

To JULIEN LANDE
THE MYSTERY OF THE FAMILY¹

Clearly I owe you a few words of explanation concerning the title under which this lecture has been announced. I must admit that it is rather a surprising title, which may seem oddly sensational. Why not have called our discussion "The Problem of the Family"? For numerous reasons: first, the family does not suggest just one problem, but an infinity of problems of every description which could not be considered as a whole; you have already heard several of them discussed with a competence which I lack. But it is above all because the family seems to me to belong to an order of realities, or I should rather say of presences, which can only create problems in so far as we are mistaken, not so much with regard to their special character, as to the way in which we human beings are involved in them. I apologise for being obliged to quote myself here; for I need to employ a distinction which I attempted about ten years ago to introduce into the domain of concrete philosophy and of which the importance still seems to me considerable.

I said that there can only be a problem for me where I have to deal with facts which are, or which I can at least cause to be, exterior to myself; facts presenting themselves to me in a certain disorder for which I struggle to substitute an orderliness capable of satisfying the requirements of my thought. When this substitution has been effected the problem is solved. As for me, who devote myself to this operation, I am outside (above or below, if you like) the facts with which it deals. But when it involves realities closely bound up

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with my existence, realities which unquestionably influence my existence as such, I cannot conscientiously proceed in this way. That is to say, I cannot make an abstraction of myself, or, if you like, bring about this division between myself on the one hand and some ever-present given principle of my life on the other; I am effectively and vitally involved in these realities. This holds good for instance in the case of the union of body and soul, or, in more precise terms, the bond which unites me to my body. I cannot make of this bond a pure idea to be placed in front of me and considered as an object, without misunderstanding its essential nature. Thus it follows that every term by which I try to qualify it as a relationship or to determine its function will invariably prove to be inadequate: I cannot exactly say that I am master of my body, or that I am the slave of my body, or that I own my body. All these relationships are true at once, which amounts to saying that each one of them taken by itself is false, that it does not so much *translate* as it *traduces* a certain fundamental unity. This unity is less a *given principle* than a *giving one*, because it is the root from which springs the fact of my presence to myself and the presence of all else to me. Thus it encroaches upon its own data and, invading them, passes beyond the range of a simple problem. It is in this very definite sense that the family is a mystery, and it is for this reason that we cannot properly and without confusion treat it simply as a question to be solved. Anticipating what is coming later, I want to point out right away that there is a deep similarity between the union of soul and body and the mystery of the family. In both cases we are in the presence of the same fact, or rather of something which is far more than a fact since it is the very condition of all facts whatever they may be: I mean incarnation. I am not, of course, using this term in its theological sense. It is not a question of our Lord's coming into the world, but of the infinitely mysterious act by which an essence assumes a body, an act around which the meditation of a Plato crystallised, and to which modern philosophers only cease to give their attention in so far as they have lost the intelligence's essential gift, that is to say the faculty of wonder.

I assure you that I am not proposing to introduce anything in the nature of an exposition of doctrine here. I am dealing rather with a series of *enquiries* leading us towards a point which thought

could not reach directly. Why? Because this point is situated at the same time too close up to us and too far away to be found in the strictly limited zone of objective knowledge. I have said too close and too far away, but, in reality, these contraries are found to coincide here, and I am inclined to think that this coincidence of that which is quite close and that which is infinitely far away is precisely what characterises every kind of mystery, even religious mysteries, which we are not dealing with here.

On the one hand, when I speak of my family, the primitive idea this word evokes is that of a certain pattern or constellation of which, as a child, I spontaneously take it for granted that I am the centre. Am I not the object of all those solicitous glances which sometimes touch me, sometimes overwhelm and sometimes irritate me, glances of which not a shadow escapes me for they all seem to be aimed at me personally in the same way as the voices whose inflections pass from gentleness to severity, from persuasion to threats. It is only little by little that I discern the relationships which bind these beings to each other, thereby discovering that each one has his own life, his inviolable relationships with all the others, and also that for some of them I am a cause of preoccupation and a subject of discussion when I am not present, so that, I only receive a partial presentation, an adaptation for my personal use, of the thoughts and feelings which I arouse in these beings of whom only one side, and that always the same, is turned towards me. From this moment, everything becomes strangely complicated, new relationships are formed between them and me. If I have found that they are hiding themselves from me, how can I avoid the temptation of hiding myself from them in my turn? But at the same time strange contours appear in my personal life, it becomes furrowed with valleys and split up into compartments as well. The simple unspoilt countryside of my first years becomes complicated and clouded over. My family draws away from me, while remaining as near and as much a part of myself as ever: a tearing process? Let us rather say a traumatisation as difficult to heal as possible. That is not all, it is not even the beginning. Under the abstract words of paternity and sonship, I have gradually come to guess at occult and forbidden realities which make my soul dizzy. They attract me, but because they attract me, and because I think I should commit a sacrilege if I

gave in to this attraction, I turn away from them. At the very least, I come to believe that, far from being endowed with an absolute existence of my own, I *am*, without having originally wished or suspected it, I *incarnate* the reply to the reciprocal appeal which two beings flung to each other in the unknown and which, without suspecting it, they flung beyond themselves to an incomprehensible power whose only expression is the bestowal of life. I *am* this reply, unformed at first, but who, as I become articulate, will know myself to be a reply and a judgment. Yes, I am irresistibly led to make the discovery that by being what I am, I myself am a judgment upon those who have called me into being; and thereby infinite new relationships will be established between them and me.

On the other hand, I have to recognise that behind the lighted but much restricted zone which I call my family there stretches, to infinitude, ramifications which in theory at any rate I can follow out tirelessly. Only in theory, however, for in fact an impenetrable darkness envelops this *upstream* region of myself and prevents me from exploring any further. I can discern enough, however, to enable me to follow this umbilical cord of my temporal antecedents, and to see it taking shape before me yet stretching back beyond my life in an indefinite network which, if traced to its limits, would probably be co-extensive with the human race itself. My family, or rather my lineage, is the succession of historical processes by which the human species has become individualised into the singular creature that I am. All that it is possible for me to recognise in this growing and impressive indetermination is that all these unknown beings, who stretch between me and my unimaginable origins whatever they may be, are not simply the causes of which I am the effect or the product: there is no doubt that the terms cause and effect have no meaning here. Between my ancestors and myself a far more obscure and intimate relationship exists. I share with them as they do with me – invisibly; they are consubstantial with me and I with them.

By this inextricable combination of things from the past and things to come, the mystery of the family is defined – a mystery in which I am involved from the mere fact that I exist: here, at the articulation of a structure of which I can only distinguish the first traces, of a feeling which modulates between the intimate and the metaphysical – and of an oath to be taken or refused binding me to

make my own the vague desire around which the magical fomentation of my personal existence is centred. Such is the situation in which I find myself, I, a creature precipitated into the tumult; thus am I introduced into this impenetrable world.

To evoke the mystery of the family is then far less to attempt to resolve a problem than to try to recapture a reality and to awaken the soul to its presence. The consciousness of this reality has become tragically obliterated during several generations, and its clouding over has been one of the contributory causes for the precipitation of men into the hell where they are struggling today.

But this evocation, which appears to be simple enough, is in reality extraordinarily difficult to accomplish. For a mysterious reality can only be made actual for him who not only rediscovers it but who has the sudden consciousness of having rediscovered it, simultaneously realising that previously he had entirely lost sight of it. I have to strive then to make you aware of this negative evidence, thankless as such an undertaking may appear.

Nothing seems to me to give more direct evidence of the blindness from which a great number of our contemporaries are suffering in the matters we are considering today than the increasing number of controversies of a strictly spectacular order which arose in the period between the wars, whether in the Press or in public meetings, in connection with marriage, divorce, the choice of a lover, the practices of birth-control, etc. For whom, before what sort of spectators, did this ceaseless and all too often poisonous controversial stream flow? Before idlers, more and more incapable of living, I will not say their life, but *a* life of any sort, who led a ridiculous and sinister existence on the margin of reality, waifs without knowing it, shipwrecked mariners who did not even know that their ship was lost. These puppets made no effort to grasp a truth and derive nourishment from it, but they had an unhealthy craving to hear what they called a discussion of ideas. A discussion, that is to say a clash of ideas, not dealing with experience, for all experience worthy of the name has a certain weight and value – but professions of faith, challenges, prosecutions. Everything that happened in this realm seemed to show that a flow of words and argumentation were the actual sign of a total absence of experience and genuine thought. No doubt I shall be stopped here: "Are you not

tending," it may be asked, "to exaggerate arbitrarily the importance of discussions which have never held the attention of the sane and healthy elements in our country? The family is not an institution which has lost its meaning, it is still a living reality. We only need to look around us. How many families, even during this lamentable period, kept their vitality and preserved their unity!" I think that we must stop here and fearlessly face some very painful truths. Certainly there is no question of denying for one moment that a great number of people – mainly but not exclusively Christians – have preserved the meaning of family life in spite of the unwearied efforts of propaganda of every description which tried systematically to weaken it. Nevertheless we cannot fail to recognise the seriousness of the crisis which has begun in our time, a dangerous and perhaps in the long run a mortal crisis, as is proved by incontestable statistics: the huge increase of divorce, the general spreading of abortive practices, etc. These are facts which force us to penetrate deeper in order to expose the roots of these "social facts," roots which are to be found at the actual level of belief, or more exactly, *unbelief* where, for my part, I am inclined to see a cardinal principle of the spiritual biology of our era. These are the roots which the philosopher has to discover with the cool self-possession of a surgeon making an incision into a wound.

May I at this point be allowed a short digression, which actually is not a digression at all?

When I recall my experience as a member of the university and that of some of my friends, I see that it had become increasingly difficult to deal with problems concerning the family before a class of young students. I remember very well the embarrassment I felt on a particular occasion when it fell to me to speak of divorce, not simply as a recognised fact but as a practice which, taken all round, is disastrous and blameworthy. I knew quite well that I had in front of me the sons of divorced parents and that there was a risk of their bringing all the weight of my judgments against their parents, unless they revolted, as indeed they had a right to do, against strictures involving their most private feelings – feelings which indeed had to be respected. On these grounds, what a temptation there was to maintain a prudent reserve and to keep to vague and meaningless generalities! But on the other hand how can we help seeing that

if these great realities of marriage, generation, etc., are not approached directly and with fearless sincerity, they degenerate into nothing but material for rhetorical arguments. Conventionality is thus substituted for life, conventionality of which for my part I shall never weary of denouncing the poisonous influence, for it will never be anything but a waste product of thought, something which cannot be assimilated. This then is the dilemma confronting so many of those responsible for education at the present time. Should we, with no fear of appearing dogmatic, courageously tackle these questions while in so doing we risk upsetting and scandalising impressionable young beings; or should we confine ourselves to the hollowest of phrases or to historical or so-called historical facts and thus, in the latter case, help to encourage the loose relativity which has tended in our day to weaken all real moral judgment so prejudicially? If I insist thus on a difficulty which only seems to affect specialists, it is because I see in it a symptom revealing a state of things so grave that we can no longer shut our eyes to it. If we took the trouble to consult the textbooks of morals and sociology which for twenty years or more were in favour with the high priests of official teaching, we should see to what an extent they encouraged the tendency to view problems in an almost exclusively historical setting and to emphasise the changing character of family institutions ever destined to grow more flexible. This tendency cannot be compensated for by what is at bottom no more than the wordy and superfluous reiteration of a few general principles earmarked by an out-worn rationalism. We might already notice at this point, so that we can probably return to it later, that, by a paradox worthy of our attention, these sociological moralists came in the end to preach the most disintegrating individualism, whilst all the time proclaiming and heralding the establishment of a socialism which was to subordinate personal initiative, in every field, to State control.

It will doubtless be objected that I am referring here to a period of our history which is happily passed and that for the last two years a vigorous and healthy reaction has taken place concerning this point and a great many others in favour of what we sometimes rather ingenuously term "right-mindedness." I most certainly do not wish to underestimate the importance and value of this

reaction. It seems to me, all the same, that we must be careful to avoid an optimism which might have many disappointments in store for us. The multiplication of catchwords and well-known slogans in official speeches and in the Press should not mislead us. There is nothing there to lead us to believe in an effective conversion of hearts and minds: it is certainly not by mere methods of publicity that we shall succeed in reaching the most deep and hidden springs of individual wills. It is even permissible to fear that there may be a serious relapse and that the evils, from which we have already suffered so much, will reappear later with increased violence.

What is needed first of all is that by reflection, the only weapon at our disposal, we should project as clear a light as possible upon the tragic situation in which so many are living. These people are unable to explain to themselves a vital uneasiness, an anguish of which it is only in their power to grasp the most exterior causes or the most superficial symptoms. It seems to me that we should indeed be setting to work in the wrong way if we started merely from a moral crisis, from the increasingly deliberate repudiation of general principles which would have been accepted without question up to a certain time in history. I should prefer to say that these principles are in themselves nothing but the approximate and imperfect expression of a certain mental attitude towards life. It is in reality this attitude itself which has been transformed. In order to make the meaning of the words I am using more precise, I suggest that what has come about is much more a vital weakening than a transgression, or a denial. In a fine passage, recently quoted by Mr. Albert Béguin, the great Swiss author Ramuz, writing some years ago, spoke of a certain sense of holiness "which is the most precious thing the West has known, a certain attitude of reverence for existence - by which we must understand everything which exists, oneself and the world outside oneself, the mysteries which surround us, the mystery of death, and the mystery of birth, a certain veneration in the presence of life, a certain love, and (why not acknowledge it?) a certain state of poetry which the created world produces in us." It is precisely this sense of holiness, this fundamental reverence for life and for death, itself considered as the nocturnal phase of life, it is this state of poetry produced in us by the created world

which, during the last decades, and more particularly of recent years, has given way to the pressure of pride, of pretentiousness, of boredom and despair; and for reasons, which will very easily appear on analysis, it is in the domain of family reality that the dire consequences of this giving way have first become apparent, actually threatening more and more directly the integrity of the individual considered in his structure and his own particular destiny.

He who refuses to face the danger goes on obstinately repeating that the family exists. But the word to exist is here the most equivocal and therefore the most deceptive of terms. If the family is a reality it cannot be simply expressed or objectively established like a simple succession. Let us even insist that it is infinitely more than what appears from pure and simple entries in civil registers. It exists only on condition that it is apprehended not only as a value but as a living presence.

A value first of all. I think that here we must make an attempt to relive – but in such a way that we think it out and elucidate it – an experience which was shared by most of us when we were children, an experience which it is actually very difficult not to distort when we try to express it, because it includes a certain pride. This pride if we are not careful might seem to be confused with vanity, but this is a degradation of it. We are proud to belong to a certain community because we feel that something of its lustre falls upon us. Pride, as I recently had occasion to write, is a certain response made from the depths of my being to an investiture of which it behoves me to prove myself worthy. Such pride is experienced on my own account. It in no way aims at impressing some other person with the awe and fear which would flatter me. Thus it is a constructive sentiment, helping to give me inner foundations on which to establish my conduct. Vanity, on the other hand, by the very fact that it is turned outwards towards the rest of the world, is essentially sterile, or even, in the last analysis, disintegrating. But it is through this sentiment of pride that we can trace in what way the family is a value. It is a recognised hierarchy, and I do not merely have to integrate myself into it by recognising the authority vested in its leader; I have actually been caught up in it from the origin. I am involved in it, my very being is rooted in it. This hierarchy cannot fail, this authority cannot be abolished without the family

bringing about its own destruction as a value. After that, in my eyes, it can no longer be anything but a net in which I feel I have been caught by mistake and out of which there is nothing left for me but to extricate myself as soon as possible.

In speaking of a presence, I introduce a somewhat different shade of meaning here, which it will be as well to explain more precisely. Again in this case each one of us must refer back to his childhood memories which, when we are dealing with realities of this sort, seem to me to play the part belonging to reminiscence in the philosophy of Plato. Each of us, with the exception of a few rare and unhappy individuals, has, at least on certain occasions, been able to prove by experience the existence of the family as a protective skin placed between himself and a world which is foreign, threatening, hostile to him. And there is no doubt that nothing is more painful in the destiny of an individual than the tearing away of this tissue, either by a sudden or a slow and continuous process, carried out by the pitiless hands of life or death, or rather of that nameless power of which life and death are but alternating aspects. The similes associated with and alas! abused by a feebly sentimental or didactic kind of poetry, the similes of cocoon, nest or cradle are those which most exactly illustrate what I should be ready to term the downy element in the reality of the family.

But here by an analytical effort we must free ourselves from metaphors themselves. We must make ourselves aware of the primitive *us*, this archetypal and privileged *us* which is only normally realised in family life. This *us* is in general inseparable from a *home of our own*. It is certainly not by chance if all the forces which have been working towards the destruction of the family house have at the same time been preparing for the overthrow of the family itself. This privileged *us* cannot, even on the humblest levels of this life of consciousness, be separated from a permanent habitation which is ours and which in the course of our existence has gradually become consubstantial with us. The spontaneous and immediate consciousness of an *always*, a perpetual life, is associated with the familiar objects among which we live, with the setting in which daily tasks are carried out, with the feelings which can scarcely be formulated of a tutelary presence incarnated in these things and in this background and which, as it were, deepens and colours the daily

outlook. All this seems to me in principle indissolubly bound up with the existence of the family considered both as a fact and a value. I want no other proof than the one (negative it is true) afforded by the mental upheaval, and often the heartbreak, so frequently brought upon a child by the common enough event of a house-move. It is brought upon a child and often enough even upon an adult if he has kept the childlike character, the tenderness of tissue which persists in some people throughout all the battering and bruising of personal experience. But inversely we must recognise that all which tends to destroy the sense of a habitation and of permanence in the surroundings of a being in process of formation will contribute directly to the weakening of his consciousness of the family itself. In passing, I may say that I am convinced that therein lies one of the chief causes of the disappearance of family consciousness among the working population of the great industrial centres, where nomadic life, not of tent and caravan, but of lodgings and furnished rooms, is the order of the day. The family tends to become simply an abstract idea instead of the very essence of the atmosphere a human being almost unconsciously inhales, an essence which imperceptibly impregnates and saturates his thinking, his appreciation and his love.

You may say that all these remarks only bear upon the outward and temporary conditions of life. But the more one strives to understand the meaning of existence, the more surely one is led to the conclusion that the outward is also the inward, or rather to the realisation that this distinction has no meaning where the actual growth of a being is involved. It is moreover obvious that the disappearance of the settled habitation, or rather of the home, is inseparable from the fading away of traditions. Actually these traditions are to the inner man what the family setting is to the visible one. We cannot just say they are his environment; they help to form him. Without them there is a risk of his becoming the plaything of every chance influence; his development is exposed to all the dangers of incoherence. But the traditions of which I am here thinking bear upon the continuity of the family itself: they are first of all the records and examples which secure the bond between the generations. But there is yet another thing: every family which has real vitality produces a certain ritual without which it would be in

danger of eventually losing its solid foundations. It is all this delicate architecture which is compromised and which, for nearly a century, has been cracking. Why? The reasons for this decrepitude appear to me to be very varied and to go very deep. Some are obvious. They have to do with ideology, with the diffusion of a mythology of which revolutionary spirits of every description have made themselves the channels. Some of them can scarcely be analysed. But we can say with certainty that the amazing transformation of the material conditions of life brought about by the industrial revolution tends to relegate to an almost legendary distance those who lived, thought and struggled before it. This upheaval was in reality too complete, too massive to be understood by those very people who witnessed it, and who became its victims instead of gaining anything from it. It was first of all a change of rhythm. Men were not able to recognise it; rather, they submitted to it by an inner adaptation, and this was not effected without causing the most serious psychological damage in many cases, and bringing about a real deterioration of the mental fibre. It was inevitable that this extraordinary acceleration of the rhythm of life should tend more and more to prevent the slow sedimentation of *habitus* which seems surely to have been from all time the essential condition at the origin of all realities connected with the family. Still more, such an acceleration could not take place without a reckless waste of the reserves slowly accumulated by living. Gustave Thibon in some illuminating passages has brought out most marvellously this tragic aspect of contemporary life. He denounces the fearful squandering of reserves which has taken place before our eyes; he points out most clearly that we are in danger of causing the worst possible confusion by preaching the duty of improvidence; for it is essential to make "the distinction between the improvidence of the saint who does not worry about the future because he has laid up his treasure, the source of eternity and life, within him, and the improvidence of the decadent man whose unstable soul has become the plaything of the moment and of every passing temptation, and who, equally incapable of waiting or of making a decision, constantly yields to the immediate suggestions of an egoism without sequence or unity. For the least economical person is also the most selfish. To economise in the sane and strict sense of the word means above all:

to keep in order to give more effectively. No doubt there is a foresight which is miserly and self-contained, which is opposed to true human exchanges. But its legitimate child, absolute improvidence, is perhaps even more the enemy of giving and communion. In the material order, as in the spiritual, liberality and munificence are only possible for him whose strict vigilance has been able to create large reserves within and around himself. Such virtues have died out today."

Let us here notice that the great contemplative, in whom reflection and vision have become fused, is capable of unlocking doors which are hidden from the vulgar gaze. Technical progress, considered not in itself, not of course from the point of view of the principles which made it possible, but as we see it incorporated into the daily life of individuals, has not been effected without the loss of human substance. This loss is indeed its none too easily detected counterpart. It is on the plane of craftsmanship that this loss of substance appears most clearly. But where it is a question of secret relationships between people, the ravages brought about by the technical revolution are harder to recognise and to understand. It is certain that they are due in great measure to the growing standardisation of individuals for which the first responsibility is to be laid at the door of far too uniform an education, having much too little respect for local customs and peculiarities. Then there is the Press, whose degraded character can never be denounced resolutely enough. In addition there is a close connection between the acceleration of the rhythm of life and the appearance of a humanity which is inwardly more and more impoverished, more and more interchangeable. A metaphor, or rather an analogy will show what I mean. To take some region full of an inner soul, such as Brittany, for example; is it not noticeable that when we cross it rapidly it seems to be emptied of this spiritual quality, this mystery, which however we rediscover if we take the trouble to go through the country in a leisurely manner? The phenomenon which I have in mind here is of the same order, but it touches on human reality where being and appearing can never be truly separated. Moreover, even the mystery of places always conceals a human presence, maybe diffused; things are impregnated with the feelings they once awoke in souls. It is from the point of view of a philosophy of duration that we can

succeed in understanding the unity, I would even go so far as to say the identity, of two phenomena which, for a superficial observer appear at first to be distinct. I mean to say on the one hand the depopulation of the country, and on the other the dissolution of the family. I think then that I shall not be wandering from my subject, if I try to expose the tragic inner reality of which these two phenomena are but two inseparable aspects.

Let us notice, first of all, that existence in towns makes a certain pretension, at any rate implicitly, of triumphing over the laws of alternation to which living beings are subject. The town-dweller strives, without the slightest success be it well understood, to inaugurate an order of life wherein there are no seasons. It is a lamentable and ridiculous application of the fateful sentence, *eritis sicut dei*: you shall be *as* gods, you shall be set free from the vicissitudes to which the animal world is subject. The large American cities are, as it were, the prototypes of a world where preservative processes, forcing and fakes are employed to provide specious satisfactions for the need we have developed to escape from the cosmic rhythm and to substitute for it I know not what inventions caricaturing the eternity for which we still yearn nostalgically. But hard experience seems to show that this exclusively human rhythm tends in fact to become that of a machine or an automaton, for it is a rhythm which is not super-organic but sub-organic. Thus the danger arises of a most fatal disorder invading the very heart of existence, for the man who is apparently striving to become a machine is nevertheless alive, although he ignores more and more systematically his condition as a living being. The inexpressible sadness which emanates from great cities, a dismal sadness which belongs to everything that is devitalised, everything that represents a self-betrayal of life, appears to me to be bound up in the most intimate fashion with the decay of the family. This sadness is sterility, it is a disavowal felt by the heart; a disavowal which, as we shall see more and more clearly, concerns the very conditions of life. It is really a question of what we might be tempted to call the very colour of existence; but yet we must understand that a colour can be looked at and as it were absorbed by the eye, whilst what we are dealing with is lived experience as such. In order to make my meaning clearer I will ask you to think of those changes, at first almost imperceptible, which tend

to weaken the ties between us and our near ones. Each of us knows from experience how an intimacy can lose its transparency, how the current bearing two beings and uniting them dynamically can lose its fluidity, so that the individualities, which a moment ago still felt themselves to be fused and enveloped in the bosom of a tutelary and vivifying element, are now separated, colliding with each other in a succession of instantaneous clashes, each as brutally hurtful as a blow. I cannot help thinking that during the last centuries of our civilisation a dislocation of the same kind has taken place between man and life, and it is related to the obscure and organic misunderstandings in which so many married existences come to ruin. Thus the family has been attacked in the double spring whence it derives its special vitality: fidelity and hope.

The idea which I want to bring out here is difficult and from the rational point of view almost impossible to grasp, so, in order to avoid expressing it in academic terms which might distort it, I propose to say quite simply how it was recently borne in upon me in a concrete form.

We had just been through one of those almost completely depopulated villages which are to be found in hundreds in the departments of the south-west. A woman with whom we had exchanged a few words had complained to us of the quietness of the place, of the monotony and lack of amusements. Suddenly my thoughts were concentrated on everything which this word amusements stands for. "Assuredly," I said to myself, "it is above all the search for amusements which sends the villagers away to the towns. On the other hand, as these out-of-the-way places become more and more empty, life in them becomes more and more boring so that in a way the exodus creates its own justification. But in reality what do we mean by amusements? Amusement is diversion, a turning away, but what from? And how does the need for diversion show itself? This is the real problem. It is only too clear that the town with its 'amusements' has exercised a regular power of suction over the country districts; we might also say that the town dweller has brought about a gradual contamination of the peasant. But all the same, the soul of the peasant, which held out so long against this infection, had to become open to it. It is said, not without reason, that the uncomfortable conditions which are so frequent

in the country, the lack of air and of light in the cottages, etc., have helped to depopulate the fields. But why have the inhabitants not devoted their energy to improving their rural dwellings as in certain mountainous districts such as the Grisons or the Tyrol? It is not enough to speak here of a certain natural laziness, there had to be a preliminary disaffection before this disastrous diversion could take place. And once more the question confronts me with an irritating persistency; diversion? Why do they seek it, from what do they turn away? How can we help seeing that the question is identically the same as that which confronts us when we enquire into the causes of the breaking up of the family?" Immediately, however, I saw the answer with a clarity which since that time has never been eclipsed. The need for amusement, as each of us knows from his own experience, is bound up with a certain ebbing of life's tide. But this is still insufficient and even ambiguous. It may indeed happen that vitality decreases without the manifestation of this need, and on the contrary this decrease may even result in the disappearance of all curiosity: indifference settles down on the soul, the being reacts less and less, he gives himself over to debility, he covers himself with veils. The ebb of life of which we are thinking here is quite different in character. The being imagines he regains his life by seizing every occasion of experiencing violent sensations of no matter what order. But these so-called stimulants afford but precarious protection against boredom. What then is this boredom? One of the most intelligent men of our time who held an important post in the government until these last weeks, said to me shortly before the war: "France is suffering from a metaphysical malady: she is bored." It was a diagnosis which went deep and which I have never forgotten – a diagnosis which has been tragically confirmed by our misfortunes. At the origin of diversion, of the will to be diverted or amused at any price, there is an attempt to escape, but from what? It can only be from oneself. The *ego* is without any doubt faced with a dilemma: to fulfil itself or to escape. Where it does not attain fulfilment, it is only conscious of itself as of an unendurable gaping void from which it must seek protection at any price. Anyone who is absorbed does not know this void; he is as it were caught up in plenitude, life envelops him and protects him. Boredom, on the contrary, is not only bound up with inaction but with a dismantling

process. Thus we can very well understand that in the country the woman is far more subject to it than the man. If it is true to say that she suffers more than he does from discomfort and inconvenience, it is because she has more time to think about such things, unless she is continually taken up by the incessant occupations of motherhood, which actually means that these tasks are not only a burden but a support for her. "One is borne along only by one's responsibilities," Gabriel Séailles said most excellently. If we start from this point we can understand the causes of the ebbing of life or rather of consciousness, wherein this consciousness comes gradually to repudiate its fundamental commitments. What then are its commitments? Here we are coming down to essentials.

It seems as though it were necessary to postulate the existence of a pact, I should almost say a nuptial bond, between man and life; it is in man's power to untie this bond, but in so far as he denies the pact he tends to lose the notion of his existence. What is exactly to be understood by this bond? I may be accused of being led away by a metaphor, of unduly exaggerating abstractions. But however we interpret this fact philosophically, we must recognise that man is a being – and the only one we know – capable of adopting an attitude towards his life, not only his own life, but life in itself. He is then not a mere living being, he is, or rather he has become, something more, and we might say that it is through this faculty for adopting an attitude that he is a spirit. M. Jean Lacroix in his fine book *Personne et Amour* very rightly reminds us that one of the essential characteristics of man is his ability to expose himself voluntarily to death. This is, however, only a particular expression, the most striking of all, of a much more general truth – the truth of his transcendence over life and death. A human act, whatever it may be, presupposes it. It is this which makes it really possible and even legitimate to speak of man and of life as of two realities which are not confused or which have ceased to be confused. From this it follows that in speaking of a pact between man and life we have in mind on the one hand the confidence which man promises life and which makes it possible for him to give himself to life, and on the other hand the response of life to this confidence of man. But it is precisely the family, considered in relation to the act by which it is constituted, which shows us the working out of this pact, for it is in fact the pact's incarnation.

And it is inversely in the acts by which families are disunited that the breaking of this same pact takes place before our eyes. It is not difficult to illustrate this very general idea by concrete examples.

The essential act which constitutes marriage is obviously not the pure and simple mating which is only a human act, common alike to men and animals; it is not just a momentary union, but one which is *to last*; it is something which is established. A family is founded, it is erected like a monument whose hewn stone is neither the satisfaction of an instinct, nor the yielding to an impulse, nor the indulgence of a caprice. From this point of view we should probably not hesitate to say that there are innumerable false marriages (of course, I am not using these words in the sense of "faux ménages"). I am thinking here of those unions which are perfectly legal, but where there is nothing in the inward depths of character, nothing in the very centre of the will which corresponds to the socially binding form or even, alas, to the strictly sacramental character of the union entered into. It is more than probable that in a society where divorce is not only accepted, but regarded in many circles as a more or less normal contingency, a time must inevitably come when the irresponsibility with which so many unbelievers lightly and heedlessly get married, is communicated from one to another until it infects even those who by tradition, human respect or some remnant of faith are still impelled to take a vow of fidelity in the presence of God, only to find out too late that by this contradiction they are themselves caught in a trap from which it is not possible to escape except at the price of a scandalous renunciation or dishonourable subterfuge.

Here we must also touch on the difficult question of knowing whether the bond of marriage can really be compared with a simple contract. I must own that on this point the opinion of jurists matters little to me, for it seems very probable that reflection should here be free of the categories which they employ. Indeed, the more marriage is regarded as a simple contract, the more one must logically come to admit that it can be renounced by common accord, that it can even become no more than a temporary promise. The more one forms an exclusively rational idea of marriage, the more one is led, not perhaps theoretically but in fact, not only to admit divorce as, at the most, a possibility in exceptional cases, but to

incorporate with one's notion of the marriage bond the idea that it can be revoked. Or alternatively one may proclaim that in the interests of society the individual should be sacrificed in this as in many other matters to the agonising pressure of convention. But this solution which may perhaps satisfy the legislator or the sociologist has the serious defect of setting up the most tyrannical heteronomy in the realm where the individual person seems most justified in claiming his inalienable right to be an exception.

The only condemnation of divorce which can be justified, at least in theory, in the eyes of those very people who suffer most under it, is the condemnation which they must recognise as being pronounced in the name of *their own will* – a will so deep that they could not disown it without denying their own natures. If one postulates that in principle the conjugal union finds its consummation, and even its sanction, in the appearance of a new being in which the husband and wife fulfil and pass beyond themselves, it becomes obviously absurd to consider it quite natural that this same married couple should become free again whenever the sentiments which prevailed at their union change for some reason or another. They are no longer simply united by a reciprocal act which by common accord they can annul, but by the existence of a being for whom they are responsible and who has rights over them which cannot be set aside – unless we are cynically to argue from the fact that in the animal species there comes a moment when male and female lose all interest in their offspring because it no longer needs them. One can scarcely deny, I fear, that the innumerable human beings who today invent for themselves the most loose conception of the married state, argue from the example of the animals to justify themselves. Moreover it is worth noticing how easy it is to slide from what professes to be a completely rational notion of marriage to the grossest form of naturalism which claims to remove all lines of demarcation between man and other living creatures, in order that he may enjoy all the licence which goes with the natural state. But we know only too well the aberrations people can fall into when they claim to draw positive conclusions concerning what can and should be considered natural and consequently justifiable, particularly in matters of sex, from their observations of animal habits.

We can in reality be certain that where the mind oscillates

between an abstract formalism and an animalism with pretensions of a pseudo-scientific or poetically mystical nature, it condemns itself to lose sight of the unity apart from which it is impossible to think of the mystery of the family. "The heads of families, those great adventures of the modern world," said Péguy. What does this mean except that a family is not created or maintained as an entity without the exercise of a fundamental generosity whose rightly metaphysical principle must be examined. We must, of course, leave on one side the man who generates by chance, who produces his offspring like the animals without accepting the consequences of his act. He does not found a family; he produces a brood. In the true head of a family, the harmony which is attained between consciousness and the life force is established in a sphere which is not easily accessible to us by analysis. Perhaps there is even a danger that such a method might prevent us from understanding how this harmony is possible. As is so often the case, our thought has to work negatively and can only reach its objective by exclusion.

It is obvious on the one hand, as we have seen, that where the family is conceived as a reality any idea of marriage as a mere association of individual interests must be ruled out. It seems as though the marriage must in some way regulate itself in relation to the offspring, for whose coming preparation has to be made; but it is not less certain, and this observation is of the greatest importance here, that a marriage concluded simply with a view to procreation is not only in danger of degeneration because it does not rest on a firm spiritual basis, but, still more, it is an attack upon what is most worthy of reverence in the specifically human order. There is something which outrages the very dignity of the person when the joining of two beings is envisaged merely as a means of reproduction. The operation of the flesh is thus degraded and terrible revenge is in process of preparation for the time when the misunderstood and stifled powers in the depths of the human soul shake off the yoke which has been tragically imposed upon them. So it is certainly not true to say that procreation is the end of marriage. We must rather admit that both form complementary phases of a particular history which each one of us has to live out and through which he accomplishes his destiny as a creative being. The meaning of this word "creative" is very precise here: it denotes the active contribution

Each soul is at liberty to bring to the universal work which is accomplishing itself in our world and doubtless far beyond it. In this connection the condition of a human being of whatever kind is not essentially different from that of the artist who is the bearer of some message which he must communicate, of some flame which he must kindle and pass on, like the torch-bearers of Lucretia. Everything seems to happen as though on the human level the operation of the flesh ought to be the hallowing of a certain inward fulfilment, an out-flowing not to be forced since it springs from an experience of plentitude. Perhaps I should make myself better understood by saying in a way which actually is not exclusively Christian that the operation of the flesh loses its dignity and degenerates from its true nature if it is not an act of thanksgiving, a creative testimony. But, from this point of view, what a deep difference we must establish between husbands and wives who prudently secure for themselves an heir to succeed them, an heir who is nothing but a representative or a substitute for them – and those who, in a sort of prodigality of their whole being, sow the seed of life without ulterior motive by radiating the life flame which has permeated them and set them aglow.

These observations, which actually should be infinitely shaded, make it possible to catch a glimpse of the meaning of the sacred bond which it is man's lot to form with life, or, on the other hand, to stretch to a breaking-point after which he remains alone in a darkened and defiled universe.

There is assuredly a sense in which it is absolutely true to say that in such a realm all generalisations are deceptive. It is not even enough to remember that there are only particular cases. The truth is rather that there are no cases at all, each soul, each individual destiny constitutes a microcosm, governed by laws which, at least to a certain degree, are only valid for that soul. Hence it follows that in questions concerning particular people, such as a certain childless couple, or a family centred upon an only child, we have no right to judge. We never know – it is not our business to know – what disappointments, what secret trials underlie that which we might at first be tempted to condemn as selfishness, cowardice or voluntary sterility. And indeed we can be glad of it, for in principle it is intolerable and undistinguishable from the most odious pharisaism that

any of us should invade the privacy of others with our judgments. We regain our right to judge, however, in matters concerned with realities of a social order, such as the increase of divorce, the spread in the use of contraceptives or the practice of abortion. We can above all exercise our judgment with full knowledge and complete justice against an abominable propaganda which aims at making such methods appear rationally justifiable.

But from my own point of view, it will be understood that the question is not really one of proclaiming the immoral or anti-social character of any action or conduct. I have rather to discuss the symptoms in such action or conduct of a disaffection of beings from Being which, to tell the truth, does not imply the denial of an explicitly formulated promise, but the drawing back by which a spiritual organism dwindles, shrivels, cuts itself off from the universal communion in which it found the nourishing principle of life and growth. But what we should notice here is that by a serious perversion of the mind this sclerosis is interpreted as an emancipation, this atrophy as a blossoming. This is the unforgivable sin of which a certain ideology has been guilty; they imagined that they were liberating the person when all the time they were suffocating it. To borrow the famous comparison of Kant, I should say that thinking to lighten the weight of the atmosphere which presses upon human souls, they have transported them into a rarefied medium, where it is not possible for them to breath normally. But what is tragic in the world of the soul is that there is no clear indication of mortal dangers as on the physical plane, where unmistakable symptoms or sufferings afford the most imperative of signals and force the organism to react. Here, alas! the coma of the dying can last for generations without the patient, misled by his physicians, realising his condition even in his death agony. Actually this expression is not strong enough, for the threat here is not merely that of death, which after all is essentially a purification; it is one of degradation and perversion under the innumerable forms possible to human nature, and these forms, by the very diversity of their character, are the counterpart or countersign of the dignity and vocation of man.

Perhaps we shall now be able to discuss why the mystery of the family can truly be said to be a mystery of fidelity and hope. Analysis shows that the crisis in our family institutions can be

traced to a deeper and deeper misunderstanding of the virtues through which the unification of our destiny both terrestrial and super-terrestrial is consummated.

First of all a fundamental error or illusion must be disposed of concerning fidelity. We are too much inclined to consider it as a mere safeguard, an inward resolution which purposes simply to preserve the existing order. But in reality the truest fidelity is creative. To be sure of it, the best way is to strive to grasp the very complex bond which unites a child to its parents. There we have a relationship which is always exposed to a double risk of deterioration. Some, professing a strict and narrow traditionalism, tend to consider the child as entirely in the debt of those who gave it life; others, on the contrary, minimising this debt, if they do not actually deny it altogether, will tend to treat the child as the creditor, for they view life not as a blessing but a crushing burden which the parents in their heedless selfishness have placed on the shoulders of an innocent creature. I have already had occasion to remark that the phenomena of the breaking up of families which is increasing so rapidly at the present day is probably connected with this systematic depreciation of life. The advocates of birth control claim more or less sincerely that it is out of pity for their possible descendants that they refuse to give them the chance of existence; but we cannot help noticing, all the same, that this pity which is bestowed at small cost, not upon living beings but upon an absence of being or nothingness, is found in conjunction with a suspiciously good opportunity for indulging the most cynical egoism, and can scarcely be separated from an impoverished philosophy which measures the value of life by the pleasures and conveniences it provides. It is no less certain that pure traditionalism presents an unacceptable position here as elsewhere. Life, as it is transmitted in the act of procreation, is really neither a blessing nor a curse in itself. It is a possibility, an opportunity, a chance for good or evil. But this possibility is only achieved in so far as the being to whom it is granted appears from the moment of his birth as a subject, that is to say as able to enjoy and above all to suffer, and capable of one day attaining to the consciousness of what he has at first only felt. This being has to be armed in such a way that the two-sided possibility which has been given him appears to him as a precious opportunity when, on

reaching the stage at which he adopts his own attitude to life, he can appreciate it. It is, then, the sacred duty of parents to behave in such a way towards their child, that one day it will have good reason to acknowledge that it is in their debt. But if ever they are to be justified in considering that they have a *credit* here it will be exclusively in so far as they have succeeded in discharging a debt themselves, which to tell the truth cannot be likened to a payment of account but rather to the production of a work of art where their only share is the laying of the foundations. This amounts to saying that the debt and credit are strictly correlated and connected together on the child's side quite as much as on that of the parents. But is not this to recognise implicitly that such categories are too narrow, that they are no longer applicable except where the mystery of the family has been somehow desecrated from within by beings who have ceased to share its life and have transported themselves onto a plane where each one demands his due? In the same order of ideas it is very interesting to notice that though these notions of credit and debt tend sometimes, alas, to be accepted in limited families where a special function seems to be vested in the child by his parents through a pseudo-agreement in which he will always be justified in saying he has had no part, they will be found quite inapplicable to large families where the husband and wife, with no niggardly calculations and no pretensions to dispose of life as of their savings, have generously given themselves up to the creative spirit which penetrated them. It is still necessary, of course, that the children should share in the spirit of the family. Unfortunately, it does not always follow that they do. If they allow themselves to become infected with the prevalent individualism they will be tempted in many cases to pose as the victims of the blameworthy thoughtlessness of those who brought them into the world. So then in the end everything comes back to the spirit which at the same time is to be incarnated or established, and maintained, the spirit spreading beyond the self; and it is precisely this spirit which is expressed by the words "creative fidelity." The more our hearts as well as our intellects keep before them the idea of our lineage, of the forbears to whom we are answerable – because in the last analysis it is from them that we receive the deposit which must be transmitted – the more this spirit will succeed in freeing itself from the shroud of

selfishness and cowardice in which a humanity, more and more cut off from its ontological roots, is in danger of becoming gradually enveloped. Inversely, the more the sense of a lineage tends to be lost in the fading consciousness of a vague and nameless subsoil, the less the human soul will be able to discern its ultimate responsibilities and the more the family will tend to be reduced to an association with common interests, a sort of limited company of which it is lawful and even normal that the constitution should become increasingly flexible.

I think that it is indispensable here to stress the fact that creative fidelity such as I am trying to define depends in no way upon the acceptance of any special religious belief, although Christian dogma gives it a transcendent justification and adds infinitely to its splendour. We must, I think, recognise on the one hand that there exists a form of Christianity, heretical no doubt but all the same unimpeachable, which, by the predominance given to the eschatological side can dangerously weaken or even undermine the soul's love of life. This love of life I should readily call the ethico-lyrical impulse which controls the human swarm. Many souls under Jansenistic influence have no doubt succumbed to the temptation of abjuring what is human and deserting the earth, without perhaps getting much nearer to heaven by so doing. But, on the other hand, I should be quite disposed to think that a *religio* exists of which the pagans themselves have left us admirable signs, a reverence for the dead and for the gods presiding over the home which apart from any essentially Christian spirituality gives evidence of the pact between man and the life-force to which I have so often had occasion to refer: and it is only too easy to understand that where this *religio* has given way to the pitiless pressure, not of technics but of a mentality fascinated and unsettled by the progress of technics, we see as at the present time an increasing number of violations of that natural morality and order still recognised as such by our forefathers. I am tempted to think that it is this *religio* which we must first restore and that unfortunately a Christian super-structure, which only too often is nothing but a camouflage, can very well disguise how fatally it is lacking. Unquestionably this point seems to me the most important in the whole tangle of considerations which I have tried to set before you today. The men of my generation have

seen carried out before their eyes with extraordinary tenacity a work of systematic subversion which is no longer directed against revealed doctrines or principles hallowed by tradition, but against nature itself. Man, whatever brainless biologists may think about him, will never be on the same level as the animals. Wherever he is truly himself, wherever he is faithful to his vocation, he is infinitely above them. Wherever he deliberately renounces his true calling, he falls infinitely below them. As for the humanism for little Voltaireans on the retired list, offered by those who advocate a return to the just mean, to average virtues, to prudent calculations and methodical precautions, we now know with tragic certainty that it is the tremulous forerunner of the worst individual and national disasters.

This is not all: if so many souls today seem to be deaf to the call of creative fidelity, it is because these souls have lost all sense of hope. I must here briefly recall the fundamental ideas which I developed a few weeks ago on this theological virtue, the mysterious source of human activity. I said that hope cannot be separated either from a sense of communion or from a more or less conscious and explicit dependence on a power which guarantees this communion itself. "I hope in Thee, for us," such is the authentic formula of hope. But the more this "for us" tends to confine itself to what concerns the self instead of opening onto the infinite, the more hope shrivels and deteriorates, and, in the domain of the family, the more it tends to degenerate into a shortsighted ambition and to fix its attention on ways of safeguarding and increasing a certain Having which actually need not take a grossly material form. But I added that it is only by breaking through Having that hope can effect an entrance into our soul. By the term Having I did not mean exclusively the visible possessions of which each of us can make an inventory, but rather the armour of good or bad habits, opinions and prejudices which makes us impervious to the breath of the spirit, everything in us which paralyses what the Apostle calls the liberty of the children of God. Perhaps in this connection it would be well to follow the example of one of the greatest thinkers of our day and to concentrate our attention on a central fact in the psychology of contemporary man; I mean anxiety, and particularly the anxiety which is less the result of bitter experience than a mortifying anticipation,

the anxiety which is like the premature decay of those who have never lived. There is indeed scarcely one of the collective influences of this age which has not tended to mark the foreheads of our adolescents with the sign of this decay; school, the Press, forms of entertainment even, have helped to impair the youthful freshness, the candid voice, the limpid gaze, the purity of heart, without which youth ceases to be a quality and a grace and becomes no more than a title, a dimension entered on an identity card. It would be unpardonable to undervalue the reaction which has been taking place for the last few years in movements which are, or hope to be, the prelude to a renaissance in our unhappy country. But there is no disguising the fact that the task is crushing and is far beyond the power of the movements in question. The atmosphere is still saturated with germs of decay which can only be swept away by an entirely new spirit. I think it is clear that on the one hand such a renewal can only spring from a religious principle but that on the other it cannot surely be the work of Christians alone, if by that we mean those who are regular members of a definite church. Finally, I am persuaded that though we certainly do not want public authorities to be patrons, since this only too often compromises a movement, we can at least ask them not to paralyse the initiative of people of all complexions, as they unite in a common effort to stimulate and revivify society. It is very much to be feared, indeed, that the State, the modern State, all of whose organs have been successively overdeveloped, will tend finally to kill everything which it claims to sanction or foster in the human being, for it is beyond its power either to give life or to reveal and recognise it.

Life: I confess that I have doubtless misused this word, the ambiguity of which I am the first to acknowledge and deplore. But whatever may be the confusion to which this ambiguity exposes loose or untrained processes of thought, it none the less has the special positive merit of revealing to us, like a drop of water in the desert, the existence of the mystery of incarnation to which I drew your attention at the beginning. The family, in as much as it is the matrix of individuality, is really the meeting place of the vital element and the spiritual. Still more it is an evidence of our inability to separate them, unless it be when we claim to abide by the wager of a purely speculative reason which sets out, with an arrogant

disregard for the conditions which follow from its introduction into the world of beings, to throw off the shackles proper to the state of a creature. In the last analysis it is on this elementary yet generally misunderstood notion of the state of a creature, the condition of a creature, that we must here place the decisive accent. By a paradox which well deserves our attention, the more man, misled not by science but by a certain elementary philosophy of science, comes to regard himself as a mere link in an endless chain, or as the result of purely natural causes, the more he arrogates to himself the right of absolute sovereignty in all that concerns the ordering of his personal conduct. The more he is theoretically humiliated by a materialistic philosophy which claims to deny any special identity to himself or his actions, the more does he actually develop a practical pride which impels him to deny the existence of any human order to which he might owe obedience. It is natural that under such conditions the family should be choked between the claims of two systems apparently opposed, but actually converging and reinforcing each other. In fact, it only assumes its true value and dignity through the functioning of a central relationship which cannot be affected by any objective causality and which is the strictly religious relationship whose mysterious and unique expression is found in the words *divine fatherhood*. Certainly this analogy may seem very far from a natural fatherhood, which is established by methods belonging to positive consciousness. The analogy, however, is not simply a spiritual way of looking at things. It is of a constructive character; it provides a key. We are here approaching a paradoxical truth upon which all the metaphysical understanding of the family depends. Far as we may be from claiming that theology arbitrarily transposes natural relationship into the sphere of divine realities, we must undoubtedly recognise that, inversely, all the so-called natural relationships which, as we have seen, can never be reduced to simple experimental data, not only symbolise transcendental relationships towards which they direct our devotion, but they also tend to weaken and dissolve precisely in so far as these relationships are misunderstood and denied. In other words, contrary to the persistent humanistic illusion, we have good reason to assert that family relationships, like human matters in general, afford no consistency, no guarantee of solidity. It is only when they are

referred back to a superhuman order, which here below we cannot grasp apart from its signs and indications, that their truly sacred character becomes apparent. Accordingly, as events have gone on showing for the last quarter of a century, wherever man betrays faith in man, wherever treason becomes a habit and then a rule, there can no longer be room for anything but insanity and ruin. It can scarcely be different wherever the claim is made to establish a way of private life which disregards the vow of fidelity. The truth is that humanity is only truly human when it is upheld by the incorruptible foundations of consecration – without such foundations it decomposes and dies. Do not let us say, however, that it returns to nothingness. If this word has any meaning, which is not certain, it is on a level of reality far below the human structure. When man, by denying the existence of God, denies his own, the spiritual powers which are dissociated by his denial keep their primitive reality, but disunited and detached they can no longer do anything but drive the beings of flesh and soul back against each other in a despairing conflict – those beings which, had their union been safeguarded and preserved, would have gone forward towards eternal life. What all this amounts to is that if, as is certain, we have to recover today the sense of a certain fundamental reverence towards life, it cannot be by starting from below, that is to say from a biology of racialism or eugenics infected with ill-will. On the contrary, only an affirmation which reaches far beyond all empirical and objectively discernible ways of living can gain for us a sense of life's fullness and, besides this, set the seal of eternity upon the perpetually renewed act of creation, that act by which the whole family preserves its being and grants to the soul, which it forms and guides, the fearful power of completing or, alas, of repudiating it.

Le Peuch.
March–May, 1942.

To JEAN DE FABREGUES THE CREATIVE VOW AS ESSENCE OF FATHERHOOD¹

The thoughts which I want to propose for your consideration today follow directly from those I put before you last year at Lyons and at Toulouse in my lecture on the *Mystery of the Family*. One might even say that in the last analysis I am only presenting an application of the general idea which formed as it were the framework of that lecture. I think therefore that as this idea can serve as a guiding thread through the sinuosities of the developments which are to follow, it will be useful to place it in abstract outline at the head of my talk. To-day, experience seems to show us clearly that the unbeliever is indulging in an illusion when he imagines that he only has to make a clean sweep, that is to say to demolish what he regards as the superstructures of religious consciousness, and he will have at his disposal a clear field, or let us say arable ground in which all he need do is to sow the good grain distributed by reason in order to see rich harvests of natural morality spring up before his eyes. In reality everything goes to show that the crumbling away of religious beliefs, which has been going on for the last century and a half in vast sectors of the western world, brings as its consequence *a weakening of the natural foundations* on which these beliefs had grown up. The philosopher, when faced with a fact of such dimensions, is obliged to seek an explanation and to wonder if the principle of these foundations does not contain a certain piety clearly religious in essence. This we might without any offence call sub-Christian, for it is the understructure upon which authentic

¹ Lecture given to the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes Familiales* at Lyons, July, 1943.