



TRUE  
HUMANITY

Looking at  
our desire for material  
things, love, and  
human solidarity

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# Contents

Introduction	1
Faith in Oneself	5
Human Love	23
Parenthood	36
Knowledge of Death	50
Creative Man	70
The Two Options	92
Ideological Belief	98
Faith in God	115
Faith and Ideological Belief in God	136
Faith and Mission	151
Spiritual Sonship and Fatherhood	167
Solidarity with Society and Human Communication	191
Expectation and Search in the Spiritual Life	211

# Introduction

At a time like the present, when all the values that have in the past given meaning to life are being called radically into question, our most urgent task is to look for firm ground so that we can go forward in confidence. If we do not find it, our revolt against the moral laws that have been imposed on us in the form of social or religious taboos will lead us to give up all the rules of life and reduce us to the slavery of non-conformity. The less we are aware of the part that we are playing in this process of revolt, the more we will be enslaved by it.

There can be no doubt that we will ultimately find this basis for judgment and decision in ourselves. This discovery is also necessary for us if we are not simply to be moved passively since, after all, everything that we are able to experience as persons depends on our intelligence, which enables us to interpret that human experience, and our critical understanding, which makes it possible for us to accept it honestly. Without this, we are only capable of reacting spontaneously and admittedly sincerely to our experience and, even when that spontaneity and sincerity do not occur successively, they only imitate authentic reality, because their roots are too shallow.

This approach is not easy. If we follow it we must be very tenacious, recollected and reflecting. We must dissociate ourselves from the powerful influences of everyday activity. We must understand human life on the basis of our own personal life and not simply be satisfied with a general knowledge, however firmly founded that may be on a study of the humane sciences. This knowledge is always impersonal and, when we limit ourselves to it, we make bad use of it. We forget ourselves and lose contact with basic downward and upward movements and impulses of our being.

This book does not aim to be a moral or a philosophical treatise. In it, I have tried to record a search of the kind briefly outlined above. I have not dealt with life purely as a matter of speculation, but as a reality that is lived personally. The book is therefore a testimony that undoubtedly relies to a very great extent on my past spiritual endeavors, but which does not go back, at

least directly, to any authority or tradition. However individual this way of seeing reality and of living may be, I believe that it is rooted deeply enough in me for many others to recognize themselves and their own experiences in it, at least so long as they have reached the point where they really understand themselves sufficiently clearly and authentically.

We can only perceive what is universal through the particular. The more forcefully and precisely the particular experience is expressed, the more vividly the universal is manifested. My testimony is therefore at times impersonal in form, partly for reasons of discretion, but also because the universal can often be stated more purely in abstract language than in other ways, since such abstract terms leave everyone free to give a concrete form to what is described on the basis of one's own experience in the past and even in the future.

In this book, moreover, I am speaking not only to our spirit and reason, but also, of course, to our intuition and experience. What I have written will be understood in an exclusively intellectual and even grammatical sense by the reader who has not yet reached the stage of knowing, if only implicitly, the fundamental theme of the book. It is therefore hardly suitable reading for young persons, for example, who have not lived long or deeply enough or who have not yet within themselves, at least in an obscure and initial form, the seeds of what they will be required to know later on and of what is described in the pages that follow. It is also not really a book for those of any age who are only looking for ideas and do not want to compare them with what they themselves are. Nor is it a book for those who do not want to ask questions about life and to search because they are already convinced that to question and to search will lead them nowhere.

On the other hand, however, anyone, however lacking in culture, who has lived honestly and humbly and with sufficient understanding of the human condition should be able to read this book with appreciation. Those who are also able to evaluate the concepts that I use and give them the exact meaning that I have given them should, even if their lives have followed a very different course from mine, find in the book an echo of their own interpretation of their existence and may even be inspired by it to go further.

I have written this book as a Christian, but I do not think that the fundamental affirmations on which we should base our lives and give them meaning necessarily go back exclusively to Christian teaching however demanding those affirmations may be and however much they call for a close examination of their inner wealth and ultimate consequences. Christian thought has undoubtedly often led to a greater precision, elaboration and development of these affirmations, to such an extent in fact that one has the impression that they were founded by Christianity. This is not true—they belong to every per-

son's very essence. They are not dependent on any religion or philosophy. They are bound to survive all contestation and, if they were to disappear, their disappearance would lead to the disappearance of the contesting forces, because what is essentially human in those forces would be destroyed.

Modern men and women have to regain what is essentially theirs if they are to remain human. This is all the more urgent because society today tends to treat us exclusively as producers and consumers and, to compensate us for reducing us to slavery, it suggests that we should find refuge in excessive expressions of unbridled freedom without showing us—and indeed by concealing from us—the resulting degradation.

This discovery of what is essentially human is, for us, also the only way of achieving a faith that will not alienate us, but will, on the contrary, make it easier for us to realize ourselves than we could possibly have imagined at first.

In conclusion, I should like to point out that I do not always use words in the way in which they are habitually employed. The words that one uses must be adapted to the demands made by thought, the distinctions that it imposes and the definitions that are required to insure that it is clear and that its integrity is safeguarded. All key-words are defined in the text as they occur. The reader will therefore be on guard and bear these definitions in mind as the same words recur in later contexts. In this way, there will be no wrong interpretation of what I have to say in this book.

To help further, I will give here and now a list of these terms and the page on which the definition will be found:

- Faith in ourselves, p. 17
- Married faith, p. 27
- Parental faith, p. 45
- Life and existence, p. 57
- Memory (the act of remembering) and recollection, p. 58
- Human goods or ultimate goods, p. 86
- Ideology, p. 98
- Faith in God, p. 115
- Faith and belief in God, p. 136
- Mission, p. 151
- Spiritual family, p. 174
- Errors and sin, p. 182

It is also important to point to my special use of the adjectives "general" and "universal." By "general" I mean everything that may be suggested to or imposed on the readers without requiring them to have a special, personal formation that makes them entirely themselves and restores them to their own

original state. What all reach personally when they are aware of their essential human reality, beyond everything that is purely social and contingent in them and characterized by a particular time and place, however, I call "universal."