Part IV

CONDITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF A CHRISTIAN ETHIC

Chapter 1

CHOICE AND GUIDANCE

We are faced with a choice which we must make deliberately. We must choose a starting point from which to formulate an ethic for Christians, a norm to which we will constantly refer (which already implies a method). For a Christian in the reformed denomination, there can be no other starting point or norm than holy Scripture.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Consequently (in our estimation), neither the authority of great theologians nor ecclesiastical decisions are sufficient or decisive. These can only be a help, a light by which to better understand the Bible—and only on the condition that they point back to the Bible itself. Holy Scripture must give us both the sense (the signification and the direction) and the Norm of Ethics for Christians because it is the will of God revealed about us and for us.

Finally, scripture is the Reason for this ethic. But we cannot say in that same way that it gives us the content of this ethic. We must be very prudent in this domain. It is here, and in regard to this question, that we will pose the problem of Interpreting the moral texts of the Revelation (which we will study in chapter VI).[[2]](#footnote-2) But we must take Scripture as a whole, whatever our position concerning its moral content. The first error to avoid is that of choosing among the texts, holding onto the texts which seem to establish principles, which seem to address our problems, which seem to agree with a certain line of Revelation which we adopt. Subsequently, we reject the texts which, in our eyes, offer only negligible consequences or applications, or myths, or historically outmoded customs. (Most of the time, this choice is made unconsciously.) This attitude is unacceptable.

It is the Bible in its entirety which contains the Revelation of the Lord. Furthermore, selecting texts is entirely arbitrary, since each person ultimately makes their choice as a function of criteria which they decide for themselves—criteria external to the Revelation by which we claim to judge the form of this Revelation. Obviously, the criteria by which Bultmann[[3]](#footnote-3) or E. Trocmé[[4]](#footnote-4) select texts are not the same as those of Goguel[[5]](#footnote-5)—and ever since Marcion,[[6]](#footnote-6) everyone has their own reasons for choosing. Actually, obedience implies that we take every text seriously. Neither can we proceed by taking a general principle from Scripture, from which we then deduct the whole of an ethic; this systematic, philosophical attitude does not correspond to the mode chosen by God for his Revelation. We can rest assured that even if the principle is precise, the fullness of the Revelation cannot be reduced to a principle, even in the limited domain of Ethics. This would be to throw out a large part of the richness of the gift of God. We can be equally sure that rigorous deduction based on a principle will lead us progressively astray from the reality of the incarnation. Even an existential way of understanding a principle taken from the Bible will lead us to construct an ethic which will be revealed as *ultimately* not conforming to Revelation. For example, to reduce biblical Revelation to the Principle of Love and to claim to take an entire social and individual ethic from this principle (as has often been attempted, chiefly by Anglo-Saxons) is wholly imprecise. We cannot give a full critique of this here, but we will point out that the first error is that love is not a principle, and we can “deduce” nothing from it; the second error is that this “notion” is always so vague that it can mean whatever we want. For what makes the Love revealed by God vigorous, demanding, and exact is precisely the way it is revealed, the demonstration of its action, the forms of its incarnation—all of which is made into an abstraction when Love is made into a starting point of an ethic by “refining” the concrete data furnished by the Bible. In reality, we must allow the Bible to lead us, following only in its footsteps, entering only the domains which it points out to us, allowing ourselves to be guided in each line by what it tells us.

The Bible in its entirety should not be a simple starting point, which would imply that we move further away from it as we go; instead, it must be a constant companion in this work, the reference for every word, and in reality the absolute guide, with no independence on our part. In sum, the choice of a starting point must be explicitly specified. We cannot simply say, “we will take our ethics from the Bible;” all protestants would agree on such a general approach. But we must also specify our own attitude towards the Bible; and it is here that disagreement risks intervening. First, we must take Scripture in its totality; second, we must not use the Bible as an object, as material to construct what pleases us, as an instrument destined to respond to our questions. Instead, we must receive it as a question posed to us, allow it to interrogate us concerning ourselves, and then decide on the ethical response that we can give.[[7]](#footnote-7) Now, these two things are directly linked. If we do not accept all of scripture in its totality, we “parcel” it out, breaking it into scattered pieces. We will be tempted to construct an edifice from these pieces, one which *we* design ourselves. We take the fragments which seem compatible with our ideas, our intentions, our preoccupations; but in doing so, we put ourselves in the foreground, instituting ourselves as the active subjects. By contrast, if we accept the Bible in its massive structure, by this fact we renounce all attempts to model it, to renovate it. But only one attitude becomes possible—the attitude of submission, which puts us in the background, in the position of the listener who is questioned. All authority is given back to the one who took the initiative in the Revelation—that is, the Lord—in the Form that he has chosen.

But having made this choice, we must be aware of what it excludes. In effect, taking Scripture completely seriously is not only a positive act; it is also negative, in the rejection of all other starting points, norms and guides.

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A first attitude which this choice eliminates is Christian spiritualism. We have already addressed this; we will not dwell on it here.[[8]](#footnote-8) This spiritualism takes on two principal forms, each with its own particular aspects. In the first form, the Holy Spirit adds new elements to the Revelation contained in the Bible, whether collectively by means of the Church or by means of a predestined man, which incidentally (and this is historically observable, and very remarkable) usually concern ethics. This is true first of the Roman church, and second of the ‘Spirituals’ such as J. de Flore.[[9]](#footnote-9) In the second form, each Christian claims to act under the direct and immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and here again there are two possible aspects: either the Christian waits to receive an express order from the Holy Spirit to act, and only acts in this manner; or, estimating that he is inhabited by the Holy Spirit, the Christians acts spontaneously following his will, and proclaims that everything he does is inspired.

These four forms of Christian spiritualism are inacceptable for those who accept Scripture as the sole authority of Revelation. We have already said that there is a correspondence between the Holy Spirit and the Revelation contained in the Bible. There is no novelty, no adding to the revelation (which would thus be incomplete); it is perfect in Jesus Christ, and everything is truly accomplished. And all spiritual subjectivism must ultimately be submitted to the control of the objectivity of the Word of God. Incidentally, it is very interesting that all these spiritual revelations which claim to be situated *beyond* the Revelation in Jesus Christ actually *fall short* of this latter in all respects. Either they manifest a ridiculous poverty, mediocrity, or incoherence; or they add absolutely nothing to what is already revealed; or they subordinate biblical Revelation to alleged revelations which completely contradict it.

If we analyze all concrete forms of spiritualism, we will see that they fit into these three categories (from Marian revelations to those of the Mormons).[[10]](#footnote-10) And in the moral domain, this can only lead to incoherence or to a crystallization: an anarchic incoherence when each one claims to be beyond all control, directed by the Holy Spirit—or authoritarian crystallization, when the group claims to *possess* a specific revelation of the Holy Spirit. Now, these two tendencies are perfectly anti-biblical.

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We will dwell at length on the second possibility of this choice. Most moralities (including Christian moralities) actually begin with man. Of course, given that we are addressing reflections of Christians, we will not say that we adopt human Nature as a criterion and starting point in order to elaborate a morality (even if certain Christian philosophers might accept a dichotomy between their thought and their faith, conceiving that a moral existence might be founded on this or that aspect of human nature). But in any case, we generally take the questions posed by men, the needs of these men, and the situations in which they find themselves as a starting point. And whether we are talking about a morality which assigns man the end of realizing himself, or another morality which “passes through the mediation of others”—a morality which, even in the name of Christian charity, associates itself with lay moralities of relation and interdependence; a morality which affirms that our dependence in relation to the other is the sole aliment of our moral acts, which recalls that the sole vocation worthy of ethical man is to make choices responding to the human needs and expectations which surround us . . . in all these cases, we begin with man and man alone.

We begin with a factual analysis of the questions which man asks himself: how must I act towards my creditor, towards the State, towards my father, etc.; can I lie in this or that circumstance? What should I do to be a good citizen? How can I attain happiness or security? And for these questions, we seek answers which would be Christian. Now, we really must distinguish two domains here: on the one hand, that of counseling (a man who approaches a brother in the faith to ask what he must do), and on the other, that of ethical reflection. As much as it is normal in the relation of faith that one might respond to the concrete question of another, participating in the prayer and responsibility for the decision which must be made, it is vain to draw up a catalogue of the questions that the men of this time ask in order to give a comprehensive response. Incidentally, let us note right away that through this method we claim to reach the concrete man, to truly speak to our times, etc., in contrast to the abstract theories of theologians. Now in reality, these questions are concrete as long as they are personal, and the response is concrete when it is *ad hominem*. But they become abstract when they are generalized, and the responses no longer mean anything because they address nobody— except maybe Man in himself! Our researchers of the concrete and current should remember that nothing is more abstract and inhuman than the generalization and conceptualization of the concrete and personal. In a similar perspective, we claim to begin with Situations: we must consider man in his true situation and provide him with a Christian ethic as a means to confront this situation, to “respond” to the challenge laid out for him, to behave as a Christian man in a given situation. And so we begin with a socioeconomic analysis of man’s situation, pairing it with the results of philosophical reflection, which we take for granted: we see man as the phenomenologists, or Marx, or Freud see him.[[11]](#footnote-11) Since these facts of human reality are decisive, we use them to situate ourselves and seek to formulate a concrete ethic in function of these situations. Most of the time, these two very traditional perspectives determine the choice of the framework and subjects to be treated in ethics: married man, man and work, man and vocation, and money, lending and interest, the right to vote, strikes, children and parents, divorce, class relations, war, the death penalty, suicide, euthanasia, etc.—currently we add to all these subjects foreign relations, the relation to communism, colonization… in other words, the object of ethical reflection is imposed on us from the outside by circumstances, and we allow ourselves to be guided by material facts. Now, this seems to us to be a decisive error, the source of innumerable banalities, setting out on paths leading resolutely nowhere. The responses that the Christian could bring to these problems with such starting points will always be inadequate and of no interest for the man living in society. Of course, the Christian will have his conscience for himself: “I have proposed my solution, and you don’t want it.” This is true—all too true: it really was a solution, and not the Word of God. But it cannot be otherwise when we adopt the concrete situation or the questions which man asks himself as our starting point. For most of the time, these are poorly understood situations and false questions. Here we are in a domain inhabited by Myths, and one of our first duties is to exorcise Myths.

Finally, we can claim to begin with the needs of man. This emanates from good intentions: out of love for our neighbor, we must become aware of their needs and respond to these needs, in the ethical domain as in other domains. But precisely, if an ethic for Christians must express the Command of God towards man and the concrete Response of man to the question of God, there can be absolutely no question of starting with the needs of man. We do not have to formulate an ethic as a service to man, but as a service to God.

Of course, this formulation absolutely must not lead to the idea that ethics is situated beyond needs. The distinction between a sphere of needs (essential needs, security, happiness) and a sphere of choices, in which the first is amoral and only the second is the object of ethics, is theologically unacceptable. It is precisely at the level of concrete life, in response to needs, and in seeking the satisfaction of these needs—in other words, outside of spiritual and intellectual domains—that the question of ethics is posed. To formulate it otherwise is to make ethics into a vain game, a collection of gratuitous constructions, and an ideology.

The very notion of incarnation implies that the consequences of received grace and Revelation must be brought to bear in the concreteness of living in the most elementary needs and satisfactions. As saint Paul reminds us, this happens at the level of eating and drinking.[[12]](#footnote-12) Choices which teach us otherwise are intellectual distractions.

If ethics is not inscribed in the sphere of needs (the search for comfort, security, happiness), if it does not bear on decisions concerning our sexual drive, or our instinct of self-preservation, or eating, if it does not ultimately put in question what is the most natural and essential—well, then it ultimately concerns nobody. But if it must apply in this domain to be taken seriously, that does not mean that its research must begin with the needs of man, still less that its goal should be to satisfy these needs. It is not a supplementary means put at man’s disposition to guarantee his security and happiness!

When we adopt one or the other of these starting points, we are necessarily led, first of all, to a casuistic. Of course, we can escape this tendency by sticking to very vague propositions (as in the case of the phenomenologists[[13]](#footnote-13)), but these propositions remain very abstract and miss their target. To be honest, if we begin with the needs, situations, and questions of man, we cannot avoid constructing a casuistic. We must respond to this inventory with an inventory of responses and distinctions between good and evil in each case. We will thus end up with an unending stream of analyses and hypotheses. The faithful will have to find a response to every one of their problems, and the circumstances themselves will vary infinitely. Even the modern ethics of protestant theologians do not escape this. We necessarily return to “What should I do if . . . ?” And in fact, K. Barth’s detailed study of “limit cases”[[14]](#footnote-14) comes down to a casuistic! Now, a morality for Christians cannot be a casuistic! Precisely because a casuistic tends to be imperative, because it does not leave man the choice of his responses, because it leads to the laziness of a predetermined attitude, because it cuts off the creativity of faith. And reciprocally, if we do not end up with responses to offer to man, what good is it to be part of his questions?

A second problem is that with this starting point, in fact, we will establish a Christian Morality, which will be situated precisely at the level of other moralities, as one morality among others: a human morality, with all the characteristics of such moralities that we have indicated. We will establish a collection of rules which will be neither more nor less human than those of Aristotle. Or, if we are modern, we will reject the idea of Rules, taking Values instead, and we will set up Christian Values in the forest of other values. Christian solutions and responses will take their place among all the others, competing on the same footing; which is to say that in the end, it is completely useless to go to all this trouble! The other moralities are sufficient for satisfaction, assurance, and the justice proper to men.

A third problem provoked by this starting point is that we are led to consider the Bible as a dictionary of answers. A given problem is posed . . . what does the Bible say about it? We search, we gather all the texts in a Concordance which directly or indirectly relate to the question, and we use these shredded fragments of the Word of God to furnish a response. We have already said that this attitude is unacceptable, that it establishes our Mastery over the Word of God and our Independence towards God himself.

We treat holy Scripture as a thing at our disposal. We should also be careful, for by working in this way, we can take anything we like from the Bible. The procedure is well-known. With biblical texts, we have shown that God was for the monarchy, or for democracy, or federalism, or a strong State, or anarchy . . . and thus for all the problems that man poses, simply because we employ fragments of torn-apart Scripture, we can reconstruct whatever we like. We can be certain that considering the Bible as a dictionary in this casuistic will necessarily lead us to false responses.

Finally, if we want to go even further, we encounter another trap. Realizing that we cannot use the Bible in this manner, but on the other hand wanting to begin with man, we will abandon the Bible altogether. And beginning with a very general, very abstract and transcendent theology (unless we are talking about the spiritualism addressed earlier), we will free ourselves from “biblical solutions” only to enter into philosophy or psychology, into Economics or politics. And we will seek responses and solutions in these domains. Incidentally, since the rapport between these sciences and theology is infinitely delicate and difficult, theology will fade out little by little, relegated to the heavens, and we will progress with unimpeded steps in human quests. From there, we can either justify this with a philosophy (and we will return to this), or get off by declaring, “it is a question of being personally Christian and doing philosophy, or Economy, and our faith will show through in what we are.” But when the problem is to formulate an ethic for Christians on this basis, this attitude is a radical lie. Far from leading us to translate the faith into an ethic, it leads us to propose human behavior, taken from human sciences, and to cover them with a cloak of hypocrisy: they are Christian because they are formulated and invented by a Christian. Curiously enough, this attitude is often recommended by Christians who are hostile to individualist spiritualism (to which they return), who affirm the necessity of theological objectivity.

In sum, we see the contradictions, the imbroglios, and the vanities we are led to by adopting this starting point and this general perspective on the question.

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Another starting point, another perspective excluded by our decisive choice of Scripture, is Philosophy. Needless to say, theologians are tempted by philosophy. Would it not be a good method of *approach* to pose the ethical problem in philosophical terms? And could we not ultimately construct an acceptable ethic for Christians on a philosophy? In effect this was continually attempted, and at the same time philosophy influenced, contaminated theology. This is true of Saint Augustine with Neoplatonism, Saint Thomas with Aristotle, the German theologians of the nineteenth century with Fichte and Hegel, and current theologians with phenomenology or existentialism, to take several simple and well-known examples. Now this simple list (which we could easily extend considerably) manifests a first weakness of this attitude: philosophy is terribly variable and uncertain. We cannot say that we progress in this domain, and that the philosophy of the 18th century is truer, more certain than that of the 13th century. I know a certain devotee of Plato who estimates that all later philosophy is only a regression . . .

The same goes for Descartes or Rousseau. Who can guarantee that today’s philosophy is closer to the true or the real than yesterday’s philosophy? Why would I adopt this one instead of another? Because it is the philosophy of today? Because it is modern? These reasons seem meaningless to me. It will be said that existentialism is very close to Christianity; will the degree of proximity to Christianity help me decide? I see very well that Kierkegaard, elaborating his philosophy *on the basis* of Revelation, formulates a Christian existentialism. But this does not tell me why I should now *begin* with this philosophy (instead of Kierkegaard, I will begin with the Revelation), nor in what manner the existentialism of Sartre might be close to Christianity.[[15]](#footnote-15) Incidentally, throughout history we have seen that philosophies which are very alien from the Bible have amalgamated with it very well; the example of Aristotle is very popular today. In the presence of this incertitude towards the superiority of these philosophies, we ought to ask ourselves: Theology is already quite fragile due to the weakness of man, his sin, his rebellion, his limitations; Ethics is even more fragile, since it is linked to the conditions of today. Is it prudent to add to these weaknesses those of a starting point, a pedestal, a guiding instrument which is even more fleeting and vain? To the causes of errors and aging of theology and ethics, should we add those which are particular to philosophy? Thomism has very recently been brought into question precisely because of its Aristotelian foundations.[[16]](#footnote-16) Incidentally, in ethics, philosophical illumination as a starting point leads to posing theoretical questions which are of little interest (except from a philosophical point of view).

But this problem is still more serious: it leads to a will to interpret Scripture in function of and because of a certain philosophy. When we seek to synthesize them, to create an apparently biblical or theological system, very often we witness a type of distortion of these texts so they can be made to fit with the assumptions of this philosophy; the system is *actually* elaborated on this philosophy. With philosophy clearly fixing the presuppositions of thought, we advance into the biblical domain, bringing a perspective which distorts Scripture (and of course, all men distort Scripture! No one has complete and true understanding) necessarily because it is *systematic.* The man who approaches the Revelation must try to be silent and avoid having presuppositions (and he will never completely achieve this); by contrast, philosophy strides forward decked out in its systematic armor. It is never the Poor one who comes, weak and naked, to receive what he is begging for. It is always the Lord of the Intelligence for whom Scripture is an object. It can also happen that, without achieving this synthesis, the Christian Philosopher elaborates an ethic in function of his philosophy, of the anthropology unveiled by this philosophy. And since he is Christian, the moment comes when he is obliged to ask himself: how can this accord with scripture? This is precisely what we have seen in recent works; the question comes as a sort of appendix. And again, it is an interpretation of Scripture because of and in function of this philosophy. Once more, this takes Scripture as a sort of culminating gesture of a human effort, while Scripture can only be living if it is found *at the origin* of this effort; it takes Scripture as a sort of controlling test, while Scripture can only be a questioning of myself. In sum, as in the preceding case, adopting a philosophy as a method or goal at the start of an ethic is to assume the heavy responsibility of becoming the master of Scripture, to align it with our system, and to impose our preexisting vision of man upon it.

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I know the objection which will be raised: “If you do not take a modern philosophy or the concrete situation of modern man as a framework for your ethic, you will once again be talking in the register of the eternal, in the abstract. What you say will not concern the person of this time, it will be of interest to no one; you will be out of step with the present. You will be addressing Man in himself, but not the men of this time; you work will be vain.” First of all, we need a little clarity on the present! If by ‘the present,’ we mean the daily events whose inventory is offered us by the Press, the tremendously fugacious emotions and interests of the crowds, the irrational passions which die out this evening and the important questions forgotten tomorrow, the Princess of Monaco and the Constitution, and even the war of Algeria—well, I believe that all this superficiality is a false present! It cannot be the occasion of a true ethical reflection. The true present is not the daily news, but that upon which the daily news is based, that which provokes and determines the daily news. The true present is found at a slightly deeper level than the immediate interest of the average man for the picture in his newspaper. It is not the Princess of Monaco, but why she becomes a center of interest (and not just her—stars, champions, etc.). It is not the Constitution, but the sociological and economic structure of France in relation to the evolution of civilization which leads us to pose the problem of a new Constitution. It is not the war of Algeria, but the ideological or technological infrastructures which have made it what it is. The true present is the form taken by man and society following the development of technique; it is the pluriform growth of the power of the State; it is the systematization of the Economy; it is the interior possession of man by psychological means; it is the creation of new Myths.

Of course, this does not directly and consciously pose problems to man. But in reality, all these questions derive from this. In our desire to run around chasing after these daily emotions and questions to offer a “Christian response” at the level of the news, we *always* arrive too late, and it is always inadequate because we never reach the root of the ethical problem. We create a superficial and symptomatic morality, when what we need is a deep, somatic and causal morality. But this does not respond to the objection: we nevertheless estimate that the present cannot be absent from the work we are proposing. In fact, the Christian who tries to formulate this ethic is first of all a man of this time himself. Even if he wanted to not belong to this time, he could not help it. He could not claim to be Man in himself. He lives in this Courant Plan[[17]](#footnote-17) house, eats canned food, reads the newspaper, listens to the Radio, feels the increase in the cost of living, speaks to his neighbors, takes the train . . . He necessarily belongs to this time, and when he reads Scripture, he does so with the eyes of a man of this society, in function of his problems and anxieties, which are those of the men of this time. Even if he is a bookworm, he cannot totally isolate himself. But here we will cross the threshold of duty; we will say that he must not isolate himself. There was a time when we sought to isolate ourselves from all circumstances, from all social or private conditions, in order to reflect. We hoped to reach the absolute or the intemporal; this time is now past, and it seems to us that this attitude was an error. The Christian who tries to reflect on Ethics must be plunged into his society, in this world; he must participate in the tensions, the searching, the hopes and needs of the men in the milieu where he finds himself; he must share the experience of the man he is speaking to; he must know the conditions and the conditioning of life. It is thus as a man of his era that he will receive the shock of the Word of God and translate it, witness to it; and it is through his mediation that the present will be present in the ethic that he will try to formulate. Since it fills his life, it cannot help but shine through it.

But we must go even further: we have said and will say again that ethics can only be relative to a given historical period, to a given society. It is thus necessary that the present (in the sense that we have given it) would be more systematically present. The Moralist will thus need to know the present as deeply, completely, and incisively as possible. He will need to personally become aware[[18]](#footnote-18) of it, rather than to recognize it intellectually. He will need to understand it globally and precisely—not so that he can make it into the starting point, the object, or the reference of his ethic (all this is furnished him by Scripture), but in short as the counterpoint and the material for a confrontation. The Word of God says that . . . I hear it as a man of my society. And what does this really mean for and in a world which is structured in a given manner? This is the permanent question . . . We meet up with the present at the far end of our approach (and not at the beginning, before anything would be established); that is, at the very point where man finds himself, where this ethic will strike: on man himself. This progression is essential. For in all other kinds of moralities, which claim to begin with man, we witness a progressive distancing from man, who remains far behind on the ethical path, and who will end up completely forgotten—just as we see happen even in ethics which claim to be existential.

Chapter II

AN ETHIC FOR THE PERSON

We could even say for ‘the Individual.’ For an ethic for Christians only ever relates to man in his particularity, in his individuality. It is addressed to him, and to him alone. Only he or she can carry it out. It concerns what a man is, what he lives by, what he thinks and what he does. In Scripture, it is ultimately always a question of man. It is a Word addressed to man in his solitude. And this is so first of all because this is the situation resulting from the fall. This lonely individual, who loves nobody and whom nobody loves, who never truly encounters his neighbor—God takes him as he is, where he is. And if this Word is addressed to the individual, it is because the mass of sinful men is always constituted only by lonely people. But this Word also raises him up, forms him, and constitutes him as a Person. In the mass of men, he becomes personalized. The individual becomes the one who recovers both dignity and the possibility to communicate at the same time; the solitary becomes the singular.[[19]](#footnote-19) Sartre’s famous quip: “today there are only two ways to talk about oneself: the first person plural or the third person singular”[[20]](#footnote-20) defines the permanent situation of man far from the face of God. But it becomes a lie when it pretends to necessarily close all men in a dilemma with no exit; for God breaks this dilemma by his Word. In doing so he institutes a Person who in turn can say “I,” and no longer only We, or He or She. And if this is so, it is because God himself is a Person, because he created Adam as a person who could respond in truth—not yet to God’s question, but to God’s love. And when Adam ceases to be this dialogue partner—when he strays from God in his faults, when he can no longer communicate—the Word of God meets him, reestablishes him in his responsibility, restitutes his authenticity as a Person, so that at that very instant he can recover the possibility of responding to the God who speaks to him, and to love him again as a singular being, unique and irreplaceable. In this vein, an Ethic for Christians can be addressed only to people, to individualities to whom the Word of God has *already* been spoken. It does not form the person on its own; it does not address the Mass of men, nor a collectivity, nor groups, but only the particular man—a man, in his unicity, to whom God has already revealed his Love and granted his grace. We have seen that it is only meaningful to the extent that the hearer believes that Jesus Christ is the Lord. It can only speak to faith. And only the one who tries to live the faith will be able, for example, to accept the starting point for an Ethic indicated in the first chapter. For all others, they will only find arbitrariness and foolishness. Talk of choice, responsibility or decision can mean something only for this one who has been instituted as a person in his Dialogue with God. The fact that each one is left alone like Cain, before the good that he must try to live and the evil that he must reject,[[21]](#footnote-21) effectively presupposes the solitude of this man. But for his decision to be true, free, and not conditioned by his sin, like Cain, he too needs the Word of God to be addressed to him beforehand, needs this promise to come to him from God himself: “You, rule over Evil.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Otherwise, to talk of choice and responsibility to this lonely and confused man in the mass, wandering like a sheep without a shepherd, is a frightful derision. For we know, alas, what his choice will always be: he demonstrated it before Jesus Christ. He will always choose Barrabas. And we know his irresponsibility, as a man driven by lust and dominated by sin. In other words, a morality for Christians can only be addressed to singularized men, to men who are already possessed and liberated by the act of God; individuals in a certain sense, persons in another. And ultimately, it has nothing new to say to them. It can only continually repeat—in various ways, and by showing the consequences and applications—the order given by God each time that God addresses himself to one of them, at the start of each dialogue He initiates, each face-to-face encounter—this order which is formulated by Isaiah (46:8) and taken up by Paul (1 Cor 16:13): “Be men.”[[23]](#footnote-23) The entire role of ethics comes down this: a development, an explanation of this inaugural Word by which God lifts man upright and expects that he comport himself with the fulness of strength and wisdom proper to man. Not as an angel, nor as a beast, but only as the only one that God has chosen to respond in freedom.

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But if this is true, it calls the famous ‘social ethic’ into question—‘famous,’ because it is the object of innumerable discussions which only appear in response to situational questions. In a collective world of masses and institutions, a collective and social morality is required. This seems remarkably false. What can be meant by this term ‘social ethics?’ It might mean that Christians must formulate an ethic which is applicable by all men, forming a collectivity, and as members of society. We have already denounced this claim to make non-Christians live according to Christian norms (and they are Norms, whatever might be our conception of ethics, since every word becomes an obligation for the one who is not a Christian). It can mean an ethic which must follow collectivities—the State, the Family, the Nation, the Commune, the Union, the Bank, etc., and in this case it is a question of defining just conduct for these collectivities. The State must act in a given manner, and it agrees to define its politics—or the Business must apply a given moral rule in competition or in relation to money . . . But in reality, there is a double misunderstanding here: how could a collectivity as such apply a morality? Only men and women are ever concerned here; only they can say yes or no to the command of God. In second place, this comes down to saying that we can formulate a Christian politics (in its rules, and of course in its content as well), or a Christian political economy, etc.—for politics and economics are really what is in question this social morality. Now for the last two thousand years, all efforts in this vein have radically failed. No Christian politics is possible because politics is always a decision of necessity, and never an expression of the Word of God, and also because the means of politics are necessarily the means of the world. Consequently, there is no Christian law or Christian way of organizing a bank. From where would we take such things? From Scripture? But this would be precisely to take the path that we tried to block off earlier. Those who try to elaborate such systems (and the most famous failure is that of Bossuet, with his Politics taken from holy Scripture[[24]](#footnote-24)) forget that the economic and political rules of the Old Testament only concern the chosen people (thus the one who is directly and consciously commanded by God) and none other. As far as the method of analogy often employed by the scholastics (Marsilius of Padua[[25]](#footnote-25), for example) and taken up by Karl Barth,[[26]](#footnote-26) it is dangerous insofar as (as we have said) it permits us to take a bit of everything from Scripture. Incidentally, the creators of social morality quickly find themselves obliged to depart from Scripture which is manifestly insufficient for these matters; thus they call on countless notions taken from philosophers—e.g., the Notion of the common Good, or the *Suum cuique tribuere*,[[27]](#footnote-27) which have very little in common with Revelation. Finally, social Ethic can mean a Christian Organization of society. This is often confused with the preceding aspect. Generally, we do not limit ourselves to saying that the State should act in a given manner; we add that it should also be instituted in a given manner. In effect, we esteem that to be able to act Christianly, the State must exhibit a certain character. And this is why Christians were so attached to the monarchy, just as they are almost frenetically attached to democracy today.[[28]](#footnote-28) And the same applies to the economic structure, to property, the organization of labor, etc. Now in reality, all this means that Christians have not renounced their ideology of Christendom—of a world where institutions would be as conformed to the will of God as the Bible itself, a world which would no longer be the world, but the Kingdom of God. All social ethics imply an underlying belief in Christendom, in the political efficacity of Christianity, in the collective applicability of the Truth, in the institutionalization of Grace, and in the direction of society by Christians. Now, on the basis of Revelation, all this is perfectly inacceptable.

Jesus Christ did not die for better State conduct, a better distribution of goods, a better organization of labor, higher productivity, better politics . . . He died exclusively so that men, humans, would be saved, that they would be reconciled with God, that their sins would be forgiven, that God would be glorified in them, and Death the Powers conquered. To make this a starting point for the formulation of a conception of the State or Law or Society would be to set out on a path which is far too long, on extremely narrow roads which, in reality, lead nowhere. It is impossible to create a Christian social ethic which would be anything but a far-fetched system. And certainly, we can use biblical texts to do this, but we cannot truly hold on to Jesus Christ himself and the accomplishment of his work in a clear and coherent manner. Certainly, we might manage to make a “Christian” system (referring to the Bible and using so-called Christian principles or notions), but it will absolutely not be Christocentric—that is, having Jesus Christ at the center and the person of Jesus Christ deciding everything. For the work of Jesus Christ is in no way related to an objective social Ethic.

Despite the heartache this will cause us as men attached to social and political problems, we must accept that there is no Christian social ethic. Of course, every society produces its own social ethic; but this is an affair of the collectivity of the men of this society, not of Christians alone. Ethics for Christians cannot have collective dimensions. It cannot manipulate crowds; it does not address a crowd of individuals. It only ever confronts one individual with his responsibility. This cannot be collectivized in any way: neither by adding together individuals who obey a Christian ethic (since they never form a collectivity, except in the Church—but is the Church a collectivity?); nor by creating a sociological movement which man would obey, which would negate the entirety of God’s will of liberation for man. In reality, the Bible never speaks to anyone but man and for man—to *one* man and *for* one man. Nevertheless, the Bible addresses many other things. It addresses money, the State, the City, the Family, Work . . . Thus it contains typically social content! It seems that in this respect, two things must be distinguished: the Bible relates a teaching about everything; in effect, it contains a Word of *God* concerning money, the State, etc.—but this is part of the Revelation. This latter contains not only God’s Revelation about himself, but also God’s Revelation about man; and this is accompanied by Revelation on the work of man, on the framework within which he lives. All throughout the Bible, the State, property, the family (and Nature as well) are only discussed in relation to the history of the Salvation of this man that God loves and seeks. It is only within this drama of Fall and Redemption, of the Revolt of Man and the love of God, that the Bible ever addresses these topics. It says nothing about them ‘in themselves.’ Consequently, what we can receive from God on these socio-political realities which surround us is exclusively relative to the work of Jesus Christ for man. Thus we can have a theological view of the State, for example (which Barth has given[[29]](#footnote-29)), or of money, etc. This theological viewpoint is true; it represents a complete, general, and absolute truth. But this truth is only recognized as such by the one who receives the Revelation, for whom the Bible is effectively the Word of God. It is not recognized by those who see the Bible as one book of human Wisdom among others. However, this opinion in no way modifies this truth: whether it is believed or not, accepted or not, this truth subsists in its absolute objectivity. The State, Society, the Jewish People *are* effectively this, even if man does not believe it: all that we can say, then, is that man is deceived, and that his error will entail others—intellectually, spiritually, and in false behavior. The one who receives this Revelation about social or economic realities as the Truth of God in Jesus Christ can conceive of a certain behavior towards these realities, a social behavior—a “social ethic.” But while the theological Truth is universal, objective, general, this ethic can be neither universal nor general; it is worthless for the one who does not believe the Revelation. And to the extent that it is not applied, it is nothing. The difference between the two is considerable: an unbelieved Theology is still an expression of the truth, and it remains such. An unlived Ethic does not remain at all: it is nothing. Despite Unbelief, the Revelation remains intact; because of Unbelief, ethics is reduced to nothingness. Now, this ethic is only acceptable for the one who has already believed in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The path moves from this acceptance, from this reception, to behavior. You who believe, here is what the Lord says about the State, and so here is the attitude that you should adopt towards it. But this path never climbs from a right attitude towards Society to the Revelation—no more than we can conceive of a social ethic outside of this Revelation which contains the entirety of the Truth, *exclusively*. Consequently, this ethic is valid precisely and only for the one who believes that Jesus Christ is Lord. And the critical, decisive point is not a good social ethic, but only this faith. Finally, we consider that this Revelation is made to a man (and here again we run into this individualism) and never to the State, the Nation, the Union. In the Old Testament, one of the most striking attitudes is that in addressing the King, the prophets always strip him of his royalty, reducing him to his character as a man, seizing the individual behind his title and his social appearance, the sinner behind the Lord, the mortal behind the Powerful. The Revelation speaks *to* this man who receives the Word of God, *about* this political and social reality; it never speaks *to* this political or social reality. Thus, there is never a question of deriving a social Ethic which could be imposed on everybody, and still less could we demand that the State or the Powers apply it.

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But on the other hand, when God addresses man, he seizes the whole man. He does not speak to his heart alone, or his “soul,” or only to his intelligence. He speaks to the total man, with his body, who is situated before the face of God. And likewise, when God speaks to him, he does not address the individual cut off from all others, to a loner abstracted from his social relations. Here too, it is man in his fullness who is concerned, and consequently man situated in a certain time, a certain society, a family, in a vocation, in a series of generations. And on the one hand, it is true that the man seized by the Word of God is perfectly, rigorously alone, as Pascal and Kierkegaard have highlighted: nobody could take his place, no one can come to his aid, no one can help and accompany him, or even remain at his side. But it is no less true that this man is there with *all* of his political, social, economic relations; because he is not disincarnate, he is there in the fulness of his flesh and his spirit. Now, this man here is considerably shaped by these relations; they are part of him. He cannot be without his family, without his training, his profession, his political ideas. Consequently, this individual, this person to whom the Word is addressed includes society along with them, bringing it into play. And subsequently, in this sense, could we not speak of a social ethic for Christians? If, on the one hand, this man is not separated from the society where he lives, and if, on the other hand, the Word of God sheds light on the elements which constitute this society, is this not both the starting point and the justification of a social ethic—but rendered valid only for the one who listens to the Word of God? And so we return to the classification made long ago: the Morality of the Christian towards himself, the Morality of the Christian towards his family, the Morality of the Christian towards society. Incidentally, in different terms, this comes down precisely to what Ricoeur proposes when he speaks of “short Relations” (love of one’s immediate neighbor) and “long relations” (of a political and economic character).[[30]](#footnote-30) Granting that these terms are more exact because they put the accent on the element of “Relations,” and thus integrating the element of personal contact indispensable to Christian conduct, they say exactly the same thing as the traditional classification. And it is quite unjust to say that the Christian ethics of the 19th century, for example, are reducible to private virtues. There is always a chapter on the Duty of the State, on political morality, etc. But what is true, in effect, is that Christians have tended to reduce the entirety of Christian life to private virtues, to bring everything back to the sphere of private interests, and to make a sharp dichotomy between private and public life. As a merchant, industrial worker, or a citizen, we apply a morality—the morality of the World; and as an individual, in our conscience, in our non-social relations with the neighbor, in our family, we apply the Christian morality. This separation, which ends in the classic distinction between the man of the weekdays and the Sunday Christian, is obviously completely false and rigorously condemnable. But if we must absolutely insist once more on the responsibility of the Christian in Economics or Politics, it is not because of the importance of economic development, nor because of the social Justice highlighted by socialism, nor because of Democracy which gives us a political role: all these are external motivations. It is exclusively because of the fact that when God speaks, He seizes the totality of the person. No part can be reserved, outside of the reach of God—somewhere where the man far from the face of God could live his life differently than God would like. And subsequently, this absolutely does not lead to a social ethic, a morality with a collective dimension. It absolutely is not the “We” of politics which must be transformed; it is the “I” seized by God, who is *also* a political man. Henceforth, to make a Christian ethic which would distinguish between short and long relations— between duties towards the neighbor and duties towards society—would be once again to consecrate what the World and Satan have invented: the distinction between differing private virtues and social virtues. (For let us not forget that today’s scorn of private virtues is just as harmful as yesterday’s scorn of social virtues!) We must rigorously begin with the unity of this Person, and the unity of the transformation of this person by the Word of God, and the unity of his behavior as a consequence of his faith. Instead of beginning with an analysis of diverse worldly situations where they might find themselves, and thus diversifying their conducts, we must begin with the observation of the complete, unified situation where they find themselves before God, entailing the refusal of any and all dichotomies. And this means, therefore, that what is important is the description of the behavior which results from faith, towards whoever, without diversification, only occasionally giving examples of application. But this division can never override the unity; it can only appear in the consequences, not in the starting point. Thus Paul, for example, recalling that the Christian uses as if not using[[31]](#footnote-31) (which is an attitude of the whole person), applies it to marriage, to joy, to suffering, to property, without separating the order of personal opinions from that of the social. Recalling the importance of prayer in the concrete life of the Christian, he applies it to the neighbor, to all men, to the king, to the authorities . . . and as for submission and humility (which also apply to all behavior), Peter[[32]](#footnote-32) demonstrates their application to the King, the Master, and the Husband (without differentiating short and long relations), and finishes by recalling that this must be accomplished by “all of you.”[[33]](#footnote-33) The addressee in question here is always only this man who has heard the Word of God and who acts as he is in various circumstances and relations; but what matters is the “as he is,” which will translate into acts. The task which ethics is called to fulfill is to remind each one of the “as he is” by the grace of God, and of *how* this being is expressed in a doing. Are we thus returning to “private virtues?” Yes, certainly, if we mean by this that these virtues and acts are those of a man, a person; in the Christian faith, there can be no other virtue. But certainly not! if we mean by this that this man would be shut away in his private life. For on the contrary, we have been continually recalling that he must also be “the man to whom God speaks” in this society, this profession, etc. Thus, we will not say that there is a social ethic because there is no ethic of the State or the Economy. But there is an ethic of this man redeemed by Jesus Christ, and living in this State, this society, this union, this technique—in the same way as he lives in this family, in his body. There is no difference—and if perhaps we must insist on the Christian’s responsibility in politics and economics today, on the importance of their behavior in these domains, it is first because the problem is much more difficult than any other; second, it is also because a certain pietist tradition has led protestants to forget this. But there can be no separation between a social morality and an individual morality, nor concerning morality’s object, nor in relation to its rules or values.

We have spoken above of the Revelation of God concerning the State, the Nation, money, etc. For this Christian, who must live as a Christian in this milieu, this simultaneously implies both a possibility and an obligation. Based on this knowledge of the profound truth of these institutions, the possibility is that of being able to conduct oneself in truth in their midst. If this Revelation has taken place, it is not in order to rally the masses around a program, around social modifications. Nor is to “realize” the indicated schema, to translate the revealed truth into concrete institutions (this junction of reality and truth will only happen in the Kingdom of God). It is only to teach the Christian how to behave as God would have them behave in this context. And thus, this context must be taken into account—not above all else, but it must be accounted for all the same. His life cannot be “interior;” it is here, and his social being cannot be dissociated from his private being, nor can this latter be split into Spiritual and Material. However, this revelation of a truth of these institutions, their illumination by the very light of God, entails obligations: first, an obligation to invent right behavior regarding this social ensemble. And on the one hand, this will come from his being transformed by the act of God, and on the other hand from revealed knowledge about this world. Thus, it is not essentially by a *natural* knowledge of money or the State or the Economy that he must learn to make decisions (though this knowledge is also required), but by the profound knowledge which comes from God. Subsequently, his decision naturally cannot dovetail with those of men who only have a natural knowledge. But his witness to this truth is part of his behavior, of the attitude in the world that he is called to choose. Now, in this total truth of the Revelation, the State, the Nation, etc., are *also* concerned. And consequently, his responsibility is not fulfilled once he has adopted a conduct which he deems just. He still needs to announce the revealed truth about these realities of the world to men. The Theology of money or of the authorities is part of the Preaching that must be addressed to the men of this world. Once again, not as a program of political or social action, but truly as a Revelation (“You think that this is the reality of the State; you are right, but behind this reality common to all, there is a truth, and here it is . . .”), and as a demand, presented on behalf of God. This demand does not concern a behavior of the State, the Boss, or the Union which would be normal and universally acceptable, which we could all agree on thanks to natural knowledge. Rather, it is a specific announcement of the Word of God, which can only be taken seriously if this pagan State, this pagan boss, this pagan union take a Word of God seriously and receive it as such by means of conversion. At this moment, they will be able to try on their own to translate this into acts, but not into institutions! The Ethic for Christians cannot lead us beyond this responsibility.

Chapter III

A COMMUNAL ETHIC

As an Ethic of the Individual and for the Individual (but a man *in* society), this ethic has nothing individualistic about it. An individualism is totally foreign to the Christian faith. We could start with the idea that the person is made for relation, and that without a relation with the neighbor, there is no person; but this is still a philosophical notion, as elementary as it may be. It is better to begin with the fact that God makes a People for himself, his people, which in its entirety bears the Good News. What is true of Israel is true of the Church. Every man called in his individuality is called to constitute this people, and this people is composed exclusively of called persons. None of the great biblical “Heros” is alone: Abraham is the bearer of the people; Moses and the Judges are raised up by God for the sake of the people, in function of the people; believing himself to be alone, Elijah learns that seven thousand men have been chosen by God. And every prophet is a prophet in this people; they cannot be so elsewhere. Just as every Christian is chosen to be a member of the body of Christ, a living stone in this edifice, etc., the messianic people is a reality without which is there is no ethic. And the commandment of love which dominates the whole Christian life simultaneously presupposes this community and produces it, provokes it, since it is the carrying out of this commandment which creates this people. God does not make this messianic people suddenly appear with a magic wand. But the election of each one, precisely, provokes in them the response of love and the explosion of this love for their neighbor. And this does not dissolve into vain sentiments and good works, but creates a solid and permanent and constant bond—so much so that this relation of love from person to person creates community. But this relation cannot be established directly from one man to another; it passes through the love of God, it passes through Jesus Christ, in Jesus Christ, by him—it is in Jesus Christ alone that we can love our neighbor with consistency, with solidity. And it is in this same sense that we must understand Jesus Christ as the head of the body: everything passes by way of the head. Thus, the commandment of love is not vague, uncertain, or reduced to emotions; it is concrete, it establishes precise contours, it precisely determines behavior and a certain kind of relation. And when a Christian acts—whether he knows it or not, whether he wants it or not—it is necessarily as a member of this Community. He expresses this people in his action; he has them completely with him; he engages this people in his actions; he bears its produce, whether the fruit of life or of death. And in the same way, he is implicated by the acts of others; he is judged in function of them; he bears their consequences. And when he is sent as a solitary witness into this world, this world which is hostile to God, it is still as a bearer of this community. And the best testimony that he can give is truly that the stranger, perceiving this community of truth, could say: “See how they love one another.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Reciprocally, it is he who sends others, who seem to be alone as well. In this people, he is responsible for what they do in the world, for the efficacy of their testimony. For it is through this community that he acts. He cannot do otherwise if he obeys the commandment of love, and if he lives it. Consequently, all this effectively determines an ethic, and we see that this can only be “communal,” a term which, to us, seems preferable to “of the community” (which implies an idea of opposition between the individual and the community) or “ecclesiastical” (which implies a too-institutional notion of the morality which would be instituted by the Church). Communal—that is, it is a shared act, a shared life, a shared belonging. Thus, this ethic is not individual on one side and “communitarian” on another; it is personal and communal *at the same time*, which are one thing. Once again, we thus cannot speak of a social ethic in this sense. Undoubtedly, the Church is a society, but the goal of this ethic is certainly not to organize it as a society. For from a social point of view, it could be that the Church must give a prophetic example of an authentic and just communal life; it has unquestionably given wonderful examples in certain monastic periods. Under the inspiration of God, it can temporarily present an image of what the people of God will become, of a behavior which is “Wholly Other” than that of the world. And there is no question that this will be an important part of the ethic for this moment. But we must always be careful not to take what should be an eschatological sign as a reality sufficient unto itself, to not try to make lasting or permanent in History that which belongs to the Today of the Lord—which is a temporal intervention that loses all its value over time. There is thus no social ethic because there is no construction of a new world in the Church which, developing and progressively winning all peoples, annexing more and more men, would lead to the Kingdom of God. This progression and this continuity are rigorously contrary to scriptural teaching, and excluded just as much by the Apocalypse as by the Gospels (for example, Matt 24[[35]](#footnote-35) and Luke 18:8).

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The ethic for Christians is a communal ethic. There is a direct relation between this ethic and this group which constitutes the community of Christians, or the Church. For we must not forget that this people of God is also a reality on its own. And that if it only exists as an edifice of living stones, the inverse is also true: these stones are only living because they are integrated into *this* edifice. The Christian is only living because he is attached to his head, as a branch attached to the trunk. Consequently, the communal Ethic is in a rigorous relation with the Church. If it exists *for* Christians, it exists *by* the community of the Church, as a function of this community. Once more, it is thus not individualist, in the sense that the individual is not its master. He cannot determine it by himself; he cannot choose it and construct it in its solidity and by his individual choices. It is always a product of the community. Now this is rather remarkable, for it must be taken in a double sense. On the one hand, the Church is a group, a human group, subject to sociology, obeying sociological structures and tendencies like other groups; but on the other hand, it is the people of God. It has an origin, an orientation, a power, and a mission which radically escape human realities (and their possibilities of control), and above all a *relation* with her head which is a Mystery. Now, the ethic will present this double character. On the one hand, like any human group, the Church will provoke, produce, “secrete” a morality: it cannot escape this sociological necessity. But as the people of God, and before the Revelation contained in Scripture, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it is also called to formulate an ethic. This duality precisely reproduces the duality for the Christian: on the one hand, as a sinful man, participating in the global human condition, he is Adam in the fall, and consequently he chooses good and evil, he decides on good and evil; but on the other hand, having received the Revelation, and enlivened by the Holy Spirit, he knows another Good and is called to live according to a new ethic. However, he is never completely stripped of the old man, and the ethic that he can formulate will always be a reminder of his situation as a natural man. Thus, this communal ethic is necessarily constituted by this tension between the sociological character of the Church and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It includes both elements. And we cannot say that this is bad—for without this, the Ethic formulated would be unlivable and outside of time; it would no longer be an ethic at all. But it is precisely indispensable to know and accept this relativism of the morality of the Church in a new aspect: for in this way we avoid the intransigence of moral judgement. Nothing is more dangerous than a community of Christians who claim to escape the reality of the world, to contain all truth, to express pure and absolute Christian conduct, immutable: this attitude (which is common among Sects) necessarily leads to the negation of the commandment of love by the exclusion of the Other. And thus we fall back into the most negative elements of morality: judgement, and ultimately solitude. We end up with the complete opposite of the Christian life. On the contrary, by accepting that this morality is temporal, produced by a group which is subject (not exclusively, but subject nonetheless) to sociological laws, we allow for the possibility of changing this communal morality, and we maintain a morality which is open towards the other. This double element of inspiration is found in the process of formation at a given moment in this communal ethic. In effect, both the entire community and the Leaders and Doctors[[36]](#footnote-36) of the Church participate in this process. What we have here is not exactly the same opposition which we saw between the Morality created by moralists and philosophers and the Morality spontaneously produced by the group. In effect, the Leaders and Doctors of the Church are in this group. They are equal to the others and have no superiority; they live the same life, receive the same teaching, depend on the same Lord, and submit to the same Inspiration and the same Rule. There is one Lord, and one Spirit. Just as the bond between the members of the Church is really different than the bond of another group (because it passes through Christ), in the same way, the relation between the Doctor and the faithful is different than the relation between the philosopher and the citizen who belong to the same nation. The two share the same concrete source of life and a same spiritual inspiration, and subsequently the Morality formulated by the Doctor cannot remain foreign to the community (for if it does, this fact is the proof and manifest witness that something is wrong in the life of this Church), and reciprocally, the communal morality truly lived by faithful is a token of the meaning and necessity of his Word. He must precisely take it into account and not simply neglect it, still less condemn it; for we must watch out for simplistic judgements concerning this constitutive double factor! We should not conclude that the community of the faithful represents the sociological element, the traditional passive factor, and the Doctor represents the inspired, prophetic, and active element! No more should we think that the community represents the element of “existence” and value, while the Doctor would be the “command,” the imperative. The two are both of these things at the same time. It is true that the community is instituted sociologically, that it bears the weight of traditions, that it moves slowly. But *this* community is also the body of Christ; it receives the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the conduct of life in its entirety and in Communion (which cannot be a private event). The Doctor should have no illusions. If he receives some inspiration from the Holy Spirit, it is the same as that of the Church; it is as a member of this community—not as an exceptional or sacred individual—and in view of the service of this community; he is its servant and not its Master. And the Doctor exhibits the sociological character just as much as the Church: we have even said that it is by this fact that he can express an ethic which is valid for the man of his time. He belongs to a given society, to groups; he is not some spiritual man off on his own! Likewise, the community bears the existence and demand at the same time; through its life as a community, the community testifies to what the Christian life must, or should, can or could be. But furthermore, it is in an unclear, fumbling trial-and-error process provoked by the Preaching of the Word of God that new paths are uncovered for Ethics. And perhaps the community is unaware, perhaps this way is not well-lit; she will follow it all the same. And she will ask the Doctor to clarify this path—this path which she follows, and no other; not the sides of the road, nor the surrounding woods. And when she fumbles, when she finds herself in an impasse with no way forward—that is, when the Christian life becomes a simple habit with no reality and no correlation with this world, made up of safeties and subterfuges—because the preaching of the Word continues, because the Spirit is at work, a moment will come when the community can no longer continue in this way; she will demand something else, will proclaim her demand for another ethic, another concrete expression of the Christian life. Thus she can also turn to the Doctor to see what he will say. But at this moment, the Doctor will not respond out of a great imagination or great knowledge; he will only say: “Here is what the Spirit says to the Churches.” Knowing what to say is what will make him a Doctor. Certainly, he can express the demand of the Word of God, can formulate the requirements of a true ethic—and pronounce, in sum, the demand of God for this community, responding to the demand of this community turned towards its God. However, he can do so (if it is given to him) only in being the first to submit, the first to live what he announces. This is not a matter of being an example for the community, nor of being a “saint,” nor of marching at the head of the community; it is just that he can only speak a true Word on the Christian life if he lives it. As a bearer of the Command, he can only authenticate it by his existence. He is by no means the first in the church, nor separate from it. He exists *as* this Church exists. He thus cannot create an absolute, ideal ethical system, a pure expression of a pure understanding of Scripture, which nobody in the Church could live; for thus he could not live it either himself, and it would not be authentic at all. His formulation of the Ethic must be exactly at the level of existence of the community (which is also his existence); it must take account of the needs, the cries of this Church; it must take account of its possibilities of life, of its human and spiritual reality, and of the “measure of faith” imparted to this group of men.

Lastly, we must highlight one final difference between this communal ethic and ethics produced by sociological groups. We have seen that very generally, morality receives its authority from the group itself; it is imposed because the will and pressure of the group impose it on each one of its members. It also receives its disciplinary sanction from this group, which can react directly by excluding or bringing judgement to bear on the Immoral one, or indirectly through the formation of a moral conscience, produced by the education and taboos of the milieu. Now, the ethic for Christians receives neither its authority nor its sanction from the community of the Church. At this level, it becomes totally independent of the Church. (It must be independent if it is serious and true. Every time that the communal morality is coupled with judgements given by ecclesiastical authorities, group sanctions, or social pressures, it is a “Christian” Morality, a morality of the world; it assimilates to all moralities, and is no longer a form of the Word of God addressed to his Church.) We have seen that biblically, there is no moral conscience, but only our becoming aware of what we are before God. The Church does not have to forge moral consciences; society does a fine job on its own. The Church only has to place man before the Mirror of the Word. It does not have to pronounce judgements. Neither the Christian nor the assembly of Christians can judge a brother. Judgement on our words and acts and our entire life belongs to God alone. Consequently, the ethic is not insured, protected, or fortified by this judgement. And in this task, the Church does not even have the right to use the threat of this judgement, presenting the anger of God. She cannot use Hell to obtain obedience to morality—first, because Hell is not a *moral* punishment; second, because when the Church threatens judgement, she steps out of the role attributed to her by God, which is to announce the *Good* News of Salvation. She can neither preach nor witness on the subject of Hell. When she does so, she ceases to be the Church of Jesus Christ. Neither does she have the right to combine morality with a teaching, a Christian education, or a conformism which she would lead children into; in so doing, she behaves exactly like all the institutions of the world, like all groups; she is in no way the earthly witness of the Wholly Other. She does not have to give this morality the formal authority of good ecclesiastical institutions, temporal power, governmental authority, or the sociological mass of believers who strengthen the morality through their adhesion to it. All this is again the confusion between temporal power and the Holy Spirit, between efficacy and truth. All these ways are forbidden for the Church. And if she cannot impose faith by constraint, no more does she have the right to combine her morality with a punishment and an authority by herself. These last few years, we have seen a lot of interest in Morality without punishment; this is all well and good, but the sole and unique morality of this kind is morality for Christians. And it is the monstrous imposture of Christian Morality which has led to the idea that Morality was punishable by Hell, and that its authority came from fear of hell. Now, this morality for Christians has no other authority than that recognized by faith. She has no *external* authority. God does not ultimately underwrite this morality. If the Holy Spirit effectively guarantees the truth of the Revelation, if he pushes us to a given decision or behavior, he is not a moral guide. We have seen the ambiguity of all morality for Christians; it is evident that the authority and the presence of the Lord are not engaged in this ambiguity. Henceforth, we have to make our decisions, to enact our (moral) choices under our own responsibility, and in freedom—never under the constraint of such an authority. This is the very principle of the Christian Life. We will study this all throughout the second part.[[37]](#footnote-37) Thus the authority of the morality presented by the Church at a given moment comes from faith—just as a work desired by God which might transgress this morality can also come from faith. And likewise, it is definitively a morality without punishment, because the judgement of God is not pronounced for moral reasons. It is not according to a criteria of good and evil formulated in a morality (not even a criteria translated from the moral commandments of Scripture!) that this judgement if pronounced. If it is often said that “fornicators, liars, thieves, etc. will not enter the Kingdom of God,”[[38]](#footnote-38) all the texts clearly show that it is not these acts in themselves which count and are judged, but they express a certain fundamental spiritual attitude towards God, and it is *this* which is determinative. John shows that not loving one’s neighbor signifies that we do not love God.[[39]](#footnote-39) And such acts *manifest* that we do not love our neighbor. They have no value except as Signs, irrefutable Witnesses, Demonstrations of the absence of Faith and the absence of love for God. Thus we are no more saved by our works, by our morality, than we are condemned for ethical reasons. Salvation comes by Faith, and only one sin is not forgiven: the sin against the Holy Spirit.[[40]](#footnote-40) Thus this morality of the community cannot receive sanctioning power or authority—neither from the community (which has no authorization from God for this, and when she does this she ceases to be the Church), nor from God himself, who will assume this work along with the other works of man at the end of time, but who does not submit himself in the least to our rules and decisions for his judgement. This judgement outstrips all ethical problems by far. Thus, even when it is expressed in rules, prohibitions and imperatives, we are in the presence of a morality which will necessarily remain flexible and open—even as, as we have seen, it remains in constant evolution.

Chapter IV

AN IMMEDIATE ETHIC

The Ethic for Christians is an immediate ethic, which is to say that it knows no intermediary, no mediator but Jesus Christ. There are no means for determining the Good or deciding on our behavior, except for the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ as elucidated by the Holy Spirit. There is no stable point of reference for the establishment of the ethic other than the will of God.[[41]](#footnote-41) There is no intermediary world, there are no intermediary axioms, no orders of creation, no values which would allow us to have intrinsic knowledge (whether through reason or otherwise), to do what is good in the eyes of God, and to chart our path on our own.

In all of this, it really is a matter of an “intermediary world,” whether because we attribute eternal value to these axioms, making them an indispensable route to follow to understand the will of God, or because values become a transcendent world. Of course, it will be insisted that this is a Transcendence internal to creation, with no relation with God, in no way a World of Values comparable to platonic Ideas. Nevertheless, the permanence of these axioms grants them a sort of “connaturality” with God. As for values, however we may insist on their being *in* the created world, there is nevertheless a separation between a Transcendent and an Immanent—which is precisely the setting up of an intermediary World. This World is not the heaven of God, but neither is it the world of men; it corresponds quite precisely to the world of spirits and gods in Mythology—for example, Egyptian (the Unnamed above the Great God) or Greek mythology (with the gods submitted to Chronos and Ananke). Now, biblically, this intermediary world is absolutely excluded. It is precisely the search for a mediator—not of a theological order, but of the order of praxis, action and ethics. But no mediator other than Jesus Christ is admissible in these domains either. If he is the Way, he is the way from God to man, and also from man to man,[[42]](#footnote-42) and from man to the world. To accept Jesus Christ as the mediator between God and man, but to seek something else to explain, provoke, or ordain praxis, is to betray him—for he does not make precisely this distinction: happy is the one who hears *these words that I say* and puts them into practice.[[43]](#footnote-43) For the putting-into-practice which is the totality of the ethic, there is no need to seek an additional measure, a reference to values, etc. The only element which allows us this putting-into-practice is precisely the hearing of this Word as a Word of God, and the reception of this “happy” as the very measure of what is given to us as possible. It is the fact that this Word is the Presence of the Wholly Other which gives an orientation to our human life, and to our action, and thus to our life (and our morality). And there is strictly no other Wholly Other than this one. If we leave it, we get caught up indefinitely in creations of men—which are perhaps admirable, but which always bring us back to ourselves.

There is no objectivity regarding man except for the objectivity of God who reveals himself. The rest is a formulation of man. There is nothing between God and man which could allow him to find a *via media*, which could in reality give him a way to turn away from God. Nothing could allow him to avoid the personal dialogue with God. Now, all elaboration of orders of creation, of intermediary axioms or values leads directly to this. From the theological point of view, K. Barth has done justice to this permanent temptation.[[44]](#footnote-44) We will not dwell on this at length, but we will nevertheless recall three elements.

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First of all, we must try to understand exactly what this notion of the orders of creation is addressing. Either it is a possibility of knowing something of the will of God and of accomplishing a certain good, which is given to all men in a natural way, specifically in the ethical domain; all good, all order, peace, justice, and the law that man establishes derives from this recognition of an order, from axioms immanent in the world and established by God, which thus coexist with the spirit of man—or it is a possibility given to Christians, who find this indication of an order willed by God in the Revelation. In this latter case it is part of the Revelation, indistinguishable from it, and this order or these axioms are no longer intermediary: they are a Word of God which is addressed to faith. They have no independent objectivity. If God reveals a truth about the State to us, this does not mean that the state is this in reality, as an independent truth from God. On the contrary, this reveals to us to what extent the State is a subjective reality for man. The same goes for all that we call “orders.” If, on the contrary, it is a question of a kind of objectivity set up in the world by God—such that natural man could make use of it and establish a livable world on his own, but in conformity with the will of God—this seems to us to be a serious problem, sending us in a direction which we cannot accept. In effect, this leads us just as quickly to separate the history of the world from the history of salvation, the society of men from that of the church. In effect, to say that man can discern something of the will of God by his natural means, can conform to this will for the preservation of the world, can establish an order of the world conformed to the will of God—all this is to consider two separate works of God: a work of Preservation and a work of Salvation. It is to give a history to creation, an independent future, which could naturally endure (since we naturally conform to the will of God); it is to put Jesus Christ in a different box (that of Redemption), no longer the Lord of the world; in reality, it is to make the work of man—who, by his own means, can guarantee the preservation (conformed to the will of God)—and the work of Salvation, the specific work of God, into extensions of one another. Ultimately, this implies a Nature and a “Supernatural”—now, the entire Bible cries out against this. Preservation occurs in Jesus Christ alone. There is no dissociation of the works of God, and the history of the World has no intrinsic value: it is integrated in the history of Salvation. But this integration is true, and this salvation is simultaneously urgent and accomplished, on the condition that man absolutely cannot accomplish a will of God by his own strength. Nothing slackens (and has slackened) eschatological Tension as much as this. Nothing allows mans to settle in comfortably on the earth, rejecting the urgency of salvation. In effect, nothing has done more to lead Christians to social conformism, to terrestrial tranquility, to an organization which eternally confines Jesus Christ to Heaven and the Judgement to Never, than this conviction that we can arrange ourselves on earth according to a justice which is of God, in a peace which is of God, and in accomplishing a good which conforms to God. The notion of orders of creation, axioms, etc., creates Christendom (or a Para-Christendom) and destroys the ethic of combat and hope. It is only if the world cannot effectuate the will of God in the least, not even for its preservation, that it can (and cannot help but) be integrated into the adventure of Salvation—*precisely* for its preservation.

Our second remark is that the affirmation of intermediary orders or values presupposes that “something” of creation has remained unscathed, has not been degraded in the Fall. If values are naturally capable of conforming us to the will of God, if the orders allow us to attain the world as God willed it, if they are truly “orders of creation,” it is thus because the Fall has not been complete; there is a transmission of something, coming from Eden to us, intact. This is strictly impossible. Let us remember the cherubim who establish a complete and unbreakable barrier between the world of Eden and that of the Fall. There is no communication here, and Adam brought nothing with him from Eden which could serve him as sustenance in this world. Let us recall chapter eight of Romans, which tells us that “the whole creation has been groaning for its redemption.”[[45]](#footnote-45) “Whole:” thus nothing has remained unaffected. The whole order of creation has been disrupted; the whole thing has been submitted to vanity and to sin. The very simple distinction between the Finitude of man (which marks him as a creature, and which is normal and good) and Sin is correct. Likewise, to say that it is a sin to want to deny this finitude is also correct. But we must remember that this Finitude itself is now in the world of sin, that it too is submitted to sin. And consequently, it is perfectly vain (and terribly dangerous from an ethical perspective) to claim to separate two domains, that of (legitimate) finitude and that of sin; this leads us to say that our situation as creatures has remained intact, which is precisely which it has not done, and cannot be. Only when he is confronted with the Revelation of the love of God in Jesus Christ can man recognize his creaturely situation (and become a true creature) and his sinful condition simultaneously. For to claim that certain orders of creation, certain axioms, etc., are intact is to render the sacrifice of Jesus Christ useless. If in any way or to any extent, man were still capable of doing the will of God in knowing it, then salvation could have come about without the sacrifice of the Son of God. Before the Cross of Jesus Christ, we are obliged to recognize that the break with God must have been absolute to have required the absolute sacrifice of God.

Nothing can permit a conscious Christian to ignore this elementary observation. Consequently, we will recognize that the world in which we live is certainly a Creation, in the sense that it has no autonomy, that it has a beginning and will have an end, that it is in no way a creator. It finds itself in the condition of being CREATED, but it is not *the* Creation, in the sense that it is not what God created in the beginning; what we see has no common measure with what came out of the hands of the Creator. And the order that exists in this world is not the *order* of *the* creation, the order established in and for Eden. It is something else. In the fallen world, God has not abandoned man, has not left him with nothing in delirium and the darkness of night. There really is still a day, and the sun gives off its light. Cain really is protected (which is grace).[[46]](#footnote-46) There really is a Word which God continues to address to man. There really is a new order that God imposes on this Fall, which is not a return to chaos and nothingness because the love of God prevents it. This order adapted to the world of sin and revolt, the world which man wanted to master, is a vital minimum. It includes both Institutions (as we tried to show in *The Theological Foundation of Law[[47]](#footnote-47)*) and Mandates (as Bonhoeffer has shown[[48]](#footnote-48)). The Institution is a thing which exists, a given, which is precisely part of the expression of man when he lives—and he cannot live without putting it into play: a certain relation with the other sex, a certain relation with living beings, a certain relation with things . . . e.g., Marriage, a respect for life, authority, property. But the form of these Institutions is in no way predetermined; man fashions these institutions and imposes them under varying forms. And in the ethical domain, a certain number of mandates which God addresses to man respond to this institutional aspect. The Institution presupposes a certain moral attitude of man with respect to it. The moral creations of man always imply a certain stance concerning the form of these institutions and on the relation between them and man. Among these stances, this one or that one conforms to the God’s will for man, who thus obeys a mandate given him by God. But ultimately, he only recognizes the existence of this mandate in the Revelation. But on the subject of these Mandates, we must make two clarifications. First, they do not represent the “Good;” they are not eternal; they have no value for salvation, nor even for preservation in a general sense. They belong only to the domain of maintaining life, like eating or drinking—at the most humble level: if man does not behave in this way, he dies. And these Mandates are not an expression of the perfect Will of God (such that they would allow man to attain this Will); on the contrary, in conformity with what the Bible often shows us, they are a sort of adaptation of the will of God to the situation established by man. In his love for the creature, God accepts his decisions and respects his independence; he submits to the decisions made by the creature, accepting even the craziest situations which he gets himself into. And every time, he tries to make this situation livable, despite everything—as in the Kingship in Israel (1 Sam), in divorce and the law of Moses,[[49]](#footnote-49) etc. Every time, God reconstructs part of the fire, when it was man who let it get out of control.[[50]](#footnote-50) This adaptation of the will of God is one more attestation of his love. But by following this path, we cannot claim to reach the eternal Design of the Father in his Son, who is the Good. And the Institutions and Mandates are of this order. Thus as Christians, we have to recognize the validity of these mandates, in their relativity, but in knowing that ethics is called to go beyond them. They are what we might call an inferior limit of ethics, below which man would become an animal, or would die. They are not the content and the reason for being of this ethic. In any case, we cannot derive from them a unique from of Institutions which would be their “christian” form. On the contrary, these Mandates render us responsible towards any and all possible forms of these institutions.

Further study of the problem of orders and axioms does not seem necessary here; it has been discussed a thousand times elsewhere. On the contrary, perhaps it is necessary to give more attention the question of values, which has recently evoked renewed interest.

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For a long time, Christian morality was presented as an ensemble of Rules. Objectifying the notion of commandment is enough to arrive at this idea. And it fit within in the line of traditional moral philosophy. Today, we repudiate this way of seeing things, proclaiming that Christian morality must have no Rules, but that it is not without Values. Following the philosophy of values, the Value becomes an important piece of this morality, and Value is sharply contrasted to the imperative Rule. It is tempting to see this as an evolution of philosophical trends. In effect, by virtue of a certain philosophy, the Commandment was interpreted as a moral Rule, which is inexact; in virtue of another philosophy, the law is discovered to be a value, which is perhaps no more exact. And incidentally, we are obliged to consider that there is not always an opposition between Rule and Value. For example, if we know the Theology of the law in Judaism—the admirable and complex construction built based on Psalm 119—we can see that the law is at once a Rule and a Value, crossing philosophical barriers. In truth, we can easily perceive that this theology of values is made to achieve two goals: first, to link a biblically founded theology to a philosophy which we believe to be exact; second, it is an attempt to find a central point of commonality between Christians and Non-Christians, to establish a bridge between them—for it is shocking, and infinitely difficult to accept, that there is a barrier between the two. Now, it is said, among both Christians and non-Christians, the ethical operation is the same, the ethical subject is instituted in the same manner, involving responsibility, choice, etc., and we can even agree on the same values (and consequently, we can have common projects) if Values are accepted in Theology. We do not hold to the catholic doctrine of values, as elaborated by Le Senne, for example;[[51]](#footnote-51) Mehl’s critiques thereof seem to us to be decisive.[[52]](#footnote-52) But we will reflect on the protestant doctrine of values which more directly concerns us. In this perspective, of course, values are only in creation; they are not eternal essences, but objects which God created and put at the disposition of man so that he might become an ethical subject and exercise his freedom and choice. While they have no preeminent distinction, they are still the “marks of the Created.” They play a decisive role in our existence; without them, we could not exist; they permit choice; they circumscribe the limits of action and give it a meaning. Far from allowing man to go beyond himself, to reach the heavens, these values limit him instead; by his own strength, he cannot go beyond values. Now, these values are inscribed *in* Creation. They are the mark, not of man’s sin, but of his finitude; he must accept values, for rejecting them would be to reject his own finitude, and consequently to fall into sin. Thus they mark the creaturely condition; to accept them is to accept oneself as a creature. And positively, moral choice always points back to them. It is ultimately a matter of choosing between them, and combining them into a just whole; such is the ethical decision, which the Christian will take as a Christian on the basis of their faith, and in Christian freedom. But in so doing, he can encounter the non-Christian because these values are common to both. All of this is extremely seductive. But we must nevertheless remark that from the beginning, the constructed philosophy of values is somewhat marginalized, somewhat “oriented” by an implicit theological presupposition. This system of values, the explanation of their authority, the relation between value and creation, and many other things can perhaps be acceptable for a Christian, but a non-Christian will have difficulty adhering to it, sensing a latent Christianity. But more importantly, to avoid all the objections to values which might be made from a Christian perspective, we are given a portrait so flexible and nuanced that, on the one hand, we are forced to grant it our support; but on the other hand, there is so much uncertainty because these values are so imprecise, so transient, so malleable that we no longer really know what they are. Our support is granted to something so terribly uncertain and contradictory. Of course, it is said that the value always produces its contrary, but we are not talking about these particular contradictions: the value is presented to us at times as a subject, at times an object, sometimes objective and sometimes subjective (with a hardly convincing demonstration that the objectivity of these values grounds their subjectivity), at times as something only chosen by man, sometimes as elaborated by him; sometimes as active, intervening (which implies man’s docility and obedience), sometimes as passive, simply an object of choice where man is the master, sometimes as surrounding the subject, sometimes as an organized, independent world, sometimes as *membra disjecta[[53]](#footnote-53)* with no reality in themselves . . . certainly, dialectics cannot resolve everything, and contextual differences cannot account for everything. It is rather difficult to find oneself in these contradictions. But they are necessary to reconcile the philosophy of values with a biblical theology.

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But try as we may, this system runs into three very serious objections, which are decisive in our opinion. When we come to the point of junction with theology, we are told that not only does the law established by God correspond to these values that man knows; moreover, these values are the content of the law revealed by God. In its concrete commandments, the law points back to values—true values, the only authentic values, which are ultimately those given by God, accepted by him; there are no other values than these. And among all the things that man might call values in different societies, it is God who chooses the true values. This responds to the question we were posing in chapter two:[[54]](#footnote-54) on what grounds do we decide that a value is true, false, or an anti-value? Here, it is clear: only the values accepted by God are valid and truly play the role of values. But this entails two consequences. First of all, the choice between values, which was made into the essential ethical act of man, is singularly downplayed; in reality, it is not man who chooses—God has already chosen before him! It is God who chooses among the Values. Of course, man can still choose against God. But above all, this comes down to saying that only Christian values are moral values, that the pagan world has never been moral except for when it chose the same values as Christianity, and that all others are anti-values, giving birth to an anti-morality. This is the old traditional position which we have rejected, according to which only Christian morality is a true morality! Now, this is confirmed in the theory that we are critiquing by the following point: choice between values (the ethical decision) is not possible for man except in freedom. Now, we are told, in the theological part, we must be *made* receptive to these values, made free for this choice: natural man is captive, is only freed and emancipated by Jesus Christ. But then this means all the more that outside of faith in Jesus Christ, no moral life is possible, there are no ethics, there is no obedience to values; the pagan has no moral existence! This appears totally unacceptable. This stems from a confusion between values and the content of the revealed law. But if we end up here, we absolutely do not see the point in starting with an apparently objective and lay philosophical construction of Values.

The second critique concerns the relation between this theory and the Bible. Right away, let us remark that in a simple reading of the Bible, the notion of Value never imposes itself, and absolutely does not emerge on its own. One must have a preexisting idea of Value to then try to discover it in the Bible; it does not flow from biblical thought. When we are told that values define what is acceptable to God or that they are the concrete content of the Decalogue, in reality, this is because we are imposing a framework and a signification which are in no way necessary or intrinsic onto the biblical text. Now, this is certainly the most dangerous and difficult-to-accept operation concerning the biblical text. But furthermore, we must recognize that what philosophers normally call “values” precisely are not values in the Bible: the Good, Justice, Freedom, Peace, Joy, etc.—these are not values. If the Good is the very Will of God, it is not a value. This alone destroys all biblical reference to values, any explanations notwithstanding. For we strictly cannot make the all-too-easy distinction between “Will of God / (abstract) Good” and “Values / (concrete) Good”; the man to whom the will of God is revealed would be pointed back to values. There is nothing biblical about this, for the will of God is never abstract: it is always revealed to us with a precise content. It is not the Good; but as a good, it points something out to us. God does not reveal the Good, but he demands a concrete decision which, in conforming to his will, is the good. Consequently, we are obliged to say either that this concrete content of the will of God is not a value since it is the will of God, or that the Good is a value, which is not biblical. Incidentally, we will return to the theory of choice between values as an expression of the Christian life in the following section. Finally, to find a biblical foundation for values, we try to transpose between *archaï,* the *exhousiaï*, and values.[[55]](#footnote-55) This is more than suspect. We present three critiques of this attempt. First, in order to make this transposition work, we are obliged to adopt Bultmann’s thesis on demythologization.[[56]](#footnote-56)We will not enter the debate, but we will only make this remark: if it is true that Paul only speaks of *archaï, dynameis*,[[57]](#footnote-57) etc., because they are beliefs of his time (which are “Myths”), and that the realities that he designates are veiled behind these mythological terms, substituting the word “Value” for these terms is no clearer (for the average person, the word “Value” is no more meaningful than the word “Power,” authority). “Re-mythologizing” will not help either, for the importance which we attach to the philosophy of values is linked to our belief in it; the word “value” is also a Myth in Bultmann’s sense of the term. We do not see the point in substituting the Myth of Values (which, despite being a modern myth, is no more accessible than ancient ones) for the Myth of the *exhousiaï* (if we accept this to be one).

The second objection is that the role which philosophy attributes to values, their function and situation, in no way correspond to the role, situation, and function of the *exhousiaï*. If we intend to hold onto these latter, all that is said about values from a philosophical perspective no longer holds and must be modified. If we want to retain the theory of values as such, Value is not comparable to the *exhousiaï*. If we made a table of the functions of the two, we would easily see all the discordances between them.

Finally (but this is a minor point), values lead us to rehabilitate a place for natural law, which seems to us to have no Christian foundation (see our *Theological Foundation of Law*).[[58]](#footnote-58)

Lastly, we come to the most serious problem. To put it bluntly, we often attribute to the value a role which only belongs to God. To say “I owe *everything* to the Value”—“The Value gives and reveals their freedom to the subject”—“The Value sustains my existence, keeps my head above water, and persuades me that existence is worthwhile”—“The Value gives me sufficient authority to interrupt temporal determination”—that by it, “necessity ceases to be fatality”—“the Value is inexhaustible” as a source of inspiration in life, “they offer themselves to us as a recourse, and this recourse will not let us down”—“If the obedience of faith is possible *in* the world, it is because the world offers it indefinitely renewable possibilities [ . . . ] through values.” Values allow us to exist in the obedience of Faith, etc. All this is very clearly the work of God and God alone. We owe nothing to values, and everything to God. Our freedom, our liberation from determinisms, is the work of Jesus Christ. What sustains our existence is the love of God. What persuades me that life is worth living is the act of the Holy Spirit; our only recourse is the patience of God, and his mercy. The obedience of faith is only possible in the world through the miracle of the Holy Spirit. That is what Scripture teaches us. It is never a question of values, to which we thus attribute an honor which only belongs to God. Consequently, to maintain the theory of values, we would have to say: the natural, unconverted man believes and thinks that it is the value which allows him to live, which grants him freedom, which gives meaning to existence (but he is deceived! For as a Christian, we must say that all this belongs to God alone). And in fact, at best, the system of values can be useful for the non-Christian, to understand their moral phenomenon, but here we encounter the difficulty that the true values are those sanctified by God… Or we would have to recognize the objectivity of two different systems: the non-Christian man obeys objectively existing values which effectively fulfill the functions described above, taking the place of God—while for the Christian, everything depends on the action of God. But this is impossible to accept theologically, and it is even more impossible to give to the value what the Bible specifically attributes to God. Certainly, we are warned that the value can be a trap or constitute an idol, that it has a kind of seductive power. But it seems that this is so true that we cannot escape it! Thus, the idea of the value is very dangerous; and incidentally, it is useless. Because it is immediate, every Christian ethic can be understood biblically without recourse to the services of the value. It is a cumbersome and misleading intercessor, inadequate for the Christian life.

Chapter V

A SPECIFIC ETHIC

For a long time, it was proclaimed that the Christian life was unlike any other—superior in every way, truer, more just, better, and more effective. No comparison between the Christian life and any other kind of life could be made. To reach the good, those outside the Christian life had to conform to Christian morality. This was the point of view of Christendom, of a church closed in on itself. Then the world was opened. It was observed that pagans also did “good,” that they had a high view of justice at times, that they could exhibit love for others and lead a worthy life. At the same time, it was discovered that Christians were often hypocrites, and that ultimately they were no better than anyone else. This must have caused some trouble for Christians. There was also a tendency (which we know very well) among more evolved Christians to thoroughly critique all claims to moral living directly, purely, and honestly as possible: an agreement with Sartrean existentialism to charge as hypocritical everything which does not make an open display of sin; an acerbic attack against Christians and a limitless admiration for Gandhi (who shows what peace and love are better than Christians) and for the communists (who teach us what justice is, and love too). We are hardly exaggerating.

Then came the most sophisticated reactions: Christianity was characterized by its spiritual value or its theological rigor. Its specificity came down to this, leaving conduct somewhat to chance. A theology of transcendence clearly favored this. This positions was forcefully expressed: “The less Christian conduct shows a visible and separate specificity, the more it needs this specificity transcendentally. The more widespread it is in the world (in the sense of indistinct from the world, diffuse), the more it must be personally linked to God” (Dumas).[[59]](#footnote-59) In other words, the Christian can behave like everyone else, there is no “morality for Christians;” as long as they have a strong faith and a correct knowledge, there is no problem. In reality, we must admit that this is a terrible statement of failure. This conception has two roots. The first is concrete: it is the fact of being powerless to lead a singular life in an increasingly conforming world. The society in which we live, the excess of work, the technicization of all activities, organization, the progress of psychological techniques, the power of sociological trends, the diffusion of the means of information—all this leads to a nearly-complete conformity of man. Nothing, whether in conduct or opinions, is indifferent to the development of society; nothing can be left to chance and spontaneity; and incidentally, the masses are so substantial that it is almost impossible to resist their movement. Thus, the Christian is obliged to lead the same life as everyone else. He is not distinguished from them. It is hypocritical to make necessity into a virtue and say that this is all very good, that it shows that the Christian is present to the world: this is false.[[60]](#footnote-60) This comes down to being *of* the world, period.

The other, theological root of this attitude has been favored by the “Theology of Transcendence” strongly reaffirmed in the last several decades. In effect, we must know that the more a theology is demanding in its objectives, all-encompassing in its reach, and complete in its explications, the more it is intellectually satisfying, and the more it is inadequate for leading man to action. It leaves him totally disarmed, faced with this transcendent with no relation to the practical world. It leads him to consider that the only important thing is the just, exact relation with God; the rest is negligible. Thus he receives no impetus for his life, by the very fact of the excessive break between the transcendent and the immanent; this is the danger. This either leads to a spiritualism (in which only spiritual values matter), or to an incoherent, inconsequential insertion in the world. The latter has been the case with most Barthians,[[61]](#footnote-61) who have thus acted for purely pragmatic reasons, actually obeying sociological currents and the press, without discerning anything Christian in their conduct, since what is Christian is reserved for theology. But how can we not see that in reality, this comes down to the spiritualism that they detest—to a Christianity of *intention*—and that the whole theology of mental Reserve is reintroduced precisely at this point? “Let’s act like everyone else, as long as we do so for Christian reasons”—“Let’s go fight in the war, let’s be good soldiers—but not for the same reasons as the others [the question that I necessarily ask myself here: if *this* Christian did not receive his draft letter, would he have gone voluntarily?]—and let’s kill our enemies, but let us love the one we kill.”[[62]](#footnote-62) This is precisely how Christianity ceases to be serious and to be taken seriously. The entire Bible teaches us that the criteria of authentic faith is a specific action inspired by faith. Conformity to the world is never a Christian attitude. In this attitude, we cannot be “present to the world” since we are similar to it, nor ambassadors of Christ, nor witnesses—i.e., martyrs. And let us not offer the Incarnation of Jesus Christ as a reason here: yes, certainly, Jesus Christ was a man, a simple man, similar to us in all things “except sin;”[[63]](#footnote-63) but really, he did not concretely behave like everybody else!!!

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But the refusal of the specificity of the Christian life takes a more subtle form with the philosophy of values.[[64]](#footnote-64) Man can only behave ethically by building on values, and ethical decisions consist in choosing values and combining them in the best way. Now, these values belong to all men. They are the same for everybody. And the problem for the Christian will thus be—as a function of his faith, because of his belonging to Jesus Christ, and in the judgement of the Spirit—to decide in favor of this or that value, assume it, and live it. Consequently, his ethical operation will be the same mechanism used by everyone else, but he will be able to manifest the singularity of his motives by exercising his choice. And yet he will not be cut off from men since this choice will be made from a bundle of common values belonging to this given civilization, to this society, created by it. In effect, the Christian must manifest himself as such with the language of all men. Through this choice of values, the world no longer appears to us as a demonic place, but as a “task to accomplish, as a possibility of affirming my presence in the world.”[[65]](#footnote-65) In this regard, the Christian plays a threefold role: recognizing the authority of values, choosing values from among the complex array that the world can offer, and finally combining values and establishing a “scheme of values” which would be belong singularly to Christians. This allows the Christian to integrate into the flow of history, to express themselves in a way that will take into account both their historical opportuniy, the moment, the urgency of present circumstances—and the end of history such as it has been revealed to us by God. By referring to values, the Christians effectively shares in the common lot of men, but by their choice, they will manifest the secret relation which unites them to Christ. Because of their urgency in a given historical situation, and because of the personal relation that this Christian has with their Lord, the Christian will choose to assume and express a given value rather than another. Now, if this choice of values is the vocation of all men, the Christian still finds themselves in an exceptionally good situation. In effect, Christianity favors this choice of values, first because values are subordinated to the person because of Jesus Christ; second, because choosing among values presupposes a liberated subject, and this liberation is the work of Jesus Christ. When the Christian acts in this way, he avoids both spiritualism and legalism. The Holy Spirit does not dictate our behavior; the Bible is not transformed into a moral Code. The Holy Spirit makes man into a being truly capable of choosing: “I am directed not to prescribed acts, but to the consideration of all these values which offer themselves to me in creation,”[[66]](#footnote-66) allowing man to recognize himself precisely as a creature. Incidentally, among these values, we find everything necessary for the Christian life to be, when necessary, opposed to the world: if we grant the ambiguity, the polyvalence, the complexity of values, the Christian can find values which fight against others—“In this world, he finds possibilities of protest against this world itself…discovering the objective values implicated by creation is to discover all the possibilities (which could have gone unnoticed by a mind which is not renewed by faith) of putting the form of this world and the form of our existences in this world in question.”[[67]](#footnote-67) (Whether we like it or not, this comes down to saying that *in this world* there is something which has remained whole, unscathed by the fall, in the state of Creation. Thus, living by means of what is in the world, the Christian can lead a life which is not of the world! Thus it is not necessary to look for a specifically Christian conduct. When we are told that the Christian has no need to apply themselves to discover so-called Christian values (there are no Christian values, any more than there are metaphysical values), we agree quite readily; but we agree because we think that the Christian life is something other than a search for values or a reference to values. For in the theological perspective of values, this ultimately comes down to saying that the Christian life has no specific character. We should already be on guard when we see the obvious contradiction between values and a given indisputable form of the Christian life. For example, it is said that poverty and sickness are not values, since they are contrary to this expansion which characterizes the action of values. Now, if the Christian life comes down to a choice between values, we will never be led to choose poverty, for example, or to accept sickness. And yet, it is specifically Christian, and biblical, that poverty is one of the gifts, one of the authentic forms of the Christian life (cf. our book *Money and Power.*)[[68]](#footnote-68) This seems to be of crucial importance. And likewise: the range of values offered to us is linked to our time and our civilization (this is the very condition of presence in the world); we thus do not have the right to speak of “Values of creation,” as if this range included all imaginable values, equally available to us. Our current society presents us a reduced inventory, and not the totality of values possible since the origin of the world. And it is from this reduced inventory that we will choose. This means that our choice is preceded by a screening which is caused by historical circumstances, by social trends, by the political world, by ideologies, etc. It is as one inserted into this mix that we must decide upon values which have already been censored by world; how can we not see that in so doing, we accept being of the world, belonging to it? We no longer represent the Wholly Other *at all*. But to understand this, we must quit getting caught up in abstraction and see things concretely. In a society whose institutions, ideology, psychology, etc., radically eliminate freedom or truth, are we as Christians going to stop affirming their existence and their necessity, or stop trying to live by them? Now this is nothing but a gratuitous hypothesis. In reality, this doctrine is the justification of conformity to given social realities—not a superficial conformity to the government (yet this is very often the case!), but conformity to the essential tendency of society, because almost necessarily (experience shows, in any case), we will choose “privileged values,” those put forth by society. Thus, the Christians who adopt this theory today are for Democracy, for Peace, for national Independence of all peoples, for Technique, for Productivity, etc.—that is, exactly for all the privileged values of our society.

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As for us, we claim that the Christian life is a specific and (in the etymological sense of the word) original life, not conformed to the world and its concrete structures (in the sense of Romans 12),[[69]](#footnote-69) incomparable to anything else in the world, and bearing something new which is not prefigured in knowledge of the world. We are a bit too quick to discount the New Birth and the Newness of Life; and yet, the Bible continually insists on this “New.” New Birth is truly the appearance of a new being, a “new creature;”[[70]](#footnote-70) and what does this mean, if not that that this creature truly does not belong to the old world, to the fallen creation? That it cannot be limited, neither to behaving as others do, nor to choosing what is right from among the things of the world? The one who is born again is a man who no longer belongs to the flesh (John 3:7).[[71]](#footnote-71) He is capable to receive the “new commandment” that others cannot hear or receive outside of this rebirth: “Love one another.”[[72]](#footnote-72) Must we believe that all this is purely inward? That it is a spiritual birth which changes nothing concrete, nothing in practice? That the new material in question is carefully hidden and that it does not manifest itself at all, that it is a mystery in God, but which is imperceptible in conduct? Doubtlessly, the “new commandment” allows us to think this. It will be said: what marks Christian specificity is love, not this or that behavior. We will have to come back to this. But right away, we can see that the biblical texts are formal: new birth affects the entire life; it must translate into a behavior which is not that of men and their values. It is precisely a matter of rejecting the “yeast”[[73]](#footnote-73) of men (and we really must consider that this yeast is really what we call values!!) and of becoming a new lump, which is to say, new in our entirety. For if we want to make the new birth into an inward event, do we not fall back into the old division between soul and body, in which the soul is in Christ and the body acts according to the world and its values? The unity of the person is broken if the *new* creature only expresses itself materially by means of *old values*. Is this not precisely what Christ was warning against when he said that it is impossible to put new wine into old skins?[[74]](#footnote-74) The wine of the Spirit cannot live in a man who continues to behave according to the criteria of the world, with the values of society. The same goes for the new patch on the old cloth:[[75]](#footnote-75) does this not tell us that the regeneration is complete, that it destroys our old ways of thinking, our values, our social, political, economic judgements, as well as our private conduct—and that by this we are thrown onto an irresistibly new path which we must open ourselves, without reference to the old? This is just what Paul confirms when he says that we should “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). This is not a question of a spirituality, nor of internal things. It concerns the most concrete form: to walk, to advance, to conduct one’s life, and it is this which must be done according to a radical novelty—Radical? What allows us to add this word? Could not this novelty consist precisely in choosing “new” values in the range offered us, in the sense of values that that we did not choose before? But precisely, this text of Paul speaks of Death: “You have been buried with Christ.”[[76]](#footnote-76) For a dead man, there is no more value. His death is the annihilation of values. And when he rises up after this passage, he does not reclaim the values cut off from him at his death. The resurrection truly initiates a completely innovative lived conduct. And this too is what Jesus Christ means when he says “Go and *Do* likewise.”[[77]](#footnote-77) The discernment of the neighbor, an act of love, entails behavior which is not that of the world. This innovation, this creation is one of the very marks of love. Love creates new forms; it is not inscribed in traditions, in existing values, in a preexisting situation. And insofar as we must live by this love that Christ conveys to us, responding with our love for him, this presupposes precisely the creation of a ‘new’ which is always renewed—we absolutely do not have the right to dissociate *agape* from behavior. For in truth, *agape* only exists when it is expressed in a behavior, and this behavior is irremediably new, since it is inspired by love. Believing that love can be inscribed in values of creation is to return to old skins. When Scripture speaks about this newness in this way, it includes the ‘How,’ and ‘Whence,’ and the ‘What,’ the foundation as well as the form of the conduct of this life in Christ. Nothing is left intact by the power of the Holy Spirit, who never sends us back to something which was already there.

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This novelty leads us to affirm the singularity and specificity of the Christian life and ethic. All throughout the Bible, we are shown that the Christian life derives directly from faith. It is expressed in a life, which is a direct prolongation of the relation with the person of Jesus Christ. And we are obliged to note that to the extent that it is faith *in Jesus Christ* which concerns us here and not just any faith whatsoever, the life and ethic which seeks to express it cannot be just any ethic either, constructed from the values of the world. This life, this conduct of life, this ethic must directly and specifically point back to Jesus Christ. When they see these works, men must recognize the act of the Lord. But how could this happen if Christians do the same works and adopt the same values as everyone else? We do not need to look very hard to find reasons for the ineffectiveness of evangelism. It is not a problem of money, nor of techniques, nor of propaganda,[[78]](#footnote-78) nor a question of language, nor a problem of the ‘break’ with the working class, nor an affair of organization: it is the fact that Christians live the same life as everyone else, that they refer to the values of everyone else, that they behave like anybody else.[[79]](#footnote-79) In these conditions, why should a man accept oral testimony of the Power of the Lord, and of Salvation? Now, the fact that Christians live the same life as everyone else is unfortunate. But as long as we can proclaim “This is so, but it is unacceptable,” there is the possibility for a tension to open up. On the contrary, the theological position that we are fighting against appears to us seriously problematic insofar as it justifies and legitimizes this atony of the Christian life.[[80]](#footnote-80) It tells Christians, “It is normal that your conduct is not singular. For your life, you have to pick from the values that your society offers you.” In their laziness, Christians are all too eager to hear such talk, and to combine that which assures their comfort in the world with their spiritual life. And yet, nothing in the Bible allows us this assurance. For example, if we refer to the Sermon on the Mount—which, whether we like it or not, is a text concerned entirely with lived behavior—we find ourselves in the presence of the affirmation of a rule of life (and our use of the term is intentional, knowing that it is not simply a Rule) which is diametrically opposed to *everything* that the world has said and can say. In the life described by the Sermon on the Mount, there is no question of values, still less any reference to the values of the world. It is the antithesis of the proposition: “The Good is the will of God, but when we want to do good, we are sent back to extant values.” Here, in this description of the “Doing,” we see precisely this good, expressed concretely, with no reference to values. Now, it seems that there is an important lesson to be learned from the fact that the first big declaration of Jesus Christ at the beginning of his ministry is entirely devoted to the Conduct of Life, to Putting into Practice, to Ethics. This must certainly have a decisive value. And *here* it is precisely a question of the specificity of Christian conduct, of its unique and irreplaceable character. In the first part, Jesus Christ marks the difference between the practices demanded by God and those of the Jews (“You have heard it said…But I say to you…”).[[81]](#footnote-81) And in a second part, we see the continual return of differentiation with the behavior of pagans (Matt. 5:46–47; 6; 7:32) and, exactly at the center of this great description, as a kind of pivot, we find the question: “What more are you doing than others?”[[82]](#footnote-82) How could we say that in our Christian life, we must refer ourselves to the structures of the world, to values, etc.—which are precisely part of what others ordinarily do? And it is not enough to say, “Love is extraordinary, it is love which colors our ordinary acts.” *No,* for Jesus Christ really says: “What more are you *doing* . . .” The distinction is not a nuanced intention; the act is called to be extraordinary *in itself*. In the presence of this, we can, we must say: the Christian Life is called to be specific and different from the life of other men—and even, if we hold to the Sermon on the Mount, the contrary of the life of other men. For in reality, the “law of the Kingdom” is the inverse of the law of the World. And the conduct demanded and permitted has strictly no positive point of reference with what exists in the world, this society, this fallen creation.

Nevertheless, a serious problem remains: some say that in his parenetic texts, Paul limited himself to adapting the lists of values extant in the pagan world. It is not denied that Paul’s whole ethic is a reflection, an expression of life in Christ, deriving directly from faith; it is acceptable that the formulation of this ethic similarly derives from theology (the famous “Therefore” in Romans 12:1 is very clear). But when it comes to the concrete expression, it is said, Paul returns to pagan values, to a “catalogue of values constructed by pagans, which they thus knew well, but whose concrete authority they were incapable of recognizing”; “As soon as man wants to act, in the recognition of the Good that he has received from Christ, he will just as soon as encounter values in his action . . . Both Paul and Peter have no problem with a recourse to these lists of values that pagan ethics had elaborated . . . Man has always known these values, but this knowledge was insufficient to allow him to accomplish them. For this, he had to receive a gift from the beneficence of God, in Christ, which is Love . . . When this love wants to act, in following its path it encounters the values familiar to pagan Antiquity, even if their profound demand was not always felt.—Christianity does not invent new values, and the Christian ethic could be explained by using values which belong to the common good of civilized humanity, but it sees them in a new light, which gives it love, and with a new Intention . . .”[[83]](#footnote-83) This theological position raises immense difficulties. Let us skip over “civilized humanity,” which, characterized by Pauline values, excludes China, India, the Incas, Islam, etc., who did not have the same system of reference! But when we are told that Paul refers to the values of pagan Antiquity, this raises four questions: which pagan Antiquity? And if I have rightly understood that this might refer to Aristotle, Plato, and the Stoics and to their moral values, we say that this represents a miniscule, almost imperceptible fraction of this Antiquity. But among the philosophers, what relation is there to the values of Heraclitus, or those of Tyrtaeus, the sophists, the cynics,[[84]](#footnote-84) etc.? And why privilege these philosophers over the others? Because these ones discovered values which were consecrated by Saint Paul? But such generalizations cannot be taken seriously. All the less so as the values which they are discussing are not the values of the society where they live. What do the values of Dionysiac Mysteries, of the cult of Orpheus and Isis (which enjoyed far greater recognition and observation than those of Plato), and the values of the Greek or Roman City have to do with those of Paul? Let us not, therefore, lump together all the values of Antiquity. The best we can say is that there is a certain coincidence between the moral ideas of several pagan personalities and those of saint Paul. And still, this is not to cede to the same movement which saw the Cumaean Sybil and Virgil’s fourth Eclogue as express prophecies of Jesus Christ.

That is the first difficulty. The second question is: is it certain that all the values expressed by Aristotle, Plato and the Stoics are found in saint Paul’s writings? And reciprocally, are all the values expressed by saint Paul found among these philosophers? If not, we cannot say that saint Paul is adapting the list of pagan values. Now, this simply is not the case. Draw up detailed lists (which we have done, but which we cannot insert here) and it will be clearly seen that the coincidence between these values is no greater than 30%. For example, all the civic values so dear to Aristotle and Plato are absent from Paul, and joy, generosity, humility, the spirit of service (become slaves!),[[85]](#footnote-85) the honor of women, etc., are absent among the Philosophers. And if we exclude: the Good, Truth, and Justice, which are not values in the Christian perspective, this reduces the coincidence even further! Thus, the best we can say is that there is a coincidence between a small number of the values of several philosophers and those which Paul lists.

The third difficulty is: when the words are similar, does Paul mean the same thing as Plato or Aristotle? In other words, might they be using the same words to designate different realities, different conducts, and ultimately a different ethic? Now, word studies show precisely that this is the case. We know that Paul uses a particular vocabulary; we know that ‘lust [*convoitise*],’ Temperance, Idolatry, and Virtue are words which do not mean the same thing in Paul and in Plato; so what remains of this assimilation of the two?

Finally, the last objection is theological. If it is true that the only result of the intervention of grace in lived conduct is to make us recognize the authority of values (which the pagans could not do—False! Plato did it!); to allow us to live out values which we have always recognized; to consider them from a new perspective, and with a new intention—then we fall back into a theology which makes grace a prolongation of Nature; which affirms that the Fall only affects the will; and which makes Christian specificity only a matter of intentions—that is, a theology quite close to Thomism![[86]](#footnote-86) And if we say: but these Values are not natural Values, they are those which are taken up by God, which we find already in the Decalogue—well, let us not say that the Christian Ethic is made up of pagan Values. Instead, we should say that pagans had the exceptional grasp, the rarest of knowledge concerning the behavior, acts, and attitudes demanded and proposed by God to man. We should not go beyond this.

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But we know very well all the misunderstandings which ought to be put aside when we affirm the specific and singular character of the Christian life, which differs in its reasons and its behavior from that of natural man. This thesis will certainly be labelled Angelism! It will be recalled that saved man is not a supernatural being, that salvation is not divinization, that the new man is still a man. Deliverance from sin should not be confused with deliverance from finitude. We do not have to leave the world to participate in the renewal of existence by faith. Certainly, all this is correct. But if saved man is not a supernatural being, he is nevertheless a participant in a justice and a holiness which are not of his nature. If salvation is not a divinization, it is nevertheless the adoption of an enemy creature by God. If the new man is still man, he is no longer the same. It is an abuse of words to say that Jesus Christ did not renounce his humanity, for this humanity is not sinful humanity. We need not leave the world, but we do not need to be of the world! When we recall that salvation provokes the humanization of man, this is perfectly true; but since there is a break with sin, this signifies that the natural man is not really man because he is sinful—and that the new man, who is the man after God’s own heart, is a different thing which is marked by a new condition, by new choices, by incompatibility with natural man and the world and society. For what matters is certainly to make this newness infiltrate the world. Thus the affirmation of the specificity of Christian life and conduct implies no moral Holiness, no separation from the world, no divinization of the world. But in our eagerness to affirm the simple humanity of the saved man, and nothing more, we reduce grace to nothing, making it into something purely spiritual and ultimately illusory. On the contrary, it is absolutely essential that Christians have a specific conduct; and this not only out of obedience to the will of God, so that grace would be truly borne into the world (we are thinking, for example, of the parable of the unforgiving servant:[[87]](#footnote-87) the grace shown to him must have repercussions on other men through the transformation of his own conduct; and this, insofar as it concerns gratuity, is not found in any morality in the world), and so that we could be ambassadors of the love and freedom of God; but also for service to and utility for the world. Insofar as Christian will concretely have a unique conduct, they will be truly useful and interesting for society, even if society does not recognize or endorse them. We cannot describe this specificity of conduct here; this will be the goal of this whole work. We will only give several examples. We should not think that an attitude of singularity leads to a sidelining of or constant opposition to everything that happens in the world. It is not a negation of the world, but an affirmation of something else, a new positioning of problems, the search for responses which are radically new because they are inspired by another spirit, shedding new light on ordinary paths. Nothing is more disappointing in politics, economics, etc., than to see Christians acting with a prodigious passivity, focusing on the problems that this or that party puts in the spotlight and adopting the readymade solution presented by this politician or that technician. The Christian is not called to choose from among diverse human solutions, but to bear the presence of the Wholly other into society, into present activity—which clearly upsets the Game, its conditions, rules, clichés, stereotypes . . . Now, the Christian should be able to do this with infinitely more audacity than anyone else because they are walking with the Lord of the world. They should know that all revolutions proposed by men are false revolutions, that they will not end in anything valuable. This does not mean that the Christian must not also be engaged in such a revolution, but that they must radically relativize all political and economic activity. In recalling the fundamental identity of the principles of the world—and that a “General-Count” is the same as a “Comrade-General,” that the capitalism of the Soviet State is the same thing as the capitalism of the great integrated unities of the U.S.A.[[88]](#footnote-88) What matters is maintaining the completely relative validity of a given political or economic judgement, of a given choice, and the profound change which must always be demanded. We have described this in revolutionary Christianity.[[89]](#footnote-89) A first aspect of this specificity will thus be a presence which is more radically revolutionary and extremist than anyone else. (This leads us to consider, for example, that the communists are the most dangerous reactionaries because they confirm and push to an absolute level all the most controversial principles of the society of *yesterday.*) We are given another example of the particularity of the Christian attitude in a completely realist attitude:[[90]](#footnote-90) no true realist exists in the world, since reality is frightful. Nobody is able of seeing reality rigorously as it is, in its totality. The normal process consists of seeing a small corner of reality and affirming that the rest is good (this is the traditional attitude of economists, technicians, *Political Social Scientists,* of *Human Relations,* etc.).[[91]](#footnote-91) Or, considering reality can make us leap into idealism and unconditioned hopes. Sartre describes a very dark world, but we jump head first into idealism when he shows that through an operation of consciousness, anyone can become free.[[92]](#footnote-92) Our habitual practice is that of the ostrich: to not consider reality. This attitude is normal for man, because he cannot accept hopelessness; he needs to cling to a hope which always resides in unreality, and in so doing, he delivers himself defenseless to the possession of the real. Among all men, only the Christian can consider reality as it is, because he has another hope; because he knows that nothing is lost, that nothing is finished, that beyond death there is the Resurrection—and that the economic or political powers are submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ: because of this, we can consider reality as it is. No painter has shown the reality of the face of man as well as those who see it in the light of the knowledge of man’s sinful and saved status: Rembrandt, Dürer, Van Gogh. All others add something, whether out of delirium, or idealism, unless they never go deeper than the surface. Nobody has considered the horror of death like Christians, in its most disturbing reality: all others have added a ritualism, or established a distance between man and his death, or have sought veils and pretenses. Yet, a precise consideration of reality is indispensable in all domains of life (both public and private).

A third example is demystification. Man continually makes Myths, Ideologies, and Illusions, and Marx has shown very well that in so doing man loses himself and is alienated. But Marxism has become the biggest of all modern myths,[[93]](#footnote-93) the most total mystification of man—for no man can live without collective beliefs, and the one who claims to free himself the most is ultimately the most mystified. To be demystified, he needs not only a relation with the Truth, but this truth must not be an idea, a thing, or an object; it must be an active power in itself, rigorously transcendent (or else it would be submitted to the same play of the myth), intervening in the life of man through a personal action. Only Jesus Christ delivers us from mystifications, allowing us to attack the Myths of society, of the world, of man—the false hopes, the fatal illusions, the mirages of Satan. Only the Christian can fight against all these things that destroy what is deepest in man, because Jesus Christ has liberated him. When we attack the Myth of Progress, or that of Technique, or the illusions of liberalism or the false hopes of communism, let us not say that we are doing a negative work: we would have to say that the man who breaks the shackles of a man in chains does a negative work (and yes! Of course he breaks a beautiful object—the product of the industry of men, of their work, of their effort and invention: a chain),[[94]](#footnote-94) or that the ‘danger’ sign on a cut-off road does a negative work (and yes! It prevents you from going in that direction, from learning on your own, etc.).

Finally, a last example of this specificity: Prayer. Above all, prayer: recall that nothing is done unless God does it. When it is serious, committed, constant, and living, the Prayer of the Church and of Christians (which is part of their behavior and their life) is much more important for the very direction of the world than all actions of all men.[[95]](#footnote-95) If we do not begin there, it is perfectly vain, perfectly useless to talk of the engagement of Christians in the world. This prayer is already a social action, a political action. The future of a people depends much more on praying Christians among this people than on its constitutions or its cannons. That those who bear authority should have the support of these authorities which depend on God, that they should be warned of the judgement of God weighing on them, is much more important than means or petitions; and this can come from prayer alone. And who else could fulfill this function? In these several examples (and they should be infinitely multiplied), we see thus that Christians play a particular role, fulfill a singular function in society, in the collectivity, in political life, in social struggles, that nobody else can fulfill—a role which is perfectly essential and without which nothing can function. Now, this role is considerable. To fulfill it will demand all the energy Christians have. They do not have much time or energy to waste on anything else. That is why it is so tragic to see Christians undiscerningly engaged in all human activities, accomplishing them the same as others: one participates in research on economic development, and another in the activity of unions, and a third in a political campaign, etc.—all things which men can do very well on their own, without the miniscule help of the Christian, who always limits himself in all these situations to howling with the other wolves. Yet, the specific activity of Christians, which is essential for the rest to bear fruit and be headed in a right direction, is left to the side, abandoned, considered as unimportant, and abandoned as well by Christians who only consider their private life, their personal salvation, seeking to lead the most perfect moral life possible, separate from others: This too is not the specificity of the Christian life, which cannot be simply one life among others.

Chatper VI

AN ETHIC OF CONTRADICTIONS

We should continually return to the process of becoming aware of the contradictions and paradoxes we encounter every time that we try to intellectually formulate the content of the Christian faith. There is the contradiction and paradox of knowing that God causes retribution to fall on himself, and executes the condemnation that he pronounces by assuming it; the contradiction of an intemporal God who enters time; the imperturbable God who bears all the suffering of the world; the sovereign who is a servant, the immortal who dies on the Cross; the all-powerful who allows his creature to act without constraining it . . . There is no explanation, no satisfying solution for all of this—the contradiction of the two Natures of Son of God, truly God and truly man: the unexplainable, scandalous encounter in which each nature remains complete in its integrity, and yet both are united in one sole person. There is the paradox that God would satisfy his love with the salvation of guilty men, by executing his Justice through the condemnation of his innocent Son (but is this not a lack of love towards his Son, and thus a sovereign injustice?). There is the paradox that the Savior would proclaim that he has come to save sinners and not the just; or the contradiction in the fact that though justified through grace by means of faith, man nevertheless remains a sinner, that this pardon and this justification do not do away with sin, do not ultimately relegate it to the past, do not transform the very nature of man; there is the contradiction between the affirmation that the Lord has conquered the powers of the world, and yet this world is becoming more and more unrelenting, terrible, aggressive, as the history progressively unfolds in opposition to the truth; the Paradox that the Christian, bound to their Savior, already has a deposit of eternal life, yet must continue to live in this world without trying to escape or separate themselves from it, even thought this world is radically sinful, wicked, rebellious and condemned, destined for annihilation—but the statement that “God so loved the world . . .” designates precisely this world.[[96]](#footnote-96) In this series of contradictions and paradoxes, no explanation is satisfactory; there is no synthesis to be made between these contradictory elements; there is no unification of doctrine by any means (such as the suppression of one of the two terms, or elevating one over the other, etc.); there is no solution. The term “dialectic” is only a way of saying that the fundamental structure of Christianity is contradictory in itself, and that we must keep the two terms opposed to one another. There is no intellectually satisfying solution, but we only need to know that *this* is how the truth is.[[97]](#footnote-97) And that the contradiction and paradox are resolved by living it: for example, the contradiction of the two natures poses a problem for our intelligence—but the two natures contained in the man Jesus Christ were perfectly reconciled: he lived both natures together. And for those who knew this man, there was no visible contradiction. The same goes for all the oppositions we have highlighted: for example, the man who received his grace knows that he is still a sinner. He lives two different things simultaneously which are intellectually contradictory, but he lives them together. And this can be so because Christianity is essentially a matter of living; it is a doctrine only secondarily. Now, in the domain of ethics for Christians, we encounter precisely this lived element. This ethic is situated as a prolongation of these foundations that we have just indicated. It thus bears contradiction and paradox within itself, but they are resolved by the living man, in his life and not in his thought. The first obvious contradiction (which we have already come across) is situated at the level of the very constitution of this ethic, which must be both the expression of the will of God and an insertion into the concrete reality of the present world. Thus the formulation of this ethic depends on an unchanging, eternal word pronounced once and for all, valid for all men, which presents a demand of God without reservation or attenuation, which puts the Whole of man in play; and at the same time it depends on historical, social, economic circumstances, on the context of civilization, on the social and psychological situation. Thus it is a temporal, moving, relative science, which must take account of what is possible; now, this contradiction absolutely cannot be resolved. All systems of thought employed (e.g., those of the scholastics—commandments for everyone, then other commandments which only apply to saints, precepts and orders, rules and exceptions, etc.)[[98]](#footnote-98) are lies. There can be no question of adapting the Word of God to circumstances, nor of sugarcoating it (for example, if Jesus Christ was so intransigent in the Sermon on the Mount, it is because he thought that the Kingdom of God would be inaugurated immediately. But now that this situation continues…we must attenuate these commandments), nor of conciliation (for example, in pitting apparently contradictory biblical texts against one another: Jesus Christ says “Woe to the rich,”[[99]](#footnote-99) and the Old Testament says “wealth is a blessing”[[100]](#footnote-100)). But neither can it entail a negation of the reality of the world where we live, in which we act as if this world did not exist. Living the totality of the Word of God to the letter while making an abstraction of society and history—this always leads to the rejection of the other (because they are part of the world), and by the same token, to the negation of the Christian life which has no meaning if it does not express love. Thus we find ourselves in the presence of a truly insoluble and inevitable contradiction: purity and love. To want to intransigently maintain the purity of the commandment leads us to cut off relations with our neighbor; to want to express love leads us to participate in the impurity of our neighbor, and to bend the absolute nature of the commandment. (For example, in the Resistance during the second world war: must we disobey the state to help Jews out of love? But God commands us to obey . . . [[101]](#footnote-101) and should we lie? Or, to keep the meaning of the truth and to respect the authorities, ought we let the Jews be persecuted?) Now, the Ethic for Christians *must* be conceived in this contradiction between the present and the Eternal, between the Temporal and the absolute, between circumstances and the Revealed,[[102]](#footnote-102) since it is a matter of living this revealed and perfect word *in* this temporal body and the affairs of this present world. The formulation of the ethic will thus be necessarily contradictory in itself and by itself; it would be disobedience and a lie to claim to offer solutions. The role of the one who thinks about this ethic is certainly to make these contradictions stand out, but certainly not to give satisfactory solutions. Highlighting the contradictions will help the Christian to correctly pose the problem of his life and his conduct. But once he is given this information, he must discover what his response will be on his own, exercising his own responsibility. He cannot hide behind the authority of this or that Doctor to avoid the judgement of God. Incidentally, no *satisfactory* solution (i.e., one accounting for all conditions, and which is just before God) is possible. What good would it be, then, to formulate a plurality of lame responses? This would mean nothing. On the contrary, each one, establishing their own response, finds themselves both in the situation of the forgiven man making use of his freedom, and of the sinful man who must ask for forgiveness for this very decision that he has just made with all his good faith, and with his faith. The Ethic for Christians will thus have to make the contradictions appear, but will not offer prefabricated solutions.

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One of the major contradictions is obviously the contradiction between the Christian life and the world, the totality of the powers which are hostile to God, rebellious and conquered. The Christian called to live in this world, called to use the things of the world, to participate in the projects of the world, in politics, in economic expansion, must always know that none of all this is legitimate, good, or right; and nevertheless, that they cannot just shake the dust off their feet[[103]](#footnote-103) and be done with it; it is the universe of men, and it is loved by God for this reason; and that at the end of time, all this will be taken up by God.[[104]](#footnote-104) To claim to live the Christian life outside of the world is false and illusory: Illusory, because whether we like it or not, we cannot avoid living in this world. The most reclusive monk still pays taxes, is still counted in the census, and submitted to police investigations . . . the most total Robinson Crusoe nevertheless cannot avoid buying this or that fabricated object, which links him into the chain of all the activity of the world. It is a false pretention. It is also a false situation from the point of view of faith: for if we are separated from the world, how could we bear witness to the love of God in this world by our life? Jesus Christ sends us into the world . . . [[105]](#footnote-105) But there is still a complete contradiction between the Christian life and the world—at no moment can the Christian life accept what happens in the world as normal and just; at no moment can it say “this war is just, I will participate in it”[[106]](#footnote-106)—nor that a given government is just, nor that a given distribution of goods is just. The Christian can never formulate this or grant his blessing, his justification to a project of the world; at no moment can he present a feasible project as the exact accomplishment of the demand of faith (constructing housing or feeding the poor, etc.). At best, it can only be a very minimal, secondary, and limited aspect of the Christian life. At no moment can the Christian believe that society organizes itself, is organized, or will organize itself in Christian truth—nor say that monarchy was the true Christian government, nor that communist society will accomplish Christian justice, etc.

But this should not lead to skepticism and abstentionism. As he cannot and should not escape the world, the Christian is effectively called to participate in the activities of the world. It is normal that he should exercise a profession, be a citizen, etc. But he must know that in so doing, he is participating in the activity of the world, and that he is not legitimate, just, or in agreement with God *ipso facto*. On the one hand, he must continually remind himself and others that all of this is extremely relative. Without a doubt, all political regimes are not indifferent; but while they may have a certain importance regarding this or that aspect of human happiness, they will never attain the justice willed by God. Yet it is not without interest to participate in these regimes, precisely to bear witness to love and the requirement of truth in these regimes. But this is on the condition that he does not let himself be taken in by this game, nor place more faith in politics than in his Lord to accomplish what is right (which happens very often). Additionally, he must recall that the best activities of the world are still sinful and submitted to condemnation, that no profession is pure, no vocation perfectly corresponds to “Christian vocation.” Of course, here again, this should not lead to indifferentism; all professions are not equivalent—it is not the same thing to be a baker or \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, a doctor or prostitute; but we must guard against passing a moral judgement on professions, knowing that the best profession is still a participation in the world of sin and evil. Let us take the doctor, for example. It is good and right for them to care and to heal. Let us suppose that through extreme vigilance, this Christian doctor manages to resist all the temptations of their profession; nevertheless, objectively, when they help the elderly live longer, they are contributing to the aging of the population (which is a disaster in France); when they save those with mental problems who will have children, they contributes to weakening the race average and the perpetuation of defects; when they eliminate infant mortality, they aggravate the tremendous population growth and set off dramatic processes, such as in Japan, Algeria, etc., for they must know that the development of economic resources cannot follow the same cadence, *under any political regime* (communism no more than capitalism). Of course, all this is not the fault of the doctor. But it is still the result of their actions, and they must know this to understand that the pure act of caring is inscribed in a sinful world and is not good in-itself, but has its own negative repercussions. Once again, this does not mean that they should not care, but that they should accept this contradiction, should be conscious of the evil produced by the best possible acts that we can accomplish as a participant in this world; and consequently, that they should not feel just in exercising their profession, or because of their rights as a citizen, etc., that they should ask God for forgiveness for every undertaking in this world. The choices which we will have to make are thus relative, yet decisive (since it is here that our Christian life will be incarnated). They will never lead to a pure, good, or just effect; yet even in this, they are obedience to the love of God. This contradiction places us exactly in the presence of the problem of compromise. Because we live in this world, we cannot avoid compromise. All our acts are so submitted to the pressure of a given social context (as is our very being) that they cannot be the pure and simple translation of the will of God. We cannot act without getting our hands dirty (and all ethics is a problem of action). The one who wants to avoid dirtying their hands, who would keep themselves pure, will thus stop acting, will stop participating in the world. But in so doing, he disobeys God himself. The one who obeys the command of God and enters into the world necessarily dirties himself in this contact. All action will be established as a compromise between the will of God and the possibility of execution, a possibility which itself rests on a number of elements: the measure of faith of the one acting, the economic situation, etc. We must know that this is how it is. We must know that Elijah, in triumphing over the prophets of Baal by a miracle of the Lord, is then led to have them massacred, thus disobeying the command of God to not kill; and thus the prophet of life has hands covered in blood. We must know that this is how it is, but we should not accept it. That is the whole difficulty. If, because we know that it is inevitable, we begin to find it acceptable, legitimate, and justified in faith, then all is lost. For what was the condition of fallen, sinful man becomes pride and a claim to justice. What was necessity which weighs on us despite all our efforts becomes an introduction of necessity *into* the Christian life, which is to say, into grace—from the moment that we begin to calculate the acceptable limits of compromise, when we begin to say that it is okay if our hands are dirty up to the wrist or the elbow, then all is lost. When we accept our dirty hands, this means that in fact we are dirty from head to toe, and that our heart is gangrenous. Compromise is inevitable, but it is always a defeat. It is never tolerable, acceptable. It is a grave heresy to consider that since compromise is of the order of finitude, of our Creaturely situation, it is thereby admissible. The fact that I should be limited in the duration of my life, in my capacity to understand or to will, in my physical strength, even in my love itself, is never a source of compromise. Compromise does not come from the limits of being, but from the presence of evil inside the limits of being. This compromise is established between the will of God and the action of the Spirit on the one hand, and the corruption of the world and myself on the other. Every time that a compromise is established, we must know that it it is established in disobedience to God, that it is always a defeat of the Christian life. The same goes for history and the community as for individual life. The whole of Christendom is founded on an ensemble of compromises (regarding the State in particular). Thus it is a matter of resisting compromise to the most extreme limit. The Christian life, which is an act of freedom, presupposes the refusal of submission to necessity. Now, as we were saying, compromise is necessary—but every time there is a compromise, there is obedience to necessities. We can thus ultimately say that compromise is the very negation of a Christian life. This life can never consist in measured and balanced doses of Holiness on the one hand and corruption on the other. The demand of the will of God is total and absolute. To say that God is a jealous God is to say that he does not accept precisely this sharing, this compromise; the same goes for the prohibition of walking two paths; the same goes for Jesus Christ’s great proclamation that the one who violates the smallest commandment violates the whole law.[[107]](#footnote-107) All this implies a will of God without reserve, without possibilities of adaptation or sugarcoating. When the Word calls us to Holiness, it is really a question of Holiness, not some moral virtue. The Christian life must thus be unlimited and unattenuated obedience to the will of God, with a perfectly intransigent radicality. To allow compromise is thus the *complete* negation of the Christian life. Except, we must have no illusions. We cannot believe that we are in the Kingdom of God; we should not take ourselves for angels. We must ultimately take measure of our incapacity to live according to this Word. Everywhere and with utmost intransigence, with the most complete exigence, we must place ourselves in the reality of our situation; and here we come up against corruption and obstacles. We must not act ‘as if’ this were not so. This would be an idealism, which would be fatal for the truth of the faith. To claim that this incarnation of the command of God is possible is childishness; *and thus,* it is also the negation of our finitude. Thus, every step of our life will be taken in the path of this contradiction, never arriving at a satisfactory situation, a solution; no situation is pure and good. But when we say this, when we set out knowing that we will be forced to expend ourselves to the very end of the fight, and end up in compromise, this must not diminish our energy, nor serve as a justification (since I cannot avoid compromise, I am thus right to accept it).[[108]](#footnote-108) I cannot avoid it, but God does not tolerate it. This thus leads us to know that the contradiction maintained (which is the opposite of compromise) between the rigorous will of God and the radical evil in which we live is an indispensable element of the Christian life. It is a delicate and difficult situation, and we can understand that innumerable Christians seek to escape it. One of the modern tendencies of this evasion consists in minimizing the Fall,[[109]](#footnote-109) in cordoning off the influence of sin, in presenting the world not as the domain of the ruler of this world, but a place where it is possible for man to exercise his virtue. This attitude is at once a biblical error and a lack of realism. It is a new version of Christian idealism which periodically reinjects its venom into the Church.

When, after having waged total war for the accomplishment of the will of God by oneself and around oneself, we end up in compromise, we were saying above that this is an expenditure of ourselves, a bending of our backs: but this is the moment in which we must fall on our knees to ask God’s forgiveness for our works. It is after the servant has done *everything* that he had to do that he must present himself before his Lord, saying, “I am a useless servant;”[[110]](#footnote-110) this cannot happen if he has not already done so. It is not by saying: “I am a useless servant, so it isn’t worth the effort of exhausting myself; I will end up compromising, so it’s not worth the trouble of fighting.” We should thus fear the anger of God. But inversely, we must know that in falling on our knees, afterwards, by the grace of God, the compromise is broken and God reestablishes our work in its purity, by assuming it himself.

But we must still know that even in obeying the will of God, we are not untouched by compromise. Let us take a simple example, with the State: when we say that the State must be lay (and likewise, when we say that ethics should be lay) this is surely correct in the biblical perspective. And yet when this lay State is established, this also means that it is a State which does not recognize the will of God, which is the great demonic temptation of the State. When we say that the Christian must obey the authorities of the State for reasons of conscience,[[111]](#footnote-111) this is indisputably biblical, but it is not enough to eliminate compromise, since this Christian also necessarily obeys because of political conformism, out of fear for the police, out of facility. And even obedience purely for reasons of conscience, discerning the State as a means of God’s action—does this not nevertheless, *also,* and *at the same* time, reinforce the Beast of the Apocalypse which the State is *as well*?[[112]](#footnote-112) In other words, to the extent that it addresses an ambiguous structure of the world, pure obedience to the commandment of God (even when it is subjectively possible) becomes itself ambiguous in its expression. Because the State is the Beast of the Abyss and the agent of God on earth *at the same time,* obedience to the commandment becomes obedience to the one but also to the other. Likewise, exercising authentic charity towards the poor in modern society is obviously a form of the Christian life. But as the source of this misery today is collective, social, attenuating this misery out of love is to prevent this man from revolting against this unjust social order; it leads us to tolerate this social order. But in order to push him to revolt against injustice, should we refuse him the help of love? This would be a monstrous ignominy. This insoluble dilemma is the entire problem of funds for social aid, for example. In this we see that we cannot simply say that all is resolved in loving our neighbor. In fact, *in our society,* loving our neighbor leads to just as much compromise as all the rest.

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Becoming aware of contradictions, the fact that the situation of Christian living is a situation of contradiction, the fact that Jesus Christ himself is a sign of contradiction—in reality, all of this leads the Christian in faith to shed light on the intrinsic contradictions of the world.

Jesus Christ is a sign of contradiction; he provokes contradiction, and he comes to bring the sword on the earth.[[113]](#footnote-113) Of course, this contradiction breaks out over the question of who he is: is he or is he not the Son of God? But this division of men concerning him is not only spiritual and internal. Pietism happily interprets this as a purely religious opposition. It seems that we must go beyond this and admit that the sign of contradiction weighs on the whole life of men, on their entire being. The advent of Jesus Christ on the earth causes what is at the heart of man and the heart of things to break out. He reveals the contradiction at the heart of man and in the nature of things, in the course of history and in the structures of society. What was latent becomes patent. The presence of Jesus Christ shows the true conflicts, the true oppositions, which are all extensions of the contradiction that breaks out concerning Jesus Christ himself.

On the one hand, as a Christian living in the world, we must become aware of the contradictions of this world, which is part of the realism of Christian faith and thought; on the other hand, the light of the Gospel projected on this world brings these contradictions to light. It acts exactly like a floodlight which, by brutally illuminating a terrain which might seem to be flat, highlights all the obstacles and rifts. This society constantly claims to be unitary, synthetic, of presenting itself as whole with no breaks—when on the contrary, in its profound reality, the world is a web of contradictions. The Christian faith should lead us to grasp the existence of this situation and to refuse all unitary pretentions. For example, Marx and Proudhon undoubtedly saw and drew attention to the contradictions of the capitalist world. But we must also understand the contradictions of the liberal State (see Ellul, *Histoire des Institutions[[114]](#footnote-114)*) and of democracy, or of communist society. When democracy claims to guarantee freedom, we must be able to grasp that it gives birth to a State like any other, that this State is oppressive and excludes freedom like any other, and that it bears a radical contradiction in itself. When Marxism claims to guarantee social Justice, we must know that it bears the source of a new injustice just as radical in itself; when it claims to offer the solution to the contradiction between the State and man, we must know that this comes at the price of a new contradiction between man and global society; when technical progress claims to be at man’s service man, we must simultaneously grasp the contradiction in which it finds itself in relation to man. But the reciprocal is also true: when we have seen all the evil that technique has done to man, this should not leads us to resolve the contradiction by adopting a simple negative position: we must also hold onto all that it brings, all its positive aspects.[[115]](#footnote-115) But one element must never efface the other. We ought to go all the way with both aspects of the contradiction; we cannot choose between the two (which we always do), then deny or minimize that which is contrary to this choice. This leads to an extremely fecund attitude in the social, economic, and political domains. There is no progress without its counterpart, no positive without a negative; everything that is gained in one domain comes at a certain cost. It is a matter of precisely seeking the price paid in each case. Now, this “price” is never situated outside of the phenomenon analyzed: it is an integral part of the phenomenon. Communism is paid for by the derision of man, concentration camps, lies, etc.; and this is not an external phenomenon, but an integral part of communism’s establishment of happiness, social justice, cooperation, etc. When we talk of a price to pay, we do not mean by this that the price can be paid once, and then the situation can become pure afterwards: for in reality, this price is the establishment of a constant situation. For example, man minimized by technique does not then become revalorized by it. He receives other advantages, but he remains minimized.

Thus, in every social, economic, political, ideological, or moral situation, there is a contradiction which is established by the fact that every progression is paid for by a simultaneous destruction and construction. And what is destroyed is not liquidated, reduced to nothingness; it subsists as a ruin, and even as an absence, and remains virulent by its very absence. What is destroyed cannot be judged as less valuable, less legitimate, or less just simply because it is destroyed; it might be an irreparable loss, and in this case it is necessary that this absence should be a contradiction borne into the system. We will thus say that it is essential to bring all the contradictions of each human evolution to light: this is the way of freedom. But here we must break free from an illusion. How many thinkers view contradiction as the sign of a possible way out? For example, capitalism is evil, communism is in contradiction with capitalism, so communism is good and we must head in this direction. Or again: political society is dreadfully cumbersome, conforming, and destructive of freedom, but man finds his freedom in literature, in the culture situated in opposition to the political world, expressing non-conformism. We could multiply such examples. This view is simplistic and false. On the one hand, each of its terms bears its own contradictions in itself: they exist within communism, as within culture, etc. But more importantly, we must understand that these two terms are two terms of *one* same system; they are not a destructive opposition like +a and -a. Rather, they are in indissoluble tension with one another, two parts of a whole. Capitalism and communism are only two contradictory but complementary faces of a society where economics, technique, and efficacy are chief values. Communism ultimately presents the same fundamental characters as capitalism and only exhibits a superficial contradiction with it. Likewise, precisely in its non-conformism, culture is an indispensable piece of conformist political society (as a means of compensation, justification, catharsis, mystification, etc.). Thus, these contradictions cannot be resolved by a choice that I will make between the two faces; the two elements make up a whole. I cannot exclude either one. It is thus essentially important (and we could say that this is the *whole* problem of understanding a society) first to grasp the extant contradictions, and then to perceive their profound relations, their reciprocal implications: this is the only generative path to attain social and political reality. Now, this path is impossible to follow for non-Christians: man is necessarily driven towards the constitution of a unitary world (from which contradiction is excluded) and towards the simple division of good and evil— distinct, opposed, with an obvious good choice. If I am a communist, I cannot tolerate contradictions in communism, and I am obliged to say that communism is the good, and I have chosen it. This process can be repeated with liberalism, culture, technique, democracy, art, science, socialism, economic productivity, work, and of course Christianity. Only the intervention of the Word of God can (by pointing us to the Wholly Other,[[116]](#footnote-116) by making us live in the tension of the “Already accomplished” and the “Not yet realized,” and finally by granting us the gift of hope) not only make us see these contradictions and their profound relations, but even allow us to truly live them, situating ourselves *in* this world and in relation to it. Now, this becoming-aware of contradictions that only the Christian can effectuate is an act of decisive importance for the whole of a society and for man, for it is precisely here that the condition of man in the very world where he lives begins to be taken seriously. This is why it is praiseworthy that Marxism undertook this effort, and if it stopped short, if it failed by falling back into the same ruts, it is because it was human, and only human.[[117]](#footnote-117) But its attempt is just, and we ought to work in this way to bring man to a possible liberation. And if Christians do not do this, nobody can do it, since we come up against a fundamental structure of society and of man; and also because to bring out contradictions without designating one of their terms as the Good is to find oneself in a hopeless situation. And no man can live pure hopelessness.

Thus, the ethic expressing both the structure of the action of God, the problem of incarnation, and the conduct of the Christian in a world of contradictions can only be an ethic of contradiction itself. It must lead the Christian to consider these tensions, to live among them, and to help his brothers to bear the drama of the contradiction of the world.

Chatper VII

AN ETHIC OF MEANS

The problem of ethics is the problem of action. It is, of course, preliminarily the problem of being, but being is nothing if it is not expressed and included in a Doing. We have no intention of formulating a primacy of action over Life, of Doing over Being,[[118]](#footnote-118) which is one of the foremost lies of our technical civilization. Being dominates and precedes doing; the miracle of the action of God in Jesus Christ is precisely the miracle of touching and transforming our being. But our manner of being necessarily manifests in certain words, certain commitments, a certain vocation, certain works, i.e., in a doing. When we do not reach this level, which is certainly inferior but indispensable, we can say nothing on the subject of being. Concerning being, we know only what is inscribed in a doing. Love is a gift of God, it transforms the profound being of man, but we only grasp it through its expressions: when it modifies our behavior towards our neighbor. This behavior taken in itself signifies nothing and has no value if it is not inspired by love (1 Cor. 13); but love is nothing if it is not incarnated in behavior (1 John).[[119]](#footnote-119) We can thus say that ethics for Christians is truly a problem of action; it is situated precisely between the gift of God given to man in Jesus Christ, concretized for man in faith, hope, and love—and on the other hand, the end of this adventure of Salvation which is established by God and already accomplished in Jesus Christ. Ethics for Christians is not the theological description of the relation between God and man, nor of the response of man to God. It is not the preaching of the revealed Word. It is not an exhortation to receive grace and live by salvation. It is the search for the concrete consequences of all of this, the effort to express *this* eternal relation established by God, and *this* revelation received by man, in present forms which correspond to the life of the man of this time.

In speaking of means, we do not only mean material instruments, technical procedures, etc., but everything which ultimately mediates between men, everything which can allow a man to express his interior life, everything which allows him to be inscribed in a certain reality. ‘Means’ thus designates both the relation with the other and a given behavior, both speech and writing, both the apprehension of the outside world through intellectual or material activity and the exercise of a profession. All these are ultimately means, for it is by them that man expresses himself, or destroys himself; by them that he makes his mark on beings and things, and is marked by them.

On the other hand, Ethics for Christians is not a description of goals to attain, of certain ends. Here we come upon the very important difference between this Ethic and innumerable moralities: these moralities always propose a certain goal and are primarily devoted to describing this goal. They say, “This is the Good,” and then describe in detail how to accomplish it; or “This is the Value,” followed by an explanation of the value, its particularity, its characteristics; or “This is Justice,” etc. There is a sort of forward projection of man towards an end, and the establishment of this end seems to be the principal task of morality, even when it claims to be limited to observing the ethical situation of man, and that choice is the exercise of morality. Now, precisely, morality for Christians proposes no ends, no goals. It does not tend towards this or that. This morality does not have to describe a goal. God reveals the goal and the end of *his* action to us, which is the Salvation of all men, the elimination of the powers of destruction and death, the establishment of the new creation. These three objectives are totally beyond what is possible for us, beyond our means. We can in no way save ourselves or others; it is by grace that you are saved. We can in no way destroy the power of Satan and Death. We can in no way construct the Kingdom of God, nor even prepare his coming. Furthermore, the three objectives of the action of God are both before and behind us. All this is effectively already accomplished, attained in Jesus Christ—the salvation of man, victory over the powers, and the new creation inaugurated by the Resurrection. Consequently, the Christian ethic absolutely does not have to propose goals to men. It does not have to say that the goal of human action is, for example, their own salvation (salvation by works, etc.)—nor the salvation of others (evangelization, witness, etc.)—nor the redemption of the (angelic) world, nor the establishment of justice on the earth (millenarianism), nor the moralization of the world, etc. Biblically, we must know that all that is important is the work of God in Jesus Christ—and that this is accomplished, and outside of our capabilities. Ethics for Christians can never describe action to accomplish what has not yet been accomplished by God: for everything is already accomplished in and by Jesus Christ. It can add strictly nothing to this; man cannot add his action or virtue to that of God. This ethic cannot be an ethic so that . . . It is an ethic because . . . It is not an ethic of conquest, but of obedience. It has no goal, only a starting point. It does not have an objective, only a reason. It is not a creation; it is an incarnation. If I have to live according to the will of God, it is not to be saved, to appease God’s anger, etc.; it is because I am saved (by grace) and because God loves me. If I seek a moral rule, it cannot be ordered according to the accomplishment of certain ends, but it must express the gift that God has given to me, which is already in me. If I accept a certain asceticism, it is not with a view to ascend into heaven, to facilitate a mystic experience, or to acquire a miraculous power, but simply out of obedience to the word of the Sermon on the Mount. Thus the moral life is not oriented towards an end; it has no teleology.[[120]](#footnote-120) It simply expresses a received impulse. The Holy Spirit is not at the end of the path to be followed, but at the origin. Jesus Christ is not encountered at the end of the spiritual life, but is present at its beginning. The famous “narrow road”[[121]](#footnote-121) leading to salvation is in no way a path that the natural man is called to walk alone by his own strength, which, after much progress in moral value and sacrifice, would lead to Jesus Christ. For this path is begun after the encounter with Jesus Christ. (The first obvious proof is that this is a word of Jesus Christ to his disciples, which we cannot take seriously unless we take Jesus Christ seriously; that is, if we are already called by him.) And furthermore, this path—it is Jesus Christ himself (“I am the way”).[[122]](#footnote-122) Ethics for Christians thus does not have to fix goals to reach, nor to describe the means to reach them (virtues, works, paths, etc.). It must first teach that the action of Christians is good for nothing, that it is completely inefficacious, ineffective, unprofitable; it is never a closer approximation of a goal. We know the objection: well, what good is it then? In our age, we are so penetrated by the values of the world, we judge so closely according to the presuppositions of society, that we evaluate everything in relation to utility, efficacy—we refuse to act if it is ineffective. Now, the Christian ethic precisely engages us in an action which is effectively good for nothing, contributes nothing essential. It does not advance the work of God, and yet it is *necessary*; but its necessity does not come from its utility, nor from the finality pursued, nor from its adherence to a certain objective, but only, exclusively from the decision of God. Because God has said…here is what man is called to do, to live. Because God has given faith, this faith bears in itself the necessity of incarnation in witness and evangelization. Because God has given love, this love bears in itself the necessity of incarnation in works of love for others. Because God has given hope, this hope bears in itself the necessity of incarnation in lived-out freedom. And so on. In sum, because God gives life in Christ, we have to live this life, in action—this element which is so inseparable from life. But in any case, we do not have to pose the problem of the efficacity of our action; only God makes efficacious, or not. The same goes for the validity, goodness, etc. of our actions. That is, we do not have to try to judge our works ourselves; it is precisely an affair belonging to God, and God alone. We do not have to try to see where and how this work will enter into the Kingdom of God; this is exactly the choice of God. All that we have to do, with our spirits at rest, and in humility, is to give this work into the hands of God so that he may judge it, that he may keep or reject it, that he may take it up or oppose it, that he may grant it efficacy or leave it inert. I have done all that was possible; I cannot know if it is good. I will only know when God will say it. I cannot know in advance if this will be good or has been good for something; nobody in the world can say; I will only know at the moment of the Resurrection and the New Creation. It is therefore completely pointless to worry about it. “Throw your bread on the waters,” the Ecclesiast recommends exactly.[[123]](#footnote-123) But first we need to have made this bread, to have earned it. And then, once this is done, throw it on the surface of the waters, let the current take it away. It will take it exactly where it must—certainly, you will find it again. All this is nothing but an explanation of: “When you will have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘I am a useless servant.’[[124]](#footnote-124) Or again, the parable of the talents:[[125]](#footnote-125) at the moment of reckoning, the servant says “Look, I have used your money (I didn’t really know what I should do, I chose this kind of action, I’m still uncertain, but *because* you had given me this beforehand, I thought it good to use what you gave me in this way)—and I made five talents (perhaps this is what you were expecting? Look, this is yours—take it—perhaps I should have done something else? Buy a house—give it to the poor—instead of risking it in these projects?).” In any case, this servant recognizes that his works do not belong to him but to God. Thus, no work that we accomplish in function of the ethic is Ours. The only virtue we could have is that of putting this work into the hands of the Lord and recognizing that it is his. And this servant does not know if his work is good in advance, if that was really what he should have done; he waits for God to pronounce his word: “Well done, good and trustworthy slave.”[[126]](#footnote-126) Only thus can he know that what he did was good. But he should not worry too much if he is wrong, that the works chosen by us are not exactly what God was expecting, if ultimately this work must be rejected by God, annihilated; this in no way means, in effect, that we ourselves are rejected. Paul tells us that the one whose work will be destroyed in the Judgement will be saved himself, but as through fire (1 Cor. 2),[[127]](#footnote-127) i.e., that he will enter naked into the kingdom, without his works. Our salvation really does not depend on our works. Nevertheless, it would be better not to be wrong! Likewise for Cain: when God rejects his offering, he does not reject Cain himself. On the contrary, he speaks to him in his love. He even tells him that he should not be saddened by this rejection. Why not? In effect, because if Cain’s goods are given to him by God, he offers God what is already God’s; his offering is not something given by himself to another, but it is a restitution, and God can effectively take what he wants from whatever belongs to him—so Cain has no reason to be hurt. The same goes for our acts, for our works. To the extent that all the acts of the Christian life (i.e., all that can be described by Ethics for Christians) can never be anything but the actualized, concretized, but necessarily partial expression of a gift that God has granted us, not an adequate instrument to attain a goal that we would have achieve (or to create, to offer to God as an innovation), it is never anything but the restitution of what belongs to God. It is small change from the capital that God had granted us. And in these conditions, how could we be troubled or sad if these works are not accepted by God? Perhaps this is understandable if we cannot express the love for God that we would have liked to express towards him, but certainly for our own salvation.

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As Ethics for Christians is not a description of ends, nor even an ordination of means to an end, it is purely and simply an ethic of means. We note in passing that in this perspective, the means absolutely cannot be justified by the end (on the problem of the Ends and the Means, see *Presence in the Modern World*).[[128]](#footnote-128) It is a matter of choosing the best means to express the work of God accomplished in a man by Grace, in concrete circumstances in a society historically determined by social, economic, political, and ideological structures. This is the whole problem, but when we insist on the fact that it is a matter of means situated in a particular society, this obviously means that we must know this society, this milieu in which we are acting. Means cannot be only an expression of the faith; they must express faith lived in this world. The parable of the blind leading the blind[[129]](#footnote-129) tells us that man is blind without the light of Revelation. But when the eyes of this blind man are opened, he opens them to see something. And this something is not only God, but it is also (and inseparably) God’s creation, and this creation does not appear in the absolute (eternal Space . . .[[130]](#footnote-130)), but under precise, historically localized and determined kinds. This thus implies that to make his way, the blind whose eyes are opened by the miracle, and who will be destined to lead the blind (and perhaps to open their eyes in turn) must not limit himself to looking out into the heavens for guidance—he must *also* (not only, but also) look at the earth and the path he is walking on. In other words, the ethical problem of the choice of means must express truth, justice, love, and the freedom of God. Thus the means do not have to be ordained towards an end, nor according to the milieu. This implies that we know this milieu—and consequently, that we can give a certain diagnosis of our situation, of the present situation of this society, and of this man in society. Those who reject the diagnostic reject by the same token reject all possible present concretization of the means of the Christian life. To say that diagnosis is useless is also to say that a map is useless for following a path in an unknown land. To say that such diagnoses are performed all too often . . . is in general to allow a superficial and cursory glance to take the place of a series of indispensable analyses. I am familiar with thousands of interpretations, thousands of detailed photographs, thousands of approximative schemas of our present society; I do not know of one single complete, in-depth, and global diagnostic of our modern civilization. To say that a diagnostic is bad because it puts labels on things and makes the world into something fixed, preventing their evolution (or preventing us from evolving in relation to them) is really to think that economics, politics, and ideology evolve at a supersonic speed! All this to say that it is not worth building a house of cards because it might be knocked down by the wind or eventually wear out! To say that a diagnostic cannot account for the fluidity of phenomena is to say that a photograph of the countryside is false because it doesn’t account for the wind which blew through the trees an hour later. Finally, to say that a diagnosis harms the reality of things is to say that the observer of a phenomenon destroys it! This attitude which refuses diagnostics is an attitude of confusion and superficiality. The fact of performing a diagnosis in no way impedes either the patient or the doctor from living, nor even from having a good rapport between them. Concerning the Christian life, it is a condition of this life. Christians cannot bear witness unless they know the man and his milieu—missionaries know this well. They cannot be seriously present in the world unless they know *to what world* they must be present. They cannot open a path for others unless they have taken the necessary bearings to trace this path. If present Christians had done the work of this diagnosis, this would have avoided weighty errors committed over the last half century by Christians who “get involved.” Of course, the diagnosis is a preliminary operation, very humble, which cannot claim to occupy a lofty place in Christian thought and activity. It is akin to the translation of the Bible used by missionaries into an African or Asian language. Like a translation, it is a specialist work, a preparatory work—a work which is nothing without the man who commits himself to it, but which must be only a good instrument in his hands. But, it will be said, is this really necessary? Christians have never done this. We do not see saint Paul performing a sociological study before going to Greece in the Acts of the Apostles. Isn’t it enough to carry on with faith, and to cross the world with the simplicity of doves?—the Holy Spirit is leading us, and he gives us enough knowledge of the world and of man. It seems to me that this attitude is not exactly right. The action of the Holy Spirit does not suppress means; Paul still needed a boat to travel on the water. Human means are necessary for the action of the Holy Spirit—intellectual as well as material means. And let us never separate the simplicity of doves from the wisdom of serpents which is *also* commended to us.[[131]](#footnote-131) Let us never forget that Jesus Christ invites us to make our plans and calculate our budget in advance for the construction of the Tower.[[132]](#footnote-132) The diagnostic is not opposed to confidence in God; it must involve putting a human competence at the disposition of God. On the other hand, if it is necessary today while it was never done in the past, this is because the society in which Paul, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, or Luther lived—despite wars, political upheavals, invasions—was extraordinarily stable in its profound structures. The framework of these societies generally stayed the same; evolutions were very slow; the psychology of man evolved little. Shocks were superficial. By contrast, for the first time since the passage from prehistory to history, we are witnessing an extremely rapid transformation of all elements of life (psychological, technical, religious, economic) and the whole of society. Because our civilization has broken the bonds connecting it to traditional civilizations, performing this diagnosis is indispensable. We are in a radically new world, without common measure with preceding worlds. We must know this to be able to work in this world. Additionally, consider that every time Christians have been in a truly new world, this is what they have done: i.e., from the fifth to the seventh century, with the great invasions; it was thus an immense effort on the part of Christian thought to take measure of this new world being created (Gregory of Tours, for example).[[133]](#footnote-133) Likewise, we hear of the remarkable sociological works of missionaries. Now, the distance between society in 1950 and 1750 is a thousand times greater than between French society in 1750 and Papuan society, or between Germanic society and Roman society in the fourth century AD.

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An Ethic of Means. — It is at the level of means that choice, reflection, and responsibility can be exercised. Which means are right to make the man of the present time grasp the truth of the Word of God, and the love of the Father for his Son? Which forms suited to our society will incarnate this truth and this love? Not that it is a question of choosing efficacious means; we will examine the problem of efficacy later. For the moment, let us stick to the following double affirmation: a (human) means bearing its particular efficacity at the human level offers no guarantee of efficacity for the transmission of Grace and love. These latter, which must pass through a human intermediary, in no way depend on the technical efficacity of the means employed (for example, this is the whole problem of propaganda in Evangelization).[[134]](#footnote-134) In second place: spiritual efficacity comes from the Holy Spirit, who alone can render grace effective and make love living. Thus the choice is not a choice of efficacy, but a choice of what is adequate. On the one hand, this means must be adequate for the work that God asks from us (in a very elementary manner, we can say that Lying is not an adequate means to transmit the truth, etc. Now, this is already a monumental criteria which allows for a very effective discrimination of means: for example, it is not true that we want peace if we continually accuse our interlocutor of wanting war). On the other hand, the means must be adequate for the man whom we are addressing, to the world where we work; but in relation to the profound reality of this world (again, in a very elementary manner, this is the problem of adapting our vocabulary—rejecting the dialect of Canaan, for example). It would seem correct to say that a certain attitude, and consequently a certain originality of the Christian life, can be best expressed in the choice of means. We are determined in our being by the conditioning of the world which surrounds us; we are assigned a certain end by the grace of God; yet it seems that we are relatively free in the exercise of our means. Of course, the modern world furnishes a profusion of means—this is the very character of technical civilization. Yet none are imposed absolutely and rigorously; none of them have so much power that we cannot evade them. It is just that all these means are defined exclusively by their efficacy. Our society thinks only of efficacy. From the moment that we renounce this mechanical and external efficacy, that we accept to enter into a game that nobody is playing; that we accept being surpassed in the abundance and seriousness of visible results; that we ourselves do not assign an end to our actions—from this moment, we have a considerable freedom in the choice of our means. And we can even say that there is no other freedom than this. Likewise, if we cannot bear the ultimate responsibility for our acts (it is borne by Jesus Christ), if it is not our task to pass judgement on the end assigned to us by God, we nevertheless do have complete responsibility regarding the means that we will have chosen to bear the grace of God among men, and to express the submission of the creature to their Lord in reality. Now, all this is particularly important if we realize that the constant temptation of “spiritual” ones, and of Christians, is precisely to neglect means. It is enough to consider the lofty goals we seek, to meditate on the ends; this is the only important and interesting thing. But precisely, in this we enjoy only an illusory freedom; in the ends, we absolutely do not have free reign. It is equally important that we realize that the present world is characterized by the proliferation of means. And we must adopt a stance regarding all this extraordinary power of invention. Means are ordained to ends, which very generally cannot be called “Christian”: power, comfort, happiness, etc. Thus we must ask ourselves if we must reject this immense apparatus wholly and completely, if we should thus orient ourselves towards the creation of specific means, holding nothing in common with what the world offers us; or, on the contrary, if we can enter into the play of these means of the world, taking them up, transposing them, assigning them another sense[[135]](#footnote-135) and another value, thus effectuating a sort of redirection of this prodigious artificial world (created by man with another end in mind) for the benefit of the Lord; or, finally, if we have to make a choice, to sort out these means, holding onto some as adequate for the work of the Church and rejecting others as the expression of wickedness. This is undoubtedly the most serious questions which can be asked today. This is the whole problem which Technique represents for Faith. But in any case, we can never give any general solution. A theological framework can orient our decisions (for example, a theological reflection on Technique, confronted with a sociological analysis of modern Technique). The conditions of the choice and the signification of the use of means can be analyzed; but ultimately, when it comes to using a given means in a specific concrete case, we cannot refer to a general rule, a collective decision, or an ecclesiastical teaching: on the level of means, we are brought back to a choice which must be made *hic et nunc*. It is here (and only at this point in ethics) that we can speak of choice as part of a normal situation, without contrepartie, and always renewed. Here again we see the relative and fugacious character of ethics; and yet, it is the arena where all the seriousness of man is brought to bear.

Chapter VIII

AN ESCHATOLOGICAL ETHIC

We have already said that an ethic for Christians cannot be an ethics of Creation, nor an ethics of the Kingdom of God. There can be no question of living as if we were still in Eden, or already in the heavenly Jerusalem. There is a radical break between our age, our world, and these others. Before us, there are the cherubim who prevent us from going back to Eden, which is presented as a radically closed world with no common measure with our own. We cannot even truly understand a given aspect of Eden, much less live it. Already the simple fact that we are obliged to write it in our current human language, which is a post-Babel language, means that when we want to talk about Eden, we cannot even talk about it correctly. We cannot say: Adam worked, so work is part of our ethic, etc. For what we call work today has no true relation with the situation lived by Adam. It is perfectly vain to try to draw practical, concrete consequences in this way. Redeemed in Jesus Christ, we did not become Adam again—neither simply Adam, nor fully Adam: we are at once more and less, or different in any case. And the world in which we are called to live has not been restored to the status of Eden. And it never will be. And after us: between us and the New Jerusalem, there is the destruction of the creation in and by the judgement of God. This destruction is not ultimate; it is not a return to nothingness. This destruction is a death in order to live again, a burial in Christ for a resurrection in Christ.[[136]](#footnote-136) Nevertheless, it is total destruction, which we cannot survive by our own strength, which constitutes an unbreachable barrier; we absolutely cannot bring anything from here into the heavenly Jerusalem, neither by our own means nor by our own strength.[[137]](#footnote-137) Still less can we imagine what this heavenly Jerusalem will be: this is just as impossible for us as it is to imagine what our bodies will be like after the resurrection. What Paul tells us on this topic allows us a blurred glimpse, but we cannot conceive it with precision.[[138]](#footnote-138) No ethical teaching can be taken from this situation of resurrected man. And this must forbid us from trying to live as if we were already resurrected. Let us recall that every ethic is lived out in a certain milieu, a certain setting; it is not a matter of an interior movement, but of a confrontation with a reality. Therefore, this does not depend on us or our personal dispositions, but on this and the concrete world in which we are plunged. Now, this world is no longer Eden, and thus we are not in the situation of Adam. Because even if we were Adam, our relation with the world around us could not be the same relation that Adam had with things and beings (and with God). We thus cannot follow an Adamic ethic. Likewise, this world still is not the Kingdom of God. We cannot claim to be in the situation of the blessed; and even if we had attained the perfect stature of Christ, we could not have the same relation with the world around us that the blessed will have with the new creation in the heavenly Jerusalem. And consequently, we have to live like men according to an ethic of the earth, which alone is appropriate for our stature, an ethic of the in-between: between Eden before us and the coming heavenly Jerusalem—an ethic of the present, of the current time—and an ethic of history—situated between the times, in the doubly limited world which is our own—but additionally, and finally, an ethic of the last times. If we examine these different elements, we can specify that an ethic between the Times means that this morality is strictly relative to our situation; it is in no way an eternal morality. The continually renewed claim of man is to elaborate an eternal, unperishable morality, valid for all time. Now this necessarily means that it is either based in Eden or in the Kingdom of God, claiming to inscribe one of the two in eternal commandments for the man of this epoch. We have just seen that these claims are rigorously excluded. The fact that this is a morality between the Times makes all morality hinge on the Patience of God. Just as he bears with our intellectual, political, or religious activities, he also bears with our moral life and our quest. The very possibility of a morality for Christians is founded in the patience of the Lord, who does not put an end to our claim and our arrogance, but who gives us a certain latitude, time and space so that (on the contrary) we could devote ourselves to this morality. Consequently, this ethic cannot exceed the measure of the patience of God, which is understood and received in faith. We cannot claim that our morality is valid on its own, with autonomy, before the will of God (and this is so even if we think we are only expressing the will of God in our morality)—which would be the case if one end of our morality touched the Eternal. We must continually remember that, on the contrary, morality only endures and has a value because God is patient, because he allows it time to be expressed and lived. It therefore receives the possibility of its existence from the patience of God. —An ethic of the Present of History: because we are in this in-between, this ethic is not a reference to a past or a future, but an engagement in a present. The origin of acts of faith is not situated in a past, but in the present of faith. And their end is not situated in a future, but in the secret of God’s decision. And when we say ‘Present,’ this is unquestionably the present traversed by the whole history of salvation, but it is just as much the present which is renewed at each moment for every man. There is no question here of a morality linked in a logical, historical, or economic continuity: as a morality of the present (as opposed to all human morality, which is necessarily of the past), it is an ethic of innovation and renewal in which past acts are given to God, taken up by him, no longer rigorously determining present acts. But at the same time, it is an ethic of history, which means that it is completely inscribed in the temporal: its setting is the unfolding of *this* time. It cannot claim to dominate it, nor to remain alien to it, nor to modify it. At most, with respect to history, this ethic will lead us to this commandment: “Redeem the times, for the days are evil.”[[139]](#footnote-139) In this sense, ethics for Christians is simply another kind of morality: it is situated in this time as a tributary of it; i.e., it receives its form and its materials from history. The Present where man must express himself is a present inside the course of this history, and not an intemporal present without significance. It has a significance in relation to the history of men. And this is the seriousness of the ethical decision in the present: we cannot do whatever we want, not only because of the will of God, but also because of the history of men in which we participate, in which this will of God must be inscribed through our works. —An Ethic of the Last Times: we know that with the Cross and the Resurrection, we have reached the last times—that is, the Times after which nothing decisive for man will be changed. The fact is there: the decision no longer belongs to the one who wills and the one who runs. It has been made, and it is done. Satan can no longer win man’s condemnation by God and complete the rupture. Creation can no longer return to Nothingness. Man can no longer establish himself definitively in his autonomous works. Nothing can tear us from the victory of Jesus Christ any longer, and nothing can put this victory in question. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Many things can happen, but nothing truly decisive for man. As long as history endures, it will be filled with remarkable activities, but these will add or subtract nothing from the truth. Thus these really are the last times. And our ethic is an ethic of the last times—which means that it too, like all works of men, can be very useful, but it cannot claim to add or subtract anything at all from the work of God in Jesus Christ. Thus, its purpose is not to guarantee the salvation of man, nor to fight Satan, nor to maintain creation, etc. At most, it can manifest this salvation, actualize the victory of Jesus Christ over Satan, bring this creation into the love of its master—and all this has no meaning except to give glory to God. Thus, ethics has no ultimate and decisive value; and yet we cannot do without it, groping about in the darkness of these last times—a darkness which is all the greater precisely because these are the last times. Since the Crucifixion, shadows are on the earth, more opaque than ever, and the light of Easter is only visible for faith. Ethics is an attempt to make a way for ourselves (and for all men along with us) to the light of Easter in the middle of the night, the covering of creation before the Cross.

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But rigorously circumscribed in this in-between the Times as it might be, Ethics is not without reference to the *eschaton*. It is not a closed world. If it is of the present, it is not without a future. It even has a very particular function regarding this *eschaton*, and it would not be a morality for Christians if it did not fulfill this function. The Christian life relates to the future, but only to this future which is in Christ, not a future which is the logical consequence of the unfolding of time. The Christian life is not only a becoming-aware of the facts of a situation, but it bears an element which does not come from the world, which is the Word of the living God. However, this relation with the future is completely astonishing.

The accomplishment of this relation with the future happens in a way which is the inverse of what we know of time. It is normal and obvious that the future comes after the present, that our act today leads to its result tomorrow; the movement goes from the past towards that which is not yet and must be accomplished. Now, in the Christian life, this process moves in the inverse direction: it is the future which moves towards the present. This future is already accomplished. It is a living reality for us, even before we existed. It is not the result of our act today; it is not determined by our acts—on the contrary! It is this future which determines what I am now. It is because Jesus Christ, resurrected, sits at the right hand of God and is coming towards me from the heart of his Kingdom that I can live what I live. The things to come are already secretly in God, and these things are coming towards the present things, attributing them a signification. As we were saying above, this explains that our acting in conformity with ethics has no consequence for our salvation, for the building of the Kingdom. Ethics is not a continually-improving preparation which will come out on the Kingdom of God; on the contrary, it is testimony that the already-accomplished Kingdom is coming towards us in Jesus Christ. But thus, the movement of the *eschaton* towards the present entails two consequences. The first consequence is the attribution of a dignity, a value to what exists through a reflection of what God has created, and of what will be for us. It is not by what it has been or what it is that the world takes on its true value, but by what it must be in the new creation. It is not like a shadow, but a light cast on each thing, magnifying it now in virtue of the future that it has received from God.

On the one hand, it consists in the fact that the Christian knows that everything now has a *true* future. Outside of Jesus Christ, we cannot know anything, except that for the duration of time, there is a future. But at every moment, this future can be interrupted—at every moment, there can be a plunge into the absence of Time—and the simple awareness of this suffices to place the living before the reality of the absence of their future. Everything ends in death. Everything is headed towards annihilation—or as the moderns say, towards [[140]](#footnote-140) the supreme order, which in reality is death and the end. And in Christ, because he is the alpha and the omega, because he is the Conqueror, and because he is destined to be the Recapitulator of all things, every thing has a future. Nothing is lost—no part of the past that we have ignored—nothing of each life that has disappeared—no part of what will happen is abandoned. Now, this implies an immense ethical consequence: we can no longer treat anything as if it were unimportant and without value. There is no mortal end; there is nothing which is so hidden that it is not destined to come to light. There is nothing which is so mediocre that it does not receive its place and its qualification from God. Nothing is so lost that it will not be ultimately recovered and saved. This dictates the entirety of our behavior towards ourselves, and towards men and things. This teaches us that everything matters, that everything must be taken seriously, all the more if it has no importance in *itself,* if it is not serious *in itself*. This is what Paul means when he says that we give higher honor to the members which are not honorable (on their own).[[141]](#footnote-141)We are certainly willing to take Thought, or Art, or Religion seriously on our own, neglecting Material or common works. Or on the contrary, if we are modern men, we will take Economics and Technique seriously, despising the Spiritual . . . These are the things which are serious in themselves, which any natural man can thus honor. But precisely, we must give greater honor to that which the natural men of our time scorn and reject, for precisely these things have *the same future* in Christ as the others, and we must attest before men to their validity and importance—in which nobody believes, but which exists in God.

The second consequence is equally essential for ethics: this is a duty and a responsibility confided to Christians. The Christian thus knows this future. He knows that God will make all things new; he knows that in the heavenly Jerusalem, God will be all in all, that death and suffering will have disappeared, that love will reign. He knows that this is coming towards man, as in the Parables: the absent Master is coming. And it is here that the Christian has a very specific function, which is to make this *eschaton* present in a temporary and limited manner in the present time of the world where he finds himself. He is charged with making the miracle of the new creation tangible for the natural man. He is charged with providing signs of this future, which is the future of all thing and all men, but which remains closed to them.[[142]](#footnote-142) This can only be accomplished by signs, not by symbols. The sign is of the same nature as that which it signifies; it is itself a reality, and not a simple image. It is partial to designate what is total. It is ephemeral to designate what is eternal. It is present to designate what is to come. It is an action of man to designate an action of God: and despite all these differences, it is still the same nature. And through the sign that is given, man can perceive the reality which is comes from God. Through the very simple sign of human love which offers a glass of water, the reality of the fullness of the love of God can be made tangible. Through the very humble act of justice given to a man, he can grasp the miracle of the justice with which God wants to clothe him. Through the very temporary healing of a sickness, a man can glimpse the victory over death which is accomplished (not the victory of Science, but of Jesus-Christ—and this remark shows very well that all signs are ambiguous; they can be taken for something which they are not, but they must be given all the same). The miracles recounted by the Bible are nothing other than the realized promise of the reestablishment of all things, but a localized and temporary realization, destined to be only a glimpse. “This is how everything will be when Christ returns”: such is the word of each miracle. But it is not necessary that a given sign of the *eschaton* should be a miracle itself. A natural act or a word can be this sign, and thus we come back to ethics. This question which must continually be put before us: “What act, what institution, what conduct can become a sign of the existence of the Kingdom of God, can manifest that this kingdom of God is coming towards us in the eyes of men?” Of course, we must express two reservations right away: first of all, whether the chosen object becomes a sign of the kingdom or not does not depend on us. The best possible act, the most “significant,” a perfect act of love (as the scholastics would say), is not a sign in-itself: it is only a sign if it is illuminated by the Preaching of the Word, which itself becomes truth by the intervention of the Holy Spirit. The sign is only a sign through the approach of the thing signified. What we choose does not point to the Kingdom of God for the spectator unless the Kingdom itself comes near at this same point. Consequently, God can use anything as a sign. This is true. And inversely, what we will have chosen as the most adequate sign can remain a dead letter and never mean anything. But this does not imply that we should therefore abandon our efforts to this end! For our responsibility is precisely to choose what can best serve the plan of God, and then hand it over to him: in this way, whether he uses it or not does not concern us, and we have to accept his decision. The one who does not carefully choose his acts and words for the service of God (i.e., as a sign of the Kingdom) on the pretext that God can use anything will be just like the servant in the parable of the Talents who buried the Talent in the ground, then gave it back, saying: “Take back what is yours.”[[143]](#footnote-143) Obviously, God does not need our talents to enrich himself—yet he asks us to do this work all the same.

The second reservation: these signs of the Kingdom must never claim to be the Kingdom itself, must never claim totality or duration. We would fall back into the error of the ethics of the Kingdom of God, which (as experience has shown) very quickly leads to the inverse of the Kingdom, through ossification, the fixing of rules (the puritans), or through spiritual delirium (the Marcionites,[[144]](#footnote-144) Joachim de Flore,[[145]](#footnote-145) etc.). The sign that we must give has no meaning in itself. It receives its meaning from the outside, from the act of God. Just as all our works on the earth will receive their value and significance at the final moment when they will appear in the Judgement, as what they are both in their reality and in their truth.[[146]](#footnote-146) The meaning of our works is not presently known to us. And thus we find another link between morality and eschatology. We cannot even know which of our works might have an ultimate meaning and which might not; this will only be visible precisely when the “last things” will be here—when the value of our works will be manifested (1 Cor. 3:13)—when God will decide to use, keep, take up this or that work, and on the contrary to destroy, to annihilate another work. From the point of view of our works, at this moment, our life is not a whole, a sum, but it is submitted to a sorting, to a division, a scission. And we absolutely cannot know what is *ultimately* valid and what is not, but we have to act in such a manner that—within the framework that we know from the Revelation—our works would be as conformed to the will of God as conceivably possible, all while leaving the election of God free to choose among these works. Perhaps the meaning that our works will receive at this moment will also be different than we might think today, different from the value that we attribute to them. This has been highlighted by novelists such as Dostoyevsky or Penn Warren.[[147]](#footnote-147) This thus means that even when our works are truly performed to be to the glory of God, even when they are a sign of the coming Kingdom of God for men, nevertheless, the *eschaton* remains a complete mystery, whose What, When, or How we cannot discern. And our works will ultimately receive their true existence from this mystery. And this explains (without reassuring us!) that the Bible can simultaneously qualify our works as Vanity—All is Vanity[[148]](#footnote-148)—and as decision, as definitive (faith without works is dead[[149]](#footnote-149)—God judges each one according to their works, etc., 1 Pet. 1:17[[150]](#footnote-150)).

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All that we have just written on the relation between our works and the *eschaton,* between ethics and eschatology, can be further clarified if we refer to the image of the kingdom of heaven which the gospel of Matthew gives us. In prudence, and without accentuating the opposition, it is possible to see a certain difference between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God—even though several texts in the synoptic gospels employ the same words and parables of Jesus, here with the term Kingdom of Heaven, there with the term Kingdom of God (in Mark and Luke). Nevertheless, if we put all these passages together and compare them, we get two tangibly different images. Without forcing things too much, it seems that we could say that the Kingdom of God is the eschatological grandeur in itself, coming after the judgement, signifying the replacement of the present world by the new heavens and the new earth; while the Kingdom of Heaven is the eschatological grandeur coming, already present in our midst—present, and therefore (in a certain sense), relative.[[151]](#footnote-151) This corresponds to the double fact concerning Jesus Christ himself: on the one hand, he is the Lord who is coming in power to put an end to this era; on the other hand, he is the Lord who *is* currently present in the middle of this era (hence, I am with you *until* the end of the world).[[152]](#footnote-152) The Kingdom of Heaven is definitely present, it inhabits the earth; that is, it is not in heaven. All these parables describe precisely the condition of men who are on this earth, in this world, and not already resurrected (or even converted). And these men on the earth encounter a grandeur which is also on the earth, but which does not belong to the earth, which is the kingdom of heaven. What really matters is to understand that this kingdom is not beyond this world, but within it. There is no question here of a spiritualism, nor of an escape from this world; the kingdom of heaven is present in this world, and it is here that we can encounter it—not by ascending into heaven. Once again, we must think this in relation to Jesus Christ. It is not by ascending into heaven that man encountered the Son of God and God himself; this happens on the earth, in the middle of men, because Jesus came as a simple man. And this is still true today: We will not find the Lord by looking into heaven (Acts 1[[153]](#footnote-153)); this will happen on the earth—precisely, in the kingdom of heaven. This kingdom is neither a place, nor an organization. When we think of a “kingdom,” we think of borders, of geography, of a State: that is, of a physically determined location, submitted to a certain administration. Now, precisely all of these texts clearly tell us that the kingdom of God is not a place; it is not a select territory where the elect will be gathered, while the others stay outside. Nor is there an organization of this kingdom—on the contrary, it is extremely mobile and fluid. Nothing allows us to assimilate this kingdom to the Church. These are truly two different grandeurs, whatever overlap they may share. But this is not the place to digress on the relation between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Church. It suffices to illuminate ethics in the light of this Kingdom. In reality, this kingdom is an active force, an action, an intervention, a power which seizes, prepares, calls, chooses, and gathers: in effect, being active is the very reality of this kingdom. Thus it is not a certain (passive) space which it suffices to enter into; it is a force in which we must participate, that we can receive or refuse, which is imposed on us, or which we can use. Furthermore, this is not an abstract, anonymous power, a kind of electricity inserted into the world by God (Matt. 13:48-22:1, for example), which would have his autonomy. It is a personal power; it is a person. The Kingdom exists where the King is present. It is the person of the King, Jesus Christ, which makes the kingdom. This latter is neither objective nor autonomous. And the force at work in this kingdom is Jesus Christ himself. In effect, a number of these passages use this strange formula: “*The Kingdom* is like *a King* . . . ”[[154]](#footnote-154) The two are assimilated. The kingdom is thus linked to the presence of this King among us; precisely, it is even the point of juncture between the King and us. When we say that the Kingdom exists where the King is, this does not mean that the King by himself *is* the Kingdom: in effect, the parables always show us that the King in question enters into relation with his subjects, and the Kingdom is situated where this relation is established. Now, let us recall that this concerns presently living people: this means that this kingdom is effectively on this earth, in this world. Other texts clearly show this character of the kingdom: we are told very clearly that this kingdom of heaven is a grandeur which is *hidden in the world* (Matt. 13:44). It is a secret, mysterious fact whose presence we can never affirm or deny. It is not visible; it does not break out. Only God sees it in its fullness. This kingdom always corresponds to the example which God gave to Elijah: “There are seven thousand men (whom I alone know) who have not bowed to Baal.”[[155]](#footnote-155) Even those who live by faith and who work in this kingdom cannot see it clearly. It never dominates (in contrast with the Kingdom of God). This secret character of the Kingdom exactly corresponds to the Incarnation of Christ: hidden in a human body, veiled, mysterious. This kingdom is no more visible to our fleshly eyes than is the person of God in the person of Jesus. And just as God was incarnate in flesh (which veiled him, but in so doing, he entered into *all* flesh), this kingdom is hidden *in the world*; and by this fact, at all times, it is infiltrating the entirety of the world. It is directly linked to this world. This kingdom situated in the world is infused into it, as intimately as salt in a soup, or yeast in bread. This entails two consequences: first, we absolutely cannot dissociate them. In the course of history, we do not have the kingdom and the world, parallel, side by side, hostile to one another; we have only their fusion, their confusion. We do not have three horsemen riding on one road, and the fourth following another path: the four horsemen follow the same path, traverse the same space—but three of them are horsemen of death and destruction, while the other is the horseman of life and salvation.[[156]](#footnote-156) Likewise, the world is made up of all nature and evil powers, but at the same time, of the power of the Kingdom of Heaven. We cannot separate them: our role on the earth is not to judge men, and we must grasp as well that our action will never eliminate evil, clearly dividing kingdom and world. If we effectuate this division, which would be very satisfying for us, we remove all the value of the kingdom of heaven (for precisely, it is there to be the power of salvation for the world) and its signification (for if it is a power, it is so that it can work on and in the world). Thus we can never divide men into good and evil—but neither can we divide institutions, nations, creations of man, works, forces, etc. From our viewpoint, the kingdom is thus an ambiguous, indecisive power: in effect, it is just as spiritual as material, just as much in a work which is proclaimed to be Christian as in pagan politics, etc. And this confusion is even greater if we consider the parable of the net (Matt. 13:47): the kingdom is a net which catches fish (thus these men belong to the kingdom of heaven!) and at the end of time, the angels will separate the good and the evil. (Thus the final judgement is not only the separation of the wheat, planted by God, who from our viewpoint represents the men of the kingdom, and the tares sowed by the devil, representing the world;[[157]](#footnote-157) it is *also* situated within this kingdom—which, while on the earth, contains objects which do not belong to the kingdom of God!)

The second consequence: This kingdom hidden in the world, strictly united to it, is a power at work on this world: that is, it is a power which transforms this world. If it is within this world, it is to transform it from within, from the inside; it is not an external force acting on appearances, or acting from the outside by constraint, by imposing a form. It is mixed into the substance of the world, to transform it from the center, in its heart. It is a conquest of this world, but this conquest is as secret as its presence. A soup is not the same after salt is added, nor is dough after yeast has worked mysteriously within it. And it is the salt and the yeast which make the meal or the bread *edible*. Thus, precisely, and without our clear knowledge, it is the presence of the Kingdom of Heaven and its action which make the world *livable* for men, which prevents this world from being hell. Thus, the world is livable, bearable, human—not because it has upheld an order of creation, but because the ultimate power of the Kingdom of God itself has entered it, which comes in the guise of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:31). Consequently, it is absolutely decisive and essential that this kingdom should effectively be present *everywhere* in the world. This kingdom accomplishes its mission on the condition of being diffused in all countries, all parties, all institutions, all classes, all works, and remaining hidden therein (until the moment when the power of God will reveal this kingdom, and manifest it as the kingdom of God). This is not a ‘Christianization;’ it is precisely the inverse. The transformation of the world can only happen through this mysterious presence in all things, and never through a Christian organization of the world at one point or place. And it is here that we come back to ethics: for as we were saying, this power of the kingdom of heaven—which is the very power of the Christ who is coming, which is the secret authority of the coming Kingdom, already present—this power does not act independently of men. In a very surprising way, the parables show us that this kingdom is linked to human action: it is the ten virgins who prepare their oil,[[158]](#footnote-158) it is the man who buys the field,[[159]](#footnote-159) it is the man who puts his talents to work,[[160]](#footnote-160) it is the servant who does not demand payment of the other man’s debt,[[161]](#footnote-161) etc. If the power belongs to the King, the action belongs to men. And the Kingdom (not always, but most often) is thus presented to us as a kind of cooperation between God and man, a combination of the action of the two. Man appears as the true meeting point between the power of the world and the power of God. And it is he who bears the power of this kingdom in the world. Sometimes this is presented to us as a prolongation of the action of God by men. For example, the servant whose debt the master had forgiven should have forgiven his debtors in turn.[[162]](#footnote-162) Thus the kingdom of heaven is present to the extent that men act as God has acted for them. For these men who call themselves Christians, it is thus not presented as recompense or hope, or refuge; on the contrary, it is responsibility and risk. They must commit themselves to this adventure, and by their work the kingdom of heaven can be established among men. This does not contradict our saying that the Kingdom is wherever the King is, for the Lord has promised to be present wherever his own are in his name. In pushing this to the limit, we could say that the King comes when his subjects “act out” the kingdom, when they make the works that God has accomplished for them reverberate for all men. Thus, they do not establish the kingdom, but they provoke its establishment and growth. If we want the kingdom of heaven to come, we must pray above all, but we must also make it present by our life.[[163]](#footnote-163) And thus it will be by virtue of this life, this power which is hidden yet decisive, this assurance of the patience of God, this attestation of the love of God, this force of salvation which the parables describe for us. For we are still learning the astonishing fact that the kingdom of heaven is composed, constituted by men, men living on the earth (Matt. 25:1–30). The kingdom of heaven is like ten virgins . . . that is, like people plunged in the darkness of the world, but awaiting the return of their Lord and pursuing their work; they illuminate the shadows of with the very light of the Lord: he has come to bring light. Thus, this kind of collaboration between men and God signifies that even when the King is apparently absent, his work is being performed by the hands of those he has instituted in the kingdom of heaven, who do what he himself has done. Thus we see the kind of relation that exists between ethics and this kingdom. But we also know that this kingdom is the presence of ultimate values in the present age, it is already the coming Kingdom of God—and also the complete power, the whole truth of this Kingdom, rendered present; for the King of the kingdom of heaven is the same as the King of the Kingdom of God.

But in the ethical sense, it is possible to be a bit more precise. In effect, we know at least two things about the behavior which is required of those who constitute this kingdom: first, this kingdom is precisely the point where the justice of God and the love of God unite (Matt. 18:23–25). This is a question which these parables often evoke. Wee see this with the eleventh-hour workers: on the one hand, those who have worked all day receive their just salary—i.e., they are paid according to their contract; but those who only work for one hour receive the same salary because of the love of God, and because the Lord considers their need to live.[[164]](#footnote-164) We see this with the wedding guests: on the one hand, justice is exercised towards those who refuse to come, and on the other, love towards all those who had no right, no claim.[[165]](#footnote-165) We see this with the servant who owed money: justice is expressed first in the fact that he is required to give an account; and then love forgives the debt, and he must act similarly towards others; but justice reappears when this servant refuses to love his neighbor—he thus falls under condemnation.[[166]](#footnote-166) Thus the eschatological grandeur of ethics appears to us to be characterized by the fact of the indissoluble union of the justice and love of God. And in his life and works, the Christian who belongs to the kingdom must manifest both aspects. Not only love, nor only justice, but their unity and—despite human appearances—their non-contradiction. This in-itself could suffice to characterize the ethic for Christians, decisively singularizing it among all other ethics. But finally, and in moving towards the most general, the parables of the Kingdom are an illustration of the Beatitudes, showing us that these latter are effectively the law of the kingdom. We must be even more precise: not only the law of the Kingdom of God, which would allow us to confine it to the future, the beyond, but the law of the kingdom of heaven—that is, of action and life on earth. And this law of the kingdom is defined as the inverse of the law of the world. The behavior of the kingdom described in these parables is truly the inversion of the normal behavior defined by what happens in the world. Precisely, without retaking all the Beatitudes, we see a creditor who forgives a debtor’s debt;[[167]](#footnote-167) a man who sells all he has to buy a field[[168]](#footnote-168) or a pearl;[[169]](#footnote-169) a master who generously pays servants who have done almost nothing;[[170]](#footnote-170) and even a master who pays the unemployed even though he has almost no work for them to perform;[[171]](#footnote-171) virtuous women who refuse to share their oil with their neighbors;[[172]](#footnote-172) and a lord who invites strangers, beggars, and whoever else into his home for his wedding celebration.[[173]](#footnote-173) In all these domains, this attitude is contrary to what is reasonable. For example, one of the greatest rules which repeatedly comes back is that the law of giving is substituted for the law of selling. In everything, this world is characterized by the general rule of sale, which is the principle of normal action. Nothing for Nothing. Everything must have (and effectively has) a price. But the principal of the kingdom is gratuity: this is the sign among men of a radically different grandeur, perfectly foreign to the world—a truth of action that man could not know or make up on his own.

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Thus the Christian is already a citizen of the coming world. He must behave according to the rules of that world, representing it in the milieu of the present world; he is an ambassador of Christ, which means that his true mission is to present himself in the world as coming from elsewhere, and as obeying the orders of a foreign State. The present world is called to disappear, and none of the orders which constitute it (the famous orders of creation!) will subsist in the new creation. And because he is already thrown into this new creation, he finds himself terribly detached from the world. The life of the Christian is a life at the end of Time. He betrays his master, he stops being his ambassador when he reunites himself with the order of the world. Because he lives in a world which he knows must disappear, he always holds himself at a critical distance. This is also expressed in his freedom. The liberation of the Christian by his Savior necessarily contains a kind of “de-worldization” (Bultmann).[[174]](#footnote-174)

1. On biblical revelation as a point of departure and norm for ethics, see the first page of vol. I of *To Will and To Do*: “I confess, therefore, that in this study and this search, the criterion of my thought is biblical revelation; the content of my thought is biblical revelation; my point of departure is provided by biblical revelation; the method is the dialectic according to which biblical revelation is addressed to us; and the goal is the search for the significance of biblical revelation as it bears on Ethics.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There is no Chapter VI (or Sixth part, according to our editorial choice). We might defend the hypothesis of an unfinished manuscript, which would have had to include a supplementary chapter. But the question announced for chapter VI is treated in chapter 3 of part 5, sec. 2 of the present volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), New Testament exegete and one of the prominent practitioners of dialectical theology. Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*; *New Testament Theology & Other Basic Writings.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Étienne Trocmé (1924–2002), New Testament exegete. Cf. Étienne Trocmé, *L’enfance du christianisme*; *L’Évangile selon saint Marc*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Maurice Goguel (1880–1955), historian of primitive Christianity. Cf. Maurice Goguel, *Introduction au Nouveau Testament,* 5 volumes; *Jésus*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Marcion (circa 85 AD– circa 160 AD), second century theologian and head of a heterodox Church which teaches a radical opposition between the Old and New testaments. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ellul defends the idea of approaching the Bible not as a collection of responses to our questions, but as a book of questions posed to us, in the following texts: Jacques Ellul, *Ethics of Freedom*, 176–177; *Éthique de la liberté,* tome II, 164, 181–182; *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World,* 100–104; “Karl Barth et nous,” 5–12 (especially 7); with François Tosquelles, *La Genèse aujourd’hui,* 214; *Mort et Espérance de la resurrection. Conférences inédites de Jacques Ellul*, 53; Gilbert Comte, “Entretien avec Jacques Ellul: ‘Je crois que nous sommes dans une période de silence de Dieu.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *To Will and To Do*, part III, chapter 1, note 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Joachim de Flore (1130–1202), Cistercian monk and theologian of the Middle ages, who received visions which he recounted in these terms: “I, Joachim, in the middle of the silence of the night, at the hour, I believe, when the lion of Judah was resurrected from the dead, deep in meditation—suddenly a light swiftly brightened my intelligence, and revealed to me the fulness of the knowledge of this book, and the spirit of the Old and New Testament” (*Concordia Novi et Veteris Testamenti*). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Mormons constitute a millenarian sect (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) which adds to the Bible, giving the same status of Holy Scripture to *The Book of Mormon*, transmitted by the prophet Joseph Smith (1805–1844). Cf. *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Phenomenological philosophers (Edmund Husserl [1859–1938], Maurice Merleau-Ponty [1908–1961]) considered man primarily as a consciousness of perception of phenomena; Karl Marx (1818–1883) considered man as an economic actor determined by the interests of his social class; and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) considered man as a subject of drives conditioned by his psychic unconscious. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ellul is undoubtedly referring to 1 Cor. 10:31: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Cf. note 11 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, FILL IN THIS FOOTNOTE . Henceforth *CD.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ellul’s theology is heavily influenced by Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). On this subject, cf. Frédéric Rognon, *Jacques Ellul: Une pensée en dialogue*, 169–209. But he reproaches the existentialist philosophers of the twentieth century, notably Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), for drawing on Kierkegaard—a Christian, anti-systematic thinker—to construct a thought which is the inverse of Kierkegaard’s—an atheist system—instead of going back to biblical Revelation, the source from which Kierkegaard drunk deeply. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) published his *Summa Theologia* (1266–1273) in reconciling the Christian tradition and the philosophy of Aristotle (384–322 BC), and in translating the notions of biblical Revelation into Aristotelian terms. Thomism is thus as much a philosophical system as a Christian dogmatics. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. In 1953, Pierre Courant (1897–1965), minister of Reconstruction and Housing in France, passed a law (called the “Courant Plan”) facilitating the construction of housing. It involved elements of real estate and financing (premiums for construction, reduced rate lending, etc.), and obliged businesses to contribute. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. ‘Becoming-aware’ here translates the term *prise de conscience.* The French word ‘conscience’ can be translated as either ‘conscience’ (which implies an innate moral sense of right and wrong) or consciousness (awareness). For a longer discussion of this term, see the end of chapter 3 of Jacques Ellul, *To Will and To Do, vol. I*. Regarding the moralist’s *prise de conscience,* see Jacques Ellul, “Conscientisation et témoignage intérieur du Saint Esprit.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This formula, “The solitary becomes the singular” (by the Word of God), is typically Kierkegaardian, and testifies to the inspiration Ellul finds in the works of the Copenhagen intellectual. On this topic, cf. André Clair, *Kierkegaard. Penser le singulier*; Vincent Delecroix, *Singulière philosophie. Essai sur Kierkegaard*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The exact and complete citation is the following: “Today [1958] there are only two manners of speaking of the self, the third person singular or the first person plural. We must know how to say ‘we’ to say ‘I’: this is beyond question. But the reciprocal is also rare: if some tyranny, in order to establish the ‘we’ first, deprived individuals of subjective reflection, then interiority would vanish at once and with it reciprocal relations.” Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations, IV*. *Portraits*, 80. Many thanks to Dr. Kate Kirkpatrick for help with this translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Cf. Gen 4:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Gen 4:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ellul expands on this command in Jacques Ellul, *L’Ethique de la liberté, vol. II*, 71–85. See also Jacob Marques Rollison, “Free to be Human in an Age of Technological Necessity: On Being Human in Jacques Ellul’s Theological Ethics,” forthcoming in *Being Human in a Technological Age: Rethinking Theological Anthropology*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Jacques Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), bishop of Meaux, wrote *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l’Écriture Sainte* (1702; Paris: Dalloz, 2003). As an example among others, Bossuet is famous for having written this phrase: “To condemn this state [i.e., slavery] would be not only to condemn the laws of men which admit slavery, as it appears in all laws; but this would also be to condemn the Holy Spirit, which by the mouth saint Paul orders slaves to remain in their state, to in no way oblige their masters to free them.” (Bossuet, “Avertissement aux protestants,” 5th avertissement, §50, in *Oeuvres complètes,* 610. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. On the scholastic thinker Marsilius of Padua (1284–1342), cf. Georges de Lagarde, *La naissance de l’esprit laïque au déclin du Moyen Âge, vol. II: Marsile de Padoue, ou le premier théoricien de l’Etat laïque* (Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux (Drôme) / Vienna: Editions Béatrice, 1934), notably 74–77, 93–94); Jeannine Quillet, *La philosophie politique de Marsile de Padoue* (Paris: Vrin, 1970). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Karl Barth never cites Marsilius of Padua in his *Church Dogmatics*, but he defends the analogical method on several occasions, recognizing that its debt to classical theology in spite of its “alienation” by natural theology. Cf. for example Karl Barth, *Dogmatique vol. 6* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1939), 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Suum cuique tribuere*: an ancient principle of roman law which means, “Render to each his due.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity,* \_\_\_. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Cf. Karl Barth, *Communauté chrétienne et communauté civile* (1946) (Geneva: Editions Roulet, 1947; Geneva: Labor et Fides, vol. 16 (1951), 1965), 110–160. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Paul Ricoeur expounds his theory of “short relations” and “long relations” in “The *socius* and the neighbor,” in Paul Ricoeur, *Histoire et verité,* (Paris: Seuil (Esprit), 1953), 99–111 (notably 111). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Cf. 1 Cor 7:29–31: “I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Cf. 1 Pet 2:13–3:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. 1 Pet 3:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Cf. John 13:35: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Cf. Matt 24:36–51. Ellul’s critique here is undoubtedly addressed to the orientations and programs of the French Ecumenical Council of Churches (Conseil oecuménique des Églises [COE]). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. For the term “Doctor,” Lisa Richmond notes that the word means “educated person” in Latin, suggesting that Ellul uses it to designate a teacher. See Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World,* 65, note 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. “The second part” may refer to the second part of this volume, hence part five of *To Will and To Do*, or to the second part of Elull’s planned theological-ethical oeuvre, hence the three volumes of *The Ethics of Freedom*; such discussion features significantly in both places. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Cf. 1 Cor 6:9–10. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Cf. 1 John 4:20: “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sisterwhom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Cf. Matt 12:31; Mark 3:28; Luke 12:10. Ellul also discusses the sin against the Holy Spirit in Jacques Ellul, “Fatalité du monde moderne” (1937), available in *Cahiers Jacques Ellul: Pour Une Critique de la Société Technicienne,* vol. I, *Les années personnalistes* (Bordeaux: Pixagram, 2004), 95–111, and in Jacques Ellul, *Hope in time of Abandonment* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 209–210. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. On the subject of the Good defined as the will of God, cf. Jacques Ellul, *To Will and To Do* *vol. I*, chapter 1, especially p. \_\_. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. This idea, according to which Jesus Christ is not only the mediator between man and God but also between man and his neighbor, evokes the reflections of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945): cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_FILL IN THIS CITATION [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ellul seems to be combining Jesus’s words in Luke 11:28 and Matt. 7:24. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, \_\_\_\_\_), vol. \_\_ (\_\_\_\_), pp……. In these pages, Barth discusses the positions of Emil Brunner, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Niels H. Søe on the question of the orders of creation and the mandates. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ellul is paraphrasing Rom 8:22. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Cf. Gen 4:15: “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.’ And the Lord put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.” [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *The Theological Foundation of Law*, trans. Margerite Weiser (London: SCM Press LTD., 1961), particularly on page 12: “The relationship between God and worldly institutions must have precedence over the possible relationship between these institutions and man.” [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (\_\_\_\_\_\_\_), \_\_\_\_. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Cf. Deut. 24:1–4, Matt 19:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. This metaphor is unclear and awkward, even in French. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. The theory of values of René Le Senne (1882–1954) is laid out in two works: cf. René Le Senne, *Obstacle et valeur* (Paris: Aubier (Philosophie de l’Esprit), 1934; translated by Bernard P. Dauenhauer as *Obstacle and Value* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972]), especially pages 175–192. Cf. 181: “Value is knowledge of the Absolute”; and *Traité de morale générale* (Paris: PUF (Logos), 1942, 1967), especially 685–734. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Roger Mehl (1912–1997) critiques the theory of values in three texts: cf. Roger Mehl, “Éthique et théologie,” in Jacques Bois et al., *Le problème de la morale chrétienne* (Paris: PUF (Les Problèmes de la Pensée Chrétienne), 1948, 25–75 (especially 55–60); “ Éthique des valeurs ou éthique de la Parole de Dieu ?”, *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 89, 1956, 81–92; *De l’autorité des valeurs. Essai d’éthique chrétienne. Thèse présentée à la faculté de théologie protestante de l’Université de Strasbourg* (Paris; PUF, 1957). Nevertheless, René Le Senne is not cited in the second text, and when he is cited in the first (32–33) and third (100, 113), he is referenced rather favorably. The proximity between Jacques Ellul and Roger Mehl appeared clearly when this latter, in “Éthique et théologie,” writes about an “ethics of freedom” (64) and recalls that God “renews in us the willing and the doing” (that is, *le vouloir et le faire*—the French titl$e of the present work). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Latin phrase meaning “dispersed fragments.” [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Actually, Ellul is referring to volume 1, part 2, chapter 3 of *To Will and To Do*, esp. page \_\_\_. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. In the Pauline epistles, the *archaï* (\_\_\_\_\_) designate the “principalities” and the *exhousiaï* (\_\_\_\_\_) designate the “authorities”: cf. for example Eph 1:21, 6;12; Col 1:16; 2:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Cf. *supra*, note 3, p. \_\_. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. In the Pauline epistles, the *dynameis* (\_\_\_\_) designate the “powers:” cf. Eph 1:21. See also 1 Pet 3:22. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Theological Foundation of Law,* op. cit. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. André Dumas, “La quête des hommes,” *Le Semeur,* 1958/3, 6. The complete citation reads: “The less Christian conduct shows a visible and separate specificity, the more it needs this specificity transcendentally. The more widespread it is in the world, the more it must be personally linked to God, and to his visible face: Jesus Christ.” This is one of the negative critiques which Ellul addressed to the protestant theologian André Dumas (1918–1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. On Ellul’s critique of the adage on virtue and necessity cited here, see Jacques Ellul, *A Critique of the New Commonplaces* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 171–178. For more on Ellul’s ethical use of (and critique of misunderstandings about) the phrase “presence to the world,” see Jacques Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World,* trans. Lisa Richmond(Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016); *False Presence of the Kingdom,* trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Jacques Ellul is doubtlessly targeting not only André Dumas with this category, but Georges Casalis (1917–1987) as well. Both taught at the Paris Faculty of Protestant Theology beginning in 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. This critique of a war conducted without hatred is unquestionably aimed at certain treatises of Luther taken up to justify Christian engagements in armed conflicts and defend the notion of “just war.” Cf. Martin Luther, « De l’autorité temporelle et des limites de l’obéissance qu’on lui doit » (1523), in : ID., OEuvres tome IV, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1958, 9–50 (en particulier p. 47 : « Les sujets sont tenus de suivre leur seigneur et de risquer leur vie et leurs biens. Chacun, par amour pour l’autre, doit s’exposer soi-même et ses biens. Dans une telle guerre, il est chrétien et conforme à l’amour d’égorger les ennemis en toute confiance, de piller, brûler et faire tout ce qui peut leur être nuisible, jusqu’à ce qu’on les ait vaincus selon le destin de la guerre ») ; « Les soldats peuvent-ils être en état de grâce ? » (1526), in : ibid., 223–262 (notamment 262 : « Si […] tu veux réciter la confession de foi et le Notre Père, tu peux le faire, et que cela te suffise. Remets alors ton corps et ton âme entre ses mains, tire ton épée et frappe au nom de Dieu »). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Cf. Heb 4:15: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.” [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. The Ellulian critique of the “philosophy of values” undoubtedly targets the work of Eugène Dupréel (1879–1967); cf. Eugène Dupréel, *Esquisse d’une philosophie des valeurs* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan (Bibliothèque de philosophie contemporaine, 1939). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Roger Mehl, *De l’autorité des valeurs. Essai d’éthique chrétienne* (Paris: PUF [Études d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses 48], 1957), 91. The complete citation reads: “Separation with the determinations of the world will happen not through annihilation of the world, but by a choice which will make me see the world as a task to accomplish, as a possibility of affirming my presence in the world, as a field of valorization.” [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Ibid., 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Ibid., 249–250. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Cf. Rom. 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” This verse plays a central role in Ellul’s ethics; cf. *Presence in the Modern World,* (op. cit.), 64–65. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. 2 Cor 5:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Actually, John 3:6: “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.” [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. John 13:34. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Cf. 1 Cor 5:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Cf. Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Cf. Matt 9:16; Mark 2:21: “‘No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Rom 6:4. The text (which Ellul cited from memory, no doubt) actually reads: “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” See also Col 2:12: “…when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.” [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Luke 10:37. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Cf. Jacques Ellul, “Évangélisation et propagande,” *La Revue de l’Évangélisation* 83, 15th year, May–June 1959, 146–162. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Ellul presents Christians as the most conformist of men in *Presence in the Modern World,* op. cit., \_\_–\_\_ (particularly \_\_–\_\_). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Ellul is undoubtedly referring here to the theologies of the death of God of John A.T. Robinson (1919–1983), William Hamilton (1924–2012), and Thomas J.J. Altizer (1927—). Cf. Frédéric Rognon, “L’identité théologique de Jacques Ellul,” in Bernard Rordorf *et al*., *Jacques Ellul, une théologie au présent. Actes du colloque du 3 octobre 2014 organisé par la Faculté de Théologie de Genève* (Le Mont-sur-Lausanne (Suisse): Éditions Ouverture (Théologie et Spiritualité), 2016), 7–36 (particularly 12-14). [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Cf. Matthew 5:21–45. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Matthew 5:47: “And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. We have been unable to identify this citation. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. These moralities of Antiquity are the polar opposite of the thinking of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics—and in the line of thinking which Ellul is addressing, therefore, of biblical thinking as well. For example, the cynics considered that the most desirable thing was to rape one’s mother, then kill and eat her . . . In a single formula, they thus advocated the transgression of the three fundamental taboos of incest, murder, and cannibalism. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Cf. Gal 5:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. The thought of Thomas Aquinas establishes a solution of continuity between nature and grace. On the contrary, most protestant theologies (and particularly that of Karl Barth) see a clear break between the two. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Cf. Matt. 18:23–35. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Ellul had already shown the analogy of communist and capitalist systems by listing the various characteristics of technique common to both models: cf. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society,* trans. John Wilkinson, 79–133. See also Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, op. cit., \_\_\_–\_\_\_\_ (particularly page \_\_); *The Technological System* (Eugenen Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 125–204. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Ellul is referring to chapter 2 of *Presence in the Modern World*, which is titled “Revolutionary Christianity.” [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. On the “Christian realism” which Ellul advocates (as opposed to pessimism or optimism), cf. Jacques Ellul, “On Christian Pessimism,” in Jacques Ellul, *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul That Set the Stage,* trans. Marva J. Dawn (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997), 92–112. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. The italicized items are in English in the original, indicating their status as commentary on foreign facts for Ellul. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre’s 1946 lecture “Existentialism is a Humanism”: “Dostoevsky once wrote: “If God did not exist, everything would be permitted”; and that, for existentialism, is the starting point. Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. He discovers forthwith, that he is without excuse. For if indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one’s action by reference to a given and specific human nature; in other words, there is no determinism – man is free, man is freedom. Nor, on the other hand, if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimise our behaviour. Thus we have neither behind us, nor before us in a luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. — We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does.” 🡨 CITE PROPERLY [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Marxism had already been identified as a myth and as the modern sacred by Erich Voegelin and Jacob Schmutz, Louis Rougier, and then Raymond Aron: cf. Erich Voegelin and Jacob Schmutz, *Les religions politiques* (1933; Paris: Cerf, 1994); Louis Rougier, *Les mystiques politiques contemporaines et leurs incidences internationals* (Paris: Librairie du Recueil Sorey, 1935), notably 57–75; Raymond Aron, “L’avenir des religions séculières” (1944), in *L’âge des empires et l’avenir de la France* (Paris: Éditions Défense de la France, 1946), 287–318 (notably 288). These analyses are taken up and developed by Ellul: cf. Jacques Ellul, “Le sacré dans le monde moderne," *Le Semeur,* 1963/2, 24–36 (notably 29–31); *The New Demons,* trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), notably chapter 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Ellul employs this metaphor of breaking chains as the positive product of his critical work elsewhere: see Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Prayer and Modern Man* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”  [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. These lines demonstrate Søren Kierkegaard’s profound influence on Ellul. Against Hegel’s intellectualist solution, the Danish thinker defended the idea of an inherently paradoxical Christianity whose internal tensions (between the finite and the infinite, the relative and the absolute, eternity and temporality, transcendence and incarnation) must be accepted, instead of seeking to reconciling the two terms in a harmonious synthesis. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846 ; \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_). See also Jacques Ellul, “Préface,” in Nelly Viallaneix, *Écoute Kierkegaard. Essai sur la communication de la parole* (Paris: Cerf (Cogitatio Fidei 94 and 95), 1979), vol. 1, i–xviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Medieval theology distinguished “evangelical counsels” (the commandments of the Sermon on the Mount) which only applied to priests and monks, and “precepts” (the Decalogue and the Summary of the Law) which were imposed on laypersons as well. Martin Luther rose up to oppose this moral duality and abolished it in the regions which followed the Reformation. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Cf. Luke 6:24: “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Cf. for example Job 42:10–15. In Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), Ellul develops the argument that wealth represented a blessing in the Old testament, but that Christ strips wealth of its character as a blessing, leaving only its character as a power. See especially pages 65–72. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Cf. Romans 13:1–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Cf. our note on Kierkegaard’s influence previously in this chapter. Thinking Jesus Christ as a function of the dialectic between the temporal and the eternal is a central element of Kierkegaard’s thought. Cf. Jacob Rollison, “God’s Time: Kierkegaard, Qoholet, and Ellul’s Reading of Ecclesiastes,” in *The Ellul Forum* (\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_). [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Cf. Matt 10:14, Mark 6:11, and Luke 9:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. On God’s taking up of all works and the ensemble of human history at the end of time, see Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, \_\_\_\_), \_\_\_-\_\_\_; *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, \_\_\_\_). The extent of this assumption of human works is a question which changes over time in Ellul’s works. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Cf. John 17:18 (“As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world”); 20:21 (“Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you”). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. For a critique of the notion of “just war,” cf. Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (1972; Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, \_\_\_\_), \_\_\_–\_\_\_; “En toute liberté: violence et non-violence,” in *Réforme* 1383–1384, Aug. 18 1973, 3 (In this article Ellul qualifies Thomas Aquinas as a ‘humorist’ for having defended the criteria of “lesser evil,” while “Only God can make this judgement”); Jacques Ellul and Patrick Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity: Conversations with Patrick Chastenet*, trans. Joan Mendès France(Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 38–39. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Cf. Matthew 5:19: “Therefore, whoever breaksone of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Here again we encounter Ellul’s opposition to “making necessity into a virtue.” On this subject, see \_\_\_, note\_\_ of the present volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. In the first volume of *To Will and To Do,* Ellul critiques the tendency of Paul Ricoeur to minimize the reality and impact of the ‘fall’: see pages 57–59. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Cf. Luke 17:10: “So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’” [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Cf. Romans 13:5: “Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience.” [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. On this identification of the State with the Beast of the Apocalypse, cf. Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: the Book of Revelation* (1975; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, \_\_\_\_), \_\_\_. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Cf. Matthew 10:34: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”  [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Histoire des Institutions*, tome V: *Le XIXème siècle* (Paris : PUF / Themis (Quadrige), 1999), 354–376. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. On ambivalence as a characteristic of technique, cf. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society,* op. cit.,94–111; *The Technological System,* 156–169. Cite differently? [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. The expression “Wholly Other” designating God comes from Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), a Lutheran theologian and researcher in comparative religions. Cf. Rudold Otto, *Le sacré. L’élément non rationnel dans l’idée du divin et sa relation avec le rationnel* (1917; Paris: Payot, 1929), 46–53. 🡨 IN ENGLISH ? [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. For Ellul’s explicit situation of his sociological attempt as a modification and updating of Marx’s attempt at understanding society, see Jacques Ellul, “Needed: A New Karl Marx! (Problems of Civilization II)” (1947), in *Sources and Trajectories*, op. cit., 29–48. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. I am correcting what seems to be an error in the French edition, which has “état” (state) instead of “être” (doing) here. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Cf. 1 John 4:7–21. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. This absence of teleology for the moral life clearly separates Ellul from Paul Ricoeur, who directly links a teleological ethic inspired by Aristotle to a deontological morality inspired by Kant. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), \_\_\_\_\_. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Cf. Matt 7:13–14: “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Cf. John 14:6: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Eccl 11:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Luke 17:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Cf. Matt 25:14–30; Luke 19:12–27. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Matt 25:21, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. The correct reference is 1 Cor. 3:15: “If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.” [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World,* chapter 3, “The End and the Means,” \_\_\_–\_\_\_. See also Ellul, *Critique of the New Commonplaces,* op. cit.,294–303. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Cf. Matt 15:14, Luke 6:39: “He also told them a parable: “Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit?” [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Undoubtedly a reference to Pascal: “The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me.” [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Cf. Matt 10:16: “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Cf. Luke 14 :28–30: “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Gregory of Tours (538–594), bishop of Tours, wrote a *Histoire des Francs* which relates the life of the church in a period of mutations. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Cf. Ellul, “Évangélisation et propagande,” 146–162. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. On page 2 of this present volume, Ellul uses the French word *sens* to include both *signification* and *direction/orientation*; I read him as implying both meanings of the word here. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Cf. Rom 6:4: “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life”; Col 2:12: “…when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”  [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Cf. note 102 above. For further reading on our relation to the heavenly Jersualem, see Ellul, *The Meaning of the City,*  173–209. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Cf. 1 Cor 13:12: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.” [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Eph 5:16: “making the most of the time, because the days are evil.” See also Col 4:5. ‘Redeeming the time’ is a central focus of Ellul’s theological ethics. Cf. Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World,* 13–14, for Ellul’s examination of these two passages in the first chapter of the book which he considered an introduction to everything he would later write. For an extended study of the present as a central category in Ellul’s theological ethics, see Jacob Marques Rollison, *A New Reading of Jacques Ellul: Presence in the Postmodern World* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books / Fortress Press, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Here, Ellul employs a term which is unable to be identified. It may be “deflagration,” “conflagration,” or “entropy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Cf. 1 Cor 12:22-23: “On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect . . . ” [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Signification is an important theme in Ellul’s ethics and body of work as a whole, one which changes over time. For more on signs, Cf. Jacques Ellul, “The Dialogue of Sign and Presence: Notes for a Christianity Learned by Heart,” in Jacob Marques Rollison, *A New Reading of Jacques Ellul: Presence in the Postmodern World* (forthcoming, op. cit.), and chapters 3 and 5 in the same work; Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World,* 2–4; Jacques Ellul, “Symbolic Function, Technology, and Society,” *Journal of Social and Biological Structures*, vol. I, n°3, July 1978, 207–218; David Lovekin, “Jacques Ellul, the Symbol, and the Political Illusion,” in *Political Illusion and Reality* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 137–150; see also the articles by G. P. Wagenfuhr and David Lovekin in *The Ellul Forum* no. 57 (Spring 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Matt 25:25. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Cf. *supra,* note \_\_, \_\_. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Cf. *supra*, note \_\_, \_\_. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. “Reality” and “truth” have a specific meaning for Ellul. These meanings are developed most concisely in Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2019), notably 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Robert Penn Warren (1905–1989), American writer and poet, is notably the author of *All the King’s Men* (1947; Orlando: Harcourt, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Cf. Eccl 1:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Cf. James 2:26. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. 1 Pet 1:17: “If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile.” [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. This semantic distinction between the “Kingdom of God” and the “Kingdom of Heaven” contests a classic thesis of historical-critical exegesis. Highlighting the fact that the first expression is more frequently used in Mark and Luke, and the second is particular to Matthew, this interpretation considers that Matthew preferred not to directly designate God in order to not offend his readers of Jewish origin. Cf. Christian Grappe, *Le Royaume de Dieu. Avant, avec et après Jésus* (Geneva: Labor et Fides [Le Monde de la Bible, 42], 2001). Ellul develops this interpretation in his biblical studies: cf. Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love and Power. Compiled, Edited and translated by Willem H. Vanderburg,* Toronto/Buffalo/London, University of Toronto Press, 2010, 149–159. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Cf. Matthew 28:20. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Cf. Acts 1:10–11: “While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Matt 22:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. 1 Kings 19:18. “Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Cf. Rev 6:1–8. This interpretation of the gallop of the four horsemen as constituting all of human history, with the white horseman of the Word of God intertwined with the others, is developed in Ellul, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation.* See also Ellul’s book of poetry focused on these four figures: Jacques Ellul, *Oratorio: Les Quatre Cavaliers de l’Apocalypse* (Bordeaux: Opales, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Cf. Matt 13:25: “but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away.” [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Cf. Matt 25:1–13. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Cf. Matt 13:44. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Cf. Matt 25:14–30 / Luke 19:12–27. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Cf. Matt 18 :21–35. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Cf. Matt 18:33: “Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’” [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. This characteristic of the kingdom, which is present both temporally and effectively, reflects the notion of “contemporaneity” developed by Kierkegaard in Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments. Johannes Climacus,* ed. and trans. Hong and Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Cf. Matt 20:1–16. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Cf. Matt 22:2–14 / Luke 4:16–24. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Cf. Matt 18:21–35. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Cf. Matt 18:27. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Cf. Matt 13:44. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Cf. Matt 13:45–46. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Cf. Matt 20:9, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Cf. Matt 20:6–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Cf. Matt 25:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Cf. Matt 22:9; Luke 14:21, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Rudolf Bultmann does not speak of “de-worldization,” but of “de-mythologization.” Ellul is undoubtedly constructing a neologism of Bultmannian inspiration. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)