



THE
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READER

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THE LOVE OF GOD AND AFFLICTION

This essay systematizes the theological ideas scattered in Simone Weil's notebooks, to the same period of which writing it also belongs. Affliction, malheur, she believes, is necessary so that "the human creature may un-create itself." Along with beauty, it is the only thing piercing and devastating enough to penetrate the soul. It marks the occasion of a supernatural process when one hears the Word of God and has a part in the Cross of Christ: "Affliction, when it is consented to and accepted and loved, is truly a baptism."

In the realm of suffering, affliction is something apart, specific and irreducible. It is quite a different thing from simple suffering. It takes possession of the soul and marks it through and through with its own particular mark, the mark of slavery. Slavery as practised by ancient Rome is simply the extreme form of affliction. The men of antiquity, who knew a lot about the subject, used to say: 'A man loses half his soul the day he becomes a slave.'

Affliction is inseparable from physical suffering and yet quite distinct. In suffering, all that is not bound up with physical pain or something analogous is artificial, imaginary, and can be eliminated

by a suitable adjustment of the mind. Even in the case of the absence or death of someone we love, the irreducible part of the sorrow is akin to physical pain, a difficulty in breathing, a constriction of the heart, or an unsatisfied need, a hunger, or the almost biological disorder caused by the brutal unloosing of an energy hitherto absorbed by an attachment and now left undirected. A sorrow which is not centered around an irreducible core of such a nature is mere romanticism or literature. Humiliation is also a violent condition of the whole physical being, which wants to rise up against the outrage but is forced, by impotence or fear, to hold itself in check.

On the other hand a pain which is only physical is of very little account, and leaves no mark on the soul. Toothache is an example. An hour or two of violent pain caused by a bad tooth is nothing once it is over.

It is another matter if the physical suffering is very prolonged or frequent, but this is often something quite different from an attack of pain; it is often an affliction.

Affliction is an uprooting of life, a more or less attenuated equivalent of death, made irresistibly present to the soul by the attack or immediate apprehension of physical pain. If there is complete absence of physical pain there is no affliction for the soul, because thought can turn itself away in any direction. Thought flies from affliction as promptly and irresistibly as an animal flies from death. Here below, physical pain and nothing else has the power to chain down our thoughts; provided that we count as physical pain certain phenomena which, though difficult to describe, are bodily and are strictly equivalent to it; in particular, for example, the fear of physical pain.

When thought is obliged by an attack of physical pain, however slight, to recognize the presence of affliction, this produces a state of mind as acute as that of a condemned man who is forced to look for hours at the guillotine which is going to behead him. Human beings can live twenty years, fifty years, in this acute state. We pass by them without noticing. What man is capable of discerning them unless Christ himself looks through his eyes? We notice only that they sometimes behave strangely, and we censure this behaviour.

There is not real affliction unless the event which has gripped and uprooted a life attacks it, directly or indirectly, in all its parts,

social, psychological, and physical. The social factor is essential. There is not really affliction where there is not social degradation or the fear of it in some form or another.

There is both continuity and a separating threshold, like the boiling point of water, between affliction itself and all the sorrows which, even though they may be very violent, very deep, and very lasting, are not afflictions in the true sense. There is a limit; on the far side of it we have affliction but not on the near side. This limit is not purely objective; all sorts of personal factors have to be taken into account. The same event may plunge one human being into affliction and not another.

The great enigma of human life is not suffering but affliction. It is not surprising that the innocent are killed, tortured, driven from their country, made destitute or reduced to slavery, put in concentration camps or prison cells, since there are criminals to perform such actions. It is not surprising either that disease is the cause of long sufferings, which paralyse life and make it into an image of death, since nature is at the mercy of the blind play of mechanical necessities. But it *is* surprising that God should have given affliction the power to seize the very souls of the innocent and to possess them as sovereign master. At the very best, he who is branded by affliction will only keep half his soul.

As for those who have been struck the kind of blow which leaves the victim writhing on the ground like a half-crushed worm, they have no words to describe what is happening to them. Among the people they meet, those who have never had contact with affliction in its true sense can have no idea of what it is, even though they may have known much suffering. Affliction is something specific and impossible to compare with anything else, just as nothing can convey the idea of sound to the deaf and dumb. And, as for those who have themselves been mutilated by affliction, they are in no state to help anyone at all and are almost incapable of even wishing to do so. Thus compassion for the afflicted is an impossibility. When it is really found, it is a more astounding miracle than walking on water, healing the sick, or even raising the dead.

Affliction constrained Christ to implore that he might be spared, to seek consolation from man, to believe he was forsaken by the

Father. It constrained a just man to cry out against God; a just man as perfect as human nature can be; more so, perhaps, if Job is not so much a historical character as a figure of Christ. 'He laughs at the affliction of the innocent!' This is not blasphemy but a genuine cry of anguish. The Book of Job is a pure marvel of truth and authenticity from beginning to end. As regards affliction, all that departs from this model is more or less tainted with falsehood.

Affliction causes God to be absent for a time, more absent than a dead man, more absent than light in the utter darkness of a cell. A kind of horror submerges the whole soul. During this absence there is nothing to love. What is terrible is that if, in this darkness where there is nothing to love, the soul ceases to love, God's absence becomes final. The soul has to go on loving in the void, or at least to go on wanting to love, though it may be only with an infinitesimal part of itself. Then, one day, God will come to show himself to this soul and to reveal the beauty of the world to it, as in the case of Job. But if the soul stops loving it falls, even in this life, into something which is almost equivalent to hell.

That is why those who plunge men into affliction before they are prepared to receive it are killers of souls. On the other hand, in a time such as ours, where affliction is hanging over us all, help given to souls is only effective if it goes far enough really to prepare them for affliction. That is no small thing.

Affliction hardens and discourages because, like a red-hot iron, it stamps the soul to its very depths with the contempt, the disgust, and even the self-hatred and sense of guilt and defilement which crime logically should produce but actually does not. Evil dwells in the heart of the criminal without being felt there. It is felt in the heart of the man who is afflicted and innocent. Everything happens as though the state of soul appropriate for criminals had been separated from crime and attached to affliction; and it even seems to be in proportion to the innocence of those who are afflicted.

If Job cries out that he is innocent in such despairing accents it is because he himself is unable to believe so, it is because his soul within him is on the side of his friends. He implores God himself to bear witness, because he no longer hears the testimony of his own

conscience; it is no longer anything but an abstract, lifeless memory for him.

Men have the same carnal nature as animals. If a hen is hurt, the others rush up and peck it. The phenomenon is as automatic as gravitation. Our senses attach to affliction all the contempt, all the revulsion, all the hatred which our reason attaches to crime. Except for those whose whole soul is inhabited by Christ, everybody despises the afflicted to some extent, although practically no one is conscious of it.

This law of sensibility also holds good with regard to ourselves. In the case of someone in affliction, all the contempt, revulsion, and hatred are turned inwards; they penetrate to the centre of his soul and from there they colour the whole universe with their poisoned light. Supernatural love, if it has survived, can prevent this second result from coming about, but not the first. The first is of the very essence of affliction; there is no affliction without it.

'Christ . . . being made a curse for us.' It was not only the body of Christ, hanging on the wood, which was accursed, it was his whole soul also. In the same way every innocent being in his affliction feels himself accursed. This even goes on being true for those who have been in affliction and have come out of it through a change in their fortunes, if the affliction has bitten deeply enough into them.

Another effect of affliction is, little by little, to make the soul its accomplice, by injecting a poison of inertia into it. In anyone who has suffered affliction for a long enough time there is a complicity with regard to his own affliction. This complicity impedes all the efforts he might make to improve his lot; it goes so far as to prevent him from seeking a way of deliverance, sometimes even to the point of preventing him from wishing for deliverance. Then he is established in affliction, and people may get the impression that he is quite contented. Even worse, this complicity may induce him, in spite of himself, to shun and flee from the means of deliverance; and for this it will resort to pretexts which are sometimes ridiculous. Even after a man has been relieved of his affliction, there will be something left in him which impels him to embrace it again, if it has pierced irrevocably into the depth of his soul. It is as though affliction had established itself in

him like a parasite and was directing him for its own purposes. Sometimes this impulse triumphs over all the impulses of the soul towards happiness. If the affliction has been ended as the result of some kindness, it may take the form of hatred for the benefactor; this is the cause of certain apparently inexplicable acts of savage ingratitude. It is sometimes easy to deliver an unhappy man from his present distress, but it is difficult to set him free from his past affliction. Only God can do it. And even the grace of God himself cannot cure irremediably wounded nature in this world. The glorified body of Christ bore the marks of nail and spear.

One can only accept the existence of affliction by considering it as a distance.

God created through love and for love. God did not create anything except love itself, and the means to love. He created love in all its forms. He created beings capable of love from all possible distances. Because no other could do it, he himself went to the greatest possible distance, the infinite distance. This infinite distance between God and God, this supreme tearing apart, this incomparable agony, this marvel of love, is the crucifixion. Nothing can be further from God than that which has been made accursed.

This tearing apart, over which supreme love places the bond of supreme union, echoes perpetually across the universe in the depth of the silence, like two notes, separate yet blending into one, like a pure and heart-rending harmony. This is the Word of God. The whole creation is nothing but its vibration. When human music in its greatest purity pierces our soul, this is what we hear through it. When we have learnt to hear the silence, this is what we grasp, even more distinctly, through it.

Those who persevere in love hear this note from the very lowest depths into which affliction has thrust them. From that moment they can no longer have any doubt.

Men struck down by affliction are at the foot of the Cross, almost at the greatest possible distance from God. It must not be thought that sin is a greater distance. Sin is not a distance, it is a turning of our eyes in the wrong direction.

It is true that there is a mysterious connexion between this distance and an original disobedience. From the beginning, we are told,

humanity turned its eyes away from God and walked as far as it could in the wrong direction. That is because it was then able to walk. As for us, we are nailed down to the spot, free only to choose which way we will look, ruled by necessity. A blind mechanism, heedless of degrees of spiritual perfection, continually buffets men hither and thither and flings some of them at the very foot of the Cross. It rests with them only to keep or not to keep their eyes turned towards God through all the shocks. It is not that God's Providence is absent; it is by his Providence that God willed necessity as a blind mechanism.

If the mechanism were not blind there would not be any affliction. Affliction is above all anonymous; it deprives its victims of their personality and turns them into things. It is indifferent, and it is the chill of this indifference—a metallic chill—which freezes all those it touches, down to the depth of their soul. They will never find warmth again. They will never again believe that they are anyone.

Affliction would not have this power without the element of chance which it contains. Those who are persecuted for their faith and are aware of it are not afflicted, in spite of their suffering. They only fall into affliction if suffering or fear fills the soul to the point of making it forget the cause of the persecution. The martyrs who came into the arena singing as they faced the wild beasts were not afflicted. Christ was afflicted. He did not die like a martyr. He died like a common criminal, in the same class as thieves, only a little more ridiculous. For affliction is ridiculous.

Only blind necessity can throw men to the extreme point of distance, close to the Cross. Human crime, which is the cause of most affliction, is part of blind necessity, because criminals do not know what they are doing.

There are two forms of friendship: meeting and separation. They are indissoluble. Both of them contain the same good, the unique good, which is friendship. For when two beings who are not friends are near each other there is no meeting, and when friends are far apart there is no separation. As both forms contain the same good thing, they are both equally good.

God produces himself and knows himself perfectly, just as we in our miserable way make and know objects outside ourselves. But, before all things, God is love. Before all things, God loves himself. This

love, this friendship of God, is the Trinity. Between the terms united by this relation of divine love there is more than nearness; there is infinite nearness or identity. But through the Creation, the Incarnation, and the Passion, there is also infinite distance. The interposed density of all space and all time sets an infinite distance between God and God.

Lovers or friends desire two things. The one is to love each other so much that they enter into each other and only make one being. The other is to love each other so much that, having half the globe between them, their union will not be diminished in the slightest degree. All that man vainly desires here below is perfectly realized in God. We have all those impossible desires within us as a mark of our destination, and they are good for us provided we no longer hope to fulfil them.

The love between God and God, which in itself *is* God, is this bond of double power; the bond which unites two beings so closely that they are no longer distinguishable and really form a single unity, and the bond which stretches across distance and triumphs over infinite separation. The unity of God, wherein all plurality disappears, and the abandonment wherein Christ believes he is left, while not ceasing to love his Father perfectly, these are two forms expressing the divine value of the same Love, the Love which is God himself.

God is so essentially love that the unity, which in a sense is his actual definition, is a pure effect of love. And corresponding to the infinite virtue of unification belonging to this love there is the infinite separation over which it triumphs, which is the whole creation spread throughout the totality of space and time, consisting of mechanically brutal matter and interposed between Christ and his Father.

As for us men, our misery gives us the infinitely precious privilege of sharing in this distance placed between the Son and his Father. This distance is only separation, however, for those who love. For those who love, separation, although painful, is a good, because it is love. Even the distress of the abandoned Christ is a good. There cannot be a greater good for us on earth than to share in it. God can never be perfectly present to us here below on account of our flesh. But he can be almost perfectly absent from us in extreme affliction. For us, on earth, this is the only possibility of perfection. That is why the Cross

is our only hope. 'No forest bears such a tree, with this flower, this foliage and this seed.'

This universe where we are living, and of which we form a minute particle, is the distance put by the divine Love between God and God. We are a point in this distance. Space, time, and the mechanism that governs matter are the distance. Everything that we call evil is only this mechanism. God has provided that when his grace penetrates to the very centre of a man and from there illuminates all his being, he is able to walk on the water without violating the laws of nature. But when a man turns away from God he simply gives himself up to the law of gravity. He then believes that he is deciding and choosing, but he is only a thing, a falling stone. If we examine human society and souls closely and with real attention, we see that wherever the virtue of supernatural light is absent, everything is obedient to mechanical laws as blind and as exact as the laws of gravitation. To know this is profitable and necessary. Those whom we call criminals are only tiles blown off a roof by the wind and falling at random. Their only fault is the initial choice by which they became those tiles.

The mechanism of necessity can be transposed on to any level while still remaining true to itself. It is the same in the world of blind matter, in plants, in animals, among nations, and in souls. Seen from our present stand-point, and in human perspective, it is quite blind. If, however, we transport our hearts beyond ourselves, beyond the universe, beyond space and time, to where our Father dwells, and if we regard this mechanism from there, it appears quite different. What seemed to be necessity becomes obedience. Matter is entirely passive and in consequence entirely obedient to God's will. It is a perfect model for us. There cannot be any other being than God and that which obeys God. On account of its perfect obedience, matter deserves to be loved by those who love its Master, in the same way as a needle once used by his beloved who has died is cherished by a lover. The world's beauty gives us an intimation of its claim to a place in our heart. In the beauty of the world harsh necessity becomes an object of love. What is more beautiful than the effect of gravity on sea-waves as they flow in ever-changing folds, or the almost eternal folds of the mountains?

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The sea is not less beautiful in our eyes because we know that ships are sometimes wrecked. On the contrary this adds to its beauty. If it altered the movement of its waves to spare a ship it would be a creature gifted with discernment and choice, and not this fluid perfectly obedient to every external pressure. It is this perfect obedience which makes the sea's beauty.

All the horrors which occur in this world are like the folds imposed upon the waves by gravity. That is why they contain an element of beauty. Sometimes a poem, such as the *Iliad*, makes this beauty perceptible.

Men can never escape from obedience to God. A creature cannot but obey. The only choice given to men, as intelligent and free creatures, is to desire obedience or not to desire it. If a man does not desire it, he obeys all the same, perpetually, in as much as he is a thing subject to mechanical necessity. If he does desire it, he is still subject to mechanical necessity, but a new necessity is added to it, a necessity constituted by the laws pertaining to supernatural things. Certain actions become impossible for him; others are accomplished by means of him, sometimes almost in spite of himself.

When we have the feeling that on some occasion we have disobeyed God, it simply means that we ceased for a time to desire to be obedient. But of course, other things being equal, a man does not perform the same actions if he gives his consent to obedience as if he does not; any more than a plant, other things being equal, grows in the same way if it is in the light as if it is in the dark. The plant does not have any control or choice in the matter of its own growth. We, however, are like plants which have the one choice of being in or out of the light.

Christ proposed the docility of matter to us as a model when he told us to consider the lilies of the field which neither toil nor spin. This means that they did not set out to clothe themselves in such or such a colour, they have not exercised their will nor made arrangements for such a purpose, they have received everything that natural necessity brought them. If they seem to us infinitely more beautiful than the richest stuffs it is not because they are richer but because of their docility. Materials are docile too, but docile to man, not to God. Matter is not beautiful when it obeys man, but only when it obeys God.

If sometimes in a work of art it seems almost as beautiful as in the sea or in mountains or in flowers it is because the light of God has filled the artist. In order to find beautiful those things which are made by men unenlightened by God, it is necessary to have understood with all one's soul that these men themselves are only matter which obeys without knowing it. For anyone who has reached this point, absolutely everything here below is perfectly beautiful. In everything which exists, in everything which happens, he discerns the mechanism of necessity and he recognizes in this necessity the infinite sweetness of obedience. For us, this obedience of things in relation to God is what the transparency of a window pane is in relation to light. As soon as we feel this obedience with our whole being, we see God.

When we hold a newspaper upside down, we see the odd shapes of the printed characters. When we turn it the right way up, we no longer see the characters, we see words. The passenger on a ship in a storm feels each shock as an inward upheaval. The captain is aware only of the complex combination of wind, current, and swell, with the ship's position and its shape, its sails, and its helm.

As one has to learn to read, or to practise a trade, so one must learn to feel in all things, first and almost solely, the obedience of the universe to God. It is truly an apprenticeship; and like every apprenticeship it calls for time and effort. For the man who has finished his training the differences between things or between events are no more important than those perceived by someone who knows how to read when he has before him the same sentence repeated several times, in red ink and blue, and printed in this, that, and the other kind of type. The man who cannot read sees only the differences. For the man who can read it all comes to the same thing, because the sentence is the same. Whoever has finished his apprenticeship recognizes things and events, everywhere and always, as vibrations of the same divine and infinitely sweet word. Which is not to say that he will not suffer. Pain is the colour of certain events. When a man who can and a man who cannot read look at a sentence written in red ink they both see something red; but the red colour is not so important for the one as for the other.

When an apprentice gets hurt or complains of fatigue, workmen and peasants have this fine expression: 'It's the trade getting into his

body.' Whenever we have some pain to endure, we can say to ourselves that it is the universe, the order and beauty of the world, and the obedience of creation to God which are entering our body. After that how can we fail to bless with the tenderest gratitude the Love which sends us this gift?

Joy and suffering are two equally precious gifts which must both of them be fully tasted, each one in its purity and without trying to mix them. Through joy, the beauty of the world penetrates our soul. Through suffering it penetrates our body. We could no more become friends of God through joy alone than one becomes a ship's captain by studying books on navigation. The body plays a part in all apprenticeships. On the plane of physical sensibility, suffering alone gives us contact with that necessity which constitutes the order of the world, for pleasure does not involve an impression of necessity. It is on a higher plane of sensibility that the necessity in joy can be recognized, and then only indirectly through the sense of beauty. In order that our being may one day become wholly sensitive in every part to this obedience which is the substance of matter, in order that a new sense may be formed in us which allows us to hear the universe as the vibration of the word of God, the transforming power of suffering and of joy are equally indispensable. When either of them comes to us we have to open the very centre of our soul to it, as a woman opens her door to messengers from her beloved. What does it matter to a lover if the messenger is courteous or rough so long as he gives her a message?

But affliction is not suffering. Affliction is something quite different from a divine educational method.

The infinity of space and time separates us from God. How can we seek for him? How can we go towards him? Even if we were to walk for endless centuries we should do no more than go round and round the world. Even in an aeroplane we could not do anything else. We are incapable of progressing vertically. We cannot take one step towards the heavens. God crosses the universe and comes to us.

Over the infinity of space and time the infinitely more infinite love of God comes to possess us. He comes at his own time. We have the power to consent to receive him or to refuse. If we remain deaf

he comes back again and again a beggar, but also, like a beggar, one day he stops coming. If we consent, God places a little seed in us and he goes away again. From that moment God has no more to do; neither have we, except to wait. We have only not to regret the consent we gave, the nuptial Yes. It is not as easy as it seems, for the growth of the seed within us is painful. Moreover, from the very fact that we accept this growth we cannot avoid destroying whatever gets in its way, pulling up the weeds, cutting the grasses; and unfortunately they are part of our very flesh, so that this gardening amounts to a violent operation. On the whole, however, the seed grows of itself. A day comes when the soul belongs to God, when it not only consents to love but when truly and effectively it loves. Then in its turn it must cross the universe to go to God. The soul does not love like a creature, with created love. The love within it is divine, uncreated, for it is the love of God for God which is passing through it. God alone is capable of loving God. We can only consent to give up our own feelings so as to allow free passage in our soul for this love. That is the meaning of denying oneself. We were created solely in order to give this consent.

The divine Love crossed the infinity of space and time to come from God to us. But how can it repeat the journey in the opposite direction, starting from a finite creature? When the seed of divine love placed in us has grown and become a tree, how can we, we who bear it, take it back to its origin? How can we make, in the opposite direction, the journey which God made when he came to us? How can we cross infinite distance?

It seems impossible, but there is a way. It is a way well known to us. We are quite well aware of the likeness in which this tree is made, this tree which has grown within us, this most beautiful tree where the birds of the air come and perch. We know what is the most beautiful of all trees. 'No forest bears its equal.' Something even a little more frightful than a gallows—that is the most beautiful of all trees. It was the seed of this tree that God placed within us, without our knowing what seed it was. If we had known, we should not have said Yes at the first moment. It is this tree which has grown within us and which has become ineradicable. Only a betrayal could uproot it.

When a hammer strikes a nail the shock travels, without losing any of its force, from the nail's large head to the point, although it is only a point. If the hammer and the nail's head were infinitely large the effect would still be the same. The point of the nail would transmit this infinite shock at the place where it was applied.

Extreme affliction, which means physical pain, distress of soul, and social degradation, all together, is the nail. The point of the nail is applied to the very centre of the soul, and its head is the whole of necessity throughout all space and time.

Affliction is a marvel of divine technique. It is a simple and ingenious device to introduce into the soul of a finite creature that immensity of force, blind, brutal, and cold. The infinite distance which separates God from the creature is concentrated into a point to transfix the centre of a soul.

The man to whom such a thing occurs has no part in the operation. He quivers like a butterfly pinned alive to a tray. But throughout the horror he can go on wanting to love. There is no impossibility in that, no obstacle, one could almost say no difficulty. Because no pain, however great, up to the point of losing consciousness, touches that part of the soul which consents to a right orientation.

It is only necessary to know that love is an orientation and not a state of the soul. Anyone who does not know this will fall into despair at the first onset of affliction.

The man whose soul remains oriented towards God while a nail is driven through it finds himself nailed to the very centre of the universe; the true centre, which is not in the middle, which is not in space and time, which is God. In a dimension which is not spatial and which is not time, a totally other dimension, the nail has pierced through the whole of creation, through the dense screen which separates the soul from God.

In this marvellous dimension, without leaving the time and place to which the body is bound, the soul can traverse the whole of space and time and come into the actual presence of God.

It is at the point of intersection between creation and Creator. This point is the point of intersection of the two branches of the Cross.

St. Paul was perhaps thinking about things of this kind when he said: 'That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.'

If the tree of life, and not simply the divine seed, is already formed in a man's soul at the time when extreme affliction strikes him, then he is nailed to the same cross as Christ.

Otherwise, there is the choice between the crosses on each side of Christ's.

We are like the impenitent thief if we seek consolation in contempt and hatred for our fellows in misfortune. This is the commonest effect of real affliction; it was so in the case of Roman slavery. People who are surprised when they observe such a state of mind in the afflicted would almost all fall into it themselves if affliction struck them.

To be like the good thief it is sufficient to remember that no matter what degree of affliction one is submerged in, one has deserved at least that much. Because it is certain that before being reduced to impotence by affliction one has been an accomplice, through cowardice, inertia, indifference, or culpable ignorance, in crimes which have plunged other human beings into an affliction at least as great. Generally, no doubt, we could not prevent those crimes, but we could express our reprobation of them. We neglected to do so, or even approved them, or at least we concurred in the expression of approval around us. For this complicity, the affliction we are suffering is not, in strict justice, too great a penalty. We have no right to feel compassion for ourselves. We know that at least once a perfectly innocent being suffered a worse affliction; it is better to direct our compassion to him across the centuries.

That is what everybody can and ought to say to himself. Because among our institutions and customs there are things so atrocious that nobody can legitimately feel himself innocent of this diffused complicity. It is certain that each of us is involved at least in the guilt of criminal indifference.

But in addition it is the right of every man to desire to have his

part in Christ's own Cross. We have an unlimited right to ask God for everything that is good. In such demands there is no need for humility or moderation.

It is wrong to desire affliction, it is against nature, and it is a perversion; and moreover it is the essence of affliction that it is suffered unwillingly. So long as we are not submerged in affliction all we can do is to desire that, if it should come, it may be a participation in the Cross of Christ.

But what is in fact always present, and what it is therefore always permitted to love, is the possibility of affliction. All the three sides of our being are always exposed to it. Our flesh is fragile; it can be pierced or torn or crushed, or one of its internal mechanisms can be permanently deranged, by any piece of matter in motion. Our soul is vulnerable, being subject to fits of depression without cause and pitifully dependent upon all sorts of objects, inanimate and animate, which are themselves fragile and capricious. Our social personality, upon which our sense of existence almost depends, is always and entirely exposed to every hazard. These three parts of us are linked with the very centre of our being in such a way that it bleeds for any wound of the slightest consequence which they suffer. Above all, anything which diminishes or destroys our social prestige, our right to consideration, seems to impair or abolish our very essence—so much is our whole substance an affair of illusion.

When everything is going more or less well, we do not think about this almost infinite fragility. But nothing compels us not to think about it. We can contemplate it all the time and thank God for it unceasingly. We can be thankful not only for the fragility itself but also for that more intimate weakness which connects it with the very centre of our being. For it is this weakness which makes possible, in certain conditions, the operation by which we are nailed to the very centre of the Cross.

We can think of this fragility, with love and gratitude, on the occasion of any suffering, whether great or small. We can think of it at times when we are neither particularly happy nor unhappy. We can think of it whenever we experience any joy. This, however, we ought not to do if the thought were liable to cloud or lessen the joy. But it is not so. This thought only adds a more piercing sweetness to joy, in the

same way that the flowers of the cherry are the more beautiful for being frail.

If we dispose our thought in this way, then after a certain time the Cross of Christ should become the very substance of our life. No doubt this is what Christ meant when he advised his friends to bear their cross each day, and not, as people seem to think nowadays, simply that one should be resigned about one's little daily troubles—which, by an almost sacrilegious abuse of language, people sometimes refer to as crosses. There is only one cross; it is the whole of that necessity by which the infinity of space and time is filled and which, in given circumstances, can be concentrated upon the atom that any one of us is, and totally pulverize it. To bear one's cross is to bear the knowledge that one is entirely subject to this blind necessity in every part of one's being, except for one point in the soul which is so secret that it is inaccessible to consciousness. However cruelly a man suffers, if there is some part of his being still intact and if he is not fully conscious that it has escaped only by chance and remains every moment at the mercy of chance, he has no part in the Cross. This is above all the case when the part of the soul which remains intact, or even relatively intact, is the social part; which is the reason why sickness profits nothing unless there is added to it the spirit of poverty in its perfection. It is possible for a perfectly happy man—if he recognizes, truly, concretely, and all the time, the possibility of affliction—to enjoy happiness completely and at the same time bear his cross.

But it is not enough to be aware of this possibility; one must love it. One must tenderly love the harshness of that necessity which is like a coin with two faces, the one turned towards us being domination, and the one turned towards God, obedience. We must embrace it closely even if it offers its roughest surface and the roughness cuts into us. Any lover is glad to clasp tightly some object belonging to an absent loved one, even to the point where it cuts into the flesh. We know that this universe is an object belonging to God. We ought to thank God from the depth of our hearts for giving us necessity, his mindless, sightless, and perfectly obedient slave, as absolute sovereign. She drives us with a whip. But being subject in this world to her tyranny, we have only to choose God for our treasure, and put our heart with it, and from that moment we shall see the other face of the tyranny,

the face which is pure obedience. We are the slaves of necessity, but we are also the sons of her Master. Whatever she demands of us, we ought to love the sight of her docility, we who are the children of the house. When she does not do as we wish, when she compels us to suffer what we would not, it is given us by means of love to pass through to the other side and to see the face of obedience which she turns towards God. Lucky are those to whom this precious opportunity comes often.

Intense and long-drawn-out physical pain has this unique advantage, that our sensibility is so made as to be unable to accept it. We can get used to, make the best of, and adapt ourselves to anything else except that; and we make the adaptation, in order to have the illusion of power, in order to believe that we are in control. We play at imagining that we have chosen what is forced upon us. But when a human being is transformed, in his own eyes, into a sort of animal, almost paralysed and altogether repulsive, he can no longer retain that illusion. It is all the better if this transformation is brought about by human wills, as a result of social reprobation, provided that it is not an honourable persecution but, as it were, a blind, anonymous oppression. In its physical part, the soul is aware of necessity only as constraint and is aware of constraints only as pain. It is the same truth which penetrates into the senses through pain, into the intelligence through mathematical proof, and into the faculty of love through beauty. So it was that to Job, when once the veil of flesh had been rent by affliction, the world's stark beauty was revealed. The beauty of the world appears when we recognize that the substance of the universe is necessity and that the substance of necessity is obedience to a perfectly wise Love. The universe of which we are a fraction has no other essence than to be obedient.

In the joy of the senses there is a virtue analogous to that of physical pain, if the joy is so vivid and pure, if it so far exceeds expectation that we immediately recognize our inability to procure anything like it, or to retain its possession, by our own efforts. Of such joys, beauty is always the essence. Pure joy and pure pain are two aspects of the same infinitely precious truth. Fortunately so, because it is this that gives us the right to wish joy rather than pain to those we love.

The Trinity and the Cross are the two poles of Christianity, the

two essential truths: the first, perfect joy; the second, perfect affliction. It is necessary to know both the one and the other and their mysterious unity, but the human condition in this world places us infinitely far from the Trinity, at the very foot of the Cross. Our country is the Cross.

The knowledge of affliction is the key of Christianity. But that knowledge is impossible. It is not possible to know affliction without having been through it. Thought is so revolted by affliction that it is as incapable of bringing itself voluntarily to conceive it as an animal, generally speaking, is incapable of suicide. Thought never knows affliction except by constraint. Unless constrained by experience, it is impossible to believe that everything in the soul—all its thoughts and feelings, its every attitude towards ideas, people, and the universe, and, above all, the most intimate attitude of the being towards itself—that all this is entirely at the mercy of circumstances. Even if one recognizes it theoretically, and it is rare indeed to do so, one does not believe it with all one's soul. To believe it with all one's soul is what Christ called, not renunciation or abnegation, as it is usually translated, but denying oneself; and it is by this that one deserves to be his disciple. But when we are in affliction or have passed through it we do not believe this truth any more than before; one could almost say that we believe it still less. Thought can never really be constrained; evasion by falsehood is always open to it. When thought finds itself, through the force of circumstance, brought face to face with affliction it takes immediate refuge in lies, like a hunted animal dashing for cover. Sometimes in its terror it burrows very deep into falsehood and it often happens that people who are or have been in affliction become addicted to lying as a vice, in some cases to such a degree that they lose the sense of any distinction between truth and falsehood in anything. It is wrong to blame them. Falsehood and affliction are so closely linked that Christ conquered the world simply because he, being the Truth, continued to be the Truth in the very depth of extreme affliction. Thought is constrained by an instinct of self-preservation to fly from the sight of affliction, and this instinct is infinitely more essential to our being than the instinct to avoid physical death. It is comparatively easy to face physical death so long as circumstances or the play of imagination present it under some other aspect than that of afflic-

tion. But to be able to face affliction with steady attention when it is close to him a man must be prepared, for the love of truth, to accept the death of the soul. This is the death of which Plato spoke when he said 'to philosophize is to learn to die'; it is the death which was symbolized in the initiation rites of the ancient mysteries, and which is represented by baptism. In reality, it is not a question of the soul's dying, but simply of recognizing the truth that it is a dead thing, something analogous to matter. It has no need to turn into water; it is water; the thing we believe to be our self is as ephemeral and automatic a product of external circumstances as the form of a sea-wave.

It is only necessary to know that, to know it in the depth of one's being. But to know humanity in that way belongs to God alone and to those in this world who have been regenerated from on high. For it is impossible to accept that death of the soul unless one possesses another life in addition to the soul's illusory life, unless one has placed one's treasure and one's heart elsewhere—and not merely outside one's person but outside all one's thoughts and feelings and outside everything knowable, in the hands of our Father who is in secret. Of those who have done this one can say that they have been born of water and the Spirit; for they are no longer anything except a two-fold obedience—on the one side to the mechanical necessity in which their earthly condition involves them, and on the other to the divine inspiration. There is nothing left in them which one could call their own will, their person, their 'I'. They have become nothing other than a certain intersection of nature and God. This intersection is the name with which God has named them from all eternity; it is their vocation. In the old baptism by immersion the man disappeared under the water; this means to deny one's self, to acknowledge that one is only a fragment of the inert matter which is the fabric of creation. He only reappeared because he was lifted up by an ascending movement stronger than gravity; this is the image of the divine love in man. Baptism contains the symbol of the state of perfection. The engagement it involves is the promise to desire that state and to beseech God for it, incessantly and untiringly, for as long as one has not obtained it—as a hungry child never stops asking his father for bread. But we cannot know what this promise commits us to until we encounter the terrible presence of affliction. It is only there, face to face with

affliction, that the true commitment can be made, through a more secret, more mysterious, more miraculous contact even than a sacrament.

The knowledge of affliction being by nature impossible both to those who have experienced it and to those who have not, it is equally possible for both of them by supernatural favour; otherwise Christ would not have spared from affliction the man he cherished above all, and after having promised that he should drink from his cup. In both cases the knowledge of affliction is something much more miraculous than walking on water.

Those whom Christ recognized as his benefactors are those whose compassion rested upon the knowledge of affliction. The others give capriciously, irregularly, or else too regularly, or from habit imposed by training, or in conformity with social convention, or from vanity or emotional pity, or for the sake of a good conscience—in a word, from self-regarding motives. They are arrogant or patronizing or tactlessly sympathetic, or they let the afflicted man feel that they regard him simply as a specimen of a certain type of affliction. In any case, their gift is an injury. And they have their reward on earth, because their left hand is not unaware of what their right hand gave. Their contact with the afflicted must be a false one because the true understanding of the afflicted implies knowledge of affliction. Those who have not seen the face of affliction, or are not prepared to, can only approach the afflicted behind a veil of illusion or falsehood. If the look of affliction itself is revealed by chance on the face of the afflicted, they run away.

The benefactor of Christ, when he meets an afflicted man, does not feel any distance between himself and the other. He projects all his own being into him. It follows that the impulse to give him food is as instinctive and immediate as it is for oneself to eat when one is hungry. And it is forgotten almost at once, just as one forgets yesterday's meals. Such a man would not think of saying that he takes care of the afflicted for the Lord's sake; it would seem as absurd to him as it would be to say that he eats for the Lord's sake. One eats because one can't help it. Christ will thank the people who give in the way they eat.

They do for the afflicted something very different from feeding, clothing, or taking care of them. By projecting their own being into those they help they give them for a moment—what affliction has de-

prived them of—an existence of their own. Affliction is essentially a destruction of personality, a lapse into anonymity. Just as Christ put off his divinity for love, so the afflicted are stripped of their humanity by misfortune. In affliction, that misfortune itself becomes a man's whole existence and in every other respect he loses all significance, in everybody's eyes including his own. There is something in him that would like to exist, but it is continually pushed back into nothingness, like a drowning man whose head is pushed under the water. He may be a pauper, a refugee, a negro, an invalid, an ex-convict, or anything of the kind; in any case, whether he is an object of ill usage or of charity he will in either case be treated as a cipher, as one item among many others in the statistics of a certain type of affliction. So both good treatment and bad treatment will have the same effect of compelling him to remain anonymous. They are two forms of the same offence.

The man who sees someone in affliction and projects into him his own being brings to birth in him through love, at least for a moment, an existence apart from his affliction. For, although affliction is the occasion of this supernatural process, it is not the cause. The cause is the identity of human beings across all the apparent distances placed between them by the hazards of fortune.

To project one's being into an afflicted person is to assume for a moment his affliction, it is to choose voluntarily something whose very essence consists in being imposed by constraints upon the unwilling. And that is an impossibility. Only Christ has done it. Only Christ and those men whose whole soul he possesses can do it. What these men give to the afflicted whom they succour, when they project their own being into them, is not really their own being, because they no longer possess one; it is Christ himself.

Charity like this is a sacrament, a supernatural process by which a man in whom Christ dwells really puts Christ into the soul of the afflicted. If it is bread that is given, this bread is equivalent to the host. And this is not speaking symbolically or by conjecture, it is a literal translation of Christ's own words. He says: 'You have done it unto me.' Therefore he is in the naked or starving man. But he is not there in virtue of the nakedness or hunger, because affliction in itself contains no gift from above. Therefore Christ's presence can only be due

to the operation of charity. It is obvious that Christ is in the man whose charity is perfectly pure; for who could be Christ's benefactor except Christ himself? And it is easy to understand that only Christ's presence in a soul can put true compassion in it. But the Gospel reveals further than he who gives from true compassion gives Christ himself. The afflicted who receive this miraculous gift have the choice of consenting to it or not.

In affliction, if it is complete, a man is deprived of all human relationship. For him there are only two possible kinds of relation with men: the first, in which he figures only as a thing, is as mechanical as the relation between two contiguous drops of water, and the second is purely supernatural love. All relationships between these two extremes are forbidden him. There is no place in his life for anything except water and the Spirit. Affliction, when it is consented to and accepted and loved, is truly a baptism.

It is because Christ alone is capable of compassion that he received none while he was on earth. Being in the flesh in this world, he was not at the same time in the souls of those around him; and so there was no one to have pity on him. When suffering compelled him to seek pity, his closest friends refused it; they left him to suffer alone. Even John slept; and Peter, who had been able to walk on water, was incapable of pity when his master fell into affliction. So as to avoid seeing him, they took refuge in sleep. When Pity herself becomes affliction, where can she turn for help? It would have needed another Christ to have pity on Christ in affliction. In the centuries that followed, pity for Christ's affliction was one of the signs of sanctity.

The supernatural process of charity, as opposed to that of communion, for example, does not need to be completely conscious. Those whom Christ thanks reply: 'Lord, when . . . ?' They did not know whom they were feeding. In general, there is nothing even to show that they knew anything at all about Christ. They may or they may not have. The important thing is that they were just; and because of that the Christ within them gave himself in the form of almsgiving. Beggars are fortunate people, in that there is a possibility of their receiving once or twice in their life such an alms.

Affliction is truly at the centre of Christianity. Through it is accomplished the sole and two-fold commandment: 'Love God',

'Love your neighbour.' For, as regards the first, it was said by Christ. 'No man cometh unto the Father, but by me'; and he also said: 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.' The serpent is that serpent of bronze which it was sufficient to look upon to be saved from the effects of poison. Therefore it is only by looking upon the Cross that we can love God. And as regards our neighbour, Christ has said who is the neighbour whom we are commanded to love. It is the naked, bleeding, and senseless body which we see lying in the road. What we are commanded to love first of all is affliction: the affliction of man, the affliction of God.

People often reproach Christianity for a morbid preoccupation with suffering and grief. This is an error. Christianity is not concerned with suffering and grief, for they are sensations, psychological states, in which a perverse indulgence is always possible; its concern is with something quite different, which is affliction. Affliction is not a psychological state; it is a pulverization of the soul by the mechanical brutality of circumstances. The transformation of a man, in his own eyes, from the human condition into that of a half-crushed worm writhing on the ground is a process which not even a pervert would find attractive. Neither does it attract a sage, a hero, or a saint. Affliction is something which imposes itself upon a man quite against his will. Its essence, the thing it is defined by, is the horror, the revulsion of the whole being, which it inspires in its victim. And this is the very thing one must consent to, by virtue of supernatural love.

It is our function in this world to consent to the existence of the universe. God is not satisfied with finding his creation good; he wants it also to find itself good. That is the purpose of the souls which are attached to minute fragments of this world; and it is the purpose of affliction to provide the occasion for judging that God's creation is good. Because, so long as the play of circumstance around us leaves our being almost intact, or only half impaired, we more or less believe that the world is created and controlled by ourselves. It is affliction that reveals, suddenly and to our very great surprise, that we are totally mistaken. After that, if we praise, it is really God's creation that we are praising. And where is the difficulty? We are well aware

that divine glory is in no way diminished by our affliction; therefore we are in no way prevented from praising God for his great glory.

Thus, affliction is the surest sign that God wishes to be loved by us; it is the most precious evidence of his tenderness. It is something altogether different from a paternal chastisement, and could more justly be compared to the tender quarrels by which a young couple confirm the depth of their love. We dare not look affliction in the face; otherwise we should see after a little time that it is the face of love. In the same way Mary Magdalene perceived that he whom she took to be the gardener was someone else.

Seeing the central position occupied in their faith by affliction, Christians ought to suspect that it is in a sense the very essence of creation. To be a created thing is not necessarily to be afflicted, but it is necessarily to be exposed to affliction. Only the uncreated is indestructible. Those who ask why God permits affliction might as well ask why God created. And that, indeed, is a question one may well ask. Why did God create? It seems so obvious that God is greater than God and the creation together. At least, it seems obvious so long as one thinks of God as Being. But that is not how one ought to think of him. So soon as one thinks of God as Love one senses that marvel of love by which the Father and the Son are united both in the eternal unity of the one God and also across the separating distance of space and time and the Cross.

God is love, and nature is necessity; but this necessity, through obedience, is a mirror of love. In the same way, God is joy, and creation is affliction; but it is an affliction radiant with the light of joy. Affliction contains the truth about our condition. They alone will see God who prefer to recognize the truth and die, instead of living a long and happy existence in a state of illusion. One must want to go towards reality; then, when one thinks one has found a corpse, one meets an angel who says: 'He is risen.'

The Cross of Christ is the only source of light that is bright enough to illumine affliction. Wherever there is affliction, in any age or any country, the Cross of Christ is the truth of it. Any man, whatever his beliefs may be, has his part in the Cross of Christ if he loves truth to the point of facing affliction rather than escape into the depths of falsehood. If God had been willing to withhold Christ from

the men of any given country or epoch, we should know it by an infallible sign; there would be no affliction among them. We know of no such period in history. Wherever there is affliction there is the Cross—concealed, but present to anyone who chooses truth rather than falsehood and love rather than hate. Affliction without the Cross is hell, and God has not placed hell upon the earth.

Conversely, there are many Christians who have no part in Christ because they lack the strength to recognize and worship the blessed Cross in every affliction. There is no such proof of feebleness of faith as the way in which people, even including Christians, sidetrack the problem of affliction when they discuss it. All the talk about original sin, God's will, Providence and its mysterious plans (which nevertheless one thinks one can try to fathom), and future recompenses of every kind in this world and the next, all this only serves to conceal the reality of affliction, or else fails to meet the case. There is only one thing that enables us to accept real affliction, and that is the contemplation of Christ's Cross. There is nothing else. That one thing suffices.

A mother, a wife, or a fiancée, if they know that the person they love is in distress, will want to help him and be with him, and if that is impossible they will at least seek to lessen their distance from him and lighten the heavy burden of impotent sympathy by suffering some equivalent distress. Whoever loves Christ and thinks of him on the Cross should feel a similar relief when gripped by affliction.

By reason of the essential link between the Cross and affliction, no State has the right to dissociate itself from all religion except on the absurd hypothesis that it has succeeded in abolishing affliction. *A fortiori* it has no such right if it is itself creating affliction. A penal system entirely dissociated from any reference to God has a really infernal aura. Not on account of wrong verdicts or excessive punishments but, apart from all that, in itself. It defiles itself by contact with every defilement, and since it contains no purifying principle it becomes so polluted that it can further degrade even the most degraded criminal. Contact with it is hideous for anyone with any integrity or health of mind; and, as for the corrupt, they find an even more horribly corrupt sort of appeasement in the very punishments it inflicts. Nothing is pure

of course, unanswerable, and which we normally never ask ourselves, but in affliction the soul is constrained to repeat it incessantly like a sustained, monotonous groan. This question is: Why? Why are things as they are? The afflicted man naïvely seeks an answer, from men, from things, from God, even if he disbelieves in him, from anything or everything. Why is it necessary precisely that he should have nothing to eat, or be worn out with fatigue and brutal treatment, or be about to be executed, or be ill, or be in prison? If one explained to him the causes which have produced his present situation, and this is in any case seldom possible because of the complex interaction of circumstances, it will not seem to him to be an answer. For his question 'Why?' does not mean 'By what cause?' but 'For what purpose?' And it is impossible, of course, to indicate any purposes to him; unless we invent some imaginary ones, but that sort of invention is not a good thing.

It is singular that the affliction of other people, except sometimes, though not always, those very close to us, does not provoke this question. At the most, it may occur to us casually for a moment. But so soon as a man falls into affliction the question takes hold and goes on repeating itself incessantly. Why? Why? Why? Christ himself asked it: 'Why hast thou forsaken me?'

There can be no answer to the 'Why?' of the afflicted, because the world is necessity and not purpose. If there were finality in the world, the place of the good would not be in the other world. Whenever we look for final causes in this world it refuses them. But to know that it refuses, one has to ask.

The only things that compel us to ask the question are affliction, and also beauty; for the beautiful gives us such a vivid sense of the presence of something good that we look for some purpose there, without ever finding one. Like affliction, beauty compels us to ask: Why? Why is this thing beautiful? But rare are those who are capable of asking themselves this question for as long as a few hours at a time. The afflicted man's question goes on for hours, days, years; it ceases only when he has no strength left.

He who is capable not only of crying out but also of listening will hear the answer. Silence is the answer. This is the eternal silence for which Vigny bitterly reproached God; but Vigny had no right to say how the just man should reply to the silence, for he was not one of

enough to bring purity to the places reserved for crime and punishment except Christ, who was himself condemned by the law.

But it is only the Cross, and not the complications of dogma, that is needed by States; and it is disastrous that the Cross and dogma have become so closely linked. By this link, Christ has been drawn away from the criminals who are his brothers.

The idea of necessity as the material common to art, science, and every kind of labour is the door by which Christianity can enter profane life and permeate the whole of it. For the Cross is necessity itself brought into contact with the lowest and the highest part of us; with our physical sensibility by its evocation of physical pain and with supernatural love by the presence of God. It thus involves the whole range of contacts with necessity which are possible for the intermediate parts of our being.

There is not, there cannot be, any human activity in whatever sphere, of which Christ's Cross is not the supreme and secret truth. No activity can be separated from it without rotting or shrivelling like a cut vine-shoot. That is what is happening today, before our uncomprehending eyes, while we ask ourselves what has gone wrong. And Christians comprehend least of all because, knowing that the roots of our activities go back long before Christ, they cannot understand that the Christian faith is the sap in them.

But this would be no problem if we understood that the Christian faith, under veils which do not obscure its radiance, comes to flower and fruit at every time and every place where there are men who do not hate the light.

Never since the dawn of history, except for a certain period of the Roman Empire, has Christ been so absent as today. The separation of religion from the rest of social life, which seems natural even to the majority of Christians nowadays, would have been judged monstrous by antiquity.

The sap of Christianity should be made to flow everywhere in the life of society; but nevertheless it is destined above all for man in solitude. The Father is in secret, and there is no secret more inviolable than affliction.

There is a question which is absolutely meaningless and therefore,

the just. The just man loves. He who is capable not only of listening but also of loving hears this silence as the word of God.

The speech of created beings is with sounds. The word of God is silence. God's secret word of love can be nothing else but silence. Christ is the silence of God.

Just as there is no tree like the Cross, so there is no harmony like the silence of God. The Pythagoreans discerned this harmony in the fathomless eternal silence around the stars. In this world, necessity is the vibration of God's silence.

Our soul is constantly clamorous with noise, but there is one point in it which is silence, and which we never hear. When the silence of God comes to the soul and penetrates it and joins the silence which is secretly present in us, from then on we have our treasure and our heart in God; and space opens before us as the opening fruit of a plant divides in two, for we are seeing the universe from a point situated outside space.

This operation can take place in only two ways, to the exclusion of all others. There are only two things piercing enough to penetrate our souls in this way; they are affliction and beauty.

Often, one could weep tears of blood to think how many unfortunates are crushed by affliction without knowing how to make use of it. But, coolly considered, this is not a more pitiful waste than the squandering of the world's beauty. The brightness of stars, the sound of sea-waves, the silence of the hour before dawn—how often do they not offer themselves in vain to men's attention? To pay no attention to the world's beauty is, perhaps, so great a crime of ingratitude that it deserves the punishment of affliction. To be sure, it does not always get it; but then the alternative punishment is a mediocre life, and in what way is a mediocre life preferable to affliction? Moreover, even in the case of great misfortune such people's lives are probably still mediocre. So far as conjecture is possible about sensibility, it would seem that the evil within a man is a protection against the external evil that attacks him in the form of pain. One must hope it is so, and that for the impenitent thief God has mercifully reduced to insignificance such useless suffering. In fact, it certainly is so, because that is the great temptation which affliction offers; it is always possible for an afflicted man to suffer less by consenting to become wicked.

The man who has known pure joy, if only for a moment, and who has therefore tasted the flavour of the world's beauty, for it is the same thing, is the only man for whom affliction is something devastating. At the same time, he is the only man who has not deserved this punishment. But, after all, for him it is no punishment; it is God himself holding his hand and pressing it rather hard. For, if he remains constant, what he will discover buried deep under the sound of his own lamentations is the pearl of the silence of God.