

CHAPTER ONE

The Christian in the World

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As we begin these studies, it seems needful to start from a few biblical truths that are well known by everyone, yet never entirely useless to recall.

Scripture tells us that Christians are in the world and that there they should remain. Christians are not meant to be separate or to set themselves apart. Such separation is for God to effect at the end of time, when he will gather the wheat and discard the chaff¹; it is never for human beings to decide their own election. Similarly, Christians ought not to live as a group, associating among themselves and ultimately refusing to associate with others. Christian gatherings should never be exclusive. Yet if Christians are thus necessarily in the world, they are not of it. This means that their mind, life, and heart are not ruled by the world and do not depend on it. They belong to another master. As Christians belong in this way to him, this master sends them out into the world while still keeping them in communion with him.²

But this communion with Jesus Christ entails very serious consequences. First, it brings Christians face to face with the world's spiritual

1. Matt 3:12; Luke 3:17.

2. John 17:11–18.

reality, not its material might. Because they are in communion with Jesus Christ, they struggle not against flesh and blood but against “thrones, powers, dominations.” This communion also assures them that they do not belong to the world. They are free from the fate of the world, which is heading toward death. With this freedom that comes through grace, they *are able* to struggle against the world’s spiritual realities. To be precise, they are called to destroy the fate that oppresses the world, and they are able to destroy it. God’s grace provides them with the arms they need (Eph 6:10–20).

If all this is the case, what then is the Christian’s role? It is too easy to reply: to witness, evangelize, lead a Christian life, or act according to God’s will. All that is true, but as long as it is not seriously understood and remains merely a traditional formulation, it does not lead us to the truth of anything. In fact, Scripture itself shows us how to make the Christian’s role more real and how to understand in a concrete way its situation and activity.

Christians must not act like just anyone. They have a role in the world that no one else can fill. They are not called on to select the human activities that they consider good and then participate in them. They are not called on to bless any natural enterprise or support any human decision. They are charged with a mission that is unknown to people in their natural condition.³ This mission is what is ultimately decisive for all human action. From this mission all the truth or error of their actions derives.

If Christians work with all their might for a human project, they are only human beings like others and their effort has no added value. But if they accept their specific function as Christians, which does not necessarily involve participating in the world in material or measurable ways, then this is decisive for human history.

God has not sent them for any other reason than to carry out this function that is entirely different from the others. The world cannot understand it, yet the meaning of all other functions depends on this one. Scripture describes it in three ways:

You are the salt of the earth.
You are the light of the world.
*I send you out as sheep among wolves.*⁴

To be the salt of the earth refers specifically to Leviticus 2:13, where we are told that salt is the sign of the covenant. This means that Christians

3. *L’homme naturel*, the natural man. See 1 Cor 2:14.

4. Matt 5:13–14; 10:16; Luke 10:3.

stand before humankind, within the world's spiritual reality, as the visible sign of the new covenant that God has made with this world in Jesus Christ. Christians must be a true sign, however: their life and words must manifest this covenant to humankind. Otherwise the earth feels itself bereft of covenant. It no longer knows where it is headed and lacks any possible self-understanding or certainty as to its preservation. This fact of being the salt of the earth is the primary way by which Christians are involved in the world's preservation, much more than by any material activity.

To be the light of the world: the light appeared in the darkness, but the darkness did not overcome it.⁵ Christians are this light in Christ. The statement has a twofold meaning. First, light is what dispels darkness, separates life from death, and provides the criterion of goodness (this is why in the biblical text a reference to good works directly follows this sentence). Apart from this light, we cannot strictly know what is a good work or the good in itself.

In another sense, this light of the world is what gives meaning to the world's history, what orients and explains it. As a mere sequence of events, the course of history reveals no logic or certainty. The logic emerges through the church's presence, as odd as this may seem. This is why Christians, by being light, are a factor in the world's life. In addition to their work of preserving the world, Christians are instruments of revelation and bear witness to salvation.

As sheep among wolves: here again Christians are the sign of the reality of God's action. The lamb of God is Jesus Christ, who takes away the sins of the world.⁶ But all Christians are treated as their master is, and all Christians receive from Jesus Christ a share in his work. They are sheep not because their action or sacrifice has a purifying effect on the world, but because in the world's midst they are the true, living, and ever renewed sign of the sacrifice of the lamb of God. In the world, everyone seeks to be a wolf; no one is assigned to play the sheep's role. Yet the world cannot survive if no one bears living witness to this sacrifice. This is why it is essential for Christians to guard against being wolves *spiritually*, that is, spiritual dominators. Christians must accept others' domination over them and daily sacrifice their lives, reflecting in this way the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

These biblical expressions should not be understood as similes or special terms to use when speaking of Christians. They are not figures of

5. John 1:5.

6. John 1:29.

speech or pretty pictures. We are much too inclined to see only fine phrases and poetry. Nor are they a sort of accident that can happen to Christians, a possibility; we speak too easily as though Christians happen to have this quality but could have others.

Instead, these biblical expressions convey a stark and unavoidable reality. Jesus Christ brings us face to face with the Christian's particular function—and we can have no other. Christians cannot be otherwise, they do not have the choice. If they are not like this, they are not fulfilling their role and are betraying Jesus Christ and the world also. Christians can always strive to do good works and exhaust themselves in religious or social activity, but this will signify absolutely nothing if they do not accomplish the one mission that Jesus Christ charges them with specifically—to be, first, a sign.

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This is the situation of all Christians. It is most acute for the laity, however, because for them in particular there is no separation from the world. They can have no illusions on this score. In the first place, they participate in the world through their work and concerns. The world constantly assails their very being. Claiming to be separate becomes more and more difficult, as each person is forced into a world that becomes more intrusive, crushing, and demanding than ever. Our occupations alone are enough today to absorb all of our resources. Each of us is drowning in overwhelming activity, leaving us no time to reflect, carry out our function as a Christian, or even live.

And just as laypeople are not free to lead their lives as they wish, they are also subject to a mechanical solidarity that entirely prevents them from making even a pretense of faith.⁷ Whether they wish to or not, they are obliged to live like others—much more so, materially speaking, today than

7. The French noun *solidarité* may refer to joining with others in movements for political or social change (the typical meaning of *solidarity* in English), but it also refers more generally to social ties, mutual responsibility, and interdependence. Given its wide range of meaning, the word is expressed variously throughout this translation. As concerns *mechanical solidarity*, in his *De la division du travail social* (On the Division of Work in Society), the sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) described *solidarité mécanique* as the social cohesion or conformity that arises from a shared way of life, and he described *solidarité organique* as that which arises in modern societies from functional complementarity and specialization.

in previous civilizations. Isolation or separation is no longer possible. The illusion has vanished that the Christian life [can be lived] within a convent or hermitage. Whether due to the simple material fact of modern transportation systems, the interconnection of economic institutions, or the rise of democracy—in any case, influences are at work to constrain people in this conformity.

Thus Christians cannot consider themselves pure in comparison with others or declare themselves unaffected by the world's sin. A major fact of our civilization is that sin is becoming more and more collective, and each individual person is constrained to participate in it. Each one bears the consequences of others' transgressions. This is particularly true in war, for example, but it is the same in all other social situations. The illusion is passing away that one can be "perfect" in the midst of a lost world.

People today can no longer have confidence in the virtues of individuals, in their goodness or energy, precisely because they no longer face individual sins but the state of human sin as a whole. This ancient biblical truth is now striking to all. Our society irrefutably manifests God's revelation of our sin. There is no one righteous, no, not one (Rom 3:10). This is not because each person as an individual is wicked, but because all things are confined under sin (Gal 3:22). This mutual relation in sin extends across space and time, linking us with those who have died in their sin, back to original sin itself. What our contemporary world teaches us is that this doctrine is not an idea or an academic discussion but the recognition of a reality that is as concrete as each person's complicity in modern warfare.

This situation is unpleasant for Christians. Priests or pastors feel it less directly, but the laity cannot escape from it. They do all they can to escape, however, and we find two ways in which this is attempted. Some try to separate the spiritual situation from the material. By divesting the material situation of significance, they declare it to be neutral and irrelevant to eternal life. They then fix their attention on "spiritual problems" alone. What counts, they say, is the inner life: to be salt or light is a purely spiritual affirmation with no practical consequences.

This attitude is just what Jesus Christ calls hypocrisy. It means that we give up living out our faith within the world. It means that we turn the living person of Jesus Christ into an abstraction. God became incarnate; it is not our job to disincarnate him. This division of our lives into two domains—one spiritual, in which we are perfect, and the other material (without importance!), in which we are "like everyone else"—is one of the

reasons why the churches' influence in the world is waning. This flight from the responsibility of faith is of course a convenient solution for the intolerable situation that our society places us in. But it is just the opposite of what Jesus Christ wants for us and what he came to accomplish.

Another solution, more common today, consists in wanting to moralize or Christianize the world's activity. If the state were Christian, how agreeable it would be to rely on it. Let us therefore create a Christian state—and so on. . . . It is a case here of having a sort of “Christian notion” of things, having good institutions and moral standards, identifying the good in each thing, and applying this coating over our world's situation. Daub the devil in guilt, dress him up in white; perhaps he will become an angel. Such is the whitewash that all Christian moralities, sociologies, and politics, even Social Christianity, offer us as the solution.⁸ They try to tinge the world's activities and conditions with a Christian hue, either by using a convenient theology to explain and justify them, or by pronouncing a blessing over them, or by seeking to apply Christian remedies and virtues.

In short, in each case we try to make acceptable the situation that the world puts us in. In the same way that we try to demonstrate that we can be a soldier or a banker *and* a Christian, we perform good works in order to acquit ourselves of social disorder and human misery. By all these means, we try to reach the point where the world's condition does not offend Christian “conscience” *too* deeply. In reality, what we want is to construct a bridge between the world and the kingdom of God, where Christians could then locate themselves permanently. Clearly, this bridge is morality, along with good works and a good conscience.

But this attempt to end the scandal that the world must be for faith, and that faith must be for the world, turns out to be the most anti-Christian position possible. In the study that follows, we will examine exactly how Christians are implicated, what their situation is, in the face of some of the profound problems that the world presents. But we will also see how in fact there is no possible solution, understood in terms of relief or satisfaction.

8. *Christianisme social*, a French religious movement that arose in the nineteenth century, seeking to improve social conditions. A similar movement in the United States is the social gospel of Washington Gladden (1836–1918) and Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918). Ellul resists any tendency to reduce the Christian faith to a this-worldly formula for social reform. (DG)

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From what angle then should the question be considered? Our task here is not to say anything at all novel but simply to rediscover what has always been a perfectly well-known Christian truth—one that Christians always strive to forget, because it is very embarrassing, even intolerable. The first element of this situation is precisely that it is not a matter of attenuating the opposition between Christian faith, what revelation requires, and life in the world with its own demands, faults, and compromises.

The fact of living in the world, which we must not evade, is a scandal for our faith. It must be and remain a scandal. We have no right to accustom ourselves to this world or spread a veil of Christian illusion over it. By living in the world, we live in the domain of Satan, the prince of this world.⁹ What we see all around us is this prince's constant activity and the consequences of the sinful condition affecting each one of us. For despite all our efforts and piety, we participate in the world's sin. We participate because, despite our faith, we are and remain sinners (*semper peccator et justus*¹⁰) and also because we are linked with others in the communities that God has instituted. When a member of my family or nation commits a sin, I am responsible before God for this transgression. This truth must not remain just a verbal one.

We need to understand what this participation in the world actually means. To do so we must consider not only our individual sin but also our sin that comes from living in the world and being implicated in it. We must stop believing therefore that our virtues can offset our sins. We must stop believing that an accommodation with the world is possible, such that humankind could be less wicked, if not less unhappy, living in it. At the same time, if we take seriously our situation as Christians, we must refuse to reconcile ourselves to the world's corruption. We must not tell ourselves that we can do nothing about it. To speak in this way . . . is to play into the hands of the prince of this world!

9. Through his writings, Ellul freely refers to this mysterious but powerful enemy of freedom and humanity. He distinguishes Satan, the Accuser, from the devil, the Divider. "The Satan is only the composite, the synthesis, the sum total of all the accusations brought by people against other people in the world. There is no 'spirit' independent of a person that would 'inspire' him to bring this accusation. It wells up from man's heart all by itself." Ellul, *If You Are the Son of God*, 8–9. (DG)

10. Latin for *always sinner and justified*. A reference to Martin Luther's commentary on Rom 12:2. For the English, see *Luther's Works*, 25:434 (Saint Louis, 1972). For the original Latin, see *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 56:442 (Weimar, 1938, reprinted 2007).

Thus we are caught between two necessities that form an unresolvable tension. On the one hand, we cannot make this world less sinful; on the other, we cannot accept it as it is. To reject either side is to reject the actual situation in which God has placed those whom he sends into the world. Just as we are caught in the tension between sin and grace, so also are we caught between these two contradictory demands. It is an infinitely painful position, it is very uncomfortable, but it is the only one that can be fruitful and faithful for the Christian's action and presence in the world.

This tension must first be accepted and then lived out continuously. We must accept, in repentance, what is irreducibly scandalous about our life in the world, recognizing that it cannot be otherwise. To claim that it can be otherwise is hypocrisy! But to truly recognize our situation in the world assumes that we truly understand its problems. To be honest, we cannot accept this tension of the Christian life as an abstract truth. We have to live it, and bring it to life in the most concrete and vital way possible. And besides, Christians must understand that bringing this tension to life is the only real way to help the world on the social, economic, and political level.

In fields such as these, the world typically presents false problems. People in their natural condition are incapable on their own of seeing the spiritual reality within which they struggle. They see only what appear to be social, political, or economic problems, and they try to work within this appearance using technical means and moral criteria. In this way they end up in situations that are always more false and complicated, until what they have called their civilization reaches the point of collapse.

In such situations, the Christian's role will be precisely not to formulate the problems as others do, not to attempt futile technical and moral solutions, but to succeed in discovering the actual spiritual difficulties that any political or economic situation involves. As for the solution, it cannot be in any way based on calculation. It can be only a way of life and the acceptance of a forgiveness, for these sins too, granted in Christ Jesus. In other words, it is by living and receiving the gospel that political, economic, and other problems can be resolved. Only by accepting the tension described above can we respond to them in a human way that is not a lie or pretense.

Besides, the fact that the laity will accept this tension in their lives, and live it out to the full, is the necessary human condition for theology to find a voice by which to address the world. It is the true price to pay so that there can be contact between the language of faith and that of pagans. In reality, theologians today no longer have anything to say to the world because the

laity no longer exist in our churches. On the one side there is the pastor who does not understand the world's situation, and on the other there are laypeople who go about carefully keeping their faith separate from their life or trying to get by with a moral system. Theological truth has no point of encounter with the world.

To say this is not to doubt that the Holy Spirit, he alone, assuredly establishes the connection, but it is to recognize that in the entire course of God's action in history he uses a material medium, a human means, to act by his Spirit. This material medium is exactly what is lacking in our churches, and this is why the Word that has been proclaimed, the gospel, no longer affects the world. This medium is the laity living out the tension described above. They are the point of encounter between the world's ideologies, in the midst of which they live, and theology—between economic realities and Jesus Christ's forgiveness for these realities that absolutely cannot be "improved" in some other way before God. It could almost be said that the lay Christian's experience is the ground for the theologian's human understanding.

Laypeople are not "guinea pigs," however. When they live out this tension each day of their lives, their very presence leads the church to recognize the value and truth of the world's distress and leads the world to recognize its true problems beneath the lies that it strives to perpetuate so that it does not hear the Word of God. Thus the position of the layperson's life is essential for the church and for the world. It would be best therefore not to distort it.

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But this does not exhaust the real problem of Christians' situation in the world. They must try to live out what it means in daily life to be "salt of the earth," "light of the world," "sheep among wolves." This must not remain a set of formulas but take on a living and concrete shape. It must become a fact of life.

This is in fact the problem of Christian ethics that is being raised, ethics that has nothing to do with morality, generally so called, and even less to do with "Christian" virtues as traditionally understood.¹¹ It is clear that

11. The Christian virtues, or positive traits of character, have typically been understood as dispositions, inclinations, capabilities, and habits that are given, even "infused," by God. Besides Jesus' beatitudes in Matt 5 and the fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5, Paul's

Christian ethics cannot be known by applying theological judgments or intellectual constructs, even when they are based in revelation and faith. At the center of Christian ethics is a battle of individual faith before God, a living attitude that is held according to each person's measure of faith and as a result of faith. It is never a set of rules, formulas, or watchwords, and all Christians are in fact responsible for their works and conscience. So we can never draw up a description of God's ethical demand that is complete and valid for everyone, any more than we can reach its center. We can only trace its outline and conditions and study its basic elements by way of examples.¹²

At the center, in fact, lies this idea that Christian ethics rests on an agonistic structure of life, meaning that the Christian life is a continual struggle, a decisive and ultimate fight. This is nothing else than the constant and actual presence in our hearts of both judgment and grace. Yet this fact is precisely what assures our freedom. We are free because at each moment of our lives we are under both judgment and grace—and thus we are placed in a new situation, one that has no predetermined program or satanic fetters. To go further belongs to the theologian, but this much is enough to show us that the whole Christian attitude has a direct relation to God's action in Jesus Christ.

The two primary characteristics of this ethics, it seems to me, are that it must be temporary, and that it is apologetic. *Temporary*, because it concerns specific, variable situations. Ethics is not a matter of formulating principles but of knowing how to evaluate an action in particular circumstances. This means that we do not have to confine ourselves to unvarying moral concepts. Scripture teaches us that ethics does vary in its form and practical applications according to place and situation. This may be surprising after

“faith, hope, and love” in 1 Cor 13 are understood as the core Christian virtues. Ellul objects to viewing them as acquired, stable conditions. His view is more existential: hope and faith are more accurately *stances* that we take on, before God and in this moment. In response, God gives us freedom and holiness. (DG)

12. Ellul's introduction to ethics is *To Will and To Do*, in which he develops a stark contrast between the “moralities” (theoretical and actual) of the world and the existentialist Christian ethics of the Word. He explores hope in *Hope in Time of Abandonment* and in *The Ethics of Freedom*, which corresponds to hope. Ellul then explores faith in *Living Faith*. He drafted a thousand pages on the ethics of holiness as a response to faith, which has not yet been edited or published. Faith binds us to Christ, and this separates us from the world and makes us holy and distinctive. Ellul wrote several essays on love, the third virtue, but not a full-length study. He did not write his ethics of relationship, which corresponds to love in his schema. This was the ethics project that he announced and that he believed to be essential for both the church and the world. (DG)

what I said above about the center of ethics. One might conclude that no givens or structures exist, that ethics consists simply in letting Christians act according to their faith. In fact this is not the case. Faith has implications that can be objectively elaborated. To say the contrary is to engage in angelism—to believe that we are already in the kingdom of God and that our flesh no longer offers any resistance to the action of the Spirit. Instead, we are still in this “body of death.”¹³

Constructing a Christian ethic is necessary, first, because it is a guide, a pointer given to faith, a true help to brothers and sisters. It also enables us to provide real, practical content to the judgment that God passes on us. And finally, it is needed for the edification of the church. But such elaboration must not substitute for the combat of faith within each Christian. This is why it is a guide and not a requirement. We should not view this ethics as providing the permanent solution to all problems. It must be in essence temporary and continually subject to question, review, and reformulation through the efforts of the whole church community.

Ethics is, next, necessarily *apologetic*. But this should not be understood in the usual sense of defending and explaining Christian truth, that is, as an intellectual exercise. Apologetics, which actually cannot be carried out by human beings, is described in Matthew 5:16: “Let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father.” In other words, works done by virtue of or as a result of ethics should appear in the light of Jesus Christ as true good works. The world is incapable of recognizing these good works on its own; it can do so only when enlightened in this way. Our works should flow so directly from the action of Jesus Christ in us that Christ’s action illuminates our works for the world.

This implies that we ought not to take the world’s judgment as our reference point in determining what we should do. Instead, our works are what should elicit such judgment. And these works should lead people to give praise to God. In this way they have an apologetic character. Our whole ethics is meaningless if it is not oriented toward this combat with the world that should result in the glory of God. Ethics as the church constructs it should thus be a precise expression of the tension that is each Christian’s situation. It is the picture of this combat, and the purpose of ethics is to direct this combat toward God’s glorification. Thus we see that ethics is inseparable from the preaching of the Word, because Christians’ actual

13. Rom 7:24.

behavior truly destroys the work of Satan and contributes to the edification of the body of Christ in the world.

But in closing, we must return to this idea that ethics is not a means of resolving Christian tension. It is not a formula for how to live uprightly. It is not a synthesis of Christian faith and the world's values. It is not an ability given to Christians for living without the Holy Spirit. It is exactly the opposite of all these.

This problem of ethics does not encompass Christians' entire situation in the world. In short, it is concerned only with describing their action. This action is however only one factor that comes between the "situation"¹⁴ (the tension to be accepted, as we have seen above) and involvement in the world's preservation, which is a fruit of the application of ethics.

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Christians must participate in the world's preservation. They really must work toward it. But again we must try to dispel serious misunderstanding on this subject. When we speak of the world's preservation, we immediately envision involvement in the activities that the world considers best for itself. The world chooses its paths and determines its plan of action for resolving its problems. It is often thought that Christians, to help preserve the world, should make efforts along these lines.

Thus when we were appalled by Hitler's diabolical program, the crusade was preached.¹⁵ The world took up arms, and Christians took up these same arms and fought against this demonic power just as others did. In the same way today, when the problem of reconstruction¹⁶ has arisen, many Christians, even the best ones, advocate this same reconstruction and urge people along the path that the world has chosen. They say that the United Nations is an admirable institution and the way of the future, that what matters most is producing material goods, and that prefabricated housing is the solution for everything. I have even seen in a very Christian (Catholic) magazine that "the washing machine could be a means of France's salvation!"

The confusion here seems to me serious and weighty. Christians participate truly in the world's preservation not by acting like others and

14. *La "mise en situation,"* the state of being in a situation, setting, or context.

15. That is, people spoke out forcefully about resisting Hitler.

16. The effort of recovery and rebuilding after World War II.

laboring at the world's technical tasks but by fulfilling their specific role as described above. This does not mean that technical work should not be done, or that it is useless. No, the point is that everyone does this kind of work, and it has no meaning if it is not guided, accompanied, and sustained by another work, one that Christians alone can do and yet often do not. For the world must be preserved by the ways of God and not by the technique of human beings (although technique can enter into the ways of God if we take care to hold it under judgment and submission).¹⁷ And the world must be preserved according to a certain order willed by God and not by the plan that human beings create from this order (although such a plan can be acceptable to God if we concern ourselves with a certain truth, an authentic justice).

This is why, in facing up to Hitler, if it is true that he represented a satanic power, there was *first* a spiritual battle to wage. Prayer is what should have been decisive, but we no longer have confidence in the extraordinary power of prayer! Prayer was the exorcism that drives out demons by the Holy Spirit, the armor of faith. It is quite possible that if Christians had truly acted according to these means, while everyone else was thinking of material warfare (which was *also* necessary) or simply of blessing the guns, the result would not have been this horrifying triumph of the Hitlerian spirit that we see now throughout the world.

The world today is reaping what Christians have sown. In the face of spiritual peril, Christians called "to arms!" and fought materially. Materially triumphant, we are spiritually vanquished. Only Christians could have waged spiritual battle, but they did not do so. They did not fulfill their role in the preservation of the world.

And today we are witnessing the same error with reconstruction. Christians and churches have first to do a spiritual kind of work, a work of realizing the world's true situation, seeking after and preaching the order of God, Christian reconstruction, and the formation of a civilization that is on the right level for human beings. This is a work precisely within the real possibility of the church. Everything else is futile if that is not accomplished. Everything else can lead only to more disorder.

It seems to me that this participation, which is both real and specific for the world's preservation, can lead to the idea of redeeming the time. If

17. Ellul's most famous book is *The Technological Society*. Technique, the root of technology, refers to rational, scientific, measurable methods of doing something in the most efficient way possible. See chapter three, below, on ends and means. (DG)

we put the two texts of Colossians 4:5 and Ephesians 5:15 side by side, we see that they are constructed in the very same fashion and the progression of Paul's thought is clear:

Colossians 4:5–6

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside.

Redeem the time.

Let your speech always be accompanied by grace, seasoned with salt.

Ephesians 5:15–17

See that you walk circumspectly, as the wise.

Redeem the time.

Understand what the will of the Lord is.

Even without trying to enter further into the problem of redeeming the time, the idea of time as enslaved and needing redemption to be set free, we need only observe that what we have here is a remarkably vital indication for studying the Christian's situation in the world. This indication seems to lie at the very center of this problem, because it is placed, one could say, at the pivot point between conduct (thus the question of ethics) and preaching—between good works, which are the fruit of wisdom, and the knowledge of God's will. So we cannot avoid considering this idea of redeeming the time, for the very reason that it is presented *on the level of the Christian's situation* (and not in its theological aspect), at the center of the Christian life, as being the particular and decisive Christian function that encompasses all that we have said to this point. In any case, these texts show us that there can be no separation between preaching and behavior. To redeem the time is both a work of preservation (and this is indeed the work of authentic preservation) and a work of salvation, because no more separation exists here. This situation of Christians in the world appears then as singularly charged with meaning, if we consider that it is on their behavior and preaching (or simply on their witness) that the redemption of time depends.

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One aspect remains to be considered as we broach the concrete nature of this situation. To participate truly in this preservation of the world, Christians must place themselves at the meeting point between two currents: the Lord's will, and that of the world.

The will of the Lord, appearing as both judgment and forgiveness, law and grace, commandment and promise, is revealed to us in Scripture,

illuminated by the Spirit of God. It has to be explicated in the present time, but it does not vary. This revelation gives us the conditions in which the world can exist, that is, in which its preservation is in fact possible. But this preservation is absolutely unrealizable in itself. Even if we bring together all of the logical, physical, political, and economic conditions, even if we bring into being these conditions that God lays out, it counts for nothing if we do not work for this preservation with salvation in mind. For God is not preserving the world on the one hand and saving it on the other. He is preserving it *by* saving it, and he is saving it by using this preservation.¹⁸ The will to preservation and the order of preservation are the same as the will to salvation and the proclamation of the gospel. But this must become incarnate in a real world, and our actions as well as our words must be oriented to the world's present situation, without allowing this situation to change either the content or the unity of this will of God.

The world's will is always a will to death, a will to suicide. This suicide cannot be accepted, and we must act precisely so that it does not occur. We need to know therefore what the present form of the world's will to suicide is, in order to oppose it, to know how and where to direct our efforts. The world is not capable of preserving itself or of finding solutions to its spiritual situation (which governs everything else). The world carries the weight of sin and is the domain of Satan, who is leading it away from God and thus toward death. This is all that it can do. It is not our job then to build the city of God, to raise up an order of God within this world while remaining unconcerned with its tendencies and suicide. Our job is to place ourselves at the very point where this will to suicide is active, in its present form, and see how God's will to preservation can operate there in the given situation. If we do not wish to be completely theoretical, we are thus obliged to understand what our world's mortal tendency is, in depth and in its spiritual reality. This is where we need to apply our effort (and not on the false problems that the world presents, or on an ill-considered application of an order of God that has become abstract). And if we act in this way, we understand that the work of preaching necessarily goes along with the work of material redemption.¹⁹

18. *Il le conserve en le sauvant. Et il le sauve en utilisant cette conservation.* In sentence constructions such as these, the French preposition *en* may be translated into English as *by*, *in*, *on*, or *while*. The meaning of *by* seems the most likely here.

19. *Sauvetage*, salvage or rescue.

And so, it is by placing ourselves always at this point of encounter that we Christians can be truly present in the world and perform effective social or political work, by God's grace.

In the chapters that follow, we will attempt to inquire into some of the contemporary manifestations of this will to death, and the Christian's attitude in the face of these realities.

SAMPLE