

Etienne Bovey



# HOMO SAPIENS

AND THE

# SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION

From animal man to spiritual man

EHB

*Homo sapiens and the spiritual Revolution*  
*From animal man to spiritual man*

(Original French version : Homo sapiens et la Révolution spirituelle; de l'homme animal à l'homme spirituel)

In translating this book in English, I was greatly assisted by the computer translator DeepL.

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ISBN code: 9798850318963

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## The author of this book

Etienne Bovey was born in Lausanne in 1952. He worked there for forty years as an ophthalmologist, specialising in retinal surgery.

Since his youth, he has had a passion for studying the Bible. In 2005, he began to summarise the four voluminous commentaries of Frédéric Godet (1812-1900), an eminent theologian from Neuchâtel in Switzerland who had a great influence in his time. These summaries, published in 2007 (the Epistle to the Romans), 2010 (the Gospel of Luke), 2011 (the Gospel of John) and 2021 (the First Epistle to the Corinthians), are valuable tools for personal or group Bible study.

Since his retirement in 2017, Etienne Bovey has devoted himself even more to writing:

His first personal book, *Un Roi, des Sujets et une Terre*, 2017 (*A King, Subjects and a Land*) paints a grand picture of the Kingdom of God in the Old and New Testaments and describes God's walk with believers throughout history.

The second book, *Christ en moi: qui fait quoi?*, 2018 (*Christ in Me: Who Does What?*) tells the story of the author's quest for a healthy and responsible relationship with Christ.

His last book, *Pourquoi l'Europe s'ouvre-t-elle à l'islam?* 2021 (*Why is Europe opening up to Islam?*) tries to understand why Europe has opened up so easily to Islam since the last war.

## Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank Eric Cazès, a faithful friend for 48 years, who has accompanied me since the beginning of the elaboration of this book. His lucid view, his criticism and his encouragement have helped me a lot to progress in my reflection and to complete this fascinating study.

I would also like to thank my friends who reviewed the finished manuscript and gave me, in their own way, their positive and negative criticism.

I quote them in alphabetical order:

Philippe and Sylvie Aubert, Mario Braunschweiger, Stéphanie Clarke, Jean-François Collet, Steven Downey, Steve Emmett, Shafique Keshavjee, Eric Lecomte, and Marie-Claire Maillefer.

Their contributions have been invaluable in helping me to refine this book in a way that makes it accessible to all. The fact that their names appear in the list above does not mean that they necessarily agree with the entire manuscript.

Many thanks to Christian Bovey, who designed the cover of this book!

Every day I thank the Lord, who continues to teach me to "think with Him". Without this community of life, this book would never have seen the light of day!

## Foreword

For more than fifty years, I have been fascinated by biblical anthropology <sup>1</sup>. What does the Bible say about human being? Who is he? How and why was he created? What is his relationship with God? Is this anthropology the same in the Old Testament and in the New Testament? Are there several possible interpretations of the biblical texts on such fundamental issues? What influence do the very many human conceptions of man have on biblical anthropology?

All these questions have accompanied me throughout my Christian life and I had great difficulty in answering them in my youth. In a previous book, "*Christ in me, who does what?*" <sup>2</sup> I recounted all the struggles I had to overcome certain dualistic influences and find, after decades, a healthy vision of man as I understood it in the Bible. I will speak about this again in Chapter 5.

The view of the world, and in particular of man, that we form in the course of our lives influences all aspects of our lives. It is therefore very important to be aware of this and to understand this view and its implications in our practical lives. This exercise is by no means reserved for a small elite, but should be the lot of each and every one of us.

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<sup>1</sup> Anthropology is the set of sciences that study the human species (Petit Robert).

<sup>2</sup> Scripsi Editions, 2018

The theme of this book may seem too intellectual to some, but in reality, it goes to the very heart of the Christian life. I will try to speak in simple language about things that are sometimes difficult. Some may criticise me for oversimplifying; nevertheless, I prefer to fall into this trap rather than produce a book that is incomprehensible to the majority of people.

A few words on the approach I have followed.

In the Introduction, we will look at the "classical" view of man, as the Church has understood it for centuries. Then we will see how this vision has been challenged by the development of the sciences, which have revolutionised our understanding of the human being, to the point where a growing gap has opened up between the Church and the scientific world.

And then I will tell you about my own personal process and how I was led, a few years ago, to revise my notions of the theory of evolution and consequently to question certain aspects of the biblical anthropology that has prevailed for centuries. But rest assured, I have not in any way betrayed the revelation contained in the Bible as a whole, nor have I taken anything away from the work of Christ as revealed in the New Testament. I feel that I have gained a clearer and more accurate view of the human being, one that not only accords with scientific discoveries, but also makes sense from a theological point of view. You will be the judge!

After talking about the human being from a scientific point of view, we will go into the heart of the matter and try to explain how God has interfered in the lives of human beings to make them spiritual



beings, capable of accomplishing the high tasks he wanted to entrust to them on this earth.

This magnificent and ambitious programme has unfortunately suffered many setbacks due to human distrust and desire for independence. However, not all was lost: there were some wonderful successes, some incredible transformations in people who opened themselves to the action of God's Spirit, becoming spiritual beings as God intended.

Throughout this wonderful epic, which runs through the whole Bible, we will have the opportunity to admire God's love for human beings, his respect for their freedom, his patience with them, his perseverance and constancy in his will to accomplish his great plan for them: to make human beings pass from the condition of animal beings, coming from the world of the living, to that of spiritual beings, capable of working in the work of God.

I usually say what I think without embarrassment, to the point that some may find my tone a little peremptory. Nevertheless, I am well aware of the limits of my knowledge, and also of our knowledge, and like to recall this text of the apostle Paul:

*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

1 Corinthians 13.12 <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of biblical texts come from the English Standard Version. Others are translations from the French version L. Segond.

Throughout this book, I will share my understanding of the biblical texts, a limited and necessarily questionable understanding, for no one can claim to hold the truth. Nevertheless, I will do so with conviction and enthusiasm, in the hope that this reflection will help you to question yourself, as I have been led to do myself.

*E. Bovey, June 2023*

## Introduction

The first chapters of Genesis created a real revolution in the worldview of the people of the time, in the second millennium BC. It is astonishing that such an upheaval could have come from a very small country, the land of Canaan, surrounded by two large countries, Egypt to the south and Assyria to the north.

These two neighbouring countries had their own worldviews, and the author of the first chapters of Genesis took on certain features of their mythologies, not to imitate them and make a pale copy, but to distance himself from them. Indeed, unlike his neighbours, the biblical author affirms the existence of a single God, the creator of all things. This means, first of all, that the universe has a beginning and that it is not eternal, as was believed in antiquity. It also means that all these created things have no divine status and should not be worshipped as idols. The sun, the moon and all the stars, the various elements of earthly nature, are all on the same plane because they are the result of divine creation. Since they have no divine status, they can be studied like any other object. This perspective opens the doors to scientific research! This aspect is very much ignored by believers and non-believers alike.

Let us look at the first chapter of Genesis, a chapter that seems simple in its wording and yet has been the subject of much discussion. It can be read

literally, as a scientific book that describes *how* God created the universe and especially the earth. However, there are several inconsistencies that make us reject such an interpretation.

One can also consider that this chapter seeks, with simple and pictorial language, to make us understand very deep divine truths. The aim of the message is first and foremost to explain to us *why* God created the universe, the earth and all living things. This is the option I will follow in this book.

Whichever way one approaches this text, one is struck by the emphasis placed on the creation of man. This comes last, as if in apotheosis. Moreover, according to the text, God gives humans, both male and female, the responsibility to rule over the animals and to work the earth and preserve it, thus becoming managers of the Creator. Is this not an exceptional consecration? Such responsibilities were not given to apes or other animals.

A psalm does not hesitate to affirm that man was created *a little inferior to God*<sup>1</sup>. This is a very surprising statement, when so often elsewhere humans are invited to remain modestly in their place in relation to God.

For centuries, the Church has emphasised the centrality of man as the image of God in creation and has shaped its worldview accordingly to impose it on others. Let us take an example: if man has such a central place, the earth can only be at the centre of the universe. It is therefore understandable that in the Middle Ages the Church had great difficulty in accepting that astronomers claimed that the earth is not the centre of the universe, but that it revolves

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 8.6

around the sun, just like other planets. These scientists were thus questioning the teaching of the Church and therefore its authority. This was all the more embarrassing because Galileo's 1632 publication, "Dialogues on the Two Great Systems of the World", received widespread public approval. To minimise this success, Cardinal Bellarmine wanted Galileo to present his discoveries as hypotheses, but Galileo refused. The confrontation became unavoidable.

In 1633, Galileo was condemned for his theory of heliocentrism <sup>1</sup>, but he was probably even more criticised for having dared to express an independent thought, not subject to the approval of the Church. Although Galileo recognised the authority of the Bible for the salvation of mankind, he did not consider it to be a textbook on astronomy. In reaction to the Reformation and the innovative ideas of the Protestants, the Catholic Church clung to a literal interpretation of the Bible and held fast to its positions. It was not until 1992 that Pope John Paul II recognised the errors of the theologians of Galileo's time.

Nevertheless, a gap was created between the scientific understanding of the universe and the understanding that the Church could, in its time, draw from its reading of the Bible. A gap that was to grow ever wider.

In 1648 (or 1651), fifteen years after Galileo's trial, the famous French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote in the preface to his

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<sup>1</sup> In 1543, Copernicus published a work showing that the sun is at the centre of the known universe and that the earth rotates on itself and around the sun. Later, Galileo worked in the same direction.

"*Traité du vide*": Science and theology "have separate rights". B. Pascal was a convinced Christian and his words could in no way be considered as those of a scientist embittered against the Church. No, he understood that science and theology both bear witness to the truth of God, but that science must not be subservient to religious authorities. Indeed, in order to do its job properly, science must not be influenced by metaphysical or religious considerations. It should be noted, however, that if science should not be subservient to the Church, it is necessarily subservient to God, the Creator of all things<sup>1</sup>. This is obvious to Christian scientists, but a heresy for atheists!

Two hundred years later, man's place in the universe was to be much more strongly shaken by the work of Charles Darwin, described in particular in his famous book "*The Origin of Species*", published in 1859. He postulated that all living species had evolved over time from one or more common ancestors and that this evolution was made possible by natural selection. This meant that the human being was not the result of a special creation separate from the animal world, but was, like animals, the result of a very long evolutionary process. This also meant that the theory of evolution partially invalidated the Church's interpretation of the texts of Genesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Some Christians would like to submit science to the authority of the Bible. This is a perilous undertaking, since the Christian understanding of the Bible is not infallible and interpretations vary. On the other hand, there is a strong necessity for science and the Bible to challenge each other, and for this to happen they must have, as Blaise Pascal put it, separate rights.

The coup de grâce came with the extraordinary development of genetics and in particular the sequencing of the human genome and that of animals and plants. It was discovered that humans share more than 98% of their coding genes <sup>1</sup> with the great apes and that gene sequences similar to those found in other animals, such as mice, were found in their genome. The conclusion was inescapable: humans share common origins with other animals, and in addition they have very similar genes to other animals.

For many scientists, the unique position that the Bible gives to man in creation was shattered. Man was now just one living being among millions! An accident of evolution, lost in the immensity of the universe! Man no longer had any reason to claim any authority to believe himself superior to animals, he was nothing more than an animal, certainly highly evolved and efficient, but an animal nonetheless. That's why I talk about animal man in this book: it is man from the world of the living.

For the Church, this was a considerable shock! How could they believe in this theory of evolution and still accept as true the very special biblical position of man within creation? The gap was too wide and it was not possible to have a foot on either side. Many chose one side or the other. Many Christians, in their literal reading of the biblical texts, crystallised around their narrow creationist conception of the universe, rejecting scientific

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<sup>1</sup> A coding gene is a part of a chromosome that gives the information needed to form a protein. Coding genes account for about 1.5% of all genes in the chromosomes. The role of "non-coding" genes is still poorly understood. Do they have a regulatory function on the coding genes? See Appendix C.

discoveries as misleading, even diabolical. In response, many scientists rejected the Bible outright, accusing it of spreading nonsense and harming the progress of science.

Others, however, tried to reconcile these two tendencies by seeking to find in the biblical text what could possibly be consistent with scientific discoveries, while at the same time expressing reservations when the scientific assertions became too embarrassing.

Since Darwin, a philosophical trend has emerged that could be called "evolutionism". On the basis of their discoveries, scientists have started to elaborate metaphysical truths that have no foundation. They consider that since we can understand how living things came into being, there is no need to turn to a higher power, in this case God, to explain it. Going further, they deny the existence of God altogether. This "evolutionism" is gaining ground in our society, which is happy to have at hand so-called "scientific" arguments to get rid of a God deemed cumbersome. In fact, these scientists are stepping outside their field of competence and making the same mistake as the Church, which, in the name of its allegedly infallible interpretation of the Bible, imposed its beliefs on everyone, including scientists.

In this book I will share with you the position I have taken throughout my life and the important changes that have occurred in recent years. These changes have led me to read the biblical texts on creation differently and to understand that the Bible and science are not opposed to each other, but speak of different things or, when they approach the same subject, do so from different angles.



We will talk about the theory of evolution in order to situate man in the immense phylogenetic <sup>1</sup> tree that has been drawn on the basis of scientific discoveries. We will then be able to address the central theme of this book. Yes, something very special happened in evolution, something that seems to escape scientific study completely, because it has left no trace in the genome or in fossilised skeletons. God intervened directly in the lives of humans to ask them to live differently. He offered them new means, spiritual means to fully assume their dominant position linked to their superior intellectual capacities. This is what I call the spiritual Revolution. A Revolution that takes humans from being animal men to being spiritual men. The Bible speaks of this from beginning to end.

Unfortunately, this Revolution has resulted in several failures, and it is tempting to accuse God of having missed the boat. But the biblical accounts show us that the real culprits were the humans who regularly turned away from God's objectives. And God respected their choices!

We will look successively at the various provisional ways that God set up in anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ two thousand years ago, the apotheosis of his extraordinary work. Throughout his ministry on earth, Jesus set an example of a man walking fully in the ways of his heavenly Father, the Creator God. In this way, he perfectly fulfilled all of God's purposes. Then, after his death and resurrection, he ascended to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to all those who chose to

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<sup>1</sup> This tree represents the relationship between all living organisms.

follow him, enabling them to live this spiritual Revolution to the full and become "spiritual beings". Through the Holy Spirit, they received the life of Christ within them, like the branches of a vine that draw their sap from the vine in order to bear much fruit. It is in this close dependence that the divine life can be communicated and lead to the changes necessary to transform animal man into spiritual man.

We shall see that this is a complex and fraught process, and we shall explain why. Nevertheless, it is the path that has been chosen by God. The path is narrow and difficult, but it is the only way to enter the Kingdom of God.

# 1. A reappraisal

While putting my library in order at the beginning of the year 2020, I discover a book I have completely forgotten existed at home: *Le hasard et la nécessité, essai sur la philosophie naturelle de la biologie moderne* (*Chance and necessity, an essay on the natural philosophy of modern biology*) by Jacques Monod. On the first page, there is a handwritten date: 17.3.1971.

A bit like Proust's little madeleine, this book and this date bring back a flood of memories from almost fifty years ago. As soon as it came out in 1970, Jacques Monod's book caused quite a stir. It was, however, in line with Darwin and his theory of evolution and, in the end, did not bring anything fundamentally new. But it was above all the word "chance" that shocked Christians, who were convinced that human beings were not the fruit of chance, but had a well-defined place in God's creative plan.

Moreover, Monod's book gave the atheists a perfect opportunity to assert even more forcefully that the earth, and all that it contains, has developed on its own without the external help of a Creator. They had one more argument to silence all those so-called backward people who still believed in the divine inspiration of the texts of Genesis.

And then this date of 17.3.1971 reminds me of a beautiful period of my youth. I was finishing my first

semester of medical school in Lausanne. At that time, the first year was devoted to the study of plant and animal biology, chemistry and physics. I was fascinated by these courses, which immersed us in the study of life and the world, thus introducing us very sensibly to the study of medicine.

As it was necessary to discuss this controversial and hot topic, our professor of plant biology at the Faculty of Lausanne was invited to give a lecture on Monod's book. Of course, I went to hear him, because I was curious to know how he would defend Monod's theses and above all how he would succeed in answering the numerous criticisms emanating from the Christians who were firmly resolved to go to the barricades. It was going to be a tense evening!

The speaker spoke brilliantly about Darwin's contribution to the scientific understanding of the evolution of living beings, and he took up Monod's theses as well as his metaphysical conclusions: man is only one living being among others, he is only an accident in the evolution of life and he is absolutely alone in the universe.

During the question time following the presentation, representatives from both sides spoke. Some were pleased to see that scientific truth was emerging more and more, while others sought to defend "biblical truth". As is often the case, the debate went nowhere, with everyone sticking to their guns. Personally, I was uncomfortable because, intellectually, I could not reject all the scientific evidence that had been growing almost exponentially since Darwin's work and, spiritually, I remained convinced that above all these evolutionary processes there was a Creator God who held all things in his hand. I should point out, however, that I was not at

all in favour of a literal reading of the Bible and therefore categorically rejected the so-called creationist <sup>1</sup> interpretations, which consider that the world was created in 6 times 24 hours or at least in a very short period of time <sup>2</sup>.

It was after this conference that I read Monod's book. It disturbed me, but did not destabilise me. And finally, I managed to make a sort of lame compromise: I reluctantly and very partially accepted the theory of evolution while thinking deep down that God the Creator must have put his grain of salt to orient evolution as he wished.

And then time passed. I have lived my entire medical career very well without this issue. In fact, it was not vital to me. But now, three years into my retirement, when I pick up this book by Monod again, I am filled with a new curiosity. Why not take up this controversial subject?

## **And if it were true?**

I begin by searching the Internet to see what Christian scientists have to say about the theory of evolution. On the site "scienceetfoi.com", I discover several conferences by B. Hébert <sup>3</sup>, entitled: "Theory of evolution and Christian faith". For the author, the

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<sup>1</sup> The term "creationists" is unfortunate, because in fact all believers are creationists since they believe in a God who created the world and everything in it. There are, however, different ways of understanding the means God used to accomplish this.

<sup>2</sup> In this case, we should rather speak of "young earth" creationists.

<sup>3</sup> Benoît Hébert was the founder of the website "Science et Foi".

theory of evolution is no longer a dubious hypothesis that should be rejected, but it deserves the title of theory, since the accumulating evidence is so consistent with one another and supports it. He believes that this theory is fully compatible with the Christian faith. Moreover, he understands evolution as a means that God set in motion to create the diversity of living beings. On the other hand, he is strongly opposed to what he calls philosophical evolutionism, which consists of using the theory of evolution to deny the reality of God the Creator.

Something clicked for me as I listened to these presentations. Am I able to question my outdated understanding of evolution? What do I have to fear? I have the advantage of having built up a solid foundation of faith throughout my life and can therefore approach this delicate subject in a much more serene manner. So, I decide to make a bet! I decide to trust the Bible, which tells us about God and his plans for the earth and humanity, and to trust science when it talks about its field of study, nature. Does not God speak to us at the same time through the Bible, a revealed and inspired book, and through nature, the subject of study of science, which is another book showing us *the invisible perfections of God, his eternal power and his divinity*<sup>1</sup>?

So I decide to buy several Christian books on the subject. You will find them cited in the bibliography.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 1.20-21. The apostle Paul considers that nature is capable in itself of revealing the greatness of God, its Creator; and he considers those who refuse to acknowledge this to be inexcusable.

In his book *Creation and Evolution*, P. Touzet describes very well these two books and their respective roles <sup>1</sup>:

- Science studies nature and tries to answer the *how* of things. "It does not pose the hypothesis of God, because the action of God or the discernment of any intentionality in evolution is outside its field of study".

- The Bible is a book in which God reveals himself to humans. It is an answer to our *whys*: that of our existence and that of our human condition. "The Bible is neither a scientific book nor a historical book in the modern sense. Nevertheless, if we admit that God is the author of the book of nature and the revealed book (the Bible), there cannot be any contradiction or inconsistency between these two books. Rather, they are expected to complement each other. Possible contradictions can arise from our partial understanding of the two books. We have to accept the limits of our interpretations of the text. The most glaring example is the literal interpretation of the biblical account of the origins. On the other hand, we also have to be fully aware of the limits of current science".

I fully subscribe to this idea of the two books and their complementarity and understand that I need to revise my understanding of both books. But to what extent? The crucial question is: how far can I accept the theory of evolution without compromising my understanding of the biblical texts? Indeed, it is not a question of abandoning or betraying one book in order to accept the other! There must be a coherence

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<sup>1</sup> *Création et évolution. De la confrontation au dialogue*, Paris, Croire-Publications, 2018, p. 45.

between them, and it is this coherence that I want to discover.

It is in this exciting search that I wish to take you. As you will see later, this reflection will lead me to question myself, and will sometimes force me to stray from the beaten track and not necessarily follow the opinion of the majority... but I won't say more for the moment!

## **Chance and necessity**

I therefore decide to read again Monod's book, this time with a different mindset, free of my old prejudices and able to take a salutary step back.

I regain the impression I had on my first reading: this book is the fruit of brilliant intelligence; everything is carried out with clarity and brio. I recall that J. Monod (1910-1976) received, along with his colleagues F. Jacob and A. Lwoff, the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1965 for his work in genetics.

Let us take up some important points of his book, even if many things have evolved since then and will continue to evolve in the future; this will make an excellent summary of the theory of evolution, which we absolutely must talk about if we want to correctly address the central theme of my book: a spiritual Revolution allows animal man to become spiritual man. Indeed, in order to be able to talk about the spiritual man, we must understand what the animal man is, the starting point of this whole spiritual adventure.

J. Monod begins by highlighting the great paradox of biology: on the one hand, in order to be able to study nature objectively, scientists, according



to him, must reject the idea of "final causes" or purpose, and on the other hand, by studying the characteristics of living beings, Monod observes that living beings are distinguished from all other structures in the universe by the fact that they follow a *project*, that of multiplying and growing. This is very embarrassing, because the word *project* necessarily implies the idea of an external designer and a goal, two elements that Monod wanted to eliminate from the scientific approach. He is careful not to consider the idea of a designer, but he maintains the notion of a goal and describes the project as *teleonomic* <sup>1</sup>.

Monod recognises that this paradox is fundamental and very embarrassing, and he is honest enough to say so. For a Christian, this profound contradiction disappears very simply because he accepts the idea of a Designer, who is none other than the Creator, the God of the Bible. The *project* is expressed in a simple way in the first chapter of Genesis: *Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*. It corresponds to the definition given above by Monod, when he speaks of *teleonomy*.

The question will be how this *project* began and how it developed thereafter. You will see that it is possible to admit the idea of an initial Designer while maintaining the theory of evolution as it is currently accepted by the scientific community. What has this Designer contributed throughout evolution? Nobody knows. Did he let nature follow the course of

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<sup>1</sup> For Monod, "The essential teleonomic project consists in the transmission, from one generation to the next, of the invariance content characteristic of the species. All the structures, all the performances, all the activities that contribute to the success of the essential project will therefore be said to be 'teleonomic'.

evolution or did he intervene as he pleased? It is a mystery and I am not interested in trying to understand it. That is not the purpose of this book at all!

On the other hand, what I do know, and the Bible repeats it from beginning to end, is that God is sovereign over all his Creation. Although he has partially withdrawn to make room for humans to carry out the tasks he has entrusted to them, he remains sovereign and can intervene at any time in his Creation to change its course. He does this in response to the prayers of his servants.

I would like to remind you here that the theory of evolution deals with the evolution of life and not with the origin of life. It therefore starts from the primordial living cell to understand its development throughout evolution, but it does not seek to understand how this primordial cell was formed from atoms. In his book, Monod does mention a few avenues of reflection, but apparently, in the last fifty years, very little progress has been made in this field.

However, studies are underway to understand how this first cell could have formed. In France, researchers at the PIIM (Physics of Ionic and Molecular Interactions) and the CNRS have carried out an interesting experiment: they put water, methanol and ammonia in a vacuum container at a temperature of -200 degrees and bombarded the mixture with ultraviolet rays. This allowed the formation of simple molecules. As the temperature increased, these molecules grouped together to form many different molecules, including the amino acid Cytosine, as well as closely related forms of other amino acids (Adenine, Guanine, Thymine), and sugars (notably ribose). These compounds are very

interesting because they are necessary for the formation of DNA <sup>1</sup>. It is assumed that substances from outside the solar system may have arrived on earth via asteroids and comets that hit the earth. This organic material could have been transformed and heated by the sun's ultraviolet rays before arriving on earth and seeding it.

These discoveries further strengthen the belief of atheist scientists that life created itself. Believers continue to see it as a divine work. Just because we can explain a phenomenon does not mean that we are entitled to exclude its author!

Let us return to our original cell. How could such a primordial cell have evolved some 400 million years ago? Monod notes the cell's exceptional properties: it is a self-constructing machine, thanks to a highly efficient information storage system: DNA. This DNA contains all the information necessary for the production of proteins, which allow the development and activity of the cell. As this is a rather specialised subject, I have dealt with it in more detail in Appendix C. For those who are not used to such a language, I have summarised it here.

DNA is an extraordinary information storage system, more powerful than a hard drive in a computer. It has the ability to replicate itself when the cell divides to give two daughter cells. So, the mother cell passes on all its information to the daughter cells, thanks to the DNA.

Let's take the first cell. If it had multiplied normally, it would have given rise to a huge population of perfectly identical cells, with no

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<sup>1</sup> <https://inc.cnrs.fr/fr/cnrsinfo/les-nebuleuses-peuvent-fabriquer-les-briques-de-ladn>

See more details on DNA in Appendix C.

diversity. It was not very interesting! But things turned out differently, presumably because of mutations <sup>1</sup>.

It turns out that in the process of DNA replication, errors can occur, which are called mutations. The DNA no longer gives the same information where the mutations have occurred. These mutations are unintentional, which is why they are said to occur "by chance". This is how the term "chance" in Monod's book should be understood.

When a mutation occurs, three possibilities of events can be envisaged:

1. The mutation brings something bad to the cell. It is therefore a disadvantage that leads to the weakening or even destruction of the organism.

2. The mutation confers neither advantage nor disadvantage. This area of information in the DNA may even become silent. It continues to be passed on to the daughter cells.

3. The mutation gives an advantage to the cell, which will grow and specialise in one direction or another, depending on the ecological niche in which it is found. This advantage is passed on to its daughter cells.

An ecological niche is a place or situation that is favourable for the development of an organism. This can be a place without predators, with optimal temperature and humidity, sufficient nutrient resources, an acceptable population size, etc. Each ecological niche will thus favour the individuals that

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<sup>1</sup> Chromosomal rearrangements and recombination or genetic mixing that occurred during sexual reproduction subsequently gave a tremendous boost to diversity.

have the characteristics best suited to that niche. Let me give you an example that is easy to understand:

Let's take a small mouse in the desert. Its dark brown coat contrasts with the light sand. It is therefore easy for predators to detect it from a distance and catch it. Let's imagine that after chromosomal combinations or mutations at the point that determines the colour of the coat, mice with very light brown coats appear. This change will not modify the life of the mouse itself, but it will give it a real advantage: its light coat will be much more difficult to see against the light background of the sand. The mouse will thus have a better chance of escaping a predator, of surviving and therefore of multiplying. This advantage will be passed on to subsequent generations. In time, the dark brown mice are likely to disappear because of predators and the light mice will multiply because they are less visible.

Let us imagine that the change leads to the appearance of a black coat. This will make no difference to the life of the mouse itself, but it will be a distinct disadvantage, as the mouse will be even more visible on light sand. Such a mouse will be less likely to survive and multiply than a light mouse. Thus, the presence of predators exerts a selection pressure on the evolution of mice.

Now imagine that these predators disappear for some unknown reason. The selection pressure will also disappear, allowing mice to proliferate regardless of their coat colour.

In this example, the "selection pressure" is determined by the presence of predators, but in nature it can be due to all sorts of other factors that

may or may not favour a transformation. This is called natural selection.

Let me give you another example, this time a real one <sup>1</sup>:

The birch moth is a nocturnal butterfly from temperate regions. Originally, this butterfly was light-coloured, but a mutation occurred that made it darker. As a result, two types of moths were found in this population: light and dark.

From the 19th century onwards, entomologists noticed that the darker form became more frequent in the vicinity of industrial cities in England. They blamed air pollution: combustion and coal residues darkened the tree trunks and branches on which the butterflies rested during the day. The dark butterflies, better camouflaged on dark trunks, probably proliferated because predatory birds less saw them. From the late 1960s onwards, the situation was reversed and the light form of the moths became more common again. This reversal was attributed to efforts in Britain to improve air quality, leading to a decrease in air pollution deposits on tree trunks. This example shows how an external factor can favour or not favour a butterfly population and transform their ecological niche.

Let us return to J. Monod's book. On the one hand, we have a *teleonomic* project, which has a goal and is perfectly coherent, with very well-tried reproduction mechanisms, but also DNA replication errors that are likely to contribute to diversity <sup>2</sup>; and

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<sup>1</sup> From Wikipedia

<sup>2</sup> Not to mention the diversity produced by the almost infinite possibilities of combining the chromosomes from the father and mother during the sperm-ovule fusion.

on the other hand, we have natural selection operated by the surrounding environment, as we saw above. The principle is simply brilliant! No one has managed to create such a powerful system, capable not only of reproduction, but also of improvement and growth!

Since the publication of Monod's book in 1970, i.e. fifty years ago, genetics has made considerable progress. One of the major advances has been the sequencing of the human genome. This was a huge and complicated project. Launched in 1985, it was not completed until 2003. The aim was to understand how the information was stored on the DNA, and above all to locate, on the chromosomes, the very many packets of information known as genes. I would remind you that a gene is a piece of DNA that codes for a single protein, i.e. it provides the information necessary for the cell to produce a particular protein.

It was previously thought that humans had about 100'000 genes. In fact, only 20'000 to 25'000 have been found. Furthermore, only 1.5% of these genes were found to be active in the production of proteins. These are called "coding genes". The other genes are not involved in protein production and may have other functions, such as turning certain genes on or off. They are called "non-coding genes".

The researchers also studied the chromosomes of various animals and living organisms. It was a big surprise to find that worms, flies or plants have a maximum number of genes of around 20'000 <sup>1</sup>. Not much less than in humans! Similarities were also found between humans and other living organisms at

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<sup>1</sup> Collins Francis S., *From Genetics to God*

certain chromosome locations. These findings are detailed in Appendix C.

For Collins, these genetic findings lead inexorably to the conclusion that humans share a common ancestor with other living things.

I will stop here, because the purpose of this book is not to say whether the theory of evolution is true or not, nor to explain it in detail; others have spoken about it in great detail. My main concern is that there is apparently (and I stress this adverb) a gap between what science says about man and what the Bible says about him. As we have seen above, science seeks to explain how life has developed and become more complex through genetic diversity and natural selection. Scientists see man as the product of a natural process over millions of years and do not need to involve a supernatural force to explain it. The Bible, on the other hand, presents God as the Creator of all things from the outset and gives man a pre-eminent place in relation to other living things. Who is right? Science or the Bible?



## What does the Bible say about the formation of man?

We have talked a little about science, now let's talk about the Bible.

Throughout my life, I have read a lot of the first chapters of Genesis and today I find that I have not finished discovering all its riches. Two verses have recently become very important to me. I now call them the "evolution verses". Here they are:

Genesis 1.20: *God said: Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures...*

Then in verse 24: *God said: Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind...*

The divine order is given: the waters themselves must produce sea animals, and the earth itself must produce land animals according to their kind. In very few words, these two verses summarise the whole evolution of aquatic and terrestrial life over millions of years!

The literary insight is simply brilliant! But these two verses do not say how this evolution took place. It will be the role of science to explain it. We thus find here the evocation of J. Monod's *teleonomic project*, but with an additional piece of information: this project is wanted by God. Indeed, each of these two verses is immediately followed by a verse that seems to contradict what has just been said:

Genesis 1.21: *So, God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds...*

Genesis 1.25: *God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds...*

The question then arises: are the animals of the sea and land the product of evolution or are they creatures of God? The answer seems obvious to me: both!

Verses 20 and 24 suggest the manufacturing process. It seems so well done that it can work by itself, which is remarkable!

Verses 21 and 25 remind us that God is the author. And if he is the author of the process, then he is the indirect creator of each step.

Those who claim to be evolutionary will only see verses 20 and 24 and reject verses 21 and 25 which affirm God's role in creation.

Many Christians only want to see verses 21 and 25 and neglect the famous verses 20 and 24 which describe in a few words the long evolutionary processes.

The biblical text shows us with astonishing wisdom that these four verses are intimately linked and that we cannot separate them! Moreover, verse 21 itself combines these two statements: *God created the great sea creatures... with which the waters swarm...*

This should give Christians and atheists pause.

So, these four verses show us that God set in motion an ingenious process of making living things, which scientists call "evolution". I can therefore

better understand these words, repeated several times in the Bible text: *God saw that it was good*. Indeed, how can we not be satisfied with such a brilliant process, which brings so much diversity into nature!

Let us now turn to verses 26 and 27 of Genesis chapter 1, two verses that are problematic:

*God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

*27. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

Biblical exegetes have understood that these verses describe the creation of the human being as a separate event, since he is created in the image of God. An event that would have occurred at a specific time in history. Nowhere does it say this about animals in the sea or on land. On the other hand, man is given a mission to dominate over the animals, which gives him a clear superiority. And finally, God speaks to humans, but not to animals. The link with humans is therefore privileged.

### **A note on dominion**

When we examine the biblical text and pay attention to the terms used to describe animals and humans, we notice several similarities:

- Land animals are created on the same day as humans (the 6<sup>th</sup>).

- Like humans, they are described by the term "living *nèfèsh*"<sup>1</sup>.

- Animals and humans are ordered to multiply.

But there are some notable differences, which are mainly linked to God's desire to enter into contact with humans and to delegate some of his dominion to them:

- The dialogue established between God and humans is quite specific and is not mentioned with animals. This dialogue is the foundation of the relationship between God and humans, and will run through the whole of biblical history.

- Dominion belongs first and foremost to God, who is by right the Master of everything. The term dominion includes both authority, which is a moral and free ascendancy, and power, which is an effective force at the service of authority. Dominion is the power, accepted or imposed, of a master over his subordinates.

Chapter 1 of Genesis tells us that God delegated part of his dominion to human beings:

*And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (1.28).*

Subduing the earth and having dominion over the animals is no mean feat! This order has immense consequences. God's deepest desire was that humans should be able to assume this dominion according to his heart, that is, with the constant concern to value

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<sup>1</sup> We'll be talking about this Hebrew term in chapter 5.

and preserve creation. Don't we take care of what we have created? But God did not want to impose his dominion, and some of his creatures took advantage of the freedom they were given to pervert the real meaning of dominion and set themselves up as tyrants. This was the case, first of all, with some of the angels, who rebelled against God, their Creator, thus becoming evil powers led by their chief, the Devil, to destroy God's work in creation <sup>1</sup>. This was also the case with humans who, by refusing the covenant with God, gave access to evil. They too became tyrants, in the couple, in the family, in the society and even in the Church <sup>2</sup>. They have given dominion a meaning contrary to God's original will. I would also remind you that God never asked human beings to dominate one another.

The Law given to the people of Israel in the desert dealt with the question of human dominion over nature and animals. For example, those who cultivated the land had to let it lie fallow every seven years <sup>3</sup>. This was an excellent way of letting it "breathe" and not exhausting it. Today, we return to this practice for the same reasons. The Sabbath also applied to animals, which were not to be exploited on that day <sup>4</sup>. They were to be treated as God's creatures. Centuries later, the prophet Isaiah envisaged the day when the wolf would live with the lamb, the leopard with the kid... and the infant would play on the cobra's nest <sup>5</sup>. Creation will be reconciled with itself and with human beings.

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 6.11-12 ; Luke 4.5-8

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3.16 ; Matthew 20.25-27 ; Peter 5.3

<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 25.2, 4

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 23.12

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 11.7-8

This question of dominion is of the utmost importance, and one of Jesus' missions was to give this term back the meaning it deserves according to God. Here are a few texts that speak of it:

The prophet Daniel announces, in a vision he received, the coming of Christ (whose name he does not mention):

*And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed (7.14).*

The apostle Paul says this:

*Christ died and lived, that he might have dominion over both the dead and the living. (Romans 14.9)*

*God worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (Ephesians 1.20-21)*

It is in communion with the Risen Christ that Christians learn to dominate, not as the world does, but as God wills.

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What are we to make of these texts from Genesis that speak of the formation of man? Has man really been created apart, without any connection with other animals? We have already seen that genetic research shows, on the contrary, that man is very close to animals, especially the great apes. Let us listen to the scientists to find out more about the formation of man.

## **Man, a product of evolution**

The evolution that led to the formation of *Homo sapiens*, modern man, was a long process, and it was not linear. Hominins split from the chimpanzee lineage about 7.5 million years ago to form several species. Specialists recognise 6 to 11 species of Hominins predating *Homo sapiens*:

The oldest *Australopithecus*, *Sahelanthropus*, dates from about 6-7 million years ago. It lived in Chad. *Australopithecines* existed for nearly 2 million years, with a wide variety of adaptations. They were bipedal, but still had tree-climbing abilities like apes. Their height was about 130 cm and the volume of their cranium was about 450 cm<sup>3</sup> (1350 cm<sup>3</sup> in modern humans).

After them came the *Paranthropes*, who survived for up to 1 million years in East and South Africa, and the genus *Homo*, our own, who alone passed this limit. Within the *Homo* group, there are several species: *H. rudolfensis*, *H. habilis*, *H. ergaster*, *H. antecessor*, *H. naledi*, *H. floresiensis*, *H. erectus*, *H. denisovensis*, *H. neanderthalensis*, *H. heidelbergensis* and *H. sapiens*.

The oldest *Homo sapiens* fossils date back about 300'000 years (Djebel Irhoud site in Morocco). Genetic analyses provide us with valuable additional information. Taking into account mutations in mitochondrial DNA <sup>1</sup>, we can estimate that we can trace our ancestry back to an ancestor common to all present-day women, known as "Mitochondrial Eve", dating back some 200'000 years.

Genetics, thanks to the sequencing of the human genome, has also shown that there has been mixing between *Homo sapiens* and representatives of other species. Currently, in the non-African population, there are 1-3% of genes from Neanderthals. In China, traces of interbreeding between *Homo sapiens* and *Homo erectus* have been found. In Melanesians, 3-5% of the DNA of *Homo denisovensis* has been found. Traces of it have been found among Australian aborigines and Tibetans. The *H. denisovensis* species is said to have passed on to the Tibetans a gene on chromosome 2 that enables them to adapt better to life at altitude (EPAS1 gene, which ensures better oxygen transfer).

One last example: eleven men were found in Mbetta, a village in western Cameroon, who had a very special Y chromosome called A00, a chromosome that was previously unknown. Taking into account the number of mutations found, its age is estimated at 338'000 years. This means that among the ancestors of these Cameroonians, a

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<sup>1</sup> DNA that does not belong to the chromosomes in the nucleus of the cell, but is present in the mitochondria (important organelles in the cell). This DNA is only transmitted by women. It is of great interest because it is present in a large number of copies in each of our cells and its mutations are uniform over the generations, which makes it possible to make useful dates.



sapiens woman mated with a man of a more archaic species. This man transmitted his Y chromosome to the woman's descendants.

All this shows us that the evolution towards *Homo sapiens* "is not a linear sequence of species progressing in one direction. It is a diversification of species encountering new ecological niches... It is a bush often pruned by the pruning shears of climatic and geographical variations, of which only a few branches remain. A singular bush that has some main branches, but no real trunk" <sup>1</sup>.

*Homo sapiens* was born in Africa. There were probably several exits from Africa; the largest and last one took place from 50'000 years before our era. For R. Klein, palaeo-anthropologist, this exit was the consequence of a profound change, a real cultural revolution. "It is the most radical behavioural change that archaeologists have ever studied. For other archaeologists, these changes were the culmination of a long series of behavioural and cultural transformations in Africa over the last 300'000 years" <sup>2</sup>.

Current scientific data show that man was not created separately, but that he has followed, like all other living beings, a long process of maturation over the ages.

One might think that man is at the top of the evolutionary chain of living beings. This is partly true, but we must not forget that in many areas, humans are far inferior to other animals. I am

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<sup>1</sup> Hublin Jean-Jacques, Seytre Bernard, *Quand d'autres hommes peuplaient la Terre. Nouveaux regards sur nos origines*, Paris, Flammarion, 2011, p. 43 (When other humans populated the earth. A new look at our origins)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

thinking of sight, hearing, smell, muscle strength, speed of movement, speed of reaction to a stimulus, memory, resistance to infection, etc. Some animals have faculties that we do not possess: sensitivity to magnetic fields, which is useful for spatial orientation, a thermal camera capable of "seeing" in the dark, a 360-degree visual field, sensitivity to polarised light, etc. And the list would go on. But humans have acquired intellectual skills that have enabled them to invent and share knowledge with each other through language. The development of human society has been fantastic and indeed the text of Genesis has been fulfilled: man has taken power over the animals and the earth. This is a fact that no one can dispute.

We have seen that science favours the progressive formation of human beings and rejects the creation of a humanity from a single human couple (Adam and Eve), created without any relation to the rest of the living world. This is a first challenge to "classical" theology!

Let us return to the biblical text and try to see if it is possible to interpret it in accordance with current scientific discoveries.

First of all, we must answer this question: can the biblical text envisage that man is also the product of evolution?

Here is what the text says in the first chapter of Genesis:

*26. God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

*27. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*                      *Genesis 1.26-27*

In verse 27, which says that God created man in his own image, the Hebrew text uses the verb *bara*. Some commentators consider that this verb means: to create from nothing. It is only used for the creation of the heavens and the earth (1.1), the living animals (1.21) and man (1.27). If we accept, as we have seen above, that the creation of living animals is a long evolutionary process set up by the Creator "from nothing" (*bara*), we can also accept that it is the same for man. But verse 27 adds an important point: God wants to make man something more than a mere animal; he wants to make him in his own image. Why is this so?

We have seen that man is the product of a very long evolution and that this evolution has not been linear. We would logically have expected this evolutionary process to continue, without external intervention. Since it has worked successfully for millions of years, could it not continue in such a way as to bring the human being to an ever higher degree of perfection? When we compare *Homo sapiens* with *Australopithecus*, we can see how far we have come in 7 million years. Why would God intervene directly in this evolutionary process? Couldn't he have left things to evolve on their own? Couldn't man have developed, over time, a spiritual sensitivity and thus responded to divine expectations? This is a fundamental question that we must address. To answer it, let us say a few words about the spirituality of *Homo sapiens*.

## Man, a religious animal

Archaeology provides us with interesting information on funerary rites and artistic creations, such as wall paintings in caves. For Hublin and Seytre, the richness of the Upper Palaeolithic <sup>1</sup> burials evokes a sophisticated mythical and religious world. The cave paintings, woodcuts and ivory engravings were made by true artists. Their art "refers us, for the first time, to a collective imagination, a magical thought, metaphysical concerns, and resolutely modern aesthetic notions. These men were endowed with cognitive capacities identical to ours" <sup>2</sup>.

How did these humans develop this mystical thinking? We can assume that, in their weakness and vulnerability, our distant ancestors were inclined to fear and revere the powerful elements of nature. Let's take a few examples:

The thunderstorm, with its lightning and thunder, arouses fear. The devastating effects of lightning striking a tree and cutting it lengthwise, or killing humans and animals, are enough to convince us. The noise is frightening when lightning strikes close to you. Lightning and thunder are untamable and humans probably saw them as manifestations of the sky's anger. These beliefs have persisted until

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<sup>1</sup> The Upper Palaeolithic began 45'000 years ago. This was around the time of the arrival of *Homo sapiens* in Europe. It ended about 12'000 years before Christ.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

scientists have explained the cause and mechanism of these phenomena.

The wind, which tears up everything in its path, may seem to manifest the anger of nature. What being, what god is behind this power?

The sun is essential to life on earth. It allows plants to grow, and without it everything would die. It illuminates the earth and allows humans to go about their business. Its disappearance every evening is worrying, because the night is frightening; it is the moment chosen by the wild beasts to attack their prey. Thanks to the moon which gives a little light during the night, but this light varies cyclically; the moon god is capricious!

The sun can also hurt by burning the skin when exposed for too long. It can dry out the earth and vegetation, which can then burst into flames. It is therefore important to be wary of it. What is this powerful being in nature, which lavishes good and evil? Is he not a god to be worshipped? Should we not worship him every day to obtain his favours?

Water is essential to life. It springs from the earth as a gift to the living. How can we not venerate these mysterious springs that cannot be tamed and which form streams, then rivers and powerful streams?

The forest is home to the animals that humans have learned to hunt for food. It also provides an abundance of fruits that humans enjoy. Humans have learned to find and recognise these fruits, and to eat those that are beneficial to them. For these hunter-gatherers, the forest is like a mother who allows them to live. We must therefore respect and thank her. Is there not a superior and mysterious force in it that we do not understand?

Don't humans feel very small in front of these powerful elements of nature; aren't they right to see them as gods, projecting onto them the image that a child may have of his all-powerful parents? Parents who can get angry when he misbehaves, but also forgive when the child gets back on track; parents who love and seek the good of their child...

This is probably how humans have started to create a whole spiritual universe, a world where higher spirits reign, a sacred <sup>1</sup> universe where many elements take on a supernatural dimension. Not only that which is frightening or inspires respect is considered sacred, but also that which appears strong because it is imbued with a supposedly superior power.

The hundred-year-old tree has withstood all the bad weather and if it is still standing, it is probably because a higher power is within it. Why not venerate it by doing ritual dances around it?

The big rock that stands in the plain is imposing by its size. It stands there like a being that observes and monitors the slightest actions of humans. It is also a landmark that allows them to orient themselves when walking. Therefore, it must be respected and honoured.

Little by little, humans have perfected their deities, making them either abstract and imaginary, or very concrete and visible, made by man himself. The Bible describes these idols very well to show their inefficiency and uselessness:

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<sup>1</sup> This term has several meanings in everyday language. In this book I consider as **sacred** everything to which one attributes a supernatural power. See also the note "sacred or holy?" at the end of Chapter 3.

*Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have a mouth, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.*<sup>1</sup>

It is astonishing that humans can lend magical power to an idol that they themselves have made from inert materials such as wood, stone, silver or gold! This shows the imperative need they have to secure themselves. After all, all these idols form a secure world around them and give meaning to their lives. It does not matter that they do not hear, see or speak, they play the role that humans want to give them. They will populate their imaginary world and make them feel safe! So, they are no longer alone in the universe, but they are in relationship with higher forces that have adopted them.

We can therefore better understand how our distant ancestors became polytheistic and how this religiosity impregnated their human nature. This is still the case today!

Animal man thus became religious man! <sup>2</sup>

Evolution has thus perfectly accomplished its task, you may say! So why did the God of the Bible intervene in the lives of humans to challenge their spirituality and offer them another, better one? Wasn't it better to let them evolve as they wished? Would they become dangerous for the planet or for

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 115.4-8

<sup>2</sup> In the note "Religious or spiritual" at the end of chapter 1, I deliberately differentiate between these two terms in order to clarify the message.

humanity? Many people today find that polytheists have no difficulty in accepting the existence of other gods and are therefore by nature tolerant, a quality that is highly recognised in our time. They do not persecute "heretics" and "infidels". So why would you want to turn them away from their beliefs?

The answer is to be found in the passage from Psalm 115 that I mentioned earlier: idols are really nothing but wind and the spirituality of those who hold them sacred is vain. There is no real relationship between humans and the idol, even if humans think otherwise. Moreover, idolatry leads humans into a sterile dependence on the idol. They become in a way slaves to what they themselves have made!

Another notorious phenomenon, which the biblical text notes: "They end up looking like them". They end up not seeing, not hearing, not speaking, not thinking... thus resembling their idols. Sad observation!

The Bible describes a God who speaks, sees, hears and acts. A God who is faithful to his promises, a God in whom we can put all our trust. God could not let mankind persevere in a vain spirituality. He therefore decided to intervene.

There may be other reasons for this intervention:

- God wanted to establish a solid relationship with humans.

- The human species was not sufficiently equipped to take on the task God wanted them to do: *work the earth and preserve it*.

- Because of their exceptional skills, humans multiplied too fast to adapt intelligently and not destroy themselves. So, God had to intervene to give them other means of adaptation.



Let's go back to these last three points.

## God wanted to establish a relationship with humans

This desire is evident throughout the Bible. For Jesus and the apostles, God had this desire *before the foundation of the world*.<sup>1</sup> This shows how important the human species was to him. I deduce from this that the human species did not come into being "by chance", but according to a preconceived plan.

It is very surprising to see God persisting in this need for relationship, in spite of the many rebuffs received from humans who rebelled against him. How many times have his plans failed because of the fault of humans! One would have expected him to throw in the towel and give up. But no! He persevered and finally succeeded in building a Kingdom of faithful and devoted believers. We will discuss this further below.

This need for relationship even led the Creator to change the rules of evolution: instead of keeping the efficient but ruthless principle of natural selection, he favoured the individual over the human species. By recommending that humans love their neighbours, care for the weak, the poor, the sick and the socially excluded, God was completely changing the paradigm: it was no longer a question of maintaining a strong and resistant human species, but rather of promoting a society in which everyone

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 25.34; John 17.24; Ephesians 1.4; 1 Peter 1.20; Revelation 13.8 and 17.8

would have the opportunity to flourish. This shows God's love for all humans, without exception. This love, let us call it that, is a common thread that runs through the entire biblical story and allows us to understand God's walk in the world correctly. We will see in chapter 4 how Christ led the construction of this new society to perfection, thus fulfilling God's plan perfectly.

This need for relationship may seem completely incongruous to an atheistic scientist, who only believes what he sees. Let us not forget that the scientist is limited by his human nature and his measuring instruments; he is therefore unable to apprehend what lies outside the world that has shaped him. Through his reason and techniques, he cannot know and understand God, who is infinite and beyond the world around us. But a clever scientist will have the humility and wisdom to recognise his limitations and stay within his field of research, which is to understand the *how* of the world we live in. His work is very important and must be respected.

Because God has revealed himself to humans and this revelation has been passed on from generation to generation through the writings that make up the Bible, we have the opportunity to get out of the "bubble" in which we are somehow enclosed, and to discover God and broaden our understanding of the human being. In this way, we find answers to the reasons for man's existence on earth. But we have to admit that the Bible does not answer all our questions, and in particular it does not say *how* man was made. These limitations should keep us humble and guard against a certain desire for omnipotence.

## Man was established to work the earth and preserve it.

Let us return to our biblical text to understand what it tells us about man and his role.

I am particularly interested in these words: *God created man in his image*. What does this term "in his image" mean?

No doubt the author of the first chapter of Genesis was familiar with the creation myths of neighbouring countries, notably Egypt and Assyria. According to M. Richelle <sup>1</sup>, the author of the first chapter of Genesis took up some of their motifs, not to be inspired by them, but to distance himself from them. His original story had a polemical and pedagogical purpose. The image is one of these motifs.

J. Buchold, in the same book, points out that in ancient Egypt, over a period of 2000 years, the various words that were translated as "image" referred exclusively to the Pharaoh. He was deified and played the role of an idol of the god Ra. He, and he alone, was the image of the god and thus the representative of the divinity on earth.

The Genesis text extends the royal quality of image of God to all humans! The mission is thus democratised, and men and women share this same

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<sup>1</sup> In : *Adam, qui es-tu ? Perspectives bibliques et scientifiques sur l'origine de l'humanité*, Charols, Excelsis, 2013. (Adam, who are you? Biblical and scientific perspectives on the origin of humanity)

dignity. They are images of God on earth, that is, his representatives in creation <sup>1</sup>.

Such a statement was revolutionary at the time; it is still revolutionary today and should inspire every human being to feel responsible for the earth on which they live, seeking to cultivate and preserve it as best they can.

This quality of being human, created *in the image of God*, is thus given to all humans <sup>2</sup>. It is part of their whole being; it is not a benefit given to a small group of people with whom God has somehow connected. Nor does it depend on a choice that humans have made to live with God. This choice will be asked of them later, as we shall see in Genesis chapter 2; that is another matter!

One wonders, of course, how and when this contact between God and humans was established. Since the biblical text tells us that he speaks to them, he must have entered into communication with them, but when? Was it 300'000 years ago, at what is believed to be the beginning of the Homo Sapiens era? Was it before or after 50'000 years ago, when the human species made a quantum leap? We are faced with a mystery.

The biblical text only tells us that contact was made, that a bond was established between God and

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<sup>1</sup> God made man his image on earth. Paul goes along with this when he says that *man is the image and glory of God* (1 Corinthians 11.7). Paul also says that Jesus is *the image of the invisible God* (Colossians 1.15). See also 2 Corinthians 4.4.

<sup>2</sup> The text of Genesis 1.26 speaks of *image* and *likeness*, but in the realisation (v. 27) it speaks only of *image*. We can assume that to resemble God requires a very long process. We will address this point later when we talk about the path of sanctification that leads the believer to become more and more like his master, Jesus Christ.

humans. No doubt because of their superior cognitive faculties and their very particular operational language, which enabled them to produce an unprecedented culture and to conquer the world as no other animal species had done, God gave humans a unique status, that of "managers" of the earth, destined to *work the earth and preserve it*.

If we study the divine requirements in both the Old and New Testaments, we understand that man without God is not able to fully meet these requirements. Christ said to his disciples: *Without me you can do nothing...* and I complete the sentence: "... of value according to divine standards". It was therefore necessary for the Creator God to grant humans a superior wisdom, a divine wisdom, so that they could accomplish their task correctly.

## The human species was at risk of self-destruction

I would like to refer to a book by K. Lorenz <sup>1</sup>, one of the founders of objectivist ethology <sup>2</sup>, for which he received the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1976. He describes well the forms of violence in different animal species. Chimpanzees kill each other, orangutans rape females, gorillas kill the young of which they are not the fathers, in order to mate with

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<sup>1</sup> Lorenz Konrad, *L'agression. Une histoire naturelle du mal*, Champs sciences, Flammarion, 2018. (original title : Das sogenannte Böse. Zur Naturgeschichte der Aggression, 1963). (Aggression. A natural history of evil).

<sup>2</sup> Ethology studies the behaviour of animal species in their natural environment.

their mothers. Lions do the same. Violence is found in many other species, including crows, hyenas, many hymenoptera and marine mammals. K. Lorenz was surprised to find that in his aquarium, the brightly coloured male coral fish fought each other until only one was left. This intra-species violence can be seen as a way to advance the species. The strongest eliminate the weakest and pass on better adapted genes to their descendants. It also helps to combat overpopulation in a limited environment with little food and to ensure better access to females. Fighting between rivals allows the selection of the strongest one, the one who will be supposed to defend the clan against external aggression and protect the young. But this violence can also be dangerous for the species, which is why evolution has put in place various regulatory mechanisms such as diversion, or redirection of violence, and ritualisation. These mechanisms can be observed in coral fish, greylag geese and more advanced mammals such as monkeys.

Humans, of course, have not escaped all this, but, according to Lorenz, they have multiplied too quickly to allow the establishment of effective regulatory mechanisms. Thanks to their social organisation and their technological achievements, particularly weapons, humans were able to cope with external dangers. These ceased to be essential factors in selection. Humans then started a harmful intra-species selection. The selective factor became warfare between neighbouring hordes of humans who considered each other as enemies.

The situation was not easy and it is known that violence has increased with the increase in population and human concentration in specific

places. Something had to be done to bring about a radical change, to prevent humanity from destroying itself. A spiritual Revolution was needed!

The first chapters of Genesis also deal with violence and aggression: *The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*<sup>1</sup>

We will see in the next chapter how God set up his first plan to help humans: the Garden of Eden.

### **Note: religious or spiritual?**

Earlier in this chapter, I put forward the idea that humans became religious by being confronted, in their weakness, with powerful and diverse forces of nature. And so, quite naturally, they conferred supernatural powers on these forces and regarded them as gods to be worshipped and favoured.

Polytheism was thus born and would endure throughout the history of mankind. In the first century AD, the apostle Paul had this to say to the Athenians:

*"I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription: To the unknown god" <sup>2</sup>*

The term religious that Paul uses here has nothing to do with the term spiritual that he reserves

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 6.5

<sup>2</sup> Acts 17.22-23

in his epistles for believers who live by the Spirit of God and do his will.

Nowadays we speak of "spiritualities". This term has become very fashionable. It is not an insignificant term, because it encompasses all the relationships that human beings can have with what they consider to be their gods. What's more, to speak of "spiritualities" is to put all these gods on an equal footing. This tolerance is fashionable in today's world, but it only leads to confusion. Paul was careful not to entertain it and presented his God as the Creator of all things, the Lord of heaven and earth, a God who does not dwell in temples made with hands, a God who gives life and breath and all things to all (24-25). Further on, Paul adds:

*God willed that men should seek the Lord and grope for him, though he is not far from each of us, for in him we have life and movement and being (27-28).*

Read on! Paul makes a very clear distinction between the God of Jesus Christ and the idols that humans have made for themselves.

In this book, I take the same option by making a clear distinction between the terms "religious" and "spiritual". I show that animal man is by nature a religious man, who aspires to come into contact with what he considers to be spiritual. I also show that the Bible, from beginning to end, seeks to redirect this human religiosity towards what is essential: the God who is the Creator of all things, the God of Jesus Christ, the God who comes to dwell through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who open themselves to him in order to do his will.



## **2. The Garden of Eden Covenant, a true Revolution.**

No matter how much you dig and scour the ground for clues to this Revolution, you will find nothing! Simply because this Revolution was spiritual and left no traces. The best book to talk about it is the Bible. So I suggest that we go back to Genesis, the first book of the Bible, and more particularly to chapters 2 and 3.

There are several ways of reading these two chapters; I will highlight three main ones, which are opposed on many points:

- 1) The story described is real and the text should be read literally, as every detail is real.
- 2) The story is a myth, an invented story, whose message we must try to understand.
- 3) This text is a historical parable, telling a true story, but with figurative elements.

Let us take up these three points:

- 1) One might be tempted to read this text literally and place it in the Neolithic period. I would remind you that this period began 8'500 years ago in the Near East, a little later elsewhere. We are therefore very far from the beginning of the Homo Sapiens era. Here are some clues that could lead us in this direction: with the help of detailed genealogies, the author insists on linking Adam to his descendants. Adam and Eve's sons, Cain and Abel, are respectively

ploughman and shepherd, Neolithic occupations. Cain builds a city; there is no longer any question of the hunter-gatherers of the Palaeolithic! Moreover, after having killed his brother, he fears being killed by the people who live in the region to which he plans to flee. Who were these people, not mentioned in the genealogy of Adam and Eve?

While this literal interpretation may make sense in some respects, there are obstacles to it. For example, as we saw in Chapter 1 in the section "Man as a Product of evolution", according to scientific studies Adam and Eve cannot have formed the first human couple, the origin of the human species. On the other hand, the creation of Eve from Adam's rib (or side) poses insurmountable problems. We are led to renounce reading the whole text literally and to accept the presence of figurative motifs in the narrative. Let us recall once again that the Bible is not a book of science, which would seek to describe how humans were formed.

2) The second reading is the opposite of the first and considers that this story is invented and has nothing historical about it. Some theologians see it as a story of the birth of Israel in the land of Canaan, while others refer to the attitude of humanity towards biblical revelation.

3) The third reading is the one I favour. M. Richelle speaks of a historical parable <sup>1</sup>. This means that the story is true, but it is not described in exact terms as a scientist would. If the author used figurative motifs borrowed from the mythologies of the time, it was probably to distance himself from

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<sup>1</sup> H. Blocher speaks of the "combination of a historical background and a parabolic or symbolic covering" ("*Adam, qui es-tu?*" p. 47)

them and create an original story specific to the people of Israel, but also valid for all humanity. It is therefore in this perspective that I will continue my study. The exercise remains difficult, because it is not easy to specify what really happened and to identify what emerges from the symbolic language, whose meaning must be understood. Many mysteries remain unresolved; we must accept this with humility!

### Note

If we accept that the story of the Garden of Eden took place in the Neolithic period, then we are led to ask ourselves this question: why did God wait so long in the homo sapiens curriculum before making contact with him? This remains a mystery. The same could be said of other divine interventions in the Bible. Why did God wait so long before calling Abraham to Mesopotamia and leading him into the land of Canaan? Why did he wait about 400 years before bringing his people out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan? Why did he wait so many centuries before sending his Son Jesus Christ? Why does he delay returning to earth in glory? These are mysteries that are beyond us. As the apostle Peter said, in the eyes of the Lord, *one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day*.<sup>1</sup> If he delays, it is because he has good reasons! We can only trust him.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 3.8. See also Psalm 90.4

Let's go back to the Garden of Eden.

The creation of this garden is the very first divine plan to rescue humans to a higher place where they can act intelligently on this earth. This is where the spiritual Revolution begins!

What can we say about this garden? It is God who created it, somewhere on this earth. This garden is not the whole earth, but a particular place on earth. The fact that four rivers, including the Tigris and the Euphrates, water it could locate it in Mesopotamia, but that is not important. This garden is beautifully landscaped with *trees of all kinds, pleasant to look at and good to eat*<sup>1</sup>. A garden that contrasts with what exists outside, where living conditions are difficult.

Verse 8 gives us an important piece of information:

*And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.*

This text seems to show that God created the Garden of Eden *after forming man*, and then placed him there. We can therefore think that Adam first lived outside the garden<sup>2</sup>. His first state was undoubtedly that of an animal man, that is to say, a man who came from the world of the living and lived among all the other animals. I would like to make it

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2.9

<sup>2</sup> This may indeed be the case if we take into account the length of the evolution of the human species, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 1.

clear that this text does not say how God formed man.

### **Note**

For many Christians, Adam and Eve were created *in* the Garden of Eden and became the founding father and mother of our human species. What I have presented in this book may seem incongruous: God took Adam and Eve *out of* the Garden of Eden and brought them *into* the Garden of Eden. This idea is suggested by the biblical text and is not at all far-fetched, since it is found elsewhere:

- Abraham and Sarah were called when they were in Mesopotamia and God led them *into* the land of Canaan, which could be seen as a kind of Garden of Eden, a place dedicated to a special relationship between God and those he had chosen for himself.

- God led the people of Israel out of Egypt *into* the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, a place where the people of Israel would experience a very special relationship with their God.

- Jesus called his listeners to *enter* the Kingdom of God, a new Garden of Eden where the Great Gardener can teach his workers to cultivate and preserve the earth according to his will.

Some will object that Eve was created in the Garden of Eden, according to Genesis 2.18-24. Such a claim cannot be validated by current scientific data. The question then arises: should the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, or side, be taken literally or figuratively? If we remain within the framework of a "historical parable", we can understand this text as the beginning of a spiritual life within the couple, where husband and wife have the same importance for God and are both "spiritual" beings, capable of

communicating with their Master. This is undoubtedly how we should understand Eve's position as *the mother of all living beings*.

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So, God places humans in this magnificent garden. I remind you that the term Adam comes from *adamah*, which means earth. This term therefore describes the human being, who comes from the earth. This is why I have no objection to considering Adam as the product of evolution, as described above. I recall that, according to Genesis 1.27, God created the human (*adam* in Hebrew) male and female.

Already in chapter 2, Adam is identified as a man and Eve as a woman. They represent humans, with whom God makes a covenant, at an unknown time in human history.

God, the text tells us, appoints Adam and Eve as the new managers of this garden, to *work it and keep it*.<sup>1</sup> Adam and Eve are going to accomplish a new task, in a reduced and secure area, but under very different conditions. We could talk about a limited model, a local experiment and why not a "test laboratory".

A work contract is established, with rights and duties. Adam and Eve are allowed to eat from all the trees in the garden, which means that they can enjoy all the natural resources of the garden. Life becomes much easier and more pleasant! I remind you that the word *Eden* means: pleasure, delight.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2.15

They also have duties, to *work the earth and preserve it*. And to do this, they have the benefit of the advice of the Master of the garden, God the Creator. This is quite different from their situation before! The text says very nicely that God walks through the garden towards evening. I take it that he is not there constantly watching his managers, but that he passes by every evening to meet them. So, Adam and Eve have some leeway in their work.

These evening meetings are certainly an opportunity for them to learn a lot about the mission they have been given. Who today would not want to have such an opportunity? Wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to talk with God and receive his guidance? Who would not want to know the future reliably in order to make good decisions? Who wouldn't need divine advice to choose a spouse, to train in a profession, to invest energy in the right direction...? Can you imagine the impact that "divine agencies" spread all over the world could have, where people could meet God and talk to him as Adam and Eve could? It would completely change the way the world works! We would need it so much as our mankind is heading for disaster, for all sorts of reasons that you know perfectly well.

The contract that God established for Adam and Eve has one limitation, only one: not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Painters have abundantly depicted this tree as an apple tree and the forbidden fruit as an apple. This makes no sense! This idea is based on a Latin play on words: *malum-malus* (apple and evil being homonyms in Latin). This tree must definitely be taken symbolically. It is not the place here to develop this very controversial subject; let us simply say that this tree represents

above all the knowledge that humans can acquire, without God.

The text in no way condemns the acquisition of knowledge. As already stated, Adam and Eve have every opportunity to increase their knowledge by talking with God. The problem is therefore not knowledge itself, but rather the acquisition of knowledge outside of God, i.e. in a self-sufficient way.

God gives them a serious warning:

*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*

How should we understand this sentence: *you shall die*? One can envisage two interpretations:

- 1) "If you eat of this tree, I will make you die";
- 2) "If you eat of this tree, you shall die by your fault, because you will not be able to live any more in the garden and thus you will not have any more access to the source of Life which I placed there".

The first interpretation is unfortunately very common. The second is much more logical and in line with the rest of the biblical revelation.

One might also ask why God planted such a tree in the garden. Many answers have been put forward. The most classical one is the following: it was necessary to test the obedience of humans, to set limits so that they would learn to follow a law. In a previous book <sup>1</sup>, I suggested that a covenant cannot be imposed, and that it must be a choice freely made

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<sup>1</sup> *Un Roi, des Sujets et une Terre*, Romanel, Scripsi, 2017



by the different parties involved, in this case: God on one side and Adam and Eve on the other. The garden could not become a prison, even a golden one. Adam and Eve had to be offered a way out, symbolised in our story by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree in the middle of the garden forced the humans to make a choice. For them, not to eat from it meant that they kept the terms of the covenant and continued to live in dependence on God. In this way, they enjoyed all the benefits of the covenant and at the same time fulfilled the responsibilities entrusted to them. To eat from it meant that they renounced the covenant, preferring to become independent by seeking knowledge in a way that was not God's way.

I would like to open a parenthesis here that seems fundamental to me: as I said above, for a relationship to be true and of quality, it is absolutely necessary that it be free. Everyone must be free to enter and free to leave. A religion that locks up its followers by threatening to kill them if they go elsewhere disregards a fundamental principle established by God in the Garden of Eden: respect for freedom <sup>1</sup>. This principle runs through the entire biblical story. To the people of Israel in the desert, God will say this:

*I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life, that you and your offspring may live.*<sup>2</sup>

The apostle John describes very well the choice that Jesus' contemporaries and all humanity after

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<sup>1</sup> This is particularly the case with Islam.

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 30.19

him will have to make: to refuse his preaching and remain in their own darkness, or to accept him and become children of God <sup>1</sup>. The choice is the same, it is free.

Looking back over the millennia, we still ask ourselves why Adam and Eve made such a foolish decision. Why did they give up a golden opportunity, a royal road that would have led them and all those who followed them to an extraordinary place on earth? This special relationship with God would have had an impact on every aspect of their lives. They would have experienced a new happiness in their personal relationships with others, a harmonious development of their families, work would have become a joy, the land they cultivated would have been blessed and would have yielded much more than before, the crops would have been abundant and would not have been compromised by diseases or predators.

You will tell me that everything I have just written in the previous paragraph is not in the biblical text and that my imagination is leading me to ramble. Well, not at all! You can find all these promises in the beginning of Deuteronomy chapter 28. God makes these wonderful promises to his people Israel, just before they enter the land of Canaan, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC. Here too, a new covenant is to be made and God, through Moses, clearly defines the terms of this covenant. He repeats this fundamental message several times:

*And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your*

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<sup>1</sup> John 1

*God...and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.*

Read on!

Why did Adam and Eve miss out on all this? It is really incomprehensible! How can we explain such a mistake? Let's simply ask ourselves this question: what would we have done in their place?

Let's go back to the biblical text, which gives us an element of answer. It involves a character, symbolically represented by a snake. This character manages to sow doubt in the couple's mind about God's goodness: Was God not deceiving them and offering them a fool's bargain, which would deprive them of their freedom and independence? Isn't obeying God binding? Will they not become the slaves of a demanding Master? The serpent supposedly offers them something much better, the possibility of becoming like gods, in total independence.

The proposal is so tempting that Adam and Eve finally accept it! The serpent thus succeeds in diverting them from the covenant. The figure of this serpent will be found throughout God's dealings with mankind. Jesus will call him Satan, the Devil <sup>1</sup>. He will even give him the title of "prince of this world" because of the power and ascendancy he will have taken over humans, who will have preferred to submit to him rather than to God <sup>2</sup>. The Apostle

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4.10; 12.26; 16.23; Mark 4.15; Luke 10.18; 13.16; 22.31; John 8.44

<sup>2</sup> John 12.31

John, in the Apocalypse, speaks of "the dragon, the ancient serpent, that is, the Devil and Satan" <sup>1</sup>.

The intervention of the serpent in the Garden of Eden is certainly decisive, but it does not take away the responsibility of Adam and Eve. They were faced with a choice and had every opportunity to make an informed decision.

On his evening tour, God meets them. Of course, he knows the decision made by Adam and Eve, but he questions them. Now it's time for a reckoning!

## The consequences of breaking the covenant

The first consequence of this break is immediate: Adam and Eve are afraid of God; that is why they hide, but in vain. God knows very well where they are! They then try to justify themselves, in a lamentable manner. Adam accuses Eve of having seduced him; Eve does the same with the serpent. The discussion ends there, because God confronts them with the harsh reality of their bad choice. They will be expelled from the garden and return to where they were before. They will find the hostile nature they knew, symbolised here by *thorns* and *thistles*; it will be difficult to look for their daily food. The relationship between them will be the same as before, i.e. the man will dominate his wife, but she will not be left out and will also seek to dominate her husband <sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 12.9; 20.2

<sup>2</sup> To describe the woman's attitude, the biblical text uses a very rare verb, *teshuwqah*, which is found in a very instructive story

It is interesting to look at the power struggle between males and females in primates. The male is usually bigger and stronger than the female, so he has de facto dominance over her. However, females know how to band together and organise a counter-power, or even take over. This is the case, for example, with the Bonobo monkeys. Although physically weaker, the females manage to dominate the whole clan, because they have much more intelligence in strategic association than the males who fight among themselves!

This question of power will be dealt with throughout the biblical story. By proposing a different version of the Garden of Eden, Christ will establish another model of relationship between people, especially within the couple. It will no longer be a question of dominating the other to exploit him (or her) for one's own ends, but rather of serving him, in order to help him to flourish.

Let us return to our Genesis story. Adam and Eve are driven out of the garden. They return to the previous life, the one they knew before entering the garden <sup>1</sup>, but the situation has become worse. In fact, a pathological relationship has developed between

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about Cain who is angry with God and with his brother Abel. And God says this to Cain (Genesis 4.7): ... *if you do wrong, the sin that is lurking at your door will try to get you (teshuwqah), but don't let it dominate you, it is up to you to dominate it.* Here the Hebrew verb *teshuwqah* clearly has the meaning of "to dominate by cunning, to manipulate". It seems to me that, in Genesis 3, this meaning is much more appropriate to the relationship between a woman and her husband than the traditional one: *your desires will be towards your husband.*

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3.23: *The Lord God put the man out of the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.* See Genesis 2.8

them and the one whom the Bible describes as Satan. The text even speaks of enmity, even hostility and war. Satan will do everything to prevent humans from reconnecting with God, and he will use all his energy to become their master instead of God and take control of the Earth. Difficulties will therefore increase because of this new and disruptive spiritual element <sup>1</sup>.

We know nothing about the feelings that Adam and Eve have after they are expelled from the garden.

Perhaps they are angry at the snake who tricked them into a false promise of becoming like gods. For the time being, this promise has not been fulfilled and they still have to struggle to survive in a difficult environment.

Astonishment? Perhaps, because they are still alive, even though God had told them that they would die if they took fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What death was he talking about? Would they die as all living things die? Would they have had the possibility of living eternally if they had remained in the covenant of the Garden of Eden?

In any case, Adam and Eve find themselves excluded from an adventure that could have been exceptional, a true spiritual Revolution that would have extended through them to all of humanity.

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<sup>1</sup> In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul describes this war very well: *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.* (6.11-12). Further on, he speaks of the *flaming darts of the evil one* (6.16).

Through their own fault, they missed this unique opportunity <sup>1</sup>.

The consequences of this breach of alliance are immense and we would be wrong to underestimate them. If we have spoken so far about Adam and Eve, we must also consider God's point of view. One can easily imagine his bitter disappointment and even anger. He has formed an exceptional design, created an idyllic garden and devised a magnificent plan to make humans special, true reflections of the divine glory. And now this plan is falling apart, denied by Adam and Eve. In fact, there is more than a lack of interest on their part, there is a real rebellion against God. And this is even more difficult to accept.

This same anger will be found when Jesus' contemporaries refuse to recognise him and enter his Kingdom <sup>2</sup>. Jesus evokes it in the parable of the wedding feast <sup>3</sup>: a king has prepared a great feast for his son who is getting married. He sends his servants to call those invited to the wedding, but they refuse to come and go about their usual business. Some insult and kill the servants. The king becomes angry and sends his troops to destroy these murderers.

Back to Adam and Eve. In his anger, God could decide to abandon everything, and yet he persists in

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<sup>1</sup> This is what can be called "original sin": Adam and Eve missed out on the salvation that God was offering them, they voluntarily missed out on this royal road. I will elaborate on this in Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup> Everyone knows the famous verse in John 3.16 about God's love for the world, but we forget what is written 20 verses later: *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 22.1-14. See also the parable of the feast in Luke 14.16.24

his intentions. He continues his work, in a different way, to make the animal man into a spiritual man, capable of carrying out correctly the functions he assigns to him.

You may be surprised that I use the term "animal man", but I have already partially explained the reason for this. In fact, the idea for this term was given to me by Louis Segond, the famous translator of the Bible into French. Here is why: in his epistles, in the first century AD, the apostle Paul uses the Greek adjective *psuchikos* several times to describe the man without God, unable to enter into contact with Him. Segond, in his 1910 French translation, speaks of "animal man". Other versions translate it as "man left to himself", "natural man"...

For a long time, I found the Segond translation of the term *psuchikos* to be a bit vulgar. I must confess that since I have taken a different look at the theory of evolution, this term no longer bothers me at all! On the contrary! Animal man is man as he is placed in the immense phylogenetic tree of all living beings. In short, there is nothing contemptuous about seeing him as he really is, with his characteristics close to those of his cousins, the primates. What Paul means, and L. Segond has understood it very well in his translation, is that this man, as he is, despite his superior faculties which have given him a clear advantage over the primates, is not capable of communicating with God. He lacks something essential to enable him to understand spiritual things <sup>1</sup> and live differently. He lacks the Spirit of God.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 2.14: *The animal man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and*



It is precisely the Spirit that God wanted to communicate to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, so that they would have the moral strength to live according to other standards than those of animal man. He wanted to give them moral and spiritual tools that they did not have, tools that would have enabled them to work with Him. But this plan failed for the reasons I have already described.

We shall see in the rest of this book how God will succeed in transforming animal man into spiritual man. Six centuries before Christ, the prophet Ezekiel announced this transformation, on behalf of God:

*I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*<sup>1</sup>

The essence of this spiritual Revolution is contained in these few words! This transformation will really take place at the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. I will say no more for now.

### **Note on the spiritual man**

Nowadays, the adjective "spiritual" has very different meanings from the one mentioned above.

A man (or a woman) is said to be spiritual when he knows how to put good words in conversation, words that make people laugh or think. A man is said to be spiritual when he is interested in religions, or better still in the spiritualities in vogue. We will discuss this in Chapter 7 when we look at cosmic humanism (New Age). These spiritualities can also

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*he cannot know them, because they are judged spiritually.*  
(Translated from L. Segond)

<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 36.27

include occult practices where the human spirit is in relationship with satanic spiritual powers.

As you will have understood, the Bible gives another definition of the spiritual man: it is the man who walks according to his spirit which is itself renewed and guided by the Spirit of God. We will have the opportunity to talk about this again in the next few chapters and to better understand what it means to walk according to the spirit <sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> As we will see in Chapter 5, the Greek term *pneuma* can refer to either the Spirit of God or the human spirit. In Galatians 5.16, Paul asks Christians to *walk according to the Spirit (pneuma)* and states that *the flesh has desires contrary to those of the Spirit*. Here the translators give preference to the Spirit of God. In Romans 8.5, Paul says this: *Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit (pneuma) set their minds on the things of the spirit*. Here, the L. Segond translator speaks of the human spirit, while others see the Spirit of God. In reality, this difference is not important, since it is the meeting of the human spirit and the spirit of God that has become the real driving force of the Christian's life, the force that leads him to do the will of God.

## A first assessment

Before going any further, I would like to take stock of what has been said so far.

Over the past few centuries, scientists have accumulated a great many observations that make the theory of evolution a real theory and no longer just a set of hypotheses. We can no longer ignore or reject it. We are grateful to all those who explain how evolution has taken place over millions of years, knowing that this knowledge will certainly evolve in one way or another.

We have seen that while science explains the *how* of this long process, it cannot say anything about the *why* of this evolution. This is not its role, but that of biblical revelation. As we have seen, the first chapter of Genesis suggests, with brilliant intuition, the principle of evolution while clearly affirming the divine creative will.

We have explained why we *Homo sapiens* cannot reasonably have been separate creations from the rest of the living world from a couple called Adam and Eve, as we have thought for centuries. Current scientific evidence shows that we are the product of a very long and not necessarily linear evolution, and that we do have a place in the immense phylogenetic tree of living beings.

Yet the place of humans is unique in creation because God willed it to be so, and in particular, he broke into this long evolutionary process by revealing himself to humans and proposing a covenant. It was intended above all to make these humans spiritual beings according to his desire, capable of assuming

the responsibilities that he wanted to entrust to them.

The theory of evolution cannot grasp this irruption of God into human life. It cannot confirm it, nor indeed exclude it! Therefore, it cannot in any way alter the biblical revelation and render God's work on earth invalid. As you have noticed, the theory of evolution does, however, force us to take a somewhat different look at the creation of humans, but does this change anything about the divine work? Does my presentation of Adam and Eve destroy or pervert the biblical message? On the contrary, I feel that these two characters have become much closer to us and, even if they represent humanity in some way, they still correspond to what Paul envisaged when he compared the work of Adam and that of Christ.

Atheistic scientists are convinced that the data of the theory of evolution are now sufficient to explain the creation of living beings and exclude the need for external divine interference. They take a step that is not scientific, but belongs to pure metaphysical speculation: "Since nature created itself, we no longer need to believe in a creator God". Others go even further: "God does not exist!"

For believers, the acceptance of biblical revelation allows them to acquire a much broader vision of the human being and to understand the reason for his existence on earth.

We have spoken of the Garden of Eden, that first plan to help humans. Unfortunately, it failed. But God did not give up and he set up other successive plans. In the next chapter, we will study the most interesting elements of these plans.

### **3. God continues his work**

#### **Occasional alliances**

Expelled from the Garden of Eden, humans resumed their lives, made up of ups and downs, greatness and misery, good deeds and jealousies leading to crime. In short! The life we see around us today, where humans are capable of both the best and the worst.

After the break of the covenant in the Garden of Eden, God could have abandoned everything. He did not, and continued to engage with humans who had an open and honest heart. Read the book of Genesis again and you will discover through these stories how God continued his work: Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, men who opened themselves to God's action and walked with him; not forgetting, of course, their wives. We could speak of specific alliances with a person or a family, knowing that in these families there were also rebels and criminals.

The most important work was undoubtedly the creation of the people of Israel and the giving of the Law. This Law included laws of life, most of them timeless, and ordinances to structure the people of Israel so that they could develop harmoniously. It is worthwhile to dwell on this.

## **The creation of the people of Israel and the giving of the Law**

A few historical reminders: due to a famine in the land of Canaan, Jacob and his family went to Egypt for help, where there was still enough grain. Invited to stay there, the family grew considerably and four generations later became a people. Yes! But a people of foreigners deemed threatening to the Egyptians who then enslaved them. The Israelites, miserable slaves, cried out to God who answered them by sending a liberator, Moses, to bring them out of Egypt. The idea was to lead the people further north into the land of Canaan, which was to become the Land of Israel.

But Moses had to deal with an unruly people who rebelled against divine orders. This resulted in a forty-year delay in entering Canaan. During this time, the people wandered in the desert. Nevertheless, it was a time of useful training when the Israelites learned to know the God with whom they had made a covenant.

The major event of this period was undoubtedly the giving of the Law.

Why a Law?

Since the transformation of human beings by the Spirit of God was not possible on a large scale, for the reasons described above, it became essential to put safeguards in place to limit the outbursts of instincts that were all human, but detrimental to the society. Moreover, any society, whether animal or human,

must establish rules of conduct if it does not want to destroy itself. Animal societies have their own rules that deal, among other things, with the authority of leaders, parents or elders, the way to hunt and feed, and the way to reproduce.

In the Law revealed to Moses, God gave instructions that dealt with the relationship the people were to have with their God, and with each other. These included allowing each person to flourish in an atmosphere of trust and security, strengthening the bonds within and between families, and determining healthy relationships between citizens and political leaders so that the nation could prosper.

These ordinances touched on all areas of life: religious, political, judicial, economic, health, educational, recreational, etc. It was thanks to this set of laws that the people were able to develop in an astonishing way, so much so that in three centuries they became a powerful and wealthy people throughout the Middle East.

These ordinances were intended for the people of Israel at a particular time, but they remain highly instructive for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Several provisions were repealed by Christ and his followers: certain laws of worship, the necessity of circumcision, certain health laws, etc.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the laws of life, contained in particular in the Ten Commandments, remain valid. In fact, Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> Christians no longer followed the laws on sacrifices, as the sacrifice of Jesus was perfect and final for all. The Jews no longer followed them after the destruction of the Temple in the year 70.

increased their requirements. We will come back to this.

While the Law is good for structuring an individual and society as a whole, it has a major flaw in that it is unable to change the human heart. This is why the apostle Paul would say much later, in his epistle to the Galatians (3.24), that the Law was *a teacher to lead us to Christ*. The real means that God wanted to put in place was Jesus Christ himself. During His earthly ministry, Jesus fulfilled the Law perfectly, in the spirit of His Father; He has risen from the dead and now lives in the hearts of Christians through the work of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to fulfil this Law as well <sup>1</sup>.

In the centuries before the coming of Christ, Jewish religious leaders unfortunately made the Law an end in itself. They failed to understand that the divine goal was to strengthen the relationship of the people of Israel with God, and the Law was to lead them to this. But they made the Law a screen between the people and God. Indeed, since obedience to the Law was primary and sufficient, there was little need for the people to cultivate their relationship with God and obey the first of the Ten Commandments: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength*. Thus, when Christ began to preach, a huge discrepancy was created between the Jewish religious leaders' understanding of the Law and the one Christ put forward. The clash was inevitable!

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<sup>1</sup> Christians are now considered righteous by God because of their faith in Christ. By this very faith they are children of God (Galatians 3.24-26). They do the Law because they know it is good for them and they want to honour the author of the Law.



## The sacrifices

I cannot end this chapter without mentioning the sacrifices. This will tell us a little more about the long road needed to turn animal man into a spiritual man after God's own heart. It will also give us a better understanding of a major work of Christ, centuries later: his sacrifice on the cross.

Let us return to the people of Israel, stranded in the desert.

The relationship that God wanted to establish with his people after they came out of Egypt was a direct relationship, stripped down, without artifice, without special ceremonies, a relationship that was probably similar to the one he had begun to establish with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But this relationship was demanding, exclusive, and apparently quickly became unbearable for people unaccustomed to such a God. And the question of sacredness and sacrifice soon came up again. Why did this happen?

As we saw in Chapter 1, the need for the sacred is deeply rooted in human nature. Humans need to populate their world with sacred people, sacred places, sacred things. As already mentioned, by sacred <sup>1</sup> I mean anything to which humans confer a supernatural power of its own. The range can be wide: the sun, the moon, elements of nature such as a tree, a stone, a source of water, an animal, etc. A place or an object becomes sacred as soon as it is attributed magical virtues and special powers.

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<sup>1</sup> Sacred and holy should not be confused. This difference is explained at the end of this paragraph in the note: "holy or sacred?"

In reality, humans attribute to the sacred thing a power that it does not have; this is why the Bible will constantly oppose those sacred things or divinities that it calls idols, which are in fact nothing but wind, things of nothingness that turn believers away from God <sup>1</sup>.

To obtain the favours of these "divinities", humans think that they have to offer them sacrifices. These can be of all kinds: food, precious objects, animals. Some people offered their own children as sacrifices to their gods when the situation of the country was catastrophic. They thought that by giving their most precious possession, their child, the "deity" would appreciate such a gesture and would return to more merciful feelings in their favour.

After living for four hundred years in Egypt, where there was a heightened sensitivity to the sacred, the Israelites are impregnated with this notion of the sacred and will not get rid of it so easily. This is all the more true because the relationship with the sacred is much easier than that with an invisible God whom one does not control. The sacred thing is visible, it doesn't move, it's within reach, and the sacrifices offered to it betray an unconscious and skilful will to manipulate it. On the contrary, the God of Israel presents himself as an all-powerful God whom no one can manipulate, a God who is invisible and unpredictable, but who constantly seeks to bless those who trust in him. He speaks, he listens, he acts, unlike idols who are silent and do not act.

Sacrifice, in their minds, is intimately linked to the notion of the sacred. The one does not go without the other. Recognising the sacred implies the need to

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 44.8-20

make a sacrifice. The challenge for God is therefore immense: how to get his people to abandon their idolatrous habits and their desire for the sacred in order to maintain a true relationship with him? It is then that God envisages a surprising but remarkable solution. He asks his people to offer sacrifices, but in a completely different spirit. The meaning of sacrifice is completely changed, to become primarily pedagogical.

We can roughly distinguish two categories of sacrifices: sacrifices of gratitude and guilt sacrifices.

- In the sacrifice of gratitude, the Israelite learns, by giving a small part of his possessions, to recognise God as the origin of all that he has. Without the earth, without the sun, without the rain, crops cannot be harvested and human work is in vain! This recognition maintains humility and helps the Israelite to remain in his place as a human being, no more and no less.

- The guilt sacrifice is no longer intended to appease the fury of a god and obtain his forgiveness, for God forgives freely. So why make such a sacrifice? It has above all a pedagogical role. Indeed, there is something deeply unjust about forgiveness, since the guilty party is not punished. Knowing that he is forgiven, the guilty party could very well end up accepting it and persevering in his bad way. The sacrifice is introduced to make the sinner understand that his fault is serious and that his punishment is not his own, but that of the animal that is sacrificed. This awareness should thus lead the sinner to repentance and a change of inner attitude. He then

becomes capable of receiving God's forgiveness in full <sup>1</sup>.

All these measures were put in place to overcome human weaknesses and to help the Israelites get back on track. These measures will bear fruit when they are taken seriously and applied, and then become completely useless when they are ignored or distorted. Read Isaiah chapter 1, where God rebukes his people for making sacrifices while turning away from him. In a pathetic way, God expresses his disgust for these sacrifices that have lost all their meaning. They are practised without any conviction, without any real repentance on the part of the people who offer them.

As we have seen, the human being is by nature a religious animal that continually needs to see the sacred around him and to offer sacrifices in order to obtain special favours. Today, the human being has not changed and still needs the sacred.

From beginning to end, the Bible destroys the sacred to invite its readers to worship God alone. When this relationship, through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart, is alive, the need for the sacred outside of God disappears completely. But whenever believers move away from God, they immediately recreate the sacred. We shall see later how, even in the Church, the sacred has been recreated by inventing, for example, saints to be prayed to and carried through the streets on major festivals. Seeing the religious fervour and the people who attend these celebrations in the streets, we have the right to think that the sacred is still in vogue and

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<sup>1</sup> This word *he shall be forgiven* is found in several verses of Leviticus chapters 4-6.

attracts people. But does this mean that our relationship with God has improved? No! Because the sacred cannot really fill the void of God.

We have just mentioned the question of guilt. It is intimately linked to the Law. Indeed, the Law necessarily creates guilt in those who would like to obey the divine laws, but do not succeed completely. They even feel a dark force within them that pushes them to disobey these laws. Unlike the wicked who do not care about the laws and therefore feel no guilt (or feel it, but deny it and repress it), those who seek to love and obey God feel guilt when they see themselves displeasing God. Such guilt is healthy and beneficial because it prompts believers to ask for forgiveness and to change their attitude. The sacrifice of guilt was designed to relieve them of this burden and allow them to start afresh.

We have spoken earlier about the limited nature of the Law, since it cannot change the heart of the sinner. The same is true of sacrifices: they cannot bring sinners to perfection. Only Christ will settle once and for all the question of the Law and the sacrifices.

**Note: holy or sacred?**

In everyday language, the term "sacred" is associated mainly with what is religious: religious manuscripts and texts, instruments of worship, places of worship, singing, prayers, etc. In this book, I have given the term the following definition: anything that is given a supernatural power of its own is sacred. So, I have discarded other meanings.

In the first two chapters, we spoke at length about the idols that their worshippers consider

sacred, and showed that the Bible, in its entirety, destroys the sacred and invites believers to worship God alone. On the other hand, it introduces a very important term: holiness, from which is derived the adjective holy. What exactly does this term mean?

Holiness, according to biblical revelation, is:

1) A fundamental quality of God, the Father, the Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

2) An indispensable virtue of every true believer.

3) An attribute of certain places, objects, days, dates, actions, etc.

Let us take up these three points:

1) God's holiness is his essential, fundamental quality, and his absolute purity reveals his eternal glory. His holiness is manifested both in his justice and in his love. His justice compels him to punish the sinner, and his love compels him to save him. Justice without love is not holy, just as love without justice is not holy. The indissoluble link between justice and love explains the necessity of sacrifices, especially that of Jesus on the cross.

As the Son of God, Jesus is holy because he manifests the qualities of his Father, being of the same nature.

The Spirit of God is holy, which is why we speak of the Holy Spirit.

2) In the Old Testament, the Jews were called to be holy: *Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy* (Leviticus 19.2). The Hebrew word *kadosh* (holy) means: physically pure and especially morally and spiritually pure. In the New Testament, Christians are called to be Christ-like and holy (*hagios*). Their holiness is closely related to that of God. The Greek

word *hagios* has the same meaning as the Hebrew word *kadosh*.

3) In the Old Testament, certain places were holy, such as the Temple. This did not give them any supernatural power, but simply meant that these places were dedicated to the worship of God. They were not places where you could party with your friends! The same was true of the instruments of worship: they were holy because they were to be used only for the worship of God.

The Sabbath day is holy, not because it is better than the other days of the week, but because it is set apart to allow believers to especially nurture their relationship with God and others. For Christians, Sunday is holy for the same reasons.

## 4. The Ministry of Christ

Here we leap forward in history several centuries and find ourselves in the year 30 (or 33) of our era.

After talking to Jesus, whom the Jewish religious leaders want to condemn to death, the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate finds no grounds for condemnation. But he still has him beaten with rods, a particularly harsh punishment. Then the Roman soldiers cover him with a purple cloak, a parody of the imperial cloak <sup>1</sup>, and place a crown of thorns on his head; they mock him and slap him.

Pilate brings Jesus out, bloodied and weakened, before the people and says the now famous words: "Here is the man!" And they all shouted: "Crucify him!"

Pilate does not know that he has just spoken a historic word. Indeed, the man who is shown to the crowd in such a pitiful state is not just any man. He is the spiritual man par excellence, the one who responds perfectly to God's wishes, the one who would probably have become Adam if he had fully accepted the covenant made in the Garden of Eden.

Unfortunately, very few people recognised him as such. The religious people of the time were

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<sup>1</sup> In Rome, only the emperors wore purple. For some interpreters, the mantle is that of the prophet; the crown is that of the king and the reed is the staff of the high priest. Matthew 27.28-29



obsessed with their legalistic system and did not see in Jesus the true spiritual man according to God. And yet, they knew the prophecies that announced him and should have been the first to recognise him! Why did it come to this? To understand it, let us return to Jesus, his personality and his work.

## An unusual birth

Jesus was born into a simple family in Nazareth. His father, Joseph, was a carpenter and his mother, Mary, was a very young woman, a first-time mother. Before she became pregnant, Mary received amazing revelations from God through the angel Gabriel:

*You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.*<sup>1</sup>

Will this son become a king in Israel like the kings of old, especially his ancestor King David?

The angel said to her this:

*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called the Son of God.*

This is a strange revelation that tells us that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who was already at work at

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 1.31-32 and 35.

creation (Genesis 1.2), is at work in this woman and also in this child, as he develops in his mother's womb, to make him a spiritual man in his own right, the Son of God.

This revelation is not insignificant. It tells us something essential about Jesus: he is a fully human being, and also a divine being, since the Holy Spirit is constitutive of his nature.

For thirty years, little more is heard of him. The evangelist Luke nevertheless tells us an instructive episode <sup>1</sup>. Jesus, then twelve years old, accompanied his parents who, as every year, went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. But when Jesus' parents returned, they could not find their son. It was only three days later that they discovered him in the Temple of Jerusalem, conversing with the doctors of the Law. These were struck by his intelligence and his answers. The parents, taken aback, rebuked him, but Jesus gave them a surprising answer: *Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?* The parents did not understand anything.

This episode described by Luke confirms the unusual destiny of Jesus and the constant presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of this teenager, who, as a result, knew more about God than the most learned doctors of the time.

## A successful test

We find Jesus at the age of thirty. He leaves his job as a carpenter to embark on a completely different ministry: proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 2.41-52

But before he can do this, he has to pass an important test to see if he is really fit to begin such a ministry. After being baptised, Jesus is taken by the Holy Spirit into the desert where he is tempted by Satan <sup>1</sup>.

The apostle Paul gives us the key to understanding this test. By naming Jesus the *last Adam* <sup>2</sup>, he reminds us that Adam had to go through a similar trial: choosing between obedience to God or an autonomous life. Adam chose autonomous life, Jesus chooses obedience.

If we look closely at the test Jesus underwent, we are struck by the similarities with the test Adam and Eve underwent <sup>3</sup>: we find the same tempter, the ancient serpent, the devil, Satan. And in both cases, he tries to separate his interlocutor from God in order to make him autonomous:

- To Eve, he asks a question that casts doubt on God's word: *Did God actually say...?* Eve allows herself to be influenced and Adam follows the same path as her.

- Satan is very subtle with Jesus: he knows that Jesus is the Son of God and he pushes him to leave his dependence on God and become autonomous: *Since you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.* By suggesting that Jesus use for himself the supernatural power that has just

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 3.16-4.1 1

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 15.45

<sup>3</sup> Eve was the first to be tempted, but Adam followed her fully. Since he was the one taught by God, it was natural that he should bear all the responsibility. This is probably why Paul mentions Adam and not Eve.

been entrusted to him, Satan pushes him to abandon the humble way in which he has walked until now <sup>1</sup>.

In both cases, Satan seeks to turn his interlocutor away from God in order to make him a disciple. The second temptation (recorded in Luke 4.6-7) makes this clear: *I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms... if you will bow down to me.*

Adam failed, Jesus succeeds. This confirms the idea that Jesus has taken over the mission that was originally given to Adam. Paul continues: If Adam could only communicate human life to his descendants, Jesus, resurrected, became a life-giving spirit capable of communicating divine life to those who receive him, so that they may be spiritual beings like him <sup>2</sup>.

## **A man permanently connected to God, his Father**

Seeing the spiritual equipment of Jesus from the moment of his conception, one would be tempted to think that Jesus would be able to afford to work with a certain degree of independence. Since he has received everything, he can do his work as he sees fit.

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<sup>1</sup> In his letter to the Philippians (2.6-11), Paul expresses very well the purpose of this temptation: to make Jesus *equal with God*. Satan set the same trap for Adam and Eve: he proposed to them *to become like gods*. Paul shows how Jesus renounced this path by *humbling himself... by taking on the form of a servant... and becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 15.45: *The first Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.*

On the contrary, he works in total dependence on his Father. He does not seek to be equal to his Father <sup>1</sup>, but remains subject to him in all things. He considers that he can do nothing of himself, but he faithfully does what his Father shows him <sup>2</sup>, and speaks the words his Father has given him <sup>3</sup>. Before making important decisions, he spends hours, even a whole night, praying to understand his Father's will. Moreover, he remains in constant communion with his Father, so that he can change his plans at any time if God asks him to.

One day, he says to his disciples: *My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.* <sup>4</sup> By being continually dependent on God, Jesus is the opposite of Adam! And he will ask his disciples to live in this same dependence: *apart from me you can do nothing.* <sup>5</sup>

### **Note on dependency**

Dependency is primarily the lot of children, and everything is done to enable them to grow out of it and become adults, i.e. autonomous. Adults must be able to decide for themselves what is good or bad for them. Any dependence on a religious system is seen as suspicious; one immediately thinks of sects dominated by a guru whom the followers obey without really thinking, thus leaving aside their responsibilities. I am convinced that many people consider the Christian life, which Jesus has modelled for us, to be a disreputable sectarian life. It enslaves

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 2.6

<sup>2</sup> John 5.19

<sup>3</sup> John 14.10

<sup>4</sup> John 4.34

<sup>5</sup> John 15.5

people and locks them in an ideological prison that is contrary to the values of freedom advocated in Europe. What they don't understand is that Christians who live in this dependence enjoy a manifest happiness and experience true freedom!

When I was twenty years old, I received a tract dealing with the dependence of the Christian on his Lord. I was so impressed with this message that I typed it up and pasted it on the back pages of my Bible. I knew in my heart that this message was addressed to me personally by the Lord and that it was going to be like a red thread for my life. And indeed, it was! It is entitled: "Others can... you can't!" It begins with these words: "If God calls you to be truly like Jesus Christ, you will be led in ways... that you certainly would not have chosen." We then understand, through several examples, that God leads his children along particular and often difficult paths in order to teach them obedience. And the tract ends with these words: "When you can rejoice without any ulterior motive in this close, personal and jealous supervision; when you are happy that this divine guardianship controls your heart, then you will have entered the vestibule of heaven".

Fifty years later, I can testify to the accuracy of this message and I say to myself that many times I have entered the vestibule of heaven. What could be considered as enslavement is in fact liberation. To live in the presence of the Lord is to live in inner freedom. As the apostle Paul said two thousand years ago: ... *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*<sup>1</sup> In a sect, followers abandon their responsibilities and even the desire to have

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 3.17

responsibilities in order to blindly obey the guru. In the Christian life, however, the Christian is fully responsible for his choices <sup>1</sup>. By obeying God, he does not become a puppet of God, but remains responsible for his life at all times. It is then that he can choose to be a servant, choose to obey, choose to do the will of his Lord <sup>2</sup>.

## The master and his disciples

Jesus was sent to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. But what exactly does the Kingdom of God mean?

A kingdom requires a king, subjects who recognise the king's authority and owe him allegiance, and a land that belongs to the king and on which they live. The Kingdom of God is exactly that: the king is Christ, to whom God has given authority; the subjects are those who recognise Christ as their Lord and seek to do his will; and the land is the whole earth, which belongs to its Creator <sup>3</sup>.

For Jesus, preaching the Kingdom of God is above all about a new relationship between God and believers, a relationship of closeness that brings life. It is easy to imagine that the many sick people who come and are healed by Jesus experience this divine life in the depths of their being; and this healing

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<sup>1</sup> I have dealt with this subject at length in my book *"Christ in me: who does what?"*, Scripsi, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi D. Kassabi rightly said this: "True freedom is choosing your master!" TV program France 2 *À l'origine*, 23 April 2023.

<sup>3</sup> This is the subject of a previous book: *"Un Roi, des Sujets et une Terre"*, Scripsi, 2017 (*A king, Subjects and a Land*).

leads them to seek to know the author of this miracle.

Jesus does not need publicity to gather crowds; his revolutionary message, confirmed by the healings, attracts huge crowds everywhere. So much so that the Jewish religious leaders are jealous and fear that their followers will desert their ranks to join Jesus' "clan".

But what to do with all these people who want to follow this new teacher? Since Jesus cannot physically be everywhere, he decides to train disciples. So he chooses twelve men, mainly from the fishing and farming communities. He will live with them and show them the example, as a master does with his disciples.

These men have not received religious instruction like the religious leaders and scholars of the time. But this handicap is actually an advantage, because they are fully receptive to Jesus' message and able to put it into practice straight away. This is the best way to learn, because Jesus quickly sends them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. They have heard his message and are able to repeat it, and they have also received from him the power to work miracles. Now the mission is expanding.

What can we say about such a school? Three years with the Master, and what a Master! The disciples see amazing things, incredible healings and deliverances. Some of them witness an amazing scene where they see Jesus, dressed in glorious white, talking with Moses and Elijah about his



upcoming death <sup>1</sup>. They even hear the voice of God: *This is my Son, my chosen Son; listen to him.*

And yet, despite this extraordinary school, these men are not really spiritual men by God's standards.

One day, Jesus asks his disciples what he means to them. Peter makes a beautiful statement: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.* <sup>2</sup> Jesus recognises that God can only inspire such a statement. Peter speaks as a spiritual man. A few verses later the text shows Jesus talking about his coming suffering and death and then his resurrection. Peter then takes Jesus aside to rebuke him: *Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.* Jesus immediately turns around and says to Peter: *Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.*

Poor Peter thinks he is doing the right thing in seeking to protect his Master. He shows real affection for Jesus and wants his good. Who could blame him for anything? But in reality, he is completely wrong, because his actions are the opposite of God's will. He no longer acts as a spiritual man, inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit, but as a natural man, an animal man, to quote the expression used at the beginning of the book.

A second example <sup>3</sup>. On the eve of his death, Jesus warns his disciples of what will happen: when he is arrested, all his disciples will abandon him. Peter proudly insists: *"Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."* But Jesus says to him: *"Truly, I tell you, this very night, before*

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 9.28-36

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 16.15-20

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 26.33

*the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."* Indeed, Peter will deny his Master three times and the rooster will crow to remind him of Jesus' words. He will experience such intense humiliation that it will take a special intervention by the risen Jesus to get him back on track <sup>1</sup>.

The attitude of the disciples after Jesus' arrest, condemnation and death is disappointing. Would we have done better? In any case, it confirms us in the idea that the disciples were missing something essential: the Holy Spirit living in them. This is not to say that the Holy Spirit did not work with them during those three years of schooling; the many miracles they performed testify to this. Jesus clearly warned his disciples before he died:

*It is to your advantage that I go away, he said, for if I do not go away, the Helper (the Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.*<sup>2</sup>

And Jesus continued:

*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*

Everything is said in these verses! The Holy Spirit will be the link between the risen Christ and

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<sup>1</sup> John 21.15-19

<sup>2</sup> John 16.7 and 16.13-14

the disciples, enabling them to live as Christ lived. He will be a force, a life-giving power in the hearts of believers, a source of supernatural life, capable of transforming human nature and turning human beings from animal into spiritual beings. This is the heart of the spiritual Revolution I mentioned at the beginning of this book. It will be fully manifested on the day of Pentecost.

## Death at Golgotha

On the eve of his death, after sharing a last meal with his disciples, Jesus goes with them to the Mount of Olives. He feels the need to spend more time in prayer, because he knows what awaits him. As a responsible person who is free to make his own choices, Jesus can still stop his mission here and choose another way out, but he immediately recovers and acts as a spiritual man: *Not my will but yours be done*. He is aware of the importance of his work for the whole of humanity and accepts to go to the end of his mission, whatever the cost. Nevertheless, his stress is so intense that his sweat becomes like lumps of blood that fall to the ground <sup>1</sup>.

Jesus is arrested by the militia of religious leaders and sent to the sacrificial sovereign. Early in the morning, he appears before a hastily convened court. After a botched trial rigged by false testimony, he is accused of blasphemy and sentenced to death. But since the Jews cannot carry out such a sentence,

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 22.42-44. This phenomenon is known in medicine as haematidrosis.

they send him to the Roman Pilate, prefect of Judea, asking him to condemn him himself.

After much prevarication, Pilate cowardly accedes to the wishes of the religious leaders and the people, who are manipulated by them. Jesus is crucified on Mount Golgotha, between two robbers.

In addition to the horrible physical torture of crucifixion, Jesus experiences an immense moral and spiritual suffering, that of feeling the full weight of humanity's degradation. It is for all humans that he has accepted to die in this way, in order to allow them to renew contact with God. This foolish work deserves an explanation.

You remember what we said at the end of chapter 3 about sacrifices. These are linked, first of all, to a question of justice. Indeed, God's forgiveness is unjust since it leaves the guilty party unpunished. One could still accept such injustice for minor offences, but not for major ones. To correct this injustice, God instituted the sacrifice of an animal. The punishment that the sinner would normally suffer did not fall on him, but on the sacrificial animal, which in theological jargon is called the sacrificial victim. Moreover, the sinner, on seeing this, had to become aware of his fault, repent and show a sincere desire to change his attitude. He also had to become aware of God's goodness to him, which allowed him to continue to live despite his sin.

By dying on the cross, Jesus accepted an unprecedented mission: to be a sacrificial victim himself and thus take on the role that was assigned to sacrificial animals under the Mosaic Law. Since Jesus is a man of the same nature as sinners to whom God grants forgiveness, and since he is also a man without sin, his sacrifice is perfect and does not

need to be repeated. From now on, in the whole world and in all times, every believer who confesses his sin to God can appropriate the forgiveness offered by Jesus on the cross. By simply acknowledging the reality of that death and its profound meaning, he opens the door wide to God's forgiveness for himself.

Some people may criticise God for unjustly granting forgiveness to people who, in their eyes, have committed unforgivable offences. God may reply: "No, my forgiveness is not unjust, for justice has been fully done: Jesus died in their place".

The Lord's Supper, instituted by Jesus on the eve of his death, is intended to remind believers of the significance of that death. The bread and wine distributed to the faithful have no magical power in themselves, they are not sacred in the sense we have defined above; they are meant to remind them, on the one hand, of all that Jesus has accomplished for them and, on the other hand, that they can accept this forgiveness by faith, freely.

This work of forgiveness accomplished by the death of Jesus on the cross is essential to remove the gap that separated humanity from God. It reconciles God and humanity and thus allows the beginning of a true spiritual Revolution. It is the indispensable step to go further.

## **The Resurrection**

Jesus probably died on a Friday, before the opening of the Sabbath. Two days later, he appears successively to several of his disciples: he has risen, as he had announced!

Read these moving accounts! The four Gospels speak of it in their own way. It is the beginning of a new era, where everything will change.

Jesus will spend another forty days teaching his disciples and telling them about the Kingdom of God. They will hear Jesus' message in a very different way, because since the resurrection the perspective of this Kingdom is different.

Jesus will then ascend to heaven (the Ascension) and sit at the right hand of God. He will then receive from his heavenly Father the responsibility to rule his Kingdom and to be the head of the Church.

But just before Jesus ascends to heaven, he instructs his disciples not to leave Jerusalem and to wait for what the Father has promised, namely the sending of the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself had told them:

*In a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit ... you will receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*<sup>1</sup>

This is a crucial step that will enable them to be truly effective servants, powerful witnesses of Christ.

## **Pentecost, the feast of Shavuot.**

Following their Master's order, the disciples return to Jerusalem and take time to pray. There are about one hundred and twenty of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts of the Apostles 1.5 and 8

Ten days later, a supernatural event occurs. Let's listen to the text in Luke:

*And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.<sup>1</sup>*

At the sound of this, a multitude of people come running. These people have come from all the known world of the time to celebrate the great feast of Shavuot in Jerusalem <sup>2</sup>. They are all amazed, for they hear the disciples speaking in their own language about the wonders of God. Each disciple is moved by the Holy Spirit to speak in a dialect that he himself does not understand, but which is understood by some in the multitude of people who listen to them <sup>3</sup>.

The people wonder and are astonished: are the disciples drunk?

Peter then stands up and speaks to answer all these questions and to announce the good news of

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2.2-4. In his commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, D. Marguerat notes that Luke has taken several terms from the text of Exodus 19.16-19 (LXX): *the noise, the fire, the voice, the amazement of the people*.

<sup>2</sup> D. Marguerat also points out that it was probably only after the destruction of the Temple in 70 that the Jewish Pentecost, celebrating the renewal of the covenant, became the feast of the gift of the Torah at Sinai. Christian Pentecost was not celebrated as special feast of the gift of the Holy Spirit until the end of the fourth century.

<sup>3</sup> This phenomenon, called xenoglossia, still occurs today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

salvation in Jesus Christ. It is no longer the weak and fearful Peter who denies his Master in the court of the high priest, but it is a Peter filled with the Holy Spirit who speaks with power and assurance. The proof is that three thousand people are converted after hearing this preaching!

In the Old Covenant, only the prophets and a few special people were animated by the Spirit of God, thus becoming the divine messengers to the people. Here, the Holy Spirit is poured out on all the disciples so that they can all bear witness to the reality of the Kingdom of God and proclaim the good news of salvation.

It can be said that the Kingdom of God really begins to function, as the disciples are equipped spiritually to work in it.

## **The narrow gate**

Before closing this chapter on the ministry of Jesus, I would like to discuss one more point that I think is very important.

Jesus has been presented as the saviour of the world <sup>1</sup>, the light of the world <sup>2</sup>, the way, the truth, the life, the one through whom believers can reconnect with God and know him <sup>3</sup>, the door through which one can enter the Kingdom of God <sup>4</sup>. The work of Jesus is therefore universal; it is not limited to the Jewish people, to the peoples of the

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<sup>1</sup> John 4.42; 1 John 4.14

<sup>2</sup> John 8.12, 9.14

<sup>3</sup> John 14.6

<sup>4</sup> John 10.7



Middle East or to the Western world. It is for the whole world! Nor is it just one work among many, as if there were several possible ways of knowing God and entering into a relationship with him. The work of Jesus is universal, but it is also exclusive, and one would have expected that such a work would have manifested itself from the beginning with a brilliance commensurate with its universal vocation. A brilliance so strong that all would have recognised it immediately, without hesitation. It would have imposed itself with power, so that the adversaries would have been either convinced or put out of action.

It was in this state of mind that most of Jesus' contemporaries awaited the glorious Messiah of whom the Old Testament prophecies speak, the great hero capable of removing the heavy yoke of Rome on Israel, the victorious king destined to lead his people to peaceful waters <sup>1</sup>. But this was not the case. On the contrary! Jesus was not born in a palace, but in a stable in Bethlehem. His parents had to flee to Egypt to save him from the wrath of King Herod, who wanted him dead. His arrival in the world was without fanfare or trumpets and the first thirty years of his life were spent out of sight. No one could have known that this carpenter's son would turn the whole world upside down.

His ministry was difficult, with fierce opposition from religious leaders and major disbelief among the people. Jesus ended tragically, nailed to a cross, abandoned by all. And for many, this miserable end confirmed their idea that Jesus was an impostor <sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 1.71-72

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 27.63-64

His resurrection changed everything for those who believed in him, but it did not convince the majority of Jesus' contemporaries and the majority of the pagan peoples who heard about him afterwards.

Yes! The question remains: why did God not impose himself with power when he presented his Son to the world? Then all would have recognised him! To allow everyone to enter his Kingdom, he could have built a huge gateway and a wide and spacious highway to get there, visible from far away, which no one would have missed.

Instead, God did the opposite! Jesus had nothing to attract attention, he never used power to put himself forward and he even refused several times to be made king in Jerusalem. Jesus did speak of a gate into the Kingdom, but that gate is narrow, very narrow, so narrow that it is difficult to find and only those who are truly motivated are made capable of finding it and entering <sup>1</sup>.

Jesus could have elaborated a speech that was flattering and encouraging to all, brilliant, sparkling, glorious, making everyone want to follow him. Instead, he told his listeners about the difficulties they would face in becoming his disciples: opposition, rejection, hatred, division, persecution and even death. Why did the Saviour of the world put such a small gateway to his Kingdom?

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 7.13-14: *Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*

The explanation that seems to me to be the most appropriate is given by the apostle Paul <sup>1</sup>: There was a time when God sought to make himself known to the world, and when he made his wisdom manifest to men. But the world would not recognise him, so God was pleased to save believers by a completely foolish means: the death of Jesus on a cross.

Let's examine this text in detail! Paul is probably talking about nature, that magnificent theatre where God has displayed all the treasures of his wisdom, his invisible perfections, his power, his divinity <sup>2</sup>. All humans had to do was to look closely at the perfections of nature to understand the wisdom, goodness and power of its Creator. This is what God wanted from humans! They were intelligent enough to accept this revelation of nature and to reconstruct the image of its Creator to glorify Him! But human reason was unfaithful to its mission. The human heart refused to glorify God as such, and even to thank Him. And human reason has become perverted: instead of recognising God as the Creator, it has begun to divinise creation itself. Thus, it fell into animism and polytheism, as we saw in Chapter 1.

Some wise men in the world, however, conceived the idea of one good God, but they did not see in this God a loving Father, willing to make believers his children. Alongside these wise men, animism and polytheism remained deeply rooted in the population, distorting human consciousness. And this continues to this day!

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 1.21: *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.*

<sup>2</sup> Romans 1.20

This revelation by nature having failed, it pleased God to choose another means of salvation, which would no longer have the character of human wisdom and which could no longer be grasped by the intellect. A foolish way that would require a special revelation, given by God to those who would ask Him. Indeed, Paul tells us, Jesus' death on the cross is a scandal to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles... but it becomes wisdom to those who believe!

Jesus rejoiced in this divine plan. This is what he said:

*I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to little children.*<sup>1</sup>

Here, for Jesus, the "*wise and understanding*" are all those who think they are far too wise to have to humble themselves before God and accept his plan of salvation <sup>2</sup>. They are proud people who have created a God in their own image. They have their own conception of the Almighty and do not want to change it. They have no desire to shed their theological pretensions and humble themselves before the Creator God.

"*Children*", on the other hand, are generally humble and open-hearted to receive divine blessings. Here, children can also be adults who are childlike and receptive to Jesus' message.

God has hidden his salvation so that it is only available to those who truly seek him with all their heart. To these he reveals himself and gives faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 11.25; Luke 10.21

<sup>2</sup> Jesus does not condemn wisdom and understanding in themselves. He is condemning their use outside the divine plan.

One might object to such a practice and accuse God of favouritism, disregarding a whole section of the population. This would be a real misjudgment. His call is addressed to all, and he would dearly like all to respond favourably <sup>1</sup>, but unfortunately few accept his invitation <sup>2</sup>.

Faith is a gift that God gives to all those whom he accepts. And to be accepted, it is enough to seek God sincerely and to desire with all one's heart to obey Him. Anyone can meet these conditions!

### **Note**

Today, this notion of the narrow gate is not well understood, not only in society, but also in the Church. Many people in our society think in terms of globalisation and unification; they would like to promote a universal religion to which all could adhere without condition. It is obvious that for these people, Christianity seems completely narrow and the conditions for entering the kingdom of God are out of place.

If Jesus were to say in some churches in the West what he used to say to his disciples and to the crowd, he would be very badly received. No one wants to hear about persecution, the need to carry one's cross, the sufferings of Christian service. For many, the Church does not need a killjoy, but a pastor who knows how to encourage the faithful and give them joy <sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 2.4; John 3.16, 17.3

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 22.2-14 (the parable of the feast)

<sup>3</sup> 2 Timothy 4.3-4: *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own*

Many churches are experiencing a serious decline in their membership, and in order to stem the tide, they find it useful to present the kingdom of God in a more acceptable light. They try to widen the front door so as to welcome as many people as possible. The demands of discipleship are reduced to present only the pleasant sides. They open themselves up to the demands of the world, even if it means evading the teachings of the Bible. They reach out to other religions in the belief that non-believers will see a commendable spirit of openness and be more likely to push open a church door.

I am struck by the fact that it is in countries where persecution of Christians is strong that we see the greatest growth of the Church. And yet, in these countries, Christians are constantly experiencing these difficulties of which Jesus spoke; they are ready to take them on in order to become fulfilled disciples. They follow Jesus' teaching in its entirety and experience the power of the Holy Spirit through them. Their testimony shines all around them!

Let us say another word about those who prevent others from entering the Kingdom of God. This is the reproach that Jesus addressed to the religious leaders of his time:

*You shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.*<sup>1</sup>

The religious leaders were blocking access to the kingdom preached by Jesus by preventing people

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*passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 23.13

from believing in him; they did this by opposing Jesus, by declaring their hostility to his person and his work. They had a lot of authority over the people and were very good at manipulating them.

Today it is easy to prevent people from entering the kingdom of God; it is enough to push them in the wrong direction. The cosmic humanists (New Age, see chapter 7) are very good at this. They claim that one can find God within oneself, since God is in everything and everyone. It is by dint of meditation that a believer can overcome the barriers that prevent him from penetrating the depths of the self to meet God. Moreover, the cosmic humanist philosophy aims to bring the believer back in line with his natural inclinations, especially sexual, which can only flatter the animal man and make the religious approach more attractive.

By its work of undermining the work of salvation offered by Jesus, Islam closes all access to the Kingdom of God. However, some Muslims sincerely seek the truth and they find it, because God reveals himself to them. Here too it takes a miracle for the blindness to be lifted and for the seeking believer to find the narrow gate that leads to the Kingdom.

## 5. The spiritual man according to God

What happens to the one who has sought and found the narrow gate of the Kingdom of God and has ventured to open it and enter?

Is he invited to visit the Kingdom as he would a foreign country? A magnificent country, with a different language and a very different way of life, an astonishing and captivating tourist destination that deserves a diversion?

Are we offering him to come here to rest from all the fatigue accumulated on earth, as if he was entering a place of convalescence after an illness? A place to feel good and get back into shape, so as to be better able to face life's difficulties?

Is the Kingdom presented to him as a parallel world in which he will live at the same time as in the world from which he comes? He will go back and forth between these two worlds. Sometimes one, sometimes the other, according to his needs and desires. The earthly world for some activities and the Kingdom for others?

No, none of that ! He enters the Kingdom of God to serve God and become a disciple of Jesus Christ. He enters definitively, which means that there is a break: he renounces the principles of the world from which he comes to adopt those of God. This break is freely chosen and accepted. It is expressed, first of



all, through repentance, faith and water baptism, three fundamental steps to be able to truly enter and work in the Kingdom <sup>1</sup>.

- Through repentance, the newcomer confesses every sin of which he is aware and which weighs on his conscience ; he thus acknowledges that his previous life was not in conformity with God's will. He renounces them and changes course completely : this is when he experiences real liberation. It's important for him to be able to translate this change in his daily life into acts worthy of his repentance <sup>2</sup>.

Unfortunately, very often in the course of his new life, he will have a tendency to go backwards and will have to repent again to get back on the right track. It should also be noted that the more the new convert progresses in his life as a Christian, the more he will discover certain sins of which he was previously unaware and which he will confess in order to be delivered from them.

- Faith is essential, not only when entering the Kingdom, but throughout life.

The new convert has had the beginnings of faith to seek and push open the door to the Kingdom. Well done ! It's a great and decisive step ! And this faith will grow progressively, as he discovers Jesus, the Son of God, to whom God has entrusted the direction of his Kingdom. He discovers him by reading the Bible and talking to other Christians, but above all he gets to know him personally by coming into contact with him through the Holy Spirit. We'll talk more about this later. In this way, he understands all that Jesus has done for him, and he can gratefully

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2.38

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 3.8: *Bear fruit worthy of repentance.*

appropriate the forgiveness that has been granted to him. He opens himself to the abundant life that Christ wants to communicate to him. He learns to pray and also to listen to his new Master, and by walking with him, he strengthens his faith in the one who has become his true model for life. By getting to know Jesus, he also discovers God his Father <sup>1</sup>.

- Through water baptism, he makes Christ's death and resurrection his own. Immersion in water symbolises the death of everything that had to do with his old life, and coming out of the water bears witness to a resurrection, a new life in communion with Christ. This act may seem trivial, but it has a very important meaning, firstly for the new Christian, who will have to deepen his understanding of it every day, and secondly for the Church and the whole spiritual world that witnessed it.

As I have already said, this Kingdom is not a prison, and every Christian can leave it at any time, but at his own risk.

Repentance, faith and water baptism are only the first three steps to enter the Kingdom of God. They are indispensable <sup>2</sup>, and no one else can do them for him! But that's not enough! There is a fourth step that is just as indispensable as the previous ones :

- The baptism in the Holy Spirit. This is the most important step, but unfortunately it is often neglected in the Church, either through ignorance <sup>3</sup> or fear of the Spirit and his manifestations.

<sup>1</sup> John 14.9: *He who has seen me has seen the Father.*

<sup>2</sup> John 3.5: Jesus speaks to Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews: *unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.*

<sup>3</sup> Acts 19.8: *Paul ... came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit*

What identifies a Christian? Is it his repentance? His faith? His water baptism? His biblical knowledge? His commitment to the Church? No, none of these; only the baptism in the Holy Spirit. We know we are children of God because he has given us his Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul says that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. This seal is a mark visible to all; it is our mark as children of God. This is how God confirms that we belong to him <sup>1</sup>.

When a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, it overflows through the overflow of the mouth in the form of various spontaneous spiritual words <sup>2</sup>: speaking in tongues, prophetic words, ineffable joy... This is how the apostles knew whether the new convert had received the Holy Spirit. If this was not the case, they immediately took steps to ensure that he received it <sup>3</sup>. We'll come back to this point later, because it's so important.

If the new convert has successfully completed these four steps, he can then truly enter the Kingdom of God, live there and work effectively for his new Master.

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*when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all.*

<sup>1</sup> Romans 8.9: *If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him.*

<sup>2</sup> David Pawson, seminar given in Lausanne in 1987: *The message and methods of the Kingdom in relation to ministry.*

<sup>3</sup> See Acts 19.1-8

The other Christians who, like him, have pushed open the door to the Kingdom form a new family. This family will help him to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The new Christian has thus entered the Kingdom, but his feet remain on the ground as before. He realises that the world in which he lives has not changed, with its share of joys and sorrows, but that his relationship with the world will change. Why should that be? Because he now has a new Master.

I thought it important to recall these four essential steps for entering the Kingdom. We should remember, however, that these steps do not necessarily follow a precise order and that they can be spread out over time, which should not be the norm.

These steps are experiences that absolutely must be lived out in concrete terms. Intellectual knowledge alone is not enough and, unfortunately, many people are content with this and thus miss out on entering the Kingdom. They get off to a bad start, which can have unfortunate consequences for the rest of their Christian life.

When I reread the New Testament and focused on this subject, I was surprised to find that the apostles took great care to ensure that this start was made correctly and in a very concrete way. On the other hand, some of them, such as Paul, took the trouble to explain these four steps in detail. I conclude that experience and intellectual understanding go hand in hand. In my youth, I was lucky enough to meet Christians who helped me to enter the Kingdom, and the Lord never reproached me for trying to understand what I had experienced.

On the contrary, such study has only strengthened my faith.

So I have no hesitation in asking all sorts of questions here and trying to answer them.

We began to talk about our relationship with Christ in the previous chapter ; now I would like to explore it further, because that relationship is the foundation of life in the kingdom.

Why does this relationship between the Christian and Christ, which seemed impossible before entering the Kingdom, suddenly become a reality? Is it only due to a new openness of heart in the Christian? Or is there some kind of revelation, some kind of illumination on the part of Christ? If so, how does it happen?

What about his animal nature, unable to understand the things of the Spirit? Is it suddenly changed upon entering the Kingdom? As if touched by a magic wand, does the Christian suddenly become an accomplished spiritual man, capable of being an effective servant in the Kingdom?

Does the new Christian receive a new organ, the spirit, which makes him receptive to the spiritual world? Or does he reactivate an organ that has been unused or misused since birth?

These are the questions I would like to answer in this chapter. And to do this, I propose to study some elements of biblical anthropology, that is to say, to see how the Old Testament and then the New Testament consider man in himself and in his relationship with God. There are so many different visions of the human being in the world that it is worthwhile to look at what the Bible says about it.

Understanding the Jewish vision of the human being was a great help to me in my youth, when I couldn't reconcile within myself a certain dualistic Platonic vision and what I understood in the New Testament about the need to put the flesh to death. Let me explain! Plato <sup>1</sup> saw the body as a prison that held the soul captive and prevented it from rising to what is beautiful and noble. So, everything had to be done to stifle the body's desires and prevent it from manifesting itself.

Unfortunately, this philosophy strongly influenced the Fathers of the Church in the first century and well beyond, and this is how the *flesh*, of which Paul speaks, came to be confused with the *body*. We came to think that to kill the flesh, we had to kill the body! This is serious! We then fell into a destructive impasse! Some Christians thought it useful to mutilate parts of their bodies, judging them responsible for certain sins. A friend of mine, a former Jesuit, told me movingly that in his youth they were taught to inflict physical abuse on themselves to "silence the flesh": self-flagellation, placing a horsehair belt directly on the skin to irritate it throughout the day, using other devices to hurt the body and "mortify the flesh". I'm also thinking of those who make the Stations of the Cross on their knees. At Easter, some people crucify themselves like Christ, thinking that this will cause the flesh to die. And the list goes on...

All these mortifications are the consequence of a false understanding of the flesh. Hence the usefulness of understanding the terms used by the

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<sup>1</sup> Plato lived from 427 to 347 BC.

biblical authors in their texts. Biblical anthropology is therefore very important.

I experienced real liberation when I understood, as I will show below, that the human being is a whole, seen from different angles in the Bible, and that the flesh is not a constitutive element of the human being, but an attitude, a way of behaving in opposition to God. The flesh is the life of the animal man in us, without God!

The work of Christ in the person of the believer then became clear and coherent for me! What a discovery!

This chapter is very technical in places, for which I apologise. I've written it for those of you who would like to delve deeper into the subject. However, I encourage you to stick with this difficult reading. In particular, you'll discover a lot of interesting things when we talk about the spirit.

## Man in the Old Testament

In order to deal with this topic, I will refer to H. W. Wolff's book "Anthropology of the Old Testament" <sup>1</sup>.

In contrast to Greek Platonic philosophy, which establishes a hierarchy of values between the body and the soul, thus creating an opposition between what is considered bad (the body) and good (the soul), biblical language always sees the human being as a whole. But it sees it from different angles. We do the same thing when we speak of a man in this way:

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<sup>1</sup> Wolff Hans Walter. *Anthropologie de l'Ancien Testament*, Geneva, Labor et Fides, 1974.

he is a force of nature, a colossus, a sensitive soul, an artist, a brilliant intellect, a gifted speaker, etc. All these expressions show this man from different angles, emphasising one particular aspect of the person, but not excluding the others! In this case, the brilliant intellect also has a body with muscles!

In the Old Testament, four terms are frequently used to describe the man:

- ***Nefesh***. This term describes the throat, the neck. This is where the predator rushes to kill its prey by suffocating it. It is inferred that *Nefesh* describes the human being in a state of necessity and weakness. This term also describes the mouth that tastes a delicious meal, the mouth that embraces the one it loves, the mouth that opens to breathe. It is the being that manifests desires, the being that lives.

*Nefesh* is a creation; it appears when the breath of God, *rouaH*, passes through the dust of the earth to give birth to this unity, this totality: the person-man, the living soul. It dies when this same *rouaH*, this creative breath, no longer acts in its favour <sup>1</sup>.

- ***Bâsâr*** describes the flesh, the muscles, and by extension the physical body. It is the perishable being, the being that exists in its natural weakness as a creature.

- ***RouaH*** describes wind, breath, vigour, vital force, sensitive faculties, energy. It is the being in motion that is in possession of all its faculties.

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<sup>1</sup> The apostle James says the same thing: *the body apart from the pneuma is dead* (2.26).



The term *rouaH* is also used to describe the Spirit of God, which complicates the interpretation of this term in the biblical texts.

Noting the wickedness of men, God decides to shorten their life span: *My Spirit will not remain in man forever, for man is only flesh, and his days will be a hundred and twenty years.*<sup>1</sup> R. Pache deduces that life is communicated and maintained by the Spirit of God <sup>2</sup>.

- ***Leb, Lebab*** describes the heart, feelings, desire, reason.

From this brief anthropology in the Old Testament, I would like to emphasise three points:

- The human being is always considered as a whole, even if from different angles.

- Some of the terms that describe the human being are also applied to animals. This reminds us of the closeness between man and animal.

- The term spirit (*rouaH*) describes both the human spirit and the Spirit of God. We will find the same ambiguity in the New Testament when we speak of *pneuma*, which can refer to either the human spirit or the Spirit of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 6.3

<sup>2</sup> Pache René, *La personne et l'œuvre du Saint-Esprit*, St-Légier, Éditions Emmaüs, 1969.

## How is the relationship between God and believers established in the Old Testament?

Let us now look at the relationship between God and humans: how does he speak to them?

In the Garden of Eden, God seems to speak audibly to Adam and Eve. The text tells us of the voice of the Lord God, which travels through the garden towards evening <sup>1</sup>. So, this is not a communication from spirit to spirit. This is probably also the case for the direct descendants, from Cain to Noah. It is also the case with Abraham: God appears to him in a tangible way and, apparently, speaks to him directly <sup>2</sup>. It also takes the form of three visible angels <sup>3</sup>.

God also appears to Isaac to tell him of his covenant with him and his descendants <sup>4</sup>. In blessing his two sons, Isaac exercises a prophetic gift, inspired by the Spirit of God.

God reveals himself to Jacob in dreams during the night <sup>5</sup>. Later, he appears to him in the form of angels, and then as a man who wrestles with him <sup>6</sup>. God also shows himself in tangible ways <sup>7</sup>. Just before he died, Jacob blessed his children and gave each of them a prophetic message <sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3.8

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 17.1

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 18

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 26.2-6

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 28.10-22 ; 31.11-13

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 32.1 and then 24-32

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 35.1, 9-14

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 49

Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, became the right-hand man of Pharaoh in Egypt. God gave him the ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Joseph was recognised as having the Spirit of God in him.

The closest and best described relationship is undoubtedly that between God and Moses. God speaks with Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend <sup>1</sup>, and Moses does not fail to write down all these words <sup>2</sup>. For this reason, many theologians attribute to him a major part in the making of the manuscripts that would later have been used to write the first five books of the Bible.

A large part of the Old Testament is made up of texts written by various prophets in whom the Spirit of God manifested itself in a powerful way through prophecies and miracles.

The story of the prophet Ezekiel is very interesting. On a very specific date, he had visions which he attributed to God <sup>3</sup>. Ezekiel then described his vision (1.4-28). So impressed was he by what he saw that he fell on his face and clearly heard the voice of someone speaking to him. The text continues: *He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet and I will speak to you". And as soon as he had spoken these words to me, the Spirit entered me and made me stand on my feet; and I heard him who spoke to me.* This is how God explained the vision to him and gave him his commission to the people of Israel. The same scene was repeated in the next chapter: the Spirit entered him again. This was probably another powerful visitation.

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 33.11

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 24.4; 34.27; Numbers 33.2; Deuteronomy 31.9, 24

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 1 and 2

We understand that the Spirit of God is poured out on those whom he calls to a particular ministry, in this case that of prophet, but that it does not necessarily remain in him, at least not at this level of intensity.

We think of other figures, such as judges and kings. The Spirit is not necessarily permanent in them and can be withdrawn <sup>1</sup>. After his disobedience, King David begged God not to withdraw his Holy Spirit from him <sup>2</sup>.

It is noted that the Spirit was not poured out on all the people of Israel and that God clothed with his Spirit mainly those whom he called to a special ministry. The Spirit did act on all the people of Israel, but to a lesser extent than he did later in the Church. The apostle John explains it as follows: *as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified*.<sup>3</sup>

To conclude this paragraph, I would like to emphasise this: in Jewish thought, man is understood as a whole. He is a man in relationship with God, with other humans, with animals and with nature. His relationship with God varies from case to case, depending on the believer's obedience and faithfulness in the work God entrusts to him. Some have been outstanding spiritual men throughout their lives, others have been so occasionally.

To be a spiritual man it is not enough to have something of the Spirit of God in oneself. A man is said to be spiritual when he has a strong bond

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<sup>1</sup> This was for example the case for Samson (Judges 13.25, 16.20), for Saul (1 Samuel 10.10 and 16.14)

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 51. 11 or 13

<sup>3</sup> John 7.39

between his spirit and the Spirit of God, a bond that leads him to walk with his God and do His will.

## Man in the New Testament

H. Mehl-Koehnlein <sup>1</sup> notes that it is difficult to find a clear and well-defined anthropology in the theology of the apostle Paul, for several reasons: Paul makes very free use of Greek terms from the philosophy and popular anthropology of the Hellenic world. We must therefore be very careful when analysing the terms used.

It must also be remembered that Paul is completely immersed in Jewish culture and especially in the anthropology of the Old Testament. Even though he is familiar with Greek culture, he thinks above all as a Jew, renewed by the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, like the authors of the New Testament, he never considers man in himself, but always in his situation before God. Man is really seen only in his existence before God, for or against God.

As we did with the Old Testament, we will examine several terms that have to do with man.

### **- *Soma*. The bodily reality of man.**

This term always refers to the body as a constituted and concrete organism. It is a whole, a

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<sup>1</sup> Mehl-Koehnlein Herrade, *L'homme selon l'apôtre Paul*, Cahiers théologiques 28, Neuchâtel, Delachaux et Niestlé, 1951. I drew inspiration from this work to write this paragraph. The "Bible on line" software was very useful for me to locate all the verses in which a particular word is used. This helps to understand the various meanings.

unity. This is what allows Paul, in some cases, to confuse *soma* with *sarx* <sup>1</sup>.

It is the material, visible, living, sensitive body of man, the human person in his totality. Man does not have a *soma*, but he is *soma*. It is for this reason that Paul cannot conceive of existence after death and resurrection without *soma*. However, this *soma* will not be a carnal body, but a spiritual body, a body of glory <sup>2</sup>.

The *soma* also designates a person who has the power to dispose of himself and to make choices.

### **- *Sarx*. The carnal reality of man**

This term describes, in Paul, the whole man as an earthly existence. It is the human personality in its creaturely weakness and powerlessness. It is the natural man in his totality. It corresponds to the term animal man that we defined at the beginning of this book, without necessarily suggesting depravity. *Sarx* can refer to the whole sphere of the human being, everything that bears his imprint and the mark of his dominion.

Paul also uses this term to describe the earthly, natural man, sold to sin, condemned to destruction. He is what he is, with all his limitations that prevent him from understanding the things of the Spirit. This is the reality of human existence without God, since man has voluntarily distanced himself from God, has even rebelled against Him and submitted to sin. It is the reality of human existence in its relation to sin, a

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15.39-40

<sup>2</sup> Philippians 3.21

reality dominated by the power of evil. A reality that cannot please God <sup>1</sup>.

It is important to understand that *sarx* is not a constitutive element of the human being like *soma*, but a way of being of the earthly, natural man. In the expression *body of flesh*, the body (*soma*) is only the instrument of the flesh (*sarx*). When Paul condemns the *flesh*, he is not condemning a part of the human being, as Plato does when he despises the body that holds the soul captive, but he is condemning an attitude that is not what the Lord would want. The difference is fundamental!

The adjective *sarkikos* comes from *sarx*. It is used ten times in the New Testament and has the same meaning as *sarx*.

### **- *Psuchè*. The soul**

The word *psuchè* could correspond to the Hebrew word *nèfesh* in the Old Testament.

For Paul, the term *psuchè* is in the Old Testament tradition. Paul does not conceive of the immortality of the soul, and he does not use the word *psuchè* to designate the principle of spiritual life. *Psuchè* is the manifestation of life, especially individual life; it is the life-bearing soul.

Like *nèfesh*, *psuchè* denotes a unity, the total man, the person, but it is more precisely man in his manifestations as a living being. It is the individual life, the oriented life of a conscious and voluntary subject.

*Psuchè* is never opposed to *soma*, but in some passages it is opposed to *pneuma* (spirit), as is the case in the first epistle to the Corinthians: Paul uses

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8.8

the adjective *psuchikos* to describe the animal man, the natural man who is oriented towards earthly things and is unable to understand anything about the things of the Spirit <sup>1</sup>. Here *psuchikos* has the same meaning as *sarkikos*. Louis Segond translated *psuchikos* in his 1910 French version as "animal man" <sup>2</sup>, which is what led me to use this term in this book. As we have seen above, the use of the term *sarx* shows the low value of this earthly life, because it is opposed to the world of God and his Spirit. Opposed to *pneuma* (spirit), the terms *psuchè* and *psuchikos* inherit this same pejorative meaning in 1 Corinthians (2.14 and 15.44).

### **- *Nous.* The intellect, the intelligence, the mind**

For H. Mehl-Koehnlein, the word *nous*, no more than the word *soma*, designates a part of man juxtaposed or opposed to another part of himself. It is not, as in Hellenism, a kind of superior organ that is in opposition to the body. *Nous* is the "I" who knows, understands and decides. It is synonymous with the *inner being* of which Paul speaks in certain places <sup>3</sup>. It is the intelligent will of man who knows

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 2.14: *The animal man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.* (Translation from Segond)

<sup>2</sup> The TOB also uses this expression when referring to Adam: *Thus it is written, "The first man Adam was a life-giving animal, the last Adam is a life-giving spiritual being".* 1 Corinthians 15.45.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 7.22-23: *For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.*



and appreciates, who agrees or rejects, who judges and chooses.

*Nous* and *soma* are two manifestations of the human person in his totality. The whole human person is God's creation, it is created *nous* and *soma*. There is no Platonic idea of incorporeal life in Paul.

*Nous* unfortunately does not have the strength to fight against the *flesh*. He knows the good, he wants the good, but he is paralysed by the flesh (*sarx*). Defeated, it sighs in its slavery and waits for the Spirit's deliverance.

It can know the Creator in His creation <sup>1</sup>, but it also has the capacity to depart from God and become a perverted mind. This is why Paul insists on the need for every Christian to be transformed by the renewing of the mind, in order to discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect <sup>2</sup>.

### **- *Pneuma*. The human spirit, the Spirit of God**

The term *pneuma* can be confusing, because it sometimes means the Spirit of God, sometimes the human spirit. It also refers to the evil spirit that can take hold of a man.

In the New Testament, there are about 370 occurrences of the word *pneuma*. About 61% describe the Spirit of God, 18% the human spirit, 12% demons and 9% have another meaning, not directly related to our topic.

Before talking about the human spirit, let us say a few words about the Spirit of God:

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 1.20-21

<sup>2</sup> Romans 12.2

## The Spirit of God

For H. Mehl-Koehnlein, the word *pneuma* is very close to the Hebrew term *rouaH* of the Old Testament. However, there is no complete equivalence between *pneuma* and *rouaH*. *RouaH* never penetrates man to the point of merging with him. The spiritual man of the New Covenant has no correspondent in the Old Testament, where, in the prophet, the Spirit always remains something external, something extraordinary that takes hold of him and lifts him up independently of his will.

For Paul, the *pneuma* is a transcendent element, a gift from God. It is a manifestation of God to man and in man <sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the *pneuma* is opposed to the purely human dimensions of the believer, to the fallen flesh that we described earlier as *sarx*.

Although it manifests itself in man and dwells in him, the *pneuma* is nevertheless at all times the *pneuma* of God, fully sovereign and always supernatural, although present in the natural human.

The presence of God's *pneuma* is for human existence the origin and the power of a restart, of a renewal, of a new creation. Thus, the whole of man is touched by the Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Before ascending to his heavenly Father, Jesus promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would come **into** them (John 16.7 and 14.16-17). During their three years together with Jesus, the disciples saw the manifestations of the Holy Spirit and even tasted it as they were sent by Jesus to preach the Kingdom of God and perform miracles and deliverances from demonic spirits. But it was not until after Pentecost that they experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit **within** them. And then everything changed!

## **The human spirit**

*Pneuma* also refers to the human spirit.

I would like to return to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter about the spiritual man. What does he have that animal man does not? Does he receive from God, at some point, a new organ, the spirit? Does this spirit make him receptive to the spiritual world and capable, among other things, of understanding what the Spirit of God is transmitting to him? Or does it reactivate an organ common to all humans, the human spirit, which is unused or misused?

These are complex questions!

Scientists have used neuro-radiological investigation equipment to find out whether believers have a special area in their brain that shows special activity when they pray. They were disappointed to find that the areas that "lit up" during such a practice corresponded to areas normally used for a common brain activity<sup>1</sup>. Their conclusion was that there is no specific part of the brain that could be called "spirit". So, we have to look elsewhere and differently.

In studying the verses of the Bible where the term *pneuma* clearly refers to the human spirit, we are struck by the fact that it is primarily concerned with the human being in his relationship with God. Although this spirit is a constitutive element of the human being, it only becomes truly awakened and effective when the Spirit of God renews it. It is not

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<sup>1</sup> Clarke Peter, *Dieu, l'homme et le cerveau. Les défis des neurosciences*, Éditions Croire, Paris, 2012. (*God, Man and the Brain. The challenges of neuroscience*)

without reason that Jesus speaks of *being born again*, that is, being transformed by the Holy Spirit, if one is to enter into a true relationship with God. When this relationship is established, the spirit is then turned towards God, it becomes fond of spiritual things <sup>1</sup>, and it is made sensitive to the language of the Holy Spirit. The spirit is then able to receive the life communicated to it by the Spirit of God and the believer receives from Him the testimony that he is a child of God <sup>2</sup>.

The bond that is established between the Christian and the Lord becomes ever stronger; Paul expresses it thus: *He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.*<sup>3</sup> This link allows a two-way communication: the believer speaks to God and God speaks to the believer. The spirit becomes the "place" of the encounter with God, where divine life and human life create something together. It is a "community of life".

One could go even further and speak of a "community of goods". The spiritual life is not disembodied, but has an implication in all areas of life. Jesus expressed it in this way when he addressed his Father: *All mine are yours, and yours are mine.*<sup>4</sup> But for this to be truly realised, the belonging must be fully reciprocal. This is the point on which we often stumble: we would like to have everything from God, but give him nothing! There is much to ponder here!

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8.5

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8.15

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 6.17. This connection obviously brings to mind the union of a man and a woman who become *one flesh* (Genesis 2.24). But in 1 Corinthians it is not flesh, but spirit.

<sup>4</sup> John 17.10

We spoke earlier about the fact that the Bible does not consider the soul to be immortal; but what about the spirit? How can we understand the words that Jesus addressed to his Father just before he died: *Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*<sup>1</sup> Was he entrusting to God a part of himself (his spirit) that was supposed to live on after his death? Was he entrusting to God that part of himself which had contributed to the building of a spiritual common good, as we have already mentioned?

This same thought is found in the story of Stephen's stoning. Feeling himself dying, Stephen prayed and said this: *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!*<sup>2</sup>

What about the story of the resurrection of the daughter of the synagogue ruler? Jesus took hold of the dead girl's hand and said in a loud voice: "*Child, arise*", and her spirit returned, and she got up at once.<sup>3</sup> The text seems to say that her spirit left her at the moment of her death and then returned to her through Jesus' intervention.

We have seen above that *the one who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him*<sup>4</sup> and that something common is created, which belongs to God and to the Christian at the same time. We can think that this spirit persists after the death of the Christian and returns to God. In a way, this spirit represents the essence of his identity, and God will give him back a body at the resurrection. But this body will be spiritual and no longer earthly<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 23.46

<sup>2</sup> Acts 7.59

<sup>3</sup> Luke 8.54-55

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 6.17

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 15.44

Before going any further, I would like to talk about the possible relationship of the human spirit with occult spiritual powers.

The Bible tells us that God is the Creator of all things, including the spiritual beings it calls angels or spiritual powers. The Bible also tells us that some of these powers have rebelled against God and seek to destroy God's creation. This evil spiritual world is called the occult world. In the Gospels, Jesus speaks of Satan as a particularly dangerous figure to be wary of<sup>1</sup>, for Satan is the leader of this occult world.

What strikes me is that people can develop spiritual links with this occult world without being in contact with God. Their spirit has been awakened to these evil and unhealthy spirits. They may even receive supernatural powers that they claim to use for the benefit of others. I am thinking in particular of the healing powers of certain diseases, powers that may be very real, but are associated with the establishment of a link between the patient and the occult world. The patient is all happy and grateful because he is cured, but he has not seen that he has opened the door to harmful spiritual influences that will prevent him from turning to God and create significant psychological disorders as well. The trap is closing!

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4.10, 12.26, 16.23 ; Mark 1.13, 3.23 et 26, 4.15 ; Luke 13.16, 22.3, 31 ; John 13.27

## The transformation of the Christian

The link between the Spirit of God (or the Spirit of Christ) and the human spirit is primarily to promote the transformation of the whole Christian.

We shall now see how this transformation is carried out.

The Greek verb for transformation is *metamorphoo*. It is used only four times in the New Testament. The first two occurrences refer to the transfiguration of Christ <sup>1</sup>: in front of his three disciples, Peter, James and John, Jesus changes his appearance; his face shines like the sun and his clothes become white as light. He then enters into conversation with Moses and Elijah. Then a voice is heard in a luminous cloud: *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased: listen to him!* This experience will have a profound effect on the three disciples of Jesus.

The other two occurrences of *metamorphoo* concern the transformation of the Christian: 2 Corinthians 3.18 and Romans 12.2, which we will now study. This analogy with the transfiguration of Jesus gives this verb a very special meaning. The first text reveals the source of this transformation; the second will show more concretely how this transformation takes place in the believer.

Here is the first text:

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 17.2 and Mark 9.2 which give the same account.

## Transformed by Christ

*All of us, with unveiled face, reflect the glory of the Lord; thus we are transformed into the likeness of the Lord and pass from one glory to a greater glory. For this is what the Lord, who is the Spirit, does.<sup>1</sup>*

The apostle Paul knows what he is talking about when he writes these words. On his way to Damascus to imprison the Christians, whom he considered to be enemies of Judaism, he was "struck down" by an apparition of Christ in his glory <sup>2</sup>. Jesus spoke to him and revealed himself to him. From then on, everything changed in Paul's life and he became a fervent follower of Christ. He will have many more revelations that will allow him to go further and further in the transformation of his being.

It is worth studying this verse carefully. Paul compares the situation of the Christian with that of Moses. When Moses spoke face to face with God, he reflected the glory of God: his face changed <sup>3</sup> and became so bright that the Israelites were afraid to approach him. That is why he put a veil over his head.

The Christian is in a similar situation: in communion with Christ who dwells in the Spirit in his being, the Christian reflects the glory of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 3.18, translated from TOB. Other translations read: we behold the glory of the Lord. The verb to reflect is more closely related to the experience of Moses. Of course, the one does not preclude the other, for no one can reflect the glory of God unless he has first contemplated it!

<sup>2</sup> Acts 9.3-18

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 34.28-35



This communion allows the Spirit to progressively transform the believer so that he becomes like Christ and reflects his glory ever more clearly.

Jesus is our model, to whom we try to conform. But he is much more than that, he is the Spirit who dwells within us, the life-giving principle that enlivens our whole being and transforms it to his image <sup>1</sup>.

The second text explains better how this transformation of the person is accomplished:

## The Renewal of mind

Transformation begins with the renewal of the mind. The apostle Paul says this:

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind... <sup>2</sup>*

At the beginning of the sentence, this injunction shows that if the animal man has been shaped by the *present world*, the spiritual man must detach himself from it in order to progress. The present world must no longer be the model for the Christian's life. Of course, it is not a question of isolating oneself to live as a hermit and deny all that has been learned. This heritage that has made man a highly evolved being

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8.29 : *God also predestined them to be like the image of his Son...*

<sup>2</sup> Romans 12.2: *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

The same injunction is found in Ephesians 4.23: *you must be renewed in the spirit of your minds.*

must not be rejected, but rethought. It must be reoriented. And to do this, the mind, the intellect, must be renewed.

There is something odd in Paul's second injunction: *be transformed* combines an imperative (*be*) and a passive (*transformed*). The command could be paraphrased as follows: "You must be transformed and it is your responsibility to do all you can to make this transformation happen; but you cannot transform yourselves, you must let the Holy Spirit work in you". This says a lot about the necessary cooperation between the believer and the Holy Spirit <sup>1</sup>.

The intellect, the mind (*Nous* in Greek, as we have seen above) is the seat of decision, the control centre of the person, the "I". It is therefore a nerve centre that needs to be transformed first.

This is all very theoretical, but how does it work in practice?

I am always moved and at the same time amused to see two lovers pressed up against each other in a public park. Most of the time they don't say anything, but enjoy this precious moment intensely, as if it were their last. The current flows: a few kisses, a few caresses, the warmth of bodies pressed together, the joy of simply being together. They give the impression of being in a bubble, isolated from the surrounding world, unaffected by the noise of the people around them. They focus on their

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<sup>1</sup> This same double action is found in the following texts: Ezekiel 36.26: *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you*. Here, it is God who acts!

Ezekiel 18.31: ***Make yourselves*** a new heart and a new spirit. It is the believer's responsibility to clear his heart and rid it of all its transgressions (see Jeremiah 4.1-4).

relationship, trying to savour every minute that passes.

As believers who discover this relationship with the Holy Spirit we experience something similar: God's love, his peace, his joy... the happiness of being close to Him. How good it is to know that we are loved! To understand that we have value! That we are not an ant lost among billions of other ants, but a unique person who counts for God. This sense of well-being and fulfilment, which Paul describes as the *fruit of the Spirit*, is not artificial or illusory. It is real and attests to the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. This feeling is always there when God speaks, and it is important to pay attention to it. Indeed, it is easy to confuse the voice of our conscience with that of God, but the latter is always associated with the fruit of the Spirit in us.

Tasting God's love, joy and peace is good, even very good, and there is nothing to prevent us from renewing this experience every day, every moment. But this is not enough to transform the animal man that we are! We need more: as Paul says, we need to discover God's will, his plans for us and for the world around us; we need to be able to appropriate his wisdom in order to implement his plans. And for this to happen, our minds must be transformed. When the relationship is well established, as evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit in us, we are then able to listen to God and allow ourselves to be transformed.

It would take a whole book to talk about this listening; I will limit myself here to mentioning some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit communicates the thought of Christ to us, knowing that the means he uses are varied.

The Spirit can speak by giving us a conviction of what to do. This conviction comes to us in such a way that we are certain that it is the Lord who is speaking. We also know this because we experience the supernatural peace and joy of God.

He can dispel the fog that often clouds our understanding, and then everything becomes clear, and we understand what to do. "Thinking with God" is the term by which I designate this work of thinking, which is no longer done alone, but in the presence of God. I ask him questions and he answers me in different ways. I leave him free to correct me, to correct the direction I am taking, to stop me altogether when I go wrong. What security to know that I am being helped in this way!

A friend of mine heard God's voice as if someone was speaking clearly in his ear. He obeyed immediately, which led to some incredible experiences. This man impressed me greatly with his faith and his immediate and complete obedience. I could see in him that the life of the Spirit is not a fable, but produces concrete fruits in everyday life.

God can also reveal himself through dreams; we have many examples of this in the Bible. We have already talked about this in Chapter 5, mentioning the experiences of men of God in the Old and New Testaments.

It is not uncommon for me to wake up in the night to find that a situation that was previously confusing to me has become clearer. The fog has suddenly lifted; I don't know how, but I know that God has answered my prayers.

God can also speak to us through the Bible readings we do. Suddenly, a text becomes clearer and communicates to us a truth that we had previously

missed. The biblical word becomes a word of God for us at that very moment.

Read Psalm 119 and you will better understand the importance that its author attaches to the Scriptures and the commandments contained therein. He regards the Scriptures as a word from God, a word he seeks with all his heart, which he meditates on day and night and to which he gives the greatest importance. He rejoices in it as one who finds a great booty, for he knows that it enlightens him in his walk. It gives him instruction, intelligence and wisdom to go forward on the difficult paths of life.

It is important to read the Bible from beginning to end on a regular basis in order to understand God's plans and the means to accomplish them. The Holy Spirit can help us in this reading to open our eyes. Such study requires sustained personal thinking, which takes time and energy. We cannot do without such work! Paul said to the Athenians *that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him*.<sup>1</sup> So, we cannot expect God to reveal all his plans at once.

We have already mentioned some of the direct ways God speaks to his children. He can also use indirect means, that is, through other people or through external circumstances. Why is this? Often because our listening is disturbed and we do not discern God's voice well. In such cases, it is good to ask for help from Christians who are used to listening to the Lord and who will receive some word or advice from him. I have benefited from this on several occasions in my life at turning points when my

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 17.27

preoccupations were taking over my spirit and preventing it from functioning properly.

God may speak to us through others to confirm a direction he has given us before. When we have to make an important decision, it is good to have external confirmation. We have several examples of this in the Bible. The best known is that of Gideon who asked God for very material confirmations of the call he had received <sup>1</sup>.

Let us not forget that our understanding of God's will can be imprecise, and that it is easy to be mistaken about the origin of an inner word: we think it comes from God, but in reality it comes from our conscience, or from elsewhere, especially from the occult spiritual world. This is why we must always pay attention to the fruits of the Spirit that accompany his Word: peace, joy, love... fruits that dispel any possible inner turmoil and give us this magnificent confirmation: "Yes! It is indeed the Lord who speaks to me!" These fruits of the Spirit are never present when the Evil One whispers his will in our ears.

Let us remember that in order to receive this divine confirmation, we must often spend time in prayer. This is rarely done in a few minutes. Jesus, by the way, spent hours in prayer before making important decisions. So let us not hesitate to extend our time of prayer and listening until we are able to hear what God wants to tell us!

God can also speak to us through the circumstances of life, which will confirm what he has told us in other ways.

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<sup>1</sup> Judges 6.36-40

We cannot lock God into patterns. He is sovereign and free to act as he wishes with his children. Let us only recognise his voice.

Thus, little by little, the animal man that we are is transformed and walks as God wishes. But let us be clear, this animal man will never disappear completely and he will always be ready to manifest himself when he has the opportunity. Why is this? Simply because we have been educated since birth according to the spirit of this world and it is difficult to get out of the ruts that have been dug so deeply in us.

## **The awakening of consciousness**

The term conscience can have several meanings. I understand it here as the watchdog of our being, a kind of internal policeman who controls our life and evaluates it according to what he understands of good and evil. It is a function of animal man that needs to be renewed and reoriented.

Conscience can be more or less acute. It can also be misdirected or defective. The person no longer has any reference points to hold on to and may be tempted to do anything.

When God said that he would write his Law in the hearts of believers <sup>1</sup>, he probably wanted to awaken the human conscience so that it would be in tune with the divine will. This renewed conscience becomes a precious safeguard at all times, especially when the Christian is momentarily no longer in communion with God. It warns the believer of the

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 31.33

wrong road he is taking and invites him to change course and return to the right path.

But, as we said earlier, the Law in the conscience sheds light on what is right and wrong, but it does not help the believer to do good by overcoming evil. The Christian must be helped by the Holy Spirit who dwells within him.

## **The control of emotions**

In my youth, I was fascinated by the Romantic period, both for its literature and its music. It was a time when emotions were highly valued and became the driving force of inner and outer life. Beautiful emotions brought a person to the top and dark moods made him fall into depression. Thus, there were sublime highs and dramatic lows, enough to fuel literary and musical art.

When I discovered the life of the Spirit and its involvement in my life, I found that my emotions could be dealt with differently. They were still present, but they had lost their ability to direct my life; they were no longer in the foreground; they no longer overwhelmed me. My decision-making centre, my "I", influenced by the renewed spirit, had taken over. It was then that I began to experience serenity and inner peace. No matter what happened, I was assured that I could continue my journey peacefully and confidently, because Christ was going with me. This dynamic has grown stronger since then.

## **Controlling the instincts**

I really enjoy watching documentaries on television about social relationships in animals. I



enjoy making correlations between animal and human behaviour. It's so instructive! Moreover, it is not surprising to see such similarities if we consider that we, as *Homo sapiens*, share common ancestors with the animals studied.

I would like to discuss three major concerns that are common to both animals and humans:

- The search for power within the pack.
- The search for food.
- The need to mate to form a family and have offspring.

One could say that these three concerns are motors, instincts that push each individual forward.

In humans, these concerns have taken on very civilised terms, but in fact they betray the same needs. We often speak of the triad: power, money and sex. This is animal man in all his greatness and weakness!

I propose to take up these three points and to see how the spiritual man manages to deal with these deep instincts.

### **The search for power**

As we have already seen, males fight for the dominant position, which gives them undeniable advantages. Sometimes they kill each other until there is only one survivor left and it is with him that the female, who was watching the show, will mate. This is a way of strengthening the race by eliminating the weakest.

In our societies, this need to become the dominant male or the dominant female is clearly present. This need can be expressed in all sorts of ways, from brutal violence to subtle and refined domination; but basically, it is the same need for

power. It is present in the couple, where the man and the woman seek to dominate each other. It is present in the family, the work group and society in general. Surprisingly, this search for power begins in early childhood.

It is not the place here to analyse this phenomenon, but I would just like to point out its existence. This search for power is part of the nature of the animal man.

The spiritual man comes to no longer seek power. In fact, he no longer needs it! He no longer feels threatened by others, because he knows that God protects him. He no longer needs to put himself forward in order to value himself, because he knows that he is of value to God, and that matters a lot. If society entrusts him with power, he will exercise it not for himself but for others. It is a service to society.

Read again the book of the prophet Daniel and you will see how this spiritual man behaved in the face of power. Daniel was one of the Jewish exiles in Babylon. He had only one concern: to do the will of God. In no way did he seek power and yet God elevated him to the highest steps of power in Babylon. Daniel accepted this position and assumed it as a service to God, his people and the Babylonian people.

In the couple, spouses who live by the spirit do not seek to dominate each other, but to serve each other in love. The relationship is quite different!

How does the spiritual man curb his instinctive need for power? Quite simply, by remaining in communion with his God and thus understanding his place in society. Remember that this discovery is a slow process!

### **The search for money**

For animals, the search for food is vital. It is also vital for humans, but they no longer have to hunt their prey or gather fruit in the wild to get food. They usually only have to buy what they need in shops. But this requires money. It is also needed for clothing, housing, health care, education, entertainment, etc.

Money thus becomes something important, and the need to possess it is strong in humans. It is a very primitive instinct. Curiously, those who have the most money are often those who have this instinct the most developed in them!

This need is intimately linked to the fear of running out of food and the essentials of life. It is the fear of being naked in the street, the fear of not having access to health care, the fear of being rejected and left in the ditch. It is a visceral fear that inhabits each of us.

The spiritual man notices that little by little this animal fear diminishes and may even disappear. He feels loved by God who takes care of him and gives him the means to provide for himself or to be helped by others <sup>1</sup>. Even if the fascination with money is enormous, it is possible to detach oneself from it by living in contact with God. The spiritual man learns not to seek wealth, but to be content with what he has. He learns to be happy with his situation, even if other people have a much better situation than he does. He can do this because he knows that his real wealth is in God.

Even if he earns a lot of money, the spiritual man does not become a slave to it. He allows himself to

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 12.22-30

enjoy it, but he also cares for those in need. The rich have a great responsibility towards the poor. Money is no longer a master, but a means, especially to help others.

Such a transformation is possible because of the presence of God in the heart of the believer. It is a real miracle!

### **Sexuality**

In nature, it is usually the males who, at a certain time of the year, feel the instinctive need to mate with a female in order to have offspring. In some animal species, it is the other way around; the female seeks out an inseminator, even if it means abandoning him or even killing and eating him once he has fulfilled his mission.

Higher primates do not seem to be bound to an annual cycle and have a more developed sexuality throughout the year. For Bonobos, this desire to mate seems to be at the forefront every day. Some males copulate very briefly with females they meet, as if to say hello.

A lion may kill a lioness' cubs, only to make her receptive to a new partner again. In this way he can ensure his own offspring.

So many variations on the same basic need of living beings: to mate and reproduce! It is a fact of nature that should not be rejected or despised. This sexual instinct has enabled living beings to multiply for millions of years.

In humans we find this same instinctive need, perhaps more marked in men than in women. It can completely dominate a person's will and lead them to behave like Bonobo males with females; conversely, it can be little present or even absent in others.

Human nature is varied! Some become insatiable sexual adventurers; prostitution, swinging, polyamory, etc. only confirm this. And others remain abstinent all their lives. Is this surprising? No! The human being is an animal man who reacts like animals.

But that's it! Human society is not a jungle where everyone can do what they want! No doubt the Christian influence has something to do with it, even if we are currently witnessing a reversal of values under the impetus of the humanists. We will talk about this again in Chapter 7. The humanists want to free the human being from any external influence, especially religious, in order to allow him to express himself fully... as an animal man.

The spiritual man is led by the Holy Spirit on a completely different path, a path that seems to contradict his natural inclinations. If there is one area where this conflict is marked, it is that of sexuality. Many Christians have been shipwrecked here.

The spiritual man is led to consider the relationship between a man and a woman as a covenant willed by God and which cannot be broken, except in a few special cases. He learns to see his sexual desires not as something shameful that must be repressed and suppressed, but as a legitimate need that must be channelled in the right direction. Willpower alone is not enough to bring about this transformation of mentality; it takes the life of God to do so. Without this life, the battle is likely to be lost in advance.

I do not want to say more, because my aim is only to show that the life of the spirit according to God can transform the animal man into a spiritual

man, but that this transformation is often slow, difficult, and is never acquired. Although there are many pitfalls, this new life is possible.

## Responsibility and control

I would not like to end this chapter without addressing a complex issue concerning the relationship between the Christian and Christ. What is the role of each? What is the believer's responsibility now, since his life belongs to Christ? On the other hand, is he still in control of his life, or is he only a puppet in God's hands?

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart could easily be understood as a way for God to establish a beachhead, allowing Him to increase His dominance and control there. Is it really his goal to crush all resistance and dethrone the person of the believer by relegating him to a subordinate role? Is it really his desire to take power and enslave his disciple? No, a thousand times no! On the contrary, we can only marvel at God's love for his children, his respect for their freedom, his concern to make them increasingly responsible for their lives and the choices they make. The Holy Spirit is given, not to dethrone the believer, but on the contrary to strengthen him in his role as leader of his life. The Christian remains fully responsible for his life.

Does this mean that he is freed from divine supervision? Does it mean that he becomes an autonomous little god? No. For the believer, being fully responsible for his life means that he alone can decide whether he wants to obey the Lord or not. He cannot in any way put the responsibility for his

choices on someone else, or even on the Holy Spirit who dwells within him. I repeat, the Christian is not a puppet manipulated by God, but a responsible being who chooses to submit to Him.

When the Christian chooses to walk with God, the Holy Spirit helps him powerfully in this endeavour. On the other hand, when he decides to walk without God, that is, to walk according to the flesh (the animal man), the Holy Spirit warns him repeatedly and in many ways, and if nothing changes, he ceases to act positively in the believer's heart. He withdraws his hand and lets the Christian go astray until he repents and gives the Holy Spirit his rightful place. All long-time Christians will tell you the same thing: they have experienced those moments of intense closeness to God that made them rejoice, they walked with God, and then they slackened off, preferring to follow their own inclinations. In doing so, they grieved the Holy Spirit, who was silent. They thought they were safe on the road, but they ended up in the ditch. And as they fell and fell again into the ditch, they came to understand that it is really better to walk in the ways of God. This obedience, which could be seen at first as a constraint, became a path of freedom and happiness. The path that seemed so narrow for the animal man has finally proved to be quite wide for the spiritual man.

We have talked about responsibility, but what about control? Can the Christian claim to have full control over his life? I would like to give you some examples that will help you to answer these questions.

You have probably been out shopping in your village or town and, for some reason, you decide to

take a different route than usual. And then you have a nice encounter, useful for the other person or maybe for yourself. You tell yourself that this meeting was not a chance encounter and that the Lord guided you there for a reason. What happened? The Lord put a desire in your heart to take a different route, without you being aware of it, and it resulted in a real blessing. Can you say that you had full control of your life? No! But it gives you great joy, because the Lord has involved you in his work, which is a privilege. Personally, I am always happy to have these experiences.

How many Christians <sup>1</sup> have been diverted, often in spite of themselves, to avoid a danger they did not know existed! Some have been warned by the Spirit and made the right decision, others have known to change their plans, without really understanding why, and it was only later that they got the explanation. I am convinced that all of them praised the Lord for this miraculous intervention, even though He had encroached on their area of control.

You may be right in thinking that non-Christians have also had such experiences. In fact, divine goodness extends to all human beings and is not limited to one category of people. Some will say that they were lucky, while others will see a supernatural intervention, without being able to specify the source. In the book of Proverbs, King Solomon gives a magnificent piece of advice:

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<sup>1</sup> God can act in the same way with non-Christians whom he wants to protect or lead according to his purpose. Why does God intervene on behalf of some and not others? It remains a mystery...



*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths. (3.5-6)*

Learning to recognise God's intervention in the smallest details of our lives is a wonderful way of praising him and drawing closer to him!

Here is another, completely different example: speaking in tongues, which is one of the spiritual gifts described by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (chapters 12 and 14), illustrates the difference between control by the Holy Spirit and control by the believer. The Holy Spirit uses the circuits of speech to speak in a language that is foreign to the Christian. It may happen that someone else understands this language and that God can speak to him in this way<sup>1</sup>. Most of the time, this language is not understandable by humans, which is why some people call it the language of angels.

The speaker does not make the words himself - it is the Holy Spirit who speaks through him - but he must decide to open his mouth and speak. He is therefore perfectly in control of himself and decides when to speak and when to remain silent. He is therefore in control of himself, but not of the words he speaks.

The gift of prophecy is somewhat similar: the Christian speaks what his spirit receives from the Holy Spirit; however, he is free to decide when to transmit this message. He is not a puppet

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<sup>1</sup> This was the case at Pentecost. These experiences are still described today.

manipulated by God. Moreover, he has the responsibility to check that what he says is in accordance with biblical revelation. As a measure of caution, Paul advises the other prophets present in the assembly to do the same verification work, in order to prevent abuses, which are unfortunately always possible <sup>1</sup>.

Many books could be written about the miraculous interventions of God in the lives of believers. I would like to remind you that these interventions are not a compulsory norm and that God can very well decide not to intervene for reasons that escape us: Christians are put to death because of their faith, others do not escape an accident, others succumb to an illness at a very young age. All these tragedies remind us that God is sovereign and that his thoughts are not ours. The book of Acts already pointed this out: in chapter 12 we are told that James, the brother of the apostle John, is put to death by Herod, and in the next verse we are told about Peter who is put in prison, but miraculously delivered by an angel. Why such a difference in treatment? We have no answer...

## It is He who leads me

Some might think from what I have just written in this section that the responsibility of the Christian is synonymous with autonomy: "I am responsible for my life, so I decide autonomously what I want to do". No. The Christian who really wants to live in the Kingdom of God follows in the footsteps of his

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 14.29

Master who said: *My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.*<sup>1</sup> During his earthly ministry, Jesus lived continually in submission to his Father, but this did not detract from his full responsibility.

Since we have decided to enter the Kingdom of God, to live and work there under the orders of Christ, we follow in His footsteps and clearly state that we want to do the will of Christ who sent us, and to accomplish His work. It is now He who leads us, it is He who gives us instructions and helps us to follow them. We have accepted to be His servants and therefore to lose our full autonomy. It is a decision we have made with full knowledge and responsibility for our lives.

## The Fruit of the Spirit

The aim of the Holy Spirit is not only to bring the life of Christ into the heart of the believer, but also to produce in him traits of character and feelings that will have a positive influence on those around him. This is called the fruit of the Spirit. The apostle Paul describes several manifestations of this <sup>2</sup>: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. That's a whole panoply of values, but what do they actually correspond to? In fact, you only need to read chapters 12-14 of the Epistle to the Romans to find out. Paul shows very clearly that the renewal of the mind must have repercussions in practical life, otherwise it is useless.

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<sup>1</sup> John 4.34

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 5.22

I propose to review the various exhortations that Paul addresses to the Christians of Rome:

- First, he reviews the duties of the Christian within the Christian community. He urges the faithful *not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment* (12.3). This is the indispensable condition for being in one's place, no more and no less. Paul adds: *Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.*

God has given each of us gifts that we must bring to fruition in the Church with *zeal and fervour of spirit*, while remaining within the limits set for this ministry: "Since we have different gifts, let us exercise them while remaining within the limits set by the gift itself". This is quite the opposite of what a man of the world would do!

Paul asks the faithful to love *without hypocrisy, to be full of affection for one another and to show mutual consideration* (12.9-10). He recommends that *they provide for the needs of the saints and show hospitality*. Love knows no bounds and should even bless those who persecute them (12.13-14).

Brotherly love must be given to all, whoever they are and whatever their difficulties: *Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep*. Nor is it a question of choosing brothers and sisters according to particular criteria, such as affinities or personal interests.

What should we do in the event of conflict and malice?

The exhortation is clear: *Do not repay anyone evil for evil; never avenge yourselves...* It is God's role to render justice. To repay evil for evil is to allow evil to win. True victory over evil consists in

transforming the hostile relationship into a relationship of love through the generosity of the benefits granted in response to the evil received: *If your enemy is hungry, give him something to eat; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink... Do not allow yourself to be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Nevertheless, the ideal is to be able to maintain peaceful relations with everyone: *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, be at peace with everyone.*

- Paul then turns to the Christian's attitude in civil life. First of all, he calls on them to *submit to the governing authorities*. Why should he do this? *Because there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God* (13.1). Authority is therefore a divine principle that must be respected. Respect for authority can be seen, for example, in the *payment of taxes* (13.6-7).

Paul does not limit himself to the authorities of the State, but to all the authorities in society.

In their dealings with other members of society, Christians must put the "Ten Commandments" into practice:

*You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and any other commandment. These commandments are summed up in these words: you shall love your neighbour as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

Civil justice does not require that we positively do good to others, only that we refrain from doing them harm. By recalling the commandment to love

one's neighbour, Paul is asking Christians to go further than what civil justice demands.

The above list is by no means exhaustive; in other epistles, Paul deals with other practical matters such as marital and family relationships, money matters, idolatry, etc. The fact that, in this epistle, these very practical questions are mentioned just after the theoretical treatise shows that the transformation of the Christian must necessarily lead to changes in behaviour in all areas of life. This is how Christians can hope to make a positive difference to the society in which they live. This is what Jesus said to his disciples: *you are the light of the world... the salt of the earth*. A light that enlightens, a salt that tastes good! This is the way the Lord has chosen to transform a society and enable it to live better. We'll talk more about this in chapter 7 (Judeo-Christian values).

All these manifestations of the Spirit that we can see in a spiritual Christian show from which source he drinks. He who is truly quickened by the Holy Spirit can only produce good fruit.

However, I have seen atheists show great love for their fellow humans, give their whole lives in a remarkable spirit of service, spread contagious joy, treat others with respect and gentleness, and show amazing wisdom. It is enough to make many Christians swoon! These people challenge me deeply because they are bearing wonderful fruit while rejecting God. This shows us that divine life is at work in some way in every human being, but unfortunately it is not recognised as such. That's a

shame, because *love is from God*<sup>1</sup>. Why not try to discover its source?

Humanity is made up of a huge range of people. There are extraordinary people as well as infamous criminals. It is somewhat the same in church circles where one can meet saints who are truly Christ-like, and unfortunately also rapists and child abusers. It is not for us to judge them, for only God really knows what is in their hearts.

In this chapter 5 we have seen how the animal man becomes a spiritual man. We have understood how the latter functions, allows itself to be transformed more and more and thus bears fruit to the glory of its Master. We are therefore able to define what a spiritual man really is, according to Paul in the New Testament: he is a Christian who no longer lives according to the world and who no longer lets his animal nature dominate and direct his life. Instead, he has given his spirit the role of the driving force of his life, a spirit that is constantly renewed and enlivened by the Spirit of God. This change in the "ruling pole" inevitably results in transformations of the whole being. Thus, the spiritual Christian no longer behaves as before, but produces fruits worthy of his Master, Christ.

Let us now go further in our study and try to understand, in the next chapter, what have been the perversions of this model of man and why the Christian life has not always matched that of its founders.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 John 4.7

## 6. Traps, deviations and perversions

The model of the spiritual man as I presented it in chapter 5 is fragile. Very fragile! For several reasons that we have already outlined: the Holy Spirit who comes to dwell in the heart of the believer is not a resource that the believer can control; it is not a reservoir of energy that he possesses and from which he can draw at will, it is not a fixed and stable "electrical network" to which he can plug in anywhere and at any time to make his whole being function. No! The Holy Spirit is a person; he is God himself in a dimension that is accessible to the believer. He does not impose himself on the believer and the relationship he establishes with him is fragile, because it can be overshadowed by the believer's unfaithfulness. The believer can indeed grieve the Holy Spirit <sup>1</sup> by his sins and thus create a chill in the relationship. As we have seen above, the Holy Spirit warns the Christian in various ways, and if nothing changes, He becomes silent and withdraws until the believer gets back on track. The bond that unites them is therefore never total and permanent, which contributes to making the relationship fragile.

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4.30: *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*



In this chapter, I propose to give you a brief overview of the main pitfalls, deviations and perversions of the spiritual life, those obstacles that often keep the believer an animal man and make it difficult for him to evolve into a spiritual man.

## **The animal man, the natural man**

The animal man is certainly the greatest adversary of the spiritual man. Conversion, water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit do not destroy the flesh, that way of life that comes to us from the animal man, a man who understands nothing of the things of the Spirit. We would so much like the flesh to be eradicated once and for all, as an infection can be after an effective antibiotic treatment. No! The conflict between the spirit and the flesh will continue until we die. However, it is possible to live according to the Spirit <sup>1</sup> and to render the flesh inoperative, but this victory is never taken for granted and must be won every moment of our lives.

Paul describes this dynamic very well in Romans chapters 7 and 8. Before he was renewed by the Holy Spirit, he tried hard to obey the Law, but he was forced to realise that he was not fully succeeding. It is necessary to read again chapter 7 of this epistle to understand the intensity of Paul's struggle against himself, against his flesh that did not want to obey God. And yet Paul was a man of strong character; before his conversion he was a leader among the religious authorities, a leader who did not hesitate to

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<sup>1</sup> Or living according to the spirit, renewed by the Spirit of God.

flush out Christians and put them in prison. He did not hesitate to use violent means to counter the Christian faith that threatened to endanger Judaism. It is worth remembering that he watched the stoning of Stephen without saying anything. This speaks volumes about his firm determination to fight what he thought was evil. Paul was by no means a softie, overwhelmed by his emotions and instincts. And yet, despite his strong will, he despaired that he could not tame his life to obey the Law and thus please God. This is what he said:

*I know not what I do: I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate ... For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.*<sup>1</sup>

This is a dramatic observation! One can easily imagine the despair of this man who is unable to emerge victorious from his personal struggle. He understands the stakes of his choices and fights with a tenacious will to win, but he must face the facts: *he does not have the power to do good!*

We can understand his bitter cry: "*Wretched man that I am!*" And there is indeed reason to despair!

But in chapter 8, he rejoices because he has found in the life of the Spirit the solution to his problem. This life gives him the strength to obey God's Law and to meet God's demands. This life is

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 7.16, 18-19

therefore a real liberation! The violent struggle that was previously hopeless has been transformed into a victory, as if the forces at play had suddenly shifted. The flesh no longer dominates, but the spirit, renewed by the Spirit of God.

As we have seen, the flesh represents in us all that is contrary to God, all that displeases him. It is wrong to reduce this term to sexual depravity, because the flesh is all human activity that is done outside of God and against Him. Let us not forget that the noblest and most spiritual activity in the eyes of the world can very well be considered carnal in the eyes of God, simply because it rejects Him. Reading the First Letter to the Corinthians again, we quickly see in the background the violent conflict between Paul who preaches God's wisdom and his opponents who claim human wisdom to counteract Paul's work. And yet, in the eyes of the world, this human wisdom is worthy of praise, but for Paul it has no understanding of the things of the Spirit; it is therefore of no spiritual value.

In the church at Corinth, talented preachers have arisen, brilliant speakers who display their human wisdom with great pride and give teachings contrary to the Gospel. They know how to manipulate the weaker members of the community and thus establish their power over them. For Paul, these people are nothing but hot air and have no real spiritual influence. These men are simply carnal. Paul will have great difficulty in countering them and silencing them.

Under the heading of "flesh", let's also mention the lure of riches, the worries of life and all the things of this world that take hold of us and prevent us from living according to the Spirit. Whatever they are, and

the list is immense, they oppose the strengthening of the spiritual man in us and tend to give importance to the carnal man.

## Legalism

From the very beginning of the Church's life, there were many obstacles. At first glance, one might be tempted to point to the persecutions that befell the first Christians, causing many deaths; but in reality, they only strengthened their commitment to the service of Christ. In these circumstances, there is no room for the lukewarm: either they give up out of hand, or they commit themselves fully, even if it costs them their lives. Persecution tends to strengthen the faith of the Christians.

We must look elsewhere, in much more subtle and insidious areas, which are difficult to identify because the ideology presented is poorly distinguished from the truth of the Gospel. Legalism is a flagrant example.

The life of the Spirit, manifested and preached by Jesus during his earthly ministry, followed a legalistic regime, the regime of the Mosaic Law, modified by the religious leaders of the time. It is understandable, therefore, that the transition was somewhat problematic and that some failed to make it. Paul tells us that his main opponents, those who most opposed his ministry as pastor and evangelist, were Jewish religious leaders who had either partially accepted the Gospel while remaining firmly attached to the legalistic model, or who had rejected Christ and sought to bring Christian traitors back into the fold of Judaism.

Let us not judge them, for the transition is not as clear as one might think. I confess that I had many problems with it during the first decades of my Christian life. What about it?

The Law given to the people of Israel through Moses was intended to encourage positive behaviour to sustain them, and to provide safeguards against human excesses. God laid down the following simple principle: "If you obey my commandments, you will live happily". The purpose of the Law was therefore to enable the people to live happily.

Then, little by little, this principle was changed, I would even say perverted. Obedience to the Law became a means of asserting and justifying oneself before Him <sup>1</sup>. Moreover, the religious leaders made this legalism a heavy burden for the people by adding to the Mosaic Law all sorts of unnecessary human precepts. However, the main fault of this legalism has been to immunise the religious against the spiritual Revolution announced by Jesus. Their eyes and ears have been closed so that they do not understand the good news of the Gospel. And it was not without reason that Jesus reproached them for closing the kingdom of God to others: they did not enter it themselves and did not let those who wanted to enter in <sup>2</sup>.

If Jesus had wiped the slate clean of Judaism and brought in something brand new, the transition would probably have been easier. But that was not the case! Jesus clearly stated that he had not come to

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<sup>1</sup> We could also talk about salvation by works. Someone said very rightly: "Religion makes us do good works to try *to* be saved. Faith makes us do them *because* we are saved by grace.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 23.13

abolish the Law, but to *fulfil it*.<sup>1</sup> For some, the verb "to fulfil" means that Jesus ended the Law and established new precepts. They thus allow themselves to reject the Law contained in the Old Testament and to retain only the teaching of Jesus. There is another way of understanding this verb, and it is the one I favour: Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Law in the spirit of the One who created it <sup>2</sup>. And what Jesus accomplished, the Christian can also accomplish thanks to the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within him. And little by little, he begins to resemble Jesus and to fulfil the Law as Jesus did.

Certainly, for Christians, some elements of the Law have disappeared because of Jesus' death and resurrection: all the sacrificial laws have been abolished since his sacrifice was unique and sufficient for all and for all time. The disciples abolished several ordinances, notably circumcision and dietary restrictions, because they did not want to impose on non-Jews rules that were given only to the people of Israel <sup>3</sup>. But the spiritual principle of the Law emphasised by Jesus remained unchanged.

If we study the history of the Church, we see that whenever the life of the Spirit has dried up, it has almost always been replaced by legalism. In his book "The Subversion of Christianity", J. Ellul describes this phenomenon very well <sup>4</sup>: instead of leading

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5.17

<sup>2</sup> God predicted this through the prophet Ezekiel: *I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules*. Ezekiel 36.27.

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 9.9-10: Some ordinances are described as *carnal, imposed only until a time of reformation*.

<sup>4</sup> Ellul Jacques, *La subversion du christianisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1984.

people to live by the Spirit and to walk by the Spirit, the Church has created a so-called Christian morality; and in order to be accepted by God, one must obey the commandments issued by the Church. Like the religious leaders of Jesus' time, the Church revisited the Law by adding its own precepts. And so we have fallen back into a legalistic system, distorted and incapable of really changing the human heart.

In the end, isn't it easier to obey the morals of the Church, whatever they may be, than to live by the life of a Spirit that we cannot see or control? Is not legalism the characteristic of the animal man, of the natural man? It is also true of animals!

Let us say a few more words about Islam, which is a very legalistic religious system. In order to please Allah and earn a place in paradise, the Muslim must obey his commandments. The word "Islam" means "submission" and the mission of Muslims is to spread Islam all over the earth and to make all humans obey the Sharia.

I have heard several times from Muslims that Islam is somehow an improved version of Christianity. Judaism was the first version of the divine plan, Christianity the second and Islam the third and final version. But how could a new legalism, Islam, be superior to the principle of life brought by Christ? It is rather a tremendous step backwards and a negation of the strength of the spiritual Revolution established by Christ.

## **Idolatry**

It consists in worshipping, instead of God, things to which one attributes a sacred power. We have

already spoken about it: these idols are nothing, they do not hear, they do not speak, they have no power except that which one claims to attribute to them.

Idolatry has marred the life of the people of Israel from the very beginning; it has brought down kings such as Solomon who, through his many foreign wives, worshipped foreign gods and turned away from his God whom he had invoked so fervently at the beginning.

It did not spare the Church, which began to venerate and pray to saints, and to make sacred objects of worship, places of pilgrimage, religious buildings, etc.

J. Ellul describes the phenomenon very well: when the spiritual life in the Church withers away, the faithful immediately replace it with the sacred, which is not incompatible with the legalism presented above. It is so much easier to pray to a saint whose image is clearly visible in front of you! You can see him, you can touch him, he seems close. Unfortunately, all this does is distract the faithful from the true life in the Spirit.

Jesus said to his disciples:

*The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is Spirit...*<sup>1</sup>

Worshipping the Father *in spirit and truth* has nothing to do with idolatry or legalism. It is entering

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<sup>1</sup> John 4.24. Why the term *in truth*? Because the only true worship of God the Father is in spirit.



into a true and simple relationship of spirit to Spirit, as we saw in chapter 5.

Idolatry is still very much present today, but these gods have other names that are so commonplace that we do not hesitate to call them "idols" without shocking anyone. Worldly goods such as money, houses, cars, work, sports, leisure, etc. have been made sacred. They have thus become gods to whom many people sacrifice most of their lives.

My aim is not to draw up an exhaustive list of all these idols, but rather to show the complexity and diversity of the phenomenon. And in each case, the principle is the same: the worship of an idol distracts the worshipper from the worship due to God, the only one who deserves to be worshipped.

## The occult

In the past, people spoke of witchcraft and black magic, and those who practised them were burnt at the stake; today, we have gone from one extreme to the other, and all this has been trivialised and easily classified as spirituality. For many people, all these spiritualities are put on the same footing, which gives them equal credit. Shamanism and Christianity are seen as spiritualities of the same nature and value.

The Bible takes a very different view and strongly condemns recourse to occult powers of any kind <sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 18.11-12: *He who questions the dead... is an abomination to the Lord.*" See also 17.5

Leviticus 20.6: *If anyone speaks to the dead or to spirits, to play the harlot after them, I will set my face against that man and cut him off from among his people.* See also 20.27.

These powers are celestial creatures that have rebelled against God <sup>1</sup>. They seek to drag humans into their wake in order to turn them against God. This is why they are particularly dangerous.

The Bible does not deny that it is possible to come into contact with them <sup>2</sup>. And if it does speak of them, it is to tell us: "Be careful, you are opening the door to powers that will make you their prey, and you will never be able to get rid of them, unless you open yourself to Christ, who will be able to dislodge them" <sup>3</sup>.

Many people regard occultism as charlatanism and deny the reality of these occult powers. On the contrary, Jesus recognised the existence of these powers, warned his disciples and even gave them the power to cast them out. He recognised that the whole world was under Satan's control, because he called Satan the *prince of this world* <sup>4</sup>. A prince who had an access point, a bridgehead in all human beings, so that he could influence them as he pleased. And Jesus added: *but he has nothing in me*. This means that Jesus left him no entry point into his life. When a Christian lives and walks fully by the Spirit, he experiences the same thing; he has rid himself of any gateway to evil powers. However, they are not immune to relapse.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 2.4

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 28: King Saul, rejected by the Lord, asks to consult a woman who evokes the dead, and in particular the prophet Samuel.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 12.45

<sup>4</sup> John 12.31, 14.30; 16.11. Satan is mentioned 33 times in the New Testament. He is described as intelligent, cunning and wicked; he is a murderer.

The apostles also taught the reality of the fight against these powers <sup>1</sup>; a battle that concerns not just a minority of particular people, but everyone.

People can open themselves up to these powers in various ways: by turning to spiritualists of all kinds, to healers who work with these powers, by opening themselves up to unhealthy ideologies, by offering worship to idols, etc.

The evangelist Matthew describes this openness very well when he talks about Jesus' three temptations in the desert. Satan tries to make Jesus fall by offering him *the kingdoms of the world and their glory*, on one condition: *if you prostrate yourself and worship me.*<sup>2</sup> This is a perfect summary of all the openings to the occult spiritual world! Prostrate yourself and worship Satan... and receive power and glory. How many people have sold their souls to the devil to obtain this power and glory? And indeed they did, but at what price? They gradually destroyed their lives and ended up in physical and moral misery. They thought they were climbing to the summit of happiness, but they ended up in the abyss.

As you will have understood, my aim in this chapter was not to make an exhaustive list of the pitfalls, deviations and perversions of the spiritual life. I simply wanted to show how the life and walk of the Spirit can be disrupted and even stopped.

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 6.12: *We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.* See also 1 Timothy 3.6-7;

<sup>2</sup> Timothy 2.26; James 4.7; 1 Peter 5.8.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 4.8-9

## **7. The humanism-Islam-Christianity conflict**

In Chapter 6 we saw what the main pitfalls, deviations and perversions of the Christian life could be, and why the Christian faith has not always borne the expected fruits in its adherents.

In this chapter 7, I would like to broaden the scope of the investigation and talk about the various ideologies that oppose the development of Christianity and mistreat it. This is to be expected: God's successive rescue plans have not been unanimously accepted and many people have chosen and continue to choose other plans to save humanity. What are they? What weight do they have in relation to the divine plan? It is important that we understand the world in which we live, and that we discern the multiple influences that are exerted in society, so as not to fall into the traps that are set for us.

We will also see why these ideologies fight against Christianity and persecute Christians.

In a remarkable book, D. Noebel analyses the war of values that is raging across North America today. It is a struggle for the hearts and minds of the people, a war of ideas, a battle between two ways of conceiving the world. On one side is the Christian vision and on the other side the humanist vision, which branches out into three fairly easily defined

branches: 1) secular humanism, 2) Marxism-Leninism, and 3) cosmic humanism (the New Age movement). These three branches do not agree on all the details, but what they have in common is their fierce opposition to biblical Christianity.

D. Noebel has studied each of these worldviews from ten different perspectives: theology, philosophy, ethics, biology, psychology, sociology, law, politics, economics and history. This careful study has been very helpful to me in writing this chapter. I have taken excerpts or summaries from it in the sections on Marxism-Leninism, secular humanism and cosmic humanism, in order to bring out the main lines and the most interesting elements for our study. I have also added some personal reflections.

Since we will be talking about worldviews, we cannot omit the question of Islam, the second largest religion on this earth. Why didn't D. Noebel mention it in his book? Probably because, more than twenty years ago, Islam did not pose as many problems in North America as it does in Europe, where islamisation is advancing at a rapid pace.

Let us first study the three branches of humanism, focusing on their theology, their view of society and their vision of the future.

## **Secular humanism**

### **Theology**

Why talk about theology when the secular humanist is an atheist? H. Titus said: "Humanism is

a religion without God". This is not false, for it has replaced God with man himself, who has thus become a god. A god-man who is fully responsible for what he is and will become, a god-man who can only rely on himself to ensure his salvation. This is why he puts all his trust in science, which is the only way to know the world around him.

For the secular humanist, God does not exist, the supernatural does not exist, there is no divine plan, nor any destiny for the human species. How then can we explain the existence of nature? How was it formed? For humanists, nature is incapable of creating, but it transforms itself indefinitely, according to the laws of evolution. There was no beginning, as the Bible claims, and there will be no end, as the Bible also claims. Therefore, they do not need a God to explain the world around them.

Humanists hold firmly to the theory of evolution because it gives them hope for improvement and progression towards a better world. Hope is life, they say! Since life developed from inert molecules, there is no reason why the evolutionary process should stop leading us to a better world. We move from the simple to the complex, from the unintelligent to the intelligent, from the amoral to the moral. Civilisation is constantly improving; the future will be better than the past and the present.

Although humanists believe in the evolution of the human species, they know that this evolution is extremely slow and that it will not be able to produce its effects sufficiently on a humanity that is developing at full speed. It is therefore necessary to accelerate this evolutionary process by making full use of the capacities that humans possess in the scientific and technological fields in particular. The

computer revolution is, moreover, a very important, indeed unavoidable, link in this evolutionary acceleration. If the human mind, "which is only matter", is considered to be the product of an immense evolution, it can be improved thanks to the help of the computer, which is in fact only a material mind of incredible efficiency. We speak of augmented man, who is in a way an improved version of himself. The field of application is immense!

Humans have a responsibility to give evolution a serious boost if they want to ensure their salvation. It is easy to understand why science has become a kind of religion for humanists. It is a real lifeline for them.

## **Its view of society**

A society cannot live without laws. But who establishes them? Christians profess that the fundamental laws are established by God, their Creator <sup>1</sup>. For humanists, God's commands are considered harmful; only humans are entitled to create their laws. This is a fundamental breaking point. Humanists therefore reject the immutable moral codes postulated by the Christian religion. They don't need them; indeed, it is enough to study animal societies to see that they each have a moral code. This shows that the source of morality is biological and not theological.

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<sup>1</sup> Just as a car manufacturer establishes operating rules to enable the user to get the most out of it.

A major question arises: on what basis are we going to create these laws? Humanists are faced with a real dilemma:

- Since there is no God to impose an absolute moral code on them, they are therefore forced to consider that their human code is subjective, depending on changes in the situation. This is called ethical relativism.

- The alternative is to recognise the existence of an absolute code, external to humans, a code that would remain within the framework of nature (natural law). But it has to be found and understood! Following this line, some think that in our world where natural selection plays a major role, the struggle for existence becomes the only moral good. But this ethic has no concern for the weak and the poor. Hitler's Aryan politics and Engels' Marxism were founded on this belief in the survival of the strong. Hard to accept!

Ethical relativism is the moral code that is adopted by most humanists. The morality or immorality of a behaviour therefore depends on the situation. A behaviour can be moral for one person and not for another, or moral at one time and not at another.

In his book "The rights of the denatured man", G. Puppinc <sup>1</sup> gives a good example of this ethical relativism. He explains that the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 was a compromise between the Christian and the humanist vision. Then the interpretation of this Declaration was gradually modified under the effect of an ever stronger

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<sup>1</sup> Puppinc Grégor, *Les droits de l'homme dénaturé*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2018. I have discussed this at greater length in my book "Why is Europe opening up to Islam?"



humanist pressure, which adapted to the evolution of morals. There was a shift in values.

A major problem remains: who can decide what is right and wrong? Is it the person himself who is the Supreme Authority? But this could lead to unacceptable excesses. Or only intelligent people, capable of making correct moral choices? But then, how do we choose these moral guides for the rest of society? Is it the state that is best able to create laws? Doesn't this amount to giving a privileged few the authority to create a dogma for others to follow? This is precisely what humanists have always tried to avoid by rejecting religious codes of ethics.

Humanists believe in the innate goodness of humans. If he behaves badly, it is not his fault, but that of society, which exerts on him deleterious pressures that counteract the naturally good inclinations of his nature. To remedy this, the individual must find his innate goodness within himself and thus determine what is good.

Humanists castigate traditional institutions and Christian values. For example, Christian marriage is seen as too restrictive, because it curbs the vital inclinations of the human being; it is social slavery! Marriage and the family are relics of the past, because they have been used by men to dominate women. All alternatives to marriage are therefore permitted and promoted <sup>1</sup>. Humanism and feminism are inextricably linked and work in the same direction: the old social order must be done away with and a new one created, based on humanist values.

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<sup>1</sup> This has led to the promotion of homosexuality and gay marriage.

Humanists rely on education in schools to instil humanist values in children from an early age. And to do this, it is essential to get rid of Christian teaching.

We need to create a society that encourages self-realisation, a society where everyone can stay in touch with their true self, their innate goodness. The ideal society is therefore one that creates fully realised individuals.

## **Towards a New World**

Man is constantly evolving. He is able to control his own evolutionary development. And to enable this development to take place on a global level, life in one community, without national boundaries, must be favoured. National governments are destined to fail, so a world government must be created that will govern a world community. This will be based on a global humanism that will wipe out all competing ideologies.

Seeing the failures and misdeeds of capitalism, humanists are turning to socialism, the only system they believe can change our world. On the one hand, they consider the democratic regime to be the most acceptable form of government, since it promotes equality among citizens; on the other hand, they want a strong state, capable of bringing about the changes needed in society to evolve the human species. The desire for a world government is part of this logic. The existence of nation states, each determining their own laws and ways of operating, can only hinder effective global development. This is why borders should be removed and

multiculturalism promoted so that local specificities are stifled. Some speak of creating a "global village". Those who advocate world government are mostly attracted to the UN because they see it as a means to achieve "global community".

## **Marxism-Leninism**

### **Theology**

For Marx, God does not exist; the concept of God is a purely human invention. The real god is man! Religion is therefore seen as a serious obstacle to the development of the socialist world.

For Lenin, the idea of God encourages the working class to drown its miserable slave situation "in a kind of spiritual alcohol". This alcohol robs it of the revolutionary zeal needed to exterminate the bourgeois class of oppressors, and it prevents it from bringing about paradise on earth in the form of universal communism. This alcohol is therefore dangerous; religion is an enemy that must be fought and destroyed. This is why the communist Soviet state sought to destroy all theistic religions, such as Christianity and Islam. This struggle is enshrined in the Handbook of the Atheist, published in Moscow in 1959.

The Marxist does not believe in God, but he has other beliefs, even more important to him:

- He believes in matter, the only reality that really exists. It is eternal, uncreated and indestructible. Everything in nature is matter. Life appeared on earth from matter. All forms of life have

arisen through the evolution of matter. The human being is matter, and his mind, his thought, his consciousness are functions of matter. There is nothing supernatural about it. It is called materialism.

- He believes in science, which alone allows us to truly know the world around us. This scientific knowledge can be applied to all areas of life. Engels said: "Just as Darwin discovered the law of evolution in the organic world, so Marx discovered the law of evolution in human history.

## The moral code

Since everything in nature evolves from the simplest to the most complicated and tends towards better forms, Marxists have the hope of an evolution of the individual and society towards a better future. As in nature, there is an upward movement in society which manifests itself in the elimination of all that is bad, that is, contrary to the communist ideal, and in the strengthening of all that contributes to the spread of this ideal. Thus, what is moral, what is good, is determined by what is most favourable to this development. If the bourgeois class stands in the way of biological and social evolution, nature demands that it be suppressed.

The aim of Marxists is first to overthrow the bourgeois class in order to establish the working class in its place and then to abolish classes in order to establish an order in which all are equal. This is why it is necessary, first of all, to reject moral codes based on religious concepts and to destroy religion, which is seen as justifying an unjust and inhuman

system, in the name of God. This hatred of Christianity has become an important element in the conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

It is vital to teach the children in the communist way and to remove from their heads the vestiges of piety that hinder the development towards a communist society. Hence the idea of detaching them from their own families in order to better control their education and above all to prevent the faith of their parents from being passed on to them.

The only way to destroy the bourgeoisie and raise the working class is through revolution. Anything that contributes to this is considered morally right, even if human lives are sacrificed. The end justifies the means! Murders, massacres on a large scale are justified by the hope of a better society. The British journalist D. J. Stewart-Smith estimates that international communism was responsible for 83 million deaths between 1917 and 1964 <sup>1</sup>.

If the struggle for survival in nature is often violent, it can also be violent in society. If nature multiplies the good and discards the bad, so in society the healthy must survive both biologically and socially, and the unhealthy must disappear, along with their social institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Noebel, *ibid*

Noebel reports later that according to R. J. Rummel of the University of Hawaii, the communist experiment from the October Revolution of 1917 to Tiananmen Square is estimated to have caused the death of 170-360 million human beings.

## Law

Since God does not exist, there is no absolute moral code or law based on an authority external to man. The Marxist foundation is the same as the humanist foundation: man... but not just any man. Not the bourgeois who exploits others, but the worker, the only one capable of making just laws for all. Thus, the working class becomes the reference for laws and has the legitimacy to form a strong state. Indeed, Marxists recognise the need to maintain a strong state, capable of managing conflicts within society and above all of imposing change towards a communist society. We have simply changed the ruling class! But this is only temporary, they say, because in the ideal communist society there will be no more classes! The state is supposed to disappear in favour of a non-hierarchical society.

It should also be noted that the state remains under the control of the Marxist party, which is considered the final source of all legal and moral truth. In the end, it is the party that decides what is legal or not. It can easily judge an act it dislikes as illegal and thus condemn its perpetrator. Justice, or rather the party, ruthlessly eliminates the enemies of the people. This is how every citizen is held hostage by the arbitrary laws of the state. Freedom has disappeared.

When communism abolishes all social classes, there will be no need to maintain order in society and the law will become unnecessary. Man will live in a calm environment, which will promote harmony between people. There will be no more crime, since injustice and inequality will no longer exist.

Socialist society is a far superior structure than capitalist society for stimulating the individual to acquire good behaviour and maintain good mental health.

Meanwhile, the state is a necessary evil. As long as there is class antagonism, it is necessary. And, as Lenin said, "As long as the state exists, there is no freedom". Freedom will come when the state disappears, thanks to communism.

## **Towards a New World**

The present bourgeois stage and the existence of classes are outdated. We must continue to fight to bring about the communist stage.

The progression of communism will be inevitable, because it is based on biological conflict and the survival of the most suitable economic system. Since the economy is the foundation of society, the socialist economy can implement all the other changes necessary to create a perfect, i.e. communist, society.

The establishment of communism on a world scale and the abolition of the state are unavoidable stages in the biological and social evolutionary development of humanity. But until then, conflicts and wars between capitalist and socialist countries cannot be avoided.

One day, man will reach perfection and will no longer need a government or a law to control him. Since he will have the right to work and access to wealth, he will be freed from the anxiety and uncertainty of tomorrow that weighs on him.

Lenin said: "Outside socialism there is no salvation for men. Nothing will save them from war, hunger and other destruction...".

## **Cosmic humanism, New Age**

### **Theology**

Cosmic humanism <sup>1</sup> differs from secular humanism in that it does not adhere to atheism. Nor does it adhere to theism, which sees God as unique, personal, distinct from the world, but acting on it, as Christianity professes. Cosmic humanism considers the whole world to be part of God, and man and God to be one and the same: "We are part of God and God is part of us. Together we are God". Thus there is no difference between the Creator and the creation, contrary to what the first chapter of Genesis states.

Cosmic humanists worship both the creation and the Creator. For them there is no difference. They believe in the supernatural and indeed consider everything to be supernatural. They believe in reincarnation.

### **The question of good and evil**

Cosmic humanists are well aware of the evil that exists in the world and in human nature. And to remedy this, they seek divine truth and knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> The adjective cosmic refers, in philosophy, to the material universe (Petit Robert).



within themselves. The truth they find there will become their truth, and it is not for an external standard to tell them what is true or not. It is by living in harmony with one's inner truth that one can live in freedom.

Cosmic humanists are therefore firmly opposed to Christianity, which they see as an external authority that blocks the ability of humans to get in touch with their inner truth. Individual autonomy is the only ethical absolute that cosmic humanists defend. This is ethical relativism. No one can decide whether the actions of others are right or wrong. No one can judge people's beliefs or actions, since everyone creates their own reality according to what they feel is right for them. The key word is therefore tolerance.

Since everything is one, it is difficult to differentiate between right and wrong or true and false. Thus, no one is really guilty. On the other hand, it is wrong to pass judgment on the moral beliefs and actions of others.

## **Its view of society**

Marriage and family are outdated and backward institutions that must be abolished. Sexuality must be freed from all prohibitions and the sexual preference of the individual should not be considered good or bad; it is what it is. This is one more reason for cosmic humanists to fight Christianity, which, through its norms, hinders the individual in his or her march towards a higher consciousness.

To bring about real change in society, work must first be done within the educational system to create

new generations capable of ushering in the New Age. It is in the classrooms that the battle for the future of humanity will be fought.

Cosmic humanists believe that man is basically good, contrary to what the Bible says. There is therefore no need to draw up rules of law or establish authorities, since the individual can make contact with his "inner God" and create his own inner truth.

However, they cannot hide the fact that there are criminals, thieves, swindlers, etc. on this earth, and they are obliged to approve the legal system that punishes them and prevents them from doing harm. So they are faced with a real dilemma.

Cosmic humanists believe that they can accelerate the great march of evolution by gaining access to a higher consciousness, which is supposed to enable them to overcome disease and ensure their moral and physical well-being. Meditation is the most effective way to achieve this higher consciousness. The rule is simple: one must remain in communion with the God within. This higher consciousness leads to a state of well-being and reduces physical, mental and spiritual pain. It is the victory of spirit over matter! Thus, a person suffering from cancer can heal himself. He can ensure his salvation, if he is God enough. Redemption is in his hands.

## **Towards a New World Order (New Age)**

The dogma "God in all and all in God" shapes the political worldview, which can only exist in unity. It is therefore necessary to abolish material and individual borders, including national borders, and

to establish a world government at the head of a global civilisation. In this way, humanity will acquire a higher collective consciousness. To achieve this, each individual has a responsibility to walk towards a higher consciousness. The new world order will emerge when enough people have reached a higher consciousness.

All will have to give up their religion, first and foremost the Christians, for Christianity is a threat to the New Age programme towards divinity and must be removed.

Those who listen to their inner God will inevitably make wise decisions that will lead them to live in material abundance. Thus poverty will gradually disappear as they allow the "Inner God" to fill them with money and possessions. Poverty and disease are signs of a lower consciousness. This is the cruellest aspect of the New Age view.

Cosmic humanists have a very optimistic view of the future. Since everything is God, humans will eventually live in harmony with each other and with the whole universe. To achieve this, some of them will form an enlightened elite that will lead all the others in this ascension to a higher, God-centred consciousness.

Cosmic humanists rely on evolution to firmly guide humans towards perfection and to ensure their salvation. Human history is seen as an ascent, a progression from lower to higher levels of consciousness. Why this ascent? Because the divine force in the universe is always pulling upwards.

The same is true of religion. The evolution of one religion into another is part of cosmic progress. While Christianity may have helped man to seek God a millennium or two ago, it is now totally outdated

and must be abandoned to allow modern man to evolve.

## Hinduism and Buddhism

I cannot end this section on cosmic humanism without saying a few very general and succinct words about Hinduism and Buddhism, with which it has many similarities.

**Hinduism** is considered the third largest religion in the world <sup>1</sup>. It has no founder and is believed to have originated in northern India. Today, 80% of the country's inhabitants are Hindus, which represents almost 900 million people. The four Vedas, the founding texts of Hinduism, were composed between 1500 and 600 BC. They are said to have been directly revealed by the Brahman. Brahman can be described as the Omniscient, the Omnipresent, the transcendent and immanent Absolute, the Eternal, the Supreme Being, the great All, the One, the Ultimate Reality, the Universal Soul...

The Hindu believes that Brahman is an eternal reality representing the All. The whole universe is an emanation of Brahman. He believes that Brahman is

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<sup>1</sup> *Hinduism*, Wikipedia. In 2015, the number of followers was estimated at 1.1 billion in 85 countries. The term Hinduism appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. "Hinduism or sanātana dharma ("eternal socio-cosmic order") is more akin to a cultural substratum, a way of life or thought, than to an organised and dogmatic religion. What is called "Hinduism" today is the attempt to bring together the disparate beliefs of the ancient Vedic pantheon, eclipsed by the popularity of Shiva, Vishnu or Krishna" (WP).

within him and he strives to seek this hidden identity within himself. In a way, we find this pantheistic notion proper to cosmic humanism. "Brahman is the abode of all beings and dwells in all beings".

Hindus are polytheistic, but their millions <sup>1</sup> of gods are only facets of Brahman.

They also believe in reincarnation, which will be more or less good depending on the way they carry out their present life. This cycle of reincarnation can be broken by meditation, devotion, the practice of various forms of yoga and certain rituals.

Man is seen as a whole, as the union of body, soul and spirit. Illness occurs when there is an imbalance between these various components.

In recent centuries, Hinduism has adapted to export itself to the United States and Europe, developing transcendental meditation, movements for "Krishna consciousness", yoga, etc.

**Buddhism** <sup>2</sup> is a philosophy founded around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC by Siddharta Gautama, a man from a wealthy Indian family. At the age of 29, he was distressed by the human misery around his family's palace and, although he was married and a young father, he decided to withdraw to meditate. Seven years later, he attained Enlightenment and understood true human nature and the means to escape it. He thus became the Buddha, i.e. the one who had attained the ultimate knowledge. He then

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<sup>1</sup> A Hindu said this: If the God of the Bible created man in his own image, every Hindu has created God in his own image.

<sup>2</sup> *Buddhism*, Wikipedia. The term "religion" is said to have originated in the West. However, Buddhism is considered more as a philosophy.

began to teach his fellow human beings to lead them on the path to Enlightenment.

He understood that the Self does not exist as an independent entity, since everything is interdependent. Moreover, the world has no reality in itself, but is only a combination of illusions. Awakening consists of dissolving the Self into absolute emptiness. This approach emphasises meditation, religious rituals (prayers, offerings) and ethical practices.

Buddhism denies the existence of a creator God, but not of superhuman beings. Thus, over time, it has added a number of deities.

The teaching is purely human and does not claim any divine revelation. One can speak of wisdom or philosophy. It is by meditating that one can make the inner discovery of the ultimate truth.

Life is only suffering and pain, the root of which is the thirst for desire. To remove pain and enter into the ultimate happiness, one must annihilate desire. This is achieved by following the "eight-duty path" which includes the search for wisdom, the performance of pure moral actions and mental discipline.

The Buddhist believes in reincarnation, but does not accept the idea of an immortal soul that enters and leaves one body and enters another. He is encouraged by Buddha's teaching to awaken in order to escape the nightmare of reincarnation and thus enter nirvana.

In 2018, there were just over 620 million Buddhists in the world, making Buddhism the fourth largest religion after Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Of the various Buddhist currents, Tibetan

Buddhism currently has the greatest influence in the West.

## Islam

### Theology

Islam is a monotheistic religion. The God of Muslims, Allah, is one God. He has no son (like Jesus for the God of Christians) and does not consider Muslims as his children, with whom he would have a personal relationship. The only thing he asks of Muslims is submission to the orders he has given.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, well after the time of the Old and New Testaments, the "revelation" of Islam is said to have come to Mohammed in the form of messages which would have been transmitted by the angel Gabriel. These messages were collected to form a book, the Koran. In fact, this Koran is understood to be a true copy of an original, the "Mother of the Book", preserved with Allah from all eternity <sup>1</sup>. This text is considered to be the Word of Allah, uncreated, eternal, unalterable and explicit. This Word is therefore pre-existent to human history.

For Muslim scholars, Islam was there long before our human civilisation, long before Judaism and Christianity. Adam was a Muslim, Abraham was a Muslim <sup>2</sup>, Moses and the other prophets were Muslims, Jesus was a Muslim. For these scholars, the only true religion is Islam.

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 13.39

<sup>2</sup> Koran 3.67

It is a natural religion: humans are born Muslims, it is their nature. They go wrong when they join another religion, such as Judaism or Christianity. That is why the mission of Muslims is to bring them back to Islam <sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the Koran states that Abraham disowned those who did not believe in Allah alone; he disowned them and showed them enmity and hatred until they converted to Islam.

Muslims are creationists, as they believe that Allah created everything in the universe. Allah decides everything in the course of history, which leaves no room for human free will. The expression "Inch'Allah" (Allah willing) is a testimony to this.

They therefore vigorously reject the theory of evolution.

## The moral code

In contrast to humanism, Islam considers that humans have no legitimacy to establish laws for themselves. The only laws that must be followed are those contained in the Sharia. These laws are immutable and cannot be adapted to the evolution of society.

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 60.4. Article 10 of the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990) states: "Islam is the natural religion of man. It is not permissible to subject him to any form of pressure or to take advantage of his poverty or ignorance to convert him to another religion or to atheism."



## The question of good and evil

Man is born good and perfect. In the course of his life, he is able to do what is good and right, if he overcomes his weakness and does not listen to the suggestions of Satan <sup>1</sup>. For evil does not come from within man's heart, but from without, from Satan who tempts him. This temptation may even be permitted by Allah in order to test the believer.

Allah is ready to forgive transgressions, if the believer regrets his sin, turns away from it and performs works of penance. Indeed, if he prays regularly, observes the month of fasting of Ramadan, gives alms and performs the pilgrimage to Mecca, he is entitled to hope that Allah will be gracious to him. But in no case can he be absolutely sure of being forgiven.

It must be understood that the Muslim believer does not sin against Allah, but against himself. Since there is no relationship between Allah and the believer, the believer cannot cause any harm to Allah by his disobedience.

According to the Koran, to sin is to disobey what Allah has commanded man, but it is not a rebellion of the inner man against Allah and His ordinances.

Islam rejects the notion of original sin and its consequences for mankind. It follows that man has no need of salvation; he only needs to obey the Sharia.

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is inspired by Christine Schirrmacher's book: *L'islam, histoires, doctrines, islam et christianisme*, Charols, Excelsis, 2016 (Original German edition published in 2003).

## Persecution of Christians

According to the statistics given by the organisation Open Doors, Christians are persecuted most in countries where Islam is dominant <sup>1</sup>. The reasons for such persecution can be found in the Koran. The Koran considers it heresy to claim that God has a Son, Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Christ did not die on the cross for the salvation of all those who believe in him, nor did he ascend to heaven to sit at the right hand of his Father. Islam considers Christians to be polytheists, "associators", since they also worship Jesus, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Christians are considered "the worst creatures in the world" <sup>2</sup>, "impurities" <sup>3</sup>, and must be eliminated <sup>4</sup> unless they convert to Islam.

Islam thus undermines the foundations of Christianity by rejecting the divine nature of Jesus and his position as the Son of God, by denying the filial relationship that God offers to those who believe in Jesus Christ, and by denying the work of salvation accomplished by Jesus through his death on the cross <sup>5</sup>.

There is therefore a huge gap between Islam and Christianity, which can never be bridged. Those who

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<sup>1</sup> See : Open Doors, Persecution Index 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Koran 98.6

<sup>3</sup> Koran 9.28

<sup>4</sup> Koran 9.5

<sup>5</sup> I have discussed this in detail in my book *"Why is Europe opening up to Islam?"*

still believe in inter-religious dialogue to bridge it are deluding themselves!

## Islam in society

Islam is, like Christianity, a proselytising religion, but the comparison stops there. The good news of the Gospel is supposed to be preached to the whole world, but it is not imposed on anyone, and everyone has the freedom to refuse the offer of salvation. When this freedom is not respected, Christians violate a fundamental biblical principle, which is the profound respect for human choice.

Muslims will say that they do not force anyone to become a Muslim. This statement is not correct for several reasons. Firstly, Muslim conquests from the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards were mainly by the sword. The conquerors also used other means of pressure: economic, by asphyxiating those who did not want to adhere to Islam, or societal, by humiliating the recalcitrant and treating them as second-class citizens. Finally, while it is very easy to enter the great family of Muslims, the Ummah, by reciting a short profession of faith, it is impossible to leave without being considered a traitor and even being threatened with death. In this, freedom of choice is violated.

The mission of Muslims is to bring humanity back to Islam. This is why they divide the world into two zones: the land of Islam (dar al-Islam) and the land of war (dar el-Harb) <sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Literally, the word "Dar" means house, dwelling.

The land of Islam is a territory where Islam dominates and where the inhabitants submit to Allah. This means that in this territory, the state religion is Islam, the government is run by Muslims and the laws of the state are based on Sharia law. This does not mean that all citizens are Muslims and strictly follow Sharia law. There may even be a majority of non-Muslims, but they are subject to a special status, that of dhimmi. They are not obliged to practise Islam, but they must pay a special tax in exchange for the peace and protection they are given. It should be remembered, however, that dhimmis are only second-class citizens, who do not enjoy all the rights accorded to Muslims. They are placed in a state of inferiority and humiliation <sup>1</sup>.

The land of war (dar el-Harb) is the territory where Islam does not rule. Even if Muslims are in the majority, the land is a land of war if the government is not Islamic, as described above. It should be noted that it is unacceptable for a radical Muslim to be ruled by a non-Islamic authority. Radical Muslims will do everything to place an Islamic government in charge of the country they live in. They will therefore inevitably come into conflict with the authorities of the host country. This is probably why this land is called the "land of war" or "land of conflict". The Koran asks Muslims to fight until the "land of war" becomes a "land of Islam". This fight is called "jihad" <sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The status of dhimmi is very well described by Bat Ye'Or, *Eurabia, the Euro-Arab Axis*, Madison, NJ, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Koran 9.5, 14, 29, 123; 47.35. Jihad is multifaceted and concerns all aspects of life. It can use force if necessary and lead to terrorism.

What differentiates these two territories is mainly the nature of the government that rules and the religion that predominates <sup>1</sup>.

It is therefore clear that Islam is above all political and that its ambition is to overthrow the country's political system in order to replace it with a politico-religious system based on Sharia law.

As we have seen, this is a very legalistic system that leads to a tremendous backward step in relation to all the gains in freedom brought about by Christianity.

## **Towards a new world order**

Man is capable of doing good; the image of man in the Koran is very optimistic. Therefore, Allah has the right to expect believers to strive to keep his commandments and to abstain from evil. But what is valid for believers is not valid for unbelievers. That is why Muslims have been given a great mission: to spread Islam throughout the world, and then the world should be much better off.

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<sup>1</sup> I have taken this paragraph from my book "*Why Europe opens up to islam?*", Romanel-sur-Lausanne, Éditions EHB, 2021.

## Christianity

Even though we have already talked a lot about it in this book, I think it is important to take up the main points of rupture with the three forms of humanism and with Islam, and to see what answers Christianity has brought.

### Theology

The Christian believes in a God who created all things. Creation had a beginning and will also have an end. But God remains transcendent to this creation, contrary to what cosmic humanism asserts. This means that humans cannot relate to God through creation, even if it gives them a reflection of the greatness of the Creator. But it is only a reflection! And yet this reflection is important, since it should have led humans to recognise God as the Creator and to worship Him as such. This is called general revelation. Paul speaks of this in his first chapter of Romans <sup>1</sup>.

Although God is above his creation, he is nevertheless its owner and he allows himself the freedom to act on it as he pleases. The God of the Bible is not a clockmaker who created a clock, set it

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 1.18-20 : *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

in motion and then withdrew, leaving it to run on its own, without intervening (this philosophy is called "deism"). No! God is constantly intervening on earth and in human history to seek to establish a relationship with people and create alliances. The Bible tells us many stories of God's walk with people.

Jesus Christ, who, as the Son of God, made God his Father known to us, gave the most intense and profound revelation to us. As Jesus said to his disciples: *Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*<sup>1</sup> Jesus therefore came to earth to link believers with the Father. He was the way that leads them to Him.

As we have seen, the risen Jesus sent his Spirit to dwell in the hearts of believers in order to continue the work he had begun on earth. Thus, in the heart of each believer, the Holy Spirit reveals more and more of the nature of the Father.

When the cosmic humanist meditates and searches for God in the depths of his being, he certainly experiences something positive, for meditation can indeed bring a certain harmony and peace to the swirling world of emotions and thoughts. But he finds nothing but himself. In my youth, I personally experienced this well-being by emptying myself in yoga exercises. But this was no match for the wonderful relationship I later experienced with the Lord when the Holy Spirit came to dwell within me. I was no longer just in a relationship with myself, but with the Spirit of God who communicated the intense life of God to me. This is really something else! But you have to live it... This is the tragedy of many Christians who do not

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<sup>1</sup> John 14.8-9

understand the importance of this relationship and are content with a "theoretical" faith.

The Christian faith is therefore based on two foundations: - a particular revelation (the Bible, Jesus Christ) and - a general revelation (the order of creation). The general revelation is to encourage humans to recognise the fundamental truths contained in the Bible and embodied in Jesus Christ. The particular revelation brings the believer into relationship with God and His Son Jesus Christ.

## **Its view of society**

The Bible teaches us that the human heart is inherently evil and corrupt. It is not society that needs to be changed, but the heart of man. We have seen what God's plans were to achieve this. I do not want to go back to them.

However, it is important to understand that the change that God wants to bring about in the heart of believers is not only for them, but also for the society around them. The lifestyle that they acquire will influence their environment. People will see how they live and what kind of life they feed on, how they behave in the various trials they go through, and they will be challenged by the testimony they give. And so they will be like the leaven that is put into the dough and that allows it to swell, to take up an image used by Jesus <sup>1</sup>. Others will also want to know their lives and will become disciples of Christ. And little by little society will change, smoothly and without violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 13.21. Idem Matthew 13.33. This parable is the only text where leaven does not have a negative connotation!



This is what Christ asked when he gave his disciples the ultimate command before he ascended into heaven: *Go then, and make disciples of all nations...*<sup>1</sup> This work is based on witness in word and deed, that is all!

There is no need to resort to force as so-called Christians have done, who have not hesitated to torture and kill to impose Christianity. What a shame! What a scandal! It is to despise a fundamental biblical principle, that of God's respect for the freedom of each person. No one can be forced to believe in God and Jesus.

There is no need to turn the Church into a political empire to spread the Gospel! Jesus said that his kingdom was not of the world and did not follow the laws of the world. A worldly kingdom has no competence to stimulate the people of this earth to become followers of Christ.

There is no need to foment a popular revolution to fight against an authoritarian and bloodthirsty regime! The conversion of hearts will do its work little by little. Let us not forget that God can overthrow dictators at his pleasure, so we are asked to pray for our authorities that God will guide them to wisdom... or overthrow them if necessary.

There is no need to seek to eliminate ideologies that persecute the Christian faith. That is not our role; I remind you of what I said about the parable of the wheat and the chaff. It is not our job to try to clean up the world of everything that could be judged as contrary to the Christian faith. Let us be content to live as persevering Christians, faithful witnesses to the work of Christ in us.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28.19

## The law, the moral code

As I studied humanism in the three forms described above, I could not help but think of Genesis chapter 3, which masterfully portrays the trap set by the serpent for Eve and then Adam. The snake's aim is simple: he wants to lead humans away from a strong relationship with God the creator. And he achieves this without difficulty by proposing to them the path of humanism! A system without God, where man becomes himself like a god, knowing good and evil. But what the serpent was careful not to tell them was that they would not be able to correctly determine the limit between good and evil. This handicap will prove to be fatal, as God had indeed predicted, and throughout the biblical story, God will reproach his people with this: *woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness...*<sup>1</sup>

As you will no doubt have understood, the establishment of a moral code remains a major problem for these three branches of humanism. Either it is established by one layer of the population to the detriment of the others, or it is relative, i.e. changing from one person to another and from one situation to another. We then spoke of ethical relativism. Can we really trust it? Are we not going to witness, as G. Puppink shows in his book "The rights of the denatured man", a progressive degradation of the moral code? Shall we see the emergence of a world where the worst things will be

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 5.20

justified in the name of the newly established moral code? The millions of deaths caused by communism have already shown us the inefficiency and danger of such a human code.

I am also thinking of G. Orwell's famous book "1984" where he describes this phenomenon very well: the shift and then the inversion of values. For example, the torture and brainwashing of party enemies is practised at the "Ministry of Love". Significant!

The Bible clearly shows us that people are not capable of establishing a correct moral code themselves. That is why God gave one to his people through Moses. This code has not disappeared and in Jesus we can find the whole Law of God revisited, with the added strength to put it into practice, which was not the case in the Old Testament. We can do this because Jesus dwells in us in the Spirit.

In society, people have the freedom and responsibility to make social laws based on the moral code instituted by God. Over the last two thousand years, we have seen how this Christian influence has profoundly affected the development of the West.

Humanists reproach Christianity with hindering the expression of the natural inclinations of the human being. This is true, because it takes a lucid look at the true moral state of man left to himself (previously described as animal man). And reality can only prove him right! Despite all the improvements in our society, humans are still dangerous predators in all areas, for nature and each other. And it is unreasonable to say that progress has been made over the last few millennia. The human heart remains inexorably evil! For example, look at

how men behave towards women and you will immediately understand the moral state of society!

However, such a lucid look leads us to turn towards the solution that God proposes: to live a new life through the Spirit, who is the only one capable of truly changing the human heart. We have spoken about this at length.

## Judeo-Christian values

As you have certainly noticed, humanism seeks to destroy several Christian values, which have nevertheless proved their worth in society. I propose to review some of them.

### **Freedom**

God created man free to choose and has always respected this freedom. The first example is given to us in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve have the choice between a life of communion and work with God or an autonomous path, that is to say without God. They choose the second solution and God respects it. This respect will run through the whole biblical story. Humans have the freedom to accept God, but also to refuse him... at their peril.

While the people of Israel are in the desert, God tells them this: *I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life, that you and your offspring may live...*<sup>1</sup> Again, the people have the freedom to make a choice, but God strongly encourages them to make the right choice, for their lives depend on it.

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 30.19

Many times, God reminds his people that he brought them out of Egypt to bring them from slavery to freedom, and that they would be foolish to go back to slavery! Freedom is too precious to be squandered. God wants freedom for his children!

Jesus has the same concern when he tells his disciples: *If you abide in my words... you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*<sup>1</sup> Jesus speaks of inner freedom, but also of the freedom that will be brought into society. There are many examples of this in the last two millennia.

Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the countries that opened up to the Reformation understood the importance of this freedom for individuals and for society as a whole. They sought to establish a type of government that could guarantee maximum freedom for citizens while preserving the individual sphere of each person. This is how democracy was born in the United States and Europe. This freedom has been a major factor in prosperity and development.

As we shall see later, this freedom cannot be dissociated from other Christian values. Wherever the desire for freedom is emancipated from the responsibilities associated with it, perverse effects flourish that turn against society.

### **The entrepreneurship**

The Christian considers that the gifts he possesses have been given to him by God <sup>2</sup> and that he should use them for God, for himself and for

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<sup>1</sup> John 8.31

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 4.7: *...What do you have that you have not received?*

others <sup>1</sup>. These natural or supernatural gifts are creativity, organisation, development, service, etc. It is an honour and a duty for every Christian to make use of his or her gifts, and the community should encourage this. In this way, the whole of society will progress and the strongest will push the weakest forward with them.

Unfortunately, some political systems work in the opposite direction. I am thinking in particular of communism and dictatorships. Let me give you a clear example. In 1990, a year after the death of dictator Ceausescu, a Romanian colleague came to Lausanne to train for a few months in the vitreoretinal surgery department. As soon as he returned to Bucharest, he worked hard to set up a technical platform and start performing vitrectomies <sup>2</sup>. But the nurses in the operating room felt that these operations were taking too long and decided to sabotage his work by emptying the gas cylinders used to operate his equipment. Several of his instruments were stolen, so much so that he had to lock them up in his office between operations. He then told me a story that says a lot about the mentality of a society indoctrinated by more than forty years of communism: There were two very poor neighbouring farmers in the countryside. One of them had lost everything, and the other still had a goat. One day, an angel came to visit the one who had lost everything and said to him: "I see that you

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<sup>1</sup> In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25.23-35), Jesus emphasises the need to make the talents received bear fruit.

1 Peter 4.10: *...each of you should use the gift you have received for the benefit of others.*

<sup>2</sup> A delicate intraocular operation involving the vitreous body and the retina at the back of the eye.

are very poor... ask me what you want and I will give it to you". What an opportunity for this man to finally get out of misery! But his answer was more than surprising: "I would like you to go and kill my neighbour's goat".

This story was a good description of the situation in my colleague's clinic and also in the country: as soon as someone stood out from the crowd by developing new skills, the others took it upon themselves to beat him over the head to bring him into line. The important thing was that everyone was equal. Obviously, this way of promoting equality was not stimulating at all and broke any desire to improve society.

In a western country, my colleague would have received support and funding to set up his surgical unit! Indeed, experience shows that when someone can make the most of their gifts, they enrich the society around them and everyone benefits!

The valuing of entrepreneurship is a sure sign of the Judeo-Christian influence.

### **Individual responsibility**

This is undoubtedly one of the strongest motors that Christianity has brought to the construction and development of society. The Christian is responsible before God for making the most of all the gifts he has received. This is not an optional gift to society, but a duty. In his book <sup>1</sup> (*The hidden strength of Protestants, opportunity or threat to society*), A. Biéler describes very well how the Reformation of

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<sup>1</sup> Biéler André, *La force cachée des protestants, chance ou menace pour la société*, Le Mont-sur-Lausanne et Genève, Éditions Ouverture ; Labor et Fides, 1995.

the 16<sup>th</sup> century made it possible to rediscover this essential value and how the Protestants have energised the Western countries in an astonishing way.

Unfortunately, I see that the more the state wants to establish its power over society and control everything, the more it stifles individual freedom and responsibility. It breaks down the desire for creativity and development and leads people to withdraw into themselves and seek only their own comfort. The more the state reinforces its control, the more the citizens become dependent on this nurturing mother... and the more they accuse it of all the evils when things go wrong.

### **The spirit of service**

This is the very last teaching that Jesus gave before he died: the Christian is called to serve his neighbour, just as he, Jesus, came to earth to serve.

It is not a matter of exploiting one's neighbours for one's own benefit, but rather of doing everything possible to enhance their value and enable them to rise up and develop. Service is not restricted to helping the disadvantaged; it is a principle that applies to all social relationships, whatever they may be. Everyone is called to serve their neighbours, whether they are a worker or a company director, a private citizen or a high-level politician. This is an extraordinary ferment of harmonious development in a society! This is a simple and effective way to bring life to any community!

### **Love of neighbour**

*"Thou shall love thy neighbour as yourself"* is the second of the Ten Commandments given by God



to Moses <sup>1</sup>. Jesus obviously took it up to emphasise its importance.

Atheists do not want to hear about such a commandment and have found some pale alternatives to it: people are asked to consider their fellow citizens as equals, not to discriminate against them and to tolerate them. Not following these instructions is now punishable by law. This has led to a return to a legalistic system, which unfortunately does not produce the desired results.

Love of neighbour requires an inner strength, a spiritual strength that finds its source in God. This love does not have its source in a code of laws, however perfect. An external force cannot impose it.

It is nonsense to want to remove God from society. It is to dismiss the only force capable of bringing about a profound renewal, a change of mentality and a new energy in those who open themselves to his action.

I know that the Church has a lot of baggage behind it and that it has not always lived up to the Christian values we are talking about here. That is no reason to spit on it and throw everything away. It would be far more intelligent to go back to the sources of the Christian faith and to examine carefully what they propose.

### **Mercy**

Mercy is related to love of neighbour and compassion for those in distress.

Many Psalms describe the cry of the believer when he is in misery or danger, and his prayer to God for help. And God answers him, because he is a

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 19.18

God of compassion. This same spirit awakens in believers compassion for the sick, the weak, the failed, the disabled and the dependent. If God shows mercy to us, we must show mercy to our fellow human beings. The parable of the "Good Samaritan", told by Jesus, sums it up very well.

This is how all kinds of charities came into being. Already in the early days of the Church, there was a food distribution service for the most disadvantaged. This service has continued over the centuries. Dispensaries, leprosaria and hospices were founded in the same spirit. More recently, organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, founded by the Swiss Henri Dunant, a committed Christian, have been emulated by non-Christians. The Church does not have a monopoly on mercy!

All these works have helped to relieve human suffering to some extent. They have profoundly marked the mentality of our societies to the point that they have been taken up by governments, which have made them a matter of state. This is good, but it should not take away the responsibility of each individual!

### **Righteousness, the refusal of corruption**

Uprightness is a value that is unfortunately becoming increasingly rare. And yet it is a source of development and prosperity. Let's take an example: as a human resources manager in a company, you have to fill a position of responsibility. Two people come forward with equal skills. How do you make a good choice? The first person shows real righteousness, while the second does not make it a priority. Wouldn't you choose the first person,

because you know you can trust him or her completely and that he or she will do the best?

The rejection of corruption is rooted in the Mosaic law <sup>1</sup>. These texts may go unnoticed, but they have major consequences if they are put into practice. For corruption is a national scourge that spreads like a gangrene. Corruption destroys the power base by giving parallel power to those with money who bribe people at will. There is nothing like it to destroy a society! Look carefully at the countries that are ranked among the most corrupt in the world and you will see that they are vegetating in misery, even though they may have considerable wealth in their subsoil. Imagine if corruption could be wiped out with a snap of the fingers: you would see these countries prospering amazingly and living in affluence!

### **The role of the couple and the family**

This is another area where Christianity is at odds with humanism and Islam <sup>2</sup>. By considering the couple as the union of a man and a woman and by advocating fidelity in marriage, Christianity is increasingly at odds with the current trend that promotes polyamory and homosexuality. The gap is widening and many humanists are using this as a battle horse to destroy Christianity and eliminate any influence it may have had in society.

As a Christian, I consider that the family as instituted by God is a fundamental element of society and that any action that seeks to dislocate it will sooner or later destroy society.

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 10.17-18; 16.19; 27.25. See also: Matthew 27.3-9; 28.12-15. Acts 8.18, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Islam allows polygamy, which is forbidden in Christianity.

### **A certain idea of government and state.**

In the Old Testament, Leviticus and Deuteronomy may seem tedious, but if we study them carefully, we discover very valuable information about the organisation of the people of Israel <sup>1</sup>. These texts inspired the founding fathers of democracy in the United States and later in Europe.

In the desert, the people have become too numerous and Moses is no longer able to meet their legitimate needs, mainly the need for justice. Moses therefore asks each of the twelve tribes of Israel to choose wise, intelligent and well-known men to lead them <sup>2</sup>. Thus, God gives the people the right to choose their political leaders, a revolutionary practice that did not exist in the world at the time <sup>3</sup>. The power thus comes from the people and the government is representative of the different tribes. Such governance requires a good deal of consensus!

Note in passing that the political and religious powers are strictly separated, but God is not removed from the life of the people; the Levites are charged, among other things, with giving religious instruction throughout the land.

The government is set up in such a way that no one can monopolise power and turn governance into a dictatorship. A wise decision! Its role is to guarantee the citizens their fundamental rights.

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<sup>1</sup> Landa Cope published a book on this subject: *An introduction to the old testament template, rediscovering God's principles for disciplining all nations*, Burtigny, The Template Institute Press, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 1.13

<sup>3</sup> We are in about the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC. Democracy began to be discussed in Greece in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

In his book "Democracy, Liberty and Christian Values" <sup>1</sup>, H. Stückelberger describes the formation of democracy in the United States. In particular, he quotes a text by the then 32-year-old Thomas Jefferson, who describes the role of the state: "We hold the following truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal <sup>2</sup>; that they are endowed by the Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Governments are established among men to secure these rights, and their just power is derived from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of this purpose, the people have the right to change or abolish it and establish a new government..."

The people thus bear a great responsibility for the establishment of government and must assume the consequences of their choices. Since the principle of authority is a divine one, the people must respect the authorities they have appointed, even if they disagree with them and wish to change them.

### **A liberal economy with social responsibility.**

Look at how a country manages the economy and you will understand better what its moral values are.

For many centuries, the Church saw fit to ignore financial matters, leaving the management of money to others, especially the Jews, who excelled at it. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Reformer John Calvin realised that this issue should not be neglected and that sound money management could do much to lift

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<sup>1</sup> Stückelberger Hansjürg, *Démocratie, liberté et valeurs chrétiennes*, Esras.net et Futur.ch, 2022, p.118.

<sup>2</sup> Are they really created equal?

people out of poverty. Calvin also gave work a dignity and a spiritual value, as man participates in God's work through his labour. Calvin even went so far as to give industry and trade the same value as agriculture, recognising in commercial traffic the expression of human solidarity.

Calvin made his mark by lifting the Church's ban on interest-bearing loans. However, he had the wisdom to separate lending into two categories:

1) the consumer loan, which is an emergency loan for those in need; such a loan must be interest-free <sup>1</sup>.

2) the production loan or business loan, through which the debtor obtains a new profit. In this case, it is normal that the lender shares in the profit, but in reasonable proportions. This is why Calvin asked the state to legislate on this point in order to avoid abuse. For Calvin, wealth is primarily intended to serve others, and hoarding and speculation are unacceptable.

Several historians have made Calvin the father of modern capitalism; they are probably right. However, it would be unfair to hold him responsible for the subsequent development of capitalism, which has gradually freed itself from its original ethics and purpose to become an end in itself. In his preface to A. Biéler's book on "Calvin's economic and social thought" <sup>2</sup>, the former French Prime Minister Michel Rocard rightly says: "The economy cannot regulate

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<sup>1</sup> Note that in the Old Testament, lending was to be interest-free within the Jewish community; interest could only be applied to foreigners. Exodus 22.25-27; Deuteronomy 23.19-20; Deuteronomy 24.6-8; Leviticus 25.35-38.

<sup>2</sup> Biéler André, *La pensée économique et sociale de Calvin*, Geneva, Georg, 2008 (reprint of the 1961 edition).

itself. There is no answer to the difficulties it encounters that does not begin by establishing the ends it serves". For Calvin, this purpose was very clear: it is to serve one's neighbour! M. Rocard agrees: "Like life itself, the resources that serve to sustain it come from God. It is therefore appropriate to give thanks to Him and to use these resources in the spirit of His service".

As soon as we dissociate capitalism from this social ethic, we see a disturbing fracture in society: the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. Such a situation is scandalous and can only lead to disaster.

The biblical ethic of economics may seem paradoxical: on the one hand, it enjoins everyone to help the poor and not to turn a blind eye to human misery, and, on the other hand, it encourages individual ownership and wealth. This may seem surprising, but the reason is that the Bible is very clear-sighted; it knows that there will always be rich and poor, and it has to accept this, but it places great emphasis on the responsibility of the rich towards the poor, so that there is a fair redistribution of wealth.

Marxist humanism seeks to destroy capitalism; Christianity seeks to restore to capitalism the social ethic as described in the Bible. The communist experiment has killed millions; Christian ideology is nonviolent!

### **Forgiveness**

As we have seen, by his death Jesus acquired for us God's forgiveness once and for all. It becomes effective in us when we accept it in all simplicity. We

are then freed from all guilt and can renew a true relationship with God.

Since we have been forgiven, Christ asks us to forgive those who have offended us. This is very important, because if we do not do this, we block God's forgiveness of us! <sup>1</sup> This forgiveness concerns our relatives, our acquaintances, but also, on a larger scale, society or the nation. Here is an example <sup>2</sup>:

On 28 June 1919, the Treaty of Versailles, a peace treaty between Germany and the Allies, was signed. The location was not random: the same Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles was the site of the proclamation of the German Empire on 18 January 1871. For the Allies, and especially the French, choosing this place was a revenge and a way to humiliate the Germans. When the League of Nations was created, the defeated were excluded and the victorious countries took advantage of this to weaken Germany as much as possible. This humiliation remained engraved in the hearts of the Germans and the Nazis were able to exploit it skilfully twenty years later when they launched hostilities in Europe (1939).

At the end of the Second World War, the victorious powers demanded an unconditional surrender from Germany, but under the influence of the United States they changed their minds and did not repeat the mistakes of 1919. It was decided to raise Germany up rather than crush and humiliate her again. After a long process of reconciliation and

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<sup>1</sup> In Islam, even though Allah is called the Merciful One, acknowledgment of faults and forgiveness are not concerns for Muslims. Nor does forgiveness exist in Japanese Shintoism. Stükelberger, p. 142

<sup>2</sup> This example is mentioned in the book by H. Stükelberger.



forgiveness, France and Germany became friends and thus the driving force of the whole of Europe.

One could also speak of similar approaches in the serious conflicts in South Africa and Rwanda in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It is impressive to see how forgiveness can free up relationships and allow for renewal and real development. But when forgiveness is denied, hatreds crystallise and slowly continue their destructive work. And eventually everyone suffers.

I do not want to say more about Christian values (it would take several books to talk about them); my aim is above all to show that these values can have beneficial effects on the whole of society when believers put them into practice in their daily lives. Their importance is confirmed by the fact that non-believers can adopt them. It is not uncommon for atheists to live according to the values that their Christian parents taught them, and to enjoy the benefits that these values bring. But as generations pass, these values wither away because they have lost their true source in God. As I said before, Europe would like to maintain some of these values while denying their origin; this is a major mistake, because one cannot hope to harvest fruit from a tree whose roots one wants to destroy!

For these values to be maintained in a society, they must be carried by people with spiritual strength and inner conviction. We have already spoken about this above. When this spiritual strength disappears, the state is then obliged to impose these values by force. This is what we have seen in communist countries and dictatorships, but at the cost of immense collateral damage. In our

democracies, more and more legislation is passed and sanctions are imposed; the use of force is different, but the principle is the same. This is not good.

In a fascinating book, C. Delsol talks about the end of Christianity <sup>1</sup>. She defines Christianity as the civilisation inspired, ordered and guided by the Church.

C. Delsol believes that Christianity began in the 4<sup>th</sup> century under the reign of Theodosius and began its slow decline with the French Revolution, ending in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Humanists applauded this brilliant success: at last society was rid, or was in the process of being rid of the Church's hold on it, which was considered contrary to the humanist principles they defended. What are we to make of this?

Despite all the faults that can be blamed on the Church, for centuries it has nourished society with Christian values that have been beneficial to it. It would be unfair not to acknowledge this. On the other hand, it is legitimate to refuse that the Church has any power over society. Christ never asked the Church to have such power; he only sent his disciples with the mission to go to the people of all nations and exhort them to be followers of Christ themselves <sup>2</sup>.

Many Christians are deeply saddened by the disappearance of the preponderance of the institutional church. They see it as the end of Christianity, the end of the Church itself. Others rejoice, for they know that in this crisis Christians will be forced to return to the original mission that

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<sup>1</sup> Delsol Chantal, *La Fin de la chrétienté*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2021. (The end of Christianity)

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28.19

Jesus entrusted to his Church and to follow the rules of operation established by him. If Christianity is dead, the true Church of Christ is still alive and well. Spiritual Christians can continue to give their witness where they are involved and have a beneficial influence on society as a whole.

## What future for our world?

Secular humanism and Marxism-Leninism have held firmly to the theory of evolution to confirm their premise: God does not exist! This is incorrect because human beings, however intelligent, cannot comprehend what is outside the universe to which they belong. Humans cannot understand God with their own intelligence; they need a special revelation from outside, i.e. "from above". On the other hand, by denying God, humanists make the theory of evolution say what it does not say!

As a Christian, I have no difficulty in reconciling evolution and biblical revelation, but the latter leads to different conclusions from those of the humanists. If water and earth have produced an extraordinary quantity of living beings, God remains the Creator and the theory of evolution cannot exclude this.

Humanists believe in eternal matter. For them, the universe has always existed and will always exist. The Bible, on the other hand, tells us that our world had a beginning and that it will have an end.

The Bible tells us about the creation of the world in the first chapter of Genesis. Very briefly, it also tells us about the end of this world. The apostle Peter describes in his second letter (chapter 3) a *new*

*heaven* and a *new earth*.<sup>1</sup> What is he referring to? We can venture some explanations, knowing that these biblical statements remain a great mystery to us.

Many Christians have understood that God would completely renew this earth, which is in great need of renewal. There is indeed plenty to do! What about all the radioactive waste buried in the ground, the pollutants that pollute the water, land and air, the waste that litters the surface of the earth and the atmosphere, etc.? Some people have mistakenly concluded from these biblical promises that there is no need to worry about the changes humans are making to the earth, since God will put everything back in order. But do we know when these things will happen? In 10 years? 100 years? 1000 years? 10'000 years? In the meantime, we must leave our children an earth that allows them to live decently. That is why we must do everything to preserve it, as God asked in the second chapter of Genesis: humans were supposed to *work the earth and preserve it*. Unfortunately, this major order is not taken seriously and there is much to worry about for our earth, especially as things are deteriorating very quickly. Too fast for the principles of evolution to provide a satisfactory solution. Time is short: scientists speak of decades, centuries at most.

We can also understand these *new heavens* and *new earth* as being elsewhere than on this earth, in a space-time that is a real mystery to us.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul speaks of the suffering of creation due to the wanderings of

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<sup>1</sup> See also Revelation 21.1: *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.*

humanity away from God <sup>1</sup>. Given the bond of solidarity that God has established between the earth and humanity, the earth suffers just as much as humanity from the latter's degradation. But she knows that when the *sons of God* appear with the Christ, she will be *freed from corruption* and will share in a new *freedom* and a profound renewal.

We live in a world where uncertainties are rapidly increasing and becoming worrying. But God's promises to us in the Bible about his eternal Kingdom are cause for rejoicing and turning our pessimism into joyful optimism. That is why I can wake up every morning looking forward to all that I can experience in fellowship with the Lord, even if the news around me is not reassuring.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8.18-22: *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*

## Epilogue

I wrote this book with two objectives in mind.

- First, I wanted to show that the theory of evolution is not incompatible with biblical revelation, provided that we revisit certain biblical texts and that scientists confine themselves to their field of research. The intuition of evolution is contained in the first chapter of Genesis, which reminds us that God is the initiator and remains the master of all things.

Science leads us to question the role and significance of Adam and Eve. While classical theology sees them as new creations, unrelated to other living beings, from which all of humanity would have emerged, scientific data do not validate such a model and show that humans are part of the immense phylogenetic tree of living beings. Even if humans are highly evolved, they are still animals.

And it is precisely here that the Bible leads us further than science, by revealing God's intentions: He intervened at a given moment in human evolution to try to make this animal man into a superior man, a spiritual man capable of living according to divine standards and able to accomplish the noble tasks He has entrusted to him. Thus God took Adam and Eve from their environment and led them into the Garden of Eden to live differently. Unfortunately, this plan failed and they returned to "square one", but with something extra: a bond was established between God and humans, a bond that God will always seek to maintain and strengthen.

- My second aim was to describe this wonderful walk of God with humans. It is an exciting story of ups and downs, a series of struggles between those who believe and trust him, and those who do not believe and reject him.

We have talked about the various plans God has put in place to transform animal man into spiritual man; we have tried to understand the workings of this incredible spiritual Revolution. In spite of its fragility, the divine work is formidable, even if it has not convinced all humans.

It would be easy to believe that God has failed, yet he has by no means lost the game. Throughout human history, men and women have believed in him and walked with him. These believers have entered the Kingdom of God and will live forever in God's presence.

It is important to understand that the Kingdom that people who accept the message of Jesus enter is not limited to their short human life on earth, but continues after their death in what is generally called the afterlife or the heavenly Kingdom. Death is therefore not an end that leads to nothing, but simply a passage where the believer leaves his or her earthly body to resurrect and put on a heavenly body.

The heavenly Kingdom is outside time and space; it is a spiritual Kingdom where believers, completely transformed, have the chance and the happiness to meet God and Jesus face to face. A Kingdom where peace, joy, love, light and holiness reign. A world where evil has disappeared, where there is no more sickness, pain or tears.

This is really the ultimate goal of this long transformation from animal man to spiritual man!

## **Appendix A: The question of good and evil**

### **What is good and evil?**

Throughout my life, I have adopted the views of a certain theology, which is quite widespread, attributing the genesis of evil in the world to the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Evil would thus have entered into humanity and would have been transmitted from generation to generation, as if it had been inscribed in the human genome. What is the basis for such an assertion?

The first chapter of Genesis repeats six times that what God has created is good. And for the creation of man, it even says that it was very good. Theologians have deduced from this that evil could not have existed in nature and in animals, since God considered his creation to be good. Evil could only be the consequence of Adam and Eve's sin.

The study of the theory of evolution has led me to revise this understanding somewhat. I am sharing with you my thought process.

In the course of this study, I became interested in the formation of the earth. I was surprised to learn that it survived five mass extinctions. The first one in



-445 My <sup>1</sup> (My = millions of years), then in -360 My, in -250 My, in -200 My and finally the last one in -66 My. This one is the best known. It seems to have been caused by the fall of an asteroid 10-80 km in diameter on the Yucatan coast in Mexico. This asteroid is believed to have caused a 180 km diameter crater, earthquakes, tsunamis, a dust cloud blocking sunlight, an increase in sulphur aerosols in the stratosphere, acid rain, infrared radiation, fire storms, an increase in greenhouse CO<sub>2</sub>... All of this has led to decreased photosynthesis, ocean acidification and the death of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of land-based life forms, including all non-avian dinosaurs.

These extinctions are seriously sobering. If we could go back in time and send an observer to study the earth from the sky just after this asteroid fell 66 My ago, he would no doubt be very shocked at the massive destruction of plant and animal life. A real planetary ecological catastrophe! And if we told him that all this was good and that God's creation was good, he would certainly be outraged. And yet this is how it happened; we have clear archaeological evidence. For all the animals that perished at that time, it was an appalling catastrophe, yet some scientists suggest that this global upheaval helped to foster the much later appearance of human life. What was "bad or evil" for some became "good or evil" for others. And so life took off again, adapting once more to the harsh conditions and diversifying in incredible ways to create what we see today.

I would like to return to another element of the evolution of species, which makes us take a different

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<sup>1</sup> These dates are disputed by some, who believe them to be overestimates. Whatever the case, the problem remains unchanged.

look at what is bad and what is good. At the very beginning, we saw that a DNA mutation <sup>1</sup> in an organism leads to three evolutionary possibilities:

1. A disadvantage that leads either to the destruction of the organism or to its progressive disappearance.

2. No change. The modified gene continues to be passed on to offspring without consequence.

3. An advantage that allows the organism to develop better in its environment and to pass on its genes to offspring. We have seen that it is natural selection, external to the organism, that acts as a judge by classifying the modification as an advantage or disadvantage. This basic process is therefore part of the evolution of life from the beginning. So, there is some "good" and some "bad". But the result is simply magnificent! You only have to open your eyes to see all the wonders of nature to be convinced. Frankly, this creative process deserves to be called "good" or even "very good" and the biblical text does not exaggerate in using these terms.

Let's take the example of an industrialist who has just finished building an automated production line for glass bottles. Despite all the adjustments and precautions taken, he finds that there are errors that lead to waste, but fortunately these only represent a tiny percentage of the production. They are detected in time by various computerised optical means and then disposed of or recycled. I ask the question: does the presence of this waste invalidate the success of the production? Certainly not! And the manufacturer will be very proud of the success of his company,

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<sup>1</sup> The same can be said of the infinite combinations between the male genetic heritage provided by the spermatozoon and the female heritage contained in the egg.

looking at the huge batch of successful bottles. He will be able to say with reason that "everything is very good".

The same is true of the natural evolutionary process: the presence of defects does not detract from the immense success of the divine enterprise, and the beauty and diversity of the species are to be admired. Yes, it was very good!

In the example given, the waste is only material, and can even be recycled, so this is hardly a problem. However, the situation is quite different when it comes to living beings, especially humans.

As we have seen, chromosomal mutations are part of the replication process in all living beings. They therefore also occur in humans. Unfortunately, these mutations can be the cause of all kinds of deficits, cancers and other pathologies <sup>1</sup>. There is no need to describe the tragedies they cause for patients and their families. Some would be tempted to see this as a divine curse, as evidenced by the often-heard comment: "What have I done to God to deserve such a calamity?" Evolutionary theory puts things in their proper place. It is indeed so much more soothing to consider these chromosomal mutations as the result of chance <sup>2</sup>, appearing as an inevitable process in the development of life. The parents have nothing to do with it and have only passed on chromosomes that they themselves received from their parents. The children have

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<sup>1</sup> As mentioned above, these conditions can be caused, and most often are caused, by combinations of male and female genetic make-up. But it is easier to explain this problem by focusing on mutations.

<sup>2</sup> Let us not forget that human activity (chemicals, radiation) can also cause chromosomal mutations.

nothing to do with it either, for the same reasons. There is a flagrant injustice here, it is true, but it is not a divine decision. Some are favoured and will spend their entire lives without health problems. Others will accumulate problems, or die at a young age. We must accept this injustice as part of the evolution of life.

The study of nature also shows us that what is good for some is not necessarily good for others. As I write this, we are in the midst of a viral pandemic, Covid 19. For this virus, it's a global success! It has managed to "grow and multiply" in the words of Genesis chapter one. But for humans, it is a catastrophe. This virus has caused millions of deaths; it has increased unemployment like never before and put millions of people in real financial difficulty. I would remind you that viruses have been around and plaguing the world for ages, long before humans appeared on earth. In no way can they be said to be an expression of an "evil" introduced by humans because of their disobedience to God.

In recent years, ticks have invaded our entire country. They are probably happy to find hosts like us, who provide them with nourishing blood. But they can transmit serious diseases such as encephalitis or Lyme disease. What is good for them is bad for us. This is the logic of nature, where the struggle of species is part of the process of developing life.

In the world, mosquitoes carry many diseases, such as malaria, yellow fever, dengue fever, etc. In fact, they are among the most dangerous animals on earth.

Let's not forget the damage inflicted on crops by all sorts of micro-organisms (viruses, bacteria, fungi,

etc.) which cause famine and many deaths. This is the implacable logic of the laws of nature.

So, we see that in the life processes that have led to the development of animal and human species, there are many good things, but also bad things. What is good rubs shoulders with what is bad. And what is good for some is not necessarily good for others. This is why I think it is wrong to think that evil entered the world because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. No. It already existed before, since the origin of life on earth millions of years ago. It has undoubtedly become more complex in humans due to the considerable development of their faculties and also under the evil influence of evil spiritual powers, which may have led humans to commit the worst atrocities in the world.

We have seen above that what is good for some can be bad for others, and this is true throughout the living world. But what about the human species? Does the same principle also apply to human relationships? Yes, it certainly does! If we stick to the crude and implacable logic of evolution, we could say that natural selection within the human species does indeed allow the strongest to be favoured. But at what cost?

We saw in Chapter 1 that by intervening in human history the Creator changed the rules of natural selection within the human species. By asking humans to take care of the weakest, the sick, the socially excluded, he went against the process of selection. By establishing a Law that defined the limit between what God considered good and evil, he changed the dynamics of selection: it was no longer a question of human beings fighting for their own survival, to the detriment of others, but of adopting a

line of conduct from above, aimed at making each individual live in society. We have seen throughout this book that only God is capable of proposing moral codes to humans that are truly beneficial to them. Every time a society has tried to free itself from this divine law and adopt its own moral codes, it has gone astray and brought about its own destruction.

## **Why does God tolerate good and evil?**

I would now like to address a second important point, related to this coexistence of good and evil, by asking a fundamental question: why did God choose to allow good and evil to exist side by side? We can still understand and accept this when it comes to living beings far removed from us, but not when we see evil doing profound damage to human nature itself, seriously disrupting human relationships. This is perhaps the main grievance that is raised against God by many non-believers when they helplessly observe the pervasive presence of evil in the world. "How can God, if he exists, tolerate it?"

I would like to share some embryos of an answer, knowing full well that we cannot go round the problem, so complex is it.

There is a verse in the book of Deuteronomy that answers this question so well that I can't resist sharing it in full. We are in the wilderness of Sinai; the people of Israel have come out of Egypt and are walking towards the promised land of Canaan. God makes a new covenant with his people and says to them:

*I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him*<sup>1</sup>.

This text is very interesting because it clearly shows that God voluntarily placed his people in the presence of life and death, as well as blessing and curse. If God allowed these two opposites, life and death, blessing and curse, to coexist, it is indeed to force his people to choose. But God directs them to make the right choice: *choose life, that you may live*. God gives them a solution: life. It is there at hand. It is not a dream for the future, it is not an unattainable mirage, it can be lived right now. The text goes on to give the means to achieve it: *to love the Lord, obeying him and holding fast to him*.

The aim is therefore twofold: to enable the people to live and establish a solid and beautiful relationship with their God. A relationship based on a reciprocal love, freely consented to, voluntarily offered on both sides.

Without doubt, if there had not been this coexistence of good and evil, such a choice would not have been necessary, and perhaps such a loving relationship between God and his people would not have developed. Humans would have lived in happiness and ease, but without God! The experience of the Garden of Eden supports this idea. Adam and Eve had everything they needed to live happily in an ideal garden, and yet they preferred to be independent. Man is so made that he must be

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 30.19-20. We have talked about this before!

seriously confronted with death in order to choose life! It is usually in the midst of difficulties that he then sets out to seek God with all his heart.

This notion of a necessary choice between life and death, between light and darkness, can be found in all the other books of the Bible. It is a real leitmotif! Take the Gospels: everywhere Jesus encourages his listeners to believe in him, in order to have eternal life. He encourages them to come out of the darkness into the light and listen to his Word.

This injunction from Deuteronomy, choose life..., is a common thread throughout the Bible.



## **Appendix B: Original Sin**

Contrary to what I said about evil, original sin is indeed associated with Adam and Eve. But before going any further, I would like to remind you that I do not consider Adam and Eve to be the unique ancestors of all humanity, the very first humans. I explained the reasons for this in chapter 1.

Adam and Eve were probably *Homo sapiens* who lived at an unknown period in history, but perhaps not so far from us. They were chosen by God to enter into a covenant, that of the Garden of Eden, but, unfortunately, they refused it, thus demonstrating their rebellion against God. This is known as "original sin".

I need to explain a term that is often misunderstood: "sin".

I like the following definition of sin: it is that which misses the point. With the Garden of Eden, God had a very specific purpose, to establish a strong covenant between humans and Him so that they would become spiritual beings, capable of assuming their function as managers of this earth. Adam and Eve simply missed that purpose. They "missed the point". By turning down the lavish offer, they missed a unique opportunity. They missed it not only for themselves, but also for their descendants and also for all those who lived at the same time as them and who could have entered this new project and enjoyed the same benefits. In the end, it was the whole of

humanity that was excluded from this beautiful project, through the disobedience of the couple Adam and Eve.

This explains, in a very simple way, how this sin was "transmitted" from generation to generation. Every child who is born is in some way under the original curse that drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. He is simply not in the covenant of the Garden of Eden. That is his curse. It's not his fault, but that's how it is!

We might be tempted to put all the blame on those distant ancestors; that would be far too easy! In fact, God has made several plans to make up for it in the future, the latest of which was put in place by Christ two thousand years ago. It is still open and offered to anyone who wants to accept it. Our personal responsibility therefore remains intact!

Original sin is not, therefore, an indelible flaw that is inscribed in man's genes and which is thus extended to the whole of humanity. Original sin is above all a sin of omission, that of having missed the plan offered by God, of having refused God's covenant. We find this same problem at the time of Jesus' coming. The apostle John speaks of it very well in the first chapter of his Gospel. He describes Jesus as a light coming into the world, the Word of God, but the world did not recognise him. He came to his own country, but his own people did not welcome him. We find here the same refusal as in the Garden of Eden: they refused the divine life offered by Jesus. But... nevertheless, some received him and believed in him; he gave them the right to become children of God. They made the best choice: they chose life.

You may say that my understanding of original sin, as expressed above, is not in line with the apostle Paul's theology on this subject. I therefore propose to take up the texts that speak of it.

## The first and last Adam

*The first man, Adam, became a living being. The last Adam (Jesus) became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual.*<sup>1</sup>

In this famous chapter 15, Paul speaks about the resurrection of the bodies. In order to emphasise the glorious state of the heavenly body, he contrasts it with the earthly body. The latter is sown despicable and corruptible, it rises glorious and incorruptible; it is sown an animal body and rises a spiritual body.

Paul shows that there was an evolution in history: the animal body came first, the spiritual body came later. The animal body is the one transmitted to us by our ancestors (Adam) thanks to the laws of reproduction; the spiritual body was transmitted by Christ who, as the life-giving Spirit, has the power to give spiritual life.

For F. Godet, Paul does not share the idea, so long considered an orthodox view, that humanity was created in a state of moral and physical

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15.45-46. Whether one views Adam as a generic term for human beings or a proper term for a particular individual does not change the understanding of these texts of Paul. As I said at the beginning of chapter 2 of this book, I favour an understanding of Genesis chapters 2-3 as a historical parable.

perfection and then fell from that position. Paul admits that, in history, man has passed from the animal state to the spiritual state, which was nevertheless foreseen and intended as a goal from the beginning.

If Adam had accepted this spiritual life, he would have drawn all his descendants into it. He did not do this and could only pass on a natural life.

If Adam had accepted this spiritual life, there would have been no need for such an evolution from animal man to spiritual man. He would probably have escaped death and become immortal, eating from the tree of life.

What are we to think of this other word of Paul:

*For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*<sup>1</sup>

Which death is Paul talking about? Physical death or spiritual death? Or both at the same time?

Classical theology sees Adam as the first man and the ancestor of all living beings. He was destined to live forever by eating from the tree of life, but through his own fault he was driven out of the Garden of Eden and was therefore unable to eat from the tree of life. This is how he brought death upon the human race.

We have seen that this way of understanding no longer fits in with current scientific data and that it is

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15.21-22

possible to understand the biblical texts in another way. Adam, mortal like all other living beings, was placed in the Garden of Eden where he could have eaten from the tree of life and probably lived forever. Through his own fault, he was expelled from the garden and deprived of this source of life. As a result, he was only able to pass on to his descendants what he had before entering the Garden of Eden: a life of limited duration, ending in physical death. What's more, he was unable to pass on the spiritual life he should have developed in the garden. We can therefore speak of physical death *and* spiritual death.

By refusing the Garden of Eden covenant, Adam remained a mortal being, like all other living beings on this earth, hence the expression *all die in Adam*.

In contrast, Christ died and then rose again and brings into this life of resurrection all those who believe in him: *in Christ shall all be made alive*.

The state of death in our human nature is therefore not inevitable: it is possible to come out of it through the spiritual life breathed by Christ. We will die one day, but we will live again in the heavenly kingdom.

## **Solidarity between earth and humanity**

Here is a text of Paul's that is worth examining here, because it is related to original sin. We mentioned it briefly at the end of chapter 7:

*I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming*

*glory to be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creation was not willingly subjected to vanity but because of him who subjected it, on hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. And we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.*

Romans 8.18-22 (MKJV)

Even though we have the Spirit of God in us and are already living in part in the Kingdom of God, we suffer from the miseries and infirmities of our bodies, from our sins and the sins of others. But after the resurrection we will live in glory, a glory that will have no comparison with the sufferings we endure here on earth.

For Paul, the creation (nature, earth) in which we live has a similar experience: at present, she sighs and suffers the pains of childbirth mainly because of human sin and its consequences. But she knows that one day, when Christ returns, she will be freed from corruption and will share in a new *freedom* and a profound renewal. Like us, she is waiting for a liberation.

What is interesting in this text is that Paul establishes a solidarity in decay and a solidarity in liberation between the earth and humanity. This is astonishing! Why should there be solidarity in decay? Paul says this: *the creation was not willingly subjected to vanity but because of him who subjected her*. This raises two important questions:

1. What does the term *vanity* mean?
2. Who is the one who *subjected creation to it*?

1. The word vanity contains the idea of failure, of not being able to achieve a goal or fulfil a purpose. We know from the early chapters of Genesis that God had a purpose for creation, to be cultivated by humans. In this term cultivation, in addition to agricultural work, we need to see all the creativity of the human genius (the culture), aimed at making nature ever more beautiful and welcoming. Without human activity, the earth would have remained an immense virgin forest, full of diversity, but unwelcoming and hostile to human life. This is what the Creator intended when he entrusted such great responsibilities to humanity and wanted to give it the means to accomplish such a work. Humans have missed the mark and have thereby placed the earth in a state of vanity, i.e. unable to fulfil God's original purpose.

2. Let us try to answer the second question: Who subjected creation to vanity?

The biblical commentators give various answers, in which there are three possible actors: God, humans and Satan. Which of these three should we choose? It is surprising that Paul was not more precise and did not clearly indicate the author of this submission. Personally, I feel that he did not because all three are involved in some way. Let's try to see why:

- By establishing a solidarity of destiny between humans and the earth, **God** has indirectly allowed the earth to suffer the consequences of human disobedience. He has even, on several occasions, acted directly on earth to make his rebellious people bend and repent. I am thinking of the curses

announced in Deuteronomy <sup>1</sup> in the event of the people's disobedience, the three-year drought willed by God to make King Ahab bend (1 Kings 18), etc.<sup>2</sup>

- **Humans** are obviously responsible for the decay of creation, since they have failed to fulfil God's purpose for them and consequently for creation. It is easy to understand how original sin, as I described above, has had disastrous consequences for creation itself right up to the present day.

- **Satan** has from the beginning sought to harm humans, the Creator's privileged creatures, and also the whole of creation. *He has been murderous from the beginning*<sup>3</sup>, and has worked against humans<sup>4</sup>, especially against the Jewish people and Christians<sup>5</sup>. Satan is therefore responsible for the downfall of creation.

Today, we are increasingly concerned about the *suffering* of the earth and scientists are trying to explain the links between human activity and the state of our planet. All sorts of technical measures are being considered to reduce the negative human impact on nature. But who is talking about the impact of the moral behaviour of our societies? Hardly anyone! Such talk is inaudible, and some people do not hesitate to condemn it violently. And yet if humanity decided to return to its Creator, it would open the doors to divine blessings through its

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 28.15-52: God allows crops to be destroyed by drought or eaten by locusts and insects, vines to be eaten by worms and olive trees to fail to produce. It allows external enemies to come and take over the crops...

<sup>2</sup> I have dealt with this subject in my book "*A King, Subjects and Land*".

<sup>3</sup> John 8.44. See also John 10.10

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3.15

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 12.13-17



repentance. And the earth would be so much better off!

My feeling is that human blindness is too advanced to understand these things and that it will take a major divine intervention to bring about real change. It will be the liberation we described above.

## **Appendix C: DNA, genes and evolution**

### **DNA**

DNA has a structure that is common to all living species. It is a very long molecule that is present in almost every cell of the body. It is shaped like a spiral ladder. The two rungs of the ladder are made of sugar phosphate; they are just supports. The "ladder rungs" are made of amino acids; they carry the information. These ladder rungs code the information with four chemical components: Adenine, Cytosine, Guanine and Thymine, abbreviated as A, C, G and T. Each of these chemical bases has a particular shape. A can only be combined with T, and C with G. There are therefore four possible combinations: A-T, T-A, C-G and G-C. These are called base pairs. These "rungs of the ladder", each formed by a base pair, can be compared to the lines of a barcode, where the shape and arrangement of the lines give the information. Similarly, it is the sequential arrangement of these bases that determines the genetic information (the genetic code). Humans have about 3 billion base pairs in their chromosomes. Human chromosome 1, the largest of the human chromosomes, contains about 220 million base pairs.

This storage system is very powerful, much more so than that of a computer. The computer codes

information with only two signs: 0 and 1. The sequence of these signs gives the information. For example 001101001001 etc. In this way, we can code text, a picture or a sound. The possibilities are immense. DNA uses not two, but four signs: A, C, G and T. It is the sequence of these signs that gives the information: AACGTT AAGCC... The possibilities are thus greatly increased!

In cells, DNA is organised into structures called chromosomes, which have the function of making the DNA more compact. Chromosomes are also involved in the regulation of gene expression by determining which parts of the DNA are to be transcribed into RNA.

DNA is capable of splitting in two, as if the ladder were cut down the middle, to give RNA. This will leave the cell nucleus and enter special structures in the cell, called ribosomes, where highly sophisticated translators decode the RNA information to produce specific proteins made up of amino acids. These proteins do the work of the cell and help maintain its structural integrity. Remember that every protein contains between 100 and 10'000 amino acid radicals and that these many radicals belong to only twenty different chemical species that occur in all living things, from bacteria to humans. It is striking to see that this basic mechanism is common to all living beings and yet this does not prevent a prodigious diversity.

During cell division, DNA is capable of replicating itself in such a way as to transmit its entire stock of information to its daughter cells. It is in this replication process that a phenomenon can occur that could be considered a defect, but which is a source of innovation and development: mutations,

where, during replication, the genetic information is not transmitted normally at a certain point. Thus, the daughter cells have a gene that is modified in relation to that of the mother cell. If the primordial cell had replicated perfectly, we would have seen a proliferation of this type of cell and that's all. It would not have changed. But thanks to mutations and so on, diversity has arisen.

Other phenomena can also intervene to modify genes: genetic recombination, damage due to various factors (oxidants, alkylating agents, ultraviolet radiation, X-rays and gamma rays), displacement of DNA sequences, incorporation of exogenous material, etc.

## **Genes**

The set of genes is called the genome.

The sequencing of the human genome and that of animals and plants has given us fundamental information about the origin of humans and their evolution within animal species. Here are some of the findings: other simple organisms such as worms, flies or plants have a maximum number of genes of around 20'000! Hardly less than in humans! One could take this information as an insult to human complexity, but, for F. Collins, we cannot limit ourselves to the number of genes that we have: "The biological complexity of human beings far exceeds that of an ascarid with its total of 959 cells, even though they share the same amount of genes. Our complexity must depend not on the number of separate instruction packets we have, but on how they are used. Perhaps our components have learned to multitask?"

In his book, Collins recounts the likelihood that we find a DNA sequence in the genome of other organisms that is similar to a human sequence:

|                  | A) Sequence of a protein-coding gene | B) Random DNA segment between coding genes |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Chimpanzee       | 100 %                                | 98 %                                       |
| Dog              | 99 %                                 | 52 %                                       |
| Mouse            | 99 %                                 | 40 %                                       |
| Chicken          | 75 %                                 | 4 %                                        |
| Drosophila (fly) | 60 %                                 | ~ 0 %                                      |
| Ascaris (worm)   | 35 %                                 | ~ 0 %                                      |

This table shows the very close genetic relationship between humans and chimpanzees, dogs and mice, if only the coding DNA is analysed (column A). As far as non-coding DNA is concerned (column B), it is high with the chimpanzee, but much lower with the dog and mouse.

For Collins, this information leads inexorably to the conclusion that humans share a common ancestor with other living things. Let's take the case of humans and mice. The size of the two genomes is almost identical and the inventory of protein-coding genes is remarkably consistent. The order in which certain genes occur on the human and mouse chromosomes is generally conserved over large segments of DNA. For example, almost all of the genes on human chromosome 17 appear on mouse chromosome 11.

Collins provides other interesting evidence: the existence of "jumping genes" that can copy themselves and insert themselves into other locations in the genome without generally having any functional consequences for the genome. These are

known as ARE (Ancient Repetitive Elements). The human genome is composed of about 45% of these genetic leftovers. What is very interesting is that these ARE can be found in different animal species at identical locations on the chromosomes. This supports the idea that these mutations occurred in a common ancestor long ago.

All these discoveries in genetics simply confirm the theory of evolution. Collins quotes Theodosius Dobzhansky, a 20<sup>th</sup>-century biologist (and devout Orthodox Christian): "Nothing makes sense in biology unless it is observed in the light of evolution."

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