

WORK AND CALLING

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I.

It is not necessary to undertake a lengthy study to realize that nothing in the Bible allows us to identify *work* with *calling*. When the terms that can be translated by the word "vocation," or "call from God" are encountered, they are always concerned with a summons to the specific service of God: a summons to be prophet or apostle, but also king, as was David; and eventually, to serve God by an exceptional act, without even knowing one is serving Him, as the Chaldeans, or Cyrus, or the king of Damascus. It is never a question of work—with the exception of Hiram and the construction of the Temple. Work is (we cannot, of course, produce a "theology of work" within the limits of this article!) a natural exercise of activity which either places man in a positive relation to the creation (the situation in Eden), or in a negative one (in the rupture with God, and "East of Eden"). In the latter case, work becomes painful and compulsory in the attempt to survive. In any case, however, it does not represent a service to God. It is an

imperative of survival, and the Bible remains realistic enough not to superimpose upon this necessity a superfluous spiritual decoration.

Moreover, the Bible is not essentially concerned with this situation of work. It is the common and distressing lot of everyone, but it is not particularly important. It has often been noted that one can find hardly anything in the Old or New Testaments about how the Judges or the Prophets, the Apostles or the Disciples, earn their living. The references to Amos the shepherd, and Paul the maker of tents, are exceptional indications of little consequence. It has often been said that this lack of reference was due to the fact that on the cultural level, in the Jewish and then Greco-Roman worlds, work held such little place and importance (and this is not certain) that people did not speak of it—and not because *it should* have little importance before God. Biblical detachment in this respect would then not be normative. In reality, however, this observation is without substance. For if work was conceived as a calling, a vocation coming from God, the Bible would have accorded it an importance that it may not have had culturally. In addition, one should ask why it was desirable to extricate from the Bible the idea of work *as* calling, at a time when work was becoming important, culturally?

When Christianity became dominant in the Roman world, about the third century, certain theologians began to put a high value on work. This coincided with

the political movement: the Empire had more and more need of workers and manual labor. This is not, however, the principle point. I do not at all believe, in this case, the Marxist interpretation (which is valid, on the contrary, for the use made of Christianity by Western bourgeoisie during the nineteenth century; we shall speak of this later), which states that the theologians formulated an ideology of work-in-the-service-of-God, *in order to* induce people to work conscientiously, with serious minds, without deceit, etc. Rather, the idea of work as vocation, as calling, appears to me to derive from two perspectives which progressively emerge in Christian theology from the third to the fifth century. The first arises from Greek philosophy, and is what I would call the passion for *unity*. The ideal life is "One", undivided, just as the ideal for the Greek city was unitary organization. All philosophy is oriented by this attraction to the *One*. The world is bad because it is shattered, divided, separated. The *One* is both the reversion to the original situation, and the fulfillment of all convergencies. Man must establish a life of oneness, unequivocal; he must not be divided. Under these conditions, and for faith, it is evident that God is the essential part of our life. It is a function of grace—the Word which is revealed to us—and faith, that unity should be constituted. Man should be of God and for God—in all that he does and in all his works. His life is not made up of incoherent and successive moments, but is one in the recapitulation of Christ. Likewise, man's diverse works are not thrown to chance: they form a whole with respect to the grace which has been given by God. Consequently, each one of these works is related to God: and, moreover, they come (if one is faithful, if one is a believer) from the will of God: recognized, discerned, accepted, loved. There will be a calling, a vocation addressed by God, not only in His service and in accordance with the proclamation of the Gospel, but also for the "states" we adopt: a vocation for marriage or celibacy, for example. Therefore, there will be a vocation for work and even for a particular work. This is what is required for our lives to be *One* in God.

But there is a second motive. We have just spoken of a calling to the service of God. Yet, more and more during the fourth century, this service to God appears not only as preaching, in the service of the Church, "deaconry," etc., but as a service in the world through the idea of Providence. God wills that the world of His creation survive. He wishes to maintain it. There is a certain order of the world which is willed by God. Hence, all that we do to maintain Creation itself (make it last; have children, work), and to preserve its order, is a service to God. Thus, military service in the fourth century could become a calling because it was part of the maintenance of the worldly order willed by God. And, of course, work, labor. All of this appears to me to be clearly formulated during the fourth and fifth centuries. However, these theological constructions will be wiped

out during the troubled period from the fifth to the tenth centuries.

Then, during the Middle ages (tenth-fourteenth centuries) a more confused situation occurs. During this period, there is in reality two contradictory currents. For some, work is purely and simply a curse, a sign of the condemnation of Adam. Consequently, it does not possess any value in itself and cannot be the object of a calling. Genuine vocation is expressed, for example, by the acceptance of poverty, and the tendency toward the begging monks (the mendicants) which corresponds to this idea. At the extreme, some will say that this world is a place of evil, dominated by the Princes of this world: we should do all in our power to speed up its end. Here, Catharism unites with a certain Christian orientation. One must do nothing to make the world last; on the contrary, to seek to bring about the kingdom of God is to work for the end of the world (from which the Cathars based their refusal to procreate). But one also finds among the theologians the contradictory tendency: the defense of the ideology of work—its sanctifying value, its integration into the unity of life, and consequently, the idea that God calls us to perform a specific work. Yet, different sorts of work are distinguished. Agricultural work is sanctifying, and can be the object of God's calling; it is a service to God in Nature. Contrawise, commerce, and more so, money traffic, is not susceptible of incarnating a vocation from God. Generally, all the theologians who attempted to construct dogmatics during the Middle Ages encountered the problem of work and energetically resolved it in the direction of a choice made between work which pleases God, and work which is damnable, and in the affirmation of the unity of man's life, entirely submitted to grace, he is called upon through these works to attest to that grace. Work was not excluded; it was the object of a vocation God addressed to man. However, it concerned more a universal, as opposed to an individualized, calling.

The situation will be reversed during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, first of all, by the great movement of secularization which began during the fourteenth century, and again, by the development of economic activities (and especially commerce) which tended to set a high value on work. Work subsequently becomes both more essential than in the preceding period, and it finds itself "ennobled." The idea of work as a curse slowly disappears. During the fifteenth century, one begins to find the argument, so often developed during the Reformation and the eighteenth century, of the uselessness of the monks (and especially the begging monks), because they do not work, and produce nothing. Work begins to be (what it was not in the thirteenth century), a value as well as a virtue.

It is amidst this cultural climate, this psycho-economic mutation with respect to work, that Martin Luther appears. He cannot reject everything that has taken place. The society in which he finds himself works as never before. The social category he principally speaks to has made work the end and meaning of life. Only the view that *everything* is related to God, that *everything* comes from God, is retained. Thereafter, work is also related to God. Work is validated, but this is true only because it comes from God, because it is a part of the order He established for man. Thus, Luther will forcefully argue, in the celebrated text about the cobbler, that in making shoes, the cobbler serves God, obeys his calling from God, quite as much as the preacher of the Word. At times, during the Reformation, the idea that work is a service to God through man also appears: the worker renders services to other men and, in doing so, obeys God's commandment.

It was also necessary to consider another interpretation of calling: work could be dreadfully painful, crushing, and mortifying, but such was God's will. It was necessary to assume this burden, this condemnation, to accept it, because it came from God. Thereby, one rapidly arrived at a concept which would be developed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—that of work as redemption. It is obvious that this was part of man's vocation, man's calling. However, an important change takes place. Luther had heavily insisted on the individual character of grace, on the singularity of each calling. Could that which was true in the spiritual realm be false in the temporal—if one served God in the one as well as the other? Hence, he who performed a particular profession did so because he was called upon by God to hold *that* particular profession, and not another. Each individual entered into God's design in a particular way. There is no longer a *general* calling for work, but a unique calling addressed to such and such individual to become a bricklayer, or a doctor, etc. This brings about, on the one hand, the impossibility of thoroughly classifying the professions which please God, and those which are cursed (God calls a particular man to a particular work . . .). On the other hand, the individual assumes the responsibility that each person must ask himself: what type of work does God wish *me* to do? And this will arouse the uneasy conscience of Protestantism—the uncertainty concerning the obedience to a call which is never so obvious as to leave no room for doubt. In any case, all this results in a tremendous professional conscience. It was clear that he who acted by vocation should place all his zeal, all his love, all his strength, in the service of God. The economic consequences which this would have for the development of capitalism and the bourgeoisie are very familiar also. It produced a considerable valuing of work, and we then see its development through reciprocal influence: the more work is valued through the idea of vocation, the more economic activity is increased; and, conversely:

the more economic activity is developed, the more work is valued.

In the ideological realm, this question takes on a double orientation. On the one hand, work is lifted to its highest pinnacle of exigency and concrete value by the bourgeoisie. We are all familiar with the "common-places" which resulted: that, for example, "he who works, prays" (which comes directly from the confusion between work and divine calling). Or, even, "work is freedom," emphasizing the redemptive character of work. We also know about the use made of God's will by the bourgeoisie concerning those who work. The bourgeoisie employed all these religious ideas during the nineteenth century to maintain the workers in submission and obedience to a divine order. At this time, the call to work (vocation) becomes once again collective, and a means of exerting social pressure, while, within the bourgeoisie itself, the sense of vocation as a personal service to God through a profession (often liberal) is very often maintained. This implied the display of exceptional qualities: one worked with more passion, taste, and care, because one worked for God and by His command.

It is also necessary to underline the other aspect of the evolution of the idea of work as calling—found in the writings of Karl Marx. Marx lifts the ideology of work to its summit. Man is what he does (in his work). Work is what distinguishes man from the rest of nature, so he awards work an exceptional place and virtue. Hence, Marx gives us this admirable text concerning the result of work:

In your use of my product, I will directly enjoy the consciousness of having satisfied a human need and objectified the essence of man, of having been for you the Middle Term between yourself and the human race; of being known and felt by you as a complement to your proper being and a necessary part of you; thus to know *myself* confirmed both in your thoughts and your love; to have created in the individual manifestation of my life, the manifestation of your life; to have therefore formed and realized directly in my activity . . . my human essence, my social essence.

Such is work according to Marx. And one can see how greatly he is influenced by the idea of vocation in his condemnation of the capitalist system—which destroys through exploitation the eminent and constructive role of work! This prodigious, high value of work, argued by Marx, which before him, had never known such exaltation, is the result, on the one hand, of the growth of work in the Western world during the nineteenth century and, on the other, the secularization of the idea of man's divine vocation in work.

II.

Now, it is clear and obvious that, with the evolution of our society, it was impossible to maintain such an ideology of work. [Assuredly, it still exists and some try to make it endure: for example, Herzberg, *Le Travail et la Nature de l'Homme* (Paris, 1972), but it is an attempt which is condemned in advance!] Of course,

one can say whatever one wishes on the philosophical level, but it has become very clear that nothing, in any historical epoch, could justify any such idealism of work. Since the nineteenth century, we have witnessed the degradation of work in three stages, yet we must always emphasize that it is never by glorifying the work of the artisan or the peasant as being easier, less tiring, etc. There was, perhaps, in this latter conception of work a greater possibility of confusion with God's command. On the one hand, the crafts represented a more individualized type of work, directly implying the rather personal idea of service, and the accomplishment, or creation, of a product expressing all the personality of the author: one could see if the product was a success or failure. It was a more complete type of work, at the same time subjected to the rhythm of the worker himself. Similarly, the peasant works in nature, and inevitably, the medieval idea was preserved that Nature, as the natural environment of man, is good. Work which is done in nature is "closer to God." (It is not, however, a question of work which is more agreeable.) These two aspects which encouraged the confusion between work and calling, have apparently disappeared, and we can now observe the shattering of the unity between the two terms, work and calling.

First of all, there was capitalism. With wage-earning, work becomes a commodity which is bought and sold. Man is then dispossessed both of his power to work and the product of his work—in exchange for a salary which allows him to do little more than survive. This salary absolutely does not represent the true, superior, "transcendent" value of work. On the contrary, it reduces work to *nothing more* than a commodity. The individual whose work is sold in this manner can have no initiative, no joy; work can no longer be the expression of his personality, since he has no other objective than to produce the objects which will enter into the commercial circuit. Hence, it was from this time already difficult to maintain the idea of work as calling, as vocation. The situation will be further aggravated, however, as the age of the machine fully develops. The problem is now familiar. For example, in the works of Georges Friedmann: "*Le travail en miettes*" ("Work in pieces," "atomized work"), and "*Où va le travail humaine?*" ("Where goes human work?") Work separated from workmanship has become pure and simple obligation without any meaning—shattered through division and specialization. The worker is ignorant in the end of what he does and makes. What is the utility, the value, of such work? He is also ignorant of the materials with which he works and is familiar only with the gadgets and instruments—thanks to which he works. The atomization and fragmentation of work prohibits any understanding of the activity to which one devotes oneself. Specialized pro-

fessional training encloses the worker in a narrow sphere of activity. Personal reflection is no longer possible concerning the "how" of his work. There is a rupture between thought and action. And this leads to the situation where each action of the machine's servant will be calculated by a third party, who is specialized in the "man-machine" combination, as well as in the combination of the machines among themselves, in order to form a harmony among them. From that moment, man's work is entirely subordinated to the possibilities of the machine and to the necessities of the organization of machines among themselves. This is represented, for example, by the problem of "cadences" and the Taylorization process. This means that work, from which man is now totally dispossessed, can be only an activity alien to him, imposed in some fashion from the outside. Work can no longer correspond to any inward reality, and literally holds no place in the true life of the worker—and yet it absorbs the major portion of his lifetime. Under these conditions, it is obvious that work could no longer be a vocation, a calling. Of course, it is always possible to contend that God can transform the worst situation, and that He can restore the sense of vocation to the worst type of work. But this really represents a convenient refusal to see the real situation: Work such as it is today cannot be universally upheld as a calling. At best, let us say that God can by grace and miracle cause work to be lived by man as a gift and a calling. Nonetheless, the *theological* rapport between vocation and work has been broken: work as such is not vocation, not a calling.

Today, the general technicization of society has even aggravated this rupture. Technique has become the mediator between all actions and all intentions. In our world, it is necessary to depend upon techniques in order to accomplish anything at all. And furthermore, technique has its own specific quality of efficiency; in fact, efficiency is technique's major characteristic. Consequently, technique itself destroys any recourse to added efficiency. Where true technique exists, it is not possible to employ Ambroise Paré's formula: "I dress his wounds, and God heals him." It is not possible to say, "I pressed on the accelerator, and God made the car speed up." This regularity of effects, this specificity of means, this generalized intercession of technique, leaves no room for the concept of vocation as calling. Quite to the contrary, we know there is serious criticism of "calling" in the technological society: where a strict technician is needed, one cannot accept a man endowed with vocation, or God's calling. Possessing vocation becomes a means for *not* becoming a competent technician. We are all familiar with men who present themselves for positions as professors, educators, psychologists, because they are obeying a calling from God to a vocation—and are perfectly incompetent. Even more so, we consider that even for a specialist, vocation can cause much bungling in the use of technique: a nurse who obeys her vocation will let herself be influenced by sentiment in her work,

and no longer be dominated by the rigorous criterion of efficiency. We also know what this social, pedagogical or medical work becomes in the absence of "calling": the application of cold techniques, the radical indifference of the practitioner toward his patient, the exactitude of the gestures in the absence of human relationships, the transformation of the patient into a case, a number.

Now, all of this results from the generalization of technique-as-mediation, which makes any grafting of vocation to technique impossible. It is only in an abstract and theoretical fashion that one can say: "There is a vocation, a call from God, and he who received it becomes a perfect technician." Or, "Beyond the use of a perfect technique, there is the marvelous adjunction of God's gesture in calling us to vocation." All such thinking is simply romantic idealism. In reality, it is perfect technique which excludes the very idea of vocation. There is only one fact to remember: technical efficiency permits us to treat a greater number of "cases" But: one cannot indefinitely multiply human resources with resort to pity, sympathy, compassion, love.

This radical rupture between work and calling, due to the "capitalism-machinism-technicization" trio, has caused as a consequence, the crisis of calling among Christians themselves. I would like to look at this crisis from three angles. First of all, it has become well known (at least in Europe) that the theory of vocation has often become a way not to pay for services at their true value. Just as the bourgeois made workers obey by explaining that their condition was the fruit of the vocation which God had given them, so in many Christian and churchly enterprises, "vocation" is used as a pretext to give lower salaries (and sometimes no salary at all) to nurses, social workers, pastors, teachers, etc. "Since you obey a vocation coming from God, you're not really going to demand to be paid for obeying a order coming from God!" This speech, made by the presidents of businesses and churches in Europe, facilitated things for them very well! At the present time, of course, there has been the expected reaction to it, and these "servants" now demand a salary equal to those who fulfill—without any calling from God—the same function. But as a consequence of all this, vocation itself has become suspect. When a professor or a tutor hears the words "calling", or "vocation," his reflex is "Well, they are invoking my 'calling,' and that means they are not going to pay me what is just and fair for what I do." So even serious Christians frequently want to hear no more of vocation—for they consider it as a means of blackmail.

From a second point of view, calling as vocation is under a shadow with Christians due to the fact that the Church's responsible people (pastors, etc.,) feel very much debased in a world of technique since they are not themselves specialists, and especially not tech-

nicians. To obey a calling and then to preach, to direct a congregation, to take time for soul-searching—all this seems frivolous in a world of engineers and producers. So, these embarrassed pastors also want to become technicians. They therefore practice psychoanalysis, group dynamics, social psychology, information theory, etc. And it is as psychoanalysts that they will act upon the Christian community—no longer because they were called upon by God for service. Here again it is totally illusory to believe that technique is simply added to, or serves, vocation: technique *in fact* substitutes itself for vocation.

When we combine these first two criticisms of vocation by Christians we rapidly arrive at the third: the refusal to admit that there can be any calling from God to render a vocation of service to the Church. In other words, Christians have fallen into precisely the opposite error which characterized the old identification between work and calling. Now, there is no longer any vocation in being a pastor or a deacon. It is simply work like any other work. The young French pastors have pushed this to the extreme: "We work in an organization which is the Church; we are ordinary wage-earners (thus a proletariat), used by a boss (the Church) who is like many other bosses. We make use of techniques (biblical exegesis or preaching—both having become pure techniques). In all of this it is not a matter of vocation, of a choice coming from God. . . ."

This denial of any possibility of vocation expresses not only the normal consequences of the process of technicization of society, not only the politization of the thinking of the young pastors, but especially the fact, very hard (although unconsciously) felt, that it is no longer possible in our society to incarnate a vocation concretely. If there is a call from God, we must find a way to express it, that is, to incarnate it. But this has now become practically impossible. So calling, vocation, tends to remain something purely inward, purely spiritual. Yet for a faith centered on the Incarnation, this is simply not acceptable. It represents a total divorce between what society unceasingly asks of us (work, military service, etc.) and God's will. Service to God cannot be written into a profession. But where then? Faced with this impossibility, one can understand the reaction: it is easier to shed oneself of the concept of vocation, of the idea that there can be a calling directed to us by God. Everything is simplified if we retain (even in the functions of the Church) the purely social and technical aspects, while rejecting all the rest. So after having unified work and calling by absorbing the professions into vocation, Christians again unify them by excluding vocation, which today has become impossible. Our situation at present, consequently, is that we find ourselves torn between work which no longer has any significance at all (and which brings no satisfaction to man) and calling, which no longer finds any possibility of incarnation.

Under these conditions, what are the possible responses if we do not accept a pure and simple rejection of vocation, if we continue to believe that God calls us to fulfill a particular service? One attitude that is still frequently adopted consists in saying that, fundamentally, there are still certain professions which can be conceived of and lived as God-given callings: physicians, to heal and preserve life; lawyers, to defend the poor, the widows and the orphans; teachers, to aid in the formation of character; psychologists, social workers, etc. . . . Christians could, therefore, direct themselves toward these professions. But I am sure that this is in no way an answer to the question of work and calling. In the first place, these "bourgeois" professions imply that Christians must be part of an "elite." Again, it is a complete illusion to believe that these professions are any longer peculiar vocations for Christians. They have become as technical as any other profession, and professional exigencies rapidly efface the sense of calling. And finally, these professions can more often than not be seen to function mainly to reintegrate our technical society. Thus, to become a lawyer by "calling" represents the expression of good sentiments, a generous will, an idealism, but it means in reality to be the victim of an illusion and to live in ignorance of what is real in our society. In our times, there is no "profession-vocation."

Therefore, we might move on to another answer: we must accept the fact that work is condemned in our society; that there is a segment of our life which is "cursed." Hence, we can abandon ourselves to a trade or profession which is without any value, without any significance, without any interest, which functions solely to supply us with enough money to survive, and we shall find the main interest for our lives elsewhere. This is the attitude of all those sociologists and social psychologists who believe that man is going to find the good life in leisure: Let us accept the fact that we shall not be living while we work. It will be rather a sort of lethargy, a blindness, an unconscious sleep (and especially let us not even approach consciousness). We shall be aroused by leisure, where we shall become ourselves at last. At least we shall live. And so it shall be exactly the same with respect to calling. Vocation will be a part of leisure, whether one undertakes some search for Christian life in his spare time, or whether one divides, traditionally: "The week for the world, Sunday for God." This dichotomy facilitates things very well. One can be an efficient and ruthless businessman for six (five!) days; on Sunday the whole of the Christian calling is resolved through participation in worship. Church festivities and works. But it is obvious that this is not satisfactory, and it is unnecessary to linger too long upon it. The case against "Sunday Christians" has often been made. But, neither must we forget that we cannot bring "a little Christianity" into modern work. It is simply out of the question to adopt the attitude often held by the Catholic Church: to bless "externally". That is to say, to Christianize by adding a little prayer or benediction to professional

activities. One's work will never be transformed because, at the beginning or the end of it, he prays to God for several seconds. Moreover, there can be a complementary form to this hypocrisy: to imply that the obedience to a God-given vocation is to live as a Christian whose calling is seen clearly and is manifested in his exercise of a profession; that in the style of a Christian in a profession, there would be an incarnation, and not merely the addition of a few pious words.

So: we have established our powerlessness. What then can we say?

III.

The first observation we must make is that, on the ideological level, work is of the order of necessity. It is given to man by God as a *means* of survival, but it is also posed as a *condition* for survival. This is evidence which St. Paul emphasizes: If a man does not wish to work, then neither shall he eat. It is not, therefore, a part of the order of grace, of gratuity, of love, of freedom. We must always avoid confusing the two when we speak of work and calling. At this juncture, I am repeating what I wrote concerning violence. For like violence, like political power, work also is part of the order of necessity. One cannot escape it; it is the human condition resulting from the rupture with God. And let us not forget that even after the Incarnation and Reconciliation, we still remain men. We have not become angels. We must still eat to live; we are still subject to the "necessity" of growing old, and we are still subject to the final necessity, to die. In Christ there is no suppression of the order of necessity: there is victory over that order. Victory of the Resurrected over death, of the Crucified over the powers of this world, of love over evil. But death, evil and the powers of this world still exist, and they form the order of necessity by which man is always trapped. Work is a part of this order. At no time, and in no circumstances, can one say that from a Biblical point of view, "work is freedom." It is just the contrary. Human experience encounters just this revelation in Christ, and that revelation never beguils us with illusions. So, we must accept it as we have been given it. And we should especially not pretend it to be something other than what it is. Otherwise, as Pascal remarked, "He who wishes to play the part of an angel, plays the part of a beast." Consequently, we must *also* accept work as calling, but not at all as a calling to live like Christian, as being redeemed, as being free. On the contrary, we must accept it as a calling to recognize ourselves as *creatures* (finite, limited, submitted to necessity) before God, as *sinful* creatures (suffering the consequences of our rupture with the Father). Work should be received in faith, marked with this double qualification. Consequently, it is "normal," in that it is alienating, overwhelming and insignificant. We should accept the feeble stupidity of it

as being the mark of the absurdity itself which constitutes our lives. Therefore, work has no ultimate value, no transcendental meaning. Before God, it is that which allows us to survive and which characterizes us as human beings. This realism matches our earlier observations, and suggests the destruction of bourgeois or Marxist romanticism, as well as any idealism concerning work.

However, the recognition that we are in the order of necessity does not at all imply the scorning of work, or the refusal and criticism of it: such is indeed the order to which we belong, and nothing more. The only thing which is forbidden us is, precisely, to confuse the order of necessity with freedom—which is to say, grace; which is to say, vocation. Work is completely relative before God. After the criticism of work by Ecclesiastes, all of the sociological studies about work are quite vain! There is no place for illusion about work. Work does not lead to anything decisive. Particularly in opposition to Marx, work does not constitute the essential meaning to life. Work is incapable of giving meaning to life, or of shedding light on what man is, or of leading to truth. We must accept the fact that while working we are truly in the most completely relative type of situation. This is what is meant by the expression: "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Work is thus limited in everyday life, and even limited to the banal, to the "hopeless." It is neither value nor creation. If we receive satisfaction from our work, like the doctor who cures or the artist who creates a work, we must not then say: "such is the *true* measure of work, by which we must measure all other tasks, that of the poor assembly-line worker, or that of the wretched laborer." No! It is in fact the latter type of work which is more genuine. And when human endeavor produces joy, or produces a work which seems to surpass the ordinary, then we must be conscious of an exceptional event, a grace, a gift of God for which we must give thanks. If we consider work in this manner, then we join realism with Biblical discernment, and we cut the wings from the idealism concerning a marvelous future where each person will do rewarding and significant work.

On the other hand, however, relative work is not without value and interest, since it also allows the possibility of continuing on in life, of maintaining the world, and consequently it opens up the possibility of history. Here, Marx's interpretation is fully valid: it is obviously work which allows history to be made. And this is God's will. Hence, at this level only, there is vocation: God calls us to a particular work (whatever it may be!) to prolong this world, which He has not yet decided to terminate and to judge. It is an entirely relative task, but it must be done. I will say it once again: it is not because something is relative that we should disdain it. Christians are all too thirsty for absolutes. What is relative never interests them (from which proceeds, for example, the many political errors they commit). Now, it ought to be otherwise. That which is relative should concern Christians, for the absolute is God's affair. It is

in the domain of the relative that we should be engaged, precisely as Christians. The relative should be considered as our true place, and should be taken altogether seriously from now on: "If you have been faithful in little things. . . ." This, however, excludes the decisive importance of the choice of a profession, as the idea of calling, in the sense we have discussed it in the above pages.

If it is not in work that we can unify our lives, or even incarnate our Christian vocation, if the society of technique brings us back to the hard condition of relative work, without ultimate value and significance, then it is obvious that we must discover a form of activity which expresses our Christian calling, which implies an incarnation of faith. And since we are involved in this world, it cannot be a purely interior matter, nor a work in the sense in which that word is usually taken—for example, in "work of charity." The Christian calling should be expressed in an *activity*—in an activity having a social and collective "impact," susceptible of modifying in one way or another the shape of the world we live in, and an activity that can only be gratuitous, while preserving the characteristics we usually attribute to work: seriousness, competence, continuity, invention. It seems to me that it is in this manner that activity can express vocation, calling, for the Christian. But since this calling is gratuitous, an expression of grace from God, activity should in response also be gratuitous. It should serve to help the men who surround us to live and society to endure. It should, therefore, be an equivalent to work, but also, a "plus," and consequently, perhaps, bring meaning.

I would like to give an example, taken necessarily from my own personal experience (but not in order to promote myself as an example!). I undertook—and this could represent a response to my own Christian vocation—work in a "Prevention Club." We so call an organization whose goal is to respond to the call and need of young people who are usually designated misfits: former beatniks, hippies, young toughs, runaways, drug addicts, rebels without a cause, delinquents and pre-delinquents, etc.; in other words, those who have maladjusted behavior in all its form, and especially, suicidal behavior. It is not, however, a question of either locking them up or giving them medical treatment. They should simply have a chance to find a gathering place that they like, and where they can come simply because they find it congenial. They should be able to do things they like to do, with good friends. Therefore: no obligation; no pressure. Secondly, it is not a question of making them

"normal"—that is, making them conform to the model society would make for them, or adapting them to some kind of work. It is, in fact, a matter of giving them the means to transform their *negative* lack of adaptation into a *positive* lack of adaptation. This means helping them learn about their personality so that they can change negative behavior into a capacity for innovation, their aggressiveness into a force of controlled action, and that they themselves develop the capacity to face the difficulties in their lives, and integrate their tensions into fruitful efforts. This is done, first of all, through certain activities (parachuting, mountain-climbing, scuba-diving, sail-boating, etc.,) during which they learn control and team relations. For these activities should always be dangerous enough to represent a genuine challenge. Secondly, an effort is made through open, interpersonal relations, which one can call "psychological therapy" if one wishes, but which has never had the character of a rigorous application of psychological techniques. To direct such an enterprise like the one I have described (and, of course, this includes a full-time, therefore, a paid staff) is genuine work. But to the extent that this does not fall into the realm of *necessary* work, as society sees it—since it takes for granted a large autonomy of action, unceasing innovation, and free choice—it appears as being truly related to the personality of the individual who is involved in it. This seems to me to be an example of one of those possibilities of incarnating grace, in a specific and unconstrained manner. I find some meaning in this. However, it implies that each person seek and invent an activity of this nature, and not be reduced simply to copying what is already taking place somewhere else. This is always the great problem with all Christian "works" for if we have received a calling, a vocation, to live in this world as witnesses, it involves us first of all in the initiative of that incarnation which can never be repeated.

Do we not, however, find ourselves again in the situation and difficulty we have encountered earlier—the division of life into two separate parts, the one devoted to work without value, and the other valued as a calling? Is this not in reality a solution of despair? To be sure, it contradicts the idea of the Christian life as the unified life, integrating the totality of our actions and feelings. But we have seen that this is not necessarily the authentic Christian understanding of life. If we have understood the true place of work according to the Scriptures, then we should not be distressed by the fact that our Christian vocation does not fall in the domain of work. Nevertheless, work is not the "cursed part" of our lives—the part which presents no interest, which has to be endured while awaiting vacation-time. In reality, we must assume, accept positively, and take upon ourselves, this sign of our rupture with God—to live fully

this order of necessity, *in order that* the freedom which is at times granted by God, the calling which we are able to assume, represents *its* true value. It is only through work, not as calling but as constraint, that the vocation which is incarnated in a work of gratitude takes on meaning. It would be disastrous to think that while I am occupied with the Prevention Club I am obeying God, while the rest of my time is anonymous, without interest or significance. I should rather be convinced that it is also working at something without significance that I am fulfilling God's plan.

Christian living thus presents itself as a dialectical movement (not dialectic that is a type of *reasoning*, but a movement of *actual experience*). What is devoted to constrained and insignificant work represents negativity: this is actually the negativity of calling, the inverted image of vocation, the expression of the impossibility of living it, of assuming it, of incarnating it. This inverted image must exist, in order that, on the one hand, we know fully what compromises vocation, and on the other, we are encouraged to express it. Calling exists. Work in the modern society of technique shows us the certainty that such work is not our Christian vocation. But this should not in any way stop us, as the "discouraged soul." On the contrary, we should seek out what is possible as incarnation and accomplishment by beginning with this negation. And conversely, when we have discovered what form vocation could eventually take, when we have invented the "how" of concrete evidence, then, the work we are obliged to do to earn our living should become enriched, valued, and to a certain extent, significant.

Thus, these are not two separated parts of life, but two faces of the dialectical movement. We are not actually dealing with a stable and kept situation, but with a relation that is constantly being challenged, a progression which results from the influence of the one on the other. And in this process, the negative portion always has a *creative* function—due to incessant questioning and re-questioning, which constantly obliges me to seek out the most satisfactory incarnation of my calling. This consequently implies that there should be a certain relationship between the two—that the choice, the invention, the discovery of the vocation form must have something to do with the work accomplished through necessity. It is obvious that if I am a doctor by necessity, and consider my vocation to be found in boating, there will be no such relation. In this example, the second choice cannot make my work significant, since it is of the order of leisure, and not vocation (which means it is of the order of false sociological freedom, as opposed to true freedom, which is grace and gratuitousness).

If I take once again the example of the Prevention Club, I would say that a professor who is called upon to deal with students, but who does so only because of professional requirements, could express his calling by taking care of young people who are different from the students, and by situating himself in another set of cir-

cumstances. But what he would then learn through working with young misfits could lead him to discover a whole facet of his students that he would not have seen as a professor. He is then engaged in a new relationship with them. Certainly, work would still remain coercive and necessary—with the typical sluggishness of institutions, the absurd regulations, the meddlesome and unjust authorities. But he would find himself removed from the function of a professor and into a total human relationship—not by humanitarianism or by liberalism—but by the effective discovery of the problems of young people. Reciprocally, the negativity of the professional function teaches how one should *not* deal with young misfits, just as the negativity of university organization instructs one as to what should not take place at the Prèvention Club!

Each person must consequently choose the form of the incarnation of his vocation with respect to his place in the order of necessity. However, this implies a reversal on our part as to the manner in which we can conceive our lives and our relation to society.

In summary, I will say that calling no longer concerns what we had so long thought it did—an entry into an order (of life, of the world) willed by God as such, and to which one adheres by vocation. Rather, calling is an entry into a *disorder* (although apparently “ordered”) established by man, and this disorder will be upset and put into question each time we seek to express our calling. □