

CONTEMPLATION IN A WORLD OF VIOLENCE II PEACE IN A TIME OF TERROR

IN THIS PAPER, I alight on what seem to me the most insistent themes in my ongoing exploration of faith in Christ. Thus selected, they hang together, I find, in an exciting way, as a radicalizing of key images which turn out to be, not surprisingly, of the Father, of the Son, and of the ever-new life of the Spirit. To find, as I strive to be explicit out of contemplative reading and prayer, that I am stumbling upon an unsuspected order, is humbling and encouraging. I just hope it works for you.

PART ONE: SHOW US THE FATHER!

Nothing is so difficult really to believe as this: that the creator of our, and every possible universe, is our loving, caring Father. For this belief challenges our deepest bias which it is impossible to think of our mind without, bound as we are to create our own universe. In this universe of our creating, we are, as far as we are concerned, the most real thing. Now we know that this existence of ours is precarious and multiply threatened. And to believe that all these threats we live with are orchestrated by a loving providence that numbers even the hairs of our head goes against the grain of our nature as we know it.

There is a deeper opposition, and it concerns humanity as a family. There is a bias in all human cultures to the effect that the father is to blame for the ills of the family. When Freud said that religion was the attempt to expiate the guilt of the brothers at slaying the father, he didn't realise that he was portraying religion as a cop-out from the real slaying, which is fraternal, the sin of Cain. The brothers pretend that

they feel bad about killing Dad, whereas what they really feel bad about is killing one another. Blaming the father is an evasion of our real moral onus, which is our failure to live together as brothers and sisters, and thus to build a world our children can live in. If the father is to blame, it is we as fathers, we who now are thrown together as brothers under the command to 'love one another or die', as Auden put it in his poem, 'September 3rd, 1939'.

As we naturally blame the father, so, far more readily, we blame the alleged Father of us all. And thus the natural inclination to find unbelievable the universal loving Father is reinforced by the anthropological bias that shifts on to the father the blame that belongs to ourselves, the blame for not loving one another.

Now where nature finds belief hardest—the image of the all-loving Father—grace most powerfully insists. And so our faith is grounded in the loving caring Father. And the story goes on to say that our failure in brotherly love has acted itself out in the slaying of our brother Jesus, who of course—so the story goes—is the Son of this Father. Thus whereas we hide from our failure to love each other by blaming the Father, God's reply is to make vivid the image of the Father through the blood of his Son that 'speaks more clearly than that of Abel.' (Heb. 11:4) In the recognition of ourselves as fratricides in the revelatory moment of Golgotha, and in the immediate forgiveness we there encounter, we are liberated from the old nature that has perpetrated this characteristic murder, and become 'participants in the divine nature.' (2 Peter 1:4) enabled to live together in love, to be the Philadelphia of God.

I find it helpful to expand the statement of Paul, that 'where sin abounded, grace has more abounded', to mean: 'where we find belief hardest, faith is most emphatic.'

The focus of this emphasis is the image of God as our loving Father. Now this enablement of belief in the Father of mercies is won the hard way. The cost of the image taking hold of the mind is the drama of Jesus, his claim, his teaching, his table-fellowship with society's necessary-for-its-survival outcasts, climaxing in a religious and political murder. Now if it is only through this means that the carapace of our natural mind has been ruptured, we have to undergo the rupture ourselves. As I stand with us around the altar where, improbably, we offer Jesus' bloody sacrifice to his Father, I have to remind myself that a drastic spiritual surgery stands between a bland and a real hearing of that word Father. The nearest thing I know to a description of a spiritual surgery is the account given by Eckhart Tolle in *The Power of Now* which is organically rather than nominally Christian (and this shows just how bland our Christianity has become). It should not surprise us to learn that saying the Our Father was once a capital offence, in contempt of Caesar and his claim on us. It was pronounced, originally, I believe, in an ecstasy of daring, declaring *his* world, *his* will, *his* kingdom and not Caesar's to be the real one, a heady wine of the Spirit.

The enablement to believe in God as our Father is the enablement for the consequence of this belief: a community whose solidarity is no longer the 'normal' father-rejecting, brother-fleeing 'horrid amity of misfortune' (Eliot, *The Family Reunion*) but brotherly-sisterly love, the true Philadelphia. One of the most striking

things about the early community as manifest in the Christian writings is the self-evidence, to them, that Baptism into that death wiped out the obstacle to love, namely sin, and brought the baptized into this new race, gender- and condition-transcending condition.

Now this enablement is the enablement to live without violence: and this does not mean to live against our nature, but to live according to our true nature that only Christ has been able to 'tap'; beneath the nature that our cultures have superimposed—our cultures with their great lie of blaming the Father and avoiding the brother. The most valuable insight in the doctrine of original sin is that what we take to be the human reality, poised now on the edge of violence with no foreseeable conclusion, is something we have made of and for ourselves in despite of the love that we more deeply and surely know is our true nature. I strongly recommend the Dalai Lama's latest book, *The Art of Happiness*, in which he argues that love is what comes naturally to us. A man I met recently told me that one of the biggest surprises of his life was on coming to know his new wife's family: he just hadn't believed that 'family' could 'work.' But once he saw it, he could no longer doubt that this is the way we are meant to be together.

It occurs to me, though, that the practice of contemplative prayer, at least of the formless kind taught by Abbot Chapman, in a sense bypasses the problem of God as loving Father. In the void that this prayer breathes, there is a suggestion of an enclosing tenderness. It is important in this connection, surely, to recognize that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, far from bypassing the image, insists upon it as the core reality. It radicalizes the image of the Father in a way that

challenging all the worlds we create to live in, improbably clarifying this image by the blood of the Son. Exactly as, with God as Father, it is the most incredible image that is the true one, so with Jesus it is the most repugnant image, of what Girard calls 'l'horreur humaine de la crucifixion' as the manifestation of this Father's tenderest love for us, that is the true one.

And in fact it is the anthropological vision of Rene Girard that brings us about as close as we can get in our terms to the mystery of the cross. In this vision, Jesus is the universal scapegoat who, through and after his death, reveals himself as our true self setting the heart afire (Lk 24: 32) that is able to shed scapegoating as our violent unifier, having now love as our bond.

In sum, a real as opposed to a vague and wistful belief in God as our Father, and in the way this mystery has got itself 'believed on in the world' (1 Tim. 3, 16), creates the true Philadelphia. It occurs to me that the Benedictine model of monastic existence owes its curious power to survive all other forms of horribly so-called consecrated life to the fact that it has as its primary aim the enfleshment of the true Philadelphia of brothers and sisters in Christ – and, I do not doubt, in the future together under one roof – living together and working together to make manifest the Kingdom of God on earth. The essence of Christianity is the mission-statement of any monastery. Thus the difficulty in 'loving the brethren' 'as we have been loved' is simply the extension into daily life of the difficulty of believing God is our Father. We are a manifestation of the improbable in a dull and heartless world.

There is, though, always the thing we have to add, that the new life in Christ is that of our true and long-buried nature, so that, as Alex Durston and the Dalai

Lama affirm, love is what comes most naturally to us if we have the courage to be who we are, which nearly all the time we don't!

So I have to ask: how are we spreading this enablement for a true non-violent way of living among the people to whom we proclaim its doctrinal foundation? Is Downside manifestly philadelphic? Or is it religiously misanthropic?

PART TWO EASTER'S EGG

Each of us lives mentally inside an imperceptible shell that is composed of our culture and everything in our experience that our culture is interpreting and normalising for us. It is an eggshell, eggshell-thin but invulnerable—so the image of a shell is not accurate in this particular.

Above all, the shell normalises everything that comes our way. I call it imperceptible, because all we see of it is its effect, which is prodigious. It is nothing short of the universe qualified, filtered—which again questions the image: can a shell filter? What the shell does on the inside is to make to be 'inside' everything that comes to me from outside. A Russian writer, Schklovsky by name, said that the mind normalises everything, from disaster to one's spouse to the fear of war. Everything is made copeable-with by the mediating shell. The class of society I belong to may be homophobic. For me, then, homosexuals will be weird.

This instance is interesting, for it sheds more light on the matter. As a member of the chattering classes, I may be liberal about homosexuality, but let even a close friend reveal to me that he is gay, and the shell comes into play. The author of a penetrating book, *The Culture of Desire* records this very

experience. When a gay person tries to tell a liberal friend how he actually feels on seeing a good-looking man, the friend doesn't want to know.

This normalising by the shell is what keeps us sane. The shell 'insides' (verb) the world outside, okays it, gives it a comforting familiarity. In Hitler's Germany, it gave this comforting feel of the normal to people as they noticed the occasional disappearance of Jewish neighbours. Well, I guess that's the way it is. This 'insiding' gives to all sorts of different things the own-skin warmth of the normal. An American newscaster who became a beloved national figure always concluded the news with '...and that's the way it is.'

Now let me try to be more precise about 'the way it is.' And let me ruminate on 'the shell' as lived in by the early followers of Jesus. Their shell told them that life was harsh and cruel, that you had to be careful, especially around government officials and the military. The imperially induced protective shell did its most heavy-duty normalizing when it came to daring initiatives of any kind. You knew what known zealots probably had coming to them. It wasn't a good idea to challenge authority, especially if you had a family to support. What you knew, through the shell, was that deviants came to a sticky end, and that this *is* the end! When you're dead you're dead! This was overwhelmingly real; this was reality for an oppressed people.

As Jesus' behaviour became increasingly confrontational, the ominous message of the shell grew stronger. The dreaded end of this kind of movement brooded over the consciousness of increasingly bewildered followers. The overwhelming Roman norm was at work in their minds. The shell, the normaliser of the way it always goes, was sickeningly foreseeing.

And then came the inevitable crisis: the police, Jesus arrested without resistance, handed over, passed into the impersonal world of the system. The huge oppressive one-way-ness of Roman rule now *is* the shell, in which their unhappy disappointed minds are safely enclosed. Peter chooses the comfort of the shell as he warms his hands at the brazier and the girl draws attention to him. That's the way it is! Walter Cronkite has his script ready for this evening. Another claimant to Jewish leadership executed. And that's the way it is. As the crowd turns ugly, and the Governor pronounces, everything in them recognizes reality happening. The shell, with all its deadly thud of reality, describes, interprets, normalizes, finalises, and finishes.

But shortly afterwards, things seemed to be happening to break the shell. The tomb was said to be empty, and he was being seen, in ways that did not follow the ordinary law of physical perception. When these events are taken together with a huge transforming wave of new feeling focused in a Jesus now more than alive because now Judge of the living and the dead, King-Messiah new style, beyond the political but the more human for that—when you put all this together, what you certainly have may be called a breaking of the customary shell. This one *didn't* come to a sticky end. He opened onto a new age.

The most important aspect of this breaking of the shell is that the intimidation that is the very substance of the shell, being its safety device, has disappeared. There is a total revolution in consciousness, as a small band of men and women set out to change the world.

Another effect of the breaking of the shell is a new coalescence on the part of the disciples. No longer kept apart by

the shell, they acquire a new identity which very soon is recognized as identity in 'the body of Christ.' Take any of the throwaway lines of Paul, and you are reminded of the breaking of the shell. 'All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' (1 Cor 3: 12) The most important and symptomatic effect of the breaking of the shell is that the new community is bound by love, as no community ever has been—I mean, love playing the role normally played by ethnic and cultural and familial factors. In the new community, 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free', because persons are present to each other as the new Christ is present to them. It is all one new presence caused by the breaking of the shell of separateness, expressed in the breaking of the bread his body. The Johannine command, 'to love one another as I have loved you', is only giving expression to this new constitution. The breaking of the shell is radical. It is the best radical image that I have come across. This is the point to introduce what the Christ event does to 'the sacred', which Durkheim says is the one category, with its contrast the profane, found in every culture there has ever been. For the sacred is very much 'of the shell.' Cesareo Bandera, in *The Sacred Game*, says that the sacred protects us from direct exposure to each other, which nevertheless will be our salvation. So we have to extend our description of the breaking of the shell. Jesus breaks it at the Last Supper before, and in preparation for, his crucifixion, by crossing the barrier between sacred and profane, making what Girard calls 'l'horreur humaine de la crucifixion' which is sheer profanity, the sacrament of a new covenant of love. What's the shell doing for the disciples at supper while Jesus pre-enacts his murder in a rite that will be 'to drink wine in the

Kingdom'? And this new 'sacred', far from protecting them from mutual self-exposure, involves them in it!

One could go on and on. And this image of the shell breaking is not new. I have come across it in some of the better new age literature, as a beautiful image for the sudden opening of consciousness to reality 'outside the egg' or ego. Welwood's fine study connecting psychotherapy with Buddhist wisdom is all about this opening to infinity of consciousness. And I have never been in any doubt that contemplative prayer suspends the shell. This is why its practitioners encounter fury on the part of authority, the disastrous Quietist controversy a case in point.

How did I know that Tolle's experience was a resurrection experience? It was the breaking of the shell! It is unmistakable. The shell owes its consistency to the pressure, on the mind, of past and future, that I can feel dissolve in the contemplative Now. Eliot's *Quartets*, especially 'Burnt Norton', become obviously true in the present context.

But the enchainment of past and future
Woven in the weakness of the changing body
Protects mankind from heaven and damnation
Which flesh cannot endure.

There is nothing in the world that I am so thankful for as the suspension of the shell in contemplative prayer. As a beloved confrere said to me half a lifetime ago, 'it's a kind of madness.' It weds me to a Catholic Church whose supreme authorities have succumbed to a vicious anti-Semitism, and, in the matter of sexuality, have behaved as if they knew better than God. Rosmini's *Five Wounds of the Church*, condemned at the time and now required reading, is dated. We now have to recognize pathologies of the Church, two of which are the Jews and sex. Anti-semitism characterised 'the church noisy', as

throughout the nineteenth century leading Catholic journals such as *Civiltà Cattolica* polluted the atmosphere with anti-Semitism, thus preparing a climate in which the Hitler nightmare would become real life. But Edith Stein discovered contemplative prayer in St Teresa and, as a Jew, ended in the gas-chambers. She discovered the real church, the community for whom the shell has broken, making way for love and nothing else.

For thirty years I have been trying to find a way of describing the resurrection of Jesus in its psychological effect. I have run into accusations of reducing it to a psychological event, and at one stage I was, I think. But I am pretty sure that what my critics were really objecting to was my breaking of the shell!

This is the best image I have come up with so far. It speaks in a play of words, with the ego as a warm egg, its shell a protection against a cold world. And at Easter, the egg hatches!

CODA

I have just finished Kertzer's book *The Popes Against the Jews*, and it is devastating. Its undeniable verdict is that the institutional church, faced with the hysterics that attack the religious psyche from time to time, scores at the very best a 'could have done better.' To give a dramatic instance, the only official complaint of the Vatican to the new racial laws was at one clause according to which a Jew who converted and married a Catholic was still a Jew, so that the marriage was not recognized by the Law. Lately the Vatican has added insult to injury by making a problematic distinction between theological and social Judaism, and accepting blame for the former not the latter! This is one of those distinctions

that work in the head and nowhere else. As Elizabeth Anscombe puts it, intention is not a story you tell yourself while you are doing something!

It is especially in relation to spiritual matters that the institutional church is inept. Oughourlian, in *Puppet of Desire*, has pointed out that whereas 'primitive' peoples have sophisticated ways of dealing with strange psychic phenomena, the authorities in the church, faced with the alleged Devils of Loudun, were duped by the lubricious fantasies of a clever nun, and on the strength of this, sentenced the priest Urbain Grandier to death at the stake.

I would like to add an appendix to Kertzer's book, entitled, 'The Catholic Church to which I belong.' It would consist in stories, of Henri Bergson, who became a Catholic and was allowed a Jewish burial to protect the Jewish community from Catholic triumphalism. Leon Bloy, who replied to a lady who had invited him to join an anti-Jewish society: 'Madame, as I eat a Jew every morning, and have pinned my faith to the testimony of a bunch of yids, I must decline your invitation.' Jacques Maritain with his Jewish wife Raissa, and countless others. Were *their* voices raised in protest at the trumpeting of *La Croix*, the most popular Catholic journal in France? The difficulty with a book of this kind by a non-Catholic is, that the only 'church' he or she can be expected to recognize is institutional. The church I belong to and pray in does not feature for such an author, although it *would* feature if the Maritains of this world had raised the powerful voice of intelligence. If they did, this should have been recorded by Kertzer as within his brief. But what about the non-public praying and loving church? What about the Body of Christ?

And here of course is the problem.

'The Body of Christ' has no sociological status—especially when we reflect, with John Robinson, that 'body' here has to be understood not corporately but corporally. How prophetic Lonergan was when he required the evolution of a 'summa sociologica' to parallel Aquinas' *summa theologiae*.

Say Let it be, and do not wonder what
The will in me, for this is all there is,
The Virgin fertile not a separate plot
For she and I are one in being his.

When I knew I would give him anything
I was the womb that bore him in the world
That has a single voice in which to sing
All the existences to be unfurled.

There's no unknowing what is in the light
And there's no bearing but the word of all.
To be in this or not the only right
Question for feeling vis-a-vis his call.

Be alive only, and then all is one
Body of the only-begotten Son.

PART THREE MIDDLE GARDEN

The previous two sections have been devoted to showing our leading Christian images as, far from the common understanding of them, radicalising. In this third section, appropriated, as theologians say, to the Third Person, I pursue this radicalising into life as we experience it in our daily struggle with ourselves and so with each other.

I have taken as my text *The Song of Songs*, and I have addressed myself to it in that dreamy pre-focused way taught as *Lectio Divina*. Furthermore, I have brought to these incandescent erotic phrases my

own sexual agenda or problem, which is a lifelong confusion over my sexual identity, a not-uncommon monastic pathology, though not commonly recognized. I treasure the memory of my old mentor Illtyd Trethowan, who one day stopped me on the way into the refectory with the remark, 'this sexual identity you're writing about these days—I don't think I have one!'

Now what happened as I thus addressed myself to the text was, that the confusion in my sexual identity revealed itself as an unrelenting war within me of the male with the female, of which these inspired lyrics were the love-making and thus the peace-making.

I found this breathtaking in its accuracy and simplicity. The erotic, in all its questing intensity, heads toward *requies in amore*, peace in the heart. And I found I needed to keep reminding myself of this peaceable tendency as I read and absorbed.

Now I do not know how this reading of *The Song* stands in the voluminous literature, from Gregory the Great through Bernard of Clairvaux and on. But I have found a wonderful ally in Phyllis Trible, whose *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* is the finest essay in biblical theology that I know. After a lengthy penultimate chapter on the Fall, entitled 'A love story gone awry', she concludes with a chapter on *The Song* as the text in which God's idea of sex prevails over our self-torturing ones. Her linking passage is the ecstatic cry of Adam at the sight of Eve presented to him be his maker—'bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh!'—in which scholars recognize the style of *The Song*. Her suggestion is that we take up the story from that point, bracketing the complication of life by knowing and language that we call the Fall. It is only for 'the priests', I would say, that there is no such world. I call it

the Middle Garden, between Eden and Gethsemani. Rabbi Aqiba, the master who rallied Jewry after the Caesarian birth of Christianity, called *The Song of Songs* 'the holy of holies', and said that the reason God is not mentioned in it is that where God is he does not need to be mentioned. He said that were the whole Torah but this text to be destroyed, it would suffice. And of course we remember Blake's Garden of Love, where 'priests in black gowns were going their rounds, and binding with briars my joys and desires.'

What is particularly interesting for my purpose is that Adam and Eve are types not individuals, so the stage is already set for reading the dialogue as between the male and the female within myself. Nor does this interior reading exclude the fleshly encounter between the man and the woman. On the contrary, it facilitates it, it makes for it. I would argue that it is precisely in the experience of harmony within evoked by the flesh-and-blood otherness of the spouse that erotic experience is revelatory of the creator. Male and female created he them. Male and female created he each. And the recognition of this is revelatory. God is there, as Aqiba saw, and as 'the priests' will never see. I suspect that the real lapse in communication between the laity and the celibate priestly caste is here: that the married know a celebration of life, whereas the caste claims unique control over celebration. I am wandering dangerously, and the Spirit will not wander with me, so let me come back on course, and say that my real starting point was when I 'heard', in the darkness of our Lady Chapel late at night, the words of the woman, 'I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys', and became hooked on an identity, in her, of longing for the man, with flowering, of adoring with self-

adorning. I stayed with this for a long time, until I came to understand that her desire was *for me*, and that it was the desire for me to be at peace with myself. I came to understand the woman in me as her whom I had hated because she got me laughed at for my 'girlish' ways—and so she never got a chance. Thank God the English public school of the 'If' kind has gone, along with its supporting class! Generations of men were rendered orgasmically inept by savage beating, as I learned from an old woman therapist.

Beating. Yes, the woman, you will remember, wandering the city at night in search of 'him whom my soul loves', is brutalized by the guards who leave her naked. A not difficult transposition here, to anatomical jokes in the locker-room! The guards, the normal, the preservers of order, as the woman bitterly recalls.

Now in my account so far, I am led to identify with the woman and the man *alternatively*. Although I growingly feel myself as both, the drama within remains intact as a dialogue. But then there is a further development, and with this I shall conclude.

For when I came to the words, 'he brought me into the banqueting hall, and his banner over me was love', something happened to the dialogue. I knew, as one experience, the pride of the man in his woman and the glory of the woman in her man. No translator that I know of has dared to paraphrase the bare statement 'and his banner over me was love.' It came spontaneously to the woman with the harelip in *Precious Bane* (preface by Stanley Baldwin!) as she found her place of inner joy in the attic. These words simply enchant.

But more is to be said of this resting-place. I find it helpful—no, vital—to think of a column within myself, at the top end of which all is turbulence, at the

base all peace. The top is controlled by ego in its bubbling together with other egos, and I am powerless against it—as the disciples of Jesus were powerless against the forces let loose that were to climax in his crucifixion. Hours spent in contemplative prayer and in Focusing and in practising the power of Now are swept away by a chance remark—at least in the seething cauldron of monastic life! The reason is of course that one is adhesive—in medical terms, addictive, in ascetical terms attached. The only thing that cuts off this energy is to descend the column. Eckhart Tolle describes a suicidal crisis at the level of self-against-self, miraculously interrupted by the thought, ‘maybe only one of them is real’, which starts up a suction downward accompanied with terror and the words ‘resist nothing.’ Finally he surrenders, loses consciousness, and awakes later to the sound of a bird that turns out to be the Bird of Paradise, where he has been ever since, spreading the good news that this peace is ours but for the ‘mental noise’ which keeps us at the top of the column, the lie of Descartes in place—the mind is not master but tool, and can with a little practice be stopped, as Abbot Chapman taught us years ago. This is the most self-authenticating description of total transformation that I have ever read—not excluding St Paul and St Augustine. And it is vividly suggestive of the inner column. I dare to read the saying ‘strive to enter by the narrow door!’ as ‘learn to sink on that inner column!’

Now I was just saying that with those words ‘his banner over me was love’ I become identified with the man glorying in his woman and the woman glorying in her man. Perhaps this is a hint of the base of the column, where ‘there is neither male nor female, but in all Christ.’

Woman I am entrapped, and you are there
Calling up to me from my depths anew
You are the very darkness of my prayer,
I trust you to the night, the night to you.

The base of a deep column of the mind
You emptiness are tender as the night
Telling me it is in me to be kind
Lose the alternatives of fight or flight.

Lovely security in knowing you
Love me and blossom in me being so,
My life has been a fight I never knew
And only now in knowing you I know

And feel you blossom in my tenderness
That know as lovers do the power to bless.

No banner flew over my young love's growing
Whose early column was a thing of shame
Denied the sign it was of pointed knowing
Shuffled into a box of private blame.

The column, first denied, now sinks its well
Into the silence whence our life is born
And I have learned by prayer at last to tell
The story of me and a life long torn.

I was a war within, female with male,
Whose peace I celebrate with a new song:
His banner over me was love, whose tale
Is told among the stars where I belong.

The pillar and the ground, the second womb,
These two are mine, with Jesus from the tomb.

SURPRISED AT OUR PASSIVITY A RESPONSE TO JAMES ALISON'S PAPER AT THIS SYMPOSIUM

It is said that ancient and medieval theology is written from God's point of view, while theology after the ‘turn to the subject’ is written from ours. A validly *postmodern* theology will have discovered our point of view as itself passive to the creative act of God. It will thus agree with medieval theology, but knowingly, understanding God's point of view as – what is the word? undermining? – ours. But what could ‘undermining’ here mean? What happens to the notion if we remove from it all connotation of threat which only comes of resistance? How could the creative act of God threaten us, since it constitutes us? Truly to know myself is to know that I am, in and for my very existence, ‘known of God’, passive. How does this passivity connect with my ordinary sense of myself, which is one of agent not patient? Did not the present pope entitle his dissertation ‘The Acting Person’? Is not our whole system of jurisprudence based on the supposition that we are agents, responsible for what we do?

A way out of this impasse is suggested by Rene Girard. It consists in positing an unacknowledged passivity in my ordinary sense of myself with others. Desire, whereby I live, does not arise in me on my own. It has to be visible to me in another, for my imitation. The modern illusion is that my desire is mine alone and that I am alone in it.

Being autobiographical for a moment, I realise that in my understanding of Girard it is as prompting rivalry that I have seen my involvement in another's desire—the two kids in the playpen for instance. But there is a positive aspect to this dependence of desire

in me on desire in another, which is of supreme importance and which I have overlooked. My hope is that desire in another includes me! My desire, at its most ‘me’, is that another's desire include me. This is quite different from the other desiring me, as I hope when I fall in love. What I am talking about is how much I hope that this particular person, whom I am getting interested in sexually or otherwise, has a place for me in his or her pursuit of objectives and goals; in his or her life in fact.

You can verify this at quite ordinary levels as a dependence for well-being on having a place in the well-being of another. Half a century ago, Gabriel Marcel gave the example of a young man going to his first adult party. He comes into the room and doesn't know anyone, and is unnoticed. He is awkward, takes a drink from the proffered tray, and spills some of it over his new jacket. Then an older man comes up and says, ‘you must be John X. Your father and I were at college together, he was one of my best friends.’ At this the young man comes to life. He feels like someone. He has a sense of himself. And this sense of himself has been awakened by someone else's enthusiasm. For our ordinary modern human theory, for our educational planners, the geeks as they have recently been dubbed by our retiring headmaster, the state of the man before this encounter is the norm of self-awareness, because there's no one else involved. And this is the modern error.

Now to go a bit deeper, I remember that Girard has applied this notion of other-dependence to the ancient argument for a prime mover. If I only come alive moved by another, you can't have an infinite series of movers, so that there has to be a first. What I want to suggest is an existential form of this argument. It would go something like this. If my

wellbeing depends on being within another's life composed of desires or interests, my very being depends on being within the creator's interest or will. I know in the abstract that I exist by God's will. But how does this truth show up in the concrete? And what would it be like to feel myself to be in God's interest as our young man at that moment felt himself to be in the older man's interest?

Because God creates me out of nothing, does not make me out of anything, there is no substantial self in me that God's desire or will embraces, as there is a self in the young man for the older man. My very self, my being at all, depends on the will of my creator. What does this dependence feel like? What is the existential dependence referred to by the doctrine that I am dependent?

Before I take this any further, I have to resile into autobiography again. It was not for nothing that I used the two kids in the playpen as my only example of the mimetic origin of desire. It was because it has, from early years, been my assumption that I'm on my own, so that the experience of being in another's interests, doubtless coveted and glowingly described in lectures I gave to American students, was never normative for me. The habit of always obliging protects this going-it-alone. As my American therapist chided, 'who could quarrel with anyone so obliging, so pleasant, so willing etc?'

This return on myself is a *reculer pour mieux sauter*. For in protecting myself from deep involvement with another, I am doubly protecting myself from the experience of passivity to God. If relative passivity is difficult, how much more difficult will be substantial passivity! But conversely, if I were to attain to substantial passivity—to what Augustine Baker calls passive union—the ordinary passivity of friendship would come

naturally.

For clearly relative and substantial passivity are related, as the accidental to the substantial. The whole drama of the first and greatest commandment of love finds in this way of thinking its basic formula. The core of the commandment is passivity, to the creator, and derivatively to my neighbour, the latter being unconditional for all its derivativeness. It is 'one and the self-same love' that binds us to God and to each other, as one of our midday collects at divine office reminds me.

Conversely, the failure in relative passivity to my neighbour will lead to a failure in radical passivity, putting God even more at enmity than I am putting my neighbour. Religion then appears on the scene as a way to keep God at bay and my neighbour likewise. Cesareo Bandera, in *The Sacred Game*, elaborates this. The face I turn away from my neighbour I hide altogether from God. 'The sacred' keeps God 'above' and my neighbour confusedly visible to me.

Salvation in Christ is the inversion of this order. In place of the tribal sacrifice with its awed hush in which the divinity was felt to be present—what you might call murder made to point upward—you had love going in the downward direction, dismantling sacrifice and, Jesus glorified, naming his self-gift on a gibbet the sacrifice that swallows all sacrifice into itself and pours out the Spirit upon all flesh. This inversion lets the real God back in as the infinite love which my desire wants totally to be in, to be passive to, and this radical passivity enlivens my dead neighbour nerve.

Another way of saying the same thing is to say that, experiencing my very existence as a passivity, I see my neighbour as passive too.

Or experiencing myself as radically vulnerable, I know what vulnerability is and see it in my neighbour before I see anything else there. This is the meaning of compassion, a term I have always felt resistant to because of my deep-seated assumption that one goes it alone.

I have to think that the most amazing spiritual event of our time, in this connection, is the experience of Eckhart Tolle, which is so very clearly our substantial passivity dramatized. Once again, I rehearse: 'I cannot live any longer with myself...are there then two of me...perhaps only one of them is real...the self as suffering disidentified with collapsing like an inflatable toy, the air let out leaving me to the vortical inward downward pull accompanied with terror...the command 'resist nothing'...the final surrender...sleep...the awakening to a world suffused with love and lived in ever since.'

People who have been able to read this hair-raising story and write it off seem to me to be as those who 'would be unmoved if someone came to them from the dead,' or like the nobility of England who, in Robert Bolt's play, 'would sleep through the sermon on the mount.' It is the hardening of the heart that besets us all—and me assuredly, but not when I read that story. I have a PhD in lonely sleepless nights!

Finally some clarifications are required. Passivity, as I am here using the word, is not a kind of behaviour, nor even an attitude. Thus the instinctive response: 'I prefer "receptivity" must be avoided, for this is shifting the ground from the passive condition to the more manageable ground of attitude and behaviour.'

We cannot sufficiently stress how immediately compassion stems from my own realisation of radical passivity. This order, as I say, inverts the order of

religion, which goes: brotherly non-love, negative *mimesis* climaxing in sacrifice in whose awed hush the deity is sensed. The revelation in Christ is this order in reverse, with divine love coming down into the crucified who unlocks the door to compassion, the passion originating compassion in a descent of Holy Spirit on all flesh.

And there is no problem as to how I can be at once radically passive and a moral agent. This is only a problem if being a moral agent is confused with existing in imagined isolation from others. 'Being my own person' is not 'being on my own.' Indeed we can take out those inverted commas and say: being my own person is (means) not being on my own.

Also there is no contradiction between radical passivity and the development of an ego, which is simply the human growth process in its early stages. Coming into my radical passivity, the Tolle conversion, is described by Jesus as a childlike being that we have to *become*—it's a later stage. Its coming for us is after the formation of the ego has met life's immediate purposes. The notion of radical passivity being inimical to growth is quite mistaken. It is the source of limitless growth, the wellspring of eternal flourishing. In this connection, let Abbot Chapman have the final word, in one of his letters. Note how clearly he distinguishes his passivity from passivity as an attitude.

But I think your temperament is probably an indolent one; you are not *naturally* given to self-confidence, or push, or enthusiasms. Do not confuse natural tendencies with the spiritual passivity to which you are drawn. They look very much alike. Yet contemplation often urges people to the most violent activity for God's sake (though they always find time for prayer, all the same). I am inclined to suppose that you ought to fight against being dreamy and taking life too easily. I am sure it is always right to throw oneself, heart and soul, into everything one does. *Letters*, p. 37

And what of my spiritual autobiography at its present stage, the progressive entering into *The Song of Songs* as the resolution of the war in my life between the male and the female? This moves more and more into celebration, the Garden's lovers' praise of the God who, according to Aqiba, thus needs no mention, indeed whose mention would tip the text into the bland. This celebratory moment is described by McMahon, of Biospirituality, as 'the body hugging itself', a phrase that becomes more and more dear to me as I practise focusing. The sheer delight of nature in itself is celebratory. The passivity that grounds all prayer and contemplative life is celebratory of ultimate mystery.

My longing from of old has been for friendship,
For being in another's interest
Thus without effort furthering my own.
This longing, very early on in fact
As soon as life suggested independence
I found somehow was unfulfillable
Came to assume that I am on my own
And so I punished my own self expecting
No joy with others and no joy in them
While in the silence of my heart in prayer
I have an altogether other story
To tell to quite another, never knowing
How isolation and the void connect
Till now across the scandal of my body
Into that same deep silence where I pray
My truth is given me to celebrate.

Passivity is not an attitude
But the condition called fully alive:
Others essentially do not intrude
But constitute the world wherein we thrive.

I want to live in the desires of friends
And have them in my own—this interchange
O God I have ignored for my own ends:
No wonder life in me tends to be strange.

But now you draw me to my passive state
All arms and legs as in a vortex falling
To knowing for which all of me must wait
Enduring all the necessary stalling.

In the attended vortex is my end
Where I hear: resist nothing, just attend.

She loves me still, she loves the man I am
Still uncaressed, fighting passivity,
She mothers our eternal slaughtered lamb
Surrendered to his Father, Spirit free.

Celebrate now the body, come to peace
The woman and the man within the mind
That itself sinks into a vast release
Where it is God's, not mine, to seek and find.

Genius that fights the horror of the void
Creates surging new movements that will bring
Millions to life only to be destroyed
And leave a silence where no bird will sing.

And still the Lamb of God holds history
On course, caress of our passivity.