

Etienne Bovey

The great Rapture

The days after

EHB

The great Rapture, the days after

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1032 Romanel-sur-Lausanne, Switzerland
All rights reserved
E-mail : ehb1032@yahoo.com
Internet : www.etiennebovey.com

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Note on the new 08/24 edition

Some readers felt that the rise to power of the “Love and Freedom” party was too rapid and therefore hardly credible, especially in a country where democracy has long been firmly established. I thought it worth mentioning what happened in Rwanda in 1994, when the assassination of the president unleashed an unprecedented wave of horror in the country overnight (see pages 101-103). The rapture of the Church will, in my opinion, produce a far greater upheaval than anything we've seen so far.

Dear Reader,

If you are in possession of this document, it is because my life has been brutally interrupted, either by accident or because someone took it, which seems more likely. As you read on, you'll quickly realise who's behind this 'someone'.

In case of misfortune, I've asked my wife to retrieve the USB key on which I save my diary and which I place every day in a hiding place known only to her. She has agreed to ensure that this manuscript is distributed as widely as possible on the Internet, so that everyone knows what has really happened over the last few weeks.

Yes, it is my duty to tell the truth about this exceptional event, which has had incalculable consequences in our country and throughout the world.

Yes, it is my duty to denounce all the lies that have been told to cover up this event in order to bring about major changes in society, in complete disregard of the established laws. The times and the laws have changed!

Yes, it is my duty to proclaim out loud what so many people dare not say, for fear of the repression that is becoming ever more ferocious against anyone who does not think like the State and the new religion.

Here is some personal information for those who don't know me. For the past 10 years, I've been the mayor of Privet, a pretty village in the middle of the

Lavaux hillsides on the north shore of Lake Léman in Switzerland.

As mayor, I found myself at the heart of the action, listening to the distress of many residents, taking note of the State's directives, having to manage with the local council the endless complications that all this generated. I did this at the very beginning, until I was ejected from the executive council.

To prepare this document, I have gathered together the most significant pages of my personal diary. You'll see that everything has happened at an alarming pace. I would never have thought that in our beautiful country, Switzerland, which has lived for so many decades in peace and freedom, the values on which our country was founded could crumble so easily. You think you're living on a solid foundation, as immovable as the mountains that surround you, and then you suddenly discover that nothing holds together any more. Something you didn't realise was important has disappeared. It's then that the beautiful, naive confidence gives way to anguish.

And yet, we have to be lucid. Things had been deteriorating for a long time, so imperceptively that we never saw it coming. This great Event has been like a catalyst, transforming a fragile situation into a major crisis. You be the judge!

Maurice

1. How it all began

1 August. Swiss national day

Midnight

It was an eventful day as we celebrated the anniversary of the founding of Switzerland in 1291. At around 3 pm, under a blazing sun, a large procession paraded through the streets of the village: first the members of the executive council, followed by the Privet municipal brass band, then the children with their teachers, class by class, and finally the various local societies. To close the procession, a float richly decorated with flowers and featuring beautiful young girls dressed as princesses.

The parade ended at the village square, where cakes and refreshing drinks were waiting for them. Games were prepared for young and old alike.

Afterwards, the traditional meal was enjoyed by almost everyone in the village. These traditions are strongly supported by the executive council, because they create social links and foster a sense of belonging to the village. That's important! The good humour, supported by the music and the pleasure of drinking good wine, encourages exchanges between people. It's the kind of thing that makes newcomers feel welcome and part of your circle of friends.

Don't kid yourself: our little village is not an idyllic place where everyone gets along perfectly! There are also some difficult people, with strong

characters, who speak out against the decisions of the authorities, whatever they may be, or quarrel with their neighbours over trivial matters; there are also clan fights and rivalries. As mayor, I have to deal with them all. But, fortunately, at this type of ceremony, people tend to leave any animosity behind.

As I do every year, after the meal, I gave my 1 August speech. I know from experience that it shouldn't last more than two minutes, because people stop listening after that. I stressed the importance of the values handed down to us by our ancestors, values that have forged our country and enabled it to live in prosperity and peace that are the envy of many other countries.

After speaking, I remembered what my grandfather, who was also mayor, used to tell me when I was a child. At the official ceremony, the pact of 1291 was read out, beginning with the words: "In nomine domini, amen" (In the name of the Lord, amen) and ending with: "The aforementioned decisions, taken in the interest and for the benefit of all, shall, God willing, endure in perpetuity...." "This reference to God is also found in the Swiss Constitution, which begins as follows: "In the name of Almighty God". Certain atheist groups did everything they could to have this reference to God removed. This was narrowly refused, but in our village they demanded that we stop reading it on 1 August. The majority of the municipality agreed.

My grandfather used to tell me that the national anthem and the patriotic prayer were sung. People would stand up and sing their hearts out, some with great emotion. There was a real fervour, even if most people no longer knew the words by heart.

After the official ceremony, a large fire was lit. It seems that from the French coast, you could see red lights blazing all over the Swiss coast. It was a breathtaking sight. Then there were the fireworks offered by the communes. The richer they were, the more sumptuous and original they were. It was then customary for families to light the rockets and firecrackers they had bought in the shops. Everyone joined in the festivities. But all this was later banned because of the drought that became increasingly prevalent during the summer. The risk of fire was becoming too great.

From 11 pm onwards, people started to disperse and go home. Roseline and I did the same. We went to bed feeling like we'd done our job, but tired after a busy day.

We had no idea that our lives would be turned upside down in a few hours.

2 August, 2.45 am

I'm suddenly woken by a woman's voice calling down the street:

- Léon... Léon, where are you? Léon...

I lean out of the window and recognise our neighbour, Germaine, in her dressing gown. Sensing that something unusual has happened, I get dressed straight away and go down to meet her in the street.

M - Germaine, what's going on?

G - My husband's disappeared. We went to bed last night around midnight, and at 2.30 am, after going to the toilet, I realised that Léon was gone. I turned on the lamp and saw that his pyjamas were neatly placed in his bed. I looked in all the rooms of the house: nobody. The front door was locked. He couldn't have gone out into the street naked after locking the door! Especially as he has difficulty walking!

M - Would you like me to come and have a look?

G - Oh yes! I'd love to! I'm really worried.

I check the front door, which has not been damaged; the lock is intact. On the first floor, the bedroom is unremarkable. But, surprisingly, the pyjamas are placed in the bed as if their owner had vanished. Here I also find Léon's watch, closed as it would be around his wrist. It's really strange! Why would he leave his pyjamas and watch in his bed before leaving? I look all over the house: there's no sign of Léon. It's really strange! He couldn't have been abducted, and even supposing some evil-minded people had committed such an act, why would they have taken off his pyjamas and watch and put them back in the bed like that?

M - Do you sleep deeply at night?

G - No, I'm more of a light sleeper.

M - Don't you take sleeping pills?

G - No!

M - So, if someone had broken into the house, you would have heard them.

G - Yes! Especially as the wooden floor is old and creaks when you walk on it, even gently.

M - That's really strange! I don't understand what's happened any more than you do. Would you like me to call the police?

G - I don't know. Let's wait until daylight. Maybe Leon will come back...

Back home, I'm having trouble falling asleep. I try to think of all the possible explanations. Germaine is an intelligent woman with a good head on her shoulders; she's not delusional. She certainly didn't invent this story to hide a voluntary disappearance. Would she have killed her husband and staged this incredible scene to lead us down such an improbable path? No! It's not possible! In any case, the police will be the judge.

The alarm goes off at 7 am. I get up straight away, have breakfast and head off to the local authority office. As I pass Germaine's house, I notice that she has already left. Where did she go?

No sooner have I sat down at my desk than I hear loud voices in the entrance hall on the ground floor. A few seconds later, Victor, the municipal secretary, ushers Bertrand, the local roadman, into my office. He is very agitated and can hardly speak, his emotion is so strong.

B - I... I... I woke up this morning... and my wife... she was gone. I looked for her in the house

and... I saw that our son wasn't there either. Our daughter was sleeping peacefully in her room and didn't hear a thing.

M - Maybe they've gone for a walk to enjoy the beautiful day that's just begun," I said, trying to calm him down.

B - That's not their habit! My wife... she would have left me a note to warn me. And our son isn't an early riser at all!

M - Did you try calling them?

B - Yes! But their mobile phones are still at home. My wife always takes it with her.

M - Ah! That's strange!

B - I noticed a curious thing: my wife's pyjamas were spread out on the bed, as if she'd vanished and her pyjamas remained in the bed. Her clothes were on the chair next to her. She never puts her pyjamas away like that. I went to look in our son's bedroom; his pyjamas were placed as if he was sleeping on his side. If our son had got up normally, he would have thrown his pyjamas loose on his bed. His clothes were also lying on his chair.

M - Ah! That's even weirder!

B - Normally, our son should be at school... I've got to go and tell the teacher.

I don't know what to say and advise him to wait until midday. I'll have more information by then.

M - Victor, did you see anything unusual in the village on your way here?

V - No! Nothing at all! Ah, yes! The bakery wasn't open and everything was dark. But they didn't tell me they were taking the day off. In any case, I didn't see any notice on the door. Mr Braset and his wife are usually very punctual. I thought they'd had a family

or health problem and had to leave in a hurry. We'll probably hear from them later in the morning.

Thirty minutes later, I hear the roadman coming two at a time up the stairs to my office.

B - It's incredible! It's incredible! The teacher, Mrs Faucher, didn't come to school and didn't tell anyone she was away. We've tried to contact her, but nobody answers. Three pupils are missing, and a very worried mother has come to say that her daughter has run away and had to sneak out during the night.

The problem is getting really serious and as mayor I have to take emergency measures. I hurry to the school and fortunately find the other teachers in the playground. The headmaster has decided to divide Mrs Faucher's pupils between the other classes until a replacement can be found.

Back home for lunch, my wife, Roseline, pesters me with questions. She already knows about the disappearances in the village. She has contacted a friend who lives in Lausanne. There too, they've noticed that members in families have disappeared. A lot of people didn't turn up for work this morning: in companies, schools, hospitals, the police, the administration... Everywhere there are no-shows. And what's more, they're people of very different ages.

R - Maurice, could this be an alien abduction?

M - Darling, we have no proof of that. It would have taken several spacecraft to transport them. As far as I know, no such craft have been reported in the region. But you're right, these disappearances remain a real mystery!

R - Are we risking something too?

M - I have no idea.

R - Can we protect ourselves against further attacks? I don't know... block the shutters of the house tonight, since it seems to have happened during the night? Perhaps we should stand guard in the village and set off the siren in case of an alarm?

M - Roseline, I doubt very much that these measures would be effective. You see, what puzzles me is that I don't understand why some people have disappeared and others not. I have the impression that there's no connection between these missing people. In fact, in the same family, some have disappeared and others have stayed! Why is that?

I think we need to wait and see. The police should give us some information this afternoon.

Back at the office, I'm besieged by villagers asking me for details. A wave of panic has swept through the village and people have the impression that the end of the world is coming.

I learn that there have been several accidents in the region. On the motorway a little further up, there were collisions in three places and several cars crashed into each other. Surprisingly, some of the vehicles were empty. In the main street of the village, a car crashed into a shop window. The driver has not been found. We wonder how he got out of his car, it's so smashed up.

The villagers are in a panic:

- Mayor, are we all going to die?

M - I'm really sorry! I don't know any more than you do at the moment; we'll have to wait and see what happens elsewhere.

I'm sure you'll get the details on the evening news. The best thing is for you to go home calmly.

I try to phone the central police station in Lausanne, but to no avail. All the lines are busy.

I try to contact other mayoral colleagues. Like me, they are overwhelmed by requests from all sides and don't know any more than I do. I understand that the phenomenon has taken on incredible proportions.

To get a better idea of the situation, I decide to take a look around the village. I bump into Jacques, the pastor.

M - Hello, Jacques! I suppose you know what's going on?

He doesn't say anything and just looks at me with eyes full of abysmal sadness.

M - You look pale... aren't you feeling well?

J - My wife and my two daughters have disappeared and now I'm all alone, absolutely alone!

M - I'm sorry for you; I didn't know.

A long silence follows, in which words lose all meaning. Our eyes meet as if they were the only means of communication. I've never had much contact with the pastor, apart from official ceremonies, because I'm not at all religious and I'm suspicious of all that superstition. And now, for the first time, I feel empathy for this desperate man. I'm so moved that I want to get to know him.

M - What are you going to do now?

J - I have to get on with my life. And then there are lots of people to visit and encourage. I have to do my job as a pastor.

M - Can I ask you a question? It may be indiscreet, but it's important: were your wife and daughters' pyjamas placed in the bed in the position they slept in?

J - But... how do you know? It's incredible!

M - No! We have received similar reports. The people disappeared, leaving their clothes at home. They didn't take anything with them.

J - Maurice, I can't tell you any more right now, because I still have to do some checking. Tomorrow I'll be able to tell you what really happened last night.

M - Why is it that our government and the police are unable to understand the reason for these disappearances, and you would be able to explain them to me?

J - Yes, you'll understand why. I suggest you come to my house, to the parish house, tomorrow morning at about 8 am. Don't make an appointment before 10 am.

Stunned, I leave the pastor and continue my rounds of the village. The houses are intact, the roofs undamaged. Apart from the shop window smashed in by a car, I see nothing unusual. The vines show no signs of anything supernatural, anything out of the ordinary.

On the other hand, on the motorway, well above the village, there are police cars, fire engines and a huge traffic jam. Traffic is blocked for many kilometres. This confirms what I've heard.

Back at the office, I ask Victor to call an emergency meeting of the village council at 5 pm.

An hour later, Victor comes back to me:

V - I was able to contact Lucie, Béatrice, André and Christophe, but not Alfred or Marilou. I went to their house, but found no one there. The shutters are closed and there's no sign of activity.

M - Well, never mind! We'll have our meeting without them.

At 5 pm, we start our meeting, without Alfred and Marilou. Victor will take the minutes.

M - Dear colleagues, we are facing an exceptional event that is beyond us all. People have disappeared and we can't explain how they got away. These disappearances don't just concern our village; according to other mayors we've contacted, they've also taken place in their towns. I'm trying to contact the police, but the phone lines are all busy. Do any of you have any information about this?

B - The husband of a friend of mine is a policeman in Lausanne. I've heard that the police are overwhelmed on all sides. They don't understand these disappearances because there have been no break-ins, no bloodshed and no signs of violence. There's never been anything like this before.

C - How could all these people have decided to leave incognito without being noticed? It's simply unthinkable. If they'd gone by car, they'd have been spotted; if they'd gone by train, they'd have been seen at stations. I just don't get it.

M - It's essential that we take a census of all the missing people in our village. The best thing to do would be to make a list of the inhabitants and check that they're still there. If they're not there, it would be a good idea to ask the neighbours. I suggest that you divide up the task and go to all the houses.

We'll take stock tomorrow morning at 10 am.

Supper is quickly dispatched, as we can't wait to watch the TV news.

As you might expect, journalists have been sent to the four corners of Switzerland. They've interviewed people of all ages and from all walks of life, and they all say more or less the same thing: members of their family, friends, work colleagues and acquaintances mysteriously disappeared between last night and this morning. No one has seen them go and no one can explain this extraordinary phenomenon. Company bosses have disappeared and the remaining workers don't know what to do. Should they continue working, even if it means not getting paid at the end of the month? Or stay at home and wait for new instructions? In some factories, the defections will create major problems in the work lines and the resumption of activity will be seriously compromised.

An old man speaks out:

- It's the end of time! The world is about to be destroyed! We're all going to die!

So I don't learn much more than what I've seen in my village.

Then we move on to the news from abroad and it becomes much more instructive. In Australia, a plane surprisingly crashed on landing. During the descent, it lost altitude too quickly and failed to correct its trajectory despite repeated warnings from the control tower. The crash was inevitable. The aircraft caught fire immediately. The fire brigade intervened very quickly, but were unable to save any lives. In the wreckage, a multitude of charred bodies were found, but no one in the cockpit.

Surprisingly, the charred uniforms of the pilot and co-pilot were carefully laid out on the two seats; they were still held in place by the seatbelts and contained various documents, such as wallets, credit cards, etc. Airport officials and police searched all around for their bodies, without success.

Also in Australia, a bus full of passengers ended up in a ditch. Fortunately, there were no fatalities, but the bus driver and three passengers were not found. Again, the driver's uniform was on the driver's seat, with the jacket held in place by the seatbelt. It seems that many road accidents have taken place elsewhere in the country. The entire population is shocked by these disappearances and the serious consequences they have had.

An operation in a hospital went wrong when the heart surgeon and anaesthetist suddenly disappeared. Nobody in the operating theatre understood what had happened. No one saw them leave.

Similar news is reaching us from all over the world, but the disappearances occurred at different times. Taking time zones into account, we can conclude that they probably happened at the same time all over the world. In Switzerland, it was the middle of the night, and in Australia, it was broad daylight.

So that's a vital piece of information that allows us to make a little more progress. But why have some disappeared and others not?

I'm impatiently waiting for this meeting with the pastor to find out more. But I still have serious doubts! How would he know more than our scientists, who are analysing this phenomenon with cutting-edge tools?

2. A surprising revelation

3 August

The Protestant parish house is clearly recognisable with its shutters painted green and white, the colours of the Vaudois flag. It's an imposing building, which allows its lucky tenants to see the lake in its entirety. Fortunately, this is a privilege shared by other houses in the village, as this one is situated on a slope that descends to the edge of Lake Léman.

As I enter this house, which I only know from the outside, I have no idea what awaits me.

After the customary greetings, Jacques, the pastor, ushers me into the living room, where two cups were being prepared on a small tray, along with some biscuits.

J - Take a seat! Tea or coffee? Or something else?

M - I'd love a cup of coffee, thank you! Did you get any sleep last night?

J - No, not at all! I had a dramatic and at the same time extraordinary night. Do you mind if I tell you my story in detail? I know that I can trust you and that you won't talk about it any further.

M - Thank you for your confidence, which means a lot to me! I'm all ears.

J - When I saw you yesterday afternoon, I already had a slight idea of what had happened early in the night, but I had to check my hypothesis. Last night's TV news confirmed it.

M - What convinced you?

J - It was the fact that these disappearances took place all over the world and at the same time. If you take into account the time difference between Switzerland and Australia, you can see that this event took place at the same time: at night in Switzerland and during the day in Australia. On the other hand, nobody in Australia or in other countries where it happened during the day saw people disappear. You could say that the people vanished in the twinkling of an eye, leaving no trace other than their clothes in the place where they were. Well, the Bible talks about this a few times in the New Testament.

M - Really? How could the Bible have predicted an event like this more than twenty centuries ago, which happened yesterday all over the world?

J - You see, even though I was a pastor, I didn't believe it. My wife and our two daughters often spoke to me about it, perhaps even more recently, as if they sensed something. And I used to laugh when I told them that we shouldn't take seriously everything the apostle Paul had written on the subject. My wife was very sad when she saw me like that and looked at me with resignation, as if a gulf suddenly separated us. You see, what happened yesterday proves them right. And I was completely wrong! What a fool I was!

M - Can you explain clearly what the Bible says? But speak simply, because I don't know anything about it.

J - Stop me if you don't understand something!

In the first century AD, the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians of Thessalonica that Jesus would one day come to take those who believed in him and had thus become children of God. He would come for them at the same time all over the world, and it

would happen in the twinkling of an eye, so that the world would not notice. Would you like me to read you the biblical texts?

M - Yes, gladly, if I can understand them!

J - Don't worry, they're very simple. Here's what the apostle Paul says in his first letter to the Thessalonians (4.16-17):

A signal will be heard, the voice of the chief angel, the sound of God's trumpet. Then the Lord himself will descend from heaven. Those who have died believing in Christ will rise from death first. Then we who are still alive will be carried up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord. And so we shall be with the Lord for ever.

This means that all the Christians who died during these two millennia were resurrected yesterday and that the Christians still alive were taken up with those who were resurrected and together they met the Lord in the air.

M - If God warned the angels with a trumpet, it must have been heard everywhere? No? I said, incredulous.

J - Probably not!

M - Honestly, that doesn't tell me much and it doesn't explain how all those people disappeared! What happened to their bodies?

J - I need to read you another text, again from the apostle Paul:

I'm going to tell you a secret: we won't all die, but we will all be transformed in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet. For when the last trumpet sounds, the dead will rise

and die no more, and we will all be transformed. For that which is perishable must put on that which is imperishable; that which dies must put on that which is immortal (1 Corinthians 15.51-5).

This means that the bodies of people who have disappeared have been transformed into imperishable, immortal bodies. No doubt bodies that are no longer subject to the laws of gravity, bodies that can pass through walls and move through the air. I'm sorry, but I can't tell you any more than that.

M - When Paul says "we", was he thinking of being raptured too?

J - Your comment is absolutely right. The Bible clearly states that no one can know when this rapture will take place. It's true that the first Christians hoped it would happen for them, but reality shows us that two millennia passed between these revelations to Paul and yesterday's great Rapture.

M - I have a question that bothers me. I hope I'm not shocking you by asking it. Why, as a pastor, were you not raptured at the same time as your wife and your two daughters?

J - Yes, you're quite right to ask me that question. *Then the pastor fell silent. A great sadness reappeared on his face... and he said this to me:*

J - Last night, I was desperate; I was thinking about my wife and our two daughters, and I asked myself this question a hundred times: why didn't I go with them?

M - What do you mean? Did you have the choice of staying or leaving?

J - No, that's not it! I asked myself why the Lord didn't take me with them. Why did He abandon me here? I have devoted twenty years of my career as a

pastor to preaching humanist values, to helping the people of my parish to live better lives; I have tried to live according to the example that Christ gave during his life on this earth and I have always behaved honestly and uprightly. What could I be accused of?

M - Excuse me for interrupting, but I've heard some people say that you were a very liberal pastor. What did they mean by that?

J - It's true that I didn't believe in Christ's resurrection. He was a man like you and me, but a man of very high spirituality. He lived for about thirty-three years and then he died, and that was that. The story of the resurrection was invented by his disciples to perpetuate his message. In a way, it is through his message that he lives on in those who believe in him. I've never believed this story about the Holy Spirit coming to live in the hearts of Christians. It's true that I thought differently from the majority of Christians!

M - How do you explain the fact that you weren't chosen to go with the others?

J - I know I can trust you, which is why I'd like to tell you what I experienced that night.

As I said a few minutes ago, I was in complete despair last night. I banged my head against the walls in a fit of fury, anger, anguish, bitterness and disillusionment, the likes of which I've never experienced in my life. I didn't recognise myself any more. I kept turning this question over and over in my mind and finally came to the conclusion that my life was no longer worth anything. My situation was becoming unbearable. So I went up to the attic, took a rope, tied a noose and just as I was about to throw the rope over the crossbeam to tie it off, I felt a hand firmly grasping my right arm. I turned round and

there was no one there. Deep inside, I clearly heard a voice saying to me: "Jacques, don't do that!" I stood there for several minutes, as if stunned, unable to move, then my strength returned and I went downstairs to the living room where we are now.

Never in my life had I touched the bottom of such an abyss. And then something surprising happened to me and I started crying, crying with all my being without being able to really explain what was happening inside me. I knelt down and, in my sobs, I could only say these words: "Lord, forgive me". I then understood why I had not been taken. I was a Christian in name only, but not a child of God. I knew the Lord intellectually, but not personally. That was the difference!

After a good hour, my crying subsided and I gradually felt a strange peace that I had never experienced before. After all that I'd shouted at God in the attic, I thought he was going to destroy me once and for all, but no! On the contrary, I experienced true forgiveness and enormous relief. On top of that, I had a very strong feeling of a presence around me and within me. I realised that I had just received the Holy Spirit within me. This Holy Spirit that I had refused all my life, preferring to trust my intelligence and my theological knowledge. What pride! What stupidity! And now everything I had put my trust in was crumbling in the face of the Lord's gentle, loving presence.

M - Wow! It brings tears to my eyes! This is the first time I've been touched by the testimony of a Christian. I don't know what to say...

J - That's not all! I got up with a very strong feeling that I was no longer the same man.

Looking through my wife's things, I found a booklet about the rapture of the Church and the return of Christ. My wife had often recommended it to me and I had never read it. This booklet helped me to read all the texts in my Bible that talked about it. I read them again and again, astonished to understand something that had completely escaped me until then. It has to be said that what happened yesterday was a masterly confirmation of those biblical texts that seemed so obscure to me. And that's why I can talk to you about it this morning!

M - I don't know what to say... Could we become friends?

J - Yes, with pleasure! We'll both need this friendship... I'll explain to you another day why.

M - Now I understand what happened, and why we weren't able to answer all those questions. And I thought the Bible was an old-fashioned, outdated book!

J - For the moment, it would be better not to divulge this information. I'd prefer this explanation to come through the official channels one way or another.

M - I'm not going to talk about it!

We chat at length about the Bible, our respective lives, our families and our future. It's a fascinating conversation, and the time passes far too quickly.

M - My dear Jacques, I'm sorry, but I must leave you. We have a council meeting at 10 o'clock.

I regretfully leave my new friend. I'm sure he hasn't told me everything he understands about the present situation. Does he have more to tell me? Why

does he say that we will need this friendship? What is he referring to?

As I walk along the road that leads to my office, I can't help but stop for a moment and contemplate the vineyards around the village, the majestic lake and the mountains opposite. I've lived here in this village for so many years that I could be getting bored with all this charm, but no! Every year that passes is a new enchantment, as if I were discovering this extraordinary landscape for the first time. But this morning, my gaze is different, almost disillusioned: will the vine, which has been cultivated with love, patience and perseverance by our ancestors for centuries, survive? Will our civilisation still be able to pamper it and make it prosper in the future? Will nature continue to be generous to us?

I'm thinking of Ramuz's novel "If the sun didn't come back". Our famous writer and poet from the canton of Vaud was asking himself this question in 1937, during the Spanish Civil War; perhaps he sensed that something was about to explode in the world, through the fault of humans, selfish, violent, proud, full of themselves. He wasn't wrong to be afraid.

And I have even more reason to be afraid. A planetary event took place yesterday, orchestrated not by humans, but by God himself, if I am to believe the words of Jacques. Millions of Christians around the world disappeared, or rather were raptured. This does not bode well for our world! What will happen now? What will become of the people who remain? I have no idea, but I'm not at ease at all. I absolutely must see Jacques again to find out more.

3. An unexpected turn of events

As soon as I arrive at the municipal office, I am approached by several villagers. They have been talking among themselves and felt that an information meeting should be held as soon as possible:

- There's too much uncertainty! We're getting all kinds of crazy answers in the village. It's absolutely vital that people are properly informed. We're all anxious about what's going on, especially as we don't understand anything.

I promise to discuss it with the administration team and let them know in good time.

At 10 am, I meet the executive council again. We have a very special thought for Alfred and Marilou who have left us.

Alfred was known for his evangelical convictions; he belonged to a religious community in the region. He was an upright, reliable man in whom I had complete confidence. Sometimes he would invite me to take part in an evangelistic evening, which I would politely decline.

Marilou was a single, dynamic young woman, even though deep down she was very shy. She never spoke about her faith and I was very surprised to learn that she too had disappeared.

M - Have you been able to draw up a list of missing persons in the village?

L - It wasn't easy at all! I'm convinced that our list isn't complete. We found ourselves in front of closed doors and no one in the neighbourhood could say whether the person had disappeared, or gone away on business or holiday.

C - We've noted down a number of names, but we'll have to wait a few more weeks before we can make a definitive assessment.

M - Have you had any news about the infrastructure that is important to the local population?

B - The baker and his wife have disappeared. The bakery remains closed. The grocer has also disappeared. So these jobs will have to be filled as a matter of urgency.

M - Victor, since the bakery belongs to the municipality, could you post a notice of competition for a baker's position in the public pillar? As the grocery shopping is privately owned, we can't do anything. André, could you contact the grocer's family and see what they intend to do? Are they going to sell or find a replacement?

A - I'll take care of it. Do we know anything more about these disappearances? Do we know how it happened?

Having promised Jacques not to report our conversation, I simply read them part of the message sent by the Council of State that very day:

"The mayors of all the communes in the canton of Vaud are asked to take precise note of absences from their executive and municipal councils so that elections can be organised as quickly as possible. In view of the current major crisis, the usual rules for

holding elections have been suspended and elections will have to be scheduled for 15 August. The election campaign will therefore be very short. Candidates have until midnight on 10 August to submit their candidatures to the municipal office in their town or village so that the lists can be drawn up and communicated to the population.

The Council of State confirms that, according to information received in the country and abroad, the missing persons are linked by their Christian affiliation. However, their disappearance remains a mystery.

To avoid general panic and facilitate the transition, the Federal Council has decided to stop talking about the case and to resolve the crisis as quickly as possible. It has therefore asked the media to block all information on this subject from tomorrow".

M - You heard the message from the Council of State! I can't believe it! How can we ignore such a huge event, a global event that has left so many people devastated? People who have been widowed, orphaned, left without one or more members of their family; company directors who have lost members of their team; workers who have lost their colleagues. Churches have been wiped off the map; all their social work has come to an abrupt halt. Our village no longer has a baker or a grocer; it will be difficult to find them again.

Yes, it's a major crisis and we can't ignore it.

L - I'm sure we agree! But we mustn't look back and lament our past. Let's look to the future and join with those who have the ideas to build it!

M - The government is asking us to organise elections by 15 August. That's a very short time! We'll do our best, bearing in mind that we're going through an exceptional crisis.

Victor, can you post the message from the Council of State at the public pillar? It should also be distributed to all letterboxes.

We've been asked to organise a public debate to clarify certain points and provide guidelines for the future. What do you think about this?

C - It's an excellent thing! We could do it tomorrow evening?

M - Victor, can you organise it and make a public announcement as soon as possible?

4 August, 8 pm, in the village hall

The hall is packed and all the available chairs have had to be taken out. Despite this, many people are standing, leaning against the walls.

I take the microphone and try to calm the hubbub of conversation. It's the first time I've seen such tension in this room. After methodically describing the events of the night of 1 to 2 August, I list the names of those who have disappeared.

I then turn to the message from the Council of State. When I mention the link between those who have disappeared, there is an outcry in the room, growing louder and louder to the point where I am no longer able to continue.

One person stands up and turns to me:

- Mayor, can you explain why the bodies of all these people have not been found? What has become

of them? And it seems that the same thing has happened everywhere else in the world...

I find myself at a loss and don't know what to say, as I don't want to make public the conversation I had with Jacques yesterday. Fortunately, a man stands up and asks for the microphone:

- My wife was a convinced Christian; she often spoke to me about the return of Christ; it was her great hobby. In fact, every day, she used to ask her Lord to come back. She told me that Christ would no longer return as a simple man, but as a victorious Lord, and that he would descend from heaven to judge the living and the dead. My wife also told me that before this resounding return, something important had to happen. She called it "the rapture of the Church". If I understood correctly, in the twinkling of an eye, all Christians would be raptured at the same time everywhere in the world. Their bodies would be changed into heavenly bodies, to become a bit like angels, and they would ascend into heaven.

This good man is interrupted by the sniggering of the people in the room. Some are astonished, others don't believe it at all and laugh at him.

Someone stands up and says loudly:

- I'll tell you what I think, frankly: I don't give a shit about Christianity, and if Christians have disappeared from the face of the earth, it's all to the good. In any case, I'm not the one who's going to regret them. *Half the room applauds loudly.*

A woman stands up:

- What's done is done, we're not going to argue about it for days. The important thing now is to turn the page and look to the future. *Everyone applauds.*

Now that the room has quietened down, I take the microphone again to continue reading the message from the Council of State and draw the appropriate conclusions for our municipality.

M - We need to re-elect two members of the executive council and eight members of the municipal council. The elections are scheduled for 15 August. Candidatures must be submitted by midnight on 10 August. The official notice is posted on the public pillar.

A man in his forties slowly rises to his feet. I don't know him; he's probably from somewhere else.

- Ladies and gentlemen, I'm not from your village, but at the request of several of you, I'd like to make a modest contribution to the debate. Since the fourth century, and in particular the reigns of Constantine and Theodosius, the Church has seized power to dominate society and impose its moral codes and its vision of the world. The Church has certainly contributed some good things to civilisation, but its conservatism and obscurantism have opposed humanism, preventing humanity from developing as much as science and technology promised. It has put the brakes on the progress that should lead human beings to their divine fulfilment. *A round of applause! He continues:*

- Ladies and Gentlemen, this is an historic moment! "Heaven", as some people say, has come to our aid by taking the Christians back to itself! As

President of the League of the Godless, I don't believe it of course, but whatever the explanations, we can only rejoice, because at last nothing will hold us back in our march towards the new man. Nothing will stop us from giving man everything that science has developed for him and still wants to offer him. Nothing will stop us from establishing a world order capable of creating an egalitarian and just society for all, a society where man will finally be free and no longer dependent on external moral codes. *A round of applause...*

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, this is the goal we must strive for! Absolutely! Whatever the cost! Because to achieve freedom, we still have a long road ahead of us, full of pitfalls. Too many people want to live according to their own ideas; too many people run this country according to their own philosophies and their own religious concepts of all kinds. All that does is create chaos that makes the country ungovernable and incapable of facing up to the immense challenges of this time of crisis!

My dear friends, it's time to give the State full powers to bring order to our society. Let's give up our petty personal privileges and think of our country, think of the world. Let's all look towards freedom together! I said.

The audience applauds once again. And then another person, whom I don't know either, stands up:

- On behalf of you all, I'd like to say a big thank you to our comrade. At the same time, I'd like to point out that some time ago we set up a new party, the 'Love and Freedom' party, which brings together members of the League of the Godless and Islamists.

Why Islamists, you may ask? Because we think they can help us to cleanse the world of all the harmful influences that Christianity has had for so many centuries. We are pursuing this goal together. Despite our major differences on several points, we have decided to work together, at least for the time being.

Your mayor has just told us that candidates will have to be elected to replace those who have disappeared. I therefore encourage you to vote en bloc for the candidates of the "Love and Freedom" party!

In the room, several Islamists from the region nod and applaud.

I had no idea that the debate would turn out this way. How can so many centuries of Christian-inspired civilisation be wiped out so quickly? I know, like everyone else, that the Church can be criticised for a number of things, but is that a reason to reject everything? I just hope that things will calm down over the next few days and that we can have normal elections that respect democracy.

I take the microphone again to give a few more details about the electoral rolls and the forthcoming votes. As for the bakery and the grocery shop, we'll have to be patient. The school teacher, Mrs Faucher, will be replaced tomorrow, so lessons can resume as normal.

After leaving the village hall, I meet my friend Pascal, who is a political journalist at *The New Hebdo*. After a few casual words of courtesy, I ask him this question:

M - I'm a bit taken aback by the turn of events and would like to discuss them with you. Would you have some time tomorrow to see me?

P - I have to admit that I'm also concerned about this situation. I'd be happy to discuss it with you. Would tomorrow at 2 pm suit you?

After returning home, I pour myself a glass of wine, sit down tiredly in front of the television and watch the news on replay. Other testimonies corroborate the information already known; some religious specialists confirm the thesis of the rapture of the Christians, giving very vague details about the transformation of the bodies.

I am yawning in front of the television, seriously considering going to bed, when the telephone rings:

J - Maurice, it's Jacques.

M - How are you this evening?

J - Better! I feel very lonely, and at the same time I feel a presence within me that inhabits my solitude. It's something completely new.

Tell me, I was at the meeting in the village hall on the sly; would you be up for talking about it tomorrow morning? I've got more to tell you on the subject. Do you have some free time?

M - Yes, of course! I sensed this morning that you hadn't told me everything and I can't wait to find out a bit more. Would it be all right if I came to your house at 8 am?

J - Perfect! See you tomorrow, and good night!

4. New revelations

5 August

At 8 am sharp, I ring the doorbell at the parish house. Jacques opens it immediately, no doubt having seen me coming. We meet in the living room, as we did the morning before, where cups, coffee and biscuits have been prepared.

J - Well, I've been reading more Bible passages about the rapture of the Church, thanks to the books my wife recommended. Books that she has displayed prominently on her bookshelf. I wondered if she didn't sense something; perhaps she was inspired to do so; I don't know. In any case, I can give you some other valuable information.

M - I'm very grateful to you for sharing it with me.

J - The rapture of the Christians will not only lead to a lack of people here and there in society, to holes that will have to be filled more or less quickly because we are overpopulated. This event will have spiritual consequences.

M - What do you mean by that?

J - There will be very important changes in social, political and religious life, but nobody will really understand them or be able to make the connection between these changes and the absence of Christians.

M - How do you explain these changes?

J - I absolutely must tell you about a text that the apostle Paul sent to the Church of Thessalonica, in Greece. He devoted the second chapter of his second letter to these Christians to explain that certain events were going to take place before the coming of Christ: first of all, the churches (not all of them!) were going to be emptied and the vast majority of people were going to abandon the faith.

M - Has this abandonment already taken place?

J - Yes, for the most part. And it will continue.

M - How do you explain this abandonment of the faith?

J - When the difficulties of life increase, as well as persecutions, those who have no real spiritual roots do not hold out. Their faith is not strong enough to face up to these difficulties and they falter, eventually abandoning their faith altogether.

M - Don't you have the feeling that many people have left the Church because they've been disgusted by all the scandals within it?

J - Yes, you're right.

M - And not all Christians have set a good example...

J - Yes, it's true; Christians aren't perfect. But these reasons are not enough.

M - Sorry, I interrupted your story.

J - The apostle Paul gives a precise name to this abandonment of the faith and the life of the Church: apostasy.

But that's not all! He announces another major event: the appearance of a man who will be truly out of the ordinary. The Bible calls him the man of sin, the son of perdition, the adversary of God. He will be so proud and so full of power that he will want to rise above God and proclaim himself God.

M - Do you know this man?

J - No! You know, I haven't been particularly interested in this subject. Most probably, he already exists and he will fully discover himself in the very near future. I'm going to quote the rest of Paul's speech, still in the same letter:

2.6-8: And now you know what is holding him back so that he will only show up at the appointed time. The mysterious power of the Evil One is already at work. When the one who is still holding him back is no longer there, he will no longer act by hiding. Then the Evil One will be discovered, and the Lord Jesus will put him to death with the breath of his mouth. He will destroy him by appearing with power.

We can see that this Evil One, this adversary of God, was not really able to manifest himself because he was held back or slowed down in his action. Paul clearly says that when this, or whoever is holding him back, has disappeared, he will then be able to give free rein to all his wickedness and perversity. He will then be able to reveal himself as he really is.

M - What's holding him back?

J - You put your finger on an essential point, which is interpreted in several ways. However, many theologians have thought that what would hold back this adversary would be the Church, as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

M - And how?

J - By its presence almost everywhere in the world. The Church has had a definite influence on the life of society by promoting Christian values that have themselves brought real blessings.

And then, through its influence and its prayers, it has shaped the course of history. That's no mean feat: just think of the millions of Christians around the world who prayed for God to bless the earth, to bless the authorities at all levels, to bless their loved ones in difficulty, to bless their village, their town, their country, and so on. Nobody has really understood the impact of all these Christians who prayed for good to overcome evil.

M - And now that they're gone...

J - Their action has simply disappeared. That's why I was talking about spiritual consequences! Evil is going to be able to unleash itself very quickly, so quickly that we're going to have trouble keeping up with it. It was already active in the world, but now it's going to go beyond what we think is possible. The consequences will be tangible and visible!

M - That's really not something to look forward to!

J - No! You're right: no doubt that's why the Bible talks about the "great tribulation" that's going to come upon the earth.

M - If God really is a God of love, as he claims, can't he prevent this great tribulation from happening?

J - You see, for centuries and centuries, God has spoken to human beings, exhorting them to repent and follow him. He did this in particular at the very beginning through his people, the Jewish people, and then through the Christians who proclaimed the message of the Gospel and showed how they lived it. Some accepted this message and became Christians themselves, but others closed themselves off to this light and rejected God. This rejection worsened considerably over time, and the persecution of the

Jewish people and Christians is a clear sign of this. God has decided to put an end to it and to judge the earth and its inhabitants. But before doing so, he chose to remove his Church from the world. This is what happened three days ago.

M - So, if I understand correctly, God will soon be sending his heavy artillery against the earth?

J - No! I wouldn't say that. He's simply going to withdraw his protective hand and leave humanity to its own devices. The principle is very simple: "Since you don't want me, I'll leave you to manage the situation on your own". He's going to leave this world at the mercy of unscrupulous, wicked, cruel and perverse rulers.

M - You spoke earlier of an adversary. Could this also be a system of governance?

J - That's a very good question! However, when you read Paul's texts, you really get the impression that he's talking about a man. The apostle John also talks about him and calls him the antichrist: this man will be the opposite of Christ. He will do everything to prevent his return and to destroy both those who would have become Christians among the nations after the rapture of the Church, and the Jewish people.

This man will be manipulated by Satan and will receive a power of seduction unequalled until now. He will perform all kinds of miracles and will succeed in seducing those who have turned away from God. He will be so good at seducing people that they will easily turn to him and follow him.

M - In a way, God will abandon those who have rejected him into the arms of the antichrist.

J - You've understood perfectly! Tell me, aren't you becoming a believer?

M - Oh, oh! Not so fast!

J - In the last three days, something has changed in you, am I right?

M - Yes, you're right. You know that I was a convinced atheist and that I wasn't shy about criticising religion and all the hypocrites who claimed to be part of it. However, I was always respectful towards those who professed a sincere faith. And then this event three days ago shook me terribly. I realised that an impressive supernatural force was at play, and that's when I started to consider the possible existence of God. Then, when I heard you testify to your distress, your desire to end your life, your anger at God and at yourself, and then your tears, your request for forgiveness, which was accepted, and finally the extraordinary peace you received, I was challenged even more. I realised that your testimony was true.

The next day, I sneaked off to church. I sat in a pew at the very back, in a dark corner, and there I prayed the same prayer as you: "Lord, forgive me". I didn't cry... I waited a little longer... I didn't feel anything in particular. On my way out of the church, I bumped into Germaine, my neighbour. She was very embarrassed to see me there and asked me not to tell anyone. She didn't want the whole village to laugh at her. I asked her to do the same for me. It's our little secret now!

Over the course of the day, I realised that something important had happened to me, even if I couldn't define it. My anxiety of the previous day had been transformed into inner peace. I had the feeling that God existed and that he had approached me, or that I had approached him. I know next to nothing

about the Bible, but now I feel the need to read it. Isn't that strange?

J - Maurice, your testimony means a lot to me and I tell myself that I was right to share my experience with you, even if it was terrible. You're an upright man and your step of faith only confirms that. Do you have a Bible?

M - Oops! No, we've never had one.

J - Can I give you the one of our daughter Florence? You'll see, it's underlined or coloured everywhere. She's adopted the same colour code as my wife: red for the words or work of God, blue for Christians, green for prayer, and black for everything to do with sin. Perhaps this will help?

Start by reading the Gospels. I'll also give you the references of the texts we've read together.

Jacques goes up to the first floor and comes back with a beautiful Bible, the cover of which is a little worn. You can see that it has been used a lot. Many verses are underlined in different colours and annotations are placed in the margins. Florence has made her Bible an object of intensive study. I'm happy to take it, convinced that it will also be a very important tool for me in learning about the God I'm beginning to discover.

M - This gift means a lot to me, especially coming from you. I'm very grateful!

J - It gives me great pleasure to know that this Bible is in good hands.

I look at this Bible with emotion. Never before would I have imagined that it would one day take up so much space in my life.

M - Tell me, I'm changing the subject completely. What did you think of that meeting with the public in the village hall last night? I saw you standing at the far end, near the exit door.

J - I did keep a low profile, because I was afraid of being picked on and having to explain to everyone why I, the pastor, wasn't raptured along with the other Christians. I prefer to talk to one person at a time.

M - In any case, you can count on me, I'll keep it a secret.

What did you think of the speeches last night? I was shocked by the contempt expressed towards Christians.

J - What happened last night confirms the texts we have just read: evil will be unleashed, and much more than we might have thought. Over the last few decades, Christians have been persecuted quite a lot, mainly because of their positions on marriage, homosexuality, sexual identity, their conception of authority and individual responsibility. In short, the gap between them and atheists has widened even further!

M - Yes, I agree.

J - But from now on, in the absence of the Church, we're going to see all sorts of excesses and debaucheries that will lead to chaos. People will want to eliminate everything that belongs to the past and is linked to the Christian influence. Everyone will believe that they can finally live as they wish, according to their own standards, and that they are finally free of previous moral norms. At the same time, atheist activists and intellectuals know that to achieve their aims, they must prevent such chaos at

all costs and bring order to society as quickly as possible.

M - Is that why they associate with the Islamists?

J - It's highly likely, even if their aims are very different from those of the Islamists. Atheists don't want to hear about God and they put man in his place; Islamists believe in Allah and want to impose submission to their God on the whole world.

M - So it's an unholy alliance!

J - Yes, that's exactly the word!

M - So why are they doing it?

J - My feeling is that the militant atheists think they can use the Islamists to bring order to society and that when the time comes, they'll get rid of them. The Islamists think they can use the militant atheists to take ever more power in society; and when they are numerous and powerful enough, they will eliminate the atheists and impose Islam all over the world.

M - Which will win?

J - I don't know. But, until the outcome is known, they will have done considerable harm to humanity!

M - What did you think of the speech by this member of the 'Love and Freedom' party?

J - It's very worrying, but perfectly in line with the movement. We need to take away the little power that individuals have and give it to a governing body, the Party, so that it can carry out the necessary transformations in society with complete peace of mind. Finally, it promises freedom for all once these changes have been made. History shows us, however, that such an atheistic party never reached that stage, and that the whole process ended in appalling deprivations of freedom and millions of deaths.

Unfortunately, we ignore the lessons of history and continue to believe in a false ideology.

M - I sincerely hope that our fellow citizens will have the wisdom to vote intelligently, in order to preserve the gains of democracy.

J - I don't want to disappoint you, but if I were you I wouldn't count on it. We're in for some surprises.

M - I'd love to continue this fascinating conversation, even if the horizon looks very bleak, but I have to go and prepare for the elections.

Let's keep in touch, we still have so much to share!

5. Pascal's point of view

5 August, 2 pm

Pascal has been living in an old winegrower's house for over twenty years, and has had it completely renovated. The exterior has retained its original appearance, but the entire interior has been transformed into a modern, functional style.

I am welcomed into a huge, light-filled living room. The white furniture contrasts with the old parquet flooring and period woodwork. The result is very pleasing.

Pascal is a political journalist at the New Hebdo in French-speaking Switzerland. He is an influential man in his field and has the reputation of being an excellent researcher, honest, upright, rigorous in his analyses and very methodical in his work. We had the opportunity to work together on a local authority project and came to appreciate each other's work. He's not a member of the local council, but for me he's a much-appreciated point of reference when I have to deal with tricky situations in the municipality. He has always been a great help, and I very much hope that he will be able to help me see more clearly in the tumultuous situation in which we find ourselves.

M - Do you know the President of the League of the Godless?

P - Mr Edouard Bassy. I've been told that he's one of the League's most influential thinkers and that

he's become the theoretician of the new "Love and Freedom" party. He's a formidable man, because he's very intelligent, has clear ideas about what he wants to revolutionise in society and knows how to talk to crowds to convince them. He's very likeable, but I'd be very wary of him.

M - Do you know this League of the Godless?

P - Their name obviously refers to the "Union of Militant Godless" created in the USSR in the 1930s. A few years after it was founded, this Union had several million followers. These people deployed considerable resources to fight against religion and especially against the Christian faith.

Using all kinds of propaganda methods, they worked hard to imbue schoolchildren with anti-religious sentiment, encouraging them to denounce their parents.

They raged against believers in industry, depriving them of their food cards and thus driving them to starvation.

They cleansed the Red Army of all believers; anyone who didn't want to become an atheist was arrested and deported to forced labour.

They closed the churches, even in the countryside. They stripped priests of their civil rights, preventing them from finding work. Many were shot or deported. Why all this? Because they considered all religion to be an instrument of exploitation, a means of putting workers to sleep and preventing them from adopting revolutionary communist ideas.

M - If I understand correctly, Mr Bassy's League is in line with this!

P - Yes, no doubt! They feel that Christians are holding them back in their desire to change society,

and that by proposing external moral codes to people, taken from the Bible, they are turning them away from atheist revolutionary principles. This is why Christians are seen as adversaries who must be eliminated.

Until now, militant atheists couldn't do much because they weren't numerous and influential enough. Now they have a motorway in front of them, and they are going to implement their revolutionary programme very quickly.

M - So the rapture of the Christians is a godsend for them!

P - Yes, it is. But we can be very worried about our society, because we are going to lose our freedom and will be forced into their system of thought and their re-education programme.

M - Don't believers, whoever they may be, have the right to practise their religion in private? Freedom of conscience and worship is enshrined in the Convention on Human Rights and in our Constitution...

P - You're absolutely right! But atheists and Islamists are taking advantage of this major crisis to set aside these fundamental texts of our Constitution.

M - It's almost like war!

P - That's true! Did you notice in Edouard Bassy's speech that they were prepared to use the hard way, as the Union of the Godless did in the USSR?

M - So they're going to eliminate all opponents.

P - Yes, the end justifies the means, even if they are violent. That's where this man is dangerous. His simple, gentle way of presenting his plan cleverly conceals his true intentions. You must have heard him say: "Whatever the cost"; in my opinion, he was

implying the use of violence and the sacrifice of human lives.

M - Mr Bassy talked about establishing a world order that would create an egalitarian and just society for all. What do you think about this?

P - The problem is that to change society effectively, you have to work on a very large scale: so you have to create an authoritarian world government. In my opinion, it's very dangerous to give one person or a small group of people such gigantic powers. It opens the door to a dictatorship that will have incalculable consequences around the world.

M - At the end of his speech, Mr Bassy was in a way encouraging the Single Thought, since he cannot accept that other people think differently from him.

P - Yes, that's the characteristic of all dictatorial regimes. The powers that be impose their way of thinking and eliminate all those who oppose them.

M - We didn't used to live like that!

P - No, we didn't! In a 'normal' society with solid ethical values respected by the vast majority of people, they can express a wide variety of opinions without threatening the survival of the population. But as soon as these values are flouted and rejected, the foundations of society are shaken and, to avoid chaos, those in power feel obliged to impose their own values, even if it means sacrificing those who challenge them.

M - You're thinking mainly of Christian values, I imagine.

P - Yes, fundamental values such as love of neighbour, forgiveness of offenders, self-sacrifice, pooling of personal talents, the desire to contribute to the good of all, sharing of wealth, mutual aid, help

for the unfortunate, and so on. They have helped to shape our society and give it a solid foundation and structure, even if other questionable values have been mixed in.

M - Does the disappearance of Christians mean the loss of these values?

P - Yes, inevitably, because they're no longer there to bring them to society. I know that many people who don't call themselves Christians carry these values to some extent, because they've been brought up that way, but they won't last long in the face of radical people determined to abolish them. They'll give up because they don't have the spiritual resources to nurture and defend them.

M - Why does the new "Love and Freedom" party insist on destroying these values? The name they've given their party is in line with the values you've just mentioned!

P - Christian values refer to the God of the Bible and Christ. Militant atheists categorically reject such references, and Islamists reject anything that doesn't bear the mark of Allah. So it's easy to understand their eagerness to destroy Christian values! Atheists propose other values which, let's face it, are pale copies of Christian values.

M - What do you have in mind?

P - For example "love of neighbour" is replaced by "the quest for equality" or "non-discrimination" or "tolerance". In a way, these values are imposed on society, and those who contravene them are punished by law. The strength of Christians lies in the fact that they find in their God the energy they need to put into practice the commandment given to

them: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself". There's a big difference!

M - You sound like a pastor!

P - Don't make fun of me! All you had to do was open your eyes to see the difference!

M - The "comrade" who spoke after Mr. Bassy said that the "Love and Freedom" party had joined forces with Islamists. Why is he talking about Islamists and not Muslims?

P - The term "islamism" was, if I remember correctly, coined in France in the 18th century, then replaced in the early 20th century by the term "islam". It reappeared in the 1970s to differentiate between currents that advocate above all for a political Islam and those that see Islam as a religion only. Thus, the former are called Islamists and the latter keep the name of Muslims, with all sorts of variations. It has to be said that many Muslims do not recognise themselves at all in political Islam, especially when it is violent and conquering.

M - Is an Islamist an extremist?

P - I'd rather say he's a Muslim who seeks to put Islam into practice in its entirety. He goes back to the sources of Islam as it was practised by Mohammed. He is a radical Muslim. He has not deviated from the Koran; on the contrary, he applies it to the letter.

M - And the others?

P - Some are very religious, but they have deliberately left out anything violent from the Koran. You can see several currents of thought among them. Others know very little about the Koran, if anything at all, but more or less follow Muslim customs and rules.

M - That seems clearer to me.

I'd like to come back to the "Love and Freedom" party, which brings together atheists and Islamists. In my opinion, such an association can't hold together, since atheists reject the idea of God and Islamists want to subject the whole world to Allah.

P - You're absolutely right! It's a useful association, nothing more! Each clan only thinks of its own interests and uses the other to that end. The atheists will use the Islamists to bring society into line and eliminate all opponents. The Islamists are using the atheists to establish themselves in our society and gain public acceptance.

M - I imagine that each of the two clans thinks it will have the last word...

P - No doubt! But no one will say so, of course! I think that, over the next few months, the atheist party will remain on the sidelines and let the Islamists lay down the law in society. But this withdrawal will be purely tactical! The atheists will remain the Party's leaders. In the long term, however, the outcome will be highly uncertain. Will one eliminate the other? Will they coexist? I can't answer that.

I'm thinking back to your question about this unholy alliance between Islamists and atheists. Do you remember the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, al-Husseini? He was a fierce opponent of the Jews and wanted to eliminate them from Palestine at all costs. Well, he allied himself with Hitler and they both worked towards the same goal: to eliminate the Jews. One was an Islamist, the other an atheist dictator. You see, it's the same unholy alliance.

M - That's a good example.

P - I'm thinking of another two-thousand-year-old example: Herod and Pilate were enemies, but

after each of them got rid of Christ, they became friends. This common goal brought them together!

M - I didn't know that story.

What do you think of the rise of Islamists in our country? A few decades ago, I had the feeling that the vast majority of Muslims had little or no involvement and posed no problem in our society. And then, today, I get the impression that many of them are radicalised.

P - I agree! Islamist leaders have worked in a coordinated and effective way, thanks also to their considerable financial resources. That's their strength. They have succeeded in motivating the country's Muslims to become Islamists. Even those who claimed to be secular ended up joining their ranks.

M - But in concrete terms, how did they manage to gain so much importance in our country?

P - Quite simply, they gradually infiltrated all the key circles of society and convinced their members to act as valiant fighters for Islam.

M - You spoke earlier of the hatred of militant atheists against Christians, because the latter were in their way; what about Islamists? Why do Islamists hate Christians?

P - In fact, this hatred began against the Jews at the time of Mohammed. Then it also developed against Christians, for religious reasons. Unfortunately, I can't tell you more. Perhaps you could talk to the village pastor; I understand he knows a lot about the subject.

M - How do you see things developing in our village?

P - It's hard to say, but this "Love and Freedom" party is going to do everything it can to impose itself,

even if it means resorting to intimidation and threats. We'll see.

M - I'd also like to talk to Kemal, who works at the Lavaux Islamic Centre. It'll certainly be interesting to find out what he's really up to.

P - Insofar as he's willing to tell you! As excellent tacticians, Islamists are skilled at hiding their true intentions. And Kemal can be clearly identified as an Islamist. Watch out!

M - And how do you see your future at The New Hebdo?

P - It all depends on the outcome of the elections in French-speaking Switzerland. If the "Love and Freedom" party wins, freedom of the press will be seriously undermined. Then I'll throw in the towel because, for me, it's inconceivable to work in a Journal that's muzzled by a political milieu.

M - Aren't the media already muzzled when it comes to Islam?

P - Yes, you're right, but I still have plenty of room for manoeuvre in my sector.

M - Your departure would be very sad! In your field, you're undoubtedly one of the last bulwarks against dictatorship in all its forms.

P - I'll do something else. I'll write my memoirs!

M - We'll certainly have a lot to talk about. In any case, I'd like to thank you for your advice and insights, which have given me a better understanding of what's going on politically! We'll see how the situation develops. But, like you, I'm worried.

At the Municipal Office

Victor was waiting impatiently for me. He called out to me as I climbed the stairs to my office.

V - We've already received the "Love and Freedom" party list. Several people are listed as Islamists. Their little advertising slogan reads: "United for a new era! Let's erase all traces of Christianity to bring about a new, fairer and more egalitarian society!"

What do you think, Maurice?

M - It's incredible! They've already submitted a list! I imagine they've been preparing it for some time. I don't like their slogan at all! We can't just sweep aside a democracy that our ancestors had so much trouble establishing. Let's wait for the other lists!

With Victor, we're setting up all the stages of the election, making sure that everything is done by the book. Given the current crisis, we have to avoid procedural errors and, above all, electoral fraud at all costs.

All the same, I'm worried and I have the unfortunate feeling that a tile is about to fall on our heads. To reassure myself, I call the four remaining members of the executive council: André, Béatrice, Christophe and Lucie.

André tries to reassure me that the Muslims running are honest and reliable.

M - I understand that, but they're going to go even further in their demands to enforce Sharia law, their Islamic laws. They've already succeeded in imposing the veil on all Muslim girls in schools, and

they've demanded separate school canteens for Muslims.

A - But it doesn't matter! The children are taking their lessons and everything's going well.

M - The courts have allowed Islamic law to apply to Muslims in Switzerland. Soon they'll be imposing it on the whole of society!

Béatrice doesn't know what to think, but I can feel that she doesn't want to tell me what she's thinking. So she dodges my questions. No need to continue.

Christophe is a fervent supporter of the "comrade" who advertised for the "Love and Freedom" party. So he's devoted to the cause.

Lucie gives me a radical and violent speech:

L - You see, Maurice, I have a very lucid view of history. Look carefully at the last few centuries in Europe, a so-called Christian Europe: how many murderous wars have taken place? Don't you think that's abnormal?

M - The Christian faith had nothing to do with the wars of the twentieth century. It can't be blamed for everything! These wars were the consequence of the violence present in human hearts.

L - And now you're defending Christians? That's something new!

M - I'm just trying to be fair.

L - And all these cases of paedophilia and sexual abuse in the Church, do you think that's normal?

M - Not at all! I'm horrified. But it happens in other circles. I don't know why, but we don't talk about it as much and prefer to put the Church in the hot seat.

L - I think we need to eradicate all remnants of Christianity and make way for a new society. And to do this, we need a strong man, a very strong man, who is capable of assuming all powers to finally act effectively.

Think, for example, of climate change: we've made some small progress, but it's not enough. Think of migration for economic, political or climatic reasons: we can no longer cope with it, because each country does as it pleases. We can't go on like this! We must now, as a matter of urgency, create a strong world government capable of imposing its law on every country. This is humanity's only chance of survival. It's a tough job! I know, but we have no alternative!

M - Do you really think we'll be able to solve these complex problems this way? Personally, I'm not convinced.

L - It's because of sceptics like you that we can't move forward! You're too attached to the past and you can't get rid of it.

I've heard you've been seen several times with the village pastor. Funny, I never thought that of you! Careful, Maurice! You're going to find yourself at odds with the rest of the board; I warned you!

After those phone calls, I'm even less reassured. Something is moving very fast. Lucie was a good town councillor who knew her stuff. She had a strong character, sometimes unpleasant, it's true, but she never said anything like that to me. Why did she change so quickly? Why did she take a 180-degree turn? It's astonishing! I'd never have thought that of her. Did she already have a sense of revolt that she was careful not to show? Given the current

circumstances, she probably has no reason to hide it and can give free rein to her deepest motivations. How worrying!

Back home, I tell my wife Roseline about the day's events. Like me, she seems perplexed about the future of our country, but says no more.

Roseline has discovered the Bible Jacques gave me:

R - What's this Bible?

M - It's the Bible of Florence, the pastor's daughter. Jacques gave it to me so that I could read certain biblical texts, the references of which he wrote down for me. These are texts about the rapture of the Church.

Roseline starts to get angry and looks at me with anguish:

R - So, you want to become a Christian? Are you going to be taken away too?

M - No! The rapture of Christians is a one-off event. It happened three days ago, and that's all. Don't worry about me.

My answer doesn't seem to have calmed her down. She grumbles off into the kitchen.

On tonight's news, there's no news of the rapture. The "black out" intended by the Federal Council has worked well: not a single media outlet has reported on this major event. We're talking about everything, but not this. Millions of people have disappeared from the face of the earth, and no one is talking about it! How appalling!

6. Kemal and the Lavaux Islamic Centre

9 August, 10 am

Kemal is of Turkish origin. He spent his entire childhood in Istanbul, before moving to Switzerland with his family when he was 12. His father worked on building sites and his mother looked after their four children at home. Kemal went on to do a brilliant engineering degree and made a very good living for himself in the canton. Together with his wife, who is also Turkish, they were heavily involved in the Association of Mosques in French-speaking Switzerland, and in particular in setting up the Lavaux Islamic Centre. He quickly became one of its leaders.

We met when they wanted to buy the big building that now houses the Centre. The Islamists wanted to create an Islamic training centre for imams and for those in positions of responsibility in our society. To prevent mosques from bringing in imams trained abroad, particularly in countries where rigorous Islam is taught, the government thought it would be a good idea to encourage the teaching of Islam here, so as to control it better. The State thought that this teaching would be more compatible with our democratic culture and would

thus enable Muslims to better integrate into our society.

Kemal was asked to act as a link between the Islamists and the Privet commune. They were after a large house to the north of the village. As the owner was selling it for several million, no one here was able to buy it. Qatar provided the funds so that the centre could be created.

At the time, I thought it was a good thing. We needed to encourage the development of all religions, which would allow a good balance between them, thanks to inter-religious dialogue. Such religious peace would, of course, promote social peace. It would be a win-win situation.

Kemal was extremely kind during the many meetings necessary for the success of this project. He showed me a great deal of gratitude and esteem, occasionally inviting me to his family for an oriental meal. We spent a lot of time together looking at the world, comparing our respective cultures and trying to highlight everything we had in common. He used to talk to me about the beauty of Islam and quote verses from the Koran that highlighted it. For Kemal, Islam was man's natural religion, the one that suited him best. It had been present since the beginning of humanity, even if it was only clearly formulated through the message of Mohammed in the seventh century AD. Judaism and Christianity have unfortunately distracted humanity from this pure and natural religion.

Knowing almost nothing about the complex subject of religions, I was captivated by Kemal's stories and explanations, and came to the conclusion that we had to make room for this religion, which has become the most important in the world.

These rich discussions also strengthened my belief that it is possible to live well in a multicultural society that respects everyone. Yes, I was experiencing this in a very concrete way. Little by little, we developed a sincere friendship. So it was only natural that I should turn to him for his point of view on the current situation and to understand what he and his Islamist colleagues intended to do for our village.

After ringing the bell at the entrance to the property, I see a stocky man arrive who asks me my name and why I've come, with an air of suspicion. He lets me in and leads me to the large lounge, all lit up by a beautiful glass roof overlooking the lake. The style is meticulous, modern and tinged with oriental colours. The atmosphere is warm. A few minutes later, Kemal enters with a determined step, greets me and seats me in a leather armchair. From the outset, I sense a certain coldness in him that I didn't know existed. Does my visit bother him? I hasten to ask him a few questions about his family to lighten the mood.

M - How are you? What about your family? Are your children still doing well at school?

K - Yes! Thank you! I'm doing well. My wife is in good health and our children are doing well. Our eldest won first prize for reciting the Koran! We're very proud of him. He's following in his parents' footsteps.

M - Was he the one who wanted to become a musician? I remember he was very gifted and showed a real passion for his instrument.

K - Yes, indeed! Fortunately, we managed to talk him out of it.

M - He could have had a great career in this field.

K - You know, Maurice, our world is going from bad to worse and we're heading for disaster unless we take drastic measures quickly. And for that, we need valiant fighters ready to sacrifice their lives to ensure that the word of Allah triumphs. We need young people. The time we have left is too short for us to lose ourselves in making music. We must all make an effort to accomplish our task.

Kemal looks off into the distance, lost in thought. I can see a great deal of sadness on his face, as if he were carrying a burden that was weighing him down.

He pulls himself together and asks me:

K - Tell me, what can I do for you?

M - We've always had a good relationship, so I'm taking the liberty of asking you for your opinion on the information session that took place on 4 August in the main community hall. I know that you were there, as were several members of the Islamic Centre. I also saw that you were very quick to put your name forward as a candidate for the executive council and that other Islamists have put themselves forward as candidates for the municipal council. What do you intend to do for the village of Privet?

K - As Mr Bassy rightly said, it's time for things to change, not just in this village, but also in the canton and throughout Switzerland. Immorality in this country is on the increase and it's time we put things right. On the other hand, we can no longer accept that people make decisions in all directions and that in the end nothing changes. This is no longer possible! For a time, democracy led people to believe that political solutions could be found by consensus and that the "truth" was on the side of the majority. Western countries took pride in their

political system and sought to impose it on the rest of the world. As we have all seen, this crusade has ended in disaster. Reality shows us that this system is obsolete and must be changed. It is time to impose a solid and clear guideline that is understood and followed by all.

Kemal has risen from his seat and starts pacing up and down the room, as some professors do in front of an audience. He walks with his eyes fixed ahead of him, his voice has become impassioned, he hammers out certain words and gives them weight with his hand. From time to time, he quotes a verse from the Koran in Arabic, as if to justify his thoughts. Of course, I don't understand any of it.

He tells me about the glorious days of Islam in the seventh century AD, when it dominated an empire which, in a century of conquests, became larger than the Roman Empire. What a pity that this domination did not extend further! The world would not have become what it is today.

He tells me about the Middle Ages and the glory of Islam in Andalusia, where the wise men shone the light of their religion on everyone. According to Kemal, society was profoundly transformed as a result, and was able to prosper peacefully in all disciplines.

From time to time, Kemal gives me a furtive glance, no doubt to see how I react. But I remain unperturbed. I don't want him to know what I think of his speech. I'm well aware that Arab-Muslim domination of Andalusia was not as glorious as he claims. At least not for everyone! For the most part, Jews and Christians were treated as second-class

citizens. Some were persecuted, driven out and even murdered. I interrupt Kemal's speech:

M - Like many people, you are nostalgic for this period in history!

K - Yes, that's true! We had created something magnificent, grandiose, sumptuous! And the Catholics thwarted our plans and pushed us back! But you'll see, we're going to recover everything we conquered and we're going to go much further, in the West and everywhere else.

Here, fortunately, things are changing and we are making progress little by little.

M - It seems to me that Islam has made a lot of progress in the West since the last World War; am I wrong?

K - Yes, you're right! We got our act together and put in place some very effective strategies that are now bearing fruit. Without hiding our intentions, we have built up a whole network of mosques and Islamic centres in all the Western countries, step by step. This has given Muslims the opportunity to learn Arabic, read the Koran and familiarise themselves with the teaching and application of Sharia law. They learnt to live together, away from Western society, which had to be rejected at all costs.

M - Why do you have to reject it?

K - Because we consider it decadent. Many of the customs it has allowed, and even adopted, are contrary to our laws, and that's something we can't accept. Because of this decay, Western society has lost its strength and has not understood that it was opening the doors to us. And we took advantage of it!

Kemal stops walking, turns to me and looks at me seriously:

K - Perhaps you remember the now famous words of one of the most influential Muslim theologians in Europe, Yousouf al Qaradawi (a Muslim brother): "With your democratic laws, we will colonise you. With our Koranic laws, we will dominate you". He said this in Rome in 2002. That was a long time ago! He summed up everything we've done in a few words!

M - So you took advantage of our democratic system to establish yourselves, taking advantage of our naivety and our sense of welcome. That was the first phase. And now you're going to dominate us by imposing your Koranic laws and forcing us to submit to Islam!

K - That's exactly it! That's the second phase.

You see, Maurice, it's a necessity! We are convinced that submission to Islam is the only possible response to the major crisis currently facing humanity. We have to put our house in order!

M - That has the merit of being clear! I imagine that the rapture of the Christians gives you a serious boost!

K - It wasn't planned at all, but I admit that for us it's a real boon.

M - How do you understand it?

K - Neither the Koran nor tradition mention it, so it's difficult for me to give you an answer. However, I can't help seeing it as a sign of destiny. As far as I'm concerned, Allah has removed from the earth all those who were preventing us from accomplishing our mission. From now on, there is nothing to stop us from accomplishing it.

M - In concrete terms, what do you plan to do in our village?

K - Our party is well on the way to taking power not just in Privet, but throughout the canton, and even far beyond.

M - Does that mean you're going to do everything you can to establish Sharia law?

K - Yes, exactly! It's the only way to lead society down a single path, that of Islam, and to live in justice and peace. The "Love and Freedom" party is giving us the green light to achieve this.

M - How is it that you have joined forces with atheist activists to create this "Love and Freedom" party? Isn't that an unholy association?

K - It's useful... for a while.

M - I imagine that when the time comes, you'll be quick to get rid of it? And what if the opposite happened: the atheists might try to get rid of you too?

K - All in good time!

M - It's incredible that believers like you can join forces with atheists who are fighting to eradicate the Christian roots of our society!

K - For the moment, we're working together because we have common interests. It's true that our long-term goals differ.

M - In the forthcoming elections, the citizens of this village will choose between the various candidates. How can you be sure that the Islamists will win?

K - Well, you'll see! We have a whole range of means to achieve our ends! We won't hesitate to use them. As I said earlier, we have to introduce drastic measures, even if they are violent.

M - What are you going to do about all those who don't want to claim to be part of the "original" Islam that you have adopted?

K - Everything will depend on their attitude towards us. If they don't get in our way, we'll spare them. However, they will have to recognise us as their superiors. They will therefore be our subordinates, as the Koran specifies, and will have to pay a special tribute to benefit from our protection. If they do not accept this inferior status, they will put their lives and property at risk.

M - What about moderate Muslims?

K - If they refuse to follow us, we will consider them as non-Muslims, in other words as adversaries.

M - And what will become of the Jews?

K - We must continue to confront the Jews and fight them. This war is a duty, whether we like it or not; it is a sign for the coming of the Last Judgement. Our worship of Allah can only be complete if we ensure Allah's victory and triumph over the Jews. Our war against the Jews is not linked to a territory or a border, but it is a war linked to religion and their very existence.

M - So the purge is going to intensify, if I understand correctly!

K - You said it! We're acting in the name of Allah, for the good of all mankind!

And whose side are you on?

M - Why are you asking me this question?

K - I know you've seen the village pastor several times. This man has become dangerous since he supposedly had a mystical experience. He has already spoken to several people in the village and is trying to convince them to believe in his God. We cannot tolerate this man spreading a message contrary to ours and evangelising people who should be submitting to Islam. We will warn him and decide what to do with him at a later date.

M - I can see that you're well informed.

K - Yes! I've got informers all over the place!

I'll ask you again: whose side are you on?

M - Honestly, I can't follow you.

K - If you come with us, we'll make room for you and protect you. But if you don't, you'll be considered our adversary and you'll have to accept the consequences.

Have you thought about this? If you submit to Islam, you could become my brother!

Don't forget what I've just told you; I've warned you. The situation is going to change radically and very quickly. Make the right choice!

I've asked all the questions that are important to me and I don't want to stay any longer in this Centre, which is really worrying me. I say goodbye to Kemal. We both realised that our friendship was over.

7. The elections

11 August, at the municipal office

Nominations closed at midnight last night. This morning, I see that no other list has been submitted. The inhabitants of this village will have to vote for the only list submitted, that of the "Love and Freedom" party.

I call Victor to ask for an explanation.

M - Victor, can you tell me why no other list has been submitted for these elections?

V - I asked myself the same question and went to interview several villagers. Some told me that they had been convinced by the arguments of the members of the "Love and Freedom" party and that it was necessary to dare to make a clean sweep of the past. Others told me, with difficulty, that they had been forced not to vote for other lists. Five potential candidates said they had been threatened with reprisals if they stood for election.

M - It's completely illegal to do this! I can't let something like this go through.

Finally, after making several phone calls to the cantonal administration, I had to face the facts: in the current context, there's nothing I can do. We have therefore communicated to the residents the single list of the "Love and Freedom" party. The elections will take place on 15 August.

15 August, 8 am

The polling station opens at 9 am and closes at 6 pm. Victor and I took it in turns to stay in the voting room to make sure everything went smoothly.

The first residents arrive at 9 am.

I greet them cordially, but they seem embarrassed and avoid my gaze. I'm stunned; how can my fellow citizens, whom I've known for so many years and fought for, suddenly turn their backs on me? An hour later, I am finally given an explanation. Germaine, my neighbour, gives me a discreet wave, inviting me to go out with her. We pretend to talk about everything and nothing, but Germaine tells me quietly that the members of the 'Love and Freedom' party have been spreading slander against me in the village: I'm a dangerous man, backward-looking, proud, corrupt, who only thinks of his own interests.

G - I feel sorry for you. This is slander. I tried to defend you, but to no avail. And now they're turning against me! Just know that I'll always be grateful for everything you've done for our village. You've put your heart and soul into all of us and done a magnificent job. I don't understand how anyone can forget that so easily. I'm sad for the village too.

M - Dear Germaine, your loyalty means a lot to me and I thank you for it. I'm also asking myself a lot of questions and I'm disappointed. But let's try to remain optimistic; there are laws that lay down a precise framework for political action and the members of the council cannot go beyond these laws.

G - I'm worried for you, for our village and for the whole country.

I return to the polling station and continue to watch the villagers streaming in. They pretend not to see me; they take the ballot papers, go and isolate themselves in the booth provided for this purpose, then come back to put their ballot papers into the ballot box, carefully stuffed into the envelope provided. They leave without saying hello to me.

At 6 pm, the office is closed and the counting of the ballot papers can begin. The result is clear: all the members of the 'Love and Freedom' party list are elected. Not a single name was crossed out and replaced by someone else. Two Islamists, Kemal and Youssef, have been elected to the executive council. Meetings are likely to turn into a battlefield.

16 August

I've called the six executive councillors together for a special meeting at 10 am. They barely greet me as I arrive, wearing a winning smile that says a lot about our future collaboration. No sooner have I introduced the meeting than Lucie cuts me off and solemnly declares:

L - We met last night and decided to remove you as mayor and appoint Kemal in your place.

Flabbergasted, I immediately reply:

M - The purpose of the elections was to fill vacant posts, not to change the mayor. My term of office isn't over and I'll be staying on until the next legislature.

L - You're right from a legal point of view, but we're going to make life difficult for you until you resign. I warned you...

After allocating Communal administratives responsibilities to the two new members and setting the date for the next meeting, we part immediately. It's the first time that we end a council meeting without a glass of wine from the region. In fact, the six members of the council decided last night to ban wine from our meetings.

On my way out, I feel the need to isolate myself and have a breath of fresh air. I take the little path that leads to the vineyards and, a hundred metres further up, I sit on the bench that my friend Georges has placed in front of his hut, in the middle of his vines. He too disappeared during the great Rapture. He was a jovial, honest man, often teasing, but never mean or contemptuous; on the contrary, he showed a great kindness that commanded respect. He knew how to put people in a good mood; he was a unifier with a sense of compromise. I'd love to be able to talk to him about what I've just been through at the council; he'd encourage me and would certainly give me some useful advice. And now I'm all alone in front of this splendid landscape.

What should I do? I've decided to stand my ground and stay where I am, but for how long? Will I be able to stand up to colleagues who have taken a dislike to me for ideological reasons? Do we all have to think in the same way and follow a single thought? If we have different opinions, do we have to become enemies who destroy each other? All for the sake of a totalitarian ideology? In the past, we often had our differences in our discussions, but we generally managed to agree and define a coherent policy. We enjoyed working together and felt we were doing

something useful for our village. These differences of opinion didn't stop us talking about anything and everything after our meetings.

Do I still feel that way? If almost everyone avoids me and wants me to leave, do I still have any legitimacy to stay in my job? I'm disgusted to see everything we've patiently built up crumble so quickly. What beast has bitten them like this?

- Ah, Georges, if you were here, what would you advise me to do?

Back home for lunch, I notice that my wife is agitated and worried:

R - This morning I had a visit from a member of the 'Love and Freedom' party. He explained to me that your way of running the commune no longer corresponded to the wishes of the Party and that he wanted you to resign. I had to convince you to do so, otherwise they'd come after both of us and make us pay dearly. And then he left without giving me any explanations.

I'm scared, Maurice, I'm scared that something bad is going to happen to us.

M - Ah! The bastards! They dared to attack you and threaten you directly. It's unacceptable!

I have to tell you that the executive council meeting went badly. Two Islamists have been appointed to replace the two missing local councillors, Alfred and Marilou. Their names are Kemal and Youssef. You remember Kemal, who was responsible for negotiating with the municipality to buy the big house just north of the vineyards. They set up the Lavaux Islamic Centre there. As for Youssef, I don't know him personally. As I understand it, he also works at the Centre.

Without asking my opinion, the council decided to remove me from the post of mayor and entrust it to Kemal. Of course, I refused. So they threatened to make my life miserable until I resigned. I can't believe it.

Yes, you're right, we have to be very careful. They're perfectly capable of coming after both of us. Don't they say that the end justifies the means?

R - What are you going to do?

M - For the moment, I'm going to stay at my post. That's the best way of finding out what's going on behind the scenes. And then I'll decide...

Roseline looks at me longingly and starts to cry. I take her in my arms and we hold each other for a long time. It's been a while since this happened to us, and it feels good!

Shouldn't I tell her all about my contact with Jacques and my spiritual journey? How will she take it? Won't she turn against me? Maybe it's better to wait a little longer...

I decide not to tell her about my meeting with Kemal; it would only increase her anxiety.

August 17, at the communal office

I've always enjoyed my job as mayor. I like challenges, I like solving problems, especially complex ones, I like the contact with the people of my village, even if some of them are a bit difficult and demanding. But now, this morning, I'm leaving for the office with a lump in my stomach, convinced that I've got some big problems ahead of me.

Victor is standing in the doorway. He says to me softly:

V - The council is in the middle of a debate in the council chamber.

M - Without me? Nobody told me about this meeting!

V - I didn't know either.

Furious, I climb the stairs two at a time and suddenly open the boardroom. They're all there around the rectangular table and Kemal is sitting in the chair I usually occupy at the end of the table.

M - Why are you meeting without me? I didn't give any notice of this morning's meeting!

Lucie replies with incredible aplomb:

L - We don't need you to run this village. There are urgent things to be done and we've decided to rush things through.

I take the chair they've removed and insert myself around the table.

M - What are these urgent things to do in the commune?

Kemal speaks up in an arrogant tone:

K - We've decided to take advantage of the disappearance of the Christians to wipe out anything that might remind us of their harmful influence. We are planning the following measures:

1. We will change all street and square names that remind us of the past.

2. We will set up a Morality police force to ensure that Sharia law is applied in the village.

3. We will ask villagers to bring all Christian literature to the church square: Bibles, hymnals, etc., and we'll make a big fire to burn them all. We will

then go into houses to check that this directive has been followed. Offenders will be seriously fined.

4. From now on, all activities will be forbidden in the church. It will be disused and turned into a mosque. The bells will be lowered, so that they will no longer ring on Sunday mornings, nor at every hour. The noise of the bells is odious and a constant reminder of the presence of the church in our village. We don't want to hear them any more!

5. We will establish solid links with other villages that are following the same approach.

6. We will continue to work in the executive council without you. You can leave, you're not welcome here!

I'm speechless and it takes me a while to come to my senses. I stand up and calmly give them this speech:

M - You know very well that you have no right to oust me from the council in this way! I'm going to complain immediately to the Council of State. Justice will prove you wrong. All the measures you have just listed are unconstitutional; they will not stand up in court.

L - The laws you are referring to belong to the past and no longer apply today! You need to get that through your head!

You want to complain to the Council of State! Then do it! You'll see that it won't support you, because it's in a state of flux, especially as the Grand Council has several new members, all from the 'Love and Freedom' party. This party now has a majority in the Assembly.

You're finished, my poor Maurice! Admit it and let us get on with our work! We have a noble task to accomplish.

I get up and head for the exit door without saying a word. I absolutely must verify their claims.

Fortunately, my desk hasn't been emptied. I take out from my drawer the list of mayors in the region whom I know well and who will be in a better position to answer my questions. I call them one after the other.

Several of them are going through the same thing as me and feel threatened by the new council.

Others have felt the wind shift and have changed direction; they're real weathervanes! They've just fallen out of my circle of friends!

I telephone Pierre, one of the seven State Councillors whom I know well. Luckily, I am able to get through. As I tell him my story, I hear him clear his throat. I deduce that he must be very uncomfortable. After a long pause, he replies:

P - You know, Maurice ... since that supernatural event that shook the whole world, the political environment has changed very quickly. You could call it a veritable cataclysm. We certainly didn't want it to happen, but we're obliged to adapt and follow the general trend that people want. We have to recognise that the 'Love and Freedom' party has taken on a dimension we never imagined; in fact, it has a majority in the Grand Council Assembly. Everything is rapidly changing.

M - What is your experience within the Council of State?

P - As you know, the majority were on the left. This has become even more pronounced in the last

ten days and the views of the "Love and Freedom" party are beginning to be taken seriously.

M - And which side are you on?

He clears his throat again

P - For reasons of collegiality, I'm obliged to go with the flow and bow to the majority.

M - I understand that, but in your heart of hearts, which side are you on?

P - I don't know! On the one hand, I'm attached to the values we've defended up to now, and on the other, I tell myself that our society could do with a good sweep.

M - A French politician, Jean Lecanuet, used to say: "I'm neither for nor against, quite the contrary"! You say a bit of the same thing! No ?

P - It's not our fault that Heaven saw fit to remove from the earth millions of people who played a decisive role in society. This is a major crisis to which we need to apply exceptional measures, even if it means calling our laws and traditions into question.

Note that it's the people who are pushing us to do this too. The other day, a couple said to me vehemently: "Since Heaven has chosen to take back its darlings, we'll do without them and erase their memory". I have the impression that many people are angry at this God who has abandoned them and despises them. Perhaps that's why the "Love and Freedom" party received so much support at the ballot box.

M - Thank you, Pierre, for this very useful information. I wish you good luck for the rest of your mandate.

So that's it for me: I have no chance of being supported in high places and I'd better retire from the council. Without telling anyone, I write a short letter of resignation and leave it on my desk. I put my belongings in boxes, which I collect in my car. And so ends my career as mayor. I leave sad and bitter. Sad for my village and my country, bitter because people didn't think through the disastrous consequences of their choices before voting.

8. A liberation

Before heading home, I decide to return to the bench in Georges' vineyard. It's a quiet little spot, out of sight, a perfect place to meditate.

Strangely enough, I feel soothed and have a whole new sense of inner peace. Yesterday, I would have liked George's advice; today, I understand that I am surrounded and accompanied by a much greater Presence, that of the God to whom I turned the other day, asking his forgiveness. And suddenly, I don't know why, I start crying. All my inner misery comes flooding back, as if the film of my life were fast-forwarding before my eyes, showing me things long forgotten. After a long time, I stop crying and peace comes over me again, even stronger than before. I've never felt such inner peace. And then there's the conviction that God has forgiven me and welcomes me as his child. From now on, he's never going to let me go. There's a deep joy inside me that I can't explain, but I know where it comes from.

When I come home, I say a big "Hello, I'm here! Immediately my wife comes running and, seeing my happy face, she says to me:

R - So, I see you've solved your problems at the council!

M - Yes! It's all sorted: they've sacked me!

R - And that makes you all happy?

M - You see, what makes me really happy is that I've become a Christian.

And I tell her about my experience in church and then on the bench in Georges' vineyard. She listens to me without flinching, and then at the end she tells me this:

R - While you were away, I took Florence's Bible and started reading the verses she underlined in the Gospels. Several times I had to stop reading because I had tears in my eyes. There was a very contradictory feeling inside me: on the one hand, I felt rage and a desire to push away something that had been haunting me for a very long time, and on the other, I felt an inner voice telling me to continue reading.

M - What's been haunting you for a long time? You never told me about it.

R - It's true, I never told you about it because I was ashamed and above all I was afraid of losing you.

M - What happened?

R - Well, that's it! *She pauses to swallow her saliva and catch her breath.*

When I was a child... I was raped by my father. And ever since, I can't imagine God being a father to me. Instinctively, I push him away.

M - How horrible! Why didn't you tell me about this when we first met?

R - I was afraid you'd reject me...

M - I would never have done that.

R - When I read all those verses in the Gospels about the Father's love, I was deeply troubled, because I've never known that kind of love from my father and I can't imagine that a Father could love his children. Perhaps that's why we weren't able to have children. I'm deeply sorry...

Roseline bursts into tears and comes to snuggle in my arms. We spend a long time together, holding each other close.

I pray inwardly, asking for help from this Father I've just discovered. Then I get the idea of going to see Jacques with Roseline. I tell her about it, and she immediately agrees.

Contacted by phone, Jacques tells us to come to his house at 5 pm.

As we enter the vicarage grounds, we pass Germaine, our neighbour, coming out of Jacques' house. We greet each other with a big smile, which says a lot about the spiritual journey she and I have recently completed.

Jacques gives us a very warm welcome and ushers us into the famous little salon.

I quickly fill Jacques in on my ousting from the council and my encounter with the Lord in Georges' vineyard.

J - Well, if Georges knew what you've been through on the bench in front of his hut, he'd be overjoyed! I'm so happy for you. This is great news!

M - It's true that I'm sad about my eviction, but my inner joy has taken over. Something wonderful is happening inside me!

Jacques, we've come because Roseline and I need your help. Earlier, she told me a secret that has been a burden since childhood and from which she would like to be freed. We're both convinced that we need to talk to you about it.

Jacques suggests that Roseline describe in great detail all the key events in her life, from childhood to the present day. She begins to speak with great emotion, her words bringing back painful memories.

When she has finished, Jacques leans forward, takes her head in his hands and stays like that for a while. Then he stands up and says :

J - The best thing to do is to pray together and hand everything over to the Lord. Roseline, I'd like to suggest that you express your anger and sadness to the Lord so that he can help you to enter into a process of restoration and healing. I know that your father is dead and that he can no longer hear the reproaches that you have a right to address to him. But you can tell your story to the Lord so that he will take it into consideration. He has already heard you, but it's good to tell him in front of us, who are witnesses to your suffering.

The three of us get down on our knees and Roseline begins to tell her story to the Lord. I am in awe: how can she speak to him so simply?

Then Jacques suggests that Roseline forgive her father. This won't change anything for her father, since he's dead, but it will free Roseline from a burden she's carried since childhood.

We start praying again. Then I hear Roseline say quite simply:

R - I've decided to forgive my father. But, Lord, you have to help me...

Jacques put his hand on Roseline's shoulder and suggests that I do the same. The two of us ask Christ to fill her heart with peace so that she can fully forgive her father and also receive the forgiveness that Christ is offering her.

I feel Roseline tremble with all her being. Then she raises her eyes to us:

R - I feel lighter! It's simply incredible! I feel at peace, free of a weight.

J - Roseline, what you've just done is very important: the forgiveness you've given your father does indeed free up a lot of things in you, but, in the days and weeks to come, you're very likely to hear little voices in your heart that will call everything into question. It's very important that you reaffirm every day the forgiveness you have given and let yourself be transformed by the Lord who now lives within you.

M - I think Roseline and I have something to celebrate. Would you like to come and eat some perch fillets with us at the Port Restaurant?

Jacques is quick to oblige. The merry trio troll down the street like schoolchildren who have passed their final exams. We settle down at a table overlooking the lake. The weather is pleasant, the sun is shining and it's still warm enough to stay out in the evening in a shirt. When it is time to place our order, I see the waiter looking left and right, and then he tells me quietly that he is no longer allowed to serve wine in the restaurant. If the Morality Police find us drinking wine, they'll slap us with a hefty fine and he, as the restaurant owner, could close up shop.

But that's no problem! We can enjoy ourselves without drinking wine! What's more, we don't want our festive meal to be spoiled by such worries.

During the meal, we share good memories of our past. We laugh heartily, happy to be able to live this moment together, reunited in a brand new friendship. But there's even more to it than that, and

that's the brotherly bond that now unites us: we've become brothers and sisters, because we have the same heavenly Father. We look at each other with smiles on our faces, because words are no longer enough to express what we feel, so happy are we to be living in this new freedom.

At the end of the meal, I notice two very serious men sitting at a table a little further away; they haven't had a drink. When the waiter arrives to clear the table and bring us the bill, I ask him:

- Do you know these men?

The waiter replies softly:

- They're from the Morality police. They're the ones who told me this afternoon not to serve any more wine. I was watching them earlier, they were looking in your direction and they kept taking notes.

- Thank you for this information!

We leave immediately. I turn around discreetly and see that these two men are following us at a distance. What do they want? Are we no longer allowed to eat together in restaurants? Are we not allowed to see our village pastor? This does not bode well.

We pick up the pace and suddenly take a small road at right angles and run to escape their vigilance. Obviously, they don't know all the little shortcuts in the village and it's fairly easy to get away from them. This gives us a chance to say goodbye and exchange more words of encouragement and blessing.

Jacques heads home and we continue on our way, holding hands like young people newly in love. How good it is to savour life to the full! To enjoy every minute of it and see it as a gift from heaven!

How good it is to discover this new bond that unites Roseline and me! Our only regret is that we didn't create it when we got married; but, at the time, we were fierce opponents of the Christian faith. What a pity!

9. The village festival

20 August

I've got into the habit of getting up at 6.30 in the morning. This gives me time to get ready quietly, eat breakfast while listening to the news on the radio and walk to the office admiring the beauty of nature. I love looking at the houses with their vegetable gardens, seeing how the trees change with the seasons, how the fruit grows and ripens with each passing day; I love soaking up village life and feeling the happiness of being able to live freely in a country at peace. How lucky we are to have been spared war in our country and to have lived in relative prosperity! I say "relative" because not everyone was able to enjoy it. But in our village, every inhabitant was able to live decently and I think I encouraged a great deal of solidarity between us all. That gives meaning to life, and everyone can honestly say that they belong to one big family, even if things haven't always been easy.

On this first day of forced retirement, the alarm didn't go off as usual (I simply hadn't set it), but a loud noise of voices in the street abruptly wakes me from my sleep. It's already 9 o'clock! A car, with a big loudspeaker on the roof, repeats this announcement: "See you at 3 pm in the Place of plane trees for the village festival!"

Really? What's the occasion? Who decided to organise this festivity? Ah, no doubt the new council. And for what purpose?

We've always enjoyed organising festivities. The most important was linked to work in the vineyards, at the end of the grape harvest. And then each local society created a special event during the year, to show the population the work it had accomplished. There was the brass band festival, the gymnastics society festival, the children's festival at the end of the school term in July, the 1 August festival, the sewing society festival, the parish festival, and so on. It was an opportunity to recruit new members and raise a little money to keep the association going. The whole village would take the opportunity to 'party'. It ended with a joyous banquet, well-watered, and the village ball. But all these parties required weeks of preparation.

And then they announce a party for the very same day! I hadn't heard anything about it and I was intrigued. I decide to go along... just to see.

At 3 pm, I head for the plane tree square. It's a pleasant spot because of the shade provided by these majestic trees. And from everywhere you can see the lake and the French mountains opposite. Chairs have been set up under the trees. The brass band has been requisitioned to play its repertoire, which it has been fine-tuning for months. Tables have been laid and are garnished with cakes, no doubt made by villagers. Soft drinks are served at a small bar improvised in a corner. At the back, on a platform, a microphone is ready for speeches, apparently.

People start pouring in from all over, astonished by this unusual event. I'm struck by the sight of several veiled women, among whom I recognise

villagers who have never professed to be Muslim. I'll have to ask them. The square is quickly filled with people and the brass band starts to play. Then a man climbs onto the stage, Kemal. He takes the microphone to welcome the people:

K - Ladies and gentlemen, dear fellow citizens, first of all I'd like to thank you for coming in such large numbers to this impromptu celebration, but one that is of the utmost importance given the current circumstances. I would like to thank all those who helped us to prepare it so quickly, and who made it possible for this celebration to be a great one. Thank you to everyone who brought so much good food! Don't forget to help yourself - it's all on the house! Thanks also to the village brass band for their contribution!

Five days ago, we all voted to elect new village councillors, to replace those who have disappeared in circumstances with which you are all familiar and which I don't wish to comment on. The elections were held democratically, in accordance with the rules communicated by the State Council. The results are final and there is no need for a second ballot. The names of the new councillors have been posted at the public pillar. I'm sure you've all seen them.

Today is a day of festivity, because we are celebrating the victory of the "Love and Freedom" party in these last elections, not only in our village, but throughout the canton and especially in the Vaud Grand Council. This party now has a free hand to bring about a significant change in the politics of the communes, the canton and the country as a whole.

As you know, this party is made up of activists from the League of the Godless and Islamists. We're going to work together to make progress towards a

fairer, more egalitarian society. But before that, we absolutely must get rid of everything that reminds us of the old society, influenced by Christianity. "Heaven" has given us the gift of removing the Christians from the earth, which leaves us free to move forward. With this in mind, the new executive council has decided on the following measures:

1. We are going to change all the names of streets and squares that remind us of the past. We will be starting this operation very soon.

2. We have set up a Morality police force, which is responsible for enforcing the application of Sharia law in the village. This applies to everyone, whether you are Muslim or not. We have put on the public pillar a list of things that you will have to put into practice. For example, we are making it compulsory for all women in the village to wear the veil. The council will be happy to explain all these measures to you.

3. Tomorrow evening at 8 pm we'll be meeting in the church square. Bring any Bibles or other Christian literature still in your homes. We will burn them on a large pyre. We'll remove all the hymnals, chairs and worship equipment from the church. The bells will be taken down in the next few days. The idea is to transform this place of worship into a mosque so that the Muslims of our village and the region can fulfil their religious duties with dignity.

4. Any further gatherings of Christians are now forbidden.

5. Any opposition to the policies of the "Love and Freedom" party will be severely punished.

I would also like to say that we have parted company with your former mayor. I have been elected by my council colleagues to replace him.

From now on, the new council will march as one behind the Love and Freedom party.

Ladies and gentlemen, today is a great day and I invite you to celebrate it together. Long live Freedom!

Many people applaud, but not all. I notice that several people haven't flinched. Perhaps they're aware of the danger of this 180° turn by the new council and regret having voted for it. I don't know, but I wouldn't be surprised.

A veiled woman approaches me with a determined look.

- So, Maurice, you came all the same?

M - Sorry, but who are you?

The woman takes off her sunglasses; it's Lucie!

L - So you recognise me?

M - Why are you wearing a headscarf? Have you become a Muslim?

L - I wear it to set an example, even though I'm not a Muslim, at least not for the moment. Sharia law is a good set of laws for disciplining a society. It's what we need to impose our programme of change. If I want people to obey, I have to do it myself.

M - I've always sensed a rebellious spirit in you, and now, from one day to the next, you're submitting to a discipline that isn't yours! I don't recognise you any more...

L - I've realised that if I want to bring about a profound change in society, I absolutely have to give up my little whims and follow the Party line.

Last July, I was in Marrakech, in a small hotel run by a couple of fervent Muslims. They gave me a very warm welcome and did everything they could to make my stay as comfortable as possible. They told

me several times about their religious community and their commitment to transforming society. We talked a lot about Islam and I have to admit that since then I have taken a different view of our Western society: it shows so many signs of decadence that sooner or later it's going to implode.

M - If I understand correctly, you favour Islam for our country?

L - Yes, definitely! I think that this religion can give our society a solid framework that will only benefit it.

I've also spoken a lot with Kemal, who has encouraged and reinforced me in this direction.

M - Ah! I wish you good luck; I don't share your choices at all!

L - Time will tell, we'll see who wins...

Disgusted, I decide to get away from all this hubbub, which makes me feel uncomfortable. I feel like I'm in a foreign country, but this 'foreign country' is here and has taken control of the village. And now it's too late to react; the die has been cast.

After all I'd heard about the plans to destroy the contents of the church and turn it into a mosque, I decide to go and warn Jacques.

Five minutes later, I enter the small living room where, in the space of a few days, I've had so many intense moments. I tell Jacques what's going on and watch him carefully. He says nothing and stares into space; a few tears roll down his cheeks. I try to imagine the distress of this friend who has always tried to "put the church in the middle of the village", despite his strong liberal convictions. The church was his place of work, the place where he met his parishioners on Sunday mornings or during the

week, the place where people in search of God often came to meditate, the place where weddings and funerals were celebrated. The bells rang out the hours and quarter hours, reminding the villagers of the presence of the church in the village and all that it could mean. And now this church was going to disappear!

J - I knew it had to happen, but not so quickly. Everything is happening at a dizzying pace.

M - What are you going to do now?

J - Some people in the village are in the middle of a spiritual search; I'm going to go with them, it's my duty as a pastor and I'm proud to do it, whatever it costs me. You'll see that, from now on, being a Christian is going to cost a lot. But no matter, the heavenly kingdom awaits us and we will have the joy of seeing the Lord face to face. This hope fills me with happiness.

M - I admire you, because I'm not there yet.

J - Maurice, I've already told you about the antichrist. I need to tell you a bit more. The rapture of the Church, very recently, has been like an aggravating factor in the progression of evil and will particularly favour the manifestation of this antichrist.

M - You still don't know who he is?

J - No, not yet! But he will reveal himself one day. No doubt in the near future.

M - How will we recognise him? Will he have a special name, a special brand?

J - The Bible tells us that he will be deceitful and a liar, an extraordinary seducer, capable of seducing all the crowds with astonishing prodigies of power. He will attack God directly and utter blasphemies against him. He will proclaim himself God. He will be

cruel and will eliminate all those who do not obey him unconditionally. He will have no laws except his own.

M - What we are experiencing today in the village is a small foretaste of what the antichrist will do?

J - Exactly! Over the last few decades, Christians have not been spared persecution, which has continued to grow. Now it will increase tenfold, so to speak. The same will happen to the Jews.

The prophet Daniel prophesied the following, probably about the antichrist:

He will speak words against the Most High, he will oppress the saints of the Most High, and he will hope to change the times and the law... (7.25)

M - Who are these saints?

J - After the rapture of the Church, thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit still present on earth, there will still be people who will be converted. Roseline, you and I are concrete examples of this. The antichrist will persecute them to death. This term no doubt also refers to the Jews who are faithful to God.

M - If I understand correctly, our life expectancy on this earth is very short.

J - Another significant fact: it seems that the antichrist will first seek to ally himself with Israel by a deceptive stratagem, then he will turn against that country and decide to attack it. When he has reached the height of his pride and power, he will lead a coalition of nations around Israel and gather all their armies in Palestine, with the aim of opposing the glorious coming of Christ. But then Christ will return to earth and intervene supernaturally to destroy the

antichrist and his armies. He will judge all those who have rejected him.

M - Does the Bible tell us where this antichrist will come from?

P - If I've understood correctly, several biblical texts call this antichrist the *King of the North*, or *Gog*, who comes from the land of *Magog*. This place seems to be either Turkey or Syria (or Iraq). It's not clear! The important thing is to understand that these prophecies primarily concern the Middle East and that it is from there that the antichrist should come. And in order to take control of the Muslim nations surrounding Israel, he is likely to be a Muslim himself, or at least to claim to be. I don't see how these nations would allow themselves to be ruled by a non-Muslim.

However, the spirit of the antichrist will act throughout the world. For my part, I am convinced that the best vector for propagating this spirit remains Islam, which is practised by more than one and a half billion Muslims. That's a huge number! All the militants are already in place, ready to act.

M - I'm impressed! And to think that all this is happening because our society has seen fit to get rid of God, his Son and the Church?

J - Yes! You're absolutely right! But now it's too late to turn back. However, for some there is still the possibility of believing and turning to Christ. But it's going to be much more difficult than before.

M - Thank you, Jacques, for these clarifications, which enlighten me and help me to understand what we're going through today.

What are you going to do tomorrow evening?

J - I'm going to keep my Bible, my wife's Bible and a few important books, which I'll hide carefully.

And then I'll give everything else away to show them that I obey their orders.

M - And what about the church?

J - I'll be watching this disaster from a distance. Do you want to come with me? I think I'll need your help.

M - Yes, I'd love to! I know a little spot out of sight where we can watch the church square. As you said at the beginning, we need this friendship to face up to the difficulties that come our way.

10. The "Night of Crystal"

21 August, 9 pm

As agreed, Jacques and I met in a small alleyway above the church. We both made sure no one was following us. I took Jacques to the house of my former colleague from the council, Marilou, who had disappeared during the great Rapture. I knew she was single and had no family, apart from a cousin who came to see her from time to time and who had also disappeared. So we're in the clear. We enter the garden and sit down on the terrace, set back a little so as not to be seen. From there, we have a bird's eye view of the church square.

The local authority employees are busy lighting the woodpile in the centre of the square. And already people are arriving, laden with books and other objects connected with the Church. These are thrown into the middle of the fire, which suddenly grows to an impressive height. For over an hour, one after another, people come to throw away their books. As the night progresses over the village, the shadows of those present become more pronounced and disturbing on the façade of the church and the neighbouring houses. Each Bible thrown into the fire is accompanied by a loud "bravo" shouted by the authorities, Party activists and the Morality police. These shouts, echoed by the crowd, only increase as

the number of books thrown into the fire increases. Some people have just started singing a song, which is taken up by the others. It's as if someone is exorcising a mysterious evil that has bewitched the village. Throwing these Bibles is a purifying act that will appease the inhabitants and deliver them from an evil spirit.

Suddenly, I see Lucie enter the church with other members of the council and the commune. A few minutes later, they emerge with the large Bible that was sitting on the table next to the pulpit. Some carry chairs, candles and hymnals; others have dismantled the organ pipes and are having fun simulating a fencing match. All this is thrown into the fire with a shout of victory. Some of the young people have taken stones and start smashing the church's stained glass windows, which are part of the canton's cultural heritage.

Jacques remains silent and watches the scene without flinching. Then, all of a sudden, he says to me:

J - Do you know what this reminds me of?

M - Crystal Night, on 9 November 1938 in Germany!

J - Yes, exactly! This outburst of violence marked the start of mass hostilities against the Jews. The more violence there is, the more it takes hold of people, who, somewhat in spite of themselves, only amplify it. Because it is done by everyone, it becomes excusable, it becomes part of everyday life and becomes commonplace. I wouldn't be surprised to see a similar phenomenon here.

M - I've read that Godless activists in Russia did the same thing in the 1930s.

How do you feel about this massacre?

J - I'm very sad. Not so much for the damage caused to the church, but above all because of the ignorance of all these people, who have been bewitched by manipulators, liars and criminals. The latter are just as much to be pitied, because they have allowed themselves to be seduced by the spirit of evil. We have to love one another.

M - Are you going to excuse them?

J - No. They have their share of responsibility, but we mustn't forget that behind all this lies Satan, the Prince of this world, to use Christ's expression. The mistake made by our fellow citizens is that they have refused to believe in the Divine Truth; in so doing, they have opened their hearts to lies. They have closed their minds to the Wisdom of God; and, believing themselves to be masters of their own destiny, they have in reality given their allegiance to the Prince of this world who manipulates them like puppets. But they don't realise it. This is how apostasy gradually comes about: people leave the faith to believe in themselves, but this leads them nowhere, except into the arms of the Evil One.

M - What are we going to do now?

J - Even if the future is extremely bleak for our world, there is a magnificent hope for born-again Christians, that of entering the celestial kingdom. My desire is that as many people as possible should still be able to enter; that's why I'm going to spare no effort to continue to speak about the Gospel to those around me. The Lord commands us to love all these people.

M - Do you know what you're risking? The new council has made it very clear that it is forbidden to talk about the Bible to other people. Offenders would be severely punished.

J - Yes, I know and I take the risks. I've met several people in the village who are not happy about this new situation and regret having voted for the "Love and Freedom" party. I'd love to tell them about the Lord, whom I really discovered personally the day after the great Rapture. Perhaps they will be more inclined to listen to me?

M - I admire your faith, I admire your love of your neighbour despite the current difficulties, I admire your obedience to the Lord. My hat's off to you!

J - You know, I'm not alone! I feel the Lord's presence in me at every moment, and that gives me astonishing energy. If only I'd been able to discover that kind of life when I started studying theology! But, as the saying goes, better late than never!

M - Yes, that's true for me too! And I feel like I'm living the best days of my life. It's really paradoxical to say that when everything around us is going downhill. Roseline tells me exactly the same thing. That time of sharing and prayer with you did her a world of good.

J - I'm very happy about that. She's taken an important step of faith. Saying that we forgive is a good start, but she still has a long way to go before that forgiveness is truly complete in the depths of her being. With the Lord, she'll get there!

M - Can I be of any help to you in your pastoral work?

J - No! That's very kind of you! I don't want to involve you in this dangerous ministry. Take good care of your wife, she needs you to get on with her new life.

M - Are you thinking of giving up your life?

J - Yes, of course! When I was a liberal pastor, I was very afraid of death and did everything to avoid talking about it. Now that fear has gone, and every day I say to the Lord: "You can take me back today if you want to". This gives me extraordinary freedom.

M - You're not afraid of dying any more?

J - No. Read the last two chapters of Revelation and you'll see a vivid description of what the heavenly kingdom can be like. It's really inspiring: there will be no more tears, no more pain, no more wickedness, no more sin, but only love, peace, joy, holiness... And above all the possibility of meeting the heavenly Father and Jesus face to face... and then myriads of people who have chosen to follow the Lord. What a feast that will be! When I read this, I rejoice in discovering this heavenly kingdom and so have no reason to be afraid of leaving this life. For the moment I'm staying here with joy and enthusiasm because the Lord has entrusted me with a mission, but when it's over, I'll leave with joy and peace.

M - Your faith impresses me...

J - There's nothing exceptional about it. You'll discover all that too...

M - Excuse me for changing the subject, but there's a question that's been nagging at me as I look at what's happened over the last three weeks: how is it that in our country, which is so well organised, with a political and judicial system that's been thought out and tested for a long time, a new party called "Love and Freedom " has suddenly been able to take power, and to do so in a quasi-democratic way? And how can it change the foundations of society without society reacting? How do you explain this?

J - Your question is a legitimate one! This is not the first time in history that a political and social regime has changed very quickly. One example springs to mind: the massacre of the Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994. The conflict had been brewing between Hutus and Tutsis for decades, with bloody clashes here and there. It took the assassination of the Rwandan President, a supporter of the Hutus, for the country to descend into horror overnight. A murderous madness took hold of a large part of the Hutu population. In the space of three months, 800,000 Tutsis, as well as moderate Hutus deemed traitors, were massacred. It is estimated that 80% of these massacres were carried out in the first month. This example shows just how quickly public opinion turned to violence. In the present situation, the "Love and Freedom" party didn't form overnight. It had certainly been in gestation for many months, in secret of course. The rapture of the Church was a catalyst that gave militant atheists and Islamists a tremendous opportunity to quickly occupy center stage and implement their political program. They took advantage of the surprise effect.

M - I understand that, but why did people vote massively for this party?

J - From what I've seen and heard, the people in our villages were stunned by the rapture of the Church. They had the impression that chaos was about to break out and that the end of the world was near. There was anguish everywhere, and quite legitimate anguish at that. And we know very well that in this kind of situation, a population does not hesitate to entrust the leadership of the country to an energetic man and a strong party, capable of reassuring the people with a well-structured

programme, even if it is dictatorial. In the midst of chaos and anguish, people are prepared to give up their laws and their freedom if they believe that the new leader will be able to get them out of trouble using his own methods.

M - Yes, you're right, and yet many people began to be disillusioned after the elections when they discovered the new party's real programme.

J - Yes, they realised that they had been seduced by fine promises, but that these were hiding very dark intentions. Unfortunately, it's too late to react! And that's very sad.

In the village square, people gradually disperse. What's left are local authority employees, who are responsible for looking after the fire, members of the local council, militants from the League and Islamists who are repeating the takbir: "Allahou Akbar".

M - Don't you find it surprising that the Islamists are taking centre stage in the village? The atheist members of the "Love and Freedom" party aren't very vocal!

J - I've said the same thing to myself. I think they're still very much part of the ideological leadership of the party, but they let the Islamists work on the ground, because it suits them. I agree with you: this cohabitation is unnatural.

I've seen enough. I'm going to bed.

M - I'll see you out.

As we approach the gateway to the parish house, Jacques looks down at the ground and immediately says to me when he sees a small piece of paper folded on the ground:

J - Here! Someone's been here while we've been away. When I closed the gate, I stuck this little piece of paper between the two railings.

Jacques goes to the front door and also finds a piece of paper on the floor. The door is locked.

J - When I closed the front door of the house, I put a discreet piece of paper in the slot. As it fell out, it means that someone had entered the house without my knowledge. And yet the door was locked. Can you come inside with me?

M - Did the vice squad come looking for compromising books? Did they find them?

J - I doubt it very much, because I've put everything in a very sophisticated hiding place. Let's have a look!

We go round the rooms. Nothing has been removed.

J - That's weird! The vase that used to be on the shelf by the window is now on the table in the centre of the living room. I'm absolutely sure I didn't move it...

I motion to Jacques to be quiet and follow me outside.

M - I wonder if they haven't broken into your house to bug it and spy on you. I've got a detector at home; I'll go and get it. Keep moving around the house as if you hadn't noticed anything. I'll be right back.

A few minutes later, I'm back with my device. We carefully examine all the walls and furniture in the rooms and find a microphone hidden in the vase on

the living room table. There's another one in the kitchen, in the bedroom and in the entrance hall.

I take Jacques aside and say to him softly:

M - That means they've been listening to all your conversations in the living room and know exactly who you've been talking to about the Lord. Do you usually pray aloud?

J - Yes!

M - Well, they know who you've been praying for! I suggest you carry on living as if we hadn't noticed. Don't see anyone at home and keep your voice down when you pray! Don't say anything on the phone that could harm you; your line is probably being tapped. Maybe you'd better switch off your mobile.

We part without saying anything, worried that the noose is tightening around us.

When we get home, I tell Roseline everything. She remains strong, but I can see that she's very worried, even if she doesn't want to show it.

We decide to examine the whole house with my wave detector. Fortunately, we don't find anything. From now on, it will be safer not to say anything incriminating on the phone. The two of us are beginning to distrust everything, even our home, which is supposed to be a haven of peace and privacy. It would be safer not to leave the house unattended. So it would be better if we took it in turns to go out.

So I decide to tell Roseline where I've hidden the USB stick on which I've put this manuscript. I think it's safer not to leave anything on my computer. This little hiding place is very cleverly designed in one of the beams in my office on the first floor.

M - If anything should happen to me, could you take this USB stick and send this manuscript to the people I've put on the mailing list? I'd like them to know what really happened. You'll see that I've included people from the village and the region, as well as people I know abroad, so that the information can't be suppressed.

11. The Resistance fighters

28 August.

Just as Roseline and I are doing the housework, the doorbell rings. A villager, whom I'll call Henri so as not to compromise him, asks me to walk him to his car. I put on my coat and follow him.

H - Mayor, I know that you don't belong to the new party and that you're opposed to it, I know that you were excluded from the executive council because of that and that you don't approve of their methods. I know you are honest, so I can trust you and ask for your opinion and perhaps your help on a very sensitive issue. Would you agree to give me some of your time?

M - Yes, of course! What can I do for you?

H - I suggest we take a little drive, it'll be safer. No one will be able to catch us.

We get into his car and Henri quickly takes the back roads to get us as far away from the villages as possible.

H - You probably know that I'm a retired army colonel. As a result, I've kept in close touch with my former colleagues; we've even set up a small think tank on the problems facing our society and the ways in which we can help. We see each other every week. These friends are loyal people whom I trust completely, and we have a great deal of freedom of speech between us.

We met yesterday and spent several hours analysing the situation in our villages, trying to understand how everything had changed so quickly and how the population had been almost forced to vote for the 'Love and Freedom' party. I'd say they've been won over.

I don't know if you've noticed, but some people are becoming disillusioned and bitterly regret having voted for this party. So there are resisters in our society who don't accept this new regime and want to turn back the clock.

M - Yes, I noticed that at the impromptu village festival on 20 August. Several people abstained from applauding the new mayor's speech. And among them I even saw some moderate Muslims that I knew well.

H - We believe it is our duty to resist this new movement by all means. We cannot accept them changing the laws in an undemocratic way and imposing a Sharia law that we categorically reject. This seizure of power is completely illegal; we have fallen into a veritable totalitarian regime.

M - May I ask what you intend to do?

H - Before answering your question in detail, it would be useful if I listed the various avenues we have explored.

Initially, we thought about political action, for example in the form of a referendum, but we soon realised that such action was no longer possible.

M - I made the same observation! They told me that the new councillors had been elected by the people and that there was nothing they could do about it. On the other hand, my ousting from the council was perfectly illegal; that's why they managed to force me to leave of my own free will.

H - That's outrageous! Believe me, a lot of people are missing you.

We then imagined a big demonstration in Bern to protest in front of the Federal Palace, but we very much doubt that such a call would be followed up. What's more, it would give the Party the opportunity to find out who their opponents were, so that they could eliminate them more effectively.

We have also considered mobilising the army and taking power. Firstly, it would be difficult to get all the military leaders to side with us. Secondly, since the Swiss Army is a militia army, we can't call for a general mobilisation and get the people to fight against those they may have voted for!

M - Your analysis is indeed correct.

H - The only option left to us is secret action.

M - What do you mean by that?

H - We are planning to create small secret commandos who will retaliate by force against any violent acts committed by the current government. From what we understand, the new government is prepared to use violence to eliminate opponents. This is why, for every murder committed by those in power, we will retaliate by assassinating a member of that same power.

M - What do you hope to achieve by such actions?

H - We think that these reprisals will make the new government think twice and dissuade them from committing crimes. They will realise that they don't have free rein to do as they please and that they are going to come up against strong resistance. And this resistance will be all the more worrying because it will be secret. So what do you think?

I don't know what to say. It's the first time I've found myself in a situation like this, where I have to quickly give an opinion that I feel will have major consequences. What wise advice can I offer? I understand perfectly well the despair of certain people who feel they've been cheated, but resorting to revenge is not a good solution. And unfortunately, legal remedies are no longer available. We've reached an impasse!

Let's try to get to the end of his reasoning!

M - I don't think the new government will be intimidated by such practices. On the contrary, it will be strengthened in its determination to break down all resistance and it will increase its repression even further.

You are heading down a slippery slope! Have you assessed the consequences of your actions? There may be mass executions to set an example. We saw this during the German occupation of France in the Second World War. For every German officer murdered by a French Resistance fighter, they chose civilians and shot them. The higher the rank of the officer, the more civilians were shot. Such executions were a powerful deterrent and kept the population terrified and submissive.

If you do this, the state will certainly mobilise the police and the army to restore order, and you won't be able to hold out against such a force. Remember that the State will do this at the express request of the people, who will prefer to submit to the new order rather than risk their lives.

H - I understand that, but if we are very well organised and wage a continuous battle, we can reverse the trend.

M - Instead, you're going to create a civil war and that'll be worse!

Eventually you'll be found and you'll all be executed. In reality, you won't have done anything positive to solve the current problem. In fact, you'll have made it worse by strengthening the power of the Party.

H - As you can imagine, your arguments have been carefully analysed in our discussion; I confess that we have not yet reached unanimity on this subject. That's why we're looking for opinions from outside our military group.

Your arguments show a certain logic, and deep down I agree with some of them. But on the other hand, we can't just sit back and do nothing. We have to act for the sake of our children and their descendants.

M - I understand your bitterness and I share it entirely, but before launching such an action, we need to weigh up the forces involved and foresee the long-term consequences. In my opinion, your initiative has no chance of succeeding in the medium and long term. If our country were occupied by a foreign army, you wouldn't stand a chance. In this case, it's even worse, because you will have to fight against a false ideology that has seduced our own citizens. You can't destroy it with weapons!

H - What would you do if you were me?

M - I would refrain from any violent action. On the other hand, I would suggest that you go underground and set up material and psychological aid for all those who fall victim to the system.

H - What do you have in mind?

M - Some people will be wanted by the police; we'll have to help them hide or flee elsewhere. It

would be good to set up an intelligence service to find out what the police are up to.

Some people will be stripped of their possessions and thrown out of their homes; they will need shelter and food. Some will lose their jobs and will no longer be able to live; their bank accounts will be frozen and they won't even be able to buy enough to survive; they will need your help.

All this requires a great deal of organisation, which will be all the more complex because it will have to remain secret.

H - I admit that we hadn't thought about all that. I'm interested in your proposals.

M - I'm delighted that your group exists. As you're all military, you're used to discipline and you're very good at organising large-scale actions. Create an effective underground network throughout the country! You can become key people in this kind of aid work. And your action will be far more useful than a violent response! What's more, every morning you'll be proud to look in the mirror: instead of spilling blood, you'll have done good.

H - I wasn't expecting such a response from you. I was hoping to get you to join our group, but I think your words of wisdom will be much more useful to us. I'll talk to my friends and let you know what we decide.

12. Jacques, the martyr

20 October

A month has gone by since the famous " Night of Crystal " in Privet. I've watched the emergency measures taken by the new council being implemented. They have really been working hard and have kept the promises they made public.

Several streets have been renamed. The names of former personalities have been removed and replaced by the names of revolutionaries in line with the Party. It's ridiculous! I watched all this from a distance, as if I didn't care any more.

The Morality Police were reinforced. Every day, these men, two by two (one Godless and one Islamist), walk around the village, scrutinising everything. They monitor people's comings and goings, reprimand women who do not wear a veil, forbid gatherings of more than three people, and check gardens, garages and places likely to host forbidden meetings. Alcohol is now banned throughout the commune and even outside. Other communes have taken similar measures. In a wine-growing region like ours, this means a lot of people are out of work. Pork has disappeared from shop shelves. There are now only halal products.

I noticed that I was regularly followed when I went shopping. It became more and more complicated to avoid their surveillance.

Despite this, Jacques and I still managed to see each other several times. We would each take our own car and, a few kilometres further on, Jacques would leave his car at the station car park and get into mine. We had plenty of time to chat as we drove along. Of course, I made sure there were no hidden microphones in my car and no beacons to indicate my GPS position.

It was a much-appreciated moment of freedom, during which we talked about the essentials. Jacques spoke to me at length about the return of Christ; he read me the prophetic texts announcing it in the Old and New Testaments. Thanks to these references written on a little slip of paper, I was able to reread these magnificent texts with Roseline at home.

It's true that, in the moral darkness that hangs over our country, talking about Christ's return to earth brings us a magnificent light. Knowing that he will return to establish his reign of justice reassures us. We are well placed to see that when humans want to establish their own laws, according to their own criteria, they create nothing good. They want to strive for freedom, but they get bogged down in measures that imprison the individual, both physically and psychologically.

Jacques taught me hymns. We sang them several times until I knew them by heart. It's a joy to be able to praise God together.

A week ago, Roseline and I agreed with Jacques to meet on a small country lane. When we arrived, Jacques was accompanied by a veiled woman. As she got into the car, she took off her veil: it was Germaine, our neighbour! She told us all about her spiritual journey since 1 August. What a joy to hear! We savoured this precious moment as if we were at a

festive meal. The four of us were able to pray and sing together! And to think that just a few months ago, we could have met in complete freedom at home! The fact that our meeting was illegal gave it a special spice, and we enjoyed it even more.

Jacques told us that other people in the village had converted to Christ. So we hatched a plan to meet in secret. One of these people had a very old cellar which opened onto a covered passageway through a narrow corridor. This narrow passage is rarely used because it's dark and the floor is very uneven, which can lead to falls. We agreed to meet there. We were each to come at five-minute intervals, make sure we weren't followed, knock once on the door and then come back ten seconds later when the door was open. We were surprised to find people we'd never thought of. I don't want to reveal their names so as not to put them in danger.

Jacques read us an exhortation from Christ in the New Testament to persevere to the end, whatever difficulties we encounter, while remaining prudent and cunning like foxes.

Then we prayed together. It was the first time I had prayed in a larger group, and I could hardly express myself, so moved was I. We spoke very softly, fearing that our voices would be heard through some kind of air vent. We all knew that the Lord was in our midst. He was in our hearts and his life was overflowing with joy, peace and love.

The few services I attended as mayor, representing the local authorities, seemed long and boring. And here, in this cellar, we were experiencing something exceptional, as if we were outside of time. Two hours later, we decided to go our separate ways.

We prayed for each other and each of us left at regular five-minute intervals.

And then, during that month, I still left the house, walking through the streets of the village where I was born and grew up. Every street corner brought back memories, and I was very grateful to the One who had kept me there. I enjoyed making these rounds when I was mayor. It was a good opportunity to meet my fellow citizens and chat with them. They would tell me about their joys and sorrows, and I would try to help them as best I could. But since August, I could see that people were running away from me. As soon as they saw me approach, they either went home or turned their backs on me, as if they hadn't seen me. What a contrast with the warmth of the contacts I've developed in this new family of Christians! A few weeks ago, if I had seen these people reject me, I would have been irritated and bitter, but I got over it and found myself praying inwardly for them. It was the first time I'd done it, and my outlook changed. Instead of cursing them, I blessed them in the name of Christ.

One day, two members of the Morality police, whom I didn't know, stopped me in the street and asked for my papers. They looked at me for a long time, then stared at me as if I were a criminal. Without saying a word, they let me go. Was it a formal check or intimidation?

Yesterday morning Victor came to see me on the sly. I didn't recognise him in his disguise: he'd put on a hat, false glasses and a false moustache. When I asked who was behind the door, he replied in a low voice: "It's Victor". Once the door was open, he rushed in, afraid of being seen in our house.

M - Victor! What a surprise! What brings you here?

V - I'm sorry, but I've got rather bad news for you. Can I speak freely?

M - Yes, last night I checked the whole house with my detector. You can talk to me. Roseline has gone shopping.

V - Yesterday, I overheard a conversation between Kemal and Lucie at the local authority office. They were congratulating each other on the efficiency of the Morality police in eliminating two opponents of the 'Love and Freedom' party. These murders were carried out in secret and nobody in the public knew about them.

M - So the purge has already begun. It's horrible! And it will continue until all resistance is broken.

V - And that's not all: in another nearby village, whose name I haven't heard, the Islamists beheaded a Muslim woman who had become a Christian. They found her reading the Bible, sitting on a low wall in the vineyard. They tortured her until she confessed that she had become a Christian. They immediately beheaded her. And what's worse, they did it in a nearby street, in front of people passing by.

M - It's horrible! They've lost all restraint. They've arrogated to themselves the right of life and death, and they kill without hesitation.

V - We're heading for a lot of bloodshed. They are establishing a regime of terror! And all to defend an ideology!

M - The terrible thing about all this is that human life is worth nothing in the face of their ideology. And even their own lives are worth nothing, because they are prepared to sacrifice themselves for their cause.

V - It's true! I heard Kemal recite a sura to Lucie, 9.111 if I understood correctly: Allah promises paradise to those who kill and are killed for him.

M - That makes it easier to understand their determination.

Victor left me in a hurry. I stood there for a long time without saying anything, unable to sort out the thoughts that were racing through my head. Why had all this happened? Why had the established order been overturned in such a short space of time? Why didn't the politicians see it coming? And if they did, why didn't they do something about it? I blame myself too, because I didn't really understand the real aims of the Islamists and I turned a blind eye to their subtle strategies.

How did our population allow this to happen with little or no protest? Why did so many Christians open their arms to political Islam in our country, without understanding the real motivations of those promoting it?

I've decided not to mention this to Roseline, to spare her. Will I be able to hide my confusion from her?

Today, on this beautiful day of 20 October, we sat out on the terrace to enjoy the beautiful autumn days. What a privilege to be able to enjoy all the blessings that nature so generously offers us! I've always been aware of this, but even more so now that I know who created it.

We feasted on two beautiful trout from the lake.

Meals have become a great opportunity to share with Roseline. Whereas over the last few years we'd fallen into a kind of routine where we didn't have

much to say to each other, now we're rediscovering the pleasure of sharing our feelings, our thoughts, our memories, our intimate lives, which have taken on a different tone since they've been illuminated by a different light. We rediscover each other as we did when we first met. We've rediscovered the pleasure of laughing at nothing, of teasing each other, of surprising each other with little gestures, in short, of looking at each other as if we were meeting them for the first time.

R - It would be nice if we could work together in the garden, because we're way behind schedule. The leaves didn't wait for us to fall.

M - It's true that our lives have been completely turned upside down. Maybe we'll be able to get back to normal.

Here comes a long ring of the doorbell. I get up to see who could be ringing so inopportunistically. I find Germaine, our neighbour, distraught and overcome with emotion:

G - The vice squad came to arrest Pastor Jacques this morning and some men are beating him up in the village square. Come quickly!

I put on a jacket and bring Roseline up to speed, then run off with Germaine. Victor's story from yesterday morning comes back to haunt me and only makes me more worried.

In the square, a crowd has gathered around a small group of Islamists. Kemal, the new mayor, stands on a crate and holds a microphone in his hand. He effortlessly silences the crowd.

K - Ladies and gentlemen, dear fellow citizens, you are aware of the drastic changes that your new

council is putting in place. You approved them by voting in unison for the members of the "Love and Freedom" party. You have given us the green light to follow this new policy.

You will remember that we banned all gatherings of Christians, if there were any new ones, all Bible readings and all Christian proselytism. The former pastor of our village disobeyed the new law by continuing to spread the Christian message to some of the villagers. He read to them from the Bible and urged them to believe in his God. People followed him and even two Muslims abandoned Islam to follow his religion. This is a sacrilege that we cannot tolerate. We warned him once, but he ignored our warning and continued to talk about Christ. That's why the Council decided to put him out of his misery and silence him forever by putting an end to his life. He is an enemy of the new order! He's a traitor who deserves to die! He will be an example to all those who would like to do the same.

Several Islamists in the crowd shout: "Death to the traitor", as if he had committed the worst of crimes.

I see Jacques, his face bloodied, his hands tied behind his back. How can I help him? What are my chances of success against a mob manipulated by people prepared to kill? Suddenly, I hear myself shouting loudly:

M - This is an outrage! You don't have the right to put a man to death for such a reason! Where is the justice in our country? There's been no trial! You're murderers!

Then I see Jacques turn to me and give me a benevolent smile, the noble smile of someone who is far above the fray and no longer affected by what is happening to him. Then I see him raise his eyes to heaven as if he were seeing something, or someone, extraordinary. And his smile becomes even brighter.

A hand grabs the back of Jacques' neck and violently throws him to the ground. The executioner sits on his victim's back and pulls out a long knife to slit his throat. In just a few strokes, he has him decapitated. At this point, some Islamists start shouting "Allahou Akbar... Allahou Akbar". They take Jacques' head and place it on a pole, which they triumphantly carry around the crowd, chanting the same refrain.

I am stunned by this horrific scene; I feel so bad that I have to run away. My legs give out and I'm forced to sit down on a low wall.

When I open my eyes, I see Victor talking to me as if he were miles away:

V - Maurice, wake up... Maurice... it's me, Victor.

I don't know how long I've been out of touch, but I feel like I've come back from beyond the grave. But what happened? Then I see that horrible scene again, and I start shaking again.

V - Maurice, you've got to get out of here or they'll come and take you too.

Victor accompanies me to the fountain. This way I can wash my face, which gives me a good boost.

M - We mustn't be seen together. You can leave me now, I'm going home on my own.

I don't dare go home looking like this. I'd risk completely panicking Roseline. Besides, I need to be alone to pray and digest all this, if I can. I decide to go back to the little bench in Georges' vineyard. That's where I'm at peace. His little hut protects me from prying eyes.

Seeing all these vines starting to change colour, these beautiful, sun-drenched soils, all makes me feel good, but in fact I see them without seeing them because I'm so absorbed in what I've just experienced. It all happened so quickly and so violently that I still can't understand that I've just lost my best friend, a brother who opened his heart to me and led me to the faith, a man who showed me how a courageous and faithful Christian lives. Sadly, our friendship only lasted a few weeks.

- Lord, why did you allow this to happen? Didn't you love Jacques? He still wanted to tell several people in the village about you... who's going to look after them now? Was his mission really over? We still need his friendship, his advice, his wisdom, his knowledge of you and of the Bible.

My heart is so heavy that I can no longer pray.

As I reach into my pocket for a handkerchief to wipe away my tears, I feel a folded piece of paper. It's a little note that Jacques slipped into my letterbox the day after the church was ransacked. I read it and put it in my jacket pocket.

Here's what it says:

Dear Maurice,

Like you, I was shocked by what happened last night in the church square. There is indeed much to be discouraged about, and yet we must lift up our heads and continue our journey.

Here are two words from Jesus that are important for all those who really want to follow him:

John 15:20: A servant is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my word, they will also keep yours.

Luke 14:27: Whoever does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

You will soon understand the full meaning of this.

Warmly,

Jacques

It's a sobering message, and on rereading it, I'm beginning to understand its meaning.

When he wrote this, Jacques knew full well what awaited him, and he was prepared to face it. I can still hear his words: carrying your cross means accepting to die because of your faith in Christ.

When Jacques told me this, I wasn't ready to hear the message and I refused to take it on board. Now I understand its full significance. I can draw a parallel between Jesus and him: Jesus fully accepted the path his Father was asking him to follow, he was persecuted, he suffered, he carried his cross on the

way to his execution, he was crucified... and all because of us and for us. Jacques was a faithful disciple of Christ, he fully accepted the path that the Lord asked him to follow, he was persecuted and he died, beheaded, without having been given a fair trial.

This sheds a different light on my friend's atrocious death. The Lord did not abandon him and he is not going to abandon me. This thought becomes a certainty that penetrates deep into my heart. My accusation to God no longer has any foundation, because the reality is quite different.

Despite my tears, I feel soothed. I feel as if I've woken up from a nightmare and come back to reality. I'll never be able to forget what happened, but my emotions no longer overwhelm me to the point of sinking. A new inner strength has taken over and is helping me to pick myself up and carry on.

Suddenly I can't wait to get back to Roseline. She must be really worried.

At home, I find my wife praying, our Bible on her lap. She looks at me sadly and asks:

R - He's dead, isn't he?

M - Yes, it was terrible, they decapitated him and carried his head on a pole through the crowd shouting "Allahu Akbar". I've never seen anything like it.

R - As I prayed, I realised that he was going to die.

I also tell her about the smile he gave me and the look he raised to heaven. I tell her about my confusion, my fainting spell, then that moment of

revolt that turned into a revelation in Georges' vineyard.

We stare at each other in a long silence, because we don't know what to say. Even though we are both certain that the Lord is walking beside us, we grieve at the loss of a very dear friend in whom we had placed all our trust and on whom we relied.

13. A light in the night

23 October

For the three days following Jacques' murder, we stayed cloistered in our house, the shutters barely ajar. We were afraid to go out and be attacked by people who had clearly become hostile to us. The proof was in the inquisitive looks of several people passing in front of our house and taking the time to spy on us. Some were pointing at us while talking to their friends and family, others were raising their fists in our direction.

All our lives we've worked on all fronts to defend our commune and improve the lot of its inhabitants, and now we're no longer welcome, we're pariahs and enemies to be hated and fought.

This morning we reread the Beatitudes, the famous first speech of Jesus recounted in Matthew's Gospel. We were particularly struck by verses 11 and 12 of chapter 5:

Blessed will you be when they revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil about you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be glad, because your reward in heaven will be great; for this is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

That's exactly what we experience! God's presence in our hearts keeps us in peace and joy,

even if, in our relationships with the outside world, we have serious reasons to worry.

Noon

The doorbell rings. To avoid unannounced and malicious intrusions into our house, we have decided to systematically observe visitors through the small peephole. It's Germaine, bringing us flowers! We open the door wide and welcome her.

G - I'm glad to see you again. For three days I've been wondering whether you'd left, and then last night I saw a bit of light.

M - How have you been since Jacques died?

G - It was terrible! And then ... I saw his smile just before he died and I said to myself that if a Christian can die like that, smiling and looking up to Heaven in such peace, it's because he has a real relationship with God.

We invite Germaine to eat with us. Sharing a meal is not forbidden by the new law, and it doesn't prevent us from talking about the essentials. We share our experiences and what we have learnt from Jacques and from our readings in the Bible. Germaine tells us how much she appreciates spending this time with us.

Three hours later, before leaving, we decide to pray together. Unfortunately, Jacques is no longer here to lead this time of prayer, but I take the plunge... We once again experience the joy of fraternal communion and communion with Christ.

After Germaine's departure, we're asking ourselves a lot of questions. Are we going to take over in some way from Jacques? Are we called to bring together several Christians and form a house church? Do we have a ministry of welcome? Inviting someone over for a meal is a way of creating a warmer, more intimate bond. These exciting prospects give us a little hope and courage.

Germaine's visit was a real light in the darkness.

Watching the news and reading the papers are the only ways we have of finding out what's going on outside our house.

On this evening's news, we learn with astonishment that the UN has decided to change the Christian calendar, known as the Gregorian, which places the year 1 in the year of Christ's birth, and to replace it with a new calendar that would begin on the date of the great Rapture. Yet another way of wiping the slate clean of the past, and in particular of everything to do with Christianity. This measure still has to be approved by parliaments, but the European Parliament is in favour of the change.

I immediately think of what Jacques was telling me: there will soon be a system of global governance that will want to change the times and the law. We could understand what it meant to change the law, but we wondered about the idea of changing the times. Do we have an application here? Perhaps.

We are saddened to discover that the whole world is changing at breakneck speed, and in the same direction as our village. Everything is being turned upside down, and what has been gained with such painstaking effort over the centuries is being overturned with disconcerting ease. How can people

tolerate such transformations? It seems that the number of suicides has risen sharply and that many people are suffering mental breakdown because their points of reference are disappearing.

What's more, we're bombarded by television reports of ecological disasters all over the world: fires, floods, tsunamis, storms, earthquakes... It seems to us that their intensity and number have increased dramatically, as if nature were also on the rampage.

It's no coincidence that all this is happening; our humanity is responsible for it. Jacques was telling me that it would be enough for humans to repent of their sins and turn to God for divine blessings to once again rain down on the earth and transform it. But nobody wants to repent!

24 October. A strange visit

This morning a lady rings our doorbell. She says her name is Irène and she's a friend of Jacques the pastor. She wants to talk to us.

We let her in and sit her down in the living room.

M - Are you a friend of Jacques? He's never mentioned you.

I - Oh, you know, Jacques was a very modest man. He didn't like talking about himself.

I was also friends with his wife and his two daughters, Micheline and Françoise.

R - Did you know Micheline and Françoise?

I - Yes, we were in the same group helping young people in the region.

R - Ah!

M - What was the purpose of your visit?

I - I did my catechism with Jacques and I've never been very assiduous. For the last three weeks, I've been asking myself a lot of questions about my faith, and when I saw you defending Jacques before he was put to death, I thought you might be able to help me on my spiritual journey.

Then I see Roseline rush to her feet, stand behind Irène and shake her head at me.

I know from experience that my wife has an excellent nose for trouble, so I decide to be on my guard.

M - You know, I defended Jacques because everyone has the right to a fair trial under the laws of our country. This was not the case for Jacques and it's a scandal. So I didn't hesitate to say it loud and clear.

I'm naturally very observant, and I notice that Irène is looking carefully at the living room table and the bookcase, as if she's looking for something.

I - What was your relationship with Jacques? I think you were very close?

M - Jacques was an excellent pastor in our village and we often worked together on social projects involving the church and the local authority. We liked each other.

I - Tell me, I'd love to read the Bible. Do you have a Bible I could borrow?

M - Since you've done your catechism, surely you must have a Bible at home?

I - Er... no! Perhaps Jacques gave you his Bibles?

M - You know it's forbidden under the new rules to have a Bible in the house.

I - Yes, I know that, but no one else will know.

I stare at her, she looks increasingly embarrassed. She reaches into her pocket and pulls out her phone.

I - Excuse me, I've just had a message.

M - Nothing serious?

I - Yes, my mother's just fallen in the street; I've got to go and help her. Excuse me, I have to go.

Irène leaves our house in a hurry. I immediately say to Roseline:

M - Put on your coat, a scarf and sunglasses and follow her discreetly. It'll be easier for you to go unnoticed than me. I'd like to know where she's going.

A few minutes later, Roseline returns triumphant:

R - I followed her from a distance. At the end of the street, she had a meeting with Lucie, your former colleague from the local council. They left laughing.

M - Oh! It's getting worse.

R - You saw: she betrayed herself by talking about Jacques' two daughters; the second is not called Françoise, but Florence. If they had really collaborated, she couldn't have been unaware of it.

M - I noticed that too! What bothered me was the subtle, cunning way she scrutinised our living room. I'm sure now that she wanted to know if we had a Bible. What's more, I'm convinced she didn't receive a message. She used this pretext to leave us without losing face.

R - You've done well. With what she's seen or heard, she has no reason to suspect us.

M - I noticed that she paid particular attention to Millet's Angelus, above the little chest of drawers. If she knew about this painting, she might have wondered why we hadn't put it on the fire in front of the church, since it shows a young peasant couple stopping work to pray. More likely, she didn't know what it was and was trying to understand its meaning. It's true that the church in the distance is very small and faded.

R - Do you want to take it out of the living room?

M - No! My grandparents bought this reproduction from the Louvre on a trip to Paris. They were very proud of it! I can still hear my grandfather saying: "You see, Maurice, this painting is magnificent because it shows us how to work and live humbly on this earth under God's watchful eye. We are the ones who prepare the land to plant the seed

and wait for it to bear fruit. We are the ones who toil to harvest and care for it. And yet, without the Creator, our efforts would be in vain. The earth does not belong to us, the water comes to us from the sky in its own time, and the sun warms it all. So we have good reason to thank God for all his blessings!"

My grandfather spoke of this with such simplicity and conviction that his message made a deep impression on me. But it's only now that I understand its full meaning.

R - It's amazing that this painting has remained in the same place for so many decades!

M - It's true! Neither my parents nor ourselves had the idea of removing it. It was handed down to us with the house!

R - Over the last two months, I've often looked at it, very moved, thinking of your grandparents who were always so grateful, and of us who have been living in the same spirit for a short time.

In the evening, in my little office.

I replay in my head all the events of the last three days. What are we going to do with our lives? We go through ups and downs.

When I look at what's happening in the world around us, I feel like I don't belong here any more. Roseline and I have thought about leaving this village and going to stay with cousins in Italy. There, at least, no one would threaten us. But it's not certain! Our cousins will soon realise that we've become Christians and they'll turn us in for fear of compromising themselves with us.

We know of no country where Christian worship is protected. They all follow this merciless movement to destroy everything that has to do with the Christian faith. How could such a movement of hatred go global? It's incomprehensible!

And then, on the other hand, there are people here in the region who are seeking God and who need help. For their sake alone, shouldn't we stay and help them?

The doorbell rings

Well! Who could be ringing at 11 pm?

I bent down through the window and see five men. I don't know what they want, but I've got a bad feeling about it. I hide my USB key; you never know...

Postscript by Roseline

Allow me to add something to Maurice's story.

The night before last, five men from the Morality police came to get Maurice and put him in their car. Two men stayed in the house and searched it from top to bottom. They found our Bible, but fortunately they didn't find the USB stick.

Victor sneaked in this morning to tell me that Maurice had been shot in the head yesterday.

I'm in despair. Victor urged me to get as far away from the village as possible, as I was likely to be arrested and tried too. He told me that he was going to leave too.

Maurice's diary will be sent to everyone on the list he gave me.

I'm leaving the house, but I don't know where to go. Germaine also felt threatened and wanted to leave with me. We're distraught, but not despondent, because we can count on the Lord to be with us.

Attached is a summary that Jacques sent us about the return of Christ. This text really encouraged us and helped us to lift our heads and strengthen our hope. I'd like you to read it too. Yes, one day soon Jesus will return and destroy all the forces of evil that have opposed him. He will reign with justice and fairness, in peace, joy and love.

In anticipation of such a kingdom, we are ready to go on living.

14. The letter of Jacques on the return of Christ

Dear Maurice, dear Roseline,

As I told you, after my conversion I enthusiastically began reading my wife's books about the return of Jesus Christ to earth. Before, I didn't believe in it and now I read the prophecies about it with a completely different perspective.

I've spoken to you about it several times, but I thought it would be useful to give you in writing the little summary I've made. I was thinking of giving this teaching at our next prayer meeting with all the others, but I have a feeling that won't be possible. So I'm passing it on to you so that you can share it with the rest of the group. Many thanks in advance!

I've also included the biblical references so that you can look them up together, bearing in mind that you need to be very careful when interpreting these texts. Jesus himself said that he knew neither the day nor the hour of his return. Only God, his Father, knows. So I'll tell you what I think I've understood.

Since the rapture of the Church has already taken place, we are probably in the home stretch leading up to the coming of Christ. As I have already told you, the antichrist has yet to manifest himself fully and act in broad daylight.

How many months or years before the great day of Christ's return to earth? I don't know, but I'm convinced that our generation will see it. All the more reason to be ready.

Our weather services are capable of predicting the arrival of a tornado a few hours or even a few days in advance; no one will be able to do the same with Christ's return to earth. He will come like a thief! So let's be ready at all times!

However, the Bible gives us some warning signs that I'd like to point out here.

Since Jesus will return to Jerusalem, we must look to Israel, because before Christ's return several events must take place in that country.

The return of the Jews to the Promised Land

This return began as early as the end of the 19th century and increased considerably after the Second World War. With anti-Semitism on the increase and some nations losing support for Israel, the persecuted Jews will have no other option but to return to Israel. Undoubtedly, the rapture of the Church will further precipitate matters, as Christians are no longer there to pray for their Jewish brothers and sisters and support their cause.

The judgement of Israel. The veil falls

Before returning to judge the Gentile nations, the Lord tested his Church in various ways and made a selection before removing it. He also tested his people Israel and will judge them again, allowing them to be attacked by the nations around them (Zechariah 14.2). I'll leave you to read these texts, which, I confess, frighten me. They are not easy to understand: in fact, some of the prophecies have already been partially fulfilled, but they will only be fully fulfilled in the near future. So it's hard to tell the difference. Other prophecies have not yet been fulfilled; they are obviously easier to place in time.

Why does God announce such a judgement of his people? For one simple reason: many Jews have returned to Israel without having returned to God or to Jesus Christ. Zionism was a nationalist movement, not a spiritual one, and the vast majority of Jews who have returned to Israel no longer have the faith of their fathers.

The prophet Daniel seems to be saying that divine judgement will end when the strength of the holy people is broken (Daniel 12.7). Then the people will repent and turn to Christ! The text from Zechariah expresses this in moving terms:

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great

as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo (12.10-11).

The Jews will then have a special revelation by the Spirit of God and will understand that Jesus, the one they pierced with the help of the Romans over two thousand years ago, is truly their Lord and Saviour, the Messiah they have been waiting for. It will be painful for them to realise that they have missed out on so many blessings for over two thousand years. Their repentance and recognition of Jesus as the Messiah will have extraordinary consequences:

- first of all for themselves, since they will regain their place as eldest sons in the kingdom of God, and a place as spiritual "leaders" throughout the world ;

- for the Church, which will be fully reunited with its elder brother at the heavenly Father's table (the parable of the two lost sons in Luke 15.11-32 brings this to mind);

- and for the world, which will be able to benefit from all the spiritual riches of this people!

The judgement of the nations

God said to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you" (Genesis 12.3). These words will apply right up to the end! When the Lord delivers his people, he will call to account all the nations that have joined forces against Israel. Here are some impressive texts:

For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land... (Joel 3.1-2).

It's truly amazing: God himself will incite the nations to come together to attack Israel. They will think they can get rid of Israel, that heavy stone for all the peoples (Zechariah 12.3), but just when they think they have achieved their goal, the Lord himself will appear and change the course of the battle.

This is what Zechariah prophesies:

Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward (14.3-4).

In fact, God will summon these nations to judgement. He will condemn all those who have insulted and arrogantly treated God's people (Zephaniah 2.9-11; Zechariah 14.12-15). He will judge the nations that have wrongfully appropriated the land of Israel as their own, that have swallowed it up and laid it waste... in order to plunder its pastures (Ezekiel 36.1-6).

Some authors I have read go even further in interpreting these prophecies; I confess that I hesitate to venture down a path that still seems uncertain to me.

As we experienced a few weeks ago, the rapture of the Church took place in the twinkling of an eye, without anyone noticing. The return of Christ, on the other hand, will be obvious to everyone! Jesus himself told his disciples:

Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matthew 24.30).

We could say that this return will be earth-shattering, since it will apparently trigger the opening of an immense geological fault that runs through Jerusalem. As we saw earlier, it will be earth-shattering for all the nations that will come to besiege Israel and will be defeated. It will be shattering for the antichrist, who will be destroyed forever.

The question is: what will happen after the return of Christ?

I confess that I have some difficulty in seeing this clearly, because the opinions of theologians differ.

- Some (called "amillennialists") think that Christ will judge the nations: the dead will rise and be judged with the living. Then a new earth and new heavens will be formed. Christ will hand over to his heavenly Father the Kingdom that his Father has entrusted to him for more than two thousand years

(1 Corinthians 15.24-28). It will be an eternal Kingdom of joy for all who have been judged worthy to share in it.

- Others (the so-called "premillennialists") understand Christ's return as the beginning of a particular and transitional period of a thousand years, called the millennium. I don't know whether this thousand years should be taken in a literal or symbolic sense. In any case, it will be a period during which Christ will personally reign on earth with all those who have recognised him as king during their lifetime. The Bible does say that Christ will return with all his angels (2 Thessalonians 1.7; Matthew 16.27, 25.31). But that's not all: the apostle Paul says that Christians of all times will also return with Christ, as he wrote to the Colossians: When Christ, our life, appears, then you too will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3.4). Paul is talking here about Christians who have recognised Jesus as their Lord and have done God's will on earth.

This period of a thousand years will one day come to an end and give way to the eternal and perfect reign in which all forms of sin will have disappeared.

I have a slight preference for this second understanding of the return of Christ and his reign on earth, even though I still have a lot of questions! What will be the role of resurrected Christians during this reign? Will they have new tasks in the administration of the earth?

The end of chapter 14 of Zechariah clearly shows the role of Israel in the world. This people will be like a light for the nations and, in Jerusalem, the nations will come to worship the Lord.

Jerusalem will finally be safe, people will be able to settle there and it will no longer be threatened with destruction (Zechariah 14.11). The whole earth will enjoy rest and peace; songs of joy will break out everywhere (Isaiah 14.3-8).

There you have it, my dear friends, a few things to help us raise our heads and not lose hope, even if the darkness around us is getting thicker and thicker.

Of course, I remain at your disposal to discuss them in person. It's always a pleasure to see you again.

Warmly in the name of Jesus,

Jacques

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 set about summarising the four voluminous commentaries by Frédéric Godet (1812-1900), an eminent theologian from Neuchâtel who had a great influence in his day. 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 even more time to writing:

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

Christ en moi : qui fait quoi? (Christ in me: who does what?) 2018, recounts the author's quest for a healthy and responsible relationship with Christ.

Pourquoi l'Europe s'ouvre-t-elle à l'islam? (Why is Europe opening up to Islam?) 2021, attempts to understand why Europe has opened up so easily to Islam since the Second World War.

Homo sapiens and the spiritual Revolution, 2023, begins by showing that the Bible is not incompatible with the theory of evolution, provided we read the texts of Genesis with a different eye, without betraying the biblical truth. The book goes

on to describe the many divine attempts to transform animal man into spiritual man.

PDFs of most of these books can be obtained free of charge from the author's website:

www.etiennebovey.com

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Etienne Bovey
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