

THE GOOD FORCE OF BEING

PART ONE

LUIGI VITALI IN CONVERSATION WITH VITO MANCUSO

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Vito Mancuso is an Italian philosopher and theologian. His works on theology like *L'anima e il suo destino* (2007), *Io e Dio Una guida dei perplessi* (2011), *Il principio passione La forza che ci spinge ad amare* (2013), *Dio e il suo destino* (2015) have become bestsellers and literary causes célèbres often triggering discussions and debate. By and large Mancuso's thinking can be described as theological evolutionism, and philosophically speaking, as emergentism. His ideas are inspired by the conviction that *Being* is evolving progressively, even of this comes about through crises, negations, contradictions, antinomies. In this sense, Mancuso understands religion as an existential hymn to the total sense of life, something that can bring harmony to its contrasts and contradictions, while revealing the grandeur and beauty of human beings who are free to opt for the good, for love and justice. Human freedom is one that recognizes the divine logos and its continuous creative activity as the physical, chemical and spiritual rationale behind the universe. A freedom that takes the good power inherent in Being to be the constituent principle of the world.

LUIGI VITALI

It's no easy task to understand exactly what we mean when we speak of the concept of "God". The term often refers to human projections and inventions of an anthropomorphic deity who decides on our affairs, a figure venerated by those who blindly believe and who is attacked by sceptics and which probably has very little to do with any real concept of God. Today the work that you are doing represents a reference point for a passionate, relevant and sensible reconsideration of the concept of God and human existence. So, my question to you is: what have you been able to learn about God in your ongoing questioning of life?

VITO MANCUSO

I have come to understand a few things, but above all, I have understood that there are some things that we can't understand. I can say that I have understood why a sort of reflection has always arisen in humanity, actually, I would call it more than a reflection, I would call it faith or belief in the divine.

Why does this need arise? Doubtless for two reasons. The first, which was felt in Antiquity, is the need to explain the complex mesh which is the world. The second and main reason is the need for consolation and healing. The two things are related but not completely the same. Wounds are something that concern the life of every human being, everybody suffers. In the best of cases we are all covered with scars, in the worst, the wounds are still open and bleeding. Wounds that are physical, psychological and spiritual. The first of the noble truths the Buddha proclaimed in his famous sermon in Benares, when he set the wheel of *Dharma* into motion, is that life is suffering: *Dukkha* which means just that, suffering, discomfort, pain. I think this is one of the most important premises, probably the most important premise behind the need for Religion.

And it is out of this suffering that the need for consolation and healing arises. "Consolation" may be understood in the not very noble sense of "soothing", but it can also be understood as something noble, such as philosophy. Philosophy the way Boetius (Roman philosopher of the sixth century) used the term with no distinction between the term theology and spirituality. As a matter of fact, it was a philosopher, Plato, who coined the term Theology in the second book of the Republic. At a deep level there is no difference between the discipline of theology and philosophy.

Isaac Newton, in his famous *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* wrote "Deus est vox relativa", God is a relative term. As Newton said and before him one of the Church fathers, Justin, God is a term which isn't a proper noun for an entity, but a relative term, that is to say, a term that points to a relationship, or rather, to a dependence. When a human being realizes that he is in the presence of something greater than himself, something that absorbs him, envelops him and sometimes even unsettles him, or overwhelms him; that is when the mind allows the concept of the divine to enter.

Here a feeling of dependence is created. A great philosopher, Friederich Schleiermacher, who lived in Berlin between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, spoke of this very feeling of dependence, as something that marks out the religious conscience. We mustn't think of this as a servile dependence, but rather as the awareness of being in the presence of something larger than ourselves, something we depend on and which at the same time we belong to. If we don't have these two things together, there is no religious conception of God.

Certainly, the concept of the divine may be interpreted in different ways, in the singular or plural, in other words, as monotheism or polytheism, as a male or female, or as both male and female together, as personal or impersonal, these are the different variations that human beings, depending on their histories, their environments, climates, etc. have put forward. Whatever the case, the concept of the divine arises in the human consciousness for one reason, to express the feeling we experience in the presence of something larger than ourselves.

If it is in feeling immersed in something larger than ourselves that we manage to conceive of the existence of a superior being, what do we really mean when we speak of God? How are we to understand and frame this concept?

We can say, indeed we must say, that God has to be considered as the good force of Being. God is the force of Being, the good power. By good I mean in its physical sense, a force that introduces organization, a power that represents the informing principle, the constitutive principle.

Even Heisenberg, the founder of quantum mechanics and Nobel prize winner for physics in 1932, spoke of God in these terms. The central principle, as an ordering principle, that is, as the power that informs the chaotic energy of the beginnings. That chaos which Being always has to deal with, which itself represents a form of Being. When I say, the good force of Being, I mean that same force that confers form on chaos, that introduces order, or rather, organization.

I prefer to speak of organization rather than order, because order is basically a static concept, it refers to a command or something authoritarian. But the term organization implies dynamism, the possibility of change, and above all, it implies the presence of a system.

So, try to name a being which isn't a system, a being that exists on its own, without the logic of a system? You won't be able to name even one. Everything is system, atoms are systems, subatomic particles are systems, not to mention, of course, everything that derives from them.

So what is the force which operates in such a way that Being has this logic of aggregation, of assembly? How does it happen that an aggregation produces a system and then a higher system and after that a web or network? Here is the force that we call God. That is to say, God, understood as the good force of Being, as a force that inhabits Being, is immanent in Being itself, the force that leads to the system, that favours organization.

That is why, the more that human beings are inhabited by this feeling of the divine, the more they feel the need to introduce system into the world, a positive energy and to create real ties, relationships with other human beings, with all living beings. But I would say, also with non-living beings, with stones and clouds, with everything that surrounds us, in a feeling of belonging, of communion, of unity. What else is mysticism, if not a feeling of unity? The profound feeling of being united with everything, not just with God.

This mysticism isn't different from the physical logic that aggregates, that organises and, in fact, there are various scientists who feel this deep unity and deep analogy with the mystical quest.

Fritjof Capra who wrote *The Tao of Physics* is one of them. I could mention Pier Luigi Luisi who taught chemistry for many years at the Technological Institute of Zurich. Augusto Sabbadini, the quantum physicist also comes to mind. Ugo Amaldi, physicist at the CERN in Geneva, son of Edoardo Amaldi who was one of the founders of the CERN, or Heisenberg himself whom I mentioned earlier, you need only read his writings.

We could cite Max Planck, or Einstein who had what we might call a Spinozian or Plotinian sense of the divine, with whom he shared this feeling of the One, this sense of order. Or Niels Bohr, one of the fathers of physics and who was closer to a Taoist vision of Being. I could mention many others.

The good force of Being means precisely this, the capacity that Being has for organization, the capacity to make itself into a system. Of course, Being is not only that, but if there weren't this informing principle we wouldn't be here talking, and there wouldn't be a cosmos either, there would just be chaos. But the world is also a cosmos.

I think that the evolution of life that is happening on the earth is really undergoing an evolution, not simply a series of mutations, but a real evolution, a movement towards greater organization and complexity.

And so why does this happen? Why doesn't Being return to the chaos of the beginning? Why does life, instead of being marked by phenomena of regression and sometimes advancement, why does it continue to move along the arrow of time towards increasing complexity and organization of the mind? Why is this so? I believe it's because there is a principle that informs and organises.

And this principle is the force that I call God.

If God and Nature are almost interchangeable concepts, can we speak of a pantheistic vision of existence?

My perspective isn't one of pantheism. Pantheism, as Spinoza understood it, says that reality and perfection are the same thing. In this sense pantheism is an orientation of the mind, and even before that, one of the heart of someone who looks at the world and finds it perfect, who finds it not just inhabited by divinity but already divine itself, completely ordered, one might almost say without any chaos, or where chaos is completely in conformity with *logos*, in full realization.

My perspective isn't that because I feel the world is undergoing an evolutionary drama that leads it continuously to moments when it is becoming perfect, at the cost of moments of imperfection, of passion, of pain, of drama. This takes us back to *Dukkha*, the fundamental pain that Buddha spoke of, back to the sin of the world, as in the fourth Gospel.

The world isn't sin, the world is marvellous, but at the same time it also isn't the original Eden Spinoza spoke of. The world contains perfection and it contains imperfection, and for that reason I use the term "Panenteism", that is, I think the world is infused by the divine principle, that it is informed by the divine principle, but this principle isn't such that it takes autonomy away from the world, so that it completely reduces chaos to *logos*. Chaos sometimes shows itself by doing evil, not only to men, but doing evil to all living beings.

What saves us, what gives us hope is the knowledge that all of us are exposed to the original wave of being. To the original wave of life. Imagine that Being is like a wave and we are like musical strings. It passes through and sets vibrating. The more we are in harmony with that wave, the more we become perfect, the more we fully realise our potential as human beings. Everything alive is the string of a violin that resonates with the wave that passes through it, which is Being, which is life, and if we wish, we can call that God.

Thought, when it is expressed, when it is formulated, is an attempt to give a voice to the fundamental emotion of life.

Spinoza speaks of *Laetitia*, a word that recurs dozens of times in his ethics, he talks about joy and perfection because he sees the world from that perspective. I don't deny that this perspective exists. In me there is this string, but it's not the only one. I also sense the truth from the opposite perspective, from that of Schopenhauer's objection, when he says that the world is the opposite of Spinoza's, an abyss of pain, suffering and injustice. I also feel the truth of this dimension, and so I try to find a balance inside myself between these two strings that resonate.

My thinking is born out of this, and may be encapsulated in the Principle of Passion which I wrote about in my book. I think that if the world is more than just an arbitrary force, but expresses a logic of a harmonious relationship, then it makes sense to understand our lives as marked by good and justice. And I'm convinced that this force that moves us to love, that moves us to hope, is not ours alone, in the sense of private property belonging to individuals separated from others and from the world, but rather, that it is the expression of a primordial cosmic logic that has always operated in the mass of energy that is the world.

Quoting Feuerbach's intuition can we say: "Whatever men's desires are, those are their gods". What are the desires that drive this ongoing search of yours?

I'm no different from the human beings who came before me and who are beside me. If sometimes I am different, I am certainly wrong, because it's about situating oneself in the great journey of humanity.

My desires are the same ones that have driven the human beings before me, that is, the need for an explanation on the one hand and consolation and healing on the other. There is no difference. The need for explanation has led human beings to great spiritual traditions and it also leads me to these categories of the divine, for example, the category of the *Tao*, the concept of the One, the concept of Being, these are all, one might say, concepts of the divine that are a little cold, in the sense that they address the intellect and refer to a logical side, that of *logos*.

Then, inside me there is that other side, the warmer side, more maternal, more consoling, that views the divine as hope, as the source from which we spring, and the harbour towards which we are heading, the great arms that embrace us or the great heart that warms us. Here we find the concept of the father or the concept of the mother, the concept of brotherhood, aspects that are very important for an understanding of the divine in its warm sense. These are the various desires that move inside me and that are united with a sense of good.

What do I mean by Good? Plato says that God is the idea of the good, and we should understand this idea of good, not as cooperation, but as something that introduces organization. Ethics or physics are ultimately the same thing. Organization that introduces itself at the physical level we call information. Organization that introduces itself at the human level we call justice, or honesty, or the good, but the logic is the same.

God is just that, the idea of good, the great ideal that drives me to go beyond my particular interests and that drives me to inter-being; drives me into harmonious relations with others, to the wish for true communion, the wish for good, for honesty, the search for justice. We can say, and indeed we must say, that the concept of God coincides with the concept of Good, Justice, Peace and Love. This is what is referred to when we speak of God. The New Testament, for example, uses three terms, saying God is Light, God is Spirit, God is Love. Just as Dante Alighieri repeats in Canto 30 of the *Paradiso*:

"O spirit, born of joy! who in the rays / Of life eternal, of that sweetness know'st / The flavour, which, not tasted, passes far / All apprehension; me it well would please, / If thou wouldst tell me of thy name, and this / Your station here."

This is the most luminous concept of God that presents itself to my consciousness.

So I would say that the desire that motivates my quest is the need for *Religio*, and I use the Latin term *Religio* and not religion because religion is a broken term, dusty and smelling of mould, but which we need to restore to its primitive sense. *Religio* means that which binds, that which brings things into relation with each other, that which unites. It is a term that refers to relational logic. The wound our world is suffering from, I mean in the West, is just this fact that *Religio* is no longer present, there is no longer present that which binds the freedoms of human beings together.

The decadence of the west, which is something people have been speaking about for centuries, or at least since Hegel in Berlin gave his lessons on the philosophy of religion, when he said we could draw a comparison between the late Roman Empire and the present day, this was happening, as he explained, because the general interest had disappeared, the great idea that unites people, and without which, everyone ends up exclusively occupied with their own particular interests. This is precisely what the death of religion is referring to. Later Nietzsche would come along and talk about the death of God, but even before God or together with God, *Religio* died, in other words the mortar that unites and unifies freedoms.

Today, what binds us together are economic interests, security interests, particular interests. Of course, a society is also held together by these things, but a society can only be cohesive, when it is able to unite freedoms beyond the interests. A civilisation is great when it tells you that it is not only your wallet that is united to other people, but that your soul is united to them as well, that we are all part of an organism. It is only in this sense that a civilisation can be strong and cohesive. As soon as this feeling disappears, society begins to fall apart, it begins to disintegrate, and this is exactly what everyone is noticing now, and it is happening in the West.

... AND DON'T ALL THINGS PRESS / ON YOUR HEAD AND HEART, / AND WEAVE, IN ETERNAL MYSTERY, / VISIBLY: INVISIBLY, AROUND YOU? / FILL YOUR HEART FROM IT: IT IS SO VAST, / AND WHEN YOU ARE BLESSED BY THE DEEPEST FEELING, / CALL IT THEN WHAT YOU WISH, / JOY! HEART! LOVE! GOD! / HAVE NO NAME / FOR IT! / NAMES ARE SOUND AND SMOKE, / VEILING HEAVEN'S BRIGHT GLOW. »

Goethe, *Faust*, part I scene XVI

Etymologically, the term society implies being partners. One has a society insofar as one feels partnered with others, if not, then all we have left is a more or less anonymous, formless mass of persons. One can be a partner to the extent that one shares not just interests but ideals. That is why my thinking and my desires are driven by the attempt to reformulate a *Religio*, a new horizon, so to speak, that will once again be fascinating for human beings.

Today we need to find a perspective that addresses freedoms, that attracts them and unites them. I think this is an important, I might say, crucial task, which philosophical and theological thinking, if they are at all responsible, cannot get away from. And here I emphasize the word responsible. Responsible thinking means the kind of thinking that seeks to understand what people need, what sickness they have and how to go about curing it. Thinking is always therapeutic, especially theological or philosophical thinking to the extent that they are responsible, that they are civil passions.

We need to understand what this age is suffering from and try as much as we can to offer suitable therapies. We need to rediscover a *Religio*. That is what I am attempting to do in my work. That's the desire that motivates me.

As a theologian, do you think it important to bring theological discourse back into the limelight? Would philosophical and scientific discourse on the origin of the world and existence be more credible and useful than theology? Why is it important today to use an inconvenient term like God?

Martin Buber in *Eclipse of God*, a book that came out at the beginning of the 1950s talks about a conference at the end of which a gentleman stood up and said: "Enough talk about God, today that's a broken, bloodstained word, how much evil has been done, how many wars have been fought in his name, let's stop talking about God". Buber reports this episode and concludes: "Even though I'm aware of all the limitations and inadequacies of this word, I can't come up with a better term".

I always try to get people to understand what is at stake with the term God, and what is at stake is, precisely, primary reality, the informing principle, the principle of order, which is the highest good if we choose to use ethical terms, or Being if we want to use physical, ontological terms. The Being that persists, that substantiates, the becoming of things, which the human mind traditionally refers to when it says God. Today we must no longer take the word God for granted, we always have to explain what is at stake, only in this way does it become legitimate to use it, but, today, using it without this explanation could even be harmful.

I'm convinced that for the vast majority of westerners, when you say God, the image that appears in their minds is the one from the Sistine Chapel, of a man between 65 and 70 years old with a white beard and a stern expression, a powerful build, a strong man who imposes his will, which brings to mind the figure of *Deus* as I call him in my latest book, that male God, authoritarian, the father and boss, typical of the patriarchal system, more or less nasty or more or less good depending on the psychology. This is an anthropomorphic image of God which obviously needs to be discarded. But we need to understand that these images too have been and continue to be vehicles. Images, apart from their limitations, are important because they are vehicles without which we would be mute. We humans are unable to think unless we use images and that is why we need to understand that these images and categories that we use to help us think are nothing but instruments.

I need to know that the car can bring me to a certain point and if I really want to climb the mountain, I have to get out of the car. I can't get to the top unless I get out of the car and walk. These categories can bring me to the slopes of the mountain, once I'm there, there are no more vehicles, something else comes into play.

More than a theological discourse, what our world really needs today is a spiritual discourse. We need a kind of thinking that is warm, generous, welcoming, able to create ties, able to create syntheses, we've had more than enough of the cold, analytical, rational, divisive kind of thinking, thinking that loves distinctions and analyses. However important that kind of thinking may be, what our age needs today, without doing away with analysis, without doing away with distinctions, is a movement towards a new alliance, towards a new synthesis of new visions. The world, as I said, needs *Religio*. This spiritual discourse can be engaged in a theological context, or in a philosophical context, or in an inter-faith context, or even in a scientific context. What is important is to seek to dialogue, and to involve different disciplines to encourage the spiritual discourse of unity that this age needs.

Let's remember that when talking of spirituality we are speaking about human specialness. We need to protect this human specialness inside this world of ours that is increasingly falling prey to technology, economics and machines. If the world runs this risk, then the task of theological

thinking is not to lose our passion for what is human, and having passion for what is human means talking about the spirit, talking about spirituality. What does speaking about spirit really mean? It means talking about freedom. Spirit is a term the mind has coined to say that we are not merely determined matter, but we're also passion for ideals, for good, for justice, for aesthetic creativity, for ethical will, for a kind of research that produces science that later produces knowledge that then produces culture. If you take away the spiritual dimension, understood as the intellectual dimension in its noblest sense, then you take away the specialness of *Homo Sapiens*. Engaging in a spiritual discourse today means safeguarding and protecting what is human. That's what is at stake.

Although your thought is critically oriented and free from any doctrine, it is still situated within the Catholic tradition, a religion which in our view developed mainly as an instrument of organization and social control that continually interposed filters between faith and truth while avoiding any search for true freedom. A religion that with the aim of propagating, popularised itself, simplified its messages, fashioned idols out of spiritual concepts, transformed intuitions into dogmas while using a sense of sin and guilt as its favourite method for exercising control over people. A religion that it is difficult to imagine as something separate from its own mystifications and limitations and which is hard to see as suitable for younger people as a spiritual pathway towards the truth and freedom from the illusions of the world. So my sincere question is: how can Christianity be a viable pathway for anyone wishing to approach spirituality today?

I like the term post-Christianity, which on the one hand uses the word Christianity but also "post". I can't think of myself without thinking of Christianity, and I don't think the West can either. Christianity is so bound up with the history of humanity in the West, with its values, its artistic, musical and intellectual creations that we can't do without it.

In 1942, Benedetto Croce wrote, "We are unable to say that we are not Christians" and I think this still holds true today. I don't think things have changed, and we can also see this in Pope Francis' popularity, who basically is the only real leader in the West. The only leader able to move peoples' consciences, because he touches the western conscience in a deep place. This is a conscience that comes out of the Christian tradition. We can't fail to acknowledge this reference. That's why when I speak of Christianity, I add the prefix "post". Because I believe Christianity needs to evolve, to reform itself, to transcend itself and to understand that its dogmatic system and the notion that there is no salvation outside the Church and Christ is a mistaken one which is no longer in step with the spirit of the times.

This is the sense in which I use the term post-Christianity, a kind of thinking that reforms and evolves in the face of science, philosophy and other religions, and above all in dialogue with atheism. For the moment I call it post-Christianity. Just as we use the term post-modern to describe something that comes after modernity but whose identity we're not clear about, which we don't understand and so we just label it "post". The same has to said about Christianity.

Traditional Christianity is over, and only if it self-regenerates will it return to being a viable pathway again. Christianity needs to lose its attitude of primacy and present itself humbly as one vehicle among many and rediscover what makes it special: its interest in mankind and its custodianship of humanity. That is what is special about it. The leading idea behind Christianity, one that will never go away, is the idea that God incarnated in man, in other words, that the divine shows its full face, expresses all its potential when it approaches the mystery of the human being, or rather the specialness of the human being. And what is special about the human being if not intelligence? Intelligence that turns into the good, intelligence that desires the good, intelligence that wants love. That's the message of Christianity: where you find the goodness of intelligence, that is where you have the highest expression of humanity. We are talking about an intelligence that understands, that doesn't renounce the light, that directs the fruits of its understanding towards the good, towards introducing positive energy into the world; introducing order, organization and generosity into the system. This is the good. And the good is the highest specific quality the human mind and heart can reach.

Mind and heart together. This is what Christianity is talking about when it speaks of the incarnation of God in man, this is where you find the highest expression of the divine, where the human is in contact with God, and with the goodness of intelligence. That's what makes it different from other religions that have other specific qualities, this is what is specific about Christianity. I think this can be something very fascinating. At least it is for me, and I think that very likely it could be so for young people too. From this perspective, I don't need to do away with the human to find the sense and summit of Being, I don't have to deny humanity, rather I have to serve it, I have to make it stronger, to purify it, in order to reach the luminous goodness of intelligence. If this is what Christianity is, then it will have a great future, but if Christianity continues to be the conscience of sin, of pain and pessimism about the human phenomenon, then at the very least it will be a bore.

Do you think the way the world is going, younger people really need organized religion?

What I believe is that we human beings need concrete symbols, concrete stories and specific communities, therefore I think that attention to a specific spiritual tradition is important.

By this I don't mean to deny that someone might attain a spirituality that doesn't need any concrete religious reference. For many people the face of Christianity is so boring, so oppressive, so negative because of memories, historical associations and practices, that they feel the need to free themselves from it and I think they are right in doing so. Let them free themselves. What is important is that human beings manage to find peace and have a sense of inner peace that can promote the goodness of intelligence.

For me, that's the point. We aren't here to become Christians or Buddhists or Taoists or Muslims. As I said, religions are instruments and vehicles that attempt to lead to a full humanity, towards the full edification of *homo sapiens*, which means reaching that dimension of the goodness of intelligence. That's the destination! That's where we need to arrive. If someone thinks they can get there without religion, simply by embracing atheism, that's fine, go for it. Personally, I find that pathway difficult and I don't practice it, but in the end the only thing that matters is pursuing an intelligence that wishes to understand and is honest. An intelligence that expresses itself as generosity, as goodness, as a desire for goodness and justice. That's the point towards which we should be striving. Whether one person gets there from one direction or another is really of secondary importance.

While that's true on a personal level, collectively I believe it's important to have an organization. The way I see it, organization is the very structure of life, there is nothing vital that can do without an organization. Take the cell, the fundamental unit of life, as it were, look how well structured it is, with its membrane, the cytoplasm, the nucleus and the connections between these three levels and all the cells connected to each other. As I said before, there is an impulse in energy, in matter towards aggregation, and this impulse towards aggregation which is rooted in our physicality generates a psychological need for social aggregation and, hence, for authority. There is a need for organization and authority and proof of this is the widespread need in our society for leadership, which if it isn't met at the highest levels, is met at a lower level, sometimes a very low level. The need for structure is inherent to life itself. I believe that the passage from the interior spiritual dimension to the religious institution is something structural that we can't get away from.

The real question is: are religions today at the same level of spiritual evolution as contemporary people? Religions need to evolve if they wish to be suitable to the needs of younger people. They need to think of themselves as independent pathways, but also relative ones, and abandon their presumption of primacy. They need to understand that they are relative instruments for the good of the world, which is something greater than they are.

I don't believe there will be a new super religion that brings everyone together. That would be a disaster, it will never happen, that idea is a creation of the intellectuals which will never come about. I even have trouble believing in Hans Küng's *Welt Ethos*, that is, a global ethics, valid for all men and for all ages, for all cultures and for every individual. Personally, however theoretically fascinating the idea may be, I don't think it is a practical route. But even if only theoretically we might hope that common ethical discourse is achievable, that is by no means the case for religious discourse. The world is a richer place because of differences and not homogeneities. We need to arrive at the idea that different pathways exist and coexist. In this area there is only the need for dialogue.

So we need to understand what is specific to the religious man, that crosses over all religions, I mean that intimate interiority which normally is called the spiritual soul, but that we can call heart, inner man, deep consciousness, transcendental consciousness. That profound dimension which isn't just the psyche, the character or temperament, that isn't something singular or something that only has to do with me, but is the voice of a larger dimension, something more universal that has to do with the structure and meaning of the world.

The soul I feel inside of me is the same soul that governs the world. It is equal to God. This is the specific quality that is found in all religions, that some express in the theistic sense, others non-theistically, some in monotheism, others in polytheism, but there is no religion that doesn't make this equation: my Self, my deepest interiority is connected to the overall sense of the world. This ought to be the starting point for inter-religious dialogue, indeed, it should be the starting point for any sort of dialogue.

I'm thinking of technology and how it has influenced our way of being and thinking over the past few years. This revolution, besides simplifying and improving many aspects of life has also, in the way we collectively exchange information, simplified the structure of our minds, our language, our attention, the way we think, not to mention the way we interact

and experience our solitude. It looks as if the future is shaping up not according to the prediction that machines will become increasingly like men, but that men will become ever more like machines. In your opinion will this affect feelings and the spiritual dimension of young people by increasingly binding us to the materiality of existence?

Of course, technology or rather the use we make of it may represent a threat for the spiritual life, but also for consciousness and for free thought, for the capacity for reflection, because the dimension of solitude which presupposes these activities almost disappears with the use of these technologies. One of the most beautiful definitions of religion I know is from William James, one of the founders of psychology who in his 1902 book *The Varieties of Religious Experience: a Study in Human Nature* wrote: "Religion is what an individual does with his own solitude".

There is a private dimension where what defines us is not the relationships we have with others or our social roles. In these moments we no longer perceive ourselves as being fathers, or sons, or professionals or by how we wish to appear, in these moments we don't define ourselves. That is solitude. This solitude which we perceive inside ourselves, to what do we connect it to, when we are not taken up by our social lives and by the energy that comes from our relationships and from being connected? To what do we connect that profound individuality that emerges in these moments?

You see, it's only in these moments that we feel we can connect our solitude to something that transcends it and gives it meaning, we feel that we find a connection between the interior dimension and the cosmic. Religion is just the use that the individual makes of this solitude. We can say that religion, or free thought and even creativity can't exist without solitude. So today, when the new technologies are so invasive that they take away any place for silence, for meditation, for being alone, that when we are so connected we can't do without it, it's clear that they represent a serious threat; not only for the spiritual dimension, but also for *Sapiens*, for the man who reflects. The risk is that thought turns into mere reaction, there is no longer the possibility of initiating an action. There is no longer the possibility of performing a free act, something original that springs up from within. One reacts just like a link in a chain, in a series with many other links, all of them connected, one to the other and it's obvious that here the sense of human existence disappears.

The observation I could make is that technology which was created to serve us has become the master, from a simple instrument, it has become an end in itself: what counts today is being connected, exchanging information, no matter what kind, the essential thing is to be part of the communicative process. Since a larger idea of the world has disappeared, the world has become the absolute, or rather, that thing in the world that has the most force has become absolute, and today that's technology: not the natural world with its mystery, but technology fuelled by capital with the aim of producing even more capital.

Since the foundation has gone missing from the horizon of the western mind, the ultimate purpose of life has also disappeared. But because we are unable to live without the direction of a purpose, the consequence is that what was once a means has become an end. We don't work to live, we work to work, we don't entertain ourselves in order to live, we entertain ourselves to entertain ourselves. The failure of the West is drying up the wellsprings of the utopian imagination, the dream of a better, of a more just world. I think that today's crisis of thinking about the divine also involves thinking about utopia and the possibility of overcoming or even merely reforming the current state of things. What else but an idea of transcendence can open the mind to the fact that reality can be different?

But this new horizon towards which to strive needs to re-emerge in the minds of the new generations, only then can the present disclose all its positive potentials. I believe that today this gathering of interconnected minds can really be the place that engenders a new collective dimension of good, community and justice. This can emerge, of course, but only if the ideal to head towards is clear in our minds.

(TO BE CONTINUED IN VOL. II)

THE GOOD FORCE OF BEING

PART TWO

LUIGI VITALI IN CONVERSATION WITH VITO MANCUSO

Translated by Fred Sengmueller

Vito Mancuso is an Italian philosopher and theologian. To quote his words: “I’m talking about a spirituality that is no longer *theist*, one might call it *a-theist* without this is any way meaning atheist like in the ‘theology of the death of God’, current in the 1960s and 1970s. Quite the contrary, my thinking aims to safeguard the very precious reality conveyed by this word and the possibility of drawing an experience out of it, and for this very reason I refuse to speak about God in the traditional manner known as *theism*, especially about his metaphysical characteristics like perfection and omnipotence that turn him into an imperial personage, far removed from the primacy of love and mercy.”

(CONTINUED FROM VOL. I)

LUIGI VITALI

The habit we’ve acquired in order to feel closer to our own lives, more in control, especially in the society of global capitalism, is to continuously seek ways of “relief” from the burden of the world. We might think of this as a personal quest, which almost exclusively takes the form of an apparent freedom of choice, gratification, absence of constraint whose purpose seems to be a reaction against the structure of the world rather than a real action towards truth and freedom.

In this quest, good isn’t defined as an ideal to move towards but as the reaction against what oppresses us. It’s a good which is arbitrary, short-lived and conceived of mostly as a relief or escape. And the risk is that this reaction against the distortions of the world only generates further distortions, so we remain unable to identify an ethical horizon to move towards. In your view, what do the young generations need in order to embrace true and free action? A true and free rebellion? What do we need to see beyond the world’s distortions, to see the image of how we really wish to be and really ought to be?

Let’s begin by asking what action is. The word action is related to the term Act, which not only refers to a completed action, but also to something that confers mastery, creativity, freedom. Whoever is capable of action, is capable of completely realizing their potential, but above all, capable of creating something new. It’s just that, active. While reaction implies passivity: we react as a response to a preceding action, and so our action may even be completed, but it can’t be free, spontaneous or creative because it is always influenced and determined by the action against which we are reacting. What characterizes human beings is precisely this possibility of effectively exiting from this continuous chain of reactions, and that happens when we create something new which can’t be explained on the basis of preceding causes, but contains something extra. This thing that is extra doesn’t come from reacting to external causes, but is born from within. This is creativity.

Let’s take an example from the history of art. Take the thirteenth century, there are various schools, there are formats to be followed, everybody paints the same way, there is a standard style, the Byzantine, images are based on icons, figures are static, hieratic and everybody paints the same way. Then at a certain point, along comes a Tuscan painter by the name of Giotto, he starts doing something different. The human figure acquires plasticity, a dramatic quality, individuality and it becomes something completely different from before. It’s something radically new. Of course, there would have been no Giotto without what came before him. Here something new arose, that wasn’t just a reaction to what was before, but a new vision that sprung up from a profoundly personal way of feeling and seeing the world. And that’s the kind of vision that can influence the world. This phenomenon is valid for painting, for music and for thought.

Most of the things we do are only reactions to external stimuli and in most of what we do there is little creativity. But whoever manages to find that creativity within themselves really has the possibility to influence the world.

So what can give young people this sense of creativity? What can give young people the strength to be Action and not Re-action? Today, certainly not religion, the religions still need to reform themselves and they have lost their appeal, especially to younger people. I would say that even ethics can’t be the departure point.

Today what I think can communicate and inspire young people is aesthetics. Naturally, aesthetics that shouldn’t become aestheticism, not something to be used and consumed. I mean Aesthetics in the sense of being able to have experiences of beauty. A profound experience that can lead to an ethical and religious sense of things.

I am talking about the sacred ideal of beauty, the kind of beauty before which I feel I have to be worthy to receive it. The kind of beauty that inspired awe and terror in Stendhal. Today, the use we make of beauty often has to do with consuming it, and no ideal comes out of this, only reaction. I see it, I want it, I take it, I own it. That’s what happens in the consumer world. But it’s different when beauty stimulates in me a feeling of fascination that makes me want to be worthy of that beauty, and then I don’t seek to own it, but if anything I dig deep inside myself to expand my heart, I try to purify my sight, to make myself worthy of this beauty. And from this aesthetic feeling an ethical dimension can arise, because ethics and aesthetics are much more connected than contemporary culture would have us think.

High culture teaches us that beauty and goodness are united, that beauty is ethics and beauty is justice. A real experience of beauty is always an experience of purification, out of which emerges the need to become just, to conform to beauty, to knock down the walls of the ego.

If there is anything that can awaken the consciousness of young people today, I believe we have to look for it in the area of aesthetics.

Currently our society looks more and more like it is inevitably heading for a clash with Islam. The increased Islamic presence in the West, whatever one may think of it, is making us rediscover and emphasize the universal, unchangeable values of freedom which our lives are based on, but it also isn’t sparing us from inconvenient doubts. As we know, integration is never a one way street, purity is never an agent of history, and both sides are destined to change and influence each other. The new is always generated by a meeting of different and opposing forces and this is what may unconsciously be fuelling the fears and defensiveness in our society, as if it were casting light on our deep weakness. The weakness we feel in the face of people who believe firmly in a clear and shared vision of the world, of life and the spirit to which we aren’t able to reply with our own equally clear, organised and shared vision. Of this process in our society, do you think the confrontation with Islam can lead to something positive, to some opportunity for our society?

Of course, I believe it can lead to something positive for our society. There are negative things like the tensions, violence and misunderstandings that we see every day and there is no need to repeat them, let’s concentrate on the positive aspects.

What is Islam? Islam is a religion for which the sense of transcendence and indifference with regard to human usage is extreme. Compared to other religions, this sense of transcendence is more emphasised, much more so than in Christianity or Judaism. In Islam, the dimension that goes beyond the human, that is, the divine as a totally other entity is radical and exalted. Today, in our culture, at a time when human beings are largely tempted to think that everything is available to them, that everything can be changed, that everything can be taken apart and reassembled, that everything is negotiable, at a time when the temptation of utilitarianism is so intense, what Islam can help us rediscover is this sense of transcendence, of interiority, of not complete availability.

This is something we need to understand and Islam can help us do this. I believe there is a need today to re-sacralize nature. We need to think of it as containing a mystery in the face of which we humans have to discover the sense of the miraculous and rediscover the sense of unavailability. Another thing Islam can generate in us is a new sense of community. For Islam the discourse of universal brotherhood is very important, the so-called *Umma*, the community of the faithful. We westerners are the opposite of this, very much torn apart, there is no longer any *Religio*, any structured thought holding us together. I don’t know whether this will happen, but one of the positive things Islam can convey to us is this rediscovery of the value of the community.

Maybe there is a third thing too: ritual. Muslims, for example, pray five times a day. I’m not saying we should pray five times a day, but that we should recover an understanding of the importance of rites and rituals within our daily or weekly lives. I believe it is important for there to be ritual moments in order to celebrate something greater than ourselves. What binds the people together are the rites, what makes us more than just a horde, but a people, a civilisation and a society are rites. Rites are remarkably important and perhaps our growing contact with Islam will lead the West to rediscover these values. Then who knows what will happen.

And what kind of influence can the West have on thinking that it is not very flexible, that it is reluctant to open up a dialogue, like Islam?

The kind of thinking that our society is up against is often one that believes it is more secure and stronger than ours because it is rigid, because it ignores the evolution of the times, fails to see concrete situations and avoids looking reality in the face. But let's not forget that Christianity too was like this, in fact, it was even more rigid than Islam, especially when we consider how the structure of Christian dogma is more detailed and complex than that of Islam. It was only with the advent of modernity that religious thought began to weaken and that weakening can only be considered a step forward from a critical perspective. In this sense, contact with the West may really lead to an interesting evolution, comparable to what Christianity underwent a few centuries ago.

Let's not forget the separation of Church and State that today Christianity asserts wasn't practiced before modernity. States had a state religion, there was even a papal state, and anyone who thought differently from the king's religion or from that of the political majority in the country, often ran into trouble. In the Islamic world, things are still like that today, possibly a comparison with the West might lead them to consider the importance of pluralism and freedom of conscience in religious matters.

Many think that the problems with Islam lie in Islam itself, rather than with the high rates of illiteracy and social conditions afflicting its peoples. Do you think that Islam, as a civilisation, has within it the possibility to help itself reform and modernize? If Islam should be reformed, where do you think it will find the strength to do this?

We have to start out from the assumption that no religion reforms itself on its own, and Islam won't do so either. Religions reform themselves when they are obliged to do so.

We can say that all religions incline to conservatism. The religious mentality is very conservative, because they have a tradition, a depository, a baggage of doctrines and rites to conserve and pass down. That is what the religious mentality wants most of all to do, and so by itself, it can't reform. If Christianity made reforms, it made them because it had to. Because Modernity imposed on it certain precise demands for reform and it is still far from having completed this process. It was forced to do this not only by the Protestant Reformation which introduced a dialectic, but also by the beginning of secularization which led it to lose political control. Before this process got underway, there was the index of prohibited books, books that the religious authorities didn't like were gathered up and burned in the public squares along with heretics. In 1600 Giordano Bruno was burned for his ideas. Until four centuries ago, that's what happened, but what are four centuries in a millenarian civilisation? Nowadays, things like that are inconceivable in the West, but they still happen in the Islamic world in a similar way.

I believe that what will lead the Muslim world to reform itself will surely be its contact with western critical thinking, and the social evolution of its peoples, which I'm hoping will happen. It's social change that leads to spiritual and religious change, because religion is always something that addresses men and women living in the present, it's clear we can't get away from this dynamic.

There are many questions Muslims today need to ask themselves. Let's look for example at the rather critical condition of women, not only in Muslim countries but inside our own western societies. Just to quote a fact, the school dropout rate among Muslim girls is extremely high in our own countries. After the age of 16 it is believed that girls already have enough basic education and that now their role is another one: to get married and have a family. It is certainly to be hoped for that an emancipation of women occurs inside the Muslim world, but the real question is: is this the result of Islam or the result of a backward society which is still reflected in peoples' mentalities? I tend to think it's the second case, but this is a question Muslims need to ask for themselves. Out of this I believe they can begin to reform.

You speak about life that starts out from below, that originates, emerges and develops out of the dust, from matter and you argue against the idea of a divine intelligence that descended from on high, that decides on human destinies. Could we say, as a way of cheering ourselves, that we can learn more about ourselves by looking at the dust than by looking at heaven. From this perspective, what is it then that influences our destiny? And to quote a term from your latest book, is there a relationship between God and our destiny?

With regard to the concept of destiny, there have been lively debates going on for centuries and there are basically two viewpoints. There is the idea that everything is written down and fixed in the book of God. Islam, for example, leans very much towards this conception, that is, that God's will is a determined will that nobody can escape from. The other viewpoint is the freedom of human beings. Man is free and so he is responsible for his actions, and if he is responsible, he must submit to judgment. If he is judged positively, then we say he goes to heaven, if negatively, then we speak of hell.

In my opinion, these two positions have to be reconciled not in order to arrive at some low level of compromise, but because both positions contain part of an important truth. It is in true that we are determined, that's something even a secular mindset can recognize, apart from whether the determinism comes from God or from nature or from our genes or genetics. Einstein, for example, said quite clearly that he didn't believe in free will or in the freedom of human beings, because the physical forces play a much greater role than anything else. We aren't free to want what we want, we are free to want or not to want, we are free to desire, but not to want what we want, because the object that we want deeply determines us. Whether we call this God, or whether we call it physical laws, or drives or instincts, we are always dealing with forces that determine us against our will. These determinations are real, they exist, and for that matter, who can claim that they aren't determined by anything? Our very characters determine us. Heraclitus of Ephesus said "character is destiny". In effect, that's just what it is.

On the other hand, the other aspect is also true, that we are the makers of our own destiny, I believe in the possibility of freedom, of creating. That discourse of action *vs* reaction we were talking about before, is extremely true. If the possibility exists of performing actions, not just reactions, that means that we have freedom. Certainly it's not an absolute freedom, but a freedom that begins in a precise context, and that gives humans the possibility of not being entirely determined, but to self-determine, both for good and evil.

Destiny can never be considered an absolute destination. We started out on one track but we can arrive at another. We can also derail on this trip, we can ruin ourselves, we can fail. We can fail as human beings, or we can even take off and leave the ground. When we take off, it's because of our creativity.

God is inside this dimension, and whoever believes in God knows that if they take off, that's not simply because it just happened. It's because they feel a strong attraction for something outside of themselves. How many people are out there who are gifted with extreme intelligence, with great sensitivity, but who never leave the ground? In fact, sometimes intellectual gifts can be a burden, because they make us so attached to our ego, because we are good-looking, intelligent or lucky that they imprison us inside our ego. In this there is no full realization of the self.

All geniuses know they need inspiration in order to create, you feel the need of a force that attracts you, that draws something out of your interiority. "Sing to me, O Muse" is how the poets began their compositions, and they are referring to the fact that if there is no inspiration, if there is no muse that sings, nothing original will come, nothing strong or true. The sense of the divine is just that; when you feel that you are ascending because you are attracted by something greater than yourself. One person will call that God, others spirit, others nature. But in any case, there is greater force that is attracting us, drawing us. God is therefore no longer that destiny that determines us and imprisons us, the one who decides and whom we have to follow. That is a way of thinking about God like an angry boss that we have to get rid of. Instead, God is the force that fascinates, the light that illuminates, but a force that illuminates your freedom and whose effect on you is so that your freedom is made to ascend, to fulfill yourself, to elevate yourself. This is the great attraction that the idea of God, the idea of good, of truth and of love in its highest purity exerts on the human conscience. It isn't something against freedom, but is something that solicits freedom, that fills it with contents, that raises it up.

"There is something fundamental about the great symbols that bring human life into relation with the life of the cosmos and which are found in different cultures: a secret of the universe which is also a secret of the human condition. And what comes to light is not only the solidarity between the human condition and cosmic condition, but the fact that for every one of us, it's about our own destiny. This is a revelation that can influence my own life."

Starting from this quote by Mircea Eliade, we can also say that in our "desacralized" world, the way we think about life reflects what we consciously or unconsciously think about the universe. Whether we like it or not, how we conceive the cosmos either as being governed by randomness or by some other force, plays a fundamental role in how we conceive of our own existence. In this sense, what importance does developing a new cosmology have in your thinking? And whose task is it to create a new shared narrative to describe the cosmos and our place in it?

Certainly, the development of a new cosmology plays an important part in my thinking, because I think that one of the great limitations of western culture, especially of the Christian variety, was to think of man as being separate from the world, anthropology abstracted from cosmology. The great spiritual experiences, actually, also within Christianity, have always had this conviction that speaking about man and speaking about the world were fundamentally the same discourse. The idea of man as a microcosm is present in many cultures, present in Chinese and Indian culture and many other traditional cultures.

A quote comes to mind, from Leonardo da Vinci's Atlantic Codex: "Man, the ancients said is a small world. Certainly, the use is well founded". Or a sentence by Kant occurs to me when he concludes in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, with one of the most famous sentences, not only in Kant but in the entire history of western philosophy: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."

These two things are in realty two aspects of one and the same thing. They are two manifestations of the same principle, which is the cosmic principle, that is, the principle of harmonious relationship. What the Chinese called *Tao*, the Hindus and Buddhists called *Dharma*, and the ancient Greeks called *Logos*. It is the logic of logos that creates relationships inside the original chaos of energy, and these relationships are all the more complex. The more they develop, the more they create organized life, intelligence and hearts. This is an intelligence that doesn't just know, but wants order, wants to lay down organization, wants the good. When we speak of the heart, this doesn't just mean the goodness of feelings, we need to understand it also as the logic behind harmonious relationships, that which introduces organization into chaos. This is what I mean by good intelligence.

And what is man viewed from this perspective? Man is the moment when the universe becomes conscious of itself. Today we know that Being should be thought of under two aspects. On the one hand, we have Being from the point of view of matter and energy. Already Aristotle said that every object is a synod, a composition of matter and form, which contemporary science expresses in a similar way. Then, on the other hand, we have that which inserts form into the primordial energy, so that what is chaotic becomes organized and produces a variety of beings, each endowed with its own particular form: that is intelligence. To go into detail, we can say that the human being is composed, on the one hand, of 18 atomic elements, and on the other, of intelligence which is enclosed in the genetic code. Intelligence plus matter and energy constitute what we are.

I say this because if we consider the human being from the point of view of matter and energy, it's obvious that our size is absolutely insignificant compared to the known universe. We are already insignificant compared to the enormity of our own planet, let alone in relation to the

universe. What comes out of this is a cosmology that implies an anthropology which is, I wouldn't say nihilist, but very close to considering humans as *Nihil* or nothing, as an insignificant presence in the universe. But if we take the other dimension, which is just as important for an understanding of Being, which is the aspect of information, then man isn't so insignificant.

If we consider the human being from the point of view of information, then we must say that there is no phenomenon inside the universe as decisive and central as man. If then, we consider the history of the universe from the point of view of the development of the mind, of intelligence and awareness, then we don't look like such a marginal phenomenon, but we regain that central importance which the ancient cosmologies attributed to us. Of course, the geocentric model was a naïve way of defining the cosmos, but the foundation that led

our ancestors to perceive this central importance wasn't so naïve, because this foundation is precisely to be encountered in the splendour of human intelligence and in the human mind as the place where the universe attains awareness of itself and reaches its highest point.

The mind is the place where the universe inflects itself, and the thought of man is what reflects the universe's flexion. The universe produces a flexion inside the human mind and the mind's reflection is the awareness the universe acquires of itself.

The fact that human thought is able to arrive at an understanding and comprehension of the universe highlights the deep bond between intelligence and cosmos. For example let's take last month's scientific discovery which experimentally confirmed Einstein's purely theoretical intuition a hundred years ago of the existence of gravitational waves. This is stunning. Just by reasoning, by having faith in the rationality of the world, the human mind is able to configure this particular type of arrangement of the universe. All without any experimental evidence, solely on the basis of reason. What does this power of reason say, if not that mind and cosmos are profoundly united?

The same can be said of Higg's Boson. In 1964 this British physicist began reasoning, pen and paper in hand, and he arrived at the assertion that if things are the way the standard model suggests they are, then there must be a certain particle, a certain type of boson able to create harmony. As we know, this theory which assumes the existence of a particle that confers mass to elementary particles was shown to exist 3 years ago at the CERN in Geneva. This intuitive capacity reveals the profound communion between mind and cosmos.

Could we say that a culturally urgent task for the new generations is to rethink the cosmos? To weave a new cosmological narrative within which we can find our own place?

I believe it is. It's of absolutely vital importance to develop a new cosmology that at the same time can serve as the conceptual basis for a new anthropology. The error of dualism which assumed that human beings could be abstracted out of the world or even opposed to the world needs to be corrected in the deepest sense, and we need to recover and re-establish all the spiritual values of greater organization, of greater relationships, and of greater intelligence that certain spiritual traditions founded by leaving aside the world or in spite of the world. The error of thinking of man as if he had a different origin from that of the universe and that his nobility comes from not belonging to the world needs to be corrected.

This dualistic thinking is the great enemy, and now the great task of humanist thinking is to rediscover spiritual values, not against nature, but starting from nature itself.

The mind could not exist without the work of the atom, and the atom itself could probably not exist if there were no mind that introduces tension to create harmony between the single components, and if there wasn't this attraction of a mind that we may well call God, which gives form to primordial energy, then there would be nothing.

There is this perfect circularity between matter and energy on the one hand, and information on the other. The task is to work for what the great Russian scientist and Nobel prize winner for chemistry, Ilya Prigogine called the "new alliance", that is, the need to establish a new alliance between the world and human beings based on current, modern parameters. If, after the scientific revolution, the old alliance between man and universe shattered because it was based on unfounded assumptions like the geocentric system, today we have the necessary conditions to develop something we could call a "new alliance". In my view, this is the main task that spiritual thinking has before it. To re-establish a renewed attention for the natural sciences and understand that the values of the spiritual world are not in opposition to the natural world, but that they are the extension of that logic of harmony that lies within the world itself. Certainly we have to bear in mind that in the natural world there is no harmony without disharmony, no order without disorder, life is never without death. The contrasts are obvious, but it is precisely here that we need to start out from, in asserting that it is where in ethics man becomes just, and in spirituality is holy. It is there that this contradiction, I don't say can be resolved, but can be better reconciled.

Every great civilisation has been great only insofar as it was able to attain a harmony between a knowledge of the Divine, that is to say, an all embracing sense of life and a hierarchy of values and a knowledge of the world, understood as the concrete experience of life.

Today this is a task we cannot escape from, especially for the younger generations, because today the ideologies and religions that used to provide a support, for a series of reasons, have failed us and with them the traditions and the society that single individuals lived their lives in and which they relied on. The social fabric is increasingly absent and the sense of belonging is disappearing, so that individuals are always left more and more alone with themselves. Therefore, it's crucial to identify a perspective that will help us recover the missing sense of unity, and in my opinion, it is only through a cosmological perception of nature as mother and of the world as cosmos that we can find a firm basis upon which to rediscover an ethics, a religio, a tradition that unites people. What we have lost is the foundation, and today we need to find it again through a new way of thinking about nature.