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TOWARDS THE ESSENTIAL

Un détail: vous me demandez si j'ai voulu dire dans un de mes livres "that intelligence cannot discern truth without reference either to esoterism, on the one hand, or the Revelation and its commentators on the other, beginning with Sayyidina Muhammad". Ce que j'ai voulu dire est la chose suivante: en principe, l'intelligence pure — l'intellect — peut connaître tout le connaissable; elle peut, en principe, le connaître par elle-même, sans l'intervention d'un enseignement extérieur. Mais en fait, il y a beaucoup de chances que même l'esprit le mieux doué ne puisse tirer de soi toute la métaphysique; si un Shankara avait grandi dans une totale ignorance, s'il n'avait jamais entendu parler du Veda, d'Ātmā, de Māyā, peut-on affirmer avec certitude qu'il aurait pu tirer ces notions de lui-même? La Révélation, quel que ou autre, est là, non seulement pour nous communiquer des idées-clés, mais aussi, et surtout, pour réveiller ou actualiser en nous les connaissances latentes que nous portons en nous-mêmes. Vous dites: "But the Muslim philosophers, like their predecessors in Greece, talked about many things not mentioned by the Prophet and the early notables of Islam..." Évidemment car le Prophète — ou le Koran — n'a fait que donner l'impulsion; les philosophes grecs eux aussi avaient besoin de certains stimulants traditionnels. Chaque homme a des parents, et les parents ont toujours des idées; je pense maintenant à l'Antiquité. L'impulsion une fois donnée, — koranique et helléniste chez les Arabes, — les auteurs métaphysiciens et mystiques pensent avoir des idées tout à fait originales, soit par inspiration, soit simplement par réflexion. —

TOWARDS  
THE ESSENTIAL  
Letters of a Spiritual Master



*Edited by*  
Thierry Béguelin

*Translated from the French by*  
Mark Perry and Gillian Harris



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For the Study of Comparative Religion

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The Matheson Trust  
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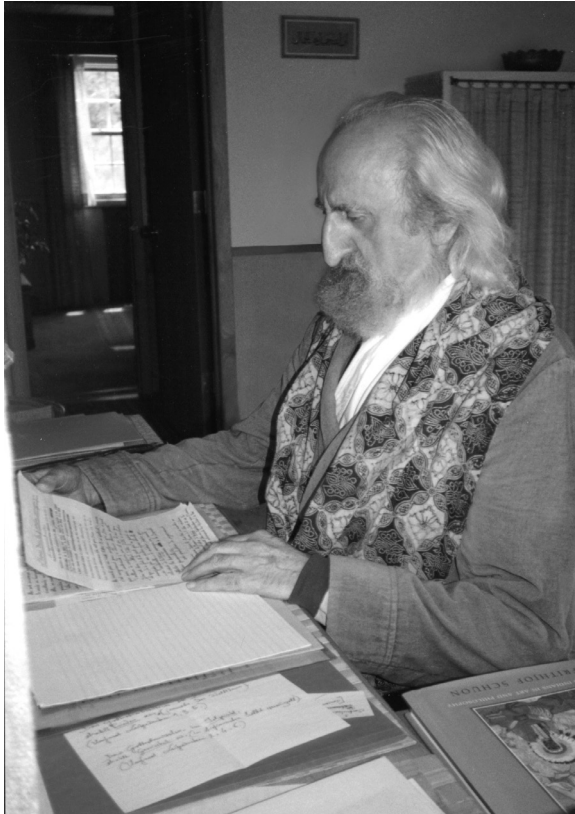
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Frithjof Schuon at his desk in Bloomington



## Preface

It was in 1976 that I first saw the name of Frithjof Schuon, as author of an article entitled “Le Paradis comme théophanie” (Paradise as Theophany), in the journal *Études Traditionnelles*. I had previously read all René Guénon’s works, to which I had been introduced by Bernard Moitessier, a long-distance solo sailor, and it was only after finishing the last book that I learned that Guénon was no longer of this world. I was disappointed, because I thought I had found in him the Master I was seeking. Thus I decided to turn to one or other of the collaborators of *Études Traditionnelles*, a Guénonian journal. But which one?

Passing through Paris at the end of the following year, I visited the headquarters of Éditions Traditionnelles, publishers of the journal, to renew my subscription, hoping at the same time to find out whom to turn to. Noticing my address, the secretary said: “Ah, you come from Switzerland? Wait a moment!” She returned with a small file, took out a card and said: “So you know Frithjof Schuon? There’s where he lives, near Lausanne.” Somewhat stunned, I remembered the address: 40, chemin de Rochettaz, in Pully. The owner of Éditions Traditionnelles, Mr Villain, had meanwhile come over and I asked him if he knew Frithjof Schuon. He replied, all in one breath: “I have never seen him, but I know that he is very tall and thin and always wears a black suit with a black tie, but his wife is very nice.”

After waiting two months—which gave me time to read some of his books—I received an answer from Frithjof Schuon to my letter; he agreed to receive me at his home. It was a striking encounter, such as I had never experienced nor could ever have imagined: an encounter with a man so different from, and superior to, anyone that I had met until then. He was like a prophet. Even before he began to speak, everything in his physique, his demeanour, his clothing and his ambience bore witness to an

eminent grandeur and nobility, without the slightest affectation. We each sat down on a pouf, side by side, with a Moroccan brass tray between us, and as he spoke, in profile, his head tilted back slightly as if he were receiving the inspiration for his long monologue from Heaven, I drank in his words, aware of the exceptional character of the situation and dazzled by so much light. I had pictured meeting a philosopher in a black suit, surrounded by books and perhaps able to direct me towards a spiritual master, but I saw neither books, nor suit, nor philosopher (as we understand that term today), but a Master. Over the next hour and a half he reviewed the fundamentals of his message—the message of *religio perennis*, pure esoterism—without ever asking me why I had approached him or what I wanted, because he knew the reason better than I did. On that day I was bound to him for ever.

The life and work of Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998) having been extensively studied and commented on, I shall limit myself to reproducing a few excerpts from a 1987 draft English review, whose content he accepted, thus guaranteeing its value. *“Frithjof Schuon was a German who acquired Swiss nationality in the French part of Switzerland and wrote most of his books in French. To mention this is not without significance, for Schuon’s writings have the merit of combining German imaginativeness and profundity with French precision, clarity, and elegance. Another remarkable feature of Schuon’s work is the fascinating combination of a rigorous intellectuality with an exceptional artistic sensibility—one might even say a kind of mystical musicality. From earliest youth, Frithjof Schuon’s doctrinal starting point was the Vedānta; and his message encompasses primarily the following domains: essential, hence universal, metaphysics, with its cosmological and anthropological ramifications; spirituality in the broadest sense; intrinsic morality and aesthetics; traditional principles and phenomena; religions and their esoterisms; sacred art. Let us add that in his youth, Schuon wrote beautiful lyrical poems in his native German, and that throughout his life he was a very gifted painter; most of his somewhat hieratic paintings portray the Plains Indians, with whom he has a strong personal connection, having even been officially adopted into the Sioux tribe. We shall thus say that Frithjof Schuon’s message is as much artistic and existential as it is philosophical and*

*intellectual, both modes being possible and fundamental expressions of concrete spirituality.*” It is worth noting that during the last three years of his life, a particular inspiration was at the origin of a corpus of more than three thousand German poems in which doctrine and spiritual teachings are interwoven.

Frithjof Schuon authorized me to publish excerpts of general interest from his correspondence. The present collection is a compilation from all the French letters currently available, as well as the few English letters that Schuon addressed to Native American chiefs and Hindus. As for his German correspondence, which is almost as copious, its value may one day motivate one of his friends to prepare a second volume.

The interest aroused by Schuon’s books and articles, a veritable metaphysical and spiritual summation, resulted in an abundant correspondence to which he responded tirelessly, conscious of his role and the impact of his thought in a world adrift, which doubts everything but its errors. He also responded to the many disciples scattered throughout the world who had only an occasional opportunity to see him.

Like many collections of letters, Schuon’s brings a practical development to his published work, and the reader interested in his message will draw invaluable sustenance from it; he will sometimes be surprised by a given response, and often convinced by an evidentness of which he had only a presentiment, echoing a timeless truth buried deep in the soul. One should also note that, due to its private nature, an archive of this kind reveals some of the author’s personal traits for the first time, tangible illustrations, as it were, of human and spiritual excellence. Schuon responded to each correspondent according to his capacity of comprehension, as one will notice in the course of reading. Unlike his books, his letters are conversational in tone; he never worried about style or about choosing the best turn of phrase, transcribing his reflections in a single draft, hence the spontaneity, at times close to speech, that characterizes many of his answers. This collection does not require a continuous reading from beginning to end, for each letter forms a whole, allowing both those readers unfamiliar with the author’s thinking and

those interested in a particular topic to opt for a selective reading by referring to the table of contents or the index.

Given that they were addressing the author himself, the great majority of his correspondents accepted the fundamental idea of a unity underlying all the great revelations—a transcendental, esoteric or metaphysical unity. The universalist perspective of these correspondents notwithstanding, I thought it best to classify the letters according to the religious forms practised by the respective recipients, at the risk of giving those unaware of my decision a false impression of confessional exclusivism. In each chapter, the letters are ordered chronologically. Contrary to academic practice, and in order to encourage the reader's personal involvement in the content of the message, it seemed appropriate to make only sporadic mention of the addressees' names, the best-known being René Guénon, Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Léo Schaya, Jean Borella, Marco Pallis, William Stoddart, Rama Coomaraswamy, Joseph E. Brown, Jean-Louis Michon, Michel Valsan and Lord Northbourne. The book includes a glossary of foreign words used in the letters (p. 251); since they appear in transliterated form (with diacritical signs and without capitals), they differ slightly from the phonetic transcriptions adopted by the author. It is perhaps worth noting here that Arabic transcriptions often appear in Arabic characters in the original text. A few remarks in square brackets will facilitate a better understanding of the text.

As well as being a concrete illustration of Schuon's thought, which is concerned above all with the nature of things, thus with *That which Is*, *Towards the Essential*, due to its relative ease of access, is also intended as a helpful introduction to a message which, in his books, sometimes approaches the limits of the expressible—the impersonal, timeless, essential and universal message of *Religio Perennis*, the doctrinal and methodical esotericism of which Frithjof Schuon is unquestionably one of the greatest spokesmen.

T.B.

# Letters to Christian Correspondents



13 May 1949 · SPIRITUALIZING SUFFERING

The facts that you recount in your second letter are indeed miraculous. They highlight the spiritual and providential meaning of the trials that followed them. Such trials have a twofold cause: the exhausting of our past errors—which may come from a former existence—and the cosmic reaction against our current ignorance; there are also sufferings whose meaning is that of a martyrdom and which a saintly man can take on for others. In your case, there is no need for you to worry about your incapacity to concentrate or to meditate: it would have sufficed to have offered your sufferings to God and invoked His Name without concentration. In a great suffering, as in a great joy, it is the experience of it that serves as meditation; and it is the acceptance—in view of God—of a suffering that serves as concentration. I know this myself, for I have suffered atrociously in my life.

In the lives of saints, for example in that of St Theresa of the Child Jesus, suffering due to a near total lack of physical well-being, and above all also due to the cold and illness, plays an important role. Assuming that St Theresa had followed a way requiring intellectual concentration, her attitude towards suffering would have been the same. Suffering is—by a direct “vision”—a meditation on death.

To understand and accept the cosmic and spiritual meaning of pain amounts temporarily to a kind of concentration. It could be said that, in such a case, and under the sole condition of the attitude I have just defined, the angels concentrate for us—exactly as it is said that angels pray in the stead of him whom illness prevents from praying, on condition that he have the intention to do so.

12 July 1950 · SPIRITUALITY

There is no spiritual method that does not wound our nature. Spirituality is both the easiest and the hardest thing. The easiest:

because it is enough to think of God. The hardest: because fallen nature is forgetfulness of God.

### 31 May 1955 · CHRISTIAN INITIATION

One cannot draw a systematic distinction between the supernatural and the spiritual, because the first necessarily intervenes in the second, in different ways. The intellect too has a supernatural aspect, but this goes beyond the ordinary theological perspective, which recognizes only will and reason in man.

One must not seek anything from priests that is situated outside their functions; therefore one must direct oneself only to their sacramental function and, depending on the case, to their theological authority; but theology can also be found in books.

In Christianity, it is baptism, confirmation, and Communion that constitute what can be termed initiation; the total character of these sacraments excludes the existence, alongside them, of more or less secret initiatic rites that could be superimposed on them—initiatic rites such as are found in Orphism, Sufism, etc. The particularity of Christianity is precisely the open character of the initiatic means; at least, this is a distinctive feature in the Semitic and Western world. There is a disagreement on this point between Guénon's thesis and mine. Indeed, one cannot conceive that there could be, in Christianity, a source of graces that is more profound or more precious than the blood of Christ, or that there could be souls or intelligences for whom this source would not be good enough. The difference exoterism-esoterism is in this case uniquely a question of perspective and method. There is, of course, a purely exoteric participation in the sacraments, so that one cannot without misuse of language describe the collectivity of Christians as "initiates", but monks and nuns are initiates by the fact that they follow a spiritual path; the same applies to priests who are saints, such as the Curé d'Ars. As for the intellectual path, namely gnosis, it is represented above all by Clement of Alexandria, Meister Eckhart, and Angelus Silesius; but it is always specifically Christian gnosis, in other words one situated very close to the perspective of love.

Consequently, the two strange occurrences you allude to in your letter cannot be initiations in the literal and technical sense



of the term, for Heaven never acts without a sufficient reason; on the other hand, such occurrences can be “accidental”—and at the same time “providential”—contacts with the world of Essences, be it considered in a subjective manner or in an objective and cosmic manner. What might the practical value be of such “encounters” with “higher states”? They are a calling or a vocational prompting for a contemplative life. After having been subjected to these “fissures” in the hardened individual shell, one ought to make of life a continuous and secret prayer. But this is only possible with the help of the Name of God, that is to say the invocation of Christ, namely the “prayer of Jesus”. In order to take on such a path, one must have, above all, the indispensable theoretical knowledge, and a purity of intention that excludes all conscious and unconscious individualism; one must be centred on God, not on the ego. There are multiple illusions on this plane. But with God, all things are possible.

### 31 May 1955 · THE EUCHARIST, INVOCATION

The impossibility of having an esoteric ritual superimposed on the sacraments results from their character of totality, and notably from the nature of the Eucharist. The revelation, in Christianity, is Christ himself; now the Eucharist is Christ, all of Christ. Since Revelation must comprise, by definition, all spiritual modes, and since Christ unifies in his divinity all these modes, including of course those that can rightly be qualified as “esoteric” or “universal”, the same applies to the Eucharist, which is the Word incarnate, and not only a “part”—an exoteric part—of the God-Man. Hence it is the central and total character of the Christian dogmas and sacraments that stands in opposition to the Guénonian thesis.

The connection between the invocation and eucharistic Communion is admirably captured in the following liturgical formulas: “*Panem celestem accipiam et nomen Domini invocabo*”, and: “*Calicem salutaris accipiam et nomen Domini invocabo*” [“I shall receive the Bread of Heaven and call upon the Name of the Lord”, and “I shall receive the Chalice of Salvation and call upon the Name of the Lord”]: the words of the priest preparing himself for Communion. *Ed.*] There can be no initiation superior to the Eu-

charist, for the simple reason that the blood of Christ contains all of the divinity of the Word made flesh; the Eucharist perpetuates the Word incarnate, in totality, not just in part.

In order to invoke without risk—and in the absence of a spiritual master—it is necessary first of all to know the doctrine contained in the *Philokalia* or, what amounts to the same, in the “Russian Pilgrim” [*The Way of a Pilgrim*, anonymous work. *Ed.*]—an essentially Patristic doctrine—then to invoke the Holy Spirit and place oneself under the protection of the Virgin; one must realize in oneself the virtues of humility and of charity, that is to say to be aware of one’s personal as well as of one’s existential limitations, and to consider oneself as a stranger while considering one’s neighbour as oneself.

As for language, I am opposed to invoking in French or in just any modern tongue, because these languages bear the imprint of the modern deviation; they are “worn-out” by “literature”, etc. One must choose a liturgical language. As for the choice of a formula, this is a matter of vocation.

There is pretension only when there is an absence of intelligibility; in other words, man is entitled to that whose meaning he perceives; intuitive and contemplative intelligence is a grace on par with mystical graces. The intellect is a “naturally supernatural” grace, if one may express oneself thus.

The soul is complex and it has need of diversity; there are thus various means to overcome our nature and to obtain transforming and sanctifying fervour and concentration. What I mean is that there are different modes of orison: the Name of Jesus, the Lord’s Prayer, the rosary, Psalms, personal prayer; it is above all the latter that, next to the invocation, must not be neglected. In the Name of Jesus, it is in some fashion God Himself who pronounces His Name; there is a great mystery in this. In the canonical prayers, it is man who prays, man as such and not this or that man; whence the use of the plural “we” in the Lord’s Prayer. The prayer of man as such is of necessity revealed, it is the prayer God wishes to hear. In the case of personal prayer, however, performed in a vulgar tongue and not in a liturgical tongue, it is a specific person who prays; it is a specific soul that channels its powers towards God. In this prayer, one must tell God every-

thing, even our boredom, even our incapacity to pray, if such be the case. Invocation, canonical prayer, personal prayer: those are the three necessary modes of the way of prayer.

1 June 1955 · *BHAKTI* AND *JNĀNA* IN CHRISTIANITY

In its general form—not in all its possibilities—Christianity is founded upon man’s volitive, thus passionate, aspect: man is will, and then reason, without which his will would not be free. In its form, Christianity is a *bhakti*, but *jnāna* also finds its place therein, thanks to the universality of Christic symbolism; this is necessarily so, since the Christian tradition is a totality. Before the Council of Nicaea, there was a certain vacillation in perspectives; the Council of Nicaea marks the crystallization of Christianity into a bhaktic perspective, while officially excluding *jnāna*, that is, a path based upon intellective factors and thereby upon the axiom that man is the intellect; according to the same viewpoint, Christ is the incarnation of the universal Intellect, so that inversely, everything that pertains to the intellect pertains to Christ, independently of the contingencies of time and place.

In fact, Christianity has a voluntarist, individualist and sentimental character; these words do not indicate a pejorative sentiment here, but express external traits that Christianity necessarily has, inasmuch as it must suit the Western mentality. In conformity with this mentality, Christian exoterism confers an absolute value upon a historical fact, and inversely, it attributes a relative character to the Absolute; it ignores the degrees of Reality, exactly as is done by the Hindu *bhakti*, for which the world is real. The result is that Christianity attributes great importance, in fact, to intermediate relativities; the cult of the Virgin, prayers for souls in purgatory, masses with such and such a purpose, etc. Being individualist, Christianity concentrates too much on sin and underestimates positive modes of spirituality based on concentration and aesthetic intuition; in general, its mysticism ignores both intellection and concentration, and in practice recognizes only individualist asceticism and sentimentalities; intellectual and technical—or “yogic”—methods seem “easy” to it—as if this were a criterion, and as if things that are easy in theory could not be difficult in practice. Christianity has a certain hostility

with regard to intelligence, this being neither indispensable to *bhakti*, nor accessible to every man; its exclusively ascetic and sentimental viewpoint brings with it by way of vulgarization, and in fact invariably, a sort of cult of stupidity and ugliness, and of disagreeableness also. Intelligence then readily seems like “pride”, and is always reduced to reason, which is something individual; beauty, for its part, appears in its aspects of seduction, sensuality, sin, or at least pleasure and ease; nature is “of this world”, one is always afraid of a “pagan” naturalism. Such a perspective admits of nothing “supernatural” in man, apart from grace, which man cannot call forth; it is fundamentally dualist by the very fact of its theological anthropomorphism. What is of grave concern here is that upon contact with intellectual or jñanic perspectives, a “personalist” mysticism is substituted for suprapersonal metaphysics, and this constitutes an inversion of metaphysical relationships; to save the lower perspective, *bhakti*—which, incidentally, is in no way threatened by *jñāna*, since the latter puts each thing in its place—the higher perspective is belittled, and once again, an absolute character is given to the relative, and inversely.

#### 1956 · CERTITUDE, INVOCATION, FAITH

The best way to escape the difficulty you describe to me is to place yourself at a viewpoint in which it is a matter of indifference if you “feel” certitude or not; that is to say, the question of knowing whether or not there is such a thing as “lived” certitude should appear to you *a priori* as a contingent matter without importance. The “taste” of certitude is a matter of realization; once one becomes engaged in a spiritual “alchemy”, certain contrasts become more acute, and one cannot but feel incomplete in some manner or another. The happiness of worldly people, if one may say, is that they do not see all their disharmonies; they dwell in an opaque and easy homogeneity; it is a harmony procured for a pittance. There is nothing unusual about the difficulty you describe to me, it is just a symptom like another; since the man who has not achieved spiritual realization lacks unity and plenitude, then he is bound to sense that lack; there are many forms of inward scission. All told, what you feel has a positive value.

No concept as such is Truth itself; “existential” certitude is the identification with that truth, which is intrinsically certitude. Absolute certitude is God.

However, it is good to be profoundly aware of the metaphysical foundation of invocation; I speak of this in a chapter entitled “Modes of Prayer” which is part of my book *The Stations of Wisdom*; it is due to be published very soon. But apart from the doctrinal lights, it is the invocation that ultimately gives all light and all soothing, provided we persevere. If our thoughts disappoint or bore us, we must replace them with the Divine Name, for it will “think” in our stead, implicitly and infinitely so.

The certitudes that we may have *a priori* need to be nourished by faith; for faith is an attitude of calmness, trust, resignation, “poverty of spirit”, existential simplicity. Man is so made that intellectual certitude does not suffice; man is not just a thinking being, he also lives. Life is situated outside our certitudes, thus it must come to meet them through faith. Faith is the feminine element which is added to the masculine element that is certitude. Within a traditional civilization, faith is something easy, it is so to speak in the air one breathes, but in the modern world it is doubt that is in the air, this doubt that exacerbates our need for logical explanations and our critical sense. Faith is a kind of beauty, whereas doubt has something of miserliness and envy, it is a kind of vindictive bitterness. Faith is nourished by metaphysical certitude on the one hand and by life in God on the other; the pivot of life in God is prayer and virtue. Virtue consists in giving up the tension and heaviness that the Fall has superimposed on our primordial nature; prayer is the fixation of the powers of our soul in God; the quintessence of prayer is the invocation, “jaculatory orison”; it could also be called “pure prayer” or “synthesis of prayers”.

7 February 1956 · SPIRITUAL LIFE, CONCENTRATION, DEATH  
to a young monk

It was a pleasure to receive news of you. In turn, I express my best wishes of blessings for this new year. I am glad to learn that you have finally found a life setting that suits your aspirations, that is to say a setting arranged in view of the “one thing neces-

sary". "Solutions of convenience"—since you bring up this moral problem and this typically modern way of looking at things—are always legitimate if God is the purpose of these solutions, for "my yoke is easy, and my burden light"; worldly people make a cult out of difficulty which is but one more form—and a fairly hypocritical form at that—of individualism; it is to forget that greatness comes from God and not from man. The greatness of divine qualities reveals itself to one who opens himself to them, if one may express oneself thus. In spiritual life, difficulties often reside in things that are apparently simple; victory belongs to him who, in secret, knows how to persevere in small things. To think of God, to empty oneself for Him, to escape that habitual dream in which the ego gazes at itself and repeats itself, this seems *a priori* simple; what could be easier than to repeat a jaculatory orison? But to do this always, to keep renouncing our dream anew, to acquire the habit of standing in the presence of God, to thus violate the congenital tendencies of our soul—tendencies towards dissipation as well as laziness—this is a great thing whose "dimensions" cannot be measured from the outside. If you read the lives of saints, you will see that they were great above all through attitudes that were simple, but consistent; the more visible glories were, somehow, superimposed upon these. Worldly people like to soothe their conscience by musing about sublime realities, as if by thinking about them they participated in them; it is of course good to think about such realities and one cannot help doing so, however it is important not to let this habit supplant the absence of real virtues. One must dedicate oneself to a discipline that is not above our strength—that may even appear to be beneath it—but one must dedicate oneself wholly to that. And one will then see, over time, that it is above our strength, but that all is possible with the help of God; nothing is possible without this help. There are things that are small in themselves but, when practised with perseverance, lead to great things; this is what is forgotten by some who constantly bring up the reproach of "convenience".

People often speak to me of concentration, and complain that they are lacking in it; this is, above all, a lack of imagination, for he who knows that God is infinitely lovable and that there is

nothing to fear outside Him, has little difficulty in maintaining himself in some state of recollectedness. The man sentenced to death has no trouble remembering death, and likewise the man parched with thirst remembers water effortlessly; it is not difficult for the young man to think about his bride-to-be. This is how every man ought to think of God; if he does not do it, it is because he lacks “imagination”. And here is the great surprise of death: the moment the soul is wrested from the body and from this earthly world, it is confronted with God, and sees the fulgurating and infinite Essence of all that it loved—or could have loved—on earth. In a word: “to concentrate” on God is to know right now that all that we love, and all that we could love, is to be found infinitely in God, and that all we love here below we love only because of God, though without being aware of this. We attach ourselves to the fleeting reverberations on water, as if water were luminous; but upon death, we see the sun, with immense regret—unless we became aware of the sun in time.

#### 1959 · THE RIGHT ATTITUDE TOWARDS A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

[previous page missing] This is a cosmic accident that poses no problem in the framework of traditional orthodoxy; thus there is no cause for concern. Such an accident is rare; it is like an opening in the soul towards Heaven; it is of no practical interest to define the exact nature or import of this opening. But what one must know is that this cosmic accident can contribute either to salvation or to perdition. Many heresies stem from phenomena of this kind.

He who practises the spiritual method puts into operation what he is able to put into operation; if a given phenomenon is real, it will come to fruition through spiritual practice, on the express condition that the disciple does not seek to use the phenomenon as a basis, nor even probe its nature. If the phenomenon is illusory, it will disappear through practice.

A phenomenon that is real—a major spiritual experience of an accidental or gratuitous character—can lead the disciple to perdition if he behaves differently from any other disciple, that is, if he relies on his experience in the belief that he has realized something.

The disciple—whatever graces he may have received—must rely on metaphysical truth and orthodox spiritual practice alone; then on the necessary traditional prescriptions—the sacraments, where they still exist—and finally on the practice of the virtues, the purification of the soul. It must be repeated a thousand times that he must never rely on a personal experience, however sublime, nor believe that the exact understanding of such an experience has any importance whatsoever on the path.

#### 1960 • EVIL, SOLITUDE, OUR LIFE

You ask me, in substance, why there is evil in the world. This is why: God, being infinite, created the world, that is to say the creation of the world is a necessary manifestation of His infinity and absoluteness. Now the world is not God; not being God, it cannot be perfect; were it perfect, it would be God Himself. And the world unfolds in duration; towards the end, imperfection predominates, whereas at the beginning of humanity, it is perfection that is preeminent. I have spoken of this in my books, better than I can do so here in a few words.

To be alone with God—without bitterness towards anyone, this is a categorical condition—is a wonderful thing; this solitude living from the invocation of the Divine Name. Our life is there before us, and we must live it; we cannot escape it. I know where the difficulty lies: it is easier—or less difficult—to be alone on a desert island, than to be among men who do not understand us. But if we have no choice, then we are obliged to accept the destiny God gave us and to do the best we can with it. Through prayer, we can transmute lead into gold, alchemically speaking; in a certain measure we can even transform those around us.

Your life cannot be without meaning in the eyes of God, for you exist and you have intelligence and free will. That you met H., and that you also know me, must mean something; there is no such thing as chance. We must start with what is certain, and not waste time fretting about how to evaluate what is uncertain; now what is absolutely certain is death, the meeting with God, eternity; then the present moment, the one we are living in this very instant and that we always live in, and in which we are free