposed to have made her believe that this was her illusion and that no soul had been saved through her intercession. Natuzza Evolo and Mother Speranza are classical examples of physical aggressions experienced at the hand of the Devil. For Natuzza Evolo, the intervention of Padre Pio is supposed to have been necessary so as to relieve her of evil. Rosa Quattrini is supposed to have had warnings concerning the battle in progress today between Michael and Lucifer. The reason for the presence of Satan, in San Damiano as in other places, is linked to that of physical catastrophes (earthquakes, floods, etc.) which hang over mankind. One finds similar signs in the cases recently examined by Miriam Castiglione<sup>29</sup>.

The basic reason in the cases referred to is that the Devil is linked with doubt, criticism, the lack of an immediate and passive acceptance of the order willed by God and the Church; a weapon to fight submission, humility, acceptance of the lessons taught, sublimation, in some way, of conflicts which are obviously present. In cases of this kind, sexual repression and social emargination are certainly underlying motives of considerable importance. Beyond the individual case and the motivations to which it refers, what is more important to emphasize is the obvious presence in the modern world of a belief which one might have supposed had been overcome, which the more advanced Catholics accept, if at all, in dialectical terms, since good may be born and developed from evil. This is a belief which may take on different forms in the city and the countryside, for a peasant or a dockworker, or among the upper bourgeoisie of the Italian North (Bergamo and Turin often come to the notice of the newspapers by way of celebrations with drugs, linked with Satanic rites). However, it by all accounts exists, notwithstanding the progress of science and the development of the psychoanalysis, and marks even today the reality of phenomena not fully explainable in scientific terms.

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<sup>28</sup> Esp. *ibid.* chap. 6 and pp. 228-231.

<sup>29</sup> See M. Castiglione, *I professionisti dei sogni*, Naples, Liguori, 1981.

## The blasphemous inversion and the Dionysian ego

The most up-to-date and disinterested historical studies confirm that the Devil is not merely a medieval character. The arguments as set out by Norman Cohn are certainly hard to discount. In his view, the figure of Satan does not appear in the Old Testament. Although he certainly has an explicit role in the Book of Job, there is no doubt that there, Satan acts and speaks as a legitimate member of God's Court whose proposals do not fall outside, still less against, God's design. Further, Cohn notes:

We are accustomed to consider the snake which seduced Eve in the Garden of Eden as a masked Satan. However, the text does not at all provide for such an interpretation, given that the snake is presented as one of the creatures of God, and as such good, and is cursed only after his disastrous intervention and as a result of this. There is no passage in the Old Testament or in the Gospels which authorizes such an identification. Indeed, the first clear indications that the tempter in Paradise was Satan are to be found in non-canonical writings after the first century A. D.<sup>30</sup>

Satan would therefore be a late creation, corresponding to the idea that there is a whole category of human beings devoted to the service of Satan himself, a sect of his secret worshipers, committed to an unrelenting struggle against Christ and the Christians. One understands easily what the latent function of this imaginary idea might be. It helps to legitimate the harshest persecution, to the point of extermination, of whoever challenges orthodoxy or dares in any practical or doctrinal way to challenge the Church as a hierocratic and political power structure. The basic role of Satan then becomes that of justifying the struggle against the heretics, the movements of protest of the emarginated and those socially excluded, the «witches» and in particular the Jews. In this sense the figure of the Devil has its special modernity. It is a fact that, not discounting the tribulations of the Blessed Curé d'Ars, from the end of the Middle Ages there is a progressive slide from the monstrous to the diabolical. It has remarked that

The end of the Middle Ages involves the gradual evolution from the monstrous towards the diabolical. From the thirteenth century on, oriental devilry saturates the West (cf. The analysis made by J. Baltrusaitis, *Le Moyen Age fantastique*, Chapter 5). The increasingly sorry characteristics of the dying Middle Ages are added to the aesthetic commitment which is intended to set forth the image of an increasingly pessimistic world [...] The Devil, Woman, the Monster, come together and end up by producing together, or as a couple, a very powerful body. The Devil is a monster, the monster makes himself diabolical whenever possible, and life appears to be permeated by an ever-present, monstrous Devil which makes itself felt on the basis of some kind of apparition.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See N. Cohn, «Il mito di Satana», in *La stregoneria*, ed. M. Douglas, Turin, Einaudi, 1980, p. 36.

<sup>31</sup> See Cl. Kappler, *Monstres, démons et merveilles...*, cit., p. 245.

This «apparition» is always very lively and through time was consolidated and laid down in «popular consciousness», if we can use this rather problematic concept, and gave rise to a rich flourishing of popular beliefs regarding devils, witches, fairies, magicians, and so forth. We must recognize that the inquisitors had no need to invent anything. Their original contribution was limited to interpreting these popular beliefs as a serious deviation toward the cult of Satan, to the extent of justifying their conception of the witch as being anyone – man or woman – who was voluntarily, explicitly involved in the service of Satan. It should be noted that at the height of the Reformation, witch-hunters were to be found equally among Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists.

It may disturb the systematic and doctrinal tidiness of preconstituted categories, but there can be no reasonable doubt regarding the convinced participation of the Lutherans in the bloody witch-hunts, or for that matter as regards the important role of the Devil in the whole movement of the Reformation. This takes away none of the significance of Lutheranism as a crucial moment of «subjectivization of the rule», but meanwhile it is as well not to confuse doctrinally the claim of «the liberty of the Christian» in the terms in which it is discussed by Luther, for a concern for individual liberty<sup>32</sup>. According to Cohn, the witch-hunt in Europe may be said to have finished in the eighteenth century, even if, to moderate a vision which today can see too optimistic, he hastens to state that «the myth of the servants of Satan is not dead, and in the nineteenth century reappeared in a new context as the myth of the world conspiracy of the Jews. [...] In the midst of Hitlerian anti-Semitism there is the idea that all Jews for thousands of years, everywhere, were united in the incessant effort to tempt, subvert, and ultimately dominate the rest of humanity»<sup>33</sup>.

Here, one may stress a notable convergence with Lutheran theology where it holds that the Devil is the Prince of this world, the God of this Earth (*princeps mundi, Deus huius saeculi*). In all Lutheran teaching, the presence of the Evil One is strong and basic. Not only are sins presented as diabolic manifestations, virtues themselves are demonized. The Devil does not only attack Christianity as a system; he attacks and tries to dominate individual Christians who by themselves cannot resist this attack. At the basis of Lutheran desperation there is this inevitable defeat, which can only be remedied through particular homeopathic treatment: *pecca fortiter; crede fortius*. Paradoxically, it is the decline of the belief in the power of the Devil which comes out as a plausible criterion to measure the decadence of Protestantism. On the other hand, the laicization of the Protestant claim opens the way to the post-Enlightenment conception of the Dionysiac ego. The Witches' Sabbath may well have been traditionally seen by the inquisitors and their informers as the blasphemous meeting in which a mysterious conventual, with the blessing of darkness, met to worship Satan and to take his instructions for the implacable, incessant war on Christians. It is also true that

<sup>32</sup> See my *Teologia per atei*, cit., chapter 2, pp. 27-49.

<sup>33</sup> See N. Cohn, cit., p. 46.

the Sabbath might signify the formation of the new human community, beyond and against the utilitarian demands and the logic of the market: a new synthesis, the orgy as the founding moment of the new participation of the human in the human, the return to the innocence of the Greeks, that people of eternal childhood.

These are disconcerting parallels, but one which have been widely and persuasively analysed: «Even the imagination of the Sabbath, Black Masses, etc., is one of the forms the Dionysian takes on. It then becomes demoniacal. [...] In the fantasy of the Sabbath and the images represented therein, orgiastic ceremonies hold a position of primary importance. A naked woman is worshiped or a young virgin is ritually deflowered, act which begin the unbridled *débauche* dedicated to the God of Evil, to the Devil himself. Precisely as the act of communion euphemistically termed by the Christian Church the 'kiss of peace' symbolizes the charitable relation between brothers and sisters, here it is the obscene kiss which marks the demoniacal religion: *Obsculum sub cauda*»<sup>34</sup>.

The Dionysian ego arises from this madness, from this *dérèglement*. Dionysian drunkenness is more than drunkenness, it is the rejection of formal logic – predictable logic – in favour of a deeper rationality, of intellectualism in favour of wisdom.

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<sup>34</sup> See M. Maffesoli, *L'ombre de Dionysus*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1982, p. 193.