

Chapter 2

JESUS AND VIOLENCE

Ecce homo (John 19:5)

During His trial, Jesus was led to the steps of the Praetorium and was made to face the crowd that was assembled there. His hands were tied, and the crown of thorns was digging into His head. A derisive reed was slipped under His arm, and a red cloak was thrown over His shoulders in mockery, as if to hide His bleeding wounds. And Pilate presented Him to the wild crowd, saying these simple words: "Here is the man!"

It seems clear that Pilate meant to mock both Jesus and the crowd; to Jesus: "Look at the pitiful state which you have been reduced by my soldiers"; to the crowd: "Look what I have done to your king. When will you stop dreaming of an impossible revolt against the empire?" In pronouncing these words "Here is the man!"; it was almost as if the governor was saying, "Here's your guy!"

But in all times, in these three words, which in Pilate's mind were purely sarcastic, Christians and theologians have discerned a profound and objective truth. He who was thus designated was also proclaimed to be a man, a real man. And we believe that Pilate truly prophesied by his own mouth without even realizing it. God Himself has affirmed for centuries that the ideal man, the model man, is Jesus of Nazareth.

Now, Jesus did not have a glorious appearance at all: He was exhausted by the flogging He had just undergone, He was weak, humiliated, made to look ridiculous. He stood there motionless, suffering, tasting the bitterness of His cruel condition, under the mocking stare of the crowd, and feeling despised by the soldiers and Roman officers. Is it not rather strange that Jesus should be proclaimed a true man at the very moment that He was undergoing such humiliation?

The pagan asleep in all of us would have much rather preferred that Jesus be presented as our model man when He appeared in the glory of His resurrected body, for example, or when He was performing miracles, walking on water, or feeding the crowds, or better yet, when He drove the merchants out of the Temple! Power and glory, that is what we naturally like. But no. The Gospel presents Him as the model man at the moment He is ready to succumb in His weakness and submission. This coincidence is certainly not a matter of chance. All His life, Jesus

had been nonviolent (by nonviolence we mean the attitude, which is described in the last paragraph of Romans 12).¹

Jesus carried Himself in a peaceful manner in all His conflicts with His adversaries, responding to hate and violence with love and gentleness, though He was known to use some harsh words at times. But now His nonviolence has attained its apogee; the Cross is there, and He is gone. Apparently, He is powerless. That is how it may seem, but we feel by faith that He is master of the situation, that He dominates it spiritually, that He truly carries the salvation of the world on his trembling shoulders. And it was at that moment that He was proclaimed the modern man, and that He gave an example for His disciples of all times to follow. Thus, henceforth, a true Christian must be nonviolent to truly be in the image of the Master.

But the crowd of Jerusalem preferred violent men to Him! With the choice placed in front of them, they asked for Barabbas to be freed, rather than Jesus. Barabbas was a brigand. We should rather translate this as a terrorist, because we have all the reason to believe that Barabbas and his two companions, those who were crucified with Jesus, were supporters of the resistance. The fact that Barabbas had been condemned for a murder committed in sedition (Mark 15:7) confirms this idea to us. Moreover, the term used for all three, *lèstès*, is currently used in contemporary literature, and notably in the writings of Josephus, to mean Jewish patriots who were against the Romans and who led an ardent, rough guerrilla resistance against them. We understand that Barabbas was considered by the Jews as a “notorious prisoner” (Matthew 27:16), and we can thus get a little feeling for the reason that this crowd, ardently patriotic, asked for the liberation of this chief *maquis* rather than the Savior.² The paganisms of violence and of the nation carried them, once more, against the faithfulness of the living God; and the crowd preferred a man of blood to the one who was gentle and good.

But this crowd also preferred another man who had much experience in making human blood flow: Caesar himself! Actually, at the end of the debate between Pilate and the crowd, when the governor for the last time questioned them: “Shall I crucify your king?,” the priests themselves responded: “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). Right then and there the decision to execute Jesus was made. Thus, the crowd, led by the priests, preferred this other violent person, a war chief and distributor of the pain of death, this foreign and abhorred tyrant,

1. “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (vv. 17-20).

2. *Maquis* is the word used for the underground resistance in France. “Maquis”: dense bush country in Corsica.

to the nonviolent man who was their King, and that the tribunal had not found guilt of one crime (John 19:4).

I must add that implicitly, did the crowd not prefer another violent man over Jesus in the person of Pilate? They did not say so explicitly, but their attitude is clear: while they do not address a single word to Jesus, not even an insult, they had a dialogue with the governor. They begged him, they argued with him, despite the despicement he felt for them. In fact, they took him seriously and honored him, while they despised and rejected Jesus. In the presence of the Son of God, who was at that moment in the very process of saving them, they preferred the cruel Roman officer to Him, a man who was the most terrible enemy of the Jewish people.

Thus, at the very moment that Pilate unconsciously proclaimed that Jesus, the gentle Lamb of God, was a true man, the crowd of Jerusalem, blinded by its passions, preferred three violent men to Jesus: a resistor skilled with the knife, a chief of state who executed people at a moment's notice, and a veteran officer of many battles whose many tortures were well-known. And the question is asked of us, this lancinating question: Does Christianity, just like the crowd of Jerusalem, continue to prefer the so-called virility of men of blood to the nonviolence of Jesus? Does Christianity not admire the ruggedness of the *maquisards*,³ the hardness of elegant officers, the bloody and pitiless domination of conquering emperors, more than the nonviolence that Christ taught and practiced?

Of course, Christians like the gentleness of Jesus, but they also like the violence of hard men, strong men; they would like to adore the former without ceasing to admire and imitate the latter. They would like to serve the Lord, but keep worshipping Moloch, the god of violence, and it makes one want to yell at them, as Elijah did: "How long will you blunder along believing in two gods?" (1 Kings 18:21 [paraphrase]).

We must notice here that, if indeed, the bloody, violent types had won out that day against the divine and nonviolent Christ; it was them, each of these three, in a way, who were the first to believe in the victory of the nonviolent Jesus. It is true. Here it is surely not an accident that the first two men, who discerned God's eternal victory in the death of Christ, were men of blood! The "second thief," the patriot "terrorist," the unlucky companion of Barabbas, crucified next to Jesus, was the first to believe in the final triumph of his pitiful neighbor: "Remember me when you come into your kingdom!" he cried (Luke 23:42). And the centurion, under the order of Pilate, who took charge of the execution that day, seeing how Jesus died, said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39), or according to Luke: "Certainly this man was innocent!" (Luke 23:47).

Must one conclude that the profession of arms predisposes one to faith? This would be a rather mature conclusion! I think it is important to point out, by way of both of these affirmations, of homage rendered to Jesus by military men, a sort of recognition of the final victory of love over hate, and of nonviolence over violence, a kind of admittance of the powerlessness of violence, and public confession

3. Underground French resisters in the Second World War.

of their own error. It is as if these two men discovered all at once, in a flash of newfound faith, the real power of evangelical nonviolence, and the failure of violence, of their own violence. That is why the terrorist said, speaking of his own torture, "And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41). While the centurion, at that moment, recognized his victim to be an innocent man, he admitted implicitly that that violence, which he had just committed, and maybe that of his profession, was unjust.

No, this was not mere coincidence if, while two military men were taking care of the execution of Jesus, two others were being the first to acknowledge His victory in condemning their own violent pasts: the contrast, the radical opposition between evangelical nonviolence and the old paganism of violence, is only more strongly brought forth here.

What Is Manhood?

Christians would like to continue admitting the gentleness of Jesus, and at the same time, regard the power of the violent people in awe. But can these two loves coexist? The story has it that Clovis, after his baptism, would passionately clutch at his sword each time he heard the story of Christ's suffering and crucifixion, and say, "Ah! If only I had been there!" Did he really understand the Gospel? Do his words not reveal rather that his acceptance of the Christian message had not uprooted the residual belief in pagan violence? And Peter, when he was wrong, when he pulled out his sword and struck the servant of the high priest? Or when he obeyed Jesus and put his sword back in its sheath (Matthew 26:51)? Maybe we should be clear on that.

To get to the heart of this, what really is manhood? What is it that characterizes a real man, an authentic man? Mussolini liked saying that war is to men what motherhood is to women. What he meant by that is, as the vocation and essential function of women is to transmit life, so the supreme function of men is to make war. At first glance, this is a shocking formulation. But does it not tragically correspond to reality? Men give children to women; they bring them into the world and raise them. Then the men take it upon themselves to exterminate a certain amount of them. Each one of us, if we look around us, can affirm the veracity of Mussolini's formula.

Yet, as Christians, we feel that this is a false formula and a lie. An anthropology that makes war the first vocation of men is truly opposed to the message of the New Testament, which never glorifies violence and the profession of arms; it invites Christians rather to gentleness, to goodwill, to meekness and grace. The Christian is not called to violence, but to nonviolence. And there in the formula of Mussolini, which was also, let us not forget that of Hitler, is a cynicism, a cult of power, a conception of man as a savage, a brutal being, which are all incompatible with the Gospel.

Another formula has been proposed to counter Mussolini's infamous formula: "War is to men as prostitution is to women."⁴ This is also a brutal formula, and just as shocking as the one we have already discussed. Yet, we must sustain that, as much as prostitution is a horrible caricature, sterile and destructive of the true vocation of men, which is to love and protect, and not to pillage and massacre, in war, men claim that they're protecting, but in fact, they scourge and destroy. They not only kill the true enemies, which Jesus instructs us to love, but they also kill compatriots, allies, children, old people, and pregnant women. They plunder people's harvest and villages; how can they possibly think that they are "protecting"?

Some people will no doubt be outraged that we compare the profession of arms to prostitution. But what then is this prudishness that causes them to protest? Is prostitution not part of war? Did you not know that on the daily radio report,⁵ the going rates in the B.M.C. (military bordellos of the country) are broadcast to soldiers, just as they announce the hours of mass? Did you not know that the army puts its premises and vehicles at the disposal of its soldiers and slaves as well as their military chaplains? For the army, religion and prostitution are indispensable distractions and consolations to maintain the morale of the troops, that excessive idleness of the rough conditions of combat that risk demoralizing them. Let's be realistic! There will be those who object and say that the reasons for defensive wars are totally respectable and noble. To this I respond that I knew some proprietors and some prostitutes who seriously believed that they were providing society with an invaluable service. What we are getting at here is that one must not judge an enterprise according to its goals (which are always admirable, even those of Hitler, if you recall!), but rather according to the methods it uses to reach those ends. It is on the grounds of methods used that a true judgment can be made and that decisive arguments can be made to uphold the particular enterprise in question and the human action involved. Now, the methods of violence are always anti-Christian.

We will be reproached for dwelling so heavily on the parallel between war and prostitution, as this is not at all fair to the military people. I respond to that first of all by admitting my own fault here, as I was in the military, and I am thus the first to

4. When he was pastor of Maubeuge, Jean Lasserre brought a long fight against prostitution. In December 1945, his abolitionist campaign led to the Verlomme prefect closing "brothels" in the Nord département, which created ripples in France with the 1946 law on the repression of prostitution. Raoul Crespín, *Des protestants engagés. Le christianisme social* [Protestants engage. Social Christianity], 1945–1970 (Paris: Les Bergers et les Mages, 1993), 316; Jean Lasserre, *Comment les "maisons" furent fermées. Les bagnes de la prostitution réglementés* [How the "houses" were closed. The regulated prisons of prostitution] (Geneva: Fédération Abolitionniste Internationale, 1955). [Rognan notation.]

5. The "report" is the meeting of troops and some noncommissioned officers and officers for the communication of information and instructions, mail distribution and the reading of punishments, and so on.

be condemned in speaking negatively about the military. Yet, on the other hand, I am not the first to make this kind of comparison; if one reads Hippolytus of Rome's book carefully, and specifically the section we have reproduced in Appendix I, you will discover that the early church disapproved of the profession of war as much as that of prostitution. In any case, Christians have honored war too much in the past, when in actuality, the true task of the church should be to pitilessly dishonor war. If it does not dishonor war, it is an accomplice in it.

Some will reproach us for downgrading the heroic virtues that war reveals and brings out of many soldiers. But what exactly do we mean by heroism? Ever since I saw this word, written in dark, shining, haloed letters on a large panel placed under a portrait of Adolf Hitler (it was in the "Kommandantur" office in Maubeuge in 1941), I must admit that the words "hero" and "heroism" leave me cold. In any case, neither the terms nor the idea exists in the New Testament.

Let's go back to our two aphorisms. If you opt for the first, you are, let me assure you, in the clan of the Mussolinis and Hitlers of all the centuries. If, on the other hand, you choose the second group, you will find yourself, maybe without even wanting to, in the clan of conscientious objectors. I doubt very strongly that there is an intermediate position that is consistent. A nonbeliever perhaps could sustain that war is a neutral activity, which is neither good nor bad, nor glorious, nor shameful, as a sort of physiological function of society. But just using the word "function" is already approving of and justifying war. A sociological analysis, "objective" and scientific, could without doubt describe the phenomenon of war coldly, and without pronouncing one value of judgment. In any case, a Christian, tied to the Word of God, cannot hold to such a moral skepticism. The reality of war is much too atrocious, and the Gospel is too precise in its demands. Ecumenical treaties have shown quite clearly that "war is contrary to the will of God." And by that, they have clearly rejected the theory of Mussolini. It still remains for us to decide, however, which one of these opposing conceptions of manhood is in accord with the Gospel.

At the base of this all, to kill a man always manifests a resignation, and is a dastardly action. If parents killed their undisciplined child, if a teacher killed his student because he was a dunce, if a doctor killed a patient because he did not know how to cure him, everyone would cry out about the scandal, and with good reason. In killing, these people have abandoned their responsibilities. Suicide is also almost always a sort of resignation, a flight from responsibility. And when society executes a condemned man, for political reasons, or for having broken the law, it is always an act of cowardice, powerless, the sign of its own failures; it feels incapable of changing the man, of using the man, is afraid of the man, and thus eliminates the man, as that is the easiest way out. When the state organizes an army and charges its soldiers with the task of killing the enemy (if they would only kill enemy soldiers), it is clear that the state no longer feels responsible for those it has caused to be massacred: organized murder by the state is also a resignation in light of the suffering or moral combat that one must face as responsible men, and not as beasts.

Recently, I put the following question to a colonel:

If, in November 1954,⁶ when FLN's revolution in Algeria broke out, if France, instead of sending five hundred thousand armed men, had sent the same five hundred thousand men unarmed but instead equipped with pickaxes, shovels, trowels, cement, lead pipes, and copper valves to improve the living conditions of the Arabs, frankly, Colonel, do you not believe that the results would have been better?

This officer responded without hesitation that he absolutely agreed with me. Is this recourse to violence by the state, to murder, not the act of a simpleton, criminal and disastrous? It is time Christians ceased admiring that which is not at all admirable. "War is a terrible thing, horrible," this same colonel kept repeating to me.

Yes, what is a real man? To this question there are two fundamental responses. To take the terms of Tullio Vinnay,⁷ there are those like Barabbas, Pilate, and the priests of Jerusalem who say, "Your death will be my life," and there are those like Jesus who say, "My death will be your life." There are those who will not hesitate to overthrow, to trample, and if necessary, will kill any obstacle in their way for a cause they may feel is noble or just, and there are those who would not commit a brutal act of despisement or hate for anything in the world. There are those for whom the cross is a sad and a lamentable affair full of shame, and there are those for whom it is the source of life and the foundation of their obedience. There are violent people and nonviolent people. There are those for whom the end justified the means, and those for whom the end never justifies the means.

Yet, we are amazed to find that Christians, who should all be together in the second group, are so numerous under the first banner, under different pretexts, and are at ease there. It really grieves me to see Christians joining in the ranks

6. On November 1, 1954, the FLN triggered rebellion in the Aurès Mountains and Constantinois, which would be the starting point for the Algerian War. Eight Europeans were victims of this first wave of attacks, which were called "Toussaint rouge" (attacks on police, sabotaging telephone lines, fires in public buildings, machine gunning cars). The French government decided to send fifteen Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité (CRS) (Republican Security Companies) and the Twenty-Fifth paratrooper division to Algeria. In eight years (1954–62), 500,000 French servicemen and servicewomen, both professionals and those called up, would be sent to Algeria. The Algerian War cost more than 500,000 lives (or a million according to the FLN). [Rognan notation.]

7. Tullio Vinay is a Waldensian pastor from Italy who, with an Apage community of around thirty young people, in 1961, in the poor town of Riesi in Sicily, started a remarkable action of socioeconomic development based on Christian principles. In 1976, Tullio Vinay was elected as a member of the Senate of the Italian Republic. See Tullio and Giò Vinay, *Le soleil se lève au Sud. Une ville en Sicile* [The Sun rises in the South. A Town in Sicily]: (Paris: Cerf, 1968); Tullio Vinay and Georges Richard-Molard, *Riesi ou la force de l'apagè* [Riesi or the strength of agape] (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1976). [Rognan notation.]

of violent men, to defend, by questionable and, frankly, bad methods, all kinds of values and causes, and thus leading sacrilegious lives, leaving their true vocation: to be witnesses of love and truth for Jesus Christ. Let us rather say—to be authentic men.

The Nonviolence of Jesus

If the formula of Mussolini were true, Jesus and the apostles would truly appear as weak, or even lame men, and we could definitely question their manhood. They never fought, and they never returned injuries: they allowed themselves to be brutalized, thrown on the ground, whipped, crucified, without ever striking back, without returning blow for blow, even forbidding their companions to take up arms to protect them (Matthew 26:53). When faced with a threat, they ran, and recommended their disciples do the same (Matthew 10:14; Luke 21:21). What strange manhood this is! This surely is out of conformity with the contemporary view of the world of courage and honor of a true man!

But on the other hand, we find with the apostles a moral coherence, a mastery of self, a goodwill and perseverant love that one never finds among the violent people. This gentleness and this grace do not mean that they lack a great and vigorous spirit, an internal fire that sometimes manifests itself in heated and virulent discourses (look at Matthew 23 and the attack on the Pharisees), but never by what we would call physical violence. It was more in bringing violence upon Himself that Jesus followed the sad and tragic way the Father had laid down for Him (Matthew 16:23; 26:43); and He warned His disciples that they too would have to bring violence upon themselves if they were to believe in Him and His royalty; for the Kingdom of God can only be “forced,” and it is the violent types who control (Matthew 11:12; Luke 16:16). This violence of faith makes a manhood of the Gospel that is not at all gentle or delicate. To the contrary, it implies firmness, moral consistency, integrity of the heart, and above all, the capacity to always respect and love others. The true man is he who, in the image of Jesus, loves to the end, with a tenacious resolution to bring salvation to the other, to the death if necessary.

In this way, Jesus was strong in an integral and profound sense. Jesus lived out the heroic gentleness and nonviolence that He taught His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount and throughout His ministry. It has quite often been said that the Beatitudes (Matthew 5) constitute, in a way, His moral portrait. But this is certainly not the portrait of a violent man; He was poor, afflicted, gentle, yearning for justice, full of grace, pure of heart, creator of peace, persecuted for justice. There is also another portrait of Christ in the Hymn to Charity of Saint Paul (1 Corinthians 13), but the silhouette we have here is again of a nonviolent man. Jesus was patient, full of goodwill. He was never envious; He did not brag, and was never puffed up with pride; He did nothing that was dishonest and never put Himself first. He was never inflamed with anger, did not suspect evil in people, did not rejoice in injustice, but rejoiced in truth; He excused everything, believed all, hoped all, and withstood all.

The moral exhortations of the Gospels and the Epistles all lead in the same direction. As Karl Barth has shown, Jesus renounced violence, and He invited His disciples to follow Him on the pathway of gentleness and patience, that is to say, in the final analysis, in the pathway of indefectible love for God's human creatures. And remember, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor" (Romans 13:10).

The Cleansing of the Temple (John 2:15)⁸

Here, without a doubt, the reader will challenge us with the incident of Jesus driving the merchants out of the Temple with a whip. They will tell us,

You see, violence is sometimes necessary and legitimate! Jesus Himself resorted to violence here; why can't we as well? Your nonviolence, in principle, is not at all realistic; moreover, it was not Christ's constant attitude, as He was violent at certain times when it seemed necessary. In closing yourself into a stance of nonviolence, you are being more royalist than the king!

Incontestably, this passage has been problematic to us for a long time. Of course, if violence on Earth never exceeded that which took place in the Temple, the problem of violence would not have been so serious! But it still remains that the concrete attitude of Jesus, on that day, was a quite violent one. His interaction with those He did not agree with was not an attitude of nonviolence. Is there a hiatus here that now contradicts what we have been saying? Do we have to finally admit that the skeptics are right, and that we can be lambs at times and wolves at other times according to the circumstances?

Actually, this episode is not only embarrassing for the adherents of nonviolence, but for all who take it seriously. It is curious to see how the commentators pass over it so quickly, how they treat this account so delicately. Yet, when one really studies this text, we are led into further considerations that make it less troubling. Look:

- 1) During his trial, by order of Pilate, Jesus was whipped quite severely. Of course, there is really no comparison with the flogging He endured, the torture He went through, and that of the cleansing of the Temple, where He delivered a few blows. But all the same, is not the horror of the chastisement that was inflicted on Him, and the pity we feel in our hearts, dulled a little when we consider that He also used a whip? Is the injustice, of which He was a victim, so total?

8. This passage of his book was reworked and deepened by Jean Lasserre two years later and led to a special issue of *Cahiers de la réconciliation* [Notes on Reconciliation], no. 10 (October 1967): 3–21, under the title: "*Un contresens tenance*" [A stubborn contradiction]. [Rognan notation.]

- 2) A whip is a normal, natural, and indispensable thing to use for guiding domestic animals. But using a whip to drive men out of the Temple, in other words, treating them like a herd of livestock, is this not rather disrespectful? Was there not some despisement here in the Savior's act?
- 3) At that time Israel was a gerontocracy. The privilege to sell in the Temple was certainly reserved only for a few friends of the old men of the Sanhedrin. It is thus very probable that a good part of the merchants, and beneficiaries of such remuneration, were also old men. Now, Jesus was only thirty years old. Did he really raise his hand against these white-haired old men? How can we justify his act in regard to the respect due to the elderly? And with the fifth commandment?
- 4) These men had all the right in the world to be in the Temple attending to their commerce, having obtained all the necessary authorization from the Temple authorities. If Jesus was against such business, should He not have taken His complaint to the proper authorities, instead of attacking the offenders who were there in good conscience? In assaulting these men in this way, was Jesus not showing a certain injustice?
- 5) In using brutal force on people, which is usually reserved for the "agents of the public force," Jesus was taking the place of the Temple ushers, without mandate from the authorities, whom, remember, we are called to obey and submit to by the New Testament. Should we not reproach Christ for having created such disorder with His disturbing act, and for having upset the necessary service of order of society?
- 6) Jesus resorted to force against human beings because of a problem on a spiritual level, and not a problem that was threatening the general maintenance of law and order in the community; that is to say, He was defending what he saw as divine truth, and in doing so was proclaiming the will of God. Theologians do not generally accept the use of violence or force, except in the case of maintaining public order, which in their eyes is a justifiable reason—but the public peace was not at all threatened by the old men selling and buying in the Temple. Did Jesus thus commit a regrettable confusion between these two orders, in putting force unduly at the service of religion?
- 7) Let us attempt to justify the scandalous brutality of Jesus (not against animals or things, which is not scandalous, but against people) in bringing up the case for legitimate defense in His favor. But He was the aggressor!

All these observations and questions are troublesome. It is hard for us to not conclude that on that day, Jesus committed an act that was maybe sinful, or in any case, an act that was not in accordance with His holiness, as we see in the rest of the Gospels.

We could attempt to evade the issue in arguing that Jesus was not an ordinary man, and that thus the standard norms usually reserved for men do not apply to Him. But this sort of argument is very dangerous, first of all because of those who like to take the example of Jesus' violence on that day to justify their own

human violence. For if we cannot appreciate Jesus' behavior in light of the norms of Scripture that are valuable for people, it is not logical to apply norms to men that are only applicable to the Son of God! Thus, it is impossible to use this account to justify the violence of men!

On the other hand, it is not satisfying, theologically speaking, to use this argument as we have presented it, as Jesus was at once God and man, fully God, and authentically human. His holiness, the redemption He accomplished, has meaning only if we acknowledge the fact that He lived under similar conditions to our own, that the temptations He had, and the obedience He showed, are those of every man, of course, yet of a true man. All that Jesus did, is it not rather normative for us, or should it not be normative? His attitude in the Temple thus remains in part somewhat scandalous.

Some will say that the whip used by Jesus has a messianic signification, in the sense that he had to show by "signs" to the attentive Jews that He was the Messiah, and that consequently His act must not be interpreted from an ethical viewpoint. Without denying the messianic character evident in the scene as a whole, these two affirmations really do not appear too convincing to us. Jesus certainly started by scattering the animals, which took off running in all directions or stayed where they were; to lead them out, he grabbed hold of a tether and used it prosaically to lead them out, because there was no other way to do it. We do not have to see a symbolic act in that. Besides, if that was the case all the same, we do not see why a messianic act would escape the demands of morality, and at the same time lose its ethical bearing. Our observations thus remain valuable.

Placed in front of such a difficulty, all we can do is to turn to the original Greek text to question it. Now, in reading the Greek text closely, we see that we do not find the conjunction "as well as," which implies that Jesus drove out the merchants "as well as" the animals. Is that not a troubling and exciting thing?

All of our Catholic and Protestant Bibles translate it like this: "And having made a whip out of cords, He drove them all out of the Temple, as well as the sheep and the cattle." Everyone understands that Jesus drove the merchants out in this episode we have been speaking of "as well as" their animals. And this is also what we read in the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the New Testament from the fourth century. But when we compare the Greek and Latin texts, one begins to wonder if Saint Jerome did not maybe make an error here in the translation of the Vulgate by using *quoque*, seeing as the conjunction "as well as" does not exist in the original Greek. Besides this case in question, we do know for a fact that there are a number of errors in the Vulgate. The Latin text is not completely reliable.

The literal Greek text, which seems important to consult here, simply says, "And having made a whip out of cords, He drove them all out of the Temple, the sheep and the cattle."⁹

Let's start our analysis at the end. Saint Jerome thought he could translate the little Greek word *te*, which is between "the" and "sheep," by using "as well as." But

9. *Pantas ek tou ierou exebalen ta te probata kai tous boas.*

what we have here is a classic mistranslation, as a professor at the University of Lyon has explained to us. This man clarified the rule concerning the use of this word: (a) when *te* is alone, it means “and”; (b) when *te* is followed by another *te*, it means “on one hand . . . on the other hand”; (c) when *te* is followed by *kai* (which means “and”), it is not translated and only serves as a reinforcer for the *kai* that follows it. Now, that is the case here. In cases (b and c), we know that the *te* at the beginning absolutely does not mean “and” in the sense of “as well as,” but it marks the beginning of the enumeration of two things. Look at these typical examples of its use.¹⁰

Thus, we must simply translate: “the sheep *and* the cattle.” But what is the significance of this part of a phrase, which at first glance does not depend on a verb? It seems that it is an opposition to the word “all” that precedes it. Actually, it may be that the masculine dominates over the neuter of the sheep (look at Hebrews 3:6, a case where the feminine dominates the neuter). The words “the sheep and the cattle” thus make clear what these “all” are that Jesus drove out of the Temple. We also make note of the fact that in the other three texts we have just cited, the enumeration that calls for a *te kai* is each time an apposition, which was our original interpretation.¹¹

People will then return with this: “But does the word ‘all’ not refer to the merchants, who were spoken of in the preceding verse?” Please, let’s not go too fast here! In truth, the word “all” can be interpreted in three different ways: it may be referring to the merchants in question, or it may be referring only to the animals (as the rules of agreement in Greek are not precise), or maybe the “all” applies to both merchants and animals together. This third hypothesis does not seem plausible, though, as it really does not make much sense for John to mention once again “the sheep and the cattle.” The first hypothesis does not stand up to the test either, because for the phrase to be correct, John would have to have said “as well as” (the sheep and the cattle), which is not in the original Greek text. Thus, only the second hypothesis remains: the word “all” indicates the animals that were mentioned in the preceding verse.

Is the verb “to drive out” (*ekballein*) used to give weight in favor of the notion that Jesus committed a violent act? Certainly not: this verb does not necessarily imply the use of brutal force, as it is translated in Mark 5:40, “put them all outside,” and in Matthew 9:38, “send.”

At last, the real sense of our passage is coming out: when John wrote the phrase: with His whip “He drove them all out of the Temple,” he was evidently thinking about

10. Matthew; 22:10; Luke 22:66, Romans 2:9-10.

11. Some will object and say that it is more logical, as the “all” was in the masculine, to cite first of all the cattle, and then the sheep (which are neuter). This is a possibility. But maybe John had a reason for mentioning the sheep first. After all, Jesus may have started with the sheep! We must remember that the word *te*, instead of being stuck with the word *kai*, is placed here between the article and the noun, which is not so common. But the exact place of this *te* is not rigorously defined, as we see in Romans 2:9-10.

the animals, and it never occurred to him that people would have the preposterous idea that Jesus could have maltreated people with such an instrument. But the way he phrases it, with cattle and people, and both in the masculine in verse 14, it is rather misleading. And that is why, in order to avoid a misinterpretation, he added “the sheep and the cattle”—almost as if he had written, “I mean to say: the sheep and the cattle.” The correct translation, then, according to the Greek, and the right meaning, is this: “He drove them all out of the Temple, all the sheep and cattle.” Moreover, this is how the Abbey of Montserrat has translated this passage in the New Testament, which has just been published: “all (*es a dir*) sheep and cattle.”¹²

It is troubling to discover that this apposition, which was manifestly destined to avoid being misunderstood, has been used in fact to bring in misunderstanding in Christianity for fifteen centuries! And that, because of a mistranslation, which seems to have affected the church all the way up to these end times—so much so that, by instinct, the Constantinian Christians were probably content and found violence a normal Christian function, citing Christ’s violence to justify their own. In their opinion, Jesus had acted like a “man”! Alas, even the biblical traditions are sometimes influenced by ambient heresies.

But then people will say that we have to consider the parallel texts of the other gospels. And as it is clearly stated that Jesus “drove” the merchants out (it is the same verb), it would be necessary to conciliate this indication with John’s account; that also confirms that Jesus drove the merchants out with His whip!

This explanation may appear interesting, but it must be rejected for the following reasons:

- a) First of all, it opposes the grammatical explanation we have given, which excludes this possibility and which it cannot possibly avoid.
- b) Second, it takes for granted that the account in John 2 is referring to the same event recounted in Mark 11. Now, it is not at all certain that they are both referring to one and the same event. The fact that John places the episode at the beginning of his Gospel, and not at the time of Palm Sunday, like the other gospels, leaves us with at least some doubt on this point.
- c) We should not start out by first comparing similar accounts to derive an understanding of how they should be translated, but we should rather translate them first, before comparing them, and then attempt to conciliate them. Let’s admit that, frankly, the first formula is never accurate. Those who inflect a biblical tradition to make it correspond with another text (or to their own prejudices) do very bad work that we must seriously disapprove of.

12. To our knowledge, the only English Bible that is correct among the Protestant Bibles is James Moffatt’s translation: “He drove them all, sheep and cattle together, out of the temple.” The translation of Ostervald and Darby is also very careful: “He cast [them] all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen [DARBY].” The Zürcher Bible and the Revised Version translate like Moffatt and Montserrat.

- d) Now it is very clear that the tradition John follows and those of the other Synoptic Gospels are different: in the first one, Jesus drove the animals out with a whip; in the second one, Jesus drove out the merchants vocally (look at Mark 11:18); the Synoptic Gospels do not mention the whip of the animals. Why must we attempt to reduce these two accounts to a single one?

We still need to examine the context and see how it clearly shows us the sense of the contested verse. Now, verse 16 confirms that, according to John, Jesus only drove out the animals with His whip, and if afterward He told the merchants: “Get them out of here,” it is clear that He was referring to the animals, and not to the merchants (actually it was pigeons at first), whom—note this—He did not command to leave. Moreover, if in verse 16 He is speaking to the pigeon merchants (who were already mentioned in verse 14), and asking them to help Him clean up the place by making their animals leave, it is quite evident that He has not driven them out in verse 15!

Is not our translation really the only one that is possible? It is the only one that is not incoherent: In verse 14, Jesus discovers the trade that is going in the Temple: the cattle, the sheep and pigeons, and money. In verse 15a, John tells us what He did with the cattle and sheep; in verse 15b, how He overturned the tables where the money changing was taking place; in verse 16, what He did with the pigeons. All that is clear, coherent. There is nothing there that would lead us to believe that He went after the merchants. The use of grammar here and common sense together lead us to the conclusion that we must exclude the use of a whip against the merchants to drive them out as a possibility.

And we ask the question: Have our churches not been wrong in maintaining and teaching a false tradition for fifteen centuries, a tradition founded on an erroneous translation that imputed to Christ a brutal and contestable act that He never committed?

Did Jesus Legitimize Violence?

We must examine three more passages that are always brought up to attempt to neutralize and soften the very real condemnation Jesus placed on violence. We will do this more rapidly, as we have already studied these passages in the preceding work,¹³ to which the reader can refer to if necessary.

- a) It is said that when Jesus met the Capernaum centurion (Matthew 8:5-13) and healed his servant, He admired the man's faith and did not reproach him for being a soldier. Does this not indicate that Jesus saw no contradiction between the condition of the soldier and obedience to the faith?

13. Lasserre, *La guerre et l'Évangile* (see preface, n. 1). [Rognan notation.]

This is how we respond: it is rather pressing the issue to try to use such a passage in favor of violence where we see Jesus practicing nonviolence with the enemy—an officer of the Roman occupation army! if your enemy is hungry, give him food; if your servant is sick, heal him; in doing so, you will heap flaming coals of fire on his head. Jesus conducted Himself in a nonviolent manner, and you are trying to legitimize violence by His example. Is this not rather excessive? In any case, if one says that Jesus did not reproach the man for being a soldier, you really do not know and nobody knows. This argument from silence, taken from between the lines of a text, is a pure sophism. But also, beware of another argument that will be thrown at you if you try to defend Jesus here (I really find it amusing to show the fault in this reasoning). People will throw an identical argument at you: since Jesus did not oppose the Roman officer and the presence of his occupation troops, it means that Jesus thought that the Roman occupation was an acceptable military situation, that it was good for His country to be militarily controlled by a foreign power. But if Jesus saw no problem in being controlled by the enemy, it is thus He denied the usefulness of the army, as the primary goal of an army is to assure independence of the nation. There you are caught! In truth, all these arguments are sophisms. The text affirms that Jesus admired the faith of this man, but nothing permits us to suppose that he approved of the man's moral conduct or profession. In many cases we find this to be true. Scripture exalts the faith of Rahab the prostitute, but that does not mean it approves of her livelihood (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25).

- b) People like to hold on to Christ's famous response to His adversaries: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:13-17), concluding that in that statement, Christ was saying in so many words that He approved of a certain level of coexistence between the spiritual and the temporal, between the two respective domains of the state and of religion. And then some will take it even further, blowing it all out of proportion in affirming that violence, which is forbidden in the spiritual realm, would be legitimate and useful in the temporal realm.

But be careful here! Do not forget that Caesar was to the Jews as Hitler was to the French in 1943: a foreign tyrant, detested and demon possessed. Are you going to say that Jesus was in collaboration with the enemy? All we need to do is transpose this statement to Hitler to better understand: Render to Hitler the things that are Hitler's, and to God the things that are God's." Now, is not all our life supposed to be given to God? All our life and all our obedience? God does not divide. That which belongs to Caesar here, at this point, is only the little coin that was shown to Jesus, with the picture of Caesar and his inscription on it, and which legally belonged to him, when it was in circulation, according to the customs of the times. But everything else belongs to God, and above all, men, who were created in His own image (in His effigy; it is the same word). Jesus thus did not legitimize the taxes imposed on them by the Romans (if He had not said what he did, He would have fallen into the trap they had set for Him). He did not justify in the least

bit a division into two domains, of which God could only claim one! As far as this is concerned, do you believe in the sovereignty of God?

- c) Did Jesus not recommend His disciples buy a sword? He was thus not so opposed to the use of violence after all. It is true that during the Last Supper, in the upper room, Jesus said to His disciples: "When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?" (Jesus was alluding to the first mission He had sent the twelve on and the euphoria of His early ministry). They responded, "Nothing." And He said to them, "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.'" They said to him, "Here are two swords." "It is enough," He replied (Luke 22:35-38).

The question is in knowing if Jesus, in recommending His disciple buy a sword, was speaking of a real sword, or if He was just speaking in imagery. The context inclines us to believe that it was an image. The first part (verse 35) talks about the climate of the apostles' first mission: a climate of enthusiasm, haste, zeal, confidence; they were lacking nothing and preached the Gospel day and night. Now, at the Last Supper, Jesus warned them that it would be different. They would enter a time of difficulty, a dangerous time, when they would find themselves alone and could no longer count on the presence of their beloved Master. During these times they would have to be completely on their own and live however they could (necessity of a moneybag and knapsack), being very careful so they could resist the assaults of evil and discouragement (thus the necessity of a sword). But it was Christ's habitual style to use images, like the camel going through the eye of a needle, the spot in one man's eye and the beam in the other man's eye—He used concrete images so they would be more striking. Think especially of Christ's command for avoiding sin: "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away" (Matthew 5:29). Has there ever been a Christian who has obeyed that command to the letter? So, getting back to the text, it is surprising that some Christians want to try to interpret the phrase concerning the sword literally, though they are careful to not literally interpret the part about the camel going through the eye of a needle.

We will present several other facts to discount the literal interpretation of the text: (1) It is doubtful that Jesus believed that His disciples could go out at that time of night and procure some swords when we consider that the sale of arms was strictly forbidden and controlled. If Jesus had literally wanted them to buy swords, He would have said so when the mob armed with sticks and stones came to arrest Him (Mark 14:43)! Now, Jesus did say, "Buy a sword" (Luke 22:36). (2) It is difficult to think that Jesus, after having told His disciples to each buy a sword (which would have been a minimum of eleven swords), was satisfied as soon as they showed Him they had two swords. Does this not reflect a certain incoherency in Christ's thinking? (3) It is just as hard to understand why, after having told His disciples to get real swords, Christ so severely reprimanded Peter for having drawn His sword, not to mention the global condemnation Christ then

gives to all (Jesus said, “all”) who take up the sword: “All who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52). Does this not lead us to believe that a literal interpretation of the earlier passage would be wrong? It is unthinkable that Jesus would be deliberately sending His disciples to their deaths. If He really believed that death came to all those who drew the sword, why would He have instructed His disciples to each buy a sword? Did He wish misfortune upon them? (4) We do not understand, moreover, to what end Jesus desired that His disciples be armed with swords. Was He admitting that the early church would have to use force and arms to maintain and defend itself? This would contradict the entire Gospel and would uproot the belief in the distinction between the temporal and the spiritual, which of course would be exactly what the Christians who want to justify their violence by the example of the two swords want to hear.

To sum this up, the literal interpretation of Christ’s advice to procure swords brings up so many problems that we believe it is wise to follow the exegetes who, like Calvin (whom we can scarcely believe was a pacifist), believed that Jesus was speaking in imagery, which is the only way we can accept this.

We can thus affirm that Jesus neither practiced nor recommended violence.

CHRISTIANS AND VIOLENCE

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