Simone Weil
Awaiting God

A new translation of
Attente de Dieu and *Lettre à un Religieux*

Introduction by *Sylvie Weil*
Translated by Bradley Jersak

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by Sylvie Weil

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Translator's Preface
Brad Jersak

Seventy years after her death, the echo of Simone Weil's voice continues to reverberate across the decades. In fact, as the post–9/11 West thrashes about in the vain hope of reaping justice by sowing ever more violence, evocations of Weil's moral authority and spiritual genius are surging. Political philosopher, liberation activist, Christian mystic—she is catching the attention and imagination of another generation in quest of Truth. Why is that? What fresh prophetic keys do we think she might deliver to our bewildered era?

I was perusing a used bookstore in Vancouver a while ago, mining treasures for my dissertation (a work on George P. Grant and Simone Weil). I found a young intellectual perched behind the cash register. He was your stereotypical hipster/philosopher-poet. Lunch crumbs caught in his tangled beard, noise-metal vibrating from his ear-buds, and the pages of a new-atheist bestseller hovering two inches from antique gold reading-glasses. Classic.

This young thinker apparently doesn't believe in any 'God'; he is contemptuous of all things religious; and reserves his deepest contempt for the Church. He projected a persona of one who uses his spare time to roll his eyes at faith. But here's the thing. He doesn't mock Simone Weil—*he writes poetry to her.*

I know that sentiment. I feel I owe her a debt of love and would love to write a book about her. But there's something more urgent happening. An imperative voice exhorting me, '*Don't*. Don't read and write endless monographs and biographies *about* Simone Weil. Read *her.* Listen to *her. Undergo* her.'

To truly hear Simone Weil one must *not* sort through her work, discerning

where we think she's right or wrong, adding her best 'zingers' to our tool-belt and then moving on. That would be listening with deaf ears. Rather, I suggest reading a line at a time until she corners you, arrests you and/or offends you. Stop there. Meditate. Journal. And ask, 'How is this thought true *and* how might it not be true?' At that point you're beginning to think like her.

Then look into her eyes and ask, 'What are you saying? *To me? About* me? About life? About God?' And push back. Hard. Tell her she's wrong and tell her why. Then let her circle in again. Let her infuriate you, seduce you and rebuff you. Then repeat this dance. And certainly never 'move on.'

My model for this process is Simone's niece, Sylvie Weil. She is certainly no starry-eyed Weilian. But she knows how and why to engage her aunt like no one else. The reader will see this in her book, *At Home with Andre and Simone Weil*, reviewed below, and in Sylvie's fine article, "Simone Weil et les rabbins: compassion et *tzedaka*" (originally published in the French journal, *Approches* No. 148). With Sylvie's kind permission and help, we have translated it into English for the first time here.

Translation

My methodology was to begin with the most literal and wooden word-for-word translation possible. In so doing, I hoped to preserve some of Simone Weil's repetitiveness where she intentionally uses a specific word or word-play half a dozen times within a few paragraphs. She is being thematic, attempting to drill an idea home very quickly. This helps us cross-reference thoughts that she associates through word association.

To share one example, she sometimes recites the first Beatitude as, 'Blessed are the *void* in spirit.' Thus, she identifies that passage with Christ's *kenotic* self-emptying in Philippians, which she translates as, 'He made Himself *void*.' Here we glimpse her doctrine of decreation as a sort of purging of the self to create space for cruciform love.

After this initial pass, I also sought to retain some of the 'hard sayings' and idiosyncrasies in Weil by retaining unusual expressions or jarring word-choices through a more literalist translation. For example, I love the picture she paints when she advocates for the intelligence to 'play without shackles to the full plenitude of its function.' There are clearer ways to render such phrases in English—like, 'allowing the intelligence to freely and fully function.' But by then we would be sanitizing the book of Weil's poetic style and aphoristic tone.

In simpler instances, I intuitively retained some of Simone's trademark

French terms like ‘miserable,’ ‘sentiment’ or ‘sensible’ even when an alternative might have seemed more natural.

Having labored through a wooden first draft, Adit Gamble (who truly knows Weil’s mind) and I worked through many complete rewrites where we (conservatively) wrestled French sentence structure into a more common English order. We rearranged some qualifying phrases, reduced the passive verbs, dropped some of the French subjunctives and many, many occurrences of ‘that.’ We have frequently replaced the older pronoun ‘one’ or gender specific ‘he’ with ‘someone’ or ‘we’ to give the work a more natural flow. This also meant employing the glorious new liberty known as the ‘singular they,’ using third-person pronouns to refer to singular indefinite, gender-neutral antecedents. Readers will also occasionally see bracketed material where I felt amplification was required to express the semantic-range, ambiguity or Weilian sense of a word.

I have chosen to retranslate the two works herein under the title, *Awaiting God*, knowing that good translations of *Waiting for God* and *Letter to a Priest* have been around for decades. By creating a single edition in conjunction with Sylvie’s poignant perspective, I hope to encourage a new generation of Weil readers to ponder her provocative wisdom.

As my own first effort as a translator, I was glad to compare, contrast and confirm our translations with the older works, sometimes consulting them for a second opinion and at others, noticing how they may have obscured Weil’s meaning through alternative translation choices or ideological filters.

I cannot say we’ve succeeded in creating the best translation possible. But if this attempt nurtures the growing interest in reading Weil firsthand, I will be more than satisfied.

Introduction

Simone Weil and the Rabbis: Compassion and Tzedakah

Sylvie Weil

Simone Weil, a Jew who became a Christian mystic, was certain that the Gospels owed nothing to Judaism. Yet her own obsession with charity may well have come from the traditions passed down by her Jewish ancestors, and her concepts of compassion, and love of one's neighbor, had much in common with those of the rabbis of the Talmud, for whom charity, *tzedakah*, was the most important of all commandments.

Simone Weil's notion of compassion is intimately linked with the act of looking, of paying attention. Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity, she writes.

This is closely related to one of the great themes of Simone Weil's writings: the extreme humiliation and dehumanization of the wretched person suffering misfortune and poverty, who becomes a nonperson, beneath pity.

One finds that the Talmud addresses this theme on numerous occasions: a number of rabbinic legends link charity with casting a gaze upon and truly seeing the poor person, all the while never humiliating him or her.

Simone's meditations on charity and compassion often have a rabbinic aspect in the way she examines various cases. She embeds the idea of charity in a mystical program that goes beyond almsgiving. The rabbis had a very similar mystical program, as we can see from different examples of rabbinic and Jewish mystical literature.

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The idea of compassion linked to almsgiving recurs, almost obsessively, throughout Simone Weil's writings. Consequently, it was not a subject I could overlook when writing my book, *Chez les Weil, André et Simone* (Buchet-Chaster, éd. Paris 2009).

While writing the chapter entitled *Tzedakah*, I began an imaginary conversation with my infamous aunt Simone (and my readers know it wasn't the first!). In this imaginary conversation, I reproached her for having viewed the Old Testament as a 'fabric of horrors' and vehemently refusing to look beyond the legalistic aspects of rabbinic Judaism. I wanted to make her understand how close her concerns were to those of the rabbis of the Talmud, rich in examples of compassion and love for others.

In my book, I spoke of Simone Weil's great-grandmothers, who had a passion for charity. One of them lived in Brody where her reputation for kindness and compassion so impressed the most feared bandit in the region that he came to her shop to offer his protection. Another lived in Lemberg, where she pawned her jewelry to rescue the needy, and where she wanted to live forever, because there were 'so many poor.'

I concluded that Simone had it in her blood! The young professor who gave away her salary to the unemployed was the worthy descendant of her ancestors.

Simone Weil writes, *The gospel makes no distinction between the love of neighbour and justice.* (*Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd). She immediately goes on to add, *In the eyes of the Greeks, respect for suppliant Zeus*

was, in a similar way, one of the first duties of justice. She saw in this a Greek heritage, not a Jewish legacy. This is a major injustice.

In Hebrew the word *tzedakah* means charity, but the *ba'al-tzedek* is the just man, the righteous man. It is the same word. Charity is a form of justice. The word *tzedakah* has the meaning of the Greek word *agape*, which is love, compassion for one's neighbour, and also the meaning of practical charity, helping provide for the poor, thus re-establishing a form of justice, a social equilibrium.

Did Simone's ancestors have a 'theory' of charity and compassion? They found it in the Bible, of course; in Deuteronomy, for example: 'You shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother,' and also in the *midrashim,* rabbinical legends, recounted by the rabbis during their weekly homilies. The men usually knew more than the women; they studied the Talmud, and some, perhaps, may even have read the *Zohar*.

But they all knew that charity is an absolute imperative in Judaism. A *mitzvah*. A commandment. The prophet Isaiah says: *Your* tzedakah *will walk before you.*

I will only mention in passing the complicated Laws of the tractate *Peah* of the Talmud, in which the rabbis discuss the biblical texts concerning what, in a field, rightfully belongs to the poor. Among others:

– The corners of the field and everything that has touched the ground.

– The 'forgotten' sheath of wheat (the rabbis entered into lengthy discussions, trying to reach a definition of the verb 'forgotten').

– And, of course, the tithe to the Levites and the priests, a portion of which was reserved for the poor.

The Talmud sets up an entire system: there must be *tzedakah* boxes in every town as well as soup kitchens and money distributions. It discusses all the cases where you need to *open your hand* and give to the poor man *sufficient for his need* following the injunction of Deuteronomy. The endless discussions of the rabbis are proof of the importance of the topic.

The formula *sufficient for his need* gives birth to some picturesque forms of charity. To a poor man who was once rich and rode a horse with a servant running before him, you need to give a horse and a servant. The Talmud speaks of such an occasion where a servant couldn't be found, so Rabbi Hillel himself ran in front of the horse for several miles!

I believe my aunt would generally have had contempt for the sages' picky

and mundane discussions in the Talmud. But how would she have read their disputes regarding charity? For example, the rather amusing discussion in which the rabbis consider which fate is worse: being naked or being hungry? According to Rav Huna, if you see a naked beggar, you must give him clothes immediately, without inquiring whether or not the beggar is as poor as he says he is. According to Rav Yehudah, on the contrary, you must give instantly and without further inquiry when a beggar asks for food, whereas if the beggar is naked, you need to verify first that he is truly naked!

When, during the strikes at Le Puy where she was teaching, Simone left her salary on the counter of the café for the striking workers to help themselves, she might have been surprised to learn that the Talmud tells of Rav Abba walking around among paupers, an open money pouch slung over his shoulder, so that the poor could help themselves without his seeing who they were. (*Baba Batra* 10b) The Talmud goes on to say that this, however, is not the highest level of charity, since the paupers knew who was giving them the money!

Simone might also have been impressed to read in the Talmud: 'When Rav Huna sat down to eat, he would open the doors of his house and his servant would announce: Whoever is hungry, let that person come in.' (Ta'anit 20b)

Even if she had been pleased with rabbinic discussions about feeding the hungry, Simone would certainly have been revolted by the idea of compensation strewn throughout biblical and rabbinical literature: blessings, long life, rain, harvest.… The Shema Israel, recited twice daily, combining passages from Deuteronomy and Numbers, lists the righteous persons' rewards when they love the Lord with all their might. It is to be noted that the great commentator Rashi (1045-1105)[1] makes explicit the link between 'might' and 'charity' when he interprets 'might' as 'money.' Therefore, 'you shall love the LORD your God… with all your might' means 'you shall practice charity.'

Simone Weil is somewhat willing to accept the rewards and gratitude Christ offers, but she sets limits: *He who gives bread to the famished sufferer for the love of God will not be thanked by Christ. He has already had his reward in this thought itself.* (*Waiting for God*)

And again: *The acts of charity which we remember will not be mentioned in the thanks we shall receive from Christ, because, since we remember them, we have received our reward.* (*Waiting for God*)

Jesus is more human than Simone! He does not prohibit thoughts about a reward, but that reward will be postponed to a distant future: *But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed,*

because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just. (Luke 14:13)

The rabbis, too, saw the moral difficulty of the promise of rewards, and often transposed them into mystical rewards. They were realistic enough to know that rewards are not consistently received in the world here below! The Talmud raises the question: He who gives in order to receive something in return—healing for his son, for example—has he practiced true *tzedakah*? There is some doubt, but here is the answer: Because he does not regret his generosity, even if his son is not healed, it can be seen as a deed of charity. (*Baba Batra* 10b)

Yaakov Ben Asher, *Ba'al ha-Turim*, called 'the Tur' (1269–1340),[2] author of a compilation of Jewish customs and laws, states that *tzedakah* is the most important of all commandments. If you do not give, a poor man could die, which implies that not giving might be equivalent to committing murder. The Tur narrates the story of Nahum Ish Gam Zo, which I will recount later.

The Tur also cites the following passage from the Talmud: 'Rav Hiyya bar Rav mi-Difti, quoting Rav Yehoshua ben Karha, tells us: Whoever hides his eyes from charity, it is as if he were committing idolatry.' (*Ketubot* 68a)

How did the rabbis come to this notion? By applying a principle of interpretation called *gezerah shavah* (equivalent construction). This consists in linking two biblical texts that use the same word, allowing one to build a correspondence between the two contexts in which the word appears. This type of play on words is typical of rabbinical reasoning.

The adjective here is *belia'al = mean*, found in the following quotes:

> *Deut. 15:9* 'Take heed lest there be a base (*belia'al*) thought in your heart, and you say, "The seventh year, the year of release, is near," and your eye be hostile to your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and it be sin in you.'
>
> *Deut. 13:13* 'Certain base (*belia'al*) fellows have gone out among you and drawn away the inhabitants of the city, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods," which you have not known.'

Linking the two texts results in the idea that being mean to your poor brother is tantamount to worshipping other gods.

Moreover, the Tur goes on to say, 'You have to realise that your money does not belong to you, but rather is a *pikadon*, a deposit God has entrusted to you. And you should carry out the wishes of the Depositor. It is His will that from it you should give to the poor.'

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In a letter to Joë Bousquet, Simone Weil writes, *Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.* Simone Weil's notion of compassion is intimately linked with that of looking. *Le regard. L'attention.*

The Talmud also associates those two ideas, attention and generosity: *tzedakah* is the act of giving, Rashi explains, but *hesed* (kindness, compassion) is the effort it takes to ensure we truly help the poor. Bringing them home and feeding them is true kindness. Giving money to the poor when there is nothing for them to buy is not *tzedakah.* (Rashi on *Soukkah* 49b) Rashi is eminently practical, but his comment also implies we must have a true regard for the poor.

Simone Weil, on the other hand, is a philosopher: *If we place ourselves in the position of someone who is hungry, we are naturally inclined, as a result of a blind and automatic action on the part of the sensibility, to wish that he should eat. Furthermore, there is absolutely no reason (unless there happen to be special reasons due to the circumstances) why we should resist such an inclination.*

But the act of providing food is only the sign of the inclination, which itself is only the sign that one has recognized the existence of the famished individual's 'I' as such. It has no other importance than that of a sign.

But it possesses the full value of a sign, for the recognition of an 'I' in the person of the famished individual is fictitious, imaginary, if it is not accompanied by an almost irresistible inclination to provide that person with food. (*Notebooks,* trans. Arthur Wills, Vol. 1, p. 295)

This correlation between almsgiving and true compassion is a recurrent theme in Simone Weil's writings. Many *midrashim*, as well, show the rabbis affirming an existing link between charity and the act of paying attention. Here is a wonderful example:

'They said of Nahum Ish Gam Zo' (the one the Tur talks about) 'that he was blind in both eyes, missing both hands, missing both legs, that his entire body was covered with boils. He lived lying in a dilapidated house, the legs of his bed placed in pails of water so that the ants would not crawl up onto him. His disciples sought to remove his bed from that crumbling house. He said to them, "My children! First remove the furniture and then remove my bed. Rest assured that as long as I am in the house, the house will not collapse." So they removed the furniture and then removed his bed and only then did the house collapse. His disciples said to him, "Our teacher! Since you are obviously a *tzaddik*, a

righteous person, why are you in such a sad state?" He answered them, "My children! I brought it upon myself. For I was once travelling on the road to my father-in-law's house, having with me three donkey loads, one with food, one with drink, and one with various delicacies. A poor man came to me. He stood before me on the road, and said, "My teacher, sustain me!" I replied, "Wait a moment until I properly unload food from the donkey." I did not have a chance to unload the donkey before his soul departed. I went and fell on his face, and I said, "Let my eyes, which took no pity on your eyes, become blind; let my hands, which took no pity on your hands, be cut off; let my legs, which took no pity on your legs, be cut off." And my mind did not rest until I said, "Let my entire body be covered with boils!" The disciples said to him, "Woe to us that we have seen you like this!" He answered, "Woe to me had you not seen me like this!"' (i.e., had I not received my punishment in this world). (Talmud, *Ta'anit 21a*)

Another very nice *midrash,* this one from Leviticus Rabba, chapter 34, shows the importance of the way we speak to the poor:

'Rav Haggai said in the name of Rav Yehudah: It is written, "And those riches perish by evil disposition," alluding to the fact that the rich man answered the poor man in an evil disposition, saying to him, "Why don't you go and work in order to get food to eat? Look at those hips! Look at those legs! Look at that fat body! Those lumps of flesh!" Says the Holy One, blessed be He, "Is it not enough that you have not given him anything of your own, but must you set an evil eye upon what I have given him?"'

This rests on an interpretation of Eccl. 5:13: 'There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches were lost in a bad venture.' In Hebrew: *Be-inyan ra* is literally 'in a bad thing.' *Inyan* can mean thing, matter, disposition or answer (the connections are between the roots *inyen* = to concern oneself, *ina* = to oppress, *ana* = to answer). The bad thing can be a bad business deal, a misfortune, or a disagreeable answer. Rav Haggai chooses the latter sense: a disagreeable answer.

One can compare this with something Simone writes about the contemptuous attitude towards the poor: *It is not surprising that a man who has bread should give a piece to someone who is starving. What is surprising is that he should be capable of doing so with so different a gesture from that with which we buy an object*. (*Waiting for God*)

In the same chapter we read: 'Rav Zeira observed, "Even the ordinary conversation of the people of the land of Israel requires study." How is this to be

understood? A poor man says to his neighbour: Give me alms (*zakki bi)* or Give me charity (*rakki bi*) by which he means: Become compassionate through me, benefit yourself through me."' (*Le-zakkot bi* = to deserve divine reward through me, to obtain merit.) 'Rav Haggai says, "The poor man sometimes says: Look at me, observe me *(sekhi bi),* by which he means: Look at what I was and observe what I am."'

A similar sentiment inspires a form of verbal etiquette designed to value the beggar rather than humiliate him: 'Rabbi Yohanan and Resh Lakish were going down to the baths in Tiberias. A pauper came to them saying, "Give me alms." They answered, "When we come out of the baths we shall gain merit through you."' Simone Weil's notion is very similar, if not identical, but she takes it in a slightly different direction when she writes, *What dignity it gives the afflicted one who receives, to know he can bring his benefactor the gratitude of Christ!* (*Notebooks VI,* trans. Sylvie Weil)

The Talmud gives numerous examples of politeness towards the poor in order to avoid humiliating them: Rav Jonah, when he gives a sum of money to a poor man whose family was once respectable, says: "I heard that you were going to receive an inheritance somewhere in a foreign land, and I have come to offer this sum which you will pay me back in the future."

The Talmud is specific: 'The poor should never be put to shame by receiving charity.' And: 'The one who gives demonstratively to a beggar (therefore shaming him) is, in reality, cursing him.' (*Hagigah* 5a)

Elsewhere in the Talmud, Rav Jonah observes that Psalm 41 does not say 'Blessed is he who gives to the poor' but 'Blessed is he who considers the poor.' The verb *maskil* means 'looks at him, has regard for him.' For Rashi, the verb *maskil* is a synonym for 'visits the sick.' To the commentator Ibn Ezra, the same verb *maskil* means 'looking with understanding.' A later commentary (*Metzudat David*) makes explicit the common root between *maskil* (to see) and *sekhel* (brains, intelligence), and this leads to the interpretation: 'Blessed is he who uses his intelligence not to embarrass the poor.'

For Simone Weil, such a discussion necessarily takes on a mystical dimension. *Christ taught us that supernatural love of our neighbor is the exchange of compassion and gratitude which happens in a flash between two beings, one possessing and the other deprived of human personality.* (*Waiting for God*).

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This brings us to one of the great themes of Simone Weil's writings, linked, of course, to that of compassion: the dehumanization of the *malheureux* (afflicted), of the unfortunate who have fallen into *malheur* (affliction), their identity transformed into that of a thing. *Too deep a misfortune places humanity beneath pity: disgust, horror and disdain.* (*Gravity and Grace*). This theme became most important for her following her experiences working at the Alsthom and Renault factories: she would henceforth consider herself branded, a slave, a thing.

Those who do not sense any distance between themselves and the beggar are a rarity, in the eyes of Simone Weil. *They give much more than food, clothes or care. By transporting their very being into that of the one they help, they give him for an instant the personal existence of which he is deprived.* Le malheur *is essentially the destruction of the personality, and passage into anonymity*. (*Marseilles notebooks*: *Love of God and Affliction*)

In *The* Iliad *or the Poem of Force,* Simone Weil evokes this 'destruction of personality': the transformation of the warrior about to be killed, of the prisoner about to be enslaved, of the woman prisoner about to be raped, and more generally of all those who have been conquered, into non-persons, things. *Force*, she writes, *is what turns anyone subjected to it into a thing.*

One such example is the visit Priam makes to Achilles to beg for the return of Hector's body in order to bury him. The attitude of Achilles, who in the end behaves quite properly, is unclear because the rarely used adverb ἦκα can be translated in several ways. The most common choice is *'gently.'*

He takes the old man's hand and gently pushes him away. (E. Bareste)

Or again, *Achilles takes the old man's hand and removes it gently.* (R. Brasillach)

Simone translates: *Taking him by the arm, he pushed the old man away a little*. She goes on to comment: *Not through insensitivity does Achilles push to the ground the old man clutching his knees. The words of Priam, calling to Achilles' mind his own old father, have moved him to tears. He simply finds himself as uninhibited in his attitudes and actions as if, instead of a suppliant, an inanimate object had touched his knees*. (trans. James P. Holoka)

Her commentary implies a degree of brutality – *to the ground* – on Achilles' part that is absent in the Greek text.

The strong correlation Simone Weil establishes between paying attention and compassion is at the heart of her unfinished tragedy, *Venice Saved.* Jaffier, along with his companions, plots to take over Venice, with all the brutality this type of

venture entails. But when he looks over the city and its inhabitants, pity fills him and he sacrifices his life to save the city.

It is worth mentioning that the only practical project ever designed by Simone, training nurses for the battlefield in 1940, was not merely practical (nurses giving first aid and moral comfort to the wounded on the front lines, at the risk of their own lives, of course) but a choreography of compassion, fit to strike the imagination. France would take the stage away from the brute force of Nazi barbarism, which transforms men into things, and oppose it with a spectacle of humanity in action in the midst of battle, through the visible presence of heroic women, filled with motherly tenderness and compassion. One will remember as well how much Simone Weil despaired that no one took her cherished project seriously.

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Simone Weil never read the Talmud, and yet the beautiful pages she wrote about charity and love of neighbour during the last years of her life have a Talmudic feel. Like the rabbis, she examines different cases, inspects them from many angles and, like the rabbis, integrates the notion of charity into a mystical journey which goes far beyond the simple practice of charity. She might have been surprised to learn that the rabbis themselves had a mystical program, which they wished to make available to any charitable person.

The sages of the Talmud imagine : ‘A man brings a large gift to a king. It is a question whether the king’s servants will accept the gift from him or whether they will not accept it from him. If you conclude and say they accept it from him, it is a question whether he will see the face of the king or whether he will not see the face of the king. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, is not so. A person gives a *perutah* (a small coin) to a pauper: he is deserving and receives the *Shekhinah*, the Divine Presence directly, for it is stated: “But in justice (*be-tzedek*) I shall behold your face… (Ps. 17:15).’” (*Baba Batra* 10a)

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Here I want to open a little window on the *Zohar*.[3] Contrary to some Weilians, I do not think she read it. To my knowledge, there is no mention of the *Zohar* in my aunt’s notebooks or reading notes. I may be wrong, but I am sure that if she had she read it, she would have written many notes, if only to conclude that it was a Greek text, not really a Jewish book! (She would not have been entirely wrong because it is, indeed, influenced by Neo-Platonism.)

One of the theses of the Kabbalah, and one of its paradoxes, is that God—

infinite and transcendent—is nonetheless in constant need of creation and of *tikkun,* restoration. Humanity was given the ability to repair and to create God's emanations, called *sefirot* (among which there is a hierarchy). I will give a simplified example here of the importance given to *tzedakah*: 'Rabbi Shimon wept and said, "Woe to those who ignore and neglect God's glory! Who creates the Holy Name every day? The one who gives *tzedakah* to the poor."' (*Zohar* 3, p. 113b). The words of Rabbi Shimon are explained by the fact that *tzedakah* is likened to the *sefirah Tiferet* (Beauty), associated with the name 'the Holy One, blessed be He.'

To give to the afflicted here below therefore restores fulness to the Holy Name, completing the *sefirah Tiferet* and restoring its relationship to the *sefirah Malkhut* (Royalty) just beneath it. *Tiferet* pours out its blessings to the *sefirah Malkhut*, which in turn pours out blessings on the earth below. (There is a sort of chain: *Malkhut,* which is also the *Shekhinah,* the Divine Presence, is the lowest of the *sefirot* and helps link the superior *sefirot* to the world here below.)

Here again the reasoning is based on rabbinical wordplay which brings together the two verses: (1) 'If you follow my ordinances, if you keep my commandments, if you put them into practice (*asitem:* if you do them) I will give you rain.' (Lev. 26:3-4); and (2) 'For I have known him [Abraham], in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do (*la'asot*: practice/do) righteousness and justice (*tzedakah* and *mishpat*).' (Gen. 18, v.19)

Both verses contain a redundancy and one can conclude that the verb *asah*, which has the double sense of creating and doing, is present in both cases in order to teach us something. The *Zohar* links the two verses and extracts the teaching that one who "does" the commandments and observes God's ways "creates" *tzedakah,* that is to say *Tiferet*, which is the Holy One, blessed be He.' (Which is why Charles Mopsik titles his book *The rites that make God.*)

Tzedakah is likened to the *sefirah Tiferet* and the poor are likened to the *sefirah Shekhinah.* Why? The poor have nothing other than what others give them, just as the moon has no light other than what it receives from the sun, and the *Shekhinah* receives its light from *Tiferet.*

To give to the poor therefore causes a downpour (rain!) of light and blessings from *Tiferet* onto *Malkhut,* which is also the *Shekhinah*, and from the *Shekhinah* onto the earth. We see here the idea of reward being transformed into a mystical notion: the kabbalist reciting the *Shema Israel* does not take 'rain' in its literal sense, but as light emanating from above. The rain symbolizes the divine

outpouring of blessings that ‘rain down.’

The Zohar then goes on to another complicated construction: the poor are considered dead (prisoners of the *Shekhinah*, which is also linked to judgment and death) and he who gives them *tzedakah* is giving them life, not only physical but spiritual life, since there is a strong connection between giving charity and the reunion, on high, of the *Shekhinah* with *Tiferet*, which is the Tree of Life. (Prov.10:2: ‘charity *(tzedakah)* delivers from death.’)

In conclusion, the *Zohar* states: ‘Blessed are they who are worthy to create the Holy Name on high. This is why *tzedakah* is above all other commandments.’

I would like to close with this magnificent sentence of Simone Weil’s, which succintly expresses a similar idea: *The mystery of Creation has its equivalent in us. It is the mystery of charity in our actions.*

Notes

1. Rashi: Rabbi Shlomo Yitzaki, or Solomon of Troyes, lived in Troyes (France) from 1040–1105, and is considered the most important commentator of the Bible and the Babylonian Talmud.

2. Yaakov ben Asher, Ba’al ha-Turim. Ashkenazic rabbi who died in Toledo around 1340. He wrote the Arba’a Turim, the Four Pillars (four sections which discuss the four domains of the Law). It is a code and synthesis of Jewish Law and was the reference for both Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews during several centuries. The Tur wanted to establish a code suitable for his time. Maimonides was overly intellectual and thorough; many aspects of the Law were no longer applicable since the destruction of the Temple. The Tur enlivened his book with descriptions of the customs he had observed in different countries.

3. *Zohar (The Book of Splendour):* The most important kabbalistic work, considered by Jews to be a sacred book. It appeared in Spain in the late 13th century. Mosheh de Leon claimed to have discovered it and attributed the writing of it to Shimon bar Yohai (rabbi of the Mishnah, late 2nd century CE), but some think that Mosheh de Leon wrote it. Alone? With others? Was it his personal mystical doctrine? Or did it come from a long oral tradition? It is composed in the form of a commentary on the Pentateuch and other books of the Bible, written mostly in an artificial Aramaic designed for the transmission of esoteric doctrines, or to reproduce intimate conversations between rabbis. Cf: *Mishnat Ha-Zohar* by Tishbi, a disciple of Gershom Scholem; also *Le Zohar* and *Les*

rites qui font Dieu, by Charles Mopsik.

Part 1

Essays

1

Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies in View of the Love of God

The key to a Christian conception of studies is that prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation toward God with all the attention of which the soul is capable. The quality of attention counts very much in the quality of prayer. Warmth of heart cannot compensate for it.

Only the highest part of the attention enters into contact with God, when prayer is intense and pure enough to establish such contact, and all our attention is turned toward God.

Of course, school exercises develop a less elevated part of our attention. Nevertheless, they are completely effective for increasing the power of attention that will be available in the moment of prayer, on the condition that it is executed for this end (purpose) and this end alone.

Although today we seem ignorant to it, the formation of the faculty of attention is the true goal and unique interest of all studies.

Most school exercises also have a certain intrinsic interest, but this interest is secondary. All the exercises that truly make an appeal to the power of attention are interesting to the same and nearly equal degree.

School children—the students who love God—should never say, ‘As for me, I love mathematics’; ‘Me, I love French’; ‘Me, I love Greek.’ They ought to learn to love them all, because they increase that attention which, oriented toward God, is of the same substance as prayer.

To have no gift or natural taste for geometry does not prevent research into a problem or the study of a proof from developing our attention. It is almost the opposite. This is almost a favorable circumstance.

It is even of little importance whether one succeeds in finding a solution or grasping the proof, although it is necessary to truly try to succeed in it. Never, in any case, is any effort of true attention lost. It is always completely effective on the spiritual plane, and therefore also, in addition, on the inferior plane of the intelligence, for all spiritual light enlightens the intelligence.

If someone searches with true attention for the solution to a geometric problem, and if after about an hour has advanced no further than from where they started, they nevertheless advance, during each minute of that hour, in another more mysterious dimension. Without sensing it, without knowing it, this effort that appeared sterile and fruitless has deposited more light in the soul. The fruit will be found later, one day in prayer. In addition, they will also undoubtedly find it in some domain of the intelligence, perhaps completely foreign to mathematics. Perhaps one day the one who gave this ineffective effort, because of this effort, will be capable of grasping the beauty of a verse from Racine more directly. But that the fruit of this effort will be found in prayer—this is certain; there is no doubt at all.

Certainties of this kind are experiential. But if we do not believe in them before having this experience—if, at least, we do not behave as if we believe in them—we will never have the experience that gives us access to such certainties. This is a kind of contradiction. At a certain level, this is the case for all useful knowledge about spiritual progress. If we don’t adopt it as a rule of conduct before having verified it, if we don’t remain attached by faith alone over the long term—a faith at first stormy and without light—we will never transform our faith into certainty. Faith is the indispensable condition.

The greatest support of faith is the guarantee that if someone asks his father

for bread, he will not give them a stone. Even outside of any explicit religious belief, every time a human being accomplishes an effort of attention with the sole desire of becoming more capable of knowing the truth, they acquire a greater aptitude for it, even if their effort produces no visible fruit. An Eskimo explains the origin of light this way: ‘The raven that was in eternal night could not find food; it desired light and the earth was enlightened.’ If there is true desire—if the object of desire is truly the light—the desire for light produces light. There is true desire whenever there is an effort of attention. It is truly the light that is desired if all other motives are absent. Even when the efforts at attention remain sterile in appearance for years, one day a light exactly proportional to this effort inundates the soul. Each effort adds a little gold to the treasure that nothing in the world can steal. The useless efforts performed by the Cur d’ Ars, during long and sorrowful years of trying to learn Latin, bore all their fruits in the marvelous discernment through which he could discern the soul of penitents, behind their words and even behind their silence.

One must therefore study without any desire to obtain good grades, to succeed in exams, to obtain any scholarly result, without any regard for taste or natural aptitudes, applying oneself equally to all the exercises with the idea that they all serve to form this attention that is the substance of prayer. At that moment when we apply ourselves to an exercise, we must want to accomplish it correctly because this wish is indispensable for any true effort. But to reach this immediate goal, profound attention must be uniquely directed toward increasing our power of attention in view of prayer, as when we are writing, and draw the form of the letters on the paper, not in view of their form, but in view of the ideas they express.

Applying this attention in our studies, solely and to the exclusion of everything else, is the first condition of their right spiritual use. The second condition is to constrain ourselves to rigorously consider head-on—to contemplate with attention for the long-term—each school exercise failure, in all its ugliness and mediocrity, without searching for any excuse, without neglecting any error or any of the professors’ corrections, trying to uncover the origin of each error. The temptation to do the opposite is great—to glide over the corrected exercises if they are bad—to consider them indirectly and hide them quickly. Nearly everyone does this nearly all of the time. We must refuse this temptation. Incidentally and in addition, nothing is more necessary for academic success, because if we refuse to give our attention to errors made or to the professors’ corrections, we will work without much progress, no matter how

much effort we exert.

The virtue of humility—a treasure infinitely more precious that any scholarly progress—may especially be acquired this way. In this regard, contemplation of one's own stupidity is perhaps even more useful than contemplating one's sin. Consciousness of sin produces a feeling that we are evil, and a certain pride can sometimes find its way into our account. When we violently constrain ourselves to fix the gaze of our eyes and the gaze of our soul on an academic exercise we have failed through stupidity, we sense with irresistible evidence that we are something mediocre. No knowledge is more desirable. When we reach the knowledge of that truth with the whole soul, we have established ourselves solidly on the true way.

If these two conditions are perfectly satisfied, academic studies are without a doubt as good a road as any toward holiness.

To meet the second condition it is enough to want it. It is not the same with the first. To truly pay attention, we must know how to take it on.

Most often, we confuse attention with a kind of muscular effort. If we say to the students, 'You must pay attention,' we can see them frown with their eyebrows, hold their breath and contract their muscles. If after two minutes we ask them what they are paying attention to, they cannot respond. They are paying attention to nothing. They are not paying attention. They are contracting their muscles.

We can expend this type of muscular effort in studies. Because it ends in fatigue, we get the impression of having worked. This is an illusion. Fatigue has no relationship to work. Work is useful effort, whether there is fatigue or not. This kind of muscular effort in studies is completely sterile, even when performed with good intentions. Such good intentions pave the way to hell. Such studies can sometimes lead to good academics from the point of view of grades and exams, but that is in spite of the effort and thanks to natural gifts. Such studies are always useless.

The will (will-power) that requires us to clench our teeth and endure suffering is the principle weapon of the apprentice in manual labour. But contrary to what we ordinarily believe, it hardly ever has a place in studies. The intelligence can only be led by desire. For there to be desire, there must be joy and pleasure. The intelligence only grows and bears fruit in joy. The joy of learning is as indispensable to studies as breathing is to running. Where it is absent, there are no real students—just poor caricatures of apprentices who, after their apprenticeship, will not even have a trade.

The role of desire in our studies allows them to be preparation for the spiritual life. For desire, oriented toward God, is the only force capable of raising the soul. Or rather, God alone comes to possess and lift the soul, but only desire obliges God to descend. God only comes to those who ask God to come—those who ask often, for a long time and ardently. God cannot prevent Himself from coming to them.

Attention is an effort, perhaps the greatest of all efforts, but it is a negative effort. By itself, it does not involve fatigue. When we feel fatigue, attention is nearly impossible, unless we have already had good practice. We are then better to abandon it, search for some peace, then recommence a little later, detaching ourselves and then resuming—just like we inhale and exhale.

Twenty minutes of intense attention without fatigue has infinitely more value than three hours of applying frowning eyebrows that make us say, ‘I have worked well,’ with a feeling of duty accomplished.

But despite appearances, attention is also much more difficult. Some things in our soul find true attention much more repugnant than our body finds fatigue repugnant. That something is much closer to evil than the flesh is. This is why: every time that we truly pay attention, we destroy evil in ourselves. If one pays attention with this intention, a quarter of an hour of attention is very good work.

Attention consists in suspending our thought; letting it become available, empty and able to be penetrated by the object. It means holding the idea close to oneself, but at a lower level and not in contact with it, forced to utilize the diverse knowledge we have acquired. Our thought should be, to all particular and already formed thoughts, like somone on a mountain who, as they look ahead, perceives at the same time what is below—many forests and plains—but without looking there. And above all, our thought must be empty, expectant, without searching, but ready to receive the object meant to penetrate it in its naked truth.

All the misinterpretations in translation, all the absurdities in the solution of geometric problems, all the clumsiness of style and all the defective connections of ideas in French assignments—all these come because our mind has settled on some idea too hastily, and was therefore prematurely filled, not open to the truth. The cause is always our desire to be active. We wanted to seek. We can verify this every time, for every fault, if we go back to the root. There is no better exercise than this verification. For this truth is one of those we can only be believe by experiencing it a hundred or a thousand times. It is this way with all the essential truths.

The most precious goods are not to be sought out, but to be waited for (expectantly). For we cannot find them in our own power, and if we give ourselves to searching for them, we find false goods in their place that we cannot discern as falsities.

The solution to a geometric problem is not in itself a precious gift, but the same law applies to it too because it is an image of a precious gift. Being a small fragment of particular truth, it is a pure image of the unique Truth, eternal and alive—the Truth that once said with a human voice, ‘I am the Truth.’

Thought of this way, every academic exercise resembles a sacrament.

There is a specific way to wait for the truth with desire for each academic exercise, without allowing yourself to search for it—a way to pay attention to the data of a geometric problem without seeking a solution. For a Latin or Greek text, the words just come on their own and place themselves under the pen, while we reject only the inadequate words.

Our first duty towards school children and students is to make this method known to them, not only in general, but also in the particular form that relates to each exercise. This is the duty, not only of the professors, but also of their spiritual guides. And we should put in plain light—in bright light—the analogy between the attitude of the intelligence in each of these exercises and the situation of the soul where, with lamps well stocked with oil, we wait for the Bridegroom with confidence and desire. That each loving adolescent, while working at their Latin translations, wishes to come, through this translation, a little closer to the instant when they will truly be like the slave who, when his master comes to the feast, watches and listens near the door to open it when he knocks. The master then places the slave at the table and he himself serves the slave food to eat.

It is only this waiting—this attention—that can obligate the master to such an excess of tenderness. When the slave has worn himself out with fatigue in the fields, the master on his return says, ‘Prepare my meal and serve me.’ And he treats as useless the slave who does only what is commanded. In the realm of action it is necessary to do all that is commanded, regardless of the price or the degree of the effort, the fatigue and the suffering, for the one who disobeys does not love. But after all of that, one is still only a useless slave. Such obedience is a condition of love, but it is not sufficient. What forces the master to make himself a slave of his slave—to love him—has nothing to do with that. Still less is it the research the slave might have the boldness to undertake on his own initiative. It is uniquely his watching, waiting and attention.

Happy, then, are those who pass their adolescence and their youth solely in forming their power of attention. Without a doubt, they are no closer to goodness than their brothers and sisters who work in the field and factories. They are closer in a different way. Peasants and workers possess this nearness to God, with an incomparable savor, which lies in the depths of poverty, absence of social consideration and long drawn-out suffering. But if we consider these occupations in themselves, studies are closer to God because of this attention that is their soul. Those who pass through years of study without developing this attention in themselves have lost a great treasure.

Love of God in not the only substance of attention. Love of neighbor, which we know is the same love, consists of the same substance. The afflicted have no need of anything else in this world except someone capable of paying attention to them. The capacity to pay attention to an afflicted person is something very rare, very difficult; it is nearly a miracle. It is a miracle. Nearly all those who believe they have this capacity do not. Warmth, movements of the heart, and pity are not sufficient.

In the first legend of the Grail, it is said of the Grail that the miraculous stone (vessel) belongs to whoever is first to say to the guardian of the stone—a king who is three-quarters paralyzed by the most sorrowful wound—'What is your agony?'

The fullness of love for neighbor is simply the capacity to ask the question, 'What is your agony?' It is to know (recognize) that the afflicted exist, not as a unit in a collection, nor as an example of a social category labeled 'the afflicted,' but in all their humanity, exactly like us, who have been stamped and marked by an inimitable mark, by their affliction. For this reason, it is sufficient but also indispensable to know how to look upon them in a certain way.

This look is first of all an attentive look, when the soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being that it is looking at, just as it is, in all its truth. It is only capable of this if it is capable of attention.

Thus it is true, however paradoxical, that Latin translation or a geometric problem, even if we get it wrong—provided only that we have granted an appropriate kind of effort—can make us better able to give an afflicted person—one day, later, if the occasion presents itself, in the moment of supreme distress — exactly the help required to save them.

For an adolescent capable of knowing this truth, and generous enough to desire this fruit in preference to any other, studies would have a fullness in their spiritual effectiveness even outside of any religious belief.

Academic studies are one of the fields that contains a pearl for which it is worth the pain of selling all of one’s goods, without keeping anything to oneself, in order to be able to buy it.

2

The Love of God and Affliction

In the realm of suffering, affliction is a thing apart, specific, irreducible. It is wholly different than simple suffering. Affliction grips the soul and marks it to the depths with a mark belonging only to itself: the mark of slavery. Slavery as it was practiced in ancient Rome is only the most extreme form of affliction. The ancients, who knew this question very well, would say, ‘A man loses half his soul the day he becomes a slave.’

Affliction is inseparable from physical suffering, and yet quite distinct. In suffering, anything not bound to physical agony or something analogous is artificial, imaginary and can be eliminated by a suitable disposition of thought. Even in the absence or death of someone we love, the irreducible part of grief is something like physical agony, difficulty breathing, a vice around the heart, an unappeased need, hunger or the nearly biological disorder caused by a brutal release of energy, until then oriented by an attachment and now without direction. A grief that does not gather around such an irreducible core is simply romanticism or literature. Humiliation is also a violent state of the whole corporal being, which wants to pounce (surge up) under the outrage, but must restrain itself, constrained by impotence or fear.

On the other hand, agony that is only physical is a very small thing and leaves no trace in the soul. Toothaches are an example. A few hours of violent pain caused by bad teeth passes in time, and comes to nothing.

It is otherwise with physical suffering that is very long or very frequent. But such suffering is quite another thing from normal suffering. It is often an affliction.

Affliction is the uprooting of life, a more or less protracted equivalent to death, rendered irresistibly present in the soul by impairment or the immediate apprehension of physical agony. If physical agony is completely absent, there is no affliction to the soul, because our thoughts can still turn towards any other

object. But thoughts flee from affliction as promptly, as irresistibly, as an animal flees death. Only physical agony here below has the properties to chain down our thoughts, a condition that includes with physical agony certain phenomena—difficult to describe, but corporal—that are exactly equivalent to it. Fear of physical agony, notably, is of this kind.

When one's thoughts are constrained by an attack of physical pain, however slight, to recognize the presence of affliction, it produces a state [of mind] just as violent as that of a condemned man who is constrained to look for hours at the guillotine that will cut off his head. Human beings can live twenty years or fifty years in this violent state. We pass beside them without noticing them. What person is able to discern them, if Christ himself does not look through our eyes? We only notice that they behave strangely sometimes, and we reprimand the behaviour.

It is not truly affliction unless an event that grasps a life and uproots it attacks it directly or indirectly in all its parts—social, psychological, physical. The social factor is essential. It is not truly affliction unless we are under some form of social degradation or fear of such degradation.

Like the boiling temperature of water, there is both continuity and separation at the threshold between affliction and all other griefs that, even if they are very violent, very profound and very long lasting, are a different thing than affliction, properly defined. There is a limit beyond which we find affliction and not before. This limit is not purely objective; all sorts of personal factors enter into account. The same event may precipitate affliction in one human being and not another.

The grand enigma of human life is not suffering, but affliction. It is not astonishing that innocents should be killed, tortured, flushed from their countries, reduced to misery or slavery, imprisoned in camps and cells—since we know there are criminals who commit these acts. Neither is it astonishing that sickness imposes long periods of suffering that paralyze life and make it an image of death—since nature is subject to the blind play of mechanical necessity. But it is astonishing that God has given affliction the power to take hold of the very souls of innocents and to seize them as their sovereign master. In the best case, the one marked by affliction only keeps half his soul.

Those to whom one of these blows has happened—after which they struggle on the ground like a half-crushed worm—have no words to express what has happened to them. Among the people they meet, even those who have suffered much, those who have never had contact with affliction (properly defined) have

no idea what it is. It is something specific, irreducible to any other thing, like sounds we cannot explain at all to a deaf-mute. And those who themselves have been mutilated by affliction are in no state to bring help to anyone at all, and nearly incapable of even desiring to help. Thus, compassion for the afflicted is an impossibility. When compassion truly produces itself, it is a miracle more astonishing than walking on water, healing the sick or even the resurrection of the dead.

Affliction constrained Christ to beg to be spared, to seek for consolations from men, to believe his Father had abandoned him. It constrained a just man to cry out against God, a just man as perfect as any human nature can be, perhaps more, if Job is less a historical person than a figure of Christ. ‘He laughs at the affliction of innocents.’ This is not a blasphemy; it is an authentic cry wrenched from anguish. The life of Job, from one end to the other, is a pure marvel of truth and authenticity. On the subject of affliction, anything that differs from this model is more or less stained with falsehood.

Affliction renders God (God seems) absent for a time, more absent than a dead man, more absent that the light in a completely dark cell. A sort of horror submerges the whole soul. During this absence there is nothing to love. What is terrible is that in this darkness when there is nothing to love, if the soul ceases to love, the absence of God becomes definitive. The soul must continue to love in the void—or at least want to love—be it even with an infinitesimal part of itself. Then one day God comes to manifest Himself to them and reveals the beauty of the world, like God did in the case of Job. But if the soul ceases to love, it falls into something here below that is nearly equivalent to hell.

This is why those who precipitate affliction on people who are not prepared to receive it are killing them. On the other hand, in an epoch like ours when affliction is suspended over all of us, bringing help to the soul is only effective to the point of preparing it for affliction. This is no small thing.

Affliction hardens and discourages because it imprints the depths of the soul —like a branding iron—with contempt, disgust and even that repulsion of oneself, that feeling of culpability and defilement, which crime should logically produce but does not. Evil inhabits the soul of a criminal without being felt there. But it is felt in the soul of the innocent afflicted ones. Everything happens as if the state of the soul was, in its essence, that of a criminal—as if the soul had been separated from crime and attached to affliction. And the affliction even seems to be there in proportion to the innocence of the afflicted ones.

If Job cries out his innocence with an accent of despair, it is because he

himself can no longer believe it; within himself, his own soul takes the side of his friends. Job implores the testimony of God himself, because he can no longer hear the testimony of his own conscience; it is no longer anything more than an abstract and dead souvenir (memory).

Humanity has the same carnal nature as animals. Chickens rush to peck an injured chicken. It is a phenomenon as mechanical as gravity. So too, our sensibilities (senses) attach all the contempt, all the repulsion, all the hatred to affliction that our reason attaches to crime. Except for those in whom Christ occupies their whole soul, the whole world, more or less, despises the afflicted even though almost no one is conscious of it.

This law in our sensibilities also applies to ourselves. The contempt, the repulsion, the hatred in the afflicted is turned against themselves, penetrating to the centre of the soul and from there, their poisoned color poisons the whole entire universe. Supernatural love, if it survives, can prevent the second effect produced by it, but not the first. The first is the very essence of affliction; there is no affliction where it does not occur.

‘He was made a curse for us.’ It was not only the body of Christ suspended on wood that was made a curse—it was also true of his whole soul. In the same way, all innocent beings in affliction feel themselves cursed. This remains the case even in those who had once been in affliction and then have been withdrawn from it by a change of fortune, if one was bitten profoundly enough.

Another effect of affliction is to render the soul its accomplice, little by little, injecting the poison of inertia into it. Anyone who has been afflicted long enough becomes an accomplice to his own affliction. This complicity hinders every effort they attempt towards improving their lot; they go to the point of preventing themselves from even searching for a way to be delivered, sometimes even to the point of preventing the desire for deliverance. They are then established in affliction, and such people can even believe they are satisfied. Better still, this complicity can push one to avoid and to flee the means of deliverance; their complicity then veils them under some ridiculous pretexts (excuses). Even in those who have come out of affliction, if they have been permanently bitten to the depths of the soul, something will exist in them, pushing them to precipitate it anew, as if the affliction was installed in them like a parasite directing them to its own ends.

Sometimes this compulsion prevails over every movement of the soul toward happiness. If the affliction ends as a result of some kindness, it can be accompanied by hatred toward the benefactor. This is the reason for certain acts

of apparently inexplicable savage ingratitude. Sometimes it is easy to deliver the afflicted from their present affliction, but it is difficult to liberate them from their past affliction. Only God can do it. Yet the grace of God Himself does not heal the nature of the irredeemably wounded here below. Even the glorified body of Christ bore the wounds.

One can only accept the existence of affliction by considering it from a distance.

God created by love, for love. God created nothing else but love itself and the means of love. God created all the forms of love. God created beings capable of love from all possible distances. God personally crossed the maximum distance, the infinite distance, because no other could do it. This infinite distance between God and God—the supreme tearing, agony that no other has approached, marvel of love—is the crucifixion. Nothing could be further from God than the One who was made a curse.

This tearing apart, through which supreme love is the link of the supreme union, resonates perpetually across the universe to the depths of silence, like two notes separated and merging, like a pure and heartbreaking harmony. This is the Word of God. The whole entire creation is only a vibration. When human music in its greatest purity pierces our souls, this is what we hear through it. When we have learned to hear the silence, this is what we grasp through it even more distinctly.

Someone struck by affliction is at the foot of the Cross, near to the greatest distance possible from God. One must not believe that sin is the greater distance. Sin is not a distance. It is the wrong orientation (direction) of one's gaze.

It is true that there is a mysterious connection between this distance and an original disobedience. From the beginning, we are told, humanity turned its gaze away from God and walked in the wrong direction as far as it could go. It is because they were still able to walk then. As for us, we are nailed in place, free only to direct our gaze, subject to necessity. A blind mechanism, which takes no account of the degree of spiritual perfection, continually tosses people and throws some of them at the foot of the Cross. It depends only on them to keep—or not—their eyes turned towards God through the shaking. It is not that the providence of God is absent. It is by His providence that God willed necessity as a blind mechanism.

If the mechanism were not blind, there would be no affliction. Affliction is before all things anonymous; it deprives those it takes of their personality and makes them into things. It is indifferent, and it is the coldness of this indifference

—a metallic coldness—that freezes all those whom it touches to the very depths of the soul. They never again find warmth. They never again believe that they are somebody.

Affliction would not have this attribute apart from the element of chance it contains. Those who are persecuted for their faith and who know it, although they suffer, are not afflicted. They fall into affliction only if the suffering or the fear occupies their soul to the point of making them forget the cause of the persecution. In the books of the martyrs, those who entered singing into the arena with the beasts were not afflicted. Christ was afflicted. He did not die as a martyr. He died as a common criminal, mixed with thieves, only a little more absurd (ridiculous). For affliction is absurd.

Only blind necessity can hurl humans to the point of extreme distance, all the way to the foot of the Cross. Human crimes—the cause of most afflictions—are part of blind necessity, for criminals do not know what they are doing.

There are two forms of friendship: meeting and separation. They are indissoluble. The two both contain the same good, the unique good: friendship. For when two beings who are not friends are close to each other, there is no meeting. When they are away from each other, there is no separation. Containing the same good, they are equally good.

God produces Himself, God knows Himself perfectly, just as we fabricate and know (poorly) objects outside ourselves. But before all, God is love. Before all, God loves Himself. This love, this friendship in God, is the Trinity. Between the terms united in this relationship of divine love, there is more than proximity, there is infinite proximity, identity. But through the Creation, the Incarnation and the Passion, there is also an infinite distance. The totality of space, the totality of time, interposing their immensity, set an infinite distance between God and God.

Lovers and friends have two desires. One is to love so much that one enters the other to make a single being. The other is to love so much that with half the earthly globe between them, their union would not suffer any diminishment. Everything that we desire vainly here below is perfect and real in God. Those impossible desires are within us as a mark of our destination, and it is good for us when we don’t hope to accomplish them.

Love between God and God, which is itself God, is the link of a double virtue; this link that unites two beings to the point where they are indistinguishable and really are one soul, the link that extends itself across the distance and triumphs over an infinite separation. The unity of God where all plurality disappears, and Christ’s abandonment of belief in being found, yet

without ceasing to perfectly love his Father—these are forms of divine virtue of the same love, which is God Himself.

God is so essentially love that unity, which in a sense is its actual definition, is a simple effect of love. And corresponding to the infinite virtue of unification of this love is the infinite separation over which it triumphs, which is all of creation, spread through the totality of space and time, made of brutally mechanical matter, interposed between Christ and his Father.

As for people, our misery gives us the infinitely precious privilege of having a part in this distance place between the Son and the Father. But this distance is only separation for those who love. For those who love, the separation, although painful, is a good because it is love. Even the distress of Christ's abandonment is a good. There cannot be a greater good for us here below than having a part in this. Here below, God cannot be perfectly present to us because we are flesh. But God can be almost perfectly absent to us in extreme affliction. It is for us on earth the unique (only) possibility of perfection. For this reason, the Cross is our only (unique) hope. 'No forest bears such a tree, with this flower, this foliage, and this fruit.'

This universe where we live, of which we are just a particle, is that distance placed by divine love between God and God. We are a point in that distance. Space, time and the mechanisms that govern matter are that distance. All that we call evil is only that mechanism. God made it so that His grace, when it penetrates to someone's very center and illuminates their whole being, permits that person to walk on water without violating the laws of nature. But when someone turns away from God, they simply give themselves over to gravity. Then they believe they will and choose, but they are only a thing, a falling stone. If we look at this closely, with a truly attentive gaze—at human souls and societies—we see that wherever the virtue of supernatural light is absent, everything obeys mechanical laws as blind and precise as the laws of falling bodies. To know this is beneficial and necessary. Those we call criminals are only tiles detached from a roof by the wind, falling randomly. Their only fault is the initial choice that made them into tiles.

The mechanism of necessity can transpose itself to any level while remaining true to itself. It remains true to itself in brute matter, in plants, in animals, in nations and in souls. Considered from the point of view where we are, according to our perspective, it is quite blind. But if we transport our hearts outside ourselves, outside the universe, outside of space and time, where our Father is, and if we regard (look at) this mechanism, it appears quite different. It would

seem that necessity becomes obedience. Matter is entirely passive and therefore entirely obedient to the will of God. It is a perfect model for us. There can be no beings other than God and those who obey God. By its perfect obedience, matter is worthy of being loved by those who love their Master as a lover tenderly regards a needle that had been handled by the wife he had loved but who has died. The beauty of the world tells us that it merits our love. In the beauty of the world, brute necessity becomes an object of love. Nothing is as beautiful as gravity in the fugitive folds of ocean waves or the nearly eternal folds of the mountains.

The sea is no less beautiful to our eyes just because we know sometimes boats sink. On the contrary, this makes them more beautiful. If the waves modified their movement to save the boats, they would be beings endowed with discernment and choice and not fluid, perfectly obedient to every exterior pressure. This is perfect obedience that is its beauty.

All the horrors produced in this world are like folds imposed upon the waves by gravity. This is why they contain an element of beauty. Sometimes a poem, like *The Iliad*, renders this beauty sensible.

Humankind can never escape obedience to God. A creature cannot help but obey. The only choice offered to humanity as intelligent and free creatures is to desire obedience or not. If we do not desire it, we obey nonetheless—perpetually—in that we are things subject to mechanical necessity. If we do desire it, we remain subject to mechanical necessity, but a new necessity supplements it—a necessity constituted by laws that belong to supernatural things. Certain actions become impossible for us; others are accomplished through us, sometimes nearly in spite of us.

When we feel that we have disobeyed God on some occasion, this means simply that for a time, we ceased to desire obedience. Of course, all things being equal, we cannot perform the same actions when we consent to obedience as when we do not. Like a plant, all things being equal, we do not grow in the same manner when we are in the light as we do in the darkness. The plant exercises no control, no choice in the affair of its own growth. We, though, are like a plant that can choose whether or not to expose itself to the light.

Christ proposes the docility of matter as a model for us by counseling us to look at the lilies of the fields, which neither toil nor spin. They do not, so to speak, propose to themselves to assume this or that color. They do not make a movement of their own will, nor dispose the means of their end (plans); they have received everything natural that necessity has brought them. If they are

infinitely more beautiful to us than rich fabric, it is not because they are richer; it is through their docility. Fabric is docile too, but docile to people, not to God. Matter is not beautiful when it obeys people, but only when it obeys God. If, in a work of art, it sometimes appears nearly as beautiful as the ocean, the mountains or the flowers, it is because the light of God fills the artist. To find beauty in things fabricated by humans who are not illuminated by God, one must understand with one's whole soul that humans themselves are only matter that obey without knowing it. For those who arrive there, absolutely everything here below is perfectly beautiful. In all that exists, in all that is produced, they discern the mechanism of necessity, and they know the infinite sweetness of obedience in necessity. For us, the obedience of things relates to God like the transparency of a windowpane relates to light. When we feel that obedience in our whole being, we see God.

When we hold a newspaper upside down, we see the strange forms of the printed characters. When we turn it upright again, we do not see the characters. We see the words. A passenger in a boat seized by the tempest feels each jolt as an upheaval in his innards. But the captain only knows the complex combination of wind, current and swell with the position of the boat, its form, its sails and its rudder.

In the same way that we learn to read or learn a trade, we must learn to sense in everything, above all and almost only, the obedience of the universe to God. This is truly an apprenticeship. Like an apprenticeship, it demands time and effort. For those who have completed their term, there is no more difference between things, between events, than the difference felt by someone who knows how to read the same phrases reproduced several times, written in red ink, in blue ink or printed with this, that or other characters. Those who don't know how to read only see the differences. For those know how to read, it is all equivalent since the phrase is the same. For the one who achieves apprenticeship, things and events, everywhere and always, are the vibrations of the same, infinitely fresh (sweet) divine word. Sorrow (pain) is the color of certain events. When a phrase is written in red ink, those who know how to read and those who do not both see red; but the color red is not of the same importance for one as it is for the other.

When an apprentice hurts himself or else complains of fatigue, the workers and peasants have a fine saying, 'It is the trade entering into your body.' Each time we suffer pain, we can say to ourselves truthfully that it is the universe, the order of the world, the beauty of the world and the obedience of creation to God

that is entering into our bodies. After that, how can we not bless the Love that gives us this gift with more tender gratitude?

Joy and sorrow are equally precious gifts—one must savor one and the other fully, each in its purity, without seeking to mix them. Through joy, the beauty of the world penetrates into our souls. Through sorrow, it enters us through the body. With only joy, we could no more become friends of God than one could become a captain only by studying navigation manuals. The body is part of every apprenticeship. At the level of physical sensibility (senses), suffering alone grants us contact with the necessity that constitutes the order of the world, because pleasure does not contain the impression of necessity. A higher kind of sensibility is capable of sensing necessity in joy, and this only happens [indirectly] through the intermediary of sensing beauty. For every part of our being to one day become entirely sensitive to this obedience that is the substance of matter—for it to form within us the new sensitivity that permits us to hear how the universe is the vibration of the Word of God—the transformative virtues of suffering and joy are equally indispensable. One must be open to both of them —when one or the other are present—to the very centre of the soul, just as a lover opens the door for messengers from her beloved. Of what importance is it to the lover whether the messengers are polite or brutal, as long as they deliver the message?

But affliction is not suffering. Affliction is quite a different thing than God's teaching methods.

The infinity of space and time separates us from God. How shall we seek for Him? How shall we turn towards Him? Even if we were to walk for centuries, we would accomplish nothing other than circling the world. Even in an airplane, we could not do anything else. We are unable to advance vertically. We cannot make a single step towards heaven. God must traverse the universe and come to us. But in fact, anyone who consents to orient their attention and their love outside the world, toward the reality situated beyond every human faculty, is given to succeed. In that case, sooner or later, a good descends upon them that shines through them onto all that is around them.

Across the infinity of space and time, the infinitely more infinite love of God comes to possess us. God comes in His time (lit. hour). We have the power to consent to welcome God's love or refuse it. If we remain deaf, it returns and returns again like a beggar. But also like a beggar, one day it does not return any more. If we consent, God plants a tiny seed in us and then goes. From that moment, God has nothing to do, and neither do we, except to wait. We must only

not regret the consent we have granted him through our nuptial ‘yes.’ This is not as easy as it seems, for the growth of the seed inside us is painful. Moreover, by virtue of the fact that we have accepted this growth, we cannot avoid the task of destroying whatever would hinder it, pulling up the weeds and cutting the quack grass. Unfortunately, the quack grass is part of our own flesh, so our garden-care is a violent operation. Nevertheless, after all, the seed grows all on its own. The day comes when the soul belongs to God; when it not only consents to love, but when truly, effectively, it is love. It must then take its turn in traversing the universe to go to God. The soul does not love like a creature loves. The love in it is divine, uncreated, for the love of God for God passes through it. God alone is capable of loving God. We can only consent to forfeit our own sentiments to allow the passage of love through our souls. This is what it is to deny oneself. We are created only for this consent.

Divine love traversed the infinity of space and time to come from God to us. But how can love repeat the journey in reverse when it starts from a finite creature? When the seed of divine love deposited within us grows, it becomes a tree. How can we who bear it relate to its origin, reversing the voyage that God made toward us, to traverse the infinite distance?

This seems impossible but there is a way. We know this way well. We know well what this tree that has grown in us is made to resemble, this tree so beautiful, where the birds of the air perch. We know it is the most beautiful of all trees. ‘No forest bears its equal.’ Something still a little more frightful than the gallows, here is the most beautiful of trees. It is the seed of that tree which God planted in us, without letting us know what seed it was. If we had known, we would not have said ‘yes’ in the first moment. It is that tree which has grown in us, which has become impossible to eradicate. Only a betrayal can uproot it.

When we strike the head of a nail with a hammer, all the shock received by the head of the nail passes through to the point in its entirety. If the hammer and the head of the nail were infinitely huge, all of this would still happen in the same way. The point of the nail would transmit an infinite shock through the point to that which it is nailed.

Extreme affliction, which is at the same time physical suffering, distress of the soul and social degradation, constitutes the nail. The point is applied to the very center of the soul. The head of the nail is all of necessity spread across the totality of space and time.

Affliction is a marvel of divine technique. It is a simple and ingenious device that gains entry into the soul of a finite creature with immense force—blind,

brutal and cold. The infinite distance that separates God and the creature gathers entirely everything into one point to pierce the soul at its centre.

Those to whom such things happen have no part in this operation. They struggle like a butterfly pinned live to an album. But they can, through the horrors, continue to love. This is not an impossibility, not an obstacle—one can nearly say not a difficulty. For the greatest suffering, as long as it is short of fainting, cannot touch the point of the soul that consents to a good orientation.

One needs only to know that love is an orientation and not a state of the soul. If we ignore this, we fall into despair at the first onslaught of affliction.

For the one whose soul remains oriented toward God while being pierced by the nail finds himself nailed to the very center of the universe. It is the true center—not in the middle—it is outside space and time, *it is God*. In a dimension that does not belong to space, that is not time, in a completely different dimension, the nail pierces a hole through creation, through the thickness of the veil that separates the soul and God.

In this marvelous dimension, the soul can cross the totality of space and time to come before the very presence of God, without leaving the place or the instant to which the body finds itself linked.

It finds itself at the intersection of the creation and the Creator. This point of intersection is the crossing branches of the Cross

Saint Paul perhaps thought of something like this when he said, ‘Be rooted in love in order to be capable of knowing what is the width, the length, the height and the depth, and that you would know that which passes all knowledge: the love of Christ.

3

Forms of the Implicit Love of God

The commandment to ‘Love God’ implies by its imperative form that it is not merely a matter of the soul’s consent to either grant or refuse God when He comes in person to take the hand of His future spouse, but also to love God prior to this visit. For it is a matter of permanent obligation.

The love beforehand cannot have God as its object, since God is not present and has never yet been present. It therefore has another object. Yet it is destined to become the love of God. One can call this the indirect or implicit love of God.

This is true even when the object of this love bears the name of God. One

could then say either that God’s name is not being applied properly, or that it is only legitimate because of the development that using it will produce.

The implicit love of God can only have three immediate objects, the only three objects here below where God really is, although only secretly present. These objects are religious ceremonies, the beauty of the world and our neighbour. These are the three loves.

To these three loves we should perhaps add friendship. Strictly speaking, it is distinct from love of neighbour.

These indirect loves are exactly one virtue, strictly equivalent. Depending on circumstances, temperament and vocation, one or the other enters the soul first; one or the other dominates through the course of the preparation period. It may not necessarily be the same one throughout the whole length of this period.

It is probable that in the majority of cases, the preparation period does not draw towards its end—the soul is not ready to receive the personal visit of its Master—until it bears within itself all these indirect loves to an elevated degree.

The ensemble of these loves constitutes the love of God under the form most suitable for the preparation period; that is, in a veiled form.

They do not disappear when the love of God in its proper sense arises in the soul. They become infinitely stronger, and all these come together to form only a single love.

But the veiled form of love necessarily precedes this, and often over a very long time. In many it only rules in the soul, maybe even until death. This veiled love can attain very high degrees of purity and power.

At the moment when they touch the soul, each of the forms available to love has the virtue of a sacrament.

Love of Neighbour

Christ indicates this quite clearly for love of neighbour. He said he would thank his benefactors one day when he said, ‘I was hungry and you gave me to eat.’ Who can be the benefactor of Christ if not Christ himself? How can a someone give Christ something to eat if they are not at least for a moment elevated to that state spoken of by St. Paul, where he no longer lives in himself —where Christ alone lives in him?

The Gospel text is only concerned with the question of the presence of Christ in the afflicted. Yet it seems the spiritual dignity (worthiness) of those who receive is of no concern. One must therefore admit that the benefactor himself,

as the bearer of Christ, makes Christ enter into the hungry afflicted ones via the bread he gives them. The other can consent or not to this presence, exactly like those who take communion. If the gift is well given and well received, the passing of the piece of bread from one human to the other is something like true communion.

Christ does not call his benefactors ‘loving’ or ‘charitable.’ He calls them ‘just.’ The Gospel never distinguishes between love of neighbour and justice. In the eyes of the Greeks too, respect for Zeus the supplicant (beggar) was the first duty of justice. We have invented the distinction between justice and charity. It is easy to understand why. Our notion of justice excuses those who possess [wealth] from giving. If they give all the same, they believe they can be content in themselves. They believe they have done a good work. As for those who receive, whether they are excused from all gratitude or compelled to offer lowly thanks depends on how they understand this notion.

Only the absolute identification of justice and love renders possible both compassion and gratitude on one hand, and on the other, respect for the dignity of affliction in the afflicted, for themselves and for others.

One must recognize that no goodness can go further than that of justice without constituting a fault under the false appearance of goodness. But one must thank the just for being just, because justice is such a beautiful thing, just as we thank God because of His great glory. All other gratitude is servile and even animal.

The only difference between those who assist in an act of justice and those who receive material advantage from it is that in such circumstances, the beauty of justice is only a spectacle for the former, while for the latter, it is the object of contact and even like nourishment. So the feeling in the former is simple admiration, but in the second, should be carried to a more elevated degree by the fire of gratitude.

When we have been treated with justice in circumstances where injustice was easily possible, to be without gratitude is to deprive ourselves of the supernatural, sacramental virtue contained in the act of justice.

Nothing permits us to conceive of this virtue better than the doctrine of natural justice, like what is found explained with incomparable intellectual honesty in those marvelous lines by Thucydides.

The Athenians, at war against Sparta, wanted to force the inhabitants of the little Island of Melos—allied with Sparta from all antiquity, and until then remaining neutral—to join with them. The Melians, facing the Athenian

ultimatum, vainly invoked justice, imploring pity for the antiquity of their village. Since they did not want to surrender, the Athenians razed the city, put to death the men and sold all the women and children as slaves.

Thucydides puts the lines in question into the mouths of the Athenians. They commence by saying that they will not try to prove their ultimatum is just.

‘Treat rather what is possible … you know as well as we do that the human spirit is so constituted that what is just is examined only if it is equally necessary to both sides. But if there is a stronger side and a weaker side, what is possible is imposed by the former and accepted by the latter.’

The Melians said that in the case of battle, they would have the gods with them because of the justice of their cause. The Athenians responded by saying they saw no reason to suppose this.

‘With regard to the gods we have belief, and with regard to men, certainty, that by a necessity of nature, each one always commands wherever they have the power to do so. We did not establish this law; we were not the first to apply it. We found it already established. We keep it as something always enduring; this is why we apply it. We know well that you also, like all the others, would act the same way once you have achieved the same degree of power.’

Such lucidity of intelligence in the conception of injustice is the light that comes immediately below that of charity. It is the clarity that sometimes remains where charity once existed but is now extinguished. Below charity is the darkness where the strong believe sincerely that their cause is more just than that of the weak. This is the case with the Romans and the Hebrews.

Possibility and necessity are, in these lines, terms opposed to justice. ‘Possible’ means everything the strong can impose on the weak. It is reasonable to examine how far this possibility goes. If we suppose it to be known, it is certain that the strong will accomplish their will to the extreme limits of possibility. It is a mechanical necessity. Otherwise it would be as if they willed and did not will at the same time. There is a necessity for the strong as well as for the weak.

When two human beings must come together and neither has any power to impose upon the other, they must agree. One must then examine justice, for justice alone has the power to unite two wills. It is the image of this love that in God, the Father and Son unite. And it is the common thought in separate thinkers. But when one is strong and the other weak, there is no need to unite two wills. Everything happens just as when a man handles matter. There are not two wills to unite. The man wills and the matter submits. The weak are like a

thing. There is no difference between throwing a stone to remove an unwelcome dog and saying to a slave, ‘Chase the dog.’

When there is a certain degree of inequality in a relationship of unequal force between people, the weaker one passes into a state of matter and loss of personality. The ancients would say, ‘A man loses half his soul the day when he becomes a slave.’

The even balance—the image of equal relations of strength—has been the symbol of justice from all antiquity, and especially in Egypt. It was perhaps a religious object even before being employed in commerce. Its use in commerce as the image of mutual consent—the very essence of justice as consisting of mutual consent—is found in the legislation of Sparta, and is without a doubt of Aegeo-Cretan origin.

If someone is stronger in a relationship between unequal forces, the supernatural virtue of justice consists of conducting oneself as if there were exact equality—‘exactly’ in every way, including the slightest details of accent and attitude. For a small detail can suffice to demote the weaker into a state of matter that would be natural in this occasion, like the slightest shock can freeze water that has remained in liquid state below zero degrees.

For the inferior who is treated this way, virtue consists in not believing there truly is an equality of strength—in recognizing that the only cause of this treatment is the generosity of the other. This is what we call gratitude. For the inferior treated in a different way, the supernatural virtue of justice consists in understanding that the treatment to which it submits is, on the one hand, different than justice, but on the other hand also conforms to necessity and to the mechanism of human nature. That person must avoid either submission or revolt.

Those who treat as equal those whose relative strength is far below their own truly give them a gift of the quality of human beings that fate deprived them. As far as it is possible in a creature, they reproduce for them the original generosity of the Creator.

This virtue is the Christian virtue par excellence. This is also what is expressed in the Egyptian ‘Book of the Dead’ in words as sublime even as those in the Gospel: ‘I have not made anyone cry. I have never made my voice haughty. I have never caused anyone to be afraid. I have never been deaf to words of justice and truth.’

Gratitude in the afflicted, when pure, is participation in this same virtue, for only the one capable of it can recognize it. Others experience the results without recognizing it.

Such a virtue is identical to real faith-in-action in the true God. The Athenians of Thucydides thought that divinity, like humanity in its natural state, commands to the extreme limits of possibility.

The true God is the God we conceive as all-powerful, but Who nevertheless does not command it where He has the power, for God is found only in the heavens or here below in secret.

Those Athenians who massacred the Melians had no idea of such a God.

The first proof of their error—contrary to their affirmation, though extremely rare—is that through pure generosity, it happens that people can abstain from commanding where they have the power to do so. What is possible for man is possible for God.

One can contest the examples. But it is certain that in such-and-such an example, if one can prove it was solely through generosity, that generosity will generally be admired. All that we are capable of admiring is possible for God.

The spectacle of this world is another proof, even more sure. Pure goodness is not found in any part of it. Either God is not all-powerful, or God is not absolutely good, or God does not command wherever He has the power to do so.

So the existence of evil here below, far from being a proof against the reality of God, is what reveals Him to us in truth.

Creation is, on God's part, not an act of self-expansion, but a retreat, a renunciation. God and all his creatures are less than God alone. God accepted this diminishment. God emptied Himself of part of His being. God emptied Himself in the act of His divinity. This is why St. John says, 'The Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world.' God permitted things to exist other than Himself and worth infinitely less than Himself. By the act of creation, God denied himself, just as Christ told us to deny ourselves. God denied Himself in our favour to give us the possibility of denying ourselves for Him. This response, this echo, subject to our refusal, is the only possible justification for the folly of love in the act of creation.

Religions with this conception of renunciation, this voluntary distance, this voluntary effacement of God, His apparent absence and His secret presence here below … these religions are the true religion, translations of the Great Revelation into different languages. Religions that represent divinity as commanding wherever it has the power to do so are false. Even if they are monotheistic, they are idolatries.

One who, after being reduced by affliction to the state of an inert and passive thing, returns at least for a time to a human state through the generosity of others

—who accepts and feels the true essence of this generosity—in that instant receives a soul issuing exclusively from charity. That person is born from on high of water and the Spirit. The word in the Gospel, *anothen,* signifies ‘on high’ more often than ‘anew.’ Treating the afflicted neighbour with love is something like baptizing them.

Those from whom an act of generosity comes only act as they do if they are transported by their thoughts into the other. In that moment, they are also composed solely of water and the Spirit.

Generosity and compassion are inseparables both modeled in God, namely, in creation and the Passion.

Christ taught us that supernatural love of neighbour is an exchange of compassion and gratitude that occurs in a flash between two beings—one who has been provided with human personality and the other deprived of it. One of the two is just a piece of naked flesh, inert and bloody, on the edge of a pit, without a name, whose personality is unknown. Passers-by barely perceive this thing and a few minutes later do not even remember what they have seen. Only one stops and pays attention to him. The acts that follow are only the automatic effects of this moment of attention. This attention is creative. But the moment of this engagement is a renunciation, at least if it is pure. We accept a diminishment when we focus ourselves on dispensing energy that does not extend our own power—that will only give existence to a being other than ourselves, one independent of us. Moreover, to want the existence of the other is to transport oneself into them by sympathy, and therefore, to take part in a state of inert matter where we find it.

This operation is as equally contrary to the nature of someone who hasn’t known affliction and ignores what it is, as it is in someone who has known or approached affliction and been filled with horror.

It is not astonishing when someone who has bread would give a morsel of it to a hungry person. What is astonishing is when we are able to do so with a different gesture than we use when buying an object. Almsgiving, when it is not supernatural, seems like a sort of purchase. It buys the afflicted.

Whatever we may want, in crime or in the highest of virtues, in miniscule troubles or in grand designs, the essence of our desire consists always in this: that first of all, we want to exercise our will freely. Wanting the existence of this faculty of free consent for another person—someone who has been deprived of it by affliction—is to transport oneself into the other. It is to consent to being afflicted, so to speak, to the destruction of oneself. It is to deny yourself. In

denying ourselves, we become capable under God to affirm the other by creative affirmation. We give ourselves as a ransom for the other. It is an act of redemption.

The sympathy of the weak for the strong is natural, for the weak acquire a strong imagination by transporting themselves into the other. The sympathy of the strong for the weak, being an inverse operation, is contrary to nature.

This is why the sympathy of the weak for the strong is pure only if its unique object is the sympathy of the other for them, in the case where the other is truly generous. It is supernatural gratitude to them which consists of being happy to be the object of supernatural compassion. It allows pride (self-respect) to remain absolutely intact. The conservation of true self-respect in the afflicted is also a supernatural thing. Pure gratitude, like pure compassion, is essentially consent to affliction. The afflicted and their benefactors, between whom the diversity of their fortunes place an infinite distance, are united by consent. There is a friendship between them, in the sense of the Pythagoreans, of miraculous harmony and equality.

At the same time, both of them recognize with their whole souls that it is better not to command everywhere that one has the power to do so. If this thought occupies the whole soul and governs the imagination, which is the source of our actions, it constitutes the true faith. For it places the Good outside of the world, where all the sources of power are, and it recognizes the Good as the model for the secret point found at the center of human personhood which is the principle of renunciation.

Even in art and science, if the production of the second order—brilliant or mediocre—is an extension of the self, the production of the first order, creation, is a renunciation of the self. One cannot discern this truth because glory (fame) confuses and obscures, by its own glow, the productions of the first order with the most brilliant of the second order, often giving the advantage to the latter.

Love of neighbour, being constituted of creative attention, is analogous to genius.

Creative attention consists of giving real attention to what does not exist. Humanity does not exist in the anonymous, inert body on the side of the road. Nevertheless, the Samaritan who stops and looks gives attention to this absent humanity, and the acts that follow testify that it is a matter of real attention.

The faith, said St. Paul, is the vision of invisible things. In the moment of attention, faith is present as well as love.

In the same way, a man entirely at the disposal of others does not exist. A

slave does not exist, not in the eyes of the master, or in his own eyes. The black slaves of America, when they injured their hand or their foot accidentally, said, ‘It is nothing. It is the master’s foot; it is the master’s hand.’ Someone entirely deprived of goods, whatever they may be, around which social consideration crystallizes, does not exist. A popular Spanish hymn says in words of marvelous truth, ‘If anyone wants to make themselves invisible, there is no better way than to become poor.’ Love sees the invisible.

God thought that which was not, and by the fact of that thought, brought it into being. In each instant, we exist solely by the fact that God consented to think our existence, although in reality we do not exist. At least that is how we represent creation to ourselves—humanly and therefore falsely—but this imagery contains some truth. God alone has the power to really think what is not. Only God present in us can really think human quality into the afflicted, to truly look with a different look than we grant to objects, truly listening to their voice as one listens to words. They then perceive that they have a voice. Otherwise, they would not have occasion to become aware of it.

Just as it is difficult to truly listen to the afflicted, so it is difficult for them to know that they are only listened to by compassion.

Love of neighbour is the love that descends from God toward humanity. It is prior to that which rises from humanity to God. God hastens to descend to the afflicted. As long as a soul is ready to consent, be it the least, the most miserable, the most deformed, God hastens into them in order to look at and listen to the afflicted through them. Only with time do they become aware of this presence. Even if they don’t find a name to give Him, where the afflicted are loved for themselves, God is present.

God is not present, even when invoked, where the afflicted are simply an occasion for doing good, even if they are loved on this account. For then they are in their natural role, in their role as matter, as things. They are loved impersonally. And we must bear a personal love to them in their inert anonymous state.

This is why expressions like ‘love of neighbour in God, for God,’ are misleading and equivocal. No one, for all their power of attention, is capable of simply looking at this little inert body, without clothes, on the side of the road. This is not the moment to turn our thoughts to God. As there are moments where we must think on God and forget all creatures without exception, there are moments when looking at creatures, we must not think explicitly about the Creator. In those moments, the presence of God in us has as its condition a secret

so profound that it would be a secret even to us. There are moments when thinking about God separates us from Him. Modesty is the condition of nuptial union.

In true love, it is not who loves the afflicted in God; it is God in us who loves the afflicted. When we are in affliction, it is God in us who loves those who wish us well. Compassion and gratitude descend from God, and when they are exchanged with a look, God is present at the point where the looks meet. The afflicted and the other love each other from God, through God, but not for the love of God. They love each other for the love of the other. It is something impossible. That is why it is only an operation of God.

Christ will not thank those who give bread to the afflicted and hungry for the love of God. They have already had their reward in this thought alone. Christ thanks those who did not know to whom they gave to eat.

Moreover, giving is only one of two possible forms of loving the afflicted. Power is always power to do good or to do harm. In a relationship of very unequal strengths, the stronger can be just toward the weak either by doing them good with justice, or in doing them harm with justice. In the first case, there is charity and in the second case, there is chastisement.

Just chastisement, like just charity, includes the real presence of God and constitutes something like a sacrament. This also is indicated clearly in the Gospel. It is expressed in the words, ‘He who is without sin, throw the first stone at her.’ Christ alone is without sin.

Christ saved the adulterous woman. The function of chastisement was not suitable for the earthly existence that terminated on the cross. But he did not prescribe the abolition of penal justice. He permitted the continuation of stone-throwing. Yet where someone does it justly, it is therefore he who throws the first stone. And just as he resides in the afflicted hungry whom the just man feeds, he resides in the afflicted condemned whom the just one punishes. He did not say so, but he has indicated this sufficiently by dying as a common criminal. He is the divine model of a convict. Just as the young workers in the JOC [*Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne* – Young Catholic Workers] thrill themselves with the idea that Christ has been one of them, the convicts can legitimately taste the same intoxication. One needs only to tell them as one tells the workers. In a sense, Christ is as close to them as he is to the martyrs.

The stone that kills and the piece of bread that feeds have exactly the same virtue if Christ is present from the point of departure to the point of arrival. The gift of life and the gift of death are equivalents.

According to Hindu tradition, King Rama, an incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, in order to avoid a scandal among his people, with extreme regret had to kill a man of the lower class who, contrary to the law, delivered himself to the exercises of religious asceticism. The king himself went to find him and killed him with a stroke of his sword. Immediately after that, the soul of the dead man appeared to him and fell at his feet, thanking him for the degree of glory that had been conferred on him by contact with the blessed sword. Such an execution, although quite unjust in one sense, but legal and accomplished by the very hand of God, had all the virtue of a sacrament.

The legal character of chastisement has no true significance if nothing religious is conferred to it, if one makes no sacramental analogy for it. And therefore, all the penal functions (offices), from that of the judge to the executioner to the prison guard, should participate in some manner of the priesthood.

Justice defines itself in chastisement in the same manner as in charity. It consists of paying attention to the afflicted as beings and not as things, desiring to preserve the faculty of free consent within them.

People believe they despise the crime but in reality, they despise the weakness of the affliction. Beings in whom both are combined abandon themselves to the contempt of affliction under the pretext of despising crime. They are thus the objects of greatest contempt. Contempt is contrary to attention. The only exception is if a crime has been committed which for some reason has prestige, as is often the case in murder because of the temporary power it implies, or crimes that do not vividly provoke those who believe in the notion of guilt. Theft is the crime most devoid of prestige and causes the most indignation because property is attached to it more generally and more powerfully. This even appears in the penal code.

There is nothing lower than a human being enveloped in the appearance of guilt—true or false—finding himself entirely at the discretion of a few people who decide his fate in a few words. They do not pay attention to him. Also, from the moment someone falls into the hands of penal machinery to the moment when they come out—and those called ‘convicts,’ as also with prostitutes, who nearly never get out until their death—they are never an object of attention. Everything combines—to the smallest detail, down to the inflection of voice—to make them a vile thing in the eyes of all and in their own eyes, an object for disposal. The brutality and the flippancy, the terms of scorn and the jokes, the manner of speech, the manner of hearing and not hearing: all are equally

effective.

There is no intended meanness in it at all. It is the automatic effect of a professional life that has crime for its object, viewed in the form of affliction. That is, in that form where horror and defilement are exposed in all their nakedness. One such contact, uninterrupted, necessarily contaminates, and the form of this contamination is contempt. This contempt pours down onto each of the accused. The penal apparatus is like a transmitter that pours onto each of the accused the entire quantity of defilement contained in the totality of environments where crime-as-affliction dwells. Mere contact with the penal apparatus causes a kind of horror directly proportional to the innocence of the part of the soul that remains intact. Those who are totally decayed suffer no damage and experience no suffering.

It cannot be otherwise, if there is not something to purify the defilement between the penal apparatus and the crime. That something can only be God. Only infinite purity remains uncontaminated by contact with evil. All finite purity itself becomes defiled through prolonged contact. No matter how one reforms the [penal] code, chastisement cannot be humane if it does not pass through Christ.

The degree of severity of the punishment is not what is most important. Under current conditions, a condemned man, though guilty and subject to a relatively mild punishment in view of his crime, can legitimately be regarded as having been a victim of cruel injustice. What is important is that the punishment should be legitimate, that is, directly from the law; that the law should be recognized as having a divine character, not by its content, but as the law; that every organization of penal justice has as its end, obtaining attention and respect for the accused from the magistrates and their aides, due from everyone who finds anyone at their discretion; and from the accused, consent to the punishment inflicted. The innocent Christ gave us a perfect model of this consent.

Being sentenced to death for a minor offence, inflicted in this way, would be less horrible than a sentence of six months in prison as it is today. Nothing is more awful than the spectacle, so frequent, of an accused person who has nothing, with no resources in this world except his words, but incapable in his manner of speech because of his social origins and his lack of culture, worn out by guilt, affliction and fear, stammering before some judge who does not listen and who interrupts him by the ostentatious language of the refined.

As long as there is affliction in social life, as long as legal and private charity and chastisement shall be inevitable, the separation between civil institutions and

religious life will be a crime. The secular idea, taken in itself, is entirely false. It is only legitimate as a reaction contrary to totalitarian religion. In that case, we must confess that it is partly legitimate.

In order to be present everywhere—as it should be—religion must not only not be totalitarian, but should limit itself strictly to the plane of supernatural love that is alone fitting to it. If it did, it would penetrate everything. The Bible says, ‘Wisdom penetrates everywhere because of its perfect purity.’

By the absence of Christ, ‘begging’ (in the broadest sense) and penal action are perhaps the most awful things that we have on earth, two things nearly infernal. They have the very color of hell. We can include prostitution with them, which is to true marriage what charity and chastisement without love are to just charity and chastisement.

Humanity has received the power to do good or evil, not only to the body, but to the soul of his fellows; to the whole soul of those in whom God is not present; and to every part of the soul that is not inhabited by God in them. People may be inhabited by God—whether they give gifts or punish—or by the power of evil, or simply by the mechanism of the flesh. Whatever they carry inside enters into the soul of the other through bread or the iron of the sword. In substance, bread and iron are virgin, empty of good or evil, capable of transmitting one or the other indifferently. Those whom affliction constrains to receive bread or suffer the sword have their souls exposed naked and without defence to both good and evil.

There is only one way to receive nothing but good. It is to know, not abstractly but with one’s whole soul, that those who are not animated by pure charity are cogs in the order of the world, just like inert matter. Therefore, we can see that everything comes directly from God, whether through the love of another person, or through the inertness of tangible or psychic matter, through the spirit and the water. Everything that increases our vital energy is like the bread for which Christ thanks the just. All the blows, wounds and mutilations are like a stone launched at us by the very hand of Christ. Bread and stone come from Christ and penetrate to our being, causing Christ to enter us. Bread and stone are love. We must eat the bread and offer ourselves to the stone in a manner that drives them into our body as far as possible. If we have armor capable of protecting our soul against the stone launched at us by Christ, we must remove it and cast it away.

Love of the Order of the World

Love of the order of the world—the beauty of the world—is thus the complement to the love of neighbour.

It proceeds from the same renunciation, the image of God's creative renunciation. God made this universe to exist, consenting not to command it, though God had the power. God allowed to reign in His place, on one hand, mechanical necessity attached to matter, including the psychic matter of the soul, and on the other hand, the essential autonomy of rational persons.

Through love of neighbour, we imitate the divine love that created us and our fellows. Through love of the order of the world, we imitate the divine love that created this universe of which we are a part.

We do not have to renounce the command of matter and of souls, since we do not possess that power. But God confers to us an imaginary image of power, an imaginary divinity, so that we also, although being creatures, can empty ourselves of our divinity.

Just as God, being outside the universe, is at the same time really at its center, in the same way all humans imagine themselves to be situated at the center of the world. This illusion of perspective situates us in the center of space; a similar illusion falsifies the sense of time in us; and again another similar illusion arranges the whole hierarchy of values around us. This illusion even extends to our sense of existence, because of the intimate connection between the sense of value and the sense of being within us. Being seems less and less concentrated the further it is from us.

We demote the spatial form of this illusion [that we are the centre] to the rank of misleading imagination. We are obliged to do so; otherwise we would never perceive a single object. We could not even direct ourselves to know how to take a single step in a conscious manner. God thus provides us with a model of operation that can transform the whole soul. Just as we all learn as children to lower and suppress this illusion in the sense of space, we must do so with regard to time, to values and to being. Otherwise, under all these aspects except for space, we would be incapable of discerning a single object or directing a single step.

We live in unreality, in dreams. To renounce our imaginary position at the center, to renounce it not only with our intelligence, but also in the imaginative part of the soul, is to awaken to reality, to eternity, to see the true light, to hear the true silence. A transformation thus occurs at the very roots of our senses, in our immediate way of receiving sensory perceptions and psychological

impressions. It is a transformation analogous to that produced at dusk, when we think we perceive a man squatting by the road and then suddenly we discern it is a tree; or when having thought we heard a whisper, we discerned the rustling of leaves. We saw the same colors, heard the same sounds, but not in the same way.

To void ourselves of false divinity—to deny ourselves, to renounce imagining that we are at the centre of the world, to discern all points in the world as being centers equally and the true center as being outside the world—is to consent to the rule of mechanical necessity in matter and of free choice at the center of each soul. This consent is love. The face of this love, turned towards thinking persons, is love of neighbour; turned toward matter it is love of the order of the world, or love of the beauty of the world, which is the same thing.

In antiquity, love of the beauty of the world held a very great place in people's thoughts and enveloped their entire lives with marvelous poetry. It was this way with all peoples, in China, in India, in Greece. Greek Stoicism—something marvelous, to which primitive Christianity was infinitely close, especially in the thoughts of St. John—was almost exclusively about love of the beauty of the world. As for Israel, certain places in the Old Testament—in the Psalms, in the book of Job, in Isaiah, in the wisdom books—contain an incomparable expression of the beauty of the world.

The example of St. Francis shows the place beauty of the world can have in Christian thought. Not only was his poetry perfect; his whole life was perfect poetry in action. For example, his choice of sites for solitary retreats or for the foundation of convents was itself poetry in him. He stripped himself naked to be in immediate contact with the beauty of the world.

We also find some beautiful verses on the beauty of the world in St. John of the Cross. But in a general way—making suitable reservations for unknown or little known treasures about forgotten things from the Middle Ages, perhaps buried—we can say the beauty of the world is nearly absent in the Christian tradition. This is a terrible omission. How can Christianity claim the right to call itself catholic if the universe itself is absent within it?

True, there is little mentioned of the beauty of the world in the Gospel. But in a text so short that, as Saint John says, it is far from containing all the teachings of Christ, the disciples are without a doubt judging it unnecessary to write about a sentiment accepted so widely.

It is, however, discussed twice. Once, Christ prescribes the contemplation and imitation of the flowers and birds for their indifference to the future, for their docility to destiny. Another time, he tells us to contemplate and imitate the

indiscriminate distribution of rain and sunlight.

The Renaissance thought it would renew its spiritual link with antiquity by passing over Christianity, but it barely drew anything from antiquity except for secondary products of its inspiration—the art, the science and the curiosity regarding human things. It barely scratched the surface of its central inspiration. It could not retrieve contact with the beauty of the world.

In the eleventh and twelfth-centuries, there was the beginning of a renaissance that would have been true if it had been able to bear fruit. It began to germinate, notably in Langeudoc. Certain lines of the troubadours' poetry on springtime are thought to be of Christian inspiration and love of the beauty of the world perhaps would not have been separate from it. Moreover, the Occitanean spirit left its mark in Italy and was perhaps not unrelated to Franciscan inspiration. But, whether by coincidence or more probably through the connection of cause and effect, these seeds did not survive the war of the Albigenses except in vestigial traces.

Today, one could believe that the white race has nearly lost its sensitivity to the beauty of the world, and that it took upon itself the task of making it disappear in every continent where they took their armies, their commerce and their religion. As Christ said to the Pharisees, 'Woe to you! You have removed the key of knowledge; you have not entered and you have not allowed others to enter.'

Yet in our epoch, in the nations of the white race, the beauty of the world is nearly the only way we can allow God to penetrate us. For we are even further removed from the other two ways. True love and respect for religious practice is rare, even in those who are diligent, and is almost never found in the rest. Most cannot even conceive of the possibility. Concerning the supernatural use of affliction, compassion and gratitude are not only rare, but have become almost unintelligible today for nearly everyone. The very idea has nearly disappeared; the significance of the words has become debased.

Instead of a sense of beauty, something mutilated, deformed and irreducibly defiled resides in the human heart as a powerful motivation. It is present in all the preoccupations of secular life. If it were made authentic and pure, it would transport the whole of secular life to the feet of God, and would make the total incarnation of the faith possible.

Moreover, in a general way, the beauty of the world is the most common, easiest and more natural way.

Just as God hastens into every soul that is even slightly open to loving and

serving the afflicted, in the same way, God hastens to love and admire the sensible beauty of His own creation.

But the reverse is truer yet. The natural inclination of the soul to love beauty is the trap God most frequently uses to open it and to breathe on it from high.

It was the trap that took Cora. The scent of the narcissus made all of heaven smile from on high, and the entire earth, and all of the swelling seas. The poor young girl had hardly stretched out her hand when she was caught in the trap. She fell into the hands of the living God. When she escaped, she had eaten the grain of a pomegranate that bound her forever. She was no longer a virgin; she was the spouse of God.

The beauty of the world is the mouth of the labyrinth. Having entered, the unwary ones take a few steps and in a little while are unable to find the opening again. Exhausted, without anything to eat or to drink, in the dark, separated from kin, from everything they love, from everything they know, they walk without any knowledge, any experience, incapable of even discovering whether they are truly walking or just turning around in one place. But this affliction is nothing compared to the danger that menaces them. For if they do not lose courage, they will continue walking, and it is completely certain that they will finally arrive at the centre of the labyrinth. And there, God is waiting to eat them! Later they will emerge, changed. Having been eaten and digested by God they become ‘other.’ After that they will be held at the opening of the labyrinth, gently pushing in others who approach.

The beauty of the world cannot be attributed to matter itself. It is a relationship of the world to our senses—those senses that come from the structures of our bodies and our souls. The ‘Micromegas’ of Voltaire—a thinking infusorian organism [an alien], could never access that beauty with which we feed ourselves in the universe. In a case where such beings did exist, we would need to have faith that the world would also be beautiful for them, but it would be a different beauty. Anyway, one must have faith that the universe is beautiful on every scale; and more generally, that there is a plenitude of beauty relative to the physical and psychic structure of every thinking being that exists—and in fact, of all possible thinking beings. It is this same concordance (agreement) of an infinity of perfect beauties that gives the beauty of the world a transcendent character. Nevertheless, what we experience of this beauty was destined for our human senses.

The beauty of the world is the cooperation of divine wisdom and creation. ‘Zeus made all things,’ said the Delphic oracle, ‘and Baccus perfected them.’

This perfecting is the creation of beauty. God created the universe and his Son, our First-born brother, created beauty for us. The beauty of the world is the tender smile of Christ to us through matter. He is really present in universal beauty. Love of this beauty proceeds from God and descends into our souls and goes out to God present in the universe. It too is something like a sacrament.

Such is the only universal beauty. Aside from God, only the whole universe in its entirety can properly be called beautiful. All that is in the universe and less than the universe can be called beautiful only by extending this word beyond its strict significance to those things that are indirectly part of beauty, that are imitations.

All this secondary beauty is infinitely valuable as an overture to universal beauty. But if one stops there, they are, on the contrary, veils. They are then corruptions. Everything contains this temptation, more or less, but to very different degrees.

There are a number of seductive factors entirely foreign to beauty, but through lack of discernment they are called beautiful because of where they reside. They attract love by fraud, since everyone calls whatever they love ‘beautiful.’ Everyone—even the most ignorant, even the most vile—knows that beauty alone has a right to our love. The most truly great know this too. No one is beneath beauty. The words that express beauty are not above coming to the lips of all who want to praise that which they love. Only a few know, more or less, how to discern it well.

Beauty is the only finality here below. As Kant said very well, it is a finality that contains no end (objective). A beautiful thing contains nothing good except itself in its totality, as it appears to us. We approach it without knowing what to ask of it. It offers us its own existence. We desire no other thing, we possess it, and yet we still desire it. We are entirely ignorant of what it is. We want to get behind the beauty, but it is only a surface. It is like a mirror that reflects to us our own desire for good. It is a sphinx, an enigma, a sorrowfully irritating mystery. We want to feed on it, but it is only an object we can look on; it appears to us from a certain distance. The great sorrow of human life is knowing that to look and to eat are two different operations. Only on the other side of heaven, where God lives, are they one and the same operation. Children already experience this sorrow when they look at a cake for a long time and nearly regret eating it, but are powerless to help themselves. Maybe the vices, depravities and crimes are nearly always or even always in their essence attempts to eat beauty, to eat what one can only look at. Eve initiated this. If she lost our humanity by eating a fruit,

the reverse attitude—looking at a fruit without eating it—must be what saves. ‘Two winged companions,’ says an Upinshad, ‘two birds on one tree branch. The one eats the fruit, the other looks at it.’ The two birds are two parts of our soul.

Because beauty contains no end, it contains its unique finality here below. For here below there are no ends. Everything we take for ends are actually means. This is a self-evident truth. Money is a means to purchasing, power is a means to commanding. This is obviously true, more or less, for everything we call ‘good.’

Beauty alone is not a means to something else. Beauty alone is good in itself, without our finding any other good in it. It seems itself to be a promise and not a good. But it only gives itself; it gives no other thing.

Nevertheless, just as it is a unique finality, beauty is also present in every human pursuit. Although every pursuit is only a means, since all that exists here below is only a means, beauty gives our pursuits a radiance that colors them with finality. Otherwise we would have no desire for beauty, and by consequence, no energy to pursue it.

For misers of the genre of Harpagon, all the beauty in the world is contained in gold. And gold is truly a pure and brilliant substance, a thing of beauty. The disappearance of gold as money seems to have also caused a disappearance of this type of avarice. Today, those who amass without dispensing are in search of power.

Most who search for riches attach the thought of luxury to it. Luxury is the finality of riches. And luxury is beauty itself for a certain class of people. It creates an environment (lit. entourage) in which it can only vaguely sense the universe is beautiful. Likewise, St. Francis needed to become a vagabond and beggar in order to sense that the world is beautiful. Both would be equally legitimate if in each case, the beauty of the world was also experienced in a direct, pure and complete manner. But happily, God desired that it should not be that way. Poverty is a privilege. It is a providential disposition without which love of the beauty of the world could easily contradict love of neighbour. Nevertheless, the horror of poverty—and every reduction of riches or even their non-increase—may be felt, since poverty is essentially the horror of ugliness. The soul prevented by circumstances from sensing the beauty of the world—even in confusion, even through deception—is invaded to its very core by a kind of horror.

The love of power amounts to a desire to establish an order among the people and things around us, whether great or small, and this desire is the result

of a sense of beauty. In this case, as in the case of luxury, it acts to create a certain finite environment. But desire continually increases for an arrangement that gives the impression of universal beauty. Dissatisfaction and desire increase precisely because what we desire is contact with universal beauty, while the environment we organize is not the universe. It is not the universe; it hides the universe. The universe all around us is like the décor of a theatre.

Valery, in the poem entitled *Semiramis*, does very well to sense the link between the exercise of tyranny and the love of beauty. Louis XIV, apart from the war—the instrument for increasing power—was only interested in feasts and architecture. Moreover, war itself, especially such as it was in former days, touches people with a sense of beauty in a lively and poignant manner.

Art is an attempt to transport an image of the infinite beauty of the entire universe into a finite quantity of matter modeled by humans. If the attempt is successful, that portion of matter should not hide the universe, but on the contrary, reveal reality all around.

Works of art that are neither just and pure reflections of the beauty of the world, nor direct openings onto it, are not properly called beautiful. They are not of the first order. Their authors can have a lot of talent, but are not authentic geniuses. This is the case with a lot of works of art, even the most celebrated and most praised. Every true artist has had a real, direct, immediate contact with the beauty of the world—contact something like a sacrament. God has inspired every work of art of the first order, though the subject may be very (a thousand times) secular. God has not inspired any of the others. Out of revenge, the light of beauty that covers the others may be a diabolical light.

The object of science is the study and theoretical reconstruction of the order of the world—the order of the world relative to the mental, psychic and bodily structure of man. Contrary to the naïve illusions of certain scholars, neither the use of telescopes and microscopes, nor the use of the most singular algebraic formulas, nor even the contempt of the principle of non-contradiction, permits an escape from this structure. It is not otherwise desirable. The object of science is the presence of Wisdom in the universe of which we are brothers, the presence of Christ through the matter that constitutes the world.

We reconstruct for ourselves the order of the world in an image, starting from given limits, numerable, strictly defined. We establish links for ourselves and conceive relationships between abstract terms that are manageable for us. Thus we can contemplate in an image—its very existence suspended in the act of our attention—the necessity that is the very substance of the universe but which,

as such, only manifests itself to us by its blows.

One cannot contemplate without some kind of love. The contemplation of this image of the order of the world constitutes a certain contact with the beauty of the world. The beauty of the world is the order of the world loved.

Physical work constitutes a specific contact with the beauty of the world and in the best moments can even be a contact of such fullness that no equivalent is to be found elsewhere. The artist, the scholar, the thinker and the contemplative should admire the reality of the universe and pierce through the film of unreality that veils it and makes it a dream or a theatre set for nearly all humans, in nearly every moment of their lives. Those whose limbs have been broken by the effort of a day of work, where they are subject to matter, bear in their bodies the reality of the universe like a thorn. The difficulty for them is to look and to love. If they arrive there (accomplish this), they love the Real.

This is the immense privilege that God has reserved for His poor. But they hardly know it at all. No one says so to them. The excessive fatigue, the nagging worry about money and the lack of true culture prevent them from seeing it. A minor change in their condition would be sufficient to open access to a treasure for them. It is heartbreaking to see how easy it would be in a good many cases for men to procure a treasure for their fellows, and how they let centuries pass without taking the trouble to do so.

In epochs when there had been a popular civilization, from which we now collect the crumbs like museum pieces under the name ‘folklore,’ without a doubt people had access to this treasure. Mythology, which is a close relative of folklore, is also a testimony of this, if one can decipher the poetry.

Carnal love in all its forms, from the highest—true marriage or platonic love—to the most base, down to debauchery, has the beauty of the world for its object. Love that gives itself to the spectacle of the heavens, the plains, the sea, the mountains or the silence of nature senses this love in a thousand faint sounds, breaths of wind and the warmth of the sun. Every human being feels it vaguely for at least a moment. It is an incomplete love, sorrowful, because it gives itself to something incapable of response, which is matter. People desire to transfer this love onto a being that is like it, capable of responding to love, of saying ‘yes,’ of yielding to it. The feeling of beauty sometimes linked to the appearance of a human being makes this transfer possible at least in an illusory way. But it is the beauty of the world—the universal beauty—toward which our desire leads.

This kind of transfer is expressed in all literature that encompasses love, from the most ancient and most used metaphors and similes of poetry to the

subtle analysis of Proust.

The desire to love the beauty of the world in a human being is essentially the desire for the Incarnation. If we think it is something else, we are mistaken. The Incarnation alone can satisfy it. It is also wrong to reproach those mystics who sometimes employ the language of lovers. They are the legitimate owners. The others are only right to borrow it.

If carnal love at every level goes, more or less, towards beauty, and the exceptions are only apparent, it is because beauty in a human being does something in the imagination equivalent to the order of the world.

Because of this, sin in this domain is grave. It constitutes an offence to God due to the fact that the soul is unconsciously in the process of searching for God. Moreover, it brings everything back to a single thing: wanting, more or less, to dispense with consent. Wanting to dispense with it entirely is the most frightening of all human crimes. What could be more horrible than disrespect for the consent of a being in whom one is searching, although without knowing it, for an equivalent of God?

It is still a crime, though less grave, to be content with consent issuing from a base or superficial region of the soul. Whether or not there has been a carnal union, the exchange of love is illegitimate if one or the other's consent does not proceed from the central point of the soul where the 'yes' can only be eternal. The obligation of marriage, which is now so often regarded as a simple social convention, is written into the very nature of human thought by the affinity between carnal love and beauty. Everything that has some relationship to beauty should be exempted (unaffected) by the passage of time. Beauty is eternity here below.

It is not astonishing that when facing temptation, people often have a feeling of the absolute that infinitely surpasses them, which they cannot resist. The absolute is indeed there. But we err in believing that it resides in pleasure.

The error caused by this transference of the imagination is the principal mechanism of human thought. The slave of whom Job spoke—who in death will cease to hear the voice of his master—believes this voice does him harm. This is only too true. The voice does him only too much harm. Yet he is mistaken. The voice in itself is not harmful. If he were not a slave, it would cause him no pain at all, but because he is a slave the pain and brutality of the blows of the whip enter with the voice through the ears into the very depths of the soul. He cannot create a barrier against it. The affliction has forged this link.

In the same way, those who believe they are mastered by pleasure are in

reality mastered by the absolute they locate in it. This absolute is to pleasure as the blows of the whip are to the voice of the master. But the association is not the effect of affliction here; it is the effect of an initial crime, a crime of idolatry. St. Paul emphasized the relationship between vice and idolatry.

Those who locate the absolute in pleasure cannot help but be mastered by it. We don't struggle against the absolute. Those who know how to locate the absolute outside of pleasure possess the perfection of temperance.

The different kinds of vices—the use of drugs in the literal or metaphorical use of the word—all represent a search for a state where the beauty of the world will be sensible (tangible). The error consists precisely in the search for a special state. False mysticism is also a form of this error. If this error enters the soul deeply enough, one cannot help succumbing to it.

In a general way, every human taste—from the most guilty down to the most innocent, from the most common down to the most unique—is related to an ensemble (combination) of circumstances, to an environment where it seems to them that they have access to the beauty of the world. The privilege (advantage) of this or that ensemble of circumstances is most often impossible to understand.

There is only one case, also frequent, where the attraction of sensible pleasure is not that of contact with beauty. It is when it procures, on the contrary, a refuge against it.

The soul searches only for contact with the beauty of the world or, to a still higher level, with God; but at the same time it flees from it. When the soul flees from something, it always flees either from the horror of ugliness or from contact with what is truly pure. For all that is mediocre flees from the light, and in all souls, except those who are near perfection, there is a great part that is mediocre. This part is seized with panic every time a little pure beauty appears, or pure goodness; it hides behind the flesh, it uses it like a veil.

Just as a bellicose (warlike) people really need to cover their aggression with some pretext in order to attain success in the enterprise of conquering—the quality of the pretext being irrelevant—in the same way, the mediocre part of the soul needs only a minor pretext to flee from the light. The attraction of pleasure and the fear of pain both furnish this pretext. Again, it is not the pleasure, it is the absolute that masters the soul, but as an object of repulsion and no longer of attraction. In the search for carnal pleasure, the two movements—the movement of running toward pure beauty and the movement of fleeing far from it—also frequently combine in an indiscernible entanglement.

In every kind of human occupation, whatever it may be, concern for the

beauty of the world, perceived in more or less deformed and defiled images, is never absent. Therefore, there is no region of human life that is merely the domain of nature. The supernatural is present everywhere in secret under a thousand diverse forms; grace and mortal sin are present everywhere.

Between God and these partial, unconscious and often criminal searches for beauty, the only mediation is the beauty of the world. Christianity can only incarnate itself when it adjoins itself to Stoic thought: filial piety for the city of the world, for the eternal country here below. The day when Christianity separated itself from Stoicism—a result of a misunderstanding very difficult to understand today—it condemned itself to an abstract and isolated existence.

Even the highest accomplishments in the search for beauty—in the art of science for example—are not really beautiful. The only real beauty—the beauty of the real presence of God—is the beauty of the universe (the whole). Nothing smaller than the universe is beautiful.

The universe is beautiful like a beautiful work of perfect art would be if we could have one that deserved the name. Thus it contains nothing that could constitute an end or a good. It contains no finality outside of the beauty of the universe itself. It is the essential truth to know this concerning the universe: that it is absolutely devoid of finality. Nothing related to finality is applicable to it, except through a lie or an error.

In a poem, if we ask why this word is in that place and there is an answer, either the poem is not of the first order or the reader has understood nothing. If we can legitimately say the word is where it is to express this idea or that grammatical connection, or to rhyme, or for alliteration, or to complete a line, or for a certain coloration, or even for several motifs of the genre of the time, we have made a search of the effects of the composition of the poem, but there has been no true inspiration. The only response to a truly beautiful poem is to say the word is there because it was fitting that it should be there. The proof of its suitability is that it is there, and that the poem is beautiful. The poem is beautiful, so to say, because the reader does not wish it were elsewhere.

In this way art imitates the beauty of the world. The suitability (fittingness) of things, of beings, of events consists solely in this: that they exist and we have no wish that they should not exist or should have been different. Such a wish is an impiety with regard to our universal country (lit. ‘fatherland’), a lack of Stoic love for the universe. We are constituted in such a way that this love is in fact possible and it is this possibility whose name is ‘the beauty of the world.’

The question of Beaumarchais, ‘Why these things and not others?’ never has

an answer, because the universe is void of finality. The absence of finality is the reign and rule of necessity. Things have causes and not ends. Those who believe they have discerned the particular designs of Providence resemble professors who give themselves to what they call ‘explication of the text’ at the expense of a beautiful poem.

The equivalent of this rule of necessity in art is the resistance of matter and arbitrary rules. Rhyme imposes on the poet an absolute direction in his choice of words without relating to the sequence of ideas. Perhaps this function in poetry is analogous to that of affliction in life. Affliction forces us to feel the absence of finality with one’s whole soul.

If the orientation of the soul is love, the more we contemplate necessity—the tighter we press its hard and metallic cold against ourselves, to our very flesh—the closer we approach the beauty of the world. This is what Job experienced. Because he was so honest in his suffering—because he admitted no thought in himself susceptible to altering the truth—God descended to him to reveal the beauty of the world to him.

Because the absence of finality, the absence of intention, is the essence of the beauty of the world, Christ commanded us to behold how the rain and the light of the sun descend without discrimination on the just and the wicked. This recalls the supreme cry of Prometheus: ‘Heaven for whom all common light turns.’ Christ commanded us to imitate this beauty. In *Timaeus*, Plato counsels us also to render ourselves into a semblance of the beauty of the world through strong contemplation, a semblance of the harmony of the circular motions that cause the days, the nights, the months, the seasons and the years to succeed each other and return. In these circular motions and in their combinations, the absence of intention and of finality is also manifest, and pure beauty shines.

Because it can be loved by us, because it is beautiful, the universe is a country. It is our unique country here below. This thought is the essence of the wisdom of the Stoics. We have a heavenly country. But in a sense it is too difficult to love, because we do not know it; yet, in a sense, it is too easy to love, because we can imagine it as we please. We risk loving a fiction under this name. If love of this fiction is strong enough, it makes all virtue easy, but also of little value. Let us love the country here below. It is real; it resists love. It is what God gave us to love. God has willed that it should be difficult and nonetheless possible to love.

We feel ourselves to be strangers here below, uprooted, in exile. Like Ulysses, who the sailors transported while he slept, awoke in a land he did not

know, and desired for Ithaca with a desire that tore his soul. Suddenly Athena unsealed his eyes and he perceived that he was in Ithaca. In the same way, those who desire indefatigably for their country, who are not distracted by their desire, neither by Calypso nor by the Sirens, one day suddenly perceives themselves to be in his country.

The imitation of the beauty of the world—our response to the absence of finality, intention and discrimination in it—is the absence of intention in us, is the renunciation of our own will. To be perfectly obedient is to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

Among humans, a slave cannot make himself like his master by obeying him. On the contrary, the greater his submission is, the greater the distance is between the slave and the one who commands him.

It is different between humans and God. Rational creatures become the perfect image of the All-powerful, as far as it is possible, when they are absolutely obedient.

What is the very image of God in us? It is something in us attached to the fact of being persons, but that is not in fact the person. It is the faculty of renouncing our own person. It is obedience.

Every time someone elevates himself to a degree of excellence that makes him a divine being by participation, it appears as something impersonal and anonymous. Their voice envelops itself in silence. It is manifest in the great works of art and thought, in the great actions of saints and in their words.

It is therefore true in a sense that one must conceive God is impersonal, in the sense that God is the divine model of a person who exceeds himself in renouncing himself. To conceive God as an all-powerful Person, or else, under the name of Christ, as a human person, is to exclude oneself from the true love of God. For this reason we must love the perfection of the heavenly Father even in the diffusion of sunlight. The divine and absolute model of that renunciation in us—which is obedience—is the creative and ordained principle of the universe, such is the fullness of being.

It is because the renunciation of being a person makes us the reflection of God that it is so awful to reduce people to a state of inert matter by plunging them into affliction. If the quality of human personhood is taken, we deprive them of the possibility of renouncing it, except for those who were already sufficiently prepared. God created our autonomy so we would have the possibility of renouncing it for love. For that very reason we must desire to conserve the autonomy in our fellows. Those who are perfectly obedient hold the

faculty of free choice in people as infinitely precious.

In the same way, there is no contradiction between the love of the beauty of the world and compassion. This love does not prevent us from suffering for our own sake when we are afflicted. It is on a plane other than suffering.

The love of the beauty of the world, while being universal, entails a secondary and subordinated love to itself: the love of all things truly precious that evil fortune can destroy. The truly precious things are those that constitute steps towards the beauty of the world; overtures (openings) to it. The one who has gone further, even to the beauty of the world itself, does not bear less love for them, but much more than before.

Numbered among them are the pure and authentic accomplishments of art and science. In a much more general way, it is everything enveloped in the poetry of human life and which crosses every social strata. Every human being is rooted here below by a certain earthly poetry, reflecting a celestial light. This is our link, sensed vaguely more or less, to our universal country. Affliction is the uprooting.

Human cities, principally, each according to their degree of perfection more or less, envelop the lives of their inhabitants with poetry. They are the images and reflections of the city of the world. Moreover, the more they take the form of a nation—the more they pretend to be countries themselves—the more they are deformed and defiled images. But to destroy cities, either materially or morally —or else to exclude human beings from a city and thrust them among the social waste—is to sever every link of poetry and love between human souls and the universe. It is to plunge them by force into the horror of ugliness. There is hardly a greater crime. By our complicity we all have a share in a nearly innumerable quantity of such crimes. We would all cry tears of blood if we could only comprehend this.

Love of Religious Practices

The love of institutional religion, even though the name of God is necessarily present there, is nevertheless not an explicit love by itself, but an implicit love of God. For it does not include direct and immediate contact with God. God is present in religious practices when they are pure, in the same way God is in our neighbour or in the beauty of the world; not any further.

The form that love of religion takes in the soul differs a lot depending on the circumstances of life. Certain circumstances prevent this love from being born or

else they kill it before it can gain enough strength. In their affliction, certain people contract hatred and contempt for religion because of the cruelty, pride or corruption of some of its ministers who make them suffer. Others have been raised since infancy in a milieu impregnated with that spirit. In such a case we must think that the mercy of God, love of neighbour and the beauty of the world, if strong and pure enough, would be sufficient to conduct that soul to any height.

The love of institutional religion normally has for its object the dominant religion of the nation or environment where one has been raised. This is the first thing everyone thinks of whenever they think of a religious service, out of a habit that enters the soul with life.

The entire virtue of religious practices can be conceived from the Buddhist tradition concerning the recitation of the name of the Lord. It is said that the Buddha made a vow to raise up to himself all those who recite his name with the desire to be saved by him, into the Land of Purity; and that because of this vow the recitation of the name of the Lord really has the virtue of transforming the soul.

Religion is nothing else but this promise of God. Every religious practice, every rite, every liturgy is a form of the recitation of the name of the Lord, and must in principle really have virtue, the virtue of saving anyone devoted to it with desire.

Every religion pronounces the name of the Lord in its own language. Most often, it is better for people to name God in their own native language rather than in a foreign language. Apart from exceptions, the soul is incapable of completely abandoning itself in the moment if it must impose on itself even a minor effort in searching for words in a strange language, even when they know it well.

A writer whose language is poor, difficult to manage and not very well known in the world is very strongly tempted to adopt another language. There have been some cases of brilliant success, such as Conrad, but they are very rare. Apart from exceptions, such a change is harmful, degrading the thought and the style. The writer remains mediocre and ill at ease in the adopted language.

A change of the religion is for the soul like a change of language for the writer. Not every religion, it is true, is equally apt for the correct recitation of the name of the Lord. Certain ones, without a doubt, are very imperfect intermediaries. The religion of Israel, for example, must have truly been a very imperfect intermediary for having crucified Christ. The Roman religion scarcely even deserves the name of religion.

But in a general, the hierarchy of religions is a very difficult thing to discern,

nearly impossible, perhaps completely impossible. For a religion is known from the inside. Catholics say this of Catholicism, but is it true of every religion. Religion is a form of nourishment. It is difficult to appreciate just through a look the flavor and dietary value of a food that one has never eaten.

The comparison of religions is only possible in a certain measure through the miraculous virtue of sympathy. We can know people to a certain degree if, while observing them from outside, at the same time we also transport our own souls into them for a time through the power of sympathy. In the same way, the study of different religions does not lead to knowledge unless we transport ourselves by faith into the very center of that which we study for a time—'by faith' in the strongest sense of the word.

This almost never happens. For some have no faith at all; and others have faith exclusively in one religion and do not grant any kind of attention to others beyond what they would give to strangely shaped seashells. Still others believe themselves capable of impartiality because they have a vague religiosity that can turn indifferently anywhere. We must, on the contrary, give our whole attention, our whole faith, our whole love to a particular religion to be able to think of any other religion with the highest degree of attention, with the faith and love that it contains. In the same way, only those capable of friendship, not others, can also concern themselves whole-heartedly with the fate of an outsider.

In every realm, love is only real when directed at a particular object. It becomes universal without ceasing to be real only as a result of analogy and transference.

It should be said in passing, knowledge of analogy and transference—a knowledge for which mathematics, diverse sciences and philosophy are preparation—has such a direct relationship with love.

Today in Europe and maybe even in all the world, comparative knowledge of religions is nearly nil. We do not even have a notion of the possibility of such knowledge. Even without the prejudices that create obstacles for us, an intuition of that knowledge is already something very difficult. Among the different forms of religious life, as partial compensation for the visible differences, there are certain hidden equivalences into which perhaps only the most acute discernment can catch a glimpse. Each religion is an original combination of explicit truths and implicit truths; what is explicit in one is implicit in another. Implicit adherence to a truth can sometimes have as much virtue as explicit adherence, and sometimes even a lot more. The One who alone knows the secrets of hearts also knows the secrets of different forms of faith. God has not revealed this

secret, no matter what anyone might say.

When one is born into a religion that is not too unsuitable for pronouncing the name of the Lord, when one loves that native religion, well-oriented and pure, it is difficult to conceive of a legitimate motive to abandon it before direct contact with God offers the soul to the divine will itself. Beyond this threshold, the change is only legitimate as an act of obedience. In fact history shows how this rarely happens. More often—perhaps always—the soul that reaches the highest spiritual regions is confirmed in the love of the tradition that served as its ladder.

If the imperfection of the native religion is too great, or if it appears in a native environment under a form that is too corrupt, or if circumstances prevent that religion from being born or even kills it, the adoption of a strange religion is legitimate. Legitimate and necessary for certain people; not, without a doubt, for all. It is the same for those who have been raised without any religious practice.

In all other cases, to change religions is an extremely grave (serious) decision and it is even more serious to push someone else to do so. It is still an infinitely more serious exercise, in this sense, to officially apply such pressure upon conquered lands.

On the other hand, despite the divergent religions that exist in the European and American territories, one can say by right that directly or indirectly, close by or far away, the Catholic religion is the native spiritual milieu of all people of the white race.

The virtue of religious practice consists in making effective contact with what is perfectly pure for the destruction of evil. Nothing here below is perfectly pure, except the beauty of the total universe, and it is not in our power to directly experience it before having advanced a long way towards perfection. This total beauty is not otherwise contained in anything tangible, although it is tangible in a sense.

Religious things are particular tangible things, existing here below, and yet perfectly pure—not by their own manner of being. The church can be ugly, its songs false, the priest corrupt and its faithfulness distracted. In a sense this is of no importance. It is like this with a geometry teacher, who to illustrate a correct mathematical proof, traces a figure in which the lines are not straight and the circles are oblong, which is of no importance. Religious things are pure by right —theoretically, hypothetically, by definition, by convention. Thus their purity is unconditional. No defilement can reach it. That is why it is perfect. But it is not perfect in the manner of Roland’s mare, in which every possible virtue had the

inconvenience of not existing. Human conventions are ineffective unless they are joined by motives that cause people to observe them. In themselves, they are simply abstractions; they are unreal and not operational. But God himself ratifies the convention according to which religious things are pure. Thus it is an efficacious convention, a convention that contains virtue, something that operates on its own. This purity is unconditional and perfect and at the same time real.

In fact, it is a truth that is therefore not susceptible to demonstration (mathematical proof, argument). It is only susceptible to experimental verification (experience).

In fact, when faith and love are not lacking, the purity of religious things is nearly always manifest under the form of beauty. Thus the words of the liturgy are marvelously beautiful and the prayers from the very lips of Christ are especially perfect for us. Just like Roman architecture, the Gregorian chant is marvelously beautiful.

But at the very center there is something entirely deprived of beauty, where there is no manifest purity, something that is merely convention. It has to be this way. The architecture, the chants, the language—even if the words were assembled by Christ—all that is something distinct from absolute purity. Absolute purity presented here below to our earthly senses as a particular thing can only be a convention and nothing else. This convention, placed at the central point, is the Eucharist.

The absurdity of the dogma of real presence constitutes its virtue. Except for a symbol so touching as food, nothing in a piece of bread could turn one's thoughts toward hanging on to God. Thus, the conventional character of the divine presence is evident. Christ can only be present in such an object by convention. He can be perfectly present there by this very fact. God can only be present here below in secret. His presence in the Eucharist is truly secret, since no part of our thoughts is admitted to the secret. Thus is it total.

No one would dream of being astonished that reasoning done with perfect lines and perfect circles that don't exist has effective applications in technology. Yet this is incomprehensible. The reality of the divine presence in the Eucharist is more marvelous but no more incomprehensible.

In a sense, one can say by analogy that Christ is present in the consecrated host by hypothesis, in the same manner that a geometry teacher says that there are two equal angles in such and such a triangle.

It is only because it is a question of convention that the form of the

consecration is important, and not the spiritual state of that which is consecrated.

If it were something other than a convention, it would be a thing at least partially human, not totally divine. A real convention is a supernatural harmony, taking ‘harmony’ in the Pythagorean sense.

Only a convention can be the perfection of purity here below, for all purity that is not conventional is more or less imperfect. That a convention can be real is a miracle of divine mercy.

The Buddhist notion of the recitation of the name of the Lord contains the same truth, for a name is also a convention. Yet the habit of confusing things in our thoughts with their name makes it easy to forget. The Eucharist is conventional to the highest degree.

Even the human and fleshly presence of Christ was something other than perfect purity, since he reprimands the one who called him good and since he says, ‘It is to your advantage that I go.’ He is therefore truly more completely present in the piece of consecrated bread. His presence is more complete insofar as it is more secret.

The entire world senses the evil in itself, is horrified by it and wants to be rid of it. Outside ourselves, we see evil under two distinct forms: suffering and sin. But in the feelings we have within ourselves, this distinction does not appear, unless abstractly or through reflection. We sense within ourselves something that is neither suffering nor sin—that is both at once—a common root of the two, an indistinct mixture of the two, at the same time defilement and pain. It is the evil within us. It is the ugliness in us. As far as we sense this, it fills us with horror. The soul rejects it like vomit. It is transported by an operation of transference into the things that surround us. But the things that became so ugly and so defiled in our eyes return the evil that we have put in them. They return it to us augmented. In this exchange, the evil within us increases. It seems to us then that even the places where we are, even the environment where we live imprisons us in evil ever further, day after day. It is a terrible anguish. When the soul, exhausted by this anguish, cannot even feel it any more, there is little hope of salvation for it.

In this way, an invalid conceives hatred and disgust for his room and his environment, or a convict for his prison, and too often, a worker for his factory.

For those who are this way, there is no point in giving them beautiful things. For nothing will not eventually be defiled to the point of horror by this operation of transference over time.

Only perfect purity cannot be defiled. If at the moment when the soul is

invaded by evil, attention bears itself onto a perfectly pure thing and part of the evil is transferred into it, that thing will not be altered. It will not return the evil. Thus each minute of such attention really destroys a little evil.

What the Hebrews were trying to accomplish by means of a kind of magic in their rite of the scapegoat can only be carried out here below by perfect purity. The true scapegoat is the Lamb.

The day when a perfectly pure being concentrated himself here below in human form, the greatest possible quantity of diffuse (widespread) evil around him automatically concentrated itself upon him in the form of suffering. In this epoch of the Roman Empire, the greatest affliction and the greatest crime of humanity was slavery. This is why he suffered the agony of the extreme degree of affliction—slavery. This transference mysteriously constitutes Redemption.

In the same way, when a human being turns his attention and gaze upon the Lamb of God present in the consecrated bread, part of the evil contained in him is carried into that perfect purity and undergoes destruction.

Or ather than destruction, it is a transmutation. Contact with perfect purity dissociates the indissoluble mixture of suffering and sin. The part of evil contained in the soul that has been burned by the fire of this contact becomes suffering alone, and this suffering is impregnated with love.

In the same manner, all the diffuse evil of the Roman Empire concentrated itself on Christ and became, in him, only suffering.

If there were no infinite and perfect purity here below—if there were only finite purity, which is exhausted by contact with evil over time—we would have no hope of being saved.

Penal justice furnishes an awful illustration of this truth. In principle it is a pure thing, which has goodness for its object. But it is an imperfect purity, finite, human. Thus, uninterrupted contact with a mixture of crime and affliction exhausts this purity and replaces it with a defilement nearly equal to the totality of crime, a defilement that passes well beyond that of a particular criminal.

People neglect to drink from the source of purity. But Creation would be an act of cruelty if that source did not spring up wherever there is crime and affliction. If there had been no crime and no affliction in the centuries more distant from us than two-thousand years ago, in the nations untouched by missions, one could think that the Church had the monopoly on Christ and the sacraments. But how could we bear the thought of a single slave crucified twenty-two centuries ago? How could we avoid accusing God if we think that in that epoch Christ was absent and every kind of sacrament unknown? It is true

that we hardly think of those slaves crucified twenty-two centuries ago.

When we have learned to turn our gaze upon perfect purity, only the limited duration of human life prevents us from being sure we can reach perfection here below, unless we sell out. For we are finite beings and the evil in us is also finite. The purity offered to our eyes is infinite. No matter how little evil we destroy with each look, if we would repeat that operation often enough, one day all evil would be destroyed. We would then reach to the end of evil, as expressed splendidly in the Bhagavat-Gita. We would destroy evil for the Lord of Truth and we would offer the truth to Him, as the Egyptian Book of the Dead says.

One of the capital truths of Christianity, almost unknown to anyone today, is that the look is what saves. The bronze serpent was lifted up so that people lying mutilated in the depths of degradation would look upon it and be saved.

In these moments when we are in a bad mood (lit. disposed to evil) as they say, when we sense ourselves incapable of the elevation of the soul fitting to sacred things, it is then that the look turned toward perfect purity is most effective. For it is then that evil, or rather, mediocrity comes to the surface of the soul—the best position for being burned by contact with the fire.

But also, the act of looking is nearly impossible then. Every mediocre part of the soul, fearing death with a fear more violent than that caused by the approach of physical death, revolts and breathes lies to protect itself.

The effort not to listen to these lies—though we cannot prevent ourselves from believing them—the effort to gaze on purity is then something very violent, yet it is absolutely different than anything we generally call effort, doing violence to ourselves or acts of the will. It requires other words to describe it, but language cannot provide them.

The effort by which the soul saves itself resembles the effort it takes when we look or listen, or when a fiancé says, ‘Yes.’ It is an act of attention and consent. By contrast, what language calls ‘violent’ is something analogous to muscular effort.

The will is on the level of the natural part of the soul. The right use of the exercise of the will is a condition of salvation, necessary without a doubt, but remote, inferior, very subordinated, purely negative. Muscular effort pulls up weeds, but only the sun and water can make wheat grow. The will cannot produce any good in the soul.

The efforts of the will are only in place for accomplishing specific obligations. Wherever there is no specific obligation, we must follow our natural inclination or our vocation, which to say the commandment of God. The acts

proceeding from inclination are evidently not efforts of the will. And in acts of obedience to God, we remain passive. Whatever pains might accompany it, whatever deployment of activity might be apparent, they produce nothing analogous in the soul to muscular effort. There is only expectant waiting, attentiveness, silence and immobility through suffering and joy. The crucifixion of Christ is the model of all acts of obedience.

This kind of passive activity—the highest of all—is perfectly described in the Bhagavad Gita and in Lao-Tsu. Also, there is a supernatural unity of contraries, harmony in the Pythagorean sense.

The effort of the will towards the Good is a secret lie from the mediocre part of oneself, in its fear of being destroyed. This effort is no menace to it at all, nor does it even diminish its comfort, even if it is accompanied by a lot of fatigue and suffering. For the mediocre part of oneself is not afraid of fatigue and suffering; it is afraid of being killed.

There are those people who try to elevate their souls like someone who continually jumps from a standing position in the hope that forcing oneself to jump all day—and higher every day—they would no longer fall back down, but rise to heaven. Thus occupied, they no longer look to heaven. We cannot even take one step toward heaven. The vertical direction is forbidden to us. But if we look to heaven long-term, God descends and lifts us up. God lifts us up easily. As Aeschylus says, ‘That which is divine is without effort.’ There is an ease in salvation more difficult for us than all efforts.

In one of Grimm’s accounts, there is a competition of strength between a giant and a little tailor. The giant throws a stone so high that it takes a very long time before falling back down. The little tailor throws a bird that never comes back down. That which does not have wings always comes back down in the end.

Because the will is impotent to generate salvation, secular morality is an absurdity. For what we call ‘moral’ only appeals to the most muscular part of the will, so to speak. Religion on the contrary corresponds to desire, and desire is what saves.

The Roman caricature of Stoicism also makes an appeal to the muscular will. But true Stoicism, Greek Stoicism, from which St. John or perhaps Christ borrowed the terms ‘logos’ and ‘pneuma,’ is uniquely about desire, piety and love. It is full of humility.

Christianity today, on this point as with many others, has allowed itself to be contaminated by its adversaries. The metaphor of the search for God evokes the

efforts of a muscular will. Pascal, it is true, contributed to spreading this metaphor. He committed several mistakes, notably that of confounding faith and autosuggestion to a certain degree.

In the grand images of mythology and folklore, and in the parables of the Gospels, it is God who searches for man. '*Quarens me sedisti lassus.*' [Latin – 'Faint and weary, thou hast sought me']. Nowhere in the Gospels is there a question of a search undertaken by man. We do not take a single step without being pushed or else expressly called. The role of the future spouse is to wait. The slave attends and watches while his master is at the feast. The passerby does not invite himself to the reception; he does not demand an invitation. He is prompted in almost by surprise; his role is only to put on the appropriate robes. The man who finds a pearl in the field sells all his goods to buy the field; he does not need to upturn the field with a spade to dig up the pearl. It is enough for him to sell all his goods. To desire God and renounce all the rest; this alone saves.

The attitude that brings about salvation does not resemble any human activity. The Greek word that expresses this is ὑπομονή, which *patientia* translated quite poorly. It is expectant waiting (*attente*), attentive immobility and fidelity that lasts indefinitely and can never be shaken by any shock. The slave that listens before the door to open it when the master knocks is the best image of it. He must be ready to die of hunger and exhaustion rather than changing his attitude. It must be possible for his comrades to call him, speak to him and hit him without causing him to even turn his head. Even if someone told him that the master was dead—and even if he believed it—he would not budge. If someone told him the master was irritated with him and would beat him on his return—and if he believed it—he would not budge.

Actively searching is harmful, not only to love but also to the intelligence whose laws imitate love. One must simply wait expectantly for the solution of a geometric problem, or for the sense of a Latin or Greek phrase to arise in one's mind (spirit). *A fortiori* [Latin – all the more so] for a new scientific truth or a beautiful verse. Searching leads to error. It is this way for every kind of thing that is truly good. We must not do anything but wait expectantly for the good and depart from evil. In the reversals that constitute the human condition, authentic virtue in every domain is negative (non-active), at least in appearance. But this expectant waiting for the good and for truth is more intense that any search.

The notion of grace—as opposed to the virtue of willing—and inspiration—as opposed to intellectual or artistic travail (work)—those two express notions, if

well understood, are efficacious through attention and desire.

Religious practices consist entirely of attention animated by desire. For this reason, no morality can replace them. But the mediocre part of the soul has in its arsenal a lot of lies capable of protecting itself even during prayer or participation in the sacraments. It puts veils between our gaze and the presence of perfect purity and is quite skillful at calling ‘God.’ Those veils are, for example, as states of the soul, sources of tangible joy, hope, comfort, consolation and appeasement, or else an ensemble of habits, or else one or several human beings, or else a social milieu.

A difficult trap to avoid is the effort of imagining the divine perfection that religion invites us to love. In no case can we ever imagine something more perfect than ourselves. This effort renders useless the marvel of the Eucharist.

It takes a certain formation of the intelligence to be able to contemplate in the Eucharist only what is included there by definition; which is to say, something of which we are totally ignorant. As Plato says, we only know it is something and we desire nothing else except in error.

The trap of traps, the nearly inevitable trap, is the social trap. Everywhere, all the time, in everything, social sentiment procures a perfect imitation of faith, that is to say, perfectly misleading. This imitation has the great advantage of satisfying every part of the soul. That which desires the Good believes it has been fed. That which is mediocre is not injured by the light. It is entirely at ease. And so the whole world is in agreement. The soul is at peace. But Christ has said he did not come to bring peace. He has come bearing the sword; the sword that cuts in two, as Aeschylus said.

It is almost impossible to discern faith from its social imitation. All the more so because in the soul, one can have part authentic faith and part imitation faith. It [discernment] is nearly impossible, but not totally impossible.

In the present circumstances, repelling the social imitation is perhaps a question of life and death for faith.

The necessity of a perfectly pure presence for removing defilement is not restricted to the churches. People come bringing their defilement (stains) into the churches, and this is very good. But it would be even more in conformity to the spirit of Christianity if more than that, Christ went bearing his presence into the places most defiled with shame, misery, crime and affliction. A court meeting should begin and end with a common prayer of the magistrates, the police, the accused and the public. Christ should not be absent where one works or where one studies. Every human being should be able, whatever they do, wherever they

are, to have their gaze fixed throughout the whole of each day on the bronze Serpent.

But also, it should be recognized publicly and officially that religion consists of nothing other that a look. As far as it pretends to be anything else, it will inevitably be locked up inside churches, or it will choke everything everywhere else it is found. Religion should not pretend to occupy any place in society beyond what is appropriate to supernatural love in the soul.

But it is true also that many people degrade charity in themselves because they want to make it occupy a place in their soul too grand and too visible. Our Father only resides in secret. Love should not go without modesty. True faith implies great discretion even over against itself. It is a secret between God and us in which we ourselves have almost no part.

Love of neighbour, love of the beauty of the world and love of religion are loves in the sense that they are quite impersonal. Love of religion could easily not be so, because religion is related to the social milieu. The very nature of religious practices must remedy this. At the center of Catholic religion is found a little bit of formless matter, a little bread. Love directed onto that piece of matter is necessarily impersonal. It is not the human person of Christ that we imagine, it is not the divine person of the Father, subject also in us to all the errors of our imagination—it is this fragment of matter that is at the center of the Catholic religion. It is that which is most scandalous and it is in this that its most marvelous virtue resides. The love of God must be impersonal, as far as it still has not had direct and personal contact; otherwise it is an imaginary love. Afterward, it should become both a personal faith and also impersonal in a more elevated sense.

Friendship

But there is a personal and human love that is pure and contains an intimation and reflection of divine love. It is friendship, on the condition that one uses the word strictly in its proper sense.

Preference for a human being is necessarily different than charity. Charity is indiscriminate. If it is posited more particularly on some area, it is only because an accident of affliction arranged an exchange of compassion and gratitude. It is equally available for all humans in that affliction can come to anyone to offer such an exchange.

Personal preference for a human being can be determined by two natures.

Either we search for a certain good in the other, or we need him. In a general way, all possible attachments are distributed between these two types. We are drawn toward something, either because we are in search of a good, or because we cannot go without it. Sometimes the two motives coincide. But often they don't. For in themselves they are distinct and completely independent. We eat repugnant food if we have nothing else because we cannot do otherwise. A moderately greedy man searches for good things but can easily go without it. If we lack air, we suffocate. We struggle to find it, not because we expect it to be good, but because we need it. We want to breathe sea air, without being pushed by any necessity, because it is pleasing. Often in the course of time the second motive automatically succeeds the first. This is a great human sorrow. Addicts smoke opium to have access to a special state they believe is superior. Often thereafter, the opium puts them in a painful state that is degrading, but they cannot let go of it. Arnolphe bought Agnus from her adoptive mother, because it seemed good to him to have a little girl live with him who would gradually make a good wife for him. Later, she would cause him nothing but heartbreaking and demeaning sorrow. But with time, his attachment to her became a vital link that forced him to pronounce this terrible verse:

Mais je sens là-dedans qu'il faudra que je crève...
"But I feel in all this that it will be that I will burst."

Harpago began by regarding gold as a good. Later it was only more an object of haunting obsession, but an object the deprivation of which would make him die. As Plato said, there is a great difference between the essence of the necessary and that of the Good.

There is no contradiction at all between searching for good in a human being and wanting the good for them. For this very reason, when the motive that pushes us towards another human being is only a search for a good [for ourselves], the conditions of friendship are not realized. Friendship is a supernatural harmony, a union of contraries.

When a human being is to some degree necessary to us, we cannot want their good unless we cease to desire our own. Where there is necessity, there is constraint and domination. We are at the discretion of what we need, unless we are its owner. The central good for every person is the free disposal of oneself. Either we renounce it, which is the crime of idolatry, since we only have the right to renounce it in favour of God; or we desire the being that we need to be deprived [of freedom themselves].

Every sort of mechanism can create links of affection between human beings

that have the iron hardness of necessity. Maternal love is often of this nature; sometimes paternal love, as in *Père Goriot* of Balzac; carnal (sexual) love at its most intense, as in *L'*école d*es Femmes* and in *Phaedrus*; conjugal love very frequently, especially as an effect of habit; and more rarely, filial or fraternal love.

There are, moreover, degrees of necessity. Everything is necessary in some degree if its loss causes a real diminishment of vital (life) energy, in the precise, strict sense the word might have if the study of vital (living) phenomena was as advanced as that of falling bodies. In the extreme degree of necessity, deprivation causes death. This is the case when all the vital energy of one being is linked to another through an attachment. To a lesser degree, deprivation causes a considerable weakening, more or less. Total deprivation of food causes death, whereas partial deprivation only causes a weakening. Nevertheless we regard the whole quantity of food as necessary, and falling short weakens a human being.

The most frequent cause of necessity in the links (bonds) of affection is a certain combination of sympathy and habit. As in the case of avarice or intoxication, what was initially a search for a good is transformed into a need through the simple passage of time. But the difference with avarice, intoxication and all the vices is that with the bonds of affection, the two motives—the search for good and need—can coexist very well. They can also be separated. When attachment of one human to another is made up of need alone, it is an atrocious thing. Few things in the world can attain such a degree of ugliness and horror. There is always something horrible in every circumstance where a human being searches for the Good and only finds necessity. The accounts where a beloved being suddenly appears with a death's head is the best image [to symbolize this]. True, the human soul possesses the full arsenal of lies for protecting itself against this ugliness and fabricates false goods in its imagination where there is only necessity. In this very way, ugliness is an evil, because it compels us to lie.

In a completely general way, wherever necessity occurs in any form, affliction is felt there so harshly that its hardness surpasses the capacity of the lies in those who receive its blows. Because of this, the purest beings are most exposed to affliction. For those able to prevent an automatic reaction of [self-]protection which tends to augment the soul's capacity for lying, affliction is not an evil, though it is always a wounding and in a sense, a degradation.

When one human being is attached to another with bonds of affection containing some degree of necessity, it is impossible for them to wish for autonomy in themselves and the other at the same time—*impossible* by virtue of

the mechanism of nature, but *possible* by the miraculous intervention of the supernatural. This miracle is friendship.

The Pythagoreans say friendship is an equality made of harmony. It is a harmony because there is a supernatural unity between the two contraries of necessity and freedom, those two contraries combined by God in creating the world and humanity. There is equality because each one desires the conservation of the faculty of free consent in themselves and the other. When someone desires to subordinate themselves to another human being or accepts subordination from them, there is no trace of friendship. Racine's Pylades is not a friend of Orestes. There is no friendship in inequality.

A certain reciprocity is essential to friendship. If for one of two sides, all good will is entirely absent, the other must repress affection out of respect for the free consent they must not desire to impair. If one of the two sides does not respect the autonomy of the other, the other must cut the bond out of self-respect. In the same way, those who accept being enslaved cannot obtain friendship. But necessity contained in the bond of affection can only exist on one side, and in that case there is only friendship on one side, if we take the word in its completely precise and strict sense.

A friendship is defiled when necessity wins, even for an instant, over the desire to conserve the faculty of free consent in each other. In every human thing, necessity is the principle of impurity. Every friendship is impure if there is found in it even a trace of the desire to please or its inverse [to dominate]. In a perfect friendship these two desires are completely absent. The two friends completely accept being two and not one; they respect the distance put between them that make two creatures distinct. Only with God do we have the right to desire being one directly.

Friendship is the miracle by which human beings consent to view from a distance and without approaching the very being that is as necessary for them as food. It is the strength of the soul that Eve did not have; and yet she had no need for the fruit. If she had been hungry in the moment when she looked at the fruit, and if despite that, had remained looking indefinitely without taking a step towards it, she would have accomplished a miracle analogous to that of perfect friendship.

Through this supernatural virtue of respect for human autonomy, friendship is very similar to pure forms of compassion and to the gratitude raised by affliction. In both cases, the contraries that act as the terms of harmony are necessity and freedom, or else subordination and equality. These two pairs of

contraries are equivalents.

From the fact that a desire to please and the inverse desire (to dominate) are absent in pure friendship, it simultaneously includes both affection and something like complete indifference. Although there is a link between two people, there is something impersonal. It does not undermine impartiality. It never prevents the imitation of the perfection of the heavenly Father who distributes sunlight and the rain everywhere. On the contrary, friendship and this imitation are the mutual conditions of each other, at least most of the time. For as all human beings—or nearly so—are linked to others by the bonds of affection containing some degree of necessity, they can only approach perfection by transforming this affection into friendship. Friendship is something universal. It consists of loving a human being like one would want to be able to love each and all of those who compose the human species in particular. As a geometer looks at a particular figure to deduce the universal properties of a triangle, in the same way, those who know how to love can direct a universal love onto a particular human being. Consenting to the conservation of autonomy in oneself and in others is in essence something universal. When we desire this conservation in more than one single being, we desire it in all beings, for we cease to arrange the order of the world in an orbit around a center here below. We transport the center to heaven above.

Friendship does not have this virtue if the two beings who love each other, through an illegitimate use of affection, believe they are one. But also, there is no friendship then in the true sense of the word. For this reason it might be called an adulterous union, even when it occurs between spouses. It is only a friendship when the distance is conserved and respected.

The simple fact of having the pleasure of agreeing with a loved one on some point, or in any case, the fact of desiring such agreement of opinion, is an attack on the purity of friendship and on intellectual honesty at the same time. This happens very frequently. But also, pure friendship is rare.

When the bonds of affection and necessity between human beings are not supernaturally transformed into friendship, not only is affection impure and base, but also, it is mixed with hatred and repulsion. This appears very well in *L'*école d*es Femmes* and in *Phaedrus*. The mechanism is the same in affections other than carnal love. This is easy to understand. We hate what we depend on. We hold in disgust what depends on us. Sometimes affection is not only mist; it is transformed entirely into hatred and disgust. Sometimes the transformation is even nearly immediate, the sort where almost no affection has time to appear.

This is the case when necessity is stripped bare nearly right away. When the necessity that links human beings has no affective (emotional) nature, when in comes only through circumstances, hostility arises (surges) almost from the start.

When Christ said to his disciples, ‘Love one another,’ he was not prescribing attachment for them. Since in fact there had been those were linked together by common thoughts, common lives and common habits, he commanded them to transform these bonds into friendship, so they should not be allowed to turn impure attachments into hatred.

A little before His death, Christ adds this word as a new commandment to those commandments of love of neighbour and love of God. One may think that pure friendship, like charity towards neighbour, contains something like a sacrament. Christ may have wanted to indicate this concerning Christian friendship when he said, ‘When two or three gather together in my name, I am among them.’ Pure friendship is an image of the original and perfect friendship in the Trinity and is the very essence of God. It is impossible that two human beings could be one while being scrupulously respectful of the distance that separates them, if God is not present in each of them. The point where parallels meet is in infinity.

Implicit Love and Explicit Love

Even the most narrow Catholic would never dare affirm that the centuries and nations where the Church was present held the monopoly on compassion, gratitude, love of the beauty of the world, love of religious practices and friendship. These loves in their purity are rare, but it would even be difficult to affirm that they have been more frequent in those centuries and nations than in others. To believe that love could occur where Christ is absent is to diminish him to the point of outrage; it is an impiety, almost sacrilegious.

These loves are supernatural and in a sense absurd. They are crazy. As long as the soul has had no direct contact with the very person of God, they cannot be supported by any knowledge founded on experience or on reason. They cannot therefore be supported by any certainty, unless we use that word in a metaphorical sense designed as the contrary of hesitation. It is then preferable that they should not be accompanied by any belief. This is more intellectually honest and it better preserves the purity of love. It is more suitable in every way. Concerning divine things, belief is not fitting. Certainty alone is appropriate. Anything less that certainty is unworthy of God.

During the preparatory period, these indirect loves constitute an ascending movement of the soul, a gaze (turning look) on high involving some effort. After God has come in person, not only to visit the soul as He does at first for a long time, but also to seize it and transport its center near to Himself, it is otherwise. The chick has pierced the shell; it is outside the egg of the world. These first loves continue, they are more intense than before, but they are different. Those who have undergone this adventure have more love for the afflicted than before, and also for those who helped them in their affliction, for friends, for religious practices and for the beauty of the world. But these loves have become a descending movement like those of God Himself, a ray mingled with the light of God. At least this is what we can suppose.

These indirect loves are only the attitude toward beings and things here below of the soul oriented toward the Good. They do not have a [particular] good for themselves as their object. They have no good here below. Thus, we are not properly talking of loves; they are loving attitudes.

In the preparatory period the soul loves in the void. It does not know if something real answers to its love. It can believe that it knows, but to believe is not to know. Such a belief does not help. The soul knows in a certain way only that it is hungry. The important thing is that it cries out its hunger. A child does not cease crying if we suggest to it that perhaps there is no bread. It cries even then.

The danger is not that the soul might doubt whether or not there is bread, but that it could be persuaded through a lie that it is not hungry. It can only be persuaded of this by a lie, for the reality of its hunger is not a belief; it is a certainty.

We all know there is no true good here below, that everything which appears here below as a good is finite, limited, gets exhausted and once exhausted, leaves the bareness of necessity apparent. All human beings have likely had several instances in their lives where they have seen clearly that no [final] good exists here below. But when they see this truth, they cover it over with lies. A great many even delight in proclaiming it, searching within their sadness for a morbid joy, which they could never bear to look in the face for more than a second. People feel that there is mortal danger in looking this truth in the face for any length of time. This is true. This knowledge is more deadly than a sword; it inflicts a death more fearful than physical death. With time it kills in us all that we call ‘me’ [ego]. In order to bear it, one must love the truth more than life. According to Plato’s expression, those who are this way turn away from that

which passes (finite things) with all their souls.

They do not turn towards God. How could they in the total darkness? God Himself imprints the proper orientation upon them. He does not however, show Himself to them for a long time. It is to those who remain immobile, without turning their gaze, without ceasing to listen, and waiting—they know not why—deaf to solicitations and threats, steadfast against shocks. If after a long wait God allows them a vague sense of His light or even reveals Himself in person, it is only for an instant. Once again, they must remain immobile, attentive and wait without budging, calling out only when the desire is too strong.

It does not depend on a soul to believe in the reality of God if God does not reveal this reality. Either they label some other thing with the name of God, which is idolatry, or their belief in God remains abstract and verbal. This is true in the nations and epochs where casting doubt on religious dogma never even come to mind. The state of unbelief is then what John of the Cross calls a ‘night.’ The belief is verbal and does not penetrate the soul. In an epoch like ours, incredulity can be an equivalent to the dark (obscure) night of St. John of the Cross if the unbeliever loves God—like children who do not know there is bread somewhere, but cry out that they are hungry.

When we eat bread, and even after having eaten it, we know the bread is real. One can nevertheless doubt the reality of bread. The philosophers cast into doubt the reality of the sensible world. But theirs is a purely verbal doubt; they do not undermine certitude. They render it even more obvious to the well-oriented mind. In the same way, those to whom God reveals His reality can doubt this reality without inconvenience (harm). It is a purely verbal doubt, a useful exercise for the health of the intelligence. But it is a crime of treason—before such a revelation and even more afterward—to cast into doubt God alone as worthy of being loved. It is to turn our eyes away, since love is the gaze of the soul. It is when we stop waiting and listening for an instant.

Electra did not search for Orestes; she waited for him. When she believed he no longer existed—that nowhere in the world was there anyone who could be Orestes—she did not return to those in her entourage. She rejected them with even more repulsion. She loved the absence of Orestes more than the presence of anyone else. Orestes was to deliver her from her slavery, her rags, her servile work, her dirt, her hunger, her blows and innumerable humiliations. She no longer hoped for this. She did not for an instant dream of using a different process for procuring a life of luxury and honour, the process of reconciliation with the most powerful. She did not want to obtain abundance and consideration

if it was not Orestes who procured it for her. She did not even grant a thought to such things. All she desired was to cease to exist since Orestes no longer existed.

In that moment, Orestes could hold out no longer. He could not prevent himself from declaring himself. He gave certain proof that he was Orestes. Electra saw him, she heard him, she touched him. She did not ask for more since her savior existed.

Those to whom the experience of Electra has occurred—those who have seen, heard and touched with their own souls—recognize God as the reality behind these indirect loves, which were like reflections. God is pure beauty. This is an incomprehensible thing, for beauty is sensible (perceptible) in its essence. To speak of non-sensible (imperceptible) beauty would seem an abuse of language to those who demand some precision and reason in their mind. Beauty is always a miracle. But there is a miracle of the second degree when a soul receives an impression of non-sensible beauty, if it does not act as an abstraction, but a real and direct impression like that caused by a song in the moment when we hear it. All this happens as if, through a miraculous favour, the senses themselves become aware that silence is not the absence of sound, but an infinite thing more real than sound, and the seat of a harmony more perfect than anything the most beautiful sounds combined are capable of producing. There is a silence in the beauty of the universe that is like noise compared to the silence of God.

God is the true neighbour. The term ‘person’ is only properly applied to God, but also the term ‘impersonal.’ God is the one who bends over us—we the afflicted ones, reduced to pieces of inert and bleeding flesh. But at the same time God is in some way also the afflicted One who appears to us as an inanimate body in some way—of Whom it seems all thought is absent—the afflicted One we know nothing about, without rank or name. The inanimate body is the created universe. The love we owe to God and would be our supreme perfection if we could reach it is the divine model of both gratitude and compassion.

God is also the friend par excellence. So that there should be something like an equality across the infinite distance between God and us, He wanted to place an absolute in His creatures: the absolute freedom of consent *or not* to the God-ward orientation imprinted in us. God has also extended the possibility of our error and lies to the point of allowing us the faculty of false-control of the imagination, not only over the universe and humanity, but also God himself, such that we do not know how to use of God’s name justly. God gives us this faculty of infinite illusion so that we have the power to renounce it out of love.

In fact, contact with God is the true sacrament.

But we can be nearly sure that those whose love for God has caused their pure loves here below to disappear are false friends of God.

Our neighbour, our friends, religious ceremonies and the beauty of the world do not fall in rank to unreal things after direct contact between God and the soul. On the contrary, only then do these things become real. Previously, they were half-dreams. Previously, they had no reality.

About the ‘Our Father’

‘Our Father Who is in the heavens.’

God is our Father; there is nothing real in us that did not proceed from Him. We are His. God loves us since He loves Himself and we are His. But God is the Father Who is in the heavens. Not elsewhere. If we believe we have a Father here below, it is not God; it is a false God. We cannot take a single step toward God. We cannot walk (march) vertically. We only have the power to direct our gaze toward God. We do not have to search; we must only change the direction of our gaze. It is God who searches for us. We must be happy knowing that God is infinitely beyond our reach. We thus have the certainty that the evil in us, even if it submerges our whole being, does not defile the purity, the bliss and the divine perfection at all.

‘Holy is (sanctify) your name.’

God alone has the power to name Himself. God’s name is not pronounceable for human lips. God’s name is His word. It is the Word (*Verbe*). The name of any being is an intermediary between the human spirit (mind) and that being, the only way the human spirit can grasp anything of that being when it is absent. God is absent; God is in the heavens. God’s name is the only possibility for people to have access to God. It is the mediator. People have access to that name, although it is also transcendent. It shines in the beauty of the order of the world and in the internal light of the human soul. That name is holiness itself; there is nothing holy outside of it. Therefore, it does not need to be sanctified (hallowed). In requesting this sanctification, we ask for what is (exists) eternally, with a fullness of reality, so that it is not in our power to add or subtract even an infinitely tiny bit. To ask for what is—what really is, infallibly, eternally, in a manner quite independent of our request—is the perfect request. We cannot prevent ourselves from desiring; we *are* desire. But that desire which nails us to the imaginary, the temporal, to egoism—if we make it pass totally into this request we can turn it into a lever that snatches us from the imaginary into the real, from the temporal into eternity and outside the prison of ‘me’ (the self).

‘Your kingdom come’

It is now something that must come. It is not here. The kingdom (rule/reign) of God is the Holy Spirit completely filling the entire soul of intelligent creatures. The Spirit blows where it wants; we can only invite the Spirit. We must not even think of a particular way of inviting the Spirit in this or that person, or even on everyone, but to invite purely and simply. To think of the Spirit is an appeal and a cry. When we are at the limit of our thirst—when we are sick with thirst—we can no longer think the act of drinking in relation to ourselves, nor even as the general act of drinking. We only think of water, taking water in itself, but this image of water is like a cry from our whole being.

‘Accomplish your will’

We are only absolutely, infallibly certain of the will of God for the past. All the events that have happened, whatever they might be, are conformed to the will of the all-powerful Father. This is implied by the notion of omnipotence. The future also, whatever it must be, once accomplished, will be accomplished in conformity to the will of God. We have no power whatsoever to add or subtract from that conformity. Thus, in this phrase, after the incentive of desire toward the possible, we ask for what is—but no longer as an eternal reality as is the holiness of the Word. Here the object of our request is what happens in time. But we request the infallible and eternal conformity of what happens in time to the divine will. After having, through the first request, snatched our desire from time to be applied to the eternal, and having it thus transformed, we resume with this desire, which itself becomes eternal in a certain way, to apply it again to time. Thus our desire pierces time to find eternity behind it. This is what happens when we know how to make every accomplished event, whatever it might be, an object of our desire. This is different than resignation. The word ‘acceptance’ is even too feeble. We must desire for everything that happens to happen, and not something else. Not because what happened is good in our eyes, but because God permitted it, and because the obedience of the course of events to God is in itself an absolute good.

‘As in the heavens, likewise on earth.’

The association of our desire with the all-powerful will of God must extend to spiritual things. Our spiritual ascents and failures and those of beings we love

are related to the other world, but are also events that happen here below in time. On that account, they are details in the immense sea of events, tossed with the whole sea in a manner that conforms to the will of God. Since our past failures have happened, we must desire that they should have happened. We must extend that desire to the future for the day when they should become the past. This is a necessary correction to the request that the kingdom of God should arrive. We must abandon every other desire in favour of eternal life, but we must desire eternal life itself with renunciation. We must not attach ourselves even to detachment. Attachment to salvation is even more dangerous than other attachments. We must think of eternal life as one thinks of water when dying of thirst. And at the same time we must desire for ourselves and for our loved ones the eternal deprivation of that water rather than being filled in spite of the will of God, if such a thing were conceivable.

The three preceding requests are related to the three Persons of the Trinity—the Son, the Spirit and the Father, and also to the three types of time—the present, the future and the past. The three requests that follow bear on the three parts of time more directly and in a different order—present, past and future.

‘Give to us today our bread, which is supernatural.’

Christ is our bread. We only need to ask for him now. For he is always there, at the door of our soul, which he wants to enter, but he will not force consent. If we consent for Christ to enter, he will. As soon as we do not want him, he is gone. We cannot bind our will for tomorrow to today; we cannot make a pact with him today for tomorrow, that he will be in us even in spite of us. Our consent to his presence is the same thing as his presence. Consent is an act that can only be actual. We have not been given a will that can be applied to the future. All that is not effective in our will is imaginary. The effective part of the will is effective immediately; its effectiveness is not distinct from itself. The effective part of the will is not effort outstretched toward tomorrow. It is consent, the ‘yes’ of marriage, a ‘yes’ pronounced in the present instant and for the present instant, but pronounced as an eternal word, for it is consent to the union of Christ with the eternal part of our soul.

Bread is a must (necessary) for us. We are beings who continually draw our energy from outside, for the measure that we receive is depleted by our efforts. If our energy is not renewed daily, we become devoid of strength and incapable of movement. Outside of the actual food, in the literal sense of the word, every

stimulant is a source of energy for us. Money, advancement, consideration, decoration, celebrity, power, loved ones—all that which is placed in us for the capacity to act is like bread. If one of these attachments penetrates deeply enough into us, even to the roots of our carnal existence, its loss can break us and even make us die. We call this ‘dying of grief.’ It is like dying of hunger. Every object of attachment constitutes, along with actual food, the bread here below. Whether they are granted to us or refused to us depends entirely on our circumstances. We should never make requests about the circumstances unless they conform to the will of God. We should not ask for the bread here below.

There is a transcendent energy whose source is from heaven that flows into us as soon as we desire it. It is the true energy; it executes actions through the mediation of our souls and our bodies.

We should ask for this food. The moment we ask for it and even by the fact that we ask, we know that God wants to give it to us. We should not endure the remainder of a single day without it. For when only earthly energy, subject to necessity here below, feeds our acts, we can only do or think of evil. ‘God saw that the misdeeds of men multiplied on the earth, and how the product of the thoughts of their hearts was constantly, uniquely wicked...’ The necessity that compels us toward evil governs all that is in us, except for the energy from on high in the moment that it enters us. We cannot make provisions (i.e. store it up).

‘And remit our debts,
in the same way that we also have remitted our debtors.’

In the moment we say these words, we must already have remitted all debts. This includes not only remitting the reparation of offences we think we have suffered; it is also letting go of the recognition for the good that we think we have done; and in a completely general way, all that we expect from people and things, everything we believe is our due, the absence of which has given us the sense of having been frustrated.

It is remitting every right we believe is ours in the past and in the future. First, the right to a guaranteed permanence. When we have enjoyed something for a long time, we believe it is ours and that fate must let us keep enjoying it. Second, the right to compensation for every effort, whatever the nature of our effort, work, suffering or desire. Every time we expend effort and the equivalent effort is not returned to us in the form of visible fruit, we have a feeling of inequity, of emptiness, that makes us believe we have been robbed. The effort of

suffering an offence makes us expect the chastisement of the offender, or an apology from them. The effort of doing some good makes us expect the recognition (gratitude) of the one obliged to us. But these are only particular cases of a universal law in the soul. Every time anything is released from us, we have an absolute need that at least its equivalent should be returned to us, and because we have that need, we believe we have that right. Our debtors are all beings, all things and the entire universe. We believe we have a claim over everything. In all the claims we believe we possess, there is always an imaginary claim of the past on the future. It is this that we must renounce.

Forgiving our debtors is to renounce the past *en bloc* (as a whole). To accept that the future is again virgin and intact, tied to the past strictly by links of which we are ignorant, but completely free from what our imagination believes it has imposed on it. To forgive is to accept the possibility that this can happen and in particular that it can happen to us, and that the future may make our lives in the past a sterile and vain thing.

In renouncing in one stroke all the fruits of the past without exception, we can ask God that our past sins would not bear their miserable fruits of evil and error in our souls. As long as we cling to the past, God himself cannot prevent this horrible fruit-bearing in us. We cannot attach ourselves to the past without attaching ourselves to our crimes, for we are not aware of what is most essentially bad in us.

The principle claim we think we have over the universe is the continuation of our personhood. This claim implies all the others. The instinct for self-preservation makes us feel this continuation as a necessity, and we feel that a necessity is a right. As the beggar said to Talleyrand, ‘Sir, I must live,’ and Talleyrand replied, ‘I do not see the necessity.’ Our personality depends entirely on external circumstances, which have unlimited power to crush it. But we would rather die than recognize this.

The equilibrium of the world seems like a course of circumstances to us such that our personality remains intact and seems to belong to us. It seems to us that all the past circumstances which wounded our personality are ruptures of equilibrium that must infallibly, one day or another, be compensated for by phenomena of a contrary sense. We live in expectancy of these compensations. The imminent approach of death is horrible especially because it forces us to realize that this compensation will not occur (lit. produce itself).

Forgiveness of debts is the renunciation of our own personality. Renouncing everything that I call ‘me.’ Without any exception. It is to know that in what I

call ‘me’ there is nothing—no psychological element at all—that external circumstances cannot make disappear. It is to accept this. To be happy that it should be this way.

The words, ‘that Your will should be accomplished,’ imply this acceptance if we pronounce them with our whole soul. For this reason, we can say a few moments later, ‘We have forgiven our debtors.’

The forgiveness of debts is spiritual poverty, naked spirituality, death. If we completely accept this death, we can ask God to revive us, to purify us from the evil that is in us. For when we ask Him to remit our debts, it is to ask him to wipe out the evil that is in us. Pardon is purification. God Himself has no power to pardon the evil in us that remains there. God will remit our debts when He has planted the state of perfection in us. Until then, God remits our debts partially, in the measure to which we remit our debtors.

‘And do not cast us into temptation (lit. testing)
but protect us from evil.’

The only temptation (test) for mankind is to be abandoned to oneself when in contact with evil. The nothingness of humanity is then experimentally verified. Although the soul has received the supernatural bread in the very moment when we asked for it, our joy is mixed with fear because we can only ask for it for the present. The future remains formidable. We have no right to ask for bread for tomorrow, but we express our fear in the form of supplication. We finish with that. The word ‘Father’ began the prayer; the word ‘evil’ ends it. We must go from confidence to fear. Only confidence gives us enough strength so that the fear should not cause us to fall. After having contemplated the name, the kingdom and the will of God, after having received the supernatural bread and having been purified of evil, the soul is ready for the true humility that crowns all the virtues. Humility consists of knowing that in this world, the whole soul—not only that which I call ‘me’—in its totality, but also the supernatural part of the soul where God is present, is subject to time and to the fluctuations of change. We must absolutely accept the possibility that all that is natural in ourselves could be destroyed. But we must simultaneously accept and reject the possibility that the supernatural part of the soul could disappear. It is to be accepted as an event that would only happen in conformity to the will of God. It is to be rejected as being something horrible. We must be afraid of it; but that fear should be like the achievement of confidence.

These six requests correspond to each other two by two. The transcendent bread is the same thing as the divine name. It is what brings about contact between humanity and God. The kingdom (reign) of God is the same thing as God's protection, extending over us against evil. Protection is a royal function. The forgiveness of debts to our debtors is the same thing as total acceptance to the will of God. The difference is that in the first three requests, attention is turned solely toward God. In the second three, our attention is brought back onto ourselves so that we constrain ourselves to make these requests a real act and not an imaginary one.

In the first half of the prayer, we begin with acceptance. Then we allow ourselves a desire. Then we correct ourselves and return to acceptance. In the second half, the order is changed; we finish with an expression of desire. But the desire has become negative; it is expressed as a fear. It therefore corresponds to the highest degree of humility, which is appropriate for an ending.

This prayer contains every possible request; one cannot conceive of a prayer not already contained in it. It is to prayer as Christ is to humanity. It is impossible to say it even once, giving each word the fullness of our attention, without a change—perhaps infinitesimal, but real—happening in our soul.

Part 2

Letters

Preface to Her Letters:
Weil on Catholicism and Judaism

Brad Jersak

Weil on Catholicism and catholicity

Simone Weil's letters to her Roman Catholic friends (esp. the priests) articulate her objections to the decrepit Tridentine Catholicism of her day, already regarded as passé by many contemporary clergymen. She especially attacks Catholicism's failure to be catholic (universal) by its imaginary restriction of salvation to baptized members, its condemnation of 'heretics' and its devaluation of non-Christian religious traditions. As things stood—because of the official narrowness of the Church and the supposed hypocrisy of its more unofficial hospitality—Weil refused to be baptized.

To Weil's postmortem credit, her objections were explicitly addressed and largely resolved by both Vatican II popes, consciously so.

Consider, Weil writes her *Letter to a Priest* in the Autumn of 1942 and dies August 1943. In 1944, Angelo Roncalli is sent to France as Apostolic Nuncio where he becomes close to Simone Weil's father. He becomes familiar with Weil's thought and by his first Pentecost sermon in Paris (May 24, 1942), he is virtually quoting Weil or affirming her stance:

> It is so easy to stay within one's group, especially for Catholics, cutting ourselves off from our Orthodox brothers, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, believers or non-believers in other religions. But I have to tell you that in the light of the Gospel and Catholic principle, this logic of division makes no sense. Jesus came to break down the barriers; he died to proclaim universal brotherhood; the central point of his teaching is charity – that is, the love that binds all human beings to him as the elder brother and binds us all with him to the Father.[1]

Roncalli would stay in Paris through to 1953 before becoming a cardinal in Venice. In 1958 he is elected Pope Paul XXIII and initiates the Second Vatican Council in 1962.

Of Weil, he would exclaim to Maurice Schumann, 'Oh yes, I love this soul!'[2]

Pope Paul VI, who completed the work of Vatican II, named Simone Weil as one of his three foremost influences (along with Blaise Pascal and Georges Bernanos).[3] And now Benedict XVI, who regards Paul VI as his guiding light in many respects, freely quotes Weil. In fact, her voice resounds through his thought when he says,

> Why does [God] remain so powerless? Why does he reign only in this curiously weak way, as a crucified man, as one who himself failed? But apparently that is how he wants to rule; this is the divine form of power. And the non-divine form of power obviously consists of imposing oneself and getting one's way and coercing.[4]

It is as if the world's largest Christian communion found it so unacceptable to leave her outside the gates of Christendom that they deliberately broke them open to include her. So much so that every Pope since Roncalli could say, 'Yes, I would have baptized her.' But in fact, perhaps Weil had baptized them all into her own generous orthodoxy.

On 'the Hebrew Religion'

In these letters, readers will also see some of Weil's far less generous censures against 'the Hebrew religion' and its sacred texts. Our post-holocaust sensibilities make us cringe at her indelicate comparisons between conquest-era Judaism, the Roman Empire and 'Hitlerism.'

Weil's severity here targets her for labels like 'self-hating Jew'[5] or an anti-

Semite, but a little disambiguation is in order. She did not regard herself as a Jew-hater. What she hated was the 'collective soul' that empowers political activity to uproot others from their native lands, cultures and religions. In other words, any ideology driven by the spirit of conquest. She perceives this spirit in Assyria, Rome, the Crusades and the Third Reich. Unfortunately, like the great Hebrew prophets before her—Jeremiah or Amos, for example—her harshest provocations are reserved for her own religious heritage:

> The Jew-haters, of course, spread Jewish influence. The Jews are the poison of uprooting personified. But before they began uprooting by spreading this poison, Assyria in the East and Rome in the West had already started doing so by the sword.[6]

As a woman persecuted for being Jewish, Weil traces the Nazi spirit back to the influence of pre-exilic Jewish texts like Joshua. Controversial and debatable, but less so if we recall how she must have read glorified accounts of biblical atrocity alongside real-time events in her beloved France. Her revulsion at *herem* law (Deut. 20:10-20) and Samuel's call for genocide (1 Sam. 15) reflects her flight from the *blitzkrieg* of stormtroopers who wore '*Gott mit uns*' on their belt buckles.

Nevertheless, as we heard from Sylvie, if Simone had studied Hebrew and the Rabbis with the same care and creativity she gave to Sanskrit and the Gitas, she may not have come across sounding obtuse about her own rich heritage. Surely she minimized the fact that the injustices of Israel's pogroms *and* their prophetic condemnation were both canonized by Jewish scribes without embarrassment. This is the unsanitized reality and genius of their story; it is what it is.

I suggest reading Weil through the lens of these Jewish social prophets who manifest Judaism's unique capacity for inspired self-criticism. Then instead of dismissing her letters as simply anti-Semitic, we might see how and why she stands in the tradition of Israel's prophets of justice.

Notes

1. Thomas Cahill, *Pope John XXIII*, n.p.
2. Richard Bell, *Simone Weil: The Way of Justice as Compassion*, xii.
3. John Hellman, *Simone Weil: An Introduction to Her Thought*, 1.
4. Joseph Ratzinger, Peter Seewald. *Salt of the Earth: An Exclusive*

Interview on the State of the Church at the End of the Millennium, 221.

5. Cf. Paul Giniewski, *Simone Weil: Ou, La haine de soi* (1978).

6. Weil, *Notebooks* 2: 575–6.

5

Hesitations About Baptism

19 January 1942

My dear Father,

I have decided to write you to bring closure to our interviews concerning my case—at least until further notice. I have become weary of talking about myself

with you, for it is a miserable subject. But I feel compelled because of your interest in me, because of your charity.

Lately I have been asking questions about the will of God: of what it consists and how we can achieve complete conformity to it. I will tell you what I think.

We must distinguish three realms. The first realm consists of everything that does not depend on us at all. This includes every accomplished fact in all of the universe at this instant. And then also everything on its way to being accomplished, or destined to be accomplished later, that lies beyond our control. In this realm, everything that is, is in fact a product of the God's will, with no exceptions. So in this realm, we must love absolutely everything—as a whole (ensemble) and in every detail, including evil in all its forms! Notably, this includes (i) our own past sins as far as they are past (for we must hate them as far as their root is still present); (ii) our own suffering—past, present and future; and, what is by far the most difficult, (iii) the suffering of others insofar as we are not called to relieve them. In other words, we must feel the reality and the presence of God through every external thing—without exception—as clearly as one's hand feels the consistency of paper through a pen.

The second realm consists of everything situated under the empire of the will. This includes things that are purely natural, nearby or easily representable by means of the intelligence and the imagination, among which we can choose, arrange and combine from the outside to determine their purpose (*fins*) and its end (*finies*). In this realm, we must execute everything that clearly manifests itself as a duty without fail or delay. When any duty is not clearly manifest, we must then observe rules more or less arbitrarily chosen, but fixed, and sometimes follow our inclination, but in limited measure. For one of the most dangerous forms of sin—or perhaps even the most dangerous—consists of placing the limitless in a realm that is essentially finite.

The third realm includes everything that, while not under the empire of the will and not relative to natural duties, is nevertheless also not entirely independent of us. In this realm, we undergo a compulsion (constraint) from God, on the condition that we have merited undergoing it and in exactly the measure we have merited it. God rewards the soul that focuses on Him with attention and love, and God rewards that soul by exercising a rigorous compulsion on it, mathematically proportional to this attention and love. We must abandon ourselves to this pressure, and run to the precise point where it leads, and not a single step further, not even in the direction of what is good. At the same time, we must continue to focus on God, with ever more love and

attention, and in this way obtain an even greater compulsion—to become an object of a compulsion that possesses for itself a perpetually growing portion of the soul. Once God's compulsion possesses the whole soul, one has reached the state of perfection. But no matter what degree we reach, we must not accomplish anything beyond what we are irresistibly pressured (compelled) to do, not even in the way of good.

I have also been asking questions about the nature of the sacraments, and I will tell you what I think about that as well.

The sacraments have a specific value that constitutes a mystery, insofar as they imply a certain kind of contact with God—mysterious contact, but real. At the same time they also have a purely human value insofar as they are symbols or ceremonies. Under this second aspect, the sacraments are not essentially different than the chants, gestures and commands of certain political parties … at least they are not essentially different in themselves. Of course, they are infinitely different in the doctrine to which they relate. I think most believers have contact with the sacraments solely as symbols and ceremonies, including some who are persuaded to the contrary. As stupid as Durkheim's theory is, confusing the religious with the social, it does include elements of truth. Namely, social sentiment so resembles religious sentiment that it can be mistaken for it. It resembles it as a false diamond resembles a true diamond, such that those who do not actually possess supernatural discernment can be mistaken. The rest: social and human participation in the sacraments as ceremonies and symbols are an excellent and beneficial as a step for all those who travel this way. And yet it is not participation in the sacraments as such. I think that only those who are above a certain level of spirituality partake of the sacraments as such. Those below that level, as long as they have not reached it, do not belong (strictly speaking) to the church, no matter what they do.

As it concerns me, I think I am below this level. That is why I said to you the other day that I regard myself as unworthy of the sacraments. This thought doesn't come, as you thought, from excessive scruples. It is founded, on one hand, in the consciousness of many definite faults in my actions and relationships with human beings—grave and even shameful faults, as you would certainly agree, and also most frequent. And on the other hand—and even more so—it is founded on a general sense of inadequacy. Nor am I not speaking from humility, because if I possessed the virtue of humility—maybe the most beautiful of virtues—I would not be in this state of miserable inadequacy.

To finish up what has to do with me, I will say this. The kind of inhibition

that keeps me outside of the Church is due either to a state of imperfection found in me, or because my vocation and the will of God are opposed to it. In the former case, I cannot directly remedy this inhibition; only indirectly by becoming less imperfect, if grace should aid me. To bring this about I must, on the one hand, endeavor to avoid faults in the natural realm, and on the other hand, I must continually increase the attention and love I give to my thoughts of God. If it is God's will that I join the Church, God will impose that will upon me at the precise moment when I merit that His will should be imposed.

On the other hand, if it is not God's will that I join the Church, how can I enter? I know well what you have often repeated. Namely, that baptism is the common way of salvation, at least in the Christian nations. And there is absolutely no reason for me to have my own exceptional way. That is obvious. And yet, if it is in fact the case that it does not belong to me to pass through, what can I do? If it were conceivable to be damned by obeying God and that by disobeying we are saved, I would still choose obedience.

It seems to me that it is God's will that I should not enter the Church for now. For, as I already said to you—and it is still true—I feel the inhibition that keeps me out no less forcefully in moments of attention, love and prayer than at other moments. However, I felt a very great joy when I heard you say that my thoughts —the ones I revealed to you—are not incompatible with membership in the Church, and that as a result, I am not estranged from it in Spirit.

In any case, when I imagine baptism as the next concrete act toward my entry into the Church, no thought troubles me more than separating myself from the immense and afflicted mass of unbelievers. I have the essential need—and I think I can say the vocation—to mingle with people and various human cultures by taking on the same 'color' as them, at least to the degree that my conscience does not oppose it. I would disappear among them until they show me who they really are, without disguising themselves from me, because I desire to know them to the point that I love them just as they are. For if I don't love them as they are, it wouldn't be them that I love, and my love would not be true.

I am not referring to helping them. Unfortunately, until now I have been totally incapable of helping. In any case, I don't think I can ever enter a religious order, because I cannot separate myself from common people for the sake of a [nun's] habit. For some human beings such a separation is not a grave inconvenience, because they are already separated from the common people by the natural purity of their souls. With me, on the contrary, I think I told you how I bear in myself the seeds of almost every crime. I noticed this in particular

during the course of a voyage, the circumstance that I narrated to you. These crimes horrify me, but they do not surprise me. I sense in myself their possibility. It horrifies me because I sense this possibility in myself. This natural disposition is dangerous and very painful, but as with every kind of natural disposition, it may serve the good if we know how to make proper use of it with the help of grace. It implies a vocation in which one should remain somehow anonymous, capable of mixing at any moment with the paste of common humanity. In our day, there is a more marked barrier in the state of people's spirits—a greater separation—between a practicing Catholic and an unbeliever than between a priest and a layperson.

I know that Christ said, 'Whoever denies me before men, I will deny him before my Father.' But perhaps denying Christ may not signify for everyone and in every case failing to join the Church. For some, this may only signify failing to execute the precepts of Christ, not reflecting his Spirit, not honoring his name when the occasion presents itself, or not being ready to die through faithfulness to him.

I owe you the truth, at the risk of offending you, although I would find it extremely painful to offend you. I love God, Christ and the Catholic faith as much as it belongs to a being who is also miserably insufficient to love them. I love the saints through their writings and the accounts concerning their lives, apart from some that I find impossible to love fully or regard as saints. I love six or seven Catholics of authentic spirituality that I have chanced to meet in the course of my life. I love the liturgy, the chants, the architecture, the rites and the Catholic ceremonies. But I do not in any degree love the Church, strictly speaking, outside of her connection to all the things that I love. I am capable of sympathizing with those who have this love, but I don't feel it. I know well that all the saints felt it. But then they were nearly all born and raised in the Church. That may well be, but we cannot give ourselves love by our own will. All I can say is that if this love is a condition for spiritual progress—which I do not know—or if it must be part of my vocation, my desire is that one day, it might be given to me.

It may be that some of the thoughts that I have just confided to you are illusory and evil. But in a sense, that is of little importance to me. I do not want to examine them further. For after all these reflections, I have arrived at one conclusion, which is the resolution, pure and simple: that I will no longer think at all about the question of my eventual entry into the Church.

It is very possible that after having entirely stopped thinking about it for

weeks, months and years, one day I may feel the sudden, irresistible compulsion to ask for immediate baptism, and I will hasten to ask. For the path of grace in hearts is secret and silent.

Maybe my life will also come to its end without my ever feeling that compulsion. But one thing is absolutely certain. If the day arrives that I love God sufficiently to merit the grace of baptism, I will receive that grace that same day, without fail, under the form that God wishes, whether that means baptism strictly speaking, or in any other manner.

So why would I have any worry? It is not my business to think about myself. My business is to think about God. It is God's business to think about me.

This letter is very long. Once again, I've taken much more of your time than I should have. I beg your pardon. My excuse is that it constitutes, at least provisionally, a conclusion.

Believe well in my very lively gratitude,

Simone Weil

6

Hesitations About Baptism Postscript

My dear Father,

This is a postscript to the letter in which I told you about my provisional conclusion. I hope for your sake that it will be the only one. I very much fear that I am annoying you. But if so, blame it on yourself. It is not my fault if I believe I owe you an account of my thoughts.

The intellectual obstacles that have, until lately, stopped me at the threshold of the Church could be regarded strictly as eliminated, since you did not refuse to accept me just as I am. Yet some obstacles remain.

All things carefully considered, I believe they come down to this: what scares me is the Church as a social thing. Not solely because of her stains, but by

the very fact that it is, among other characteristics, a social thing. Not that I am by temperament very individualistic. I fear for the opposite reason. I have in myself a strongly gregarious spirit. I am by natural disposition extremely easily influenced in excess, and especially by collective things. I know that if in this moment I had before me twenty German youth singing Nazi songs in chorus, part of my soul would immediately become Nazi. It is a very great weakness of mine. But that is how I am. I don't believe it will serve any purpose to combat my natural feebleness directly. One must deal violently with oneself to act as if we did not have weaknesses in circumstances where duty makes it imperative. And in the ordinary course of life, we must know them well, to take them into account with prudence and force them into good use, for every weakness is susceptible to being put to some good use.

I am afraid of the patriotism of the Church that exists in the Catholic culture. I mean 'patriotism' in the sense of sentiment analogous to an earthly homeland. I am afraid because I fear contracting its contagion. Not that the Church appears unworthy of inspiring such sentiment, but because I don't want any sentiment of this kind for myself. The word 'want' is not accurate. I know—I sense with certainty—that such sentiment of this type, whatever its object might be, would be disastrous in me.

Some saints approved the Crusades and the Inquisition. I cannot help but think they were wrong. I cannot withdraw from the light of conscience. If I think I see more clearly than they do on this point—I who am so far below them—I must allow that on this point they must have been blinded by something very powerful. That something is the Church as a social thing. If this social thing did such evil to them, what evil might it not also do to me, one who is particularly vulnerable to social influences, and who is infinitely feebler than they?

Nothing has ever been said or written that goes so far as the words of the devil to Christ in St. Luke concerning the kingdoms of this world: 'I will give you all this power and the glory attached to it, for it has been abandoned to me and to anyone I want to share it with.' It follows that the social realm is irreducibly the realm of the devil. The flesh pushes us to say *me* and the devil pushes us to say *us*; or else to say, like the dictators, *I* with a collective signification. And, conforming to his proper mission, the devil fabricates a false imitation of divinity, an ersatz divinity.

By 'social' I do not mean everything related to a city, but only collective sentiments.

I know well how inevitable it is that the Church must also be a social thing;

without that it could not exist. But insofar as it is a social thing, it belongs to the prince of this world. Because it as an organ of the conservation and transmission of the truth, it poses an extreme danger to those who, like me, are excessively vulnerable to social influences. For thus it is that what is most pure and what is most defiled look similar and are confused under the same words, making it a nearly inseparable mixture.

There exists a Catholic culture ready to welcome warmly whoever enters. Now, I do not want to be adopted into a culture. Or live in a culture that says *we* or to be a part of this *we*, finding myself a home in any human culture, whatever it may be.

In saying I don't want this, I am expressing myself badly, for I would like it a lot; it is all delicious. But I sense it is not permissible for me. I sense that it is necessary—prescribed for me—to be alone, a stranger in exile who can relate to any human culture, no matter what, without exception.

This seems to contradict what I wrote you about my need to melt (merge) into every human culture I pass through, into which I would disappear. But in reality this is the same thought. To disappear is not to become a part of it, and the capacity for me to merge into all of them implies that I cannot be part of any one of them.

I do not know if I have succeeded in making you understand these nearly inexpressible things. These considerations concern this world, and seem miserable if one turns to consider the supernatural character of the sacraments. But it is precisely the impure mixture of the supernatural and evil in me that I fear.

The relationship of hunger to food is certainly much less complete, but just as real as the act of eating.

It is perhaps not inconceivable that in someone with these natural dispositions—such a temperament, such a past, such a vocation and so on—desire for and the deprivation of the sacraments may constitute a contact more pure than participation.

I do not know at all if this is so for me or not. I know well that this would be something exceptional, and it seems there would always be a crazy presumption to claim to be the sole exception. But that exceptional character may very well proceed, not from superiority, but from inferiority in relation to others. I think that may be the case with me.

Although that may be, in any case, as I have told you, I do not believe I am actually capable of true contact with the sacraments, but only of the premonition

that such contact is possible … an even stronger reason why I may never actually know what kind of relationship with them is appropriate for me.

There are moments when I am tempted to hand myself over to you entirely and ask you to decide for me. But in the end, I cannot. I do not have the right.

I believe that in the very important things, we do not overcome our own obstacles. We fix our gaze on them for as long as needed, until if they have proceeded from the power of illusion, they just disappear. What we call an obstacle is something other than that kind of inertia we need to overcome with each step we take in the direction of the good. I have experienced this inertia. Obstacles are quite another thing. If we try to overcome them before they have disappeared, we risk the phenomenon of compensation, which I believe is alluded to in the Gospel, with the man indwelt by one demon and to whom seven demons later returned.

The simple idea that if I were ever baptized in a disposition other than agreement, then later was to have a single internal movement of regret, even for an instant … such a thought fills me with horror. Even if I am certain that baptism is the absolute condition of salvation, In view of my salvation, I would not run the risk. I would choose to abstain until I no longer had the conviction that I was running that risk. One has such a conviction only when we think we act in obedience. Only obedience is invulnerable to time.

If I my eternal salvation was laying before me on this table, and if I only had to extend my hand to obtain it, I would not extend my hand as long as I did not know that I had received the order to do so. At least I would love to believe that. And if instead of my own, if it was the eternal salvation of all human beings past, present and future, I should do the same. Then I would have difficulty (sorrow) with that. But if I were the only one involved, it almost seems to me that it would cause me no difficulty. For I desire nothing other than obedience itself in its totality, which is to say, even as far as the Cross.

Yet I have no right to speak this way. In speaking this way, I lie. For if I desired this I would have it. And in fact what continually happens is that I delay for days and days in the accomplishment of obligations, which I sense obviously as obligations, easy and simple to execute in themselves, and important for their possible consequences to others.

But it would take too long and be uninteresting to explain my miserable faults to you. And it would, without a doubt, be of no use. Except however, to prevent you from misunderstanding me.

Believe always in my very vivid gratitude. You know, I believe, that this is

not just a formula,

Simone Weil.

7

Departure from France

Apart from unforeseen circumstances, we will see each other in eight days for the last time. I must depart at the end of the month.

If you can arrange things for us to talk at leisure about that choice of texts, that would be good. But I suppose this may not be possible.

I do not have any desire to leave. I am leaving with anguish. The calculation of probabilities that will determine my course is so uncertain that it hardly gives

me support. The idea that guides me and has lived in me for some years—the sort I dare not abandon, though the chances of its realization may be low—is close enough to the project which you were so generous to help me with a few months ago, and that has not succeeded.

Basically, the principle reason that drives me away is that given the rate and concurrence of circumstances, it seems to me the decision to remain would be an act of self-will on my part. But my even greater desire is to lose not only my whole will, but also all my personal being.

It seems to me that something is telling me to depart. As I am totally sure it is not just my sensitivity, I am surrendering myself to it.

I hope this surrender, even if I am mistaken, will finally lead me to safe harbor. What I call safe harbor, as you know, is the Cross. If I am not given to earn a share in the Cross of Christ some day, may I at least share the part of the good thief. Of all the beings other than Christ who are mentioned in the Gospels, the good thief is by far the one whom I most envy. Having been beside Christ and in the same state during the crucifixion seems a great privilege, more enviable than to be at his right hand in his glory.

Although the date of my departure may be near, my decision is not yet completely irrevocable. Thus, if per chance you have any counsel to give me, now would be the moment. But do not think about it specially. You have many things—much more important things—to think about.

Once I have departed, it seems less probable to me that circumstances will allow me to see you again one day. As to an eventual meeting in another life, you know that I do not picture such things to myself in that way. But that is of little importance. That you exist is sufficient for my friendship with you.

I will not be able to stop thinking with vivid anguish of all those I will have left in France, and especially of you. But this also is of no importance. I believe you are one of those to whom, whatever happens, no harm will ever come.

Distance will not stop my debt to you from increasing with time, day by day. For distance will not prevent me from thinking of you. And it is impossible to think of you without thinking of God.

Believe in my filial friendship,

Simone Weil

PS – You know that for me this departure is a matter of other things than

escape from suffering and danger. My anguish comes precisely from the fear that in going, I will do, in spite of myself and without knowing it, what I would above all not want to do: to flee. Until now, we have lived here very tranquilly. If this tranquility disappears right after my departure, it would be awful for me. If I were certain it would be that way, I believe I would remain. If you know anything that would allow predictions (lit. pre-visions) of what will happen, I count on you to communicate them to me.

8

Spiritual Autobiography

To read first:

This letter is appallingly long, but as there will be no need to respond—at least since I will doubtless be departing—you have years ahead of you, if you want, to read it. Read it anyway, one day or another.

My father,

Before departing I want to speak to you again, maybe for the last time. For over there I will, without a doubt, only send my news to you occasionally to get news from you.

I told you that I owe you an immense debt. I want to try to tell you exactly and honestly what it consists of. I think if you would be able to understand my spiritual situation, you would have no chagrin about not having led me into baptism. But I do not know if that is possible for you.

You did not bring me the Christian inspiration, nor did you bring me to Christ. For when I met you there was no more need. It was accomplished without any other human intervention. If it had not been that way—if I had not been taken (lit. seized) before, not only implicitly, but consciously—you would

still not have contributed anything to me, for I would have never received it from you. My friendship with you would have been a reason for me to refuse your message, for I would have feared the possibility of error or delusion involved through human influence in the realm of divine things.

I can say that in all of my life I have never, at any moment, ‘sought for God.’ Perhaps for that reason, without a doubt too subjective, I do not like that expression and it seems false to me. Since adolescence I have believed that the problem of God is a problem of missing data here below and that the only certain method for avoiding a false solution, which seems to me the greatest harm possible, is not posing it. So I did not pose it. I did not affirm or deny anything. It useless seemed to me to solve the problem, for I think that in this world our business is to adopt the best attitude of solving the problems of this world, and this attitude is not dependent on a solution of the problem of God.

At least this was true for me, for I have never hesitated in this choice of attitude. I have always adopted the Christian attitude as the only possible attitude. I was, so to speak, born, grew up and remain within a Christian inspiration. While the very name of God had no part in my thinking, I have regarded the problems of this world and of this life from a Christian conception in an explicit manner—rigorously—with the most specific notions of what it consists. Some of these notions have also been in me for as far as I can remember. With others, I do know when, in what manner or under what form they imposed themselves on me.

For example, I have always forbidden myself from thinking about a future life, but I have always believed that the instant of death is the center and the end (aim) of life. For those who live as they should, I think there is an instant when, for an infinitesimal fraction of time, the pure, naked truth, certain and eternal, enters the soul. I can say that I have never desired for myself any other good. I believe the life that leads to this good is not defined solely by the common morality, but that for each person, it consists of a series of acts and events that are strictly personal to them, and those who pass such obligations by miss the goal. For me, such is the notion of vocation (calling). I see the criteria of actions imposed by our vocation as an essential compulsion and as a different manifestation from that which proceeds from the emotions or from reason, and not to follow such a compulsion, when it arises, even if it demanded impossibilities, seems to me the greatest of afflictions. This is how I conceive obedience, and I put this conception to the test when I entered and remained in the factory, when I found myself in the state of intense and uninterrupted

sadness, which I recently admitted to you. The most beautiful life possible always seemed to be one where everything was determined, whether by such compulsions, or when there was never a place for another choice.

At fourteen years old I fell into the bottomless despair of adolescence and I seriously thought of dying because of the mediocrity of my natural faculties. The extraordinary gifts of my brother, who had a childhood and a youth comparable to that of Pascal, were forced into my awareness. I do not regret having no external success, but I was unable to hope at all for access into the transcendent kingdom where only authentically great people enter and where truth lives. I preferred to die rather than live without it. After months of interior darkness (gloom), I suddenly had and always have had the certainty that any human being whatsoever can penetrate the kingdom of truth reserved for geniuses—even if their natural faculties are practically nil—if only they desire the truth and make a perpetual effort of attention to attain it. They too attain genius, even if, for lack of talent, this genius is not visible from the outside. Later, when my headaches paralyzed the few faculties I possessed, I very quickly supposed them to be probably incurable. That same certainty would preserve in me for ten years the effort of attention that was not sustained by any hope for results.

Under the name ‘truth’ I would also include beauty, virtue and all kinds of goodness, so that for me, truth was a conception of the relationship between grace and desire. The certainty I have received is that when someone desires bread, they do not receive stones. But I had not yet read the Gospel at that time.

Just as I was certain that desire possesses within itself an efficacy in the realm of spiritual goodness under these forms, so also I could believe that it may not be effective in any other realm.

As for the spirit of poverty, I do not remember a moment when it was not in me in some measure, though unfortunately only in a feeble way, where it was compatible with my imperfection. I fell in love with St. Francis since I first came to know about him. I have always believed and hoped that some day fate would drive me into the life of a vagabond and beggar that he entered freely. I did not think I would reach the age I am now without at least coming close to that experience. It is the same way with prison.

From earliest childhood, I also had the Christian notion of charity for neighbor, to which I gave the name ‘justice,’ found in many passages in the Gospels and so beautiful. You know that on this point I have failed gravely many times.

The duty of acceptance to the will of God—that which must be—has

imposed itself on my spirit as the first and most necessary thing of all. We cannot lack in this duty without dishonoring God's will, as I have found it explained in Marcus Aurelius under the form of Stoicism's *amor fati*.

The notion of purity, with all that word can imply for a Christian, possessed me from the time I was sixteen years old, after I had gone through several months of the emotional anxiety natural to adolescence. This idea appeared to me as I contemplated a passage about a mountain landscape, and bit by bit it imposed itself upon me in an irresistible way.

Of course, I knew very well that my conception of life was Christian. For that reason it never came to mind that I could enter Christianity—I had the impression that I was born inside of it. But to add dogma itself to this conception of life, without being compelled by evidence, seemed dishonest to me. I even believe it would have been dishonest if I had posed a question about the truth of dogma to myself, or even simply desired to get though to a conviction on this subject. I have a rigorously extreme notion of intellectual honesty, to the point where I have never personally encountered anyone who did not seem to me to lack it in more than one respect. And I am always afraid that I lack it myself.

Abstaining from such dogma, a sort of shame prevented me from entering churches, where I nevertheless love to go. However I have had three contacts with Catholicism that truly counted.

After my year in the factory, before resuming my education, my parents took me away to Portugal. While there I once left them to go alone into a small village.

Some parts of my soul and body had been killed during my youth through contact with affliction. Up until then, I had no experience with affliction other than my own, which because it was my own, seemed unimportant to me. Furthermore, mine was only a semi-affliction, biological and not social. I knew well that there was a lot of affliction in the world—I had obsessed about it—but I had never observed it through prolonged contact. While in the factory, merging with the anonymous masses to the eyes of all and to my own eyes, the affliction of others entered my body and in my soul.

Nothing ever separated from affliction, for I had really forgotten my past and had no expectation of a future. I had difficulty imagining the possibility of surviving this fatigue. What I suffered marked me in a permanent way so that even to this day, when a human being—whoever and whatever they are, in any circumstance—speaks to me without brutality, I cannot refrain from getting the impression that they must have erred and that the error will, without a doubt,

unfortunately disappear. There I received the permanent mark of a slave, like the mark of a red-hot iron that the Romans put on the foreheads of their most despised slaves. Since then I have always regarded myself as a slave.

In that state of mind and spirit, and in a miserable physical state, I entered this little Portuguese village that was, alas, also very miserable and alone. It was evening under a full moon on the very day of the festival of their patron saint. The village was beside the sea. The wives of the fishermen were parading by the boats in procession, bearing candles and chanting certain very ancient hymns of heart-wrenching sadness. Nothing can convey any idea of what it was like. I have never heard anything so poignant, except the songs of the boatmen of the Volga. Suddenly, I had a certainty that Christianity is the religion *par excellence* of slaves; that slaves cannot help but belong to it—myself among them.

In 1937 I spent two marvelous days in Assisi. There, alone in a little the twelfth-century Roman chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli—an incomparable marvel of purity where St. Francis very often prayed—something stronger than I am compelled me, and for the first time in my life I was brought me to my knees.

In 1938 I spent six days in Solesmes, from Palm Sunday to Easter Tuesday, following all of the offices (liturgical services). I had a very intense headache; each sound hurt like a sudden blow. With extreme effort of attention, I was permitted to exit this miserable flesh, to leave it suffer alone, huddled in its corner, and to find a pure and perfect joy in the unheard-of joy in the hymns and words. This experience permitted me, by analogy, to better comprehend the possibility of loving divine love through affliction. It was, of course, through the course of those offices that the idea of the Passion of Christ entered into me once and for all time.

There was a young English Catholic who gave me the idea of the supernatural virtue of the sacraments for the first time, through his truly angelic splendor, which seemed to clothe him before having communion. Chance—for I always prefer to say ‘chance’ rather than ‘providence’—made him a true messenger for me. For he brought me to know the existence of those English poets of the twefth-century who are called ‘metaphysicians.’ Much later, in reading them, I discovered the poem I read to you entitled, ‘Love.’ Unfortunately it is a very insufficient translation.

Here is the text of the poem in a translation that is good enough:

LOVE

Love welcomed me, yet my soul recoiled
Guilty of dust and shame.
But love, clear-eyed, saw me hesitate
From my first entrance.
It approached me, asking gently
If I lacked something.
A guest, I responded, worthy to be here
Love said, You shall be he
Me, the unkind, the ungrateful? Ah! My love,
I cannot look at you!
Love took my hand and responded, smiling
Who made these eyes except me?
This is truth, Lord, but I have defiled them;
That my shame would go where it deserves.
And you know not, said Love, who took on the blame?
My love, then I will serve.
You must sit down, said Love, and taste my meat.
So I sat down and I ate.

I have this memorized by heart. Often, in the culminating moment of crisis during a violent headache, I make myself recite it, applying all my attention and adhering my whole soul to the tenderness it contains. I believed that I was only reciting this as a beautiful poem, but without my knowledge, this recitation had the virtue of a prayer. It was during the course of these recitations that, as I wrote to you, Christ himself descended and possessed me.

In my contemplations on the insoluble problem of God, I did not anticipate the possibility of real contact, person-to-person, here below, between a human and God. I had vaguely heard tell of things of this kind, but I never believed them. The history of apparitions in the Fioretti rather repelled me from any such thing, like the miracles in the Gospels. Moreover, in Christ’s sudden possession of me, neither my senses nor my imagination had any part. Through my suffering I only felt the presence of a love analogous to that which one reads in the smile of a beloved face.

I had never read any of the mystics, because I have never felt called to read them. In reading, as in other things, I always attempt practical obedience. There is nothing more favorable to intellectual progress, for as far as possible I do not read anything except for that which I am hungry in the moment, when I am hungry for it, and then I do not read … I eat. God mercifully prevented me from reading the mystics, so that it would be evident to me that I had not fabricated this absolutely unexpected contact.

Yet I still half refused, not my love, but my intelligence. For it seemed certain, and I believe it still today, that we can never wrestle God too much if we do so out of pure concern for the truth. Christ loves that we prefer the truth to him, because before being the Christ, he is the Truth. If someone takes a detour from him to go towards the truth, they will not go a long way without falling into his arms.

It was after this that I felt Plato was a mystic, that all the *Iliad* is bathed in Christian light and that Dionysus and Osiris are Christ himself in a certain way; and my love has been redoubled

I never asked whether Jesus was or was not an incarnation of God, but in fact, I was incapable of thinking about him without thinking of him as God.

In the spring of 1940 I read the Bhagavad-Gita. Strangely, in reading those marvelous words with such a Christian sound, put in the words of an incarnation of God, I felt strongly (with force) that we owe to religious truth something other than the adherence we give to a beautiful poem—a special adherence of a very different category.

Yet I did not believe I could even pose the question of baptism to myself. I felt that I could not honestly abandon my sentiments concerning the non-Christian religions and Israel–and in effect, time and meditation only reinforced them. I believed this would be an absolute obstacle to baptism. I never imagined the possibility that a priest would even consider granting me baptism. Had I not met you, I would never have posed the question of baptism to myself as a practical problem.

Throughout this spiritual progression I never prayed. I feared the power of suggestion in prayer, that same power for which Pascal recommended it. The method of Pascal seemed to me the worst possible way to arrive at faith.

Contact with you was not sufficient to persuade me to pray. On the contrary, the danger seemed even greater to me, for fear that I must also beware the power of suggestion in my friendship with you. At the same time I was very troubled about not praying and not telling you. And I knew I could not tell you without

inducing you to make an error in my regard. At that time I could not have made you understand.

Last summer, while studying Greek with T___, I did the *Our Father* word-for-word. We promised ourselves to learn it by heart. I do not believe he did. Nor did I for the moment. But some weeks later, leafing through the Gospels, I told myself that since I had made that promise to myself and that it was good, I had to do it. I did it. The infinite sweetness of the Greek text so possessed (seized) me that during several days I could not help but recite it continually. One week later, I commenced with the grape harvest. I recited the *Our Father* in Greek each day before work, and I repeated it very often in the vineyard.

Since then I have imposed on myself the unique practice of reciting it once each morning with absolute attention. If my attention strays or dozes off during the recitation, even in an infinitesimal manner, I start over until I have completed it once with pure, absolute attention. Sometimes I repeat it once more for pure pleasure, but I only do it if desire prompts me.

The virtue of this practice is extraordinary and it surprises me each time, for although I feel it every day it surpasses my expectation each time.

Sometimes the first words tear my thoughts from my body already and transport them to a place outside space where there is neither perspective nor point of view. Space opens. The infinity of the ordinary space of perception is replaced by an infinity of the second or sometimes the third power (degree). At the same time, this infinity of infinities fills me with wall-to-wall silence—a silence that is not an absence of sound, but is the object of a positive sensation, more positive than that of sound. Noises, if there are any, only get through to me by traversing the silence.

Sometimes also, during the recitation or at other moments, Christ is present in person, but a presence infinitely more real, more poignant, more clear and more full of love than the first time when he possessed me.

Never could I have taken it upon myself to tell you all that, except for the fact that I am leaving. And as I leave with more or less the idea of probable death, it seems to me I have no right to conceal these things. For after all, in all this it is not about me. It is only about God. I am truly nothing in it. If one can suppose mistakes in God, I would think that all this has fallen on me by mistake. But maybe God enjoys using the garbage, the throw-aways, the objects for disposal. After all, should the bread of the host (Eucharist) be moldy, even then it becomes the Body of Christ after the priest consecrates it. Only it may not refuse. But we … *we* can disobey. It seems sometimes that since I have been

treated so mercifully, that all sin on my part must be a mortal sin. And I commit it without ceasing.

I have told you that you have been like a father and a brother to me at the same time. But these words only express an analogy. Maybe they basically only correspond to a feeling of affection, gratitude and admiration. As for the spiritual direction of my soul, I think that God Himself took it in His hands from the beginning and keeps it.

This does not prevent me from owing you the greatest debt that I could have acquired toward any human being. This is exactly what it consists of:

First, at the beginning of our relationship you once told me some words that have gone to the depths of my being. You said to me, ‘Pay close attention, for if you pass by a great thing by your own fault, it would be a pity.’

That made me perceive a new aspect of my duty to intellectual honesty. Until then I had only conceived it as contrary to faith. It seemed horrible, but on the contrary, it is not. It was, as far I can tell, because of my love for the faith. Your words made me think that there may be impure obstacles to the faith in me—in my knowledge—prejudices and habits. I felt that only after saying, ‘Maybe all this is not true,’ to myself for so many years, I must, without ceasing to say it, take care to say it often to myself even now—and to join this formula to the contrary formula, ‘Maybe all of this is true,’ and make them alternate.

At the same time, in making the question of baptism a practical problem for me, you have forced me to face, long-term, up close, with a plentitude of attention, the faith, the dogmas and the sacraments, as things toward which I have obligations that need to be discerned and accomplished. I would have never done it otherwise, and this has been indispensable for me.

But your greatest blessing was of another order. In gaining my friendship through your charity—I have never encountered its equal—you have furnished me with a source of inspiration more powerful and more pure that one could find among human things. For nothing among human things is as powerful for maintaining our gaze, applied ever more intensely on God, than friendship with the friends of God.

Nothing better enables me to measure the extent of your charity than the fact that you have tolerated me for so long and with such gentleness. I may seem to be joking, but that is not the case. It is true that you would not have the same reasons that I have (those I wrote about to you the other day) for experiencing hatred and repulsion toward me. But nevertheless, your patience with me seems like it could only come from a supernatural generosity.

I have not been able to prevent myself from causing you the greatest disappointment I had in my power to cause you. But until now, although I have often posed the question during prayer, during the mass or in the light of radiance that remains in my soul after the mass, I have never had, even once, even for a second, the sense that God wants me in the Church. I have never had, even once, a sensation of uncertainty. I believe that for the present, I can finally conclude that God does not want me in the Church. Therefore, have no regrets about that.

God does not want it, at least for now. But unless I am mistaken, it seems to me that God's will is that I will also remain outside in the future, except perhaps at the moment of my death. Yet I am always ready to obey any command, whatever it is. I would even obey with joy the command to go to the center of hell and to remain there for eternity. Of course I am not saying I have a preference for an order of this kind. I am not that perverse.

Christianity must contain within itself all vocations without exception, since it is catholic; therefore, the Church should as well. But in my eyes, Christianity is catholic by right and not in fact. So many things are outside of it; so many things that I love and do not want to abandon; so many things that God loves, for otherwise they would not exist: All the immense expanse of centuries past, except the last twenty; all the nations inhabited by races of color; the whole secular life in the nations of the white race; in the history of these nations, all those traditions accused of heresy, like that traditions of the Manicheans and Albigenses; and all the things issuing from the Renaissance, too often degraded but not in fact without value.

If Christianity is catholic by right but not in fact, I regard it as legitimate for me to be a member of the Church by right and not in fact, not only for a time, but for my whole life if necessary.

But this is not only legitimate. Until God gives me the certain command to the contrary, I think it is an obligation for me.

I think and so do you, that the obligation for the next two or three years—an obligation so strict that one can hardly fail in it without treason—is to make the possibility of a truly incarnate Christianity apparent to the public. Never in all of currently known history has there ever been an epoch like today, when souls throughout the whole terrestrial globe have been in such peril. The Serpent in the wilderness must be lifted up anew so that everyone who casts their eyes on him will be saved.

But everything is so linked to everything else that Christianity cannot be

truly incarnate unless it is catholic, in the sense that I have just defined it. How can it circulate through the whole body of nations in Europe if it doesn't contain everything—absolutely everything—within itself? … Except falsehood, of course. But in all that is, there is more truth than falsehood a majority of the time.

Having feelings so intense, so painful and so urgent, I would betray the truth—that is, the aspect of the truth I can perceive—if I left this point where I have found myself since birth: at the intersection of Christianity and all that it is not.

I have always remained at the threshold of the Church on this precise point, without moving, immobile, ἐν ὑπομένῃ (this is a word so much more beautiful than *patientia*). Only now my heart has been transported, I hope forever, into the holy sacrament exposed on the altar.

You can see that I am very far from the thoughts that H___ attributed to me with very good intentions. I am also far from experiencing any worry.

If I have sadness, it comes first from the permanent sadness of the kind that was always imprinted in my emotions, where the greatest joys, even the most pure, can only be superimposed. And for this, the price is an effort of attention. Then also, I have sadness about my miserable and continual sins. And finally, from all the afflictions of this epoch and of all those past centuries.

I think you would understand why I have always resisted you if, in spite of being a priest, you could admit that an authentic calling might prevent entrance into the Church.

Otherwise, there remains a barrier of misunderstanding between us, whether the error is on my part or yours. This causes me chagrin from the point of view that you are my friend, because in that case, the result of these efforts and desires, provoked by your charity towards me, would be a disappointment for you. And although it is not my fault, I cannot help but accusing myself of ingratitude. For, once again, my debt towards you passes all measure.

I want to appeal to your attention on a point. It is that there is an absolutely impassible obstacle to the incarnation of Christianity. It is the use of two small words, *anathema sit* [Latin, 'let him be accursed,' used formally to condemn heretics]. Not of their existence, but of their use up until now. This also prevents me from crossing the threshold of the Church. I remain beside anyone who cannot enter the Church—this universal receptacle—because of those two little words. I remain at their side all the more because my intellectual honesty numbers me among them.

The Incarnation of Christianity implies a harmonious solution to the problem

of relations between individuals and collectives. Harmony in the Pythagorean sense: the just equilibrium of contraries. This solution is precisely what people are thirsting for today.

The position of the intelligence is the touchstone of this harmony, because the intelligence is a specific and rigorously individualist thing. This harmony exists everywhere where the intelligence, remaining in its place, plays without shackles to the full plenitude of its function. It is what St. Thomas admirably said about all the parts of the soul of Christ, about his sensitivity to pain during the crucifixion.

The proper function of the intelligence requires total liberty, implying the right to deny anything and be free of domination. Whenever it usurps a commandment, there is an excess of individualism. Whenever it is ill at ease, there is an oppressive collective, or several of them.

The Church and the State should punish it, each in their proper manner, when it advocates acts of which they disapprove. When it remains in the realm of pure speculative theory, they still have the duty, when necessary, to place the public on guard, by any effective means, against the danger of the practical influence that certain speculations might have in the conduct of life. But whatever these speculative theories are, the Church and the State do not have the right to seek to smother, nor to inflict on their authors, any material or moral damage. Notably, they should not be deprived of the sacraments if they desire it. For whatever has been said—even if they were to publicly deny the existence of God—they might not have committed any sin. In such a case, the Church should declare that they are in error, but not demand anything resembling a disavowal of what they have said, nor deprive them of the bread of life.

A collective is the guardian of dogma, and dogma is an object of contemplation for love, faith and intelligence—three strictly individual faculties. There has been a malaise of the individual in Christianity almost since its origins, and notably a malaise of the intelligence. One cannot deny it.

When Christ himself, who is the Truth itself, spoke before an assembly such as a council, he would not use the same language as he would when face to face with a beloved friend. And without a doubt, when confronting the Pharisees, one could accuse him of contradictions and deceit. For one of those laws of nature that God Himself respects, because He wills it from all eternity, is that there are two quite distinct languages, although composed of the same words: the collective language and the individual’s language. The Comforter that Christ sent us, the Spirit of truth, speaks one or the other language according to the

situation, and by necessity of nature there is no agreement between them.

When authentic friends of God, such as Meister Eckhart in my opinion, repeat words they heard in secret amidst the silence during union with God, and are in disagreement with the teachings of the Church, it is simply that the language of the marketplace is not that of the nuptial chamber.

The whole world knows there is only truly intimate conversation between two or three. As soon as there are five or six, the collective language begins to dominate. That is why, when one applies the words to the Church, ‘Anywhere two or three are gathered in my name, I will be in their midst,’ one is committing a complete contradiction. Christ did not say two hundred, or fifty or ten. He says two or three. He says precisely that he is always the third in intimate Christian friendship, in face-to-face intimacy.

Christ made promises to the Church, but none of these promises has the force of this expression: ‘Your Father that is in secret.’ The word of God is spoken in secret. Those who have not heard this word, even if they adhere to all the dogmas taught by the Church, are not in contact with the truth.

The function of the Church as the collective conserver of dogma is indispensable. It has the right and the duty to punish anyone who expressly attacks it in the specific realm of that function by depriving them of the sacraments.

So, although I know almost nothing about this business, I am inclined to believe, provisionally, that they had reason to punish Luther.

But she commits an abuse of power when she pretends to compel love and intelligence to make her language their standard. This abuse of power does not proceed from God. It comes as a natural tendency of every collective, without exception, to abuse power.

The image of the mystical Body of Christ is very seductive. But I regard the importance given to this image today as a very grave sign of our deprivation. For our true dignity is not to be parts of a body, whether mystical or that of Christ. It consists in this: that in the state of perfection, which is the calling of each of us, we do not live in ourselves, but Christ lives in us. So in this state of perfection, Christ in his integrity—in his indivisible unity—becomes each of us in a sense, just as he is entirely in each host (piece of communion bread). The hosts are not part of his body.

The importance actually given to the image of the mystical body shows how miserably vulnerable Christians are to outside influences. Certainly there is a lively intoxication in being a member of the mystical body of Christ. But in my

opinion, today many other mystical bodies that do not have Christ as their head provide their members with an intoxication of the same nature.

It is sweet to me, as long as it is by obedience, to be deprived of the joy of being part of the mystical body of Christ. For if it is God's will to help me, I may testify that without this joy one can nevertheless be faithful to Christ until death. The social sentiments today have such a hold—they so effectively elevate people to a supreme degree of heroism in suffering and in death—that I believe it is good for some sheep to be left outside the fold to testify that the love of Christ is essentially a completely different thing.

The Church today defends the cause of the individual's inalienable rights against the oppression of the collective, of our freedom to think contrary to tyranny. But these are causes embraced voluntarily by those who momentarily discover they are the least strong. It is the only way they may one day become the strongest again. This is well known.

This idea may be offensive to you. But you would be wrong. You are not the Church. During periods of the most atrocious abuse of power committed by the Church, it must have had priests such as you in its number. Your good faith is not a guarantee, even if shared by your whole order. You cannot foresee how things will come about.

For the actual attitude of the Church to be effective and truly penetrate, like a wedge, into social existence, it should openly say it has changed or wanted to change. Otherwise, who can take it seriously when they remember the Inquisition? Excuse me for speaking of the Inquisition; it is an evocation that because of my friendship with you, and through you extending to your order, is very painful for me. But it did exist. After the fall of the Roman Empire, which was totalitarian, the Church was first, through the thirteenth-century and after the war with the Albigenses, to establish an outline of totalitarianism in Europe. This tree bore much fruit.

And the spring (source) of this totalitarianism was the use of the two little words, *anathema sit*.

Moreover, it was the judicious transposition of this use that became the forge from which all the parties in our day are founded into totalitarian regimes. It is a point of history that I have particularly studied.

I must give you the impression of a luciferian pride in speaking so of many things that are too high for me and about which I have no right to understand anything. This is not my fault. The ideas that come pose themselves within me by accident. Then, realizing their mistake, absolutely want to come out. I do not

know where they come from nor what they are worth, but for all the hazards I do not believe I have the right to prevent their operation.

Good-bye. I wish you every possible good, except the Cross; for I do not love my neighbor as myself, especially you, as you yourself have noticed. But Christ granted to his beloved friend, and without a doubt all those of his spiritual lineage, to come to him without degradation, defilement or distress, but in joy, purity and uninterrupted sweetness. Therefore, I can allow myself to wish that even if one day you have the honor of dying a violent death for the Lord, it may be in joy and not in agony, and that only three of the beatitudes (meekness, purity in heart and peacemaking) would apply to you. All the others include suffering, more or less.

This wish is not solely the weakness of human friendship. For any human being taken individually, I always find a reason to conclude that affliction is not appropriate for them, whether they seem too mediocre for something so grand, or on the contrary, too precious to be destroyed. One cannot fail more gravely in the second of the two essential commandments. And as for the first, I fail in a manner still more horrible, for every time I think on the crucifixion of Christ, I commit the sin of envy.

Believe, more than ever and at all times, in my filial friendship and tender gratitude,

Simone Weil.

9

Intellectual Vocation

From Casablanca

Dear S.

I am sending you four things.

First a personal letter for Father Perrin. It is very long and does not contain anything that could not wait indefinitely. Do not send it to him; give it to him when you see him, and tell him not to read it until a day when he has leisure and liberty of spirit.

Second (in the closed envelope, for greater convenience, but you may open it and the two others), a commentary on the Pythagorean texts that I have not had time to finish, to be combined with the work I left with you when we parted. This will be easy because it is numbered. It is a horribly bad draft and poorly composed, certainly very difficult to follow when reading it aloud and much too long to be transcribed. But I only sent it such as it is.

Tell P. Perrin that finally, as I had told him at first, I desire all of these collected works ultimately to be entrusted to the care of Thibon and combined with my notebooks. But also, that P. Perrin may keep it for as long as he thinks he might be able to extract a drop of juice for his own use. And that he may also show it to whomever he deems suitable. I bequeath all my property to his ownership without reservation. I only fear that aside from the Greek texts, this present is nothing of value.

Third, I have also included a copy of a translation of a fragment of Sophocles that I found among my papers. It is the dialogue between Electra and Orestes, of which I had only transcribed a few verses in the works you already have. In copying it, every word went to the very center of my being with a resonance so profound and so secret that the interpretation that equates Electra to the human soul and Orestes to Christ is nearly as certain for me as if I myself had written these verses. Tell this also to P. Perrin. In reading the text he will understand.

Read him also what I have written; I hope from the bottom of my heart that it does not cause him pain.

In finishing the work on the Pythagoreans, I felt in a definitive and certain way that—as far as any human being has the right to employ these two words—my vocation requires me to remain outside the Church, and without any special implicit engagement toward it, nor toward Christian dogma—in any case, for as long as I am not quite incapable of intellectual work. And that is so I may serve God and the Christian faith in the realm of the intelligence. The degree of

intellectual honesty that I am obligated to because of my particular vocation requires that my thoughts are indifferent to all ideas without exception, including for example materialism and atheism; equally welcoming and equally reserved with regard to all of them—as water is indifferent to objects that fall into it. It does not weigh them; they weigh themselves after a certain time of oscillation.

I know very well that I am not truly this way—it would be too beautiful. But I have the obligation to be to so; and I could never be that way if I was in the Church. In my particular case, to be 'born of water and the Spirit,' I must abstain from the visible water.

It's not that I sense in myself the capacity for intellectual creation. But I sense the obligations related to such a creation. It is not my fault; I cannot help it. Other people cannot appreciate these obligations. The conditions of intellectual creation or artistry are things so intimate and secret that they cannot be penetrated from outside. I know that artists excuse their bad actions in this way. But for me it is a different.

Indifference of thought at the level of intelligence is never incompatible with the love of God, even with a vow of love inwardly renewed each second of each day—each time eternal and each time entirely complete and new. If I were what I ought to be, I would be like this.

This position seems balanced precariously, but faithfulness—for which I hope God does not refuse me the grace—allows me to remain this way indefinitely without shifting, ἐν ὑπομένῃ.

It is for the service of Christ—in that he is the Truth—that I deprive myself of partaking of his body in the manner that he instituted it. More exactly, *he* deprives me. For I have never had, even until this second, the impression of having a choice. I am also as certain as any human being has the right to be that I will be deprived in this way for my whole life, except maybe—only maybe—in the case where circumstances definitively and totally remove the possibility of intellectual work from me.

If this causes grief for P. Perrin, I can only hope he forgets me quickly. For it would be infinitely better to have no place in his thoughts that to cause the least chagrin for him—except in the case where he could draw some good from it.

To return to my list, I have also sent you the paper on the spiritual use of school studies, which I took with me by mistake. It is also for P. P., because it relates indirectly to the *jécistes* of Montpellier. He can do whatever he wishes with the rest.

Let me thank you again from the bottom of my heart for your gentleness to

me. I think of you often. I hope that in time we can get news of one another; but this is not certain.

Affectionately,

Simone Weil

10

Last Thoughts

My Father,

It was a very kind act on your part to write me. It was precious to me to receive some affectionate words from you at the moment of my departure.

You cited for me the splendid words of St. Paul. But I hope that in confessing my misery to you I have not given you the impression of misunderstanding the mercy of God. I hope that I have never fallen—that I never will fall—to that degree of cowardice and ingratitude. I do not need any hope or any promise to believe that God is rich in mercy. I understand this richness with the certainty of experience; I have touched it. What I understand by ‘contact’ so much surpasses my capacity of comprehension and gratitude that even the promise of future happiness could not add anything to it for me, in the same way that for human intelligence, the sum of two infinites is not an addition.

The mercy of God is manifest in affliction as in joy, by the same right—maybe more—because under this form it has no human analogy. The mercy of man only appears in giving joy or else in inflicting pain in view of an outward result, healing of the body or education. But the outward effects of affliction are

not what testify to divine mercy. The outward effects of true affliction are nearly always bad. When we want to disguise this, we lie. It is in the affliction itself that the mercy of God shines—in the depths, at the center of our inconsolable grief. If, while persevering in love, we fall to the point where the soul cannot restrain the cry, 'My God, why have you abandoned me,'—if one remains at this point without ceasing to love, we finish by touching something that is not affliction, that is not joy—that is the central essence, essential, pure, beyond the senses, common to joy and to suffering. It is the very love of God.

We know then that joy is the sweetness of contact with the love of God; that affliction is the wound of this same contact when it is painful; and that only the contact itself matters, not the manner of contact.

In the same way, if we see someone very dear to us again after a long absence, the words we exchange with them are not important—only the sound of their voice that assures us of their presence.

The knowledge of this presence of God does not console us. It takes nothing away from the ugly bitterness of affliction, nor does it heal the mutilation of the soul. But we know with certainty that the love of God for us is the very substance of this bitterness and this mutilation.

I would want to be able to testify to this with gratitude.

The poet of the *Iliad* loved God enough to have this capacity. That is the implicit significance of this poem and its unique source of beauty. But hardly anyone has understood this.

Even if there were nothing more for us than life here below—even if the instant of death were to bring us nothing new—the infinite superabundance of divine mercy, in all its entirety, is already secretly present here below.

If by some absurd hypothesis, I were to die without ever having committed a serious fault, but nevertheless fell in my death to the bottom of hell, even then I would owe God infinite gratitude for his infinite mercy on account of my earthly life, and this in spite of being someone of such poor success. Even in this hypothesis, I would believe all the same that I had received my full share in the riches of divine mercy. For here below we receive the capacity to love God and to conceive of God with all certainty as being the substance of real joy—eternal, perfect and infinite. Through the fleshly veils of the body we receive sufficient intuitions of eternity from on high to erase all doubts on this subject.

What more is there to ask for or desire? A mother or a lover, having assurance that her son or her lover has joy, would have no thought in her heart capable of asking or desiring other things. We have much more. What we love is

perfect joy itself. When we know this, even hope becomes useless; it no longer makes sense. The only thing that remains to hope for is the grace not to disobey here below. The rest is God's affair alone and not our concern.

This is why, even though my imagination, mutilated by uninterrupted suffering for too long, cannot receive thoughts of salvation as something possible for me, there is still nothing lacking in me. What you say to me on this subject may have no other effect on me than to persuade me that you truly have some friendship for me. In this respect, your letter to me was very precious. It could not operate in any other way in me. But that was not necessary.

I know my miserable weakness well enough to realize that a little adverse fortune might be enough to fill my soul with suffering to such a point that for a long time, it would allow no place for the thoughts I just expressed to you. But even this matters little. Certainty is not subject to the states of the soul. Certainty is always in perfect security.

There is only one occasion when I know nothing of this certainty: when I am in contact with the affliction of others. This includes both the indifferent ones and the unknown ones, and—maybe even more so—those who comprised the centuries of the distant past. This contact causes me such atrocious pain—tears my soul to pieces—that the love of God sometimes becomes nearly impossible. It would take little more to say impossible. I reassure myself a little by remembering that Christ wept while foreseeing the horrors of the sack of Jerusalem. I hope he will pardon my compassion.

You caused me pain by writing that the day of my baptism would be a great joy for you. After having received so much from you, it is in my power to cause you such joy; and yet I just cannot give it a thought to do it, even for a second. I cannot help it. I truly believe that God alone has the power over me to prevent me from giving you that joy.

Even considering just the purely human plane of relationships, I own you my infinite gratitude. I believe that aside from you, every human being I ever happened to give the power to easily cause me pain through my friendship, has at some time amused themselves to do so, frequently or rarely, consciously or unconsciously … but all of them at some time. When I recognized it was conscious, I took a knife and I cut off the friendship without, by the way, forewarning the person in question.

They would not conduct themselves in such a way by malice, but as a result of the well-known phenomenon that causes hens, when they see a wounded chicken among them, to attack them and to peck them.

All people bear this animal nature within themselves. It determines their attitude to their fellows with or without their knowledge or consent. Thus, sometimes without the mind realizing anything, the animal nature in a person senses the mutilation of the animal nature in the other and reacts accordingly. So it is with all possible situations and their corresponding animal reactions. This mechanical necessity holds all people at every moment; they escape only in proportion to the place in their souls held by the authentically supernatural.

Even partial discernment is very difficult in this matter. But if it were truly, completely possible, one would have the criteria for the role of the supernatural in the life of a soul—certain criteria—precise as a balance and entirely independent of any religious beliefs. It is, among many other things, what Christ meant in saying that the two commandments are really only one.

It is with you alone that the backlash of this mechanism never reached me. My situation as it relates to you resembles that of a beggar, reduced by the poverty of always being hungry, who throughout one year, went to a prosperous house occasionally to search for bread, and who for the first time in her life would not suffer humiliation. Such a beggar, if she had a life to give in exchange for each morsel of bread, and if she gave them all, would think her debt was not diminished at all.

But in addition, because with you human relationships perpetually enshrine the light of God, this should carry my gratitude to higher degree still.

Yet I will not give you evidence of my gratitude, unless it is to say things about you that may cause you legitimate irritation with me. For it is not fitting at all to speak them or even think them. I do not have the right, and I know it well.

But since I have in fact thought them, I dare not keep them silent from you. If they are false, they will not do harm. It is not impossible that they contain some truth. In that case, there could be a place to believe that God sent you this truth through the pen that found itself in my hand. It is fitting for some thoughts to be sent by direct inspiration; and it is more fitting for others to be sent through an intermediary creature. And God uses one way or the other with His friends. It is well known that anything at all, even a donkey for example, may serve as an intermediary without any difference. God may even be pleased to choose the vilest objects for His use. I need to tell myself these things so as not to fear my own thoughts.

When I let you have the written sketch of my spiritual autobiography, it was with one intention. I wanted to provide you with the possibility of seeing a concrete and certain example of implicit faith. Certain, because I know that you

know that I am not lying.

Whether right or wrong, you believe I have the right to the name ‘Christian.’ I assure you that when I wrote about my childhood and my youth and used the words vocation, obedience, poverty of spirit, purity, acceptation, love of neighbor and other similar words, it was strictly with the signification that they have for me now. Yet I was raised by my parents and my brother in complete agnosticism; and I have never made the least effort to depart from it. I have never had the slightest desire to do so, and with good reason in my opinion. Despite this, since birth so to speak, each of my faults and each of my imperfections truly had no excuse of ignorance. I shall have to render a complete account of everything on the Day when the Lamb comes in wrath.

You can also believe my word that Greece, Egypt, ancient India, ancient China, the beauty of the world, the pure and authentic reflection of this beauty in the arts and sciences, the spectacle of the ‘folds’ of the human hearts in hearts empty of religious belief—all of these things have done as much to deliver me into the captivity of Christ as anything done by visible Christians. I believe I might even say more so. The love of those things outside visible Christianity keeps me outside the Church.

Such a spiritual destiny must seem unintelligible to you. But it is a very fitting object for reflection for this very reason. It is good to reflect on that which forces us to come out of ourselves. I can barely imagine how it can be that you truly offer friendship to me; but apparently, since it is so, it must have some use.

Theoretically you fully allow for the notion of implicit faith. In practice too you have a broad mind (spirit) and a very exceptional intellectual honesty. Nevertheless, in my judgment, it is still very insufficient. Only perfection is sufficient.

Whether I am right or wrong, I think I often recognize in you a biased attitude. Notably, a certain repugnance to admit in fact the possibility of implicit faith in particular cases. At least I get that impression when you talk about B___, and especially the Spanish peasant whom I regard as being not very far from sainthood. Without a doubt, it is true that this has been especially my fault. My awkwardness is such that I often do harm to those I love in my speech; I have experienced this very often. But it also seems to me that when you speak of unbelievers who are in affliction and accept their affliction as a part of the order of the world, this does not make the same impression on you as the behavior of Christians and their submission to the will of God. Yet it is the same thing. At least if I truly have the right to be called a Christian, I know by experience that

the virtue of Stoicism and the virtue of Christianity are one and the same virtue. The virtue of authentic Stoicism is, above all, love—not the caricature made by some Roman brutes. Theoretically, it seems you would not deny it either. But you find it repugnant to recognize, in concrete facts and contemporary examples, the possibility of the supernatural effectiveness of the virtue of Stoicism.

You caused me a lot of pain one day when you used the word ‘false’ when you wanted to say ‘non-orthodox.’ You corrected yourself immediately. In my opinion, this is a confusion of terms, incompatible with perfect intellectual honesty. It is impossible that this is pleasing to Christ, who is the Truth.

It seems certain that there is a serious imperfection in you. And how could there be an imperfection in you? It does not suit you at all to be imperfect. It is like a wrong note in a beautiful song.

This imperfection is, I believe, your attachment to the Church as an earthly homeland. In fact, it is your link with the heavenly homeland and an earthly homeland at the same time. You live there in an atmosphere of human warmth. This makes a little attachment almost inevitable.

That attachment may be for you the almost infinitely fine thread of which St. John of the Cross spoke, which for as long as it is not broken, holds the bird to the ground as effectively as a great metal chain. I imagine that the last thread, although very fine, must be the most difficult to cut. For once it is cut, one must fly and this causes fear. But the obligation is also imperative.

The children of God must have no other homeland here below than the universe itself, with the totality of rational creatures that it contains, has contained and will contain. This is the native city to which we owe our love.

All things less vast than the universe—the Church numbered among them—impose obligations that may be extremely far-reaching. But among these we will not find the obligation to love. At least I think not. I am also convinced that no obligation to the intelligence is found there.

Our love should have the same far-reaching extent as traversing all of space, the same equality as all the proportions of space and the same light as the sun. Christ orders us to achieve the perfection of our heavenly Father in imitating this indiscriminate distribution of light. Our intelligence must also have this complete impartiality.

All that exists is equally sustained in its existence by the creative love of God. The friends of God must love God to the point of merging their love with His as it concerns everything here below.

When a soul achieves a love that fills the whole universe equally, this love

must become the chick with golden wings that pierces the egg of the world. After this it loves the universe not from the inside, but from the outside, from the place where our firstborn brother, the Wisdom of God, is seated. Such a love does not love beings and things in God, but from the home (abode) of God. Being near to God, it lowers its own gaze, merging with God's gaze, onto everything and anything.

We must be catholic, so to speak, not bound by a thread to any created thing, unless it is to the totality of creation. Formerly, this universality could be implicit in the saints, even in their own consciousness. On one hand, they could implicitly have a rightful place in their souls to love only God and all His creation, and on the other, to their obligations to all that is smaller in the universe. I believe that St. Francis of Assisi and St. John of the Cross were this way. Also, they were both poets.

It is true that one must love one's brother, but, in the example Christ gave as an illustration of this commandment, the brother is a being, naked and bloody, unconscious on the road, and one who we do not know. It is a question of completely anonymous love and therefore, it is universal.

It is true that Christ also said to his disciples, 'Love one another.' But I believe this is a question of friendship, a personal friendship entered by two beings that links friends of God to each other. This friendship is the only legitimate exception to our duty to love only in a universal way. Still, in my opinion, it is only truly pure if it is surrounded on all sides, so to speak, by a compact envelope of indifference that maintains distance.

We are living in an epoch entirely without precedent, and in the present universal situation, what could formerly be implicit must become fully explicit. It must impregnate our language and all our ways of being.

Today it is not enough to be a saint. One must be saintly, as the present moment requires, with a new saintliness, which is also without precedent.

Maritain said this, but he only enumerated the aspects of saintliness of former times, which today—for our time at least—are obsolete. He did not sense, however, how much the saintliness of today must include miraculous innovation.

The new type of saintliness is a gushing spring, an invention. Keeping everything in proportion, in maintaining each thing to its own rank, it is nearly analogous to a new revelation of the universe and human destiny. It is to lay bare a large portion of truth and beauty, concealed until now by a thick layer of dust. There must be a greater genius than any has had since Archimedes invented

mechanics and physics. A new saintliness is an even more prodigious invention.

Only a kind of perversity could oblige the friends of God to deprive themselves from having genius, since to receive the superabundance of genius it is sufficient for them to ask their Father in the name of Christ.

It is a legitimate request today at least, because it is necessary. I believe that under this form or under some other equivalent, it is the first request to make now, a request to make every day, every hour, like a hungry child always asking for bread. The world needs saints that have genius, just like a village with a fever needs medicine. Where there is a need, there is an obligation.

I cannot make any use of these thoughts myself, or all that accompanies them in my spirit. First, the considerable imperfection that I am cowardly enough to leave subsist within me creates a distance far too great from the point where they would be applicable. This is unforgivable on my part. Such a great distance, in the best of cases, can only be crossed with time.

But even if I had already crossed it, I am a rotten instrument. I am too exhausted. And even if I believed in the possibility of God repairing the mutilations in my nature, I could not resolve to ask for it. Even if I was sure to obtain it, I could not. Such a request seems to me an offense to the infinite tender Love that gave me the gift of affliction.

If nobody consents to pay attention to these thoughts that have arisen, I know not how, in one as insufficient as me, they will be buried with me. If, as I believe, they contain the truth, it would be a pity. I am biased towards them. The fact that they are found in me prevents people from paying attention to them.

I see no one but you whom I can implore to favor them with your attention. I wish I could divert the charity which you have given me away from me and direct it toward that which I carry in me, the value of which, I have come to believe, is much greater than I am myself.

It is a great sorrow for me to fear that the ideas which have descended into me would be condemned to death by the contagion of my insufficiency and my misery. I never read the story of the sterile fig tree without shuddering. I think it is a portrait of me. In it, nature was also powerless, and yet that was not an excuse. Christ cursed it.

This is why even though there may not have been any particular, truly grave faults in my life, outside those that I have confessed to you, I think—to regard those things reasonably and coolly—I have more legitimate cause to fear the wrath of God than many great criminals.

Not that I do in fact fear it. By a strange reversal, the idea of the wrath of

God only increases love for Him in me. It is the idea of the possible of favor of God—of God's mercy—that causes me a sort of fear; that causes me to tremble.

But the feeling of being like a sterile fig tree for Christ tears my heart.

Happily, God can easily send, not only these same thoughts, if they are good, but also many other much better ones to a being who is intact and capable of serving him.

But who knows if these thoughts in me are not at least partially destined so that you could make some use of them? They can only be destined for someone who offered me a little friendship—and true friendship. For the others, whoever they are, I do not exist. I am the color of dead leaves, like certain insects.

In all that I just wrote you, if something coming from my pen seems false to you, forgive me. Do not be irritated with me.

I do not know if, in the course of weeks and months to come, I can send you news or receive yours. But this separation is only bad for me and therefore, it is not important.

I can only assure you again of my filial gratitude and my friendship without limits,

SW

11

Letter to a Priest

When I read the catechism of the Council of Trent, I sense that I have nothing in common with the religion that it describes. When I read the New Testament, the mystics, the liturgy and when I celebrate the Mass, I sense with special certainty that this faith is mine, or more exactly, would be mine apart from the distance between it and me because of my imperfection. This is a painful spiritual situation. I do not wish to make less painful, but more clear. Any such pain is acceptable with clarity.

I will enumerate to you a certain number of thoughts that have dwelt in me for years (as least some of them) and form an obstacle between me and the Church. I am not asking you to discuss their basis. I would be happy for such a discussion, but later on, in the second place.

I ask from you a certain response—without formulas like ‘I think that,’ etc.—on the compatibility or incompatibility of each of these opinions with membership in the Church. If they are incompatible, I want you to tell me clearly: ‘I would refuse baptism (or absolution) to anyone who told me they adhere to opinions contained in topic number such-and-such, etc.’ I am not asking for a rapid response. It is not urgent. I only ask for a categorical response.

I apologize for putting you to this trouble, but I do not see how it is avoidable. Reflection on these problems is not a game for me. Not only is it more than vitally important because eternal salvation is engaged; but, moreover, it is also more important in my eyes than my own salvation. The problem of life and death is a game by comparison.

Among the questions that follow, I am doubtful about certain ones; but in a

case where a strict faith (dogma) would esteem them false, they are as serious an obstacle for me as the others, for I am firmly convinced that they are doubtful, which is to say, it is not legitimate to deny them categorically.

Certain of these opinions (notably those concerning the mysteries, the non Judeo-Christian Scriptures, Melchizedek, etc.) were never condemned even though they were very probably held in the first centuries. This makes me ask whether they were not secretly accepted. In any case, if they were publicly proclaimed today by me or by others but condemned by the Church, I would not abandon them unless I were persuaded that they were false.

I have thought on these things for years with all the intensity, love and attention at my disposal. This intensity is miserably feeble because my imperfections are so great, but it seems to me it is always growing. To the degree that it grows, the bonds of my attachment to Catholicism become more and more powerful, and more and more profoundly rooted in the heart and the intelligence. But at the same time, the thoughts that draw me away from the Church also gain in force and clarity. If these thoughts are really incompatible with membership in the Church, I have hardly any hope of ever taking part in the sacraments. If this is the case, I cannot see how I can avoid the conclusion that my vocation is to be a Christian outside the Church. The possibility of such a vocation implies that the Church is not catholic in fact as it is in name, and that it must one day become so if it is destined to fulfill its mission.

The opinions to follow are, for me, of diverse degrees of probability or certainty, but all are accompanied in my spirit by a question mark. I will express myself in the indicative because of a poverty of language—I need a conjugation that contains a supplementary tense. In the domain of holy things, I affirm nothing categorically. But those opinions that conform to the teaching of the Church are also accompanied by the same question mark in my mind.

I consider a certain suspension of judgment regarding all ideas, whatever they are, without exception, to constitute the virtue of humility in the domain of the intelligence. Here is the list:

1. If we take a moment of history prior to Christ and sufficiently distant from him—for example, five centuries distant—and if we disregard what followed, at that moment Israel had less a share in God and divine truth than several of the surrounding peoples (India, Egypt, Greece, China). For the essential truth concerning God is that He is good. To believe that God could order men to commit acts of atrocious injustice and cruelty is the greatest error one could make with regard to God.

Zeus, in the *Iliad*, ordered nothing cruel. The Greeks believed ‘suppliant (begging) Zeus’ inhabits the afflicted and implores pity. But Yahweh is the ‘God of hosts (armies).’ The history of the Hebrews shows that this is not solely about the *stars*, but also the *warriors* of Israel. Now, Herodotus enumerates a great number of Hellenistic and Asiatic peoples, among whom *only one* had a ‘Zeus of armies.’ It is a blasphemy unknown in all the others. In the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, at least three thousand years old—without a doubt even older—is impregnated with evangelical charity. The dead man says to Osiris, ‘Lord of Truth, I bring you the truth. … I have destroyed evil for you. … I have not killed anyone. I have not made anyone weep. I have not left anyone to suffer hunger. I have never been the cause of a master doing evil to his slave. I have never caused anyone to be afraid. I have never made my voice haughty. I have never made myself deaf to words of justice and truth. I have not advanced my name for honours. I have not spurned God’s manifestations.’

The Hebrews, who were in contact with Egyptian civilization for four centuries, refused to adopt this sweet spirit. They wanted (willed) power.

All the pre-exilic texts are attached to this fundamental error about God, I think—except the book of Job, which has as its hero a non-Jew, the Song of Songs (but is it pre-exilic?) and certain Psalms of David (but are they attributed correctly?). In the other sections, the first perfectly pure character that figures in Jewish history is Daniel (who was initiated in Chaldean wisdom). The life of all the rest, beginning with Abraham, is soiled with atrocious things. (Abraham began by prostituting his wife).

This gives one the idea that Israel learned the essential truth concerning God (namely, that God is good before He is powerful) from foreign traditions, Chaldean, Persian or Greek, and as a favour of the exile.

2. What we call idolatry is in large measure a fiction of Jewish fanaticism. All peoples in all times were always monotheists. If the Hebrews of the good old days were resuscitated, and if they were given arms, they would exterminate all of us—men, women and children—for the crime of idolatry. They would reproach us for adoring Baal and Ashteroth, taking Christ to be Baal and the Virgin to be Ashteroth.

Conversely, perhaps Baal and Ashteroth were representations of Christ and the Virgin.

There is a reasonable charge against certain cultures for debaucheries that accompanied them—but, I think, much more rarely than we would think today.

But the cruelties linked to the cult of Yahweh—the exterminations ordered

by Him—are defilements at least as atrocious. Cruelty is a crime even more dreadful than lust. Lust satisfies itself elsewhere just as well through murder as it does by carnal union.

The sentiments of purported pagans for their statues were most probably the same as that inspired by the crucifix and the statues of the Virgin and the saints, with the same deviations as those in people who are spiritually and intellectually mediocre.

Do we not commonly attribute some supernatural virtue to some particular statue of the Virgin?

Even if they arrived at the belief that the divinity is totally present in some stone or wood, perhaps sometimes they had a reason. Do we not believe that God is present in the bread and the wine? Maybe they had the real presence of God in statues fashioned and consecrated through certain rites.

The true idolatry is lust (πλεονεξίαν ἐστιν εἰδωλολατρία: 'greed is idolatry,' Col. 3:5), and with its thirst for carnal goodness, the Jewish nation was guilty in the same moments when it was also worshiping God. The Hebrews had for idols, not metal or wood, but a race, a nation, something just as worldly. Their religion is in essence inseparable from such idolatry, because of their notion of the 'elect (chosen) people.'

3. The ceremonies of the Eleusian mysteries and of Osiris were regarded as sacraments in the sense we intend today. And *maybe* they were true sacraments, with the same virtue as baptism or the Eucharist, drawing that virtue from the same relationship with Christ's Passion. The Passion was coming. Today it is past. The past and the future are symmetrical. Chronology may not have a determining role in the relationship between God and man, a relationship of which one term is 'eternal.'

If Redemption, with its corresponding tangible signs and symbols, had not been present on the earth since its origin, we could not pardon God—if it is permissible to employ such words without blaspheming—for the affliction of many innocents, the uprooted, the slaves, those tortured and put to death over the course of centuries prior to Christianity. Christ is present on this world, unless people chase him away, wherever there is crime and affliction. Without the supernatural effects of this presence, how would the innocent crushed by affliction avoid falling into the crime of cursing God, resulting in damnation?

Elsewhere, St. John refers to 'The Lamb that was slaughtered since the foundation of the world.'

The proof that the content of Christianity existed before Christ is that since

then, there has been no considerable change in human behavior.

4. Among diverse peoples (India, Egypt, China, Greece), there may have been sacred scriptures revealed in the same way as the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. Some of the texts that remain today may be fragments or echoes of them.

5. The passages of Scripture (Genesis, Psalms, St. Paul) concerning Melchizedek prove that from the dawn of Israel's existence, there existed outside of Israel a knowledge of God situated on the same plane as Christianity and infinitely superior to anything Israel ever possessed.

Nothing prohibits the supposition of a link between Melchizedek and the ancient mysteries. There is an affinity between the bread and Demeter, the wine and Dionysius.

According to Genesis, Melchizedek is apparently a king of Canaan. Therefore, the corruption and impiety of the villages of Canaan were probably either dated back a few centuries to the times of the massacres, or were the slanderous inventions of the Hebrews against their victims.

6. The passage in St. Paul on Melchizedek approaches the words of Christ: 'Abraham saw my day.' Could the same indicate that Melchizedek was already an incarnation of the Word?

In any case, we are not certain that there were no incarnations of the Word prior to Jesus, or that Osiris in Egypt or Krishna in India were not among that number.

7. If Osiris is not a man who lived on earth while being God, in the same manner as Christ, then the history of Osiris is at least a prophecy infinitely more clear, more complete and more near to the truth than all that is called by that name in the Old Testament. The same applies to other gods that died and were resurrected.

The extreme importance of this in the present is that it is becoming urgent to remedy the divorce that has existed for twenty centuries and will continue to worsen between secular civilization and spirituality in Christian countries. Our civilization owes nothing to Israel and very little to Christianity. It owes almost everything to pre-Christian antiquity (the Germans, the Druids, Rome, Greece, the Aegeo-Cretans, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Babylonians …). If there is a watertight barrier between this antiquity and Christianity, it is the same barrier that divides our secular life and our spiritual life. In order for Christianity to

truly become incarnate—for Christian inspiration to impregnate our whole life entirely—we must recognize first that historically, our secular civilization proceeded from a religious inspiration that, although chronologically pre-Christian, was Christian in essence. The Wisdom of God must be regarded as the unique source of all light here below, even the feeble lights that illuminate the things of this world.

And the same applies for Prometheus. The history of Prometheus is the same history as Christ, projected into the eternal. It lacks only the localization of time and space.

Greek mythology is full of prophecies. So also the stories of European folklore, what we call ‘fairy tales.’

Many names of Greek gods are probably in reality various names designating a single divine Person, namely the Word. I think this is the case with Dionysus, Apollo, Artemis, heavenly Aphrodite, Prometheus, Eros (*l’Amour*), Proserpine and many others.

I think also that Hestia, Athena and perhaps Hephaestus are names for the Holy Spirit. Hestia is the ‘central fire.’ Athena came out of the head of Zeus after he had eaten his wife, Wisdom, who was pregnant. She ‘proceeds’ therefore from God and from His wisdom. The olive attributed to her, and oil, in the Christian sacraments, has an affinity with the Holy Spirit.

We commonly comment on certain acts, and certain words of Christ, saying, ‘That the prophecies must be fulfilled.’ These are the Hebrew prophecies. But other acts and other words that relate to non-Hebrew prophecies could be commented on in the same way.

Christ commenced his public life by changing water into wine. At the end, he transformed wine into blood. He thus marked his affinity with Dionysus. So also with his words, ‘I am the true vine.’

The words, ‘Unless a kernel dies,’ expresses his affinity with the gods who died and were resurrected that have vegetation for an image, like Attis and Proserpine.

The maternity (motherhood) of the Virgin has a mysterious relationship with the words of *Timaeus* by Plato concerning a certain essence, mother of all things and forever intact. All the mother goddesses of antiquity, like Demeter and Isis, were figures of the Virgin.

The comparison of the Cross with a tree—so insistent—of the crucifixion with hanging, must be related to mythologies that have disappeared today.

If the Scandinavian poem, *The Rune of Odin*, came prior to any Christian

contamination (this is not verifiable), it also contains a very striking prophecy:

‘I know I hung on a tree balanced by the wind for nine full nights, wounded by a spear and offered to Odin, alone by myself; this tree of which no one knows the roots from which it springs.

‘No one gave me bread, nor a horn from which to drink. I looked down, I applied myself to the runes, then I descended from there.’ (*First Edda*).

The term, ‘Lamb of God,’ without a doubt, relates to traditions which may be linked with what we call ‘Totemism’ today.The history of Zeus Ammon in Herodotus (Zeus slaying a lamb in order to appear, covered with a fleece, to the one who begs to let him be seen) approaches the words of St. John, ‘The Lamb slain since the constitution of the world,’ and casts the above in a new light. The first sacrifice that pleased God—that of Abel recalled in the canon of the Mass as an image of Christ—was an animal sacrifice. It is the same in the second sacrifice—that of Noah—which definitively saved humankind from the wrath of God and led to a pact between God and man. These are the same effects as in the Passion of Christ. There is a very mysterious relationship between the two.

In very ancient times, we thought the real presence of God was in the animals we killed for eating; that God descended into them to offer Himself as food for people. This thought made the animal food into a communion; otherwise it is a crime, unless we have more or less a Cartesian philosophy.

Maybe at Thebes, in Egypt, they had the real presence of God in the ritually sacrificed ram as we have today in the consecrated host. It is worth noting that at the moment Christ was crucified, the sun was in the constellation of the Ram (Aries).

Plato, in *Timaeus*, described the astronomical constitution of the universe as a sort of crucifixion of the Soul of the World, the point of intersection is at the point of equinox, that is to say, the constellation of the Ram.

Several texts (*Epinomis*, *Timaeus*, *Symposium*, Philolaos, Proclus) indicate that the geometric construction of the proportional mean between a number and unity—the centre of Greek geometry—was the symbol of the divine mediation between God and humanity.

Now, a great number of the words of Christ reported in the Gospels (esp. St. John) are marked with great insistence that can only be intentional. They have the algebraic form of the proportional mean. Example: ‘As my Father sent me, so I send you.’ The same relationship unites the Father with Christ as Christ to his disciples. Christ is the proportional mean between God and the saints. The very word ‘mediation’ indicates this.

I conclude that as Christ recognized himself in the Messiah of the Psalms, in the Just One who suffers in Isaiah, in the serpent in the wilderness of Genesis—in the same way, he recognized himself in the proportional mean of Greek geometry, which becomes the most brilliant of prophecies.

Ennius, in a Pythagorean writing says, ‘The moon is called Proserpine because, *like a serpent*, she turns now to the left, now to the right.’

All the mediator-gods, comparable to the Word, are lunar, bearers of horns, lyres or bows that evoke the crescent (Osiris, Artemis, Apollo, Hermes, Dionysus, Zagreus, Eros, …).

Prometheus is the exception, but in Aeschylus, Io is his counterpart, condemned to perpetual vagabondage as he is to crucifixion, and she is horned. (It is worth remarking that before he was crucified, Christ was a vagabond—and Plato depicts Eros as a miserable vagabond).

If the sun is the image of the Father, the moon—perfect reflection of solar splendor, but a reflection that we may contemplate (i.e. gaze on), and which suffers diminution and disappearance—is the image of the Son. The light is that of the Spirit.

Heraclites had a Trinity, which we divine solely through fragments that remain, but which appears clearly in *Hymn to Zeus* by Cleanthus, a Heraclitian inspiration. The Persons are: Zeus, the Logos and the divine Fire or Lightning.

Cleanthus says of Zeus, ‘This universe *consents* to your domination (ἑχῶν χρατεῖται)—such is the virtue of the servant that you hold in your invisible hands—on fire, double-edged, eternally alive, lightning.’ The lightening is not an instrument of coercion, but a fire that creates consent and voluntary obedience. Therefore, it is Love. This love is a servant, an eternal living presence, and therefore a Person. The very ancient representations of Zeus with a double-edged axe (a symbol of lightning) in the Cretan bas-reliefs had perhaps already signified this. Compare ‘double-edged’ with the words of Christ, ‘I have not come bearing peace, but a sword.’

The fire is constantly the symbol of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

The Stoics, heirs of Heraclitus, called *pneuma* the fire whose energy sustains the order of the world. *Pneuma*, this is the breath that ignites (fiery breath).

The semen that produces carnal generation (natural conception) is, according to them and according to the Pythagoreans, a spirit mixed with liquid.

To be understood properly, the words of Christ about the new birth—and as a result, all the symbolism of baptism—must be particularly reconciled with Pythagorean and Stoic conception. Elsewhere, I think Justin compares baptism

with conception. Hence the Orphic words, ‘Kid, you have fallen in the milk,’ must perhaps be connected to baptism (the ancients regarded milk as being made of the father’s semen).

The famous words, ‘The Great Pan is dead,’ perhaps wanted to announce, not the dissolution of idolatry, but the death of Christ—Christ is the Great Pan, the Great All. Plato (*Cratylus*) says that Pan is the ‘*logos*.’ In *Timaeus*, he gives this name to the Soul of the World.

Saint John, by using the words *logos* and *pneuma*, indicates a profound affinity that links Greek Stoicism (to be distinguished from that of Cato and Brutus!) with Christianity.

Plato also knew clearly, and indicated by allusions in his works, the dogmas of the Trinity, mediation, the incarnation, the Passion and the notions of grace and salvation through love. He knew the essential truth. Namely, that God is good. He is only all-powerful in addition.

In saying, ‘I have come to cast fire on the earth, and what do I wish? That the fire had already been lit!’ Christ indicates his affinity with Prometheus.

His words, ‘I am the Way,’ are comparable to the Chinese ‘Tao,’ a word that literally means ‘The way.’ And metaphorically it refers, on one hand, to the method of salvation, and on the other, to the impersonal god who is that of Chinese spirituality, but who, although impersonal, is the model of the sages and acts continually.

His words, ‘I am the Truth,’ make us think of Osiris, Lord of Truth.

When he says in one of his most important teachings (lit. words), ‘Those that *do* the truth’ (ποιοῦντες ἀληθειαν), he employs an expression that is not Greek, and which for all I know is not Hebrew (must verify). In contrast, it is Egyptian. *Maat* means both justice and truth. That is significant. Without a doubt, it is not for nothing that the Holy Family went into Egypt.

Baptism regarded as a death is the equivalent to ancient initiations. St. Clement of Rome employed the word ‘initiated’ for baptism. Using the word ‘mystery’ to designate the sacraments indicates the same equivalence. The circular baptistery very much resembles the stone basin in which, according to Herodotus, the mystery of the passion of Osiris was celebrated. Both perhaps evoke the high (lit. ‘full’) sea, those high seas on which Noah’s ark and that of Osiris floated, the wood that would save humanity before that of the Cross.

Many accounts from mythology and folklore could be translated into Christian truth without ever forcing or distorting anything. On the contrary, doing so would project a vivid light on them. And this truth would also discover

clarity.

8. Whenever someone pure would invoke Osiris, Dionysis, Krishna, Buddha, the Tao, etc., the Son of God responded by sending the Holy Spirit to them. And the Spirit acted on their souls, not by engaging them to abandon their religious tradition, but by giving them the light—and in the best case, the fullness of light—inside that tradition.

Prayer among the Greeks very much resembled Christian prayer. When Aeschylus says in *The Frogs* of Aristophanes, 'Demeter, you who nourish my thoughts, would that I be worthy of the mysteries,' it very much resembles the prayer of the Virgin, and had to have the same virtue. Aeschylus describes contemplation perfectly in this splendid verse: 'Whosoever turns his thoughts to Zeus shall cry out his glory—they shall receive the fullness of wisdom.' (He recognized the Trinity: 'Beside Zeus stands his acts and his words.')

Therefore, it is futile (useless) to send missionaries to entreat the Asian peoples, the Africans or Oceana to enter the Church.

9. When Christ said, 'Teach all nations and bring them the News (Gospel),' he ordained them to bring news, not a theology. Christ himself, having come, tells them to add this news to the religion of Israel.

He probably wanted each apostle to likewise add the good news of the life and death of Christ to the religions in the nations where they would find themselves. But the order was misunderstood because of the ineradicable nationalism of the Jews. They needed to impose their Scriptures everywhere.

If it seems very presumptuous to suppose the Apostles could misunderstand the orders of Christ, I would respond that they had their share of miscomprehension on certain points. Because after Christ was resurrected, he said, 'Go to the nations (or the Gentiles) and baptize them,' after which he spent forty days with the disciples, revealing his doctrine to them. Peter nevertheless needed a special revelation and a dream for him to decide to baptize a pagan. Peter had to invoke that dream to explain this act to his entourage; and Paul had great difficulties eliminating circumcision.

Besides, it is written that a tree is judged by its fruits. The Church has borne too much bad fruit for there not to be some error from the beginning.

Europe has been spiritually uprooted, cut off from that antiquity where all the elements of our civilization had its origins. And she went on to uproot other continents since the sixteenth-century.

Christianity, for twenty centuries, has gone practically nowhere outside the

white race; Catholicism is even much more restricted. America remained without hearing the words of Christ for sixteen centuries (yet St. Paul had said, ‘the News that has been announced to all of creation’) and its nations have been destroyed in the midst of many horrible cruelties before ever having had time to know him. The zeal of missionaries has not Christianized Africa, Asia and Oceana, but has brought these territories under the cold, cruel and destructive domination of the white race, which crushes everything.

It would be strange that the word of Christ produced such effects if it had been properly understood.

Christ said, ‘Teach the nations and baptize those who believe,’ which is to say, those who believe in him. He never said, ‘Obligate them to renounce everything their fathers viewed as sacred and adopt the history of a people unknown to them as a holy book.’ I have been assured that the Hindus would in no way be prevented by their own tradition from receiving baptism if the missionaries had not imposed renunciation of Vishnu and Shiva as a condition. If a Hindu believes that Vishnu is the Word and Shiva is the Holy Spirit, and that the Word had been incarnated in Krishna and in Rama before becoming incarnate in Jesus, by what right do we refuse them baptism? All the same, in the quarrel between the Jesuits and the Papacy over missions in China, the Jesuits were the ones fulfilling the Word of Christ.

10. Missionary action that is actually carried out (especially since the condemnation of Jesuit policy in China since the seventeeth-century) is bad, except maybe in particular cases. The missionaries—even the martyrs—are accompanied too closely by cannons and battleships to be true witnesses of the Lamb. I do not know that the Church has ever officially condemned the punitive actions taken to avenge the missionaries.

Personally, I would never give as much as a franc towards missionary work. I think for someone to change their religion is as dangerous as it is for a writer to change languages. This can succeed but also has fatal consequences.

11. The Catholic religion contains truths explicitly that other religions contain implicitly. But conversely, other religions contain explicitly truths that are solely implicit in Christianity. The best instructed Christians could still learn much concerning divine things in other religious traditions, although the internal light can also help us perceive everything through our own. Nevertheless, if these other traditions disappear from the face of the earth, it would be an irreparable loss. The missionaries have made too many disappear already.

St. John of the Cross compares faith to reflections of silver, the truth being gold. The diverse authentic religious traditions are different reflections of the same truth, and may be equally precious. But we do not realize this because each of us lives only one of these traditions and perceives the others from outside. Now, as the Catholics repeat ceaselessly to unbelievers—with good reason—a religion can only be known from the inside.

It is as if two men were placed in two adjoining rooms (lit. ‘communication chambers’). If each one sees the sun through his own window and the neighbor’s wall illumined by the sun’s rays, each one believes he alone sees the sun and his neighbor only has the reflection.

The Church recognizes that the diversity of vocations is precious. It needs to hear this idea of vocations situated outside the Church.

12. As the Hindus say, God is both personal and impersonal. God is impersonal in the sense that His infinitely mysterious way of being a Person is infinitely different from the way humans are persons.

We can only grasp this mystery by employing faith like two pincers, this notion of two contraries, incompatible here below, compatible only in God. (It is the same for many other pairs of contraries, as the Pythagoreans used to understand).

We can only think of God by faith—not successfully—as three-in-one (a thing very few Catholics reach) only by thinking of God as both personal and impersonal at once. Otherwise we represent God, sometimes as one single divine Person and sometimes as three Gods. Many Christians confound this oscillation with the true faith.

Saints of a very high spirituality—like St. John of the Cross—have grasped simultaneously and with equal force both the personal and impersonal aspects of God. Less advanced souls hold their attention and their faith overall or exclusively on one of these two aspects. Thus, the little saint, Therese of Lisieux, only represents a personal God for herself.

As in the Occident (the West), the word ‘god’ in its usual sense designates a *person.* People whose attention, faith and love bear almost exclusively on the *impersonal* aspect of God can call themselves—and believe themselves to be—‘atheists,’ even though supernatural love dwells in their hearts. Such people are surely saved.

They are recognized by their attitude to things here below. All those who possess a state of pure love of neighbour and acceptance of the order of the world—including affliction—all of them are surely saved, even if they should

live and die in appearance as atheists.

Those who possess these two virtues perfectly are saints, even if they live and die as atheists.

When we encounter such people, it is futile to want to convert them. They are already completely converted, though not visibly. They have been born anew by water and the Spirit, even if they have never been baptized. They have eaten the bread and drank the wine, even if they have never taken communion.

13. Love (charity) and faith, although distinct, are inseparable. The two forms of love even more so. Whoever is capable of a movement of pure compassion towards the afflicted (a very rare thing anyway) possesses—maybe implicitly, but always really—the love of God and faith.

Christ does not save everyone who says to him, ‘Lord, Lord.’ But he saves everyone with a pure heart who gives a piece of bread to a starving person, without thinking of him in the least. When thanked, they respond, ‘When, Lord, have we fed you?’

Thus, the affirmation of St. Thomas [Aquinas]—that those who refuse adherence to a single article of faith have no degree of faith at all—is false, unless we can establish that the heretics never had love of neighbour. But this would be difficult. As far as we know, the ‘perfect’ [among the] Cathars, for example, possessed it to a degree very rare even among the saints.

If we pretend the devil produces the appearance of such virtues in heretics to better seduce the soul, it would contradict the words, ‘You shall know the tree by its fruit.’ We would be reasoning exactly like those who regarded Christ as a demoniac; and perhaps we would be very nearly committing the unpardonable sin: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

So too, atheists—‘infidels’—capable of pure compassion are just as close to God as any Christian, and therefore know him just as well, even though their love is expressed in different words or in silence. ‘For God is love.’ And if God rewards those who seek Him, God gives light to those who approach, especially if they desire the light.

14. St. John said, ‘Anyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.’ Thus, anyone who believes this, even if they adhere to nothing else the Church affirms, has true faith. Hence, St. Thomas was completely wrong. Further, by adding other articles of faith to the Trinity, the Incarnation and Redemption, the Church went contrary to the New Testament. To follow John, they should never have excommunicated anyone except the Docetists—those

who deny the Incarnation. The definition of the faith according to the Council of Trent (‘firm belief in all that the Church teaches’) is a long way from that of St. John, for whom the faith was purely and simply belief in the Incarnation of the Son of God in the person of Jesus.

Everything has happened as if over time we no longer regarded Jesus, but the Church, as being God Incarnate here below. The metaphor of the ‘mystical body’ serves as a bridge between the two conceptions. But there is a small difference: Christ was perfect, whereas the Church is stained with a multitude of crimes.

The Thomist conception of faith implies a ‘totalitarianism’ as oppressive or worse than that of Hitler. For if the mind (spirit) completely adheres, not only to all the Church recognizes as being the strict faith, but also to all that it will ever recognize as such, the intelligence is gagged and reduced to servile tasks.

The metaphor of ‘veil’ or ‘reflection’ applied by the mystics to the faith permitted them to exit this oppression. They accepted the teaching of the Church, not as being the truth, but as being something behind which the truth is found.

This is a long way from the faith defined by the catechism of the Council of Trent. Everything has happened as if under the same name of ‘Christianity’ and inside the same social organization there had been two distinct religions, that of the mystics and the other one.

I believe the former is the truth and the confusion of the two has been both a great advantage and a great inconvenience.

According to the phrase of St. John, the Church has never had the right to excommunicate anyone who truly believes that Christ was the Son of God descended here below in the flesh.

The definition of St. Paul is much wider still: ‘Believe that God exists and rewards those who search for Him.’ This conception has nothing in common with St. Thomas and the Council of Trent. They are even in contradiction. For how dare we affirm that there was never anyone among the heretics who searched for God?

15. The Samaritans were to the ancient Law what the heretics are to the Church. The ‘perfect’ Cathars (among others) were to many theologians what the Samaritan of the parable was to the priest and the Levite. Hence, what are we to think of those who left them to be massacred and who encouraged Simon de Montfort [to do so]?

The Church should have understood from the parable never to excommunicate anyone who practices love of neighbor.

16. There is not, as far as I can see, any real difference—except in the modes of expression—between the Manichaean conception and the Christian conception of the relation between good and evil.

17. The Manichaean tradition is one in which we would be sure to find some truth if we study with enough piety and attention.

18. Noah was a ‘figure of Christ’ (see Origen), a perfect and just man whose sacrifice pleased God and saved humanity, the person through whom God made an alliance with all humanity. His drinking and his nudity must probably be understood in a mystical sense. In this case, the Hebrews must have distorted history, as Semites (children of Shem) and murderers of the Canaanites. Ham must have had a share in the revelation of Noah; Shem and Japheth must have refused to take part.

A Gnostic cited by Clement of Alexandria (*Strom. VI, 6*) affirms that the allegorical theology of Pherecydes (mother of Pythagoras) is borrowed from ‘The Prophecies of Ham’—Pherecydes was a Syrian. He said, ‘At the moment of Creation, Zeus transformed himself into love.’ Would this be the faith of Noah?

This prompts me to think about the genealogies. The offspring of Ham were the Egyptians, the Philistines (that is to say, the Aegeo-Cretans or Pelasgi, very likely), the Phoenicians, the Sumerians and the Canaanites—in other words, the whole Mediterranean civilization immediately before the historical times.

Herodotus, confirmed by a number of indications, affirms that the Greeks borrowed all their metaphysical and religious knowledge from the Egyptians, via the Phoenicians and the Pelasgi.

We know the Babylonians borrowed their traditions from the Sumerians, who therefore date back to the ‘Chaldean Wisdom.’

In the same way, the Druidism of Gaul is very probably Iberian and not Celtic; for before Diogenes Laertius, certain Greeks saw in it one of the origins of Greek philosophy, which would otherwise be incompatible with the late arrival of Celts in Gaul.

Ezekiel, in the splendid passage where he compares Egypt to the tree of life and Tyre to the cherubim guarding it, confirms completely all that Herodotus teaches us.

It seems then that the people who descended from Ham, and first of all the Egyptians, knew the true religion, the religion of love, where God is the sacrificial victim and at the same time, the all-powerful ruler. Among the people who descended from Shem or Japheth, some—such as the Babylonians, the

Celts and the Greeks—have received this revelation from the descendants of Ham after conquering and invading them. Others—Romans and Hebrews—refused out of pride and wanted national power. Among the Hebrews, we must make an exception for Daniel, Isaiah, the author of the book of Job and some others. Among the Romans, the exceptions are Marcus Aurelius and in a sense maybe such men as Plautus and Lucretius.

Christ was born in the territory belonging to these two rebellious peoples. But the inspiration at the centre of the Christian religion is a sister to that of Pelasgi, Egypt and Ham.

Yet Israel and Rome have put their mark on Christianity, Israel through the inclusion of the Old Testament as sacred text and Rome by making Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, which was something like what Hitler dreams [of doing].

This double defilement, nearly original, explains all the defilements that make the history of the Church so atrocious over the course of centuries.

Something as horrible as the crucifixion of Christ could only occur in a place where evil far outweighed the good. But the Church, born and raised in such a place, was also bound to be impure from the beginning and to remain so.

19. The Church is not perfectly pure except in one aspect: as the guardian of the sacraments. What is perfect is not the Church, but the body and blood of Christ on the altars.

20. The church does not seem to be infallible, for in fact it is evolving. In the Middle Ages, the saying, ‘Outside the church there is no salvation,’ was taken in the literal sense by the general magisterial of the Church. At least the documents seem to indicate this. And today we understand it in the sense of the ‘Church invisible.’

A council has declared *anathema* (cursed) anyone who does not believe that in the words of Christ, ‘Anyone who is not born anew of water and the Spirit,’ the word ‘water’ designates material baptism. On this count, all the priests today are *anathema*. For if someone who has not been and has no desire to be baptized may be saved, as is generally admitted today, they are reborn of water and the Spirit in a certain sense, necessarily symbolic. The word ‘water’ is taken therefore in the symbolic sense.

A council has declared *anathema* anyone who said they were certain of final perseverance (i.e. assured of salvation) without having a particular revelation. St. Therese of Liseiux, a little before her death, said she was certain of her salvation

without alleging any revelation. This did not prevent her from being canonized.

If someone asks several priests if something is a strict article of faith, they obtain different responses, often dubious. This makes for an impossible situation, when the edifice itself is so rigid that Thomas could make the affirmation cited above.

There is something in this that does not fit.

21. In particular, the belief that a person may be saved outside the visible Church requires that we rethink all the elements of the faith, under pain of complete incoherence, for the whole edifice is constructed around the contrary affirmation, which almost no one would dare support.

No one has wanted to recognize the necessity of this revision yet. One gets out of it through miserable tricks. The cracks (lit. dislocations) are masked with ersatz solutions, glaring faults of logic.

If the Church does not recognize this necessity soon, it is to be feared that it will not be able to accomplish its mission.

There is no salvation without ‘new birth,’ without interior illumination, without the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the soul. If then salvation is possible outside the Church, individual or collective revelations are possible outside Christianity. In that case, the true faith consists of a special adherence very different from that which consists of believing such-and-such an opinion. We must rethink the notion of faith.

22. In fact, the mystics of almost every religious tradition come together almost to the point of being identical. This constitutes the truth of each.

The contemplative practices in India, Greece, China, etc. are all as supernatural as those of the Christian mystics. Notably, there is, for example, a very great affinity between Plato and John of the Cross. Also between the Hindu Upanishads and St. John of the Cross. Taoism is also very close to the Christian mystics.Orphism and Pythagorism were authentic mystical traditions.

23. There is no reason at all to suppose that after a crime as atrocious as the murder of a perfect human being, humanity must become better and in fact, globally it does not seem to be getting better.

Redemption is situated on another plane, an eternal plane. In a general sense, there is no reason to establish a connection between the degree of perfection and chronology. Christianity caused the notion of progress to enter the world, previously unknown, and this notion became the poison of the modern world. It de-Christianized it. It must be abandoned.

We must undo the superstition of chronology [‘progressivism’] in order to find eternity.

24. The dogmas of the faith are not things to affirm. They are things to be regarded from a certain distance with attention, respect and love. This is like the bronze Serpent whose virtue is such that anyone who looks at it lives. This watchful and loving look, by an impact of backlash, causes a source of light to flood into the soul. It illuminates all the aspects of human life here below. The dogmas themselves lose this virtue once we affirm them.

The proposition ‘Jesus Christ is God’ or ‘the consecrated bread and wine are the body and blood of Jesus,’ set forth as facts, have no meaning, strictly speaking. The value of these propositions is absolutely different from the truth enclosed in the accurate statement of a fact (e.g. Salazar is president of the government of Portugal) or a geometrical theory.

Their value is not, strictly speaking, of the order of truth, but of a superior order; for it is a value the intelligence cannot grasp, except indirectly through its effects. And the truth, in a strict sense, is the domain of the intelligence.

25. Miracles are not proofs of the faith (a proposition charged as *anathema* by I know not which council). If miracles constitute proofs, they prove too much. For all religions have and have always had their miracles, including the strangest sects. There is reference to a dead person rising in Lucian. The Hindu traditions are full of such stories and they say that even today in India, miracles are events without interest because of their banality.

To claim either that only Christian miracles are authentic and all the others false, or that they alone are caused by God and all the rest by demons, is a miserable expedient. For it is an arbitrary claim, and hence, the miracles prove nothing. They themselves need to be proven since they receive a stamp of authenticity from the outside.

The same can be said of prophecies and martyrs.

When Christ invokes his ‘χάλαἐργα,’ there is no reason to translate them ‘miracles.’ It may just as well be translated ‘good works’ or ‘beautiful acts.’

As I understand it, Christ’s thought was that he should be recognized as holy because he was perpetually and exclusively doing good.

He said, ‘Without my works, they would be without sin,’ but also, putting the two things on the same plane, ‘Without my words, they would be without sin.’ Now his words were not in any way miraculous, only beautiful.

Even the notion of ‘miracle’ is Western and modern; it is connected to the

scientific conception of the world, with which it is nevertheless incompatible. What we regard as miracles, the Hindus see as natural effects of exceptional powers that are found in a few people, and more often in the saints. They thus constitute a presumption of saintliness.

The word ‘signs’ in the Gospels does not mean any more than that. It *cannot* mean more than that. For Christ said, ‘Many will say to me: *Did we not perform signs in your name?* And I will say to them, *Away from here, workers of iniquity* …’ And ‘There will arise false prophets and pseudo-Christs, and they will provide signs and considerable wonders that even the elect, if they were able, would be deceived.’ Revelation 13:3–4 seems to indicate the death and resurrection of the Anti-Christ.

Deuteronomy says, ‘If a prophet wants to announce a new god, even if he works miracles, kill him.’

If the Jews were wrong to kill Christ, it was not therefore because of his miracles, but because of the saintliness of his life and the beauty of His words.

With regard to the historical authenticity of what are called miracles, there is no sufficient basis to either affirm or deny them categorically.

If we admit their authenticity, there are several possible ways to conceive the nature of these acts. One of these is compatible with the scientific conception of the world and is preferable for that reason. The scientific conception of the world, properly understood, must not be separated from the true faith. God created this universe as a fabric of secondary causes. It seems impious to suppose there are holes in this fabric, as if God could not achieve His ends without violating His own work.

If we admit such holes, it would be a scandal that God does not make some more holes in order to save the innocent from affliction. Resignation to the affliction of innocents cannot arise in the soul except by the contemplation and acceptance of necessity, which is the rigorous sequence (chain) of secondary causes. Otherwise we would be forced to take recourse to artifices (tricks) that all essentially negate (deny) the very fact of the affliction of the innocent, and therefore distort all intelligence of the human condition and even the core of the Christian conception.

The phenomena said to be miracles are compatible with the scientific conception of the world if we admit the postulate that once sufficiently advanced, science could render an account of them.

This postulate does not remove the link between these phenomena and the supernatural. A fact can be linked to the supernatural in three ways:

Certain phenomena can be the effects either of what occurs in the flesh, or the action of a demon on the soul, or the activity of God. Thus someone cries because of physical pain; beside that person, another cries as they think about God with a pure love. In the two cases, there are tears. These tears are the effects of a psychophysical mechanism. But in one of the two cases a cog in this mechanism is supernatural; it is charity. In this sense, although the tears are such an ordinary phenomenon, the tears of a saint in a state of authentic contemplation are supernatural.

In this sense and only in this sense, the miracles of a saint are supernatural. They are supernatural by the same principle as all the material effects of charity. Almsgiving accomplished in pure charity is a wonder as great as walking on water.

A saint who walks on water is at every point analogous to a saint who weeps. In both cases there is a psychophysiological mechanism, one cog of which is charity. There is the miracle: that charity can be a cog in such a mechanism and has a visible effect. The visible effect in one case is walking on water, in the other case it is tears. The former is more rare. That is the only difference.

Are there certain phenomena which the flesh alone can never produce, but are solely mechanisms where the cogs are either supernatural love or demonic hatred? Is walking on water numbered among these?

It is possible. We are too ignorant to be able to affirm or deny in this matter.

Are there phenomena which neither the flesh nor demonic hatred can produce, that can only be the result of mechanisms that have charity among their cogs? Would such phenomena be the certain criteria for sainthood?

Maybe there are. Again, we are too ignorant to be able to affirm or deny it. But for this very reason, if such phenomena exist, they cannot be of any use to us. They cannot serve as criteria for us, since we cannot have any certainty about them. That which is uncertain cannot render anything else certain.

The Middle Ages were obsessed with the search for material criteria for sainthood. That is the significance of the search for the philosopher’s stone. The quest for the Grail seems to bear on the same theme.

The true philosopher’s stone, the true Grail, is the Eucharist. Christ indicates to us what we must think of miracles by placing an invisible and, in some way, purely conventional miracle at the very center of the Church (only the convention is ratified by God).

God wants to remain hidden: ‘Your Father who is in secret.’

Hitler could die and rise again fifty times and I would not regard him as the

Son of God. And if the Gospels were to omit all mention of the resurrection of Christ, faith for me would be easier. The Cross alone is sufficient for me.

The proof for me—the truly miraculous thing—is the perfect beauty of the Passion narratives, together with some of the brilliant words of Isaiah: ‘Injured, maltreated, he never opened his mouth.’ And of St. Paul, ‘He did not regard equality with God as a thing to be grasped (lit. looted). … He emptied (lit. voided) himself. … He made himself obedient even as far as death, and death on the Cross.’ This is what compels me to believe.

Indifference with regard to miracles would not trouble me, if not for the *anathemas* launched by the councils, since the Cross produces for me the same effects that the resurrection does for others.

On the other hand, if the church does not put out a satisfactory doctrine of the phenomena called miracles, a great many souls will be lost through the Church’s fault because of the apparent incompatibility between religion and science. And a great many others will be lost because, believing God frequently enters the fabric of secondary causes to produce particular phenomena with particular intentions, they will impute responsibility to God for all the atrocities where He did not intervene.

The current conception of miracles either prevents the unconditional acceptance of the will of God or obliges us to be blind to the quantity and nature of evil in the world—an easy thing, evidently, from the depths of a cloister; and even in the world if we are within a restricted environment.

Also, notice the deplorable immaturity in many pious souls. The book of Job might never have been written, judging by their ignorance of the human condition. For such souls, there are only sinners on one hand and martyrs that die singing on the other. This is why the Christian faith does not catch on (lit. ‘bite’) —does not propagate from soul to soul like a (wild)fire.

Besides, if the miracles possessed the nature, the significance and the value attributed to them, their rarity today (despite Lourdes and the rest) would create belief that the Church no longer or scarcely had any share in God. For the resurrected Christ said, ‘Those who believe and are baptized will be saved; those who have not believed will be condemned. Here are the signs that accompany those who believe. In my name, they chase out demons, speak in new languages, grasp serpents; if they drink of deadly poison, it will not harm them; they shall lay on hands and heal.’

How many believers are there today, by this criteria?

Happily, this text might not be authentic. But the Vulgate includes it.

26. The mysteries of the faith are not an object for the intelligence as the faculty which permits affirmation or denial. They are not of the order of the truth, but above it. The only part of the human soul capable of real contact with them is the faculty of supernatural love. Therefore, it alone is capable of adherence to them.

The role of other faculties of the soul, beginning with intelligence, is solely to recognize that the things with which supernatural love are in contact are realities; that these realities are superior to the objects of that reality; and to become silent as supernatural love actually awakens in the soul.

The virtue of charity is the exercise of the faculty of supernatural love. The virtue of faith is the subordination of all the faculties of the soul to the faculty of supernatural love. The virtue of hope is the orientation of the soul towards a transformation after which it will be entirely and exclusively love.

To subordinate them to the faculty of love, the other faculties must each find their proper good, and particularly the intelligence, which is the most precious after love. It is, indeed, effectively so.

When intelligence, having become silent, lets love invade the whole soul, it commences again with a new exercise. It finds itself taking advantage of more light than before. It has a greater aptitude to grasp objects and the truths proper to them [i.e. seeing things as they really are].

Better still, I believe this silence constitutes an education for the intelligence that has no other equivalent, and permits it to grasp truths that otherwise remain hidden from it.

There are truths that are in range—accessible to it—but we are unable to grasp them until after having passed in silence to traverse the unintelligible.

Is this not what John of the Cross wants to say in calling faith a ‘night’?

The intelligence is only able to recognize afterward, by experience, the advantages of subordination to love. They are not present in advance. And this subordination is also a supernatural thing, operated by God alone. The first silence, lasting barely an instant, happens to traverse the whole soul in favour of supernatural love. It is the grain thrown by the Sower; it is the grain of mustard seed, nearly invisible, that will become the tree of the Cross.

Similarly, when one gives perfect attention to perfectly beautiful music (and the same goes for architecture, painting, etc.) the intelligence will not find something to affirm or deny. But all the faculties of the soul, including the intelligence, become silent and are suspended in listening. Listening is applied to an incomprehensible object, but which contains the reality of good. And the

intelligence, which cannot grasp truth, nevertheless finds nourishment.

I believe the mystery of beauty in nature and in the arts (only in art of the first order, perfect or nearly so) is a tangible reflection of the mystery of the faith.

27. We owe an attitude of permanent and unconditional respectful attention —but not our adherence—to the definitions the Church believed must surround the mysteries of the faith, and notably its condemnations (*anathema sit*).

And we must give equally respectful attention to opinions that were condemned or to the lives of those who proposed them —as small as their content is—where they contain some appearance of good.

Intellectual adherence is never owed to anything whatsoever. For it is never a chosen thing to any degree. Attention alone is voluntary. And it *alone* is a matter of obligation.

If we try to provoke ourselves to intelligence adherence through the will, what is produced is not intellectual adherence, but (auto-)suggestion. This is what Pascal's method amounts to. Nothing degrades faith more. And sooner or later, it will necessarily produce a phenomenon of compensation in the form of doubts and 'temptations against the faith.'

Nothing contributes more to weakening the faith and propagating incredulity than the false conception of intellectual obligation. All other obligations, except attention itself, imposed on the intelligence in the exercise of its function smother the soul—the whole soul, and not the intelligence alone.

28. The jurisdiction of the Church in matters of faith is good insofar as it imposes a certain discipline of attention on the intelligence—and insofar as it prevents it from entering and straying into the domain of the mysteries, which are foreign to it.

It is altogether bad when it hinders the intelligence in the investigation of truths proper to it, preventing it from using the diffusion of light in the soul with total liberty for the contemplation of love. Total liberty in this domain is essential to the intelligence. The intelligence must exercise itself with total liberty, or be silent. In this domain, the Church must not have any jurisdiction. And therefore, notably, all the 'definitions' where it is a question of *proof* are illegitimate.

As far as 'God exists,' is an intellectual proposition—but only in that measure—one can deny it without committing any sin against charity or against faith. And indeed this negation made on a provisional basis is a necessary step in

philosophical investigation.

In fact, since the beginning—or near to it—there has been an intellectual malaise in Christianity. This malaise is due to the way the Church has conceived its power of jurisdiction and especially its use of the formula, *anathema sit.*

Wherever there is an intellectual malaise, there is oppression of individuals by the social factor, which tends to become totalitarian. Especially in the thirteenth century, the Church established a commencement of totalitarianism. For this reason, it is not without responsibility for today's events. The totalitarian parties were formed by the effects of a mechanism analogous to the use of the formula, *anathema sit.*

This formula and its use prevent the church from being 'catholic' [universal] except in name.

29. Before Christianity, an indeterminate number of people—within Israel and outside Israel—*may* have gone as far as the Christian saints in love and in the knowledge of God. And similarly, since Christ, so did a portion of humanity situated outside the Catholic Church ('infidels,' 'heretics,' 'unbelievers'). And more generally, it is doubtful that since Christ, there is more love and the knowledge of God within Christianity than in certain nations of non-Christians, such as India.

30. It is *very probable* that the eternal destiny of two infants who die a few days after they were born, one baptized and the other not, are identical (even if the parents of the second never had any intention of having the baby baptized).

31. Among the books of the Old Testament, only a small number (Isaiah, Job, Song of Songs, Daniel, Tobias, parts of Ezekiel, parts of the Psalms, parts of the wisdom books, the beginning of Genesis, …) are assimilable to the Christian soul; and some principles scattered throughout the others. The rest are indigestible because they lack the essential truth at the heart of Christianity which the Greeks understood perfectly well: to know the possibility of the affliction of the innocent.

In the view of the Hebrews (at least before the exile, with few exceptions) sin and affliction, virtue and prosperity, were inseparable, which makes Yahweh an earthly father rather than a heavenly Father, visible rather than invisible. He is therefore a false god. A single act of pure charity is impossible under that conception.

32. One can pose the postulate: all conceptions of God which are

incompatible with a movement of pure charity are false. All others are true in varying degrees.

The love and the knowledge of God are not really separable. As it is says in Ecclesiastes, '*Praebuit sapientiam diligentibus*' [Latin: He gave wisdom to those who love].

33. The story of creation and original sin in Genesis are true. But other stories of creation and original sin in other traditions are also true and include incomparably precious truth.

They are diverse reflections of a unique truth, untranslatable in human words. We can approach this truth through one of these reflections. One can approach it even better through several of them. (Notably folklore, properly interpreted, contains spiritual treasures).

34. It seems untrue that the Church has perfectly fulfilled its mission as preserver of doctrine—far from it. Not only because it may have added abusive definitions, restrictions and interdictions, but also because it almost certainly lost treasures.

Evidence of this remains in passages of the New Testament that are admirably beautiful, but now incomprehensible, yet must not have always been so:

- First, nearly all of the Apocalypse (Revelation).
- The passage in St. John, 'Christ, who came through water and blood; not only in water, but in water and blood. Three testify: the spirit, the water and the blood, and these three are in unity.' And the insistence of this same St. John that water and blood came out of the side of Christ.
- The encounter with Nicodemus is also very mysterious.
- St. Paul: 'that you should be rooted and grounded in love, to have strength to know, as do all the saints, *what is the length, the width, the height and the depth*, and the knowledge that surpasses all knowledge, the love of Christ.' Origin, already separated from St. Paul by such short time, comments on this beautiful passage in the flattest way.
- The passage in St. Paul about Melchizedek, 'without father, without mother, without genealogy, priest from eternity, made like the Son of God.'
- The doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh. The living flesh that must perish; the 'spiritual body (flesh), which is eternal' (*pneumatiké* – must one think of the Pythagorean theory of the 'spirit' contained in the semen?). The connection between that doctrine and the importance attached to chastity ('All

sins committed by people are outside the body; the sin of fornication is against one's own body.' 'Food is for the belly and the belly is for food; God will destroy them both. But the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body'). What is the sense of this word 'body' if it is singularly opposed to 'the belly'?

The study of Hindu doctrine throws a much more vivid light on it than any Christian text to my knowledge. Christians have never said, as far as I know, *why* chastity (and especially virginity) is of spiritual value. This is a grave omission and it distances many souls from Christ.

• The connection between the doctrine of redemption in which humanity is the goal (and which, as Abelard said so well, is quite unintelligible) and the apparently contradictory doctrine indicated by the words, 'God wanted to give his Son a great many brothers.' (We would have been created *because* of the Incarnation).

• The mysterious connection between the law and sin, expounded by Saint Paul in a way that is sometimes so strange. Here also, Hindu thought furnishes a little light.

• The insistence placed on repeating expressions such as 'hanged on a tree,' or 'made a curse.' Here, some truths were lost without getting them back.

• The extraordinary violence of Christ against the Pharisees, who were representatives of the most pure spirit of Israel. Hypocrisy, narrowness and corruption—vices common to all kinds of clergy because human feebleness—do not explain that violence. And his very mysterious words indicating that there was something more: 'You have removed the key of knowledge.'

The Pythagoreans used the word 'key' for the mediation between God and Creation. It was also named 'harmony.'

• The words, 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect'—coming shortly after, 'Your Father, that is in heaven, makes the sun rise on the wicked and the good and makes it rain on the unjust and the just'—imply an entire doctrine that to my understanding is developed nowhere else. For Christ cites as the supreme trait of God's justice that which is always alleged to be injustice by the Accuser (e.g. Job): that He favors both the good and the wicked indifferently.

In the teaching of Christ there must have been a notion of a certain virtue of indifference, resembling what may be found in Greek Stoicism and Hindu thought.

These words of Christ remind one of the supreme cry of Prometheus: 'Heaven by which all the common light turns …'

(Moreover, this light and this water [rain] probably also have a spiritual significance, that is to say, everyone—in Israel and outside Israel, in the Church and outside the church—are equally flooded with grace, although the majority refuse it).

This is all contrary to the current conception according to which God arbitrarily sends more grace to one, less to another, like a capricious sovereign—under the pretext that God does not owe it to anyone! God owes it to His own infinite goodness to grant to each creature an abundance of goodness. Rather, we ought to think that God is continually spreading the abundance of grace on everyone, but we consent to it more or less. In purely spiritual matters, God hears (grants) all desires. Those that have less ask for less.

• The very fact that we have translated ‘logos’ (Greek) as ‘verbum’ (Latin = Word) indicates that something has been lost, for λόγος means above all ‘*relation*’ and is synonymous with ἀριθμός (number) in Plato and the Pythagoreans. Relation, which is to say proportion. Proportion, which is to say harmony. Harmony, which is to say mediation. I would translate it, ‘In the beginning was Mediation.’

The whole opening section of the Gospel of St. John is very obscure. The words, ‘He was the true Light that illuminates everyone who comes into the world,’ absolutely contradicts the Catholic doctrine of baptism. For in that case, the Word dwells secretly in all people, not only the baptized; it is not baptism that makes Light to enter the soul.

One could cite a great many other passages.

On the one hand, the inability of some of the disciples to comprehend, even after Pentecost (as proven by the episode of Peter and Cornelius), and on the other hand, the massacres caused by persecution, explains the deficiency in transmission. Maybe towards the beginning of the second-century all those who had understood were killed, or nearly all.

The liturgy also contains its mysterious words:

• *Quaerens me sedisti lassus* (Latin: ‘Faint and weary, you sought me’) must be connected to things beyond what is recited in the episode of the Samaritan in St. John. Considering these words, along with the theme of a great many stories from folklore, illumines them with vivid clarity.

The idea of God’s quest for man is a splendor and unfathomably profound. When it is replaced by the idea of man’s quest for God there is decadence.

• *Beata* (tree) *cujus brachiis – Pretium pependit saeculi – statera facta corporis. - Tulitque praedam Tartari.* (Latin: ‘Blest Tree, whose happy branches

bore the wealth that did the world restore; the beam that did that body weigh, which raised up hell's expected prey' – *Vexilla Regis*).

This symbol of a balance is a profound marvel. The balance played a grand role in Egyptian thought. When Christ died, the sun was in the constellation of the Ram and the moon was in the Balance (Libra). It is remarkable that this sign was named, 'The Pincers of Cancer.' Writers did not begin to use the term 'balance' until a short time before the Christian era (one month before, the sun was in the Fish and the moon in the Virgin; cf. the significance of the symbol of the Fish [IXOUE = Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour]).

If one thinks on this metaphor, the words of Archimedes, 'Give me a fulcrum [lit. support point] and I will shake the world' may be regarded as a prophecy. The fulcrum is the Cross, the intersection between time and eternity.

Sicut sidus radium – profert Virgo filium – pari forma. – Neque sidus radio – neque mater filio – fit corrupta. (Latin: 'As the star its ray, the virgin brings forth the son in like manner: neither star by its ray nor mother by her Son is blemished.' [Bernard de Clairvaux, *Laetabundus, Sequenza*]).

And the preceding stanza (*sol occasum nesciens, stella semper rutilans, semper clarans*.) [Latin: 'sun knowing no setting, star forever shining, forever bright'] becomes extraordinary by considering with it a tale from the American Indians, where the sun, in love with the chief's daughter, descends to earth as a sickly youth, nearly blind and in sordid poverty. A star accompanies him, disguised as a miserable old lady, grandmother to the youth. The chief puts his daughter's hand [in marriage] in a contest and imposes three very difficult ordeals. Only the miserable youth, although sick and lying on his pallet, succeeds in all of them. The daughter of the chief goes home as his spouse, despite his repugnance, faithful to her father's words. The afflicted youth transforms himself into a marvelous prince and transforms his spouse, changing her hair and garments into gold.

One could not, however, attribute this tale to Christian influence, it seems …

• In the liturgy of holy days, *ipse lignum tunc notavit, damna ligni ut solveret* – [Latin: 'destined, many ages later, that first evil to repair.'] … *arbor una nobilis: nulla silva talem profert, fronde, flore, germine* [Latin: 'One and only noble tree! None in foliage, none in blossom, none in fruit thy peers may be.' From *Pange Lingua*, 'Sing, my tongue'] also sounds strange. These words are splendid; there must have been a connection to a whole symbolism that is lost today. Besides, the whole liturgy of Holy Week has the hallucinating perfume of antiquity to it.

• The legend of the Grail indicates a combination which is unintelligible today, no doubt brought about through the course of years following the death of Christ, although the poems date from the twelfth-century, between Druidism and Christianity.

Note that the Church never condemned the poems about the Grail, despite the obvious mixture of Christianity with a non-Christian tradition.

Almost right after the Passion, Herod was sent into forced residence in Lyon, accompanied by a large entourage in which there must have been Christians. (Maybe Joseph of Aramathia?) The Druids were exterminated by Claudius some years later.

• The *Dionysiacs* of Nonnos, a poem composed by an Egyptian—probably Christian—from the sixth-century, which concerns only the Greek gods and astrology, and which presents a very singular resemblance with the Apocalypse, must have been inspired by a similar kind of combination.

(N. B. It concerns a king, Lycurgus, already named in Homer, who has attacked Dionysius through treachery, disarmed and forced him to take refuge *in the depths of the Red Sea.* He was king of the Arabs from south of Mt. Carmel. Geographically, it can only be Israel. If we admit that Israel was regarded as a cursed people by the ancients for having refused the notion of the mediating, suffering, redeeming God revealed to Egypt, we can understand what is otherwise incomprehensible: namely, that Heroditus, so avid about all the curiosities of a religious nature, never spoke of Israel. Note that Israel was destined to serve as the birthplace of Christ, but also for his assassination. Note also that according to many testimonies, Dionysius is the same god as Osiris. If we possessed the Egyptian version of the history of Moses, we might be surprised.)

• *The Rune of Odin* cited above, if it came before any contact with Christianity, would be a trace of an analogous mixture. This would be no less extraordinary.

Perhaps from the beginning there were those among the apostles of Christ who understood the words, ‘Go, teach all nations,’ in the manner that I believe is right?

35. Our understanding of Christianity renders it nearly impossible for us to access the profound mystery that surrounds the history of those early times.

This mystery bears first on the connection of Christianity with Israel on the one hand, and with the religious traditions of the Gentiles on the other.

It is extremely improbable that there were not, in the beginning, attempts at

syncretism analogous to those dreamed by Nicolas of Cusa. Nor was there any trace of condemnation by the Church against such attempts. (Nor has Nicolas of Cusa ever been condemned). And yet everything has happened as if he had in fact been condemned.

Beside the nonsense of Clement of Alexandria—who no longer even knew the close links that unite classical Greek philosophy and the mystery religions—there must have been those who saw the Good News as the coronation to that religion. What became of their works?

Porphyry had declared that Origen symbolically interpreted the Scriptures of Israel by using the secret books of the Pythagoreans and the Stoics. However, when Origen speaks of Greek philosophy, is it with the pretense of refuting it? Why? Is it because it is the shop across the road (the competition)? Or for some other reason? Or is he trying to hide his debt to it? And why?

This passage by Porphyry reveals clearly that the mysteries were entirely constructed of allegories.

Eusebius cites this passage and calls Porphyry a liar for saying that Origin began by 'hellenizing.' But he does not deny the rest.

Eusebius also cites a very strange letter from Bishop Melito to Marcus Aurelius, written in a very amicable tone (*Hist.* IV, 26). 'Our philosophy first developed among the Barbarians, but flowered *among the peoples* (τοῖς σοῖς ἐθνεσιν) under the reign of Augustus the Great.'

These 'barbarians' could only be the Hebrews. But what does the rest of the phrase signify?

Augustus was dead in 14 AD (year of our era). Christ was an adolescent. Christianity did not exist.

Would 'our philosophy' be that of our *Logos*, the Christ? Did it flower (that is to say, have its youth) among the '*gentes*' (Gentiles) in Greece or in Italy?

The Bishop adds, 'The best proof that our *Logos* grew in the same times as the fine commencement of the Empire for the good is that there had been no humiliation by the authority of Augustus, but on the contrary, all splendor and all glory conforming to the desires of all.'

We always speak of the 'hidden life in Nazareth.' But we forget that if it is true that this life was hidden, we rigorously ignore whether it actually unfolded in Nazareth.

This is all that we know of the life of Christ, from the Gospels, before he was baptized by John:

He was born in Bethlehem. When still very small, he was taken by his family

to Egypt. He remained there for an undetermined amount of time. Joseph returned after the death of Herod, but there is nothing that says whether this was soon after; years could have elapsed. When he was twelve years old he spent the feast of the Passover in Jerusalem. His parents were settled in Nazareth. It is only Luke who does not mention the flight to Egypt. At thirty years old, he was baptized by John. And this is strictly all.

This is again a singular mystery.

A third mystery is the relationship between Christianity and the Empire. Tiberius wanted to put Christ in the Pantheon and refused to persecute the Christians at first. Later he changed his attitude. Piso, adopted son of Galba, was probably from a Christian family (cf. the works of M. Hermann). How do we explain how men such as Trajan and especially Marcus Aurelius persecuted Christians pitilessly? Nevertheless, Dante put Trajan in Paradise. … On the other hand, Commodus and other scoundrel emperors rather favoured them. And how is it that the Empire later adopted Christianity as the official religion? And under what conditions? What degradation did it suffer in exchange? How did it come about that the Church of Christ colluded with the Beast? For the Beast of the Apocalypse is almost surely the Empire.

The Roman Empire was a totalitarian and grossly materialistic regime, founded on exclusive adoration of the state, like Nazism. A spiritual thirst was latent in the afflicted subjects of this regime. The emperors understood from the beginning the necessity of extinguishing that thirst with a false mystery, for fear that the true mystery would arise would upset everything.

There were attempts to import the Eleusinian mysteries into Rome. These mysteries almost certainly lost all authentic content—strong evidence shows this. The atrocious massacres that occurred so often in Greece—and notably in Athens since the Roman conquest and even before—may very well have interrupted their transmission. The mysteries were perhaps refabricated by initiates of the first degree. This explains the scorn with which Clement of Alexandria speaks about them, although he may have been an initiate himself. Therefore the attempts failed.

In fact, the oriental cults that sprouted in Rome during that epoch resemble the sects of the theosophical genre today. As far as we can render an account, in the first case as in the second, they are not the genuine article, but fabrications designed for snobs.

The Antonines are like an oasis in the atrocious history of the Roman Empire. How is it they could persecute the Christians? One could ask whether,

under the cover of the underground life, a real criminal element was introduced among the Christians.

One must especially take into account the apocalyptic spirit that animated them. The imminent expectation of the coming Kingdom exalted them and established for them acts of the most extraordinary heroism, just like the Communists' expectation of imminent revolution does today. There must be a great many points of resemblance between the two psychologies.

But also, in both cases, such an expectation creates an extremely great social danger.

Ancient historians are full of stories about cities where, as a result of some measure of freedom given by a tyrant for some reason, the masters were unable to make their remaining slaves obey.

Slavery was such a violent state that it was only sustainable in those souls crushed by the total absence of hope. When a ray of hope appeared, disobedience became endemic.

What effect must have been produced by the hope contained in the Good News? The Good News was not solely in redemption, but even more in the quasi-certainty of the immanent arrival of the glorified Christ here below.

In St. Paul, for each recommendation of kindness and justice addressed to masters, there were maybe ten addresses to slaves, enjoining them to labour and obedience. If necessary, we can explain this by his remaining social prejudices, in spite of his Christianity. But much more probably it was easier to persuade Christian masters to kindness than to persuade Christian slaves, inebriated by expectancy of the Great Day, to obedience.

Marcus Aurelius may have disapproved of slavery, for it is untrue that the Greek philosophers, except Aristotle, were apologists for that institution. According to the testimony of Aristotle, certain philosophers condemned it as 'absolutely contrary to nature and reason.' Plato, in *The Statesman,* only conceives of its legitimate use in the case of criminals, as is the case in our prisons and labour forces.

But Marcus Aurelius had to put the conservation of order ahead of everything else. He would remind himself of this bitterly.

The Catholics try to justify the massacres of heretics by the social danger inherent in heresy. It never comes to mind that the persecution of Christians in the first centuries is susceptible to the same justification—with at least as much reason. Much more so, without a doubt, for no heresy contains an idea as overwhelming as the certain expectation of the imminent coming of the Christ-

King.

It is certain that a wave of disobedience among the slaves of the Empire would have caused the collapse of the whole edifice in the midst of frightful disorder.

By Constantine's time, apocalyptic expectancy must have worn considerably thin. Besides, by creating an obstacle to the transmission of its more profound doctrines, the massacre of Christians had perhaps—and even probably—emptied Christianity of a great part of its spiritual content.

Constantine was able to succeed with Christianity where Claudius' operation had failed to succeed with Eleusis.

But it was not in the interest or the dignity of the Empire for its official religion to appear as the crowning of a centuries-old tradition from nations conquered, crushed and destroyed by Rome—Egypt, Greece and Gaul. As for Israel, it was of no importance; first, the new law was very far from the old law; and then especially, Jerusalem did not exist any more. Besides, the spirit of the old law, so distant from all mysticism, was not so different from the Roman spirit. Rome could accommodate the 'God of Armies.'

Even the Jewish nationalist spirit, which from the beginning prevented many Christians from recognizing the affinity of Christianity with the authentic spirituality of 'the *gentes*' (nations / gentiles), was a favourable element in Christianity for Rome. This spirit, a bizarre thing, had even communicated itself to the 'pagan' converts.

Rome, like all colonizing nations, had morally and spiritually uprooted the conquered nations. This is always the effect of a colonial conquest. It was not about giving them back their roots. It was necessary to uproot them again a little more.

Note: as confirmation, the only pagan prophecy ever mentioned by the Church is that of the Sybil, which the Roman tradition had annexed. Furthermore, there had been a real messianic expectancy in Rome, resembling that of the Jews and equally as carnal, as the *Fourth Eclogue* clearly shows.

Christianity, subjected to the combined influence of Israel and Rome, succeeded brilliantly. Today again, wherever missionaries carry it, it carries out the same act of uprooting.

All this is, of course, the fabric of supposition.

But there is one quasi-certainty: they wanted to hide something from us and they have succeeded. It is no accident that so many texts have been destroyed, that so much darkness covers such an essential part of history.

There was probably a systematic destruction of documents.

By what good luck did Plato escape? But we do not have the *Promethean Unbound Books* of Aeschylus, which must have allowed a glimpse into the true significance of the story of Prometheus, the love uniting Prometheus to Zeus, already indicated—but only barely—in *Prometheus Unchained*. And how many other treasures were lost!

The historians have come down to us with great gaps. Nothing remains of the Gnostics, and little from the Christian writings of the first centuries. If there had been any in which the privileged place of Israel was not recognized, they have been suppressed.

Yet the Church has never declared that the Judeo-Christian tradition should be the only one to possess revealed Scriptures, sacraments or the supernatural knowledge of God. They have never declared that there is no affinity between Christianity and the mystical traditions of nations other than Israel. Why not? Could it not be that the Holy Spirit, in spite of it all, preserved it from a lie?

These problems are *of capital importance, practical and urgent* today. Since all the secular life of our nations comes directly from ‘pagan’ civilizations, such that the illusion of a split between so-called paganism and Christianity persists, this one (Christianity) will not be incarnate. It will not impregnate all of secular life as it should; it will remain separate and as a result, inactive.

How our lives would change if we saw that Greek geometry and the Christian faith have sprung from the same source!