The Discovery of God

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Preface

The Discovery of God is the first unabridged English translation of Henri de Lubac's *Sur les chemins de Dieu* (1956), which is itself a revised and greatly expanded edition of *De la connaissance de Dieu* (1945, with a slightly different version in 1948). De Lubac republished the book in its present form — with its addition of extensive notes — mainly to show that its teaching was firmly rooted in the tradition. Although the book provoked much controversy at the time of its original (1945) publication, de Lubac insisted that its intention was simply to draw on the double treasure of the *philosophia perennis* and Christian experience, in order "to lend a helping hand to a few people in their search for God." The passages that were often criticized, he insisted, were scarcely more than translations or paraphrases of very traditional texts.

The Discovery of God expresses the original point of departure for de Lubac's thought, which had already been sketched out earlier, especially in *Catholicisme* (1938) and *Surnaturel* (1946). This point of departure is certainly "Augustinian," if one views Augustine as the "pinnacle of the patristic age" and the most important inspiration of the Middle Ages and even of the modern period (cf. the claim of E. Przywara). But de Lubac is keenly aware of the limits of any one historical system or "school" of thought. Indeed, it could as well be said that the book develops almost as a gloss on the dictum of St. Thomas that, in every act of thought and will, God is also thought and willed implicitly (*De Veritate*, XXII, a.2, ad 1).

Bringing together the Augustinian and Thomistic traditions, then, the author shows how the dynamism of the "restless heart," of that "habitual" longing for the absolute that breathes in the soul, while not involving any

vision of absolute being, precedes every act of thinking and willing. Recognizing the necessity of rational concepts and of modes of proof and "systems" in our knowledge of God, de Lubac argues that these nonetheless serve as reflexive clarifications of a notion that has always already been present *implicitly*, by virtue of God's initiative.

One will find in *The Discovery of God* not only the main themes of de Lubac's theology but also many of the key issues in twentieth-century and indeed classical Christian theology and philosophy: the relation between nature and grace; the place of "natural theology" in our understanding of the God of biblical revelation; the "power of affirmation that surpasses both our power to conceive and our power to argue"; the proper place of "negative theology" *("via negationis")* in our approach to God. And evoked in all of these issues is the thought-form of "paradox" which de Lubac saw as fundamental for any authentic Christian theology. Opposing expressions, when conceived properly in terms of paradox, are understood neither to contradict one another nor to fuse into each other dialectically. Instead, together they point beyond themselves to the phenomenon that lies both "beneath" and "above" them. Paradox thus interpreted does not sin against logic but is its most profound expression.

The Discovery of God is a timely book, in the light of our age's theoretical and — more often in Anglo-America — practical atheism. The study brings into relief the startling fact that no instance of human consciousness or human action is *without implication* of God, hence is ever simply *neutral* with respect to God. The importance of such a fact can scarcely be exaggerated for a liberal culture whose claim is that it can, in its public institutions and way of life, safely bracket just such an implication regarding the existence and meaning of God.

In bringing into relief the implied "presence" of God in every act of human consciousness, *The Discovery of God* invites attention also to the important fact that our affirmations always exceed the explicit contents of our understanding. Whatever terms one employs to explain this, it is crucial to see that the feature of *implicitness*, by virtue of its being basic in every act of knowledge, is therefore ineliminable: it must be integrated into any notion of "rationality" or indeed "objectivity," adequately conceived. Again, it seems hard to exaggerate the importance of this achievement, in a culture whose presuppositions regarding "objectivity" have been so decisively shaped by Descartes.[1]

1. In this connection, we might highlight how de Lubac's book provides support — and ontological broadening and deepening — for such significant "postcritical" cognitional theory as that of Michael Polanyi (cf., for example, his *Personal Knowledge* and *The Tacit Dimension*) regarding the "from-to" structure of knowing and the existential commitment tacitly involved in all thinking.

Those interested in the history surrounding de Lubac's writing of *The Discovery of God* may usefully consult his memoir on the circumstances that occasioned his books: *At the Service of the Church* (Ignatius Press, 1993), pp. 41ff. and 81ff.

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"Those who scrutinize the Majesty will be overawed by the Glory."[69]

The philosopher does well to look with suspicion upon titanic metaphysical structures. He should not imagine that he can rise, of his own power, to a genuine "science of God." He should use his critical faculties to moderate the pride of his curiosity. If, at the conclusion of his efforts, he begins to rediscover the object towards which his deepest impulse moved him, and affirms the existence of God, he is simply giving a principle of unity to all beings, a basis to his thought, an explanation of his own existence and meaning to the universe. Thus he limits himself "to putting down the only answer required by the world in question: God has not yet unveiled himself."[70] And though he may pursue his reflections beyond the proof, they will never enable him to penetrate into the divine nature. His inkling of the unknown may perhaps keep him outside it. Nor will all the wisdom of which he is capable allow him to begin contemplating God himself; he can only contemplate "the economy of his wisdom."[71]

"Lord, I do not try to reach your heights, for I do not put my intelligence on your level. But I long for a glimpse of the truth which my heart loves and believes in."[72]

69. Proverbs 25:27b (LXX).

70. H. Paissac, O.P., "Théologie, science de Dieu," *Lumière et Vie* 1 (1951), p. 36. Cf. Karl Barth, *Dogmatik im Grundriss* (1948), Paragraph 3.

71. Evagrius, *Gnosticos*, bk. 5, ch. 51: "He who sees the creator through the harmony of beings does not know what his nature is, but rather recognizes his wisdom. By this wisdom God made everything. I do not mean his essential wisdom, but rather the wisdom which appears in beings, the wisdom which those who are learned in these matters are accustomed to call natural contemplation. If this is the case, how foolish are those who profess to understand the nature of God himself!" Cf. *Selecta in Psalmos* (PG 12:1661c). Zeno of Verona, bk. 2, *Tract.*, 17, n. 1: "It is a religious confession of human devotion to know about God what it is licit to know; for just as testimonies of human devotion for in the simple heart, his inmost secrets are not to be investigated through curiosity . . ." (PL 11:444-445). St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Cantica sermo* 62, n. 5: "not an examiner of his Majesty, but of his Will" (PL 183:1078b; cf. *De consideratione*, bk. 5, ch. 3, n. 6 (PL 182:790d); St. Thomas, *De virtutibus in communi*, a.12, ad 11m: "The wisdom by which we now contemplate God does not look immediately to God himself, but to the effects by which we contemplate God at the present time."

72. St. Anselm, *Proslogion*.

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The Ineffable God

Infinite intelligibility — such is God.[1] The incomprehensible is the opposite of the unintelligible. The deeper we enter into the infinite, the better we understand that we can never hold it in our hands. *Quidquid scientia comprehenditur, scientis comprehensione finitur.*[2] (Whatever is understood by science is limited by the understanding of the knower.) The infinite is not a sum of finite elements, and what we understand of it is not a fragment torn from what remains to be understood. The intelligence does not do away with the mystery nor does it even begin to understand it; it in no way diminishes it, it does not "bite" on it: it enters deeper and deeper into it and discovers it more and more as a mystery.

At the summit of man's effort, face to face with the Being of God, the nothingness of man is brought home to him; and in the same way, as the Mystery of God allows itself to be penetrated by reason — or rather as it penetrates reason — it reveals its depths, and the light which it radiates only increases the obscurity in which the Mystery conceals itself. That does not, strictly speaking, mean that we realize increasingly "the infinite distance between God and man" — to use Kierkegaard's expression — as though God withdrew his greatness from us in proportion as the infinite grows in

1. For he is, to use the words of St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration*, 45, *in sanctum Pascha*, ch. 3 (words that are taken up by St. John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, bk. 1, ch. 9 [PG 94:833], and then also by St. Thomas Aquinas (cf. below): The one who "gathers together in himself the totality of Being, like a limitless, shoreless ocean of 'ousia.'"

2. St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, bk. 12, ch. 18 (PL 41:388).

us, and as we come the better to see that the divine is not "simply the superlative of the human."[3] It is not really a question of distance, or at least the word only expresses one aspect of the reality. God does not retreat to the outermost edge of our horizon; he does not escape us entirely, or better still he does not let us escape him — but in this, too, he reveals himself as God, as the incommensurable, the inapprehensible, that is to say, impregnable. One can, therefore, without the least fear, enjoin reason to "understand." But with each advance and each time it discovers some new wonder in the divine Object, the desire to know and the desire to comprehend will be mortified.[4]

The exercise of "speculation," says the Carmelite, Dominic of St. Albert,[5] "is the deepest death that a loving spirit can suffer."[6] And the Angelic Pilgrim, Angelus Silesius, adds:

> The better you know God, the more you agree
> That you are less and less capable of expressing what he is.
>
> *Amictus lumine sicut vestimento.*
> (Clad in light as in a garment.)[7]

3. Kierkegaard, *Journals*, 11 A 48 and 679; 12 A 320 (1849 and 1850).

4. Théodore de Régnon, S.J., *Etude sur la Sainte Trinité*, vol. 3 (1898), p. 458: "[A definition] should be 'measurative'. But can reason encompass God? Can the effect circumscribe its cause? As well, the rational measure of God can only be the negation of all measure or the affirmation of incommensurability." St. Hilary, *De Trinitate*, bk. 2, ch. 7 (PL 10:57a). Cf. St. Bonaventure, *In Hexaemeron*, bk. 20, ch. 2: "Consequently that is where we find that thick, misty cloud which, though, illuminates minds that have done away with prying attempts at investigating it" (Quaracchi, vol. 5, p. 447). Cf. also the following heading of a question in the *Summa theologica* of Alexander of Hales (pars 1, inq. 1, tract. 2, q.2 [Quaracchi, vol. 1, p. 58]): "On the immensity of God insofar as the intellect is concerned, or on his incomprehensibility."

5. 1596-1634; the favorite disciple of John of St.-Samson. Cf. Henri Bremond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France* (1916), vol. 2, pp. 388-389. (Eng. trans., *Literary History of Religious Thought in France* [1930], vol. 2, p. 287.)

6. Cf. the expression used by Henry Suso: "Bild mit bilden us triben," which means "to drive out image with image." See P. Bizet, *Henri Suso et le déclin de la Scolastique* (1946), p. 280.

7. *The Cherubic Pilgrim*, bk. 5, ch. 41. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 5, the whole of ch. 12.

The mind which tries to "comprehend" God is not a *miser* amassing a heap of gold — a summa of truths — which goes on increasing.[8] Nor can it be compared to an *artist* returning to a rough sketch, adding to it, improving upon it, and, in the end, enjoying his work aesthetically. The mind is better compared to a *swimmer* who can only keep afloat by moving and who cleaves a new wave at each stroke.[9] He is forever brushing aside the representations which are continually reforming, knowing full well that they support him, but that if he were to rest for a single moment he would sink and perish.

"However far thought may rise, there is always further to go."

"If you have understood, then this is not God. If you were able to understand, then you understood something else instead of God. If you were able to understand even partially, then you have deceived yourself with your own thoughts."[10]

8. On the impossibility of getting away completely from the imagination here below in this world, one should read the quite beautiful meditation of William of St.-Thierry, *Meditativae orationes*, meditation 2: ". . . Therefore the quaking and bewildered soul stands before her God, ready to entreat him, ever holding her very self in the hollow of her hands, as if she were about to make an offering of herself to you. Quaking at the things she is accustomed to, bewildered at things that are out of the ordinary, she carries a sign of faith in you, in order to find you. But not as yet has she discovered to whom she might remit that sign. Behold her seeking your face, Lord, seeking your face, and not knowing, not at all knowing what she seeks. She loathes the phantoms that her heart conjures up about you as she would idols. She loves you, such as faith describes you to her; but her mind does not suffice for the sight of you. And when, burning with a desire for your face, offering to you a sacrifice of her piety and justice, oblations and holocausts, she is carried off, she is thrown into confusion all the more. And when she does not obtain so quickly the illumination of faith in you, who are the one to whom she has entrusted herself, she is sometimes so bewildered that she scarcely trusts herself to believe in you, so bewildered that she hates herself, because, as it seems to her, she does not love you. Far be it from her not to believe in you, seeing that she is so anxious on account of her desire for you. Far be it from her not to love you, seeing as she desires you even to the point of contempt for everything that exists, even herself! *How long, Lord, how long?* If you do not light my lamp, if you do not illuminate my darkness, let me not be rescued from this trial, nor, except in you, my God, let me step foot across this wall" (Latin ed. by M. M. Davy, pp. 64-65 and 68-70).

See also St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 28, ch. 12 (PG 26:41). And the general law formulated by St. Thomas, *Prima*, q.84, a.7.

9. St. Bernard, *De consideratione*, bk. 5, ch. 7, n. 16 (PL 182:798).

10. St. Augustine, *Sermo* 52, n. 16 (PL 38:360). *Sermo* 117, n. 5: "We are talking about God. What wonder is it, if you do not comprehend? If you do have comprehension, he is not God. . . . To touch God just a little bit with the mind is a great beatitude; to comprehend him, however, is altogether impossible" (PL 38:663). It is, I believe, to

"Whatever is understood by knowledge is limited by the understanding of the knowledge. . . . If you have reached an end, then it is not God."[11]

When we say that God is ineffable, it does not mean that we cannot say anything about him![12] It does not mean that there is nothing to say on the subject, or that there is nothing to be done but keep silence, or that the

strip the thought of St. Augustine of its force to say with X. Le Bachelet (*Dictionnaire de théologie catholique,* vol. 4, col. 1110) that in texts like these what is at issue is only the discarding of the idea of a "perfect knowledge," by which "divine knowability would find itself plumbed exhaustively." These kinds of enfeebling commentaries signal an era when the urgent peril of modernist agnosticism gave rise to a one-sided apologetics, too earnest and officious to be always adequately thought out. — Already Théodore de Régnon wrote, in *Etude sur la Sainte Trinité,* first series (1892), p. 45: "It is to do the Fathers of the Church a gratuitous injury to hedge in their teaching with so many minimizing interpretations." For St. Thomas, cf. above, ch. 4, nn. 17 and 40, etc.

Cf. *Le livre de la Bienheureuse Angèle de Foligno* (= French trans. by Paul Doncoeur), p. 140: ". . . When I came to my senses, I knew with very much certainty that those who are more keenly conscious of God are less able to speak of him. For it is by virtue of the very experience they have of the infinite and ineffable God that they are less able to speak of him. . . . Would to heaven that you understood this when you set about to preach. . . . For in that case you would not know how to say anything at all about God. And in such an instance every man would fall silent. And I would be very pleased to come to you at that point, saying: 'Brother, tell me a little bit about God now.' And you would not know how to say anything to anybody, or how to think of God in any way, so much would his infinite Goodness surpass you. And the soul does not lose her consciousness, any more than does the body and all its senses. One is fully conscious and in possession of all one's faculties. But you would say to the people most emphatically: 'Go with the blessing of God, for I can say nothing to you. . . .' "

There is a similarly lofty reflection to be found in *The Guide for the Perplexed* by Maimonides: "Glory and praise to Him who is so raised up on high that, when the intelligences contemplate his essence, and when they delve into the manner in which his actions are the result of his will, their knowledge changes to ignorance, and when their tongues wish to glorify him with his attributes, all their eloquence becomes a feeble stammering." I am not going to try at this point to find out whether the teaching of Maimonides was able to take these traditional ideas into account in a wholly satisfying way. There is a restatement of the question by St. Thomas, *Prima,* q.13, a.12.

11. St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei,* bk. 12, ch. 18 (PL 41:368); *Sermo* 53, ch. 11, n. 12 (PL 38:370). Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Letter to Gaius,* ch. 1.

12. St. Anselm, *Monologion,* ch. 65: "Thus, therefore, his nature is also ineffable, because it is in no wise able by way of words to be appreciated as it truly is; and it is not false, if under the tutelage of reason there can be an appreciation of his nature by way of another thing just as in a riddle" (PL 158:212b).

names which men have given him are all of them synonymous, and that one can affirm anything one likes about God, or deny everything about him, indiscriminately. Nor does it mean that everything that has been said is only provisionally or pragmatically valuable. The ineffability of God — and this is what gives it a precise and eminently positive meaning — is acknowledged *at the end* of the dialectic. Those who affirm it do not fall into an empty void. On the contrary, their affirmation is the summit of a thought-process rigorously pursued. It does not nullify the results of that effort of thought, and even in its negation it gathers its fruits.

Our ideas about God need, in fact, to be conducted with as much and more order as our ideas on other subjects. Nothing is worse than a premature "negative theology." The interplay of affirmation and negation is not a game without rules.[13] The qualities which are affirmed about God — and they are not all affirmed in the same way or on the same grounds — are only identified, as is right, when they transcend themselves and when they cancel one another out. God is not ineffable in the sense of being unintelligible: he is ineffable in the sense of being above everything that can be said of him. He is always above everything which one *must* in fact say of him at first, and which is never simply revoked subsequently: to *deny* is not to *revoke,* for it is always the same God, *semper major,* who impels us first of all to "affirm" and then to "deny" in the course of the same movement, of the same advance.

The ineffability of God is only another name for absolute transcendence. Silence comes at the end — not at the beginning.

> Have we said anything, uttered any sound, which is worthy of God? Indeed, I feel that I have said nothing but what I wished to say; yet if I have said anything, it is not what I wished to say. . . . And a sort of battle with words ensues. Since if what is ineffable is what cannot be said, yet what can be called even ineffable is not ineffable. This battle with words is to be prevented by silence rather than stilled by speech. . . .[14]

13. See, for example, the proposition condemned in 1348: ". . . that the propositions, 'God is,' and 'God is not', signify the same thing in their deepest meaning is allowed in another manner of speaking." *Errores Nicolai de Ultricuria,* n. 3 (Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum* . . . , 32nd ed. [1963], n. 1030, p. 302).

14. St. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana,* bk. 1, ch. 6 (PL 34:21). St. Thomas, *In Boethium de Trinitate,* q.2, a.1, ad 6m: ". . . God is honored by our silence, not because we do not say or inquire into anything about him, but rather because we understand

6

The Search for God

What is the philosopher? And what is the mystic? What is the essential difference between them, if we consider their original "intention" and take them at the root from which they naturally develop?

Should we say that the philosopher makes use of dialectic, where the mystic relies on experience? Does the mystic plumb the depths of Being, while the philosopher tries to discover how thought engenders or expresses it? Could one say that the mystic is concerned with the immediate and the philosopher with mediation?

In fact, dialectic is common to both of them. The only difference is, perhaps, that the one is mainly affective and vital, whereas the other is rational and conceptual. In each case there is experience, though the experience of the philosopher is active and that of the mystic "passive." Certainly there is no more typical dialectic than that which attempts to translate the mystical experience — or at least its tendency — into thought. The alternation of opposites is nowhere seen more clearly, more instantaneously so to speak. . . .[1] It has even been maintained that the most obviously dialectical of Plato's dialogues, the *Parmenides,* is at bottom the most mystical.

1. Just as in the case of those cross-hatched designs where empty and full spaces can be seen changing alternately one into the other, there is a continuous alternation of light and shade, of affirmation and negation, identity and otherness. . . . And dialectic does nothing but interpret the experience itself. Cf. William of St.-Thierry, *Letter to the Brethren of Mont-Dieu,* bk. 2, ch. 3, n. 19 (PL 184:350b-c): "Exaltation is joined to trembling, when it is understood that God humbled himself even to the point of death on the cross, in order to raise man to a likeness with Divinity."

Could it be that the mystic tends to see Being as personal, and the philosopher to conceive it as impersonal?

And yet, to judge by many of the facts, the opposite might equally well be maintained. For as philosophy and mysticism reach the summits of their aspirations, they would appear to transcend this opposition in one way or another.

Perhaps it would be possible to indicate the essential difference between them more nearly by saying that philosophy is above all the search for the *unifying One*, whereas mysticism is the search for — or the attraction of — the *one One*.[2]

The philosopher starts from the need to explain, a need which is, at least virtually, a desire for a total explanation. What he desires is to unify diversity, and at the same time to diversify the one; he requires a system of relationships which embraces everything and makes everything intelligible. His ambition is to comprehend the universe. And if in the course of his search he comes upon God — as he cannot fail to do — it will be as an explanatory principle and a support for the world, as a unifying One. *Res divinae non tractantur a philosophis, nisi prout sunt rerum omnium principia.*[3] (The things of God are

2. As for ascertaining how this "One" ought to be sought, how it can be found, and whether the very desire which tends towards it should not at the outset be sacrificed, or at least transcended and transfigured — in broaching these questions we find a whole other concatenation of problems into the depths of which we shall not penetrate. At this point we are speaking only of mysticism in general, in its natural roots, not of Christian mysticism. Let us state only that a Christian mysticism cannot be other than a mysticism of love, that love of neighbor in Christian mysticism is the indispensable sign of God's love, that the preferred ecstasy with regard to it is an ecstasy of actions, and that certain forms of high contemplation are utterly incapable of being in conformity with the spirit of Christianity. As Jacques Maritain has written in *Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle*, p. 144, "the truest theology of supernatural contemplation is to be found less in the theory of an *intuition* of God" than in a doctrine of "divine experience through a union of love," although the genuinely "noetic" range of the impetus towards contemplation should not be denied. Cf. St. Bonaventure, in his commentary on St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *In 2 Sent.*, d. 22, a.2, q.3, ad 4m; or *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*. See also the remarks of Etienne Gilson in his *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin*, 2nd ed. (1943), p. 319, n. 2.

3. St. Thomas, *In Boethium de Trinitate*, q.5, a.4: ". . . And so the things which are common to all the things that exist are treated in the context of the principles within which they find themselves placed. . . . There is, moreover, another way of investigating things of this kind, not according as they are made manifest through effects, but according as they themselves manifest themselves. . . . And in this way divine things are treated according as they subsist in themselves. . . . And this is the theology which is spoken of through Sacred Scripture."

not treated by philosophers except as the principles of all things.) When the philosopher posits the absolute, it is never the absolute absolutely, but "the absolute in relation to him."[4]

Philosophy is the work of the reason. It is a "science." But God *in himself* is not an object of "science" to natural man.[5] He can neither be comprehended nor even named. And, as St. Thomas says, we do not know "what he is": we only know "the relation of everything else to him."[6] "To deduce God from becoming," or from any other aspect of the world, "does not mean that one rises to a certain direct knowledge of God with the help of becoming; it means penetrating further into the intelligible structure of becoming itself; or, if one prefers, it means knowing God only to the extent to which he is signified by the essential 'transcendental relativity' of metaphysical 'becoming.'"[7] That suffices, in a sense, to define him. In any

4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, interpreting Louis Lavelle in *Eloge de la philosophie* (1953), p. 12.

5. I am mindful that St. Thomas defined theology as the science of God (see note 3 in particular). But it should also be remembered that theology is not philosophy. Following St. Thomas himself, whose words are too clear and too often repeated to allow of any serious dispute, I maintain that, to the reason of the pure philosopher, "God, in himself, is not an object of science" — a statement which I maintain in the sense in which St. Thomas meant it, and which the context makes perfectly clear, and not in some vague or general sense, since such a statement in isolation would be equivocal.

6. St. Thomas, *De Potentia*, q.7, a.2, ad 11m and ad 1m: "We do not know what God is. . . . The being of God is the same as his substance, and just as his substance is unknown, even so is his being. . . ." "Concerning God, we discover what he is not; what, in truth, he is remains something that is utterly unknown." *Contra Gentiles*, bk. 1, ch. 30. Here we have what Xavier Moisant called "a purist theodicy": *Dieu, l'expérience en métaphysique*, p. 136.

Cf. Etienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme*, 5th ed., pp. 150-159 (Eng. trans., pp. 103-110). A. D. Sertillanges, *Somme théologique, Dieu*, vol. 2, p. 383: "Therefore we do not know at all in any wise or in any degree what God is"; or p. 330: "For Saint Thomas . . . what appears to be a judgement of nature is in truth only a qualification of God as necessary cause. That is to say, it amounts to a pure and simple affirmation of God"; and *Les grandes thèses de la philosophie thomiste*, pp. 49ff.: "This expression, 'God is', is only positive when it is considered as an expression of the insufficiency of the world and the correlative necessity of an ultimate underpinning; as a worthwhile definition, in the proper sense of the word, it is entirely negative." H. Paissac, *Le Dieu de Sartre*, p. 15: "In the same way, the pure Act of Being is beyond reason. It is arrived at by reason inasmuch as it is the real significance of the world, and that reality without which the world would not have meaning, which is to say, would not exist. But it is never held or possessed by the intelligence in a concept."

7. Joseph Maréchal.

case, it satisfies the philosopher in the formal sense of that word which we have indicated. As such he does not ask for more:

Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas![8]

But that does not satisfy man. It does not satisfy the spirit. The mystical aspiration is greater, more fundamental, and more total than the demands of reason. The mystic reaches out beyond the supreme Cause and the unifying One, which is, so to say, hardly more than a function, and pursues the One itself. He seeks the One in its being and unity. And the least knowledge of that One is worth more in his eyes than the profoundest and most comprehensive knowledge of all else[9]; and for the sake of finding the One, and being united to it, he is prepared to sacrifice the whole universe.[10]

8. Virgil, *Georgics*, 2, 490. *In Boethium de Trinitate*, q.5, a.4. Similar texts in St. Bonaventure, *In 3 Sent.*, d. 23, a.1, q.4, ad 5m; *Quaestiones de Theologia*, q.2, resp. ad 3m; q.4, respons. ad 3m. Cf. Patrice Robert, O.F.M., "Le problème de la philosophie bonaventurienne," *Laval théologique et philosophique* (1951), p. 22. Aimé Forest, *Du consentement à l'être* (1936), pp. 107ff. Or A. D. Sertillanges, *Somme théologique, Dieu*, vol. 2, pp. 384 and 388: "This affirmation, 'God is', is a true affirmation, not inasmuch as it qualifies God on the level of being, but inasmuch as it calls for God by basing itself on being. . . . But also we do not want to define God, but rather to think of him in terms of the creature that emanates from him and that requires this mystery so as to have meaning and so as to exist." In this case God is "the remote principle postulated by a universal need," the supreme condition for the intelligibility of the universe (J. de Finance, *Être et agir*, p. 18).

9. St. Thomas, *De Veritate*, q.10, a.7, ad 3m: "The least knowledge which can be had of God surpasses all knowledge that is had of the creature."

10. This duality has been noted by Jacques Maritain in "L'expérience mystique naturelle et le vide," which has been collected in *Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle*, pp. 139ff. and 162: "What I shall try to show is that there can be, in the proper sense of the word, a natural mystical experience that prolongs and completes a metaphysical impulse. . . . But — and in my opinion it is this point which is not adequately taken into account by the school of Father Rousselot — this philosophical outstripping of philosophy, this meta-philosophical contemplation, does not pursue the natural movement of philosophy nor does it go in the same direction. . . . To the contrary it presupposes inevitably a kind of turning back in a way that is opposite to nature; and so there is the irruption of a desire that is certainly not the constitutive desire of philosophy itself, the intellectual desire for being, but a more profound desire, one suddenly liberated in the soul, and properly religious, and which is not, to be sure, that intellectual desire to see the First Cause . . . which follows on the intellectual desire for being. The desire I am now talking about is a desire that is more radical than the natural desire of the intelligence for being and than its natural desire for the Cause of being . . ."; ". . . the intervention of a natural desire that is more profound and more total than that of the philosophical intelligence for the intellectual conquest of being"

When, as a child, St. Thomas Aquinas exclaimed "I want to understand God," it was not so much the budding philosopher who was speaking as the religious genius, the contemplative, the potential mystic, the saint with an intellectual cast of mind. And insofar as his speculation led him to satisfy that desire, it is not so much the rational science, whose long career in the West he inaugurated, as one of the aspects of the "intelligence of faith" whose ideal and method had been transmitted to him by the Christian tradition.

But when, on the contrary, he insists so emphatically that "we do not know God, but only the relations of all things to him," he is speaking as a pure philosopher. From that point of view, and that point of view only, there is no reason to read regret or nostalgia into the phrase. As one of his surest interpreters writes: "In a natural theodicy it is not God who is in question as the subject of science; it is universal being, the creature. For God is only envisaged and attained as the first cause and not in himself. In other words, there cannot be a natural theology apart from general metaphysics."[11] The God of the philosophers "completes the formula of the world"[12] and fully satisfies their reason.

(p. 162). Maritain has recently returned to these problems in the fifth of his *Neuf leçons sur les notions premières de la philosophie morale* (1951), pp. 89-108.

11. Sertillanges, *Les grandes thèses . . .*, p. 75. Cf. Etienne Gilson, *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale* 2nd ed. (1944), p. 261: The natural theology of Saint Thomas "legitimates all the ambitions of Christian hope, but at the same time it is the most modest theology that there is."

12. St. Thomas, *Prima*, q.32, a.1: ". . . The only thing which we can learn about God by means of natural reason is that which of necessity belongs to him, inasmuch as he is the principle of all things. And we have made use of this fundamental principle above in our consideration of God." Q.12, a.12: ". . . [Through effects] we can be led to a knowledge of God and whether he exists; and we can also be led to a knowledge of those things about him which of necessity belong to him, inasmuch as he is the first cause of all things and surpasses all the things that have been caused by him. Wherefore we know of his relationship towards creatures, that he is, indeed, the cause of all things; and we also know the way in which creatures differ from him, the fact that, in truth, he is not a part of the creatures which were caused by him, and that these creatures are not removed from him on account of a defect on his part, but rather because he surpasses them all."

Such already, from the point of view which presently occupies us, was the conception of metaphysics in Aristotle. Cf. G. Ducoin, "Saint Thomas commentateur d'Aristote" (unpublished thesis, Gregorian University, Biennium S.J., Rome, 1951), p. 97: "The explanation of nature constitutes the unique angle of perspective from which Aristotle considers other systems, when he wishes to elaborate his metaphysics. When it comes

And yet St. Thomas insists no less that "the intelligence naturally desires to know God in himself." What exactly is that desire? Does it express the rational need to which philosophical activity corresponds, or does it, in its own way, define the mystical impulse in its natural root? Or should one perhaps see in it the fundamental unity of both?

Let us begin by saying — without for the moment trying to decide whether the suggestion reveals a faulty analysis or a deep insight — that, in speaking as he does, St. Thomas merges the two points of view which we have just distinguished. The "desire to see God," which he regards as natural to us, is certainly, at bottom, mystical in character. It cannot be limited to a desire to comprehend the world. Nevertheless, St. Thomas tries to establish its reality in a purely rational manner, starting from the effects which the intelligence desires to know in their Cause so as to know them fully. With that in view he unfolds a whole argument in the *Contra Gentiles,* which is inspired by his faith, and which a pure philosopher might no doubt criticize as without apodeictic value[13] — and that is precisely why a certain number of his interpreters consider themselves justified in maintaining that the natural desire in question, being the desire to see God *as cause,* is not the desire to *see God* in the full sense of the word.

In brief, the argument consists in showing that human reason, the reason which is responsible for the work of philosophy, is not satisfied with knowing an effect as long as it does not know the cause. Hence that continuous movement, that permanent disquiet, that unrest which lasts until reason, moving from effect to effect and from cause to cause, at last reaches the supreme cause from which everything derives, and which, by that very fact, explains and so unifies everything.[14]

to speaking of the unmoved substance, it is still with reference to the sensible world that he judges and condemns affirmations concerning unmoved substances, so true is it that his first philosophy is profoundly rooted in metaphysics and the world of Nature. . . . The (Platonic) Ideas are not capable of explaining movement or change, and for that very reason, since they are not *causes,* they are of no interest for science."

13. Cf. Roland-Gosselin, O.P., "Béatitude et désir naturel," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* (1929), p. 200: "The first conviction that orients his analysis and gives it a whole air of security is his faith in the word of God, which promises man the beatific vision. . . . Faith in the beatific vision should be considered as exercising a positive and decisive influence in the argumentation itself."

14. In addition to the well-known texts of the *Contra Gentiles,* see, for example, *Expositio in Matthaeum Evangelistam,* ch. 5: "The happiness of man is the ultimate good of man in which his yearning is quieted. . . . Thus that yearning will not be quieted until he comes to the first cause, which is God, that is to say, to his divine essence."

It is a solid argument. But does it, in fact, prove *all* that it sets out to prove? Is the term of the argument *formally* the term envisaged? In its desire to comprehend the universe, the intelligence cannot abandon its search until it has reached the first cause, and one can therefore say, with every show of right, that there is a congenital desire in the intelligence to know that cause.[15] But between that and saying, as St. Thomas does in effect, that the intelligence desires to know the first cause, not only as the cause of the effects which it aspires to understand — as the universal *propter quid* — but in its essence,[16] in itself and for itself, independently of its effects and of its relations with everything else, there is surely an abyss?

The mystical impulse, no doubt, bridges the abyss at a single leap. The mystic discerns the One in the Unifying cause, and when he meets the Unifying cause he adheres to the One. But can one say that his strength comes to him from the principle which first moved the intelligence to look for the "cause of causes"? Could one even say that the mystical impulse simply continues along the path of reason, that it simply goes further in the same direction? Would it not be better to recognize that the philosopher's reasoning conceals an anagogical dialectic, the inspiration of which is quite different from the general desire to know?

St. Thomas, therefore, seems to have failed in his attempt to establish continuity between philosophy and mysticism, between the dynamism of the intelligence and the desire of the spirit. The doctrine of "the natural desire to see God" is central to his thought, and he has not succeeded in completely unifying it.

No one will succeed where he has failed.[17] The attempt, strictly speaking,

15. Cf. Origen, *In Psalmum 2,* v. 8: "But the inheritance of rational nature is the sight of corporeal and incorporeal things, and of God who is the cause of all these things" (PG 12:1608c).

16. *Compendium Theologiae,* ch. 104: ". . . Therefore the natural desire for learning cannot be stilled in us, until we know the first cause not in any manner whatsoever, but by way of his essence."

17. About these last words it has been written: "There now, we are somewhat reassured. . . . This too facile game only half pleases us, however, for it seems to us to elicit conjecturally, in so serious a matter, a smile from Saint Thomas, who would not be a total picture of indulgence." I admit to not having penetrated the implications of this remark. As far as I am concerned, there is no room for games in this matter. I believe quite seriously (although the matter is not easy to express in formulas that are perfectly clear) that the total and complete unification of our diverse spiritual activities is not possible in our present condition, and I believe as well that it is salutary to be obliged to make an open declaration of this sometimes. Already at this point the

is no doubt impossible. The mystical impulse does not exactly prolong metaphysical inquiry; it does not repeat or extend the work, though it can animate it and, in return, be stimulated by it. The root, in each case, is different, the end is different, and the basic procedure no less so. Philosophical inquiry rises analytically from effect to cause, in virtue of a rational necessity. The mystical impulse rises from effect, perceived as a sign, to that same cause, by a movement which cannot be wholly justified by pure reason — for if it were an argument, there would be more in the "conclusion" than in the "premisses" — but which springs from a need of the spirit no less imperious in its demands than the demands of reason, or more precisely, from the magnetic attraction of Being through its signs. The philosopher may rest from his inquiries in contemplation, once the effect is fully understood; the mystic, in the end, will reject all signs — though he will never quite finish doing so — in order to rest in the contemplation of God alone.[18]

coherent organization of all the proceedings of reason appears very arduous, for these proceedings are quite various, are related to a great many objects, are undertaken on a great many occasions, and are under the influence of a great many points of view that are scarcely capable of being coordinated. How much more arduous would we find the perfect synergy of every intellectual effort and every spiritual impulse! In one sense, which I define as well as I can on this page, it seems to me also that this is an impossible thing to do and that the history of Christian thought bears witness to this estimate. A want of total unification, moreover, does not in any way signify a logical contradiction. And doesn't the author of the remark that I have just cited himself write almost immediately afterwards of: ". . . Three aspirations of the human soul, organically linked, *insofar as the nature of things permits such linkage,* in the doctrine of Saint Thomas"? (my emphasis).

18. On the relationship between philosophy and mysticism, if we understand them throughout in terms of their natural roots, the following page of Jacques Maritain, in *Les degrés du savoir* (1932), pp. 477ff., may be read once again: "Whether it tends towards a known or unknown God, a God loved as God or desired as a supreme truth whose name remains unknown, such a movement, such a mystical impetus animates every great philosophy, — I speak here on the part of the subject, for a person is not a philosopher if he does not love the absolute and desire to unite himself with it. But sometimes this impulse animates philosophy insofar as it tends towards an end which transcends philosophy and insofar as it does not intervene in philosophy's specification (for the latter depends purely on the object, which is of a wholly rational order here). Sometimes this impulse animates philosophy insofar as it tends towards an end that is immanent to philosophy and insofar as it intervenes in order to constitute philosophy's own proper object and to specify it. In the first case, the very purity of philosophy as such will cause, especially in the eyes of non-philosophers, the value and efficacy of this impulse to risk being masked. But at the very least, the impulse, passing into a further

There is, however, something artificial about the distinction originally established. However well-founded it may be, it posits the "philosopher" and the "mystic" as abstract beings. It distinguishes two functions of the mind. But while it is true that the functions of the mind are diverse, we must not forget that the spirit is one. The intelligence is steeped in it, and no philosopher worthy of the name would be content to remain for good and all imprisoned in his specialty, even if it were the knowledge and explanation of the whole. Philosophy is always pushing back the frontiers of thought. The philosopher is more than a philosopher, and cannot be reduced to a precise definition. His knowledge of the world is equivalently, or at least becomes inevitably, the perception of his own inadequacy. And the labor of elaborating an intelligible world does not save him from "the nostalgia of Being."[19] The greatness of St. Thomas is to have recognized this. By a process which pure reason alone does not suffice to justify, but which the spirit satisfies, or rather insists upon, he was able to penetrate and explore the ways by which the intelligence moves to the point at which he discovered the spiritual appetite within it. In his very philosophy, the philosophical endeavor develops into a mystical flight. The human spirit becomes conscious of its total nature and of its high vocation. He explores all its dimensions and, going beyond the techniques and specializations which obliged him, as it were, to divide himself in two, he seeks to rediscover the simplicity of the mind's essential act.[20] The formal distinctions

realm, will be able to bring the soul to an authentic and pure contemplation. In the second case, the very fact that philosophy has undergone a mixing will render the presence of this impulse in it more manifest and more sensible, and it is this all too beautiful testimony to eternal aspirations which, in its very defeat, and whatever may be its price, will always incline a metaphysician towards revering a Plotinus or the thinkers of ancient India. But it is into an empty void — if we suppose the end term of the movement, as well, to be simply natural — that the latter will emerge; or at any rate, if superior influences enter into play . . . , he will emerge again into a mixture, where the part played by deception will be great." Cf. pp. 549-551.

19. This is true even of Descartes, so often accused since the time of Pascal of only being interested in God for the sake of possessing the world. See in particular the well-known *Letter to Chanut.*

20. Hence the definition of first philosophy which appears to contradict the texts referred to in note 9 above. "First philosophy is entirely ordered to the knowledge of God as to its final end, and that is why it is called the divine science" (*Contra Gentiles,* bk. 3, ch. 25). Cf. Etienne Gilson, *L'Être et l'Essence,* pp. 81-83. It is in the same spirit, it seems to me, that J. de Finance writes, in *Être et agir,* p. 351: "If the dynamism of personal life, which expands exquisitely in the religious consciousness, is merely the interiorisation of the dynamism of being, there would not prove to be any conflict or

and oppositions tend to be reabsorbed into unity, although without ever quite reaching it.

The whole of St. Thomas's philosophical research is the search for God.

To reject God because man has corrupted the idea of God, and religion because of the abuse of it, is the effect of a sort of clear-sightedness which is yet blind. For surely the holiest things are inevitably destined to be the victims of the worst abuses. Religion, which is its own source and origin, must continue to purify itself. Moreover, under one form or another man always turns back to adoration. It is not merely his first duty but his deepest need. It is something he cannot extirpate; he can only corrupt it. God is the pole that draws him, and even those who deny him in spite of feeling that attraction, bear witness to him.

God is the Transcendent — but he is also the absolute other. He is the Beyond of the hierarchical universe — but he is equally the unconditioned, the uncoordinated, which no series of conditions brings nearer to us, and which no system of relationships can situate. We can rise up to him — to the threshold of his Mystery — through the "degrees of being," for he is the "being of all beings" — and yet our ascent never really leads us nearer to him, for if we say that "he is," then we cannot really say that other beings are.[21] By comparison with him, all of them are equally nothing:

> I looked upon the earth, and saw that it was empty;
> I looked into the heavens, and found no light.[22]

The universe is a "cosmos" whose beautiful order reflects its Author, the heavens proclaim the Glory of God — and yet that Glory extinguishes the

indeed irreducible distinction between what reason demands in order to guarantee the whole order of being and the living God whom a life is in need of in order not to fall away from the plan of the spirit."

21. St. Catherine of Siena, *Vita*, ch. 14: Of all created things, "however beautiful, good, and useful they may be thought to be in this world, it cannot be said that they exist." Cf. St. Clement of Rome, *Letter to the Corinthians*, ch. 27, n. 4: "God has created everything by the word of his majesty, and by this same word he can reduce everything to nothing."

22. Jeremiah 4:23. See the commentary of St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. 1, ch. 4.

light of the stars and reduces everything to dust:[23] silence alone can proclaim it.

Before thy rising Light, everything is a desert![24]

Every creature is an image or vestige of the Creator — though nothing resembles God.[25] *Similis quidem, sed dispar.*[26] (Similar indeed, but different.) *Dissimiles similitudines.*[27] (Dissimilar similitudes.) The μὴ ὄν is incurably opposed to the ὄντως ὄν — and yet that radical opposition does not exclude a symbolic relation between that which is not and that which is; the hiatus makes room for participation. "The grace and beauty of creatures are a supreme dis-grace compared with the Grace of God" — the austere thinker to whom we owe that uncompromising maxim is also the great poet who sings of the grace and beauty scattered throughout the creation:

> Scattering a thousand graces,
> He passed though these groves in haste,
> And looking upon them as he went,
> Left them, by his grace alone,
> Clothed in beauty.[28]

23. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. 11, ch. 4, n. 6: "You, therefore, Lord, who are beautiful, have made those things, and they are beautiful; you have made them, you, who are good, and so are they; you have made them, you, who exist, and so do they. And they are not so beautiful, nor so good, nor so existent as are you, their founder, compared to whom they are neither beautiful, nor good, nor existent" (PL 32:811).

24. Paul Claudel, *Vers d'exil.*

25. St. Augustine, *In Psalmum* 85, n. 12: ". . . Whatever else a man may think, what has been made is not like him who made it. . . . Who could properly ponder the great gulf of difference between the maker and what has been made? Therefore he said, 'There is none like thee among the gods, O Lord'; he did not say to what extent God is unlike, because it cannot be said. . . . God is ineffable. . . . Think of the earth: it is not God . . . men and animals . . . ; think of the angels: they are not God. And what is God? This alone have I found myself able to say, namely, what he is not. . . . What is it that you bid rise onto your tongue that does not rise up into your heart? 'There is none like thee among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like thine'" (PL 37:1900).

26. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Cantica sermo* 81, n. 4 (PL 183:1172d).

27. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy*, 2, 4, and 5 (PL 3:144a and 145a).

28. St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. 1, ch. 4: "All the being of creatures, compared to the being of God, is mere nothingness. . . . All the goodness of creatures, compared to the goodness of God, is merely supreme badness." *Spiritual Canticle*, strophe 5.

The passage from the world to God is thus effected by a double dialectic.[29] On the one hand there is negation, on the other construction. The one suppresses, the other develops.[30] The one is refusal and rejection, the other is acceptance and enhancement.[31] The two movements are interwoven, and neither is altogether independent of the other. We are not faced by a choice between them, and neither has ever brought its task to completion. No mystical ladder reaches its end unless we renounce it.[32] The soul in search of God explores the whole cycle of creation from matter to pure spirit, from the rhythm of the universe to the march of history, but

29. Corresponding with this double dialectic there are two spiritual ways, the way of signs and the way without signs. Like the two dialectics, these two spiritual ways are, moreover, less separate than united; but it is sometimes one and sometimes the other which dominates. These ways have been described by Jules Monchanin, *De l'esthétique à la mystique* (1955), pp. 105-112.

30. St. Augustine, *De vera religione*, ch. 29, n. 52: "Let us see how far reason can advance, ascending from visible things to invisible things, and from temporal things to eternal things. . . . [In an examination of things] a step has to be made towards things that are immortal and everlasting" (PL 34:145).

31. St. Anselm, *Proslogion*, ch. 14: "O my soul, have you found what you were seeking? You were seeking God, you found him to be something that is the highest of all things, than whom nothing better can be thought of" (PL 158:234d). On the "anagogical mediations" used by Richard of St. Victor: G. Dumeige, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, fasc. 18-19 (1954), col. 326.

32. "Whereas in the course of the initial contemplation, the soul used to attribute to God, to an eminent degree, all the good that she found in creatures, she seeks henceforth to eliminate all of this as notoriously insufficient for the expression of the divine perfections and the consideration of God in the shadow of un-knowing. . . ." St. Axters, O.P., *La spiritualité des Pays-Bas*, p. 72, summarizing Dionysius the Carthusian, *De contemplatione*, pt. 3, ch. 14 (*Opera omnia*, vol. 41).

Cf. St. Hilary, *De Trinitate*, bk. 1, ch. 7, commenting on The Wisdom of Solomon 13:5: "The creator of great things is in the greatest of things, and the author of the most beautiful things is in the most beautiful things . . . , and God, who is most beautiful, must be confessed in such a way that he is not within the sense of comprehension nor outside of the comprehension of sensation" (PL 10:30); and ch. 19: "There can be no comparison of earthly things with God; but the weakness of our intelligence forces us to seek certain images from the realm of inferior things as a touchstone of superior things, so that, admonished by customary and familiar things, we might be drawn from a knowledge derived from our senses to the supposition of sense perceptions to which we are not accustomed" (col. 38).

Compare this with the twin dialectics of progress and rupture that are to be found in Buddhism: Paul Mus, *Barabudur*, vol. 1, pp. 137-140, 217, 222, etc. Gustave Thibon, *Nietzsche ou le déclin de l'esprit*, p. 279: "We should have traversed all the deserts of negation in order to discover the *profound* symbolism of the sensible world."

it never passes from one stage of its ascension to the next except by a series of rejections and denials, for the beings which it questions on the road all reply: "We are not the God you are seeking."[33]

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Let us admit that three-quarters, and perhaps more, of all that man says and thinks of God in his worship and his prayer is infected with hypocrisy and superstition, childishness, convention, and routine repetitions.[34] Yet we must be on our guard against contemptuous judgments, because they are the most blinding of all. This enormous wastage must not blind us to the spark of truth that burns in the innermost recesses of the soul. Even when it conceals it from us, it is not always stifled, and from time to time it can be seen glowing and bursting into a pure and upright flame.

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Optimi corruptio pessima.
The coating of hypocrisy is never so thick as round the idea of God.

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God can never really be thought or recognized apart from a *sursum*, which no proof can ever arouse. It is much less important to prove God to the unbeliever than to open his eyes. Apologetics is to testimony what the sermon is to example.

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If, when night comes, I think back to certain privileged moments when the truth of my affirmation was revealed to me in an experience, I am not

33. *Confessions*, bk. 10, ch. 6, n. 9 (PL 32:783). Cf. *Sermo*, 53, 12 and 14: "Force your heart to think of divine things; compel it, urge it. Cast away from yourself any thinking that has affinities to the body. Not yet can you say, 'He is this'. Rather say, 'He is not this'. For when will you say, 'This is God'? Not when you see; because what you will be seeing is ineffable. . . . He is not a likeness. The Christian should blush with shame to carry such an idol in his heart" (PL 38:369 and 370). See also the admirable *Enarratio in Psalmum*, 41, nn. 7-10, which is less well known than a similar passage in the *Confessions*, but is nonetheless more complete and more lyrical: "By hearing every day: Where is your God? etc." (PL 36:467-471). I reproduce this passage at the end of the chapter.

34. Cf. Julien Green, *Journal*, vol. 4 (30 June 1943), p. 543: "What happens is that a person thinks so often and so habitually about God in conventional terms that this great reality, which is the sole reality, becomes attenuated behind a screen of phrases that have been learned by rote. . . ."

living on a deceptive memory, on the recollection of a pleasing experience, but recollecting a value perceived; it is not the recollection of the fulfillment of a value which I bore in principle within me, but the recollection of a newly discovered existence which integrates, orders, and judges all human values.

I had been told that the grey canopy of the sky was only a thin curtain of cloud which hid the sun. I had been offered ingenious and even convincing proofs. They explained many things. That fine solution was a correct one. My reason had nothing more to say. And yet its direction was not unalterably fixed. My mind remained perplexed. . . . One day the clouds opened, and I saw the sun appear beyond them. I was unable to fix my eyes upon it, but I was struck by its rays. My countenance was illuminated.[35] From then on the trial was no longer a scandal. The clouds are once again opaque, but they cannot make me doubt the sun.

Perhaps, if I get caught up in a network of argument, it will be enough to meet a man for whom the clouds have in effect opened. Perhaps it will be enough to see a man who has seen, and to believe on his testimony. For that is the miracle which is endlessly repeated, generation after generation, which overcomes our prejudices and all the precautions we oppose to it: it blows a breach in the critical fortress and dynamites negation. Such a testimony is unlike any other we encounter in ordinary life. Through his testimony, through the man who has seen, I really see — or at least glimpse or have an inkling of what he has seen. The sound of his voice awakens an echo in me. The night in which I live is illuminated, without ceasing to be darkness. And what the psalmist says to God I can say to the "man of God": *In lumine tuo videbimus lumen.* (In thy light we shall see light.)

The saints are the efficacious witnesses of God among us.[36]

When we meet a saint we are not discovering at long last an ideal, lived and realized, which had already been formed within us. A saint is not the perfection of humanity — or of the superman — incarnate in a particular

35. Cf. St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle,* ch. 14, n. 24: ". . . like the sleeper who, awakening from a lengthy sleep, opens his eyes to the sight of an unexpected light."

36. See Léonce de Grandmaison, S.J., *La religion personelle,* pp. 177-179, and the beautiful article by Gabriel Le Maître, "Choisir l'espoir," *Etudes* (September, 1950), pp. 216-226.

man. The marvel is of a different order. What we find is a new life, a new sphere of existence, with unsuspected depths — but also with a resonance hitherto unknown to us and now at last revealed. We are shown a new country, a home we had originally ignored, and as soon as we perceive it we recognize it as older and truer than anything we had known and with claims upon our heart.

No feeling of self-satisfaction invades us; we do not see our noblest image reflected in a mirror. This is not the fulfillment of our loveliest dream — or rather there is something further, which is not only more beautiful: we are simultaneously attracted and repelled, and the more we are repelled the more we are attracted. We experience an ambiguous sensation as of something at the same time very near and very far; something disturbing, troubling, and at the same time obscurely desired. The feeling is a mixed one, compounded of a sense of strangeness and of supreme fulfillment beyond all desire. We are both disconcerted and ravished, and the delight we experience is never without a sense of dread. Our worldliness reacts to the threat. Our secret connivance with evil is aroused. We are on our guard. If we had begun to regard ourselves as perfect in some respect, we shall be doubly tempted to reject the provoking vista which is going to oblige us to recognize our misery and, more than that, the wretchedness of what we call perfection.

But in all this we are not left to ourselves, as spectators. It acts upon us as a provocation. It is a summons to choose and to act, unveiling our most hidden tendencies. . . . All of a sudden the universe seems different; it is the stage of a vast drama, and we, at its heart, are compelled to play our part.

If there were more saints in the world, the spiritual struggle would only be more intense. As the Kingdom of God becomes more manifest, it calls forth more fervent adherents — and, correspondingly, more violent opposition. The heightened urgency of the situation provokes tension and becomes the occasion of resounding conflicts.

For if we are more or less at peace in the world, it is simply that we are tepid.

"Love and do as you will," St. Augustine said — if you love enough to act, in every circumstance, according to the dictates of love.

One might also say "love and believe what you will" — if you know how to extract all the light from love, whose source is not in you.

But do not rush to the conclusion that you know what love is.

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If the task of reason is to penetrate sensible appearances, the task of faith is to penetrate all appearances. It must pass through all the nights. That is what sometimes makes it so hard; it is the very opposite of a "lazy solution."

Faith is always a victory.

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The solitary mystic sees himself as identical with the Principle of Being, and so infinitely increases his solitude; the believer is brought up short against the Other, is overthrown, and, after the struggle, united with him in love.

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When the witness of the saints incites my adherence, I do not confuse the power of their testimony with the force of a rational argument. I know perfectly well that I am not effecting a scientific operation. I can see quite clearly that there are two *genera*, and that their difference cannot be bridged. But although their testimony is not a proof, that does not mean that it is a bad or even a weak proof, any more than it is an apodeictic one. And so I shall not say that it is "reasonable and prudent" to rely on what I am told by men who deserve respect, whose affirmations converge, and whose sincerity is beyond doubt, although the evidence which they claim to bring remains "purely extrinsic" and does not allow me to draw any conclusion with real certainty. I do not need to be told that such an argument is "devoid of scientific value," since I have already admitted that there is no question of arguing. What I contest is that the testimony to which I give my adherence is "purely extrinsic." On the contrary, its whole value — which, to repeat, has nothing "scientific" about it — consists in the echo it evokes in me. It enables me to unravel something essential within myself. That does not mean that it supplies a proof. None is even hinted at. But the two epithets "reasonable" and "prudent" are nonetheless inadequate to describe the adherence which that testimony compels me to give.[37]

37. Cf. Jacques Maritain, *Approches de Dieu*, p. 118, who, even while he speaks of the argument founded on evidence, adds: "I do not think that this argument entails a rational or purely natural adherence without belief of a wholly different order being

The witness of the saints does not produce an automatic effect. Nor can it be generalized in the same way as a rational proof. But when it is efficacious, it is an altogether different thing and not a simple and inferior form of proof.[38]

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"Once a thing is explained it ceases to interest us" (Nietzsche). So God interests us eternally — and everything else in God through its participation in his infinity.

In the "now" of eternity, everything will be "new, fresh, and present" to us in God.[39]

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To some people God is the one who lets them sleep in peace, a reassuring word which dispenses them from the fatigue of inquiry. To others he is the one who tears them from the "false security" in which, according to Pascal, the world lived before the coming of Christ.

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The humility of the saints is not the humility we attribute to them. Nor is their love what we imagine it to be. And to say everything — if we must — our God is not their God.

Yet each one of us, at the bottom of his heart, has some inkling of the difference, and can begin to measure the gulf. And that knowledge helps us to reduce it. Each one of us, if he will but attend, can have some premonition of the strange new country in which the saint finds his home.

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mixed in with it, a belief, indeed, that is founded on an invisible testimony, in the depths of the soul, to the God whom we intend to speak of on the part of his friends." The witness of the saints would thus become a witness to God himself; and this is very much what I think. But without denying, indeed far from doing so, the possible interventions of grace, I believe that there is a place here to make an appeal, first of all — and if Maritain does not say so expressly, he does not at least deny it — to a certain resonance that arises from the connaturality that exists between the soul of a saint and our own soul.

38. Cf. Fernand Van Steenberghen, "Le problème philosophique de l'existence de Dieu," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 45 (1947), pp. 146, 302.

39. Master Eckhart (*Oeuvres de Maître Eckhart, Sermons-Traités*, trans. Paul Petit, p. 14).

Hell is the work of man, of the man who refuses to give himself and puts himself in bondage: to whom love is unbearable.

As the first Christians understood so well and symbolized so admirably, it is one and the same gesture which both saves and condemns, the serene and majestic gesture with which Christ shows the five wounds. The Redeemer does not transform himself into the Judge, as though tired of his first role; it is the same unique love, the same unchanged love which pronounces the double sentence as it is refracted in our hearts.[40]

It is the same word, the one double-edged sword which comes to some as the word of life and to others as the word of death. *Semel locutus est Deus, duo haec audivi.* (God has spoken, and these two things have I heard.)

It is the same "contemplation" which is obscure or luminous, exquisite or cruel, according to the state of the subject.[41]

In its unchanging essence the same divine Fire is pain for one, Purification for another, and Beatitude for a third.[42]

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Noverim me, noverim te. May I know myself, and may I know you, O God, my God! — only that double wish must not be realized at two different times. I cannot get to know myself without seeking to know God — for in my very being I am wholly relative to God. The subtlest investigations

40. See, among others, the fresco of the Last Judgement by Cavallini at the farther end of the tribune in the Church of St. Cecilia in Rome.

41. St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night,* passim, ch. 6: ". . . the unspeakable torment that the soul endures when it is purified by the fire of this contemplation"; cf. also ch. 8.

42. Alexander of Hales, *In Sent.,* d. 37, n. 10: "God is in himself the Alpha and Omega, as it were, he is in the world as creator and guide, in an angel as savior and helper, in the damned as their terror and dread" (Quaracchi [1951], p. 368; text cited as being from St. Augustine, *Confessions*). Adam Scotus (of Dryburgh), *Epistola:* "God is in himself incomprehensible, an object of terror among the damned, and of love among the elect" (PL 198:795a; cf. 778c). Maximilianus Sandaeus, S.J., *Pro theologia mystica clavis* (1640), p. 169; *Theologia mystica, seu Contemplatio divina Religiosorum a calumniis vindicata* (1627), p. 101: "What then is God? — he is no less the punishment of the wicked than the glory of the humble. He is a certain unchangeable and indeclinable uprightness of rational moderation that in very truth touches everything everywhere, and it is for him a necessity to confound every kind of wickedness in this way." Cited by St. Bernard, *De consideratione,* bk. 5, ch. 12, n. 25, who adds: "God is the punishment of those who are evil. For he is light; and what is more hateful to foul and shameful minds? . . ." (PL 182:802).

and the most learned reflections only serve to lead me astray instead of revealing me to myself so long as I try to know myself alone. Man only knows himself — can only desire and love himself — in God or before God. *Noverim te, noverim me.*

The man of prayer discovers in himself and upon himself the light which the man in search of his "self" does not discover.

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Man, alas, is above all frightened of God. He is afraid of being burned at his touch, like the Israelites who touched the Ark. That adds subtlety to his denials, cunning to his attempted escapes, and makes the pious inventive in devotional tricks to deaden the shock. . . . Whether incredulous, indifferent, or believers, we compete with one another in ingeniously guarding ourselves against God.[43]

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"Whenever we seem to touch upon God, or when we perceive that he has come to us in our dreams and our wretchedness, we are horrified" (Maurice Blondel).

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The mystical impulse is not a luxury. Without it the moral life would run the risk of becoming a form of repression, asceticism a withering dryness, docility a form of sleep, and religious practices a routine, a matter of display if not of fear.

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The genuine mystic confides in no one — not because he is prudent or aloof, nor solely from humility or love of mystery. He has no confidences to make.[44] The life of consciousness is beyond the range of psychology, particularly in its highest form, the mystical life.

43. Cf. Simone Weil, *La Pesanteur et la Grâce,* p. 77: "We fly from the inner void since God might steal into it."

44. Cf. Marie of the Incarnation, letter to her son, October 1671: "God consumes me in a state of simplicity with him. If I wanted to speak of it further, I would not have much to say, for I would almost always say the same thing." To her son again, 26 October 1653: ". . . The greatest intimacy has not been in my power. It is this in part which makes me reluctant to write of these matters, although it is my delight to find absolutely nothing in this great abyss and to be obliged to be at a loss for words in losing myself

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The mystic longs to know God in himself, that is to say, as God knows himself; and — if love has revealed itself to him in some measure — he longs to love God for himself, that is to say, with the love with which God loves himself. And then he will be open on all sides to the inflow of the divine.

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Cum absens putatur, videtur; — cum praesens est, non videtur.[45] (When he is thought to be absent, he is seen — when he is present he is not seen.)

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Is mysticism "an intuition of God"? Yes, but always in the dark night. For God is only found by always seeking him. He is always "the one sought."[46]

O Luce qui mortalibus
Lates inaccessa, Deus.[47]

(O God who dwelleth in light which is for mortals inaccessible!)

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Progress in the knowledge of God there is, but it would not merit the name of progress unless it took us nearer the term, and in another sense left us just as far away. As the infinite allows us to approach it, so it proves the more inaccessible. Moreover, "those who ascend never cease ascending";

in it. The older one gets, the more incapable one is of writing about it, because the spiritual life simplifies the soul in a consummate love, the result being that one can no longer find the terms to speak of it."

45. St. Augustine, *De videndo Deo (Epist.* 147, *ad Paulinam)*, ch. 6, n. 18 (PL 33:604).

46. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *In Cantica canticorum; In Ecclesiasten*, hom. 7, n. 6: ". . . to find him is always to seek him. For it is not one thing to seek him and another to find him: but the advantage of seeking out is seeking itself" (PG 44:720c). John Scotus Erigena, *De divisione naturae*, bk. 5 (PL 122:1010c-d). Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica*, pt. 1, bk. 2, ch. 10, n. 2, ad 3m: "Coming to know about God is always within the context of becoming in this life." Correlatively, ἔρχε ται ὁ ἀε ὶ παρώ*ε*ρchetai *ho aei parōn* [= "The one who is always present comes"], an insight that comes again from Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Moysis* (PG 44:472c). Cf. Apocalypse 1:4, 8; 4:8.

47. Gallican liturgy, hymn for vespers.

those who have started on their course move "from beginnings to beginnings, through beginnings without end."

"Once the soul takes flight and begins, insofar as it can, to participate in the divine good, then the Word begins to draw it to itself as though it were still at the beginning of its ascent. . . . 'Arise' it says to the soul which has already arisen, 'Come' it says to the soul which has already come. And indeed those who really rise up must always continue to do so, and those who run towards the Lord will never find their journey to the divine cut short. In saying 'Arise and come,' the Word obliges us to rise up continually, and never to slacken speed, always giving us grace for a new and more perfect ascent."[48]

48. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *In Cantica canticorum*, hom. 5 (PG 44:873-876); cf. Hom. 8 (940-944); *De vita Moysis* (PG 44:405). "Thus," comments Louis Beirnaert, "there is indeed an ascent, but this ascent and this progress do not occur between two points which remain fixed. There is never a satisfaction of desire and an achievement of importance, because, for the Christian mystic, desire and its object are both drawn together by a mysterious gravitation, which causes new summits to come into view, even as one scales the heights, and hunger to be rekindled, even as one is sated. What is there to say, except that the greatest and the least, the high and the low, take on their value in this case with reference to an Absolute whose loftiness is of such a kind that one is always starting out on an ascent? But always to be starting out and to recognize the fact unceasingly is, to use the words of Tauler (*Sermons*, French ed. of Hugueny-Théry-Corin, vol. 1, p. 358), to remain 'in the depths of humility, precisely in the spot where one is absolutely like a beginner' (even while one is already being raised up beyond oneself and all things). It is paradoxically to live an ascent which is inscribed in a situation of greater depth, a situation for which the distance between high and low does not have a measurable meaning. . . . This is why in the end the Christian ascent, inasmuch as it is inscribed in time, is a progress towards the depths of humility at the same time as it is a movement towards the lofty heights of divinity, for where God has been humbled 'to the point of death on the cross', the road to the heights wends its way unceasingly through a landscape of humiliation."

Cf. St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, bk. 9, ch. 1, who cites Sirach 18:6: "For when man brings it to completion, then he begins . . ." (PL 41:961). St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Cantica, sermo* 84, n. 1 (PL 183:1184-1185). Maurice Blondel, *L'Action* (1893), pp. 351-352: "As soon as a person thinks that he knows God adequately, he does not know him any more. Without a doubt the moment of his appearance in a person's consciousness has such a resemblance to eternity that a person is fearful, as it were, of entering into it quite entirely, his gaze being fixed on a lightning flash which serves only to deepen the night for him. But the mixture of light and shade remains such that the presumption of the person who thinks he sees and the expectation of the person who supposes he is ignorant are both confounded. Against those who are overly clear-sighted it must be maintained that in the realm of what we know and wish, God remains that which we cannot either know or make. Against those who are wilfully blind it must be maintained

Far from discouraging us, that thought can only strike us with wonder. What it teaches us has nothing to do with Penelope's web or the rock of Sisyphus. Nothing is ever lost, the distance we cover is not wasted, and there is no turning back upon our steps — but everything is greater and more beautiful than we could have imagined or suspected. For God must always be greater than everything "not only in this world but in the next."[49] Everything, therefore, which has to do with God always preserves the freshness of a beginning and the zest of the original departure. No fatigue or satiety "which would dull the spirit"[50] need be feared. The rich autumn harvest will have the savor of the first fruits of spring. And we ourselves shall participate in this eternal youth. We shall understand more and more as we experience it, and as we see better and better that we do not yet understand it, and never shall understand it, what this astounding thing, the discovery of God, means — for it will never cease to astonish us.

Cum consummaverit homo, tunc incipit
Sanctorum sicut aquilae juventus renovabitur.[51]

(When man is consummated, then he really begins.
The youth of the saints shall be renewed like eagles.)

"Not to be able to reach God is our discovery; the failure itself, our success."[52]

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that, without dialectical complication or long studies, in the twinkling of an eye, for anyone, at any time, God is the immediate certitude without which there is no other, the first brightness, the language that is known without one's having learned it. He is the only one whom a person can never seek in vain without ever being able to find him in his fulness."

"No man can seek you without already having found you. Thus you wish to be found so that you may be sought, to be sought so that you may be found. You can in truth be sought and found, but not, however, anticipated" (St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *De diligendo Deo*, ch. 7, n. 22 [PL 183:987c]).

49. St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 2, 28, 3 (PG 7:806a).

50. Leibniz, *Principes de la nature de la grâce*, no. 18. Cf. Gratry, *Connaissance de l'âme*, vol. 1 (1857), 1, 13: "The wine of eternal life, says the Savior in the Gospel, will itself be new."

51. Psalm 102:5. See also St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, bk. 15, ch. 2, 2; see the lovely commentary on Psalm 104:3-4: "Let the heart of those who seek the Lord rejoice. . . ."

52. Master Eckhart, *Treatise* 14 (F. Pfeiffer, 1857). Cf. St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia*

"God is not a spectacle. The contemplation of him is something more secret, veiled and disconcerting. He is only discovered, and then only in a certain degree, in the fidelity of our movement towards him, in a 'passover' which brings peace out of suffering and gives riches at the cost of stripping ourselves of everything."[53]

. . . It should not be imagined that the soul always remains or should remain at the highest point of the spirit, and so adheres to God as a most pure spirit, in whose presence all things are as nothing . . . in such a way that progress consists solely in inserting, immersing and concealing itself deeper and deeper in the divine spirit. Spiritual profit should be conceived in this way: once the soul has reached the summit in one order or degree, then if it is to be raised by God to another degree, substantially more perfect, it must first of all return to the lower state and begin a new and more searching purgation, an expansion and a fresh disposition, a deeper and more sincere foundation of true self-knowledge than heretofore. Which new beginning, nevertheless, virtually contains in its lowliness all the heights previously attained.

For this must be carefully noted: all that the soul acquired at the summit of its spirit, the sublime fruit and final term, she now possesses in secret by way of principle, by way of being, as basis and substance, hidden and unknown, as something which is joined and identified with her own substantial being in this new beginning at the lower levels: and this, by a singular disposition and artifice of God, in order that the soul should not esteem its interior state too greatly and magnify it; so that being exempt from the danger, she may continue always to grow in God. . . .

Hence it comes that true spirituality does not always consist in enjoying God; nor, similarly, in always being able to persevere continuously at the summit of the spirit; but in being able to follow God according to all the changes and vicissitudes and fruitions and all the

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in Job, bk. 24, n. 11: "The closer the spirit approaches to divine realities, the further from them it considers itself to be, for, if it perceived none of them, it would be incapable of understanding that it is impossible for it to contemplate him without a veil." Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, ch. 6, 40, n. 1: "the contemplation which does not satisfy."

53. Jacques Paliard, *Profondeur de l'âme* (1953), p. 159.

diversity of degrees which he imposes upon the soul. In a word, the ability to follow him wherever he leads.[54]

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The real problem is not "the search for God" — for there are ways of searching for him which are no more than provocations[55] — and any search in which man allots himself the principal role is surely a provocation. The real problem is to cultivate the right dispositions so that one may hope to find him without — so to say — having to search for him. The essential thing is to understand that these dispositions themselves can only come from God. For it is he who searches for us and who, in his time, will manifest himself to us.

Turn towards the East and await God,
And the dawn of grace will soon rise in you.[56]

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Sometimes we think we are looking for God. But it is always God who is looking for us, and he often allows himself to be found by those who are not looking for him.

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No critical ingenuity can ever prevail over the clear-sightedness of the pure in heart.

The pure in heart are twice blessed: they shall see God and through them God will make himself seen.

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That which man, starting from his own level, calls "God" is a vital impulse, the topmost summit of the world whence the summons leads into the beyond, a jumping-off place for the leap of faith. But if one stops at that point, giving it a definitive value, the result is a "religious" deception, and nature or some ideal or other is turned into God. Such

54. Constantin de Barbanson, *Anatomie de l'âme et des operations divines en icelle* (1635), pt. 3, art. 16, pp. 155-158.

55. Cf. Wisdom of Solomon 1:2: "because he is found by those who do not put him to the test."

56. Angelus Silesius, *The Cherubic Pilgrim*, bk. 2, ch. 5.

a divinity, starting with the *numina* of natural religions, and ending with the absolute being of religious philosophy, has no real existence. The God who is, the true and living God, is he who shows himself to us in Revelation. It is with him, whether man likes it or not, that he is concerned in time and in eternity.[57]

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Light is the Lord's cloak; rest assured that if you lose the light you have not yet lost God himself.[58]

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Beyond all conventions — in the rejection of all untruth — at the cost of security — behind all negations — when everything fails — in the abandonment of everything: The discovery of God.

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What is an unhealthy subtlety or at least a superfluous refinement to some is a necessity to others. It is the "flight ahead" to which they are condemned. That narrow defile is their only path to salvation.

They are certain to disconcert or antagonize the easily satisfied mind, more than the clever and the restless, more even than the adventurers in

57. Romano Guardini. It should, however, be noted that the "natural" God whom the author excludes is only the one in whose name one would exclude the God of supernatural revelation by attributing to him "a definitive value." By the same author, *Christliches Bewusstsein. Versuche über Pascal*, 2nd ed. (1950), pp. 58ff.: ". . . The ordinary representations or universal conceptions of God which claimed to be 'pure', and which, to be sure, were in a certain sense such, are immersed in this apparent humanization of God. The two worlds of thought and experience which were capable of being characterized by the formulas: 'God is absolute' and 'God is the one who speaks through Jesus Christ', contend with one another, . . . even though they have for their object the same reality, namely the living God. . . ." However, "all that a faithful effort at 'the philosophical knowledge of God' was capable of bringing to light keeps its value. And this value is great, in spite of all the despisers of philosophy, either in our own day or times gone by. For the great ensemble of the real, just like the postulates of thought and the power of the spirit from which these concepts are taken, did not take their rise just anywhere; nor is it any more strongly the case that they spring from evil. Rather do they spring from that God who has spoken through Christ. But creation is ordered to grace and is only grasped properly in all its truth in relation to it."

58. Angelus Silesius, *The Cherubic Pilgrim*, bk. 2, 5.

the world of thought with their dubious designs, more than the disguised adversaries of the truth. But how can they help it?

Their choice is between scepticism and the purification of faith. Between despair and the purification of hope. Between hatred of their kind and rebellion, and the purification of love.

And the Peace which comes upon them coexists with an anxious dread.[59]

And the God of their distress is more *God* to them than any other — and is *theirs* more than any other.

And no other God is so contagious — and no distress so effectively appeases the mind without lulling it to sleep.

No, my Love, you are neither fire, nor water, nor aught that we say. You are what you are in your glorious eternity. You are: that is your essence and your name. You are life, divine life, living life, unifying life. You are all beatitude. You are ineffable, incomprehensible unity, supremely adorable. In a word, you are Love, and my Love. What, then, shall I say of you? You made me for you; for you, I say, who are Love. Why, then, should I not talk of love? But alas, what can I say? On earth I cannot speak of it. The saints who see you in heaven adore you in silence, and their silence is a sacred language in which they taste love. You pour your love into us, O my God, as into them. And you fill us with yourself, as you do them. Why, then, should we not do as they do? Why should we not taste love as they do? For if you are their Love, you are also ours. They see you directly, O my dear life, and that is what they have and what we have not in the lowliness and the misery of the flesh. But when we are delivered from our prison, we shall see you as they do, we shall praise you as they do, we shall embrace you as they do, we shall possess you as they do, we shall be immersed in you as they are, and we shall no longer express your love in humble similitudes, because we shall be wholly in love, that is, in you, who are my one Love, my mercy and my All.[60]

59. Marie of the Incarnation, *Relation de 1654*, 12: "The soul is carried away passively by a stroke which, in its depths, gives her a very great peace. But beyond this, divine love holds her bound in an anguish which can be vividly felt but not spoken of" (*Écrits*, ed. Jamet, vol. 2, p. 216). There are, however, different forms of anxiety. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Der Christ und der Angst*, 6th ed. (1989).

60. Marie of the Incarnation, *Exclamations et Élévations*, 2 (ed. Jamet, vol. 1, pp. 380-381).

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
  Though all things pass,
God does not change.

Patience wins all things,
But he lacks nothing,
Who possesses God:
  For God alone suffices.[61]

But if I do not reach my goal? If I fall by the wayside? I shall nevertheless have the joy of having run, strained, and sweated as much as I could, in search of the face of my Lord.[62]

O Lord and my God, my one and only hope, hear my prayer, lest in my wearied state I should find myself unwilling to seek you. But rather let me always seek your face with a burning desire. Give me the energy and power to seek you, Lord, who have made us to find you, and have given us an ever greater hope of finding you. My strength and my infirmity are known to you. Preserve my strength and heal my infirmity. My knowledge and my ignorance are also known to you. When you have opened the door to me, be my stay as I enter through it. When you have closed the door, open it to me when I knock. May I remember you, may I understand you, may I love you. Increase and nurture these aspects in me, until you reshape me completely. . . . Free me, Lord, from the excess of talk and words which I suffer within my soul. . . . Many are my thoughts, which you are well aware of, my thoughts that are all too human, inasmuch as they are a vanity. Grant that I may not consent to them . . . , nor dwell upon them like one in a daydream. . . . When, therefore, I finally reach you, many of the things we speak of now shall cease, . . . and you alone will remain all in all, and we shall speak of

61. St. Teresa, *Poems*.

62. Richard of St. Victor, *De Trinitate*, bk. 3, ch. 1 (PL 196:915-916).

you alone as being without end, even as we praise you together, having been made one in you. . . .[63]

O ergo, quem nemo quaerit vere et non invenit, quippe cum ipsa veritas te quaerendi in conscientia quaerentis non suspectum jam habeat responsum aliquatenus inventae veritatis! [64]

(So no one truly seeks you without finding you because the very truth that you are being sought in the consciousness of the seeker contains in itself the unsuspected answer of a truth which, in a measure, has been discovered already.)

To await God is to possess him.[65]

63. St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, bk. 15, ch. 28, n. 51. Translation provided here is by M. Sebanc.

64. William of St.-Thierry, *Speculum fidei* (PL 180:397a).

65. Fénelon, *Oeuvres* (Paris), vol. 8, p. 557. Cf. St. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmum*, 41, 7-10 (PL 36:467-471). A translation by M. Sebanc appears on the pages following.

Where Is Your God?

Hearing every day the words, "Where is your God?" feeding every day on my diet of tears, I have pondered day and night on what I have heard. . . . Also I have sought my God, so that, if it were possible, I might not merely believe in him, but even see him to some extent. For I see what my God has done, but I do not see my God, the very one who has done these things.

But because I long like a hart for flowing streams, and the font of life is to be found in him, and the Psalm is written to be understood by the sons of Korah, and the invisible things of God come within our ken through the things which are made: what am I to do, so that I might find my God?

I shall examine the earth: the earth has been made. Great is the beauty of the earth. But it has an artificer. Great are the marvels of seeds and plants. But all these things have a creator. I declare the greatness of the encompassing sea. I am awestruck, I marvel. I seek an artificer. I look up at the sky and the beauty of the stars. I marvel at the splendor of the sun which suffices for the putting forth of day, the night-time moon that mitigates the darkness. These things are marvellous. They are praiseworthy, even stupendous. For these things are not earthly in character, but are already heavenly. — Nor, indeed, does my thirst linger with a view to being sated by them. I marvel at them, I praise them, but I thirst for him who made them.

I return to myself, and I search out who it is that I myself am, I, who ask such questions. I find that I have a body and a soul, etc. But is God actually any such part of myself as is spirit? Indeed, God cannot be seen except by the spirit, but he cannot, however, be seen in such a way as the spirit can be seen. For this spirit seeks in some way to find out what God is, and those who say, 'Where is your God?' do not insult him. This spirit seeks a certain unchangeable truth, a substance that has no defects. The spirit itself is not such. . . . Its kind of mutability does not fall to the lot of God. . . .

Therefore it is in seeking my God in visible and corporeal things and not finding him, in seeking his substance in myself, as if he were something like what I am, but not finding it, that I feel that my God is something above my soul. Thus, so that I might touch him, 'These things I have pondered, and I have poured out my soul above myself.' . . .

. . . Let them still say: 'Where is your God?' Thus I seek my God in every body, be it earthly or heavenly, and I do not find him. I seek his substance in my soul, and I do not find him. I have pondered, however, the search

for my God, and through the things which have been made, desiring to catch sight of and understand the invisible things of God, 'I have poured out my soul above myself'. And now there remains no one whom I might touch, except for my God. For the home of my God is there, above my soul. There he lives, from there he views me, from there he created me, from there he guides me, from there he takes an interest in me, from there he inspires me, from there he calls me, from there he directs me, from there he leads me, from there he shows me the end of my way.

For he who has the loftiest of homes in solitude also has a tabernacle on earth. His tabernacle on earth, his Church, is still a wayfaring pilgrim. But the seeking must occur here, because the way homewards is found in the tabernacle. . . . Beyond the place wherein the tabernacle is situated I shall roam as I seek my God; 'Because I shall enter the place of his wonderful tabernacle, even to the house of God.' . . .

. . . Behold how many things I marvel at in his tabernacle! For the tabernacle of God on earth is the faithful . . . and I regard the soul herself in her obedience to God, . . . I regard justice and charity which are near . . . and I marvel at those virtues in the soul. But I am still walking in the place wherein the tabernacle is situated. And now I pass beyond a discussion of these matters. For I am awestruck at how wonderful the tabernacle is when I reach the home of God. . . . In the home of God there is everlasting festivity, the face of God is present, there is unblemished joy. . . . The sound of this festivity wafts caressingly to the ear of the person who walks in this tabernacle and who considers God's miracles in redeeming his faithful. It carries off the hart to flowing streams.

But because, brothers, for as long as we are home in this body, we are a stranger to the Lord, and the body, which is corrupt, weighs down the soul, and living on this earth weighs down the mind that muses on many things. Even though in some ways the foggy mist is dispelled by our journey through the realm of yearning, and even though now and again we come within reach of those festive sounds, so that by our efforts we acquire something from this house that is God's, still, on account of a certain burden of infirmity, we fall back on our accustomed ways and we come to grief on those old habits. And just as we had found in the former situation the source of our joy, so there will not be lacking in the latter something for us to bewail.

For that hart . . . is seized by desire for flowing streams, that is to say, the interior sweetness of God, and pours out his soul above himself so that he might touch what is beyond his soul, journeying to the place of the

marvellous tabernacle, even to the house of God, led by the delight of interior, rational sound, so that he despises all exterior things and is enthralled by interior things. Still, however, he is a man, still he sighs and groans here, still he bears his fragile flesh, still he is exposed to danger among the stumbling blocks of this world. Therefore he has cast his gaze back at himself, saying: "Why are you sad, my soul, and why do you throw me into confusion? Behold, already we rejoice in a kind of interior sweetness; behold, we catch sight of something unchangeable with our keenness of mind, even though we have been able to examine matters only cursorily and superficially. Why then do you still throw me into confusion, why are you still sad? For you are no longer in doubt about your God. For this is what you say to yourself, against those who say: 'Where is your God?' 'Already I have felt something unchangeable. Why, then, do you throw me into confusion? Hope in God.'"

And his soul answers him in silence, as it were: "Why do I throw you into confusion, except for the reason that I am not yet in that place of sweetness, by which I am so caught up as by a rite of passage? . . ."

But "Hope in God," he answers his own soul as it throws him into confusion. . . . Meanwhile live in hope. For hope which is seen is not hope. If, moreover, we hope for what we do not see, we wait patiently. . . . (Cf. Romans 8:24-25.)

7

God in Our Time

Whenever it abandons a system of thought, humanity imagines it has lost God.

The God of "classical ontology" is dead, you say? It may be so; but it does not worry me overmuch. I have no inclination to defend the petrified constructions of Wolf. And if "classical ontology" disappeared, it was surely because it did not correspond adequately with being. Nor was its idea of God adequate for God. The mind is alive, and so is the God who makes himself known to it.

"God is dead!" or so at least it seems to us . . . until, round the next bend in the road, "we find him again, alive." Once again he makes himself known, in spite of all that we have left behind on the road, all that was only a viaticum for one stage of our journey, all that was only a temporary shelter till we had to make a fresh start. . . . And if we have really progressed along the road, we shall find God himself greater still. But it will be the same God. *Deus semper major.* And once again we shall move on in his light.

God is never left behind among the dross. . . . In whatever direction we go, he is there before us, calling to us and coming to meet us. . . .

It is only too true, often enough "a deist is a man who has not had time to become an atheist."[1]

1. De Bonald. Cf. Peter Wust, *La crise occidentale,* in *Le Roseau d'or,* Chroniques (1929), p. 330: "The God of the Deists is no more than an absolutely dead shadow of the paternal God of the Christians." Jacques Maritain, *Les degrés du savoir,* pp. 446ff.; Paul Hazard, *La pensée européenne au XVIIIe siècle,* vol. 1, p. 153; *La crise de la conscience . . . ,* vol. 2, p. 31. Proudhon put it quite crudely in his *Philosophie de la misère:* "I know a man who would be ready to draw his sword in God's cause, and,

The deist's God, the God of several modern "theodicies" which weigh and measure him rather than defend him, the God who can hardly say "I am" any longer, the God who tends to be no more than "the universal harmony of things," who rules over a beyond where "everything is the same as here,"[2] the God imprisoned "within the limits of reason," who no longer intervenes in the world, who is really nothing but the projection of natural man, who is distant yet without mystery, a God made to our measure and defined according to our rules, a God merged in the "moral order of the universe" as man understands it, a God who is not adored and whom one can only serve by the cult of morality, a God who is "only accessible in pure knowledge" and who is "nothing but that knowledge itself," a God in fact whose thoughts are our thoughts and whose ways are our ways: such a God has proved very useless in practice and has become the object of a justified *ressentiment*.[3] And when at last man decided to get rid of him altogether in order to enter into his own inheritance, he was only a shade, "reduced to the narrow limits of human thought."[4]

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like Robespierre, to set the guillotine going till the last atheist had been destroyed, little suspecting that he would be the last." Let us say, at the very least, that rationalist deism provides the denial of God, on behalf of man, with its most redoubtable argument.

2. Cf. Jules Lachelier, criticizing Leibniz's conception, *Lettre à Jean Baruzi*, 10th December 1906.

3. Cf. already F. Pillon, "Une dénonciation épiscopale," *La Critique philosophique* (1876), vol. 2, pp. 122ff.: "Was it desired only that he should be decorously respectful to the God of Cousin and the *Revue des Deux Mondes*? Is he wrong to disdain, indeed, to scorn this colorless, bourgeois religiosity of dilettantes and those of a doctrinaire disposition, a religiosity which is of no consequence, which exerts no influence on life, which is not in any way incompatible with a profound, subconscious skepticism, which puts an obstacle, by virtue of the place it occupies in terms of habits and customs, to every spontaneous and original manifestation of true religious thought?" For Hegel, cf. Jean Hyppolite, *Logique et existence* (1953); the thought of Hegel himself is ambiguous yet, but this was the case, moreover, in his first works already; cf. Marcel Méry, *G. W. F. Hegel, Premières publications* (1952), p. 299; and *La critique du christianisme chez Renouvier*, vol. 2 (1952), conclusion (pp. 500ff.).

4. It should, however, be remembered that each case is unique, that something active very often survives, that there are ambivalences, that the "quarrels over atheism" are often muddled, and that what looks like a degradation in one light may sometimes be in fact the beginning of a rediscovery. . . . Gabriel Marcel notes, for example, that "among the greatest representatives of idealism" — he is thinking in particular of Fichte — "there existed an extraordinarily vigorous recognition of values": *Le mystère de l'être*, vol. 2 (1951), p. 89.

"To convict Voltaire of atheism is not really a great victory over Christian thought"[5] — nor is it, for that matter, to show that the God of Fichte or Hegel easily turns into the Man of Feuerbach. "Let them reach what conclusions they please against deism," Pascal prophetically remarked.[6]

We have witnessed, during the last few centuries, "the rationalistic evaporation of God."[7] But it was the rationalist God. A single puff will disperse the vapor. We shall not be disturbed. We shall even breathe more comfortably. The true God, the God we continue to adore, is elsewhere. He is everywhere you think to find him. He is everywhere, even when you do not find him.

When "God's cause" is lost, then God is victorious once again. Then "he is his own defender."[8]

It is generally conceded that Christianity "inaugurated the struggle against false gods." But some people would like to take over from it, as though it could not complete the task itself. They would like to make philosophy the heir to Christianity. Yet the philosopher, it is said, is "the man who understands" and not "the man who chooses."[9] In that case the false gods still have a promising future!

One must "reject the gods," a certain writer says, "all the gods." That is precisely what the disciples of Jesus taught us to do from the beginning. If they were taken for atheists, it was not because they were making the banal claim to have discovered *another god*, who would simply have been one among many, but because they proclaimed him who is *totally different from*

5. Etienne Gilson, replying to Leon Brunschvicg in *Querelle de l'athéisme*.

6. Cf. G. Fessard, *La main tendue* (1937), pp. 124ff., with regard to the Hegelian formula proclaiming "the death of the abstraction that is Divine Essence."

7. Georges Gusdorf, *Mythe et Métaphysique* (1953), p. 221.

8. Cf. Leibniz, *Causa Dei* . . . .

9. Merleau-Ponty, *Eloge de la Philosophie* (1953), p. 65.

the gods, and who frees us from their tyranny. They denied everything that the men around them took for the divine — everything that man, at every epoch, tends to deify in order to adore himself and tyrannize over himself, in and through his gods.

The Gospel is the only "twilight of the gods."

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It is possible to maintain that religion — faith in God in the first instance — is a system invented by nature with the object of *reassuring* man who would otherwise be paralyzed by fear in face of a hostile mystery.

But there is another way in which man can reassure himself: the rationalist way, the way of the short-sighted optimist who does not even rise to the level at which the mystery can be felt and proudly announces that there is none to know.

Which of the two is nearer the truth?

Faith in God certainly gives us confidence.[10] That is undeniable, and there is no reason to be ashamed of it, as though it were more intelligent not to have been touched by dread or anguish, or nobler not to wish to be delivered from it. Faith, indeed, reassures us — but not on our level, or so as to produce a paralyzing illusion, or a complacent satisfaction, but so as to enable us to act. It gives man the confidence to become worthy of himself, and helps him not to succumb in the great crisis in his growth to maturity, when consciousness awakens from animality. Faith gives him confidence, but it does so by establishing him in the truth and by communicating a disquiet of a higher order.

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What could be more horrifying than a world without God, without stability, and without mystery, convinced of its own transparency, falling headlong into an abyss of meaningless and endless change, *dum nil perenne cogitat*, while the soul thinks of nothing eternal? or a society entirely given over to temporal idols, in which the *mens avida aeternitatis* is suffocated to death — a world of inexpressible horror and despair?

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10. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Texts Chosen from the Prophets*, nn. 21 and 26: God is at once "inaccessible light" and "devouring fire"; as fire he engenders fear, as light he gives back security.

To compare Nietzsche to Jesus: Jesus was killed because he proclaimed the Father who is in heaven; Nietzsche killed himself, his mind foundered in perpetual night, because he proclaimed, accepted, and willed "the death of God."

Since that decision was taken, in spite of deliberately persuading himself that he possesses a "carefree knowledge," man is obliged to admit, with Nietzsche, that his knowledge leaves him "frozen stiff with fear" — he is a prey to "a sacred terror."[11]

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The divine right of kings, the divine right of peoples: both of them human inventions and instruments of oppression. The divine right of God is the only source of freedom.

The anti-theist — the militant atheist — claims to know God, otherwise he could not oppose him. But by that very fact, and whatever he may say, he is not really opposing God. For God cannot be known in that way.

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Even from the point of view of sociological analysis, the Marxian theory of religion is hardly exact — or at least it is incomplete. Religion, let us admit for argument's sake, might really be the opium of the people if the people had that particular craving. In certain favored circumstances, perhaps, they have. But observation suggests that as a people becomes a proletariat, it loses that taste. Far from stimulating the religious impulse by a sort of mystical compensation, the increasing "alienation" and isolation which goes with the proletarian condition tends, on the contrary, to smother any interest in religion. It turns those whom it dehumanizes away from God.

For in fact a certain degree of social "alienation" very often involves the alienation of the consciousness. And the alienated consciousness is the exact opposite of the religious consciousness.

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"The proletarian has no country." In an analogous sense and for similar reasons, the proletarian has no religion. In a society such as ours, religion tends to become a luxury article, which is denied to a whole section of the

11. Cf. the present author's *Affrontements mystiques* (1950), ch. 3, "Nietzsche mystique." Also similarly in *Drame de l'humanisme athée*, 7th ed. (1983), pp. 493-532.