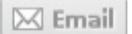


# Nobility and Analogous Traditional Elites

## Details

Created on April 16, 2003

Written by Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira



Note to the Reader: The original texts of all the allocutions cited in this work can be found in the Vatican's published collections of documents for the respective popes. Translations of the allocutions of Pius XII are provided in Part III of *Nobility and Analogous Traditional Elites in the Allocutions of Pius XII*, Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, Hamilton Press (October 1993). Footnote references to the allocutions have been shortened to "RPN," followed by the year of the allocution and the page(s) on which they may be found in the collected documents or, when otherwise indicated, in Part III of *Nobility and Analogous Traditional Elites*. References to allocutions to the Pontifical Nobel Guard have likewise been shortened to "PNG."

## Preferential Option... What is it?

*Preferential option for the nobility.* At first glance this expression may startle readers familiar with the more common phrase often used by Pope John Paul II: "preferential option for the poor." Nevertheless, what inspires this book is precisely a preferential option for the nobility.

The objection may be raised that, *ex natura rerum*, at least a noble is wealthy, well-connected, and socially prominent. Accordingly, he possesses manifold means to deliver himself from any situation of penury into which he may fall. The preferential option already exercised on his behalf by Providence gives him everything he would need to rise again.

The case of a poor man is precisely the opposite. He has no social standing and no useful connections, and he often lacks the means to remedy his privations. Therefore, a preferential option to help him take care of his basic necessities may be mandated by justice.

In this light, a preferential option for the nobility seems almost an affront to the poor.

In reality, however, the antithesis between the nobility and the poor is becoming an anachronism, since poverty besets an ever larger number of nobles, as Pope Pius XII observes in his allocutions to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility. Moreover, the situation of an impoverished noble is more poignant than that of a poor man in the street.

The poor man, by his very wretchedness, can and should awaken his neighbor's sense of justice as well as his generosity. The nobleman, on the other hand, by virtue of his nobility, has reasons to avoid requesting aid. He even prefers to conceal his name and origins when he can no longer conceal his poverty. This is what the expressive language of old termed "nobility in embarrassed circumstances."

Efforts to relieve the distress of such nobles—and of all impoverished people regardless of their social status—merited the encomium of the ancients. Christian charity discovered a thousand ingenious ways to alleviate the plight of impoverished nobles without compromising their dignity.<sup>[1]</sup>

However, the materially destitute are not alone in deserving a preferential option. Such an option should

also benefit people in positions that entail particularly arduous duties whose fulfillment edifies the social body and whose neglect scandalizes it. Members of the contemporary nobility are often in this category, as the present work will show.<sup>[2]</sup>

The preferential option for the nobility and the preferential option for the poor are by no means mutually exclusive. Nor are they in opposition to one another. Pope John Paul II reminds us: "Yes, the Church takes upon herself the preferential option for the poor. It is, to be sure, an option of preference and not, therefore, an exclusive or excluding option, since the message of salvation is destined for all."<sup>[3]</sup>

Indeed, these options are complementary ways of manifesting the justice and charity that go hand in hand in the service of the same Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the model both for the nobles and the poor, as the Roman Pontiffs emphatically proclaim.<sup>[4]</sup>

May these words serve as clarification for those who, motivated by the spirit of class struggle—at present in evident decline—cling to the discarded notion that constant conflict between the nobility and the poor is inevitable. This false concept led many to interpret the *preferential option* of John Paul II as an *exclusive* preference. Such a passionate and factional interpretation lacks all objectivity. One's preferences may fall simultaneously on several objects with differing degrees of intensity. A preference for one in no sense demands the exclusion of the others.

## Chapter I

### Resolving Prior Objections

When a train is ready to leave, normal procedure requires both engineer and passengers to be in their proper places, and the conductor to signal for departure. Only then can the train begin to roll.

So also, at the outset of an intellectual work it is customary to set forth preliminary principles and explain, if need be, the logical criteria that justify them. Only then may the author pass on to the doctrinal part.

However, if a number of readers are suspicious of the subject to be dealt with, or even have deep-rooted prejudices against it, the situation is like that of an engineer who notices that although the passengers are already seated, the tracks ahead are blocked.

The trip cannot begin without the removal of the obstructions.

In a similar way, the obstacles the present work will encounter—the prejudices that fill the minds of numerous readers regarding the nobility and analogous traditional elites—are so great that the topic can only be treated after their removal.

This explains the unusual title and content of this first chapter.

#### 1. Without Detriment to a Just and Ample Action on Behalf of the Working Class, an Opportune Action in Favor of Elites

Much is said today regarding the demands to meet the social needs of workers. In principle, this solicitude is highly commendable and deserves the support of every upright soul.

However, to favor only the working class while neglecting the problems and needs of other classes, often just as harshly affected by the great contemporary crisis, is tantamount to forgetting that society includes not just manual laborers but various classes, each with its specific functions, rights, and duties. The formation of a global classless society is a utopia that has been the unvarying theme of the successive egalitarian movements arising in Christian Europe since the fifteenth century. In our day,

this utopia is heralded mainly by socialists, communists, and anarchists.<sup>[5]</sup>

The TFPs and TFP Bureaus throughout Europe, the Americas, Oceania, Asia, and Africa support all just improvements for the working class. But they cannot accept the notion that these improvements imply the eradication of other classes or such reduction of their specific status, duties, rights, and functions as would lead to their virtual extinction in the name of the common good. Trying to solve social questions by leveling all classes for the apparent benefit of one class is to provoke genuine class struggle. To suppress all classes for the exclusive benefit of one, the working class, leaves the others no alternative but legitimate self-defense or death.

The TFPs cannot endorse this process of social leveling. In contradistinction to the proponents of class struggle, and in cooperation with the multiple initiatives underway today in favor of social peace through a just and needed advancement of the workers, all conscientious contemporaries must develop an action in favor of social order, opposing the socialist and communist action, which aims to create social friction and, ultimately, unleash class warfare.

The survival of social order requires that the right of each class to what it needs to live in dignity be recognized and that each class be able to fulfill its obligations to the common good.

In other words, action in favor of the workers must be coupled with a complementary action in favor of the elites.

The Church's interest in social questions does not stem from an exclusive love of the working class. The Church is not a labor party. She loves justice and charity more than She loves any specific class, and She strives to establish these virtues among men. For this reason, She loves all social classes, including the nobility, so besieged by egalitarian demagogues.<sup>[6]</sup>

These reflections naturally lead the reader to the subject of this book. On the one hand, it is evident that Pius XII recognizes that the nobility has a significant and specific mission in contemporary society, a mission shared in considerable measure by the other social elites, as will be discussed later.

This concept is taught in the Sovereign Pontiff's fourteen masterful allocutions delivered in audiences granted the Roman Patriciate and Nobility<sup>[7]</sup> on the occasion of their New Years' greetings from 1940 through 1952 and again in 1958.<sup>[8]</sup>

On the other hand, no one can ignore the vast and multifaceted offensive underway in today's world to abase and eradicate the nobility and other elites. One need only consider the overpowering, relentless, and pervasive pressures to ignore, contest, or diminish their roles.

In this light, action on behalf of the nobility and the elites is more opportune than ever. Thus we affirm, with serene courage, that in our day and age, when the *preferential option for the poor* has become so necessary, a *preferential option for the nobility* has become indispensable as well. Of course, we include in this expression other traditional elites, which are worthy of support and in danger of disappearing.

This affirmation may seem absurd since in theory the worker's condition is closer to poverty than is the noble's, and since, as is commonly known, many nobles possess large fortunes.

Large fortunes, yes. But these are generally eroded by crushing taxes, giving rise to the distressing spectacle of lords compelled to transform substantial parts of their manors and mansions into hotels or inns, while they occupy only a fraction of the family home; or, into manors where the lord serves as curator and guide, if not bartender, while his spouse feverishly applies herself to often menial chores to keep their ancestral home clean and presentable.

This persecution advances by other means as well, such as the extinction of the rights of primogeniture and the compulsory division of inheritances. Is not a preferential option for the nobility required to counteract this offensive?

If the nobility is regarded as an inherently parasitic class of profligates, the answer is no. However, Pius XII rejected this caricature of the nobility, which is part of the black legend spread by the French Revolution and those that followed it in Europe and the world. While clearly stating that abuses and excesses deserving history's censure have occurred in noble circles, he nevertheless affirms, in moving terms, the existence of a harmony between the nobility's mission and the natural order instituted by God Himself, as well as the elevated and beneficial character of this mission.<sup>[9]</sup>

## 2. Nobility: A Species Within the Genus "Traditional Elites"

The expression "traditional elites" appears frequently throughout this work. We use this term to designate a socioeconomic reality that may be described as follows:

According to the pontifical texts discussed hereafter, the nobility is an elite from every point of view. It is the highest elite, not the sole elite. It is a species within the genus "elites."

Some elites derive their status from sharing in the specific functions and features of the nobility. Others, although engaged in other functions, also enjoy a special dignity. There are elites, then, that are neither noble nor hereditary *ex natura propria*.

For example, a university professorship in itself introduces its holder into what can be called the nation's elite. The same holds true for a military commission, a diplomatic office, and comparable positions.

While the exercise of these activities is not a privilege of the nobility today, the number of nobles engaged in them is not small. Obviously these nobles do not relinquish their status by doing so. On the contrary, they bring to these activities the excellence of the attributes specific to the nobility.<sup>[10]</sup>

When enumerating elites one should not overlook those that give impulse to the nation's economy through industry and commerce. These activities are not only legitimate and dignified, but manifestly useful. Their immediate and specific goal, however, is the enrichment of those who practice them. In other words, it is by enriching themselves that these individuals, in a collateral way, enrich the nation. In itself, this is not sufficient to confer nobiliary character. Only a special dedication to the common good—particularly to its most precious element, the Christian character of civilization—can confer nobiliary splendor on an elite.

Nevertheless, this splendor will shine in industrialists or merchants who, in the pursuit of their activities, render noteworthy services to the common good with significant sacrifice of their legitimate personal interests.

Moreover, should the interplay of circumstances enable a non-noble family to render such services for several generations, this alone may well be considered sufficient to elevate that lineage to noble status.

Something of this sort occurred with the Venetian nobility, which was largely made up of merchants. This class governed the Most Serene Republic and, consequently, held in its hands the common good of the State, which it raised to the rank of an international power. It is not surprising, therefore, that these merchants attained the status of nobles. They did this so effectively and authentically that they assimilated the elevated cultural tone and manners of the best military and feudal nobility.

There are, on the other hand, traditional elites based from their onset upon aptitudes and virtues transmitted through genetic continuity, or through the family environment and education.<sup>[11]</sup>

A traditional elite arises when this transmission bears fruit and, consequently, families—and not rarely large groups of families—distinguish themselves from generation to generation through signal services to the common good. The precious attribute of traditionality is in this way added to the status of this elite. Frequently these elites do not formally constitute a noble class merely because the law in many countries, in accordance with the doctrines of the French Revolution, forbids the granting of noble titles by public authority. This is the case not only in certain European countries, but also in the Americas.

Nonetheless, pontifical teachings on the nobility are largely applicable to these traditional elites by virtue of their analogous roles. For this reason these teachings are both important and timely for those who bear authentic and lofty family traditions, even when not adorned by a title. They have a noble mission in favor of the common good and Christian civilization in their respective countries.

The same can be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of the nontraditional elites as they become traditional.

### 3. Objections to the Nobility Imbued with the Egalitarian Spirit of the French Revolution

*Nobility, elites.* Why does this book only deal with them? Such will be, no doubt, the objection raised by egalitarian readers, who are ipso facto hostile to the nobility.

Contemporary society is saturated with radically egalitarian prejudices. Sometimes these are consciously or unconsciously harbored even by people belonging to sectors of opinion where one would expect to find unanimity in the opposite vein. Such is the case with members of the clergy who are enthusiasts of the revolutionary trilogy, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, heedless of the fact that it was originally interpreted in a sense frontally opposed to Catholic doctrine.<sup>[12]</sup>

If such egalitarian dissonance is found in clerical circles, one should not be surprised that it also occurs among nobles and members of other traditional elites. With the recent bicentennial of the French Revolution fresh in our memories, these reflections readily recall the revolutionary noble par excellence, Philippe Egalité, Duke of Orleans. To this day, his example has not ceased to inspire emulators in more than one illustrious lineage.

In 1891, when Leo XIII published his famous encyclical *Rerum novarum* on the condition of the working class, certain capitalist circles objected that relations between capital and labor, being a specifically economic matter, were no concern of the Roman Pontiff. They suggested that his encyclical encroached on their domain.

Today, some readers might wonder why a Pope should concern himself with the nobility and elites, traditional or otherwise. Their mere survival in our changed times might seem to these readers an archaic and useless outgrowth of the feudal era. From this perspective, the nobility and contemporary elites are nothing more than the embodiment of certain ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that man can no longer appreciate or even comprehend.

These readers deem that the few who still value elites are inspired by empty aesthetic or romantic sentiments, and that the people who pride themselves on being part of the elites have succumbed to arrogance and vanity. These readers, convinced that nothing will prevent the inevitable march of history from eradicating such obsolete malignancies from the face of the earth, conclude that if Pius XII would not foster the march of history thus understood, at least he ought not put obstacles in its way.

Why, then, did Pius XII address this subject so extensively and in a way so agreeable to Counter-revolutionary minds, such as that of this author, who has assembled these teachings, annotated them, and now offers them to the public? Would it not have been better for the Pontiff to have remained silent?

The answer to such egalitarian objections imbued with the spirit of 1789 is simple. People who wish to know the answer can do no better than to hear it from the authoritative lips of Pius XII himself. In his allocutions to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility, Pius XII points out, with an extraordinary gift for synthesis, the profound moral significance of his intervention in the matter, as we shall see.<sup>[13]</sup> He also highlights the legitimate role of the nobility according to social doctrine inspired by Natural Law and Revelation. At the same time, he describes the richness of soul that became their hallmark in the Christian past. Confirming their continued guardianship of that treasure, the Pontiff proclaims their lofty mission of affirming and radiating this rich legacy throughout the contemporary world. This remains the case despite the devastating effects of the ideological revolutions, world wars, and socioeconomic crises that have reduced many nobles to modest circumstances. Repeatedly the Pontiff reminds them that, much to their honor, their situation is similar to that of Saint Joseph, at once a Prince of the House of David, a simple carpenter, and, above all, the legal father of the Word Incarnate and chaste spouse of the Queen of all Angels and Saints.<sup>[14]</sup>

#### 4. The Teachings of Pius XII: A Precious Shield Against the Opponents of Nobility

Some readers among the nobility may wonder what the reading of this study can possibly avail them. They might ask themselves, "Have we not already received most of these teachings in the venerable environment of our fathers' homes, rich in elevated traditions of a formative and moral nature? Have we not practiced them throughout our lives, with our gaze set on our forefathers' example?"

We could easily answer this objection by saying that the religious root of these duties and their basis in pontifical documents might not have been clear enough to them. They, in turn, might reply, "How can the knowledge of these teachings be a source of spiritual enrichment for us, since the legacy of our ancestors has proven sufficient to guide our lives in a genuinely aristocratic and Christian way?"

An aristocrat who, alleging these reasons, shuns as useless the study of the perennial teachings of Pius XII on the Roman Nobility—which are relevant to the entire European nobility—would show signs of superficiality, both of spirit and of religious formation.

If the moral integrity of a Catholic is not based on a lucid and loving knowledge of the Church's teachings, and a deeply rooted adherence to them, it lacks a solid foundation. Thus it risks sudden ruin, especially in today's post-Christian society, so troubled and saturated with incitements to sin and social revolution. To resist the seduction and pressures of this society, the gentle and profound influence of family formation is not sufficient without the support of the teachings of the Faith, observance of the Commandments, steadfast piety, and frequent recourse to the Sacraments.

From this perspective, it is a great encouragement for the truly Catholic aristocrat to know that his traditional way of thinking, feeling, and acting is solidly founded on the teachings of the Vicar of Christ. This encouragement is all the more timely in this age of neopagan "democratism," which victimizes the aristocrat with misunderstanding, criticism, and even sarcasm. This persecution is so persistent that it may expose him to the temptation of feeling ashamed of his noble status. Consequently, the aristocrat can easily harbor the desire of withdrawing from his uncomfortable situation by implicitly or explicitly renouncing his noble state.

The teachings of Pius XII transcribed and analyzed in these pages will serve him as a sturdy shield against his relentless adversaries. They will be forced to admit that a noble who is true to himself, to his Faith, and to his traditions is not an eccentric who simply concocted the convictions and lifestyle that distinguish him. Rather, these will be understood to spring from an immensely more elevated and universal source, the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church.

Although opponents of the nobility may hate such teachings, they cannot reduce them to the category of mere personal speculations of a crank or quixotic paladin of things gone forever.

While this may not convince someone who objects to these ideas, it will curb the boldness and impact of his attack and prove a great polemical advantage to the defenders of the nobility and traditional elites. This is true, above all, when the maligner of the noble class is a Catholic layman or—*pro dolor!*—a priest.

Such opposition is not unlikely, given the tragic crisis affecting the Church.<sup>[15]</sup>

Paul VI referred to this crisis as a "self-demolition," and he expressed his feeling that "Satan's smoke has made its way into the temple of God."<sup>[16]</sup>

Nor is it unlikely that opponents of the nobility and other traditional or even nontraditional elites may misuse Sacred Scripture to support their argument. In such cases, it is important for nobles and members of other elites to rely on the teachings of Pius XII, his predecessors, and successors, thus placing their opponents in the harsh predicament of either recanting their error or admitting that they are in open contradiction with the pontifical teachings cited in this work.

#### 5. Intuitive and Implicit Notions Do Not Suffice—The Wealth of Concepts in Pius XII's Treatment of the Matter

We have enumerated several objections raised today against the nobility as well as arguments the nobles must have honed and ready at hand for their defense.

Proponents and opponents of nobility have some notion, however intuitive and vague, of the nobility's concept of its essence, *raison d'être*, and fidelity to Christian civilization. But merely intuitive notions, more often implicit than explicit, are insufficient in a serious and conclusive debate. Whence arises the sterility that so often characterizes polemics on the subject.

It should be added in passing that the literature against the nobility is far more abundant and accessible than that in its favor. This explains, at least in part, why the defenders of the nobility are frequently less informed on the subject and, consequently, more insecure and timid than their opponents.

In his allocutions to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility, the memorable Pontiff Pius XII establishes the foundations of a contemporary apologia for the nobility and traditional elites. He does this with an elevation of mind, a wealth of ideas, and a conciseness of style that makes the reading of the present work all the more useful and opportune.

#### 6. Are These Allocutions Merely Social Amenities Devoid of Content, Thought, and Affection?

Some will probably claim, with manifest flippancy, that they are exempted from reading and reflecting on these allocutions of Pius XII, alleging that they were merely given to comply with social courtesy, and therefore lack doctrinal and affective content.

Paul VI was of a different opinion, as the following remarks reveal.

*We would like to say many things to you. Your presence provokes much reflection. So it was also with Our venerable Predecessors, especially Pope Pius XII of happy memory. They, on occasions such as this, addressed you with masterful speeches, inviting you in your meditation to consider your own situations and those of our times in the light of their admirable teachings. We want to believe that the echo of those words, like a gust of wind swelling a sail,...still vibrates in your thoughts, filling them with the austere and magnanimous appeals that nourish the vocation preordained for you by Providence and sustain the role still required of you today by contemporary*

As for their doctrinal content, a reading of the texts and the accompanying commentaries will suffice to demonstrate their relevance and richness. Throughout these pages the reader will see that far from decreasing with time, this relevance has only increased.

A word remains to be said about their affective content. In this regard, it will suffice to quote Pius XII's allocution to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility in 1958.

*You, who at the start of each new year have never failed to come visit Us, must surely remember the careful solicitude with which We endeavored to smooth your way toward the future, which at that time promised to be harsh because of the profound upheavals and transformations in store for the world. We are certain, however, that when your brows too are framed with white and silver, you will yet be witnesses not only to Our esteem and affection, but also to the truth, the validity, and the timeliness of Our recommendations, which We hope are like fruits that have come to you and to society in general.*

*You will recall to your children and grandchildren how the Pope of your childhood and adolescence did not neglect to point you toward the new responsibilities that the new circumstances of the age imposed on the nobility.<sup>[18]</sup>*

Beyond any doubt, these words show that the allocutions of Pius XII to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility correspond to lofty designs that were clearly defined in the Pontiff's mind and heart. They also show that he expected them to bear lasting and important fruits. This is a far cry from what one would expect from allocutions meant to comply with mere social etiquette and therefore devoid of content, thought, and affection.

The esteem of Pius XII for hereditary nobility shines with particular brilliance in the following words addressed to the Pontifical Noble Guard on December 26, 1942:

*None can be envious upon seeing that We bear you such special affection. To whom, in truth, is the immediate protection of Our person entrusted, if not to you? And are you not the first of Our guards?*

*Guard! What lofty resonance there is in this word: the soul trembles therewith; thoughts take wing. An ardent love for the sovereign and a steadfast reverence to his person and cause vibrate and voice themselves in this name; it sets in motion a tested generosity, an unvanquished constancy and courage in face of the risks met in his service and for his defense; it speaks of virtues which, molding the champion on the one hand, on the other hand evoke from the sovereign sentiments of esteem, affection, and confidence in his guard.*

*You, the guard of Our person, constitute Our armor, refulgent with that nobility which is the privilege of blood and which shone in you as the pledge of your devotion even before your admission into the Corps, for, as the ancient proverb says, "Good blood cannot lie." Life is the blood that is transmitted from rank to rank, from generation to generation in your illustrious lineages, carrying with it the fire of that devout love for*

*the Church and the Roman Pontiff that neither diminishes nor cools with the changing events, be they joyous or sad. In the darkest hours of the history of the Popes, the loyalty of your ancestors shone brighter and burned more ardently and generously than in the resplendent hours of magnificence and material prosperity....We have no doubt that just as in the past so chosen a tradition of familiar virtues was transmitted from father to son, so will it continue to be transmitted from generation to generation as a patrimony of greatness of soul and most noble merit of one's respective stirp.*<sup>[19]</sup>

## 7. Documents of Perennial Value

Lastly, some might object that after the death of Pius XII a new era began for the Church, that of the Second Vatican Council. Therefore, the allocutions of the deceased Pontiff to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility fell like dead leaves on the floor of the Church, and Conciliar and post-Conciliar Popes have not returned to the subject.

This is not true, either. As proof, this work will cite, *argumentandi gratia*, eloquent documents from the successors of the mourned Pontiff.<sup>[20]</sup>

We will now proceed to study the allocutions of Pius XII highlighting their magnificent doctrinal wealth.

### Chapter II

#### The Universal Scope of the Allocutions to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility

#### The Situation of the Italian Nobility in the Pontificate of Pius XII

##### 1. Why Focus Specifically on the Italian Nobility?

In 1947 the constitution of the Italian Republic abolished all titles of nobility.<sup>[21]</sup> The last blow was thus struck against the juridical status of an age-old class—which lives on today as a social reality—and a problem, complex in all its aspects, was created.

Complexity was already perceptible in the antecedents to the issue. Contrary to what occurs in other European countries—France and Portugal, for example—the makeup of the Italian nobility is highly heterogeneous. Before the political unification of the Italian peninsula in the nineteenth century, the various sovereigns who ruled over different parts of the Italian territory all bestowed titles of nobility. This holds true for the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire; the kings of Spain, of the Two Sicilies, and of Sardinia; the grand-dukes of Tuscany; the dukes of Parma; and still others, including the patriciates of cities such as Florence, Genoa, and Venice. It is principally true—and this is of the utmost interest for the present study—of the Popes. The Popes were temporal sovereigns of the relatively extensive Papal States. They also granted titles of nobility and continued to do so even after the de facto extinction of their temporal sovereignty over these states.

In 1870, when the unification of Italy was consummated with the occupation of Rome by Piedmontese troops, the House of Savoy attempted to amalgamate these different nobilities.

The project failed both politically and juridically. Many noble families remained faithful to the dethroned dynasties from which they had received their titles. Particularly, a considerable part of the Roman aristocracy, maintaining tradition, continued to figure officially in Vatican solemnities. They refused to recognize Rome's annexation to Italy, rejected any rapprochement with the Quirinal, and closed their salons as a sign of protest. To this mourning nobility was given the name "Black Nobility."

Nevertheless, the amalgamation advanced in no small scale in the social sphere through marriages, social relations, and the like. As a result, the Italian aristocracy in our day constitutes a whole, at least from many points of view.

Article 42 of the 1929 Lateran Treaty, however, assured the Roman nobility a special status, since it recognized the Pope's right to grant new titles and accepted those granted previously by the Holy See.<sup>[22]</sup> Thus the Italian and Roman nobilities, by then already at peace, continued to exist legally side by side.

The Concordat of 1985 between the Holy See and the Italian Republic makes no mention to this matter.

\* \* \*

The situation of the Italian nobility—and of the European nobility in general—did not cease to be complex.

In the Middle Ages, the nobility had constituted a social class with specific functions within the State, which entailed certain honors and corresponding obligations.

During modern times this situation had gradually lost its stability, prominence, and brilliance, so that even before the Revolution of 1789, the distinction between the nobility and the people was considerably less marked than in the Middle Ages.

Throughout the egalitarian revolutions of the nineteenth century, the position of the nobility suffered successive mutilations of such extent that its political power in the Italian monarchy at the end of World War II survived solely as a prestigious tradition, which was seen, incidentally, with respect and affection by most of society. The republican constitution attempted to deal the final blow to the last vestiges of this tradition.<sup>[23]</sup>

As the aristocracy's political power declined, its social and economic standing followed the same trend, albeit more slowly. At the turn of the century, the nobles were still at the apex of the social structure, due to their rural and urban properties; their castles, palaces, and artistic treasures; the social renown of their names and titles; and to the excellent moral and cultural values of their traditional household environments, manners, lifestyle, and so on.

The crises resulting from World War I brought some changes to this picture. They deprived part of the noble families of their means of livelihood and forced many of their members to secure subsistence through the exercise of professions at variance, even when honest and worthy, with the psychology, customs, and social prestige of their class.

On the other hand, contemporary society, increasingly shaped by finance and technology, produced new relations and situations as well as new centers of social influence that were usually alien to the aristocracy's traditional surroundings. Thus, a whole new order of things arose alongside the surviving old one, further diminishing the nobility's social importance.

Finally, to all this was added an important ideological factor, also detrimental to the nobility. The worship of technological progress<sup>[24]</sup> and the equality proclaimed by the Revolution of 1789 tended to create an atmosphere of hatred, prejudice, defamation, and sarcasm against the nobility, which is founded upon tradition and transmitted in a way that egalitarian demagoguery most hates: by blood and cradle.

World War II brought additional and more extensive economic ruin to many noble families, worsening yet further the multiple problems the aristocracy had to face. In this way, the crisis of a great social class became acute and firmly entrenched. It was with this picture before him that Pius XII addressed the

current situation of the Italian nobility in his allocutions to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility, which had obvious relevance for all the European nobility.

## 2. Pius XII and the Roman Nobility

This situation, and particularly the way it affected the Roman Nobility, was known to Pius XII in all its details.

He belonged to a noble family, whose sphere of relations was naturally among the nobility. In 1929, one prominent member of his family was graced with the title of marquis; and the Pope's nephews, Don Carlo Maria, Don Marcantonio, and Don Giulio Pacelli, each received the hereditary title of prince from King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy.<sup>[25]</sup>

There was something imponderable in that Pope which evoked nobility: his tall, slim bearing, his way of walking, his gestures, even his hands. This Pontiff, so universal in spirit and so friendly to the lowly and poor, was also very Roman and had his attention, consideration, and affection also turned toward the Roman Nobility.

*In the Roman Patriciate and Nobility We see and love an array of sons and daughters whose merit and bond and hereditary loyalty to the Church and the Roman Pontiff, whose love for the Vicar of Christ arises from the deep root of faith and does not diminish with the passing of the years and the vicissitudes of the ages and of men. In your midst We feel more Roman by custom, by the air we have breathed and still breathe, by the very sky, the very sun, the very banks of the Tiber on which Our cradle was laid, by that soil that is sacred down to the remotest passages of its viscera, whence Rome draws for her children auspices of an eternity in Heaven.*<sup>[26]</sup>

## 3. The Universal Scope of the Allocutions of Pius XII to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility

Having thus enunciated the theme, it may seem at first glance that the allocutions to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility are of interest to Italy alone.

In reality, the crisis undermining the Italian nobility also affects, *mutatis mutandis*, all the countries with a monarchical and aristocratic past. It also affects those countries presently living under monarchical regimes whose respective nobilities find themselves in a situation analogous to that in Italy before the fall of the Savoy dynasty in 1946.

Even in countries with no monarchical past, aristocracies were constituted by the natural course of events, in fact if not in law.<sup>[27]</sup> In these countries, too, the wave of demagogic egalitarianism born of the 1789 Revolution and brought to its height by communism, created in certain environments an atmosphere of resentment and misunderstanding in relation to the traditional elites.

The allocutions of His Holiness Pope Pius XII thus have a universal scope.

This scope is enhanced by the fact that, in his analysis of the Italian situation, the Pope rises to high doctrinal considerations and, therefore, reaches a perennial and universal dimension. An example of this is his allocution of December 26, 1941, to the Pontifical Noble Guard. From considerations about the nobility, Pius XII ascends to the highest philosophical and religious reflections:

Yes, faith renders your rank more noble still, for all nobility comes from God, the noblest Being and source of all perfection. Everything in Him is nobility of being. When Moses, sent to deliver the people

of Israel from Pharaoh's yoke, asked God atop Mount Horeb what should be the name whereby He would be made manifest to the people, the Lord replied to him: "I am Who am: *Ego sum qui sum*. Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel: He Who is—*Qui est*, hath sent me to you" (Exod. 3:14). What, therefore, is nobility? "All nobility of any thing," teaches the Angelic Doctor Saint Thomas Aquinas, "appertains to it in accordance with its being; indeed the nobility that man gains from wisdom would be nothing if through such wisdom he were not made wise; and so it is with the other perfections as well. Therefore the measure of a thing's nobility corresponds to the measure in which it possesses being, inasmuch as a thing is said to be more or less noble according to whether its being is restricted to a particularly greater or lesser degree of nobility.... Now God, who is His being, possesses being in accordance with all the virtue of being itself; thus He cannot lack any nobility that belongs to any thing" (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, I, q. 28).

You too have being from God; He it was who made you, and not you yourselves—" *Ipse fecit nos, et non ipsi nos*" (Ps. 99:3). He gave you nobility of blood, nobility of valor, nobility of virtue, nobility of faith and Christian grace. Your nobility of blood you place at the service of the Church and employ in the defense of Saint Peter's Successor; it is a nobility of good works by your forebears, which will ennoble you as well if day by day you take care to add to it the nobility of virtue.... Indeed nobility joined with virtue shines so worthy of praise that the light of virtue often eclipses the glimmer of nobility; and oftentimes in the annals and halls of the great families, the name of virtue alone remains the sole nobility, as even the pagan Juvenal did not hesitate to assert (*Satyr. VIII*, 19-20): "*Tota licet veteres exornent undique cerae atria, nobilitas sola est atque unica virtus*" [Even though old wax figures adorn the palaces of the great families on all sides, their only and exclusive nobility is virtue].<sup>[28]</sup>

### Chapter III

The People and the Masses, Liberty and Equality: Wholesome Versus Revolutionary Concepts in a Democratic Regime

#### The Teaching of Pius XII

Before beginning the study of Pius XII's allocutions to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility, it seems useful to forestall any shock that the reading of these commentaries may cause in people influenced by today's radically egalitarian populism. The same shock may also come to others—perhaps even some belonging to the nobility or analogous elites—who fear infuriating the partisans of this populism with the frank and uninhibited assertion of many of the themes articulated in this work. To prevent this, we shall first set forth the true Catholic doctrine on the just and proportioned inequalities in the social and political hierarchies.

#### 1. The Legitimacy and Even Necessity of Just and Proportional Inequalities Among the Social Classes

The Marxist doctrine of class struggle considers all inequalities unjust and harmful. Consequently, it proclaims the legitimacy of the mobilization of the lower classes on a global scale in order to suppress the higher classes. "Workers of the world unite!" is the well-known cry with which Marx and Engels ended the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848.

On the contrary, traditional Catholic doctrine proclaims the legitimacy and even the necessity of just and proportional inequalities among men.<sup>[29]</sup> Consequently, it condemns class struggle. This condemnation clearly does not include legitimate attempts—and even struggles—of a class seeking recognition of its rightful position within the social body or the body politic. Catholic doctrine does condemn, however, the degeneration of this legitimate self-defense of a beleaguered class into a war of extermination of other classes or into a denial of their rightful position in society.

A Catholic should desire mutual harmony and peace among the classes and not chronic fighting

among them, particularly when such conflict seeks to establish complete and radical equality.

All of this would be better understood had the admirable teachings of Pius XII on "the people" and "the masses" received appropriate dissemination in the West.

"Ah, Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name!" the notorious French revolutionary Madame Roland allegedly exclaimed shortly before being guillotined by order of the regime of the Terror.<sup>[30]</sup> Beholding the history of our troubled twentieth century, one could similarly exclaim: "O People, O People, how many insanities, how many injustices, how many crimes are committed in your name by today's revolutionary demagogues!"

The Church certainly loves the people and prides herself on having loved it in a most special manner from the moment of her founding by the Divine Master.

What, however, is the people? It is something quite different from the masses, which are agitated like a churning ocean, an easy prey to revolutionary demagoguery.

Mother that she is, the Church does not refuse her love to these masses as well. Rather, it is precisely because of the love she bears them that she desires, as a precious good, that they be helped to pass from the condition of a mass to that of a people.

Is this assertion a mere play on words? What are the masses? What is the people?

## 2. The People and the Shapeless Multitude: Two Distinct Concepts

The admirable teachings of Pius XII explain this difference very well, clearly describing the natural concord that can and should exist between the elites and the people, contrary to the assertions of the prophets of class struggle.

Pius XII affirms in his 1944 Christmas radio message:

*The people, and a shapeless multitude (or, as it is called, "the masses") are two distinct concepts.*

*1. The people lives and moves by its own life energy; the masses are inert of themselves and can only be moved from outside.*

*2. The people lives by the fullness of life in the men that compose it, each of whom—at his proper place and in his own way—is a person conscious of his own responsibility and of his own views. The masses, on the contrary, wait for the impulse from outside, an easy plaything in the hands of anyone who exploits their instincts and impressions; ready to follow in turn, today this way, tomorrow another.*

*3. From the exuberant life of a true people, an abundant rich life is diffused in the state and all its organs, instilling into them, with a vigor that is always renewing itself, the consciousness of their own responsibility, the true instinct for the common good.*

*The elementary power of the masses, deftly managed and employed, the state also can utilize; in the ambitious hands of one or several who have been artificially brought together for selfish aims, the state itself, with the support of the masses, reduced to the minimum status of a mere machine, can impose its whims on the better part of the real people; the common interest remains seriously, and for a long time, injured by this process, and the injury is very often hard to heal.<sup>[31]</sup>*

### 3. Natural Inequalities Should Also Exist in a True Democracy

Immediately afterwards, the Pontiff distinguishes between true and false democracy. The former is a corollary of the existence of a true people; the latter, on the contrary, is the consequence of reducing the people to the condition of mere human masses.

*4. Hence, follows clearly another conclusion: the masses—as we have just defined them—are the capital enemy of true democracy and of its ideal of liberty and equality.*

*5. In a people worthy of the name, the citizen feels within him the consciousness of his personality, of his duties and rights, of his own freedom joined to respect for the freedom and dignity of others. In a people worthy of the name all inequalities based not on whim but on the nature of things, inequalities of culture, possessions, social standing—without, of course, prejudice to justice and mutual charity—do not constitute any obstacle to the existence and the prevalence of a true spirit of union and fraternity.*

*On the contrary, far from impairing civil equality in any way, they give it its true meaning; namely, that before the state everyone has the right to live honorably his own personal life in the place and under the conditions in which the designs and dispositions of Providence have placed him.* [\[32\]](#)

This definition of the genuine and legitimate "civil equality," and the correlated concepts of "fraternity" and "union," clarifies, with richness of thought and propriety of expression, the true equality, fraternity, and union according to Catholic doctrine. This equality and fraternity are radically opposed to those implemented, to a greater or lesser extent, in the sixteenth century by Protestant sects in their respective ecclesiastical structures. They are likewise contrary to the sadly famous trilogy that the French Revolution and its partisans throughout the world hoisted as their motto in the civil and social orders, and which was eventually extended to the socioeconomic order by the Russian Revolution of 1917. [\[33\]](#)

This observation is particularly important since these words are usually understood in the erroneous revolutionary sense when used in everyday conversation or in the media.

### 4. With the Corruption of Democracy, Liberty Becomes Tyranny and Equality Degenerates into Mechanical Leveling

Having defined true democracy, Pius XII then describes false democracy.

*6. Against this picture of the democratic ideal of liberty and equality in a people's government by honest and far-seeing men, what a spectacle is that of a democratic state left to the whims of the masses!*

*Liberty, from being a moral duty of the individual, becomes a tyrannous claim to give free rein to a man's impulses and appetites to the detriment of others. Equality degenerates to a mechanical leveling, a colorless uniformity; the sense of true honor,*

*of personal activity, of respect for tradition and dignity—in a word all that gives life its worth—gradually fades away and disappears. And the only survivors are, on one hand, the victims deluded by the specious mirage of democracy, naively taken for the genuine spirit of democracy, with its liberty and equality; and on the other, the more or less numerous exploiters, who have known how to use the power of money and of organization in order to secure a privileged position above the others, and have gained power.* [34]

Many of the teachings in Pius XII's allocutions to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility, and in those to the Pontifical Noble Guard, are founded on these principles of the 1944 Christmas radio message.

From the perspective the Pontiff described so objectively, it is evident that even in our time, in any well-ordered state—be it monarchical, aristocratic, or even democratic—the nobility and the traditional elites are entrusted with an elevated and indispensable mission. We shall now analyze this mission.

## Chapter IV

### Nobility in a Christian Society The Perennial Character of Its Mission and Its Prestige in the Contemporary World

#### The Teaching of Pius XII

##### 1. Clergy, Nobility, and People

In the Middle Ages, society consisted of three classes, the clergy, the nobility, and the people, each of which had special duties, privileges, and honors.

Besides this tripartite division, a clear distinction existed between rulers and those ruled, a distinction inherent to every social group and principally to a country. Not only the king, however, but also the clergy, the nobility, and the people participated in the country's government, each one in its own way and measure.

As is well known, both Church and State constitute perfect societies, each distinct from the other and sovereign in its respective field, that is, the Church in the spiritual realm and the State in the temporal. Nonetheless, this distinction does not prevent the clergy from participating in the government of the State. In order to clarify this point, it is fitting to recall in a few words the specifically spiritual and religious mission of the clergy.

From the spiritual point of view, the clergy is the ensemble of people in the Church who have the mission to teach, govern, and sanctify, while it is for the faithful to be taught, governed, and sanctified. Such is the hierarchical order of the Church. The documents of the Magisterium establishing this distinction between the teaching Church and the learning Church are numerous. For example, Saint Pius X affirms in his encyclical *Vehementer nos*:

*Scripture teaches us, and the tradition of the Fathers confirms the teaching, that the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, ruled by the Pastors and Doctors—a society of men containing within its own fold chiefs who have full and perfect powers for ruling, teaching and judging. It follows that the Church is essentially an unequal society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the right*

*and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing all its members toward that end; the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the pastors.*<sup>[35]</sup>

This distinction between hierarchy and faithful in the Church, between rulers and those ruled, is also affirmed in more than one document of the Second Vatican Council.

*Therefore, by divine condescension the laity have Christ for their brother.... They also have for their brothers those in the sacred ministry who, by teaching, by sanctifying, and by ruling with the authority of Christ so feed the family of God (Lumen Gentium, 32).*

*With ready Christian obedience, laymen as well as all disciples of Christ should accept whatever their sacred pastors, as representatives of Christ, decree in their role as teachers and rulers in the Church (Lumen Gentium, 37).*

*The individual bishops, to each of whom the care of a particular church has been entrusted, are, under the authority of the Supreme Pontiff, the proper, ordinary and immediate pastors of these churches. They feed their sheep in the name of the Lord, and exercise in their regard the office of teaching, sanctifying, and governing (Christus Dominus, 11).*<sup>[36]</sup>

Through the exercise of the sacred ministry, the clergy bears the lofty and specifically religious mission of providing for the salvation and sanctification of souls. This mission produces a supremely beneficial effect on temporal society, as it always has and always will until the end of time, since sanctifying souls amounts to imbuing them with the principles of Christian morals and guiding them in the observance of the Law of God. Peoples receptive to this influence of the Church are ipso facto ideally disposed to direct all their temporal activities to the attainment of a high degree of competence, efficacy, and prosperity.

Saint Augustine's famous image of a society whose members are all good Catholics speaks for itself.

*Therefore, let those who say that the teaching of Christ is contrary to the State provide such an army as the teaching of Christ orders soldiers to be; let them provide such governors, such husbands, such wives, such parents, such children, such masters, such servants, such kings, such judges, and lastly such taxpayers and tax collectors as Christian teaching admonishes them to be; and then let them dare to say that this teaching is opposed to the welfare of the State, or, rather, let them even hesitate to admit that it is the greatest safeguard of the State when faithfully observed*<sup>[37]</sup>

Under this perspective, it is proper for the clergy to firmly establish and maintain the moral foundations of the perfect civilization, the Christian one. By a natural connection, in the Middle Ages, education and works of public assistance and charity were entrusted to the Church. The Church performed these services, normally the purview of the departments of education and public health in contemporary secular states, without burden to the public coffers.

It is understandable then that the clergy was recognized as the first class in the Middle Ages, due to the

supernatural and sacred character of its spiritual mission, and also to the beneficial effects its proper exercise produced in temporal society.

On the other hand, the clergy, in the exercise of its sublime mission, apart from any temporal or terrestrial power, is an active factor in the formation of the nation's spirit and mentality. Between clergy and nation, there normally exists an exchange of understanding, trust, and affection that apportions to the former unmatched possibilities to know and orient the aspirations, concerns, sufferings, in short, the spiritual life of the population, as well as the temporal affairs that are inseparable from it. To accord the clergy a voice and a vote in the great and decisive national assemblies is, therefore, an invaluable way for the State to ascertain the yearnings of its people.

Hence it is understandable that throughout history clerics, although maintaining their alterity in relation to the political life of the country, have frequently been heeded and respected counselors of the public power and valuable participants in the development of certain legislative matters and governmental policies.

But the picture of relations between the clergy and the public power is not limited to this.

The clergy is not a group of angels living in Heaven, but of men who exist and act concretely on this earth as God's ministers. The clergy comprises part of the country's population, before which its members have specific rights and duties. The protection of these rights and the proper fulfillment of these duties are of utmost importance for both Church and State, as Leo XIII eloquently stated in the encyclical *Immortale Dei*.<sup>[38]</sup>

All this indicates that the clergy is distinct from the other elements of the nation. It is a perfectly defined social class that is a living part of the national body and, as such, has the right to a voice and a vote in its public life.<sup>[39]</sup>

After the clergy, the second class was the nobility. Essentially it had a military and warrior character. The nobility was responsible for defending the country against external aggression and for keeping the political and social order. Besides that, in their respective domains, the feudal lords cumulatively exercised, without cost to the Crown, functions somewhat analogous to those of our judges, police chiefs, and city council presidents.

Thus, these two classes were essentially ordained toward the common good and, in compensation for their weighty and important charges, they were entitled to corresponding honors and privileges, among which was exemption from taxes.

Lastly, there was the people, a class devoted specifically to productive work. It had, by right, a much lesser participation in war than the nobility and, in most cases, exclusive right to the exercise of the most profitable occupations, such as commerce and industry. Normally its members had no special obligation toward the State. They worked for the common good only in so far as it favored their own personal and familial interests. Thus, this class was not favored with special honors and had to carry the burden of taxes.

*Clergy, nobility, and people.* This trilogy naturally brings to mind the representative assemblies that characterized many monarchies of the Middle Ages and the Ancien Régime: the Cortes of Portugal and Spain, the Estates General of France, the Parliament of England, and so forth. In these assemblies, there was an authentic national representation that faithfully mirrored social organicity.

During the Enlightenment, other doctrines of political and social philosophy began to conquer several leading sectors of Europe. Under the effects of a mistaken notion of liberty, the Old Continent began to destroy the intermediary bodies and to completely secularize the State and nation. In this way inorganic societies arose, based on a purely quantitative criterion: the number of votes.

This transformation, extending from the last decades of the eighteenth century until our days, perilously facilitated the degeneration of peoples into masses, as Pius XII so wisely pointed out.

## 2. The Deterioration of the Medieval Order in Modern Times

As explained in Chapter II, the feudal organization of society—at once political, social, and economic—deteriorated in modern times (from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries). From then on, the successive political and socioeconomic transformations have tended to meld all the classes and entirely, or almost entirely, deny a special juridical status to the clergy and nobility. This is a difficult contingency to which these classes should not pusillanimously close their eyes, since this would be unworthy of true clerics, as of true nobles.

Pius XII, in one of his masterful allocutions to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility, describes this state of things with noteworthy precision.

*First of all, you must look fearlessly, courageously, at the present reality. It seems superfluous to insist on recalling to your mind what, three years ago, was the object of Our considerations; it would seem vain and unworthy of you to veil it in prudent euphemisms, especially after the words of your eloquent representative have given Us so clear a testimonial of your adhesion to the social doctrine of the Church and to the duties stemming therefrom. The new Italian Constitution no longer recognizes you as possessing, as a social class, in the State and among the people, any particular mission, quality, or privilege.*<sup>[40]</sup>

This situation, the Pontiff observes, is the outcome of a chain of events that creates the impression of following an "irresistible course."<sup>[41]</sup>

In view of the "very different lifestyles"<sup>[42]</sup> now emerging in modern society, members of the nobility and traditional elites should not engage in futile lamentation, nor should they ignore reality. Rather, they should take a strong attitude toward it. This is the conduct proper to courageous people: "While the mediocre can only wear a frown in the face of ill fortune, superior spirits are able, according to the classic expression, to prove themselves '*beaux joueurs*,' imperturbably maintaining their noble and untroubled bearing."<sup>[43]</sup>

## 3. The Nobility Should Remain a Leading Class in Today's Greatly Changed Social Context

According to Pius XII, "one may think as one wishes"<sup>[44]</sup> about the new lifestyles. One is not at all obliged to applaud them, but one must accept that they constitute the palpable reality in which we are obliged to live. Just what, then, is the objective and manly acknowledgment of these lifestyles?

Have the nobility and the traditional elites lost their reason for being? Should they break with their traditions and their past? In a word, should they dissolve among the common people, mixing with them, extinguishing everything the noble families preserved in the way of lofty values of virtue, culture, style, and education?

A hasty reading of the allocution to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility of 1952 would seem to lead to an affirmative answer. This answer, however, would be in patent disagreement with the teachings of analogous allocutions in previous years, as well as with passages from more than one allocution of later pontiffs. This apparent disagreement results especially from the passages quoted above, as well

as from others that follow.<sup>[45]</sup> Yet this is not the teaching expressed by the Pontiff in his 1952 allocution. In his view, the traditional elites should continue to exist and have a lofty mission.

*It may well be that one thing or another about the present conditions displeases you. Yet for the sake and for the love of the common good, for the salvation of Christian civilization, during this crisis which, far from abating, seems instead to be growing, stand firm in the breach, on the front line of defense. There your special qualities can be put to good use even today. Your names, which resonate deeply in the memories even of the distant past, in the history of the Church and of civil society, recall to mind figures of great men and fill your souls with echoes of the dutiful call to prove yourselves worthy.*<sup>[46]</sup>

This teaching is made still clearer in the allocution to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility of 1958, a passage of which was already cited.<sup>[47]</sup>

*You, who at the start of each new year have never failed to come visit Us, must surely remember the careful solicitude with which We endeavored to smooth your way toward the future, which at that time promised to be harsh because of the profound upheavals and transformations in store for the world. We are certain, however, that when your brows too are framed with white and silver, you will yet be witnesses not only to Our esteem and affection, but also to the truth, the validity, and the timeliness of Our recommendations, which We hope are like fruits that have come to you and to society in general.*

*You will recall to your children and grandchildren how the Pope of your childhood and adolescence did not neglect to point you toward the new responsibilities that the new circumstances of the age imposed on the nobility; that, indeed, he explained many times how industriousness would be the surest and most worthy way of ensuring yourselves a permanent place among society's leaders; that social inequalities, while they make you stand out, also assign you certain duties toward the common good; that from the highest classes great boons or great harm could come to the people; that transformations of ways of life can, if one so wishes, be harmoniously reconciled with the traditions of which patrician families are the repositories.*<sup>[48]</sup>

The Pontiff does not desire, then, the disappearance of the nobility from the profoundly transformed social context of our day. On the contrary, he invites its members to exert the necessary effort to maintain their position as the leading class among the groups that direct the present world. In expressing this wish, the Pontiff includes a singular nuance: The persistence of the nobility among these groups should have a traditional meaning, that is, a sense of continuity, of *permanence*.

In other words, the Pontiff desires fidelity to one of the founding principles of the nobility of former times: the correlation between the "social inequalities" that made them "stand out" and their "duties toward the common good."

Thus, "transformations of ways of life can, if one so wishes, be harmoniously reconciled with the traditions of which patrician families are the repositories."<sup>[49]</sup>

Pius XII insists on the nobility's permanence in the post-war world, so long as it truly distinguishes itself

in the moral qualities it should manifest.

*Sometimes, in alluding to the contingency of time and events, We exhorted you to take an active part in the healing of the wounds caused by the war, in the rebuilding of peace, in the rebirth of the life of the nation, and to refuse all "emigration" or abstention. For in our society there still remained an ample place for you if you showed yourselves to be truly elites and optimates [aristocrats], that is, exceptional for serenity of mind, readiness to act, and generous adhesion.* [\[50\]](#)

#### 4. Through a Judicious Adaptation to the Modern World, the Nobility Does Not Disappear in the General Leveling

In accordance with these observations, an adaptation to the modern world—so much more egalitarian than pre-World War II Europe—does not mean that the nobility should renounce its traditions and disappear in the general leveling. Rather, it means that it should courageously continue a past inspired by perennial principles. The Pontiff emphasizes the highest among these, namely, fidelity to the Christian ideal.

*Also do not forget Our appeals to banish from your hearts all despondency and cowardice in face of the evolution of the times, and Our exhortations to adapt yourselves courageously to the new circumstances by keeping your gaze fixed on the Christian ideal, the true and indelible entitlement to genuine nobility.* [\[51\]](#)

Such is the courageous adaptation that befits the nobility in face of the evolution of the times.

In consequence, the nobles should not renounce their ancestral glory. Instead, they ought to preserve it for their respective lineages and, even more, for the benefit of the common good as the worthwhile contribution they are still capable of making.

*Yet why, beloved Sons and Daughters, did we express then and do we now repeat these admonitions and recommendations if not to fortify you against bitter disillusionments, to preserve for your houses the heritage of your ancestral glories, and to guarantee for the society to which you belong the valid contribution that you are still capable of making to it?* [\[52\]](#)

#### 5. To Fulfill the Hopes Placed in It, the Nobility Should Shine in the Gifts Specific to It

After emphasizing once again the importance of the nobility's fidelity to Catholic morals, Pius XII outlines a fascinating picture of the qualities that the nobility should manifest in order to correspond to the hopes he places in it. It especially interests the present study to note that these qualities should shine in the nobility as a fruit of long family traditions. These traditions are clearly hereditary and comprise something unique to the noble class.

*And yet—you may ask Us—what exactly must we do to achieve so lofty a goal?*

*First of all, you must maintain an irreproachable religious and moral conduct, especially within the family, and practice a healthy austerity in life. Let the other classes be aware of the patrimony of virtues and gifts that are your own, the fruit of long family traditions: an imperturbable strength of soul, loyalty and devotion to the worthiest causes, tender and generous compassion toward the weak and the poor, a prudent and delicate manner in difficult and grave matters, and that personal prestige, almost hereditary in noble families, whereby one manages to persuade without oppressing, to sway without forcing, to conquer the minds of others, even adversaries and rivals, without humiliating them. The use of these gifts and the exercise of religious and civic virtues are the most convincing way to respond to prejudices and suspicion, since they manifest the spirit's inner vitality, from which spring all outward vigor and fruitful works.* [\[53\]](#)

Here the Pontiff shows his illustrious listeners an adequate way of responding to the invectives of today's vulgar egalitarian, who is opposed to the survival of the noble class.

#### 6. Even Those Who Show Disdain for the Old Ways of Life Are Not Totally Immune to the Splendor of the Nobility

Pius XII emphasizes vigor and fertility of works as characteristic of genuine nobility and encourages the nobles to contribute such qualities to the common good.

*Vigor and fruitful works! Behold two characteristics of true nobility, to which heraldic symbols, stamped in bronze or carved in marble, are a perennial testimony, for they represent as it were the visible thread of the political and cultural history of more than a few glorious cities of Europe. It is true that modern society is not accustomed by preference to wait for your class to "set the tone" before starting works and confronting events; nevertheless, it does not refuse the cooperation of the brilliant minds among you, since a wise portion thereof retains an appropriate respect for tradition and prizes high decorum, whatever its origins. And the other part of society, which displays indifference and perhaps disdain for ancient ways of life, is not entirely immune to the seduction of glory; so much so, that it tries very hard to create new forms of aristocracy, some worthy of respect, others based on vanity and frivolity, satisfied with merely appropriating the inferior elements of the ancient institutions.* [\[54\]](#)

In this paragraph, Pius XII seems to be refuting an objection possibly raised by discouraged aristocrats appalled by the egalitarian wave already spread throughout the modern world. According to these aristocrats, the world scorns the nobility and refuses to collaborate with it.

Regarding this objection, the Pontiff reasons that one can distinguish two tendencies in modern society in face of the nobility. One "retains an appropriate respect for tradition and prizes high decorum, whatever its origins," by which "it does not refuse the cooperation of the brilliant minds among you." The other tendency, which consists in exhibiting "indifference and perhaps disdain for ancient ways of life, is not entirely immune to the seduction of glory." Pius XII notes expressive evidence of this disposition of spirit.

#### 7. The Specific Virtues and Qualities of the Nobility Imbue Its Work

The Pontiff continues:

*It is clear, however, that vigor and fruitful works cannot still manifest themselves today in forms that have been eclipsed. This does not mean that the field of your activities has been reduced; on the contrary, it has been broadened in the total number of professions and functions. The entire range of professions is open to you; you can be useful and excel in any sector: in areas of public administration and government, or in scientific, cultural, artistic, industrial, or commercial activities.*<sup>[55]</sup>

The Pontiff alludes here to the fact that in the political and socioeconomic regime prevalent before the French Revolution certain professions generally were not exercised by nobles, since these were deemed beneath nobility. Their exercise implied, at times, the loss of noble status. One example was the exercise of commerce, reserved in many places to the bourgeoisie and the common people. These restrictions gradually diminished during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and have entirely disappeared today.

In this passage, Pius XII seems to have in mind that the disturbances resulting from the two world wars had economically ruined a significant number of noble families. Their members were thereby reduced to exercising secondary activities, inappropriate not only for the nobility but for the high and middle bourgeoisie as well. One could even speak of the proletarianization of certain nobles.

In view of such harsh realities, Pius XII encourages these families not to dissolve in a prosaic anonymity, but rather to practice their traditional virtues and act with vigor and fruitfulness, thus communicating a specifically noble note to any work they exercise either by choice or under the harsh sway of circumstances. In this way they will make the nobility understood and respected, even in the most painful situations.

#### 8. A Sublime Example: The Couple of Royal Lineage in Whose House the God-Man Was Born and Dwelt

This elevated teaching takes examples from the public administration of government and from other offices usually held by the bourgeoisie. But it also brings to mind the couple of the royal line of David in whose house, at once princely and working-class, the God-Man was born and lived for thirty years.<sup>[56]</sup>

Such a reflection is found in the allocution of Pius XII to the Noble Guard in 1939:

*You were already noble, even before serving God and His Vicar under the gold and white standard. The Church, in whose eyes the human social order rests fundamentally on the family, however humble it may be, does not disdain that family treasure that is hereditary nobility. Indeed, one may even say that Jesus Christ Himself did not scorn it: The man to whom He entrusted the task of protecting His adorable Humanity and His Virgin Mother, was of royal stock: "Joseph, of the house of David" (Luke 1:27). And this is why Our Predecessor Leo XII, in his brief on reform of the Corps of February 17, 1824, attested that the Noble Guard is "consecrated to render the most proximate and immediate service to Our very Person and constitutes a Corps, which, as much for the end for which it was instituted as for the quality of the individuals composing it, is the first and most respectable of the arms of Our Princedom."*<sup>[57]</sup>

## 9. The Highest Social Function of the Nobility: To Preserve, Defend, and Spread the Christian Teachings Contained in Its Distinctive Noble Traditions

In his 1958 allocution, the Pontiff mentions the moral duty to resist modern corruption as a general charge to the upper classes, which include the Roman Patriciate and Nobility:

*We would like, finally, for your influence on society to save it from a grave danger inherent in modern times. It is well known that society progresses and raises itself up when the virtues of one class are spread to the others; it declines, on the other hand, if the vices and abuses of one are carried over to the others. Because of the weakness of human nature, more often it is the latter that are spread, with all the more rapidity nowadays, given the greater facility of means of communication, information, and personal contacts, not only among nations, but from one continent to the next. What happens in the realm of physical health is now happening in the realm of morals as well: neither distances nor boundaries can any longer prevent an epidemic germ from quickly reaching faraway regions. The upper classes, of which yours is one, could, because of their multiple relations and frequent sojourns in countries with different and sometimes inferior moral conditions, become easy conveyers of aberrations in customs.*<sup>[58]</sup>

The Holy Father defines this duty of the nobility more specifically: It is a duty to resist, above all in the field of doctrine but also in that of morals. "As for your own task, you must be vigilant and do your utmost to prevent pernicious theories and perverse examples from ever meeting with your approval and sympathy, let alone using you as favorable carriers and hotbeds of infection." This duty is an integral element of "that profound respect for tradition that you cultivate and hope to use to distinguish yourselves in society." These traditions are "precious treasures" that it is important for the noble to "preserve...among the people. This itself may be the highest social function of today's nobility; certainly it is the greatest service that you can render to the Church and to your country."<sup>[59]</sup>

To conserve, defend, and spread the Christian teachings contained in its distinctive noble traditions: What loftier use can the nobility make of the splendor of past centuries that still illuminates and distinguishes it today?<sup>[60]</sup>

## 10. The Nobility's Duty: To Avoid Sinking into Anonymity; To Resist the Influence of Modern Egalitarianism

Pius XII paternally insists that the nobility not let itself be diluted in the anonymity into which the indifference and hostility of many, spurred on by crude modern egalitarianism, seek to drag it. He likewise points out another relevant mission: By cultivating and disseminating its living traditions, the nobility should help preserve the values of each people from a cosmopolitanism that erodes their distinctiveness. "To practice virtue and use the gifts proper to your class for the common good, to excel in professions and activities promptly embraced, to protect the nation from external contaminations: These are the recommendations We feel We must make to you at the start of this New Year."<sup>[61]</sup>

As he closes this expressive allocution with paternal blessings, the Pontiff makes special mention of the continuity of the nobility. He reminds the noble families present that the grave and honorable duty of continuing the most worthy traditions of the nobility lies with their children: "That the Almighty may strengthen your resolve and fulfill Our desires, answering the prayers We have thus made to Him, We impart to all of you, to your families, and especially to your children, future successors to your worthiest traditions, Our Apostolic blessing."<sup>[62]</sup>

## 11. The Nobility: A Particularly Distinguished Order in Human Society—It Will Have Special Accounts to Render to God

An application of these rich and solid teachings to the contemporary condition of the nobility may be found in the allocution of John XXIII to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility on January 9, 1960.

*The Holy Father is pleased to note that the distinguished audience is a reminder of what human society is as a whole: a multiple variety of elements, each with its own personality and efficiency like flowers in the sunlight, and each worthy of respect and honor, regardless of its importance and size.*

*The fact of belonging to a particularly distinguished order of society, however, while requiring due consideration, is a call to its members to give more, as befits those who have received more, and who will one day have to render accounts to God for everything.*

*By acting in this manner, you cooperate in the wondrous harmony of the kingdom of Our Lord, with the profound conviction that the things that made the fame of each family in the past must now strengthen its commitment—precisely as dictated by its particular social condition—to the sublime concept of Christian brotherhood and to the exercise of special virtues: sweet and gentle patience, purity of customs, humility, and above all, charity. Only thus will great and undying honor be conferred on individuals!*

*And from this it follows that, tomorrow, the young scions of today will bless their fathers and demonstrate that Christian thought has been an ideal inspiration and rule of conduct, generosity, and spiritual beauty.*

*These same dispositions will serve as comfort even in the face of inevitable misfortunes that are never wanting, since the cross resides in every dwelling, from the humblest country house to the most majestic palace. It is nevertheless quite clear and natural that one must pass through this school of pain, of which Our Lord Jesus Christ is the unequalled Teacher.*

*To fortify the most excellent dispositions of those present the Supreme Pontiff imparts his blessing to each and every family, invoking divine assistance especially where there is suffering and greater need. He adds the paternal wish that you should act in such a manner as not to live *alla giornata* [from day to day] as they say, but should feel and express, in everyday life, thoughts and works in accordance with the Gospel, which has pointed the way along the luminous roads of Christian civilization. He who acts in this way now knows that in the future his name too shall be repeated with respect and admiration. [\[63\]](#)*

The specific role of the contemporary nobility is remembered by John XXIII in the allocution to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility of January 10, 1963:

*The resolution, expressed on behalf of those present by their authoritative representative, is very reassuring, and its enactment will bring peace, happiness, and blessings.*

*He who has received most, he who has risen highest, finds himself in the most propitious conditions for setting good example; each must make his contribution: the poor, the humble, the suffering, as well as those who have received numerous gifts from the Lord and enjoy a situation that brings with it particular and serious responsibilities.* [\[64\]](#)

## Chapter V

### Elites, Natural Order, Family, and Tradition—Aristocratic Institutions Within Democracies

#### The Teaching of Pius XII

The previous chapter considered the teachings of Pius XII with respect to the mission of the nobility in our day. We shall now analyze the Pontiff's doctrine concerning the role of traditional elites—the most important being the nobility—in preserving tradition and thereby contributing to progress. We shall also analyze his thinking on the continuity of these elites and their complete compatibility with true democracy.

#### 1. The Formation of Elites Even in Countries Without a Monarchical or Aristocratic Past

The formation of traditional elites with an aristocratic note is so profoundly natural that it occurs even in countries without a monarchical or an aristocratic past.

*Even in democracies of recent date that have no vestiges of a feudal past behind them, a kind of new nobility or aristocracy has been forming by force of circumstances. It consists of the community of families that by tradition place all their energies at the service of the State, its government, its administration, and whose loyalty it can always count on.* [\[65\]](#)

This splendid definition of the essence of nobility reminds us of the great lineages of colonizers, pioneers, and planters who for centuries contributed to the progress of the Americas, and who, remaining faithful to their traditions, constitute a precious moral resource for their societies.

#### 2. Heredity in Traditional Elites

There is, before all else, a natural fact linked to the existence of traditional elites that needs to be remembered, namely heredity.

*The nature of this great and mysterious thing that is heredity—the passing on through a bloodline, perpetuated from generation to generation, of a rich ensemble of material and spiritual assets, the continuity of a single physical and moral type from father to son, the tradition that unites members of one same family across the centuries—the true nature of this heredity can undoubtedly be distorted by materialistic theories. But one can, and must also, consider this reality enormously important in the fullness of its human and supernatural truth.*

*One certainly cannot deny the existence of a material substratum in the transmission*

*of hereditary characteristics; to be surprised at this one would have to forget the intimate union of our soul with our body, and in what great measure our most spiritual activities are themselves dependent upon our physical temperament. For this reason Christian morality never forgets to remind parents of the great responsibilities resting on their shoulders in this regard.*

*Yet of greater import still is spiritual heredity, which is transmitted not so much through these mysterious bonds of material generation as by the permanent action of that privileged environment that is the family, with the slow and profound formation of souls in the atmosphere of a hearth rich in high intellectual, moral, and especially Christian traditions, with the mutual influence of those dwelling under one same roof, an influence whose beneficial effects endure well beyond the years of childhood and youth, all the way to the end of a long life, in those elect souls who are able to meld within themselves the treasures of a precious heredity with the addition of their own merits and experiences.*

*Such is the most prized patrimony of all, which, illuminated by a solid faith and enlivened by a strong and loyal practice of Christian life in all its demands, will raise, refine, and enrich the souls of your children.*<sup>[66]</sup>

### 3. Elites: Propelling Forces of True Progress and Guardians of Tradition

There is a link between nobility and tradition. The former is the natural guardian of the latter. In temporal society, the nobility is par excellence the class entrusted with keeping alive the link whereby the wisdom of the past guides the present without, however, paralyzing it.

#### *a. Are elites enemies of progress?*

Revolutionary spirits often raise the following objection against the nobility and the traditional elites: Being traditional, they are constantly turned toward the past and have their backs to the future, where true progress lies. They thus constitute an obstacle for any society wishing to pursue progress.

Pius XII teaches us, however, that authentic progress lies only in tradition. Progress is real only if it constitutes a harmonious development of the past, and not necessarily a return to it.<sup>[67]</sup> Were progress to break with tradition, society would be exposed to terrible risks.

*Things of this earth flow like a river in the course of time: Of necessity the past gives way to the future, and the present is but a fleeting instant joining the former with the latter. This is a fact, a motion, a law; it is not in itself an evil. There would be evil if this present, which should be a tranquil wave in the continuity of the current, became a billow, upturning everything in its path like a typhoon or hurricane and furiously digging, by destruction and ravage, a gulf between what has been and what must follow. Such chaotic leaps as are made by history in its course constitute and mark what is called a crisis, in other words, a dangerous passage, which may lead to salvation, but whose solution is still wrapped in mystery amid the smoke of the conflicting forces.*<sup>[68]</sup>

Societies avoid stagnation, as well as chaos and revolt, through tradition. The guardianship of tradition, to which Pius XII alludes in this passage, is a specific mission of the nobility and the analogous elites.

Some elites neglect this mission by distancing themselves from contemporary life. Others sin by the opposite excess, becoming absorbed in the present and renouncing everything of the past.

Through heredity, the noble prolongs on earth the existence of the great men of the past. "Remembering your ancestors, [you] relive their lives in a way; and your ancestors live again in your names and in the titles they left you through their merits and their greatness."<sup>[69]</sup>

This confers a very particular moral mission on the nobility and the traditional elites. It is up to them to assure that progress has continuity with the past.

*Is not human society, or at least should it not be, like a finely tuned machine, in which all the parts work together toward the harmonious functioning of the whole? Each part has its own role, and each must apply himself toward the best possible progress of the social organism; each must seek to perfect it, according to his strengths and virtues, if he truly loves his neighbor and reasonably strives for the common good and welfare.*

*Now what part has been assigned in a special way to you, beloved Sons and Daughters? What role has been allotted particularly to you? Precisely that of facilitating this natural development, the role that in the machine is fulfilled by the regulator, the fly-wheel, the rheostat, which take part in the common activity and receive their part of the motive force so as to ensure the operational movement of the apparatus. In other words, Patriciate and Nobility, you represent and continue tradition.*<sup>[70]</sup>

| *b. Significance and value of true tradition*

Respect for tradition is a very rare virtue in our day. On the one hand, the Revolution<sup>[71]</sup> turned the craving for novelties and the disdain for the past into common attitudes. On the other hand, the defenders of tradition sometimes understand it in an entirely false manner. Tradition is not merely a historic value, nor is it simply a theme for romantic yearnings for bygone days. It must be understood as an indispensable factor for contemporary life, and not in an exclusively archaeological way. The word *tradition*, says the Pontiff,

*resounds disagreeably in many ears, and it is justifiably unpleasant when pronounced by certain lips. Some misunderstand it, others make it the mendacious label of their inactive egotism. Amid this dramatic dissent and confusion, more than a few envious voices, often hostile and in bad faith, more often ignorant or deluded, ask you bluntly: What are you good for? To answer them, you must first come to understand the true meaning and value of this tradition, of which you must of necessity be the principal representatives.*

*Many minds, even sincere ones, imagine and believe that tradition is nothing more than memory, the pale vestige of a past that no longer exists, that can never return, and that at most is relegated to museums, therein preserved with veneration, perhaps*

*with gratitude, and visited by a few enthusiasts and friends. If tradition consisted only of this, if it were reduced to this, and if it entailed rejection or disdain for the road to the future, then one would be right to deny it respect and honor, and one would have to look with compassion on those who dream over the past and those left behind in face of the present and future, and with greater severity on those who, spurred by less pure and respectable motives, are nothing but derelict in the duties of the now so very mournful hour.*

*But tradition is something very different from a simple attachment to a vanished past; it is the very opposite of a reaction mistrustful of all healthy progress. The word itself is etymologically synonymous with advancement and forward movement—synonymous, but not identical. Whereas, in fact, progress means only a forward march, step by step, in search of an uncertain future, tradition also signifies a forward march, but a continuous march as well, a movement equally brisk and tranquil, in accordance with life's laws, eluding the distressing dilemma: "Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait!" [If youth knew, if the aged could]; like that Lord of Turenne of whom it was said: "Il a eu dans sa jeunesse toute la prudence d'un âge avancé, et dans un âge avancé toute la vigueur de la jeunesse" [In his youth he had all the prudence of advanced age and in his advanced age all the vigor of youth].<sup>[72]</sup> By virtue of tradition, youth, enlightened and guided by the experience of elders, moves forward with a surer step, and old age can confidently pass on the plow to stronger hands, to continue the furrow already begun. As the word itself implies, tradition is a gift handed down from generation to generation, the torch that at each relay one runner places in and entrusts to the hand of the next, without the race slowing down or coming to a halt. Tradition and progress complement each other so harmoniously that, just as tradition without progress would be a contradiction in terms, so progress without tradition would be a foolhardy proposition, a leap into darkness.*

*The point, then, is not to go against the stream, to backstep toward lifestyles and forms of activity already eclipsed, but rather to take and follow the best of the past and go out to meet the future with the vigor of unfailing youth.<sup>[73]</sup>*

### *c. The traditional elites: their importance and legitimacy*

The demagogic breath of egalitarianism blowing on the contemporary world creates an atmosphere of antipathy toward traditional elites. This is due, in great measure, to their fidelity to tradition. There is, therefore, a great injustice in this antipathy, so long as these elites understand tradition correctly.

*In this manner, your vocation, grand and laborious, is already radiantly defined, and should win you the gratitude of all and raise you above the accusations that might be leveled at you from either side.*

*As you prudently seek to help true progress advance toward a saner, happier future, it would be unjust and ungrateful to reproach you and dishonorably brand you for the cult of the past, the study of history, the love of sacred customs, and unshakeable loyalty to eternal principles. The glorious or unhappy examples of those who preceded the present age are a lesson and a light to guide your steps; and it has already been rightly stated that the teachings of history make humanity a man forever moving but never growing old. You live in modern society not like immigrants in a*

*foreign country, but rather as exemplary and illustrious citizens, who want and intend to collaborate with their contemporaries toward the recovery, restoration, and progress of the world.* [\[74\]](#)

#### 4. God's Blessing Illuminates, Protects, and Caresses All Cradles, but Does Not Equalize Them

Another factor in the hostility toward the traditional elites lies in the revolutionary preconception that any inequality of origin is contrary to justice. It is generally admitted that one may stand out due to personal merit, but descent from an illustrious family is deemed inadmissible as a special title to honor and influence. In this respect the Holy Father Pius XII teaches us a precious lesson.

*Social inequalities, even those related to birth, are inevitable: Benign nature and God's blessing to humanity illuminate and protect all cradles, looking on them with love, but do not make them equal. Look, for example, at the most inexorably leveled societies. No art has ever been able to work things so that the son of a great chief, the son of a great leader of the masses, should remain in the same condition as an obscure citizen lost among the common people. Yet, although such ineluctable disparities may appear, in a pagan light, to be the inflexible consequence of the conflict between social forces and the power acquired by some people over others, according to the blind laws believed to rule human activity and to make sense of the triumph of some and the sacrifice of others, on the other hand, to a mind instructed and educated in a Christian way these disparities can only be considered a disposition willed by God with the same wisdom as the inequalities within the family. Hence, they are destined to bring men more closely together on the present life's journey toward the Kingdom of Heaven, with some helping others in the way a father helps the mother and children.* [\[75\]](#)

#### 5. The Paternal Notion of Social Superiority

The Christian glory of the traditional elites lies in serving not only the Church but also the common good. Pagan aristocracy boasted exclusively of its illustrious lineage. Christian nobility adds to this title another still higher: the exercise of a paternal mission vis-à-vis the other classes.

*The name "Roman Patriciate" awakens in our mind even greater thoughts and visions of history. If the term patrician in pagan Rome, patricius, signified the fact of having ancestors and of belonging not to stock of common rank but to a privileged and dominant class, in a Christian light it takes on a more luminous aspect and deeper resonance in that it associates the idea of social superiority with that illustrious paternity. It is a patriciate of Christian Rome, which had its highest and most ancient splendors not in blood but in the honor of protecting Rome and the Church: patricius Romanorum, a title carried over from the time of the Exarchs of Ravenna to Charlemagne and Henry III. Through the centuries, successive Popes also had armed defenders of the Church, drawn from the families of the Roman Patriciate; and Lepanto marked and eternalized a great name in the annals of history.* [\[76\]](#)

This body of concepts certainly conveys an impression of the paternity permeating the relations between the highest and lowest classes.

Two objections against such an impression readily arise in "modern" minds. First, someone can always be counted on to affirm that frequent oppressive acts committed in the past by the nobility or the analogous elites invalidate this whole doctrine. Others hold that any affirmation of superiority eliminates Christian gentleness, sweetness, and amenity from social relationships. They argue that superiority normally arouses feelings of humiliation, sadness, and sorrow in those over whom it is exercised, and that to arouse such feelings in one's neighbor is opposed to evangelical sweetness.

*If this paternal conception of social superiority has sometimes, in the clash of human passions, driven souls to deviations in the relations between persons of higher rank and those of humbler station, it is no surprise to the history of fallen humanity. Such deviations in no way serve to diminish or obscure the fundamental truth that, for the Christian, social inequalities merge in the great human family; that therefore relations between unequal classes and ranks have to remain regulated by a fair and righteous justice and at the same time be informed by mutual respect and affection, which, while not abolishing the disparities, should diminish the distance and temper the contrasts between them.* [\[77\]](#)

Typical examples of this aristocratic gentleness are found in many noble families who know how to be extraordinarily kind toward their subordinates without consenting in any way that their natural superiority be denied or abased.

*In truly Christian families, do we not see perhaps the greatest of patricians being careful and solicitous to maintain toward their domestics and all those around them a comportment which, while surely in keeping with their rank, is always free of haughtiness and expressive of kindness and courtesy in words and actions that demonstrate the nobility of hearts that see these men as brothers and Christians and united to them in Christ by the bonds of charity, of that charity which, even in their ancestral palaces, between the great and humble, always comforts, sustains, gladdens, and sweetens life.* [\[78\]](#)

## 6. Our Lord Jesus Christ Consecrated the Condition of a Noble as well as that of a Laborer

Considering the condition of a noble or a member of the traditional elites in this manner, it is understandable that Our Lord Jesus Christ hallowed it, as was already said, [\[79\]](#) by becoming incarnate in a princely family.

*Although it is true that Christ Our Lord chose, for the comfort of the poor, to come into the world bereft of everything and to grow up in a family of simple laborers, He nevertheless wished to honor with His birth the noblest, most illustrious of the lines of Israel, the House of David itself.*

*Therefore, loyal to the spirit of Him whose Vicars they are, the Supreme Pontiffs have always held in high consideration the Patriciate and the Roman Nobility, whose sentiments of unalterable devotion to this Apostolic See are the most precious part of*

the heritage they have received from their forebears and will pass on to their children.<sup>[80]</sup>

## 7. The Perennial Character of the Nobility and the Traditional Elites

The dead elements of the past are bound to be blown away by the winds of the Revolution, just like dead leaves caught by the wind. Nevertheless, the nobility, as a species within the genus "elites," can and should survive because it has a permanent reason for being.

*The furious currents of a new age envelop the traditions of the past in their whirlwinds. Yet, more than this, these winds show what is destined to die like withered leaves, and what instead tends with the genuine force of its interior life to stand firm and live on.*

*A nobility and a patriciate that would, as it were, grow stiff and decrepit by regretting times gone by, would consign themselves to an inevitable decline.*

*Today more than ever, you are called upon to be an elite, not only by blood and by stock, but even more by your works and sacrifices, by creative actions in the service of the entire social community.*

*And this is not just a duty of man and citizen that none may shirk with impunity. It is also a sacred commandment of the faith that you have inherited from your fathers and that you must, in their wake, leave whole and unaltered to your descendants.*

*Banish, therefore, from your ranks all despondency and faint-heartedness; all despondency in the face of the age's evolution, which is bearing away many things that other epochs had built; and all faint-heartedness at the sight of the grave events accompanying the novelties of our age.*

*Being Roman means being strong in action, but also in support.*

*Being Christian means confronting the sufferings, the trials, the tasks, and the needs of the age with that courage, strength, and serenity of spirit that draws the antidote to all human fear from the wellsprings of eternal hope.*

*How humanly great is Horace's proud dictum: *Si fractus illabatur orbis, impavidum ferient ruinae* [Even if the world crumbles to pieces, its ruins would strike him without, however, unsettling him] (Odes, III, 3).*

*Yet how much greater still, how much more confident and exalting is the victorious cry that rises from Christian lips and hearts brimming with faith: *Non confundar in aeternum!* [Let me not be confounded eternally—from the *Te Deum*].<sup>[81]</sup>*

## 8. The Law Cannot Abolish the Past

Thus we understand why, despite the proclamation of the republic in Italy in 1946, the Holy Father Pius XII upheld the Roman Patriciate and Nobility as a noteworthy remembrance of a past of which the present should conserve elements to assure the continuity of a beneficial and illustrious tradition.

*It is quite true that in the new Italian Constitution "titles of nobility are not recognized" (except, of course, in accordance with Article 42 of the Concordat, as pertains to the Holy See, those titles granted or to be granted by the Supreme Pontiffs);<sup>[82]</sup> yet not even the Constitution can annul the past, nor the history of your families.<sup>[83]</sup>*

There is no moral judgment in Pius XII's explicit and direct reference to the abolition of nobiliary titles by the Italian Republic. The Pope simply acknowledges the fact. But *pari passu* he affirms with noble agility that, far from following the example of republican Italy, the Church vindicates the validity of the titles of nobility she has hitherto granted or may come to grant in the future. These titles continued to be valid even in the Republic of Italy in virtue of Article 42 of the Lateran Treaty.<sup>[84]</sup> This is evident, since an article of the Italian Constitution cannot unilaterally suspend the validity of pontifical titles recognized by a bilateral act such as the Concordat of 1929.<sup>[85]</sup>

So, the Roman Patriciate and Nobility still have a momentous and magnificent duty, resulting from the prestige that friends and foes alike must acknowledge.

*Therefore even now the people—whether they are favorable toward you or not, whether they feel respectfully loyal or hostile toward you—look at you and see what sort of example you set in life. It is thus up to you to respond to such expectations and show how your conduct and actions are in keeping with truth and virtue, especially in the matters we have just discussed in our recommendations.<sup>[86]</sup>*

Considering the past of the Roman Nobility and finding therein not something dead but an "impetus for the future," Pius XII, "moved by feelings of honor and loyalty," reserved for it a treatment of special distinction and invited his contemporaries to do likewise.

*In you we hail the descendants and representatives of families long in the service of the Holy See and the Vicar of Christ, who remained faithful to the Roman Pontificate even when it was exposed to outrages and persecutions. Without doubt, over the course of time the social order has been able to evolve, and its center has shifted. Public offices, which once were reserved for your class, may now be conferred and exercised on a basis of equality; nevertheless, such a testimonial of grateful remembrance—which must also serve as an impetus for the future—must also command respect and understanding in modern man as well if he wishes to possess just and fair sentiments.<sup>[87]</sup>*

## 9. Democracy According to the Doctrine of the Church— Archaeologism and False Restoration: Two Extremes to Be Avoided

One might ask if Pius XII with these teachings, uttered in an epoch of overwhelming desire for equality, was attempting to react against this egalitarian tendency by condemning democracy.

In this respect, further considerations may be useful.

The social doctrine of the Church always affirmed the legitimacy of the three forms of government: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. It always refused to accept that democracy is the only form of

government compatible with justice and charity.

Saint Thomas Aquinas teaches that, in principle, monarchy is a form of government superior to the rest. But this does not mean that particular circumstances may not render aristocracy or democracy more appropriate in one state or another.

Saint Thomas views with singular satisfaction those forms of government in which elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy are harmoniously combined.<sup>[88]</sup>

Leo XIII, in turn, when explaining the Church's social doctrine on the forms of government, declares: "By giving oneself up to abstractions, one could at length conclude which is the best of these forms, considered in themselves."<sup>[89]</sup> However, the Pontiff does not affirm which form it is.

Nonetheless, we must note the categorical nature of his affirmation, although it seems at first glance to be conditional: "one could conclude."

In fact, the Pontiff affirms that it is *possible* to determine which form of government is intrinsically better so long as the thinker remains in the realm of abstractions. And so he adds:

*And in all truth it may be affirmed that each of them is good, provided it lead straight to its end—that is to say, to the common good for which social authority is constituted; and finally, it may be added that, from a relative point of view, such and such a form of government may be preferable because of being better adapted to the character and customs of such and such a nation.*<sup>[90]</sup>

One question remains. According to the Pontiff's reasoning, which form of government would be considered better in the realm of mere abstraction?

To answer this we must recall the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* of August 4, 1879, concerning the restoration of Scholasticism according to the doctrine of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Among many other tributes to the work of this great Doctor of the Church we find the following:

*It is well known that almost all the founders and lawgivers of religious orders enjoined upon their members to study and adhere religiously to the doctrines of St. Thomas, warning them that no one of them should with impunity recede, even in the slightest degree, from the teachings of so great a master....*

*But what is of more importance, the Roman Pontiffs, Our predecessors, extolled St. Thomas with the highest encomiums and distinguished praise....*

*To the opinions of the greatest Pontiffs, Innocent VI, as if raising a monument to St. Thomas's memory, adds the declaration: "His teaching above all others, the canonical writings excepted, has such an accuracy of expression, such an arrangement of subjects, such a correctness of conclusions, that those who held to it have never been found to depart from the path of truth, and those who opposed it have always been suspected of unsoundness" (Sermon on Saint Thomas).*

*And it was an honor reserved to St. Thomas alone...that the Fathers of Trent in their Hall of Assembly decided to place upon the altar, side by side with Holy Scripture and the Decrees of the Roman Pontiffs, the Summa of St. Thomas, to seek in it*

| counsel, arguments, and decisions for their purpose.<sup>[91]</sup>

We must not suppose that in this matter the thinking of Leo XIII would differ from that of Saint Thomas. In this regard, the following sentence of the same Pontiff is worthy of special attention:

| *We never intended to add anything either to the opinions of the great scholars on the value of different forms of government, or to Catholic doctrine and the traditions of this Apostolic See on the degree of obedience due to the constituted powers.*<sup>[92]</sup>

Democracy being the government of the people, and the Church's concept of *people* being profoundly different from the current neopagan concept—which equates *people* with *mass*—it follows that the Catholic concept of democracy differs profoundly from what democracy is generally understood to be.<sup>[93]</sup>

In view of the egalitarian avalanche, and refraining from political preferences, Pius XII seeks to consider the democratic tendency as it exists and to guide it in order to prevent damage to the sociopolitical body.

He discloses this design when, during the reorganization of post-war Italy, he gave the Roman Nobility the following counsel:

| *Everyone generally admits that this reorganization cannot be conceived as a pure and simple return to the past. Such a step backward is not possible. The world, despite its often disorderly, disconnected, fragmented, and incoherent movements, has continued to move ahead; history does not stop, it cannot stop; it is forever advancing, following its course, whether straight and orderly or twisted and confused, toward progress or toward an illusion of progress.*<sup>[94]</sup>

When reconstructing a society, as when reconstructing a building, there are two extremes to avoid: one, merely archaeological reconstruction; the other, construction of an entirely different edifice, in which case it would not really be a reconstruction. The Pontiff says:

| *Just as one could not conceive of reconstructing a building required to serve modern-day needs in the same manner as one would conceive of an archaeological reconstruction, likewise such rebuilding would not be possible following arbitrary designs, even if these were theoretically the best and most desirable. One must always bear in mind inescapable reality, the entire sweep and scope of reality.*<sup>[95]</sup>

## 10. Highly Aristocratic Institutions Are Also Necessary in Democracies

Now, if the Church does not intend to destroy democracy, she certainly does desire that it be well understood and that the distinction between the Christian and revolutionary concepts of democracy be clear. It is timely to remember, in this vein, what Pius XII teaches about the traditional character and the aristocratic tone of a true Christian democracy.

*On another occasion, We spoke of the conditions necessary for a people to be ripe for a healthy democracy. Yet who can raise and nurture this state of ripeness? No doubt the Church could draw many lessons in this regard from the treasury of its experiences and its own civilizing activities. Yet your presence here today brings to mind one particular observation. As history will testify, wherever true democracy reigns, the life of the people is permeated with sound traditions, which it is not legitimate to destroy. The primary representatives of these traditions are the ruling classes, or rather, the groups of men and women, or the associations, which set the tone, as we say, for the village or the city, for the region or the entire country.*

*Whence the existence and influence, among all civilized peoples, of aristocratic institutions, aristocratic in the highest sense of the word, like certain academies of widespread and well-deserved renown. And the nobility is in that number too. Without claiming any privilege or monopoly, it is, or ought to be, one of these institutions. It is a traditional institution, founded on the continuity of an ancient education. Of course, in a democratic society, which our own wishes to be, the mere title of birth no longer suffices to command authority or esteem; therefore, in order to preserve in worthy fashion your elevated station and social rank, indeed to increase it and raise it, you must truly be an elite, you must meet the conditions and fulfill the indispensable demands of the epoch wherein we live.* [\[96\]](#)

The milieu of a true nobility or traditional elite is as it were a breeding ground where elevated qualities of intelligence, will, and sensibility are formed, thereby increasing its prestige with the merit of each successive generation. For Pius XII, this type of nobility or traditional elite is not a heterogeneous and contradictory element within a truly Christian democracy, but rather a precious element of it. Thus we perceive how different an authentically Christian democracy is from the egalitarian democracy proclaimed by the Revolution. For the latter, the destruction of all elites—and especially the nobility—is deemed an essential condition for democratic authenticity. [\[97\]](#)

## Chapter VI

### The Meaningful Contribution of the Nobility and Traditional Elites to the Solution of the Contemporary Crisis

#### The Teaching of Pius XII

Having seen the legitimacy and necessity of the existence of traditional elites, we shall now present Pius XII's teachings on how these elites should act as leaders of society through the qualities and virtues proper to them. Indeed, they have no right to exempt themselves from this responsibility.

#### 1. Christian Virtue: The Essence of Nobility

Today's noble should be, above all, a man in whom spiritual qualities shine. Christian virtue and the Christian ideal are part of the very essence of nobility.

*Lift your gaze and keep it fixed on the Christian ideal. All those upheavals, those evolutions and revolutions, have left it untouched. They can do nothing against what is the inner essence of true nobility, that which aspires to Christian perfection, the same that the Redeemer pointed to in the Sermon on the Mount. Unconditional*

*loyalty to Catholic doctrine, to Christ, and to His Church; the ability and the will to be also models and guides for others.... You must present to the world, even to the world of believers and of practicing Catholics, the spectacle of a faultless conjugal life, the edification of a truly exemplary domestic hearth.*[\[98\]](#)

Pius XII then calls the nobility to a holy intransigence.

*You must build a dike against every infiltration, into your home and your circles, of ruinous ideas, pernicious indulgences and tolerances that might contaminate and sully the purity of matrimony and family. Here indeed is an exemplary and holy enterprise, well suited to ignite the zeal of the Roman and Christian nobility in our times.*[\[99\]](#)

*a. The spiritual qualities of the contemporary noble*

To overcome the grave obstacles that hinder the perfect fulfillment of his duty, a member of the nobility or traditional elites should be a man of valor. This is what the Vicar of Jesus Christ expects of him.

*Therefore, what We expect of you is above all a strength of soul that even the harshest trials cannot vanquish; a strength of soul that should make you not only perfect soldiers of Christ for yourselves, but also, as it were, instructors and supporters for those who might be tempted to doubt or give in.*

*What We expect of you is, secondly, a readiness to act that is not daunted nor discouraged by any anticipation of sacrifice that might be required for the common good; a readiness and a fervor that, in making you swift to carry out all your duties as Catholics and citizens, should keep you from falling into an apathetic, inert "abstentionism," which would be a grievous sin at a time when the most vital interests of religion and country are at stake.*

*What We expect of you, lastly, is a generous adhesion—not under your breath and for the mere sake of formality, but from the bottom of your hearts and carried out without reservation—to Christian doctrine and the Christian life, to the precept of brotherhood and social justice, the observance of which cannot fail to ensure you spiritual and temporal happiness.*

*May this strength of soul, this fervor, this brotherly spirit guide every one of your steps and reaffirm your path in the course of the New Year, which has been so uncertain in its birth and almost seems to be leading you toward a dark tunnel.*[\[100\]](#)

The Pontiff develops these concepts even more in his allocution of 1949.

*All are in need of strength of soul, but especially so in our times, in order to bear the suffering bravely, to overcome life's difficulties victoriously, to constantly perform one's duty. Who does not have some reason for suffering? Who does not have some*

*cause for sorrow? Who does not have something to fight for? Only he who surrenders and flees. Yet your right to surrender and flee is much less than that of others. Suffering and hardship today are commonly the lot of all classes, all social stations, all families, all persons. And if a few are exempt, if they swim in superabundance and enjoyment, this must spur them to take the miseries and hardships of others upon themselves. Who could find contentment and rest, who, rather, would not feel uneasy and ashamed, to live in idleness and frivolity, in luxury and pleasure, amid almost universal tribulation?*

*Readiness to act. In this moment of great personal and social solidarity, everyone must be ready to work, to sacrifice oneself, to devote oneself to the good of all. The difference lies not in the fact of obligation, but in the manner of fulfilling it. Is it not true that those who have more time and more abundant means at their disposal should be more assiduous and more solicitous in their desire to serve? In speaking of means, We are not referring only nor primarily to wealth, but to all the gifts of intelligence, culture, education, knowledge, and authority, which fate does not grant to certain privileged individuals for their exclusive advantage or to create an irremediable inequality among brothers, but rather for the good of the whole social community. In all that involves serving one's neighbor, society, the Church and God, you must always be the first. Therein lies your true rank of honor, your most noble preeminence.*

*Generous adhesion to the precepts of Christian doctrine and the Christian life. These are the same for all, for there are not two truths, nor two laws; rich and poor, big and small, noble and humble, all are equally expected to submit their intellects through faith in the same dogma, their wills through obedience to the same morals. Divine justice, however, will be much more severe toward those who have been given more, those who are better able to understand the sole doctrine and to put it into practice in everyday life, those who with their example and their authority can more easily direct others onto the road of justice and salvation, or else lose them on the fatal roads of unbelief and sin.<sup>[101]</sup>*

These last words show that the Pontiff does not accept a nobility or a traditional elite that is not effectively and unselfishly apostolic. A nobility living for profit and not for Faith, without ideals and like the bourgeois (in the pejorative sense sometimes attributed to this word), is not a true nobility but a mere corpse thereof.<sup>[102]</sup>

#### *b. Aristocratic chivalrousness: a bond of charity*

The effective and enduring possession of these virtues and spiritual qualities naturally breeds chivalrous and distinguished manners. Does a noble, gifted with such qualities and manners, constitute an element of division among the social classes?

No. Far from being a divisive factor, a well-understood aristocratic chivalrousness is truly an element of union that gracefully penetrates the relationships between the nobles and the members of the other social classes with whom they deal because of their occupation or activities.

This chivalrousness maintains the distinction of classes "without confusion or disorder,"<sup>[103]</sup> that is, without egalitarian leveling. Quite the contrary, it establishes friendly relations among them.

## 2. The Nobility and the Traditional Elites as Guides of Society

The spiritual qualities and chivalrous manners that derive from Christian virtues qualify the noble to exercise the mission of guiding society.

| a. *Guiding society: a form of apostolate*

Today's multitudes need competent guides.

| *The numberless, anonymous multitude is easily provoked to disorder; it surrenders blindly, passively, to the torrent that carries it away or to the whims of the currents that divide and divert it. Once it has become the plaything of the passions or interests of its agitators, as of its own illusions, it is no longer able to take root on the rock and stabilize itself to form a true people, that is, a living body with limbs and organs differentiated according to their respective forms and functions, yet working all together for its autonomous activity in order and unity.* [\[104\]](#)

It is the responsibility of the nobility and the traditional elites to guide society, thereby accomplishing a brilliant apostolate.

| *You could well become this elite. You have behind you an entire past of age-old traditions that represent fundamental values for the healthy life of a people. Among these traditions, of which you are rightfully proud, you number religiousness, the living and working Catholic faith, as the most important of all. Has history not already cruelly proved that any human society without a religious foundation rushes inevitably toward its dissolution and ends up in terror? In emulation of your ancestors, you should therefore shine in the eyes of the people with the light of your spiritual life, with the splendor of your unshakeable faith in Christ and the Church.*

| *Among these traditions is also the inviolate honor of a profoundly Christian conjugal and familial life. In all countries, or at least in those of Western civilization, there rises now a cry of anguish about marriage and the family, a cry so piercing it is impossible not to hear it. Here too, with your exemplary conduct you must put yourselves at the head of the movement for the reform and restoration of the domestic hearth.*

| *And among these same traditions you also count that of acting for the people, in all the facets of public life to which you might be called, as living examples of an unwavering performance of duty, as impartial, disinterested men who, free of all inordinate lust for success or wealth, do not accept a post except to serve the good cause, courageous men unafraid of losing favor from above, or of threats from below.*

| *Lastly, among these traditions there is also the calm, loyal attachment to all that which experience and history have validated and consecrated, that spirit unmoved by restless agitation and blind lust for novelty so characteristic of our time, but also wide open to all social needs. Deeply convinced that only the doctrine of the Church can provide an effective remedy to the present ills, set your hearts upon paving the way for Her, without reservations or selfish suspicions, with words and with works, and*

*especially by guiding, in the administration of your estates, true model businesses from an economic as well as social point of view. A true gentleman never lends his participation to enterprises that can only sustain themselves and prosper at the expense of the common weal and to the detriment and ruin of persons of modest condition. On the contrary, he will put his virtue at the service of the small, the weak, the people—of those who, practicing an honest trade, earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow. Only thus will you be truly an elite; thus will you fulfill your religious and Christian duty; thus will you nobly serve God and your country.*

*May you then, beloved Sons and Daughters, with your great traditions, with care for your progress and your personal, human, and Christian perfection, with your loving good works, with the charity and simplicity of your relations with all the social classes, may you then strive to help the people reestablish themselves on the foundation stone, to seek the kingdom of God and His justice.*<sup>[105]</sup>

*b. How the nobility should exercise its mission of leadership*

In the exercise of this directive mission, the nobility should bear in mind that there is a vast variety of leadership functions.

*In an advanced society like our own, which will have to be restored and reordered after the great cataclysm, the responsibilities of the leaders are rather diverse: the leader is the man of State, of government, the politician; the leader is the worker, who, without resorting to violence, threats, or insidious propaganda, but through his own worth, is able to gain authority and standing among his peers; the leaders are all those in their respective fields, the engineer, the jurist, the diplomat, the economist, without whom the material, social, and international world would go adrift; the leaders are the university professor, the orator, the writer, all of whom aim at molding and guiding spirits; the leader is the military officer who infuses the hearts of his soldiers with a sense of duty, service, and sacrifice; the leader is the doctor carrying out his mission of restoring health; the leader is the priest who directs souls onto the path of light and salvation, providing them assistance for advancing safely along that road.*<sup>[106]</sup>

The nobility and the traditional elites must participate in the leadership, not just of one sector of society, but of any worthy sector, and always with a traditional and proper spirit and in a thorough way.

*And what, in this multitude of leaderships, is your place, your function, your duty? It presents itself in dual form: the personal function and duty of every one of you individually, and the function and duty of the class to which you belong.*

*Personal duty requires that you, with your virtue and diligence, endeavor to become leaders in your professions. Indeed, we all know well that today the youth of your noble class, aware of the dark present and the even more uncertain future, are fully convinced that work is not only a social duty, but also a personal guarantee of livelihood. And We use the word professions in its broadest, most comprehensive sense, as we had occasion to point out last year—that is, technical or humanistic professions, but also political and social activities, intellectual occupations, works of every sort: the prudent, vigilant, hard-working administration of your property, your*

lands, following the most modern and tested methods of cultivation, for the material, moral, social, and spiritual good of the peasants or other populations who live on them. In every one of these situations you must make every effort to succeed as leaders, whether because of the trust placed in you by those who have remained faithful to the wise and still living traditions, or because of the mistrust of so many others, which you shall have to overcome by winning their esteem and respect, by dint of excelling in everything in the positions in which you find yourselves, in the activities you pursue, regardless of the nature of the position or the form of the activity. [\[107\]](#)

More precisely, the noble should transmit to everything he does the relevant human qualities that his tradition affords him.

*In what, then, should this excellence of life and action consist, and what are its principle characteristics?*

*It manifests itself above all in the perfection of your work, whether it be technical, scientific, artistic, or anything else. The work of your hands and your spirits must bear that imprint of distinction and perfection that cannot be acquired from one day to the next, but rather reflects a refinement of thought, of feeling, of soul, and of conscience, inherited from your forebears and ceaselessly nurtured by the Christian ideal.*

*It also shows itself in what can be called humanism, that is, the presence, the intervention of the complete man in all the manifestations of his activities, even if specialized, in such a way that the specialization of his ability should never hypertrophy, should never atrophy, never becloud the general culture, just as in a musical phrase the dominant should never break the harmony nor burden the melody.*

*It is also made manifest in the dignity of one's entire bearing and conduct—a dignity that is not imperious, however, and that, far from emphasizing distances, only lets them appear when necessary to inspire in others a higher nobility of soul, mind, and heart.*

*Lastly, it manifests itself above all in the sense of lofty morality, or righteousness, honesty, and probity that must inform every word and every deed. [\[108\]](#)*

Aristocratic refinement, so inherently worthy of admiration, would be useless and even harmful were it not based on a higher moral sense.

*An immoral or amoral society that no longer distinguishes between right and wrong in its conscience or in its outward actions, that no longer feels horror at the sight of corruption but rather makes excuses for it, adapts to it indifferently, woos it with favors, practices it with no misgivings or remorse, indeed parades it without blushing, thereby degrading itself and making a mockery of virtue, is on the road to ruin....*

*True nobility is another matter altogether: In social relations it lets shine a humility filled with greatness, a charity untouched by any egotism or concern for one's own*

*interest. We are not unaware of the tremendous goodness, gentleness, devotion, and self-abnegation with which many, and many among your number, have in these times of endless suffering and anguish bent down to aid the unfortunate and have been able to radiate about themselves the light of their charitable love, in all its most progressive and efficacious forms. And this is another aspect of your mission.* [\[109\]](#)

"Humility filled with greatness:" What an admirable expression, so opposed to the vain style of the jet set and to the vulgarity of today's supposedly democratic and modern manners, lifestyles, and way of being!

*c. Elites with a traditional upbringing are profound observers of reality*

A noble, gifted with a profoundly traditional spirit, can find in the experience of the past that lives in him the means to understand current issues better than many other people. Far from being on the fringes of reality, he is a subtle and profound observer of it.

*There are ills in society, just as there are ills in individuals. It was a great event in the history of medicine when one day the famous Laennec, a man of genius and faith, anxiously bending over the chests of the sick and armed with the stethoscope he had invented, performed auscultation, distinguishing and interpreting the slightest breaths, the barely audible acoustic phenomena of the lungs and heart. Is it not perhaps a social duty of the first order and of the highest interest to go among the people and listen to the aspirations and malaise of our contemporaries, to hear and discern the beatings of their hearts, to seek remedies for common ills, to delicately touch their wounds to heal them and save them from the infection that might set in for want of care, making sure not to irritate them with too harsh a touch?*

*To understand and love in Christ's charity the people of your time, to give proof of this understanding and love through actions: This is the art and the way of doing that greater good that falls to you, doing it not only directly for those around you, but also in an almost limitless sphere. Then does your experience become a benefit for all. And in this area, how magnificent is the example set by so many noble spirits ardently and eagerly striving to bring about and spread a Christian social order!* [\[110\]](#)

Moved by Faith, the authentic and, therefore, genuinely traditional aristocrat, while preserving himself as such, can and must love the people, over whom he should exercise a truly Christian influence.

*d. The authentically traditional aristocrat: an image of God's providence*

But, someone might ask, will not the nobility belittle itself by assuming today's leadership posts? And will its love of the past not constitute an obstacle to the exercise of present activities? In this respect Pius XII teaches:

No less offensive to you, and no less damaging to society, would be the unfounded and unjust prejudice that did not hesitate to insinuate and have it believed that the patricians and nobles were failing in their honor and in the high office of their station in practicing and fulfilling their duties and functions, placing them alongside the general activity of the population. It is quite true that in ancient times the exercise of professions was usually considered beneath the dignity of nobles, except for the military profession; but even then, once armed defense made them free, more than a few of them readily gave themselves over to intellectual works or even manual labor. Nowadays, of course, with the changes in political and social conditions, it is not unusual to find the names of great families associated with progress in science, agriculture, industry, public administration, and government—and they are all the more perceptive observers of the present as well as confident and bold pioneers of the future, since with a steady hand they hold firm to the past, ready to take advantage of the experience of their ancestors but quick to be wary of the illusions and mistakes that have been the cause of many false and dangerous steps.

As custodians, by your own choosing, of the true tradition honoring your families, the task and honor of contributing to the salvation of human society falls to you, to preserve it from the sterility to which the melancholy thinkers jealous of the past would condemn it and from the catastrophe to which the reckless adventurers and prophets dazzled by a false and mendacious future would lead it. In your work, above you and as it were within you, there shall appear the image of Divine Providence which with strength and gentleness disposes and directs all things toward their perfection (Wis. 8:1), as long as the folly of human pride does not intervene to thwart its designs, which are, however, always above evil, chance, and fortune. By such action you, too, shall be precious collaborators of the Church, which, even amid the turmoil and conflict, never ceases to foster the spiritual progress of nations, the city of God on earth in preparation for the eternal city. [\[111\]](#)

#### **e. The aristocracy's mission among the poor**

One aspect of the traditional elites' participation in the direction of society is their educational and charitable action. This is admirably described by Pius XII.

*But, like every rich patrimony, this one brings with it some very strict duties, all the more strict as this patrimony is rich. There are two above all:*

*1) the duty not to squander such treasures, to pass them on whole, indeed increased, if possible, to those who will come after you; to resist, therefore, the temptation to see in them merely the means to a life of greater ease, pleasure, distinction and refinement;*

*2) the duty not to reserve these assets for yourselves alone, but to let them generously benefit those who have been less favored by Providence.*

*The nobility of beneficence and virtue, dear Sons and Daughters, was itself conquered by your ancestors, and bearing witness to this are the monuments and houses, the hospices, asylums, and hospitals of Rome, where their names and their memory bespeak their provident and vigilant kindness to the needy and unfortunate. We are well aware that in the Patriciate and the Roman Nobility this glory and challenge to do good, inasmuch as they have been in a position to do good, has not*

*been lacking. Yet at this present, painful hour, in which the sky is troubled by watchful, suspicious nights, your spirit, while maintaining a noble seriousness, indeed a lifestyle of austerity that excludes all trifles and frivolous pleasures, which for every genteel heart are incompatible with the spectacle of so much suffering, feels all the more keenly the urge for charitable works impelling you to increase and multiply the merits you have already achieved in the alleviation of human misery and poverty.*<sup>[112]</sup>

### 3. The Absent Leaders—The Harm of Their Absence

#### *a. Absenteeism and omission: sin of the elites*

Unfortunately, not a few members of the nobility and the traditional elites have a tendency to isolate themselves from contemporary life. Imagining themselves to be protected from the uncertainties of life by a secure patrimony and absorbed in memories of bygone days, some of them estrange themselves from real life. They shut themselves off from the outside world and let the days and years elapse in a careless, quiet life with no definite earthly objective.

Search for their names in apostolic works, in charitable activities, in diplomacy, in academia, in politics, in the arts, in the armed forces, in the financial world. It will be in vain. Save for some exceptions, they will be absent. Even in social life, where it would be natural for them to shine, their role is at times null. We may even witness the situation of a country, province, or city where everything happens as if they did not exist.

Why this absenteeism? The cause lies in a mixture of qualities and defects. If we were to examine closely the lifestyle of these elites, more often than not we would find it dignified, honest, even exemplary, because it is inspired by noble reminiscences of a profoundly Christian past. This past, however, seems not to have any meaning except for themselves. They cling to it with exacting obstinacy and alienate themselves from contemporary life. They do not perceive that among those reminiscences, there are elements that are no longer applicable to our day.<sup>[113]</sup> Nevertheless, that past still holds certain values, inspirations, propensities, and directives that could favorably and deeply influence the "very different lifestyles" of the "new chapter [that] has begun."<sup>[114]</sup>

This precious ensemble of spiritual, moral, cultural, and social values—of great importance both in the public and private spheres—is tradition, a life born of the past to lead the future. Upholding the permanence of tradition, the nobility and the analogous elites should exercise a profound and co-directive action of presence in society for the common good.

#### *b. The absence of leaders: a virtual complicity*

One thus comprehends even better the moral irresponsibility implicit in the omissions of the perpetually absent elites.

*Less difficult, on the other hand, is the task of determining, from the various options open to you, what should be your mode of conduct.*

*The first of these modes of conduct is unacceptable: that of the deserter, of him who was incorrectly called the "emigré à l'intérieur";<sup>[115]</sup> it is the abstention of the angry, resentful man who, out of spite or discouragement, makes no use of his qualities or energies, participates in none of his country's and his epoch's activities, but rather withdraws—like Achilles in his tent, near the swift-moving boats, far from the battles<sup>[116]</sup>—while the destinies of the fatherland are at stake.*

*Abstention is even less appropriate when it is the result of an indolent, passive indifference. Indeed, worse than ill humor, worse than spite and discouragement, would be nonchalance in the face of a ruin into which one's own brothers, one's own people, were about to fall. In vain would it attempt to hide behind the mask of neutrality; it is not at all neutral; it is, like it or not, complicit. Each light snowflake falling softly on the mountain's slope and adorning it with its whiteness plays its part, while letting itself be dragged along, in turning the little clump of snow that breaks away from the peak into the avalanche that brings disaster to the valley, crushing and burying peaceful homes. Only the solid mass, which is one with the rock of the foundation, can victoriously resist and stop the avalanche, or at least diminish its destructive course.*

*In this same way the man who is just and firm in his desire for good, the man of whom Horace speaks in a famous ode (Carmen Secularae, III, 3), who does not let himself be moved in his unshakeable thought by the furor of the citizens who give criminal orders nor by the tyrant's menacing scowl, but remains undaunted, even should the universe crumble over his head: "si fractus inlabatur orbis, impavidum ferient ruinae." Yet if this just and strong man is a Christian, he will not content himself with standing erect and impassive amid the ruins; he will feel duty-bound to resist and prevent catastrophe, or at least to limit its damage. And if he cannot contain its destructive force, he will be there again to rebuild the demolished edifice, to sow the devastated field. That is what your conduct should rightly be. It must consist—without having to renounce the freedom of your convictions and your opinions on human vicissitudes—in accepting the contingent order of things such as it is, and in directing its efficiency toward the good, not of a specific class, but of the entire community.<sup>[117]</sup>*

With these last words the Pope insists on the principle that, as long as it fulfills its duty, a traditional elite benefits the whole social body.

#### 4. Another Way to Shirk One's Mission: To Allow Oneself to Be Corrupted and Debased

The nobility and the traditional elites can also sin against their mission by allowing themselves to deteriorate through impiety and immorality.

*The French high society of the eighteenth century was one tragic example of this, among so many others. Never was a society more refined, more elegant, more brilliant, more fascinating. The most varied pleasures of the mind, an intense intellectual culture, a very refined art of pleasure, and an exquisite delicacy of manners and language predominated in that outwardly so courtly and gracious society, and yet everything in it—books, stories, images, furniture, clothing, hair-styles—encouraged a sensuality that penetrated one's veins and one's heart, and even marital infidelity scarcely surprised or scandalized anyone anymore. Thus did that society work toward its own downfall, rushing headlong toward the abyss it had*

When they become corrupt like this, the nobility and the traditional elites exert a tragically destructive action upon society, which should see in them an example and an incentive for the practice of virtue and goodness. In the contemporary crisis, they therefore have the duty of making reparation for their destructive action in the past and at present.

History is forged principally by the elites. Because of this, if the action of the Christian nobility in the past was highly beneficial, the paganization of the nobility was one of the sources of the catastrophic contemporary crisis.

*It is useful, however, to recall that this movement toward unbelief and irreligion found its starting point not from below but from above, that is to say, in the ruling classes, in the upper tiers of society, the nobility, the thinkers and philosophers. We do not, mind you, mean all the nobility, much less the Roman nobility, which has greatly distinguished itself for its loyalty to the Church and to this Apostolic See—and the eloquent and filial expressions We have just heard are yet another luminous demonstration thereof—but rather, the nobility of Europe in general. Does one not clearly perceive in the Christian West in the last few centuries a spiritual evolution which, horizontally and vertically, breadthwise and lengthwise, so to speak, has been progressively undermining and demolishing the Faith, leading to that devastation visible today in the multitudes of men without religion or hostile to religion, or at least animated and confused by a profound and ill-conceived skepticism toward the supernatural and Christianity?*

*The vanguard of this evolution was the so-called Protestant Reformation, during whose vicissitudes and wars a large part of Europe's nobility broke away from the Catholic Church and appropriated her possessions. But unbelief properly speaking spread in the age that preceded the French Revolution. Historians note that atheism, even in the guise of deism, had become widespread at that time in high society in France and elsewhere; belief in a God who was Creator and Redeemer had become, in that world given over to all the pleasures of the senses, something almost ridiculous and unseemly for cultivated minds avid for novelty and progress. In the greater number of the salons of the greatest and most refined ladies, where the most arduous questions of religion, philosophy, and politics were tossed about, literati and philosophers, champions of subversive doctrines, were considered the finest, most eagerly sought ornaments of those worldly meeting-places. Impiety was fashionable in the high nobility, and the writers most in vogue would have been less audacious in their attacks on religion if they had not enjoyed the approval and incitement of the most elegant high society. Not that all the nobility and all the philosophers set their sights on the immediate de-Christianization of the masses. On the contrary, religion was supposed to remain, for the simple people, as a means of governance in the hands of the State. They, however, felt themselves and thought themselves to be above faith and its moral precepts, a policy that very quickly proved to be deadly and shortsighted, even when considered from a purely psychological perspective. With inexorable logic, the people, powerful in goodness and terrible in evil, always know how to draw practical conclusions from their observations and judgments, however well-founded or mistaken they may be.*

*Take the history of civilization of the last two centuries: It clearly reveals and demonstrates the damage to the faith and morals of nations wrought by bad*

examples being set and handed down from above, the religious frivolity of the upper classes, the open intellectual struggle against the revealed truth.<sup>[119]</sup>

## 5. For the Common Good of Society: Preferential Option for the Nobility in the Field of Apostolate

Much is said about the apostolate on behalf of the masses and its corollary, preferential action in favor of their material needs. But it is important not to be one-sided in this matter and never to forget the great importance of the apostolate to the elites and, through them, to the whole social body. It is likewise necessary never to lose sight of the importance of a related apostolic preference for the nobles. In this way, with great benefit to social concord, a preferential option for the poor will be harmoniously complemented by a preferential option for the nobles and for the analogous elites. Pius XII states:

*Now, what conclusion are we to draw from these lessons of history? That today salvation must begin there, at the place where the perversion had its origin. It is not in itself difficult to maintain religion and sound morals in the people when the upper classes set a good example and create public conditions that do not make a Christian education immeasurably onerous, but rather promote it as something sweet and to be imitated. Is your duty not the same, beloved Sons and Daughters, you who, by the nobility of your families and the offices you often hold, belong to the ruling classes? The great mission which to you and to very few others has been assigned—that is, first to reform and perfect private life in yourselves and in your homes, and then to apply yourselves, each in his place and in his share, to bring forth a Christian order in public life—does not admit postponement or delay. It is a most noble mission, rich with promises, especially at a moment when, in reaction to a devastating, demoralizing materialism, a new thirst for spiritual values has been emerging in the masses, and minds are opening up to religious things, in a move away from unbelief. These developments allow one to hope that the lowest point of spiritual decline has by now been left behind. To all of you, therefore, falls the glory, by the light and appeal of good examples raising themselves above all mediocrity, of working together to make these initiatives and aspirations to religious and social good achieve their happy fulfillment.<sup>[120]</sup>*

The specific apostolate of the nobility and of the traditional elites continues, therefore, to be of the greatest importance.

## Chapter VII

### Genesis of the Nobility Its Past and Present Mission

#### Pius XII's Main Emphasis

The study of the allocutions of Pius XII to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility arouses the curiosity of the average person, especially because the public is often surprisingly uninformed about the nobility, its origins, its role, and the various traits it has assumed throughout the ages.

His curiosity, however, may not be wholly satisfied by reading these allocutions. In them, the Pontiff did not comment on the nobility in all its aspects. This is not surprising, since he was addressing nobles, naturally acquainted with many doctrinal and historical facts concerning the nobility. This may not be the

case with readers of this work.

To satisfy the curiosity of many intelligent but incompletely informed readers, this chapter presents a compilation of facts about the nobility that may be difficult to find readily available in a single work.

Containing multiple considerations on diverse themes, this chapter is naturally one of the book's longest. In order not to extend it, the number of citations has been limited to an indispensable minimum.

## 1. The Private Sphere and the Common Good

### | *a. Human groups—leaders*

In any human group existing in the private sphere, the exercise of authority confers a certain prominence. This is the case of a father,—and, in participation with him, his wife—the president of an association, a professor, the coach of an athletic team, and so on.

### | | *1) Intellectual Requisites of a Leader*

The exercise of authority requires certain qualities. In the first place, the leader must have a clear and firm notion of the objective and the common good of the group he directs. Then he needs a lucid knowledge of the means and procedures to attain this good.

These intellectual qualities, however, do not suffice.

The leader must also be able to communicate his knowledge and, as much as possible, persuade those who differ. However broad his powers, however drastic the penalties imposed on those who disobey, however honorable and generous the rewards conferred on those who do obey, these factors are not enough for the leader to make himself obeyed.

A profound and stable consensus must exist between his subordinates and him regarding his objectives and methods. His subordinates must also have earnest confidence in his capacity to employ these methods correctly and achieve these goals, all in view of attaining the common good.

### | | *2) Requisites of the Will and the Sensibility*

Moreover, it is insufficient for the leader merely to persuade through flawless logical argumentation. Other attributes are also necessary. These lie in the realm of the will and the sensibility.

Above all, the leader must be gifted with a penetrating psychological sense. This quality requires the simultaneous exercise of the intelligence, will, and sensibility. A very intelligent but weak-willed and unperceptive person ordinarily lacks the psychological sense needed to fathom even elementary aspects of his own mentality. How much less can he fathom that of others, such as his spouse, children, students, and employees. For a leader lacking psychological sense it is difficult not only to persuade the minds of subordinates but also to unite their wills for a common action.

Not even this psychological sense, however, suffices. The leader must also be endowed with a

sensibility rich enough to suffuse whatever he says with the flavor of reality, honesty, authenticity, and a touch of interest and inspiration that prompts those who should obey him to follow joyfully.

In brief, these are the qualities without which someone who presides over a private social group will lack the conditions to fulfill his mission in ordinary circumstances.

### *3) The Leader in Exceptional Circumstances, Whether Favorable or Adverse*

However, exceptional circumstances, whether favorable or adverse, occasionally alter the normal order in any private group.

Unable to rise to the occasion, the average leader risks losing the excellent opportunities that he either fathoms incompletely or misses altogether. In this way, he lets them slip by, taking either partial advantage of them or no advantage at all.

Should he prove incapable of discerning danger when it appears on the horizon, evaluating the threat it poses, and devising means to eliminate it as quickly as possible, he risks seriously harming the group under his direction and even causing its ruin.

When confronted with exceptional occasions, whether favorable or unfavorable, a good leader is stimulated by them and grows in his qualities in proportion to the exceptional nature of the circumstances, thereby proving himself superior to them.

### *4) The Usefulness and Timeliness of Systematizing These Concepts*

None of this is new. However, since these commonsense ideas have become blurred in many minds in our confused times, a succinct systematization has become necessary for easily understanding what follows.

*b. The superiority and nobility of the common good—its distinction from the individual good—private organizations whose common good has a transcendent character, whether regional or national*

Regarding groups of any kind in the private sector, we can say that since the common good of the group—in other words, its general good—is higher than the individual good of its members, it is ipso facto nobler.

### *1) The Importance of Private-sector Organizations for the Common Good of the Region, the Nation, and the State*

At times the common good of a private organization transcends itself, rising to another level.

We will illustrate this point with the following example:

A private university—of which there are so many in America and Europe—frequently develops its own style of researching, thinking, and teaching. Its intellectual achievements are molded by this style and corresponding religious, patriotic, artistic, and cultural impulses. Having distilled an enduring set of values, the university perfects and transmits it from one generation of teachers and students to the next. This tradition constitutes a precious boon for the successive generations of academics. It deeply marks the lives of the graduates and creates a human type that can influence the character of the city around or near the university. It is obvious that this institution, although private, constitutes a common good for the region and, depending on the case, the whole country.

Private institutions like this university enable us to understand better the regional or national common good. Their excellence brings them closer to this common good, and thus they acquire a certain nobility that is not to be confused with the dignity, indeed authentic, of institutions limited to the private sector.

## | 2) *The Family: a Special Private Society*

Of all these private institutions, none is as fundamental as the family: the greatest source of authentic and dynamic life for the nation and the State. It will be discussed in section two of this chapter.

\* \* \*

Thus, we see how the impact and influence of private institutions can deeply mark the political life of a nation, and even the international order, and thus safeguard the country from cliques of adventurers. This impact and influence result largely from the intensity, vitality, and cohesion of these institutions, and from the continuous striving for improvement that animates them.

*c. The nation and the State are born from the private sphere—the plenitude of the common good*

## | 1) *The Formation of Nations and Regions*

A nation is born when an ensemble of people, social groups, and associations dedicated to the private good—or cumulatively to the private and the common good—coalesce into a whole that is clearly distinct from everything outside it. It becomes a closed circuit of an ethnic, cultural, social, economic, and political character, and does not allow itself to be included or federated into any larger whole. The common good of this nation, which constitutes a state when politically organized, hovers above the good of each of the constituent groups. The latter, in turn, hovers over the good of each individual.<sup>[121]</sup>

An analogous affirmation could be made with regard to a region. A region is a territorial reality with an ensemble of constituent elements similar to those of a nation. It differs from the nation in that it does not embrace all the constituent elements of a nation, but only a significant part of them. The difference between the various regions of a nation results from the fact that the constituent elements usually vary from one region to another.

A comparison may clarify this point. Regions differ from each other and from the nation as a whole like different carvings in the same stone. Nations differ from one another like one statue from another.

Sovereignty is proper to nations; autonomy is proper to regions. An example of this is found in federal states, which are sovereign and composed of autonomous federated units.

2) *The State as a Perfect Society—Its Sovereignty and Majesty—Its Supreme Nobility*

The common good in this sense encompasses all subordinate goods without absorbing or repressing them. This encompassing gives the State a supremacy of mission, power, and, therefore, intrinsic dignity, which is adequately expressed by the word *majesty*.<sup>[122]</sup> A nation normally constitutes a complete and *perfect*<sup>[123]</sup> society. Regardless of its form of government, this society is sovereign and majestic.

Its majestic power is supremely noble. By virtue of being sovereign, that is, supreme, it has an intrinsic natural nobility superior to that of the intermediate bodies between the individual and the State.

Everything said before corroborates this.

## 2. The Family Vis-à-vis the Individual, the Intermediate Bodies, and the State

At this point several questions arise. What is the family's relationship to the bodies that mediate between the individual and the State? More specifically, what is its relationship to these bodies according to their various connections to the common good? Above all, what is its relationship to the body that encompasses, unites, and governs all the other bodies, that is, the State and its supreme directive organ, the government?

We have already referred to the family as one of the intermediate bodies. We may add here that its situation vis-à-vis these other bodies is entirely unique. While the latter tend to differ from each other, the family, for its part, tends to permeate them all. None of these bodies can exercise over the family an influence equal to that which the family can exercise over them.

*a. From the individual to the family, from the family to the gens, and finally to the tribe—the process toward the foundation of the civitas—the State is born*

Marriage is the common state of man. Therefore, it is as a member of his family that a man joins the great fabric of families that make up the social body of a country.

The social body is also formed of other intermediate groups such as guilds, universities, and local governments. An individual's admission into one of these groups is also a means of integration into the social body.

When we consider the State's origin, we see that, in one way or another, it arose from entities whose "raw material" was the family. The family had given rise to large family blocs that the Greeks termed *génos* and the Romans *gens*. The *gens*, in turn, formed larger blocs still of a familial nature, but whose genealogical correlations tended to be diluted and lost in the night of time. These were the *phratries* of the Greeks and the *curiae* of the Romans. "The association," explains Fustel de Coulanges, "naturally continued to grow larger in the same manner. Many *curiae* or *phratries* grouped together and formed a tribe."<sup>[124]</sup> Later, the ensemble of tribes formed the city, or better, the *civitas*; and with it the State.<sup>[125]</sup>

*b. The main elements of the common good of the intermediate bodies, the region, and the State are already present in the individual and the family—the fruitful family: a small world*

Experience shows that a family's vitality and unity are usually in direct proportion to its fecundity.

In large families, the children normally look up to the parents as leaders of a sizeable community, given the number of its members as well as the considerable religious, moral, cultural, and material values inherent to the family unit. This surrounds parental authority with prestige. The parents are, in a way, a common good of all the children. Thus, it is normal that none of the children try to monopolize all the parents' attention and affection, making of them a merely individual good. Jealousy among siblings finds scant favorable ground in large families. On the contrary, it can easily arise in families with few children.

Tension between parents and children is also frequent in small families and tends to result in one side tyrannizing the other. For example, parents can abuse their authority by absenting themselves from the home in order to spend their free time in worldly entertainments, leaving the children to the mercenary care of baby-sitters or scattered in the chaos of turbulent boarding schools devoid of any real affection. Parents can also tyrannize their children through various forms of family violence, so cruel and so frequent in our de-Christianized society.

In larger families, these domestic tyrannies become less likely. The children perceive more clearly how much they weigh upon their parents, and therefore tend to be grateful, helping them reverently, and, at the appropriate time, sharing the burdens of family affairs.

On the other hand, a large number of children brings to the home liveliness and joy, and an endless creative originality in ways of being, acting, feeling, and analyzing reality both inside and outside the home. Family conviviality becomes a school of wisdom and experience made up of a tradition solicitously communicated by the parents and prudently renewed by the children. The family thus constitutes a small world, at once open and closed to the influences of the outside world.

The cohesion of this small world results from all the aforementioned factors. It is strengthened mainly by the religious and moral formation given by the parents in consonance with the parish priest, and by the harmonic convergence of inherited physical and moral qualities that contribute to model the personalities of the children.

*c. Families: small worlds that interrelate like nations and states*

The characteristics that differentiate the small world of one family from that of another bring to mind the differences between regions of a country or between countries in the same area of civilization.

A family constituted in this way usually has a common temperament as well as common yearnings, tendencies, and aversions. It has its own way of living together, resting, working, solving problems, facing adversities, and profiting from favorable circumstances. In all these fields, large families show patterns of thought and behavior reinforced by the example of ancestors who are frequently idealized by nostalgia and the passing of time.

*d. The family and the world of professional or public activities—lineages and*

Continually enriched by new aspects modeled by a tradition that is admired, respected, and loved by all family members, this incomparable school of continuity greatly influences individuals in their choice of a profession or charge to be exercised in favor of the common good.

As a result, it frequently happens that members of a family choose the same profession, forming professional lineages. In this way, the family's influence permeates the professional world. In this consortium between the professional or public world on the one hand and the family on the other, the former also influences the latter. A natural and highly desirable symbiosis is thus established. However, it is important to note that, by the very nature of things, the family's influence on the extrinsic activities is normally greater than the influence of these activities on the family.

When the family is authentically Catholic, its natural and spontaneous cohesion is enhanced by the supernatural strength of mutual charity derived from grace. In such conditions, the family is optimally poised to influence all, or almost all, the intermediate bodies between the individual and the State, and finally the State itself.

| *e. Family lineages form elites even in the most plebeian professional groups or milieus*

With these considerations, we can see how the presence, in all social classes, of lineages filled with tradition and creative force is a precious and irreplaceable ordering factor in individual life, the private sector, and public life.

We can also see why the administration of some private bodies customarily ends up in the hands of lineages that prove to be the most gifted in understanding and coordinating the social group, to which they impart a robust tradition and a vigorous impulse toward continual improvement.

In view of this it is legitimate that a para-nobiliary elite or dominant para-dynastic lineage arise within some of these groups. Its appearance contributes to the formation, in rural sub-regions and regions, of local "dynasties" analogous to a family endowed with royal majesty.

| *f. Human society is hierarchical and, as such, participative—kingly fathers and fatherly kings*

In this light, a nation is an ensemble of social bodies. At times these are likewise constituted by gradually lesser bodies, down to the individual.

If we follow the inverse order, we will clearly perceive the gradational and, as such, hierarchical character of the bodies between the individual and the highest level of government.

Since the social fabric is an extensive network of individuals, families, and intermediate bodies, we may conclude that, from a certain viewpoint, it is also an ensemble of diverse hierarchies that coexist, collaborate, and intertwine. Above them hovers, in the temporal sphere, the majesty of a perfect society, the State; and in the spiritual sphere (the highest one) the majesty of the other perfect society, the Church.

This society of elites is highly participative. In it, refinement, influence, prestige, wealth, and power are shared from top to bottom in diverse ways according to each degree by bodies with particular characteristics. Thus, in the past it could be said that in the home, even the most modest home, the father was the king of his children, while at the summit the king was the father of fathers. [\[126\]](#)

### 3. Historical Origins of the Feudal Nobility—The Genesis of Feudalism

In this context, it is easier to understand what the nobility is. It is the class that, unlike others, does not merely have elements of nobility, but is fully noble, entirely noble; it is noble par excellence.

A word about its historical origins is appropriate here.

#### | a. *The class of landowners constitutes a military nobility and a political authority*

The grand Carolingian empire had been reduced to rubble. Devastating incursions of barbarians, Normans, Hungarians, and Saracens preyed upon its ruins. Attacked on all sides and unable to resist with recourse to the greatly weakened central power of the kings, the populations naturally turned to their respective landowners, demanding that they command and govern them in such calamitous circumstances. Heeding their request, the landowners built fortifications for themselves and for their own.

True to the profoundly Christian spirit of the time, "their own" paternally included not only family members, but the manorial society, formed by the domestic servants, manual workers, and their respective families living on the lord's lands. All received shelter, food, religious assistance, and military leadership in these fortifications that, with time, became imposing seignorial castles, of which so many still remain. Within these fortifications, peasants safeguarded the movable goods and livestock they had managed to save from the invaders' greed.

In military action, the landowner and his family were the foremost combatants. Their duty was to command, to be in the vanguard, leading the most daring offensives and the most determined resistance. The condition of military leader and hero was now added to the condition of landowner.

Quite naturally, these circumstances translated during the intervals of peace into local political power over the surrounding lands. This made the landowner a lord, *dominus*, in the full sense of the word, with the duties of lawmaker and judge. As such, he became a link of union with the king.

#### | b. *The noble class: subordinate participation in royal power*

Thus, the noble class developed as a subordinate participation in the royal power.

This noble class oversaw the common good of the private sphere, that is, the preservation and improvement of agriculture and livestock raising, from which both nobles and plebeians lived. As the king's representatives in the area, they were also responsible for the common good of the public sphere. More elevated and universal than the private common good, the public common good was intrinsically noble.

The nobility also participated in the central power of the monarch. The higher nobles were frequently royal councillors. Most of the ministers, ambassadors, and generals were members of the nobility, which thus held posts indispensable to the exercise of the supreme government of the country.

The link between high public office and the nobiliary condition was such that, when the common good required that plebeians be elevated to these posts, they were usually ennobled, frequently with hereditary titles.

Endowed by circumstances with a mission higher than mere farming—namely, the partial overseeing of the *salus publica* in war and peace—the landowner found himself invested with local powers that normally belonged to the government. Hence he automatically rose to a higher condition. He became a miniature of the king, since his mission was an intrinsic participation in the nobility of the royal mission itself.

From the spontaneous circumstances of history the figure of the landowner-lord emerged. His mission, at once private and noble, was gradually broadened as Christian Europe, increasingly free of afflictions and external threats, enjoyed longer periods of peace. It did not cease to expand for a long time.

### | c. *The regions are defined—the regional common good—the local lord*

This new situation enabled people to expand their horizons, thoughts, and activities to gradually vaster fields. Regions were born, shaped by local factors such as geographic characteristics, military necessities, commercial interests, and the influx of pilgrims to popular shrines, students to renowned universities, and merchants to famous fairs.

Psychological affinities also contributed to the formation of these regions. These affinities resulted from a long past of fighting common enemies, a similarity of language, customs, artistic expressions, and so on.

The regional common good thus encompassed the several local common goods, and was therefore higher and nobler.

The direction of this regional common good naturally befell some higher lord, owner of vaster dominions, more powerful, more representative of the whole region, and therefore more capable of uniting the various areas without harm to their autonomies, whether for reasons of war or peacetime pursuits.

The regional lord was a miniature of the king in the region. His station entailed rights and duties intrinsically nobler than those of the landowner-lord, a miniature of the king in the locale. Therefore, the feudal lord (the noble landowner-lord whose numerous workers participated in his property rights through a link similar to today's emphyteusis<sup>[127]</sup>) owed the regional lord a vassalage analogous to that rendered by the regional lord to the king. This resulted in the formation of a nobiliary hierarchy at the top of the social hierarchy.

### | d. *The medieval king*

Of course, in principle none of this existed independently of or in opposition to the king, the supreme symbol of the people and the nation. On the contrary, it existed under his tutelar aegis and supreme power in order to preserve on his behalf this great organic whole of autonomous regions and locales that was the nation.

Even when the de facto royal power was at its weakest, the unitary monarchical principle was never

contested. A nostalgia for royal unity—and even, in many places, for the Carolingian imperial unity, which embraced all of Christendom—never ceased to exist throughout the Middle Ages. As the kings gradually recovered the means to exercise a power that effectively encompassed the whole realm and represented its common good, they did so.

This immense consolidation, definition, and organization, first at the local level and then at the regional level, followed by a no lesser re-articulation of the national unity and authority, did not occur without strife. Here and there excessive claims, formulated in a unilateral and passionate way, were made both by representatives of legitimate autonomies and by promoters of necessary unifications. This generally led to feudal wars that, at times, were long and intertwined with international conflicts.

Such was the heavy price men paid because of Original Sin, actual sins, and softness or complacency, when not surrender, in the struggle against the spirit of evil.

Despite these obstacles, the profound meaning of the history of feudalism and the nobility cannot be understood without considering what was said above. This is how the society and state of the Middle Ages were modeled.

In some places the origin and development of the feudal regime varied according to the local circumstances. The exemplification above, therefore, does not apply to all European states. Many of its elements, however, are present in the history of kingdoms that did not have a feudal regime in the full sense of the word, as, for example, Portugal and Spain. [\[128\]](#)

| *e. The feudal regime: a factor of unity or division?—The experience of contemporary federalism*

Many historians see the feudalism of certain regions of Europe and the para-feudal agrarian arrangements of others as dangerously divisive.

Experience shows, however, that autonomy per se is not necessarily a factor of disunity.

No one today sees divisive factors in the autonomy of the states forming the federal republics on the American continents. On the contrary, one sees flexible, resilient, and fruitful relationships. One sees an intelligently planned union. Regionalism does not mean hostility among the parts, or between the parts and the whole, but harmonious autonomy and spiritual and material richness, both in the features common to all the regions and in the peculiarities of each.

#### 4. The Mutual Shaping of the Noble and the Nobility

| *a. Genesis—a process based on custom*

Seeing the nobility as it existed at its peak in medieval and post-medieval Europe, and also the image its admirers form of it today—whether in Europe or in the nations born of the Discoveries, the organizational genius of the European peoples, and the missionary zeal of the Church—we notice that it is rooted in certain coherent principles. These constitute a doctrine that has remained essentially the same *semper et ubique*, albeit with notable variations according to time and place.

We can discern the germination of this doctrine in the mentality of the European peoples of the early Middle Ages as they shaped the nobiliary institutions, usually by way of custom. Historically, this

doctrine reached its widest and most logical application at the height of the Middle Ages. This occurred in step with the full and harmonious expansion of feudalism and its ramifications in the political, social, and economic fields.

We must emphasize that this theoretical-consuetudinary elaboration was carried out simultaneously and harmoniously not only by the noble families but by the rest of the social body as well, notably the clergy, universities, and other intermediate bodies. From intellectuals exploring the highest regions of human thought, down to modest bourgeois and simple manual laborers, everyone contributed to the process.

This process is so natural that it continues in several fields even in our troubled century.

### | *b. Some examples*

Before the First World War, the German army was largely modeled by the idea that public opinion, deeply influenced by Prussian militarism, had of it. An analogous process had shaped the gestalt of Kaiser Wilhelm II, symbol of the army and the nation. A similar affirmation could be made (with less of a military note) about the idea public opinion in other countries had of their respective monarchs and armed forces, as, for example, Franz Josef in Austria and Edward VII in England.

We use these historical examples because they are indisputable... if anything is indisputable in these matters.

As for the perennality of this process, it suffices to mention the marriage ceremony of Charles and Diana, the Prince and Princess of Wales. The ancient and resplendent ceremony caused a universal wave of enthusiasm, which, in turn, strengthened the already classic psychological and moral profile expected of an heir apparent and his wife by the age-old yearnings of England. The ceremony also revealed the incidental modernizations the country wanted to introduce into this profile and, therefore, into the general physiognomy of the nation.

These examples illustrate how a whole nation, with little clash among its currents, can gradually and prudently shape institutions like the nobility through a force of custom that is spontaneous, creative, conservative, and restorative.

## 5. Absolute Monarchy: Hypertrophy of Royalty Leading to the Populist Totalitarian State

The harmonious result attained in feudal society began to crumble with the dissemination of the principles of the legists<sup>[129]</sup> and other factors. From then until the Revolution of 1789, royal power in Europe tended to absorb the ancient autonomies and to become ever more centralizing.

### | *a. The absolute monarchy absorbs the subordinate bodies and powers*

The absolute monarchy spreading throughout Europe was very different from the system of superposed elites, noble or otherwise, which had existed in so many nations. The powers formerly spread among the various levels were gradually concentrated in the hands of the king, who increasingly identified himself with the State. Whence the famous phrase attributed to Louis XIV: "*L'Etat, c'est moi.*"

In contrast to the feudal monarch, the absolute monarch of modern times was surrounded by a nobility that accompanied him day and night, serving him mainly as an ornamental element without any

effective power. In this way, the absolute king found himself separated from the rest of the nation by a deep trench, or better, an abyss. Such was the case in the modern French monarchy, for example, which had in Louis XIV, the Sun King, its most complete model.<sup>[130]</sup>

With greater or lesser eagerness, most late eighteenth-century monarchs tended to adopt this model. At first glance, they were impressed by their omnipotence. The appearance of unlimited power, however, was merely superficial and only partially veiled the profound impotence in which the absolute kings put themselves by their isolation.

***b. The only solution for the absolute monarchy was to support itself with civil and military bureaucracies, the heavy "crutches" of absolute monarchy***

By becoming increasingly detached from the intermediate bodies that constituted the nation, absolute monarchs either lost or weakened their natural supports through the suffocation produced by their own absolutism.

Unable to stand, walk, and struggle alone, and deprived of their natural constituent elements (the intermediate bodies), absolute monarchs were forced to support themselves with ever larger bureaucracies. These bureaucratic networks became the heavy crutches, brilliant but fragile, of this late eighteenth-century monarchy. The larger a bureaucracy is, the heavier it is. The heavier it is, the more it burdens those obliged to carry it.

Through this process, absolute and bureaucratic royalty began to devour the paternal, familial, and organic state.

We shall mention a few historical examples to illustrate how this process occurred in some European countries.

***c. The centralization of power in France***

***1) Under the Kings***

In France the great fiefs were gradually reabsorbed by the Crown, particularly through marriage alliances between members of the Royal House and heiresses to great feudal units. Meanwhile, a kind of centripetal force concentrated the realm's main levers of command and influence in Paris. Louis XIV pursued this policy to its extreme.

The last feudal territory absorbed by the French Crown was the duchy of Lorraine, incorporated through diplomatic negotiations that still retained aspects of a familial arrangement. The Treaty of Vienna (1738) between France and Austria established that Lorraine would belong during his lifetime to Stanislaw Leszczynski, the dethroned king of Poland and father of Queen Marie Leszczynska, wife of Louis XV. When Stanislaw died, the duchy of Lorraine would automatically be incorporated into the kingdom of France. So it happened.

***2) Weakness of the Ostentatious Bonapartist "Omnipotence"***

The ostentatious and ominous archetype of this bureaucratic monarchy, which no longer had anything paternal about it, was Bonaparte's entirely military, financial, and administrative state.

After defeating the Austrians at Wagram (1809), Napoleon occupied Vienna for a few months. When the French troops finally left, Emperor Francis I of Austria returned to his capital. The Viennese offered him a festive reception to console him for the crushing defeat and the misfortunes he and the country had suffered.<sup>[131]</sup> It is reported that, upon hearing this news, the Corsican despot could not help exclaiming, "What a strong monarchy!" Thus did he term the Hapsburg monarchy, perhaps the most paternal and organic of Europe at that time.

History proved Bonaparte right. When he was definitively crushed at Waterloo at the end of the Hundred Days, no one in France thought of offering him a festive homage in reparation for the immense tragedy that had befallen him.

On the other hand, when the Count of Artois, the future Charles X, entered Paris for the first time since the Revolution as official representative of his brother Louis XVIII, a grand celebration was held to acclaim the legitimate dynasty returning from exile without the laurels of any military victory, but with the prestige of an immense misfortune borne with majestic dignity.<sup>[132]</sup>

After his second and definitive abdication, Napoleon, isolated in defeat, was reduced to such an impotence that he was forced to request shelter from one of his archenemies, the King of England. Not even the prospect of his imminent downfall aroused in his closest followers the filial love of loyal subjects for their monarch and the courage to undertake some guerrilla action or revolution on his behalf.

On the contrary, guerrilla actions and revolutions did break out in Vendée and the Iberian Peninsula, where people were inspired by loyalty to their legitimate princes.<sup>[133]</sup> Also, the steadfast loyalty of the brave peasants of the Tyrol is legendary. Led by Andreas Hofer, they rose up against Napoleon in the name of the Catholic Church and the House of Austria.

These defenders of the Faith—as well as of the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns and independence, the French throne, and the Hapsburgs—shed their blood for dynasties that still bore considerable traces of the fatherliness of bygone days. In this and in many other ways, these dynasties differed radically from the harsh and arrogant despotism of Napoleon Bonaparte and the weak and cowardly despotism of his brother Joseph, whom he brashly promoted from "king" of Naples to "king" of Spain.

Except for the Hundred Days' adventure, the French army accepted Napoleon's fall with discipline. However epic and brilliant may have been the memories that united it to the Corsican, they did not have the force of cohesion of familial ties. Napoleon could not say of his armies what Queen Isabella of Castile affirmed, not without a certain envy, of the loyal and bellicose Portuguese people. The secret of their loyalty and dedication, she said, was that the brave Portuguese combatants "are all sons, not subjects" of their king.<sup>[134]</sup>

#### | *d. The dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire*

The throne of the Holy Roman Empire, elective from its origins, became de facto hereditary in 1438, when Albert II, the Illustrious, from the House of Austria, was elected. From then on the college of Electoral Princes always chose the head of this House for the imperial throne. The election of Francis of Lorraine in 1745 was only an apparent exception, since he had married the heiress of the House of Austria, Archduchess Maria Theresa of Hapsburg. The house of Hapsburg-Lorraine thus came into

being as the legitimate continuer of the House of Austria at the head of the Holy Roman Empire. [\[135\]](#)

Nonetheless, the strongly federative character of the Holy Roman Empire lasted until its dissolution in 1806, when Napoleon forced Emperor Francis II (Francis I of Austria) to abdicate. With his imposition of the Confederation of the Rhine that same year, the Corsican drastically reduced the number of sovereign principalities in the Empire.

The subsequent German Confederation (1815-1866), which had the emperor of Austria as its hereditary president, represented a conservative interim in this centripetal march. It was, however, dissolved after the Austro-Prussian war and the battle of Sadowa (1866). The North German Confederation was then formed under Prussian hegemony. Austria and the states of southern Germany were excluded.

After the defeat of Napoleon III in 1870, this confederation became the German Reich, which was much more centralized and recognized only twenty-five member states as sovereign.

The centripetal impulse did not stop here. The *Anschluss* of Austria and, shortly thereafter, the annexation of the Sudetenland to the Third Reich (1938) carried this impulse to an extreme and resulted in the Second World War. The nullification of these centripetal conquests of Adolf Hitler and the recent incorporation of East Germany into the present German state may mark the final point of these successive modifications of the German map.

## e. *Absolutism in the Iberian Peninsula*

### 1) *Before the French Revolution*

The march toward royal absolutism in Portugal and Spain followed a similar pattern.

With the decline of the Middle Ages, the political and socioeconomic organization tended to become centralized in both Iberian kingdoms. This tendency was shrewdly exploited by their respective monarchs, with the aim of broadening and consolidating the Crown's power over the various bodies of the State, especially the high nobility. When the French Revolution erupted, the power of the kings of Portugal and Spain had reached its historical apex.

Of course, this did not take place without much friction between the kings and the nobility.

This tension provoked dramatic episodes in Portugal. During the reign of John II (1481-1495), the Duke of Braganza and other great nobles were executed. The Duke of Viseu, the Queen's brother, was stabbed in the monarch's presence. In the reign of Joseph I (1750-1777), the Duke of Aveiro and some of the most outstanding figures of the aristocracy—among whom were members of the illustrious house of Távora—were publicly executed.

In Spain, this centralizing tendency was already noticeable in several monarchs of the House of Trastámara. It grew throughout the following reigns, becoming fully defined during the reign of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. It reached its apex with the kings of the House of Bourbon in the eighteenth century.

Among the initial measures taken by Ferdinand and Isabella were the demolition of many castles, the prohibition of building new ones, the curtailing of nobiliary privileges, and the transfer of seaport administration to the Crown. These measures diminished the power of the nobility. Concomitantly, the

mastership of the main military orders was incorporated into the Crown.

At the end of this evolution—prior to 1789—the historical nobility was increasingly inclined to gravitate around the monarch and reside in the capital, frequently in the royal palaces themselves. In this way its members imitated the nobility of other European countries, following the trend established by the Sun King and his successors amid the unparalleled magnificence of Versailles.

These nobles held high positions at court. Court life absorbed a great part of their time and demanded a luxurious lifestyle that exceeded the revenues of their patrimonial lands. Consequently, the kings remunerated many of these nobles for their services at court. Even then, however, this remuneration and the patrimonial revenues were often insufficient. In more than one court, nobles incurred crushing debts, at times paid off through *mésalliances* with the upper bourgeoisie or with subsidies granted by the king as a favor.

## 2) *The Consequence of Absolutism: the Weakening of the Nobility and Royal Power Itself*

After the ill-fated Napoleonic invasions of Portugal (1807-1810) and Spain (1808-1814), both monarchic regimes became increasingly liberal. These Crowns thereby lost not only political but also socioeconomic influence. The growing largess with which the Portuguese and Spanish monarchs granted titles of nobility, on the other hand, brought many plebeians into the nobility. They were ennobled because of mere personal preference of the monarch, or for services rendered to the State or society in various fields.<sup>[136]</sup>

Although this expansion of the nobility corresponded to reasonable demands of socioeconomic transformations by recognizing the value of these services to the common good, at times it lacked discretion and discernment, thus depreciating the prestige the nobility enjoyed. As a result, the reward received by authentic promoters of the common good became increasingly less meaningful. The nobility can only suffer by such a lack of discreet and discerning selection, since nobility and selection are correlated concepts.

After the proclamation of the republic in Portugal, in 1910, the nobiliary titles, honorific distinctions, and rights of the nobility were abolished.<sup>[137]</sup>

The proclamation of the republic in Spain in 1873 and again in 1931, with the successive monarchic restorations, twice led to the abolition and subsequent restoration of the nobility's rights and privileges. All this had a traumatic effect on the institution of the nobility.

## f. *The super-powerful bourgeois state— the omnipotent communist state*

Concerning the present status of this centralizing process, it should be noted that already in the nineteenth century the super-powerful bourgeois state was beginning to take shape in various nations, some residually monarchical, others triumphantly republican.

Throughout the *Belle Époque*—as during the period between the Wars and in the aftermath of World War II—more and more crowns fell as the super-powerful democratic state paved the way for the omnipotent proletarian state.

A history of the absolutism of the proletarian state, the furious maligner yet remote continuator of the Enlightenment's royal absolutism, is clearly outside the scope of this work. So is a history of the rise of perestroika, glasnost, and socialist self-management—reactions that malign yet perpetuate proletarian absolutism.

## 6. The Genesis of the Contemporary State

### | a. *The decline of regions—the march toward the hypertrophy of royal power*

As stated in the previous section, at the outset of modern times the feudal system entered a process of political decadence. Royal power gradually consolidated, reaching a state of hypertrophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The contemporary state began to appear, based ever less on the rural aristocracy and the autonomous and creative impulse of regions, and ever more on bureaucratic organs, through which the action of the State extended to the whole nation.

Concurrently, the means of communication gradually improved and were secured from the endemic banditry of previous centuries. This favored multiple exchange between the regions of the country. The expansion of commerce and the rise of new industries standardized consumption. Regionalism waned as the increasingly larger cities began to shift the nerve centers from micro-regions to macro-regions and then to national metropolises.

More than ever, the capital of each country became the great pole of attraction of its centripetal energies and the source of the irradiation of the Crown's power. *Pari passu*, the court drew more and more of the nobility, until then predominantly rural. The nobility flocked around the king, who determined the direction of everything done in the country.

### | b. *Royal absolutism became state absolutism under the democratic regime*

This gradual yet relentless centripetal process had continuity in the successively more absorbing types of state born in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The republican and bourgeois state of the nineteenth century, despite its liberal democratic aspects, was more centralizing than the monarchical state of the previous phase. In it, an undeniable process of *democratization*<sup>[138]</sup> opened all the doors of power to the non-noble classes, but gradually excluded the noble classes from this same power—a rather debatable way of practicing equality. Liberty, in turn, became more and more restricted as a growing mass of laws began to weigh on the citizen.

### | c. *Centripetal pyramidization—super-pyramidization—two examples: large banks and the mass media*

For a global idea of the decline of liberty throughout the nineteenth century, we must take into account the tendency to pyramidization that manifested itself in the field of private enterprise. A gradual intertwining of companies formed increasingly larger blocs, which tended to absorb any autonomous unit reluctant to join its respective pyramid. Obviously, at the peak of these pyramids were (and still are) super-fortunes controlling the progressively smaller fortunes. As a result, owners of small and medium-sized businesses lost much of their freedom of action in face of the competition and pressures of macro-capitalism.

By the very nature of things, this group of pyramids was in turn capped by even more powerful institutions; for example, the banking system and the mass media.

This process accelerated in our century due to the new inventions and the continual progress of science and technology.

Besides diminishing the freedom of small business owners, this concentration of the private capital in the hands of a few holders of large fortunes can have another consequence, affecting the position of macro-capitalism vis-à-vis the State.

A strange inversion of values began to occur in the liberal-democratic bourgeois world—ever more democratic and leveling from one point of view, and ever less liberal from another. Consider large banks and the mass media. These institutions are usually privately owned, yet, incidentally, often wield in our days more power than the nobility in the nineteenth century, or even before the French Revolution. More importantly, they frequently have more power over the State than the State has over them. Large banks and the mass media have more means to influence the filling of elective offices in most modern democracies than the State has to influence the selection of top executive officers for these institutions. This is so notorious that the State at times feels handicapped if it does not assume the role of a large banking or media enterprise. It therefore invades the private sphere—itsself an invader of the State's sphere.

Is this convergence? No. It is a road to chaos.

From the point of view of freedom of action and progress, this confrontation between the State and macro-capitalism brings no economic or political advantage to the average citizen.

Consider an election-day scenario. People are lined up at the voting booths. Standing in line like any other citizen is a magnate of the "antithetical nobility"<sup>[139]</sup> of the twentieth century. He enters the booth and casts his ballot, aware that it is worth as much or as little as the vote of the most obscure citizen.

The next day, he comments on the electoral results at his club as if he had influenced them no more than any other voter. However, which of his listeners who knows that he owns a large newspaper chain, which can sway the vote of today's amorphous and disoriented masses, will entertain such an illusion?

| *d. State capitalism: continuation of the centripetal and authoritarian trend—the tomb of all that came before*

What changes did state capitalism bring to the countries where it was implemented? It heightened *ad infinitum* the preceding centripetal trend. It turned the State into a Leviathan, whose omnipotence dwarfed the powers of the kings and nobles of earlier eras. In its craving to centralize, state collectivism absorbed absolutely everything. It thereby buried in the same abyss, in the same nothingness, as in a tomb, kings, nobles, and, not much later, the "antithetical aristocrats," who had by then reached the height of their historical march.

All this happened through the influence—at times direct, at times remote—of the ideology of 1789.<sup>[140]</sup>

| *e. One tomb—two trilogies*

Were these the only victims of this collectivist gangrene?

No. The successively inferior levels of the bourgeoisie were also victimized. The Leviathan's collectivist absorption did not spare a single individual, nor a single individual right. In the unfortunate countries it tyrannized, collectivism violated even the most elementary rights of man, those that stem not from any state law, but from the natural order of things, expressed with divine wisdom and simplicity in the Ten Commandments.

This sinister panorama of collectivism was made evident to the whole human race with the fall of the Iron Curtain. Even the right to life had been absorbed by the collectivist state, which thereby denied man what the contemporary ecological trends strive to guarantee to the most fragile bird and to the smallest and most repugnant worm. In this way, the workers, the lowest servants of the State, became the most recent occupants of this tomb.

Were the tombstone to bear a general epitaph for these victims of yesteryear, yesterday, and today, it might well read:

### TRADITION—FAMILY—PROPERTY

These are the three great principles that collectivism denied. Their denial provoked the intrepid and combative reaction of the largest group of anticommunist organizations of Catholic inspiration in the modern world.

According to certain popular legends, over the tombs of the victims of blatant injustice flutter multitudes of confused and tormented evil spirits. We could imagine, therefore, another trilogy, hovering over this agitated, feverish, and noisy swirl:

### MASSIFICATION—SERVITUDE—HUNGER

| *f. What remains of the nobility today? The answer of Pius XII*

At this point it is fitting to ask what remains of the nobility, now that revolutionary totalitarianism has destroyed the autonomies and the growing egalitarianism of our age has abolished the special offices and related privileges that made the nobility, in the Middle Ages and still in the Ancien Régime, a defined social and political body.

Pius XII categorically answers: "A page of history has been turned; a chapter has ended. A period has been placed, indicating the end of a social and economic past."[\[141\]](#)

From this class, to which nothing palpable remains, the Pontiff still expects the exercise of a high function for the common good. He describes this function with precision and evident satisfaction in his various allocutions, including those of 1952 and 1958, the year of his death. His thought clearly lives on in the allocutions of John XXIII and Paul VI to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility and to the Pontifical Noble Guard.

To fully understand this delicate, subtle, and important matter, we must first consider the historical panorama explained herein, analyzing the events from a specific angle.

## 7. The Moral Profile of the Medieval Noble

In every social body constituted by professionals in the same field, we easily notice how much the profession influences the mentality and the intellectual and moral profile of its members, and,

consequently, the domestic and social relationships extrinsic to their professional sphere.

In the Middle Ages and the Ancien Régime, the condition of a noble could not be equated to a mere profession. In a sense, it was a livelihood, but it was also much more. Consequently, it profoundly marked the noble and his family, through which the noble condition was to be transmitted to future generations. The title was incorporated into the family's name and sometimes subsumed it. The coat of arms was the family's emblem. And the land over which the noble exercised his power usually bore his own name, and when it did not, its name was incorporated into his title. [\[142\]](#)

| *a. In war as in peace, the example of perfection*

Two essential principles defined the physiognomy of the noble:

1. In order to be the exemplary man placed at the summit of the fief as the light atop a chandelier, the noble had to be, by definition, a Christian hero disposed to endure any sacrifice on behalf of the good of his king and his people. He had to be the armed defender of the Faith and Christendom in the frequent wars against pagans and heretics.

2. In every field, he and his family had to give a good example—or better, an excellent example—to their subordinates and peers. In virtue as in culture, manners, taste, the decoration of the home, and celebrations, their example had to motivate the whole social body so that everyone would improve in every field.

| *b. The Christian gentleman and the Christian lady*

These two principles had an admirable practical scope, as we shall see. During the Middle Ages, they were lived with authenticity of conviction and religious sentiment. In this manner, the physiognomy of the Christian gentleman and the Christian lady appeared in European and, later, in Western culture.

*Gentleman* and *lady*: two concepts that, throughout the ages and despite the successive dilutions inflicted by the gradual secularization in the Old Regime, always designated the excellence of a human standard. Even in our time, in which both titles have lamentably become obsolete, they nevertheless continue to designate this excellence.

Even when the nobility lost everything we mentioned, not only in Italy (which Pius XII had particularly in mind) but in other countries as well, its elevated human standard remained. This standard, the supreme and last treasure of the nobility, cannot be fully understood without taking into account why and how it was formed through the creative process of feudalism and the feudal hierarchy.

| *c. Sacrifice, good manners, etiquette, and protocol—simplifications and mutilations imposed by the bourgeois world*

*Sacrifice*. The word deserves to be emphasized, for it had a central importance in the life of the noble. It was present even in his social life in the form of an asceticism that deeply marked it. Indeed, good manners, etiquette, and protocol were developed according to standards that demanded from the noble a continual repression of what is vulgar, rough, and even offensive in so many of man's impulses. Social life was, in some aspects, a perpetual sacrifice that became more demanding as civilization

progressed and refined itself.

This statement may elicit a skeptical smile from some readers. However, if they wish to see how true it is, let them consider the mitigations, simplifications, and mutilations that the bourgeois world, born of the French Revolution, has gradually imposed upon the etiquette and ceremony that have survived to our days. Without exception, all these changes were introduced to offer ease, insouciance, and bourgeois comfort to the nouveaux riches bent on conserving as much as possible, in the midst of their recently-acquired opulence, the vulgarity of their previous lifestyle.

Thus, the erosion of good taste, etiquette, and good manners resulted from a spirit of laissez-faire, a desire to "unwind," and the prevalence of the spontaneous and extravagant whims of "hippieism," which reached an apex in the unbridled rebellion of the Sorbonne in 1968 and in subsequent youth movements such as "punkism."

| *d. Harmonious diversity in the practice of virtues: through self-denial in the religious state; amid grandeur and splendor in temporal society*

At this point we should mention a trait of soul that stands out in many members of the nobility.

Many saints of noble birth renounced their social condition to practice the perfection of virtue in the earthly self-denial of the religious state. How splendid were the examples they gave to Christendom and the world!

Other noble saints, however, remained amid the splendors of temporal life. With the prestige of their station, they stressed in the eyes of the other social classes the magnificence of the Christian virtues, and set a good moral example to the collectivity they headed. They did this to the advantage, not only of the salvation of souls, but of temporal society too. In this sense, nothing is more beneficial to the State and society than having in its highest ranks persons shining with the sublime respectability that emanates from the saints of the Catholic Church.

Moreover, these saints—so worthy of reverence and admiration because of their elevated station—were especially loved by the multitudes due to their constant and exemplary practice of Christian charity. Indeed, there are innumerable beatified and canonized nobles who, without renouncing the earthly honors of their rank, stood out for their particular love for the needy. They earnestly practiced a *preferential option for the poor*.

Many nobles who chose the admirable self-denial of religious life also shone in this solicitous service to the needy. They became poor with the poor to lighten the earthly crosses of the destitute and prepare their souls for heaven.

It would unduly prolong this work to mention the numerous nobles of both sexes who, for love of God and neighbor, practiced the Evangelical virtues amid the grandeur and splendor of temporal society, as well as those who practiced them in the self-denial of religious life. [\[143\]](#)

| *e. Hownot to govern—howto govern*

To govern is not only, nor principally, to make laws and penalize transgressors, compelling the population to obey by means of an extensive bureaucracy and a coercive police force. At best, one can govern a prison in this way, but not a people.

As we said in the beginning of this chapter, to govern men it is first necessary to gain their admiration, confidence, and affection. This requires a profound consonance of principles, aspirations, and rejections, and a body of culture and traditions common to those governing and those governed. Feudal lords generally achieved this objective in their fiefs by continually stimulating the people toward excellence in every field.

Even when trying to obtain a popular consensus in favor of wars resulting from the conditions of the time, the nobility used suasive means. In doing so it was expected to give priority to the ecclesiastical hierarchy's preachings on the moral circumstances that might justify a war, whether for religious or temporal reasons.

| *f. The bonum and pulchrum of just war— The knight felt it to the depths of his soul*

The nobility made the *bonum* of just war shine together with its *pulchrum*<sup>[144]</sup> through the expressiveness of its military ceremonial, the beauty of its arms, the caparison of its horses, and so on.

A noble viewed his participation in just war as an immolation for the glorification of the Church, the spreading of the Faith, and the common good of the temporal sphere. He was ordained toward this immolation, as, in an analogous way, the clergy and religious were ordained toward the spiritual immolation inherent to their respective state.

Knights—who were not always nobles—felt the *bonum* and the *pulchrum* of this immolation to the depths of their souls. They went to war with this state of spirit. The beauty with which they surrounded military activity was far from a mere means of enticing plebeians into accompanying them to war. This was, however, the effect this beauty produced in the spirit of the people. (Let it be said in passing that the commoners of the time were not subject to compulsory draft.)

Of course, in that age of ardent Faith, the teachings of the Church had a much greater effect upon the people than did these brilliant appearances. These teachings left no doubt about the fact that a holy war, more than being simply legitimate, could be a duty for all Christians, nobles, and plebeians alike.<sup>[145]</sup>

## 8. The Nobility of Our Time— The Magnitude of Its Present Mission

| *a. The essence of all nobilities, whatever their nationality*

What is the substratum of the human type that characterizes the nobility? To answer this question, historical scholarship has accumulated data on the origin of this class, its political, social, and economic roles throughout the ages, its influence on morality, fashions, and social customs, and its patronizing of the arts and culture.

What is a noble?

A noble is a member of the nobility. This membership implies that he corresponds to a certain psychological and moral type which, in turn, wholly shapes him. However profound the transformations endured by this class throughout the ages, however numerous the varieties it presents according to different nationalities, the nobility is always one. For this reason, however much a Hungarian magnate

might differ from a Spanish grandee, or a French duke and peer from a British, Italian, German, or Portuguese duke, a noble is always a noble in the public's eyes. More specifically, a count is always a count, a baron always a baron, a *hidalgo* or gentleman always a *hidalgo* or gentleman.

The historical vicissitudes the nobility endured modified its situation dramatically. While some nobles still remain at the summit of wealth and prestige, others are in the abyss of poverty, forced to do hard and humble labor to earn a living, and looked upon with sarcasm and contempt by many contemporaries imbued with the egalitarian and bourgeois spirit spread by the French Revolution. Still others are bereft of any goods, downtrodden and reduced to a proletarian condition by communist regimes from whose despotic domination they were unable to escape in time.

*b. Nobility: a standard of excellence—the impulse to all forms of elevation and perfection*

Deprived of any political power in contemporary republics, the nobility retains mere shreds of it in monarchies. It has a scant representation in the world of finance, when it has any. In diplomacy, as well as in the world of culture and the patronage of the arts, its role is much less evident than that of the bourgeoisie. In most cases, the nobility today is little more than a residue. Notwithstanding all this, it is a precious remnant that represents a tradition essentially consisting of a human type.

How can this human type be defined?

The very course of events made nobility a standard of excellence that would edify all men and, in a certain sense, give all excellent things the prominence they deserve.<sup>[146]</sup> When we say that something is noble and aristocratic, we stress that it is excellent in its kind. This is so even in our society intoxicated with egalitarianism, vulgarity, and base moral corruption.

Even down to the first decades of our century, temporal society, at least in its general lines, still tended to continuously improve in the most varied fields. As far as public or private religiousness and morality are concerned, this statement would need to be strongly nuanced.

Today, on the contrary, there is an omnifarious tendency toward vulgarity and extravagance, and at times even toward the brutal and insolent triumph of ugliness and obscenity. In this sense, the revolution of the Sorbonne in 1968 was an explosion of universal scope that ignited evil tendencies long incubated in the contemporary world. These phenomena brought with them a pronounced proletarianization, in the most pejorative sense of the word.

Nevertheless, the old impulse toward elevation and perfection, born in the Middle Ages and developed, in certain aspects, in the following centuries, has not died. On the contrary, it still checks, to some extent, the expansion of the proletarianizing impulse. In some ambiances, it even has a certain dominance.

In the past, the nobility as a social class had the mission of cultivating, nourishing, and spreading this impulse toward perfection throughout society. It was preeminently oriented toward this mission in the temporal sphere, as was the clergy in the spiritual order.

The noble was a symbol of this impulse, its very personification. He was like a living book in which all of society could read everything our elders, eager for elevation, yearned for and were gradually attaining. Such was the noble.

Of everything he was, this precious impulse is perhaps the best he retains. Little wonder that men of our

time, in growing numbers, turn to him and ask with mute anxiety if the nobility will preserve this impulse and even expand it courageously, and thus help save the world from the chaos and catastrophes into which it is sinking.

Should the twentieth-century noble remain aware of this mission and, animated by Faith and love for a well-understood tradition, do everything to fulfill it, he will achieve a victory of no less grandeur than that of his ancestors when they held back the barbarians, drove Islam beyond the Mediterranean, or smashed through the gates of Jerusalem under the command of Godfrey of Bouillon.

| *c. Pius XII's main emphasis*

Of everything the nobility was or possessed in former times, the only thing left is this multifaceted excellence, along with a residual ensemble of indispensable conditions that prevent it, most of the time, from falling to a proletarian or proletarianizing situation.

We said "only." Indeed, how little this is in relation to what the nobles once were and had! But how much better this is when compared with the insolent and boastful vulgarity of so many of our contemporaries! How favorably this remnant of excellence among the true aristocrats compares with the vulgar corruption among the moneyed jet set, the extravagance of more than one surviving tycoon, the unrestrained self-indulgence and Sancho Panza-like security of certain middle and lower bourgeois!

This excellence is the main emphasis of Pius XII's allocutions to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility. The Pontiff shows the illustrious members of this class, and through them the whole world, that the excellence inherent to nobility confers on them an unequivocal place among the leading classes emerging from the new conditions of life; a place of clear religious, moral, and cultural significance, which makes the nobility a precious shield against the torrential decadence of the contemporary world.

| *d. The nobility: leaven and not mere dust from the past—the priestly mission of the nobility to elevate, purify, and pacify the world*

On January 5, 1920, shortly after the First World War, Benedict XV (1914-1922) addressed the Roman Patriciate and Nobility. He uttered words of ardent praise for their dedicated and heroic conduct during the dramatic days of the conflict, while emphasizing the importance of the mission that lay before them in the ensuing period of peace.

On that occasion the Pontiff spoke of a "priesthood much like the Priesthood of the Church: that of the nobility."

The Pontiff was not only alluding to the good example set by the Roman patricians and nobles during the war. With loftier considerations, he affirms that at the core of the nobility's mission there is something priestly. Coming from a Pope, this eulogy of the nobility could not be greater.

Of course, the Pontiff does not intend to equate the condition of a noble with that of a priest. He does not affirm an identity between the two missions, only a strong similarity. He develops this principle with quotations from Saint Paul, as we shall see.

When stressing the importance and authenticity of the noble's duties in the field of Faith and morality, the Pontiff's teaching takes on a superb force of expression.

*Alongside the "regale Sacerdotium" of Christ, you too, My Children, rose up as society's "genus electum," and your task was that which above all others resembled and emulated the task of the clergy. While the clergy aided, supported, and comforted with words, example, courage, and the promise of Christ, the nobility also performed their duty on the field of battle, in the ambulances, in the cities, in the countrysides; and, in fighting, assisting, striving, and dying, they remained true—old and young, men and women—true to the traditions of their ancestral glories and to the obligations that nobility entails.*

*If, therefore, it pleases Us to hear praise given to the priests of our Church for the work done during the painful period of the war, it is also right that We should give due praise in turn to the priesthood of the nobility. Both of these priesthods serve as the Pope's attendants, for in the darkest hours they have well interpreted his sentiments.* [\[147\]](#)

Benedict XV then speaks about the duties of the nobility in the period of peace that was beginning.

*Should We not, therefore, say that the priesthood of the nobility, like the priesthood that will continue its good works even in peacetime, will be viewed by Us with especial benevolence? Indeed, from the zealous ardor displayed in times of misfortune We are pleased to infer the constancy of purpose with which the patricians and nobles of Rome will continue to carry out, in happier days, the holy tasks on which the priesthood of the nobility lives.*

*St. Paul the Apostle admonished the nobles of his day, that they might be, or become, what their station required of them. [He was] not satisfied with having said that they too should present themselves as models of good action, in doctrine, in integrity, in seriousness of purpose: "in omnibus te ipsum praebe exemplum bonorum operum; in doctrina, in integritate, in gravitate" (Titus 2:7). Saint Paul was thinking more directly of nobles when he wrote to his disciple Timothy to admonish the wealthy "divitibus huius saeculi praecipe," that they might do good and become rich with good works: "bene agere, divites fieri in bonis operibus" (I Tim. 6:17-18).*

*One can rightly say that the Apostle's admonitions are admirably applicable as well to the nobles of our times. You too, O beloved Children, the higher your station, the greater your obligation to lead others by the light of your good example: "in omnibus te ipsum praebe exemplum bonorum operum."* [\[148\]](#)

Some readers might object: Do these duties also apply to the nobility in our days, so different from those of Benedict XV? Would it not be more objective to say that these duties now belong as much to any citizen as to the nobles? The teachings of Benedict XV run counter to these objections. The Pontiff continues:

*In all ages nobles have been duty-bound to assist in the teaching of the truth, "in doctrina"; today, however, when the confusion of ideas, companion to the revolution of the people, has in so many places and in so many minds made the true notions of right, justice, charity, religion, and fatherland disappear, it has become all the more*

*imperative for the nobility to strive to restore to the intellectual patrimony those sacred notions that should guide them in their daily activities. In all ages nobles have been duty-bound to allow nothing indecent to enter their words and their actions, that their own license might not become an incitement to the vices of their subalterns, "in integritate, in gravitate." Yet, this duty too, Oh how urgent and weighty it has become, because of the bad habits of our time! Not just the gentlemen are beholden, however; the ladies, too, are obliged to join together in the holy struggle against the extravagancies and obscenities of fashion, distancing themselves from, and not tolerating in others, what is not permitted by the laws of Christian modesty.*

*And coming to the application of what Saint Paul advised directly to the nobles of his day,...to Us it is enough that the patricians and nobles of Rome continue, in peacetime, to shape themselves by that spirit of charity of which they have given such wonderful proof in times of war...*

*Your nobility, then, will not be seen as a useless relic of times gone by, but as a leavening to resurrect corrupt society; it will be a beacon, a preserving salt, a guide for wanderers; it will be immortal not only on this earth where everything, even the glory of the most illustrious dynasties, fades and vanishes, but will be immortal in heaven, where everything lives and is exalted in the Author of all things beautiful and noble.* [\[149\]](#)

When giving the Apostolic blessing at the end of the allocution, the Pontiff manifests his desire that "each might cooperate with the priesthood proper to his class toward the elevation and purification of the world and, by doing good to others, ensure entry for himself as well into the kingdom of eternal life —'ut apprehendant veram vitam!'" [\[150\]](#)

#### *e. Present admirers of the nobility*

Even when scorned and despised, the noble who remains worthy of his forebears is always a noble. He is the object of special attention, and not rarely even courtesy, on the part of those with whom he comes into contact.

An example of the interest aroused by the nobility is the fact that today, even more than in preceding decades, there is in every society a growing number of people who admire the nobility with great respect and a moving, almost romantic, interest. A list of facts proving the presence in our days of this compact vein of admirers would be endless.

Two facts speak for themselves. One, already mentioned, is the joyous and admiring enthusiasm with which countless multitudes throughout the world accompanied, via television, the marriage ceremony of the Prince of Wales and Princess Diana. Another is the constant growth of the Parisian magazine *Point de Vue—Images du monde*, which is dedicated to news concerning the aristocratic segments of the population around the world, be they in monarchies or republics. The circulation of *Point de Vue*, around 180,000 copies in 1956, grew to 515,000 in 1991. [\[151\]](#)

#### *f. The nobility: thesis and antithesis*

At this point we should include some considerations on those moneyed elites that, instead of striving to cultivate qualities appropriate to their high economic station, pride themselves on maintaining their vulgar habits and lifestyles.

Individual property tends to remain within the lineage of its owner. The family institution leads to this in a powerful way. This has resulted, at times, in the formation of commercial, industrial, and publishing lineages, or even "dynasties." Each of these family groups can exert over political events an incomparably greater power than the common voter, although all citizens are equal in the eyes of the law...

Do these lineages constitute a new nobility?

From a strictly functional point of view, perhaps they do, but this is not the only point of view, nor even necessarily the main one. Concretely, this new "nobility" frequently is not, nor could it be, a true nobility, foremostly because a great part of its members do not wish to be noble.

In fact, egalitarian prejudices, which so many of these lineages have cultivated and flaunted since their origin, lead them to differentiate themselves progressively from the old nobility, become insensible to its prestige, and, not infrequently, downgrade it in the eyes of the world. This is done not by a forced elimination of the characteristics differentiating the old nobility from the masses, but by this new "nobility's" ostentation of a characteristic willingly cultivated for demagogic purposes. This characteristic is vulgarity.

While the historical nobility was and wanted to be an elite, this modern antithesis of the nobility frequently prides itself in not differing from the masses. It strives to camouflage itself with the ways and habits of the masses, purportedly to escape an impending vengeance of the demagogic egalitarian spirit. This spirit is usually fanned by the mass media whose owners and top executives paradoxically often belong to this same antithetical nobility.

As the head with the body, the nobility naturally forms an organic whole with the people. Conversely, this antithetical nobility tends to avoid this vital differentiation as much as possible, striving—at least in appearance—to integrate itself into that great amorphous and lifeless whole which is the masses. [\[152\]](#)

It would be exaggerated to affirm that all contemporary plutocrats are this way. But many of them undeniably are. This is especially true of some of the richest among them, to whom, by the way, an attentive observer will not deny notability by their dynamism, their power, and the archetype of their characteristics.

## 9. The Flourishing of Analogous Elites—Contemporary Forms of Nobility?

In speaking of the bourgeois society and its peculiarities, we do not intend to include those families of the bourgeoisie in whose bosom, down through the generations, flourished a genuine family tradition, rich in moral, cultural, and social values.

Contrary to the antithetical nobility, these families' fidelity to tradition and their desire for continual improvement make them true elites.

In a social structure open to everything that enriches it with true values, these families little by little become an aristocrat-like class. They gradually and smoothly blend into the aristocracy or, by force of custom, become a new aristocracy with its own characteristics alongside the old aristocracy.

Whoever is simultaneously at the summit of political power and social influence—as is the case of monarchs—must know how to preside in a kind, prudent, and tactful way over these highly respectable betterments of the sociopolitical structure. He must be more concerned with sounding out the yearnings

that animate wholesome social transformations and identify the aspirations of an organic society than with geometrically setting a course for the nation through decrees.

Far from jealously and narrow-mindedly hindering the full flourishing of other elites, the existence of aristocratic elites is a standard for fruitful analogies and a stimulus for fraternal improvements.

The pejorative sense of the term *bourgeoisie* is applicable to the sectors of this social category that are uninterested in forming their family traditions, or in maintaining and improving them through successive generations, and instead concentrate on pursuing the most outlandish modernity. Even when their families have lived in opulence or easy comfort for several generations, these bourgeois still choose to resemble a group of parvenus—parvenus in a state of permanent mutation caused by their self-destructive determination not to refine their habits over time!

| *a. A matter the Pontiffs did not treat: Are there updated forms of nobility?*

The preceding considerations lead to an aspect of this question that Pius XII, his predecessors, and successors did not deal with, perhaps for reasons of prudence.

As shown throughout these chapters, Pius XII attributes an important role to the nobility of our time. In view of this role, the Pontiff wishes to conserve the nobility as one of the leading classes of the modern world. Thus, he strives to open its eyes to what it retains of the past, and to the use it should make of this remainder as a means of survival and action, not only to preserve its present situation successfully, but perhaps to recover a broader place for itself at the summit of today's society.

But the nobility's acknowledged role is so important that its fulfillment requires more than this paltry and indeed contested residue. Means should be found to expand the nobility's base of action. What would be the desirable way of doing this? To what extent would this "desirable" also be viable in modern conditions?

Why not consider, for example, a society that would generously provide a framework of support for the nobility's existence and the plenitude of its benefic action? This framework could eventually take on "updated" forms, consisting of more than just urban or rural property. For example, why not officially recognize the nobility as the bearer of the precious boon of tradition and as a counselor to be heeded and respected by those who hold the levers of power in today's world?

We should not exclude the hypothesis that Pius XII seriously considered this possibility, even though, for prudential reasons, he did not express the conclusions he may have reached.

Since he analyzed the modern problems of the nobility with such solicitous attention, nothing would have been more natural than for him to have pondered what follows.

| *b. Authentic, if less brilliant, nobilities—historic examples*

With time, especially from the late Middle Ages on, new nobilities came into existence. Although less brilliant, they were no less authentic than the nobility par excellence: the warrior, rural, and seignorial nobility. Examples of these new nobilities abound in Europe.

In Portugal the doors of the nobility were opened to intellectuals. Anyone who graduated from the famous University of Coimbra in theology, philosophy, law, medicine, or mathematics became noble,

although without a hereditary title. If three successive generations of a family graduated at Coimbra in one of these fields, all their descendants, even if they did not study at this university, became hereditary nobles. [\[153\]](#)

In Spain, the investiture in certain civil, military, or cultural offices, and even the exercise of certain forms of commerce and industry particularly useful to the nation, automatically conferred either a personal lifetime nobiliary status or a hereditary one. [\[154\]](#)

In France, beside the *noblesse de robe* (nobility of the robe), composed of magistrates, there was the *noblesse de cloche* (nobility of the bell). This latter name refers to the bell used by the authorities of small towns to summon the people. This *noblesse de cloche* was customarily formed by bourgeois families who had distinguished themselves in the service of the common good of small urban communities. [\[155\]](#)

### | c. *Nouveaux riches, nouveaux nobles*

These ennoblements did not occur, however, without giving rise to noteworthy problems. Certain historic episodes illustrate this clearly.

For example, King Charles III (1759-1788), contrasting the new industrial progress of some European nations with the painful backwardness of Spain in this field, decided to stimulate the establishment of industries in his kingdom through the Royal Decree of March 18, 1783. Among other measures, he decided to elevate almost automatically to nobiliary status those subjects who, with advantage to the common good, successfully invested capital and effort to establish industries or develop those already existing. [\[156\]](#)

Many candidates to the nobility became industrialists as a result of this resolution. However, as we have seen, the authenticity of the noble condition consists not only in the use of a title conferred by royal decree, but also—and notably—in the possession of what could be called the characteristic moral profile of the aristocratic class. It is understandable that certain *nouveaux riches* becoming *nouveaux nobles* by the royal decree might have found it very difficult to acquire this moral profile. This profile is only acquired through a long family tradition, which the *nouveaux riches* and the *nouveaux nobles* usually lack. Important elements of this tradition can be found, however, in less affluent traditional bourgeois elites.

The injection of this new blood into the traditional nobility could, in certain cases, increase its vitality and creativity. However, it could also introduce certain traces of vulgarity and *arrivisme* disdainful of old traditions, with evident harm to the integrity and coherence of the aristocratic profile. The very authenticity of the nobility could thus be impaired.

Similar situations in more than one European country had an analogous result. In general, though, it was circumscribed by various factors.

First of all, the aristocratic influence was still profound in European society. The *nouveau noble-nouveau riche* felt ill at ease in his new social condition if he did not strive to assimilate, at least in part, its profile and manners. He rarely gained easy admittance to many of the salons. This exerted an aristocratizing pressure upon him that was reinforced by the attitude of the common people.

The people perceived the comic situation of the brand-new count or marquis and made him the target of unpleasant mockery. Far from opposing the environment in which he was heterogeneous, then, the new noble generally strove in earnest to adapt himself to it. Above all, he did his best to give his

children a genuinely aristocratic education.

These circumstances facilitated the absorption of the new elements by the old nobility to such an extent that, after one or more generations, the differences between the traditional and new nobles disappeared. The new nobles ceased to be "new" with the mere passing of time. The marriage of young nobles, bearers of historic names, to daughters or granddaughters of *nouveaux riches-nouveaux nobles* enabled them to avoid economic decadence and to give new luster to their coats of arms.

To some extent this continues today. However, due to the strongly egalitarian tone of modern society and to other factors mentioned in this book, an almost automatic ennobling, such as that instituted by King Charles III, would demean the nobility much more than it would serve it, since the *nouveaux riches* are less and less inclined to become new nobles.

| *d. Are there means, within the present political framework, of creating new forms of nobility?*

The question remains: Are there means today of establishing new nobilities—with new hierarchies and modalities that correspond to new functions—so long as they aim to attain some degree of that plenitude of excellence linked to hereditary continuity, which characterizes the nobility still recognized as such today?

On the other hand, what means are there within the present political framework, and independently of hereditary succession, to admit new forms of nobility for people who have rendered distinguished services to the common good, either because of outstanding talent, salient personality, heroic self-denial and chivalrous courage, or great capacity of action?

In the Middle Ages and in the Ancien Régime, there was always room to receive into the nobility people who, although born in the humblest plebeian home, nevertheless gave incontestable proofs of possessing these attributes in a heroic or excellent degree. This was the case of some soldiers who distinguished themselves in war by their courage or tactical skill.

| *e. A new hierarchical step in the social ladder*

These considerations broaden the perspective and give a new flexibility to the distinction between nobility and bourgeoisie, paving the way for a nobiliary *tertium genus*. This would be a nobility *diminutae rationis*, like the nobility of the robe and the nobility of the bell in Old France.

A question arises here about the use of the word *nobility*.

Just as the fruitful vitality of a country's social body can give rise to new nobilities, so it can also spark the formation of new non-noble levels within lower classes. This is happening among blue-collar workers today. Modern technology's demand for highly skilled and responsible manpower is creating a third category of worker, midway between the intellectual and the manual worker.

This picture places the reader before a blossoming of new situations. Only with the utmost tact and the intelligent caution intrinsic to organic societies will it be possible to develop, with firmness of principles, justice, and objectivity, new levels in the social hierarchy.

There is yet another question: In view of this rousing "hierarchical" work that the course of events is

demanding from the principled men of today, what do we mean by *noble*? In other words, what characteristics should a new level in the social scale have to merit the qualification of noble? And what characteristics would bar title to this illustrious qualifier?

The question covers so many complex situations in constant change that it is impossible to provide a quick and simple answer at this time. This is especially true if we consider that problems of this nature are better solved through the joint effort of thinkers and the consuetudinary evolution of society than through the lucubrations of mere theorizers, technocrats, and the like.

Merely touching upon this interesting question, we must say that the qualifier *noble* can only be granted to social categories that maintain significant analogies with the nobility's original and archetypal standard, which was born in the Middle Ages. It continues to be the standard of true nobility down to our times.

Among the factors whose felicitous convergence favors the formation of new types of nobility we may mention the vigorous and close link between the purpose of the social class and the regional or national common good; the distinctive willingness of its members to disinterestedly sacrifice personal rights and interests for the sake of this common good; the excellence attained by its members in their daily activities; the consequent and exemplary elevation of the human, moral, and social standards of its members; a correlated lifestyle made possible by the special gratitude with which society reciprocates this dedication to the common good; and, finally, sufficient economic means to confer adequate preeminence to the condition resulting from these factors. [\[157\]](#)

| *f. The hope that the way indicated by Pius XII not be forgotten*

These reflections, prompted by the attentive study of the allocutions of Pius XII on the nobility, express hope—yes, hope that the way shown by this Pontiff be neither forgotten nor underestimated by the nobility, nor by the authentic but not specifically noble social elites existing not only in Europe, but also in the three Americas, Australia, and elsewhere.

May the closing words of this chapter express hope therefore and not merely legitimate nostalgia.

## Conclusion

In the Apogee of Today's Religious, Moral, and Ideological Crisis: A Propitious Moment for the Action of the Nobility and the Traditional Elites

Despite the stupendous vitality the European peoples displayed in facing the havoc wreaked by the two world wars, one must admit that the reconstruction in the aftermath of the last conflict demanded considerable effort and much time.

Throughout the period when Pius XII pronounced his allocutions to the Roman Patriciate and Nobility (1940-1958), the postwar economic recovery of Europe was progressing slowly. The Pontiff's paternal concern naturally led him to make many references to this critical situation in these memorable allocutions.

In the following decade, however, the rate of the economic recovery increased appreciably, resulting in famous "economic miracles" like the "German miracle" and the "Italian miracle." This series of "miracles" has not ended. The present economic prosperity of Spain and Portugal—little-favored nations until now—can still be somehow included in it.

This surge of prosperity—the apogee of which Pius XII (who died in 1958) did not see, but to which the Conciliar constitution *Gaudium et Spes* sang a hymn of salutation and joy in 1965—noticeably modified the European scene.

History will one day give a detailed account of the role played by the nobility and other traditional elites in this recovery. This account will perhaps permit an assessment of the repercussion of Pius XII's notable directives on the conduct of these classes as they helped in Europe's economic recovery. Without venturing a precise judgment, it seems that this role was considerable, albeit proportional to the means of action available to the aristocracy and the elites of each country.

One thing is certain. When the tragic extent of the failure of state capitalism and the dictatorship of the proletariat in Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe began to be patent in 1989, the western European countries, the United States, and other nations promptly sent enormous sums to their aid—for which little or no repayment may be expected. Thus did the great democratic nations, oriented and enriched by free enterprise, implicitly show mankind the triumphant contrast between West and East.

Nevertheless, how mistaken are those who imagine that this reacquired prosperity solved the crises inherited by the Western nations in previous decades and worsened by new factors. The misconception that prosperity is always the mainstay of the order and well-being of nations, and that poverty is the principal cause of crises is clearly disproved by events in postwar Europe.

The process of healing and reflowering on the Old Continent was well advanced in 1968 when the terrible Sorbonne crisis erupted. This crisis revealed the tumultuous and destructive influence on the youth of philosophies previously considered extravagant manifestations of certain "beautiful people" in cultural and worldly circles.

The extensive reverberations of the Sorbonne phenomenon among avant-garde youth in Europe and elsewhere revealed the depth of this opened chasm. The general deterioration of customs, already deplored by Pius XII, found favorable grounds in this milieu of wealth and extravagance, prompting a moral and cultural crisis that plunged the free world into a situation that was graver than previous crises, which had been merely or predominantly economic. The spreading of prosperity was rightly seen by lucid and well-documented observers as an important factor in this tragic worsening of the moral crisis. [\[158\]](#)

This situation was exacerbated by a crisis of totally unprecedented magnitude that afflicts the Catholic Church, the pillar and foundation of morality and the good order of society. [\[159\]](#)

Two important events subsequently influenced these perspectives: the Gulf War and the victorious stand of the Baltic peoples—notably the glorious resistance of the heroic Lithuanian people—in favor of their independence. It would be a serious error to underestimate the importance of this latter event. Involving fundamental principles of morality and international order, it caused a just and emphatic disturbance in the conscience of peoples, as was shown by the brilliant petition drive promoted by the TFPs in 26 countries, which attained the impressive total of 5,218,520 signatures. [\[160\]](#)

\* \* \*

As this work draws to a close, grave unknowns beset mankind.

The world situation described by Pius XII has changed considerably, mainly thanks to the economic improvement resulting from Europe's aforementioned "miracles."

Since then, however, two great crises have become more pronounced. One is the internal crisis in the former empire behind the Iron Curtain; the other is the crisis within the Catholic Church.

This latter painful crisis is related to the very essence of the issues discussed herein. We nevertheless will refrain from analyzing it, for its gravity and amplitude would demand a separate work, probably of many volumes.

The general features of the former crisis are well known throughout the world. At the moment of this writing, the nations that constituted the U.S.S.R. have separated. Frictions among them are increasing, deepened as they are by the fact that some of these nations have the means to unleash an atomic war.

It is not improbable that an armed conflict within the former U.S.S.R. would lead to the involvement of major Western nations, with consequences of apocalyptic dimension. One of these consequences could easily be the migration of entire populations pressed by fear of war and actual famine to Central and Western Europe. This migration could assume a critical character of unpredictable scope.

What effects would this exodus have on nations until recently under Soviet domination, such as those on the Baltic Sea? What effects would it have on other countries, such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria, about which it would be very daring to affirm that they have entirely escaped the communist yoke?

To complete this panorama, we should consider the possible reaction of the Maghreb in face of a Western Europe enmeshed in problems of this magnitude, as well as developments throughout northern Africa and the profound impact of the immense fundamentalist wave sweeping the peoples of Islam, of which the Maghreb is an integral part. Who can predict with certainty the extremes to which these factors of instability will bring the world, and especially the Christian world?

For the time being, the latter is not engulfed in the triple drama of a seemingly peaceful invasion from the East, a probably less peaceful invasion from Africa, and an eventual worldwide conflagration. However, the fatal outcome of the long revolutionary process whose outline was summarized in the last chapter of this work is already within sight.

This process has advanced relentlessly, from the waning and fall of the Middle Ages to the initial joyful triumphs of the Renaissance; to the religious revolution of Protestantism, which remotely began to foment and prepare the French Revolution and, even more remotely, the Russian Revolution of 1917. So invariably victorious has been its path despite uncountable obstacles that one might consider the power that moved this process invincible and its results definitive.

These results seem definitive indeed if one overlooks the nature of this process. At first glance it seems eminently constructive, since it successively raised three edifices: the Protestant Pseudo-Reformation, the liberal-democratic republic, and the Soviet socialist republic.

The true nature of this process, however, is essentially destructive. It is Destruction itself. It toppled the faltering Middle Ages, the vanishing Ancien Régime, and the apoplectic, frenetic, and turbulent bourgeois world. Under its pressure the former U.S.S.R. lies in ruins—sinister, mysterious, and rotten like a fruit long-since fallen from the branch.

*Hic et nunc*, is it not true that the milestones of this process are but ruins? And what is the most recent ruin generating but a general confusion that constantly threatens imminent and contradictory catastrophes, which disintegrate before falling upon the world, thus begetting prospects of new catastrophes even more imminent and contradictory. These may vanish in turn, only to give way to new monsters. Or they may become frightful realities, like the migration of Slavic hordes from the East to the West, or Moslem hordes from the South to the North.

Who knows? Will this actually happen? Will this be all? Will it be even worse than this?

Such a picture would discourage all men who lack Faith. Those with Faith, however, can already hear a

voice coming from beyond this confused and grim horizon. The voice, capable of inspiring the most encouraging confidence, says: "Finally, my Immaculate Heart will triumph!"<sup>[161]</sup>

What credit can be placed in this voice? The answer, which it gives, is but a sentence long: "I am from heaven."<sup>[162]</sup>

So there are reasons for hope. Hope for what? For the help of Providence in any work performed with vision, rigor, and method to defend the world from the threats hanging over mankind like so many swords of Damocles.

It behooves us, then, to pray, confide in Providence, and act.

To develop this action, it is fitting to remind the nobility and analogous elites of their special and, indeed, primordial mission in the present circumstances.

May Our Lady of Fatima, the special patroness of this agitated contemporary world, help the nobility and like elites to heed the wise teachings Pius XII bequeathed them. These teachings direct them to a task that Pope Benedict XV had expressively termed the "priesthood" of the nobility.<sup>[163]</sup>

Should they dedicate themselves entirely to this extraordinary task, they and their descendants will one day be amazed at the vastness of the results they will have obtained for their respective countries, for mankind, and, above all, for the Holy Catholic Church.

- [< Prev](#)
- [Next >](#)