

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND CIVILIZATION

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WE MAY begin by outlining the limits of our discussion. It will be enough to concentrate on the experience of European Christendom, although the problem might be posed, on another plane and in other terms, with reference to non-Christian religions and to missionary Christianity outside of Europe. We must also define what we understand by civilization. We must choose a limited sense of the word, although we include the entire natural history of man, economic, political, social, intellectual, mechanical, and not, like the Germans, merely the material elements of technique and organization. These latter we will consider only insofar as they can be distinguished from man's natural history. We will not pose, at least at the outset, theoretical or juridical problems: Church and State, history and the Kingdom of God, the jurisdiction of the spiritual over the temporal. That would be to encroach on the domain of the theologian. We will work from the testimony of experience, which, it seems to me, is the proper function of the layman in fields where the theologian legislates. The layman is enlightened by the definitions of the theologian, and offers him in return the concrete evidence, the laboratory test which endlessly raises new questions.

What is this experience? It is the experience of a double stream in the profound history of contemporary humanity. The one carries the Church, Christian life, the realization of the Kingdom of God, according to the traditional representations we make of them. The other stream is a series of historical creations, new ideas or new sentiments, the progress of institutions. In brief it is a current of civilization which, though different from what it would have been without the constant interference of the Christian heritage, develops itself on the margin of the Christian world and at times stands against it, though we cannot deny it has produced much that is valuable. When we relate this experience to the supposed experience of medieval Christendom we believe it very new. If one takes account, in the medieval institutions, of the survivals of Roman antiquity and of the large segments of the beginning of laicization, one perceives that our problem has not ceased to be more or less

Emmanuel Mounier, who died early this year in Paris, was generally recognized as the authentic spiritual descendant of Charles Péguy. He founded the monthly review ESPRIT in 1932, to help form a political-cultural climate responding to the demands of the spiritual nature of the human person. This 'personalism' (cf. Mounier's PERSONALIST MANIFESTO, Longman's, out of print), of profoundly Christian inspiration, freed ESPRIT from a parochial outlook, and made it one of the most intelligent expressions of Europe's non-Communist 'left'. A volume of Mounier's essays will be issued by Fides later this year, and a long essay, "Christian personalism faces our times", is available in a symposium presented by Catholic University, RACE, PERSON, & NATION (Barnes & Noble, 1944). The article that follows was a lecture given at the Semaine des Intellectuels Catholiques in Paris last year.

actual to Christianity. But usually one thinks about these questions too much as if Christianity had begun with medieval Christendom, when actually it lived for many centuries and with a life of great intensity in Latin and Greek civilizations, born and consolidated outside her influence. It still lives so in mission countries. So much so that except for rare moments and perhaps for certain privileged places, this dualism of the Christian community and profane civilization has so far been the most common condition of Christianity in the world.

Is this situation a normal one and in conformity with the status of the life of faith in the world? Is it a disorder which the Christian community ought to reabsorb? Should Christianity penetrate civilizations and rebuild them as Christian civilizations? Is Christianity a stranger to the world of civilization, without interest in it, with no effect on its innermost life? The first Christians could not fail to ask themselves those questions. Christians and citizens, Christians and humanists, Christians and slave-owners—they were forced into these dilemmas by the double loyalties into which their conversion had thrust them. But they posed the questions inevitably in a theoretical way, since Christianity was then only beginning to run its course. You will recall those brutal controversies: Tatian against Justin, Tertullian against the Greeks. Today between the life of faith and the evolution of civilizations, we have centuries of experience.

The replies are still so hesitating, however, that the debates of Apostolic times begin again with unabated vigor. From one point of view the problem today is not essentially different. For the first Christians, the pagan splendor of a pre-existing civilization raised the problem from behind, from before the birth of Christ; for us it lies within the borders of professed Christianity. If we call on the assistance of Christ who sums up all, who can be a stranger to none born in truth and love, may we not see that the first Christian generation stood in the same relationship to the Jewish and Graeco-Roman world as we do to ours? Once again Christian thought applies itself to reuniting the totality of the universe and of faith. With such a fire will the word *Catholic* burn when it rediscovers its consuming significance.

But if the dualism was normal at the dawn of the Christian era, its persistence at the end of twenty centuries presents us with a new problem. Does it represent the wilfulness of evil even to the end of time, or does it not rather indicate a *structure* in the Christian universe which has caused us to misunderstand an impatience to unify the world according to the first schemes of the imagination?

Let us begin by questioning history: if it is the book of God, read in the light of faith, it carries a sort of natural revelation which may enlighten us.

Let us pose this initial problem: has the life of faith, gradually incorporated into the Church and into the Christian world, had a notable influence on the destiny of our civilization, and if so in what way?

We have all heard of Christianity as a revolutionary leaven. The Gospels at first glance contain enough explosive material to blow up the family, the state, class harmony, the institutions of property, frontiers, the framework of race, propriety—in fact the entire social pattern. It was precisely this that the Roman Emperors feared. They did not persecute visionaries; they persecuted subversives. Now what did these subversives do? Within three centuries they made themselves masters of the Empire, but without an armed struggle. And what of the society which bred them? Did they withdraw from it like ascetics into the

desert? Did they carry everywhere conscientious objections, refusing to obey? Did they try to imagine new forms of life, to be 'constructive' as the modern phrase has it? No. They were in the army and the court, the forum and the senate, the baths and the market-place; they refused to worship false gods, even at the cost of their lives—but that was their only rebellion. The strongest voices against pagan corruption, such as Tertullian, took the greatest pains to advise conformity in everyday life, to underline the regularity of their citizenship.

"There are now neither free men nor slaves", they proclaimed. And in fact the condition of the slave under a Christian master was profoundly altered. The most scandalous dispositions of slaves were abandoned. But slavery itself remained. Twelve and thirteen centuries after the revolutionary doctrine, all medieval theology, from St. Bonaventure to St. Thomas and Duns Scotus, still justified it. Slavery finally disappeared only because of economic pressure.

"Thou shalt not kill", they preached. But until the end of the second century, this was not a question of conscientious objection among the disciples. Even in the tenth century war was considered a normal state of affairs. It required the approach of the first millennium to produce the great reactions of the Assemblies of Peace and the Truce of God. The theology of the just war, broached in the thirteenth century, reached its full development only in the sixteenth.

The influence of Christianity on Roman law has been widely discussed. The most recent works on the subject reduce the influence to a very small one. The institution of private property was not formally condemned. Though the Church preached to her saints the complete abandonment of worldly possessions and soon organized for the faithful a powerful system of charitable works, still she left the institution of private property untouched. Justinian retained the Roman formula: *qui suo jure utitur neminem laedit*. The Fathers insisted on the indissolubility of marriage but in the fifth century it had not yet been established in law, even under Christian Emperors. Divorce by mutual consent was not abolished until 542, and was authorized anew in 566. Life continued as if Christian morality had no effect on the law or political institutions. Moralists and theologians thundered against practices contrary to Christianity, but they addressed themselves to the consciences of individual Christians—they did not try to create "Christian" institutions.

The same attitude prevailed with regard to education as Henri Marrou points out in his *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'Antiquité*. The Church was preoccupied with religious education—that is, with training Christians in dogma and morality. The rest she entrusted to the pagan schools, even in the fourth century when the State had been officially converted. Pagans taught Christians; Christians taught Pagans. Christians continued to teach Homer, complete with nymphs and goddesses. Only the fall of the ancient city and the need to undertake the work of education abandoned by civil hands led the Church to found her own schools at the beginning of the sixth century.

Some would perhaps explain this slight disposition on the part of the first generations of Christians to build a Christian civilization, by the hypnotic fascination of the Gospels and their teaching, or by the common belief of the time that the Empire and the world would soon come to an end at the Second Coming. But when this illusion passed? Constantine brought Christianity to the throne of the Empire. Did one see Christian legislation as a result? Not even

for the exclusive use of Christians. A little later when the clergy obtained jurisdictional privileges, they remained as an ecclesiastical nucleus in the general law without any influence over secular society. It has been said that in the later Empire the bishops became almost everywhere *defensores civitatis*, the principal municipal authorities. Today, we know they were not invested with any functions of the kind. When the ancient authorities succumbed to the attacks of the barbarians in the fifth and sixth centuries, the bishops assumed their functions in the absence of other authorities. The Church alone could preserve the organization, the resources, the traditions of the State. To what else could one turn? But, as Ferdinand Lot has written, the bishop ". . . concerned himself with all because he was solicited by all." He thought no more than before of founding ". . . a temporal Christian order." Soon, in the ruins of the ancient city, the monks would accomplish an important civilizing work, but once again without *willing* it. Read their rules: the monastic work, that monumental work which cleared forests, relocated villages, founded cities and created an agricultural civilization, was instituted not to make Europe, but to aid in the struggle against idleness and to discipline the body. The rules of the monks specify that the work ought to be a disinterested activity, independent of its result and confined to the mere subsistence of the monastery and its activities.

It was only at the beginning of the seventh century that the Church began to grow directly enmeshed in temporal society, to the point of decaying there before the Gregorian reform. The bonds between the Church and the secular government were tied with increasing tightness by the unexpected and undesired inheritance of the Empire. It was only as an aftermath that theologians formed a theory to fit this new situation. This is what Maritain has called the Theocratic Utopia. Contrary to the popular opinion this was neither the doctrine nor the official practice of the Middle Ages, but only a thesis of the schoolmen. The dominant temptation of medieval Christianity was to struggle against the distinction, maintained by the Church, of two powers and two societies. It was not content to think that the faith was directly established in the organization of the world. By a sort of holy impatience, a return to the old temptation of the Jewish law, it wished to realize immediately and constitutionally the Kingdom of God in the stuff of this world under the temporal jurisdiction of the Pope.

No one held this doctrine with a more absolute firmness than Gilles of Rome in his treatise on the *Rule of Princes*, published in 1302. Titular head of the most perfect and most sacred state, the Pope is in himself perfect and sacred, the supreme possessor of temporal power. It is wrong to affirm that the two powers stem immediately from God: the royal power exists only through the mediation of the spiritual power and is delegated by it. The Church owns all the goods of the earth and no one can possess anything except in submission to the Church and through her. The pontifical power then is "limitless, passing all weights and all measure." But let this monumental synthesis not move us. Contested as soon as promulgated, it ever remained a dream of monks too quick to transcribe the absolute of their contemplation into the concrete reality of history.

Outside of their treatises, modern historians, both Christian and profane, have shown us that this perfect domination of the state by the Christian organism has never existed—unless in the nostalgic imaginations of some contemporary Christians ill adapted to the struggle in this our world.

I have taken my examples from the world of public life, because they move a greater number of minds. I could have selected them as well from philosophy or art. No more than they have sought to build a state materially different from the pre-Christian state, have the Christian ages striven to found a new art or a new thought. It is well known how the Middle Ages lived on the foundations of ancient thought. Most of the first flowerings of Christian thought were concerned with theology and morality. *Ideas* were shaped and reshaped only insofar as they were useful to refine the dogma and teaching of the Church. When Plato seemed to St. Thomas to deviate dangerously from Christian truth, it is another pagan, Aristotle, whom he hurls in the service of the Word into the attack on Plato. It was the same in art. The first churches were converted basilicas. Christ was at first represented by Bacchus. You know the famous letter of St. Gregory to Mellitus on the construction of churches: "Do not destroy the idolatrous temples in England. It is sufficient to destroy the idols they contain. Purify the buildings with holy water, construct altars; throw out the relics. If these temples are solidly built it is important to turn them from the service of the Devil to the true religion of God. The people, seeing that the temples are not destroyed, will lay aside the error in their souls, and knowing and adoring the true God, will come together all the more easily in places which are familiar to them." Gregory concludes: "Whoever wishes to reach a summit ought to ascend gradually, step by step, and not by leaps." It is faith and morals which absorb the Pope's attention, with a superior indifference to means as long as the spirit of the means be good. This is far from the creative, formative dogma, from the Gothic arch subduing heavy stone to Christian prayer, or from baroque plenty setting in form the canons of the Council of Trent against the Lutheran theory of grace.

Let us linger for a moment on this point. It is not the only aspect of the question, as we shall see, but it is of sufficient historical importance to raise a problem. What are we to conclude?

If it were a question of only the first Christian centuries, an interpretation would come immediately to mind. The material of history is rebellious. Even as in the case of culture, where moral habits implant themselves in us slowly, just so it required many years for Christianity to rebuild a world settled in its foundations, a world which opposed to any change the enormous power of inertia. This is certainly a part of the answer. But two objections present themselves to limit this explanation. If it were simply a matter of material resistance to a clear intention, there would be no problem. The most troubling fact is the absence of the intention—an intention of realizing a civilization clearly bearing a Christian trademark, wished and sought after as a new and unique civilization, instead of aspiring to a Kingdom not of this world, although beginning in this world and using the materials of this world. Besides, the inertia which played its part against the introduction of Christianity should have operated in favor of its preservation, especially once it was strengthened by the medieval effort. At the end of this historic strengthening, the Church, if such had been her intention, ought to have given the Christian State the consecration of her dogma. But the Church, as we all know, though she has often been, and at times still is, tempted by this totalitarian Christianity, has always refused to sanction it, and her development through the ages indicates to us that the bark of Peter is

withdrawing itself progressively away from such perilous shores. We must then seek elsewhere for enlightenment on this strange history.

FIFTY years ago, no one would have dared to predict a place for the Christian message in the history of civilization. He would have been afraid of being left behind the times. Today a powerful current has formed to support the basic indifference of the faith to the things of the world. It was born in a Protestant atmosphere in reaction against a religion confined within the limits of reason and of the success which religious liberalism had won there. The paradox of faith for Kierkegaard is that of an absolute isolation, so absolute that it imitates supreme egoism. It can in no way enter into the ranks of the general—into ideas, institutions, customs. The servant of faith can absolutely not be understood by anyone, nor can he be of aid to any other servant of the faith. If he is powerless to communicate faith to anyone even in the order of faith, how much less will he be able to communicate it at the level of organization? Christendom is a "horrible illusion." So far is Christendom from being a realization of Christianity that the whole problem today is to reintroduce Christianity into Christendom. It is not the dullness of our time which separates the Christian from Christ, for even now the individual Christian can be at one with Christ by following Him. It is the dullness of Christendom which has "abandoned Christ". Today a man becomes a Christian "much as he puts on his socks," the simplest thing in the world. He no longer sees the infinite opposition between the Christian order and the way of the world. This is absurdity and heresy. Mankind has wished to anticipate eternity and pretends to have installed a Church triumphant. It succeeds only in instituting a Christianity set up in trade and fingering the scales—in other words, the very contrary of Christianity. Christianity is a choice in the depth of the heart which is offered to each man, but only to each man as an individual, and not to an organization which makes commodity with time and with number. "The many" is meaningless, and time, for Kierkegaard, has no other meaning than as a part of the "continued rarefaction" of Christianity. In such a perspective, Christianity has nothing to look for from history. The idea of expansion is radically foreign to it. Its pretended progress is such as the doctor speaks of in the play of Holberg: "The fever has completely disappeared, but the patient is dead."

This basic condemnation of history, such as one finds in some aspects of Barth, though since rejected by him, is properly speaking a Protestant idea. It would be difficult for Catholic thought to maintain it so strictly. It finds favor, however, with certain temperaments—how this happens, we would have to investigate not only by an examination of ideas, but also by a psychological and sociological analysis. The myth of automatic progress is simply inverted by such people into the counter-myth of the systematic regression of civilizations—our own in particular. Maurras preached one of the most typical schemes of this kind of modern Jansenism: Renaissance, Reformation, Revolution are the three landmarks in the decay of history. Many second-rate imitators have repeated it. Others, baptizing Rousseau and Ruskin, have fixed the blame on the technical age. Of particular interest is the way such affirmations tend to erect a sort of closed theology and religious myth—neither exempt from socio-political infil-

trations—as a true anti-history, by a resentment against history which serves as a counterpart of its naive idealization in the opposing camp.

This tendency to ignore phenomena is Greek; it is not Christian. It is strongly encouraged by the vague and confused relationship of the spiritual to the temporal. For the Christian the spiritual is, in the strict meaning of the words, the presence in our life of the eternal life, in opposition to our natural activities. But this eternal life is itself bred in the flesh and ordinarily presents itself to us only through the agency of natural activities. Instead of maintaining at all cost the central point of view of a religion which has the Incarnation as its axis, we have little by little allowed our concept of the spiritual to be contaminated by the eclectic and rootless idea of an idealism in which *spiritual* and *moral* signify the soul without the body, the breath of life without life, good will without the will, culture without earth. Thinking that the Christian ought to live only in the world of spirit, we send him under a pneumatic glass and when he finds the air a bit rarefied we tell him that he ought to exchange it for the *temporal*, as if the *spiritual* were separated from the *temporal* and the temporal stripped of spirituality. We do not have to carry the spiritual to the temporal; it is there already. Our task is to discover it there and to give it life, indeed to sacramentalize it. The temporal in its entirety is the sacrament of the Kingdom of God.

We have not yet divorced ourselves from the Hellenism which leads us, inspired by a half-pagan spirituality, to scorn as a *demi-monde* the temporal, the body, matter, even when these are at the heart of the mystery of the Redemption—are temples of the Holy Ghost. Master Eckhart had the boldness to press the formula even to the point of stating that the body has been given to the soul for the purpose of purifying it. We cannot fail to be impressed by this fact: what we call material civilization has grown from Christian earth and it follows the growth of Christianity in the world. It is a simple matter to fall back on *digestive satisfaction* and the sad recollections of mathematics classes in denouncing the rule of the many. It is less simple to regard this denunciation as serious when one recalls the mysterious bond between mathematics and the deepest secrets of the universe. It is easy to blame our earliest follies on the earliest machines. It is less easy to forget that, according to Genesis, man has been created *ut operaretur terram*, that he may exploit the earth by his labor, and to discard the thought that a partial liberation from the oppression of labor by taking advantage of the triumph of man's labor may be for sinful humanity a first remission of the punishment of sin through the very agency of that punishment. However far we allow our minds to stray in these matters, one point at least is clear in the religion of the universal imitation of Christ Incarnate: Christianity commands man to take an active place in the temporal world. The Church has completely rejected the Gnostic heresy, which wished to preach once more the Platonic evasion. It has replaced in total perspective the teaching of Pseudo-Dionysius, who dared to draw all of Christian living into a mystic detachment. Perhaps it is for this reason, as Jean Guitton suggested in the last *Semaine Sociale*, that the Word of God has chosen, for the path of religion, our civilization—the most positive, the most reasonable, the most active, in order to be under the most favorable ballast before setting out from port.

Here we are then—torn between the absolute demands of the Incarnation

and the patent detachment of the first Christian period from the work of civilization. How are we to reconcile them?

UNDOUBTEDLY it would be better not to decide the question in the abstract, but rather to consider how the situation came about. If we consider more closely how Christianity has seized on civilization whenever it has spread itself, we will discover a very singular type of influence. When we seek to apprehend it in its general outline, certain terms leap to the mouth: lateral, indirect, on the bias. Let us remember that we are considering here not the jurisdiction of the Church over temporal affairs but the spontaneous influence of the life of faith, individual or collective, on the development of the civilization surrounding it. Whatever the delays and the indirect paths, it is no longer deniable today that this influence has been massive, and it is so deep-seated and profound that it conditions even those who remain detached from it.

First of all the faith disturbs human institutions as such as little as possible, at least as long as they do no violence to the justice of God. Neither in the word of Christ nor in apostolic or patristic teaching do we hear the anathemas which were later hurled against human institutions by Luther and Jansenius. Christ was the point overturning the Jewish order, the Jewish nation and the exclusive rule of the Law which in the Jewish theocracy composed a single entity. But He has only praise for the profound permanence of this Law, and He fled the sovereignty which would have permitted Him, in His *human* capacity, to overthrow it immediately. "Render to Caesar" dominated the preaching of the Apostles. Anathemas against ancient culture and civilization were found a little later only in certain isolated mouths, among barbarous apologists, and these found no echo. When he described the two cities, St. Augustine took every precaution lest he make the city of God an imaginary and separate city and he underlined its incorporation into the earthly city. "It is indifferent to the city of God what attire the citizens wear, or what rules they observe, as long as they contradict not God's holy precepts, but each one keeps the faith, the true path to salvation. And therefore when a philosopher becomes a Christian, they never make him alter his manners, which are no hindrance to his religion, but his false opinions." (*City of God*, Bk. XIX, Ch. xxix). Let us take up the word of Augustine: we can truthfully speak of a sort of Christian *indifference* to the matter of civilizations. Note however the connotation of the word. It is not a question of an indifference of abstention but of relation—to be exact it is an indifference of projection. Standing in the ground in a dense forest, one path alone seems to lead to the goal. Flying overhead many paths appear equally satisfactory. This relative indifference is inevitably scandalous to one who places his entire stake in direct action, the only effectual means in his opinion. He can see this partial unconcern, which he believes purely negative, only as an abandonment of the post. "If all imitate you," said Celsus to the Christian, "the King will remain alone and abandoned, all the things of the world will fall to the power of the barbarians, and your sect itself and the true wisdom will disappear from the midst of men." Did not Origen justify him when he said that the Christian ought to "deny himself to the public magistrates because he has higher ministers"?

In fact, this sacred indifference is very difficult to maintain in its spiritual exactness. There is a constant temptation for the *interior* Christian to withdraw

himself from the affairs of the world, at the same time profiting from the efforts of those who do combat there—not a very honorable position. He appears to the profane eyes like those hirelings who refuse to take risks in a strike because they “have nothing to do with politics,” but who, year after year, profit by the concessions obtained by the strikers who receive the blows and serve the prison terms. Is this what the transcendence of his faith asks of him? By no means. Notice that the Fathers did not say “Avoid the affairs of the world, they are insignificant,” but on the contrary, “Because they are insignificant do not withdraw from them. Take them as they come.” And when they added “Penetrate the works of others with the Christian spirit,” they started the Christian on an endless road of supplementary tests and travails. The Christian was thus bound to the world with ever stronger ties until he had to seek with difficulty the secret ways to answer the call of grace.

Refusing to throw into confusion the world it had entered, the Christian idea turned instead to the task of introducing itself by indirect means. Like Christ in the upper room, it insinuated itself imperceptibly into the whole intact, without breaking through the gates, and at first it dropped out of sight. Where is it? How does it operate? What is it doing? No one knew. It did not wish to be handled, administered, rationalized. At first there was no change to be seen. He who like Thomas had not the living faith did not wish to believe it was there—was acting—but soon the catalyst was at work and the reaction was produced.

A man is pointed out—he has freed his slaves, without any sensation. He keeps them in his home and exacts obedience from them. But instead of machines, they are now men. They are treated with kindness; they are free to marry at their own choice. A second man follows suit—five, ten, a hundred. An institution from time immemorial, one which seemed eternal, has been broken as the surface of a stone after the silent frosts.

Recollect the attitude of the apostles toward the Jewish observance. The first Christian community, the depository of a universally explosive doctrine, was composed entirely of Jews committed to Mosaic practice. It even seems that the first Christians to preach outside Jerusalem addressed themselves only to Jews. The presence of Hellenic Jews who long since had abandoned part of the Mosaic ritual posed a problem. The problem reached an acute stage with the stoning of Stephen, who had emphasized the Hellenist point of view in his preaching. But after this dramatic climax, the fever dropped. James preached conciliation, and limited the obligations of Gentiles to a respect for the Law, without as yet attempting to suppress it. Paul heightened the scandal by vigorously asserting the universalist message. Many within the Church wished to submit all Christians of whatever origin to circumcision and to the strict observations of the Old Law. James was again the peacemaker and obtained concessions from Paul. The troubles continued even to the time of Paul's arrest. The Judaists did not go down to defeat until almost 60 A.D.

The same movement applied toward the Empire. Christianity in insinuating itself within the Empire allowed her not only to survive but to grow more and more monstrous. The capricious omnipotence of the State soon passed even beyond the frontiers of madness. Who resisted it? Men who obeyed all her laws, followed all her customs, but who on one solitary point refused to submit, obstinately refused. One point and only one, a seeming trifle—the cult of the

God-Emperor. But this was a vital point. As a hundred light blows delivered against a selected area can by vibration after vibration dislocate a powerful bulwark, so the Empire began to break under this chorus of *no, no, no*. Henceforth, wherever the Moloch-state reappears, Christianity will tirelessly undermine it with her power of disassociation.

The Roman landowner remained in his place. But there were men who sold their goods and shared their wealth with their fellows. Among them there was no longer any yours or mine. This lasted for only a short time—when they saw that the world survived the destruction of Jerusalem each one laid his hand on his own. One blow had been struck for naught. But soon monastic poverty returned to the attack; then the prophets appeared: Saint Basil, Saint Chrysostom, men who thundered, followed by the theologians who defined. They preserved the principle of the personal disposition of goods, but they undermined it by the doctrine of common use. Little by little the idea spread, to grow five centuries later into the socialist inspiration marching toward one knows not what tardy destiny.

In all these examples, Christian inspiration has played the same role: it has not *constructed*, it has *disassociated*. Like those products which burn the young corn, Christianity has turned to the sun to disassociate the good roots from the bad—to burn the wild stock while the light of truth transforms the good plants.

When, instead of this negative action, the Christian spirit has directly influenced a process of civilization, it seems as if it always has produced its temporal effects as by-products, at times almost without being aware of them. Theologians leaped into the depths of the Trinity, and two centuries raged for or against *procession* and *succession*. From a turmoil of councils and heresies there passed into history, by the definition of the divine Persons and their relationships, the double principle of the individual and the community which thereafter ruled over the fluctuation of societies. Generations of spiritual energy were expended to maintain in the Incarnate Word the integrity of the human nature and the fullness of the Incarnation: thanks to which European civilization alone will never withdraw from this world but will unite human activity with the spirit of contemplation. God alone was preached and no subordinate *latria* was tolerated; at the same time, as Duhem has shown, science was freed from the spirit of magic and thus became possible, by the unity of God, the unity of the world. Faith in one God, infinite and ever calling man to his own perfection, gives scope to a civilization indefinitely active and progressive—a marked contrast to the heavy immobility of Asia or of Islam. One might compare this relationship of Christian inspiration to the practical realizations of civilizations with that of mathematics to technical inventions. There are examples of mathematical researches which seem, in the intention of the scholars, to be as remote as possible from any practical application, but which finally, as in the case of research on the nature of waves or the constitution of the atom, have produced the most astonishing practical results. Mathematics has sought, more intimately than the calculations of the engineer, and in another dimension than his mechanical dimensions, a secret of matter which, once set free, has splashed the timid with their own revelations. Even so Christianity contributes more to the most material works of mankind when it increases in spiritual intensity than when it loses itself in problems of tactics and management. Kierkegaard thought that

it experiences only indirect communication. One might say that it experiences only indirect fertility. We are touching here on a master structure of divine and human history which gives its full significance to the words of the Gospel: *Seek ye the Kingdom of God and its justice and the rest shall be added unto you.*

Another figure from the Gospels enables us to picture, in a similar way, the operation of supernatural action in the temporal order. It is the figure of the leaven—of yeast or of salt. Some men even today follow with nostalgic eyes or despair the last remnants of medieval Christendom. One might ask himself if this earthly Kingdom, the temptation to which the Christian era had to submit even as the Jewish people before them, was not formed on a perverted representation of the presence of the Spirit in history. The theorists of Caesaropapist Christendom believed that the faith commanded them to organize the world under God. The problem is to know when it is not at least as important, and more in conformity with the teaching of the Gospels, to disorganize the world under God—I mean to render it transparent before God when the inevitable weight of *management* has succeeded in erecting a screen between the world and God. We must have administration and yet preserve the inspiration behind the administration. Perhaps this is what the Papacy wished to preserve when it refused to join the League of Nations. The great significance of this gesture at the threshold of our time has not been adequately emphasized. By reading history in this light we see the entire Christian past appear and take on new significance. Christ did not prepare a systematic outline of new Christian ideas: the idea of creation, of a supernaturally ordained nature, of sin, of redemption—ideas to overturn the world. He threw them to a sickly reason which was pawing at their gate, close to the threshold. Philosophy, nourished and strengthened by Revelation, if she accepts Revelation, still continues to be philosophy, but becomes greater and better than before under the sustaining force of the Holy Ghost. It is through a continuity which drew to itself all the heritage of ancient times that philosophy has gathered, warmed and matured the new seeds. St. Irenaeus called on the divine pedagogy—more recently one has spoken of the *discretion* of God. An immense silence which continues throughout all history, an inspiration by personal contact which leaves the field free for all human efforts, a patience with all the detours which separate the inspiration from its effect—these are the ways which are not ways.

DISCREET and concealed, Christian inspiration reveals its strangeness even more by the ambivalence which it assumes in presenting itself to our mind or to our will. It transmits the Word of God to sovereign liberties. Therefore it cannot translate it into a language perfectly clear to men, for that would be no longer the Word of God, and it would impose necessity on our liberty. It offers itself always in such a way as to give light to those who seek the light, and, to follow the powerful aphorism of St. Paul, to give darkness to those who reject the light. Some evangelical sects have justified moral anarchy by the same texts which led other believers to heroic chastity. "Render to Caesar" has in turn served as a motto for theocracies and Erastians, autocracies and democracies. The disciplinary decisions of the Church assume the same ambiguity beneath the structures of their formulas: solving one heresy, they hatch another which nourishes itself on their substance. The condemnation of liberalism awoke some

to discover deeper perspectives in liberty and cast others into authoritarian politics. The condemnation of atheistic communism directs our attention to the danger of a system of human relationships which grows perverted by closing its eyes to the total nature of man, but it serves also, against its own intention, to consolidate the social blindness and egotism of class. It would be a radical misunderstanding to accuse here a weakness of the Christian direction. If the Church ceased to offer possibilities of illusion, it would cease also to offer possibilities of salvation. It would have departed from the field of liberty.

Another aspect of this same ambivalence is the way in which Christianity operates through the very currents which set themselves in opposition to her. Here we are still in the dialectic of indirect communication. God does not communicate Himself clearly under any human name, through any human act. Some find Him by analogic affirmations. These are the faithful. Certain mystics find Him through negatives wrapped in an infinite love. Some find Him by an apparent negation accompanied by an apparent hostility, which is often only the negation of idolatrous representations of God. These last are those atheists who, though declaredly atheists, yet live in good will in the theological sense of the word, and under other names actually give themselves to God as the end of their lives. No more than in the case of nominal Christians does this indirect inclusion in the body of the Church guarantee them against the idolatry and pharisaism of their own language on God. Less conscience is never better than more conscience. But this life-bearing graft leads these anti-Christians to play their role in the development of a civilization of Christian inspiration. A history could be written of the fruitfulness of atheism for the development of the Christian conscience, and especially important for our subject, of the way in which atheism in its public work transmits the Christian sap. We all know its contributions to the advancement of science, the progress of civil liberties and social justice. Let us remember that on the Day of Judgment many men, as we know from the words of Christ, will be astonished to learn that they have performed in Christ works which in their conscience never seemed directed toward Him. Doubtless the adventure of these fugitive ideas sometimes turns out ill. One can take too easy satisfaction in always speaking of "Christian ideas turned to folly." Christian ideas sometimes turn to folly in the bosom of the family without scouring the country. And it happens that even if far afield, when they are properly handled, Christian ideas are so vigorous, so well nourished, that for a long time they show no weakness as a result of transplanting. Perhaps it occurs sometimes that God, weary of the somnolence of His own, gives them directly to the Gentiles, fresh as on the *first day*. It would be too close for our comfort to have atheism automatically branded with stupidity.

If it is never evident in its practical indications, the Christian message is also rarely of the present hour. Often it is so far in advance of the time that only a much later period can disentangle its implications. Thus the formal denial of differences in class, state, race and nation has as yet only very partially revealed its effects. The Apostolic Fathers, under the immediate influence of the Gospel message, developed a conception of history which was held down for centuries by a variable image of civilization, strongly impregnated with the mentality of the ancient world. The patristic sense of creative history did not attain currency until the nineteenth century. The spirituality of dispossession has not yet conquered Roman Law. On the other hand Christianity frequently

lags behind in political and social matters. Those who say it has always been a "reactionary" force, on the basis of presumptions it would take too long to analyze here, touch on an incontestable truth for a large part of its history. It happens that Christianity contains elements both retrograde and progressive—the condemnation of liberalism at the beginning of the nineteenth century, at least in the terms in which it was often presented, misunderstood the already-matured acquisitions in the development of the rational and scientific conscience; but at the same time it anticipated by a hundred years the laic criticism of rationalism and science, and the social criticism of unconditioned liberty. Always contemporary in its essence, Christianity is never so in the written word. It doubtless would be if it held to the level of the facts of civilization. That it is so rarely "on time" leads us to suppose that its clock does not strike the hours at the same time as ours. The natural philosophies have taught us that the striking of a clock has a great metaphysical significance.

Historic Christianity expresses itself freely by paradox in action. It sanctifies marriage, blesses the family and preaches fruitfulness. We expect its ministers to provide examples of these. Instead, (at least in Catholicism) it makes celibates of its priests and sings hymns to virginity. Good sense laughs at this. But a reason more profound than good sense proves that marriage and the family escape animality only in a spiritual discipline of the flesh for which it is good to have some models take special care. Against all rules of logic it has without doubt been the celibate Christian throughout history who has by a mysterious communication tended the flame of the Christian family. Another paradoxical situation is offered us by men withdrawn from the world: monks, who in the Middle Ages fashioned a populous and productive European world. There were contemplatives who accomplished the enormous task of laying the foundations for our western civilization.

This "taking stock" carries its own significance. I have already had to suggest this in passing, so well does it square with the facts. The detours, rises, ambivalences, negations, paradoxes which mark the influence of Christian ideas on the plan of civilizations are signs in which the philosopher recognizes a reality trying to express itself on a level of reality which the ideas themselves transcend. What we know of the absolute of the Incarnation prevents us from concluding that Christianity has nothing to do with civilization. But their complicated relationships, irreducible to linear causality, remind us that Christianity is not directly oriented to the work of civilization, though obliged to guide it completely toward salvation. We can now define the theological climate of our subject.

THE Church is not charged with maintaining order in the state, nor with the equable distribution of goods, nor with the greatest happiness of the greatest number. It is a community of life in Christ. Charged with maintaining this life, with offering it to every man who comes into the world, and of perfecting it in view of his accomplishment in the Body of Christ, the coming glory of humanity, the Church is not in herself a professor of philosophy, nor a custodian of morals, nor a guardian of society—neither is she a dispenser of riches, a foyer of culture, a center of works. Less still is she a power or an academy. This is what the first Christians, *voyageurs sans bagages*, saw, not better than we, but with more

simplicity or more freedom. For the first two centuries the Church was devoted directly and fully to the process of evangelization. The bishops were the great artisans of this first conquest. They multiplied into a considerable number, creating an indefinite (and dangerous) parceling out of churches. It was only gradually that the mission was consolidated and the parish constituted. Without operating in any sense from a determined will, she made her way empirically by diverse paths which took a long time to find a common end. Little occupied in organizing herself, the Church was far less occupied in organizing the world. Not that she scorned the task. It was simply not her affair and she left it to those whose care it was.

But since the Church, in imitation of her Master, is fully incarnate, her mission, which is not of this world, must be accomplished in this world. Properly speaking there are not two histories alien to one another, sacred history and profane history. There is but one history, that of humanity on the march toward the Kingdom of God. "Sanctified history" *par excellence*, but extended between two poles, a supernatural pole and a temporal pole, with marked boundaries about each of them and an infinitely graduated composition between them. Even as the Church refuses the separation of the two worlds, so she affirms their vigorous distinction.

"The supernatural is not given its due" wrote Bernanos. A single dimension of history, abstracted for the occasion of a limited and necessarily incomplete act, may reveal an historic pattern. But the totality of history in each of its moments assumes its significance for the Christian only in an historic supernaturalism which classifies all events in terms of collective salvation and the attainment of the Kingdom of God. If human nature is completely itself only in the gateway to the supernatural life and fails when it turns elsewhere, its condition is not altered when it passes into collective life. In the condemnations of Communism by the Church, one can debate about this or that attitude toward the economic order which the Church does not set as an article of faith and which can always be subject to revision by her. But what seems essential and what is the most constant part of her message is the denunciation of any society, whatever its structure, which shuts itself off from the supernatural. To men who lack the faith, this firmness may seem vain and anachronistic. But the Church knows that this approach, apparently alien to daily living, is actually the basis of the safeguard of individuals, and through them of all civilization. Well do we say *historic* supernaturalism. Let no one speak of evading the issue. For the Christian the Kingdom of God has already begun amongst us and through us. That is why history is neither farce nor melodrama, but a divine comedy coupled with a divine tragedy. In many religions sacred history is mythical. It is not a comedy in which man plays a part but a magical scenario which man undergoes as a fantasy of the gods, and which ends badly for him. The Germans, ever vindictive, even drag the gods into the final catastrophe. For Christianity God is so intimately bound up with the history of man that at the last man is drawn into the glory of God. And that begins here and now, under our eyes. It is then entirely impossible for a Christian to speak as if he were separating his occupations—to the Church or to the life of faith, the supernatural domain; to this doctrine or that action, the organization of the earth. The earth cannot be organized outside the faith, even as the faith cannot develop without the forces

of the earth. We are penetrated and determined, both individually and collectively, by their influence.

Nevertheless the life of the Church and (in us) the life of faith engrafted upon her, are transcendent in their effects or historic expressions. We know the realities sought by faith only in a mirror or through an enigma. Bound to the ordinary resources of our spiritual life and of the teachings of the Church, we cannot see clearly the relationship between these obscure truths and facts of civilization. It is presumptuous to dogmatize at random and to no purpose. In our short lifetime what have we not heard of "monarchists because Christians", "democrats because Christians", "progressives because Christians"? But underlining that side of agnosticism does not exhaust our analysis. The relationships of the conscience of the Christian to the conscience of the Church and of the conscience of the Church to the conscience of history are complex and we must now attempt to clarify them for they have been considerably confused in recent polemics.

The vital action of the supernatural on the course of a history under submission to the true Kingdom of Christ, the organic graft of sacred history onto profane history—these prevent us from considering them as two separate streams, from isolating them into two schemes of judgment and two sectors of activity. That was the error of the Christians of *Action Française*. In a somewhat different way it is the error of certain Christian Communists. But to eliminate an error it is not enough to identify it. We must seek out its origin, and identify also the vein of truth which sustains it. The Christian political conscience at the beginning of the century, where it was not pure and simple conservatism, had been touched by the final fervors of Romanticism, and was a vague mixture of the political, the religious and the sentimental. That was one of the weaknesses of the Sillon and in general of the Christian Democrat tradition. Against them the *Action Française* rallied a keen realization of the autonomy of politics in its own field, even as scientism had rallied a sense of the autonomy of scientific research. But it passed from distinction to separation, as witness the condemnation of 1925. The danger following such condemnations is always to take for true the contradictory proposition to the one condemned although frequently the condemnation aims only at the separation of two contraries dialectically yoked together. Circles of Catholic youths and their directors in the years preceding the recent war reacted against "Politics First" taken in a too narrow sense and too often they turned toward a "purely spiritual" formation—impurely spiritual would be a better term from the Christian standpoint, since the spiritual is rooted in the temporal. With neither a political nor an economic formation, when these generations were confronted by political or economic problems, they were tempted to resolve them in the climate in which they had been formed, by a short circuit of spiritual considerations with practical problems in the confused medium of good will and of moral approximations. I remember soon after the war having heard a priest say to an assemblage of Catholics: "I pray you, call to mind your responsibilities and do not criticize us. We have been together in Catholic action. Well, it is the same work we are carrying on now by other means." Our youth had already reacted vigorously against these same confusions during the thirties. We have called to mind that in confronting practical problems we must begin with vigorous economic or political analysis, and close the door on moral approximations and intermediary idealists,

those false ministers of the spiritual. This reaction survives today with some young Catholics who are more or less Marxist. If one wishes to recall them from their error, he must first see the healthy aspects of their point of view. It is necessary to provide a skeleton for the knowledge and the practice of the firmly-structured world in which we live. Intentions will not give it muscles and bones. But this necessary work of vertebration should not lead us to forget the total Christian organism, nor that the skeleton can animate deeds of death or deeds of life. And so we should react no less vigorously against separation than against confusion. The work of the economist is not without usefulness to the concrete destiny of grace. The fact of grace is not without a place in the concrete destiny of economics.

It is true that in France today the Christian world by and large is more shackled by a confusion of the orders than by too fine distinctions between them. For several centuries out of fear of the struggle between the angel and Jacob, between the dialogue of the Word of God and the music of this world, we have multiplied transitions, conciliations, amalgams until our faith today is bottled up to the stifling point. We feel the need of rediscovering pure essences and vigorous existences, Christianity in its supernatural clarity, the world in its detailed splendor, and their relationship in all its truth—obscure no doubt, but hard as diamond, not vague as mist. We have wished to understand too much, to understand Genesis scientifically, Justice politically, Unity philosophically and miracles medically. We have forgotten how to adore directly, and thus to understand properly. From this stems our new and extreme prudence in the matter of historic interpretation, whether providential or prophetic. A puritanical situation perhaps, but after all we must judge reactions on the basis of the agents to which they are reacting. There is no age which is not dominated by some one excessive idea. Is not a little excess necessary to compensate for the inertia of the opposite excess which enjoys the advantages of antiquity and the comforts of power? It is in the life of the whole that the excess acquires an ironic self-knowledge and sets itself in perspective with regard to the whole in order to contribute finally to the rightness of the whole.

I AM not forgetting that the conscience of the Catholic is not isolated in these difficulties. His life of faith is grafted onto the faith of the Church, not (if it is a living faith) in an exterior relationship of blind submission to authority but in a profound vital unity: *sentiat cum Ecclesia*. What then is the situation of the Church with regard to the reading of history? She too lives in the enigma of faith. The book with the seven seals will open only on the last day. The complete comprehension of history, and thus the full understanding of each of its moments, will be fully revealed only at that time—for the doctors and theologians as well as for the faithful. Probably that moment will hold surprise for all. Must we conclude that the teaching Church may be as unprovided as the natural reason for discovering the rationale of history in that partial, deficient, conjectural reading we are able to make of it? That would be to overlook the spiritual. This assistance does not imply that churchmen and theologians cast more light on the problems of civilization than do those who refer them to the natural reason, nor that they possess absolute evidence as to the ways of God, even in their supernatural destination. No one today, I dare say, would pretend

to decide peremptorily whether the conversion of Constantine was a good or an evil for the Church, or whether a socialistic type of economic structure is better suited to the progress of the Kingdom of God than a capitalist economy. But the Church is assisted by the spiritual in its power of direction, and this direction, although bearing directly on sacred history, cannot, in the organic connection of the orders, fail to bear at least indirectly on profane history, on its intelligence, on the choices which must be made there.

The Church is herself assigned her limits in this reading of history and she has in doctrine kept within them more resolutely than the practice of her clerics would indicate. Against the Caesaro-Papist theses she has maintained that civil society and its powers, reason and its capacities, have a natural autonomy within their own orders. It has been possible to say that the idea of the laicity of the state and of society is a Christian idea and is guaranteed only by a vigorous concept of transcendence. Today the Church withdraws from many quarrels in which she has been a contending party since the Middle Ages. It is not so much that she renounces her presence in the world as that she concentrates rather on the most essential factor—indeed on the most pressing aspect of her presence—which is not external display, even less an imperialism, but an ardent discretion, even as the very presence of God.

Each individual member of the faithful should keep in mind that he is a citizen of the earth, and that if he attempts a complete imitation of Christ, he must completely assume, like Christ, the duties and charges of that citizenship. He must not conceive the grandeur of God in terms of the stupidity of the world. But this anxiety for free play with the things of this world ought not allow him to forget that as a Christian he cannot enclose his earthly citizenship in self-sufficiency. "You are," St. Thomas says, "fellow-citizens of the saints, you are members of the household of God." The panoply of virtues which is theoretically adapted to the natural order of the earthly citizen is no longer sufficient for a fallen nature in the true works of this earth. Still less can it satisfy the demands of our supernatural citizenship. Therefore it is not enough, in order that we may live organically as Christians, to recognize that the supernatural has its place in our lives and in history, but we must recognize that it is everywhere, even though it may not be everything. If Christians concentrated only on the actual failure of Christians in matters of political and economic analysis, on their moralizing confusions; if they consecrated all their passion to making good that failure and left the care of the supernatural universe to clerics and to the life of separated faith (however fervent that faith may be), one day holiness would cease to penetrate their political life so set apart and separated. If I cut off my arm because it is infected let me not look to see another arm appear in its stead; what will come is a stump. In brief a Christian today must break away from the intermediary facilities of thought and action. He must cease to be an idealist, or a spiritualist, in order to be a Christian. That will allow him *ipso facto* to be entirely a man among men, one who will not cheat with the necessities of the earth. But this implies at the same time and with the same force that he will bury himself in the tradition and the life of the Church in order that he may be half a Christian no more than half a man. It implies that he be as deeply sensitive to the devitalization of our supernatural plan of natural truths, as he is sensitive to the devitalization of our supernatural message by the weakness of our *présence* in the world. An arduous work was needed to

dissociate modern scientific acquisitions from their dramatization by scientism, while the Church was freeing her teaching from its decrepit representatives—before science and the faith could be enticed into pacific coexistence. The truths which the modern world has disentangled in the matter of civilization cannot, as they are and without *digestion*, become Christian truths.¹ First there is necessary the alliance of two virtues rarely united: boldness and patience, wonder and fidelity. The adventure is well worth the doing.

Let no one relax in the representation of the balance which must animate this dialectic. There is a strong temptation for the Christian to sit tenderly before beautiful theological landscapes while the human caravan marches on. Christian hope lives from despair to despair; the Christian balances from trial to error. The law of the pendulum which Bergson formulated from human experience is the irresistible rhythm of an incarnation in which the supernatural cannot fail to incorporate itself and cannot incorporate itself without being both diminished and bemired. And so the life of the Church will swing continually between two movements: a movement of insertion within the temporal in which, following the excellent formula of Father Desroches, she will ask of the temporal orders the maximum for subsistence within them, and a movement of recoil from the temporal in which she will ask of them the minimum for subsistence outside them. A strong hour and a weak hour for the Incarnation, a strong hour and a weak hour for Transcendence. We leave one phase to enter another. It is a passion-stirring history we are living, different from a crisis of decadence or facility.

HERE emerges from our analysis one consequence which especially pre-occupies the man of action. The most rigorous theologians tell us that it is only exceptionally that temporal affairs enter under the jurisdiction of the Church as a result of their occasional connection with the supernatural good of souls. It seems then, and the practice of the pre-medieval Church confirms this, that a large field is left for natural reason and experimental practice to determine the good and the evil in these matters (under the reserves imposed on the Christian by the fallen condition of the reason and of the will). But if the passion for the Kingdom of God is the dominant passion for the Christian, is there not some risk in turning it away from the organization of the earth? It is necessary here to fasten more securely the bond between the spiritual and the temporal, and to do this we will consider now the question we have so far described only indirectly. We might phrase it so: *Is the development of civilization a help or a hindrance; is it superfluous or necessary for the life of faith?*

We can now descend one step and ask: is a well-ordered and happy civilization a Christian civilization? It is always possible to give to order and happiness meanings which will comprehend both heaven and earth. But in the plan to which we have assigned the name civilization, order is the rational management of relationships, happiness is a convenient satisfaction of needs.

If we suppose they could establish themselves in a durable equilibrium and even decorate themselves with such moral virtues as are bound to the balance of health and strength, they would form a sort of animality of superior conditioning or of marvelous industry. In no way would they constitute a Christian order, for that consists in faith, hope, and charity and in their reverberations

on the whole of life. There would even be a risk of their closing themselves in a confined whole so well adjusted that the true destiny of man would then find no place in which to take root. The best of worlds is the most redoubtable, and the best-conditioned of men would truly be, in the Nietzschean sense, the last of men. The hypothesis of an equilibrium so isolated from the universal drama is, besides, almost as abstract from the Christian point of view as the theoretical egg sliced in liquid masses in our old manuals of physics. Such a world is not capable of life because it would not be a human world. The powers of thunder deposited in us by the Holy Ghost would burst there one day. Nevertheless, so that it may delineate itself and reveal its spiritual poverty, we have the instructive spectacle of certain countries, large and small, which have for a long time enjoyed prosperity and relative peace. We are today, even in our problematical *spiritual*, at grips with the difficulties of poverty and the struggle for existence. We can even now imagine what no less formidable problems prosperity and peace will bring us tomorrow.

Have we pursued the argument thus far only to defend penury and its struggles? To oppose a sort of prophetic ill humor to the progress of material life and of social organization? The religious conscience is here the plaything of many mystifications. I do not speak of the most common which can rise surreptitiously from injured interests or from the instinct of tranquillity. But the countries which have lived for so long in these mediocre conditions of hygiene, comfort and public order which are still largely our own, mingle many things together. They have installed and oriented in the midst of this life their most profound civilization; they have formed therein their spirituality itself. They tend to believe in the whole as a building unit. It is not Christian poverty they defend but rather that form which the spirit of poverty takes amid external conditions of penury, and along with it those pitiful dispositions of habit: the taste for the common life, for mediocre projects, for domesticity. They do not defend the liberty of the children of God, but a sort of Mediterranean anarchy and egoistic indolence which cries 'Nazi' as soon as the keeper of the toll-house takes out his notebook, and 'Robot' at every proposal to lighten the housewife's tasks. We tend, too, for reasons that the psychologist and the theologian ought to analyze together, to nourish curious sentiments of culpability on our highest destiny—that of co-creators called to participate in the very life and action of God. When the atomic secret was discovered, there was talk of sacrilege, of violation. There are families and cities in which bathrooms fall into the category of sins against nature. So do some people believe they bear witness to the spirit of poverty and humility. But what if they have borne witness only to weakness and confusion? It is a commonplace that wealth of long-standing lends itself more readily to simplicity of dress and of manner than wealth of recent acquisition. The false virtues I have been mentioning are perhaps only the embarrassment of *parvenus* new to civilization, still embarrassed by its gifts and making more display of them than is suitable to the modest conditions of the one true life.

But these conditions are not contemptible for the true destiny of faith. To say that they are necessary to it would be to steal from faith the profound gratitude it affirms from time to time by flowering against all the rules of logic. But although sovereignly free, the grace of God has sovereignly chosen to submit within ourselves to the conditions of the Incarnation. Christ has played fair.

His activity within history has been free of deceit. In this sense we can say that He wishes it to undergo the conditioning of matter and of the body. The bond between the spiritual and the physical is tied more strongly than by necessity. It is tied by a will founded on love.

The more one considers the multitude, the greater part these conditionings play. The social encyclicals, following the doctors, endlessly recall that as a general rule and for the great number, a minimum of physical development, of health, security and material ease is essential to the exercise of a Christian life. Cro-Magnon man could not receive the Christian message. That is why Christ did not come until 200,000 or 300,000 years after the creation. The true proletarian can with difficulty see the spiritual life project itself amid the privileges of culture to which he has no access.

But it is not only a question of minimal conditions. The discussion lies on the frontiers of the *vital* minimum, and the influence of the structures of the spiritual life goes far beyond that. One always speaks of the spiritual as if the material universe did not fill History with its presence, and of the Church as if it were fully realized and radically separated from the world and from time. Altogether different is our condition: "We are not the sons of God, and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be." In step with humanity the Church is between the *already known* and the *yet awaited* joined to the *still to come*, and only this dialectic defines its true position in history.² This *still to come* notably allows for the progressive expression in matter and in the history of civilizations of truths attained by the act of faith. Since in this world we do not see them face to face, but in a mirror and across the enigma of these expressions, how could the most intimate destiny of the life of faith not be bound to them? There are in history, according to the bold expressions of Father Chenu, "historic accidents of grace."³ Perhaps history has also known through our fault or through bad guesses some true historic mischances. It is an historic commonplace that the march of the legions prepared the path for St. Paul. The map of penetration of the great religions covers again that of the diffusion of epidemics. The roads are the same for microbes and for the word of God, the carrier is the same. The lassitude of an agitated and wandering population at the end of the Empire inspired the Benedictine vow of stability and favored the impetus of that order. The rapid growth of the feudal organism, into which the Church might easily have inserted herself, failed to stifle the Church under the laic power of the ninth century, and Gregory the Great detached her from the established order to return her spiritual liberty to her. It was the birth of the new communal society, the displacement toward the cities, the agitation of populations by a commerce threatening the old feudal stability, which provoked the rise of the great mendicant orders in the thirteenth century. The attraction of the riches of the Orient and the economic crisis of feudalism were not strangers to the impulse of the Crusades. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, in the reforms of the Canons Regular toward interior piety, simplicity of life, open-hearted humanism, one may read the weariness of a society overwhelmed by the weight of scholastic cavilling and of a monastic order corroded with formalism. We could pile up examples indefinitely showing the way of bourgeois austerity in the Jansenist sect, or of commercial comfort in religious liberalism. Even today where the last remnants of feudal and peasant civilization still predominate, is the sociological basis of the Church without influence on the behavior of Christians? And

what of the massive absence of the world of the workers? Can we think that certain reconquests of the religious life are possible unless some aberrations are removed? "In History there is more than History" as Father Montuclard has justly said.⁴ There is an invisible regency of the Incarnate Word, perhaps a secret legality which forms a sort of natural revelation. It seems that profane history pays even less attention to Christianity than Christianity to her, and that like Christ it consents to undergo violence but not to exercise it. Therefore we must safeguard the discretion of Him whom we imitate, in our manner of proposing Him to the institutions of this world. But on the other hand we must watch closely this tight bond between the facts of civilization and the condition of the spiritual in which the witness of the faith can blockade himself and worse still be altered by all sorts of faithless aberrations.

HISTORY and civilization viewed in this perspective appear to us no longer as realities foreign to the Kingdom of God. To cut one off from the other is to cause the Kingdom to pass into the pure irrational and to renounce the interior unity of the Christian vision. And so certain Christians, unwilling to accept their inability to assimilate history, prefer to give it a catastrophic essence and to be pleased by this. It is a little as if they found it unworthy of the transcendence of Christ that He had a body wholesome in itself and pleasant to view, and thought that it could affirm itself only in deformed limbs. History and civilizations are as a collective sacrament of the Kingdom of God. That means that they are in our dispensation necessary mediators. And sometimes, when Christian society has not fully communicated to them the wholeness of its message, they effect a true substitution for it, just as bread without salt or leaven replaces the living God. Or rather, the unleavened bread, without manifesting His full significance, becomes the living God received in His silence and His humility. It is only at the summit of that sacramental reality of civilizations that our subject finds its full significance. Perhaps we other Occidentals, nurtured in a civilization of the word, are too exclusively sensitive to the word which reduces to a formula, and not enough to the word which dances in the imagination. *Verbum Dei* but also *Gesta Dei* and *Corpus Dei*. Civilizations too, unconsecrated, are only a fragile crust. Even then a sort of reverential fear prevents us from taking them too lightly, for they have the form of that which was made to be consecrated.

Translated by ERWIN W. GEISSMAN

¹ Yves Congar, "Conditions d'un vrai renouvellement," *Jeunesse de l'Eglise*, Cahier 8.

² Yves Congar, "Sacerdoce et laïcat dans l'Eglise," *Monde Ouvrier*, December 1946.

³ M. Chenu, "Réformes de structure en Chrétienté," *Economie et Humanisme*, March-April 1946.

⁴ H. Montuclard, "Délivrance de l'homme," *Jeunesse de l'Eglise*, Cahier 7.

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