

# Faith and Mission

## *Function and ideological belief; mission and faith in God*

Like ideological belief that is experienced in an authentic way, whether God is the centerpiece or not, faith in God calls on us to courageously and generously make a total gift. Despite this important likeness, however, the radical difference between faith in God and ideological belief can always be detected at the level of human activity.

Although ideology makes few demands on us to live at a deeper level of personal experience, it very soon makes us clearly aware of our function, doing this from without and at the same time within the framework of society. Faith in God in the true sense of the word, however, goes beyond all theological speculation and excludes all thoughts and pronouncements other than those that bear on the reality of God, partly as the result of certain tragic events. In this way, with a few rare exceptions, this faith only discloses itself to us after a long period of faithfulness. Faith in God calls for a high degree of interiority and maturity in us if it is to be clearly revealed to us, even before we are able to take this decisive step into the dark in a fully conscious and explicit manner. Because of this, we have gradually to prepare our way over a period of many years before we can really discover what we must be and what we have to do if we are to correspond to everything that is in us and fulfill ourselves. We will in this way give form to what comes from our own depths in a slow but unbroken ascent and in an unforeseeable and in no way preconceived manner, in order finally to become a coherent whole. We will devote ourselves to this process with the whole of our being, the part that we know and the part that we do not yet know. This task comes from our own inner substance and is not simply constructed with elements that do not belong to us. To accomplish it, we make use of all our existing possibilities and call on those that continue to be given to us, adapting ourselves constantly to the varying rhythms of our spiritual life. In such cases, our task goes far beyond anything that we may have wanted or have been able to do systematically and for very good and even impelling reasons, because it is so valuable and timely.

This task, which is so intimately and indissolubly united with our spiritual development, can with justice be called our "mission."

Because of its intrinsic nature, our mission, which comes from our very being but transcends our desires, enables us to be creative in a way that exceeds all our other activities. It is precisely by devoting ourselves to making this discovery and to this fulfillment that we will be able to confess and even strengthen our faith in God. This faith will also, because of the power that it sets free in us, help us to carry out our mission especially at the critical times in our life. Unlike ideological belief, however, faith is quite unable to show us our mission because of its lack of intellectual content.

### *Needs and appeals*

Our discovery of our mission is a very important result of our gradual consciousness of what we are and of the appeals that make themselves heard in us. These appeals are urgent because they are necessary, even if nothing outside us gives them this urgent character. They are quite different from the demands that derive their power from our needs. These needs are felt by all of us, who experience them in a very similar way, despite their human differences. They do not give those of us who feel them an individual character. Even if they are only partly satisfied, they also continue to be felt. Sometimes this partial satisfaction only makes them more strongly felt. Appeals, on the other hand, have a very individual and personal character and cannot be conceived, at least in an abstract form, by anyone else. If those who hear them do not respond fully to them, they will gradually disappear. We will not even be able to welcome them, because the memory of them, if they are not instinctively rejected, will cause a violent and bitter reaction, which is the result of an unconscious regret.

### *Function, vocation and mission*

The discovery of mission is both helped and hindered by the ideology to which we are, to begin with at least, dedicated. Function and mission are therefore, from the very beginning, closely interconnected. The vocation that results from this combination, since our ideological belief takes us to a deeper level of experience, undoubtedly depends on what we are. On the other hand, that vocation is still too influenced from outside, by ideology, for it to be the only factor in our mission. If it follows our progress as we keep as closely as possible to our own being in our confrontation with events, our ideological belief and activity will develop into our mission.

We must, however, go beyond our belief and our activities if we are to make that mission our own, since our ideology usually only reflects the atti-

tudes and convictions of our environment. We will, moreover, be able to transcend that ideology and the activities that it promotes as we become more aware of their relative and imperfect nature. We will look for authenticity in all that we say and do or at least we will not try to conceal the superficial and pragmatic character of those statements and actions that occur when practical wisdom constrains us to conform to a universally accepted teaching and to accept a collective discipline.

Mission has always begun as vocation but, however carefully it is followed, if it does not eventually become mission in the full sense of the word, vocation will inevitably degenerate into mere function.

### *The difference between our discovery of mission and our choice of function*

We select our function by comparing our own possibilities with the demands made by our ideology, the scale of values that it constructs and the general aims that it gives us. We can accept a function if it asks no more from us than what we can give. The situation is quite different in the case of mission.

Our mission is something that rises up from our own depths far more than being suggested explicitly by the needs of society. It may, of course, prove later to be especially effective in satisfying those needs, but this is less because we may have foreseen or desired this and more because of a secret agreement between what is coming to life in us and what is beginning to grow.

Mission often seems to be able to develop demands that are quite out of proportion with the possibilities of the one who is called to that mission. Experience has shown, however, that the resources required are found in us when we need them, because there is such a powerful connection between our achievement and the development of our mission. What would be a wild claim on the part of those choosing their function without sufficiently considering whether they had the means to carry it out is, in the case of their mission, a precise intuition that is nonetheless only dimly conscious of what that mission holds in the future. It is also a risky, but ultimately very fruitful initiative. Seen objectively, only the future can prove whether this intuition and this initiative were right. On the other hand, they impel those who receive them to accept them fully as certainties that are more powerful than all evidence to the contrary that may be obvious to everyone and based on a consideration of all possible predicaments.

Our function may be usefully suggested and even enforced by an authority, since all that it requires, if it is to be suitably carried out by someone who is able to fulfill it, is sustained attention. Many of us may have the same function and one can replace the other in carrying it out without seriously diminished results.

Mission, on the other hand, is quite personal. It cannot be separated from those who have conceived it and accepted it without the intervention of any outside authority. If others try to carry out this mission, there is always a danger that it will be falsified. It is theirs and theirs alone. It can only be performed by them and this is because it calls for more than conscientious work. It demands creativity. There is, then, a bond between them and their mission that goes back to a deep inner necessity. It is possible to say that without those particular persons those particular tasks cannot be properly conceived or realized, not even relatively completely. We can even go further and say that without that task those persons cannot fulfill themselves. They may appear successful in society, but their existence will be no more than vegetation.

#### *Difficulties of and demands made by mission*

Mission does not overlook the needs expressed by society, but it is not compelled to satisfy them immediately. We depend on those needs only in order to discover our mission. We are aware of the world around us, but we do not submit to its conditions, because our mission, which is in no sense arbitrary, is not determined by usefulness. Its reason for existing comes from a different source. Mission calls for faithfulness and, if we are to respond really faithfully to our mission, we must regard every action dictated by circumstances, however necessary it may seem to be and however naturally generous or humanly virtuous our response may be, as a temptation. We must, in these conditions, keep to a line of behavior which cannot be confirmed by anyone else and which may even cause surprise or scandal. We may not always be able to convince ourselves or others by really valid reasoning, but we must always reject, instinctively, what is obviously unsuitable. We will only later be able to check whether our decisions were correct and know how wrong they may have seemed—so wrong that they would have been condemned if they had been made.

Our mission, then, is characterized by a certain originality which normally leads us a long way from the paths followed by most people and sometimes to steer a course that is against the current followed by society as a whole, however dedicated we inevitably are to society by virtue of our personal faithfulness. We are hidden and anonymous in the midst of the crowd although we are not really part of it, are not carried along by it and are unable to impose our will on it. Frequently we have to fight against a feeling of being buried alive. We have to follow a lonely path which may well seem to us to be a dead end when we are weighed down with fatigue, suffering from a recent defeat or strongly influenced by our environment and unable to react against it. This path seems to have no end and, at least to our knowledge, never to

have been followed before, so that we have no model to imitate. All the same, it is really the way that will enable us to do the work to which we are personally called.

It is only from ourselves that we are able to derive the light that will permit us to make decisions and the strength that will enable us to keep to those decisions. In the long run, that light and that strength will insure victory. No person can help us in this struggle, although we may receive encouragement from others. We will not, however, be without critics. Many will, for example, attribute our uniqueness to a narrowness of mind, individualism or selfishness, because it is common to value what is immediately and obviously useful, and rare to respect and understand the necessity of each one's originality for the good of all. It happens quite often that those who are closest to that one are the most hostile to the mission that we are called to carry out in the form in which we conceive it. This is because it is not without consequences, often of a very painful kind, for them. Events are also not always favorable and cannot always be made to conform to the task of carrying out one's mission. The seed that is buried very deeply in the hard earth is condemned to remain there for a long time before it germinates. The longer it stays there, the stronger its roots will be. In the same way, a mission that develops very slowly and has many obstacles to overcome because it is so unique will only gradually be made manifest. A long struggle against the surrounding world, however, gives mission a great and effective strength and often an exceptional fruitfulness.

Sometimes this mission is glimpsed but not fully and consciously accepted in the darkness of its development. When this happens, there is a danger that it will disappear from our horizon and that we will forget it, even though there is no question of faithlessness on our part. In that case, we will live for a time as though we had never heard the call of mission. In fact, however, that mission will still be maturing secretly within us. During this interval, we will overcome certain preconceived ideas and prejudices that may have prevented us from responding fully to what we were personally called to do. We will also dissociate ourselves from situations which, if we had clung to them, would have paralyzed us and made us incapable of taking necessary initiatives. We will also discover in ourselves a number of hitherto unknown possibilities which will be useful to us in the future when we go forward to carry out our mission.

Unlike function, which only takes from us what it needs and which only gives us the satisfaction of serving for a time, mission will exhaust us until the end and will make us fruitful to a degree that we could never have foreseen simply in the light of reason. It will confirm us in an essential and creative joy which will go far beyond the satisfaction of being useful and even that of being faithful. What joy can be compared with the joy given by God?

The results obtained by the exercise of function are of necessity always limited to the object of that function. The fruits of mission, on the other hand, are universal and the more exclusively they are derived from the original mission, the more universal they are. They provide nourishment not only for the one who bears them, but also for those who gather them.

*Our sense of mission and our presence to ourselves and to God*

For us, mission is above all a special activity providing the best way for us to increase our understanding of our own being. Through our mission, we can reach ourselves in ourselves in a much deeper way. We can also grasp the fundamental continuity and stability of our being and at the same time become conscious of our limitations and accept them. Mission is far better equipped than any other function to help us to enter into our existence beyond everything that forms the fabric of our life. It also reveals the importance and the serious quality of our life, while at the same time pointing to the contingency of all nature. Faith in God, which continues to be our first option and empty of all intellectual content, gains in intimate confidence and is both strengthened and humanized. We who are dedicated to our mission and sustained by it become more and more stable in our consistent and lasting nature, through which we become dimly aware of the presence of God in us. As soon as we are able to recognize the frontiers which are set up by our own limited means and which cannot be crossed, we can distinguish the activity of God in us.

Becoming conscious of God's presence and our discovery of our mission are interrelated. Both call for the same kind of spiritual activity. They also support each other. Throughout our lives, the one is made gradually clearer by the other. At important times, when a decision has to be made, God's presence makes itself felt and invests with its authority the appeals which come from the depths and try to make themselves heard in us or which refuse to be silent when we refuse to hear them. These same appeals are always very similar when they make themselves heard or when they have been silent for a while and then heard again. They also help the presence of God to make itself even more strongly felt in us by the very fact that they are so insistent and by the steadfast energy of the activity that they arouse, as well as the very special history that they have in us.

The successive stages in the past leading to the development of mission in us form a precious store of living and life-giving memories which appeal to each other and reveal themselves to us as inwardly closely united to one another. The more closely we keep to our basic path, the more fully and harmoniously these memories are united. They also help us to enter into a deep state

of recollection, which is the threshold of an encounter with ourselves and with God. Because of their clear and fundamental unity and the climate which they bring about, they can often lead to a new and intimate movement and a new divine activity in us.

Mission, then, is a special place where we can more easily and more frequently be present to ourselves and to God. The same can be said of the frontiers of our life, when we are confronted with the fundamental questions which make us more powerfully and urgently conscious of our human condition. Because we are so adaptable, however, these situations soon cease to act as a spur, regardless of how extreme they may have been, and fail to stimulate us to follow paths other than our habitual ones. We find that we cannot keep to them for very long and that we soon forget them or at least only retain a faded and even inert memory of them. Our mission, on the other hand, continues to develop throughout the whole of our life, so long as we remain faithful to it. All that it requires of us is that we should normally remain in a modest and recollected state without any artificial stimulus raising us up, no matter what may happen as the result of the dramatic situations that we may encounter. It is therefore possible to say without hesitation that mission is the way to God *par excellence*.

#### *Mission and the work of God in the world*

Mission is not only the work that reveals us in the best possible way to ourselves and enables us to establish a relationship with God, a relationship that is so close and direct that it would not be going too far to call it the relationship of a child with a parent. It is more than this. It also corresponds—and the more it develops, the more closely it corresponds—to what God asks of us in his desire that we should collaborate in his activity. When it takes possession of us, mission enables God to construct the world beyond the possibilities made available by the mere development of natural laws. At the front of what is and the frontier of what is becoming, it provides God with the instrument that is needed by the movement that leads him to create.

Mission is more deeply rooted than any other activity in those who have been chosen to receive it. It is also centered in them. Because of this, it is directed toward the work of the world. It draws its strength from these people and develops on the basis of all the events that it uses to achieve its ends. In this way, it collaborates more effectively in preparations for the future than any activity resulting from preconceived ideas or pre-arranged plans. Subject to the inevitable limitations of time and place, it is the very activity of God, at least to the extent that it strives toward essential purity. It is not merely a response on the part of those who have already responded to the appeal ex-

pressed by their most intimate reality and who have found that it imposes a divine claim on them. It is also the word of God addressed to them and translated into their language.

*As we become more personal, mission becomes more and more exclusively an activity of being to being*

In the past, mission had a mainly social and political form because this was the only form that could be effective. Even then, however, mission had each individual in mind and addressed itself to each of us in the midst of the crowd. It spoke to us through what it said to all of us, even though it did not call on us explicitly. The more fully we emerge from the social matrix in which we are born and are nourished and the more completely we separate ourselves from the grasp of society and go beyond the collective environment, the more perfectly mission is able to present itself as a direct form of communication between persons and to gain its true value from that interpersonal relationship.

In the past too, the type of mission that consisted of a relationship between persons undoubtedly already existed, although it may well have been very rare and has certainly continued to be overlooked—this is clear from the fact that history only records data of social importance. The only missions in the past of which we have heard are those of some historical importance. We hear of them in the case of political leaders and especially those who are the heads of great dynasties, because an established function, which is solid and conservative by nature, is not favorable to the birth of mission, which is above all essentially creative. Very frequently too, these missions are experienced by those without political responsibility of any kind—simply persons who come from the ordinary people. They are often accompanied by extraordinary actions which give those who perform them a wide audience, despite their obscure origin. To begin with, however, these missions almost always lead people into the desert, where they are able, in solitude, to set themselves free from all forms of slavery and become more fully themselves. In the course of their public lives, they are therefore able to remain more independent and to cling more faithfully to their mission and to its unique and therefore also violently disputed aspects.

These people do not question the exceptional quality of their activity, but affirm it openly and solemnly in ways that are fully adapted to their own times. They have to make it public in order to impress themselves on their listeners, who are often too lacking in inner experience to be able to perceive the appeal that they ought to hear simply in the substance of the message. These ways of making themselves heard in public are their letters-patent of nobility.



These missions are also reactions and protests not only against injustice and crime, but also against every way of twisting the law in order to observe no more than its letter. Either directly or indirectly, they also include an aspect of general education of a much wider and more positive dimension that is suited to the prevalent attitudes of people and is in accordance with their spiritual possibilities. They are at one with the hopes and fears of all men and women. They are closely in touch with the current ideas about God, his power and his activity, even though they may go beyond those ideas in their teaching.

That teaching often takes explicit forms that are very similar to each other in the style, imagery and attitude that prompted them. However, they lack those shades of meaning and distinctions that enable us to infer directly from them how they should behave, especially in conditions that are quite different from those prevailing when the teaching was given. All these forms of teaching, however, bring a message which is derived from all that is most fundamental in us, but which is also, regrettably perhaps, inseparably involved in an intellectual context that is imperfect and limited by time and place.

This message, which is the result of our faithfulness to our mission is universally valuable and is able to reveal us to ourselves by calling on us. It is rooted in the depths of our being, grows secretly in us throughout our life and has an authority that is proposed with great strength, but not imposed with force. Because of this, it is revelation. It is, however, only we who can begin with the letter and recreate this message so that we live by it according to the spirit who is really capable of receiving it as revelation and interpreting it correctly.

As we become more personal, the work that has to be done becomes more and more difficult and exacting from the human point of view. Mission becomes less and less a collective activity and more and more an activity of direct contact between being and being. It is less a question of teaching than of appeal and by this appeal it leads to an intimate formation and a personal activity of a kind that makes spiritual activity possible. In the past, this appeal was often made by society to the individual. The type of appeal that is under consideration here, on the other hand, is made from person to person. Missions are therefore less and less frequently made public in a spectacular fashion that will attract the attention of the crowds and impress them from outside. There are fewer and fewer very striking phenomena of the kind that used to accompany missions in the past. They no longer call on divine authority when they reveal themselves to others. This is above all because it is important for the aim that they propose that they are not imposed from without, but that they should discover for themselves the nature of the message that they bring as something both personal and universal that is addressed to them. They become more and more remote from and even radically hostile to any form of

illumination, whether it is an illumination of feeling or of intellect, and especially if it is inspired by function. If this kind of climate prevailed when these missions were born, it would sterilize them by falsifying their meaning and importance at birth, letting them be conceived and carried out by some others with an unsuitable attitude and giving them, in the case of others, an authority and an effectiveness lacking in spirituality. Because of this discretion, each person to whom this appeal is made can hear it and respond to it in an individual way, which is, of course, the only authentic and really useful way.

Those who are faithful to their mission, especially when it is above all spiritual, will inevitably be encountered less and less frequently, the more demanding that mission is and the more it has to be carried out in conditions that are far from being directly favorable. If they are able to become clearly and permanently conscious of their fundamental solitude, they will not experience the slightest desire to be isolated. If they feel that they are being separated by the energy that torments them, they will remain in the midst of others like any one of them. No outward appearance will distinguish them from the others. Their activity will be turned inward into their own depths and will be almost invisible to those whom it does not concern. Its social dimension will become less and less. If it were later to gain some importance from that nature, its spiritual effect would be impoverished and almost betrayed to the point where it could be no more than indirect. These people generally slip through the mesh of history. Our present period seems very deprived of God's action, compared with those times in the past when mission developed among very docile crowds and with the help of powerful means. But this is only apparent. They are in fact more filled with the action of God than they have ever been. His activity has never been revealed and received in such a pure and real way before.

*We can insure the fulfillment of various functions, but our mission is one*

We have many functions in the course of our life. They depend quite closely on each other because of the professional formation that they require and obtain. Those with a strong sense of mission, on the other hand, may be led to take initiatives and even to adopt very different ways of life that strike others as unexpected and even as incomprehensible. This may happen as the result of personal limitations and insurmountable difficulties that we have to skirt around as the years pass, without knowing exactly where we are going, but guided with a precision that later causes us great astonishment.

Seen from outside, these successive phases in life are irregular, but they are at the same time intimately connected with each other inwardly. We may not be aware of this unity existing between them when we take initiatives, but it will become clear to us later when we review our past life and discover

the fundamental spirit that has guided us and which was present when our being was beginning to develop. This irregularity or diversity in the stages that occur in our life will inevitably seem to us to have been caused less by the events that might have led to them than by an inner development which might have drawn attention to everything that we are. This irregularity and diversity therefore make for great fruitfulness.

When we have become sufficiently faithful to our mission, our whole life becomes stable, despite all hesitations, deviations and setbacks. There may still be a diversity and even apparent contradictions in our decisions, but fundamentally they will be one. This unity will be more strict than any that we had believed possible at the beginning. Our whole existence will be lasting and consistent and able to give us, at a suitable moment and despite our instinctive reactions, the strength that we will need to confront death and to make it our own. If we think deeply about these statements when we approach the evening of our life, they may help to make us open—and, what is more, effectively open—to a form of contemplation that will go far beyond our own private life and put us in touch with the history of creation.

Mission, then, has the same dimension as existence itself, because it penetrates to our innermost depths and draws attention to them. Function simply corresponds to the demands made by the period and its needs and does not attempt to stimulate what is in accordance with our depths. It only cultivates in us what is in accordance with the aim that it is pursuing itself. When we carry out our mission we, at the same time, receive and create ourselves. When we carry out our function, on the other hand, we model ourselves on the pre-fabricated image of the one whom one needs in a very precise and limited way. Our mission insures that we will be fruitful for a long time that cannot be prescribed in advance. Our function acts more quickly and makes it possible for us to be useful for a little while.

*We who are faithful to our mission contain, by its mere presence, an appeal to be ourselves*

Mission provides us with the only possible means of reaching another person at the level of being. Other ways of communicating are not concerned with what is essential and can even distract our attention from it. The more we measure ourselves against our own reality and bear our destiny in our fundamental solitude, the more powerful and penetrating will be the appeals—which cannot be foreseen or premeditated—that come from life and work in which our being is expressed in a much better way than it is by what we are able to say about it. It is really only in this way that we can ever help others to find themselves. It is only in this way too that we can be a source of light which is at the same time strength. The influence that we may exert in other

ways may be effective, but it is only indirectly useful. These signs of what lies beyond what can be grasped in us and what we ourselves cannot produce or even recognize when they emerge from us give to our mission the power of a seed and a ferment, whatever their objective contribution and social effectiveness may be.

What is left of us after our death, when we have dedicated our life to a function, is no more than a memory of someone who has served the cause of an ideology. Our mission, however, does not cease when we die; it simply changes in its mode. A life that has been entirely animated by mission makes a deep impression because it provides a glimpse of the fundamental oneness of that life. It points to the higher meaning of human existence that is so frequently wasted and to the absolute importance of that existence, which is often misunderstood by those of us whose attention is normally drawn away from themselves and from the reality that underlies all appearances.

Every life that has been made fruitful by mission is always an appeal. It bears the personal mark that cannot be erased of the one who has been the creator rather than simply the worker of that life. It acts through itself, whatever the circumstances may be that make it known. For those who respond to this appeal, it has a private meaning which applies to each one separately, since this action taking place in them is similar to the activity of God and, of course, it comes from God. It goes back to that "being" of person which is God's.

#### *The independence, solidarity and convergence of missions*

These missions, which are inalienably personal, are neither isolated nor independent. They all form part of a single whole which is, in a hidden but very authentic way, coherent. This coherence can be glimpsed when we go beyond purely objective history and enter intimately, by our own experience, into the lives of those who have been faithful to their mission in the past. Despite each person's originality, they are all very similar. They all find their own way and are urged on by the same spirit. They also react externally on each other, as functions do, but the principal activity that unites them comes mysteriously from within each of them. Everything takes place as though it were prompted by the mere fact of their existence and without any need for more explicit, active communication. By their very existence, then, missions help each other to be born and to develop in the secret hearts of those who live in accordance with them.

Nothing is more impressive than this rising tide of being caused by the action of some invisible planet. All these people come from very different spheres and none of them know where they are going, even when they think

that they know precisely because they believe the evidence provided by their environment. However original, independent and different they may be, they all converge, approaching each other even when they appear to be in conflict with each other and moving toward the same human reality that is both single and multiple, while creating it within themselves, according to their own measure.

*The fulfillment of the world depends on the accomplishment of these missions*

The fulfillment of the world requires more from us than simply a conscientious carrying out of our function, which can only lead human society to perfection in the direction in which it set off and make it more and more precisely submissive to the laws prevailing at the time of that society's growth and decline into old age. A true fulfillment of the world requires us to be faithful to our mission. It calls for a true creativity and not simply for a structure made in accordance with preconceived ideas. It is only if this situation is present that it will not be reduced to a mere result of the forces and influences that bear down on reality and will not swallow up its workers in an immense complex that is unrelated to their own measure. It will, on the contrary, allow them to discover their own fullness. This condition of faithfulness to mission makes this success as improbable as it is unimaginable and shows it to be transcendent.

*Faith and ideological belief in the world*

Despite the predictions that are so often made with confidence at the beginning of our life, the ultimate aim of our mission is in fact unknown to us. When we set off we cannot really know its meaning, and its goal is only gradually revealed to us and even then never completely, however faithful we may be to that mission. How much more difficult it is to imagine the ultimate fulfillment of humanity as a whole, which is an amalgam of countless individual missions, an alchemy beyond our understanding that is resumed again and again after every failure.

This fulfillment of the world, which is connected with the fulfillment of us, who bring it about in a superhuman manner, must be respected because of its mysterious quality, as God himself is respected. It cannot be the object of an ideological belief, which would, because of its teaching, give an almost absolute value to science and technology and would justify the religious gift of ourselves that we are sometimes tempted to make, even though it may not be desirable to call it this. Despite its grandiose nature, however, this belief soon becomes out of date in its forms of expression and sometimes even in its ob-

ject, because it is so conditioned by the time and place of its origin. This gift, which is hostile to mission because of its development, implies a sacrilegious renunciation of self, because its origin is purely ideological.

We must believe in the full value of the work that is done in the world if we are to perform it usefully and not simply be spectators. In order to avoid being merely unskilled workers or cogs in an enormous machine that is revolving but quite unproductive, we must believe in it through an act of faith that is grafted on to our faith in God and our faith in ourselves.

Ideology shows us in quite a clear and explicit way the work that has to be done to build up the world, a task which interests us and raises us up. It also gives us a function that is suitably organized in conjunction with the functions of others so that the aim will be accomplished. Faith in God and faith in ourselves, on the other hand, are inseparably united, but leave the future of humanity in total darkness. They also leave in total darkness the path that each of us must follow step by step if we are to become ourselves. As we raise ourselves up, however, and reach the spiritual level that enables us to become conscious of our mission, we share—individually and without any collective planning, separated from each other yet still influenced by a full inner agreement and in an organic manner—in the fulfillment of the world and in so doing fulfill ourselves. Missions are born like seeds that are broadcast. The only thing that holds them together is the hand of the sower and the sheaf of the harvester.

#### *Faith and community, ideological belief and collectivity*

The basic difference between faith in God and ideological belief, when this attempts to speak about God, is manifested both in society as a whole and in the individual.

We who are faithful to the same ideology are connected to each other because we cling to a doctrine that is always developing and being defined more precisely. We form a society which, in a sense, already existed before its members and which transcends them. This society requires us to be uniform in our thinking and disciplined in our initiatives, so that we are unable to become truly ourselves. We may even become deformed or betray ourselves. Such a society does not bring us closer together. On the contrary, it enslaves us by making us devote ourselves to the work that it gives us. It only trains us for its own purposes and does not concern itself with the individual's originality or with its birth and growth.

The society that is formed by us who are animated by faith, on the other hand, helps all members to be faithful to their own mission. It enables them to become deeper in a way that cannot be done by any other agency. Unlike the other kinds of society, it does not exist apart from its members. Indeed, it

only exists because of the existence of each member and in this way transcends the individuality of each without crushing it. It even exalts each one's individuality in a unity that fulfills all its members. It is both the way and the end of the way. It is only a real way if it is seen as an end that cannot be reached. It is an appeal and a means. It is only a means if it is recognized that its appeal comes from beyond the horizons that it is able to reveal. This society is one, but it is not unified. It is organic, but it is not organized. It is rich because of the diversity of its many members and it reflects both the spiritual energy which brings them together and the originality of each one of them, precisely because it forms part of them.

At the level of society, then, this is what distinguishes faith in God from clinging to any kind of religious ideology. Faith in God is rooted at the very center of every person and gradually brings about community between them where otherwise there would only be collectivity. The intellectual bareness of this faith means that this community will continue to grow and will never be finally established. It also means that it will not degenerate into a mere collectivity based on a religious ideology, however spiritual that may be.

The real nature of this community, which distinguishes it from all forms of collectivity brought about by ideological belief, is invisible. It is overlooked from outside, because one has to form part of it if one is to know it at all. Anything that can be glimpsed of this community and received from it while remaining outside its fundamental reality cannot be measured alongside what it really is. It can only really help its members to the extent that they bring it about, but, through each one of those members, it has an influence on many people and makes them more personal. As a society, it exercises a sociological influence. Unlike the effect of forms of collectivity based on ideological belief, however, this community has a purely secondary influence that is not in any way essential to its being. Again, unlike collectivity, which has a real power to attract even the most passive of people, community lives and thrives by discretion.

The center of this community of faith is God. We discover ourselves in ourselves and among each other in it. We become united with each other in it, while remaining solitary. We cling to what God is in us and in others.

This community is as invisible in its own reality as God himself. It is lasting and consistent. It exists as God exists in each of its members. By what they already are, it is. It also becomes by helping each one toward a self-creation.

*Everyone has an obscure longing for community*

This community is like a citadel with sheer walls, no entrance and no road leading to it. It can only be open to the great ones among the living. Yet

everyone has an obscure desire to enter it. It is the hidden end of our journey and it is unknown rather than mistaken. Many forms of collectivity based on ideological belief claim to be communities. In this, they reveal a nostalgia that they do not openly admit and indeed they are not even capable of understanding its nature. This blind nostalgia is concealed among our many different aspirations and gives strength and energy to the most lofty of them. It is the hidden form of a universal expectation which is combined with a similarly obscure expectation based on faith in God that is also hidden in each of us.

In practice, faith in God is never entirely free from ideology. It reveals itself in us on the basis of what is deepest in us and also through the teaching that we have been given since our earliest childhood. This teaching has, of course, also continued throughout our life in our whole environment and we can never completely escape from it. All believers, however authentic and strong their faith may be, tend again and again to rely on some ideology in order to fortify the superhuman affirmation of their faith at normal times. All persons, then, who have faith in God also belong closely or more remotely and consciously or unconsciously to a religious collectivity with an ideology forming its charter. In practice, this is a necessary help, but it contaminates faith with intellectual data and aspects of feeling that are very dependent on the time and the place at which they are experienced.

How then are we able to be born into the community of faith and to grow in it if the collectivity which is based on ideology and which brings it to birth and advances it up continues to be unable to help us to go beyond what it shows us as the highest aim?