

ARTICLE REPRINT

Prayer and its Answering according to Gabriel Marcel

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Abstract: The article introduces a set of reflections on prayer that understands the phenomenon not as a technique for producing results but as a mode of being and as a personal participation in the Transcendent. Prayer is presented as a humble communion with God—integrating worship, sacrifice, petition, and fidelity—aimed at presence rather than possession and grounded essentially in self-gift rather than in a calculative approach based on evaluating outcomes. Drawing on Marcel’s various notes and papers, the author rejects any scientific or psychological measures of efficacy, arguing that prayer “works” by transforming the believer in the order of being, not by measurable “causality.” The author suggests that, for Marcel, prayer is experienced as an existential encounter in which suffering, hope, and joy are integrated into a lived relationship with God, accessible through the order of faith.

Translator’s Introduction: The original title of the article is “*La prière et son exaucement d’après Gabriel Marcel.*” *Exaucement* has the meaning of fulfillment or answer—which with prayer amount to much the same thing, but I have used both words as best fit the context. “According to (*d’après*) Gabriel Marcel” in the title means here *in the light of* Marcel, as the author unpacks and elucidates Marcel’s thought, rather than analyses his statements, seeing how they square with one another, and what conclusions may be drawn. However, the text is not merely “hermeneutical.” On the question of prayer and its answer, this is where Marcel stands and why. References to Marcel’s texts are mostly left to footnotes and the reader’s trust that the author knows them inside out (and perhaps imagines his reader does equally). I have left the footnotes as is, because I don’t have access to all of the author’s references in French; so they would be a starting place for any reader who wanted to go further into Marcel on this subject of prayer.—*Matthew Del Nevo*

Original Editor’s Note: These pages are taken from a work that is being published this month [in 1953] by the Bibliothèque des Facultés Notre–Dame de la Paix (39, rue de Bruxelles, Namur) under the title *De l’Existence à l’Être: La Philosophie de Gabriel Marcel* (2 volumes) [*From Existence to Being: The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*]. The author synthesizes what the philosopher has scattered in his journal notes, his lectures or his articles. Most of the texts used here predate his conversion (Gabriel Marcel was

¹ This article was first published in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 75 (No. 8) 1953, pp.828–852, and later appeared in *De l’existence à l’être*. It is reprinted here with permission. Roger Troisfontaines, S.J. (1916–2007), was a Belgian Jesuit priest who served as professor of philosophy, psychology, and ethics at the Notre–Dame de la Paix Faculties in Namur from 1950–1984, and professor of religious studies at the Catholic University of Louvain from 1967–1988. A prolific author, among his books are: *De l’existence à l’être—la philosophie de Gabriel Marcel* (two volumes, 1953); *Existentialism and Christian Thought* (1949; English edition); and *I Do Not Die* (1963; English edition).

² DeepL was used to assist in the making of this translation.

baptized in 1929, at the age of 39). This fact explains the absence of specifically Christian characteristics of prayer, but does not diminish the interest of these reflections. We draw the reader's attention to the rather pejorative meaning that Marcel gives to the words "object," "objective," which he takes in the etymological sense: "ob-jectum"—"that which is thrown before, that which does not participate in my inner life." It is this portion of reality that can be reached by techniques or physico-mathematical sciences; Marcel reacts against the "scientists" who recognized only this "objective" as real. The word "being," on the contrary, designates the conscious and free participation to which every human must rise, while the word "existence" characterizes the initial participation in which one finds oneself engaged without having wanted it. (The words that relate to "objectivity" thus understood are placed in quotation marks; those that refer to "being" are in italics).—*N.d.l.R.*

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As an exercise in our personal *communion* with God, prayer is the essential activity of the mind. Its expressions are numerous but unequally consistent with the essence of prayer. Some deviate so far from it that they can be described as almost completely impure. Authentic prayer is neither the mechanical recitation of formulas nor a self-centered request. It must be, at the very least, a humble and fervent way of *uniting myself with . . . (m'unir à . . .)*, clearly stating that the One with whom I unite myself is not one of my fellow human beings, but the Absolute Transcendent.³

Worship, Vow, Sacrifice

Also, the first form of prayer to be noted is adoration, the recognition of *the Other* in a feeling for the sacred that includes respect, filial fear, and boundless charity. Through a paradox which, transposed to the absolute, is that of love itself, religion accentuates the distinction (one might even say, the sense of distance) between those it unites. Never, as a believer, do I treat God as a "means" that I "would have" at my disposal. I cannot reach Him correctly through a distinct, "possessive" apprehension, but only through the appeal launched, from the depths of my poverty, towards the *absolute Recourse*. It cannot be a matter of relying on words, on my own strength; but in the very act by which I commit myself, I open infinite credit to the One I invoke. It is up to Him to reveal Himself to me as He sees fit. There, where pure reverence tends to be abolished in piety, religion degrades—just as love is exhausted where respect is lacking. The faithful do not pray first to ask, to change, or to "do" something: what they seek above all is *presence*. For them, God is not "there" like an "object." In the *mystery*, indefinable in "objective" terms, I discover that God is, in His very Transcendence, more intimate than my innermost being. *You are with me, I am with You*. That is enough for me, because You love me. As soon as You are present to me, I can no longer doubt it. To pray is to allow oneself to be loved. Those who do not want prayer refuse to know infinite love. When I pray, I place myself in the axis of a light that shines without my forcing it, but which can only reach me and pass through me if I have adopted this welcoming position, which is essentially humility. I admire and I give myself. I join my hands in the feudal gesture of personal homage, of dedication. This is an act, the highest there is, in which

³ Mss XIV and XVIII; J.M, 137, 197, 255; E.A, 42; M.E, II, 95–96, 103; *Méditation sur Dieu, dans Philosophies*, I–III–1925, pp. 607–610. **Abbreviations used in the footnotes can be found at the end of the article.**

it is not a question of "taking" or even "understanding" something, but of opening oneself and offering oneself.⁴

The "objective" or "technical" mentality would like to "explain" self-sacrifice through an operation analogous to a market. This cannot be the case, even if certain literature seems to support the idea that the soul renounces superficial and perishable goods to ensure the possession of a beatitude independent of all human vicissitudes. This distorting interpretation overlooks what is truly specific in the experience it seeks to convey. Are there not, moreover, sacrifices that are made in the night of seemingly total ignorance and disbelief? Thanks to them, we know that the prerogative of martyrdom is not reserved for those who hope for "heaven," and we do not succumb to the temptation to denigrate sacrifice by attributing it (falsely, moreover) to a calculation. Men are capable of facing death for an idea or for other people without any individual hope to sustain them. This fact challenges the idea that it is by ordination to the absolute that man transcends "nature" and places himself on a higher plane. When the believer seeks to explain his sacrifice by invoking the idea of some kind of bargain, he deludes himself and misunderstands the true meaning of his act.

Does that then mean that man lives in a "pure renunciation" such as Gide sometimes advocated? Certainly not. What may appear to the spectator as pure renunciation has an inner side that this spectator, due to his position, is incapable of perceiving. This inner side is, however, the true face of the act, of which those outside it are only allowed to perceive a fallacious obverse. It is the perspective of the "spectator," and even "perspective" itself, that must be eliminated. What we have, not to imagine, but to conceive, is the act of sacrifice insofar as the agent is himself intimately engaged in it. This act certainly presupposes a true disengagement. From this undoubtedly comes the experience of relief felt by the soul suddenly freed from the weight of daily life and the minute servitudes it imposes. But we would be seriously mistaken in imagining this disengagement as the withdrawal of a being who isolates himself from the community in which he participated. The process of sacrifice is essentially different. It resides, at once, in this faculty of tearing away and *in the response*, sometimes immediate, sometimes delayed, that reality grants to anyone who discovers within themselves this strange power and obtains from themselves the ability to exercise it in self-consecration. Pure renunciation is nothing if it does not have as its correlative the act by which a sovereign and adorable Reality is posited in its absolute transcendence. This Reality which responds, which maintains, which stimulates, which renews, in truth, who is it?

Thought here must pause as a pilgrim pauses and reflects before crossing a venerated threshold. The Christian himself must first impose silence on himself before uttering the divine name, which for him is the only response. Just because it is a unique response. Because the impulse that drives the faithful to proclaim it always risks being not the ecstatic sob of a child recognising his father, but the automatic recitation of a catechumen repeating a well-learned lesson. The true believer does not like to answer the atheist who asks him: "But to whom, to what do you offer yourself, open yourself?" For while he has the absolute certainty of the divine presence, he feels incapable of speaking about it adequately. Treated as a "third party" about whom one discourses or discusses, God is no longer then the *You* that is ineffable *with* whom I commune. There is no other way than to help the atheist meet God personally and live with Him. Only then will he be able to understand. If the believer ever lets go of his reserve, he risks

⁴ E.A. 211, 277-278, 280-281, 330-332; P.A., 289-294; H.V. 139; M.E., I, 37; M.E., II, 94-95; *Réflexion et Mystère*, dans *Cahiers du Monde Nouveau*, V-1949, p.71.

provoking a kind of retractile movement in the face of what he will inevitably regard as the shamelessness of a lover too inclined to divulge his secret.⁵

Taken in its purity, the gift of self does not imply any of the characteristics of a necessarily conditional bargain: "If you grant me such a favour, I undertake in return to act in a way that will please you." Any attempt at seduction should be excluded from authentic religious life. Assuming that I undertake to respond to the favour eventually received with an act that will demonstrate my gratitude, this visible act will only be the sign of the interior act by which I will dedicate myself to the power that will have been exercised for me. The religious vow is, in essence, unconditional. It is not a matter of saying: "If through this favour granted You reveal Yourself to me, in return I will dedicate myself to You." But rather (for thus the vow is truly a prayer): "I ask You to make Yourself present, so that it may be possible for me to dedicate myself to You." I do not claim moreover that You should attach any value for Yourself to this consecration which can add nothing to what You are; but if You love me, if You regard me as Your son, it seems to me that You must want, not certainly for Yourself, but for myself, that I recognize You and serve You, since, if it is not given to me to recognize You and serve You, I am doomed to perdition."

If commitment followed by fidelity creates *being*, and if *I am* all the more so as I unite myself more absolutely with a *being* higher than I am,⁶ it is obvious that the unconditional vow of religion made to God is the most ontological act that man can perform. Once the commitment is made, absolute creative fidelity will have no other goal than to keep the human–divine relationship alive. More than for other fidelities, of which no third party has the right to establish themselves as Judge, this fidelity is recognized only by the one who lives it. At most, it can appear to us in certain witnesses, the *martyrs* above all. Even then, it is only perceptible to those who more or less participate in their faith.

If all fidelity aspires to unconditionality, it must, to become absolute, encompass the absolute person: God. Absolute fidelity to a creature, as required, for example, by the sacrament of marriage, presupposes the One before whom the spouses unite. This is why, unlike friends who might break away from their mutual commitments, spouses—even apart from social reasons: children to raise, an example to set, etc.—remain indissolubly united. Even where a certain sentiment no longer exists, the constancy of their relationship is not reduced to a proud fidelity of each to themselves; in the absence of fidelity to the other, their constancy can be interpreted as a deeper fidelity rooted in God, the absolute Other.⁷

When faith triumphs over darkness and inner division, joy bursts forth, the joy that is not only the mark, but the very outpouring of *being*. Joy implies fullness. Thus, everything done in authentic joy has religious value. On the contrary, any division of the soul from itself alienates it from God or testifies to its distance from Him. The believer, however, reconciles the state of perfect trust with restlessness (*l'inquiétude*) very well. For if joy is the opposite of self-satisfaction, it risks becoming confused with it when restlessness is lacking. The religious life, paradoxically, reconciles the feeling of unworthiness linked to the nature of the finite and sinful being, knowing itself as such, with unalterable faith, the experience of fullness that results from

⁵ J.M., 158; H.C.H., 162; *André Gide et le Problème spirituel*, dans *La Nouvelle Revue des Jewies*, 10–VII–1929, p. 765; *La Parole est aux Saints, Préface de Les Condamnes*, par M. Deguy, Pion, 1946, pp. 8–16, 23–24.

⁶ Here alluding to previous chapters of the book.

⁷ E.A., 160; R.L. 205; H.V., 160–162.

the feeling of resourcefulness (*plénitude*). This reconciliation can only be precarious here below: hence a complex drama with multiple twists and turns that is the very life of the believing soul.⁸

Dialogue

Setting a rhythm of human–divine communion, prayer is either silent contemplation or incessant dialogue. All accents of the intersubjective relationship are possible; everything can provide material for interior conversation. God is never a "him" for me, a believer, and nothing can be thought of as foreign to God. If I discuss a question (political, for example) with a friend, this question is an "it" for "him" as well as for "me", it is external to us both. But is this the case when it concerns what touches him most intimately? To think that the world can be an "object" for God, wouldn't that be to deny God as such? To think of an "object" is, in fact, to think of "that for which I do not count."

"But, one might ask, can't I think of the world in this way? Is it not from the idea of a world for which I do not count that I rise to that of the personal God for whom I am *you (tu)*? There is a perfectly graspable dialectic here." It is a question of knowing whether my relationship with God, in order to be alive and enriching, must not exceed what is dangerously abstract in such a relationship. Far from making me grasp God as somehow "outside" the universe, does not religious life consist in the fact that it transcends any enunciation with an "objective" aim and forbids me from treating anything as a "third party" in relation to the dialogue that I constantly pursue with God? Should not all creation be considered, in its relationship to ultimate communion, as a gift that God gives me to "prepare me for the Gift that He will make of Himself"? "My most intimate, unshakeable conviction," Marcel noted on March 4, 1933, "and if it is heretical, so much the worse for orthodoxy—is, whatever so many spiritual scholars and doctors have said, that God in no way wants to be loved by us *against* creation, but glorified through creation and starting from it. This is why so many edifying books are intolerable to me. This God, set against creation and in some way jealous of his own works, is in my eyes nothing but an idol. It is a deliverance for me to have written this. And I declare, until further notice, that I will be insincere every time I appear to be making a statement contrary to what I have just written."

The next day, he added: "What I wrote yesterday still needs to be qualified. This is true at the stage I am at, but I know that this stage is still rudimentary."

Spiritual people all know this oscillation between the discovery of the Creator in his creature and the withdrawal from the world to be absorbed in the love of God alone. It is not up to us to impose limits on the inspiration of a friendly and divine life. But it remains true that we must guard ourselves against the excesses of an imagination that proposes to itself the fiction of a Jealous God demanding for himself alone the tribute of our fervour. The theocentrism of a Bérulle, for example, which has given us perhaps unsurpassable formulas, cannot by their anthropomorphic affirmations translate the transcendence of God, and this is not only because of the weakness or compromising nature of language. Do not mystics discover in all that is, in the most humble realities, an infinite value that accepts no exchange, no substitution? Do they not recognize that, as long as our becoming lasts, God is within us like a guest? He wants the dwelling He has granted us to remain ours until the sacred moment when it will shatter. *I am* only to the extent that beings count on me; can I believe that these beings do not count for God or only count for Him to the extent that I mediate between them and Him? That would be

⁸ J.M., 230–231.

ridiculous egotism. I have not recognized God as long as I do not think, and as long as I do not want with all my strength, that an infinity of other beings also count for Him. Moreover, what type would be the reality of the "it" that would be exclusively "him" for God, that could absolutely not be loved?

Already in human love, the lover finds in all things the opportunity to pay homage to the person he loves. Hyperbolically, he offers the world by giving himself: "All this is for you. I love you in all things and I give you everything." The world is an infinitely closer bond between the faithful and God. But how can I offer myself to Him when I know I am his creature? How can I justify the exclamation wrested from the religious soul moved by the spectacle of life: "To you, oh! my God!?" Belonging to myself and God (on the plane of existence), *I* must nevertheless give myself to him, turn towards him (*to be-with-him*). And "all that" that already belonged to him, I must give it to him freely, restore it to him, consecrate it to him. It is as if God expected every believer to recognize their divinity. When they are not directly addressed to a *You*, our formulas become mechanized or slip more or less into idolatry."⁹

Invocation and Universality

Before full communion, my prayer always takes the form of a call, an invocation. A traveller on earth, I can never believe I have "arrived." Certain parts of myself, the most free, the most liberated, emerge into the light; others, not illuminated by the almost horizontal sun of dawn, have not yet been evangelized. Responding by faith to the divine invitation—which always has the initiative—I recognize that religious (ontological) participation was preceded by a "de facto participation" (existential) which, without my knowledge, constituted me as a creature, as the image of God. My participation in God by faith still remains, I understand, inchoate, inadequate to my de facto participation. But just as I did not begin alone, I will not progress alone. It is from the tension, from the living dualism between the two modes of participation that are reconciled in the personal unity of God, that invocation springs. Is not the prayer most suited to my earthly condition of the type: *Be with me, assist me*. Not in the abstract, but in a particular, rigorously determined, situation. Is it not in tragic circumstances where human beings cannot accept their solitude, where they feel threatened—as individuals or as groups—that the need for God, the call to the absolute You, arises in their souls most forcefully?

Prayer for oneself (in order *to be-with-God*) therefore has a profound meaning and value. But the "*be-with-me*" must not give us to think that everything is achieved in the relationship between God and me. Implying communion, *being* (unlike "having") is the prototype of those goods that grow when others participate in them. Another would only be excluded from my prayer if they were a third party, a "him" in relation to God and myself. But no one is whole in relation to God, and it depends on me whether the "him" becomes, for me, a *you* [*tu*]. If they are already believers, they participate in the human-divine *we*, and, from a religious point of view, God himself appears as the mediator in whom alone I truly am *with* the one for whom I pray. When I pray for others, I posit that their reality, while being independent of me (who am only a creature), nevertheless depends to some degree on the act of prayer itself, by which—united with God—I enact; my prayer contributes in some way to this reality of being *with* the one for whom I pray. Thanks to divine mediation, what we already have assurance of on

⁹ J.M., X, 135, 137, 158–159, 224; E.A., 196; *Charles Du Bos dans ses rapports avec lui-même*, dans *Résurrection* (Toulouse), 3II–1946; *Du Secret au MerveiUeu*, dans *Alternances* (1946); *Existentialisme et Pensée chrétienne*, dans *Témoignages*, n° XIII, 1947.

a purely psychological level is undoubtedly verified ontologically, namely that each of us is somewhat made of the thought and love of others. Even when I cannot "do" anything for others, when it is not possible for me to visibly demonstrate my fidelity to them, I can still—and I must—pray for them. Is not the clear affirmation of this interdependence of spiritual destinies on the plane of salvation—as Marcel noted at the time of his conversion—what is sublime, unique in Catholicism?

In reaction to a subjectivism inherited from idealism, a certain sociology has declared that prayer is never the work of an isolated conscience and that it only finds a place within a constituted group. This is a clear exaggeration. Prayer is a personal act, but this should not obscure the element of communion included in all authentic religious life. Even if I pray alone in my room, I connect myself through and in this prayer to a communion that does not primarily belong to the visible world. This has little to do with the claims of an "objective" sociology focused on the institutional aspect of religion.

The voluntary desire for union with my brothers, essential to the religious value of prayer, is obviously not limited to coreligionists. The *de facto* participation—of which the believer is aware for himself—extends, as expressed by faith in the universal fatherhood of God, to all men. The faithful would like everyone to rise equally to *religious participation*. Unable to resign themselves to the thought that others will remain irremediably outside of authentic *being*, they feel, alongside divine clemency, that they intercede for all their brothers and sisters. Thanks to prayer's mediation, they have the hope that those very ones who remain dominated by what Claudel calls the spirit of the earth will gradually assume their personality.

An expression of my union with God, in its blossoming and in its realization, prayer also manifests and seals my union with others. All in all, I truly pray for others only when there is or when I aim to establish a spiritual communion between us, better, when I am or want to be with them in the same relationship in which I am with myself. Praying for my soul or praying for my friend, are they not, ultimately, one and the same act? In selfless love, praying for *me* or praying for *you* is always and first of all praying for *us*. Would we not find here the true formula of prayer? I pray to God *for us*. My God, be with us! Help us!¹⁰

Demand

Adoration, dialogue, invocation are relative to your *being*. Request relates rather to "having." Is it legitimate? Yes, to the extent that having remains subordinate to your *being*; not to the extent that it obstructs it. The temptation is specious, because a minimum of having is indispensable here below, and all having can be good when it remains a means. The error—and the fault—is to covet it for its own sake, to convert it into an end that excludes the interpersonal relationship in which Your true *being* consists.

The distinction between what *we are* and what we "possess" is not always clear. Where, for example, do we place intelligence? Can we pray to be more intelligent? No, if it is only to be more powerful, to better master the natural order. Yes, if it is to participate more fully in the communion of being. Prayer is not directed to "possession," but to the good use I will make of it. What I "have," as such, does not yet have a religious significance; admissible, even indispensable in its relationship to *being*, having becomes harmful outside of this relationship, for it fills man with a fallacious arrogance and sets him against his brothers. In no case can I pray that "my part" in this world be increased. It is not in relation to "my part," thought of as such, that I enter into a

¹⁰ J.M., 73, 86, 133, 169, 219–220, 255, 257–258; E.A., 297, 350–353; M.E., II, 95.

relationship with God. Judging my share is, moreover, judging Him; even when I thank Him for the lot He has assigned me, I risk setting myself up as an entity exclusive of others, without concerning myself with their lot. This is all the more true since I would consider external goods, objects of competition: power, wealth, and, if not intelligence, at least the benefits one can derive from them. Beyond certain limits, gratitude would turn into idolatry. My gratitude, like my prayer, must focus less on what I "have" than on what *I am*.

It goes without saying that this is only an attitude–limit. In practice, prayer inevitably tends to be treated as a means. However, the more my request concerns an "object" or a means of increasing my power, the less it is, in the proper sense, a prayer. It then subordinates God himself to my ambitions, it treats Him as a finite individual whose way of acting I attempt, through my appeal, to modify. When I ask a stranger for directions, I expect them to "put themselves in my place," to imagine my predicament and provide me with the information they possess; sympathy will determine them to utter a word (or make a gesture) that they would not have uttered (or would not have made) without my request. We remain at the level of "having." When I pray to be cured of an illness, my prayer is not illegitimate; however, it is not without commonality with purely human requests addressed to beings purely human. My request implies the existence of a powerful, even all–powerful being, on whom my healing depends, just as, for example, the release of a prisoner depends on a despot. If my request is an impure prayer, does it not imply that assimilation which tends to reduce God to non–divine norms?

Conversely, to the extent that prayer tends to promote my *being*, it is no longer addressed to a finite individuality: it does not put pressure on God, but opens me to his action, to his love. Since *I am* all the more the more God *is* for me, I should not ask God for anything other than Himself. If my prayer dares not rise to this supreme Gift, at least let it never concern anything other than what is likely to be regarded as a divine gift, as a disguised form of this indivisible Gift that God makes to me of Himself. I will then be beyond all exclusivity, beyond anything that resembles the attribution of a jealously possessed "share." I can ask for health, for example, or the ability to perceive, but only to the extent that they are gifts from God. Therefore, I will not demand them, for it may be—and God judges this better than I—that they are not the best gifts for me. It is not my isolated, momentary advantage that I adopt as the norm. Requesting is an impure prayer, insofar as it remains centred on the "self," insofar as it pursues a more or less selfish end. It will therefore be less impure when it is directed not at myself, but at others, even those closest to me. Unless, of course, it is dictated solely by consideration of "my" individual well–being. Asking for the healing of my servant is a prayer that is not flawed from its very beginning, precisely to the extent that my servant is at the same time my friend.

If I have within me the capacity to pray, I feel the duty to call upon this mysterious power on behalf of all those for whom, however vaguely, I feel responsible. To refuse to pray for them would be to abandon them, to betray them. If I am a believer, I know, moreover, that the One I invoke has regard for the act by which I assume this responsibility. Certainly, we are here in a mixed bag: as I am in some way carnally attached to those for whom I pray, my prayer can always be attributed a selfish character. However, I do not have the right, yielding to excessive purism, to argue this relative impurity as a reason to refuse to pray on behalf of those I love. The notion of God implied here is already much purer than the one that underpinned the selfish request. What is presupposed now is the active recognition in God and by God of the bond that constitutes all true love. I love all the more authentically the less love I have for "myself," for "what" I can expect from the other; I love all the better the more subordinate to my prayer "having" and "me" are, the more the communion of you and I is blended and perfected in the

sense of *we*. From the act of praying, we therefore discern the possibility of progression in the very way in which God is thought of. The request focused on the "me" alone implies a false idea of God and so may be said to be an impure, inauthentic prayer. It does not open me to *presence*, to *communion*, to *Being*.

Considered in his reality, God does not appear to me as a distributor of "having," but as the One who wants me as *I am*. Consequently, true prayer will never exempt me from assuming the responsibilities incumbent upon me. The spirit of prayer fits very well with the positive steps prescribed by reason in the face of a given situation. It is perfectly conceivable that a surgeon might feel the need to pray before undertaking a particularly difficult operation. However, for him, it is not at all a "means," a "technique," which supplements that of his profession. Thus, again, if I must (especially in our time) pray for peace, this does not mean asking God that peace, treated as a good external to me, be left to me or granted; it means first praying that I may be given the ability to maintain the spirit of peace within myself and indirectly around me. For this reason. I cannot renounce thinking, appreciating, I cannot cultivate a lazy or indiscriminate "pacifism" that would run counter to the noble demands of human reason.¹¹

Fulfillment (L'exaucement)

These insights shed light on one of the most difficult questions in religious philosophy: is prayer always answered? We would answer: yes, to the extent that it is not a self-interested request but an intimate relationship with God, that is, *yes*, to the extent that it is truly prayer.

The "problem" of prayer being answered [*exaucement*], it should be noted, only concerns those who "objectify" prayer and, from the outside, theorize it. It does not pose itself to the believer as such. Whether he prays for himself or for another, he has faith in the effectiveness of his prayer. Even if it is not empirically answered, he is convinced that it is not in vain. He *is* close with God; the one for whom he prays *is* close with God too (unless he refuses); this is what the believer wants, this is what he always obtains. The rest, the details of the requests, he cares less for; it is up to the Love of God to decide, whose designs are often incomprehensible to us. Fulfillment of prayer is only a problem to those who seek its "objective verification", those who have not taken prayer itself seriously, those who do not pray or only do so "for the sake of conscience," without even seeking the presence of God, the result of a regressive shift from *being* to "having," from *faith* to "science." When a believer considers prayer's answerability, it is not at a level of himself or his assumed faith, it is precisely that he prays to the extent that he ceases to think of such things. The man of prayer who withdraws into himself, who self-analyses and thereby splits his act of prayer and its results, interrupts the communion with God by which he exists; such activity externalises and "objectifies" God's will and thereby isolates it from the supernal order that frames and supports it. When I question God's attitude toward my prayer, I place myself outside of my own invocation. When I ask myself whether my prayer has in fact been answered, it is no longer a *prayer* that I am thinking of—but a simple approach to some power. I return to the crude idea that reckoning is possible with God. In short, prayer can never be treated as a "means" to be questioned retrospectively, whose effectiveness is a measured by practical means. Pragmatism is, in this sense, the very negation of religion.

The "problem" of knowing whether "there is" someone who hears my prayer and can respond to it is, moreover, insoluble, because it is false. It is a misunderstanding of prayer to

¹¹ J.M., 206, 219–220, 232, 259, note; M.E., II, 96–100, 104; *La Vertu de Force et la Paix*. dans *La Vie Intellectuelle*, 15–V–1935, p. 357.

imagine it as a call made by a certain station, and one wonders whether or not it is picked up by another station, a sort of telephone switchboard that would be God. We are, much more than we realize, prisoners of this crude representation, inspired by the "technical" mentality. We equate prayer with "objective communication"—on a plane where observations and "verifications" are possible because we move in a space where locations and reference points can be made. But the very act of praying implies that I transcend this plane. Let us suppose that, by some impossibility, I am in a position to verify whether my call is heard (as in the case where I would seek to know whether an S.O.S. launched by a ship in distress has been picked up by some station locatable in space), the empirically identified Receiver would immediately appear to me as not being the *absolute Recourse* toward which my invocation rises. The transcendence of the One I invoke asserts itself in relation to all "objective experience," in relation even to all rational supposition, which would still be no more than anticipated and schematized experience. That transcendence presents itself to the figurative imagination as a spatial transcendence, "upward," does not mean that we need to be disturbed by this (certain categories of lived experience are inevitably linked to the fact of my embodiment), but neither is there any need to be overly fixed on "upwardness". Beyond the opposition of "here" and "elsewhere," despite the forms of temptation that are space and time, we must remember that the One to whom I pray is more interior to me than I am to myself and we may then discover the dizzying closeness of God, His *presence*. The situation of the exile is exemplary here. He *is* not primarily where he lives, where he is condemned to live; he is much more where he no longer lives, where he does not yet live. Is it not only on the condition of feeling exiled from *Being* that each of us goes beyond the immediate and, in some way, sheer existence in which he finds himself, to become what he *is*?

Given the difference in level between the one who prays and the one who poses "problems" about prayer, it must be said that prayer is effective and that this effectiveness is perceived only by faith, understood as an inchoate experience of the personal relationship with the "unobjectifiable" Transcendent. Every prayer presents itself as understood and welcomed, given the One it invokes. A request addressed to a finite being can either not be heard or not be taken into consideration; this is so long as finite beings remain "external" to one another. But I cannot be "external" to God. Let us suppose that what I prayed for has not come true. If I say that my prayer has not been heard, I will have thereby lost the awareness that it is to God that I address it: I fall into idolatry. My resentment translates into an all-too-human formula of "external" that immediately places itself outside the religious sphere.

If my prayer is sincere and if God hears it, He will certainly answer it. This answer does not necessarily translate into words, it does not always correspond to my still selfish desire. It can consist of an ineffable pacification, a grace of silent acceptance, a mysterious influx, an "unobjectifiable" inner transformation. But for those who believe, prayer appears to be certainly effective in the order of *being*.¹²

"It appears to itself to be effective," retorts the rationalist, who has not experienced true prayer. Here we are! Prayer is explained by psychological and sociological conditions to which human beings are subject. "If you pray with sufficient intensity, you will believe your prayer is, if not answered, at least heard. In reality, you have only transformed your 'state of mind,' your subjective 'disposition.' Show me, then, what effect does your prayer have on external reality?"

Many points could be taken up in this "scientistic" objection. First, it is not the intensity of prayer that matters, but its quality, its ontological level. Are we at the level of "objective

¹² J.M, 159, 219–220, 257–259; E.A., 30, 181–182; R.I, 48, 189; M.E, H, 100–102; *Sous le Soleil de Satan* par G. Bernanos, dans la *Nouvelle Revue Française*, VI–1926, p. 757; *Le Primat de l'existentiel* (1947).

having" and "mechanical efficiency" or rather at the level of *being* and participation? We must certainly safeguard the reality of the action of prayer, if we do not want religious life to be reduced to a play of subjective appearances; but what do the words "action on external reality" mean? Doesn't prayer, an act of communion, expressly deny this exteriority? By what right then can we demand that the "action" of prayer be "objective," that is, "verifiable"? However, it would be rather contradictory to admit that any mind placed in so-called "normal" conditions (those of "science") could recognize this effect, which is situated on a plane of personal participation (with God and with my brothers) that goes beyond the plane of "science."

Once again, the objection presupposes the false dilemma between what is merely an individual disposition, a subjective "state of mind," and what is truly an "object," a fact of experience properly speaking. It places itself on the ground of "there is." It starts from the idea that the believer places himself, in prayer, in "communication" with something or someone who perhaps does not exist. The atheist declares: "In reality, there is no one to hear you or to respond to you. You believe that such and such a light, such and such a favor, are sent to you by God; this is an error. It is you who invents this illusory causality that you call Grace." However, we have deliberately avoided the word "causality," which, interpreted as "objective causality," would distort our perspective, just as it would vitiate traditional theological statements. If the believer thought of divine help as an "object," as a force of nature, he would grant "anyone" the right of verification. But he specifically forbids himself from confusing divine action with "physical causality." No more than in the realm of volition, the idea of an etiology is applicable here. However, the atheist's denial would only be valid if "specific verifications" were possible; it is legitimate only where "identifiable causalities" are at work. When I wrongly imagine that a given gift was given to me by a given person, it is possible to establish through investigation that this is not the case. This cannot be the case in the case of prayer, for God cannot be "himself" for me, and there is no possible "investigation" into his way of acting. Because it is an intersubjective relationship, the reality of the divine response can only be perceived by the one participating in the dialogue; it cannot be "demonstrated" by a "general observer" outside this personal communion.

Will not the opponent conclude that since no investigation, no "verification" is possible, there is also no sense in saying that it is true that God revealed Himself to the believer? Let us grant him that this communion is not an "objective truth," since subjectivity must be engaged in it for it to exist. We will not concede that we remain "below" the true. Is not *the Truth of Being* "beyond" the "scientific truths"? If one had to choose between the plane of "science" (that of depersonalized "generality") and that of *faith* (that of intransmissible personality), would it not be the latter that should be given ontological preeminence? In truth, one must not choose, but use science where it is competent and only prohibit it from arrogating to itself the right to subject everything to its method of experimentation and "verification," to rationalize the personal concrete that escapes its grasp.

By virtue of the power of universal intrusion that he grants to "science," the rationalist attributes to himself the truly magical power to decipher a faith he does not share and which he declares incapable of elucidating itself. But isn't the postulate of "generality," valid in scientific research (insofar as it is impersonal), excluded in the religious domain, as in the aesthetic domain, for example? In the spiritual economy, "generality" as such is in no way a supreme end. It is only a means or a basis on which the essential remains to be built by each person personally. In particular, religious life exists only for the concrete person who affirms himself as both real, as desiring and suffering, and at the same time as finite, as dependent.

Does this mean that prayer escapes all control, all criteria? Certainly not, for that would be to fall almost inevitably into illusion, without any means of remedy. All spiritual people have felt the need to test the quality of their inner movements, to discern spirits. But their reflection, which we do not need to examine in detail here, remains at the very level of prayer. It does not claim—except when it misunderstands its own role—to return to the criteria and methods of "objective science." It is solely against this "scientist" pretension that we protest.

Now, this is what we find when the rationalist becomes a "psychologist." He no longer says openly: "No help was given," but: "You prayed, and as a result of praying, you suddenly felt stronger. The help you received emanated from the unconscious parts of yourself." Once again, he treats me as an "object," that is, as a certain active system. Prayer appears to him as a definable process that continued within this system. While he does not deny its complete efficacy, he declares that only the belief in this efficacy had any causal value here. He therefore admits that "in a subject exhibiting such and such a characteristic, the belief in the efficacy of such and such an approach can lead to such and such a consequence." Here he is in possession of a "general" proposition about "suggestion" or "autosuggestion." We see how the devaluation took place. The psychologist does not address the believer, he speaks of "him" as someone who was the "seat" of such a phenomenon. This is a topic of discussion and investigation. The believer's own account, his personal understanding, is nullified. Who proceeds in a purely dogmatic manner? Is it not the psychologist who treats himself as the norm? He will obviously defend himself by observing that he is translating into a universal language an affirmation stated in particular terms. The question is whether this translation is legitimate. If I am a believer, I will say to the psychologist: "Are you qualified to translate this experience—which you have not lived? Your translation is only possible because you have not lived it."

If the psychologist, in fact, recognized this faith as real (instead of treating it as a simple "subjective" phenomenon), he would associate himself with it. I cannot say: "God is truly for you" without conceding that he is also for me. But if I limit myself to saying "for him," I do not leave the domain of "objects," I distort this relationship between "him" and God. Only the "psychologist" could not express a judgment in you without elevating himself from the plane of "science" to the personal plane. He would lose his aura of "scholar," he would be no more than a man among men!

From the perspective of the praying believer, we can therefore conclude that when the prayer is entirely sincere and appears to be answered to the one who formulates it, we are beyond any valid criticism, because the idea of an absolute recourse is a function of faith and is rigorously opposed to criticism as such.¹³

If this is so, we see that there is no way to establish whether or not (to use the objector's utilitarian language) prayer "serves" or does not "serve."

1) For fear of ambiguity, the believer will not assert that it always "serves." His interlocutor would immediately equate it with a "mechanical cause" endowed with constant efficacy. This interpretation is obviously unacceptable. A truly spiritual notion of prayer presupposes, between human freedom and divine freedom, a relationship exclusive of any mechanical constraint. Prayer is not a magical rite.

¹³ J.M., 99, 220–223, 257, 274–277, 287–289; M.E., II, 102, 104, 106; *La Querelle de l'Athéisme, dans le Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, V–VI: 1928, pp. 81–83 ; *Exposé sur les Groupes d'Oxford, dans le Bulletin de l'Union pour la Vérité*, IV–V: 1936, pp. 369–371 ; *Dieu et Liberté, dans Giornate di Metafisica*, 1947, pp. 490–492; *Le Primat de l'existentiel, dans Actas del Primer Congreso Nacional de PUosofia, Mendoza (Argentine)*, 1949.

2) Nor will the believer say that prayer never "serves," to express the fact that its action is not comparable to that of a physical agent. The proponent of the deterministic or naturalistic point of view of "science" would conclude that it is completely ineffective. He believes himself to be in the presence of a purely blind and absolutely necessary process, indifferent to any kind of value and to which he would be impossible, except by physical means, to change anything. The believer does not admit this. I pray for the healing of a loved one; they heal, I give thanks to God. Does this mean that my prayer has acted like a remedy? It is clearly not. Its action is not "objective" in the sense required by the "scientist." But it is metaphysically false to see in this realism of physical conditions the ultimate expression of what is. The value that this healing takes on for us is in no way less real than the factual conditions analyzed by "science." The criterion of the "scholar" does not legitimize its negation when it claims to prohibit me from regarding my prayer as effective.

3) Since the effects of prayer are sometimes tangible (although it requires the eyes of faith to discern them as effects of prayer), it will be said that prayer "serves" *in certain cases*. This intermediate solution risks being equally unfortunate. Indeed, if a list of effective and vain prayers could be drawn up, if it were possible by statistical means to determine the cases where it is worth praying and those "where it would be a waste of time," it would be the end of prayer as such; belief in prayer, if it is reflected upon at all, absolutely denies the possibility of such a calculation. If I say "this time it would be a waste of time," I am, for all that, outside religious life. The same is true if I adopt the attitude of the sick person who, in desperation, summons a charlatan under the pretext that there's no risk in trying, or that "there's a chance it might get me out of trouble." The sick person in question is banking on our general ignorance of matters relating to life and death; he tells himself that after all, the charlatan "might hit the nail on the head." He is, in short, dominated by the idea of trial and error. Everyone fumbles: there is no reason why the charlatan shouldn't have a "happier hand" than the high priest of the Faculty. This way of reasoning, this very skepticism, fundamentally implies a belief in the possibility of a rational "technique" that humans do not yet possess. When a sick person has lost all confidence in medicine, religion may appear to them as a way to get out of trouble "in case there is another world," as a set of precautions that it is best not to neglect, etc. Against such a conception, the rationalist objection would certainly be valid. If religious practices are conceived as "means" to achieve "certain ends," the first question that arises is certainly whether these "means" are "effective." But the believer precisely rejects any "technical" relationship between prayer and the event. This is why they cannot adequately answer the question: Does prayer "serve"? They do not stand on the same level as the one asking it, and any answer will remain ambiguous. Indeed, even if the event responds to prayer, it cannot appear as conditioned by it only to the believer and to the believer alone, or better (this is to rule out an illegitimate individual interpretation) to faith and to faith alone. We cannot therefore speak of "causality" in the restricted sense of the word; because the judgment of causality is by definition "objective," valid regardless of whoever makes it, valid for "thought in general."

Will it be said that if we locate the action of your prayer in the order of faith, it is by force, because religion has been dislodged from the world of "objects" when, originally, it aimed to provide an "objective" explanation? The ambiguity is obvious. Yes, certainly, the distinction we now establish between "objective" determination (the plane of "having," of "science") and religious understanding (the plane of *being*, of *faith*) could only be formulated at the end of a long speculative development. The question is whether this development has not resulted in the identification with ever greater precision of the very essence of religion and the ontological

domain. Should we regret, in the name of faith, that religious affirmations of a "causal" (in an "objective" sense) order can no longer be made? For the truly religious soul, no regret is possible here. Far from requiring the confusion of domains, religion never accommodates itself to it except very poorly. For the believer, faith is an essential, intrinsic condition, without which no efficacy can be attributed to prayer.

Does this mean that prayer and the idea of its effectiveness degenerate into pure "subjective" representations, into vain illusions? Certainly not, but it is important to distinguish once again between subjectivity and "subjectivism." We certainly admit, we demand the intervention of subjectivity, the participation of the Self: there is no faith, there is no prayer except at the level of Being. To exclude the subject is to break communion, to annihilate that of which one claims to speak. Is not the truest, the most real of musical interpretations the one in which the artist engages his personality to the greatest extent? We are beyond the purely "objective." But legitimate and indispensable subjectivity is not to be confused with a psychological and illusory "subjectivism," where we also denounce a perversion of the religious attitude. We affirm precisely that it has nothing to do with this transcendence of the "objective" of which faith consists.

One could only speak of "subjectivism" (in the pejorative sense) in belief in the efficacy of prayer if there were an "objective" reality of the event in relation to which the interpretation could truly be regarded as contingent. This is not the case. There is no "objective truth" of the course of events, of which religious understanding would be nothing more than a distorted and imperfect vision. On the contrary, as in musical decipherment, it is personal understanding that attains the truth, whose "objective" signs provide only useful but insufficient benchmarks.

Communion, experienced in faith and prayer, transcends the false dilemma between "scientific objectivity" and "subjectivist illusion." This is precisely how the saints understand it, proposing criteria to distinguish true mysticism from its counterfeits. On a philosophical level, let us remember that prayer is only possible where intersubjectivity is recognized, where it is in action. If the highest experience is not susceptible to experimental "verification," it is because it truly unites the subject as such, the "I," another person, with the Wholly Other who is God. The intersubjective can never be recognized except through a freedom that commits itself. I therefore also always have the power to deny it. Even on a human level, I can always behave as if I really had no access to the reality of others, as if the other were merely a set of possibilities to be utilized or threats to be warded off. This is a practical solipsism that can declare itself, "validate" itself. Only for those who have entered the realm of intersubjectivity can this practical solipsism appear as anything other than a somewhat voluntary blindness. Indeed, we can affirm with near certainty that no one has found themselves, throughout their lives, in situations that made it impossible for them to unite with others or obliged to deny others as a real presence. Is it not the same, relatively speaking, in the religious realm? We do not have to "judge" any of our brothers and sisters, and until the moment of death, they can meet God. But is not each one obliged to examine himself deep in his heart to see if his lack of religious experience is not due to the erroneous conception he has of his relationship with God or to the more or less implicit rejection that his pride or selfishness opposes to Him?¹⁴

¹⁴ J.M., 87–88, 287–288; M.E., II, 106–107.

Fiât Voluntas tua . . .

An expression of the human–divine "we," the prayer is formulated spontaneously as one: "Thy will be done..." Like all formulas, this one must be well understood. It would do away with the prayer itself if interpreted in a fatalistic way: "I must in any case bow before the divine decrees made from all eternity. What happens is good, that is best. What's the point of asking? What's the point of praying? Wouldn't it be more perfect, more metaphysical, to await events while affirming, beyond all immediate knowledge, that destiny can only be good?" This point of view, that of Stoic optimism and various forms of pantheism, can give the illusion of great nobility of soul. However, it is repugnant to the religious soul, for it ends up converting God into an "abstract order," into a pure "him." If I could affirm massively that "everything that happens" is willed by God, how could I not fall into quietism? How could I not abandon myself purely and simply to the divine will? Only, by abandoning myself in this way, it is not to God that I would be abandoning myself. God, in fact, is not the All–Substance of pantheism: He is Freedom that gives rise to freedoms so that Love may be possible. As each being draws closer to God, they feel their initiative grow even more than their "wealth."

Certainly, I am willed by God and I constantly refer to His will in relation to me, but I do not believe myself to be the instrument of a predetermining will, nor do I consider the divine will for me as an "objective" norm. This would be the source of the most dangerous illusions. God wants me to act as a loving person, that is, freely and in accord with Him. I only participate in His Being on this condition. Therefore, He does not allow His will to appear to me as a force, an "objective" given that would impose itself on my knowledge. His will, because it is freedom, can only be affirmed—or denied—by freedom. One could not judge it otherwise without falling into magic or reintroducing the idealistic chimera of "absolute knowledge." Divine Will is not "given" to me by events. It is to be *recognized* by me through them. In the world we live in, it is extremely difficult for us to discern what is desired and what is merely permitted. I cannot imagine that any circumstance should be considered desired simply because it presents itself to me. Otherwise, we would come, like some sects of "chosen" people, to deem the medical treatment of an illness or the operation that can put an end to it sacrilege.

For religious consciousness—whatever the difficulties of theoretically "explaining" this attitude—divine will cannot be treated either as "such" or such a determined will (which would be "it" for me), nor as an abstract order. It is *Yours*. I do not have to submit to it as a destiny; I must freely adhere to it: "*Thy will be done.*" To pray is to actively refuse to think of God as "law," but to think of Him as pure *You*, to refuse to admit that everything is given, decided in advance, to invoke a free Being.¹⁵

The difficulty often stems from a false conception of "divine foreknowledge" which makes the "problem" absolutely insoluble: "I am convinced," Marcel noted on December 18, 1918, "that if "from all eternity" means that divine decrees were made "a time ago impossible to measure," we are in the midst of heresy (and perhaps at the very heart of the absurd). " From the moment the divine vision is posited as temporally "prior" to the free act on which it bears, predetermination is inevitable. Could the error not lie in an inaccurate notion of eternity conceived in the same dimension as temporal becoming, whereas it is its ever–present depth? For "foreknowledge," it is better to substitute *co–presence*, which is not susceptible to being expressed in the language of "objectivity." God is not the "him" that the atheist denies, although I

¹⁵ Ms. XVIII: *Théorie de la Participation*; J.M., 89, 139, 220, 259; E.A., 186; M.E., II, 103–104; *De l'Acte* par Louis Lavelle, dans la *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 1–II–1938, p. 317.

am tempted to think of it that way when I show myself unavailable to him. We should not even say that God "observes everything that happens." God's apprehension of my action cannot be posited as "objective" data (in the sense that I would say, for example: right now someone is picking up my words over the airwaves). *Co-presence* is infinitely more intimate and can only be understood by a being placed in a certain spiritual situation, since we only understand on the basis of what we *are*.

Eternity as the depth of time restores prophecy's meaning and value. A certain laziness of the mind makes us take this word in its temporal sense (to announce the future), when it essentially means speaking in the name of the Eternal, to step aside to let God speak. Interest and curiosity are focused on prediction because, in an increasingly secularized world, the notion of the eternal tends to be lost. It is easier to conceive of a future that certain privileged beings would be able to penetrate than an eternal meaning that one would be able to decipher through and beyond time. The authentic prophet can certainly, at times, pierce the clouds that cover the future, but this is only a consequence of the entirely different fact that he penetrates the depths of time.¹⁶

I cannot "objectively" imagine God's attitude toward me to determine what he thinks and what he wants. Despite the claims of some theorists of analogy, it is impossible to admit that we can place ourselves ideally in God, put ourselves in his place, and then turn back on ourselves. No one has the right to place themselves outside the concrete conditions implied in the status of the creature as such. Now, ignorance of the divine plan is, negatively, perhaps the principal one among these conditions, the one that gives human destiny its properly tragic value, the one that makes free commitment possible, without which action would be radically inhibited. If a "knowledge" of Providence were possible, Providence itself would cease to be the religious affirmation of a free intersubjectivity; it would be reduced to a sort of sophisticated mechanism. Faith in Providence could not be converted into "knowledge" without religion collapsing.

A similar mystery hovers over the eschatological consummation of history. At every moment in time, our actions must be ordered to the Parousia, and yet we do not have the right to believe in the end of time, to confine ourselves to feverish expectation or to a beatific quietism. We must act in a spirit of humility, without claiming to free ourselves from the normal and current framework of our existence. It is not the "I" captive to becoming, but only the *I* of love and prayer that can *be* an eschatological consciousness. Without predicting anything, he prepares for the "Encounter." This preparation has nothing funereal about it, on the contrary: it is carried out with joy because it is the anticipated response to a foreboding call, but one that will always become more distinct, more instant.¹⁷

For the believer, prayer replaces any speculation that would seek to discover a pre-formed divine plan for me or for the world. One who prays seeks, one might say, *with God*. He prays to be enlightened, but the clarity that prayer implores is unlike that which emerges from an inquiry or even from a series of reflections. The situation, from the heart of which prayer springs, is unique for the subject, unique for God: it calls for *inspiration*.

This point of view does not compromise the unity and continuity of religious life, but instead of freezing them in an impersonal destiny, it rediscovers them in a living communion.

¹⁶ J.M., 135–137, 151–152, 159, 189–190; E.A., 117–119; H.C.H., 195; *The destiny of France. Reflections on Literature and Prophecy*, dans *The Times*, 20–XII: 1947, p. 6S3; *Préface à Larmes et Lumière à Oradour* par Camille Mayran (1952), p. 10.

¹⁷ J.M., 95–96, 98; H.C.H., 17, 153–154, 161–162, 171–172; *La fin des Temps* à la radio (1950) ; *Athéisme et Religion dans le Théâtre français contemporain* (Conférence, 1952). N. R. TH. LXXV, 1953, n. 8.

There would be subjectivism if God's will were reduced to being nothing more than a seal affixed by my fantasy, either to my whim, or to the event itself. This is not the case. Every believer experiences that divine will does not necessarily coincide — far from it! — with their plans and dreams. However, to discover in God the "objective" truth of the course of things, a criterion of divine will would have to be possible. This criterion implies a contradiction, because religion concerns *being*, the concrete person. However, there are criteria only in the abstract: given a certain category, the question is whether a particular case can fall within it. We start with a notion, such as that of justice, and we ask ourselves whether a particular "case" can be reduced to this general notion, whether a particular way of willing can be called "just." An interpretation of this kind is the very negation of God; it is, in fact, implied in all theoretical atheism. This is the profound meaning of statements such as "God's ways are inscrutable."

Whereas, in the ethical order, the autonomous subject reflects to discover, by means of "objective" criteria, the universal norm of his action, in the religious order, I affirm myself dependent, I pray to commune, beyond "objectivity," with the personal love of God which transcends all criteria. Every conversion illustrates this character of uniqueness which opposes the two orders. If there is no criterion of divine will, it is because there is no criterion of love.

I cannot think of divine will as a historical factor, but only in its relationship to my *task*. "I understand," Marcel noted on December 15, 1920, "that a [composer and statesman, Ignacy] Paderewski might worry about whether God wants Poland to live; it would be absurd for a foreign journalist to ask himself this question, because he is purely critical and Poland is not *my Poland* for him." God is truly God, the absolute *You*, for the real person, not for "thought in general." The critic only claims to see clearly; but he does not have a cause to defend; he is outside the religious domain.

An "experience" of divine adherence would either be of the order of feeling—how fleeting and uncertain!—or reflective, and would then presuppose this criterion, which is illegitimate in its very principle. To ask "what God thinks" or "if he loves a given cause" is either to question truth conceived impersonally, or to convert God into "someone" with whom I don't see why I would necessarily agree. The attitude of the believer is completely different. When he prays, he neither discusses nor questions: he invokes divine assistance, he calls for help. He never brings into play concepts such as divine impartiality. Rather, God is, he would dare to say, universally partial. To judge impartially is, in fact, to recognize whether a given predicate is appropriate for a given subject; it is the practical form of "objectivity." For the impartial judge, I am a "him," and reciprocally, he is a "him" for me. Religious thought involves the refusal to think of God as "him."¹⁸

. . . in vita mea

Only in prayer can I deeply understand the meaning of everything that happens to me. In the light of God, who calls me to personal communion, my entire life, in each of its circumstances, appears to me as a *trial*: it always entails a temptation and a challenge. For my soul, insofar as it is to be saved, events are ordered. Moreover, my soul truly *is* only to the extent that an order, defined to a certain extent in relation to it, is manifested in events—my soul and this order, moreover, not being two things, but one. *This which explains the strange conformity between what we are and what happens to us.*

¹⁸ Ms. XVIII: *Théorie de la Participation*; J.M., 255–260, 264; *Préface à Walther Rathenau* par H. Kessel, Grasset, 1933, p. XVI; *Phèdre au Théâtre Montparnasse*, dans *Temps Présent*, 12–V: 1940.

How so? How can all situations and life itself be regarded as *trials*? Here is a disappointment, a bereavement. There is a threat of spiritual annihilation to the extent that the soul has allowed itself to be obsessed by an "object" or a "him." If this "object" or this "him" disappears, it risks no longer being attached to anything, even to itself; it risks losing itself, dissolving. This is the danger that we find in one form or another in every temptation. *Salvation is finding in all reality one's relationship to the beyond. Trial is that which has a beyond.*

But this is only possible for faith which, in prayer, unfailingly maintains the relationship in You. To deny that life is a trial would be tantamount to saying, "It is not true, it is not possible that a being endowed with consciousness would have permitted this." In the throes of misfortune, the tragedy of Oradour, for example, or if the person I love most in the world is taken from me in incomprehensibly brutal or cruel circumstances, I may be tempted to exclaim, "If God existed!..." or, what amounts to the same thing, "If he possessed the attributes with which we are accustomed to bestowing upon him, he would not have permitted this monstrosity." I am all the more exposed to this temptation because my relationship with God was not a living communion, but involved an unacknowledged conditioning and was reduced to a set of abstract theological affirmations. The flick-God, prime mover and great machinist of the Universe, the "object-God" who treats us as "objects" even in our innermost being, where any protest attracts his vindictiveness, this God cannot resist the assault of the concrete when it becomes pain and revolt. On the other hand, if I am inhabited by true faith, I will find, not in myself, certainly, not in my own resources, but in the very assistance of God with whom I commune, the strength to repel this temptation. Not, doubtless, through the mediation of a "logical" response, but through the divine fact, through the attainment of grace, which alone can fill the soul and impose upon it the silence that surpasses all intellect.¹⁹

Some will say, "The value of trial is purely psychological. I will endure a calamity more easily by assuming that it is a trial imposed on me by a higher will. It is an adjuvant." But the word "hypothesis" is not appropriate here. We cannot place ourselves on biological ground, where we regard the use of the "category of trial" as a favourable condition for self-preservation. Moreover, what kind of preservation are we talking about? From the point of view of a "scientific" (calculative) psychology, it is perfectly correct for the terminally ill man, knowing that he is going to die, to decide to make the most of the time he has left to live. Yet, let us not forget that we are all going to die. Religious conscience proclaims, however, that a completely different attitude must be preferred to the calculative mind. We incurable ones must regard our situation as of fundamental interest for us. The *spirit of prayer* rejects the perversity of a withdrawal into oneself, that combines pride and despair (and communicates them) and also rejects the perverse and selfish enjoyment (*jouissance*) of suffering. Positively, I welcome everything that can tear me away from "myself," from the propensity I have to hypnotize myself with my own situation. Above all, suffering reveals to me the paternal heart of God; it prevents me from "finalizing" what is beyond any "objective finality." Nothing would be more false, in fact, than to imagine, as the imprudence of certain preachers might sometimes incite us to do, some unknown celestial magister instituting genuine spiritual tests to which he would subject his creatures. This fable, accredited by the experience of our adversities, has something derisory and offensive about it; it leads to atheism. (Correlatively, it is also not a question of falling into a kind of Manichaeism and exonerating God by invoking his partial impotence. To incriminate and to

¹⁹ J.M., 201–202, 260–262; M.E., II, 138–139; *L'Homme qui ressuscita d'entre les Vivants* par J. Wilbois, dans *L'Europe Nouvelle*, 19–V–1928, p. 685; *Préface à Larmes et Lumière à Oradour* par Camille Mayran (1952), p. 17.

exonerate are equally impious, equally illicit approaches.) The examiner who institutes tests does not treat his subjects as *beings*, but as "cases." Paternity excludes these abstract relationships between an expert and those being expertly assessed. In truth, a human father always has the possibility of behaving like a magister or a pedant, but it is based on a pretension or a conceit that he does so, that paternity should exclude. God is not a father in the sense of the Roman *Pater familias*; He portrayed himself in the parable of the prodigal son. It is in the supra-judicial fullness of the Gospel that paternity manifests itself as divine, as opposed to simple relationships of power and law or even to mere carnal belonging.

In heart-to-heart prayer, God makes me understand that, whatever their origin, suffering and death are trials for me, because they provide me, if I so choose, with the opportunity to be more, to grow in His love. Providence, is it not this permanent presence of God that will never fail me, if I myself do not desert Him?²⁰

ABBREVIATIONS

Mss == Unedited M/s

E. A. == *Etre et Avoir* (Aubier, 1935).

H. C. H. = *Les Hommes contre l'Humain* (La Colombe, 1951).

H. V. = *Homo Viator* (Aubier, 1945).

J. M. = *Journal métaphysique* (1914–1923) (Gallimard, 1927).

M. E., I. = *Le Mystère de l'Être, I: Réflexion et mystère* (Aubier, 1951).

M. E., II. = *Le Mystère de l'Être, II : Foi et Réalité* (Aubier, 1951).

P. A. = *Position et Approches concrètes du Mystère ontologique* (published as an appendix to the volume *Le Monde cassé*, Desclée, 1933, and preprinted in pamphlet form by Nauwelaerts in 1949).

R. I. = *Du Refus à l'Invocation* (Gallimard, 1940).

²⁰ J.M., 201–202; M.E., II, 105, 141–142; *Préface à Larmes et Lumière à Oradour* par Camille Mayran (1952), p. 15.