

RUDIMENTS OF THE NATURAL LAW

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This introductory report on the Natural law which I am going to present to you is simply a sort of elementary course recalling the rudiments, the more fundamental and common elements. It will not be, by any means, an exposé of my personal ideas, that is supposing I have any (save perhaps a few in the final observations). I wish only to reiterate the ordinary doctrine of the Church on the Natural Law: and this common teaching I have taken from St Thomas Aquinas, the Universal Doctor. One finds besides that the Second Vatican Council, for the first time in the history of ecumenical councils, has explicitly recommended a particular Doctor who is none other than the Universal Doctor.¹ It is substantially and often literally, his doctrine which I undertake to explain to you.

But, as this doctrine was only explained by St Thomas, not as a complete text, but scattered throughout his works, with some parts here and some nuances there, the order of explanation will of necessity be mine. This may well give rise to some imperfections which will arise neither from the Doctrine, nor from the Universal Doctor, but rather from the simple student here before you, not proud at all, believe me, at having to address you about a question on which the salvation of man directly hinges. In examining 'politics' from the perspective of the natural law we are examining it in fact from the perspective of salvation and the economy of salvation - from the perspective of salvation which God offers and brings to the human race.

The very name of the 'International Office'² recalls this question since it invokes the natural law. What is this natural law? And why do we call it both natural and Christian. The answers to these questions are found in the ordinary doctrine of the Church concerning the natural law.

Let us recall, first of all, how the natural law fits into the economy of salvation. As you know there are three things knowledge of which is necessary for Salvation. But the degree of knowledge required is in proportion to our abilities and means.

Knowledge of the contents of the penny catechism is sufficient at the lower levels of education. It is not adequate at the level of a university professor. The level of moral and religious knowledge required of each person is in proportion to his knowledge of matters profane, his personal vocation and his state of life.

There are three things knowledge of which is necessary for salvation:

1. Knowledge of what we must believe - the Credo (The 'I Believe').
2. Knowledge of what we ought to desire - the *Pater Noster* (the 'Our Father').

¹ [Alas, M. Madiran was not aware, at this time, that the 'all pervading characteristic of post-conciliar theology...is precisely...the rejection of Thomism as a philosophy' to quote Romano Amerio in *Iota Unum*, p.535. Added by Editor, *Apropos*.]

² *L'Office international des œuvres de formation civique et d'action culturelle selon le droit naturel et chrétien.* (The International Office of Associations for Civic Education and Cultural Action in Accordance with Christian Principles and the Natural Law.)

3. Knowledge of what we must do - the law.

Faith concerns what we have to believe, hope what we have to desire and charity what we have to do and that is to love always. You will recognise in these, the three theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity.

I. Definition of the Law

We have arrived immediately at a first definition of the law: the law is what we must do.

But why must it be done? In whose name must it be done?

A law is normally defined as a reasonable command, made in the interests of the common good and promulgated by legitimate authority. This appears clear if one considers human laws, those which the legislator decrees for application in society.

But this definition holds good for the moral law also. The law is not a commandment concerning a single individual in particular. It has as its aim, a good which is common to many. It presupposes a community, a society. As you know, life in society is not simply a physical necessity. For man it is a moral duty imposed by God by which he must seek his natural and supernatural end in community with others. Our supernatural destination calls us to membership of the Communion of Saints, or the Church in Heaven, of which the common good is God Himself.

The law, therefore is what must be done in the light of the common good, and it must be done because the author of the law is God Himself, Creator and the Last End.

II. The Four Laws

Four laws exist in the moral order, three of which have been promulgated by God, and a fourth which is a false law - one promulgated by the Devil.

- 1) Firstly - the natural law is that light of reason placed in us by God since our creation. By this natural light we know what we must do and what we must avoid.
- 2) The Devil then intervened and *superseminavit* has sown in man another law, a mockery of a law, contrary to reason and contrary to the common good: it is called the law of concupiscence or the law of sin: In the state in which man was created by God, the flesh obeyed reason (the flesh, that is, in the broader sense - the body, the sentiments, imagination, desires etc.)

After his first sin, delivering man over to the Devil, the latter implants the law of concupiscence in man: the flesh no longer submits to reason. And even when man continues, by his reason, to recognise and seek good, he is inclined to evil by concupiscence. That is what Ovid meant when he wrote, '*Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor.*' (even though I know better, I continue to do the wrong thing.)

St Paul said exactly the same thing. He made the same observation from experience: '*I do not the good that I wish and I do the evil that I do not wish*' (Rom VII, 19). Thus the law of concupiscence fights against the natural law and destroys the order of reason.

It even succeeds in almost completely obscuring in us the light of the Natural Law, for many reasons the most obvious of which is that stated by the moralist, '*if we do not live as we think, we end up thinking as we live.*'

- 3) God has come to man's aid and has re-established the light of the natural law by promulgating respectively:
- a. The Law of Moses revealed on Sinai.
 - b. The law of love, the law of Christ, contained in the Gospel.

From the Law of Moses we will concentrate on the moral element, which is universal and unalterable, i.e. the Decalogue. The other part of the Law of Moses is the ritual element which by nature was temporary.

The Law of Moses is said to be a law of fear. It enslaves, creating slaves of the law, whereas Christ's law of love makes men free. The law of fear tends towards temporal benefits, the law of love towards eternal benefits. The law of fear is burdensome, the law of love is light. But the law of love did not come to abolish the law of fear, it came to fulfil it. That is, to bring it to the fullness for which it was intended.

It was necessary to recall briefly these fundamental ideas in order to place the natural law in its historical and moral context in the economy of salvation.

Historically, the natural law was itself, in the beginning, an integral part of the act of creation. It was promulgated then by God in that He inscribed it in the structure itself of the nature He gave us. Each created thing therefore has its own natural law: This natural law is that each creature should love its Creator above all else. The whole universe naturally loves God above all, but it loves Him in its mineral or vegetable manner. One would require to be a poet here to do this justice, or a painter or musician, because such is the highest function of art when it portrays material things. It is not simply a matter of taking a photograph of them, otherwise the photographer would do a better, more exact job than the artist.

Nor is the artist called on to make the presumption and quite unrealistic effort to portray material things as more beautiful than they are, as if God had been an inferior artist. The artist's task is the mysterious one (impossible to express in words) of showing that a landscape, the curve of a river, the design of a tree render in their own way to the Creator, a testimony which is a testimony of love.

Because he is endowed with reason and will, man's natural law is to love God above all with his reason and will, that is to say, freely. Because man is a free being who has the power to follow or not to follow his nature; the natural law of man is a moral law.

After the fall, God promulgated man's natural law anew, this time under the form of a written law; the Decalogue. Then, by the work of the Redemption, he perfected the promulgation of the Decalogue in a threefold manner:

- a. He promulgated the law of love for which the Decalogue was ordained.
- b. He gave us the way to fulfil the precepts of the Decalogue: by love and not fear.
- c. He gave us real strength to meet the requirements of the Decalogue - this we lack in the state of fallen nature as a result of sin.

Three ways to know the Natural Law

From what we have said it is already evident that there are three ways in which the natural law may be known.

1. The first and most certain, and sufficient in itself, is to resort to the Decalogue, which the Church generally taught in the Catechism under the heading 'Commandments of God'. 'The Decalogue', 'the Ten Commandments', 'The Commandments of God', the 'Natural Law' are four names for the same thing.

Each of these names has besides its own justification. Each one says something which the others do not:

The Decalogue

These are the ten fundamental precepts of the Natural Law, those which were revealed by God to Moses and to the Jewish people.

The Commandments of God

This name reminds us that God is the author of the Natural Law.

The Natural Law

Makes two things clear:

- a. These are not commandments which are external to us, they were written in our nature and they guide us towards the good which is connatural to us, the good to which our nature aspires and which completes it.
- b. These commandments are able to be discovered in the absence of all divine revelation by natural reason, therefore, for those that are neither Jew nor Christian, there exist two other ways to know the Natural Law.

2. The Second Way:

The light of reason. All the precepts of the Decalogue are accessible by natural reason, - only it is necessary to state that whereas this is theoretically possible, it is not always in fact a practical possibility. It would entail a long and laborious philosophical undertaking, and everyone is not an Aristotle. It would take a long time, and much reflection, which carries with it the risk of error because, if human reason is capable of knowing the natural law, it is not infallible - it is also capable of error.

All men know with immediate perception the 'first principle of practical reason' which is expressed by the dictum 'It is necessary to do good and to avoid evil', and also the general imperatives such as 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. But to arrive by reason at a clear and certain knowledge of the ten commandments of the Decalogue, while possible in itself, is very difficult in fact.

3. The Third Way:

To consult one's own human nature.

We are not talking here about the knowledge arising from reason, but a knowledge called connatural, a knowledge which is almost spontaneous and as it were instinctive. The natural law is written in the heart of man - this is the expression of St. Paul. Let man therefore consult his heart and the natural inclination of his heart: but let him be very sure that it is its true natural inclination. In the state of fallen nature which is ours since the sin of Adam, under the yoke of the law of concupiscence which inclines us towards evil, such a consultation risks often being illusory,

chimerical or false.

These two natural ways moreover, most often go together, the one helping and clarifying the other. In this respect the natural law is called the unwritten law - the unwritten law of the 'Antigone' of Sophocles - by distinction to the written laws of the human legislator. For anyone who is neither Jew nor Christian, the natural law is indeed a law which isn't written anywhere save in his reason and in his heart. Greek thought had attained a very high and sometimes a very certain conception of the natural law. Very certain, since Sophocles' Antigone gave her life to obey the natural law which was precisely conceived as a law superior to human laws.³ If the human laws promulgated by the State contradict the unwritten law, one must disobey the human laws and obey the unwritten law, if necessary at the cost of one's life. Whatever progress we have made we find ourselves today in analogous circumstances where the political law contradicts the natural law. But for us the natural law is not only the 'unwritten law'; for us it is the Commandment of God, duly formulated and written, and our duty is therefore clearer. It is better to obey God than man.

IV The Content of the Natural Law

We have already said that the natural law comprises the ten Commandments of the Decalogue, with this distinction: the Decalogue is to the natural law what the Penny Catechism is to the Christian Faith.

All the Christian Faith is encapsulated in a concise catechism, if it is a true catechism. But this content of the Christian Faith may be deepened and developed in dozens upon dozens of volumes without ever achieving a complete statement of the subject. This work is the task of Saints, Doctors and the Magisterium of the Church and, under their guidance we must all meditate daily on the import of the Faith.

At the same time, there is nothing in the Natural Law which does not refer back to one of the ten commandments of the Decalogue. It is essentially the task of philosophers to study in finer detail all that conforms to reason and the nature of man.

As this is not a Congress of Philosophers, but a Congress of Christian and Catholic citizens, we will not study the natural law any further in any of the perfectly valid philosophical formulations that have been worked out so far. We are going to refer directly to the Decalogue.

The Ten Commandments were inscribed on the two tables of the law. On the first table were the first three commandments which concern our natural duties to God, on the second table, the seven other commandments which concern our natural duties towards men.

The First Commandment

'I am Lord thy God: thou shalt not have strange gods before me.' In the Catechism we learn this through the formula: *'One God alone shall you adore and you shall love Him absolutely.'*⁴

³ King Creon of Thebes decreed on pain of death that as her brother had died 'as a traitor and rebel', his body should be left to rot unburied on the battlefield. For Antigone, love and natural piety outweighed this command; she defied him, performed the funeral rites and gladly died. (Trans.)

⁴ Here and later, Madiran is referring to the rhymed verse version of the commandments taught to French children. (Trans.)

The Second Commandment

'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.'

The Third Commandment

Thou shalt cease work so as to be able to render God visible worship.

(This is not expressed in the formula you know, but we will return to that.)

These three commandments belong to the natural law. The first commandment formulates what we naturally owe God in our hearts. The second commandment formulates the respect we naturally owe to God in our words. The third commandment states that we are naturally required to consecrate some time and certain external signs of respect to God. I insist that this is the *natural debt* which we owe towards God, Creator of our nature.

These first three commandments are written in our nature and in our hearts, and we can understand and justify them by a proper use of our reason. To put them in parenthesis would gravely amputate the natural law and irreparably disfigure it.

Concerning the third commandment, let us be precise: It is indeed natural reason which enlightens us on our duty to make certain external acts in honour of God. But nature does not tell us what this visible act of worship should consist of, or what rites to follow. It belongs to the positive prescription of human authority and to Divine authority to fix the precise rites by which this visible cult should be rendered to God.

In the law of Moses, the specific prescription of the ritual was naturally announced in these terms:

*'Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.'*⁵

Likewise in the Catholic formula of the Commandments of God, the specific prescription of the ritual was also announced in similar terms:

*'Thou shalt keep Sunday by serving God devotedly.'*⁶

But for those who are neither Jew nor Christian, neither Sunday nor Sabbath have any significance. The Sabbath and the Sunday belong to the ritual order of revealed religion and commemorate God's rest on the seventh day of Creation. (They prefigure besides the 'eternal rest' found in the Beatific Vision.)

Setting that aside, for those who are neither Christian nor Jew, who have neither Sunday nor Sabbath: the third commandment doesn't lack relevance for them altogether. At the level of the purely natural law, of a purely natural morality - that is to say quite apart from any reference to a rite positively fixed by a revealed religion - the Third Commandment sets forth the natural obligation to render to God a visible cult *in ceasing work* in order to *devote a certain time* to Divine things. It is in the nature of man to consecrate a certain time to all sorts of necessary things - food, sleep, etc. and

⁵ The author distinguishes here between Saturday (the Jewish day of rest i.e. the 7th day of Creation) and Sunday (first day of the week), though he does not mention it as the day of resurrection. (Trans.)

⁶ See footnote 4.

therefore to consecrate a certain amount of time to God. This is a natural moral commandment which is universally essential. But those who are neither Christian nor Jew will be unable to find any precise guidance either from nature or reason, about the form this visible cult must take.

The first commandment of the second table is the fourth commandment which says:

'Honour thy father and thy mother, that thou mayest be long-lived upon the land which the Lord thy God will give thee.'

This fourth commandment sets out the moral basis of temporal life in society. It is, so to speak, the basis itself of the 'social contract'. Without it, a society has no 'constitution'. Any society which is not founded on it is no longer a society. It is moreover the only commandment in the Decalogue with an explicit promise of a reward - and of a temporal reward (but don't forget that *all* the commandments of the Decalogue aim to guide us, if we observe them, towards those temporal goods which conform to our nature.)

'To have long life' can moreover, and must be understood in different ways, but all of them temporal. It covers all facets of temporal life. It may perhaps mean living to a ripe old age oneself, or to have a long-life through one's descendants, or again to live long in the memories one has left behind one: all these meanings are valid, and there are others besides. For a life is 'long' says St Thomas, when it has been 'well spent': This is primarily a measure of its *quality* and not necessarily of its duration on earth.

The first three commandments indicate our natural debt in relation to God Himself. The fourth commandment indicates the debt that we owe to those who are the natural mediators of God around us. What God has given us, He has given through them and by them: our physical life and our moral life - that is - our life and education.

We owe naturally a cult to God, from whom all good things come including existence itself. We owe naturally a cult to our parents, who are the instruments, the free instruments and the natural mediators through whom God gave us life and upbringing.

This is certainly not the *same* cult we owe to God, but a cult nevertheless, a cult proportioned to its object.

And by this 4th commandment we owe a cult, a reverence to all those to whom we are beholden for anything in the field of life and education, the parents of our parents, our ancestors, our elders, benefactors and rulers, the great men and women of our nation - the great men and humble servants of our country, our civilisation, of humanity.

In passing from the first to the second table of the law we have thus passed from the cult of God to the cult of man. One hears much talk about the 'cult of man'. It always existed. It is profoundly natural. It is commanded by the natural law. But the cult of man is not the cult of the self - neither individually, nor collectively, here is its difference from the modern heresy. The natural cult of man is the reverence paid by filial piety to parents, ancestors, elders, benefactors, rulers and heroes. It is a cult rendered to those greater than oneself.

On entering this world man is completely in debt. What we have and what we are we have *received* from others. We must also take account of what we make of our lives, that too is important because we will have to render an account of what we have done with our lives. But what we make of our lives is nothing in comparison with what we have freely received. Even the most extraordinary genius

owes to himself neither his existence nor his genius. It is never possible for him *to render all that he owes to God the creator and to those natural mediators with God, parents, ancestors, forebears, elders, rulers, the great men and humble servants of our country and civilization.* All the commandments of the Decalogue have justice as their object, which consists in rendering to each what he is due. But the first four commandments concern a justice, which is of necessity incomplete and imperfect, and by which we cannot succeed in rendering *all* that is due: natural religion is this imperfect justice which we render to God; filial piety is this imperfect justice which we render to our parents, our country, our civilization. Our life in this world, our temporal life, our social life, - our political life is largely determined by our natural situation, our inborn indebtedness which we can never fully repay: we must fully acknowledge this if we wish to take our proper place in the real order of things, and which inspires in us a natural virtue somewhat analogous to the supernatural virtue of humility. To forget, fail to recognize, or deny this situation is to build a make believe society on the basis of an unreal vision of man and to condemn oneself infallibly from ever having that long life on earth which Our Lord God has promised us.

We obviously don't have the time here to study all the precepts of the Decalogue one by one; their richness is inexhaustible, and all aspects of life both social and moral would require to be examined. But I have already said enough about it for you to at least appreciate that *the mandatory basis of all natural politics lies in obedience to the commandments of God without omitting a single one.* Please take to heart this 'line of investigation' as one says nowadays, and you will be able to ascertain and deepen your appreciation of the truth each day of your life. Let us venerate the commandments of God, so that they do not become for us a dead letter or a meaningless formula, when in fact they hold the whole secret of temporal life.

All the commandments of the Decalogue have as their object natural justice, which is the indispensable basis of life in this world, and they have love as their aim. They were ordained to love, they are destined to the two precepts of supernatural charity: the love of God and the 'love of our neighbour'.

Let us understand properly what we mean when we say that grace does not suppress nature, but heals it and elevates it. Or when we say that charity does not abolish the law but fulfils it. Charity is above and beyond the law of justice, it surpasses it but does not deny it. We are told in Scripture that the love of neighbour is like the negative test of the love of God: whoever says he loves God whom he cannot see, and who doesn't love his brother whom he can see is a liar. This does not mean that the love of God amounts to or is confined to the love of neighbour but that in all cases if there is no love of neighbour there is really no love of God.

Similarly natural justice is akin to a negative test of supernatural charity. Charity is not limited to fulfilment of the natural law. But where natural justice is not respected, or where it is not observed, then we do not find true charity.

IV CAN ONE OBSERVE THE NATURAL LAW WITHOUT GRACE?

We have said that one can know the natural law, even outside the Church, but not without difficulty and the risk of error. What does it profit man to know the law naturally, if he does not naturally have the power to observe it?

Nevertheless it helps man to desire, expect and search for help and salvation outside himself.

But to reply to the question, we quoted above the teaching of Ovid and that of St Paul: '*For the good I will, I do not.*' Is man without grace unable to accomplish any good?

He certainly cannot accomplish any supernatural good. Supernatural good is beyond the power of nature alone. But can he not accomplish any natural good?

Catholic doctrine does not make such a claim. Man without grace is able to accomplish the prescriptions of the natural law but subject to two serious reservations.

1. When he fulfils the precepts of the natural law without grace he fulfils them having regard to what is commanded but not in the manner in which they ought to be fulfilled. He fulfils them by a spirit of justice which is a spirit of fear: fear of losing the temporal benefits, which derive from the natural law. (This is not an immoral spirit, it is legitimate but limited. He does not accomplish them through the love of God.)
2. Further, man without grace is able to observe some precepts of the natural law, sometimes one, sometimes another, but not all of them. In other words, he is not incapable of good, but in the state of fallen nature he is not capable of *all* the good that is connatural to him. He is no longer capable of all the good which is inscribed in his nature. He is able to build houses, plant vines, be just to his neighbour, honour his parents and live in society. But societies which have only the natural law i.e. those which have not progressed beyond the natural law to the law of Christ.) do not arrive at its full observance. Man *without* grace – but with original sin, and under the law of concupiscence, is like an invalid: an invalid is able to make movements, he is not dead, but he is neither able to make all the movements that a healthy man can make nor in the manner of a healthy man..

In particular, man without grace is incapable of loving God above all things through this natural love, this love, if I can say so. of justice (rather than charity) which is in his nature! The very foundation therefore of the natural law is thus at risk of disappearing, more or less, from his eyes and from his heart.

Reason is able to present God, for example, as the Immovable Prime Mover and to conceive that this Prime Mover is the most important thing and the most worthy of being loved. Nevertheless this Prime Mover will remain firmly abstract and firmly indifferent in comparison to all those highly attractive and suggestive things which present themselves to us in daily life under the reign of the law of concupiscence.

That is why the grace of God does not only come to raise us to an order superior to that of nature, but also comes to heal our wounded nature. Hence the double function that we recognise in Grace: It restores nature (*gratia sanans*) and it raises it to the supernatural order (*gratia elevans*).

Such is the very simple principle I have sought to remind you of in this introductory report. It is a very simple principle but virtually indispensable. Finally I will present some personal observations.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

These are grouped around two objections:

Objection I

The Decalogue is, of course, very important, but it is much too general. It does not resolve the

particular problems which present themselves today.

Certainly, it is not the law which resolves problems. It is we who have to resolve them one by one. Below I put forward three successive observations on this question.

- A. Frederick Le Play, the great 19th century economist and the author of such words as *Social Reform in France*, *European Workers*, and *The Essential Constitution of Humanity* spent a great part of his life visiting most European countries on foot as a means of thoroughly studying the social and economic problems of his time. His experience led him to the conclusion that the absolutely indispensable conditions for economic prosperity (i.e. a real and lasting prosperity) lay in respect for the Decalogue; and that the principal cause of economic and social crises is that the Decalogue is not respected. There thus exists, a direct and vital relationship between the law in its general principles and particular concrete situations. It is important to grasp this fact.
- B. The Decalogue is an objective rule, that is to say, it does not depend on the human will (individual or collective). It is a law that we receive with our nature itself; and not one created by man. We touch here on the fundamental error of the Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1789 which affirms that; 'The Law is the expression of the general will.' That Declaration claims to affirm imprescriptible rights; but as these are founded on nothing other than the general will, they can be modified or abolished.

This is the sin of Adam raised to the nth degree: man claims to create law for himself. But man cannot promulgate his own law, he receives it from the Creator, he finds it in his created nature. His only function is to recognise it and apply it. The human laws of the State have as their function, to specify the natural law according to the diverse conditions particular to time and place.

C. The application of the natural law is not automatic. Law is by definition general, whereas the actual situations in which one finds oneself involved are particular by definition. Take for example, the classic example of the object held in custody which one is under an obligation to return. A friend gives me a very beautiful dagger for safekeeping, a collector's item. When he comes to ask for it back, I have every good reason to think that he wants to use it to kill his neighbour. I therefore postpone returning it. The commandment has not been abolished by the particular situation, as 'situation ethics' would have us believe since it denies the existence of general principles and universal laws. Particular situations are unable to abolish the commandments in any way, but they do pose the problem of knowing which commandment takes priority in a specific case. In this example priority is given to the 5th commandment prohibiting killing or being an accomplice in such a crime.

The fifth commandment 'thou shalt not kill', is never abolished by the particular terrible situation of war. It is precisely because of this commandment that during war, unless we are savages, we cannot kill whenever or whoever we wish. Between the general law - always general, and the particular case - always particular - it is obviously necessary to use the intermediary of that moral commonsense that the theologians call the virtue of prudence: not to avoid the law, but to discern which of the principles of the law it is just to apply in a given situation. The law does not address itself to robots who will apply it mechanically. It is addressed to free and responsible beings who will apply it in conscience and according to its spirit of justice.

It is necessary not only to have an exact knowledge of the law, but also an exact knowledge

of the situations to which one applies it. And this exact knowledge of situations is not ordinarily found in books: it is to be found in personal experience arising from situations. Apart from extraordinary speculative geniuses, and the saints who have equally extraordinary charisms, it is only experience which allows us to truly know concrete situations. To conduct ourselves in a just manner we must have both a knowledge of the natural law and knowledge of situations, and if we have no experience of the situation in which we find ourselves, it behooves us to seek advice from those who have that experience. The advice of experienced people is not merely nor primarily a useful practical consideration or an efficient technique: it has a moral value, it is a moral necessity. That is why the person who will address you about war and the natural law is at the same time an illustrious serviceman, a great citizen and a Christian thinker. Admiral Paul Auphan, whom you will hear on Sunday. If he was only a warrior or only a Christian thinker, and was not in addition a great citizen, because remember that war is a political problem too, he would be very likely to fall either for the barbaric theories of total war, or for the illusion of conscientious objection, both of them contrary to natural morality.

I have given this truly exemplary example, because at a more modest level each of us in our daily lives has to do much the same thing: to apply the natural law, never blindly, but in the domain of our responsibility and competence, in spirit and in truth.

Objection 2

At the beginning of this Congress, someone asked me rather sceptically: The natural law, now that is a very obscure and controversial question. Is there such a thing as the Natural Law?

Modern Philosophy is very uncertain on this point. It no longer manages to discern or to admit the existence of a natural law and often radically rejects the very notion.

This is indeed a grave problem: but a problem for philosophers, and for Philosophical Congresses. This is not a congress of philosophers and certainly not a congress of 'modern'⁷ philosophers.

If by misfortune we are not capable of knowing what the natural law is by reason, then we can know it by faith and the teaching of the Church.

That is why the natural law is the object of Divine Revelation - to help us overcome the weaknesses in our reason. The same goes for the existence of God. By natural reason we are able to know that God exists. But if as a result of a decadence of spirit our philosophy is not capable of knowing with certainty the existence of God then at least faith affirms, with the certitude it has, both God's existence and His law. When reason fails, then faith comes into play, by a sort of subsidiary action, to take over (from natural knowledge) in giving us an understanding of those things necessary for salvation.

This is not to say that we have no philosophical answer to the philosophical uncertainties and errors of modern philosophy. But, firstly this is not our task here, and it is certainly not my task. Secondly, for us, the existence and content of the natural law does not depend on the issue of such a philosophical debate as it does for modern philosophy which is neither Jewish or Christian. We will take note of the doubts of modern philosophers for their sake and with a view to offering them

⁷ What we call modern philosophy is not the whole field of contemporary philosophy: but that part of contemporary philosophy which has broken completely from both traditional philosophy and the common experience of humanity.

some help in their philosophical thinking.

But we will not entertain these doubts ourselves. We who have received the gift of faith and at the same time knowledge of God's law have no right to allow our certainty to be shaken by such doubts.

Whatever sympathy we might have for the modern philosopher, or whatever desire we have to help him, we cannot blind ourselves on his account, nor close our eyes to the degeneracy of natural reason to which he bears witness.

Chesterton hit the nail straight on the head when he wrote that: '*The most dangerous of all criminals today, is the modern philosopher, freed from all laws.*'

Freed from the natural law and from the supernatural law, being no longer Greek, nor Jewish, nor Christian, the modern philosopher has nothing to teach us. (Except perhaps by accident, and then on secondary or anecdotal points only.) On the contrary he is for that reason, the most dangerous of all the criminals, the most pathetic of all the ignorant, the most unhappy of unhappy mortals. He lacks the very essentials of philosophy.

He has returned to barbarism, since the absence of law is the very definition of barbarism. Intellectual and moral barbarism can be defined as ignorance or misinterpretation of the natural law (a misinterpretation which culminates in the Marxist denial). According to St Thomas, man without the natural law becomes, *pessimum omnium animalium*. the most wicked and the worst of all the animals. And Chesterton is thinking along the same lines as St Thomas when he affirms that the modern philosopher, who has freed himself from the natural law is in this respect the most dangerous of all criminals.

The lay doctor - or the ecclesiastical doctor who does not recognise the natural law has become *pessimum omnium animalium*. We know nothing of his personal culpability. God alone knows it and God alone is his judge. But such a one is objectively a public criminal.

If the light of reason fails you concerning the natural law, don't bother yourself, don't worry, ask God for the light of faith. God does not refuse the light of faith to those who ask for it. ■

28

This is not to say that we have no philosophical answer to the philosophical uncertainties and errors of modern philosophy. But, firstly this is not our task here, and it is certainly not my task. Secondly, for us, the existence and content of the natural law does not depend on the issue of such a philosophical debate as it does for modern philosophy which is neither Jewish or Christian. We will take note of the doubts of modern philosophers for their sake and with a view to offering them some help in their philosophical thinking.

But we will not entertain these doubts ourselves. We who have received the gift of faith and at the same time knowledge of God's law have no right to allow our certainty to be shaken by such doubts. Whatever sympathy we might have for the modern philosopher, or whatever desire we have to help him, we cannot blind ourselves on his account, nor close our eyes to the degeneracy of natural reason to which he bears witness..

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