

Simone
Weil

Gravity and Grace

First complete English language edition

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LOVE

Love is a sign of our wretchedness. God can only love himself. We can only love something else.

God's love for us is not the reason for which we should love him. God's love for us is the reason for us to love ourselves. How could we love ourselves without this motive?

It is impossible for man to love himself except in this roundabout way.

If my eyes are blindfolded and if my hands are chained to a stick, this stick separates me from things but I can explore them by means of it. It is only the stick which I feel, it is only the wall which I perceive. It is the same with creatures and the faculty of love. Supernatural love touches only creatures and goes only to God. It is only creatures which it loves (what else have we to love?), but it loves them as intermediaries. For this reason it loves all creatures equally, itself included. To love a stranger as oneself implies the reverse: to love oneself as a stranger.

Love of God is pure when joy and suffering inspire an equal degree of gratitude.

Love on the part of someone who is happy is the wish to share the suffering of the beloved who is unhappy.

Love on the part of someone who is unhappy is to be filled with joy by the mere knowledge that his beloved is happy without sharing in this happiness or even wishing to do so.

In Plato's eyes, carnal love is a degraded image of true love. Chaste human love (conjugal fidelity) is a less degraded image of it. Only in the stupidity of the present day could the idea of sublimation arise.

The Love of Phaedrus. He neither exercises force nor submits to it. That constitutes the only purity. Contact with the sword causes the same defilement whether it be through the handle or the point. For him who loves, its metallic coldness will not destroy love, but will give the impression of being abandoned by God. Supernatural love has no contact with force, but at the same time it does not protect the soul against the coldness of force, the coldness of steel. Only an earthly attachment, if it has in it enough energy, can afford protection from the coldness of steel. Armour, like the sword, is made of metal. Murder freezes the soul of the man who loves only with a pure love, whether he be the author or the victim, so likewise does everything which, without going so far as actual death, constitutes violence. If we want to have a love which will protect the soul from wounds, we must love something other than God.

Love tends to go ever further and further, but there is a limit. When the limit is passed love turns to hate. To avoid this change love has to become different.

Among human beings, only the existence of those we love is fully recognized.

Belief in the existence of other human beings as such is love.

The mind, is not forced to believe in the existence of anything (subjectivism, absolute idealism, solipsism, scepticism: c.f. the Upanishads, the Taoists and Plato, who, all of them, adopt this philosophical attitude by way of purification). That is why the only organ of contact with existence is acceptance, love. That is why beauty and reality are identical. That is why joy and the sense of reality are identical.

This need to be the creator of what we love is a need to imitate God. But the divinity towards which it tends is false, unless we have recourse to the model seen from the other, the heavenly side. . . .

Pure love of creatures is not love in God, but love which has passed through God as through fire. Love which detaches itself completely from creatures to ascend to God and comes down again associated with the creative love of God.

Thus the two opposities which rend human love are united: to love the beloved being just as he is, and to want to recreate him.

Imaginary love of creatures. We are attached by a cord to all the objects of attachment, and a cord can always be cut. We are also attached by a cord to the imaginary God, the God for whom love is also an attachment. But to the real God we are not attached and that is why there is no cord which can be cut. He enters into us. He alone can enter into us. All other things remain outside and our knowledge of them is confined to the tensions of varying degree and direction which affect

the cord when there is a change of position on their part or on ours.

Love needs reality. What is more terrible than the discovery that through a bodily appearance we have been loving an imaginary being. It is much more terrible than death, for death does not prevent the beloved from having lived.

That is the punishment for having fed love on imagination.

It is an act of cowardice to seek from (or to wish to give) the people we love any other consolation than that which works of art give us. These help us through the mere fact that they exist. To love and to be loved only serves mutually to render this existence more concrete, more constantly present to the mind. But it should be present as the source of our thoughts, not as their object. If there are grounds for wishing to be understood, it is not for ourselves but for the other, in order that we may exist for him.

Everything which is vile or second-rate in us revolts against purity and needs, in order to save its own life, to soil this purity.

To soil is to modify, it is to touch. The beautiful is that which we cannot wish to change. To assume power over is to soil. To possess is to soil.

To love purely is to consent to distance, it is to adore the distance between ourselves and that which we love.

The imagination is always united with a desire, that is to say a value. Only desire without an object is empty of imagination. There is the real presence of God in everything which imagination does not veil. The beautiful takes our desire captive and empties it of its object, giving it an object which is present and thus forbidding it to fly off towards the future.

Such is the price of chaste love. Every desire for enjoyment

belongs to the future and the world of illusion, whereas if we desire only that a being should exist, he exists: what more is there to desire? The beloved being is then naked and real, not veiled by an imaginary future. The miser never looks at his treasure without imagining it n times larger. It is necessary to be dead in order to see things in their nakedness.

Thus in love there is chastity or the lack of chastity according to whether the desire is or is not directed towards the future.

In this sense, and on condition that it is not turned towards a pseudo-immortality conceived on the model of the future, the love we devote to the dead is perfectly pure. For it is the desire for a life which is finished, which can no longer give anything new. We desire that the dead man should have existed, and he has existed.

Wherever the spirit ceases to be a principle it also ceases to be an end. Hence the close connexion between collective 'thought' under all its forms and the loss of the sense of and respect for souls. The soul is the human being considered as having a value in itself. To love the soul of a woman is not to think of her as serving one's own pleasure, etc. Love no longer knows how to contemplate, it wants to possess (disappearance of Platonic love).¹

It is a fault to wish to be understood before we have made ourselves clear to ourselves. It is to seek pleasures in friendship and pleasures which are not deserved. It is something which corrupts even more than love. You would sell your soul for friendship.

Learn to thrust friendship aside, or rather the dream of friend-

¹ Here 'Platonic' love has nothing to do with what today goes by the same name. It does not proceed from the imagination but from the soul. It is purely spiritual contemplation. Cf. later, in the chapter on Beauty. [Editor's note.]

ship. To desire friendship is a great fault. Friendship should be a gratuitous joy like those afforded by art or life. We must refuse it so that we may be worthy to receive it; it is of the order of grace ('Depart from me, O Lord. . .'). It is one of those things which are added unto us. Every dream of friendship deserves to be shattered. It is not by chance that you have never been loved. . . . To wish to escape from solitude is cowardice. Friendship is not to be sought, not to be dreamed, not to be desired; it is to be exercised (it is a virtue). We must have done with all this impure and turbid border of sentiment. Schluss!

Or rather (for we must not prune too severely within ourselves), everything in friendship which does not pass into real exchanges should pass into considered thoughts. It serves no useful purpose to do without the inspiring virtue of friendship. What should be severely forbidden is to dream of its sentimental joys. That is corruption. Moreover it is as stupid as to dream about music or painting. Friendship cannot be separated from reality any more than the beautiful. It is a miracle, like the beautiful. And the miracle consists simply in the fact that it exists. At the age of twenty-five, it is high time to have done with adolescence once and for all. . . .

Do not allow yourself to be imprisoned by any affection. Keep your solitude. The day, if it ever comes, when you are given true affection there will be no opposition between interior solitude and friendship, quite the reverse. It is even by this infallible sign that you will recognize it. Other affections have to be severely disciplined.

The same words (e.g. a man says to his wife: 'I love you') can be commonplace or extraordinary according to the manner in which they are spoken. And this manner depends on the depth of the region in a man's being from which they proceed without the will being able to do anything. And by a marvellous

agreement they reach the same region in him who hears them. Thus the hearer can discern, if he has any power of discernment, what is the value of the words.

Benefaction is permissible precisely because it constitutes a humiliation still greater than pain, a still more intimate and undeniable proof of dependence. And gratitude is prescribed for the same reason, since therein lies the use to be made of the received benefit. The dependence, however, must be on fate and not on any particular human being. That is why the benefactor is under an obligation to keep himself entirely out of the benefaction. Moreover the gratitude must not in any degree constitute an attachment, for that is the gratitude proper to dogs.

Gratitude is first of all the business of him who helps, if the help is pure. It is only by virtue of reciprocity that it is due from him who is helped.

In order to feel true gratitude (the case of friendship being set aside), I have to think that it is not out of pity, sympathy or caprice that I am being treated well, it is not as a favour or privilege, nor as a natural result of temperament, but from a desire to do what justice demands. Accordingly he who treats me thus wishes that all who are in my situation may be treated in the same way by all who are in his own.

simone weil

WAITING
FOR GOD

TRANSLATED BY EMMA CRAUFURD

With an Introduction by Leslie A. Fiedler

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during the period of preparation. It is not necessarily the same one for the whole of this period.

It is probable that in most cases the period of preparation does not draw toward its end, the soul is not ready to receive the personal visit of its Master, unless it has in it all three indirect loves to a high degree.

The combination of these loves constitutes the love of God in the form best suited to the preparatory period, that is to say a veiled form.

They do not disappear when the love of God in the full sense of the word wells up in the soul; they become infinitely stronger and all loves taken together make only a single love.

The veiled form of love necessarily comes first however and often reigns alone in the soul for a very long time. Perhaps, with a great many people, it may continue to do so till death. Veiled love can reach a very high degree of purity and power.

At the moment when it touches the soul, each of the forms that such love may take has the virtue of a sacrament.

The Love of Our Neighbor

Christ made this clear enough with regard to the love of our neighbor. He said that he would one day thank his benefactors, saying to them: "I was anhungered and ye gave me meat." Who but Christ himself can be Christ's benefactor? How can a man give meat to Christ, if he is not raised at least for a moment to the state spoken of by Saint Paul, when he no longer lives in himself but Christ lives in him?

The text of the Gospel is concerned only with Christ's presence in the sufferer. Yet it seems as though the spiritual worthiness of him who receives has nothing to do with the matter. It must then be admitted that it is the benefactor himself, as a bearer of Christ, who causes Christ to enter the famished sufferer with the bread he gives him. The other can consent to receive this presence or not, exactly like the person who goes to communion. If the gift is rightly given and rightly received, the passing of a morsel of bread from one man to another is something like a real communion.

Christ does not call his benefactors loving or charitable. He calls them just. The Gospel makes no distinction between the love of our neighbor and justice. In the eyes of the Greeks also a respect for Zeus the suppliant was the first duty of justice. We have invented the distinction between justice and charity. It is easy to understand why. Our notion of justice dispenses him who possesses from the obligation of giving. If he gives all the same, he thinks he has a right to be pleased with himself. He thinks he has done a good work. As for him who receives, it depends on the way he interprets this notion whether he is exempted from all gratitude or whether it obliges him to offer servile thanks.

Only the absolute identification of justice and love makes the coexistence possible of compassion and gratitude on the one hand, and on the other, of respect for the dignity of affliction in the afflicted—a respect felt by the sufferer himself and the others.

It has to be recognized that no kindness can go further than justice without constituting a fault under a false appearance of kindness. But the just must be thanked for being just, because justice is so beautiful a thing, in the same way as we thank God because of his great glory. Any other gratitude is servile and even animal.

The only difference between the man who witnesses an act of justice and the man who receives a material advantage from it is that in such circumstances the beauty of justice is only a spectacle for the first, while for the second it is the object of a contact and even a kind of nourishment. Thus the feeling which is simple admiration in the first should be carried to a far higher degree in the second by the fire of gratitude.

To be ungrateful when we have been treated with justice, in circumstances where injustice is easily possible, is to deprive ourselves of the supernatural and sacramental virtue contained in every pure act of justice.

Nothing better enables us to form a conception of this virtue than the doctrine of natural justice as we find it set forth with an incomparable integrity of spirit in a few marvelous lines of Thucydides.

The Athenians, who were at war with Sparta, wanted to force the inhabitants of the little island of Melos, allied to Sparta from all antiquity and so far remaining neutral, to join with them. It was in vain that the men of Melos, faced with the ultimatum of the Athenians, invoked justice, imploring pity for the antiquity of their town. As they would not give in, the Athenians razed their city to the ground, put all their men to death, and sold all their women and children as slaves.

Thucydides has put the lines in question into the mouth of these Athenians. They begin by saying that they will not try to prove that their ultimatum is just.

“Let us treat rather of what is possible. . . . You know it as well as we do; the human spirit is so constituted that what is just is only examined if there is equal necessity on both sides. But if one is strong and the other weak, that which is possible is imposed by the first and accepted by the second.”

The men of Melos said that in the case of a battle they would have the gods with them on account of the justice of their cause. The Athenians replied that they saw no reason to suppose so.

“As touching the gods we have the belief, and as touching men the certainty, that always, by a necessity of nature, each one commands wherever he has the power. We did not establish this law, we are not the first to apply it; we found it already established, we abide by it as something likely to endure forever; and that is why we apply it. We know quite well that you also, like all the others, once you reached the same degree of power, would act in the same way.”

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

Possibility and necessity are terms opposed to justice in these lines. Possible means all that the strong can impose upon the weak.

It is reasonable to examine how far this possibility goes. Supposing it to be known, it is certain that the strong will accomplish his purpose to the extreme limit of possibility. It is a mechanical necessity. Otherwise it would be as though he willed and did not will simultaneously. There is a necessity for the strong as well as the weak in this.

When two human beings have to settle something and neither has the power to impose anything on the other, they have to come to an understanding. Then justice is consulted, for justice alone has the power to make two wills coincide. It is the image of that Love which in God unites the Father and Son, and which is the common thought of separate thinkers. But when there is a strong and a weak there is no need to unite their wills. There is only one will, that of the strong. The weak obeys. Everything happens just as it does when a man is handling matter. There are not two wills to be made to coincide. The man wills and the matter submits. The weak are like things. There is no difference between throwing a stone to get rid of a troublesome dog and saying to a slave: "Chase that dog away."

Beyond a certain degree of inequality in the relations of men of unequal strength, the weaker passes into the state of matter and loses his personality. The men of old used to say: "A man loses half his soul the day he becomes a slave."

The even balance, an image of equal relations of strength, was the symbol of justice from all antiquity, specially in Egypt. It may have had a religious purpose before being used for commerce. Its use in trade is the image of the mutual consent, the very essence of justice, which should be the rule in exchanges. The definition of justice as being made up of mutual consent, which is found in the legislation of Sparta, probably originated in the Aegeo-Cretan civilization.

The supernatural virtue of justice consists of behaving exactly as though there were equality when one is the stronger in an unequal relationship. Exactly, in every respect, including the slightest details of accent and attitude, for a detail may be enough to place the weaker party in the condition of matter, which on this occasion naturally be-

longs to him, just as the slightest shock causes water that has remained liquid below freezing point to solidify.

Supernatural virtue, for the inferior thus treated, consists in not believing that there really is equality of strength and in recognizing that his treatment is due solely to the generosity of the other party. That is what is called gratitude. For the inferior treated in a different way, the supernatural virtue of justice consists in understanding that the treatment he is undergoing, though on the one hand differing from justice, on the other is in conformity with necessity and the mechanism of human nature. He should avoid both submission and revolt.

He who treats as equals those who are far below him in strength really makes them a gift of the quality of human beings, of which fate had deprived them. As far as it is possible for a creature, he reproduces the original generosity of the Creator with regard to them.

This is the most Christian of virtues. It is also the virtue that the Egyptian Book of the Dead describes in words as sublime even as those of the Gospel. "I have never caused anyone to weep. I have never spoken with a haughty voice. I have never made anyone afraid. I have never been deaf to words of justice and truth."

Gratitude on the part of the unfortunate, when it is pure, is but a participation in this same virtue, for only he who is capable of it can recognize it. Others experience the results of it without any recognition.

Such virtue is identical with real, active faith in the true God. The Athenians of Thucydides thought that divinity, like humanity in its natural state, always carried its power of commanding to the extreme limit of possibility.

The true God is the God we think of as almighty, but as not exercising his power everywhere, for he is found only in the heavens or in secret here below.

Those of the Athenians who massacred the inhabitants of Melos had no longer any idea of such a God.

The first proof that they were in the wrong lies in the fact that, con-

rary to their assertion, it happens, although extremely rarely, that a man will forbear out of pure generosity to command where he has the power to do so. That which is possible for man is possible also for God.

The examples of this may be challenged, but it is certain that if in one or another example it can be proved that the sole motive is pure generosity, such generosity will be generally admired. All that man is capable of admiring is possible with God.

The spectacle of this world is another, more certain proof. Pure goodness is not anywhere to be found in it. Either God is not almighty or he is not absolutely good, or else he does not command everywhere where he has the power to do so.

Thus the existence of evil here below, far from disproving the reality of God, is the very thing that reveals him in his truth.

On God's part creation is not an act of self-expansion but of restraint and renunciation. God and all his creatures are less than God alone. God accepted this diminution. He emptied a part of his being from himself. He had already emptied himself in this act of his divinity; that is why Saint John says that the Lamb had been slain from the beginning of the world. God permitted the existence of things distinct from himself and worth infinitely less than himself. By this creative act he denied himself, as Christ has told us to deny ourselves. God denied himself for our sakes in order to give us the possibility of denying ourselves for him. This response, this echo, which it is in our power to refuse, is the only possible justification for the folly of love of the creative act.

The religions which have a conception of this renunciation, this voluntary distance, this voluntary effacement of God, his apparent absence and his secret presence here below, these religions are true religion, the translation into different languages of the great Revelation. The religions which represent divinity as commanding wherever it has the power to do so seem false. Even though they are monotheistic they are idolatrous.

He who, being reduced by affliction to the state of an inert and pas-

sive thing, returns, at least for a time, to the state of a human being, through the generosity of others; such a one, if he knows how to accept and feel the true essence of this generosity, receives at the very instant a soul begotten exclusively of charity. He is born from on high of water and of the Spirit. (The word in the Gospel, *anōthen*, means from on high more often than again.) To treat our neighbor who is in affliction with love is something like baptizing him.

He from whom the act of generosity proceeds can only behave as he does if his thought transports him into the other. At such a moment he also consists only of water and of the Spirit.

Generosity and compassion are inseparable, and both have their model in God, that is to say, in creation and in the Passion.

Christ taught us that the supernatural love of our neighbor is the exchange of compassion and gratitude which happens in a flash between two beings, one possessing and the other deprived of human personality. One of the two is only a little piece of flesh, naked, inert, and bleeding beside a ditch; he is nameless; no one knows anything about him. Those who pass by this thing scarcely notice it, and a few minutes afterward do not even know that they saw it. Only one stops and turns his attention toward it. The actions that follow are just the automatic effect of this moment of attention. The attention is creative. But at the moment when it is engaged it is a renunciation. This is true, at least, if it is pure. The man accepts to be diminished by concentrating on an expenditure of energy, which will not extend his own power but will only give existence to a being other than himself, who will exist independently of him. Still more, to desire the existence of the other is to transport himself into him by sympathy, and, as a result, to have a share in the state of inert matter which is his.

Such an operation goes equally against the nature of a man who has not known affliction and is ignorant of its meaning, and a man who has known or had a foretaste of affliction and whom it fills with horror.

It is not surprising that a man who has bread should give a piece to

someone who is starving. What is surprising is that he should be capable of doing so with so different a gesture from that with which we buy an object. Almsgiving when it is not supernatural is like a sort of purchase. It buys the sufferer.

Whatever a man may want, in cases of crime as in those of the highest virtue, in the minutest preoccupations as in the greatest designs, the essence of his desire always consists in this, that he wants above all things to be able to exercise his will freely. To wish for the existence of this free consent in another, deprived of it by affliction, is to transport oneself into him; it is to consent to affliction oneself, that is to say to the destruction of oneself. It is to deny oneself. In denying oneself, one becomes capable under God of establishing someone else by a creative affirmation. One gives oneself in ransom for the other. It is a redemptive act.

The sympathy of the weak for the strong is natural, for the weak in putting himself into the place of the other acquires an imaginary strength. The sympathy of the strong for the weak, being in the opposite direction, is against nature.

That is why the sympathy of the weak for the strong is pure only if its sole object is the sympathy received from the other, when the other is truly generous. This is supernatural gratitude, which means gladness to be the recipient of supernatural compassion. It leaves self-respect absolutely intact. The preservation of true self-respect in affliction is also something supernatural. Gratitude that is pure, like pure compassion, is essentially the acceptance of affliction. The afflicted man and his benefactor, between whom diversity of fortune places an infinite distance, are united in this acceptance. There is friendship between them in the sense of the Pythagoreans, miraculous harmony and equality.

Both of them recognize at the same time, with all their soul, that it is better not to command wherever one has power to do so. If this thought fills the whole soul and controls the imagination, which is the source of our actions, it constitutes true faith. For it places the Good outside this world, where are all the sources of power; it recognizes it

as the archetype of the secret point that lies at the center of human personality and is the principle of renunciation.

Even in art and science, though second-class work, brilliant or mediocre, there is an extension of the self; work of the very highest order, true creation, means self-loss. We do not perceive this truth, because fame confuses and covers with its glory achievements of the highest order and the most brilliant productions of the second class, often giving the advantage to the latter.

Love for our neighbor, being made of creative attention, is analogous to genius.

Creative attention means really giving our attention to what does not exist. Humanity does not exist in the anonymous flesh lying inert by the roadside. The Samaritan who stops and looks gives his attention all the same to this absent humanity, and the actions which follow prove that it is a question of real attention.

“Faith,” says Saint Paul, “is the evidence of things not seen.”* In this moment of attention faith is present as much as love.

In the same way a man who is entirely at the disposal of others does not exist. A slave does not exist either in the eyes of his master or in his own. When the Negro slaves in America accidentally hurt their feet or their hands, they used to say: “It does not matter, it is the master’s foot, the master’s hand.” He who has absolutely no belongings of any kind around which social consideration crystallizes does not exist. A popular Spanish song says in words of marvelous truth: “If anyone wants to make himself invisible, there is no surer way than to become poor.” Love sees what is invisible.

God *thought* that which did not exist, and by this thought brought it into being. At each moment we exist only because God consents to think us into being, although really we have no existence. At any rate that is how we represent creation to ourselves, humanly and hence inadequately of course, but this imagery contains an element of truth. God alone has this power, the power really to

*Hebrews 11:1.

think into being that which does not exist. Only God, present in us, can really think the human quality into the victims of affliction, can really look at them with a look differing from that we give to things, can listen to their voice as we listen to spoken words. Then they become aware that they have a voice, otherwise they would not have occasion to notice it.

Difficult as it is really to listen to someone in affliction, it is just as difficult for him to know that compassion is listening to him.

The love of our neighbor is the love which comes down from God to man. It precedes that which rises from men to God. God is longing to come down to those in affliction. As soon as a soul is disposed to consent, though it were the last, the most miserable, the most deformed of souls, God will precipitate himself into it in order, through it, to look at and listen to the afflicted. Only as time passes does the soul become aware that he is there. But, though it finds no name for him, wherever the afflicted are loved for themselves alone, it is God who is present.

God is not present, even if we invoke him, where the afflicted are merely regarded as an occasion for doing good. They may even be loved on this account, but then they are in their natural role, the role of matter and of things. We have to bring to them in their inert, anonymous condition a personal love.

That is why expressions such as to love our neighbor in God, or for God, are misleading and equivocal. A man has all he can do, even if he concentrates all the attention of which he is capable, to look at this small inert thing of flesh, lying stripped of clothing by the roadside. It is not the time to turn his thoughts toward God. Just as there are times when we must think of God and forget all creatures without exception, there are times when, as we look at creatures, we do not have to think explicitly of God. At such times, the presence of God in us has as its condition a secret so deep that it is even a secret from us. There are times when thinking of God separates us from him. Modesty is the condition of nuptial union.

In true love it is not we who love the afflicted in God; it is God in

us who loves them. When we are in affliction, it is God in us who loves those who wish us well. Compassion and gratitude come down from God, and when they are exchanged in a glance, God is present at the point where the eyes of those who give and those who receive meet. The sufferer and the other love each other, starting from God, through God, but not for the love of God; they love each other for the love of the one for the other. This is an impossibility. That is why it comes about only through the agency of God.

He who gives bread to the famished sufferer for the love of God will not be thanked by Christ. He has already had his reward in this thought itself. Christ thanks those who do not know to whom they are giving food.

Moreover, giving is only one of the two possible forms love for the afflicted may take. Power always means power to do good or to hurt. In a relationship where the strength is very unequally divided, the superior can be just toward the inferior either in doing him good with justice or in hurting him with justice. In the first case we have almsgiving; in the second, punishment.

Just punishment, like just almsgiving, enshrines the real presence of God and constitutes something in the nature of a sacrament. That also is made quite clear in the Gospel. It is expressed by the words: "He that is without sin among you let him first cast a stone." Christ alone is without sin.

Christ spared the woman taken in adultery. The administration of punishment was not in accordance with the earthly life which was to end on the Cross. He did not however prescribe the abolition of penal justice. He allowed stoning to continue. Wherever it is done with justice, it is therefore he who throws the first stone. As he dwells in the famished wretch whom a just man feeds, so he dwells in the condemned wretch whom a just man punishes. He did not say so, but he showed it clearly enough by dying like a common criminal. He is the divine model of prisoners and old offenders. As the young workingmen of the J.O.C.*

* *Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique*, cf. note on *jécistes*, page 41.

thrill at the thought that Christ is one of them, so condemned criminals have just reason to taste a like rapture. They only need to be told, as the workmen were told. In a sense Christ is nearer to them than to the martyrs.

The stone which slays and the piece of bread which provides nourishment have exactly the same virtue if Christ is present at the start and the finish. The gift of life and the gift of death are equivalent.

According to the Hindu tradition, King Rama, the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity, was obliged, much to his regret, to avoid scandal among his people by executing a man of low caste who had broken the law through giving himself up to the ascetic practice of religion. The King went himself to find the man and slew him with a stroke of his sword. Immediately afterward the soul of the dead man appeared to him and fell at his feet, thanking him for the degree of glory conferred upon him by the contact of this blessed sword. Thus the execution, although quite unjust in one sense, but legal and carried out by the very hand of God, had had in it all the virtue of a sacrament.

The legal character of a punishment has no true significance if it does not give it some kind of religious meaning, if it does not make of it the analogy of a sacrament; and therefore all penal offices, from that of the judge to that of the executioner and the prison guard, should in some sort share in the priestly office.

Justice in punishment can be defined in the same way as justice in almsgiving. It means giving our attention to the victim of affliction as to a being and not a thing; it means wishing to preserve in him the faculty of free consent.

Men think they are despising crime when they are really despising the weakness of affliction. A being in whom the two are combined affords them an opportunity of giving free play to their contempt for affliction on the pretext that they are scorning crime. He is thus the object of the greatest contempt. Contempt is the contrary of attention. There are exceptions only where there is a crime which for some

reason has prestige, as is often the case with murder on account of the fleeting moment of power which it implies, or where the crime does not make a very vivid impression upon those who assess its culpability. Stealing is the crime most devoid of prestige, and it causes most indignation because property is the thing to which people are most generally and powerfully attached. That is apparent even in the penal code.

No state is beneath that of a human being enveloped in a cloud of guilt, be it true or false, and entirely in the power of a few men who are to decide his fate with a word. These men do not pay any attention to him. Moreover, from the moment when anyone falls into the hands of the law with all its penal machinery until the moment he is free again—and those known as hardened criminals are like prostitutes, in that they hardly ever do get free until the day of their death—such a one is never an object of attention. Everything combines, down to the smallest details, down even to the inflections of people's voices, to make him seem vile and outcast in all men's eyes including his own. The brutality and flippancy, the terms of scorn and the jokes, the way of speaking, the way of listening and of not listening, all these things are equally effective.

There is no intentional unkindness in it all. It is the automatic effect of a professional life which has as its object crime seen in the form of affliction, that is to say in the form where horror and defilement are exposed in their nakedness. Such a contact, being uninterrupted, necessarily contaminates, and the form this contamination takes is contempt. It is this contempt which is reflected on every prisoner at the bar. The penal apparatus is like a transmitter which turns the whole volume of defilement contained in all the circles where the miserable crime is to be found upon each accused person. The mere contact with this penal apparatus causes a kind of horror in that part of the soul remaining intact, and the horror is in exact proportion to the innocence. Those who are completely rotten receive no injury and do not suffer.

It cannot be otherwise, if there is not something between the penal

apparatus and the crime capable of cleansing defilement. This can only be God. Infinite purity alone is not contaminated by contact with evil. All finite purity becomes defilement itself through prolonged contact. However the code may be reformed, punishment cannot be humane unless it passes through Christ.

The severity of the sentence is not the most important thing. Under present conditions, a condemned man, although guilty and given a punishment which is relatively light in view of his offense, can more often than not be rightly considered as having been the victim of a cruel injustice. What is important is that the punishment should be legitimate, that is to say that it should proceed directly from the law. It is important that the law should be recognized as having a divine character, not because of its content but because it is law. It is important that the whole organization of penal justice should be directed toward obtaining from the magistrates and their assistants the attention and respect for the accused that is due from every man to any person who may be in his power and from the accused his consent to the punishment inflicted, a consent of which the innocent Christ has given us the perfect model.

A death sentence for a slight offense, pronounced in such a way, would be less horrible than a sentence of six months in prison given as it is at the present day. Nothing is more frightful than the spectacle, now so frequent, of an accused, whose situation provides him with nothing to fall back upon but his own words, and who is incapable of arranging these words because of his social origin and lack of culture, as he stands broken down by guilt, affliction, and fear, stammering before judges who are not listening and who interrupt him in tones of ostentatious refinement.

For as long as affliction is to be found in society, for as long as legal or private almsgiving and punishment are inevitable, the separation between civil institutions and religious life will be a crime. The lay conception considered alone is completely false. It only has some excuse as a reaction against a totalitarian religion. In that respect, it must be admitted, it is partly justifiable.

In order to be present everywhere, as it should, religion must not only not be totalitarian, but it must limit itself strictly to the plane of supernatural love which alone is suitable for it. If it did so it would penetrate everywhere. The Bible says: "Wisdom penetrates everywhere on account of its perfect purity."

Through the absence of Christ, mendicity, in the widest sense of the word, and penal action are perhaps the most frightful things on earth—two things that are almost infernal. They have the very color of hell. Prostitution might be added to them, for it is to real marriage what almsgiving and punishment without charity are to almsgiving and punishment which are just.

Men have received the power to do good or harm not only to the body but to the souls of their fellows, to the whole soul of those in whom God is not present and to all that part of the soul uninhabited by God of the others. A man may be indwelt by God, by the power of evil or merely by the mechanism of the flesh. When he gives or punishes, what he bears within him enters the soul of the other through the bread or the sword. The substance of the bread and the sword are virgin, empty of good and of evil, equally capable of conveying one or the other. He who is forced by affliction to receive bread or to suffer chastisement has his soul exposed naked and defenseless both to evil and to good.

There is only one way of never receiving anything but good. It is to know, with our whole soul and not just abstractly, that men who are not animated by pure charity are merely wheels in the mechanism of the order of the world, like inert matter. After that we see that everything comes directly from God, either through the love of a man, or through the lifelessness of matter, whether it be tangible or psychic, through spirit or water. All that increases the vital energy in us is like the bread for which Christ thanks the just. All the blows, the wounds, and the mutilations are like a stone thrown at us by the hand of Christ. Bread and stone both come from Christ and penetrating to our inward being bring Christ into us. Bread and stone are love. We must eat the bread and lay ourselves open to the stone, so that it may

sink as deeply as possible into our flesh. If we have any armor able to protect our soul from the stones thrown by Christ, we should take it off and cast it away.

Love of the Order of the World

The love of the order and beauty of the world is thus the complement of the love of our neighbor.

It proceeds from the same renunciation, the renunciation that is an image of the creative renunciation of God. God causes this universe to exist, but he consents not to command it, although he has the power to do so. Instead he leaves two other forces to rule in his place. On the one hand there is the blind necessity attaching to matter, including the psychic matter of the soul, and on the other the autonomy essential to thinking persons.

By loving our neighbor we imitate the divine love which created us and all our fellows. By loving the order of the world we imitate the divine love which created this universe of which we are a part.

Man does not have to renounce the command of matter and of souls, since he does not possess the power to command them. But God has conferred upon him an imaginary likeness of this power, an imaginary divinity, so that he also, although a creature, may empty himself of his divinity.

Just as God, being outside the universe, is at the same time the center, so each man imagines he is situated in the center of the world. The illusion of perspective places him at the center of space; an illusion of the same kind falsifies his idea of time; and yet another kindred illusion arranges a whole hierarchy of values around him. This illusion is extended even to our sense of existence, on account of the intimate connection between our sense of value and our sense of being; being seems to us less and less concentrated the farther it is removed from us.

We relegate the spatial form of this illusion to the place where it belongs, the realm of the imagination. We are obliged to do so; other-