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OF THE YEAR
TWO THOUSAND**

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by
ETIENNE GILSON

University of
St. Michael's College
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FOREWORD

The Terrors of the Year Two Thousand was first published by St. Michael's College, Toronto, in 1949. It is now re-issued in 1984 to mark the hundredth anniversary of the birth of its author, Etienne Gilson, which took place on 13 June 1884. St. Michael's honours the memory of its most distinguished professor of philosophy who lectured in its classrooms almost annually from 1929 to 1972, and who was the founder and life-time director of its Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. Gilson died in Auxerre in Burgundy, France, on 19 September 1978.

A member of the Académie Française, Etienne Gilson is possibly the most renowned medievalist of his generation. He was professor of medieval philosophies in the Sorbonne and in the Collège de France from 1921. He became also visiting professor of medieval thought at Harvard (1926) and at Toronto (1929). In the course of his long productive life he delivered, in addition to countless individual lectures, the following outstanding series: the Gifford Lectures in Aberdeen; the Henry James Lectures at Harvard; the Powell Lectures at Bloomington, Indiana; the inaugural lectures of the Mercier Chair at Louvain; and the fourth series of the Mellon Lectures in the National Gallery, Washington. The published bibliography of Gilson's full-length books and articles (Margaret McGrath, Toronto, 1982) contains 1210 items, all of them rich, revolutionary, beautiful and totally Christian.

As a national figure, Gilson represented France at many international meetings: after World War I in London, Naples and Cambridge (Mass.); after World War II at important conferences held in San Francisco (United Nations), London (UNESCO) and the Hague (United Europe). For two years he was a *conseiller* or senator in the French government.

The story of how Gilson came to write *The Terrors of the Year Two Thousand* carries its own interest: it is partly the product of his friendship with Henri Focillon, partly his love of the Church in the persons of two French archbishops, cardinals Suhard and Liénart. Focillon, like Gilson, was a philosopher whose interests carried him deeply into other disciplines and arts. Focillon called himself “an engraver-philosopher” and most of his books on art history are generously adorned with reproductions of medieval treasures. Gilson became Focillon’s friend and admirer during the 1920’s and 1930’s. In 1938, seconded by Paul Valéry, Gilson sponsored Focillon’s appointment to the Collège de France. When the results proved favourable, Gilson and Paul Valéry rushed hilariously up the rue Saint-Jacques announcing the appointment to all and sundry.

It was Focillon who first impressed upon Gilson the importance of an artist’s hands. In the case of painters especially it is the hands that really matter: creation through the hands is more fundamental to great art (Croce, who in any event is only a critic, notwithstanding) than creation through the mind. Focillon and Gilson were still close friends when Focillon died in 1948 leaving his treatise on *L’an mil* unfinished. Gilson already knew the contents of *L’an mil*, and especially of that book’s important Part I on “The problem of the Terrors” which dealt with the extravagant *histoires* of the chronicler Raoul Glaber. It is from this Part I of *L’an mil* that Gilson in the present essay launches into his moving treatment of the philosophical terrors besetting a world which is now moving toward *l’an deux mille*.

The other part of the story of the *Terrors* is as simple as two-plus-two equals four. The two cardinals invited Gilson as an intellectual to share his special competence in the field of thought with the French episcopate. Like

Focillon's death, this too happened in 1948. Gilson immediately teamed up with Paul Claudel, Romano Guardini and Robert Speaight to revive the once successful but now moribund *Semaines des Intellectuels Catholiques*.

Gilson prepared a brilliant talk on the topic "The Intellectuals and Peace" in which he examined peace in terms of the Nietzschean atheism permeating the existential thought of Jean-Paul Sartre, for whom existentialism was the will to extract the necessary consequences from a coherent atheism. Gilson used for this talk his own historical and philosophical methods joined to the methods of his deceased friend Henri Focillon to draw a comparison between the outlook of people of 948 who were expecting Antichrist and the people of 1948 who have been told by philosophers that there is no God. If, said Gilson, there is no God, then everything is permitted. It was this essay "The Intellectuals and Peace" that Gilson reshaped for his North American audience into the imaginative piece you are about to read.

The Terrors of the Year Two Thousand is, in very truth, a beautiful, frightening, penetrating prose-poem. Gilson gives it to us without scholarly references, even enigmatically in what concerns his medieval base, the *histoires* of Raoul Glaber. Yet the analysis of what some philosophers would do to us is devastating. This little book is a self-standing work of art consistent with Gilson's inmost being. It will be in the inmost being of the modern reader that *The Terrors of the Year Two Thousand* will live.

Laurence K. Shook,
Pontifical Institute of
Mediaeval Studies,
Toronto.



Etienne Gilson



F OLD, CHILDREN were taught to hold as certain that around the year One Thousand a great terror took possession of people. We were told so, at any rate, and we believed it, and the really amazing thing is that all was not completely false in this story. The scholars of today make fun of it and treat it as a legend. Nowhere, they say, can we find trace of this so-called panic which is supposed to have then paralyzed whole populations in the expectation of the approaching end of the world. These historians are right, at least to a degree, but even if they were wrong, we would probably smile as we read today, in the *Chronicle* of the good monk Raoul Glaber, the report of all sorts of wonders which marked the last years of the tenth century. A war, a pestilence, a famine, a fiery dragon and a whale the size of an island? We have witnessed much better! This time the enemy of mankind has got an earlier start; he has even improved his methods considerably, and if the terrors of the year One Thousand are not a certainty for today's historians, those of the year Two Thousand will surely be so for future historians.

From 1914 to 1918, the world was ravaged by a war which had known no parallel. A mighty people broke through its boundaries and spread over Europe, leaving in its wake ruins past numbering, dead by the millions, and historical materialism, master of Holy Russia, whence later we have seen it menacing the whole earth. Even during that armistice of twenty years which we took for peace, what tragic bloodshed! China in perpetual war seems a little far away for us to worry about what happens there, but have we already forgotten what took place during that barbarous civil war in Most Christian Spain, where man was so cruel to man that those who saw it lower their voices to speak of it, and murmur: "Anything, rather than see that again!" The tenth century famine? But I have only to shut my eyes for a moment to see once more, in the villages of the Ukraine and on the banks of the Volga, the dead children in 1922, whose little corpses lay abandoned in their emptied schools; or again, wandering along the railways, those bands of children reduced to savagery who later were to be mowed down with machine guns. At the beginning of the twentieth century, as at the end of the tenth — official documents bear witness to the fact — parents devoured their offspring. Fathers and mothers like our own, like ourselves, but who knew the meaning of that frightful word: hunger.

That, however was but a modest beginning. We saw the German army hurled upon Europe a second time, like a great tidal wave; Poland vanquished, plundered, butchered; nations falling one after the other under the blows of an irresistible conqueror. France in agony, her very honour wounded. Paris crumbles in its turn, and the echo of its downfall reverberates in the silence of an astonished world. A Raoul Glaber of the year Two Thousand would never stop multiplying the chapters of this woeful tale. He would have to describe the prodigious

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series of disasters which now swoop down upon the entire world and to which we ourselves, who witnessed them, can scarcely bear testimony. The sky everywhere furrowed by fiery dragons much more formidable than those which, on the threshold of the year One Thousand, crossed from north to south the sky of France; in Japan, in the South Sea Islands, in China, in Russia, in Germany, in France, in Italy — in that very England which believed itself sheltered behind our army, its fleet and the depths of its surrounding seas — a heap of ruins which has not yet been cleared away and which is there for us to see; the numbers of dead increase and they are still in our hearts for us to mourn; a whole race condemned to destruction, savagely wiped out, pursued by a hatred fierce and ingenious as only man is capable of conceiving for man. Germany opened for the Jews, and closed upon them, charnel pits whose numbers we still do not know. Of course, all this was to be brought to a close by a liberation, but we know what further details and further ruins this was to cost, even to that bomb of Hiroshima, whose solemn detonation announced to a terrified world, with the supposed close of a war which no peace has yet followed, the dawn of a new era where science, formerly our hope and our joy, would be the source of greatest terror.

Man has just made the most outstanding of his discoveries, but by a symbolism the more striking for being quite involuntary, the great secret that science has just wrested from matter is the secret of its destruction. To know today is synonymous with to destroy. Nuclear fission is not only the most intimate revelation of the nature of the physical world and the freeing of the most powerful energy that has ever been held, but at the same time and inevitably the most frightful agent of destruction which man has ever had at his disposal. The three are inseparable. Atomic piles can be built more and more

powerful, and immense quantities of useful energy can thus be produced, but the operation of these piles yields as a by-product the very explosive of the atom bomb. Not only does man know today so many things that he wonders if he will be able to control his own domination, but the conditions of his rule are such that they present to the scientist this tragic dilemma: formerly, it was by obeying her that one mastered nature, now it is by destroying her.

And yet we are only at the beginning. The age of atomic physics will see the birth of a new world, as different from our own as ours is from the world before steam and electricity. Doubtless, it will be even more so — for things will move quickly — especially when to the era of physics there will succeed the still more redoubtable one of biology. Very few of those who work in laboratories doubt it: we are on the verge of a great mystery which may, any day, surrender its secret. We will be able to work, not only on inert matter, but even on life, and it is not only the breadth of our power but its very nature which will become terrifying; and the more so that here again, and for the same reason, the possibility of good is inseparable from that of evil.

Pasteurian arms is today a common term. It is a horrible term, and it carries with it a symbolism that is more impressive because it is entirely independent of all human intention. Pasteur never cultivated microbes except to attenuate the virulence of their cultures, and thus save human lives. Today, on the contrary, we are striving to increase their virulence in order to kill and no longer to cure. The biology of tomorrow will allow more subtle, but not the less formidable, interventions in human destiny. Can we imagine the repercussions which the free determination of the sexes will have some day, perhaps in the near future? Can we picture what would happen in a world where we could not only turn out males and females

at will, but select them and produce human beings adapted to various functions as do breeders with dogs or horses or cattle? In that future society which will know how to give itself the slaves and even the reproducers which it needs, what will become of the liberty and dignity of the human person? For once, the most daring prophecies of H. G. Wells appear tame, for in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* they were still only working to transform wild brutes into men; in the future society, it is men whom they will be transforming into brutes — to use them to foster the ends of a humanity thenceforth unworthy of the name.

And these are not today — as in 948 — fears localised in a small corner of the earth. It is a world-wide terror, with the whole planet as its domain, from Vladivostock around the world to Alaska, by way of Moscow, Berlin, Paris, London and Washington. But do we really know its cause?

These men of the tenth century knew at least what they feared. Not at all — as has been erroneously reiterated — the end of the world, but an event which, on the contrary, was to precede it by a sufficiently long interval of time which was announced prophetically in the Apocalypse, ch. 20, v. 7: “Then, when the thousand years are over, Satan will be let loose from his prison, and will go out to seduce the nations that live at the four corners of the earth — that is the meaning of Gog and Magog — and muster them for battle, countless as the sand by the sea.” That is the way St. John himself had said it, the enemy of God was soon to appear, ushering in a fearful era of abomination and desolation.

By what signs would we recognize it? The question was asked with that curiosity which always tempers anxiety; and moreover the Middle Ages had on that point precisions that surprise us a little. The Beast with seven heads and ten horns was Satan “and the names it bore on

its heads were names of blasphemy”, which the Apocalypse describes: like a leopard, but it had bear’s feet and a lion’s mouth. A secret number formulates his essence, and “let the reader, if he has the skill, cast up the sum of the figures in the beast’s name, after our human fashion, and the number will be six hundred and sixty-six”. Why? It is, as St. Irenaeus says, that Noah was six hundred years old at the time of the flood, the statue of Nabuchodonosor was sixty cubits high and six cubits wide: add the age of Noah and the height and width of the statue of Nabuchodonosor and you get six hundred and sixty-six. This is not only clear, it is evident! Would you know his name? Evanthas, Lateinos, Titan, perhaps another. Irenaeus knows everything. He even informs us that the Antichrist will devastate the whole earth, reigning in the Temple three years and three months; and after that will come the end of the world when creation will have lasted six thousand years.

Today we cannot read these details without at first an amused smile on our lips. On that subject the Bishop of Lyons knows so many things, that the future unfolds before him with all the regulated precision of the scenario of a super-film. We ourselves enter into the spirit of the thing and put a few questions to him, but he has an answer for everything. Why should the world last exactly six thousand years? It is because creation lasted six days and since a day of creation is worth a thousand years, the world will come to an end after the six days of creation have run their course. The answer is perfect! But here we stop smiling and an uncomfortable doubt slips into our mind. Six thousand years? But how old was the world at the time of Christ? Suppose the six thousand years of the world were not finally to have expired until around the year Two Thousand? The scourges which have struck us, the menace of the blows which await us, do not favour abandoning this

hypothesis. If the drama which we live does not announce the end of the world, it is a rather good dress rehearsal. Shall we see worse than Buchenwald, Lydice and Oradour-sur-Glane? Perhaps it is not impossible, but it is difficult to believe. At this point in our reflections, we cast our eyes about and ask anxiously: "But where is Antichrist?" And behold, he is right there!

Ecce homo, said Friedrich Neitzche of himself: behold the man! This time, no longer God who becomes man to make him divine, but man who makes himself God to usurp his place and who wishes to be his own god. We are surprised at first, for he bears no resemblance to the fantastic beast of the Apocalypse. However, like it he has a number, and it is a human number. On the body of a man, a man's head with a hard, wilful chin, a broad intellectual forehead crowned with blasphemies, and in his beautiful eyes the anguish of insanity. His name is none of those which they had told us. He does not call himself Lateinos, Evanthas but Zarathustra, and behold he speaks like the one of whom St. Paul formerly prophesied, who will go so far as to sit "in God's temple, and proclaim himself as God". (*II Thess. ii, 4*).

That is indeed what Nietzsche does, when he puts himself forward as the sole guardian of the terrifying explosive which humanity does not yet know and which will nevertheless change its destiny. More powerful than the bomb of Hiroshima which it prefigures, and a thousand times more devastating still, the terrifying message that Zarathustra murmurs to himself as he comes towards us is contained in these few very simple words: "They do not know that God is dead". He himself, at least, knows it, and that is why his name is *Ante-christus* as well as *Anti-christus*. "Have you understood me?" he asks. "Dionysus face to face with the Crucifix". He does not only come *before* Christ but *against* Him.

This is the capital discovery of modern times, the event of which all the rest, tragic as they may be, are only the corollaries or the sequels. Trace back as far as you like the history of humanity and you will find no upheaval to compare with this in the extent or in the depth of its cause. The demoniac grandeur of Nietzsche is that he does know and that he says so. This is not just our imagination; it is enough to read his *Ecce Homo* to have proof of it: "I know my fate. A day will come when the remembrance of a fearful event will be fixed to my name, the remembrance of a unique crisis in the history of the earth, of the most profound clash of consciences, of a decree enacted against all that had been believed, exacted and sanctified right down to our days. I am not a man, I am dynamite." Do you doubt for an instant that he would have said today "an atomic bomb"? And how right he is! From his very beginning, man had thought nothing, said nothing, done nothing that did not draw its inspiration from this certitude that there existed a God or gods. And behold, all of a sudden, there is no longer one, or rather, we see that there never was one! We shall have to change completely our every thought, word and deed. The entire human order totters on its base. Antichrist is still the only one who knows this, the only one who foresees the appalling cataclysm of the "reversal of values" which is in the making, for if the totality of the human past depended on the certitude that God exists, the totality of its future must needs depend on the contrary certitude, that God does not exist. But see the folly of men who do not yet know this, or who continue to act as if two or three among them did not know it already! Everything that was true from the beginning of the human race will suddenly become false, but what will become true? Whether he knows it or not, man alone must create for himself a new formula of life, which will be that of his destiny.

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Very well, let us get to work. But man will never use his creative liberty as long as he believes that what is already dead is still living. Nietzsche has definite knowledge of his mission to destroy: "When truth opens war on the age-old falsehood, we shall witness upheavals unheard of in the history of the world, earthquakes will twist the earth, the mountains and the valleys will be displaced, and everything hitherto imaginable will be surpassed. Politics will then be completely absorbed by the war of ideas and all the combinations of power of the old society will be shattered since they are all built on falsehood: there will be wars such as the earth will never have seen before. It is only with me that great politics begin on the globe . . . I know the intoxicating pleasure of destroying to a degree proportionate to my power of destruction."

Have we understood at last? That is not certain, because the announcement of a cataclysm of such magnitude ordinarily leaves but a single escape: to disbelieve it and, in order not to believe, to refuse to understand it. If Nietzsche speaks truly, it is the very foundations of human life which are to be overthrown. Before stating what will be true, we will have to say that everything by which man has thus far lived, everything by which he still lives, is deception and trickery. "He who would be a creator, both in good and evil, must first of all know how to destroy and to wreck values." They are, in fact, being wrecked around us, and under our very feet, everywhere. We have stopped counting the unheard of theories thrown at us under names as various as their methods of thought, each the harbinger of a new truth which it promises to create shortly, joyously busy preparing the brave new world of tomorrow by first of all annihilating the world of today.

Destroying today to create tomorrow, such is indeed the mission of the seducer. "I am the first immoralist, I am thereby the destroyer *par excellence*." He knows his mission, and his disciples too have understood it. It is not only to some of their novels, it is to their entire work that *The Immoralist* of Gide would serve as a rather good title. That is merely literature? Doubtless, and it is sometimes beautiful — but have we not long known that the seducer would be handsome? That we should not have foreseen him, is still forgivable. But that we should not understand what he is doing while he is doing it right under our eyes, just as we were told he would do it — that bears witness to a stranger blindness. Can it really be that the herd of human beings that is being led to slaughter has eyes and yet does not see?

It is none the less very simple! Whatever criticism can be levelled at the venerable Artisan of the Bible, let us at least do him the justice of admitting that he knew quite well what "to create" means. He did not take himself for some Greek demigod, fashioning to his idea a material which did not owe him existence. Insofar as a thing is made out of another, concession must be made to the material which is used. To create, on the contrary, is truly to make something of nothing, in the supreme freedom of an act which, since it is producing *ex nihilo*, nothing conditions, nothing determines, nothing limits. A truly *gratuitous* act of which one is the sole and complete author, that is the only act which is truly creative because it alone is truly free. In an eternity which transcended time, Jehovah was free; but we are not, for even if the world was not created, everything appears to us as if it had been created, for it exists. And it is indeed that world which restricts us! Try as we may to fashion it and remodel it, in a hundred different ways, we shall only make of it what its nature allows us to make. We shall perhaps be great

manufacturers, but creators — never! To create in his turn *ex nihilo*, man must first of all reestablish everywhere the void.

It is too soon yet to create, but one can begin to destroy. Man is thus occupied on all sides with that intoxicating joy which Neitzche has just told us is as great as his power of destruction. Perhaps that is the answer to the poignant question which so many of us are asking ourselves: what does man want? Has he gone mad? Yes, in a sense, but only with the supremely lucid madness of a creature who would annihilate the obstacle which *being* places in the way of his creative ambitions. Such is the profound sense of our solemn and tragic adventure. Antichrist is not among us, he is in us. It is man himself, usurping unlimited creative power and proceeding to the certain annihilation of that which is, in order to clear the way for the problematic creation of what will be.

We are then in the decisive moment of a cosmic drama. *Quis ut Deus?* It is I, says man. When we no longer want to be the image of God, we still can be his caricature! The explosion of Hiroshima did not only silence that atrocious clamour which swelled towards us from the camps of slow death and the charnel pits of Germany, it will resound for a long time, as a solemn assertion with a definite meaning. We have at last seen through the secret of matter! We know exactly how it is made, since we are able to destroy it. How will the world end? We used to think we knew; then science accustomed us to consider these answers as myths, and behold it now produces its own answer. On the threshold of a new millenium, man has the proud conviction that the day is perhaps not far off when he himself will be able to explode the planet. Let us admit that the adventure is enticing. You press a button, and the earth bursts like a gigantic bomb whose pulverized fragments are lost in a shower of stars which

the startled eyes of the Martians — if there be any — will see shooting through the night into space. As a child who amuses himself by breaking his toy for no reason at all, just to see what it is like inside, so man will have smashed the world. It is possible that another will then be born, but that is not certain; in the meantime, what is certain is that ours will be ended.

At least, it will be said, man is free! One can henceforth attempt all things, and especially in the realm of the mind. So wrote Stéphané Mallarmé, whose whole work attests what has been called “the obsession to abolish”, but who would abolish everything only that he himself might perform a pure act of creation and thus, as it has been said, “became equal to God”. Is not that precisely the sacrilegious effort whose meaning we would like to decipher? The terms which a critic of Mallarmé used to describe his poetic enterprise fit exactly the mad ambitions of modern man: “to construct a poetry which would have the value of a preternatural creation and which would be able to enter into rivalry with the world of created things to the point of supplanting it totally”.

To abolish existing creation in order to create another: that is also the ambition of authentic surrealism, by which I mean the one which André Breton defined a short while ago as: “something dictated by thought, released from all control of reason, divorced from all aesthetic or moral preoccupation”. We will then be able to say everything as well as to do everything. If we start by annihilating everything, what limits can stop us? None whatever. Everything is possible, provided only that this creative spark which surrealism seeks to disclose deep in our being be preceded by a devastating flame. “The most simple surrealist act consists in this: to go down into the streets, pistol in hand, and shoot at random, for all you are worth, into the crowd.” Why not? This massacre of values is

necessary to create values that are really new. "Everything is still to be done", affirms André Breton, "every means becomes good when employed to destroy the ideas of *family, native land, religion.*" Now that is not only necessary: since God is dead, it has become possible. The eternal obstructor who has encumbered the heavens ever since the beginning of the world has suddenly disappeared. The terrible interlocutor to whom, during ages without number, man gave only trembling reply — behold he has suddenly vanished, leaving for the first time man, face to face with himself, alone in a world empty of God, and at last master of his destiny. "But, Smerdiakof", says old Karamazov, "if God does not exist, then everything is permitted." What a prodigious liberation! Man knows henceforward that he can do anything without the echo in his ear of the redoubtable summons of the sovereign judge, "Adam, where art thou?" There is no longer any judge, save Adam himself, who, since he alone makes the law, alone applies it, without knowing yet that man is for himself the hardest of masters and that, by a comparison with the yoke which he lays on his own shoulders, that of the Lord was light to bear.

To learn this, he needs a bit of time. Long after the amazing discovery that all is henceforth permitted, man still continues to act as if that which had formerly been forbidden still remained so. The ancient law of good and evil continues to rule his actions, but instead of being called the divine law it is called the voice of conscience. Nothing has then been gained, and man has merely changed the name of his master; until the inevitable day when conscience, finding herself but the lees of long use, doubts in her turn that even she has authority to impose law. It is only then that all becomes actually permissible, and to the question: what must we do?, there is no longer an answer, but from the moment when there is indeed no

longer anything that man must do, he no longer knows what he will do. As the soldier, on leave, knows the desolation of twenty-four hours passed with nothing to do, man knows today that infinitely more tragic desolation of a life which is all spent in the idleness of a liberty he is powerless to use.

It is this nausea that has engendered contemporary existentialism and, we must admit, its courageous decision to dispel it. "Existentialism", says Sartre, "is nothing other than an effort to draw all the consequences from a coherently atheistic position." That is true, and these consequences are terrible. Everything is permissible if God does not exist, but also, as a consequence, man is abandoned, for he finds neither within nor without himself anything on which to rely. Then begins for him the stern martyrdom of the paths of liberty. "We have neither behind us nor before us, in the bright domain of values, any justification or excuse. We are alone, without excuse. That is what I would express in saying that man is condemned to be free . . . man, without any support and without any help, is condemned at each moment to invent man." A truly exhausting task, that of a perpetual invention of self, without model, without purpose, without rule. The father of existentialism is not Prometheus bound, nor even unbound, but rather Sisyphus, "the hero of the absurd". Tragic hero, because he knows, and by that very fact is superior to his destiny. Is he not stronger than his rock, asks Albert Camus, since he rolls it eternally? "To live is to make the absurd live. To make it live is above all to contemplate it."

That the absurd creates itself out of nothing is not astonishing, nor that it nauseates him. But these are the sports of the princes of the mind. For unless we welcome the eerie invitation to suicide, our problem is to live. A half-dozen intellectuals may find a meaning for the absurd

in the literary success they gain by it, but such a justification has no value for the masses of ordinary men, liberated by atheism and who, having become gods without asking for it, do not know what to do with their divinity. The latter make no pretence to save themselves, they eagerly beg to be saved. Then there appear other men who undertake to exploit atheism in their turn, and who organize the cult of the new god. It is not without a profound philosophical reason that Marxism required atheism as one of its necessary principles.

“Aragon and I”, André Breton used to write. Let us not be surprised that Aragon, a Marxist writer, made his debut under the chief of the surrealists. Their paths have since parted, but all the creative ambitions of the man who makes himself god at least find a harmony in the will to destroy which they presuppose. How could Marxism be able truly to free man, if it did not first free him of God? Since Feuerbach, we know exactly what is the essence of Christianity and how man, who believed himself the creature of God, is on the contrary His creator. Since there is no longer anything between man and himself, there is no longer anything between man and other men. Once again, he is free, but is he truly free? Once he is free of God, he is no longer free of other men, between whom and himself there never existed any other protection but God and the law of God. It is a very old story. We read in the Book of Judges (xxi, 24): “In those days there was no king in Israel: but every one did that which seemed right to himself.” The day came, however, when this free people grew tired of its liberty, and as the prophet Samuel was growing old, they went to him and said: “Make us a king, to judge us, as all nations have.” At these words, Samuel experienced a great sadness, for he thought he had always judged according to the law of God, but he feared he had committed some fault and by it had turned men from that law.

The Lord knew his thoughts, and said to him: "Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to thee. For they have not rejected *thee*, but *me*, that I should not reign over them." However, before granting the Jewish people the king that they asked, God made known to them the rights that their future masters would not fail to claim: "He will take your sons and put them in his chariots, and will make them his horsemen, and his running footmen to run before his chariots. And he will appoint of them to plough his fields, and to reap his corn, and to make him arms and chariots. Moreover, he will take the tenth of your corn to give to his servants." We have seen these things and worse still, for if governments today were satisfied with an income tax of ten percent, what a sigh of relief would we hear in the world! Since men have refused to serve God, there is no longer an arbiter between them and the State which dominates them. It is no longer God, it is the State which judges them. But who, then, will judge the State?

To know the answer to this, it is enough to glance at what is going on round about us. To judge the State, there is no one left. In every land and in all countries, the people wait with fear and trembling for the powerful of this world to decide their lot for them. They hesitate, uncertain, among the various forms of slavery which are being prepared for them. Listening with bated breath to the sounds of those countries which fall one after the other with a crash followed by a long silence, they wonder in anguish how long will last this little liberty they still possess. The waiting is so tense that many feel a vague consent to slavery secretly germinating within themselves. With growing impatience, they await the arrival of the master who will impose on them all forms of slavery, starting with the worst and most degrading of all — that of the mind. Blessed be he who will deliver us from ourselves! Alone under a heaven henceforth empty, man

offers to whoever is willing to take it, this futile liberty which he does not know how to use. He is ready for all the dictators, leaders of these human herds who follow them as guides and who are all finally conducted by them to the same place — the abattoir.

What, then, is to be done? To this question permit me to reply by another: In this year of grace, 1948, how much grace is there still left? And this would be the whole question if there did not remain a second one: Is man willing to receive what still remains of grace today? For it is not by wallowing in the evil but in turning our backs on its cause that the remedy can be found. Let us not say: it is too late, and there is nothing left to do; but let us have the courage to look for the evil and the remedy where they exist. It is in losing God that man has lost his reason: he will not find it again without having first found God again.

There was in the thirteenth century a philosopher to whom the sight of the world did not give nausea, but a joy ever new, because he saw in it only order and beauty. Man did not seem to him a Sisyphus hopelessly condemned to the liberty of the absurd, for he read in his own heart the clear law of practical reason. On all sides, within as well as without, a single and self-same light enlightens the understanding and regulates things, for the spirit which is found in them reconstructs them in the mind according to the order of the same creative intelligibility. This harmony of thought and reality which in our time Einstein describes as the most incomprehensible of mysteries, does not astonish our philosopher, for he knows its source — that same God Whose pure existence is at the origin of all reality as well as of all knowledge. And what is liberty for created man, unless it be to accept himself lovingly, even as his Creator wants and loves him? What is it to act as a free man unless it be to regulate the will according to reason, and reason itself according to the divine law? The vastest

community is the universe. God, Who created it, governs it according to the eternal law, of which the natural law, the human and the moral law are only so many particular expressions. Not a sin, not a moral fault is there which is not first of all an error made to the detriment of intelligible light, in violation of the laws of the supreme reason.

Eminently habitable, because it is Christian, is this universe of St. Thomas Aquinas still ours? I am afraid not. It is, however, the only one in which man can live without having to create himself in the permanent anguish of his own nothingness, without having eternally to push up again and again the rock of Sisyphus or to yield to the fascination of a slavery which will deliver him even from the memory of liberty. This world is that of the divine wisdom which penetrates everything with its power and orders all with sweetness. Raoul Glaber reports that after so many misfortunes and fateful presages, a sort of peace came into the heavens and the earth was covered with a white robe of churches. Thus disappeared the fears of the year One Thousand. Salvation is the same today. There still remains only God to protect man against man. Either we will serve Him in spirit and in truth, or we shall enslave ourselves ceaselessly, more and more, to the monstrous idol which we have made with our own hands to our own image and likeness. The cause of so many miseries is indeed the ignorance which men have of an important message: they no longer know that a Saviour is born to us. This is not the message of Zarathustra, it is the promise of peace which rang out, nearly two thousand years ago, in the skies of Bethlehem.

