



Bernard Charbonneau's Ecological Reflection on Violence and War in Society, the State and Revolution

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Introduction

Having pioneered political ecology as a revolutionary stance in France four decades before he resurfaced among its fledgling groups around 1970, Bernard Charbonneau (1910-1996) remained even less well-known to a wider audience than his friend Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), whom he had mentored in the critique of technological society in that pre-war context. Though Charbonneau was no less prolific a writer and a more original thinker, their respective intellectual paths, first articulated within a distinctive Gascon splinter of the French Personalist movement,¹ intertwined from the start around an overarching concern for personal freedom, rooted in the Christian tradition of resistance to social power dynamics. Charbonneau differed from Ellul however in being neither a Christian, nor an anarchist, nor a pacifist in his critique of the violence associated with the State and Revolution.²

I propose to follow here some key strands of Charbonneau’s reflection on conflict, war and revolutionary violence, through several books and articles in which these interrelated themes are developed. All are untranslated—with the notable exception of *The Green Light, A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement*³ written in 1980, a decade into its emergence in the public eye, but informed by his effort of half a century to work out the tension between freedom, nature, and the “second nature” that is society for man.⁴ This was just about when Charbonneau found confirmation of many of his insights in René Girard’s work on the

¹ See Christian Roy, “Nature and Scripture in Bernard Charbonneau’s *The Green Light*,” *Ellul Forum* 64 (2019): 5-16.

² On his friend’s positions in this area, see Jacques Ellul, *Contre les violents* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1972); Jeffrey Shaw & Timothy J. Demy (eds.), *Jacques Ellul on Violence, Resistance, and War* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2016).

³ Bernard Charbonneau, *The Green Light, A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement*, trans. Christian Roy (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

⁴ Bernard Charbonneau, *Une seconde nature: l’homme, la société, la liberté* (Paris: Le Sang de la Terre, 2013).

violent underpinnings of social existence, which his own thought complements, among other things, by bringing to the elucidation of their historical unfolding and contemporary escalation a keen awareness of ecological issues. What is more, Girard's analyses often find striking parallels in writings by Charbonneau that in many instances antedate them by several decades. Girard's last book *Achever Clausewitz* (2007) would thus lend itself to being read in light of Charbonneau's first (and long unpublished) book *L'État* (1948), and other writings I will be drawing from here to instead present his lifelong reflection on war and violence on its own terms, with only the occasional sidelong glance at Girard's mimetic theory.

I. The Mimetic Nexus of Development and the State

In *Le Feu vert* as at many points in his later writings, Charbonneau alludes to René Girard as someone who confirms his sense of the sacred violence inherent in society. This is somewhat ironic given how long it took Girard to take interest in environmental issues or the question concerning technology (aside from its overtly violent applications), as reported by journalist and essayist Jean-Claude Guillebaud,⁵ a disciple of both Ellul and Girard who could not get the latter involved in dialogue with the former around these topics, despite their related understandings of the uniqueness and implications of Biblical revelation.⁶ It is only in this century that Girard would come around to integrating technological hubris and environmental degradation in the unfolding Apocalypse he describes in *Battling to the the End* (2007), explicitly concurring with Ellul about how "to worship technology today, rather than being modern, is really to return to the archaic" atmosphere, one in which "we sacralize power".⁷ As for Charbonneau, who had been analyzing technology in terms of the social sacred since the 1930s, he wryly notes in 1980 that if "ecology has hardly made any strides in the critique of violence and war," it is probably because "René Girard is not in fashion yet"⁸ when he starts to get his books as they come out (as his personal library attests), at the height of *détente* in the last decade of Marxism's intellectual dominance.⁹

As the mortal threat posed by the spread of atomic weapons recedes into the background, so does its cause, nationalism, which anti-Americanism or anti-Sovietism leads many to treat rather leniently. And yet the myth of national independence, perforce a deceptive one for small and middling States, leads not only to a justification of the proliferation of "strike forces" [*forces de frappe*, 'adding a plural to the official name of France's nuclear arms doctrine] but to economic and demographic development to keep up with the competition of neighbours: the economy is a war whose challenge must be taken up. At every moment, ecology meets nationalism on its path, whether it is destroying local nature in the name of the nation or it refuses European or world legislation

⁵ Frédéric Rognon, *Généralions Ellul: Soixante héritiers de la pensée de Jacques Ellul* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2017).

⁶ See the special issue of *Ellul Forum* on René Girard and Jacques Ellul (2005), <https://journals.wheaton.edu/index.php/ellul/issue/view/60>, (accessed April 13, 2020).

⁷ David Gill, "A Conversation With René Girard," *Ellul Forum* 35 (2005): 20.

⁸ Bernard Charbonneau, *The Green Light, A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement*, 110.

⁹ Ellul made similar noises at the time in *L'idéologie marxiste chrétienne. Que fait-on de l'Évangile ?* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1979): "Recently we have witnessed the appearance of a new interpretive grill [*sic. grille* = "grid"] presented by René Girard . . . Rather than presenting merely another interpretation, Girard gives us a genuine method. Since it fits no ideological canon, I feel certain it will never attract notice or be taken into account by biblical scholars." See Jacques Ellul, *Jesus and Marx: From Gospel to Ideology*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 86, n.2. Also cited on the cover of *Ellul Forum* 35 (2005): "René Girard & Jacques Ellul".

protecting the planet in the name of the sovereignty of France or of Burundi. If ecologists want all ethnic groups of the world to someday federate their differences so as to save them together, they would do well not to identify them with national particularisms which, by the same means, absurdly pursue the same goal: political, military and industrial power.¹⁰

That one goal of development as power, pursued by states and national groups on every scale, fuels their mimetic rivalry to assert their difference by compulsively increasing the same developmental attributes, so that all economic and political competition makes them alike in their assumption that “bigger is better,” the opposite of ecology’s “small is beautiful” (often referenced in *The Green Light*). But:

Relations between States whose *raison d'être* is peace and war are even more than others power relations, and there too, it is not by negating war that we will end it. If we are to believe non-violent ecologists, conflicts between peoples that are naturally respectful of their differences are only due to the dark conspiracies of a handful of capitalists who prevent them from going along and establishing the world federation where the common law will respect everybody's freedom.¹¹

Leftist ecologists who point to the French Resistance, Vietnam and Algeria as models of popular guerilla in an anti-imperialist struggle that can counter the military-industrial complex overlook that success in that kind of struggle depends on: (1) support and supplies from rival imperial powers; (2) liberal and peace-loving public opinion in the opposing camp that is allowed to hamper the war effort. Ruthless Soviet repression of uprisings behind the Iron Curtain suffice to show that resistance is futile when an authoritarian State has no compunction about deploying its full force. European resistance without U.S. support would be as useless as that of a people in revolt against an absolute tyrant bent on using the nuclear option to quell it,¹² as Baathist regimes have not hesitated to do with chemical weapons.

More fundamentally, like a Gordian knot that tightens with every attempt to pry it loose, a pattern of mimetic rivalry that Girard himself may have overlooked can be recognized in the deadly contradiction that Charbonneau, writing in the aftermath of the failed 1968 uprisings, sees at work “between the unification of the world by science and its division by nationalisms,” in competition for the same prize of total control held out by Technique, as it has them all play by its own set of rules even against its dominant agents. This common power logic of State and Science leaves the modern world in the horns of a “final dilemma,” between “chaos or total order, the destruction of mankind or world Empire,”¹³ or in other words, literal death or living death. This dilemma had been haunting Charbonneau ever since Hiroshima crystallized his darkest forebodings about the superhuman, all too human stakes of the development of industrial society. As he wrote under the heading “Peace” in a regular column critiquing commonplaces that Ellul got him in the Protestant weekly *Réforme* on September 4, 1954:

this looming war is measureless, it is total; and we can only escape it now by wishing for a peace that is just as total. Tomorrow, man will only have a

¹⁰ Bernard Charbonneau, *The Green Light, A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement*, 110-11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹² Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae* (La Bache: À plus d'un titre, 2010), 122.

¹³ Bernard Charbonneau, *Prométhée réenchaîné* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2001), 309.

choice between the sun of some planet-wide explosion or the icy order of some worldwide Leviathan: between nothingness and nothingness.¹⁴

For “war is so closely tied to peace in man that if one day a total peace were to overcome all the conflicts that tear him apart, it would be that of the grave.”¹⁵

“Unless that is there arises a revolutionary spirit that overcomes nationalism as it aims for the common flourishing of all unique homelands [*patries singulières*],”¹⁶ as political ecology is supposed to do. Even then, “will we be able to avoid violence, war?” Charbonneau wonders in 1977 about the “revolution of the year 2000,” having already taken this date as emblematic of that dilemma in a 1945 public lecture on the question raised by the atom bomb,¹⁷ which is “none other than that of Technique and of our freedom with respect to it, pushed to the limit.”¹⁸ As a political answer to that existential question, it is probably once blood is shed in an “ecological civil war” that we will know that the Green revolution has begun —one that, “far more than socialism, threatens the interests and principles of our bourgeois society,” as unlikely as any to disappear without a struggle.¹⁹ Finding the strength to say no to the war already implicit in its very workings²⁰ entails tearing oneself away from them without in turn losing oneself in the total mobilization of a rival movement that ends up building up another power vortex, as it falls prey to the same “political illusion”²¹ as all previous revolutions. Anticipating the kind of trade-off between the collective good of bare life for all and drastically curtailed personal freedoms which all governments have imposed amidst the current global health emergency as an effect of environmental stress, Charbonneau even goes so far as to state:

Despite appearances, ecofascism has the future on its side, and it could issue just as well from a left-wing totalitarian regime as from a right-wing one under the pressure of necessity. For governments will increasingly find themselves compelled to act in order to manage dwindling resources and space. [...] It will be possible to ensure the preservation of the oxygen level needed for life only if another vital fluid is sacrificed, namely freedom. But as in wartime, the defence of the common good, of the earth, will be worth the sacrifice. Already, the action of ecologists has started to weave this net of regulations, matched with fines and prison terms, which will protect nature against its uncontrolled exploitation. What else is to be done? What awaits us, as during the last total war, is probably a mixture of technocratic organization and return to the Stone Age: [...]. We are going to have the Merovingian period managed by

¹⁴ Bernard Charbonneau, “Paix,” in *Lexique du verbe quotidien*, ed. Alexandre Chollier (Geneva: Héros-Limite, 2016), 28-29. First published in the weekly *Réforme* (September 4, 1954).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁶ Bernard Charbonneau, *Prométhée réenchaîné*, 309.

¹⁷ Bernard Charbonneau, “An Deux Mille (1945),” in Bernard Charbonneau & Jacques Ellul, *Nous sommes des révolutionnaires malgré nous. Textes pionniers de l'écologie politique*, ed. Quentin Hardy, Sébastien Morillon & Christian Roy ((Paris: Seuil, 2014), 193-215.

¹⁸ Bernard Charbonneau, “La question sans réponse: La chose,” in Bernard Charbonneau, *Lexique du verbe quotidien*, ed. Alexandre Chollier (Geneva: Héros-Limite, 2016), 81. First published in *Réforme* (April 20, 1957).

¹⁹ Bernard Charbonneau, *Notre table rase. Essai* (Paris: Denoël, 1974), 204.

²⁰ Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 136.

²¹ See Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, trans. Konrad Kellen (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2015); David W. Gill & David Lovekin. *Political Illusion and Reality. Engaging the Prophetic Insights of Jacques Ellul* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2018).

electronics: scarcity, violence and terrors that can only be made bearable by the power and sacred authority that will save the planet —or finish it off.²²

II. World Wars Reveal Total Mobilization as the Post-Christian Sacred

The new “sacred authority” that may purport to “save the planet” as it once did the nation, the faith, or civilization is but society’s ancient power to rally as a cohesive whole against a perceived threat in the name of the common good it embodies. Bernard Charbonneau had first encountered it as a boy during the Great War in the modern guise of the *Union sacrée* of France’s government and people, foreclosing all meaningful discussion beyond the consensus that subsumed every issue under the friend/enemy distinction deployed by the wartime emergency powers of the nation-State. These now gave a free rein to total mobilization, revealing it as the brutal reality underlying business-as-usual in industrial society around the entire world, regardless of the modern or traditional ideals professed by the various belligerents. Ernst Jünger would outline a similar vision of the Great War’s meaning —albeit moved at first by very different values— in essays such as *Die totale Mobilmachung* (1930) on the nature of Technique as total mobilization, published under the Weimar Republic. Charbonneau’s example shows it was not necessary to have been a decorated trench warfare veteran to come to this realization around the same time. Growing up with his eyes open far from the frontline in Bordeaux, he was able to sense the advent of a new reality from his conscripted older brother’s eloquent silence while on leave amidst ideologically mobilized civilians, connecting it with the broader silence surrounding things like the complete transformation of the streets in which only recently children and cats had been playing freely. As a teenager already, he came to think it no coincidence that mechanized warfare’s imperious demands instantly remade in its image every nation alike just when automobile traffic was replacing shared living space as the city’s organizing principle. Cars were but one, everyday manifestation of the vast, unquestioned network of technical infrastructure taking over all aspects of life, in a global society where nature and freedom were together pushed to the margins.

War as a total phenomenon thus provided Charbonneau with the key to understanding the man-made “second nature” that is industrial society, as the full unfolding of a totalizing drive incipient in any society, only now unmoored from natural settings and creating an artificial environment that dispenses with them. It was assumed there should be no room for wasteful armed confrontation in the rationalized world made one by its universal progress, bypassing or coopting all contingent local particularity. Therefore, “if modern nations engage in total conflict, it is in the belief that it is ‘the war to end all wars’, the one that will ensure total peace.”²³ But in modernity as at any time, “war is society’s strongest expression. And it is because the individual identifies with it that he bears to receive and give death in its name. One must have lived through a war —the real one, which is civil, religious or total in the nation’s name, and not the external war of a few professionals— to experience first-hand to what extent it is a communion and a collective festival from which it is impossible to remain aloof”, centered on a “sacrifice whose consecrated host is our own life.”²⁴ For civilizations as for men, war is the revelation of “certain possibilities hidden within the ambiguities of peace.”²⁵ Hence Charbonneau’s call to “discern this war that is hypocritically concealed in peace”: the one that is inherent to the social fact and that the total mobilization of natural and

²² Bernard Charbonneau, *The Green Light, A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement*, 83-84.

²³ Bernard Charbonneau, “Paix”, 26.

²⁴ Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 125.

²⁵ Bernard Charbonneau, *L’État* (Paris: Economica, 1987), 181.

personnel resources only exacerbates in wartime. For “the first global conflict marks the beginning of a climax of history whose pace has grown ever faster, driven by the forces unleashed by Western mankind.”²⁶

Charbonneau concurs with Girard that these modern forces are inextricably linked to the West’s founding myth,²⁷ one that the latter thinker claims does not really qualify as one, because it uniquely dispenses with ritual scapegoating’s sleight of hand. “For Girard, modern science and technology are an inevitable consequence of the demythologization of sacrificial violence and magical thought”, as “the loosening of ancient sacred restraints and prohibitions [...] unleashes the phenomenon of mimetic desire in a wave of consumerism, ethnic rivalry, media frenzy and politically correct victimology.”²⁸ Bernard Charbonneau’s critical focus on Science²⁹ however makes him alert to the agonistic component of any mental act of discrimination, and the built-in short step to aggressive opposition that Technique may have fueled by naturalizing it as an impersonal method, justified by an ethical agenda. While Girard sees science as “necessarily part of the Christian concern for victims and is a consequence of this charitable impulse” down to modern technology’s “apocalyptic edge,”³⁰ Charbonneau feels that “man has been at war ever since he tasted the fruits of the tree of knowledge [or of *science* as Charbonneau pointedly uses the word’s double meaning in French]: for the Good, against Evil.”³¹ From the start, knowledge means at once the power to act and taking sides to further this power; to grasp the workings of life and to push against whatever resists this grip, in an operative conflation of cognitive and moral templates.

Furthermore, if “violence and war are rooted in man, the individual, and especially society and the State,”³² it is, at each of these levels, at once in “what is worst and what is best in man.” For if “a pacifist can invoke horror before death, as widespread as the exaltation of life that leads to violence”, deriving the demand for peace merely from the self-preservation instinct would amount to “negating the superhuman part of man that deems certain goods to be worth more than life. Any spiritual imperative that commands us to go beyond our own nature can only act in us if it is moved by a spiritual violence.”³³ By the same token, any leap of faith of this kind is liable to hardening into “a fanaticism that is ready to sacrifice everything to truth. The apostle turns crusader and his evangelism into a crusade.”³⁴ Even if it is in the name of peace, since “to want peace, final peace, means wanting an absolute order that totally excludes those who fail to recognize it”, so that “everything that insists on remaining itself” becomes “a force for conflict”, whether it undermines national unity or betrays ideological dissent. As a result, “anyone who does not give in to this order” is accused of being a “warmonger” and becomes fair game.³⁵

Western nations slid down this slippery slope in the First World War, when Judaeo-Christian values had already become an “absurd façade”, but by the Second World War, this kind of “realism” had become strong enough to be its own justification.³⁶ (One need only

²⁶ Ibid., 180.

²⁷ See Christian Roy, “Nature and Scripture in Bernard Charbonneau’s *The Green Light*,” *Ellul Forum* 64 (2019): 5-16.

²⁸ Jim Grote, “Introducing René Girard,” *Ellul Forum* 35 (2005): 3.

²⁹ See his 1986 essay *Ultima Ratio* included in Bernard Charbonneau, *Nuit et Jour – Science et Culture* (Paris: Economica, 1991).

³⁰ Jim Grote, “Introducing René Girard,” *Ellul Forum* 35 (2005): 3.

³¹ Bernard Charbonneau, “Paix”: 27.

³² Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 125.

³³ Ibid., 126.

³⁴ Ibid., 127.

³⁵ Bernard Charbonneau, “Paix”: 26.

³⁶ Bernard Charbonneau, *L’État*, 251-252.

think of mass internments and deportations of “foreign” elements —however defined— on both sides.)

War lays waste to Western society's values because it suspends their application in the name of necessity; it thus helps spread the sense that these values are in contradiction with life, and that it is not indispensable to live them. The spirit flees the world, and the world flees it. At the moment when Technique used to its full extent speeds up the pace of events, war interrupts control over them. The refusal of the given in the name of a good, voluntary action —this tie whereby man binds up time to create it in his image— gives way to systematic adaptation to circumstances. Breaking a continuity that alone can ensure faithfulness to spirit, war prevents man from creating civilization; when peace is rung in, he no longer recognizes anything in the present of what he wanted in the past. The society of 1914-1918 had nothing to do with the hopes of socialists or the wistfulness of conservatives, for all men it was a monster, and this is why they stubbornly persisted in failing to see its true face.³⁷

“On August 1 1914, the enormity of the lie of liberal society had been revealed: that of a free individual, be it physically or morally.” As would perhaps be most ironically proven by Woodrow Wilson's iron-fisted wartime regime three years later, “human rights suddenly gave way to a police dictatorship of unprecedented efficiency; for this time, aside from technical means, it could count on the support of the masses,” under cover of which the assumptions of an organic society were restored, only with mechanical thoroughness, as “the individual only has meaning in terms of the collective; war assigns to each one his post; it is no longer a matter of being, but of serving.”³⁸ “In peacetime, never had the critical mind gone so far; in the face of war, never had so few men given witness to their convictions in death; infinitely less than in eras when intellectual boldness was infinitely rarer.” There arises a new social order based on all-powerful necessity, one that is monolithically cohesive, because, unlike liberal society, it is perfectly consonant with the means and the spirit of modern civilization. “War resolves modern society's contradictions: the armed nation is perfect society”³⁹ as a composite collective being, now endowed with the automatic command-and-control responsiveness of technical organization to secure its flawless unity against outer enemies and any significant inner diversity. Obliterating critical distance and personal autonomy, “war saves the individual within society: any war is therefore counter-revolutionary,” as a result of the very process of concomitant atomization and consolidation that is modernity. In a twist on the famous Clausewitz dictum about war as “the continuation of politics by other means” that would much exercise Girard (after other thinkers who reversed it⁴⁰) in his final book *Battling to the End* (2007), Charbonneau wrote after the war in a treatise on *The State* that no publisher would touch for forty years:

The more society gets politicized, the more the State puts war at the forefront: national democracy more than traditional monarchy, totalitarian dictatorship more than national democracy. War alone can justify a social state based on

³⁷ Ibid., 252.

³⁸ Ibid., 224.

³⁹ Ibid., 225.

⁴⁰ Jean-Vincent Holeindre, “Violence, guerre et politique. Étude sur le retournement de la ‘Formule’ de Clausewitz”, *Res Militaris* 1/ 3 (2011), www.resmilitaris.net/ressources/10144/29/res_militaris_violence_guerre_et_politique-jean-vincent_holeindre.pdf, (accessed May 12, 2020).

power. For the State, it is not a matter of avoiding war, but of preparing it well to avoid being defeated. Mobilization immobilizes society.⁴¹

Making the forceful movement of the social whole both untouchable and irresistible, “total war is a religion,” “the answer that puts an end to the question” left open by the death of God, long suppressed in peacetime like a shameful disease: how to find absolute meaning and embody it in action? 1914 brings to a close the era opened by 1789, marking, “after two centuries of individualist theory, the irresistible re-entry of the social fact in history:”

there is no more personal judgment in its tide than in the crashing of a flood, only justifications at best. As in mobilization, —this day of doom with festive trappings— man yields with both despair and hope; because the sacrifice of the individual answers the old yearning of the social being. [...] Man surrenders into the mighty arms of war as in those of a mother, diving into its peace as the suicide yields to the abyss; and it is in vain that he struggles when this sleep turns into a frozen grip. Modern war is irresistible because it answers the deepest need of today’s man: his need to dissolve in his environment, to be relieved of a personal existence that no supra-personal force helps him to take responsibility for.⁴²

The old values of human rights and popular will are likewise of little matter when modern war ushers in a new order based on force,⁴³ as a “total Fact expressed at once in terms of a spiritual absolute and of measurable results”, an intimate mix of “inner communion and physical resolve”, ideal and necessary discipline.⁴⁴ As a result, there can no longer be a murderer in the absence of personal agency for pliant components of an impersonal war machine whose victims now number in the millions. Crimes against humanity are really the crimes of the kind of humanity that routinely produces them.

The atrocities of modern war go beyond a human being’s capacities for evil; it is no longer this man who kills, but War; only mankind as a whole can bear responsibility for such crimes. Each of us; for if we are powerless against war’s fateful monstrosities, the greatest fault remains ours; to have accepted the unleashing of inhuman automatism; to have accepted that we were no longer responsible.⁴⁵

“It is down this path that, in the era of philanthropy and comfort, the phobia for pain, the fond love of children and animals end up in a senseless waste of human sufferings,”⁴⁶ “a monstrous massacre for a tradition that claims to hold sacred the life of one.”⁴⁷ For Charbonneau, this logic held regardless of political regime, so that he was even reluctant to take part in a war against fascism that did nothing to address the features of modern society fascism best expressed, and for which liberal democracies had laid the ground. In the summer of 1939, at a reflection retreat of Personalist activists in the Pyrenees, he swore not to take part in the coming war, arguing that a society organized for war against fascism was a fascist society, since its total mobilization assumed the same amoral absorption of the individual into militarized social machinery. Though he was later sorely tempted to join the Resistance while

⁴¹ Bernard Charbonneau, *L'État.*, 231.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 230.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 251.

it was still a wilderness struggle of individual volunteers against desperate odds, he lost interest once the war's outcome became certain and irregular partisan units were now pawns in a global strategy that could only confirm impersonal technological hegemony, no matter which side emerged as the victor. While Jacques Ellul would provocatively title a VE article "Hitler's Victory?"⁴⁸ Charbonneau's rationale for not getting involved in military struggle, preferring to articulate in long-unpublished manuscripts the underlying issues no one else would address, seemed validated by the blinding flash of VA's atom bombs, devised by humanistic scientists who were like saints and children, and deployed by a Christian, liberal, democratic nation.⁴⁹ Moreover, "when you are fighting for God, you can ally with the Devil, play Stalin against Hitler,"⁵⁰ as even Churchill did, so that the securing of freedom claimed by the West as justification for that war amounted to a mere changing of concentration camp guards in the Eastern half of Europe.⁵¹ "Stopping the Nazi robot required the coalition of Russian totalitarianism and American technology," which would both recycle scientists involved in Germany's war effort. Nazism's antimodernist rhetoric had never been more than ideological camouflage: a romantic film projection of Rhineland castles onto the smokescreen of Ruhr Basin industry. For "whoever says nationalism, war, says power, hence technique: industrialization. In Germany as elsewhere, medieval nostalgia was the reaction of a society that is suddenly turning industrial."⁵² But "modern war is less than ever a quarrel between the warriors of rival tribes," once organization matters more than valour.

In Rome already —that distant prototype of of the State and the modern army— it had spawned the soldier, the standard cogwheel of the war machine, whose virtues are the exact opposite of the plumed warrior's. Bellicists love war because it fosters warrior virtues, but a soldier's first duty is discipline, i.e. to execute instructions automatically and on pain of death, not to take decisions on his own. He no longer provokes his adversary by drawing his blows with his ornaments, he dons a "uniform", which becomes as drab as a mechanic's. He is now but a piece of material like any other, only more sensitive; but we are told he must choose to become that. Fighting has a lot more to do with uncomprehendingly putting up with decisions coming from above, and with the disproportionate power of killing machines: becoming "cannon fodder." And since the army is even more organized than civilian society, it becomes an industrial bureaucracy. More than courage or genius, its leaders must display method or competence. Thus, all that can be said about "the mother of warrior virtues" is largely inaccurate. [...] Since compulsory military service has put nations into barracks, war is no longer a tournament between war professionals (for which the bulk of the troops and peasants occasionally paid the price), it is a struggle to the death between two societies for their very existence. Since then the whole of the population and resources are mobilized, everything becomes a soldier or a military objective to

⁴⁸ Jacques Ellul, "Victoire d'Hitler?" *Réforme* (June 23, 1945), available in English at <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/jacques-ellul-the-victory-of-hitler> (accessed April 13, 2020).

⁴⁹ Christian Roy, "Aux sources de l'écologie politique: le personnalisme 'gascon' de Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul." *Canadian Journal of History/ Annales canadiennes d'histoire* XXVII (April 1992), 93-4.

⁵⁰ Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 112.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵² Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Système et le Chaos* (Paris: Economica, 1990), 161.

annihilate; and scientific progress makes it possible to take death everywhere. By mobilizing civilians, war becomes a sacred war with no holds barred.⁵³

In this way, an advanced civilization that has increasingly bypassed traditional customary ways of life and war to replace them with secular standard procedures becomes *de facto* religious by nature of the total, godlike scope of the State as a largely military enterprise of total control over life and death. Since the progress of the State and that of War go hand in hand, Progress itself may well be “an aspect of the arms race,” Charbonneau wrote as the Cold War was beginning.⁵⁴ “The State is war, and its first effort is to secure a monopoly over the latter. For opposite reasons as the Church, it forbids private wars”, and if the right to bear arms has largely disappeared (but for one egregious national exception), “more than the law, it is technical progress that ensures that the State keeps the monopoly of means that are impossible to counter.”⁵⁵

As a result, “if the use of armed force between individuals or clans is prohibited in so-called evolved societies, war is all the more violent between them. They only forbid murder and violence to private persons because they have nationalized them, and technical progress has allowed them to turn them into genocide.”⁵⁶ Christianity’s historic compromise with State power has contributed to the paradox that if “certain regimes have killed less than others” within their own borders as the rule of law in defense of the weak took hold, “external war has only gotten worse.” Thus, Charbonneau writes in the 1980s—with a nod to *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (1978), “as Girard points out, by destroying the balance of nature and the ritualism of traditional societies, Christian nihilism unleashes the war of man against the earth and against man. If Christian freedom does not go all the way by re-establishing an order and a peace based on the law of love, it will end up destroying the human species,” dependent until then on the ancient law “imposed by sacred power to sublimate violence” in “this internal and external war” that is politics.⁵⁷

It is thus in a secularizing society that ideology comes to play a role similar to that of the traditional sacred, albeit in a subordinate capacity, as one essential means of war among several others. For “the man whose trade is not war can only kill or be killed if he believes his destiny is at stake in the struggle; [...]”. In the same way that bourgeois society uses Christianity to buttress its legitimacy, modern wars use ideology “like cast-iron or tungsten”: as material for industrial mobilization. Being so remote from any distinct spiritual end, “our wars over principles are further removed from the wars of religion than the political wars of the kings of old. Temporal power’s absolute demands are but a hellish reversal of those of God.”⁵⁸ They take over the latter’s sacred and total character for secular ends, even openly mobilizing God in fake crusades for king and country. For in societies that bring together individuals holding different convictions, the only thing they have in common is the nation itself. “The modern crusader’s choice is determined in advance by borders, so that he always ends up choosing to be mobilized by his government.”⁵⁹ The State needs existential threats to its borders and to national unity to become stronger—a template perfected and spread by the French Revolution. “In 1792, national war completed the crystallization of French national feeling, and spawned in reaction the other European nationalisms.” Among Germany’s educated élites hurt in their national pride more than regional populations largely

⁵³ Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 110-111.

⁵⁴ Bernard Charbonneau, *L’État*, 45.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵⁶ Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 104-105.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 129-130.

⁵⁸ Bernard Charbonneau, *L’État*, 212.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 212.

untroubled in their folkways, France became the example to follow even against France, with both love and hatred of the Revolution as motives for imitation. "National unity and conscription had led the French army to the conquest of Europe, only they could drive it back." Germany thus refashioned itself as a nation on the French model. Anticipating by sixty years a central argument of Girard's last book *Battling to the End* (2007), Charbonneau maintained that it was the resulting similarity to its imitated rival that fuelled the violence of German nationalism as the main thing keeping alive an elusive difference with France.⁶⁰ However, power differentials still often precede rough convergence as irritating drivers of mimetic violence.

Wherever force is established, it awakes in the vanquished an inferiority complex which he can only free himself from by the use of force. By taking over the world, Europe has everywhere unleashed the will to power. [...] Colonial conquest has given rise to national feeling in populations to which it was absolutely alien, that now see only one way of freeing themselves from the West: aping its greatest weaknesses.⁶¹

Charbonneau means by this the cult of national State power as a substitute for broader, deeper spiritual truths. The Bourbon white flag was for Frenchmen of the Ancien Régime no more than the King's battle pennant, "whereas the flag of modern peoples is the sacred object par excellence. The symbol of military society becomes in peacetime the highest symbol of civil society. There is no better proof that the Nation is an army." —And indeed, a church, for "since there is no longer any religious truth, nothing dominates the Prince from above; and since he identifies with the People, nothing judges him from below. The Nation practices sacred egoism; but at the same time, it elevates its interest to the rank of universal truth," allowing every particular nation to see itself as the fairest, freest, first in the world, above all of mankind; "no doubt because every State feels called to dominate the totality of the world." In a colonial era of national states vying for resources and markets in a world economy, true to the Girardian logic of mimetic rivalry that Charbonneau already discerned by mid-century, "the violence of antagonisms hides the similarity of the goal; nations that no longer have common values unfortunately have a common objective: Empire" as the divisive common horizon of the modern competition of several great rival States instead of just one facing barbarian peoples in ancient or early medieval times⁶² The scramble for Africa thus provides a vivid example of how, as Girard would put it, "rivalry does not arise because of the fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather, *the subject desires the object because the rival desires it.*"⁶³ As a result, "an insoluble contradiction condemns nation-States to violence; closed unto themselves, they lay claim to the universal."

Under these conditions, the history of the world can only be that of the progressive disintegration of international relations. Christian order has collapsed, and it is force that increasingly determines relations between States.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Ibid., 170.

⁶¹ Ibid., 170.

⁶² Ibid., 170.

⁶³ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 145.

⁶⁴ Bernard Charbonneau, *L'État*, 171-2.

III. Sectarian Violence or Spiritual Violence? The Ecological Challenge of a Society of Individuals

Bernard Charbonneau wonders if there is any gap left for individuals who find themselves simultaneously ground between these millstones and compacted into their power blocks. “Are we even able to bear a real freedom that would not be a sheer verbal fantasy without immediately doing an about-face into its opposite by going back to a sacred society, armed this time not with a sword but with atomic rockets? Will we have the strength to pay the price of freedom, which is anxiety,”⁶⁵ but that “war and revolution with their aftereffects can temporarily fill” in states of emergency that allow society to seamlessly coalesce? Even in normal times, “the social need for truth and communion” is only heightened wherever individualism prevents society from answering it. This need is especially strong in classes that either poverty or wealth makes marginal to the common framework of developed societies, be it “Third World immigrants or teenagers from the ever-expanding middle classes,” of the kind now seduced by jihadism or the other forms of radical identity politics that have taken over from the revolutionary ideologies still in favour among post-war generations. God may be dead as secularization theory maintains after Nietzsche, but his ghost haunts the earth now that, “absent sacred foundations, morals and reason are proving unable to replace religion.”⁶⁶ “At least until war and Revolution restore, along with faith, brotherhood and death.”⁶⁷ Since they can only be declared “in the name of a meaning that goes beyond any man,” “wars that mobilize civilians are all civil wars and crusades. They therefore reveal that they are our true ultimate. The Absolute, God”⁶⁸ is whatever manages to have all members of a community accept as their duty to kill at the risk of getting killed, in a socially sanctioned reversal of “the basic law of peace forbidding murder.” When the time comes, “how do we bear the unbearable, if not by viewing it as an unquestionable imperative,” of a sacred nature?⁶⁹ As in Girard, sacrificial violence must be unanimous to play its pacifying role for the inside group whose aggression is channelled onto a designated outsider, called the enemy in modern societies that purport to have moved beyond scapegoating rituals. Therein lies the whole ambiguity of the sacred, archaic or modern: making an obligation, at certain special times of compulsory group communion, out of the very violence society normally condemns when it comes from individuals. But the lack of a ritual outlet to vent and transfigure this impulse comes to be felt once relativism undermines all truth claims save the generally accepted pragmatic rules of technical operation overriding them.

The decline of festivals and communions leaves the individual in a world made profane by the plurality and uncertainty of truths that explain the universe and bind men together.⁷⁰

Here Bernard Charbonneau betrays an ambivalent kinship with the themes if not the spirit of the Collège de sociologie sacrée, though he sounds less like Georges Bataille, with whom he had direct and indirect exchanges before and during the war, than like Roger Caillois, who wrote on the topic around that time in similar terms, presenting the modern “cult of war” as the dark counterpart of bygone traditional festivals: “the paroxysm of society,” due to its total character. It is not impossible that Charbonneau was aware of some version of the essay Caillois would develop into his book *Bellone, ou la pente de la guerre* (1963), but his own book on

⁶⁵ Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 152.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 151.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 152.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 104.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 103.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 150.

The State and its sacred drift to total war was written before the inclusion of “Guerre et sacré” in *L’Homme et le sacré* (1950) and of “Le paroxysme de la société” in *Quatre essais de sociologie contemporaine* (1951), shortly after “Del culto de la guerra” was published in Argentina in *Fisiología de Leviatán* (1946). Be that as it may, by the 1980s, drawing on Girard, Charbonneau covers related territory in *Finis Terrae* when he dwells on mass culture’s propensity to seek to recover the sources of the sacred in the violence that allows bewildered atomized individuals to come together in the aggregate of a body politic, fused in crisis conditions as the crucible of a “collective salvation that gives meaning to a man’s life, one worth sacrificing it to.”

It is this society that substitutes order to the chaos of the war of all against all by sublimating into laws the internal violence it can only humanly contain by mobilizing it against an external enemy. As René Girard saw, the peace whose other name is war is what constitutes the social pact until now. Society only expels violence from itself by adding to it. For to the extent that it compresses it, it also heightens it, so that it must find a substitute for human aggressiveness: a potential enemy to sacrifice on which men’s spiritual and material imperialism can become fixated. Embodying their need for a sacred ideal, it shows itself to be just that: sacred, by arrogating to itself the right of life and death. In it thus becomes manifest the only force that goes beyond life. [...] And if in it the Good, Reason take on a concrete existence, Evil naturally takes on presence in that of the Enemy who threatens the homeland’s sacred body at the borders. But this essentially foreign power still somehow drives all kinds of agents up to the very heart of France. Any society’s life depends on constantly having a scapegoating victim ready at hand that it must sacrifice, or else it runs the risk of being sacrificed itself: the one which loses the sense of having enemies will not be around for very long. And the one that no longer believes it is exorcizing Evil through specific sacrifices must endlessly perform sacrifices.⁷¹

As Girard also saw, their failing ritual efficacy must then be compensated by the industrial overkill of purges and bloodletting, or else “it would lose that superhuman character without which it is non-existent: the social pact would be broken, with all the woes this entails. War, hot or cold (i.e. peace), is the engine of the social fact; [...]”⁷² When the latter breaks down, totalitarianism, whether “black or red, Islamist or that of sects,” is ready to step in to again place man in a universe without gaps, thereby giving him “the peace of the heart,” “at the cost of life: of the sacrifice of one’s own life and that of others. If the dead of Nazism and Communism, including total war and extermination camps, come close to a hundred million, those of sects, as a by-product of a post-Christian liberal West, only number in the hundreds,”⁷³ wrote Charbonneau in a *Combat Nature* column entitled “Christianisme, science et technique, sectes et écologie” in August 1995, some nine months before his death.

Yet Charbonneau is also uneasy about certain sectarian elements and features of the Green movement itself, because the opportunities it might seize amidst the predictable breakdown of the economic system along with the ecosystem expose it to the drift built into any state of emergency or revolutionary moment. Again sounding like Caillois about the spirit of the sects when they come to power and develop a “religion of war”⁷⁴, Bernard

⁷¹ Ibid., 128.

⁷² Ibid., 129.

⁷³ Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel* (Paris: L’Échappée, 2019), 110-111.

⁷⁴ Roger Caillois, “Del espíritu de las sectas”, in *Fisiología de Leviatán*, trans. Julián Calvo & C.A. Jordana (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1946), 74f.

Charbonneau thus reminds his own political family that “the worst of all regimes is the one where the sect becomes the State. That day, we may be sure that, since absolute Truth excuses all means, the violence inflicted on men and nature will no longer know any bounds.”⁷⁵ But even aside from the still far-off temptation of a technocratic ecofascism, “forgetting nature’s lessons, the ecological left also dreams of a national and international society identified with Freedom and Justice and where any power relations and struggle for life would have disappeared. In the meantime, every moment, it keeps on crashing against this wall; furious over the failure of non-violence, it becomes tempted by terrorism”, once “it is only the enemy’s violence that is called violence [...]”⁷⁶ This is why “the question that clandestine or State terrorism puts to any minority movement deserves to be decided in the negative, or at least approached with fear and trembling: [...]”,⁷⁷ in view of the risk of “being taken in by the irresistible urge to wield power in our turn more than to save the earth and freedom.”

Coercion, hierarchy, violence are rejected. But the day we are faced with the necessity of acting, there is no more choice: if we do not want to be annihilated by the adversary, we pretty much have to organize like he does. And then the repentant idealist active in politics, convinced as he is of fighting the good fight, organizes, disciplines, hierarchizes and wages war even more efficiently than the enemy, thus emptying his action of content, the means causing him to forget the ends. And victory only ends up reinforcing Power over men and nature; this has been the fate of all revolutions until now.⁷⁸

On the other hand, “today as yesterday, revolution is inseparable from tradition (see the Swiss and French revolutions that started out as a defence of custom against monarchical centralization).”⁷⁹ The Green movement is well placed to acknowledge this paradox⁸⁰ of being “at once revolutionary, because it demands of society a radical change of direction, and conservative.” “It must not be ashamed of being conservative, far from it; it must wrest this term from a Right that no longer conserves anything of the treasure accumulated by the earth and by men.”⁸¹ But since “the principle of the established disorder is today the plunder of what exists, its defence is revolutionary: anyone who insists on saving what is left of rivers or streets learns quickly at his own expense that, within a legal framework, one can at most conduct delaying actions.”⁸² And yet, the revolutionary militant who dares to step beyond this framework to speed the demise of the overarching edifice it upholds naturally flips into the ruthless military⁸³: “by answering violence with violence, he places himself on its turf.”⁸⁴ A movement dedicated to the peaceful coexistence of humans and nature cannot get around the fact that, “in spite of the human desire for peace, as in nature, but in a far less regulated way, violence is everywhere in society. Social relations are in part power relations. Were it only for class struggles! There are those, even harsher, between Churches, nations and trades, clans and families, and even individuals.” Charbonneau stresses that while “similarity and comparability induce rivalry, difference leads to war,” much as for Girard anything that stands

⁷⁵ Bernard Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 132.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁸⁰ See Thomas Keller, *Les Verts allemands. Un conservatisme alternatif* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1993).

⁸¹ Bernard Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 149.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 175.

⁸³ Bernard Charbonneau, *L’État*, 144-147.

⁸⁴ Bernard Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 175.

out as altering the perceived balance of power in that charged atmosphere can become the lightning rod that triggers open confrontation. He goes on:

Aggression is inherent in life, even weeds are imperialistic; and it is not a miracle drug that will rid us of this virus, but its recognition around us and above all within us. Provided we do not give this factual acknowledgment the authority of a value judgment, thus repeating in reverse the mistake of the idealist who takes his value judgment for a statement of fact. The problem is not that of choosing between non-violence and violence, but of knowing which is which and of mastering it to the extent that it can and must be mastered. Failing this, one gets mired in contradictions and dead-end situations.⁸⁵

It may not be unfair then to indict as antisocial the tenet “thou shalt not kill” bequeathed by Christianity to pacifism, and addressed to the individual rather than to society, which for better and for worse never followed it to the letter. For if it had, there could never have emerged such a thing as a Christian society in a position to transmit and embody—however fitfully—the calling both Christianity and pacifism presuppose: the one to aim beyond the human given, in “a reversal and a subversion, not of values but of any order that ever existed until now.”⁸⁶ Without personally subscribing to religious dogmas about the figure of Jesus Christ, Charbonneau always saw his advent as the turning point of world history. As a result of it, the political takes on unprecedented weight as the only locus for working out a way of living with the new situation where it has been stripped of its sacred foundation in violence, now that the spirit points to a kingdom that is not of this world, even as it demands embodiment in the here-and-now.

By desacralizing political power, by having men commune on a plane that is no longer its own, Christ gives it its own distinct existence; and if he strips the State of any sacred character, by stripping religion of anything profane, he makes it all the more necessary in this world. He ruins that simple and perfect solution primitive society was for man. Instead of a stable totality, he creates a human relation of tension between the human spirit's inner demand and the world; between truth and reality, between ends and means; between political power and spiritual authority. From now on, for society, as for individuals, to live is to be in conflict; the spirit is no longer identified with earthly things, because it is the power that lifts human beings above them; like conscience on the personal plane, spiritual authority on the social plane dominates temporal power as the force that *transforms*.⁸⁷

Because it substitutes to this lived conflict a ready-made default position, “the error of pacifism lies in its ‘ism’ as it were, in forming a system that eliminates the contradiction between the spiritual imperative and the given”,⁸⁸ a contradiction that becomes insoluble if the rule against killing admits of no exceptions, giving a free rein to killers. “The only way to escape war is to first accept it: to look at the obstacle straight, to recognize our adversary in order to somehow get along with it in spite of everything.”⁸⁹ “Until now, war is the irreducible fact”, and never more so than in the XXth century as its classical age (foreseen by Nietzsche),

⁸⁵ Ibid., 91.

⁸⁶ Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 130.

⁸⁷ Bernard Charbonneau, *L'État*, 32.

⁸⁸ Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 130.

⁸⁹ Bernard Charbonneau, “Paix”, 28.

coinciding with the advent of pacifisms as another way to avoid dealing with violence and power as inherent in life as we know it. For war is the rule of a nature red in tooth and claw, while “Christian or post-Christian philanthropy” goes against its grain.⁹⁰ It is thus only insofar as man goes all the way, giving himself a “supernature” all his own, on “this other side of life that is horror before nothingness”, that he will be able to “renounce war, what has been until now society, nature”, to see through the political illusion and business-as-usual that lull the social being⁹¹ in the embrace of a “second nature”, duplicating the first one’s stifling hold. For “although man *came out* of nature, he no longer quite belongs to it; his dream has torn him from his mother’s womb.”

Born of the universe, he dreams of another world in which absurdity, coercion and violence, suffering, old age and death — in short what for lack of a better term may be called evil — would be abolished. By dreaming of non-violence and of freedom for all, of a paradisiacal earth and society where everyone’s love and desire would replace the laws of nature and society, the “ecological movement” obeys in its turn the invincible drive of the human spirit. “Take your wishes for reality!” Nature on its own would never have given such counsel.⁹²

That May 1968 slogan proclaims the contradiction that the spirit introduces, only to wish it away in a naturalization of desire and a denial of nature’s resistance to it. Charbonneau however remains ever mindful of —and in his own way faithful to— the spiritual source of the yearning for freedom in nature that the ecological movement often naively subsumes under fashionable philosophies of desire. He feels it owes little to the idealized “noble savage” of tribal cultures close to nature as a divine cosmos indistinguishable from society, whose shattered pattern advanced civilizations attempt to emulate, only with an even tighter grip.

And yet, from social and religious man was born a different tradition, of Jewish and Greek origin, but of which one would find traces in other cultures. The dream of a world in which the individual would not be totally sacrificed to family, Church, and polity: to society. Where the spiritual is distinguished from the temporal, God from the religious institution and its liturgy, the share of the heart of hearts, of personal and private life being safeguarded in public life, and the collective would lose that absolute value that justifies putting to death. Such is the hope of democratic and liberal societies that believe themselves to be founded on contract and reason; their only fault is not to have understood how much of a paradox is a society based on individuals.⁹³

Conclusion: Which Violence for What Kingdom?

Charbonneau formulates this paradox, around which his entire thought revolves, as an open question in concluding one of his last published articles:

As heirs of the old Order that confused the spiritual and the temporal, are we up to the task of building the new Order: that of a freedom that distinguishes them to freely unite them? That respects a nature of which man is henceforth

⁹⁰ Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 104.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 136-137.

⁹² Bernard Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 49.

⁹³ Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 150.

the sovereign, as the individual does the laws of a society that he will have freely chosen?⁹⁴

For “the alchemy that transmutes man’s war on nature and on man into peace can only take place in the silence and the reflection of an individual”, who can then share it with others in view of common action. The old adage *Si vis pacem para bellum* thus acquires a novel meaning: “It is first by making war on oneself that one conquers peace.”

It may then be that, halfway between an unbearable reality and an impossible ideal, pathways will open, hard because they lead uphill, for the contradictory need for peace and conquest that preys on the mind of our species, and the violence that drives it to shackle itself in mutual destruction will be sublimated into spiritual violence.⁹⁵

A violence of the kind the kingdom of heaven is said to suffer (Mt 11:12). Not that Charbonneau expects “the answer to come from heaven”, like his friend Ellul as a theologian,⁹⁶ and “still less that it emerge from the Earth,” like many of *its* friends among environmentalists. “From now on,” he insists, “it is up to us to imagine the answer we want to give.”⁹⁷

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⁹⁴ Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 111.

⁹⁵ Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 137.

⁹⁶ “I say that without hope and without the certainty of a Transcendence, the situation in which we are can only lead to suicide,” writes Ellul in response to Carl Amery’s critique of Christianity’s role in the environmental crisis, to which Charbonneau by contrast was very receptive. See Jacques Ellul, *Théologie et Technique. Pour une éthique de la non-puissance*, ed. Frédéric Rognon (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2014), 306, cited in Christian Roy “Nature and Scripture in Bernard Charbonneau’s *The Green Light*”: 7.

⁹⁷ Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 111.

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