

# Ideological Belief

## *A definition of ideology*

There are, as we have seen in the previous chapter, two options open to those who want to give meaning to their life, after having made sufficient progress in their understanding of their own condition as the result of a gradual growth in courageous, persistent and at the same time pitiless clarity. The first is to take a vision of the All as their point of departure for an understanding of themselves and their situation. The second option is to choose themselves and what they are in themselves as their starting point and to find, in an effort to explore their inner depths, their own personal relationship with that All. By choosing one of these two ways, they are able to raise themselves up to the level of their true destiny.

Making such a choice would seem rather to be based on a mental effort of systematization and less the result of a real experience of life in the concrete. It is, moreover, only possible for those who have the strength to accept fully one or the other of these options, together with all its consequences, to make this choice. To those who lack this strength, the choice is only present in an abstract form. It does not provide such people with the opportunity to make a decision that fundamentally affects their lives.

This choice presents itself, however, when those, who are still unconsciously enslaved, but are nonetheless already dissatisfied with appearances and transient goods, yet are unattached and aimless, have reached the point where they have lost their taste for life. When this happens, they are not at first threatened as far as their spontaneous actions are concerned, since these are deeply rooted in their being and function at a level that is lower than consciousness. They are also protected by an inner sense of emergency. On the other hand, the functions that persons are obliged to carry out as members of the society to which they belong mean that they have to perform a number of quasi-automatic actions which sustain them in their daily activities. At the same time, however, their free initiatives made in an attempt to know and to undertake more are gravely hampered.

Even if they are extremely busy and hard-working, however, they are spontaneously aware, even from a great distance in time, of this mortal danger that first shows itself as a void in their life. They are conscious of the weight of a boredom that is too great to be relieved by any remedy and sometimes even threatens to dissipate all their energy. In the ordinary course of events, they are not fully conscious of the danger involved—it is usually only later, when they have lived long enough and experienced enough to see their own past in a sufficiently clear light, that they are able to understand it completely—and at that time all that they can do is to try to ward it off. Before they are in fact able to look for and find their real humanity and the foundations on which it is built, they are obliged to relate their existence here and now to the environment in which they are living and of which they feel themselves to be physically a part, to their family, to their community in the wider sense (this would include their class in society, the nation to which they belong and the religious body of which they may be a member) and, especially now, for we are living in an age when our knowledge of other peoples is quite extensive, to the whole of humanity and indeed to the whole cosmos.

This is, then, at least at the beginning, the way which suggests itself naturally to us and which we will most readily follow, because it is clearly the least demanding of all ways. We give meaning to our lives by clinging more or less explicitly to a system of thought which in turn gives value and significance to the whole reality to which we quite consciously belong. In so doing, we are following our own intellectual endeavor. This system of thought, whatever form it may take, is what we call an ideology.

*The birth of ideology is due as much to human imagination as to our knowledge. Society is in favor of it because it gives a soul to its institutions*

At every period of history, human knowledge, aided by our imagination, has been able to supply the material for this intellectual endeavor. Nowadays, the rapid extension of that knowledge has meant that contemporary ideologies have derived their speculative power and their scope from this source. A great deal of its very evocative vocabulary and many of its most expressive images have, of course, been taken from earlier ideologies and the latter have in this way been brought, as it were, up to date although only by submitting to certain modifications, some clearly visible, others less so. Human knowledge enables these ideologies to share the prestige which their success earned for them. It provides them with collective evidence. Modern people cling spontaneously to such ideologies and do so all the more enthusiastically because they believe that they are more rational in their approach and less credulous than their ancestors.

Society, on the other hand, is in favor of every ideology that is able to give

a soul to its members. It is really only able to provide material goods and cannot—despite the rich vocabulary used by those who speak on its behalf—entirely satisfy the human heart from its own resources or influence it enough to be able to perpetuate itself and continue to develop independently. As it exercises control over more and more beings of increasing diversity and becomes more perfect of its kind by reason of its increasingly complex and ponderous organization, it has greater need of an ideology that will cast an ever more powerful spell over its members. Despite the great versatility of gifts possessed by those members and the growing burden of responsibility that it imposes on them, how could society maintain the delicate balance of its structure in any other way? That structure is, after all, becoming more and more fragile and artificial and, in spite of a very elaborate fabric of laws, less and less human.

Every ideology that insists on the unique value of work in the world and gives meaning to human history in this way proposes to those who accept it the ultimate usefulness of the intellectual and other activities to which people devote themselves. It acts as their guarantee of the value of those activities, despite their defects and the indisputable fact that they are exposed to chance. The initiatives that they take do, after all, prepare the way for a possibly distant, but nonetheless real age of justice and peace, the distance in time being overcome, perhaps, by an almost instinctive process of destroying the stages that separate the past from the present. Humanity believes that this age will be reached simply on the basis of the progress made in science and the organization of society. It has planned this progress, at least in broad outline, and it wants fervently to achieve it, as much as if it were its own. Because of this ideology, it is able to devote itself entirely to increasing its knowledge and developing its technical skills and, in this way, it can give meaning to its life and live it ardently.

If people are energetic and generous enough to apply the principle of logic to their everyday existence, however, they will not simply cling intellectually to the dominant ideology in society, nor will they use it as a means of finding consolation or as an alibi. They will not confine themselves to platonic speculations about the destiny of human society, the structures of humanity or the collective development of the universe. Speculation will not satisfy them—because of the work of construction that they see taking place all around them, they will have to contribute actively to it. It is present, within their reach, and it calls on them every day to take part in it. Because its demands are authoritative and total, they consciously or unconsciously invest it with an absolute character. In fact, they are unable to prevent themselves from regarding this work as absolute, even though they may have intellectual reservations that have arisen, either spontaneously or after deep reflection, as the result of a growing consciousness of the disturbing question presented by

their own lives. As they gain in strength, they will throw themselves more and more, body and soul, into action, at least in the small area in which they are able to take the initiative and collaborate with others in an attempt to achieve the goal defined by the ideology that governs not only their minds, but also their hearts.

*Clinging to an ideology and the activity that it brings about only partly deepens human experience*

Whenever we cling without reservation or limitation to an ideology and give ourselves resolutely and persistently to the work that we are called to do to express that ideology, we become totally absorbed by it. Although both the ideology and the activity that it entails to some extent deepen our personal experience, at least indirectly, they are at the same time instrumental in protecting us from the enigma that we are to ourselves. In our modern age, humanity and the universe are so immense that they overwhelm individuals and draw their attention away from themselves. By comparison, they are, after all, a very small world, but their true dimensions are of quite a different order. They make it difficult, if not impossible, for us to devote the attention and to cherish the expectations that are necessary to them if they are to become truly aware of the richness of their individual human reality and to make it fully their own. They also invite us to reject every intimate and personal appeal to look for human goods. If we hear the call of these goods, we resist it as though it came from the sirens. If we respond to it, we do so because of weakness and our need of the care that they may provide. We also tend to think that these human goods can be reduced to the level of a few powerful impressions when they present themselves to us, but are, in the long run, only subjective and ephemeral. These impressions are, of course, very dependent on chance, but they may also be very valuable and, even at some distance, have a reality similar to that proclaimed by ideology.

*Clinging to an ideology is a belief that goes far beyond the assurances of knowledge*

People's idea of the universe as a whole, to which we cling so persistently, owes nothing to our personal experience of life or to any deepening of that experience that might have caused it to enter our existence that is otherwise solitary and incapable of communication. This idea of humanity and the world is, of course, firmly based on reasons that we regard as convincing, yet, despite this, it continues to be irrational. This vision of the universe of the future on which we base our lives is in fact radically different from the scientific knowledge which it claims for itself. This ideology goes far beyond that knowledge

and also extends it by means of bold extrapolations in which both the spirit of the system and the imagination play an important part. It would seem to be wise to mistrust these grand and global ideas because they claim to understand and explain everything. However, it is of course precisely those claims to be able to find an explanation that is direct and uncomplicated and requires no personal effort for the whole of reality which makes these visions seem so attractive to so many people, even if they are not conscious of that attraction. These intellectually inflated ideas lack probability, but this absence is concealed by the solidity of the scientific foundation on which they are built and by the fact that they arouse an almost unanimous interest and people are persuaded to cling to them. On the other hand, it is not only their inner substance which makes us cling so fervently to them. These ideologies are, in fact, surrounded by the glory of scientific knowledge rather than being essentially scientific in themselves and they form a point, a contact with a secret metaphysical anxiety that we experience without being able or willing to acknowledge its existence. They have an entirely rational appearance and they base their appeal on common sense or on certain apparently very important reasons. Despite this, however, they call, to a far greater extent than they would declare openly, for belief.

*Ideological belief is in accordance with a natural human tendency*

All ideologies satisfy a human need that is as old as humanity itself and makes itself felt in us as soon as we begin to think of something other than mere daily survival. This intellectual need to synthesize forms an integral part of our being and long ago led us, within the age and the society in which we were historically situated and given the attitudes, knowledge and modes of thought that were imposed on us, to develop cosmogonies and theological or gnostic systems that would help us to penetrate the secret of the universe of which we form a part. Our aim was above all to overcome the feeling that we were strangers, lost in the world and to make that world more human. Modern ideologies, however varied they may be (and they are certainly very numerous, because they are dependent on the social environment and the personal background of those who have evolved them or who cling to them), fulfill very much the same function, but make use of a greater number of more complex data and many more subtle and powerful means of expression than we had at our disposal in previous centuries.

This practice of clinging to ideologies, which has continued throughout the centuries, has been made easier by our constant predilection for an apparent, though not real, coherence between various systems of thought and for that mysterious element that is affirmed and illuminated by certain doctrines. The logical strength of these intellectual structures, the precise wording of

their statements and the assurance with which they define what is transcendent and infinite all make them, wrongly of course, convincing and valid for many persons.

These ideologies therefore enable us to experience a warmth of a very complex kind, a vital and creative impulse that continues to make itself felt at a more specifically human level. They give direction to our activities, but do not in any way help us to become ourselves. Indeed, they tend to be an obstacle to this development because, instead of encouraging us to look for our own inner depths, they point the way to a goal that lies outside us. They may fill us with enthusiasm, but they also keep us in a state of immature subjection. They take us along with them, although we may, on the contrary, believe that we are acting on our own initiative. They persuade us to use our intelligence and understanding, but do not urge us to go further than this. They stimulate our will from outside and do not deepen our own roots in ourselves or make us strive after authenticity.

The goal to which these ideologies point, mainly because they are so logical and fearless, precise and energetic, appears to be quite magnificent. For this very reason, they are most attractive to upright people of equable temperament who are not corrupted by selfish passions or base desires. The young, who are naturally generous and enthusiastic, are also quickly inspired by these ideologies and often set on fire by them. We can, however, sink into a state of unconsciousness, in which we will fail to possess our true humanity at a really deep level of interiority. We may, despite our natural generosity and goodness, even be seriously damaged and diminished, without even knowing it. This may happen even when we are driven by an ideology to go further than our own individual interests in pursuit of a higher aim, such as the aspiration to make humanity materially more powerful and society more just in its structures and even if we continue to devote ourselves to fruitful activities.

It is a simple fact that we are always swallowed up by any ideology as soon as we abandon ourselves totally and exclusively to it. This self-abandonment commands our respect, but it is a form of self-imposed death for us. The ideology fascinates us by its consistent and logical teaching and the absorbing activity to which it commits us. When it succeeds in captivating us completely, it is by making a deep incision into personal possibilities. While giving greater prominence to some of our abilities, it at the same time impoverishes us. It arouses, but simultaneously polarizes all our interests and directs us toward a place of work where we are ceaselessly employed. However important that work may be and whatever it may provide for us as believers (whether we accept the word "belief" as applied to us or not), it continues to be alien to what basically constitutes our being humans. Work, which is often really struggle, reduces us to the level of a mere instrument which is sometimes, though rarely, essential and we have to be content to be used as such until we

are worn out or broken and are thrown aside, to disappear forever. Ideology requires servants who are hard and cast in one piece and it molds them so that they will work without any hesitation or reservation for the goals set by that ideology. It is not afraid of fanaticism, but encourages its growth among the most vigorous of people, if not among the best of them, and gives it the appearance of faithfulness.

*All ideologies are transient*

Obscured by the apparent greatness of all ideologies, the poison which they secrete provides an account of their history. Some, satisfying the needs or anxieties of a certain period or place, disappear very soon. Others last, but become more and more rigid, paralyzing too those who cling to them in abstract ideas and comforting collective certainties. As long as they retain power, they draw along in their wake many persons who claim to believe in them without any real conviction, a great mass of humanity that gives a false impression of the real vitality of these ideologies. Hardened within their orthodoxy, they become, in the long run, incapable of defending themselves effectively against the new ideologies which are in harmony with the spirit of the age and which therefore have, at least to begin with, a youthful vigor that is able to engage in contestation and to influence.

*Modern ideologies crush people by the means that they generate and the mass support that they command*

As a result of the power developed by their ideas and the series of events that they bring about, all ideologies make their devotees deprive their efforts and the effects of those efforts of the human dimension that they were in the first place unable to find in themselves. The work that they do in pursuit of those ideologies assumes proportions that overwhelm beings with a deep inner life. In fact, it crushes people under its weight. Faith, by its very nature, has more respect for the whole human reality than all ideologies. If, however, with the rapid progress of science and technology and the increasing influence and domination of the structures of society, it fails to replace them, human beings will inevitably be drawn, with all their work and achievements, into a blind alley where, despite all their efforts, they will perish.

*Ideological belief is different from married faith and parental faith*

Clinging to an ideology, whatever its origin or its teaching may be, is a form of belief. It is, however, very different from married faith and parental

faith. Like them, it germinates spontaneously and quickly becomes rooted in the human soil. All three are opposed to selfishness and vanity and all three lead us to let go of ourselves. But, whereas the two forms of faith require us to be more and more recollected and to devote ourselves more and more to our inner life, less is required of us when we cling to an ideology. Fervor rather than silence and conviction rather than seeking—ideological belief calls for these. Ideology is spread and wins devotees by a proselytism that is based on zeal and the self-abandonment involved in this proselytizing zeal is admirable. Attentiveness and discretion are less involved in this process.

Ideology can only gain a larger number of skilled devotees if it is fully in tune with the attitudes and ways of thinking of the period, although it is true to say that it sometimes flourishes in opposition to contemporary attitudes. Then, it recruits those who are spontaneously reacting against the society in which they are living. It wins followers by linking itself to them with their own chains. It only grants them an individual value—which is, moreover, usually superficial and transient—when it sets them to fight against its own enemy, either real or threatened. Love and parenthood, on the other hand, are always faithful to the demands that make them human. They are also much less the result of collective practices. Indeed, they always have to go beyond those established ways of life and often have to oppose them. They make us individuals, even among those who are closest to us, but they do not lead us in any way to oppose them. They enable us to deepen our experience in quite a different direction.

*Ideology is presented above all as a system of thought which is also a way of feeling*

Ideology is essentially a system of thought and a way of feeling which give meaning to our life, considered in a general sense. For this reason, it is handed over at the very beginning as a single unit and is presented in the same way to everyone. It displays its strength and maintains at a high level the ardor of its devotees by stating its teachings in increasingly precise language, developing its logical ideas, enriching its doctrine with new themes and combating everything that it regards as deviating from the orthodox teaching. What also happens very frequently is that ideology hardens and acquires the widely appreciated taste of severity and extreme strictness.

On the other hand, a major obstacle to the growth of love and parenthood is the conviction that they can be fully known before they have been experienced and the development of an a priori theory of married and parenthood faith. Those who know only too well what love and parenthood should really be can do no more than reject their ultimate demands, which only become



apparent to them very gradually as they become attuned to them and as those whom they love reveal themselves more and more completely and disclose their full depths to them.

The promises made by ideology have great powers of attraction. Ideology is also, partly because of these promises, very much in accordance with our hopes and even stirs up and increases the volume of those hopes in order to make us more easily subject to its teachings. It arouses sufficient enthusiasm in us, so that we will respond to it with the warmth that is required to prevent us from abandoning it too soon.

Love and parenthood, on the other hand, are experiences which we long to have even before we know them. They cause a hope that is entirely without frontiers or limitations to be born in us. They often require us to be obstinately and blindly tenacious and to persevere in deep humility. Love and parenthood may at times in the course of their development obtain a rare, refined and intimate joy for us. This, however, only happens during brief moments of special grace which cannot be produced by individuals. If we long too powerfully for this joy, we will prevent it from occurring. It is above all a fruit of love and parenthood and not a means enabling us to love or to become a parent.

Whereas love and parenthood delicately suggest to us and appeal to us, ideology teaches and commands us. It encloses us within a framework and molds our way of thinking, feeling and speaking into its own shape. It forms us in order to make use of us. It fashions us for the purpose that it has in mind, but does not take into account what we really are or are able to become. In contrast to this way of proceeding, the action of love and parenthood is discreet and almost circuitous. We look forward, when we experience them, to a good which we can hardly discern, but which we feel to be all the more essential the closer we come to it. We have the task of responding to it, in accordance with what we are in ourselves.

*The solidarity brought about by ideology is different from the communion born of love and parenthood*

Love and parenthood make those in whom mature people believe present and we are in communion with them because of the faith we have in them. Ideology, on the other hand, means that we only consider others as instruments to be used for the purpose that it has in mind. Any communion between two beings that has no point of contact with ideology is in competition with that ideology and assumes the form of a special friendship. It cannot co-exist with ideology, which is necessarily exclusive by virtue of its totalitarian character, which would be attacked at its source by such a coexistence.

Ideology is certainly able to establish various forms of authentic solidarity

among those who follow it but despite all appearances, they are very different from those created by love and parenthood. They may be greater in size and even more ardent, but they are much less intimate. Those who follow an ideology enjoy solidarity among themselves only because they are all dedicated to the same ideal and to the accomplishment of the same task. The more fully committed they are to the ideology, the more closely united they are as brothers, sisters and companions. When they die, the memory that is left behind of each of them is more than useful because it is exemplary. What is more, if there is ever a split in the ranks of these devotees and especially a division resulting from conflicts over teaching, this brotherhood and sisterhood quickly change into scorn and even hatred. The opposite side of the coin of the solidarity built up by ideology is sectarianism and all its substitutes.

*All ideological belief weighed down by its absolute character is inhuman, even if it claims to respect great human values*

It is possible to have doubts about the basic inhumanity of certain ideologies, and especially the most recent of them, because they claim more explicitly than many of the earlier ideologies (and perhaps less authentically) to respect and further great human values such as truth, freedom, equality and unity. It is, however, not enough simply to set up these values as a banner over the place where we work for us to experience them as a living reality. Instead all of us have to discover for ourselves the excellence and intimate necessity of these human values. As soon as they have reached a sufficiently human level of development, love and parenthood can help us to do this, but, whatever their content may be, ideologies are too subjected to abstractions to be able to do the same. They can only provide general information about these great human values and can only impose them when they have the means to do so. The best of us can, with the help of the other resources that we have, make these values our own, but for the rest they remain, despite their nobility and excellence, barren ideas which deceive those who profess them without practicing them or make them behave in ways that are strictly limited to the achievement of the goals set by the ideologies that they follow. This is, of course, always a betrayal of those values.

Some people derive a deep inner contentment from these ideologies, with the result that they are reduced to the level of narcotics. Others are excited by them, so that they act as alcohol, with an inebriating effect. No one can say how many crimes have, in this way, been committed in their name. These crimes are an accusation of all ideologies, even those that are deeply spiritual. They are the evidence of the ambiguous nature of the dictatorship exercised by ideology and of those clinging to it.

*Clinging to an ideology makes human potentialities that are not in agreement with the objective of that ideology sterile*

When we eventually find meaning in life by clinging to an ideology that gives us a clear reason for continuing to exist, we have to follow the logical course of devoting ourselves to the task suggested by that ideology. The more generous and energetic we are, the more fully we will dedicate ourselves to that task. All active thoughts that do not have a direct bearing on the intellectual structures of that ideology and may therefore call those structures into question strike us as useless and even as dangerous. We are especially inclined to confuse inner experience with subjectivity. We suspect that the first is the result of an abnormal development of the ego such as pride and contrast it with the objectivity of the teaching of our ideology, which we regard as having an absolute character. The greatness of disinterested service which we fulfill, of the sacrifices that we accept and of the ideology itself to which we cling hide from us that other greatness which is really our own, but which we are led by the original nature of our belief to underestimate and even to vilify. Because we fail to recognize the essential importance of the inner life, we cannot understand the special nature of our faith in ourselves. We cannot be driven to accept this faith, because our ideological belief exempts us from it. We inevitably confuse it with self-confidence, of which we are rightly critical.

Like all intellectual specialization or rather like all concentrated activity that does not come from the depths of our being, but is imposed from outside by a determination that is stubborn enough to be invincible, clinging to an ideology makes human potentialities which are not in agreement with the objective of that ideology sterile. Generally speaking, it causes us to suspect or at least to underestimate all human goods if they have not been subjected to the work which ideology regards as an idol. Our feeling for beauty, right thinking and harmony—the latter would be sufficient in itself because of flexibility and its peacefulness—together with all the other irreplaceable points of departure from which we set off on the way to maturity, disappear and die if we cling persistently to an ideology. The work which has, at least partly, arisen as a result of these truly human intuitions also deteriorates to the level of becoming an instrument of propaganda and enslavement, precisely because it is indirectly brought about and deliberately used for purposes that are not specifically its own.

Love and parenthood, on the other hand, remain at the level of the instincts that brought them to birth. There is certainly grave danger and there may be serious consequences when we are so overwhelmed by the activity imposed on us by ideology that we cease to think of founding a family, fail to do so in time or go so far as to renounce all intention of doing so. If we are so

preoccupied with an ideal that does not invest these goods with the importance that is naturally theirs, we will only expect emotional and other forms of satisfaction that are essential to our nature from them. Our loved ones are bound to be relegated to a secondary and contingent place in our life for as long as our ideology occupies the first place. We will see them through the relatively obscure part played by them in the ideological teaching that dominates our hearts and minds. We will also judge them on the basis of the place occupied by that teaching in our life. Because of this, we will not be able to believe in them in the way that we should if we are to be a true spouse or parent.

All suitably developed human potentialities are healthy and they all give balance to our life. They insure that we will be stable and fulfilled in a way that is impossible for ideology, however energetic and persistent we may be in its service. Indeed, those men who are enslaved to an ideology can easily become very intolerant. In the name of truth and in order to be able to proclaim that truth more convincingly, we will adopt a hard attitude toward ourselves—this is, in our opinion, a virtuous attitude—and we will also, without even knowing that we are, be openly hard toward others. Similarly, in the name of the necessity required by the urgency of the task that we have to carry out, we will make use of them, again quite openly, and we may even go so far in our ignorance of what we are doing as to take unfair advantage of them and to do so without any scruple. At the same time, however, as though in compensation for a hidden lack of balance in ourselves and an inner emptiness, we are more than usually sensitive to the admiration of others. We have no defense against flattery and are indeed blind to it. We even seek it with a longing that is only partly disguised as indifference. For the same reasons, we are extremely afraid of criticism. Depending on our temperament, we are either completely demoralized by it or else roused by it to violent feelings. We may be genuinely disinterested and have an attitude of humility, even if this attitude is not necessarily brought about by failures and the need to compensate for them, but, as time passes, we will continue to pursue honors and seek high positions.

The more resourceful we are, the more completely we will be consumed by the flame of ideological deception. Vivid memories of the past, the appeals made by the present and secret fears of a void in the future all merge together in this passionate experience, which cannot even alarm us by the disturbing violence that it arouses in us. It does not even reveal its contingent and ultimately transient nature to us. It has to possess us and we do not have a sufficiently clear insight into ourselves to recognize that we are possessed by it. It casts a spell on us against which we have no defense. It is a destructive passion which does not cease to consume us until it has exhausted us or until we feel so threatened in our innermost being and so forced into a defensive posi-

tion by our recent retreats that we are at last driven to fight back against this tyranny.

The fact that we are possessed is often concealed by an apparent expansion. When we are totally devoted to an ideology, fascinated by the systematic presentation of its teachings or absorbed by the demands made by the work that it imposes on us, some of our potentialities are frequently developed at the expense of others, which are completely neglected and even destroyed. We therefore usually become highly skilled in those activities that relate directly to the ideology which we follow.

*The void that ideological belief leaves in everyone is revealed when it is no longer taken up in action*

As time passes, however, even if our life seems to have been successful, we become aware that the reality is quite different. We come to like the mere mechanisms of our thought-processes and the routine habits of our activity more and more for their own sake, precisely because they draw our attention away from ourselves. We devote ourselves not only more and more freely, but also with increasing intoxication to these processes because we have recourse to nothing else when our ideological ardor dies down without our knowing it. As we grow older, our occupations seize possession of us, while we in fact devote ourselves less and less to them in a real sense. We are no longer able to separate ourselves from them when the time comes to do so, either because of our age or our changed circumstances. As soon as they are in fact taken away from us, we are left with a void. The more fully a second nature has been blown up inside us by our functions and the character that has been created by those functions, the more completely our life seems to us to be at an end. We are driven to seek refuge from this disturbing situation by giving way to an infantile form of thinking and acting which is all that remains of our previous culture and activity. This happens, moreover, at a time in our life when we should pass through and go beyond an experience of detachment from everything and begin, as adults, to contemplate our own existence and the world in silence.

*An ideological belief is necessary for a good beginning in life*

Ideological belief certainly creates a favorable situation for a good beginning in the life of the spirit. For a long time it is quite indispensable to us. Like the human goods and indeed more easily and perhaps even more powerfully than those goods, it can disclose horizons to us which would otherwise remain hidden from us. It arouses within us and throws a clearer light on certain aspirations that have become dormant or are still too vague for us to

respond to them. It leads us to go beyond ourselves. It is often more effective than love and parenthood, which, if they do not set off in time on their very demanding flight to the great heights, quickly become distorted and make adults turn in on themselves in a selfish preoccupation that is strengthened by the togetherness of the couple or the family.

On the other hand, however, if ideological belief continues for too long to be the only force that inspires us, it will prove in the end to be as incapable of helping us as the human goods. In the long run, it will paralyze us and even drain us of all our substance. After having borne us along and raised us up at the beginning of our life, it will leave us at the end with nothing but quasi-automatic actions. In an imperceptible movement backward, ideology reduces those who have not succeeded in going beyond it to the level of mere cogs in a vast machine. Even if there is an element of authority and decision-making in this function there is, despite all appearances, no really free or creative initiative in it.

#### *Crises in clinging to an ideology*

There are, however, certain times when the germs of humanity, after having been misunderstood and crushed beneath the tyranny of ideology, take on a new and vigorous life among the hardiest and most gifted people. The experience which a long career of dedication and sacrifice provides may give rise to a more complete awareness of one's possibilities, until then concealed and even despised as the result of an abstract, incomplete or badly planned education. Our age also has an effect on our way of seeing and feeling things. When we have lived intensely, we are more disposed to the inner life and to go beyond what is rigid and excessive. Such times of crisis are the result of a long period of preparation in one's life. This preparation is formed of numerous disillusionments encountered in our activities and undermining the basis of our clinging to an ideology and of the prolonged weariness that results from a long career consisting of many fierce struggles and determined efforts.

Events also play a part in this change of attitude, carrying us along on their waves. They also gradually create a distance from the goal toward which our efforts are directed. Sometimes the ideal in our life, which is the result of our ideology, disappears before our eyes like a mirage. The spontaneous enthusiasm that we felt when we first clung fervently to our ideology and saw how close it was to its aim grows cool and can no longer be seen as an exaggerated consequence of a determination not to give up or an artificial attitude assumed by someone who refuses to resign. Nothing, however, can set that fundamental revolt against the absolute power of an ideology in such violent motion as a refusal to agree that we should be used by and even sacrificed to it against our will and without our knowledge. Even the most spiritual ideolo-

gies and those claiming to respect great human values have therefore often crushed their devotees with a blind unconsciousness which has at times gone so far as to have the theory of the ideology in question extolled and which is all the more difficult to understand since those with whom it originated were above all placed under its spell. All ideologies have therefore driven their followers to commit the most serious crimes. The scandal that this causes is all the greater when it is caused by collective actions done by spiritually developed people who claim that they are behaving justly and in a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood.

When we who have been fashioned more by a lifelong dedicated self-abandonment than by an ideology revolt in this way against ideology, we are shaken to our foundations and react at once quite spontaneously. To begin with, we become harder and more deeply entrenched in our conviction of the rightness of systematic, absolute doctrines. This is because, in this extreme position, we are instinctively aware of the presence of the nothingness into which we will slip if we begin seriously to doubt the validity of those teachings. Another and quite different reaction, however, is possible. This is a faceless, underground reaction that is buried very deeply in us and then rises up at the moment of revolt, coming from the distant past which may be almost completely forgotten, a time when we were seized by some hesitation or doubt. This doubt had gripped us when we had to make certain very serious decisions, possibly of definitive importance, occasioned by our ideology, and we had, at that time, at once suppressed that doubt as though it had been a temptation. This reaction is something against which we have no defense and it invades us and takes us over entirely. For the most part slowly and continuously, but at times brusquely and roughly, it shatters all the certainties that we have ever had and all the security that we go on trying to obtain for ourselves.

Those who have been led to maturity by their experience of life, are no longer intoxicated or even sustained by their ideological ardor and are placed in more and more demanding situations will try in vain to practice renunciation and sacrifices of this kind that have so far been so easy for them that they have hardly been aware of them. These efforts, which are contrary to their own nature, cause them in reaction, to have dreams that fascinate them all the more as they become more and more difficult to fulfill. The whole person is engaged in this solitary, secret, sometimes terrible and always tormenting struggle in which that individual's destiny is at stake. The more generous, persistent, persevering and forceful we have been in the past, the more committed we are to this struggle. No one, however, can take part directly in it. Even if one has already conducted it oneself, one can now only witness it in silence.

When we are in such a state of crisis and are intellectually and emotion-

ally so confused, we are troubled by an obscure form of despair. We become aware of that void from which we have up till now striven, more or less consciously, to escape by abandoning ourselves body and soul to an ideology. At the same time we are profoundly disillusioned by a life that we have found to have a lasting and irreversible bearing on an ideal that is no longer meaningful to us. Consciousness of that void and this fundamental disillusionment are indistinctly confused in our mind. After following a long path strewn with doubts which we have suppressed again and again, but which reappear as often as they are suppressed, we become brutally, or because of an unconscious dissatisfaction, aware that this ideology is quite unrelated to our essential needs and is in fact no more important to us than a breath of wind. The ground on which we have built our life sinks. What aroused us in the past to great enthusiasm can never again make us glow with warmth, however hard we try. The best that we can do is to reassure ourselves by appearing to remain unchanged in the eyes of others and possibly, in the long run, in our own eyes. This failure in our own intimate life reveals us to ourselves and displays to us the nakedness of our own being.

*The way in which men and women get out of these crises is a judgment of them*

Is there a new road to Damascus open to us? Will we emerge victorious from our own defeat or will we, on the contrary, be defeated and, because of a false victory achieved over our deepest being, seek refuge in a frenzied obedience to an ideology and be reduced to mere barren conformity?

This is the ultimate and vitally important choice confronting all who have achieved sufficient personal maturity and strength to resist giving way to hidden or open failures. There is, after all, no one who has not, at some time or another and in one way or another, been stimulated and enriched by an ideological enthusiasm. Consciously or unconsciously, imperceptibly or openly, all of us have to make this choice in accordance with what we are in ourselves. It is a basic option for which the whole of life is a preparation and which can only be made explicit by a mature person. That is how we are made. Our true being can only be revealed when, whether we know it or not, everything in us is called into question.

When, thanks to what we are in ourselves and thanks also to the generous act of self-abandonment that we make as a result of clinging to an ideology, our humanity has become sufficiently developed, we will be confronted with these critical decisions. They may burst on us dramatically and even brutally or they may sound very gently and regularly throughout our life, like the bell of the beliefs on which we have built up our lives. At these times, we will discover, in solitude and emptiness of spirit, the value of relationships that are simply and humbly human—relationships between person and per-



son. We will then give up ideology, with its abstract and solemn teachings and its apparently great but always ambivalent works, and choose in preference real contacts with other human beings. These contacts may be rare and of modest proportions, but the less richly provided the others are, the closer they will be to us. We too have become poor, even if we are famous and rich. Because of present nihilism, which is the result of the revolt brought about by the failure of an ideology that we have recognized as empty, we are not yet able to concede an absolute value to people. Our forsaken state and our patient, humble openness, however, prepare us far more effectively than any other inner state to reach the Absolute in ourselves, if only very obscurely, with a purity which our earlier inheritance of superstition and credulity could never have given to us, even with the help of a very spiritual ideology.