

EXISTENTIALISM AND CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Roger Troisfontaines, S.J.

This was the first book to discuss the whole existentialist movement from a specifically Christian point of view. It has already been translated into several languages and now appears for the first time in English.

Translated by Martin Jarrett-Kerr, C.R.

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THE MYSTERY OF THE FAMILY BOND

By

GABRIEL MARCEL

We are living to-day in a world in which the notion of sonship, and the notion of fatherhood, too, are tending to be emptied of that richness of meaning which they possessed for other societies. The philosophy that is tending to triumph to-day is the old philosophy of the eighteenth century, of the *Aufklärung*, in a new dress. For that philosophy, the metaphysical reality of sonship is one superstition among many others and ripe for the rubbish-heap. It is important, therefore, for us to get a firm grasp of the almost completely negative conception of sonship which is tending to define itself and to assert its authority before our eyes. It seems to define itself, in fact, basically in terms of a refusal—a refusal to acknowledge the existence in life, in the fact of being alive, of a value that allows us to think of life as a gift. The old French expression *devoir le jour à*—to owe the light of day to—would never be used by anybody to-day. It is not enough to say that it has become rather trite to talk of owing the light of day to one's parents. The notion, or rather the feeling, that these words express is no longer experienced except in a residual fashion. There are certain basic reasons for this state of affairs; the most obvious of them, on the face of it, is that to be alive in such a tragic and such a threatened world as ours seems to many people not a gift but a penalty—but, a penalty after all, pronounced by whom? And a penalty for what crime? Can one be justly punished for an offence that one is not aware of having committed? But this is not the whole story. Let us look at it from the side of fatherhood, as well as from that of sonship. In very many cases, is not the act of begetting a child something unpremeditated, the act of somebody who is not behaving in a responsible fashion, and who is very far from taking upon himself everything that his act will entail for somebody who never asked to be born? It is precisely this affirmation, reinforced by a question and by an exclamation, "I never asked to be born, by what right—by what right I—has life been inflicted on me?" that lies at the roots of that contemporary nihilism, to which I shall have to come back much later. What we should notice particularly, is that from this negative perspective, this perspective of refusal, the bond between father and son gradually tends to lose every spiritual quality; it is conceived of now merely, in a rather vague fashion, as a somewhat obscure objective relationship, which can be of interest, from a strictly technical point of view, to the biologist alone. We might say that we are witnessing a more and

¹ The HIBBERT JOURNAL is privileged to publish a translation by Mr George S. Fraser of a shortened version of the tenth *Gifford Lecture* (First Series) by M. Gabriel Marcel. Acknowledgments are made to the Harvill Press who hope to publish the First Series of these Lectures in the autumn.—[Ed.]



✓ more general disavowal of fatherhood, but a disavowal, paradoxically, mainly pronounced by sons. But naturally the process becomes to some extent a reciprocal one; when sons deny the rights of fathers, fathers are likely to refuse to acknowledge that they have any responsibility towards sons.

I know that I probably seem to be painting a rather gloomy picture here. In the majority of cases this basic situation of estrangement between father and son is masked by a customary tolerance and ordinary human decency; but it breaks through to the surface in a very striking way in contemporary literature. In a body of work like that of Sartre's, a body of work whose importance cannot be brushed aside, this situation of estrangement emerges in a most definite shape; one might even say that Sartre's world is one where fatherhood, whether as a fact or as a value, has actually ceased to exist; it would be no exaggeration, in fact, to call this a world in which a man claims, in Sartre's slightly technical phraseology, to *choose himself* as the son of X, and therefore equally to *reject himself* as the son of X. But in relation to the general body of human traditions of feeling and behaviour, this is an innovation of a completely revolutionary sort. It is, in the most exact sense of the word, an impious innovation; and it is not by mere chance that Orestes, in Sartre's very first play, has the *beau rôle* just in that (not in spite of the fact that) he is the murderer of his mother.

It is rather important to ask ourselves how, or rather where, we are going to take our stand when we are faced with such a refusal to recognise life as a gift and, therefore, to acknowledge the metaphysical reality of sonship. It is pretty clear, at least, that we cannot simply condemn such refusals as infringing certain rules of morality, which we assert to be self-evident and beyond discussion; if we are to protest against this kind of nihilism, it can only be in the name of a sort of depth of reality which nihilism refuses to recognise, and, as it were, blots from view; it was just this very depth, in fact, that I was trying to make manifest in my book, *Homo Viator*. This ✓ deep reality that nihilism ignores, has to do this same act of recognition and acknowledgement whose central importance for our thesis I have so often underlined. It is essential to the very notion of being a father that one should recognise one's son, and acknowledge him to be one's son, and to that of being a son, that one should recognise and acknowledge one's father's fatherhood. But I am not talking at this point, naturally, of recognition in the merely legal sense. I am not envisaging the case of the man who may be forced to recognise, and to contribute to the support of, a casually begotten bastard; what we are concerned with is a much deeper and more intimate kind of recognition—and a kind of recognition that is bound up with an activity of a very actual and very vital kind. If a man, in fact, fails to show any real interest in his child, he is behaving as if he did not recognise the child as his own; we are within our rights in saying that in such a case the father does *not* recognise the child, and even that real fatherhood is lacking, at least in the human sense of the term; from a purely biological point of view, in so far as heredity is a scientific fact, it continues of course, to manifest itself, whether or not the biological father behaves like a human father. But really, of course, the notion of fatherhood has its true and full meaning only at the human level; dogs, for instance, these casual and promiscuous creatures, are not really fathers in the human sense, though there are certain animal species—one thinks particularly of birds—

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in whose behaviour there is something like an anticipatory sketch of human fatherhood. We ought to be aware, however, that in such cases we are always interpreting bird behaviour on the analogy of human behaviour ; human behaviour as we intimately experience it, is our point of departure.

What has just been said of fatherhood might also be said of sonship—though, while the father has often in the past refused to acknowledge the son, it is only in our own day that the son, except in very exceptional circumstances, has admitted his obligation to acknowledge his father as such. What is also misleading is the notion of a moral imperative, a notion really springing in the last analysis from the Ten Commandments ; "Honour thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Reflection shows us, however, that this commandment can only have meaning against the background of certain given structural social conditions ; in a world that had become entirely proletarianised, the given conditions would tend to abolish this commandment or at least to rob it of any concrete significance. This is not to say that in such conditions one would be within one's rights in not honouring one's father, but more profoundly that an entirely proletarianised world would produce an increasing number of beings who in their very depths would feel themselves as being fatherless—as being *nobody's sons*, to quote the title of a contemporary French play—and who would feel this even though the individual who had physically begotten them were still alive.

It seems clear, therefore, that the notion of human fatherhood is one that is applicable within fairly strict limits ; at one end of the scale it disappears to leave in its place a mere biological phenomenon ; at the other end the biological phenomenon disappears without destroying the essentials of human fatherhood ; I am thinking of the case of adoption—and here, too, we must look beyond legal definitions, for there can be legal adoption without the accomplishment of that spiritual act of which I am always thinking, and, on the other hand, the act can be accomplished in cases where legal adoption, for one reason or another, is impossible. The words "spiritual act" here should be taken in their strongest possible sense ; one does not become the adoptive father of somebody merely through having a sudden impulse of affection, but only through a self-commitment to which one will have to remain faithful in spite of almost certainly inevitable lapses of interest, disappointments, and setbacks. Ought we to conclude, however, from the possibility of becoming a father by adoption, that it is necessary to make a radical distinction between spiritual and biological fatherhood ? That, I think, would be a very rash thing to do. On the contrary, we ought to maintain that in normal circumstances the separation of the two kinds of fatherhood is something that ought not to be brought about, and even ought not to be able to be brought about ; where there is such a separation it is because of some flaw in the individual's physical framework or social situation. But let us be wary about what we intend to convey here by the word "normal" ; I am not thinking of a norm in an abstract sense ; some formal rule of ethics whose basis would be hard to discover and which would subsist somehow or other beyond the world of everyday experience, but rather to a certain fullness of life which, when spiritual fatherhood is separated from biological fatherhood, becomes something for which the reflective consciousness feels a certain homesickness. Thus parents who

have adopted a child, and love the child with all their heart, cannot fail to feel a certain regret, except in very exceptional cases, that it is not the child of their own bodies. The exceptional cases I have in mind are those where, if the child was physically their own, they would risk transmitting to it certain hereditary weaknesses ; but a satisfaction of that kind is, after all, an extremely relative satisfaction—taking its rise in something that is in itself a smart, a wound, a humiliation.

It is, in fact, very possible that in our actual world a dissociation between the spiritual and the biological is becoming quite generally operative ; but this is only one more proof that our world is a broken world ; it is only a broken world that could give rise to such practices, for instance, as artificial insemination.

Such topics may seem strangely alien to such readers as are the victims of an illusion which consists in the last analysis of adhering to that conception of the spirit as something at the opposite pole from the flesh, or as something completely transcending the flesh, against which I have never ceased to protest. In a very general fashion indeed, one might say that the difficulty that we have continually to face up to, lies in the very fact that the spiritual seems to wish to claim for itself the dignity of a separate existence, whereas in a deeper sense it only constitutes itself effectively *as* spirit on condition of becoming flesh. The example, that we have taken already, of adoption is very significant in this new regard ; adoptive parents only really become parents on condition that they lavish on their adopted child the most actual, the most material, and the most humble cares and services, the same which they would have bestowed upon him if they had really engendered him. In this sense adoption is a kind of grafting of the flesh on to the spirit, and it cannot be anything else ; it is wonderful that it should be possible at all, and in fact its possibility shows up better than anything else the limits of every philosophy of life that claims to base itself on purely biological considerations.

Yet, on the other hand, nothing can give us a more intense feeling of insecurity and strangeness than this human situation of ours ; the situation of being placed at the point of juncture, or of co-articulation, of the vital and the spiritual. It is not a matter of the sense of strangeness that would be felt by an observer of the situation from the outside—but of the strangeness that is felt from within by somebody who recognises the situation as his own. Let us recall, for that matter—what goes without saying to anyone who has grasped the significance of these investigations of ours—that the very notion of observing the situation from the outside is, in this context, a meaningless one. It is of the very nature of our situation that it can be grasped only from within its own depths. But at the same time in a world like our own, which is becoming more and more completely subjected to the dominion of objective knowledge and scientific technique, everything, by an almost fatal necessity, tends to fall out as if this observation of our situation from the outside were a real possibility. From that falsely objective point of view, the very phrase “spiritual reality” is in danger of becoming emptied of all meaning ; or rather what is still *called* “spiritual reality” is offered for our consideration as a mere superstructure, an epiphenomenal garment that masks, and rather thinly masks, a basic hurrying of matter : it might be demonstrated that an assumption of this sort, shared by both parties, is the

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main-spring of that strange convergence so often noted by scientists, at least
 in France, of strictly biological generalisations, on the one hand, with Marxist
 speculations on the other. Both biologists and Marxists are seeking to
 arrive at an interpretation of life at the purely objective level ; only, unfortu-
 nately, the kind of objectiveness they are aiming at entails a preliminary,
 and complete, elimination of the subject as such.

We know, of course, that we are not, from our own point of view to
 understand the notion of the subject as it has traditionally been understood
 by idealist philosophers. Neither the transcendental ego of Kant nor the
 monad of Leibniz have any place in our argument. It is precisely in order to
 underline that fact that I have been emphasising the notion of the family
 bond and its mysterious character. At the point we have now reached, it
 is on this new and difficult notion of *mystery* that we must concentrate.

When I talk about the mystery of the family bond some of my readers
 will, I fancy, be disconcerted. The family is an institution ; it is a fact ; it
 is something which can be studied, at least in some of its aspects, by the
 methods of positive science. In talking about its *mystery*, am I not bringing
 in a touch of vague literary floweriness at a level of discourse where such
 battered ornaments of speech have no proper place ? However, as we have
 seen already, the situation with which we are concerned, in our special
 context, is one whose true nature can be grasped or acknowledged only
 from the inside ; there are no objective statements that can be made about
 it from the outside, for by definition, it is *our* situation, the situation we
 cannot get outside of. That is why the kind of writer who makes the
 mystery of the family palpable to us is always, for example, the novelist
 rather than the historian of social institutions. However, though these
 remarks help to clear the ground a little, we have not yet succeeded in giving
 the term *mystery* that very precise and almost technical sense which alone
 can justify its introduction into the vocabulary of a philosopher.

I distinguish between *problem* and *mystery* in the following manner :

A problem is something which I meet, which I find complete before me, but
 which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in
 which I am myself involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as “ a sphere
 where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning
 and its initial validity.” A genuine problem is subject to an appropriate technique
 by the exercise of which it is defined ; whereas a mystery, by definition, transcends
 every conceivable technique. It is, no doubt, always possible (logically and
 psychologically) to degrade a mystery so as to turn it into a problem. But this is a
 fundamentally vicious proceeding, whose springs might perhaps be discovered in
 a kind of corruption of the intelligence. The *problem of evil*, as the philosophers
 have called it, supplies us with a particularly instructive example of this degradation.

Just because it is of the essence of mystery to be recognised or capable of recog-
 nition, it may also be ignored and actively denied. It then becomes reduced to
 something I have “ heard talked about,” but which I refuse as only being “ for
 other people ” ; and that in virtue of an illusion which these “ others ” are
 deceived by, but which I myself claim to have detected.

We must carefully avoid all confusion between the mysterious and the unknow-
 able. The unknowable is in fact only the limiting case of the problematic, which
 cannot be actualised without contradiction. The recognition of mystery, on the
 contrary, is an essentially positive act of the mind, the supremely positive act in
 virtue of which all positivity may perhaps be strictly defined. In this sphere

everything seems to go on as if I found myself acting on an intuition which I possess without immediately knowing myself to possess it—an intuition which cannot be, strictly speaking, self-conscious and which can grasp itself only through the modes of experience in which its image is reflected, and which it lights up by being thus reflected in them.¹

And perhaps it is at this point that we at last get a precise notion of one of the essential notes of the type of philosophy that is being put forward here. It should be now very clear that a philosophy of this sort is essentially of the nature of a kind of appeal to the listener or the reader, of the kind of call upon his inner resources. In other words, such a philosophy could never be completely embodied into a kind of dogmatic exposition, of which the listener or reader would merely have to grasp the content. It is, in fact, from this very point of view that the question of the opposition between problem and mystery ought to be approached. When I am dealing with a problem, I am trying to discover a solution that can become common property, that consequently can, at least in theory, be rediscovered by anybody at all. But we have seen that this idea of a validity for "anybody at all" or of a thinking in general has less and less application the more deeply one penetrates into the inner courts of philosophy: into, that is to say, that spiritual reality with which, in fact, our investigations have been concerned. In the last analysis, the idea of an *acquisition* (as it is an acquisition to know how to speak French, or how to play the piano, or how to work out quadratic equations) is inadequate in such a context as this. The greatness of philosophy, though it will seem to most people the disappointing side of philosophy, is just this impossibility of regarding it as a discipline which can be acquired; where we are concerned with the highest matters, with, if you like, presences, we cannot hope to come across anything at all comparable to the permanent acquisitions of the elementary sciences. I underline, there, the word *elementary*: for I think it is true that when we leave the teachable elements of, say, mathematics and climb up towards the principles, the enabling acts of the science, our perspectives begin to blur, just as they do in philosophy. We cannot be sure after all, that in a hundred years from now men may not have a notion of the principles of mathematics that will be different in very many ways indeed from the notion that prevails to-day.

But the philosopher finds himself in a completely different situation, and it is essential to *his* activity that he should reflect deeply on this situation, in order to get a gradually more and more ample insight into it. Now one thing that we may feel that we have really established is that this process of getting an insight has essentially nothing to do with the objective as such; we do not get an insight into something whose reality, by definition, lies completely outside our own. We have been forced to insist more and more emphatically on the presence of one's self to itself, or on the presence to it of the other that is not really separable from it. And we have, in fact, real grounds for stating that we discern an organic connection between presence and mystery. For, in the first place, every presence is mysterious and, in the second place, it is very doubtful whether the word mystery can really be properly used in the case where a presence is not, in the very least,

making itself somehow for topic, I brought up the presence near one of From the point of view of physical activity is defined the sleeping child is completely power; from that point on with the child. But from it is just because this being mercy, that it is also invulnerable all that the strongest and can imagine would confer invulnerability. This sacred what we might call a certain type (not, of course the guest has been regarded defenceless he is. In civil of the type dominated by might be said, the idea authority the more this the wounded, towards the later absurd: and, in the assertion of the absurd practical shapes.

The above remarks may value. But that would just presented does throw tion and mystery around up. When we talk about defenceless, we are not ceremonial attitude of which might claim to discover that philosophy, if it is to stand. It is something real.

And it is with an attempt draw to a close. Probably it is best to start by seeking first glance, it seems that I am relating it to a certain way in which I organise central interest, say, for everything that seems of little positive importance, and importance. Experience rejected or ignored, that liable to collapse like card else in their place, sometimes or greed had merely masquerade yet in a position to define apprehension, is not the

¹ This quotation is from the English translation of M. Gabriel Marcel's book *Être et Avoir* (1935) by Katharine Farrer—*Being and Having* (1949) reviewed in this *Journal*, October, 1949.—[Ed.]

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M. Gabriel Marcel's book *Étre et avoir*
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taking itself somehow felt. In the course of a recent conversation on this
topic, I brought up the example of the mysterious character that attaches to
the presence near one of a sleeping person, especially of a sleeping child.
from the point of view of physical activity, or at least in so far as the notion
of physical activity is defined in relation to the possible grasping of things,
the sleeping child is completely unprotected and appears to be utterly *in our*
power ; from that point of view, it is permissible for us to do what we like
with the child. But from the point of view of mystery, we might say that
this is just because this being is completely unprotected, that it is utterly at our
mercy, that it is also invulnerable or sacred. And there can be no doubt at
all that the strongest and most irrefutable mark of sheer barbarism that we
can imagine would consist in the refusal to recognise this mysterious
vulnerability. This sacredness of the unprotected lies also at the roots of
that we might call a metaphysics of hospitality. In all civilisations of a
certain type (not, of course, by any means merely in Christian civilisations),
the guest has been regarded as all the more sacred, the more feeble and
defenceless he is. In civilisations of a certain type I say : not, I might add,
of the type dominated by the ideas of efficiency and output. The more, it
might be said, the ideas of efficiency and output assert their supreme
authority the more this attitude of reverence towards the guest, towards
the wounded, towards the sick, will appear at first incomprehensible and
ever absurd : and, in fact, in the world around us, we know that this
assertion of the absurdity of forbearance and generosity is taking very
practical shapes.

The above remarks may appear to have a merely cursory and superficial
value. But that would be a mistaken judgement. The example we have
just presented does throw into very bold relief that co-articulation of reflection
and mystery around which the whole of this argument has been built
up. When we talk about the sacredness of the defenceless, because it is
defenceless, we are not dealing merely with a pragmatic and in a sense
ceremonial attitude of which the sociologist, or perhaps the psychoanalyst,
might claim to discover the origins. It is precisely against all such claims
that philosophy, if it is to be true to its own nature, must take its strictest
stand. It is something really *essential* that is here at stake.

And it is with an attempt to define this term, *essential*, that I would like to
now to a close. Probably in seeking to discover what we mean by *essential*
it is best to start by seeking to discover what we mean by *important*. At a
first glance, it seems that when I decide that something or other is important
in relating it to a certain purpose of mine or perhaps, more generally to a
way in which I organise my life. If I orientate my existence towards some
central interest, say, for instance, the search for pleasure, power or money,
everything that seems likely to subserve this interest will strike as having
positive importance, and everything that does not, as having negative
importance. Experience, however, shows us, and its lessons cannot be
rejected or ignored, that our special ways of organising our lives are always
able to collapse like card-houses under our very eyes ; leaving something
in their place, something which the original structures of lust, ambition
and greed had merely masked from us. This *something else*, which we are not
in a position to define, and of which we have not perhaps even a direct
comprehension, is not the *important*, but *the essential*, the "one thing needful."

It is obvious that the believer, at least, has a name for this "something else": he will say that the one thing needful is salvation, but the latter is a term of which philosophy ought not to make a premature use. The first question, rather, that can be asked at a strictly philosophical level is whether one can or cannot, affirm that in the life of the individual something of absolute, not merely of relative, importance is at stake. But we can acknowledge even at this moment that by our labours up to this point we have cleared away some of the obstacles from the path that leads to an answer to this question.

These obstacles, there can be no doubt at all, have all to do with a tendency within us to transfer the definitions and the categories that are valid only in the purely objective world into a realm of discourse where they do not properly apply. Following in the steps of Bergson, we have seen that this temptation to make a falsely objective representation of the inner world is at work not only when I am thinking of such a general concept as time, but when I am thinking of what I call my own particular life and history. We have thus been brought to recognise what one might call the trans-historic depth of history: which is, no doubt, the best short cut we can take towards the idea of Eternity. Moreover, as we shall see by and by even more clearly, the nexus between the ideas of Eternity and mystery is as strict a one as can be. In the first place, Eternity cannot be anything other than a mystery, we cannot, as it were, figure it to ourselves in terms of a map, even an endless map, that could be rolled out on a table. The spatial images through which we get our first insight, no doubt always a rough and inadequate insight, and one needing much correction, into so many other concepts, are here, even in the very first instance, totally out of place. In the second place, every mystery is itself like a river, which flows into the Eternal, as into a sea. All this, of course, must be taken in a very vague and general sense; but it is true for each of us, and true especially in relation to our roots in the family, true, that is, in relation to the conditions under which we have been able to make our appearance in the world.

But to what degree, and within what limits, is it possible for us to raise ourselves above that condition of *being in the world* which is our specific mode of existence? To what degree are we within our rights in turning our glances up towards a higher sphere than this? What are—at the point where we are supposed not yet to have received the enlightenment of any special revelation—these floating, glittering, these unfixed lights, that can to some degree throw light into the obscurest depths of our beings? These are the formidable problems that still remain to be faced. I am under no illusion that we are moving forward on a plain and beaten path; may we be granted that help that is rarely refused to those who are animated by the love of truth alone. Of truth alone. That is indeed the first and the last word, alpha and omega; for every society pronounces sentence of doom or acquittal on itself according to the throne of state which it reserves, both within itself and high above itself, for that Truth which is not a thing but a spirit.

PARIS

GABRIEL MARCEL.

AMERICAN PROBLEMS

PROFESSOR OF CL

Professor of Cl

THE American problems are as has affected American literature, the whole phase of concern demarcation with time and again thinking, and by conceive of Lincoln group.

America presents the fact that the we isolation from the were felt on the not so great as populated country atmosphere was mentality to do Lincoln differed men.

It is only late going optimism reached the conclusion I much doubt. But at least the good as well as older generation good they took

And why should America was east of wealth, European shores. The country to exploit them

As for more Good is a position there has always

Gabriel Marcel: Fidelity--a Character Study
of One Tragic Figure in Each of Three Plays

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty
Of the College of Liberal Arts of St. Meinrad Seminary
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

J. Patrick Gaza
May, 1965
St. Meinrad Seminary
College of Liberal Arts
St. Meinrad, Indiana



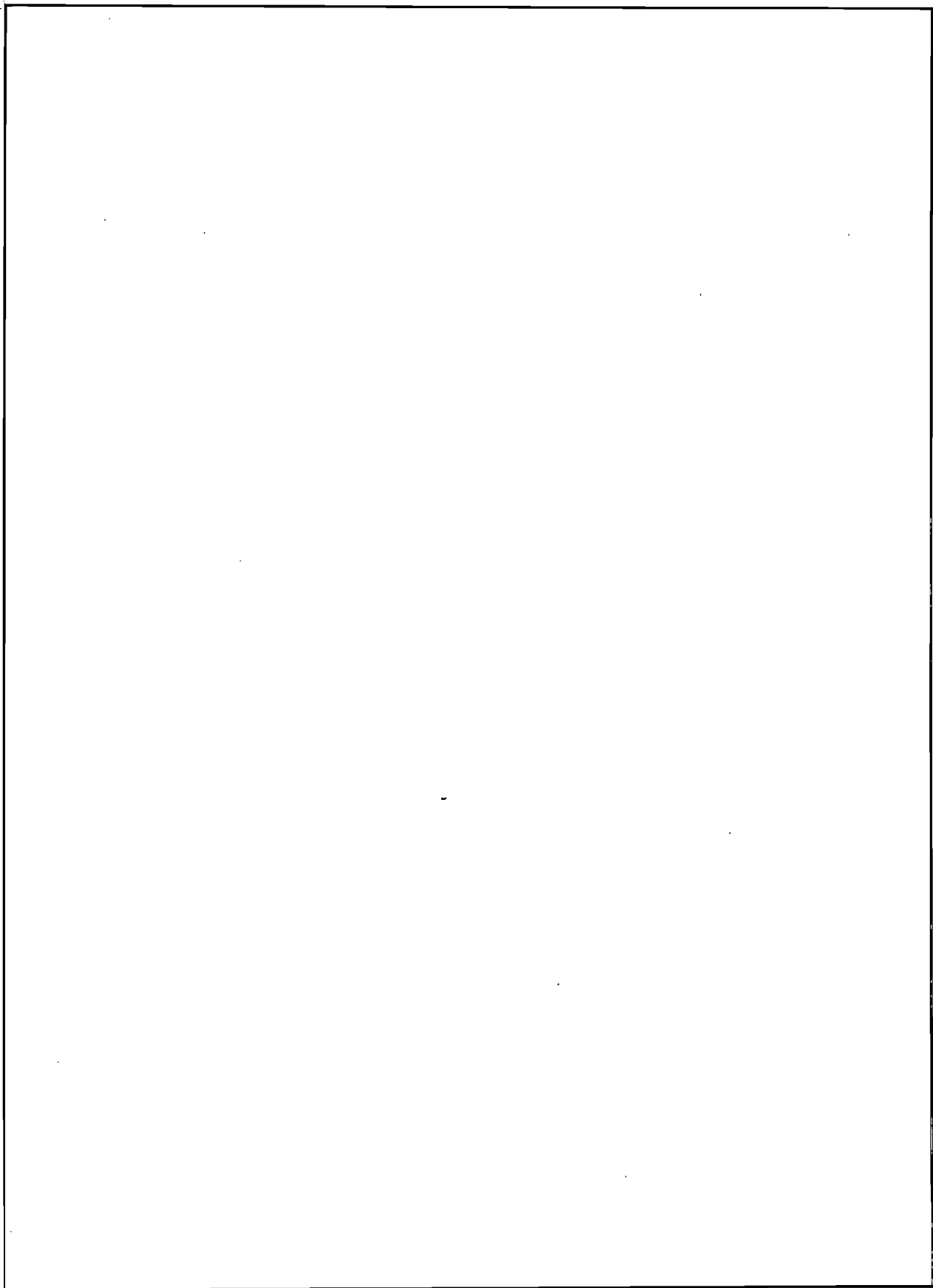


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to
V. L. S.
and
A. M. G.

PREFACE

Altruism... Paranoia...

The mere juxtaposition of these two words seems paradoxical, almost sacrilegious; nor can any rational, systematic justification be given for their -- adequation. Rather, a growing-conscious awareness, not unlike that of one's own existence and relevance, has forced the acceptance of this reality. "Growing-conscious" because there has been no sense of "about to be"; all of a sudden it's there, and only by looking back can one recognize its "development." But the world is lived "forward" and no amount of back-tracking and scientific investigation will uncover the full realization of this unity. Only a superficial recalling of specific circumstances, variously contributing and of unknown rank and importance, can be managed.

Ayn Rand's Ellsworth Toohey¹ was the incarnation of an idea of altruism which I encountered two years ago. His dogmatic "everything that can't be ruled must go" characterized his humanitarianism. Consciously, I knew that his was an extreme position, and that Howard Roark's "objectivism" --his determination to build his kind of building by his own standards--was the obvious extreme reaction. But unconsciously, perhaps subconsciously, Roark's condemnation of altruism² seems to have been my "ruling passion"--indirectly and negatively.

This seems abstruse ... I have yet to grasp its implications

myself. I naturally sought a synthesis of the extremes, since neither was adequate but both were necessary. Yet, I think, because of an idealistic preconception, I was drawn toward altruism. My reactions were labelled "paranoid" because I tactlessly exposed an awkward classroom situation where both teacher and students were play-acting. At the same time, a very close friend of mine tried to conform to the pattern expected, demanded by her superiors and peers, and suffered a nervous breakdown. That Kierkegaardian "To thine ownself be true" seemed so necessary and so unattainable!

In both instances, my immediate reaction was hostile. Hostile to the audacity of giving advice. I felt that the "advisors" didn't understand the situation and only made matters worse with their superficial comments and criticisms. I didn't realize that perhaps my judgment amounted to the same thing.

Yet these situations remained abstract, for I was withdrawn from those circumstances. Consciously and often vociferously, I clung to what was becoming an obsession: Be yourself--show them it can be done! Yet I realized, very clearly, that this required a definite consideration and regard for the other. I read about things one shouldn't do to others. People told me what I shouldn't do.

So very meticulously I set out to not do what I shouldn't. I acceded to the advice. But the utopia I was striving for failed to materialize; rather it seemed to be deliberately frustrated even before its inception.

Why?

I don't feel that this question is peculiar to me. Students in Berkeley, California; Negroes and whites in Selma, Alabama; seminarians at

Saint Meinrad, Indiana, seem to be asking it.

Why?

The present generation has been labelled, at least in part, as the "new breed" and soundly criticized, even denounced in many circles for being so inquisitive, so disrespectful regarding tradition. This phenomenon is not confined to students, but involves married and professional people.³ Freedom of conscience has joined the ranks of "rights to be guaranteed by society." But upon what is this freedom grounded? Where are its roots? What is the "spirit" which must underly the "law"? Can man survive the threat of freedom?

INTRODUCTION

Quel qu'en puisse être le sens ultime, l'univers où nous avons été jetés ne saurait nous satisfaire; ayons le courage de le déclarer une fois pour toutes.⁴

Ce que ma démarche tendait en définitive à exclure, c'était la notion d'une pensée qui définirait en quelque sorte objectivement la structure du réel et se regarderait dès lors comme qualifiée pour statuer sur lui. Je posais au contraire en principe que l'entreprise ne pouvait se poursuivre qu'à l'intérieur d'une réalité en face de laquelle le philosophe ne peut jamais se poser comme on se campe devant un tableau pour le contempler.⁵

Characteristically, even Marcel's "explicitation" of the background of his philosophic convictions⁶ reveals his whole approach. Three features are immediately evident: (1) he avoids any systematic presentation, yet is thoroughly realistic and precise in his discussion of various factors (2) which are usually expressed negatively, or (3) if positively, not dogmatically, but usually prefixed by "a sort of" and like expressions. On the one hand, his penchant for exactness and clarity of expression does not drive him into a Cartesian world of "clear and distinct ideas," nor on the other hand into Nietzschean nihilism or Kantian transcendental idealism because of the connatural opaqueness of reality.⁷

Rather "j'en ai la conviction, dans la mesure où mon expérience comporte encore une part non exploitée, non réfléchie, que je puis garder la possibilité de créer sur le plan philosophique."⁸ Thus M.-M. Davy structured her description of Marcel to

rendre accessible une pensée qui peut apparaître de prime
abord d'un contact difficile; il s'adresse au public cultivé

non spécialisé dans les études philosophiques; son ambition est surtout de répondre au désir d'étudiants qui nourrissent dans leur coeur la passion de la vérité.⁹

Marcel is interested primarily in truth, dynamic and transcendent. But this ever-seeking wonder is not the result of an arbitrary decision or a gratuitous assumption. Nor is his philosophical inquiry a matter of academic dedication and disinterested objectivity. His work is his life, his life his work.¹⁰ Any analysis of Marcel's ideas--unfair though it be to a man who has always detested the cold and impassioned technique of such an approach to reality--presupposes a knowledge of his life, of a life fraught with suffering and solitude and warmly refreshed in the communion with reality, living and dead, personal and interpersonal.

Gabriel Marcel was born in Paris, December 7, 1889. His father, Henri, a State Counsellor, was at one time also a French minister to Sweden, and later director of the Beaux-Arts at the Bibliotheque nationale and the Musees nationaux.¹¹ Little is known of his mother, a Jewess, who died when he was four. His mother's sister, Marguerite, raised him and eventually married his father. In describing his family, Marcel does not resort to physical and apparenential characteristics, but rather--as he treats the characters in his plays--presents their attitudes toward life and the atmosphere these conflicting ideologies create.¹²

His father, though a baptized Catholic, had turned to agnosticism at an early age, preferring the free-mind ideas of Taine, Spencer, and Renan to the absolute Catholic thought "tainted with absurd superstitions." Marcel saw in his father "a kind of basic French paganism"; but this revolt against "the subjection of human nature to Catholic asceticism" was counter-balanced by a strictly disciplined life and a highly developed sense of duty

to the state.¹³

His aunt, a Jewish convert to Protestantism, also rejected dogmatism, but to her the absurdity of existence could only be met by self-denial, helping one's fellow sufferers, and extreme self-discipline. It was she who created "the atmosphere of moral scruples and of hygienic precautions" which drove Marcel to the haven of idealism, safe from impure empiricism. Quite naturally, Marguerite overshadowed his mother; and yet, though he had few visual memories of her,

elle m'est restée présente, mystérieusement elle a toujours été avec moi. [...] et je crois comprendre aujourd'hui que cette étrange dualité au coeur de ma vie entre un être disparu dont par pudeur ou par désespoir on parlait assez rarement, et sur lequel une sorte de crainte révérentielle me retenait de poser des questions¹⁴ et un autre être, extraordinairement affirmé, dominateur, et qui se croyait tenu de projeter la lumière dans les moindres encoignures de mon existence--je soupçonne, dis-je, que cette disparité, ou cette polarité secrète de l'invisible et du visible a exercé sur ma pensée, et bien au delà de ma pensée exprimée, sur mon être même, une influence occulte qui a dépassé infiniment toutes celles dont mes écrits présentent des traces discernables.¹⁵

With his father always busy with his work, his aunt and her mother cared for him and their solicitude caused much of the tension and anxiety in his life. He was bright and both women were overly conscious of his achievements in the classroom.¹⁶ They were further vexed because of his frequent illnesses, because these kept him from school.

School for Marcel was anything but bearable. Even today his judgment of the French scholastic system is colored by the anxiety he felt as a young student. Unlike other boys, he was not interested in playing hooky to go fishing. But he feels that the school had ignored and still ignores "the facts and particularly the modes of human growth." Such an attitude in a boy of eight would hardly be considered less than precocious--and

probably a bit snotty. But his father's attitude tempered an otherwise unbearable situation.

In complementary opposition to his sister-in-law, who expressed her agnosticism in ethical rigorism, Henri Marcel turned to aesthetic expression. His love for music and the theater was incarnate in his only child. The younger Marcel did not seek aesthetic satisfaction alone, however. For him the theater was a "a privileged form of expression."

Sans bien entendu que ma prédilection pour le dialogué fût alors en état de rendre compte d'elle-même, mon goût me portait naturellement non vers le récit ou vers la description, mais vers un art qui se dissimule en quelque sorte derrière les sujets qu'il confronte. Je l'ai dit ailleurs, j'ai ressenti de très bonne heure une sorte d'ivresse non seulement à évoquer des êtres distincts de moi, mais à m'identifier assez complètement à eux pour devenir leur truchement. Il serait vain de se demander à quoi tint chez moi cette disposition. Le fait que mon père avait un sens inné du théâtre et était un lecteur de pièces incomparable n'est certainement pas négligeable. Mais j'ai toujours pensé que les personnages de théâtre que je me plaisais à faire dialoguer me tinrent lieu à l'origine des frères et soeurs dont je déplorais cruellement l'absence.¹⁷

In drama and in the "supra-rational unity of music,"¹⁸ Marcel found, not a way out from, but an approach to the many insolubilia of life--concretely presented to him at that time as the family quarrels and misunderstandings which were only confused by words.¹⁹ It is no wonder that these two arts appealed to him. They furnished him with concrete reactions to the technical sterility of the classroom--even the most uncultured can distinguish the technically perfect execution from the aesthetically pleasing presentation of a Beethoven symphony or a Shakespearean tragedy; they created for the lonely only child a community of super-imaginary characters; and they gave vent to the creativity of a lad who was not about to be bound by the stultifying conventions of the world of problems.

Nor was his reaction confined to the world of fantasy. When his father was appointed minister of Sweden, the eight-year-old Marcel found himself free from the classroom for a whole year. He spent all his time getting to know the other children of the diplomatic corps and becoming at home to the varied and strange lands and customs.²⁰ The lycée to which he was sent eighteen months after his return was the more stifling for this experience; but the ease with which he obtained his every desire from his aunt and grandmother enabled Marcel to indulge his passion for travel in trips to the country around Paris and journeys into the Swiss Alps and southwestern Germany with his father.

This ethical-aesthetic conflict²¹ thus manifested itself in every phase of his life: the stuffy lycée and the refreshing trips to the country; the solitude of being an only child--and a sickly one at that--and the dramatic conversations with created persons; an idealistic flight from the contamination of empiricism and the hidden expression of the theatre;²² insoluble problems and the supra-rational unity of music.

At this point one might expect a Kierkegaardian leap to the sphere of faith, but such an allusion is unfair to Marcel. He would hardly run from the situation at hand. Yet, once convinced of the need for transcendence, he would ascertain the conditions and limits of the reality of that sphere before even contemplating, not a leap, but recognition of a Fall.²³

Speaking of faith, one is immediately drawn to ask concerning the religious formation of today's foremost "Christian existentialist."²⁴ Marcel admits²⁵ that he did not consciously miss the religious training he observed in his classmates. In fact, no doubt under the influence of the agnosticism of the Marcel household, he could only imagine the outside

possibility of an intelligent person being Protestant--because Protestantism implied private judgment--but to a Catholic was silly, even hypocritical.²⁶

Patterns seem to be emerging, though Marcel would be the last to define their precise nature.

Sans doute, mes amis, y a-t-il quelque chose de choquant et même d'absurde à paraître aligner sur une table comme des jetons ou comme des pièces anatomiques les dispositions souvent presque inébranlables qui présidèrent à mes recherches. C'est pourtant là, me semble-t-il, le seul moyen de comprendre ce que mon entreprise avait en soi de hasardeux, et aussi de rendre compte du caractère presque informe que présentèrent mes premiers écrits philosophiques.²⁷

No, Gabriel Marcel would never confine by defining; but, on the other hand, he would never consent to confuse by merely suggesting. His philosophical inquiries depend as much upon his style and approach as they do upon his life. Perhaps a word about his choice of medium may clarify--will surely introduce any discussion of the modern philosopher and modern philosophy according to Gabriel Marcel.

Seymour Cain, in his introductory essay to the thought of Gabriel Marcel,²⁸ overlaps his consideration of media and approaches, but some distinctions are clear. Marcel has a definite preference for the diary mode of presentation,²⁹ as well as the phenomenological essay. The reader accompanies the author in his intuitive grasp for meaning, in his response to the evocation of the phenomenon.

For Marcel's philosophical stance, so to speak, is auditory, rather than visual. He does not observe, but responds to reality. This harks back to his appreciation of music. The supra-rational unity does not emanate from the mere listening; but only when a person actually plays or writes music does he experience this union of content and method. The music of Bach

furnished Marcel with his first understanding of the religious experience. Improvisation for him is not merely virtuosic self-expression, but the answer to an inward call--dialogue.

However, this is not romantic flight and escape from the real situation of insolubilia that he experienced at home.

Thus in Marcel's life-work there are three paths: first, the way of music, of spontaneous improvisation, pointing to the realm where communion is fully achieved; second, the way of metaphysical meditation and phenomenological analysis, locating in thought the beacons and reefs in man's spiritual journey; and third, the way of dramatic presentation, acting out in concrete characters and situations what is explored independently in the metaphysical meditations.³⁰

Marcel continually emphasizes³¹ the role of drama in the development of his thought. It is in drama that the concrete expresses itself, is not bracketed off into concepts and ideas to be analyzed in laboratory sterility. Perhaps Marcel's distinction between mystery and problem will clarify this approach. Marcel first experienced this insight or syneidesis in October, 1932.

October 22nd

The Position of the Ontological Mystery: Its Concrete Approaches.

This is the proposed title for my paper to the Marseilles Philosophical Society. The phrase "mystery of being, ontological mystery" as against "problem of being, ontological problem," has suddenly come to me in these last few days. It has enlightened me.

Metaphysical thought--reflection trained on mystery.

But it is an essential part of a mystery that it should be acknowledged; metaphysical reflection presupposes this acknowledgement, which is outside its own sphere.

Distinguish between the Mysterious and the Problematic. A problem is something met with which bars my passage. It is before me in its entirety. A mystery, on the other hand, is something in which I find myself caught up, and whose essence is therefore not to be before me in its entirety. It is as though in this province the distinction between in me and before me loses its meaning.³²

And it is in drama, as in music, that this interpenetration, this "intersubjectivity" of the way and the what, that man's real situation can be presented. Thus drama for Marcel is not an aesthetic escape into the world of make-believe. Nor on the other hand, is it a didactic technique explaining what life should be all about. It is the concrete acting out of life in situation. But it also furnishes the basis for philosophical reflection and as such concentrates on individual reaction to this situation. It is highly cerebral, with little, often no attention given to physical description and action.³³ Before any analysis of his plays can be had, however, a word must be said regarding a few dominant ideas of this philosopher-dramatist.

"Dominant ideas," because Gabriel Marcel is not a systematic philosopher in any sense of the word. His approach is one of inquiry (recherche) or exploration.³⁴ Yet this search is not aimed at a pre-notion, an object which can be observed in its totality before the researcher. It is a presence, a mystery, beyond and within the philosopher. That is, the philosopher is an explorer, open to reality, eager to receive, animated by wonder, ready to answer a call. It is precisely here, as a response to a call, that Marcel relates philosophy to life.³⁵

For despite, rather because of increased impersonalizing socialization and technology, human experience has lost its ontological weight, has lost its sense of mystery. Technical manipulations and statistical calculations give "yes" and "no" answers; questions demanding more are not asked. And it is here where the philosopher must plant his feet and ask the questions, to resurrect wonder and the "ontological need," which must be ans-

were to give meaning to life.

Thus, the central question of Marcel's philosophical inquiry reduces to "What am I?" The answer, vague and ambiguous--clear and open as it may be, presupposes various "notions" employed by this poet-philosopher. Some thoughts and reflections on these will assist our discussion. But it must be remembered that these are not definitions.

As pointed out above, Marcel turned to idealism in his philosophical search. This was his natural reaction to the "impure empiricism," following upon his hope life. But his love for drama and music, as well as his reading of Bradley's Appearance and Reality,³⁶ turned him from idealist abstraction. Fleeing the Hegelian synthetic One and the Kantian consciousness in general, Marcel adopted a concrete philosophy.³⁷ He himself declines to assert this as an entirely new approach, but it was definitely opposed to the idealism patent at the turn of the century.

He summarizes his approach to reality in four words: "Person -- engagement -- community -- reality."³⁸ Beginning with the immediately known, which he characterizes as being-in-a-situation³⁹--the fundamental fact, he describes being variously: as a mystery beyond the before me and the in front of me, as "that which withstands analysis," Freudian or otherwise,⁴⁰ as impossible to think of as an object.⁴¹ Such a radical departure from traditional patterns of thought required a new approach.

Thus Marcel employs a concrete approach,⁴² the phenomenological method,⁴³ calling for a constant revaluing of words.⁴⁴ The traditional soul-body and self-reality problems are specified as incarnation and participation, respectively.

Le monde existe pour moi, au sens fort du mot exister, dans la mesure où j'entretiens avec lui des relations du type de

celles que j'entretiens avec mon propre corps--c'est-à-dire pour autant que je suis incarné.⁴⁵

... the infinitely mysterious act by which an essence assumes a body ... to which modern philosophers only cease to give their attention in so far as they have lost the intelligence's essential gift, that is to say the faculty of wonder.⁴⁶

Participation

is not a fact, not a mental endowment, it is a requirement of free thought, a requirement which becomes actual in posing itself, since its realization does not depend on any extraneous condition. We can, however, distinguish two stages of participation, according to whether it is defined as an object of thought, or whether thought, renouncing its function as a thinking subject, gives itself wholly to participation: this second phase alone deserves to be called Faith: Faith is in a certain sense more than an immanent act since it is the accomplishment of a dialectic wholly directed towards transcendence. It is manifest, moreover --and it is thus that its transcendence is to be defined-- that this Faith can in no way make itself explicit in a judgment, even in a judgment of existence, for the subject which makes judgments of existence is already engaged in existing ... Faith is thus not the affirmation of an existence; the problem of the existence of God--a problem completely devoid of metaphysical meaning--could only have occurred to crude intellectualism imprisoned in empirical modes of thought concerned with contingent objects. Maimonides was right in pointing out that existence could not possibly apply to God.⁴⁷

Par la foi j'affirme la paternité divine de tous les hommes; et d'autre part je ne puis me penser moi-même comme participant à Dieu qu'en tant que j'ai foi en lui, c'est-à-dire que cette participation ne peut et ne doit m'apparaître comme un fait dont je prends ou non conscience. Pour les autres hommes au contraire je suis obligé de dissocier la participation de la foi; car la foi des autres n'est rien pour moi, elle n'est pensable à aucun titre.⁴⁸

Faith for Marcel is man's only hope in the world of technique,⁴⁹ the appeal to the transcendent, "to a level of being, an order of the spirit, which is also the level and order of grace, of mercy, of charity."⁵⁰ It is this grace of faith, the grace that is faith which Sartre and Camus have ignored.⁵¹

It is the transcendent which furnishes itself as basis for value as "essentially something which does not allow itself to be chosen."⁵² It is a suprapersonal appeal having "proper existence only for metaphysical reflection."⁵³ This metaphysical reflection is what Marcel calls secondary reflection or second-level reflection, which is essentially synthetic and recuperative, as opposed to primary reflection, which is essentially analytic.⁵⁴ That is, "réflexion braquée sur un mystère,"⁵⁵ "recollection that has become self-conscious,"⁵⁶ "which seeks, as it were, to establish the conditions of primary reflection and of the more mechanical operations of the understanding."⁵⁷ It is the duty of this type of reflection to expose the vicious circle of being and having.⁵⁸

Participation, as James Collins emphasizes,⁵⁹ is in being as transcendent, effected "by gaining awareness of one's personal significance and joining in the community of persons." To be is to be with. Esse is coesse.⁶⁰ This is the ontological mystery. Presence⁶¹ and intersubjectivity⁶² here become correlative terms, almost synonyms. It is here that liberty is found.⁶³

And it is this reality which secondary reflection alone can fathom.

The metaproblematic that is, mystery is a participation on which my reality as subject is built.⁶⁴

... the concrete approaches to the ontological mystery should not be sought in the scale of logical thought, the objective reference of which gives rise to a prior question. They should rather be sought in the elucidation of certain data which are spiritual in their own right, such as fidelity, hope, and love.⁶⁵

Love is intimately connected with intersubjectivity, and thus with the whole of Marcel's philosophy.⁶⁶ Love finds its criterior in hope⁶⁷ and fidelity.

"Being as the place of fidelity." At a certain moment of time this formula is emblazoned across Marcel's consciousness with an irresistible suggestiveness, as if its truth were the fountain out of which the multiple insights of his thought spring and to which they return. And with good reason. For his prolonged meditation on the ontological implications of fidelity will easily serve as a paradigm for Marcel's philosophical method; in the course of it we gradually come to understand how a descent into intersubjectivity is simultaneously an ascent into transcendence.⁶⁸

Marcel has worked various phenomenological analyses of faith and fidelity. It is the American philosopher, Josiah Royce, whose philosophy of loyalty influenced Marcel's formulation of a concrete philosophy, rather than Søren Kierkegaard, who laid the groundwork, so to speak, for Marcel's theme.⁶⁹

Keeping in mind what was cited above concerning presence, fidelity can be described as "the active perpetuation of presence, the renewal of its benefits--of its virtue which consists in a mysterious incitement to create."⁷⁰ Presence is the factor which distinguishes fidelity from constancy or "perseverance in a certain goal."⁷¹ The latter is what we normally refer to as fidelity to a principle or a cause. But "it is always necessary that some concrete principle enter into fidelity."⁷²

Constancy in the pure state, with respect to interpersonal relations, is therefore in danger of being replaced by a struggle, at first internal, then external, which can culminate in hatred and in mutual aversion.⁷³

Such is the case of the husband who remains faithful to his wife only out of a sense of duty or honor. Marcel is not here belittling or condemning duty and honor, but only decrying the awkward situation resulting when a relationship is based only on them. But what is this concrete principle?

Faithful to the phenomenological approach, Marcel tries to elucidate the matter with a number of examples, "to distinguish various shades of meaning."

I join a party; the members and the head of the party committee only expect of me a strict and regular obedience to a certain discipline. It may be that I submit to this discipline only against my better judgment, that something within me fiercely rebels against my subjugation by the party; however, the committee and the membership are only directly concerned to the extent that a secret insubordination of this kind can lead to treason or to a future defection. It is only because of these possible consequences that somebody who divined my state of mind might be prompted to advise me to quit the party.

There is a further point which is important: it may in fact be maintained that party membership threatens either to sustain a continuous division between the words or gestures of a man and his true thoughts or feelings, or, what is no less unfortunate, to culminate in the enlistment of the soul itself, discipline becoming internalized to the point where all inner spontaneity is eliminated. The more organized the party, the more it encourages either hypocrisy or spiritual subservience; the present-day world offers us far too many ominous examples of this dilemma to make any further emphasis of this point useful.

Again, we have to show the form this problem takes with respect to the closest and perhaps the most fundamental of all personal relationships--I mean the conjugal relation. We are all acquainted with marriages where one spouse is faithful to the other only out of a pure feeling of duty, where fidelity is reduced to constancy. Let us assume that the other person perceives this; this discovery can lead to an anguishing problem for him. Can he--I mean: does he have the right to reason the way in which the friend does in the example I gave above, and release his partner?⁷⁴

The very simple example to which I refer in Being and Having is that of a promise made--no doubt on the spur of the moment--to a sick person whom one has seen in the hospital where he is laid up with an incurable disease. As I so often do, I resorted to the personal form: seized with pity at the sight of the sick person, moved by discovering that my visit caused him an unexpected joy, I promise to come to see him often. This promise is made on the basis of a certain disposition within me. A few days pass. I notice with some embarrassment that although the sick person's condition is not improved, my disposition is no longer the same. A strange remoteness has replaced the sincere and immediate sympathy that I had felt while with him. Now I think of him only abstractly. I am going to have to return and visit him since I promised to do so, but the visit now assumes a merely burdensome aspect. And I asked myself: in making this promise I took it for granted, it seems--and implicitly had the understanding if only with myself--that my inner attitude would remain the same. But now that I see how poorly I knew

myself, by what right can I make this sort of draft on the future? Or else must I think that by assuming this engagement I was telling myself: even though I shall no longer experience a few days from now the feeling which at this moment dictates my promise, I shall behave as though I were feeling the same way. For, after all, I have no right to make this unfortunate man suffer the unpredictable fluctuations in my way of feeling. However, in this case would I not be condemning myself to playing a farce by pretending to feel what I no longer feel?⁷⁵

These examples are obviously not the same, but they do have some common ground. Is it possible to make an unconditional commitment? Or must every promise of fidelity be qualified both by any subsequent change in the situation and in the disposition or attitude of the subject? And if it must be so qualified, what duty of fidelity still binds the subject after these alterations have taken place? Must one refrain from making promises entirely?

Even the very phrasing of such questions presupposes attitudes which must be rectified. The human personality infinitely transcends its instantaneous dispositions. And further, this personality has a definite capacity for influencing its future state.

The fact is that when I commit myself, I grant in principle that the commitment will not again be put in question. And it is clear that this active volition not to question something again, intervenes as an essential element in the determination of what in fact will be the case.⁷⁶

But another problem arises: How does one test the initial assurance which is the ground of fidelity? A vicious circle appears: to commit oneself requires knowing oneself, but the self can be known only insofar as it commits itself. The fallacy of a compromise, e.g., premarital relations, arises from treating fidelity as a problem, as a habit to be cultivated (nineteenth-century idealism of Kant and Fichte) or a mode of pride. That is, as objective or subjective.

In the existential tradition begun by Kierkegaard, a paradox has been encountered:

On the one hand, fidelity to a specific individual who is given in our experience, seems to the person who lives it rather than who views it from the outside, as irreducible to that feeling linking consciousness with itself or with its contents.

On the other hand, an absolute fidelity, which is therefore vowed not to a particular being, to a creature, but to God himself, is in danger of being construed today by the critical mind which is generally allied with the common sense view, as an unconscious egocentrism which ends up by hypostatizing a subjective datum.⁷⁷

In other words, though in daily life, there can be a real fidelity to a thou having objective reality, the reality of the bond can usually be questioned, allowing for the disappointment of finding an idea instead of a person.

But if this fidelity be directed to God invoked in his real being, the possibility for disappointment lessens, being a sign of my inadequacy only.

Thus, Marcel finds the solution to the paradox in its formulation:

Hence this ground of fidelity which necessarily seems precarious to us as soon as we commit ourselves to another who is unknown, seems on the other hand unshakable when it is based not, to be sure, on a distinct apprehension of God as someone other, but on a certain appeal delivered from the depths of my own insufficiency ad summam altitudinem; I have sometimes called this the absolute resort. This appeal presupposes a radical humility in the subject; a humility which is polarized by the very transcendence of the one it invokes. Here we are as it were, at the juncture of the most stringent commitment and the most desperate expectation. It cannot be a matter of counting on oneself, on one's own resources, to cope with this unbounded commitment; but in the act in which I commit myself, I at the same time extend an infinite credit to Him to whom I did so; Hope means nothing more than this.⁷⁸

This is the consecration effected by the "I believe."⁷⁹ Like hope

... belief in the strong sense of the term--not in the sense of believing that, i.e., assuming that--is always belief in a thou, i.e., in a reality, whether personal or suprapersonal, which is able to be invoked, and which is as it were, situated beyond any judgment referring to an objective datum.⁸⁰

By treating it as a problem admitting of a defined solution, by objectifying the transobjective, by attempting to verify the unverifiable,⁸¹ the reality of the belief is distorted. This situation in the ontological order is analogous to Heisenberg's theory in quantum mechanics:

... This formulation (matrix mechanics) of quantum theory is equivalent to the Schroedinger formulation (wave mechanics) but emphasizes the role played by the observer in the measurement of a physical quantity and the fact that natural limits imposed on measurements which he makes must be incorporated into a theory which purports to describe such measurements. Thus in particular to specify the momentum (p) and corresponding position (x) of a particle is strictly speaking not legitimate since the very measurement of the one will lead to an unpredictability of the other given by the Heisenberg indeterminacy relation ...⁸²

Unfortunately, Marcel does not give us a formula to apply in the ontological order.

Thus, in attempting not a synthesis of, but a middle path between materialistic and physical realism on the one hand and Kantian and Hegelian idealism on the other, Gabriel Marcel is treading a narrow road. Like the growing contingent of scientists engaged in pure research, he maintains an openness, but not that of the laboratory technician and field-work observer. Each individual has something to do with that mystery of reality.

Something of Marcel's outlook is evident in his appraisal of the efforts of Teilhard de Chardin. In a lecture given at Ursuline College, Louisville, Kentucky, on March 7, 1965, he criticized those interpreters who tended to mechanize de Chardin's evolutionary theory. Like de Chardin, he does not deny the reality and the positive contributions of technological advance; but, ever conscious of the tyranny of anonymity and function able to be wielded by this awesome power much like the tyranny of abstraction and generality consequent upon nineteenth-century rationalism, Marcel

emphasizes much more than de Chardin the role of the free person who must be faithful in responding to the inner call to intersubjectivity and transcendence.⁸³

This response of fidelity is not specified by any particular manifestation of the transcendent, but to the transcendent as incarnate in oneself, in others, in reality. Marcel objects to canonizing his thought as Catholic, no doubt because of the dogmatic overtones of such an espousal. Yet his thought is undeniably religious. His interpretation of being as Light, "as the identity at their upper limit of Love and Truth," against which he must not sin,⁸⁴ is strikingly similar to Christ's "I am the Light of the world." It is the Light Which is in us all and Which must be witnessed to by us all as It is in Itself, not by man in general, but by each individual person.

Marcel himself has been caught short trying to explain his position philosophically. He constantly has recourse to concrete situations. It is the purpose of this paper to analyze the situations of some characters from Marcel's plays in hope of finding an insight into a mystery. This will be much like imbibing the poésie révélatrice of Paul Claudel without the comfort of having the beauty of the language and symbolism to meditate on if the content remains unintelligible.

The characters: the pardoning pastor and husband, Claude Lemoyne, from Un Homme de Dieu⁸⁵; the distraught mother, Agnes Courteuil, from Croissez et Multipliez⁸⁶; the older generation Alfred Champel from Mon Temps n'est pas le V^otre.⁸⁷ The question: What was the nature of the inner call to which each was to respond? How did each respond? Or did each betray his call? Finally, how was Gabriel Marcel faithful to his dramatic art?

UN HOMME DE DIEU¹

Un Homme de Dieu was written in 1922, first published in 1925 (Collection: Les Cahiers Verts), but was not staged till 1949.² Its sources are varied. Sottiaux suggests a link to an earlier dramatic effort:

Chose curieuse, en 1904, Gabriel Marcel avait soumis au poète Fernand Gregh une pièce d'allure Ibsénienne, dont le thème rappelle "Un Homme de Dieu": il s'agissait d'un pasteur devenu incroyant: c'était, dira Marcel, "un bien puéril presentiment" du future drame de conscience de Claude Lemoyne.³

Marcel, in an appendix to the play itself, cites some unpublished entries from his Journal, referring to an earlier, never finished version, entitled Le Guérisseur, or Guérir.⁴ The work was composed during the period preceding his conversion to Catholicism, preceded by the speculative considerations regarding faith in the Metaphysical Journal. The problem of faith was the only natural topic for the play. His choice of a married Protestant minister for the main character is not unpremeditated. It was not in order to satirize Protestantism, however,⁵ but rather because this character could only find himself through love and this love only exists between people who have known how and have wished to live their very being in all its personal value--especially if married.⁶

Apparently the situation is relatively simple, though with untoward consequences. Claude Lemoyne is a successful minister in a poor quarter on the Left Bank in Paris. All had not always been this way, however, for twenty years earlier his debut in a mountain village, Saint-Loup-de-Talvas, in Ardèche, had run aground. It was also at this time that he had serious

doubts about his vocation and that his wife, Edmée, confessed that she had been unfaithful. The baby to be born was not Claude's, but belonged to Michel Sandier.

Claude forgave his wife and settled down to a successful life, raising the girl, Osmonde, as his own. However, his religious indoctrination has not been wholly received by his "daughter," nor, for that matter, by his wife. Such is the situation at the first curtain, and the four acts to follow witness the progressive awareness of an artificial psychology.

Claude's character is immediately reflected even in the setting:

Le salon des Lemoyne. Ameublement froid et banal. Au mur, des "paraboles" de Burnand et une reproduction de la Vierge de saint Sixte.⁷

This coldness is one manifestation of the mechanical nature of Claude's ministry. It is further highlighted by the contrast between the undirected intimacy of Osmonde and Megal⁸ and the cut and dried discussion of the Lemoyne household during the rest of the first act.

The familial antinomies are quickly exposed: Edmée complains about Francis, Claude's brother, who never visits them--Claude excuses this apparent rudeness, explaining that Francis is a busy doctor with many calls to make.⁹ Already Edmée's sensitivity is rebuffed by Claude's systematic response. Madame Lemoyne, Claude's mother, is on edge: a relative is expecting her. Her reasoning suggests the training Claude has received:

Ce serait un horrible crève-cœur si je n'étais pas là-bas pour les fêtes. C'est si difficile de contenter tout le monde... Le malheur des familles trop unies.¹⁰

"Contenter tout le monde," how idealistic! "Familles trop unies," how ironic!

Madame Lemoyne continues in her unreal judgments. Edmée expresses

some concern that "Osmonde n'a pas un goût très vif pour les enfants en général, l'école du dimanche est plutôt une corvée pour elle."¹¹ Edmée's sensitivity has noticed the difference in Osmonde's attitude at Sunday School and at Megal's home. In the latter situation, beings have replaced ideas. But Madame Lemoyne misses the point:

Osmonde est comme son père, qui a toujours été le dévouement en personne... Enfin je veux dire qu'avec l'exemple qu'elle a toujours eu sous les yeux il n'y a rien d'étonnant à ce qu'elle ait pris ces pauvres enfants en pitié.¹²

Thus far no damage has been done. Her judgment neither comforts nor alarms Edmée. But she adds: "il faut toujours avoir confiance,"¹³ even... and, perhaps for lack of a better example, she makes an allusion to some moral crisis which Claude has suffered. Edmée has been ignorant of such a trial and questions Madame Lemoyne. The latter had found out about it through many long letters which Edmée herself had seen Claude mail during the first years of their marriage. Edmée persists in ascertaining the date of this crisis--before 1928, before her "affair," But

Il m'avait promis que vous ne sauriez jamais rien. ...
Oh, ce n'est plus la peine de chercher à me tromper... Ce secret... Notre secret... il l'a... le misérable!¹⁴

Claude re-enters and notices Edmée's confusion, but she leaves before he can find out why. His mother explains: "Edmée vient de découvrir que tu m'avais tout raconté."

Tant mieux... Vois-tu, maman, ce mensonge à son égard me pesait terriblement; combien de fois ne me le suis-je pas reproché!¹⁵

Only his promise had prevented him telling Edmée himself. But

En tout cas, depuis qu'Edmée est revenue à la santé, depuis que je l'ai guérie, j'aurais dû tout lui dire; elle aurait compris.¹⁶

Claude admits that his pardoning Edmée had restored his confidence:

Le meilleur de l'épreuve, c'était justement qu'elle ne comprît pas. J'étais tout seul... avec Lui. Et alors, peu à peu, quand j'ai senti qu'elle reprenait confiance... La façon dont il lui arrivait de me regarder quand elle croyait que je ne faisais pas attention! Cet appel muet dans ses yeux! C'était comme si j'aidais quelque chose à vivre... quelque chose de si fragile... quelque chose qui avait tant de chance de mourir. Les premiers temps, quand je rentrais le soir, mais je m'attendais toujours à apprendre qu'elle était partie pour le rejoindre! Je suis sûr que pendant très longtemps elle y a encore songé... elle a cru qu'elle y songeait. Mais en réalité entre elle et lui il y avait une force. Et puis un jour j'ai eu brusquement la certitude qu c'était fini-- qu'elle n'y pensait plus--que nous avions gagné.¹⁷

But now too she had regained confidence. She was healthy and able to bear the truth. Her soul had been raised from the depths.

Chacun a porté aussi la croix de l'autre, chacun a saigné pour l'autre. Nous sommes comme enrichis--meilleurs, oui, meilleurs.¹⁸

Thus when his brother tells him that Michel Sandier, Edmée's lover, is dying and wishes to see his daughter, Osmonde, Claude consents. He rejects his mother's objections about paternal rights, faked illness, and unexpected consequences. "C'est une épreuve qui se présente à moi: je dois la vivre au jour le jour."¹⁹ One is reminded of Inez in Sartre's Huis Clos.²⁰ When Francis suggests that the rendezvous take place without Edmée's knowing, Claude balks: "C'est toute notre relation qui est en jeu. Si j'ai réussi à créer entre nous de la confiance, de l'intimité, vous..."²¹ Francis counters: "Tu risque de remettre tout ça en question. ... Je n'en sais rien, mais je le sens."²² However, the ideality of Claude's constancy becomes evident when the possibility of Edmée leaving him comes up. "Est-il possible de s'acquitter plus complètement de ses devoirs, de mener une existence plus remplie, plus utile?..."²³

Francis is speechless. It is not because of love that she will not leave. No, her function requires her to stay. And so the thing which

Claude had rescued from destruction twenty years before has become an irremovable cog in the family wheel. Claude has created a machine which cannot function outside its proper sphere. He is convinced that all is functioning perfectly. This will be the final test. This confidence built on an ideally preconceived system is short-lived, for Edmée and Osmonde are about to expose the artificiality of Claude's position.

Edmée is annoyed at Claude's confiding in his mother; but she immediately seeks the root of the problem. "Est-ce un simple hasard si c'est après avoir appris la vérité que tu as retrouvé... ta confiance en Dieu?"²⁴ Still unaware of the implications,²⁵ Claude tactlessly relates the terrible crisis he had suffered. Disappointments with his catechumens, loss of self-confidence, discouragement. "Cette fois, c'était vraiment le vide absolu. J'étais complètement seul."²⁶ But suddenly a light shone in the darkness.

C'était comme un appel lancé au plus profond de moi-même.
[...] Pour la première fois j'étais mis en présence de moi-même, j'allais avoir à découvrir à qui j'avais affaire, et c'est peut-être le sentiment de mon infini faiblesse qui m'a sauvé.²⁷

But this abstraction is the cause of the present superficiality. Claude has become enveloped in a religious system. His allegiance is to an ideal, rationally and logically constructed. Edmée sees the basic egocentricity of the situation. "Au fond, c'est toi seul qui étais important, bien entendu."²⁸ Claude continues, unabashed, to describe Michel's proposed visit. Edmée begs him to prevent it. He explains how everything has been arranged so that she will not have to meet Michel. The interchange that concludes the first act illustrates the sharp contrast in the psychology and sensitivity of the two spouses.

EDMÉE -- Tu as déjà tout arrange dans ta tête! Mais c'est épouvantable. Mais qui es-tu donc? mais tu n'es pas un

homme.

CLAUDE -- C'est un mourant.

EDMÉE -- Alors, pour toi le passé est aboli, non avenu.
Qu'il m'ait serrée dans ses bras, qu'il m'ait pressée contre son coeur...

CLAUDE -- Tias-toi.

EDMÉE -- Oh! tu peux tout entendre. Ce n'est pas le sang-froid qui te manque quand il s'agit de moi.

CLAUDE -- Mais c'est monstrueux, Edmée, ce que tu dis là...

EDMÉE -- Cette grandeur d'âme à bon marché me fait horreur.

CLAUDE -- A bon marché! Mais quand je t'ai pardonné...

EDMÉE -- Si tu ne m'as pas pardonné parce que tu m'aimais, qu'est-ce que tu veux que j'en fasse de ton pardon?²⁹

Claude's system prevents him from even considering such questions. Edmée is weak yet, and must be braced for the future. Claude will support her.

Osmonde has asked to speak to Claude alone, a practice Claude deplores and Osmonde needs. Osmonde had already expressed her revulsion for her mother's omniscience.³⁰ She does not seek solutions from her father, His attempts to convert her inquiry into a problem with a definite, specified answer reveal another failure. Osmonde is unhappy. "[...] tu disais que notre bonheur est en nous. [egocentrism] Pour moi, en tout cas, ce n'est pas vrai... il me semble qu'il n'y a en moi que de quoi me faire souffrir."³¹ Adopting a situation ethic, she sees no happiness in her projected life of marriage and yearly children,³² of senseless conformity. Claude responds rightly that "chacune de ces vies a sa beauté secrète. [...] Son originalité intime..."³³ This is what Osmonde wants to hear; she despises "des exemplaires [...] des tracts."³⁴ Claude tries to formulate the idea of commitment, of receiving by giving. This ideation, of course, only

alienates Osmonde: in the middle of the conversation Claude glances at his watch.

Tu as trop d'obligations, papa... Sembler qu'on n'est qu'un numéro entre la fille-mère de la rue de l'Ouest et la paralytique de l'avenue du Maine... si tu crois que c'est ça qui facilite les confidences... Et puis, c'est peut-être aussi que tu en recois trop de tout le monde... C'est presque ton métier. Ça me glace un peu.³⁵

Eh bien, ça ne va pas avoir l'air gentil, du tout, mais je t'avoue que l'idée d'épouser même quelqu'un comme toi... quelqu'un qui aurait une âme comme la tienne... ça me ferait peur. Et alors, épouser un médiocre ce serait encore pire. La vie est effrayante.³⁶

A letter from Francis arrives, announcing Michel's imminent visit.

Edmée wants Claude to refuse the letter, saying he's not home or sick or something. Claude refuses. "Tu mens à ta femme, pas à ton concierge."³⁷

The gap is widening. Claude is oblivious. She reproaches him again:

"Encore! Claude, nous marchons sur la tête. Mais si, moi, je consentais à recevoir cet homme, ton devoir serait de t'y opposer."³⁸ Claude tries to calm her with pious aspirations.

Claude, tu es mon mari, tu n'es pas un prêtre.³⁹

Mon Dieu, tu raisones, tu fais des citations. Le devoir! Qu'est-ce que le devoir a à faire là-dedans? Ah! écoute! si c'était tout de même une comédie que tu te joues à toi-même, une espèce de pose!⁴⁰

Suddenly Osmonde brings in Michel, at Edmée's request! The meeting is unavoidably uncomfortable. Despite Claude's attempted distractions, Michel deftly suggests points in common between him and Osmonde. The girl is fascinated with his descriptions, photographs, attitudes. Again Claude has to leave because of an appointment!

Michel and Edmée together, alone. Her worse fears are soon confirmed. Michel still loves her. He accuses her of not having loved, of

taking the easy way, of confessing to Claude in order to hide herself behind his superficial shield of respectability. Michel is not as gentle in his denunciation as was Osmonde with her father.

[...] Mais enfin, si vous aviez eu un peu plus de cran et un peu moins de vertu, eh bien, à nous deux nous aurions peut-être pu avoir une vie.⁴¹

He minces no words in blaming her. She had succumbed to the tyranny of an idea. She had betrayed her love.

Michel leaves. Edmée is greatly troubled. She begins to criticize Osmonde for her egotism, but finds the tables turned:

Je le suis moins que toi. Tu ne mets ton coeur dans rien de ce que tu fais. Et il n'y a que ça qui compte. Ce n'est pas le fait d'assister à des comités, de diriger un ouvrage ou de tricoer [sic, tricoter?] des chaussettes qui prouve qu'on est bon. Tu n'est pas bonne, tu n'est pas meilleure que moi. Il n'y a qu'à te regarder quand tu parles à un malade; tu ne souris jamais. Toute la peine que tu te donnes c'est... c'est...⁴²

Claude finally returns and Edmée relates what Michel has said about her betraying her love. The second act closes with an exchange during which Claude finally realizes that he has failed as a husband, perhaps even as a minister. Edmée bluntly exposes his facade.

EDMÉE -- ... Au fond, ce soir-là, je ne t'ai pas parlé comme à mon mari.

CLAUDE -- Edmée!

EDMÉE -- C'est la cause de tout. Si tu avais été mon mari, si tu m'avais aimée comme on aime sa femme, avec le meilleur et le pire de soi...

CLAUDE -- Le pire de soi?

EDMÉE -- Tu sais bien que je ne t'aurais pas trahi.

CLAUDE -- Tu n'est pas dans ton bon sens...

EDMÉE -- Ta voix sonne faux tout à coup.

CLAUDE -- La confiance que tu m'as témoignée...

EDMÉE -- La confiance! Plus on s'aime, plus on se méfie...

CLAUDE -- Pour des coeurs comme les nôtres...

EDMÉE -- D'abord, ce pardon qui ne t'a rien coûté, tu n'avais pas le droit de m'en accabler.

CLAUDE -- Je n'avais pas le droit de te protéger contre toi-même?

EDMÉE -- Ce sont des mots. Tu étais juge et partie: oh! je ne veux pas dire qu tu m'aimais. Ne proteste pas... mettons que tu m'aimais en Dieu... Non mais, d'abord, il n'y avait pas que moi.

CLAUDE -- Le reste ne comptait pas.

EDMÉE -- Ton ascendant sur les âmes? Allons, tu ne te rends pas justice en ce moment. Le scandale d'une rupture entre nous...

CLAUDE -- Ne serait retombé que sur toi.

EDMÉE -- Tu ne le crois pas sérieusement... Et puis surtout...surtout... une occasion aussi merveilleuse de déployer tes dons évangéliques...

CLAUDE, il s'est dressé, blême. -- Tais-toi.

EDMÉE -- Ah! tu vois clair.

CLAUDE -- Tais-toi: tu me détruis.⁴³

Claude's world has been shaken: "le monde cassé." He must seek to either re-establish it or establish a new one. His nervous exhaustion prompts his mother to call Francis for a check-up. Claude asks Francis for his opinion regarding Edmée's affair and Claude's pardon. Francis answers frankly: "Je crois encore aujourd'hui que ce que tu as fait là était dans la ligne de ta vie."⁴⁴ Slowly Claude recognizes the sincerity of this answer, but realizes that Francis, as a doctor, does not understand:

Mais tu ne comprends donc pas! On a vécu des années sur une une [sic] certaine idée de soi-même, on a cru puiser de la force dans cette idée, et l'on s'aperçoit qu'on s'est

peut-être indignement trompé.⁴⁵

Peut-être. On n'en est même pas sûr... Alors on ne sait plus, on est perdu... Enfin mes pensées, mes paroles d'autrefois, tout cela devrait être transparent pour moi, je devrais m'y reconnaître comme dans ma propre maison... Eh bien, non, ça m'est impenetrable.⁴⁶

Francis sees this as one of "ces petits jeux très protestants."⁴⁷ Claude only asks: "Francis, parle-moi en homme, pas en spécialiste."⁴⁸

Edmée has been thinking. Her denunciation has opened an abyss. She questions this sudden discovery. "Quand ces espèces d'éclairs s'allument brusquement, il n'y a qu'à fermer les yeux. Il faut se faire crédit à soi-même."⁴⁹ She throws his accusation of delusion right back at him. Claude again admits his motivation:

J'avais cru que ce pardon, était un acte de charité, l'acte d'un chrétien. Mouvement d'Edmée. Si j'ai simplement fui devant le scandale ou la solitude... Et maintenant que tu m'as forcé à ouvrir les yeux, tu viens plaquer tes deux mains dessus pour que ce soit de nouveau la nuit. Mais que me veux-tu donc? qu'est-ce que je t'ai fait?⁵⁰

Edmée asks only that he help her. But Claude counters: "Pas à n'importe quel prix. Pas au prix d'un mensonge. Je ne peux pas. Je ne veux pas. Un long silence."⁵¹ Edmée re-emphasizes that they must face things squarely, that they are not alone, that they have sacrificed Michel to their egoism and laziness. This last is too much for Claude, however, and he rises with one last professional stab: "Je vous ai tout de même sauvées toutes les deux."⁵² It was he who prevented further adultery. It was he who had provided a home ("foyer") for Osmonde. But he is caught in the void of "having"; he had not loved...

Non, il y avait en toi une force intacte, tu l'as dépensée avec moi comme avec une fille, mais ce n'était pas de l'amour, tu le sais bien. Et le reste, ton amour pour mon âme... La femme en moi, tu ne l'as pas satisfaite, tu ne l'as même pas soupçonnée.⁵³

Edmée tests Claude further. She has seen Michel again and he has demanded to see Osmonde. "Je ne veux pas qu'il la revoie."⁵⁴ Finally! But Claude gives no real reason for this abrupt about-face. It is deliberate, he admits as much. But this is the extent of his motivation.

Before any further inquiry can be made, however, Osmonde brings a letter written by Edmée to Megal: "Qu'est-ce que c'est que cette façon de me protéger comme un objet?"⁵⁵ Claude asks Edmée to leave. Osmonde claims that she and Megal are in love. Finding no trace of physical danger, Claude proceeds to ask what she expects from such a triangle.

Je n'espère rien, je ne compte sur rien; j'ai besoin de voir clair en moi. [...] c'est savoir ce que moi je trouve bien, ce que moi je trouve mal.⁵⁶

She counters his challenge:

Ce n'est pas de la vanité. Pour la première, et probablement l'unique fois de ma vie, un être pense à moi sans m'associer à je ne sais quelle image de home [sic, d'homme?] chrétien et de pieuse nichée. Moi, j'ai besoin de vivre par moi-même; l'idée d'une existence sur rail me fait horreur, et je ne sais pas si c'est une infériorité. Dans une vie aussi plate que la nôtre, si on n'a pas la chance de croire...⁵⁷

C'est ton immense privilège de n'avoir pas connu certaines tentations. [...] Mais cette supériorité même... il me semble qu'elle entraîne une espèce de rançon.⁵⁸

Osmonde has echoed her mother's sentiments. Claude is at a loss to prevent her "chute." "Tu peux tout empêcher. D'abord en ayant confiance en moi. Ce secret, quel qu'il soit, je veux le partager avec toi."⁵⁹ Osmonde's wish seems unattainable. He tells her he is not her father! Osmonde is taken back, but quickly regains her composure. She is ready to face life. She asks for details. Claude slips into his ideal world again, however: Osmonde is only a child, to be loved and protected by her "parents." She must not judge her mother, but live as if nothing had happened. Osmonde cannot live

such a lie. She catches herself in egotistical criticism, and repeats her wish to share life. Claude, blinded by her apparent rejection of all tradition and training, solicitous that she remain "intact," cannot fathom such a request. His system has failed him and he knows not where to turn. Yet a certain ingrained attitude prevents him from adopting Osmonde's approach. He is clutching, not searching. As his world disintegrates, he scrambles to recoup, much like the land speculator who perceives an imminent market collapse and tries to grab up his outstanding securities. Osmonde embraces him and can only say "Pauvre papa chéri."⁶⁰

Claude had turned to his mother during the original crisis. She comes again, but her attitude is strangely irrelevant. She persists in speaking of a possible promotion for Claude, reducing his moral confusion to idle thinking. After all, he has a job to do, a function. Claude cannot stomach being treated as a utensil! "Les larmes qu tu arais versées a l'idée d'avoir un fils dans un bureau--comme si ce n'était pas probablement tout ce qu'il me fallait!"⁶¹ Continuing, in a vein strongly hinting of Marcel's childhood, Claude describes the pattern he was forced to fill, the mold he carelessly let himself be poured into, "la vie d'un grand chrétien."⁶²

Il aurait fallu d'abord mener celle d'un homme, et je ne suis pas un homme, je n'ai pas seulement su aimer comme un homme -- haïr comme un homme.⁶³

Claude collapses and is taken to a mental hospital for treatment. The inefficacy of institutionalized care is obvious. But he has had time to reflect. He had lied to Osmonde, fearing she would discover much that was humiliating for him. He had had to maintain a front, the only support she had--and this very ideal had caused her to fall instead of rise.

He is still staunch in his determination that Osmonde must not see

Michel, despite Edmée's pleas. Megal comes in answer to a letter from Osmonde. Claude refuses to allow Osmonde to go with him. She threatens to run to Michel, giving Claude the choice: "Va, rappelle-toi qu'au fond on ne gagne jamais grand'chose à retenir les gens malgré eux."⁶⁴ This Claude has realized only too well: Edmée had recently asked for her liberty. Claude refuses to let her go to Michel. Osmonde exposes the utter artificiality of this reaction:

[...] Voilà un homme jeune, robuste, enchaîné à une folle... Il m'aime, et je l'aime aussi. Entre lui et moi il n'y a qu'une convention, un mensonge, dont nous ne sommes pas dupes ni l'un ni l'autre. Si par pure lâcheté je me dérobe, il n'est pas difficile de deviner sur quelles consolations dégradantes il se rabattra.⁶⁵

Claude continues, clutching, while Osmonde describes him:

Mon pauvre papa, tu me fais penser à ces gens de la pension d'Evilard qui allaient regarder les Alpes tous les matins à travers les vitres colorées de la véranda... vu ainsi, le paysage leur paraissait bien plus beau, mais en même temps ils regrettaient que ce ne fût pas un effet naturel: ils discutaient là-dessus à perte de vue, ils n'arrivaient jamais à se mettre d'accord avec eux-mêmes. Tu es comme eux, tu ne sais pas ce que tu préfères et tu te rends malheureux. La grande différence entre nous, vois-tu, c'est que je n'arrive plus à prendre tout cela au sérieux. C'est peut-être que j'ai trop entendu pérorer autour de moi sur nos devoirs, sur notre dette envers Dieu. Quand on a entendu parler de son âme tous les dimanches de dix à onze, sans compter les prières quotidiennes... Il y a certains mots, certaines idées... je ne sais pas, il me semble qu'il faudrait sentir une espèce de frisson, une espèce de vertige chaque fois qu'on les prononce devant vous. Eh bien, non! Ton sermon du dimanche, c'est un peu comme les comptes de cuisine. Je crois que si ce n'était pas une sorte de routine même pour toi, si j'avais eu près de moi quelqu'un qui vécût dans la terreur ou dans l'éblouissement... Mais une religion comme la tienne, en somme, ça ne change rien à rien. C'est une toile de fond, rien de plus. Du reste, le Bon Samaritain qui est là, il te ressemble, mais à un point.⁶⁶

The "organization man" par excellence. Osmonde cannot remain: "Pour pouvoir vivre ensemble il faut tout de même garder un minimum d'illusion les

uns sur les autres."⁶⁷ She cannot live in such a situation.⁶⁸ Edmée is aghast that Claude should allow her to leave.

But Claude suddenly rebels:

Maintenant, écoute-moi, Edmée: c'est probablement la dernière fois que j'aurai l'occasion de te faire connaître ma façon de penser, car je ne me soucierai pas de te disputer plus longtemps à l'intéressant victime sur laquelle tu t'attendris depuis quelques jours. [...] J'aurais scrupule à priver plus longtemps ce mourant des bons soins que tu brûles de lui prodiguer.⁶⁹

[...] Maintenant qu'elle nous quitte, il n'y a pas de raison pour que nous continuions à vivre ensemble. Tu as, paraît-il, de grands devoirs envers quelqu'un d'autre. Tu pourras les remplir en conscience désormais. Quant à moi, il est probable que je quitterai le pastorat.⁷⁰

Claude questions his faith, his love for Edmée during the first years of his marriage. He momentarily contemplates suicide. "Etre connu tel qu'on est ... ou alors dormir."⁷¹ Suddenly a neighbor brings her son to congratulate them on their anniversary. Ironically, the facade is quickly raised. Appearances must be maintained. Claude and Edmée graciously accept the good wishes; they chat as if all were well. After the neighbor leaves Edmée sighs: "Voilà... voilà pour qui il va falloir vivre à présent."⁷² Claude is lost in thought: "Etre connu tel qu'on est..."⁷³

The denouement is disconcerting. It is probably fairest to Marcel, and least likely to equate his approach and attitude with that of Jean-Paul Sartre, if we agree with Chenu in evaluating the drama:

Peut-être est-ce surtout par toutes ces pièces qui semblaient, sombres et désespérées, ne jamais apporter de solutions, que G Marcel a su se frayer une route: il a ainsi jalonné la piste et repéré les obstacles à éviter.⁷⁴

Exactly what are these obstacles? Each interpreter has emphasized one or another. Marcel himself, even forty years after, was barely able to formulate any sort of judgment concerning Claude's reactions:

[...] Claude's forgiving his wife was an act which had real meaning and value only at the time it was performed, aside from all the questions that might later be raised about it. Furthermore, is it not only useless but even wrong to question, twenty years after the event, the motives of an act which is so far removed from both husband and wife?⁷⁵

Francis had said as much when he first mentioned Michel's designs.⁷⁶ Claude had tried to reduce the situation to a problem, a problem with a definite solution provided questions were placed correctly and directly. His own marriage was but another "case to analyze."⁷⁷

In 1925, three years after writing Un Homme de Dieu, Marcel had noted an entry in the Journal Metaphysique which capsulated this theme:

Decouvert ce matin une articulation capitale. Les questions auxquelles je puis répondre sont exclusivement celles qui portent sur un renseignement que je suis susceptible de donner (fût-ce sur moi-même). Ex.: quelle est la capitale de l'Afghanistan? aimez-vous les haricots? Mais plus il s'agit de ce que je suis comme totalité (et non de ce que j'ai) plus la réponse et la question même perdent toute signification; par ex.: êtes-vous vertueux? même: êtes-vous courageux.⁷⁸

Again the distinction between being and having.

Claude was applying intellectual techniques to being, mystery, presence. The call to a "toi" had been crushed by the objectivized judgment concerning a "lui." Two other texts from the Journal Metaphysique help to better describe the "toi."

Au fond cependant, toi, c'est plus essentiellement ce qui peut être invoquée par moi que ce qui est jugé capable de me répondre.⁷⁹

Le toi est à l'invocation ce que l'objet est au jugement; il ne peut être dégagé de ce qu'on doit considérer comme sa fonction sans cesser d'être toi.⁸⁰

Claude was trying to extricate himself from a situation and determine its significance from the outside. "Etre connu tel qu'on est..." He was looking for answers, not necessarily the truth.⁸¹ He clung tenaciously to

a system which was no longer valid.⁸² Was it ever? Osmonde obviously does not think so. Sottiaux thinks she is the "winner."⁸³ But this does not seem to be Marcel's intent.

The drama began as an investigation, phenomenological in nature, of a man devoid of real personality. Sartre would have deserted him.⁸⁴ Albert Camus would have exalted him.⁸⁵ But Marcel only presents him in situation, permitting the readers to grasp the truth present.⁸⁶ The questions Claude asks are only a rephrasing of the central question: "What am I?" Only God could answer the question as Claude asked it. But Claude cannot wait. He chooses to resurrect the system, to betray the "toi." As Marcel says,

In the final scene--the one I like best, perhaps, both Claude and Edmee come to acknowledge that they no longer know if they really loved each other, or what their love was like, or what had caused it. For one brief moment Claude is tempted to commit suicide. But no, he must not forget that good people who in no way suspect what he is going through and naively look upon him as a saint, need him, and, in fact, he has been and will continue to be of real service to them. This, however, is only a sort of pragmatic consolation with which the man of God he is--despite everything--cannot be entirely satisfied. The only recourse left to him is prayer, the calling upon Him who knows him as he is, while he himself, groping his way through life, has always misjudged himself or seen himself as he is not.⁸⁷

Sottiaux is not as considerate.

L'impression finale de cette piece est res pénible: le drame est sans solution. Pour Edmee, la vie va recommencer dans la meme grisaille; pour Claude, c'est différent: il a acquis la conscience douloureuse de l'echec profond de sa vie: guide éclairé des ames par sa profession, il n'a rien compris aux problèmes des êtres qui partageaient sa vie. Le sursaut violent de lucidité qu'il vient de connaître ne lui est pas naturel, Osmonde le lui a bien dit. Pourtant la carté est faite: il se connaît tel qu'il est. Mais devant lui s'étale, visible maintenant et douloureusement conscient, le pitoyable bilan de sa pauvre existence.⁸⁸

Concluding, there arises that ever persistent question of the Thomist and scholastic philosopher: What is the positive yield? The

question reflects a scientific orientation, is pregnant with technical overtones. This drama at least proves that even a satisfying answer to such a question is not the whole, that objective truth is measured by the subject as well as the object, that in situation man lives and in situation man knows truth.⁸⁹ Furthermore, man must not approach reality, be it self, others, or god, with preconceived categories. Rather, it is a question of availability; that is, not bullibility, but fullness, honest openness to the reality in which he is immersed. "I believe..."; not "I believe that ...". "I hope in you for us"; not "I hope that..."

Finally, fidelity is not directed at an idea, a thing, even a him. It is rooted in the other, not as other, but as thou. This thou is not an idea. For the idea of thou implies no contradiction in the possibility of, e.g., more than one person within one being, or the simultaneity of past, present, and future time. The idea of thou is susceptible of rational analysis, of being structurally defined, of being scientifically determined. The idea of thou can be reconstructed, can be constructed. Thus, the thou is a presence, unfortunately admitting of ideated distortion by analysis and anticipation. And these techniques must be avoided in order to preserve this presence. The past doubtlessly influences the present--this is the basis for development. But the past is not the present. Past failure or success does not imply present success or failure. The future also influences the present--without motivation, action would cease.⁹⁰ But to think the present as future is laziness; to try to manipulate the future in the present is egoism, that is, playing God. Man can only determine what he himself causes. And what he determines is not itself any longer, but connotes him.

Thus, Claude's fidelity must include a recognition of Edmee as a person, soul and body; it must include a recognition of Osmonde as a person, a life, implying ex se motum habere⁹¹; it must include a self-denying love which alone can create a self: "Give and you shall receive."

Bien plus, nous décelons le point de départ de ces développements ultérieurs qui viseront à faire prendre à l'homme conscience de sa condition d'être situé, et à définir la métaphysique comme l'exploration par l'intérieur de sa position dans des ensembles qui le transcendent, et finalement dans l'ensemble cosmique: métaphysique qui est aussi, comme toutes les métaphysiques, une éthique, car elle vise à trouver l'adaptation la meilleure à notre condition. "Le metaphysicien est semblable à un malade qui recherche une meilleure position." Il ne s'agira donc plus de construire et de déduire. La pensée métaphysique doit subir une conversion: elle doit tourner le dos à la pensée scientifique objective pour procéder à un "éclaircissement" de notre existence, lorsque nous aurons, par la réflexion, "rétabli dans sa continuité le tissu vivant qu'une analyse imprudent avait disjoint." Elle se détourne par là des problèmes pour toucher au mystère.⁹²

INTERVENING DEVELOPMENTS

Mon Temps n'est pas le Vôtre and Croissez et Multipliez were both published in 1955. The thirty years since the publication of Un Homme de Dieu had witnessed both cataclysmic changes in Europe and a consequent proliferation of writings from Gabriel Marcel. France, even today, has not fully recovered from the terrible losses she suffered from the Second World War. This is to say nothing of the deeper spiritual and psychological inflictions consequent upon the rise of materialistic and atheistic communism, totalitarian fascism and Nazism, existentialism, nihilism, pessimism, and the philosophy of the absurd. Human existence is being challenged on every plane. Paradoxically, as varied as these threats are, human existence is their common object.

The idealism of the nineteenth century had spawned political systems which seek to crush the individual into "mass society." The Hegelian Absolute is to be realized through science and technology. The sociologism of Comte is but the forerunner of Freudian psychology, Deweyan pragmatism, and Whitehead's philosophy of process (in its most technical aspects). Techniques are being applied in every realm. The contemporary emphasis on methodology rather than content in education reflects this trend.

Such depersonalization naturally has nourished a contrary movement--existentialism. In its extreme forms, it has fathered degradation similar to that of technology. Men caught in the death throes of mechanical society see no appeal, no help but the idealistic systems of the nineteenth century.

Thus, the negative philosophies of Sartre and Camus, of men who see value only in choosing value, of men who ridicule tradition (sometimes justifiably, but never mercifully), of men condemned to an existence without value, to a freedom without a choice, to a death without an afterlife.

This same period also witnessed a deepening of attitude and conviction in the life and philosophy of Gabriel Marcel. Undoubtedly the most significant event was his conversion to Catholicism in 1929, following the long speculative analysis of faith recorded in his diary. Parts of his journal were published in 1927 (as the Journal Métaphysique) and again in 1935 (in Être et Avoir).

The insights contained in this latter volume were given expression in Le Monde Cassé.¹ As Chenu points out, the dramatic approach has here changed. The progressive realization of an artificial existence yields to the development of a situation, itself antithetical in character. The realization of the basic human condition now serves as the milieu for further considerations.

Christiane, though in love with Jacques, had married Laurent, when Jacques retired to a monastery. She soon finds that her marriage--to give happiness to Laurent who loved her--was a mistake. News of Jacques' death is accompanied by some intimate letters in which Jacques reveals that he was in love with Christiane. He holds himself responsible for her tragic existence, but begs her not to succumb to "the broken world." She at first rebels, but slowly the communion in the invisible world makes itself felt. She tells Laurent the truth. He is at first shaken, but soon himself experiences participation in this communion.

The play ends abruptly with this deux-ex-machinistic realization,

having expressed the conclusions reached at the end of our first chapter: man is in the world, being is a mystery. Marcel himself elaborates on these in an appended meditation: Positions et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique.² This ontological mystery is the light, the positive tone characterizing the four plays written between 1936 and 1938.³

[...] dans le "Fanal" la dialectique en vertu de laquelle l'absence devient une présence par la médiation de la fidélité. La mort, en dissolvant l'être physique, fait tomber toutes les barrières, toutes les défenses et tous les regards chargés de jugement.⁴

In Le Chemin de crête, Ariane Leprieur's behavior toward her husband, his lover, and their child appears to be motivated by magnanimity and sacrifice. Or is her kindness only part of a scheme to win back her wandering husband? Is the publication of her manuscript pride or conversion? Claude Lemoyne had only discovered his inauthenticity; perhaps Ariane had perceived the light of the ontological mystery--the antithesis.

Eustache Soreau (in Le Dard) conscientiously espouses the class ideology as did Claude; but he is continually troubled by a bad conscience, irritated even more by Gertrude Heuzard, who accuses him of having betrayed himself by marrying into a bourgeois family. He is continually confronted by a young German, Werner Schnee, who refuses to join the party, who insists he intends to remain a man; he refused an opportunity to return to Germany, even though his wife wants to go back. Eustache, ever conscious of avoiding party treason, betrays Werner and tells his wife. She is furious and accepts the offer. Werner gives her money, then follows, without the traitorous passport. He knows he will be arrested, but is thankful for the grace to be able to help relieve the suffering of fellow prisoners. Again the antithesis--Eustache pledged to an idea, Werner devoted to people.

At the end of La Soif, Arnaud, "a devout Christian, in whom the spirit of a child still lives," meditates before his sleeping father. The old man always seems to be speaking "to a gallery," in a dogmatic and pompous way.

It won't be long now before all these sentences he has been delighting in will be lost in silence. This affectation he takes so seriously will fall from him. He will remain here alone, weak and defenceless, like a child overcome by sleep and still clasping his toy to his breast. When in the presence of the living man who rants and raves, if only we could imagine him lying cold in death tomorrow.⁵

Faithful to the existentialist trend, Marcel began supplementing his dramatic presentation with phenomenological essays. Presented in no systematic order, these essays on various topics have been grouped into collections, entitled according to the main lines of thought contained therein. Four such collections have been published: Du refus à l'invocation (1940), an articulation of a "concrete philosophy"; Homo Viator (1945), a Prolégomènes à une métaphysique de l'espérance, as well as essays concerning fidelity, value, Sartre, Camu, and Rainer Maria Rilke; Les hommes contre l'humain (1951), the modern philosopher and technology; and Le déclin de la sagesse (1954), wisdom in an age of technique.

Marcel grew in popularity and renown during this period as well. So much so that he was invited to deliver the Gifford Lectures at Aberdeen in 1949-50. Everyone expected that finally a systematic presentation of the "concrete philosophy," the metaphysics of mystery of Gabriel Marcel would be had. But his lectures proved true to the man: phenomenological in approach, an appeal to the reader to understand for himself rather than a dogmatic presentation.

The tenth lecture of this series, "Presence as a Mystery,"⁶ best

summarizes Marcel's notion of human dignity, and with its emphasis on sonship in a way explains his constant use of family situations in his dramatic works. Today the notion of fatherhood and sonship are being rejected. Sartre has best expressed this in his claim that man must choose himself as the son of X. It is most vulgarly reflected in the practice of artificial insemination. This is not to equate fatherhood with biological paternity, however: fatherhood is also a spiritual act, a "creative vow." Furthermore, there is no radical distinction between biological fatherhood and adoption.

On the contrary, we ought to maintain that in normal circumstances the separation of the two kinds of fatherhood is something that ought not be brought about, and even ought not to be able to brought about.⁷

This is the essence of incarnation, the spirit constituting itself effectively as spirit only on condition of becoming flesh. It is precisely this incarnation, the human condition, which gives us an intense feeling of insecurity and strangeness, which can only be felt from within its own depths. The observer may elaborate problems, but, as observer, can never fathom the mystery of this exigency.

Thus, at last a precise notion of one of the essential notes of the type of philosophy Marcel is illustrating: it is an appeal to the reader, a sort of call upon his inner resources. It is not composed of dogmatic solutions valid for "anybody at all." "The greatness of philosophy, though it will seem to most people the disappointing side of philosophy, is just this impossibility of regarding it as a discipline which can be acquired."⁸ This philosophy "operates" by way of an intuition which is possessed without really being known as possessed, a non-objective insight of the presence as completely unprotected, seemingly utterly in our power. And precisely as

unprotected, this presence is also invulnerable and sacred. It is in the essential something else that remains when the important organization crumbles.

The believer realizes that the essential is salvation: the philosopher, animated by the spirit of truth, conceives of this through a philosophy of intersubjectivity in relation to man's basic eschatological position.⁹

So, the philosophy still requires articulation in the drama to express its full depth, for it is in intersubjective dialogue that man attains truth. This finds expression in direct discussion of topical issues. The characters in the play now talk about their problems directly, working out the details together. This requires absolute sincerity and absolute goodness--the lack of either creates the crisis, the antithesis.

CROISSEZ ET MULTIPLIEZ

Both Croissez et Multipliez and Mon Temps n'est pas le V^ôtre can be considered as elaborations of themes contained in Un Homme de Dieu, with the added dimension of presence, of course. The crisis of the latter evolves from the conflict of generations, a continuation of Claude's misunderstanding Osmonde. Croissez et Multipliez reflects the contrary parallel of Claude's love for Edmee: Agnes feels she is no more than a "baby factory."¹⁰

The situation is deceptively simple.¹¹ Agnes Coureuil, a young mother of five overwhelmed with the labor of motherhood, questions her husband's love and dreams of a former lover, who returns to confess his betrayal. Superficially, the plot is in the Ian Fleming and Erle Stanley Gardner tradition: basic structure of standard characters with slight variation for amusement and entertainment. But, in contrast to Un Homme de Dieu, varied notions are precisioned by the characters: Agnes Courteuil and her sister, Corinne, present the laborious side of married life, and contrast with Chantal's idealistic interpretation. Petitpaul is the incarnation of advice, Bruno elaborates on the religious vocation. Thierry, in typical fashion, is the slow-to-comprehend husband. But the characters must not be identified with these ideas completely, rather the antithesis of the situation is supported by the antinomies in each character.

Two preliminary remarks seem necessary for a clearer understanding of Agnes' personality. First, the family situation employed to represent

the human condition in all its intersubjective reciprocity closely resembles the machinations of Madame de La Fayette's La Princesse de Clèves.¹² Monsieur and Madame Lemage de Pierrefort have two daughters, Corinne and Agnes. Madame's sister, Madame de Lieure, "tante Fanny," has a son, Bruno, and a daughter, Chantal. Chantal has married Guillaume Forge, Bruno's friend who actually loves Corinne. Agnes loved Bruno, but had married Thierry after Bruno had retired to a monastery because of a fear of homosexual attachment to Guillaume. Secondly, Marcel says, in his Postface:

[...] ce problème est posé aux consciences par l'attitude rigide qu'adopte l'Eglise catholique en ce qui concerne les relations conjugales regardées par elle comme ordonnées à une fin unique: la procréation.¹³

Thus the presence of abbé Petitpaul; the change from Protestantism to Catholicism as the family religion concurs with the author's own religious conviction and search for clarity.

Again the very setting reflects the tragic figure's psychology: "un grand salon très encombré."¹⁴ Two noticeable changes in approach are, of course, the positive role taken by the tragic figure, Agnes, and the presupposition of a situation. The principle psychology is still directly presented, but through dialogue rather than description. Agnes reveals herself by talking to the other characters.

When her children's mistress complains of their misbehavior, she replies: "Ce sont des enfants comme les autres. Insupportables: tous les enfants sont insupportables."¹⁵ She tells Corinne why she wants to remain undisturbed in her piano playing: "tu comprends quand je suis ici, quand je me replonge un peu dans ce que j'aime pour oublier ce bague."¹⁶ She is pregnant again. "Ça fera six naissances en six ans, nous battons les records."¹⁷ But she quickly defends Thierry when Corinne tries to blame him.

Thierry rejoices in having children: it is not egoism, however; he is intelligent "à sa manière."

Si Thierry est égoïste, qui ne l'est pas? Lui n'est pas personnel, comprends-tu? Moi, je le suis mille fois plus que lui. J'ai besoin d'avoir un petit domaine à moi toute seule où personne ne puisse venir me déranger. C'est justement ce qu'il ne comprend pas, parce qu'il n'est pas ainsi.¹⁸

Only a child himself, Thierry treats her like a child. Agnes makes an allusion to the rise of feminism and its concomitant effect on some husbands:

"Mais Thierry c'est juste le contraire, c'est le plus normal des hommes."¹⁹

Thierry n'est pas un homme-femme, c'est un homme-maman,--un homme-nounou. Il est patient, expert, vigilant. Il adore langer les petits, les mettre sur le pot, les torcher. Au début je trouvais ça attendrissant, maintenant ça m'exaspère.²⁰

Agnes' mother, Madame Lepage de Pierrefort, is the reincarnation of Madame Lemoyne: she pontificates about how her husband is publishing his memoirs despite the scandal she sees it will cause; how her sister is calling for her son, Bruno, out of remorse for denouncing his entrance into the monastery; how she had foreseen all the tribulations Agnes was suffering the moment Thierry appeared at the marriage bed "dans l'état d'innocence où les jeunes, de mon temps,--car aujourd'hui n'en parlons pas--parvenaient au mariage."

Les seules années agréables de ma vie conjugale ont été celles où Paul-Emile a entretenu des relations intimes avec cette Italienne qui était avec nous à Tirana.²¹

Corinne agrees--though she is unmarried--but Agnes is visibly shaken. It is not that Thierry makes love "comme on tette."²²

A present cette casuistique pour alcôve, bien pensante sous le contrôle d'un binoclard ensoutané me donne la chair de poule. [...]

Moi je pense que ce qu'on appelle l'oeuvre de chair, pour l'accomplir décentement, il faudrait peut-être garder le

sentiment qu'elle est un péché. Mais quand j'ai dit ça à Thierry il a poussé des clameurs et m'a traitée de Janséniste. L'amour tel qu'il le comprend, c'est une façon de collaborer au travail du bon Dieu. [...]

Au fond, c'est peut-être admirable. Il m'est arrivé de le regarder dormir après, il respirait doucement comme un enfant, l'air si heureux, si détendu... Mais moi, je pensais aux nausées qui allaient venir quelques semaines plus tard, aux rancœurs dont on ne peut pas se défendre, à toute cette espèce de chimie repugnante. Lui ne voit rien, ne se représente rien. Quand on dit grossesse il pense gestation. Un mystère d'amour digne d'être chanté par les poètes. C'est une espèce de malentendu atroce qu'on ne peut même pas chercher à dissiper; et d'ailleurs sans ce malentendu il est probable que la vie s'arrêterait. Du reste ce serait peut-être beaucoup mieux.²³

Corinne mentions an intern-friend of hers who condemns procreation and begins to elaborate on his scheme, but Agnes ignores her. Monsieur Lepage de Pierrefort enters, and Agnes and Corinne slip out quietly. Madame begins another harangue about his forthcoming book and Thierry's shameful behavior, but he bluntly turns her off: "Mais ce que je vous dirai, moi, c'est que vous êtes aujourd'hui comme hier et plus que jamais une abominable emmerdeuse."²⁴ Madame mutters something about his reading Sartre and leaves.

Agnes returns to talk with her father. She reassures him that Thierry is not deliberately mistreating her..."ça la vie." But

La vie qui bourgeoonne en nous obstinément, stupidement, ignoblement, la vie qui fabrique une tumeur comme elle fabrique un petit enfant, avec la même application, la même tenacité imbécile... Je déteste la vie.²⁵

A telephone call from abbé Petitpaul interrupts the conversation. Thierry had again consulted him!

Chantal bursts in just as Agnes hangs up. She starts to discuss the expected child, but Agnes stops "tous ces bavardages." But what irks her most is "l'impudeur des croyants et celle des prêtres."²⁶ Thierry communicates daily and feels she should do likewise. Yet he does not force her to

comply. Abbé Petitpaul is counseling him though--and here is another departure from the theme of Un Homme de Dieu. The emphasis is shifted from the dogmatic system itself to the perpetrator of such a system. His mixture of infantilism and dogmatic infatuations answers nothing. He treats them like boy scouts, reading them the handbook of married life's Do's and Don't's.

Ce sont des enfants sages qui ont sûrement mérité le tableau d'honneur ou même la croix, mais ils prétendent connaître le fin mot de toutes choses. [...]

Est-ce que le catholicisme dispense de connaître ce dont on parle? [...]

Les gens d'Église ne comprennent rien. S'il pouvait y avoir des prêtres femmes,--mais je suppose que c'est absurde.²⁷

The antithesis in Agnes' character is becoming increasingly more evident. Maternity has become a burden for her. But she loves Thierry, But he is being counselled by Petitpaul. But Petitpaul knows nothing of married life. A final block is added to the paradox when Agnes remarks about Chantal's prospective adoption: "Tant mieux, chérie. Vous avez bien raison, une maison sans enfant ce n'est pas une vraie maison."²⁸ But when the question of the care of her own children comes up, she says Thierry will arrange everything for them. She explains her begrudging attitude: "Disons même que c'est une immense qualité quand tout va bien. Mais quand tout est remis en question..."²⁹ Chantal thinks Agnes is leading a full life, but only "parce que tu m'envies, et envier quelqu'un c'est le plus sûr moyen de ne pas le comprendre."³⁰ Only Agnes can live her life. Only she can know what it is like. But Bruno is coming back! Chantal says he hasn't changed, but she still doesn't know why he entered the monastery. Agnes replies:

Tu dis cela comme s'il s'agissait d'une vie déchue, moins réelle que la nôtre. Eh bien, moi, je penserais plutôt le contraire. Moi qui ne lis rien, l'autre jour j'ai entrouvert

les oeuvres de Rimbaud à qui je ne comprends rien, et je suis tombée sur cette phrase que je me suis répétée bien souvent depuis: "La vraie vie est absente..." La vraie vie est absente...³¹

She feels that Bruno holds the real meaning of life for her. She plays the piano:

C'est tout de même littéralement vrai, tu sais, que trois mesures peuvent nous transporter dans un autre monde où il n'y a plus ni ennuis domestiques, ni servitude conjugale, plus de disputes, de comptes à régler et de végétations à enlever... Pourtant ce monde-là ce n'est pas la mort, c'est la perfection.³²

Her mother returns--for comic relief only, for she continues speaking irrelevancies. Thierry follows shortly. He has invited Petitpaul for dinner. Agnes demands he cancel the engagement. Thierry balks: "Tu n'as pas encore compris ce qu'il a été pour moi en captivité. Je le considère comme ma conscience."³³ But Agnes cannot tolerate his interference in their married life. Suddenly she sees Bruno who has just entered. He doesn't recognize her. She runs to him:

Bien sûr! Laissez-moi vous dire. Vous êtes pour moi l'image de la vraie vie, celle qui est absente. C'est vous que j'attendais. Votre mère a échappé pour cette fois à la mort. Elle va redevenir l'être dur et borné qui a rompu avec vous parce que vous avez refusé ce qu'on appelle la vie, la vie que je déteste... Mais moi, je suis de votre bord.³⁴

Bruno has arrived. But Agnes will only be able to speak with him on three separate occasions, and then only briefly. Concurrently, the family situation complicates considerably. Agnes herself becomes more "absent." She is unmoved by the presence of the new governess, Yolande, who is enamoured of Thierry (who had almost married her before). She is cold to Thierry's letter forgiving her rudeness as fatigue. Chantal laments Guillaume's not wanting to have children; this is why she has decided to adopt a child, in hopes of simplifying the situation. Agnes

cautions:

Un être qui fabrique de la complication autour de lui trouvera toujours moyen d'en fabriquer dans n'importe quelle circonstance; mais en revanche pour quelqu'un de simple comme Thierry il n'y aura jamais que des situations simples, des rapports évidents.³⁵

But Agnes fails to see the full implications of her own words. Yes, Thierry is almost a saint: he has always guarded the vitality of the animal. But Bruno is the true saint: he has chosen "la chasteté absolue."

"Aunt Fanny" is still not reconciled with her son, Bruno. She still cannot fathom a religious vocation: Agnes doesn't appreciate l'abbé Petit-paul. But he is a professional! His eyes do not entertain the light, the "lumière qui vient d'ailleurs." Madame de Lieure is a bit apprehensive and asks Chantal to explain things to Agnes. She leaves.

It seems that Bruno entered the monastery just after his brother's death--robbing his mother of all consolation. But he is a saint! Not quite, for his mother believes that a saint should smile, be happy, even carrying the cross. Bruno is too preoccupied with misery.

Agnes remains adamant. She waits for Bruno to hear her confession; but she is not seeking forgiveness so much as understanding and illumination. This is not a mirage for her.

Quand une mélodie que j'entends pour la première fois prend aussitôt pour moi figure de révélation, on prétendra aussi que c'est un mirage. Mais alors seuls les mirages sont réels; hors des mirages il n'y a qu'un monde où tout se réduit à de la comptabilité, le monde des contrats et des contrôles qui est aussi celui des déceptions sans recours, mais tu le sais bien, voyons! toi-même tu étouffes dans ce monde là, et pourtant tu n'as pas le courage de la renier.³⁶

Agnes perceives mystery and presence, but she still wants external verification. The light is shining, but it is still ineffable.

Bruno begins as harshly as did Michel Sandier. He declines to use

the familiar form in conversation. In hopes of forestalling any sentimentality, he demands that she avoid any nostalgia for misused childhood opportunities:

Feindre de remonter le cours du temps, de nous replacer en deça des engagements absolus que nous avons contractés vous et moi, c'est fuir à la fois la vie et la vérité pour chercher asile dans une espèce de théâtre où nos paroles n'auront plus aucun poids.³⁷

Nor does he want her to belabor her physical trials.

But unlike Edmée, Agnes has perceived a spark of truth and she is not to be calmed easily. This is not just another marriage case. She appeals to Bruno as he is: "un être unique et irremplaçable, brûlé par une fièvre, tenaillé par une angoisse, car sans cette fièvre ou cette angoisse, vous n'auriez pas revêtu cette robe qui vous expose à toutes les curiosités, pas seulement, certes, à la vénération."³⁸ She wants to know why Bruno has chosen the religious life, why his mother and sister have abandoned him. Bruno explains that after his brother's death, the family looked to him to carry on the name and had arranged a marriage for him. But the girl died.

But why did he then enter the monastery? "J'ai agi en pleine liberté, mais à la suite d'une épreuve intérieure dont je n'ai jamais parlé à personne."³⁹ Agnes must know this secret, not out of some impure curiosity. For Bruno is unlike other monks, few of whom remain faithful to their vow of chastity. Bruno shouts "calumny!"

Agnes is not questioning Bruno as a professional, as an "homme raisonnable." "Vous ne voyez pas que je cherche éperdument un témoin véritable de l'autre vie, celle qui est absente." "[...] je m'adresse à un vivant qui a triomphé de la chair, j'interroge cette chasteté absolue que je crois voir briller dans votre regard."⁴⁰

Bruno explains that Christ has commanded: "Croissez et multipliez."

No, Agnes questions Bruno's absolute chastity. Bruno continues:

Vous êtes la femme de Thierry, vous avez mis cinq enfants au monde, vous avez accompli les commandements. ...

[...] sans doute n'y a-t-il rien de plus impur au monde que cette hantise de la pureté, cette obsession qui vous habite. Si la pureté est possible ce n'est peut-être qu'à travers une impureté qui se connaît, qui s'éprouve et s'humilie devant l'inaccessible perfection. Notre seule manière d'y participer, c'est de nous abîmer devant elle et de l'adorer, car elle n'a pas de commune mesure avec notre être, notre non-être. Aspirer à la pureté dont vous croyez avoir la nostalgie, c'est prétendre, c'est mentir.⁴¹

Agnes is searching for a technique, a method to a presence. She wants confirmation of a mystery only she can witness. To put it in banal terms, she has all the pieces and only has to put them together. She has perceived that only she can know her own life. She has perceived a light of meaning beyond the conflict of everyday existence--a positive counterpart to her music. She has perceived that this situation cannot be clinically analyzed, but is the "object" of a testimony, an appeal to be answered. But he has not seen her own role.

While she reflects, Madame de Lieure brings news that Guillaume has demanded a divorce--the adoption furnishing grounds for incompatibility. Actually, Corinne is his mistress. Furthermore, Madame Lemaige de Pierrefort suspects Corinne is a Lesbian and Madame de Lieure adds that this is consonant with Guillaume's designs. But Chantal loves Guillaume and will not take the shock lightly. Bruno must face Guillaume with his responsibilities! Bruno balks: "Il n'y a plus aucune intimité entre nous."⁴²

Later Madame de Lieure muses about the miscalculations of her family: Chantal and Guillaume would never be happy married, Bruno refused to have confidence in his mother. She also tells Agnes about Bruno's close

friendship with Guillaume. Agnes also learns that Yolande has left and the children are without supervision; also the child Chantal is to adopt is afflicted with meningitis--and Chantal doesn't know it!

Corinne and Guillaume ask to spend the night on their way to Paris. Chantal and Guillaume go for a walk. Agnes reproaches Corinne for her liaison with Guillaume, her betrayal of Chantal. But Corinne counters Agnes' exaltation of chastity:

Alors, c'est un autre nom de l'impuissance. Maintenant tu m'obliges à mettre les points sur les i, eh bien je peux te dire sans l'ombre d'une hésitation que c'est vous, oui, c'est Thierry et toi qui m'avez dégoûtée du mariage, enfin je veux dire du mariage-sacrement et de ses suites utérines
...⁴³

Love and marriage have become only arbitrary conventions.

Guillaume and Chantal return from their walk to listen to Agnes play the piano. Agnes becomes disgruntled; Corinne and Chantal retire. Agnes tells Guillaume that Bruno is going to talk to him. Guillaume becomes recalcitrant.

Bruno has talked with Chantal. She wants a child only to preserve their marriage. If Guillaume abandons her, she is sure to succumb to a moral suicide for which Guillaume will be held accountable before God. Agnes exclaims: "ils ne croient à rien ni l'un ni l'autre."⁴⁴ Guillaume retorts that it is upon which he constructed his life. Bruno addresses Agnes rather than Guillaume:

Tu appelles ça construire... Mais d'abord il ne s'agit d'une idée ou d'une parole prononcée. A cette question, c'est notre vie qui est la réponse, et elle ne prendra forme qu'à la fin et par la fin.⁴⁵

Agnes reproaches him:

Ce qui est inconcevable, c'est la facilité avec laquelle vous vous dérobez quand une autre destinée est en jeu, une

destinée dont vous avez à vous reconnaître responsable.⁴⁶

After Guillaume rushes to Chantal, to whom Corinne has just told the truth, Agnes wonders if this will all be resolved in death.

On ne meurt pas aussi facilement que vous le pensez. L'animal tient bon, il résiste, il se cramponne... L'âme laisse faire, peut-être même est-ce à l'animal qu'elle obéit, même lorsqu'elle croit connaître la passion.⁴⁷

Bruno continues, revealing his choice as stemming from his recognition of homosexual tendencies. He found his true life in the community, in prayer.

Agnes questions his sincerity:

Sinon par la prière... Le ton dont vous avez dit ces mots-là ... il n'y manquait qu'un "bien sûr...", un "bien entendu..." Vous vous acquitterez régulièrement de vos obligations par quelques phrases consciencieusement répétées aux heures fatidiques... peut-être le matin au réveil avec la gymnastique respiratoire... La vérité est que ce devoir envers elle, vous ne le sentez pas. Peut-être n'avez-vous pas cessé d'éprouver pour Chantal un sourd ressentiment... ..

Vous avez fléchi sous l'émotion, mais cette émotion, qui osera la nommer? Guillaume a beaucoup changé, son visage s'est durci, il n'a plus ce regard clair, enivre...⁴⁸

Agnes is indicating that Bruno's choice was not an alternative, but a sublimation. He still is attached to Guillaume and bitter towards Chantal.

Thierry comes home: Bruno leaves. Thierry tells how lonely Yolande had propositioned him and how shamefully he had been physically attracted to her. Agnes asks if he thought she would be jealous.

Non, j'ai pensé que toi tu me pardonnerais, mais, je vais peut-être t'étonner, ce qui m'a retenu, c'est la pensée de la tristesse qu'en aurait [l'abbé].⁴⁹

Suddenly Chantal bursts in: "Il a tout avoué. Ils partiront cette nuit, c'est moi-même qui l'ai exigé. Thierry, Agnes, recueillez-moi."⁵⁰

Guillaume and Corinne went to Paris. Chantal was renting a one-room flat. Madame de Lieure had retired to a Swiss rest home. Agnes was

preparing to leave Thierry and the children. Bruno was being transferred to the missions. The family was dissolving, but some farewells were unavoidable.

Bruno tries to explain to Agnes. His revelation had been distorted because he had not spoken as a religious man, as a man "habite par Dieu." Rather he had betrayed this presence in trying to protect his "sang-froid." Thus his passion for Guillaume was rekindled...

et du coup je remettais tout en question. Il me semblait que si je n'avais pu vous faire que du mal et si je me sentais incapable d'apporter à ma pauvre soeur le moindre réconfort, c'était comme le double signe d'une malédiction.⁵¹

Agnes had struck close to home with her accusation of "compter sur ses cadres pour se remettre en place," of succumbing to a system. Thus he had accepted the dangerous mission plan for parachuting priests into communist territory, out of love: "Le plus grand, le plus haut amour est celui qu'on ne sent plus, comme ces radiations qui nous traversent sans devenir pour nous ni son ni couleur."⁵² It is this love, this "sentiment fraternel" which enables him to accuse Agnes of sacrilegious designs and forgive her in the same instant. It is the love served in the mystery of faith. But Agnes is still groping:

Mais d'où vient que votre foi retrouvée ne vous inspire pas une seule parole qui puisse m'aider à vivre? Pour moi du moins, quoi que j'aie pu penser d'abord, cette rencontre n'aura eu ni signification ni vertu.⁵³

Petit Paul also makes a visit. He, too, attempts to explain what he has done.

Vous avez pu croire que je m'installais confortablement dans un rôle usurpé, et que j'usais de mon crédit pour maintenir Thierry dans une espèce d'état d'enfance qui m'attendrissait. Il m'a dit le soupçon, l'accusation qu'il vous est arrivé de parler contre moi, je me suis interrogé avec rigueur. A vrai dire, je ne discerne pas en mon attitude la moindre concupis-

cence. Non, non... mais quelque chose de bien plus indistinct qui n'appartient pas au domaine des sens. Une intrusion de l'âme...⁵⁴

This was not a justifiable exercise of his ministry:

Ce ministère ne se justifie que s'il est une croix. Quiconque s'y établit comme dans une fonction, quiconque s'y prélassasse se rend coupable de la pire offense contre notre Seigneur.⁵⁵

He was responsible for the break between Agnes and Thierry. Now he would leave, but Agnes must not surrender Thierry to adultery. Yet, even if Thierry changes directors, the problem remains:

The abbé calls Thierry into the room. He slowly realizes that what the Church needs is heroism, in daily life.⁵⁶ But can a marriage be heroic?

Agnes answers:

En ce qui me concerne, la réponse est claire. J'ai passé de l'ardeur à la bonne volonté, puis à la résignation, enfin à la révolte. L'héroïsme ne peut pas exister sans une foi que j'imagine à peine. Nous avons été quelque temps un ménage consciencieux, rien de plus, et puis... si je décidais de rester, peut-être retrouverais-je la résignation, à un niveau encore plus bas...⁵⁷

Thierry is not as sure of his role: "Je sais bien que je n'ai rien d'un héros... mais j'espérais ne pas être un bien pensant, c'est un mot qui me fait horreur..."⁵⁸ And this is precisely where the problem arose. Only a word, not a reality. Agnes is bitter:

Thierry, je te le répète encore une fois, ce serait peut-être le salut pour notre ménage puisque nous ne pouvons ni l'un ni l'autre nous hausser à l'héroïsme, descendons d'un degré vers la vie sans mirage, où l'on pêche, où l'on se repent, où l'on recommence...⁵⁹

But Thierry can't. For him the body is something sacred which rises on the last day.

Il n'y a pas de solution, chacun doit prier pour trouver sa voie, et je crois,--mais cela, je le dis en tremblant--que le Souverain Pontife et ceux qui l'assistent, doivent prier

eux aussi. Il ne leur est pas permis non plus de s'établir dans des formules. Imaginer, réfléchir, prier, nul n'en est dispensé.⁶⁰

Chantal bursts in to say something about the children. Thierry asks l'abbé to pray for the three of them. He prays, "implemment, avec une profond ferveur."

Seigneur, donnez-nous la force de considérer nos coeurs sans dégoût, de mesurer l'entendue de nos fautes, toutes imputables à l'amour de nous-mêmes, à l'inertie et à l'aveuglement qui en sont la suite inévitable. Je m'accuse devant vous, mon Dieu, moi qui aurais dû éclairer mes amis, d'avoir été un mauvais conseiller qui les a induits en tentation. Seigneur, dans cette vie commune qu'ils vont reprendre, avec le ferme propos de se conformer à vos lois sans préjuger de leurs forces, assistez-les, donnez-leur, puisque moi j'ai erré, de rencontrer un prêtre dont les conseils ne soient pas une intrusion.⁶¹

Thierry and Agnes are going on their "second honeymoon," in a country with no map. Suddenly Thierry understands:

J'avais voulu fonder un foyer chrétien, mais qu'est-ce qu'un foyer sans la flamme? et la flamme c'est la joie. Mon contentement n'était pas la joie, il est devenu ta souffrance et ton amertume...⁶²

He has discovered what Madame de Lieure didn't see in Bruno, what Osmonde failed to find in Edmée, the joy of testimony to presence.

Again the denouement is thrust forth full of question. But the tenor of the questions is no longer the void of ignorance. "The light shines in the darkness"--but has "the darkness grasped it not"? Does Thierry really understand? Can he understand? Or will he again succumb to his naivete? Does Bruno have a true religious vocation? Or has he retired to a more subtle form of sublimation? Did Guillaume ever love Chantal? Did Corinne's machinations destroy that devotion to a beloved person? What will become of Chantal? Agnes?

Most obviously, only each character will be able to determine that,

and only for himself. Their future is not inevitable. But their being is, as is the being of those around them. Agnes has learned that beneath the superficial conflicts of everyday life, there is something essential, something else, something absent. She has perceived this mysterious presence not as an abstract idea, but as reflected in Bruno--reflected, not originating.

But Agnes is still enmeshed in the categories of problem, having, technique. She wants to know how and what, just as the physicist seeks to describe the motion and the apparent cause of the motion of electrons. But even Bruno is not able to lay hands on the presence which inhabits him; though he can, and, in fact, did betray it. He betrayed it by trying to explain it: all he can do is bear witness to it, or rather let the presence pass through him. He must not let his rationalization interfere. The analogy or symbolism of light best describes this mystery for Marcel.

No, it is more than an analogy or a symbol. It is the reality. This presence, which is served by faith, by the testimony of the believer, shines in each man, without being grasped by any one man. It is like music, perhaps it is a sort of music, which can only appeal to human beings, which, even though mechanically produced, cannot be reduced to the technique producing it. And any musician will quickly admit that real music is based on no technique, but on a certain sensitivity, a certain openness to...inspiration? Rather, reality.

As music is neither only harmony nor only melody, and as light is reducible neither to particles only nor waves only, so this presence is incarnate in the human condition, neither soul alone, nor body alone, but man in his whole being. Ignoring or over-emphasizing one or the other leads

to betrayal.

So Agnes' fidelity must include, besides her recognition of the futility of techniques and of the almost inevitable irrelevance of advice du dehors, a positive commitment, based not on any system or external norm, but on the internal conviction whose neglect leads to betrayal of appresence, essential and sacred.

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