1 Truth of the World

There are many kinds of truths. “The sky is getting dark and it’s going to rain” is one of them. “In a circle all the radii are equal” is another. These two truths differ in that the first is contingent (the sky could be blue), whereas the second is necessary: it is impossible that the radii of a circle not be equal. Philosophers say of contingent truths that they are a posteriori: it is experience that teaches me that the sky is darkening, since it could equally well clear up. And they say that necessary truths are a priori, since it is by the very law of a circle’s construction, and thus before the actual construction of any particular circle, that the equality of its radii is implied. Of both contingent truths and rational truths we nevertheless say, despite the difference separating them, that they are “truths.” What is it within them that is equally “truth”?

What is true is what shows itself. It is because the sky shows itself with a threatening aspect that we can say: “The sky is threatening.” The truth of the proposition refers back to the prior truth of a state of things, to the appearance of a darkly colored sky. It is this appearance as such, it is the fact of the sky showing itself, that constitutes the “truth.” Suppose that, in the manner of logicians, we wanted to isolate the proposition from the state of things to which it naturally relates - to consider in itself the proposition “the sky is threatening” without going to the window to verify whether this is correct. Then this proposition, reduced to itself, put into quotation marks, would still show itself to us, and this appearance - in this case, of the proposition and not the sky - would confer on itself its own truth, making it, too, a phenomenon, something that appears and that, in this way, is true. What we have just said about “contingent truths,” about the state of the sky or the proposition that expresses it, we can just as well assert about “necessary truth,” about a geometric state of things and the statements that formulate it.

From these brief preliminary indications it follows that the concept of truth is twofold, designating both what shows itself and the fact of self-showing. What shows itself is the gray sky or the equality of radii. But the fact of something showing itself has nothing to do with what shows itself, with the gray of the sky or with geometric properties, and is even totally indifferent to what shows itself. The proof of this is that a blue sky can show itself to us as well, just as geometric properties, other forms, or even the fury of people killing each other, the beauty of a painting, the smile of a child. The fact of self-showing is as indifferent to what shows itself as is the light to what it illuminates - shining, according to Scripture, on the just as well as the unjust. But the fact of self-showing is indifferent to all that shows itself only because by its nature it differs from all that, whatever it may be: clouds, geometric properties, fury, a smile. The fact of self-showing, considered in itself and as such - that is the essence of truth. Inasmuch as it consists of the pure fact of showing itself, or else of appearing, of manifesting itself, of revealing itself, we can just as well call the truth “monstration,” “apparition,” “manifestation,” “revelation.” Moreover, it is under these three equivalent terms - apparition, manifestation, revelation - that the truth is designated in the New Testament, as well and as often as under its proper name of Truth.

If it is in the very essence of truth - in the sense of a pure manifestation, of a pure revelation - that the fact of self-showing consists, then everything that shows itself is true only in a secondary sense. It is only because the pure act of appearing takes place, and that, in it, the truth deploys its essence beforehand, that everything that appears is susceptible of doing so - that the sky shows itself and, likewise, geometric forms, the fury of people, the painting, the child’s smile. Thus any truth concerning things - beings [étants, that is, beings], as the Greeks said - any ontic truth, refers back to a pure phenomenological truth that it presupposes, refers back to the pure act of self-showing, considered in itself and as such.

If any truth concerning things - again, for example, the manuscripts of the New Testament or the events they relate - refers back to a preexisting truth, to the absolute phenomenological truth that consists in the pure act of self-showing that is implied in everything that shows itself, then it is of the greatest importance to know what this act of self-showing consists of, and what the nature of the
original truth presupposed in any particular truth might be. Modern philosophy - and more precisely, Husserl’s phenomenology - first posed this fundamental question explicitly. But because phenomenological truth precedes and determines everything that is true, whatever the particular nature of what is true each time (images, circles, manuscripts, historical events), the question of truth in this radical sense has had to be posed and truly resolved at least implicitly by philosophy ever since its inception, and perhaps even before the birth of philosophy properly speaking, through common sense and its most proximate language.

In Greece, things are called “phenomena.” “Phenomenon,” phainomenon, comes from the verb phainesthai, which carries within it the root pha-, phōs, which means light. Phainesthai therefore means “what shows itself by coming into the light, by coming into daylight.” The light into which things come in order to show themselves in their quality as phenomena is the light of the world. The World is not the set of things, of beings, but the horizon of light where things show themselves in their quality as phenomena. The world thus does not designate what is true but rather Truth itself. The phenomena of the world are things inasmuch as they show themselves in the world, which is their proper “monstration,” their appearance, their manifestation, their revelation. Already implied in the Greek interpretation of things - beings - as “phenomena” is an intuition that will be taken up by contemporary phenomenology and will serve as its fundamental principle, to wit, the idea that what is (cloud, circle, etc.) “is” only inasmuch as it shows itself, precisely as a phenomenon. Consequently, what is is that which is true, in such a way, ultimately, that the being of everything that is, Being as such, is the truth as such, the pure fact of self-showing considered in itself, as appearance and as pure manifestation.

The interpretation of what is as what shows itself, and thus the interpretation of Being as Truth, dominates the development of Western thought. If you consider, for example, the philosophy of consciousness that appeared in the seventeenth century, you soon realize that consciousness is nothing other than the act of self-showing grasped in itself, pure manifestation, the Truth. On their side, things are reduced by this philosophy to what shows itself to consciousness, to their status as phenomena. The shift from the ancient and medieval philosophy of Being to the modern philosophy of consciousness is generally interpreted as one of the great breakthroughs in Western thought. However, such a shift changes nothing in the definition of the thing as phenomenon but on the contrary carries it to the absolute level. The phenomena of consciousness are its representations, its objects. The relation of consciousness to its objects allows us to discern with greater precision the nature of that pure manifestation that is consciousness, the nature of truth. To re-present anything to oneself, for consciousness is to place it before oneself. In German “to represent” is vorstellen = to place (stellen) before (vor). “Ob-ject” designates that which is placed before, in such a way that it is the fact of being placed “before” that renders the object manifest. Consciousness itself is nothing other than this manifestation that consists in the fact of being placed before. What is placed before is the ob-ject [object], that which is true, that which shows itself, the phenomenon. The fact of being placed before is equally well the fact of being placed outside: it is the “outside” as such. The “outside” as such is the world. We say “the truth of the world,” but the expression “the truth of the world” is tautological. It is the world, it is the “outside,” that is manifestation, consciousness, truth.

As we now see, consciousness in no way refers to a truth of another order than the truth of the world. Quite the contrary, the emergence of the modern philosophy of consciousness marks the moment when the world ceases being understood in a naive fashion as the sum of things, of beings - and this because things cease themselves to be understood just as naively as what is quite simply present before us, as what we supposedly have access to, without the possibility of acceding to these things posing a problem. However, it is precisely this “being-there-before-us” that makes things phenomena. But this “being-before” is nothing other than the “outsideness” that is the world as such, its truth.

To this original truth of the world is subjected everything that is true, every phenomenon, whatever its nature, whether a sensory reality, like the blue of the sky, or an intelligible one, like the equality of the radii of a circle - everything we can perceive, conceive, imagine, or name through language. A thing exists for us only if it shows itself to us as a phenomenon. And it shows itself to us only in that primordial “outsideness” that is the world. It matters little in the end whether the truth of the world is
understood through consciousness or through the world itself, if in either case what constitutes the capacity of self-showing, truth, manifestation, is “outsideness” as such.

The capacity of self-showing that finds its possibility in the “outsideness” of the world implies that everything that is susceptible of being shown in it is in principle different from it. We recognize here an essential trait perceived from the start of our analysis: the division of the concept of truth between what is true and truth itself. This division is made manifest, as we have seen, in the indifference of the light of the truth to what it illuminates, to what is true. It is precisely when the truth is understood as that of the world that this indifference is borne into evidence: in the world everything and anything shows itself - children’s faces, clouds, circles - in such a way that what shows itself is never explained by the mode of revealing specific to the world. What shows itself in the world’s truth is shown in that truth as other than itself, as forsaken by it, uncovered as this or that, but a “that” which might be different from what is shown, a content that is contingent, abandoned to itself, lost. What is true in the world’s truth in no way depends on this truth: it is not supported by it, guarded by it, loved by it, saved by it. The world’s truth - that is to say, the world itself - never contains the justification for or the reason behind what it allows to show itself in that truth and thus allows “to be” - inasmuch as to be is to be shown.

The world’s truth is not merely indifferent to everything it shows. Much more seriously, it undermines that which draws its truth from it, which is not “true” except by showing itself in it. And this is because the world is not some inert and ready-made milieu that preexists things, into which they have only to penetrate in order to find themselves illuminated by it, by the light of that “outsideness.” In the philosophies that place consciousness at the foundation of truth, consciousness is defined as an active transcendence that projects beyond beings the horizon on which they become visible. The placing of the being in the condition of “obj-ect” and “opposite us” [en-face], and thus of a phenomenon, is only possible through the production of that transcendent horizon of visibility that is the world itself. Consequently the world “is” not, but unceasingly intervenes as a horizon that unceasingly takes shape, but only on the condition of a power that unceasingly projects the horizon. In Kant this power is called the transcendental imagination; it is the imaging of a world that is itself nothing other than this imaging. And it is in this imaging, in this imaginary site, that every being in turn shows itself to us as an image, a representation, an ob-ject, something opposite us, a phenomenon.

It is not necessary to connect this production of a horizon of visibility as an imaging of a world with a consciousness and with a particular power of this consciousness called imagination. It rather suffices to think of this production of the outsideness of the world for itself as a primary and absolute fact. It is the “outside” itself that is externalized, of itself and through itself. The “world’s truth” is nothing other than this: a self-production of “outsideness” as the horizon of visibility in and through which every thing can become visible and thus become a “phenomenon” for us. Nature as conceived by the Greeks was undoubtedly no different from this self-production of “outsideness” as the original truth of the world. As for modern consciousness, it was merely an inexact way of formulating this same truth. Consciousness is foremost understood as a subject that relates itself, some conscious or spiritual substance that would have the property of relating itself to objects. This is why it is important to understand that consciousness is nothing other than this relation to the object. It is “consciousness of something,” pure intentionality moving beyond itself toward the object and foremost toward that “outside” where everything is shown as an “ob-ject,” as “opposite us,” as “phenomenon.”

The self-externalization of the externality of the “outside,” which we call the world, is not a metaphysical or speculative affirmation of a kind to leave the reader uncertain or in doubt. To say that the world is truth is to say that it makes manifest. What we now need to understand is how the world makes manifest, how this pure manifestation is achieved. It so happens that this self-externalization of the externality where the horizon of visibility of the world is formed, its “outside,” has another name that we know still better: it is called time. Time and the world are identical; they designate that single process in which the “outside” is constantly self-externalized. Such a process should be examined on two levels: in itself, where is literally just the formation of a “world,” the coming outside of that horizon on whose screen every thing shows itself to us. According to the unconsidered but constant experience we have of it, this horizon is discovered to be that of Time. Ceaselessly being hollowed out in front of us is a “future,” where things and events take place toward which we are projecting
ourselves - I will go to work, to the station, etc.; and a “present,” where our immediate environment is held - the room, the table on which I am writing; and finally a “past,” into which everything that has just been present for us slides away - those thoughts I have just had while writing. The horizon of the world is thus deployed before us in the form of three temporal dimensions and constituted by them. The expanses of externality, which Heidegger called the three temporal “ek-stases,” are not fixed but slide into each other, from the future to the present and to the past, thus constituting a continuous flux that is the flow of time. It is this three-dimensional horizon of time that fashions the visibility of the world, its truth. It is against the background of this horizon that everything that shows itself to us becomes, as temporal, visible.

Here we may perceive the seriousness of the way in which the world’s truth undermines everything it makes seen, everything that it makes true. To the extent, then, that the truth is a placing outside, seizing everything to render it manifest, it actually casts the thing outside itself at every instant. This putting-outside-itself by no means signifies a simple transfer of the thing from one place to another - as if, in such a displacement, it remained similar to itself, at most receiving this new property of showing itself. Rather, this coming-into-appearance in the “outside-itself” of the world signifies that it is the thing itself that finds itself cast outside itself. It is fractured, broken, cleaved in two, stripped of its own reality - in such a way that, now deprived of that reality that was its own, emptied of its flesh, it is no longer outside itself, in the world’s Image, but just its own skin, a simple image, in effect, a transparent film, a surface without thickness, a piece of naked externality offered to a gaze that slides over it without being able to penetrate into it or reach anything but empty appearance.

This coming-into-appearance as coming-into-the-world - which, according to phenomenology, should confer Being on everything that shows itself - now withdraws Being from it, making of this Being its contrary, a sort of naught of itself, but in the form of an appearance foreign to reality, and foremost to the reality that ought to be its own, which this coming-into-appearance can make seen only by destroying that reality. This making-seen that destroys, which consists in the annihilation of everything it exhibits, not letting it subsist except under the aspect of an empty apparition, is time. Time is passage, a slipping away in the form of a slipping into nothingness. But time is not the incessant annihilation through the effect of a property to which we would be subject without understanding it, in the manner of a mysterious fatality. It is because the coming-into-appearance is here the coming-outside that, casting every thing outside itself and tearing it away from itself, it precipitates it into nothingness. It is the way of making a thing appear as drawing its essence from the “outside itself” that is the annihilation. How time passes! It’s already autumn! Already my lamp is out! But time is not truly a slipping from the present into the past, according to the celebrated analyses that approach common sense. In time there is no present, there never has been one, and there never will be one. In time, things come into appearance, but since this coming-into-appearance consists in coming-outside, things do not rise into the light of this “outside” except as torn from themselves, emptied of their being, already dead. It is because its power to make manifest resides in the “outside-itself” that time annihilates everything it exhibits. But time’s way of making manifest is the world’s. It is the world’s way of making seen, the truth of the world, that destroys.

Thus the “world’s truth” does not refer to some judgment delivered from on high upon the world and everything that shows itself in it, upon the course of things. Because the truth of the world lies in its manner of making each thing appear, it inhabits this thing as its way of appearing precisely and of standing out in our experience, of giving itself to us and touching us. The truth of the world is the law of the appearance of things. According to this law, things being given outside themselves, being deprived of themselves, being emptied of themselves in their very appearing, never give their own reality but only the image of that reality that annihilates itself in the moment they are given. They are given in such a way that their appearance is also their disappearance, the incessant annihilation of their reality in the image of it. This is why there is no present within time: because this coming-into-appearance that defines the very present as a phenomenological present, as a presentation of the thing, destroys the reality of that thing in the process of its very presentation, making of it a present-image homogeneous with the image of the future as well as with the image of the past. The coming-into-the-present as a coming-into-a-future that slips into the past is thus nothing other than the
modalization of an Imaginary - that modalization of the image of the world that is time itself as the world’s time, as this deployment of the “outside-itself” that is the world’s truth.

I said that the world’s truth is indifferent to what it illuminates: clouds, forms, smiles, manuscripts, events in a history. Starting from the appearance of the world, one can, in fact, never deduce what appears in it each time. But appearing in the world confers on everything that appears in that way a state of being cast outside itself, emptied of its reality, reduced to an image - since it is the manner of being cast outside itself that constitutes appearance as such. Everything that appears in the world is subject to a process of principled derealization, which does not mark the passage from a primitive state of reality to the abolition of that state but rather a priori puts everything that appears in that way into a state of original unreality. It is not that a thing would first be present and then later would pass away. From the beginning this thing was passing away. When it was still only future, it was already traversing the successive phases of this future existence; through them, without halting in the present, it was propelled toward its nothingness in the past. At no moment did it cease being this nothingness. If everything appeared to us in this way - if there existed no other truth than that of the world - there would be no reality at all anywhere but only, on all sides, death. Destruction and death are not the work of time being exercised after the fact on some reality preexisting time’s reach; rather, they strike a priori everything that appears in time, as the very law of its appearance - everything that is shown in the truth of the world, as the very law of this truth. It is this essential connection that links destruction and death to the very appearance of the world, to what he calls its form, that the Apostle was thinking of in this striking phrase: “For, indeed, the form of this world is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:31).

Any form of truth, except the truth of Christianity. This is what we must now elucidate and understand, in its radical foreignness with respect to everything that common sense, philosophy, and science call (and continue to call) “truth.”

2 The Truth According to Christianity

The truth of Christianity must be understood according to the pure phenomenological meaning that we have granted this concept. It is not a matter of a truth of the type: “The French took the Bastille on July 14, 1789.” Nor of another kind of truth, formally similar to the preceding one: “Christ came into the world in order to save humankind.” In these two examples, our attention is drawn to a certain content, specifically a historical fact or - since a fact of this type is never present in isolation - to a certain state of things that is itself historical. It is this state of things that constitutes the theme of thought and that alone matters as far as that state of things is concerned, to wit, that the French took the Bastille on July 14 or that Christ came into the world. What makes the two states of things true is situated, according to ordinary thought, at the very level of the state of things and depends upon that state. That the French did in fact take the Bastille on that day, brandishing the head of the governor at the end of a pike, is what makes the truth of this state of things, and accordingly of the proposition that expresses it. Because the verity of the state of things seems of the same order as the state of things, and ultimately is one with it, its affirmation appears as a sort of tautology in relation to the state of things, a quite useless way of expressing it a second time. After the spontaneous realization of the state of things - the taking of the Bastille - what interest is offered by the variation: “It is true that the French took the Bastille on July 14”? What does the “It is true that” add?

Nothing less than the truth of the world. If a state of things seems to count in itself and to be proof of its own truth, it is only to the extent that it shows itself: it is on condition of a manifestation that owes nothing to the head of the governor, any more than to the howling crowd escorting it - a manifestation without which, however, nothing of that kind would exist. And this pure manifestation, totally different from what it makes manifest, is the “outside-itself,” the “outside,” that cavity of light sketched by the horizon of the world, where there becomes visible for us everything that is susceptible of being know by us. The philosophical question of truth as such is thus not superfluous, except in the view of a naive kind of thought that, hypnotized by the content of what it perceives or studies on each occasion, ignores the content’s coming into the light of day in its quality as a penomenon, which, along with Kant, we must call the transcendental condition of the possibility of experience.

Thus, the philosophical question of Truth cannot be eluded. We see this clearly when, on the empirical plane itself, the truth of the state of things presents a problem - for example, when it concerns the coming of Christ into the world. Did this coming really happen? Is it true? And the texts
announcing it, the Scriptures - are they also true? What “being true” means is now no longer the superfluous duplication of a prior and self-sufficient state of things. Quite the contrary, the state of things is true only if it manifests itself or was once manifest - more radically, if this manifestation manifested itself, in itself and as such. The coming of Christ into the world is subordinate to the coming of the world itself, to its appearance as the world. Because if the world had not first opened its space of light - if it had not been shown to us as that horizon of visibility cast beyond things, as that screen against which they are detached - then Christ would never have been able to come into the world or show himself to us, or at least to those who were given the privilege of seeing him.

Now, did Christ really come into the world? Were people favored with being witnesses to his extraordinary acts; did they hear his staggering words? Were the writings into which these words and these acts were consigned written by witnesses, or at least by contemporaries? Or are they instead collections of bits and pieces of diverse provenance belonging to a much later redaction? These questions, with which any approach to Christianity begins, it would seem, lose their preliminary character, becoming no more than secondary, if they are subordinated to the prior question of the appearance of the world, and thus to a much more original Truth than that of Christianity itself - if the latter means we are concerned only with knowing whether Christ actually came into the world, whether his historical existence is an established fact or not.

Moreover, when during our earlier approach to Christianity these questions of the historical truth of the events related in Scripture (or, these events having themselves disappeared, of the authenticity of the texts that relate them) were mentioned in passing, did it not appear that the truth of both the events and the texts immediately referred back to that more original essence of the truth of the world and the nature of this truth? It is because in the time of the world any particular reality is effaced and disappears, it is because language in turn leaves this reality outside itself and, like time, enlightens only through the negation of that reality, that the truth of Christianity appears so precarious, as if fading. At the end of the day, it is not facts or things that are precarious, fugitive as the years, but rather their mode of apparition. It is pure phenomenological truth that, as the world’s truth, determines any particular form of truth for us - that of history, for example, or that of language - as a sort of evanescent apparition, eroded by nothingness.

It is then decisive to note that the Truth of Christianity differs in essence from the truth of the world. Like the latter, it is true - and as we shall see, even more true: it is a pure phenomenological truth, in an absolute sense. Consequently, it concerns not what shows itself but the fact of self-showing, not what appears but the way of its appearing, not what is manifest but the pure manifestation, in itself and as such - or, to put it another way, not the phenomenon but phenomenality. The fact of self-showing, appearing, manifestation are pure phenomenological concepts precisely because they designate phenomenality itself and nothing else. Other equivalent terms, already mentioned because they are those of Christianity, are “apparition,” “truth,” and “revelation.” As soon as concepts of truth, manifestation, or revelation are understood in their pure phenomenological signification, a crucial question arises: What does this truth, this manifestation, this revelation, consist in? What within them makes true, makes manifest, reveals? It is not a power situated behind manifestation, behind revelation, behind truth - that of making manifest, making true, revealing - because such a background power does not exist. It is truth itself in its very deployment that makes something true; it is manifestation as it itself manifests itself that makes manifest; it is revelation in revealing itself that reveals. But how? What does the phenomenological effectivity of this revelation consist in, each and every time?

Here appears the radical difference separating the truth of Christianity from that of the world, as well as from all forms of truth that draw upon the world for their own possibility - the truths of science, of knowledge, of perception. How the truth of the world makes manifest is something that has long been a subject of analysis. Let us recall from this analysis some essential conclusions so as to understand how the truth of the world and the truth of Christianity contrast with each other on all points. The truth of the world makes each thing seen by placing that thing outside itself, in such a way that it is the externality of the “outside-itself” that makes seen, which is phenomenality. It is because the truth of the world consists in the externality of this “outside-itself” that it differs from everything that is given within this externality, from all the things that are shown within it as “objects” or beings. From this follows a decisive consequence: the division of the concept of truth between the truth and
what is true does not belong to the concept of truth in general. It is only when the truth is understood as that of the world, when it makes everything seen by placing it outside itself, that the division in the concept of Truth, the difference between the truth itself and what it shows - what it makes true - is produced.

It is the first decisive characteristic of the Truth of Christianity that it in no way differs from what it makes true. Within it there is no separation between the seeing and what is seen, between the light and what it illuminates. And this is because there is in that Truth neither Seeing nor seen, no Light like that of the world. From the start, the Christian concept of truth is given as irreducible to the concept of truth that dominates the history of Western thought, from Greece to contemporary phenomenology. This traditional concept of truth determines not only most of the philosophical currents that have succeeded one another until the present day but even more so the ideas currently held about truth within the domain of scientific knowledge and within common sense, which is more or less impregnated with the scientific ideal. It is precisely when the Christian concept of Truth ceases to determine the collective consciousness of society, as it did in the Middle Ages, that its divorce from the Greek idea of a true knowledge and a true science appears in full force. And the consequence is, if not the suppression of the Christian concept, then at least its repression into the realm of private life, or even superstition.

What, then, is a truth that differs in no way from what is true? If truth is manifestation grasped in its phenomenological purity - phenomenality and not the phenomenon - then what is phenomenalized is phenomenality itself. The phenomenalization of phenomenality itself is a pure phenomenological matter, a substance whose whole essence is to appear - phenomenality in its actualization and in its pure phenomenological effectivity. What manifests itself is manifestation itself. What reveals itself is revelation itself; it is revelation of revelation, a self-revelation in its original and immediate effulgence. With this idea of a pure Revelation - of a revelation whose phenomenality is the phenomenalization of phenomenality itself, of an absolute self-revelation that dispenses with whatever is other than its own phenomenological substance - we are in the presence of the essence that Christianity posits as the principle of everything. God is that pure Revelation that reveals nothing other than itself. God reveals Himself. The Revelation of God is his self-revelation. If by chance “the Revelation of God” were addressed to people, this would not consist in the unveiling of a content foreign to its own essence and somehow transmitted to a few initiates. To reveal Himself to people could only signify for God that He gives to them a share of his eternal self-revelation. Christianity is nothing other, truly, than the awe-inspiring and meticulous theory of this givenness of God’s self-revelation shared with man.

Where can we see something like the phenomenalization of pure phenomenality as its immediate and original self-phenomenalization, as the self-revelation of what we are presumptively calling “God”? Nowhere. But it is also clear that such “seeing” is out of the question here. Seeing is only possible in a “world.” Seeing presupposes the distancing of what must be seen and thus its coming-outside - more precisely, the prior coming-outside of “Outside” itself, the formation of the world’s horizon. It is the coming-outside of “Outside,” the “outside-itself” as such, that constitutes the visibility of everything that, situated in this “Outside” before our gaze, will be susceptible of being seen by us, as a being-seen as such. And this concerns not only sensory seeing but equally so intelligible seeing, any form of experience in which one accedes to what is experienced as an en-face or as an “ob-ject.”

That God’s revelation as his self-revelation owes nothing to the phenomenality of the world but rather rejects it as fundamentally foreign to its own phenomenality is something that powerfully emerges in Christ’s final prayer on the Mount of Olives: “I am not praying for the world” (John 17:9). Now, it is not the circumstances, tragic as they may be, that explain this terrifying declaration; instead, it finds its striking justification in a proposition whose theoretical character cannot easily be challenged: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Here again one would be sorely mistaken if one imagined this to be primarily a matter of moral judgment. Everywhere in Christianity, the ethical is subordinated to the order of things, “Kingdom” does not mean a sort of domain across which divine power extends, a terrain reserved for its action. It is the very essence of Christ as identified with “the Revelation of God,” with His absolute self-revelation, that is designated foreign to the world: “even as I am not of [the world]” (John 17:14).
However, if the Revelation of God owes nothing to the world’s truth - if its pure phenomenological matter is not identified with the horizon of light that is the world, in such a way that this Revelation cannot show itself within the world and will never show itself there - how then can we have access to Revelation? And how can we even think it? Thought is only one mode of our relation to the world. To think is always to think something that thinking brings into sensory or intellectual seeing, and thus brings under the condition of the world. Any form of knowledge - and especially the scientific method of research, including the phenomenological method - proceeds according to a play of intentional implications constantly deployed so as to result in evidence and thus in a seeing. It is in this seeing, and thanks to it, that any advance in knowledge is constituted. How could the work undertaken here concerning the Truth of Christianity, that is to say, concerning God’s self-revelation, produce results if that self-revelation in principle slipped away as a target of thought, inasmuch as thought always presupposes the prior opening of a world?

The irreducibility of the truth of Christianity to thought, or to any form of knowledge or science, is one of the major themes of Christianity itself. Such a situation does not merely confirm the opposition of Christianity to a tradition of Western thought oriented toward the world and toward obtaining knowledge that is objective and, as such, scientific. Precisely because this opposition refers back to a final irreducibility (of the truth of Christianity to any worldly form of knowledge and science), it, too, finds itself formulated in an extremely forceful manner by Christ himself: “I praise you, Father, . . . because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children” (Matthew 11:25).

What is meant by “little children” and their mysterious appropriation of divine Revelation is something we will try to catch sight of. But an initial difficulty must first be overcome, that which a priori deprives thought of any possibility of access to divine revelation, because the phenomenality of everything that shows itself to thought is itself incapable of making manifest this divine revelation - because the phenomenality of this Revelation is never phenomenalyzed as “outside” the world. Still, the question of access to divine Revelation does not concern us either first or principally, we people who think, even if it would inevitably be a matter of knowing, at some moment or other, how we could arrive at this revelation or how it came to us. Although it is not thought or some other form of knowledge, although it is not the truth of the world, that gives access to the Revelation of God, at least a single possibility persists, already mentioned as a simple matter of fact and now rendered unimpeachable. Access to God, understood as his self-revelation according to a phenomenality proper to Him, is not susceptible of being produced except where this self-revelation is produced and in the way self-revelation does so. There where God originally arrives in himself, in the phenomenization of phenomenality that is his own and is thus like the self-phenomenalization of this phenomenality proper - there alone is access to God. It is not that thought is lacking and so we cannot accede to the Revelation of God. Quite the contrary, it is only when thought defaults, because the truth of the world is absent, that what is at stake be achieved: the self-revelation of God - the self-phenomenalization of pure phenomenality against the background of a phenomenality that is not that of the world.

Where is a self-revelation of this sort achieved? In Life, as its essence, since Life is nothing other than that which reveals itself - not something that might have an added property of self-revealing, but the very fact of self-revealing, self-revelation as such. Everywhere that something like a self-revelation is produced there is Life. Everywhere there is Life, this self-revelation is produced. If, then, the Revelation of God is a self-revelation that owes nothing to the truth of the world, and if we ask where such a self-revelation is achieved, the answer is unequivocal: in Life and in Life alone. Therefore we are in the presence of the first fundamental equation of Christianity: God is Life - he is the essence of Life, or if one prefers, the essence of Life is God. Saying this we already know what God is, but we do not know it through the effect of some knowledge or learning - we do not know it through thought, against the background of the truth of the world. Rather we know it, and can know it, only in and through Life itself. We can know the essence of God only in God. But this observation is premature.  

The assertion that Life constitutes the essence of God and is identical with him is constantly made in the New Testament. Here we shall be content with brief indications - “I am the First and the Last; I am the living one” (Revelation 1:17), “the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15), “by him who is declared to be living” (Hebrews 7:8), “He who is living” (Luke 24:5) - not to mention the decisive declarations that occur during a more developed elaboration of the divine essence, and to which we shall return: “For
as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:26). Of the
Word that is at the Beginning, John’s celebrated prologue declares: “In him was life.”

To the definitions of God as finding his essence in Life, as well as the many propositions in which he
appears as the Living, people will not fail to contrast those definitions that make reference to Being.
Thus Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who names himself in a way that can be
approximately translated “I am who I am,” by all accounts refers to this concept of Being. Revelation
also says of God: “I am the Alpha and the Omega . . . He who is, who was, and who will come, the
Almighty” (Revelation 1:8). We observe, too, that the concept of being even intrudes into statements
that identify the divine essence with life, such as the following: “He who is living.” In order to clear
away from the start the massive misconception that equates the essence of the Christian god with
Being, and thus with a concept proper to Greek thought - opening the path to the great Western
theologies that reduce the God of Abraham to that of the philosophers and scholars (to that of
Aristotle, for example) - we must remember that, restored to its ultimate phenomenological
foundation, the concept of Being is related to the truth of the world, designating nothing other than its
apparition, its clearing, which suffices to deprive it of any pertinence to the Truth of Christianity, that is,
to God himself.

More precisely, the word “Being” belongs to human language, which is that of the world. This is
because, as we have previously suggested and will have occasion to establish at length, any language
makes seen the thing of which it is speaking as well as what it is saying about this thing. Such making
seen arises from the world and its own Truth. To the extent that the language of Scripture is the one
spoken by people, the word “Being” is found there at every step, even when it involves God
identifying himself to people in the language that is their own. When, on the contrary, this language is
explicitly referenced to God to the point of becoming his own Word, this Word is then given
unfailingly as the Word of Life and as Living Word - but by no means as “the word of Being,” which
from a Christian viewpoint does not mean anything at all. “The words I have spoken to you are spirit
and they are life” (John 6:63); “‘Go, stand in the temple courts,’ he said, ‘and tell the people these
words of life’” (Acts 5:20). We will have occasion to cite many other passages in which the divine
essence is explicitly stated to be that of Life, “the bread of life” (John 6:48). As for the many metaphors
used in New Testament texts, which will give rise to an entirely new iconography and generate a
specifically Christian art that will change the course of Western art, they all converge toward another
truth, in the phenomenological sense, than that of the world. Things do not appear merely as bearers
of “mystical” significations. Rather, their worldly being actually dissolves in symbols of fire or water -
“the water of life.” In a passage to which we will return, deer drink from the source of life, flowing
down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of
life” (Revelation 22:2).

What is specific to life as self-revelation is therefore the fact that it reveals itself. This apparent
tautology implies two distinct meanings that we must now separate for the first time. Self-revelation,
when it concerns the essence of Life, means, on the one hand, that it is Life that achieves the
revelation, that reveals - but, on the other hand, that what Life reveals is itself. And it is here that the
mode of revelation specific to Life differs fundamentally from that of the world. The world, too,
reveals and makes manifest, but within the “outside,” casting a thing outside itself, as we have seen,
in such a way that it never shows itself as other, different, external, in its setting of radical exteriority
that is the “outside-itself” of the world. Hence it is doubly exterior: external to the power that makes it
manifest - and this is where the contrast between Truth and what it makes true intervenes - and also
exterior to itself. It manifests itself only in its own exteriority to itself, emptied of its own substance,
unreal - emptied of this unreality that comes to it from its own mode of apparition, from the truth of
the world. If, then, Life reveals itself not only in the sense that it achieves revelation but also because it
is itself that it reveals in such a revelation, then Life is possible only because its own mode of
revelation ignores the world and its “outside.” Living is not possible in the world. Living is possible only
outside the world, where another Truth reigns, another way of revealing. This way of revealing is that
of Life. Life does not cast outside itself what it reveals but holds it inside itself, retains it in so close an
embrace that what it holds and reveals is itself. It is only because it holds what it reveals in this
embrace, which nothing can pull apart, that it is and can be life. Life embraces, experiences without
distance or difference. Solely on this condition can it experience itself, be itself what it experiences - and, consequently, be itself that which experiences and which is experienced.

In the self-revelation of Life reality is given birth, any possible reality. And we can understand why. It is clear from the start that reality of whatever sort can be established only if the conditions that make it a priori impossible are excluded and are thus incapable of performing their destructive work. Where the “outside” that casts everything out of itself and strips it of its reality has neither place nor power - there alone, in the essence of Life, can something like reality be possible. This is why, from now on (and even if we will have to return to the point at greater length), we must reject an idea found in Hegel’s philosophy - and in its by-products such as its most tenacious expression, Marxism - before determining in turn many of the commonplaces of modern thought. This is the idea that Christianity is a flight from reality, inasmuch as it is a flight from the world. But if reality resides in Life and only in Life, this reproach disintegrates to the point of ultimately appearing as non-sense.

Thus, reality resides in Life not merely because what Life experiences, being experienced without distance or any kind of difference, is not emptied of itself with the “outside-itself” of a world, in the noematic unreality of what can only be seen - because what Life experiences is still itself. The content of Life - what it experiences - is Life itself, refers back to a more fundamental condition, to the very essence of “Living,” to a mode of revelation whose specific phenomenality is the flesh of a pathos, pure affective material, in which any cleavage, any separation, finds itself radically excluded. It is uniquely because such is the phenomenological matter of which this revelation is made that we can say that in this revelation what reveals and what is revealed are one and the same. It is this pathētik phenomenological substance of living that defines and contains any conceivable “reality”. When we say that in the Living where any reality takes place - in the self-revelation that constitutes the essence of life and thus of God himself - what reveals is the same as what is revealed, is there not a distinction to be apprehended (at least in rough outline) between the first of these terms and the second, even though we are declaring them the same? Is this distinction not overcome by, or supposedly overcome by, an identification that in fact presupposes it? Similarly, with regard to an “experiencing” that expresses nothing except Living, when we affirm that what experiences is the same as what is experienced, have we not already broken up what we had taken as the primordial unity of Living? But these potential differentiations, as well as the copula that overcomes them, belong to the morphology of language and are ultimately rooted in the world in which this language is the only language. Experiencing oneself as Life does is to enjoy oneself [jouir de soi]. Enjoyment does not presuppose any differences similar to those in which the world is born: it is homogeneous phenomenological material, a monolithic affective body whose phenomenality is affectivity as such. The self-revelation of Life is not a formal structure that can be conceived on the basis of “outside oneself” and in terms of its own structures, since these are bypassed, overcome while being maintained in this very bypassing. The self-revelation of life is its enjoyment, the primordial self-enjoyment that defines the essence of Living and thus of God himself. According to Christianity, God is Love. Love is nothing other than the self-revelation of God understood in its pathētik phenomenological essence, specifically, the self-enjoyment of absolute Life. This is why the Love of God is the infinite love in which he eternally loves himself, and the revelation of God is none other than this Love.

Urgent questions arise here. If the truth of Christianity finds its essence in Life, and if this essence of Life is that of God himself, then what relation can such a Life have with what we usually call by this name, and which seems to be the privilege not only of God but of all the living? More precisely, what relation does Life have with what science means by this term - with the subject of biology? Doesn’t biology, which concentrates within itself the spectacular progress made by contemporary research and which possesses extraordinarily sophisticated and complex methodologies, shed an entirely new light on life? Does the archaic discourse of Christianity, encumbered by theological considerations as well as by an obsolete kind of learning, still hold some interest for people today? How can we think man himself in the light of the Christian conception of Truth, as meaning the single idea of life? Doesn’t the Greek elaboration of what constitutes the humanity of man in terms of his specific difference from animals - as an animal possessing logos, reason, and language, as capable of thinking, reflecting, and reasoning - lead us much nearer to who we really are? And leads us, moreover, in such a way that it is impossible, even dangerous, to see in man nothing more than a living.