

VALERY ALEFF

IN THE END WAS THE WORD

PSALMS

PSALM 1

There are enemies and they wish to eat my heart.
 My heart is not eatable; nor is it drinkable.
 They drink my blood for they say my blood is drinkable.
 They are probably right, although I have never drunk my blood
 and so I do not know if it is drinkable or not.

Perhaps it is, for some insects drink it, some mosquitoes
 and other animals whose names I have forgotten.
 They drink my blood even when they do not drink it.
 My blood is here and over there;
 and they drink it even if they eat something, even if they fly.
 They do not drink, and yet they drink because it is my blood
 and it is more delicious than the air where they fly.

It is also more delicious than the Earth, needless to say, needless to do.

They walk on the surface of the Earth
 and drink my blood as if they had nothing else to do.
 They have nothing else to do:
 we know there is nothing to do on this Earth of ours,
 of Yours, my God, my Lord, my Landlord.
 Why do you love these people, animals and insects?
 You do love them, otherwise you would have exterminated them.
 You do not touch them;
 and if you do, you bless them.
 Why do you bless them, my God, my Lord, my Land?

PSALM 2

I am perhaps my own enemy.
 That is what they always say and repeat:
 'Don't look around you.
 'Your worst enemy is inside you, not outside.'
 And you say to them that what is inside is also outside.
 They do not understand, O Lord.
 Then I say, 'Vice versa' several times in a row.

And the row grows on so now it is no longer a row;
 it is a space swarming with my pains.
 All of them are both identical and different somehow.

Somehow all this happens in my head
 and my blood pressure is so high
 I might say I am high on blood pressure.
 I keep it company so I go higher and higher.
 I keep myself company and we are all very high indeed:
 all my pains, all my Is.
 I am Is, my Lord. I am my blood pressure
 and this pressure IS High.
 IT IS the highest blood pressure one can think of.
 My Lord, please stop their thoughts.
 One thinks of the highest blood pressure;
 so does the other.
 Stop them, please! They are my enemies.
 I am lying in their laps and we have just crossed the stars.

PSALM 3

Thank you, my Lord.
 On behalf of the entire company,
 I would like to thank you for all Your work.
 You must have worked very hard over the last half-an-hour.
 Inside and outside my body I had many enemies, many pains, many veins.
 I could not cope with the ebb and flow of my blood.
 Nor could *they* cope with my forthcoming death.

I heard death's steps near my doorstep.
 And I prayed of course because if you hear the steps of death,
 you begin to pray. You have no alternative
 but to ask the Almighty to get you out of a tight spot.
 If the spot you find yourself in is large,
 you walk around it and say to yourself that this spot is the Garden of Eden;
 you must have regained it in one of your dreams.
 And you simply do not recognise death
 and apparently he takes it as a snub.

But I, for one, do not care because I have God on my side.
 God delivers me from my pains, my enemies' hands, laps and what not.
 What is more, God delivers me from *not*; and even from *what*,
 for you have no idea what this *what* has in store for you.
 So you discard both what and not.

And I thank God on behalf of the entire company:
 of my egos, sinews, muscles, nerves, supers, its, myths, archetypes.
 My home is my castle; my body is my company.
 And our show – and our snow, alas – may go on
 because the Almighty gives us permission to go on and even somewhere.
 He also bestows upon my poor self freewill
 and its consequences.

So my freewill gets the Academy Award for Best Director.
 In accepting this award,
 I would like to thank the producer, the director, the scriptwriter
 and, lastly, the film crew, my muscles, my sinews,
 my intestines, my blood vessels, my blood,
 my genes, my parents, my ancestors, Queen Victoria.
 To my shame, I never wrote and thanked Mary for her present.

PSALM 4

I wish to ask You what happens, my Lord.
 You may think that nothing happens because You feel no pain,
 never and under no circumstances.
 But You may possibly decide I am created in Your own image,
 which is true, if only in part.
 All right, I am *partly* created in Your image,
 but the part created in the image of Man bothers me a lot;
 and I must convey this truth to You and Your angels.

My problems seem to be over for the moment,
 but there could be more trouble ahead;
 and both this trouble and their aheads are so awful
 I lose sleep over them.

I also lose sleep over many other troubles.

So I do not sleep at all, my Lord.

You know, the trouble began when my father came to live with us.

I love my father: You told me I should love my parents.

All right, I love them to the best of my abilities
and of my stock of love.

Of course my mother died many years ago,
but I still love her because I cannot do otherwise,
given that I am duty bound to obey Your commandments,
Your orders and so on.

I even obey Your sos and ons. Or eons.
And I know I shall only be storing up trouble for the future
if I do not go to the dentist now.

What is Your participation in my life?
Are you up there? On the right-hand side?
You are generous and I know You spend money right, left and centre.
And You do not have to invest the money
in a high-interest bank account.
Your interests are high;
so are Your banks, judging from the banks of Vatican.

I ask you to give me some money for my rotten tooth.
Last year I had to have a tooth out.
It was awful.

I will not undergo the same operation this year.
Could you please help me on this occasion?
On many other occasions?
I must have *all* my teeth out as well.
Have everything out, I say to myself.

I wish to live a different life.
I am sure that would agree with me.
A different set of teeth.
A different body; a different soul.
A different *You*, my Lord.

Of course the same and only God,
 the same Almighty.
 The same Slightly.

PSALM 5

I fear everything
 and I do not know how to get rid of this fear.
 I also have a lot of angst.
 I do not know if quantity really counts in these matters,
 but I do know that when I say to myself I have nothing to fear,
 a small quantity of it remains in my breast.

The same goes for my angst.
 I speak to it as I try to calm myself down.
 How do I go about it?
 I recall my mother who tried to calm any screaming baby
 by rocking it back and forth.
 That is how she calmed my brother, my sister
 and even my nephew.
 I suppose she also rocked my own cradle
 with a gentle backwards and forwards motion.
 I still recall this movement as I rock in my sleep,
 which happens every other night.

But what about angst?
 I am not sure that,
 to struggle for life with this existential phenomenon,
 I should rock either in my sleep or in my waking hours.
 Nor should I read either Kierkegaard or Heidegger – God forbid!
 Please, forbid this nonsensical act,
 O my Lord, my God,
 my only protection from existentialism and the unconscious.

I know you protect only small children
 who sing about little stars and dance in the breeze
 like some daffodils or other.
 So I go out, dance in the breeze –

even if there is no breeze in the neighbourhood –
and sing for my supper,

‘Little, little, little angst
How I wonder why thee comest.
Go, go, come thee not
Do not, do not bring me *Tod*.’

And once my song is over,
I have another last supper and feel happy,
believe it or not.

Of course I know You are not supposed to believe
in what humans and animals say to you
whenever they feel like pouring their hearts out.
And they all feel like that,
judging by the barking of my neighbours’ dogs;
or by my neighbours’ barks.
Why keep a dog and bark yourself? I ask myself.
Hark, hark, another bark!
Another thief, another night.

PSALM 6

Another freewill.
There is only one freewill apparently and logically.
If you have your freewill –
and every freewill is a personal allowance –
there are no other free wills;
otherwise they might interfere with your own freewill
and destroy it.
That is how determinism and predestination win hands down.

They always win
even if there are no hands involved in this boxing.
For once, however, they should not win and your freewill –
and even your half-freewill –
will take part in this contest.

The winner of tonight's freewill contest will be decided by clapometer.

The same goes for the winner of last night's freewill contest.

Your freewill chooses last night and thinks it won this contest.

It is even sure it did win it,
whatever their clapometer shows and says to everyone.

According to this clapometer, you lost the contest
and so have neither any will nor any freedom to speak of.

All right, you do not speak of anything,
but you wish to win *something*,
even if the big victory is out of your reach.

You hear a voice and assume it belongs to your guardian angel:
'Don't forget to claim your travelling expenses after the contest.'

You follow his advice and say to yourself
that nothing has ever been lost:
there are other contests and other free wills at your disposal.

Of course you should not *dispose* of them –
certainly not.

You keep your freewill in your jewellery box.
You take it out and feel an irresistible urge to leave your room.
Yet you have no intention of leaving your room.

Why should you?
You are about to leave your room against your wills, all of them.

The force you have to cope with
has something to do with electricity:
you are likely to get a nasty shock from predestination
if you are not earthed properly.
So you grasp a drainpipe or a lightning conductor
and the impulse vanishes into one of the thin airs
that surround you on all sides.

My Lord, let me not let go of this drainpipe,
of Your conductor.
For the love of God.

PSALM 7

My God, my Love.

No one listens to what I say or think.

A woman seems to be ensconced in one of my armchairs.

No, she *is* ensconced in this armchair:

she does not *seem* to be ensconced in it.

But she does not seem to *listen* to my grievances.

And my grievances are at the core of my speech,
of my monologue.

What I say may be likened to Hamlet's monologue.

I say to her I do not know whether it is better to be or not to be –
as far I am concerned.

I am not concerned about Hamlet: he is dead anyway.

Anyway, he has never lived in our world.

He might have lived in a sort of land,

being the member of some dream team or other.

Shakespeare and his characters *are* a dream team,
and Hamlet is one of its symbols, leaders, signs and minds.

But I am concerned with the lady sitting opposite me in my room.

It is my living room, my dying room,

my dining room, my last-suppering room.

Say what you wish, my God, my Lord.

You say what you wish because you cannot do otherwise.

Montaigne says we should not say everything.

He means that not all of our thoughts should be given utterance.

Whatever we do say, however, should be true

within the framework of our views and opinions.

But You, my Lord, my God, my All, my Unfallen Mighty
can say whatever You think,

and even Montaigne cannot prevent you from saying
that and this and even what not.

You can even say what not;

and You can undo the past, according to Ockham
and some other others.

At the moment, however, I am not concerned with You,

I am sorry to say.
 There is a lady opposite my armchair.
 And she does not seem to listen to my speech,
 my tales of woe and other tales I keep in my archives.
 I can see she is tired because her eyelids have started to droop;
 so has her head.
 Even my flowers are drooping in the heat,
 within the framework of my speech.
 No one will listen to what I shall say for another month
 except you my Lord, my God, my Senior.
 My grief at my own death is terrible and awful.
 So is my grief at *Your* death.

PSALM 8

I am ashamed of myself.
 But this shame I experience does not concern either others
 or anyone else.
 I *am* ashamed of myself,
 but and yet what I do is my affair.

 What I do in my spare time is my affair;
 the same goes for other times of mine.
 Even if the time I am speaking of is not spare
 and consequently I cannot spare it,
 it is my time and no one owns it except myself, except my life.

 Yet and but I am ashamed of myself
 and I cannot hide it from myself.
 I can hide it from others – from my neighbours, for instance.
 Alas, I cannot hide it either from myself or from You,
 my God, my Saviour, my Flavour.

 Let me explain what I mean by my Flavour, my Saviour.
 They always say,
 ‘Add a little salt to bring out the flavour of the herbs.’
 All right, they say many other things about flavours and favours.
 For instance, they say, ‘This wine has a light, fruity flavour.’

They do not speak of blood whenever they say
such a thing.

They speak of some wine or other
and I wonder what wine they have in mind.
Yet I do not favour light wines – or anything light, for that matter.
And I generally favour travelling by night,
when the roads are quiet.

But nothing and nobody are quiet nowadays.
All that stress at work has begun to drag them down,
all of them.
And people often behave irrationally
when they are under stress.
So they behave irrationally and I travel at night.
And I encounter only trees and bushes and owls and You,
my Night Watchman.

PSALM 9

Even if there is no news, this is a series of bad news.
Nothing happens, I know, I know.
I suffer neither from asthma, nor from cancer,
nor from toothache,
nor from earache,
nor from anything else.

Yet I suffer, my Lord. And round the clock
my enemies spit contemptuously right in my face.
Even if I see neither their faces nor their saliva,
they spit right (and wrong) in my face.
And yet, in my opinion,
they cannot see either my face or anything else –
not even my armpits.
But they do see something and keep on spitting
as if they had too much saliva in their bodies.
They have to get rid of this saliva and they spit right in my face,
right in my right eye; right in my left nostril.

And if I show them great hospitality –
 with the hospitality so characteristic of the people
 who open their house to over 50 guests –
 they spit my meat out in disgust.

Apparently, they are fond of spitting, You know.

You do know their habits,
 don't You, my Lord?

All right: I understand what all this means
 and why they behave like that and not otherwise.
 They must be vegetarians; at least that is what I say to myself.
 And I also say that to them.

I say to them, 'Would you care for my carrots and turnips?'

They shake their heads.

Well, I take all my cucumbers out of my fridge
 and put them on my dinner table.

They put these cucumbers into their mouths and spit them out in disgust.
 And sometimes they spit them right in my left ear.

I am going deaf, my Lord.

Anyway, I am deaf in my left ear.

And my right nostril cannot smell anything.

When I put a few onions right under my nose,
 my right nostril does not feel them.

This does not matter, my Lord:

I can live with one nostril only.

And I can enjoy Your life with this nostril of mine.

I am blind, You know.

But I refuse to let my disability prevent me from doing
 what You want me to do.

PSALM 10

My God, my Lord!

My Good God, my Bad Lord!

I know you cannot hear me.
 Whatever you say on the subject, I know you cannot hear me.
 I am Your subject and You understand
 neither my subjectivity
 nor my objectivity,
 alias my enemies, my friends and my worries.

You can neither hear nor answer me.
 Yet I pray, yet I pray day and night.
 To no avail or just to NO.
 I do not know.
 You know everything
 and you must know what all these noes and avails
 might mean in the context of my life, of Your subject's life.
 But, in spite of everything and every prayer,
 I seem to be Your *object* rather than your *subject*.

Over the last five years – my five-year plan of sorts –
 I have become an object of ridicule among Your angels,
 alias Your true and only subjects.
 Unto thine own self be true, as You say.
 And what if Your angels obey this command of Yours?
 They may become *fallen* angels, You know.

Well, let us drop the subject or the subjects.
 Actually I am not sure I am true unto my own self.
 But I am sure I am true unto *Your* own self or *Your* other self –
 Your archangels, for instance.
 Yes, I am even true to Your archangels
 but this faithfulness of mine is to no purpose,
 if You see what I mean.
 You see everything and You created Leviathan,
 according to the Scriptures.
 You are perhaps this Leviathan Yourself.
 Who knows, who knows.
 I do not: I am always frank with You.

Anyway, I am not the Leviathan they speak about
 in the Scriptures and elsewhere.
 Nor am I a worm about which a Russian poet speaks in one of his poems.
 In *my* poems I speak of You and only of You,
 for there is no other subject in the world.
 It is a curious paradox that there are many subjects, to wit:
 Your subjects about whom You do not care.
 And there is only *one* Subject,
 namely You:
 my God, my Lord and my Warlord.

I cannot sleep, You know.
 I took one sleeping pill one hour ago.
 I took a second sleeping pill half-an-hour ago.
 They do not work, You know.
 I hope You know they do not work, these lazy bastards.
 You might think, however, that they do work
 because they are also Your creation and belong to this world of ours,
 Yours and mine.

It is not true: for once, You are mistaken.
 They do not work and I am spending
 another sleepless night.
 Please, do something about it my Lord, my God, my iPod.

PSALM 11

My Lord, my God and my Lord!
 Can You hear me? Or Thou.
 Can Thou?
 Of course You can. We always say,
 ‘Yes, we can! Yes, we can!’
 But we *cannot*, You know.
 Of course You know we cannot.
 And if we can, it is thanks to You that we can do something.
 Not much.

Thanks to You we were born;
 thanks to You we shall die.
 That is what You call 'nothing but the Truth'.
 And You are right, as usual; as usual.
 Well, I am talking to You today just to say
 they do not understand what I say.
 Can You hear me?

Listen, listen, o list!
 I am the laughing stock of them
 and also of other them.
 I am the laughing stock of everybody, if You see what I mean.
 All right, I accept whatever happens to me
 because my misery originates in Your bounty.
 So I just get down on my knees and pray.
 And then I lie down and go on praying
 because one can pray under any circumstances.
 In other words, nothing can prevent you from praying.

I am not meaning You, this time; for once.
 Of course You do not have to pray
 because that would amount to what they call the 'sin of pride'.
 Why should You pray to Yourself?
 You should not.

Of course I am not supposed to tell You what You should do
 and what You should not.
 It is up to You to decide, as usual.
 But I must tell You I cry a lot and my tears fall on the Earth.
 This Earth is Yours,
 along with all other Earths and universes.
 So I cry because I know I am worse than any criminal.
 I have not killed anyone ever since my birth.
 But I know I am worse than a serial killer;
 or a soap-opera killer.

Well, I am worse than anyone

and that is why I am blessed like everything.

Exceptionally I am as fit as a fiddle.

This afternoon.

Why?

Because I leapt out of bed bright-eyed and bushy-tailed.

Believe it or not.

PSALM 12

My God, my Lord, my Thou.

My Everything and Everybody.

I do not know how to address You or Thou.

Apparently You like to be addressed as 'Almighty' or 'Sir' or 'Mr God'.

They say what they wish;

it is my neighbour who talks like that.

And I cannot stop him because I love him.

I have no alternative but to love him and so I have to accept whatever his says.

And he says we should address you as 'Sir'

because we live today and yesterday there was another world.

In that world of theirs they said, 'Thou', 'All', 'Nothing',

'Niet, niet, niet, niet'.

That is what they call 'negative theology' or 'philosophy'.

We are supposed to be positive and so we say,

'You are wrong.

'It is true that Your Son died on the Cross.

'As for ourselves, we go to beaches and expose our bodies to the sun.

'And also to the moon – to *anything*, to be exact.

'We go to beaches and make loves and sleep with our neighbours

'and also with our *distant* neighbours.'

We are neighbours, all of us. Don't You think?

Don't Thou thinkst?

It is not nothing, is it?

We are made in Your image

and this image is brimful of computer-generated imagery.

But I am sad, my Lord;

and I cannot hide from You the fact
 I am sad and almost dead.
 And I do not see why I should hide from You
 this state of mind of mine.

So I do not hide it; and You listen to it.
 And You also see it, if I am not mistaken.
 You see my state of mind.
 You see a loaf of bread and realise that bread cannot make one happy.
 And I am the one, You know.
 So I need butter and also circuses.
 Where are they?

Of course I can see my neighbours and their lives;
 and I can say to myself these lives of theirs are
 circuses in their own right.
 And I am certainly right. So what?
 Am I happy? I am not.
 And what about the butter?

PSALM 13

Dear, dear, dear Lord!
 Of course I am poor and cannot make ends meet.
 They never meet, You know.
 No ends of mine ever meet.
 It is better this way, perhaps, perhaps.
 I think I am not only poor in my everyday life.
 I am also poor in the domain of the spirit
 and I hope You like *that* at least.

One of my thoughts does not meet
 another thought of mine.
 I can see the end of one of my thoughts
 and the beginning is also there, somewhere,
 not far from the end.
 But the beginning of the other thought of mine
 does not meet the end of the first one;

of the one that precedes it in time and also in space.
 So I must admit that even my beginnings do not meet my ends.
 I therefore cannot say, 'In my end is my beginning.'
 Nor can I say, 'In my beginning is my end.'
 Nevertheless, I would like to make ends meet, my Lord and God.

I mean there are two ends
 and these ends are not related to my thoughts.
 I can follow one thought of mine from beginning to end,
 but this end of mine – this end belongs to my thought –
 is isolated, so to speak,
 because it meets neither the end
 nor the beginning of another thought of mine.

All right, my spirits are poor; so are my thoughts.
 So I shall not go through needles
 because I am poor in every sense of the term.
 I shall go straight to Paradise:
 I am not even exposed to the sin of pride.
 (I am not Dante, You know.)
 So I shall not have to stay in Purgatory, not for a second.
 I shall go to Paradise and stay there forever,
 if You allow me to do so.

Please, allow me to stay in Paradise,
 my God and my Lord
 and my Everything
 and my Everybody!
 With careful training, a man will obey its master completely.
 That is the maxim I learnt in my babyhood.
 So I have always obeyed You,
 You, You and only You.
 Because You are my Master and My Lord.
 And also My God, You know.
 And my Good.

You know everything, my Lord.
 You know even more – more than everything.
 And more than everybody, mind You.
 I know You know some bodies no one knows.
 Not even your angels and archangels know them.
 But You know them and that is why You are our Lord.

First and foremost You are *my* Lord, my God.
 I am a worm and You are warm –
 that is one of the differences one may notice when looking at us.
 So You are warm-hearted;
 and even hot-hearted, if You allow me to say so.

So You understand my predicament.
 You understand every predicament and even more than
 all predicaments put together.
 You see other predicaments beyond those predicaments.
 There are only predicaments in the world,
 predicaments and impediments.
 Even humans know that, You know.
 There are also discomfitures, a lot of them. But, as I pointed out,
 there are also comfort zones and that is what counts after all
 – after what I have been through ever since my birth
 and a series of my birthdays.

Of course I know there are remedies.
 I cannot say there are lots of them,
 but there are *some* remedies
 and the best of them is forgiveness.
 I mean, I beg forgiveness all the time,
 even when I have a clear conscience.

Of course my conscience – or anyone's conscience, for that matter –
 is never really clear.
 It is either unreal clear or downright unclear.
 Never mind.
 I beg forgiveness and that is what counts.

For instance, I see a serial killer.

At once I beg his forgiveness.

Why?

You know why because You know the whys and the wherefores –
all of them.

And even beyond them, all of them.

I say to myself and to You he has killed so many people
because I am an inveterate sinner.

I am a veteran of the World Sin Department.

I am as guilty as sin.

I am the guilty party, the only one perhaps.

Forgive me, my Lord.

You know how to forgive and forget.

And Your forgiveness goes beyond all my sins.

PSALM 15

I do not like suicides, my Lord.

And I cannot bear those who commit them.

There are many of them, as You know; and I do not like them.

Of course I know they are also Your creations,
but they are unworthy of You, my Lord.

And I hope You know that as well as I do.

I do not mean You made a mistake when You hit upon the idea
of bestowing the gift of life upon them.

No, of course not.

But they have forgotten You, my Lord.

One wonders how one can forget You.

Indeed this is nothing short of a miracle.

But I do not like this kind of miracles, my Lord; and I hope I am right.

Anyway, I do not like suicides.

Some swallow sleeping pills, others wield revolvers.

I do not condemn them as others do habitually and traditionally.

These others say life was given to us
and so we are not supposed to take it.

I know that in every friendship there has to be some give-and-take.

And others know that as well.

So they say to themselves, 'God gave us life
and we take this life in our hands.

That's what we call "free will".

Our life is in our hands and we take our life.'

These people think they are God's friends.

Give-and-take, take-and-give.

I do not think so.

And I do not like these people, my Lord.

I cannot bring myself to like them, whatever I may say to myself;
and do to myself.

I cannot bear these people.

Forgive me for this act of intolerance, my Lord!

Life is so beautiful.

Why should they commit suicide?

PSALM 16

O God, my Lord!

I am speaking to You

because You are the only listener I know of.

You are the only *real* listener.

(And the only *real speaker* of course.)

I turn to You because there is no one else to turn to.

I turn to You and speak to You because You are real;

You are as real as reality itself.

Actually You *are* reality Itself,

Himself,

Herself and

What Not.

But You are not Not, whatever they say.

They say You are neither this nor that.
 And I say You are both This and That.
 And also Thi and Tho and Mo and Pru and Pro and Con and On;
 and so on.

You are the only Being; the only *Sein* and Mine.
 And I talk to You because I have many enemies.
 Of course I would talk to You even if I had no enemies,
 if I had only friends and no one but friends.
 But You are the biggest friend of mine;
 in other words, You are much bigger than anybody else.

So I am talking to You right now.
 What am I saying to You?
 I am saying that my enemies poison me round the clock.
 They pick up this clock and smear poison all over it.
 It is my clock, my God.
 But it is also Your clock and so I ask You
 to do something about it.
 Remove this poison from our clock and my life.
 And Your own life, if You please,
 for Your life is my life and vice versa.
 If I were You, I would remove everything from our lives
 save life itself.

PSALM 17

What is harmony, my Lord?
 When I ask this question, I seem to know the answer.
 But when I ask it again and again,
 I realise I do not know anything.

Of course I realise You are the best representative of harmony on Earth
 and in Heaven.

So it is probably enough to say, 'My Lord' to enjoy this harmony
 to the utmost.

I say, 'My Lord, my Lord, my Lord
 'and God

‘and God
 ‘and Lord,’
 and I enjoy this harmony, for this harmony is very harmonious.

Of course I realise I hear a sort of English harmony
 because I have no Hebrew.
 Nor do I speak Yiddish.
 I am a Jew, my Lord, but I do not know our languages.

I do know the language of humanity.
 Isn’t that enough, my Lord and God and *Seigneur*,
 as they say in French?

I think it is enough;
 and I hope I am right for once.
 So what is harmony? Being right? For once?
 You extend this ‘once’ beyond the end of the road
 and you get what they call ‘universal harmony’.
 Am I right, my Lord?
 For once?
 For twice?

PSALM 18

My Lord!
 I wish to know if I have to say anything
 before talking to You.
 Should I say ‘my Lord’ or ‘my God’?
 What *should* I say?
 Nothing perhaps. That is what I think.

You know I am talking to You.
 To whom could I talk? To my neighbours?
 All right, I shall try to talk to them, but I know for sure
 they will turn their backs on me as if I were asking for help.
 They always think I need their help
 and so they turn their backs on me even when I stay at home
 and do not go anywhere.

I see their backs out of my window and say to myself,
 ‘Once again they’re turning their backs on me and my words.’
 They have many backs and they turn all of them on my tales of woe.

So I have no alternative but to talk to You.
 In the first place, You do not turn Your back on me,
 as far as I can tell.

I am not even sure You have a back and a chest.

So what *could* you turn on me?
 Anyway, I can see Your eyes and Your ears.
 So You can hear me, as far as I know.

You know, I am fond of women.
 They call it ‘libido’ and I do not call it at all
 because I do not want to think about it.
 Suppose you say to yourself, ‘Legs, breasts, big, slender,’
 and you see what you are talking about.
 What is more, you *think* about it.
 And this kind of thought destroys you completely.

Of course I am not talking about You,
 for once.
 It is my body I have destroyed through these thoughts, images,
 longings and yearnings.
 What am I supposed to do, my Lord?
 My enemies seem to have calmed down.
 They were furious at first but I think they have calmed down a bit now.
 But I am my own enemy, my Lord.
 And I cannot calm down,
 even if I think neither about their legs nor about their breasts.

I cannot calm down.
 Could You please try and calm my libido
 by rocking it back and forth?

PSALM 19

My, my, my. Is that what they say?

Yes, they say, 'My, oh, my, what have we here?'

Well, you have the Almighty Who is here;
and everywhere, to tell the truth.

So it is pointless to ask about *His* whereabouts
because He is *everywhere*, as Spinoza or someone else put it.

He is in this bush, for instance.

If you have a garden, you must have a few bushes
and even a tree.

It does not matter what kind of tree you have in your garden.
What matters is your garden; and also the bush I am talking about.

And if you look carefully at this bush,
you will see God.

If you focus all your attention on this bush,
you will see God.

And this God of ours will talk to you,
otherwise it is pointless to see Him.

All right, you see Him. So what?

You say to Him, 'My, my, my.'

All right, you do not know God's name because His name is secret.

It is a secret we are dealing with, you know.
And we are not supposed to divulge this secret.
And our silence is all the more understandable
since we do not know this secret.

The best way to keep a secret is not to know what this is all about.

We know nothing about You, my-my-my.

And I, for one, do not mean to pry. (I mean to *pray*.)

So I do not ask Who You are and Where You are.

I just want to know what I could do with this life of mine;
and Yours of course.

Yes, it is You Who gave me this life some time ago.

What could I do with this gift of Yours?

Of Thouest?

The Japanese are shy and find it difficult

to convey their feelings of affection and thanks through words.

(I am quoting a Japanese book, You know. Thy knowest.)

They do this – and other things – through gifts.

If you give a box of matches to a man or a woman,
this gift of yours means they can go on smoking till doomsday.

I do not smoke. But I know You gave me life;
at some point.

What could I do with it?

You do not answer questions;

You just give lives.

That is why we are facing a population explosion.

PSALM 20

God, God, God, God.

Good, Good, Good, Good.

I am on the brink of this and that.

For some time I have been on the brink
and I do not know what to do with this brink or drink.

Yes and no, I do not know.

You *must* know what I should do with all this and that.

You must, You must, otherwise You are neither God nor the Almighty.

Yes, You are God and Good, and also *Gut*,

for You speak every language one can think of.

This time I am thinking about the German language.

You speak it, don 't You?

You might even *write* in German.

You are perhaps Heidegger or Nietzsche.

So You say from time to time, 'I am dead, I am deaf.'

Yes, You *are* deaf.

I talk to You for hours on end, for hours without end;
and You do not hear me.

And if You do, You do not do anything
to alleviate my pain and suffering.

So I have to go to the nearest chemist's
 where I can buy a few sleeping tablets and vitamin tablets.
 Apparently these tablets are poisonous.
 Everything is a poison in disguise.
 So is everyone except You.

You are not in disguise.
 You are majestic and beautiful.
 I have looked at you for seven years.
 There is an American movie that talks to us about seven years.
 It is a talkie, You know.
 But I am talking about something else.
 Seven years ago I saw the Blessed Virgin
 and ever since I have been thinking about You, day and night.

PSALM 21

My Lord, my God, my Not.
 I think the word '*Not*' means 'need' in German.
 But I am not quite sure.
 Never mind. I wish to ask You, whoever or whatever You are.
 Why? Why? Why?
Warum? Warum? Warum?
 Why do I have to suffer?

I know life is a gift. And life itself realises it is a gift.
 And it says so all the time.
 Whenever you wish to commit suicide, life says to you,
 'I'm a gift, you know. And I'm very beautiful.
 'Can't you see my beauty?
 'Every tree you look at is beautiful.
 'So is every blade of grass or every shoulder blade.
 'All of them are beautiful and bountiful.
 'I'm your bountiful benefactor.'

So what? So what? So what, my Lord?
 'Bountiful' is Your word; so is 'beautiful'.
 It is sometimes difficult to find exactly the right word

to express what you want to say.
 But You say 'Bountiful' and everybody smiles and thanks You for Your bounty.
 You say 'Beautiful' and the same people have tears of happiness in their eyes.
 Even if You do not say anything,
 people think our life is beautiful.
 They buy roses and smell them.
 And they smile; and then they die.
 Beautiful, isn't it?

My God, tell me if You are God or Not.
 Tell me if I am a man or a nem.

PSALM 22

My God, I think I am a river.
 I am flowing and I have no idea what all this means
 or does not mean.
 There are no flows, no winters, no summers.
 There is nothing except You and Your kindness, Your humanism.
 Or Your Godinism.
 I can rely on You, can't I?
 I can trust You, can't I?

My enemies are right here; or right there.
 Actually their whereabouts do not matter.
 They are somewhere, You know.
 Enemies are always somewhere; or everywhere, as the case may be.
 And the case is always there; so are my enemies.
 They spy on me and beat me viciously.
 They beat me with their words and swords.
 And if they have no swords, which might happen in this day and age,
 they just beat me and that is what happens, I can assure You.
 And even if it does not happen,
 it *can* happen at any moment.

And if it can happen, it does happen.
 So I am beaten viciously round the clock.
 You think that only dogs are beaten with sticks.

You are mistaken, my Lord.
 I am beaten to death with sticks and other things.
 There are many other things and I am beaten with those or these things.
 I am dead. I am dead.

I hope I shall rise from my death in a few days' time.
 I do not know anything about other deaths or the dead.
 They may rise or may not rise at all; or fall.
 I am not the Messiah and so cannot raise everybody from everyone's tomb.
 I can *rise*; I cannot *raise*.
 I can. I cannot.
 Flowing, doing, undoing.

PSALM 23

My Lord!
 I know I have to get down on my knees
 whenever I can do it.
 If course I kneel in front of any altar and pray.
 I mean, whenever I see an altar, even if it is an ugly altar,
 I kneel in front of it and pray.
 I also kneel in front of those who insult me
 and that is how I follow your teaching to the letter.

 I do not know which letter of yours says I should kneel in front of
 ruffians, thugs and yobs,
 but I do not attach too much importance to letters.
 What does the letter Q mean, for instance?
 I think life is much more important than letters.
 So I just kneel whenever there is enough room for this rite of mine.

 A yob tells me, 'Go to hell', but instead of going to hell
 I kneel and ask him to forgive me.
 If a ruffian says, 'Go to hell and beyond all hells,'
 I do not go anywhere.
 Once again I kneel and wait for another insult.
 That is how one gets a ticket to Paradise, apparently.

I hope I shall be able to get to Paradise on my knees.
 What counts is the speed of one's internal light.
 And this light of ours has nothing to do with Einstein.
 This light is Yours and no relativity will ever detach it from You.
 You are not *relative*, my Lord.
 You are *Absolute*.
 And the whereabouts of Your bounty are always the same,
 whatever the speed we reach in the course of our journey to the Hereafter.

The speed of light is my speed, my God.
 And in spite of this speed of mine You grow neither older nor younger.
 You are young at heart, at body and at soul.
 You are also wise at heart, at mind and at reason.
 I kneel in front of Your heart and reason.
 And if You say, 'Go to hell,' I will go to it at once.
 Give me a break, my Lord.

PSALM 24

Someone said that if You were not,
 one would have to create you –
 out of nothing perhaps.
 I do not know exactly whether they intend to create You out of nothing
 or in their own image, which would be easier, I suppose.
 Of course such an abominable thought has never crossed
 my mind, my heart, let alone my soul.

It is as if they told me, 'You don't exist, but we'd better create you
 because you're kind and have a lot of money.'
 What would You say to them?
 What would *I* say to them?
 It is easy to send everybody to Hell or even further off,
 as the Russians say.

No, I would not send them to Hell.
 I would say to them, 'Leave me alone.
 'And if you wish to help me in some way or other,
 'don't you ever try to create me in your own image.

‘God forbid!

‘Anyway, I forbid you to do so.

‘Please feel free to create your own children in your numerous images.

‘As ye sow, so shall ye reap.

‘But don’t you ever dare tamper either with God or your disobedient servant.’

One might think I have no enemies, my Lord.

Well, everyone has enemies, as far as I know,
otherwise the word ‘enemy’ would not so much as exist.

At some point it did not, I suppose,
and so we came up with the idea of giving a name to this idea.

‘What’s the bright idea?’ You ask me and others.

Being surrounded by enemies; on every side.

Such ideas and arguments always get my adrenalin going.

What would we do without them, my Lord?

Without our enemies, I mean?

What would you do without Satan?

To whose care would You have entrusted Job?

PSALM 25

My Lord, tell me if I am or not.

I know if I say, ‘My Lord,’ I am.

If I say something, I am, in other words.

No, it is not true; and there are no other words, my Lord.

There are only Your words, my Lord,
and I know if I say these words of Yours,
I am and am.

I am doubly am, so to speak.

And sometimes one has to be triply am to am, You know.

But suppose the words I attribute to Your wisdom and eternity
are not Your words.

Suppose these words are someone else’s;
not necessarily Satan’s, mind You.

Usually people say, ‘If this is not our God, this is Satan.

‘And Satan is not ours.’

All right, they mean there is nothing else in the world.

And what about us and me and others, my Lord?

If we are, we are either Yours or Satan’s.

I, for one, am not a child of what they call the Devil or Satan.

No, I know whose child I am and my parents do not look like Satan.

Nor do they look like the Devil, I can assure You.

What *do* they look like?

You may ask me.

Well, they look like human beings.

And I do not think I have to explain to you what human beings look like
and what they are made of.

They are made in Your image

so You just have to look at Yourself in a mirror

to know what we all look like.

And what about our brains?

They must look like Your brain, my Lord.

The same goes for our thoughts: like brain like thoughts.

So I cannot help thinking Your thoughts

because I cannot think otherwise.

And I ask myself whether I am or not.

PSALM 26

All right, my Lord. Suppose I am. So what?

All right, all right. I say, ‘My Lord,’ and that means I am.

Whoever says ‘My Lord’

is or has been or will be forever and ever.

All right, I say it. I say, ‘My Lord,’ and I can repeat it as often
as You wish.

But what does that mean?

I mean, I am, and I am probably am, am, am, am, am.

So what? What of it?

I drink so I am. I smoke so I am. I sin so I am.

I am so I sin.
 What is the meaning of all this, my Lord?
 And what is the meaning of the song I learnt in my childhood?

This song speaks of a little star
 that twinkles and twinkles and twinkles.
 And I am supposed to wonder what this little star is and why it twinkles
 instead of keeping calm and leaving children alone.
 Children sing about this little star,
 which is as big as Jupiter, I suppose,
 and their teachers tell them off for singing out of tune.

What is it, my Lord?
 Why should we sing about little stars?
 Why should we sing in tune instead of going somewhere
 and getting lost?
 They tell us, 'Get lost!'
 We cannot.
 We cannot.

PSALM 27

Multimillionaires and multinationals think
 they are allowed to ridicule us
 and trample all over our bodies, our sinews, our veins.
 They think they can swim in our blood and get away with it.
 They walk towards our blood, dive in and swim to the other side.
 They know the whereabouts of the other side;
 we do not.
 We know neither our beginnings nor our ends.
 It is a well-known fact that your torturer knows you better:
 you cannot see your back, for instance;
 unless you surround yourself with mirrors.
 Your torturer looks at your back, cracks his whip, takes aim
 and lands his whip on the spot he has just chosen
 to make you suffer and scream.

You scream and suffer;
your torturer cracks his whip.

You should say to him
before the blow leaves another pool of blood around your feet,
‘Last night God told me, “You’re my Son. I begot you last week.”’
If you impart this truth to them,
they will think twice before ordering your punishment
and pushing the torturer towards your back.

It is no easy task to speak to God Zhivago.
(‘*Zhivago*’ means ‘living’ in Russian.)
Nor is it easy to beat His Son.
So restrain your ambitions and be more realistic.

Do you really need so much money?
We are ridiculously underpaid, especially as the work is so dangerous.
We are ill, you know.
If you do not believe us, you can ask Our God
whether we are ill or not.
He shall give you a piece of His mind.
He knows that our numerous illnesses have been brought on
by money worries and overwork.
Here are our claims and demands: We should like to work off stress
by running for at least half an hour every day.

PSALM 28

Of course when I speak of whips and pools of blood,
I do so metaphorically.
Am I not allowed to speak metaphorically, my Lord?
From time to time?

Of course, whenever I say, ‘My Lord,’
I mean that literally, otherwise there is no point in praying.
Why should one pray metaphorically, I wonder?
Does this make any sense?
Not at all, in my opinion.

When I pray to you, I do so literally,
 meaning every word I utter.
 And every word I utter as I address you, my Lord,
 means exactly what it says.

Of course I am quite aware of the fact
 that I used the word 'whip' in one of my psalms.
 I also touched upon a pool of blood
 and the back on which the aforementioned whip
 must have left a few scarlet traces.

So what, my Lord?
 Doesn't King Lear say 'The whip' as he looks at his fool?
 And he is prepared to use this whip if the fool goes too far.
 But the latter does not go too far:
 he knows exactly where he should stop.
 That is why he is a *professional* fool,
 not an *amateur* one.

The phrase 'born again' is used metaphorically
 to mean that someone has suddenly become very religious.
 But why should I become religious,
 all of a sudden?
 As God is my witness I have always believed in God.
 Not *metaphorically*, mind you.
 And I am *literally* born again
 when I set about writing a psalm.

I stay in God's womb and suddenly I am *literally* overwhelmed
 by a surge of excitement.
 I get out of the womb and write a psalm.

As for billionaires,
 they really and literally deserve a whip.
 Do You know what they do? They buy paintings at auctions
 and then resell them at a vast profit to collectors.

The whip!

PSALM 29

My Lord! Why are You taking care of me?
 I am not as big as any ocean, however small and foul.
 Nor am I as beautiful as nature.
 But You will never let me down, my Lord.
 At least I ask You to take care of me and think of my welfare
 all round the clock, as I say.

I often say 'round the clock' because many clocks are round
 and time is round too,
 although it may be square sometimes.
 Of course if we declare time is round,
 we think about the doctrine of eternal recurrence,
 hoping we shall come back and prosper on Earth.

But, according to my thoughts, time is just the mud;
 and we are like boats, You know.
 We might think we cross both oceans and seas,
 but we are actually in the mud.
 And several years ago my boat settled into this mud
 at a 35 degree angle.

I have no idea why I think in terms of this angle.
 There are so many angles, my Lord;
 and so many terms.
 Why do I visualise this angle and not anything else?
 Anyway, it does not really matter.

Suppose I settle into this mud at a 50 degree angle.
 What difference would that make?
 None, none, none.
 So I prefer the predicament I found myself in
 several years ago when, for some obscure reason,
 I settled into time at a 35 degree angle.

I am getting used to it.
 I might say I settled into eternity;
 at the same angle.
 Or into immortality.

PSALM 30

O Lord, how many are my foes!
 Their number has increased dramatically,
 significantly,
 alarmingly.

We need to increase public awareness of the disease,
 You and I.

But You do not help me and so public awareness
 goes on decreasing.

I am aware of both: their unawareness of the disease
 and the increase of the aforementioned disease.

But no one listens to my speeches and shouts for help.

Nor do *You* listen to them despite Your well-known magnanimity
 and tender-heartedness;
 and Your awareness of the disease.

Of course You are much wiser than I am
 and You seem to forget that Your omnipotence
 protects from any foe, be he Devil Himself or any devil incarnate.
 I am unprotected against predators.

My Lord! You are always one to lend a sympathetic ear
 if I have problems.

Please lend me this ear once again;
 or any other ear.

You must have a multitude of ears, according to Buddhists and Hindus;
 and a multitude of eyes and tongues.

According to Ramakrishna, there is only one God in the universe;
 and this God is You of course.

One God with many ears, eyes, arms and heads.
 That is what one of Your ears and brains must hear right now.

Do you know how they react to my sermons?
 ‘Our main aim is to increase sales by 12% this year,’ they say.
 ‘And what about ecology?’ I ask them.
 ‘You’re destroying our planet,’ I add.
 ‘Studies show,’ they point out,
 ‘that if a working environment is pleasant, productivity increases.’

My Lord and Bosom Friend,
 I implore you to make their lives and working environment Hell.

PSALM 31

You make what You want, Your Majesty or My Lord.
 You do-it-Yourself and no one else can do it as You do it and that
 and whatever comes into Your head.

I do not know what I am saying.
 But You must know all this: my hesitation, my despair, my Angst.
 One of my enemies rejoices in his strength
 and in the victories You give him.
 Yes, he is victorious, if You must know.
 I am Othello, in a way;
 in this way at least.
 My body is on the floor and he puts his foot on my head
 and even on my neck and my stomach.
 ‘Here is the author of a few psalms,’ he says sniggering.
 By the way, he spends half the time sniggering at the clothes I am wearing.
 And what about the other half?
 He spends it sniggering at my thoughts.

What am I to do, my Lord?
 I try not to think any more; he sniggers at my stupidity.
 I strip down to my underwear; for my medical examination, for instance.
 He sniggers at my underwear and also at the doctors
 who take blood and urine specimens for analysis.
My blood and *my* urine, mind you.
 Whenever they take *his* blood and urine, he does not snigger.

He spends a sleepless night as he waits for the results of the tests.

O my God! I cry out by day and by night
and by midnight;
and by midday, You know.
You do not answer.
Where are You?

You know, I got an email the other day.
‘Where are you?’
That is how this email began.
And then they asked me for three thousand euros.

Well, I am neither a crook nor a swindler.
Nor am I a hacker.
But I am asking you for five thousands euros.
And if You have only dollars, I shall go to a bureau de change.

PSALM 32

Dear Lord, my heart is full.
It is not half-full or half-empty: my heart is not a bottle of wine.
I do not like halves, you know.
Some of my enemies speak about half-life and I used to listen to them.
I thought they were speaking about Dante and his masterpiece.
Now I know they talk about the length of time
needed for the radioactivity of a radioactive substance to be reduced by half.
They talk about Fukushima and Chernobyl, in other words.

Nor do I favour what they poetically call ‘half-light’.
All these people have poetry in their souls and hearts.
‘In the dim half-light of evening,’ they say, their eyes half-shut,
‘I was unable to tell whether it was a tree or Mary.’
All right, all right. I, for one, would like to see everything and everybody
in the bright light of day.
And in Paradise, mind you,
for days and lights and nights are different up there,
according to the Book.

Unfortunately I am still down here, on the surface of this planet.
And my heart is full, my Lord.

What is it full of, You may ask?
My heart is full of desire. And my head is full of projects.
May the Lord grant all your requests.
That is what I read in the Book; and the Book never lies.
So I hope You will grant them.

You know what I need, my Lord.
I need a companion in misfortune, among other things.
I need a shoulder to cry on.
Of course I could cry on Your shoulder.
The point is I do not think You have one; or two shoulders.
And yet Michelangelo's frescoes
are classic examples of anthropomorphism.

I do not believe in these frescoes, my Lord.
I believe in You and I am sure You will grant me my requests.
I know You have been inundated with requests for help,
but I am in a class of my own.
To begin with, I need a villa on the Riviera,
otherwise I am not likely to find an appropriate shoulder.

PSALM 33

The law of the Lord is perfect.
According to this law, I am supposed to win.
But where is my victory, my Lord?
You might think I need no victories. I do, my Lord; I can assure You I do.
And I do assure You I can.
I mean, we can, yes, yeah.

You might think I am not fabulously rich or anything,
but I am quite comfortable.
And You *might* think it is much better to have a small cosy room
than a big cold one.
No, my Lord – I can assure you it is much better

to have a big, cosy and warm castle.

To achieve this result, I need a big victory over my enemies.

I am surrounded by them on every side.

They crouch behind my hedge
and spy on me and daily poison my lungs and intestines.
All my projects have been sabotaged.

To each of my enemies I would like to send an SMS – on Your behalf.

‘If you do not leave my Son alone, I will come like a murderer,
‘and you will not know at what time I will come to you.’

I know, my Lord, that You will make them come and fall down at my feet.

Well, I do not think it is advisable at this point.

Why not kill them outright?

We might spare their little ones, though.

Aren’t we full of the milk of human kindness?

But we should chase them away from my apple trees.

PSALM 34

I know, one cannot be victorious every day.

From time to time one has to rest on one’s laurels.

Even You were driven to rest on your laurels on the seventh day,
if my memory serves me right.

Where are my laurels, my Lord?

Your laurels are everywhere: You can rest on the Milky Way,
on black holes, on stardust.

What about me and my head, my body?

My enemies and I declared a ceasefire.

There is no fire either in heaven or in my garden.

If I do see any fire somewhere, I will say tomorrow
this was a deliberate attempt to sabotage the ceasefire.

I will say so on the radio and on television.

For the moment I see neither fires nor laurels.

If there are no laurels, my victory is not complete. What is more,
the future of my children is in doubt because of a lack of money.

To tell the truth, I have no children, my Lord,
so I adopt my thoughts, my flowers, my apples, and call them 'children'.
If I had a few wreaths of laurels, I would call them 'children' too.
Cute, isn't it?

But I am childless, my Lord.
I am afraid You do not understand our psychology, however;
our *human* psychology, I mean.
Of course You understand Your own image
implanted in our bodies and souls.
But what about *our* consciousness and unconscious?

If I had a few laurel wreaths on my bedcover,
I might think I have been victorious all my life.
I need six laurel wreaths so I can rest on them until the Sabbath.
And then I shall rest from my rest.

PSALM 35

My dear Lord! You know to what extent
I appreciate Your life: the one You gave me many years ago.
I suppose You are not surprised at hearing this declaration of mine:
it is perfectly understandable.

When I write my essays and treatises, I constantly say to myself,
'You've got to put the facts into a form that's understandable to everyone.'
You know how stupid Your human beings are
in spite of the fact they were made in Your image.
But they saw this image of Yours in a looking glass,
in a fog, near a bog.
That is why their children are so stupid; let alone themselves.
They cannot beget intelligent people, let alone scholars.
So if I do not put the facts I need to enlarge upon into a plain, down-to-earth form,
no one will ever understand what I write about.

Well, You put the facts of life into such a form that everyone realises

Your life is beautiful.
 I mean, this life of ours – Yours included – is so beautiful
 one can hardly part with it.
 That is why I am so reluctant to die.
 Do You really wish to deprive me of Your lakes, Your pastures,
 Your cows and bulls,
 Your meadows and hills?

I am quite aware that death may come because it *must* come;
 it has *no alternative*, I am afraid.
 Adam's fault, isn't it?

Well, You triumphed over death many years ago.
 Your Son did, actually.
 But aren't You consubstantial with Your Son?
 So You did it too.
 You both achieved a comfortable victory over death.

On the other hand, Your Son's victory was not as comfortable as all that.
 But that is beside the point, isn't it?
 What counts is the victory You won; both of You.
 So why should I die?

PSALM 36

My Lord, O my Lord. Why is the world so beautiful?
 You ought to have created an ugly world
 in which no one would ever have longed to stay forever.
 On the contrary, we would have flown from such a world like birds or airplanes;
 or like rockets.
 We might have flown to another planet,
 another galaxy,
 another singularity or plurality.

But this world of Yours and ours is so beautiful one's heart aches
 and one throws up one's hands in despair.
 Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?
 Had you created a horrific world, we would have said,

‘The world is so absurd we’d better die.’
 And we might have added, ‘The sooner the better.’
 We might also have said, ‘The world is full of suffering.’
 ‘It is more than a vale of tears.’
 ‘It is a vale of sobs, of starving mobs.’
 And once again we would have committed suicide.

Instead, we say, ‘The world is so magnificent.’
 ‘He and she and a lot of its have brought us so much happiness
 ‘over the years and decades.’
 ‘The landscape over there is dotted with the tents of campers and hikers.’
 ‘Every camper and also every hiker are happy.’
 ‘And all of them are sure to die and unsure to live eternally.’
 ‘They’re even unsure to live another day, another hour.’
 ‘A nuclear bomb could wipe the whole country off the map.’
 ‘We’re also afraid of the Chinese.’
 ‘Their numerous progeny are scattered all over the globe.’

PSALM 37

O Lord, my mouth is a grave.
 Whenever this grave of mine opens and stays open,
 nothing comes out of it;
 not a word,
 not a world.

Why can’t I speak, O God?
 Because no one listens to me?
 Only if they listen to you can you utter words.
 Is that it?

And what about You?
 Do You listen to me and my heart?
 All right, I cannot speak even if I make an effort and open my mouth.
 I cannot raise my words from the dead.
 My words are dead; so are my deeds.
 Sometimes I get the feeling all is dead;
 everything and everybody.

Except You Who are my life.

And then my enemies knock at my door and break in,
 for I do not open my doors.
 Nor do I open my windows, You know.
 So they also walk in through my windows.
 And they put their daggers at my throat.
 And they look daggers at me.

There are daggers *everywhere*, my Lord and God.
 One might think they are performing a Shakespeare tragedy.
 There are Macbeths everywhere
 and in front of each of them there is a dagger floating in the air.
 And I am Duncan.

Well, I *am* a king, my Lord.
 I am also *God*.
 You made me in Your image.
 You are unmaking me in Your image.
 God is in the unmaking.

PSALM 38

My God, why is it not?
 Whatever is is ridiculous and not worth our attention.
 We yearn for what is not and there are only nots we come across
 wherever we direct our steps.

Actually we do not direct them; it is one of our legs
 that guides us towards this goal and other goals.
 One goal is not enough: if you dare accomplish one task,
 you have to accomplish a dozen tasks,
 otherwise nothing will ever work.

All our tasks and urges are intertwined so we do a lot of network
 to get one loaf of bread and two glasses of wine.
 Yet we do not get what we want.

A woman comes to our place and the various houses we own
 for the sake of orgies and other things
 which make us forget that life is awful, unbearable and unliveable.

We ask her to dance for us and our guests.
 She begins to dance, but what she dances is ludicrous
 because she is not stark naked.
 And whenever we point out she is not, she says,
 'I'm not a doll. Only dolls are stark naked.'
 We point out that some dolls wear dresses and historical costumes.

She says, 'What do you mean?
 'What historical costumes you are talking about?'

We are weary of these talks and notes, my Lord.
 Whatever we desire comes to nothing.
 They say, 'You have to pay.'
 We pay thousand dollars, two thousand dollars or euros.

A woman comes and executes a pirouette.

So what?
 We pay five thousand dollars.
 She executes two pirouettes.

Is that Your life, my Lord?
 A few pirouettes?
 Seven thousand dollars?

A glass of beer?
 A glass of beer.

PSALM 39

What is life, my Lord?
 Of course I do not need any *theoretical* knowledge of life.
 I need a *practical* one, a *utilitarian* one.

I do this or that because the result of my action is positive.
 Brilliant, magnificent, marvellous and wonderful.
 What is more, my action is universal so it concerns many people –
 the entire world population, to be exact.

I act and every man and woman become a millionaire, a billionaire.

That is what they call a 'utilitarian approach'.

And what about other approaches?

Is it not better to withdraw from life?

Shouldn't we become Buddhists, Gnostics, and So On?

All right, we become all of them.

Now we keep life at bay and no desires of ours or anybody else's

tarnish our glory.

We have no desires whatsoever.

We are saints, even if we do not live in deserts, sucking stones.

No, we listen to the *Rolling Stones* and there are only Rolling Tens around us;

instead of Roaring Twenties.

They all roll, roar and oa-oa-oa-oa-oa.

We are in the midst of life, at the very core of it.

And we realise that life is just life;

and God.

There are two things or subjects or objects:

life and God.

God creates life and life reciprocates.

So you say, 'The former,'

and the former says 'The latter'.

You point to a distant star saying, 'The former.'

And the star says, 'The latter' or 'The later', or just

'Later, later, later, later, later on.'

PSALM 40

Lord, you have offered me this glass of wine, this sleepless night

and the day I know nothing about.

Do I really have to know anything about the days to come?

Let them come for others;

I shall live elsewhere, beyond days and nights.

Have you offered me this woman?

She came two days ago.
 Why did she come?
 Meeting this woman was a bitter disappointment to me
 and probably to my neighbours.
 They might have wondered what this woman was doing in my garden.
 She is ugly and stupid.
 She does not understand the first thing about my life and destiny.

You have offered me this glass of wine.
 In one swift go, I have just drunk it down to the dregs.
 Could You please offer me another glass of wine?
 In one swift go, in two swift goes.

I go, I go, I go, my Lord.
 Of course I cannot know where I am going
 because Your ways are unfathomable.
 So are *my* ways, by the way. So are *any* ways, I suppose.
 Is this way fathomable?
 The one I can see in the distance?
 I, for one, cannot fathom it.

It must be one of Your ways, my Lord.
 All ways are Yours.
 The way of all flesh, among other ways, flesh and blood.

We all go this way and that,
 and that way is no better than this way,
 whatever they say about ways and days; and sleepless nights.

I have a delightful inheritance.
 Even at night my heart instructs me and I drink another glass;
 to the dregs.
 Just another divine providence.

PSALM 41

I understand neither the whys nor the whats.
 I am not asking You to instruct me, giving me a lesson.

I have had so many lessons, my Lord.

What are they for?

They are just lessons, nothing more; I need more and more.

All will be well. It is something I have in my memory.

It comes from something but I have no idea what it comes from.

From some poem or other.

I hope it does not come from T. S. Eliot.

Perhaps it does come from him; yet I do not like this poet.

What does it matter where it comes from!

It comes from You, my Lord,

for everything comes from You and goes to You as well.

Even these words of mine go to You

and I say I have just listened to Mahler's *Ninth*.

Am I reconciled to the world?

No psalm can reconcile me to it; nothing at all except music.

Why did You create music, my Lord?

Is it Your world, the other world?

The Hereafter?

It is both the here and the after; and also the before.

I have always heard this music, even before my birthday.

My mother could not listen to this symphony

because it was unavailable in the days of Stalin

and his successors.

I heard it; I had even heard it before my birth.

That is why I was born perhaps.

Why should one be born?

Because one can hear Bach's *Art of the Fugue*

and Mozart's *Requiem*.

One can die before being born: one hears them everywhere.

Anyway, one can die peacefully.

PSALM 42

I do not need my past, my Lord.
 Let them have their past. Let humanity have their
 Napoleons and Waterloos.
 I do not need anything except this moment when I can say what I think.

Actually I do not think any more; I just say what I say.
 No one hears me and I can say whatever crosses my mind.
 This thought of mine goes through my mind
 and I can even follow its itinerary.

There are bones inside my brain
 and this thought of mine knocks against these bones.
 Whenever it does, I hear my thought and also other thoughts of mine.
 There is a network of thoughts based on associations, I suppose.
 This supposition also knocks against a bone
 and stops in the middle of nowhere.
 Then it takes the road which skirts my brain instead of going through it.

This thought is not mine any more;
 it floats around my room and if I open the window,
 my thought will fly away.

I open the window and fly off, away, into a cluster of stars.
 I am just a thought and a star is a spade.
 You call a spade a star and it works.
 Everything works if you say to yourself, 'It works.'

But these words should not knock against the bones of *your* brain.
 They should target the bones of *God*.
 Then everything will work to perfection,
 to your satisfaction.
 Everything will resound in the universe.

PSALM 43

I am probably unknown.
 And if I say, 'My Lord,' I am not sure this Lord is mine.

I even doubt the existence of any lords.
 There are lords called Mountbatten,
 but I would not be surprised if they told me
 there are no other lords.

‘Yes,’ they say nodding their heads and the rests of their bodies.

‘There are only Mountbattens.

‘There are also mountains and batons.

‘But there are no other lords *one* can think of.’

All right, you are not *one*; you are not *two* either.
 You have no idea how to set about changing a tyre on your car;
 or on any other car, for that matter.

So you stay at home, in your room.
 And you ask yourselves how many lords there are in the world
 and outside it;
 in the Hereafter and also in the Thereafter.

One lord must have created the stars you see overhead,
 providing you take the trouble to raise your glance and head and hair.
 You see the stars and also the lord who created them just after the Big Bang.
 Right after the Big and before the Bang.

Another lord created both your mother and father.
 That is why you can look at the stars and think about lords.
 You can even say, ‘My Lords, keep me safe.
 ‘I am unsafe, I am unwell.
 ‘Well, well, well, my Lords.
 ‘Well, well, well.’

PSALM 44

There is only one God.
 You can rummage through all your chests of drawers,
 looking for another god or other gods.
 You are not likely to find them anywhere.

Not in one of your drawers anyway.

All right, you may look for *them* or *it* in your nooks, crannies
and even in nunneries.

You are sure to find several Ophelias,
but you will never find any other god within those walls.

Of course you may find the god to whom
these nuns are supposed to pray day and night.
But you will not find another god in their cells
unless there are nuns who pray to another god – to an idol, so to speak.

A couple of planks of wood.
That is what one can see in their cells.
They kneel down in front of these planks and pray to them at dawn.
Then they hear some bells and rise from their knees.

For an hour or so they pray to another god;
then they come back to their planks and pray to *their* god,
to the god they own forever.

No, no, no. I say 'NO' and I hope
You hear me my Lord.
These nuns are awful and I hope You will burn them
in one of Your furnaces; or in two of them.
I hope You will burn their bones too, for bones are stubborn, You know.
They are likely to go back to those cells or hells
and go down on their knees and sinews in front of idols.

Burn them, burn them, burn them!
Let me live with You in Your cell,
in Your hell.
Sure enough, Your Hell is much better than all their paradises
put together.

PSALM 45

My Lord, I am frustrated.

I am not sure I wish to rise from the dead.

Please raise all my fellow citizens
and also their daughters, sons and nephews.
Let them take their beds, tombs and tombstones with them.
They will rise and go to other tombs and stones,
for there is nothing else in the world, as we all know, my Lord.

We go from one cemetery to another
and that is what we call 'our holiday' and 'our felicity'
and 'happiness forever'.
We may call it differently, if we want.
We want it so our mouths utter the words 'beauty', 'serenity',
'wisdom', 'eternity'.
We utter these words and they resound everywhere
as if to corroborate our hypothesis.
They do corroborate it.

Our hypothesis boils down to this,
'We are happy because we believe in God Who makes us happy.
'He cannot do otherwise because He is our Christian God.
'And Christian Gods are supposed to make people happy – much more so
than the revolutionists who took over in France and Russia.
'Their happiness was short-lived or not lived at all.
'Our happiness is everlasting, provided our enemies do not eat us alive.
'They also eat us dead and we do not like their manners, my Lord.

'Let them eat us while we are alive,
'but our tombs are the sanctuaries we have been looking for
'all our lives.

'We would be grateful to You
'if You could protect our bones.'

PSALM 46

My Lord, I see only this glass.
This is not the looking glass through which I am supposed

to see the world before coming to You and Your arms.
 I know they are wide-open
 and I am already prepared to be received by You and Your arms.

I can assure You I am prepared:
 I took a bath this morning after putting a lot of bath salts in the water
 to which I finally entrusted my body.
 My body was happy and I cleaned and cleansed it as best I could.
 I remember the bombs they threw on Belgrade.
 They said on TV: 'We cleansed, we cleansed.'
 But they said 'cli:nsed'.

These generals did not know the English language, my Lord.
 What did they know? Bombs and corpses.
 No, they did not know the corpses – just the bombs,
 nothing but the bombs.

Such is life, my Lord.
 There is such a thing as collateral damage.
 What else is there, my Lord?
 You might have wished to create a beautiful world.
 Our world is what they call 'collateral damage'.
 They always cli:nse something.

You must have had cli"nsed something too.
 Well, we are cli"nsed, which does not mean we are happy.
 We are hi:ppy.

PSALM 47

My Lord, I do not accept Your world.
 You might say it is beautiful.
 Of course I am supposed to look at Your
 trees, lakes and mountains, saying, 'Wonderful, gorgeous, divine.'
 I look at them and I even go so far as to climb these mountains of Yours.
 All right, they are more or less beautiful.
 But then I suffer and I suffer a lot. You say, 'There's no instant way

‘of finding a cure – it’s just a process of trial and error.’

All right, I go through Your trials and also through Your errors.

There are many of them, You know;

I go through all of them.

What do I find at the end of the road? A sort of stadium.

And you say, ‘We’re holding a tournament in this stadium,

‘as a trial run for the Hereafter.’

My Lord, I wish I could avoid all tribulations related to stadiums, tests,
toothaches, earaches and upset stomachs.

Here is a hymn I wrote yesterday,

‘You are my Lord; apart from You I have no good thing.

‘Apart from You I have only bad things.

‘And these bad things are: arthritis, paralysis, deafness, neuritis.

‘I hope they are apart from You.

‘And what is Your part in all this, in this process and rite?

‘Only Your goodness.

‘I walk through the landscape I see

‘and I admire every tree and bush because they are really beautiful.

‘And they prove Your goodness and Your Beauty.

‘Yes, You are Good and Beautiful.

‘You Are Yes, My Lord, as Joyce would have put it.’

I am No.

PSALM 48

I am not, and not, and not.

When I hear what happens around me, I say I am not.

I do not plug my ears. I just say, ‘Not.’

And that is enough, I hope.

I know my hope is also ‘not’, but I accept it; I accept a few nots.

My fate is a not and I accept it.

And I hear Spinoza’s applause.

Amor, amor, fati, fati.

Not *fati*, nor *amor*.

Nothing.

It is just a not and I do not say 'yes' to life
because Nietzsche did it many years ago, which allowed him to go mad smoothly,
without a hitch.

You wish to go mad because madness is the only barricade
you can erect in this world of revolts and revolutions.

You fell a few trees and put them somewhere.
This barricade of yours protects you from the universe.

You are not; so am I. So am *not* I.
I am not I so you might leave me alone.

I cannot turn you into billionaires; nor will you become immortal
on account of my skill and the sacred lore my great grandfather
whispered into my ear two hundred years ago.

I know nothing and I am not.
That is what I am, my Lord.
It is true I was created in Your image. But I am not You,
whatever they say.

And if I am, I am a distorted image.
I am ord or horde.
I am Dor or More or Moore.
I am any letter, my Lord. And a Cabbalist might say what I am,
if I say to him, 'I am DO, DO, DO, DO.'

I am probably C; C Major, my Lord.
Or D Major.
Or E Marshal.

PSALM 49

I am not Yours.
I am not Your creature.
I am not worthy of You, my Lord.
I have no idea of whom I am worthy and what I am,
but I know for sure I am not Your creature.

I am not created in Your image; perhaps I am not created at all.

I might be non-created or uncreated.

You think whatever You wish, my Lord.

You might think I am just 'un'.

All right, I am 'un'.

Whenever one puts the following question to my ears and my brain,

'Who are you?'

I say, 'I am un and under.

'I am also over because I'm both an under- and overdog.

'I am also an undercat and an overhorse.'

I am not an overgod, and I know that by heart.

If asked to recite a poem, I recite it thus,

'I'm no overgod,

'I'm an undergod.

'I'm under, under, under, under.

'I'm over unders and Anders.

'But I'm under Joans and Joanesses.

'I'm under Joans and Arcs,

'but I'm above Jennies.'

Sure enough, I am above Johns and Jeans.

I am under You, my Lord.

I am under our Earth because You are this Earth of Ours.

I am also under waters because You are waters.

You know, this morning I took a bath.

There was a revolting green slime in between the bathroom tiles.

Suddenly I realised this slime was You.

That is how one is supposed to believe in God.

And that is what they call a 'Revelation';

or a 'Conversion'.

I can see trails of slime where the slugs have been.

PSALM 50

I see what life is, my Lord; it is a repetition.
This life has nothing to do with what they call 'eternal recurrence',
not at all.
It is a repetition of Your glory.

I do not know what Your Glory means or might mean
in our day and age.
Or just in our day.

I am sixty-eight. What does that mean? What all that means?

This is over there and sometimes everywhere,
whenever I go outside.

I do not go outside, my Lord, because everything is inside.
You are inside and that is what makes me happy.

I am not always happy but there are many insides
and all these insides are You, my Lord.
Every inside of mine is Yours, my Lord, and the same goes
for all my outsides.

Every out, down, in, over and true is You, my Lord;
I am Your true and obedient servant.
So I am often down – when I am on my knees.

I am sorry, my Lord – sometimes I am on my legs,
but it does not matter really or unreally.

I need my legs
to walk towards You.

Or else I shall need a wheelchair.

But I do not need it, my Lord; not for the moment anyway.
I might need it in the future if I have a car accident and am paralysed.
In this case, I shall not be able to walk towards You.

For the moment I can do it, given that my legs are
in perfect working order.

So I am walking towards You,
and my walk is in perfect walking order.

In *Your* order, my Lord.

And if I happen to walk towards You
in perfect disorder,
this disorder will be Yours,
my Lord.

PSALM 51

I am lost, my Lord. Lost, lost, lost, lost, lost.
I wish I could say, 'I am Lord, my Lord.'
Alas, I am not.
I am perhaps alas, but I am not my Lord.
Neither my Lord nor Your Lord.

What is more or less, I am not found.
I wish I could be found.
Where?
I do not know.
I wish You could find myself somewhere, my Lord.
I wish You could find myself
in that tree over there;
or in that bush.
I am probably in that bush over there.
I might be inside that 'over there', though.

I am over and here.
I am there and everywhere, as they say.
They think they are Adam Kadmon and so coincide
with the universe.
They are all mystics, You know.
I am speaking about my enemies who say, 'You should have a revelation,
'otherwise you're nothing.'

All right, I am nothing, my Lord. I wish
I could have a revelation.
What about Your mother, my Lord?
I wish I could see Her here and there. Or just here,

near my bed.
 Why don't I see Her?
 Why don't I see *You*, my Lord?
 Not even in my dreams, You know.

You do know I do not see You in my dreams.
 I have never seen You, my Lord; not even
 in my early/mid/late teens.
 Usually children see Your Mother.
 She turns up somewhere and they say, 'You are my Mother.'
 And then She goes away or flies in spite of the fact She has no wings.
 She is not an angel.
 She is neither an angel nor an archangel.
 I know She is neither this nor that.

I know what negative theology is about, my Lord.
 But theology is not the only negative subject or object in this world:
 everything is negative, You know.

My life is negative;
 so is my death.
 So is that tree over there.

PSALM 52

I am not found, my Lord.
 I wish I could be found. Why do You say,
 'He was lost but I have just found him'?
 Who are You speaking of?

And You add, 'He was my prodigal son.
 'Until last night he was prodigal.
 'Now he is singing a madrigal in My honour.'

I know You love those who forsake You.
 Twenty years later they come back and You love them more
 than Your other sons and daughters.
 Your prodigal children say, 'Father, give me two million,'

and You give them three million because they have been found.

By whom?

For what?

Why should You look for those children?

They are unworthy of You and Your religion, Your doctrine.

What is Your doctrine?

Your doctrine says, 'I am a doctrine so you should obey me round the clock.

'I say to you that you should not kill anybody, not even your enemies.

'You should kiss your enemies, even if they are out of your reach.

'You should kiss the air if your enemies are not on the spot.

'You should kiss them on the spot, even if they are not on the spot.'

And so on.

I wish to live peacefully, calmly.

My Lord, my Lord, my Lord, my Lord.

I wish to wake in the morning or in the afternoon.

I wish to say to myself, 'I'm in my bed and I'm alive. And I'm life itself.'

And life will come to me and I shall kiss my life

instead of kissing all my neighbours.

I shall kiss both my life and death.

And I shall say to my death, 'I'm Judas. So I kiss you.'

PSALM 53

I am, am, am, am.

O Lord, I do not know what is 'am'.

Nor do I know what is 'ma'.

I do not even know what is 'a'. Nor 'm', You know.

What is all this, my Lord?

Did Adam say all this?

Did he say, 'This is m and that is o'?

What are all these letters and words?

I say, 'Mother, mother, mother, mother, mother.'

Yes, I was in her womb and then I came out. And I said,

‘Mother, mother, mother.’

I sucked her breasts.

I sucked my thumb until I was seven, You know.

And my life has always sucked me dry or humid or moist.

I do not know what my life has done to me, but I am undone,
as You can see, hear and touch.

Touch my body, O Lord.

What do You touch? A body?

No, no way. You have just touched a corpse
and that is what You will touch in a week’s time
if You vouchsafe to touch my body or my self, or my corpse once more.

Touch me, my Lord.

I realise You do not like corpses.

But what else can You touch?

You touch only corpses, don’t You?

Touch them, touch them, touch them.

Only corpses are delicious, aren’t they?

PSALM 54

My enemies.

Why do I always talk about my enemies?

I am my own enemy, my Lord.

You are my enemy too.

You are my enemy number One; not number Two, mind You.

Yet I pray.

But for You, I would be free in this world.

I would not have to pray and say what I have done.

Here is my sin number One.

This morning I smoked a cigarette.

This is my First Sin.

My Second Sin took place this afternoon:

I drank a glass of beer.

After drinking four glasses of cognac, I began to think

about my neighbour's wife.

I said to myself, 'I like her legs.'

The legs I am thinking about belong to my neighbour's wife.

I desire her with all my heart and also my body;

with all my body, I mean.

And if I had another body, I would desire her with that body too.

Body Two.

I am about to say to myself, 'I like her breasts too.'

Both of them.

Three of them, four of them.

If she had five breasts, I would like all of them.

And desire them; You know.

My heart's desire; my body's desire;

my manifold bodies' desire.

So if I say, 'I desire only to be left in peace,' I lie through my teeth;

and also through my body.

And this lie is my umpteenth sin.

PSALM 55

My Lord! I believe in You and whatever You stand for.

And if You stand for nothing, I stand for both You and nothing.

Apparently You stand for low taxes and individual freedom.

That is what our politicians say.

They say, 'The Almighty stands for low taxes and individual freedom.

'And also for our party.'

All right. I also stand for parties and individuals.

What else do I stand for?

For You of course.

And apart from You?

There is nothing apart from You, my Lord.
 So I stand for You and nothing and nobody else.
 I just stand for You, my Lord.
 It is much easier to stand for one thing or being than to think about
 the whole world.

I think about this world of yours and love all my neighbours.
 So what?
 There are so many neighbours and loves.
 What can I do with all of them?
 I love my neighbours and my loves.
 I love my loves because they prove I am a good Christian and Jew.

One of my neighbours pulls my tooth out; one of my teeth, so to speak.
 Immediately I pull one of *his* teeth out.
 He turns another cheek, one of the cheeks he has got; I slap it.
 And then I kiss it.

That is how I live today and I pray accordingly.
 If I hap, I clap; if I mishap, I misclap.

PSALM 56

There is only You, my Lord.
 This garden is You and also every bush I see and hear.

 I hear a lot of bushes on a windy day.
 Do You know what I wrote in my diary last night?
 ‘It was a windy day and small white clouds were scudding
 ‘across the blue sky.’
 There are white clouds somewhere,
 and they scud across the blue sky or any other skies and other colours.
 There are many skies, according to Giordano Bruno, and some of them are blue;
 others are red.
 And there are many clouds here and there;
 the same goes for bushes.

I can hear these bushes on a windy day and night.

And every bush is You, my Lord.

Every whistle I hear is also You; or You too.

Or Too You;

or You Tube.

Do bushes whistle? I am not sure, my Lord.

Some leaves rustle in the breeze; so do bushes, I suppose.

They rustle and buzz. I can hear something buzzing.

That means You are speaking to me, my Lord.

What are You saying? Mlkhjnpjljhmmhmkkl.

All right, I understand.

I shall call a few Cabbalists and they will tell me what meaning

You wish to convey to my brain.

Do not forget that my brain is mlijnpoinuijbiub yuhlj.

So is Your meaning, I suppose;

otherwise I am not likely to understand anything.

PSALM 57

I am sinful, my Lord.

I have a lot of sinful thoughts.

Yes, I confess I have sinful thoughts.

How many, You may ask?

You do ask how many sinful thoughts I have.

And I tell You I have many sinful thoughts and no multiplication table

will ever help me count them.

Whenever I begin to do so, I count three thoughts immediately.

But beyond every sinful thought there is another sin

and thought

so that I am both thoughts and sins.

I am this sin and also that sin.

I am both this and sin.

And I am also that.
 I am everything,
 as they say whenever they speak of Adam Kadmon;
 and everything is so sinful I am the sin itself.

There is only one sin inside Your creation;
 and also outside it.
 And I am this sin; You know.
 There is nothing else in the world and I am this and also the world.
 But I am not nothing else, my Lord:
 I am everything and everybody.

And both my body and soul are Yours, my Lord.
 What else is Yours, I wonder?
 This arm is Yours because it is You Who created this arm.
 This arm is my left arm and it is You Who begot it and held it in Your bosom
 for a while.

What else?
 What else?
 This thing is Yours too;
 any thing, You know.
 And this sin of mine is Yours too.
 Your thoughts are sinful, my Lord; so are
 Your actions, words and so on.
 And I am afraid of Your so ons. I am terrified.

PSALM 58

Am I You or Yours, my Lord?
 If I ask You, 'Am I Yours?' I know the answer.

This answer is very simple and I wish
 I could always answer any question by saying, 'Yes, yes, yes.'
 I am Yours. But am I You?
 Suppose I am Yours. And what if I am not You?
 I am Yours and not You.

Well, I suppose I have to live all my life without being You.

I am not You; yet I live.

It is possible, as one of Your poets says.

Everything and everybody are possible, feasible and wonderful.

All right, all right.

My Lord!

I am aching all over.

As you get older, you have all sorts of aches and pains.

What about You, my Lord?

Do *You* have these sorts and pains?

You must be very old, my Lord.

They say our world was created many millennia ago.

You are created in our images, our pains and aches. So what? So what?

Or just, 'What? What? What? What?'

I go out or I do not.

I do and look around. And I sing,

'High mountains rise above the plain.'

After a while, after much soul-searching, I sing,

'High mountains do not rise above the plain.'

And then I sing,

'The high plain rises above mountains.'

And then I sing, 'High mountains rise above God.'

And then I sing,

'God falls bellow Low Mountains.'

And then I sing, 'Low Mountains fall below God.'

And then I sing,

'Low God falls bellow every mountain.'

And then I sing,

'Low is bellow.'

PSALM 59

This is my path and I go through life along this path.

This path is joy and I rejoice whenever I set my foot on this path.

Actually my right foot is always on this path;

so is my left foot.

My left arm is also on this path: I am too old to walk on my feet.

Instead, I walk on my knees and my knees know my path
better than my feet.

Soon my breast will also know this path;
so will my heart.

My heart will roll up, up and down this path.

In those days I shall not say, 'Lord is at my right hand.'

In those days I shall say, 'Lord is at my right valve.'

And what about my set of dentures?

What if it is set upon by a vicious dog?

My God will save my set of dentures because it is also on the right path,
near my God's mouth.

You have made known to me the path of life;
and the valve, and the set.

I know a lot, my Lord.

I know there are many things I am not aware of.

Apparently it is not necessary to know them.

I can live with my valve and my set, provided I am on the path of life.

I am on it; at least my valve and set
are within it,
not far from God's mouth.

PSALM 60

My Lord, I cry and You give ear to my prayer.

I sleep and You give ear to my sleep.

Sometimes I talk in my sleep and You give ear to my talk.

Sometimes I just breathe – deeply, I suppose.

You also give ear to my deep breathing.

What next?

I am still in this cramped house of mine.

We have six beds in this room, so we are rather cramped for space,
for air and also for time.

My children cannot learn their lessons.

I am going to karate lessons to learn how to defend myself.
Whenever I practice my karate at home, I hit my children all the time.

I am pure so You always show me something pure.
You know, in the Soviet Union they used to say, 'I'm longing for something
'big and pure.'

These people were conveyed to the nearest zoo where
they were supposed to wash an elephant.

Big and pure.

And what about *small* and pure?

They belong to the humble, I suppose.

On the opposite side, there is a group of the haughty
and also that of the naughty.

Why should We look at *them*, my Lord?

Let us look instead at our children.

Children should be seen and not heard.

But what if these children put kittens in pools
and keep them under water for several minutes?

Should they been seen, *all* of them?

We hear nothing, nothing at all.

PSALM 61

What is Time? One, two, three.

What is life? One, two, three, four.

If life is smaller than time, we should not live:

This would be a waste of time.

Why should I waste my time?

One, two, three, four.

What is life?

Five, five.

You are a cow; so am I.
 (For once, I am not speaking of the Almighty.)
 I am a cow and I am in the field.
 The cows are all standing in one corner of the field.
 I am one of these cows.
 I am standing in one corner of the field; or in another corner.
 I realise the farmer put up the fence to stop people walking across his field.

I also realise the field was planted with citrus trees.
 I have no idea when it was planted with citrus trees; or other trees.
 I am not sure it had been planted with citrus trees;
 or mistrus trees.
 I do not know whether it has ever been planted or not.
 Nor do I know if it is a field or not.
 Perhaps it is nothing; it must be nothing, for all I know.

So I am standing in one corner of the field.
 Sometimes I am standing in two corners of the field.
 And I am I a cow, You know.
 I suddenly see a train.
 This train moves from one corner of the field to another.
 I am looking at the train; the cow I had planted myself behind is doing the same.
 The field is overgrown with weeds, my Lord.

PSALM 62

My Lord!
 Why should I always speak of my enemies?
 All right, they are everywhere and they have already eaten me alive.
 They also have written me dead so I wonder what is left,
 dead,
 at.

Yet I am talking to you, for I cannot do otherwise.
 Actually I can forget about my nap.
 All right, I have already forgotten about it.

My nap is dead; so is my nape, I suppose.

My enemies must have destroyed my time,
not only my body's space.

I have just hit upon a brilliant idea, my Lord.

What if I create space – literally?

You and I?

I am cramped for space; that is for sure.

Instead of spending another million on a new house,
I take the word 'house' or rather 'castle' and begin to work on it.

I take the letter 'c' and distend it so it becomes

'c-----'

The same goes for the latter 'a'.

It is easier to extend it, isn't it? You just open your mouth and say,
'AA.'

Somebody might think you are crying for help;
you are not.

You are just working on space and also on time.

The space has been widened, but the result is just more noise.
I open all the windows and put on Wagner's *Ring* and Bruckner's *Symphonies*.

What can You hear?

'YYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY.'

It is not a cry for help.

PSALM 63

My Lord!

I have two arms and these arms are You –
not only on account of the fact that You created them once upon a time;
or twice upon time.

First the right one and then the left one.

(I wish You had created two armies.)

So now I have two arms and they belong to You,
and so they give themselves bodies and souls to your teaching

and my prayers.

In a way, it is You who happen to pray to Yourself
and even for Yourself.
I cannot help wondering if I am at contradiction with myself.
Why should I pray to You and for You
if You do exactly the same, in the same moment?
Or does this ritual mean you are praying for me and vice versa?

In this case, use Your hands and knees for other purposes.
I think I can manage on my own.
Or can't I?
You certainly can, but if I do not pray at all,
You are likely to say I am a bad believer – in spite of Your own
performance of my prayer.

Doesn't Your prayer makes the one I utter redundant?
I could give some money to the poor instead of wasting my time on my knees.
Anyway You are doing all this much better;
and You know Yourself better too.
I mean You know what You are prepared to give or not to give.

So You do not waste Your precious time on the requests
You will never grant in spite of Your Heart's well-known generosity.

I am leaving You, my Lord, to Your prayer.
Please do not forget my needs and deeds.

PSALM 64

Why so many people, my Lord?
Do you need so many images of Yours?
Everywhere?
Don't You see Yourself everywhere, at any time, through eternity?
Why do You need these scoundrels and mountebanks?
Don't you never *select* Your images?
Humans do.
They go to a photographer and are shown several versions of their faces.

And they point to several faces they like more or less,
 as the case may be.
 You do not really need many versions of Your spiritual upheaval,
 quasi sexual allure and stature.

They say God is in the making.
 I wonder how these people can make You.
 They cannot make anything of value.
 They just play cards and go to worthless concerts.
 And they eat poisoned food.
 Do You really need all this inorganic food?

Besides, those people's bodies are stuffed with drugs
 and they die in clinics, chiefly in Switzerland.
 They pay more than 200000 dollars per week for massages and psychotherapies,
 otherwise they are likely to die next day or next month.

Or they might spend eight years in prison.
 And if they do, they will have difficulty in crowds
 and their obsessive-compulsive tendencies, which are supposed
 to worsen in solitary confinement,
 will keep them company forever.
 Solitary's confinement lasting damage, they call it.

Do you need all this?
 You also have difficulty in crowds, aren't You?

PSALM 65

I love You, O Lord, my strength;
 but You are also my weakness, oddly enough;
 for one is weak in the presence of those he or she loves.

And let us not forget You are really God.
 How much stronger than ordinary human; how much weaker I am
 in relation to You and Your strength.

Of course we communicate on a regular basis

and this mostly happens
 when I pray to You
 and You pray with me (Cf. Psalm 64).
 But why not talk somewhere else?

You must know Arzama, I suppose. Wonderful, wonderful, divine.
 The hotel is in a lovely location overlooking the lake.
 You must love lakes that are Your creatures too.
 Besides, You could look at Your image in the water,
 as Narcissus did once or twice.

Well, I shall not worry about You:
 You are not likely to fall in the lake and drown forever.
 The gods are unsinkable, as someone said about the *Titanic*.
 On the other hand, many other people think the gods are *unthinkable*,
 but I do not think we should take notice
 of those ignoramuses and hooligans.

We shall stay at the hotel and have gorgeous dinners.
 And we shall talk about this and that.
 Apparently the Queen of England is not supposed
 to speak to champions and pop stars before the main dish.
 These are supposed to enlarge upon their exploits to the ladies
 sitting next to them on other sides.
 Then the main dish comes, but they already have drunk too much wine
 and forgotten their cars, tubes, horses and mothers.

But I shall be allowed to talk to You even before the appetisers, shall I not?

PSALM 66

The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness,
 according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.
 I bow to my Lord and then look at my hands.
 And I find they are not clean; at least they are not clean in *my* sight.
 I know God has a better sight than me:
 I have suffered from short-sightedness throughout
 my wretched existence,

my wretched stay on this Earth, in this wretched Universe.
 But every cloud has a silver lining so that I might see tiny spots
 and even molecules much better than God
 Who has been long-sighted for many years, given His age and state of health.

He was taken into hospital last week
 when His condition suddenly deteriorated.
 God is in the making, as I used to say, and this process actually takes place
 in hospitals and clinics.
 Not in the Library of Congress, whether you like it or not!
 So I say to my Lord, 'My Lord, You overvalue my body's cleanness.
 'Of course I take my bath every morning but my spiritual and moral purities
 'are certainly beneath Your contempt.
 'I wish they could be *above* Your contempt.
 'You see, my reputation was stained by this and that scandals.
 'Could You see these stains? You can see the entire Cosmos but these stains of mine
 'escape Your notice.
 'Well, two days ago, I made a full confession to Your police.
 'Well, I hope this confession of mine would make things easier for me in the Hereafter.'

(*He* believes that redemption is based on remission of sins.
 And remission of sins is based on confession.)

PSALM 67

What have I seen?
 These blind men always see something.
 They do not even touch their eyes.
 Why do I touch my eyes?

 Of course their eyes are spiritual and mine earthly,
 physiological, physical, lyrical.
 They see something lyrical – not destiny that is not lyrical, nor dramatic.
 It is just one the destinies or the only One;
 and you listen to God if you are longing to listen to Him.

 Or you just stay on a square and listen to a fountain.
 And that is your psalm.

This fountain speaks to you and others, and you listen to it.
Why do you think your God will ever talk to you like that or otherwise?

He might speak to Anita Edberg.
And He speaks to her, not to you, even if you are not in your libraries,
browsing through books and treatises.

You have learnt Wordsworth's lesson; you worship nature
and hate classrooms.

But nature is now with God Who does not really love her.

But He loves Fellini, Anita Edberg, Marcello.
They have their natures, their waters, their times.

All dead by now?
The fountain is not. But what is fountain?
Travi, Trivia.
A fountain of Youth, of Truth, of Once, of Trance.
Of France, of my dear France. Lost forever?
My Lord, please do Your best to convey me to Paris, Versailles, Touraine;
and the rest of this adorable country.

PSALM 68

I *have* seen, but I should not testify to it
because they are likely to say, 'All right, he must have
'seen something. Can we trust his memory? If you see something,
'you memorise it;
'otherwise you have not seen anything. And he does not seem
'to have an excellent memory for names. What
'can we do without names?
'Nothing at all.
'It is true that "nothing" is a name in its own right
'and we might do something with it.
'Why should we? Why take care of nothing, good-for-nothing.
'It is everything we should be looking for.'

I am not everything, my Lord.
You must be weary of me, like everybody else.
My enemies assault me on every side;

so do I.
 I am assaulted everywhere and my enemies are chiefly
 my doubts, O Lord.
 I am therefore my own enemy.

Why don't you show up?
 Why don't you appear in front of me naked?
 Strip Your clothes off, O Lord. Get rid of Your beard.
 You need a shave, O Lord. I do not recognise You in paintings.
 Go to our saunas and come back immaculate
 so we could recognise You.

Our painters have made a real mess of Your likeness and unlikeness.
 Come here and stand before me as naked as a tree after a storm;
 or in the winter.
 We need to conserve our supplies
 so we can get through the winter.
 O Lord,
 O Lord.

PSALM 69

If I say, 'In Lord, in God, in Lord, in God,' they point out
 they have nothing against it.
 'In God you put your trust so you've good news for your company.'

 'But I trust you too,' I add. They shake their heads.
 I add that I was a very sociable child.
 They shake their heads and even their bodies.
 If they had several Buddha-like heads and arms, they would shake
 all of them, I am sure.

 So I say, 'I'm going to make an effort to be a bit more sociable.'
 They look doubtful, although they no longer
 shake their heads.

 'Give me money,' I say.
 Once again they shake their heads.

‘I’m not asking for an army. It’s *money* I need now.

‘Do I drink the blood of goats?’

Once again they shake their heads.

‘Do I drink *your* blood?’

‘Why do you cast my words behind you?’

‘Look how many words there are behind you!’

‘Can’t you pick them up?’

They pick up my vase instead;

there are roses in this vase.

They smell the roses and admire their beauty.

PSALM 70

Horror again. As long as you say, ‘His love endures forever,’
this love, whether it is forever or not, seems to endure.

If it is not forever, it does not endure.

What is meant for an instant lasts this instant
and the rest goes up in smoke, especially if you attend
the performance of this drama.

You look at a beautiful lady smoking a cigarette
and you cannot see either her legs
or her breasts
wrapped up in smoke.

The point is you have no wish to see anything
in spite of the publicity made by French philosophers.
They say that, but for grimaces, you would not understand
the meaning of what people are trying to convey to you.

All right, do not convey your expressions and modulations.

Do not devote so many treatises to letters
and the codes one must decode on the way to the proverbial success
that brings nothing but success and death.

O Lord, I am inside a success; what is more,

I am inside Your insides, authorised as I am to sit in one of Your
wingchairs, for services rendered.

My Lord, I have rendered You no services.
I have always been an obedient servant and a friend, I hope;
but I do not deserve Your Paradise.

Your country is a free country so I have always felt myself free.
Even now I can leave Your Kingdom for Hell,
according to Bernard Show.
I disagree with him.

PSALM 71

It is not hard; nor is it absurd.
They talk to us about their concepts; or their concerts, for that matter.
They play their sonatas and concertos
and our lives go on.

Are they our enemies? I do not think so.
I know that Solomon also made all the furnishings
that were in God's temples.

What could I do?
In what temple?

'The table on which was the bread of the Presence.'
I do not understand what that means but I do understand
there is nothing worse than the bread of the Absence.

This bread is a fake, a false prophet, an idol
that one can hear in Schoenberg's opera.

You eat this bread and realise
it is nothing,
just nothing.
It is not even a piece of bread.

PSALM 72

Why have You rejected me, O Lord?
 You are no longer with me and so I cannot feel Your presence.

And what am I supposed to do without it?
 In shops, for instance?
 I go shopping but cannot buy anything.
 And window-shopping is not my cup of tea, You know.

Of course I can I do it without Your help,
 but I do not do it because it makes me suffer.

I suffer a lot when I see all these windows and I often stop them
 from dressing them.
 I say, 'Why do you show me your treasures?'
 'I can't afford them.'

In days of yore, my ancestors bought a lot of dresses
 and costumes in such shops.
 They also bought a lot of jewels.

But all these jewels were stolen by my enemies
 a long time ago.
 And I can see my jewels on my neighbours' necks and hands.
 They even wear them on their feet, let alone in their ears.

If they thought I have any commercial value,
 they would wear me as well,
 but they set no value either on my numerous gifts
 or on my face and its spiritual beauty.

I provide them with a chance to reflect on spiritual matters,
 but they spurn my silent offers of help.
 I say, 'You should give these jewels to the poor,'
 whereupon I show them how poor I am.

I take off my shirt and show them my spare ribs.

‘I think it’s a sin to waste food,
 ‘when so many people in the world are hungry,’ says one of them
 picking up a butcher’s knife.

PSALM 73

I cannot speak to you tonight, my Lord.
 Something or someone prevents me from doing so.

I think it is my neighbour I am dealing with once again.

He stands in between us
 and I cannot move his body from where
 it stands, rooted to the spot.
 It stands, rooted to the spot.

His body is so large and heavy no weightlifter
 would be able to uproot it
 and throw its bulk out of the window.

I do speak to you of course,
 every day
 and every glorious morn.
 (All Your morns are glorious, You know.)

I have tried to discuss my feelings with You
 several times,
 at every opportunity,
 but it is like talking to a majestic, magnificent brick wall.
 You are not a brick wall, are You?

So, for some time, I have been talking to a brick wall,
 not to You.
 And the brick wall vouchsafes no answer, however often I talk to it.

I talk to it very loudly
 and I also sing a few arias from Russian operas.
 The brick wall is as silent as the grave.

Perhaps it is a grave of sorts.
Of what sorts, I wonder?

Edgar Poe told a story about a man immured in a wall.
Is that what I am dealing with?
I hope it is my neighbour whose mortal remains are hidden within this wall.

PSALM 74

They fled in terror.
I do not know who they were
but I saw them.
And, in my opinion, they were fleeing in terror.

Whenever I see my enemies flee,
I realise they flee in terror,
otherwise they never flee, according
to my observation.

They just stand there, in front of you, and even
if you fling stones at them,
they do not budge.
Because their money is situated within the spot where
they stand.

And they think that if they leave this spot,
if only temporarily,
for one or two seconds,
their money will be gone forever.

In this case, their money will be in their enemies' pockets;
and also in their safe deposit boxes, needless to say.

Even if I threw a boulder at them, they would not budge.
Upon seeing this boulder in my arms,
they would say to their assistants, 'His bark is worse than –'
(You know what they compare my bark to.
Don't You?)

But their bodyguards are worried about the outcome of the battle.

So they say, 'Suppose this boulder is his bite,

'not his bark.

'We can't really hear him bark.'

I throw the boulder at them and they say to each other,

'No, it's just another bark of his.'

I wonder why they fled in terror.

I know, I know:

You subdued them under me, my Lord. At last.

PSALM 75

I have been made secure forever.

Oddly enough, I am not in a citadel; and I am not protected

by a series of atom bombs.

Of course I would not mind having a few rockets

in my cottage,

but that does not really matter.

I could strip myself naked and go to our longest avenue where

everyone has always seen me dressed to the nines.

I suppose they have their Kalashnikovs at the ready,

but I am invulnerable, for God is my force

and fortress;

and my canon balls.

I am living in God's fortress where there are enough

bombs to destroy not only the Earth

but also the Moon

and the space stations one can see on TV.

No enemy will ever dare enter my abode,

even if this abode of mine is not a citadel, a medieval fortress.

I am protected by waves and quantum mechanics
that protect me better than bombs.

An enemy gets closer and closer to my room,
but my buttons are within reach.
As I press one of them one army disappears forever.

If I feel like pressing another button,
another region of the Earth will be annihilated.
And I do feel like that.

All right, I promise not to do so in the near future,
provided you behave yourself.
If you do not,
I shall press four buttons at once and you will see the result of
my action.

You will not live in this world
if I press only half-a-button.

PSALM 76

I suppose you trust in your wealth.
And I hear you boast of your great reaches.
My hearing is slightly impaired so I cannot make out
every word you utter.
But whenever I do hear something, I hear, 'Two million, eight million.'

I am not in the habit of jumping to conclusions
and I do not jump to them.
I carefully draw them on my computer screen. And I eventually
come to the conclusion that you speak only about money.
And even if you take the trouble to speak of love,
you do so only in terms of money.

So you seem to trust in your wealth.
And what about the crisis they warned us two years ago;

and also three years ago?

And what about the crises they have not warned us about?

Not a word, not a word.

You wish to live forever and think you can buy your immortality.
But you agree there are a few wrinkles on your face, a few signs of decay
inside and outside your body.

Fools and sages perish alike.

Have a look at their graves, if any.

(Actually many fools are not buried at all.)

Look at a family vault and then turn your attention to a mass grave.

What do you see?

A mass of bones.

Where?

Everywhere.

The same goes for royalty.

Wherever there is royalty, there are always hangers-on.

The same goes for all their bones.

PSALM 77

They say one must learn to forget,
otherwise it is hard to live and even to die.
And it is also hard to live if you forget too many things.

So you should forget what cannot be done.
You wish to buy a supercomputer but you do not have
enough money for it.
So you forget it, as they say.

And you do forget it.

Not quite, not quite.

But you say to yourself, 'I can't change the situation
so I'm going to have to learn to live with it.'

How do you learn to live with it?

You try to forget it; and to forgive all those who put spokes
in your numerous wheels.

Of course you should not forget to remove the spokes
from these wheels of yours, otherwise
you will be dead and gone; like Ireland, according to W. B. Yeats.

You throw the spokes out of your window
and try to forget them.

But how to forgive their former owners?
You try to forget them, saying, 'I still remember Johnson's
'first name.

'I've already forgotten his second name.
'I even wonder if he ever had one.
'But I still remember his first name and his family name.
'His first name is John.
'What's his second name, I wonder?'

O Lord, if I forget anything, I may forget You,
for You are everything.
If I forget a part of Your everything I am sure to forget You.

You are everything and everything is everything.
You cannot omit anything from it, as Parmenides used to say.
Otherwise everything would not be
everything.
It would be just a thing.

Of course I do not have to forgive You, my Lord.
But if I had, I would not forgive You.

PSALM 78

I think the key verb is 'to understand';
or rather '*not* to understand'.

They say we are supposed to forget whatever is unpleasant

and does not add a few years to our lives.

And what about 'to understand'?

Or '*not* to understand'?

I do not understand why my enemies wish to destroy me;
nor do I understand why they are my enemies.

I am a lovable child:

I am in my second childhood, You know.

I am also a lovable rogue, as they say.

Do You also say that, O Lord?

Do you say, 'This servant of Mine is a lovable rogue'?

Say whatever You wish, O Lord.

I willingly and devotedly love whatever You wish,
say and think.

Actually I am not sure You really *think*, O Lord.
Of course we say, 'Think twice before you utter a word,'
but You can utter as many words as You wish;
the more the better.

You do not have to *think* before uttering them
because You utter the truth and nothing but the truth.
What is more, Your truth is Absolute,
as the saying goes.

Actually it is not a saying and it does not go.
Is it because whatever is Absolute neither speaks nor goes?
It stays wherever it is, saying nothing,
moving neither this way
nor any other way.

I do not understand why my life is so wretched.
And if I do not understand it, my life is not wretched.
Only what we remember does actually exist,
says Goethe,
if I remember rightly.

The same goes for our understanding.
Unfortunately it does not always go.

PSALM 79

Do not drag me away with the wicked, O Lord.
You might think they are not wicked and so You say to Yourself,
‘They are not wicked and my servant can be in their midst.
‘No harm done.’

I can assure You, there is a lot of harm done, O Lord.
Much more than You think or can imagine
despite the size of Your imagination.
Incidentally, I am not sure You really have an imagination.
Do You need one?

You see and know everything.
What could You picture to Yourself?
Another universe?

Do not do that, I beg of You.
This misery of ours is enough for a million of universes.

So let us remain modest, O Lord.
Modesty is a virtue, isn’t it?
In all modesty,
as they say.
As *You* say as well, I suppose.

But I do ask you not to drag me away with the wicked.
In the first place I have no idea in what direction
You are dragging them.
I suppose they are heading for Hell.
If my conjecture is right, I am right as well.

I mean I am reluctant to join them.
And even if You drag them towards an Aladdin’s cave,

I have no wish to follow the crowd, for the crowd in question
is made up of the wicked.

I should rather be poor and virtuous than rich and wicked.
I should rather be rich and virtuous than poor and wicked.

I hope You will repay them for their deeds
and for their evil work.
Not with jewels, though.

PSALM 80

Does this tune come from You, O Lord?
I realise that Mozart's melodies are Yours: You composed them
in Your leisure hours.

Or Your angels did.
They have nothing else to do, apparently.
Either they talk to little girls or sing round the clock
or rather round eternity.

Eternity is round, isn't it?
Or is it spherical?
Well, in this case they sing round the sphere.
Not round the triangle, though.

But what about the tune I have been humming
for more than two hours and three days?
Of course every sound comes from You; like anything else.
A dog barks and I say to myself,
'God is speaking to humanity and plants and animals.'
But this time I have no idea what this tune means and where it comes from.

It comes perhaps from the domain of music.
But isn't this domain situated within Your domain
or rather Your Kingdom?
Do You want me to whistle it for You?
Shi-shi-shi-shi-to-ta.

That is what it sounds like.

Does this really come from You?

From Your brain and mouth?

It is true that 'shi' is not a four-letter word.

One might say I am thinking and singing about a woman.

I am singing, 'She, she, she, she, she, that one, this one, one,' and so on.

And then I hum, 'So, so, on, onan.'

I know Your voice twists the oaks.

My humming does not twist anything except my brain.

PSALM 81

'You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you.'

I am sorry, O Lord, but I wonder what You mean in the sentence

I have just quoted.

Whom are You speaking to?

I hope You know I love Your instruction

and put Your words on my desk and even

on my dinner table.

Your words are always with me, in other words.

How could I cast them behind me?

What for?

Am I really crazy?

I am not, O Lord.

Do have a look at my dinner table.

What do You see on it?

You see a few words.

Let us choose two of them.

The first word is 'instruction'.

Can't You see it on my dinner table?

Did I cast it behind me?

Did I put it in my kitchen?
Did I throw it into my rubbish bin?

Of course I did not; and I can assure You I have no intention
of doing it in the future, either near or distant.

I am not sure what it means, though.
I know what the future means, be it near or distant or eternal.
I have no idea what *You* mean.

I know what the word 'instruction' means,
but given that this word is not You,
I do not know what it means.

Let me look it up in my dictionary. It means,
'Something that someone tells you to do.'

All right, I agree with this definition.
And I know what this dictionary alludes to
and what truth it conveys.

'Someone' is You of course: I do not listen to anyone else.
But what about *something*?
What about *nothing*?

PSALM 82

Surely I have been a sinner from birth.
But I am not sure I shall be one from death.
How could one be a sinner from death or from the Hereafter?

You are a sinner from here – from this divan, for instance.
Yes, I indulge in my sins on this divan, either
from time to time
or all the time.
But I wonder if I am really responsible for my sins.

I do not think I would indulge in them elsewhere;

not in my garden anyway.
 This atmosphere is more conducive for enjoying life and sins.
 I am speaking of my divan of course.
 The same does not go for my garden.

In the first place, some of my neighbours may see me,
 given that they are used to spying on me day
 and night.
 The same does not go, full stop!

I do not enjoy my sins anywhere else, however much
 I try and do my best.
 I always do my best, O Lord, because I do
Your best;
 and Your best is the best of all the bests.

And even if there were one best better than Your best,
 I would not accept it.
 I would say,
 ‘I agree that this world is even better than the best of possible worlds,
 ‘but I don’t accept it because it’s not a creation of God’s.
 ‘It must therefore be a creation of Satan’s.’

The same goes for my divan:
 it is Satan’s instrument and furniture.
 Please do not put this divan in my Paradise, O Lord.

PSALM 83

O Lord! Where does that lead to?
 Nowhere?

Even if I ask myself what it is, I do not know anything;
 and I even forget what I have known so far.
 Is it evolution, devolution, devaluation, evaluation?
 It is just a sort of development perhaps.

All right, I am not against the stream.

I am looking for a job which will enable me to develop
 my skills and talents.
 And what happens next?

All right, I have this job and everyone says,
 ‘Don’t worry – you’ll soon get the hang of it.’ But I do not.
 I get neither the hang of *it*
 nor the hang of *that*.

No matter how often I define my predicament,
 I get nothing, not even a decent salary.
 Then I get a sort of salary but I cannot put it to any use
 because they say,
 ‘We don’t accept this currency.’

I get another currency and they say, ‘We don’t accept your looks.’
 I change my clothes and even my body –
 to some extent.

Well, I go to swimming pools and run ten kilometres
 around our city parks.
 They say, ‘We might accept your body, but your thoughts
 ‘are foreign to us.’

So I say to myself, ‘All right, I’ll adjust
 ‘to living with them.’
 I go, see them and say, ‘I’m prepared to live with you.’

But they explain they have nothing to do with my adjustments.
 So I go to their superiors and they say,
 ‘Show us your adjustments.’
 I show them to them and they say, ‘We don’t know these adjustments.’

‘So you don’t know God?’ I ask them.
 ‘We do know God,’ they say.

PSALM 84

My words fly up.

Do they fly at all?

Do my thoughts remain bellow?

My words fly if I send them somewhere;

so do my thoughts.

I remain bellow.

And nothing will ever go to heaven

without myself, O Lord.

I do go to heaven, I can assure You.

I assure You this time, that time.

I make assurance doubly and triply sure.

I remain bellow,

in front of my computer.

And my thoughts?

Am I really praying?

What am I doing?

I can say, 'O Lord, I am

'Yours,

'Yours,

'Yours,

'Yours.'

I can also say,

'O Lord! What is this sky?'

Or

'Is it a sort of sky?

'What is there everywhere?

'Are you on the top of that tree over there?

'And also all over the cosmic three?

'I do not recall what it is called.

'Let us call it You, Thou, Mou, for this tree is also

mine.

‘Let us call it Thee; or Me; or Wee.

‘No, no, that is not what I mean.

‘I do not want to say, “Daddy, I want to wee!”

‘You are my Daddy, but I do not want anything except
‘whatever You want Yourself.

‘I want Thee, O Lord.

‘I do not want anything.’

PSALM 85

I say my days vanish like smoke.

How could I compare smoke to my days?

I smoke a cigarette and the smoke I create in the process
vanish in the air, so to speak.

That is how I speak at the moment,
and in another moment I shall speak differently:

I am aware of Time,
of its importance.

My days do not vanish like smoke. A poet can say,
‘I smoke a pipe and I see the smoke vanish into thin air;
‘or any air, for that matter.’

They vanish differently: the smoke of your cigarette or pipe is different
from the one you see inside your days
that continue to fly away, vanishing in the air forever.

And some smoke stays for hours or days,
if your neighbours burn something in their garden.
This smoke remains for days in your own garden and you will not
get rid of it
unless you call the police.

And the police will tell you, ‘This smoke comes
‘from your neighbours.
‘And their territory is sacred as long
‘as it remains their territory.’

And what is *my* territory, O Lord?

You, my Lord.

You are my territory.

And if I burn anything on Your territory – it is forbidden, by the way –

I have no alternative but to say it is God's command.

By the way, I can assure you, My Lord,

that nothing will vanish like smoke.

Not You.

Not I.

PSALM 86

There is only One or

the One.

No, if there is the One, there are two.

And there is only One to whom I guide my thoughts.

No, only one thought do I direct towards One.

And this thought is One.

The thought Number One goes towards One Whose Number is also

One

and they touch each other.

They embrace and become two – a couple, so to speak.

They speak to each other

and they speak of a son.

And they beget this son and become Number Three

or just Three:

they no longer need numbers.

Now I direct my three thoughts towards them;

each thought finds its object, subject,

signifiant, signifié,

naturant, nature,

or something along these lines.

Now they signify a lot of somethings and enjoy nature to the utmost,
especially whenever the sun goes out and shines all day long.

But even the absence of the sun signifies a lot
and not only the insignificant take advantage of it.

The insignificant too leave the beaches and go to casinos
where they spend whatever they can spend
and even the rest:
their shirts and their sleeves.

And that is how life goes on in Your Absence,
O Lord.

Life takes off its shirt and shows everyone a tattoo
that has nothing to do with the beauty of Your Creation.

This is what they call a *signifiant*.
And the *signifié* in question is the body
on which this tattoo was tattooed some time ago.

PSALM 87

My God, I am alone.
Only my computer is in front of me.
And my cat calls me from time to time.

Am I alive, am I dead?
I am both and I am also many other things.

I look at a girl on TV and cannot sleep afterwards.
What does she have?
Legs, breasts?
Just one look, one pose?
That is enough.
For what?

For clinking our glasses and drinking to Your Creation?
Is that what You are created my substance or rather nonsense for?

Well, if it is a sort of nonsense I have to deal with,
I deal with it.

I deal with dealers and with senses
that make no sense anywhere.

I shall find the birch tree I saw in my youth and kiss it twice;
and I shall hug it if I can.

I cannot hug too many objects or subjects my Lord,
if You see what I mean.

They hug me and I collapse, my bones being broken forever.
I wish to preserve my bones, You know.
My relics, You know.

So I do not hug too many people.
I hug only fragile women.
These do not really hug me; they *touch* me, as a matter of fact,
as if to say, 'If I kiss you, I'll kill you.'

Kill me, if you wish.
I would not mind being killed by a kiss.

They are too humane, I suppose.
Or inhumane.

PSALM 88

Let us sing to the Lord a new song.
But all songs are old,
as the French say.

We can sing, however, 'O Lord,'
but this is not new,
in my opinion.

I heard this song many times in my childhood

and also in my youth.
I heard 'O Lord' day and night.

When my mother could not sleep, she sang, 'O Lord.'
When my father had a problem, he sang, 'O Lord,' and sometimes,
'My God.'

That is how I was born
and I shall die in the same way.
They will sing, 'He's going, O Lord.'
Then they will add, 'O Lord, he's going in Your direction.'

And then they are likely to speak about accommodations.
Actually, while he was in the library,
Steve decided to seek out some information
on accommodation in the area.
(Steven is very helpful – not only because he is my son.)
'They have first and second class accommodation on this flight,' I heard.
'First class,' I said at once.
'You have expensive tastes,' he said.
'I'll borrow some money from God.' 'Or from Satan,'
Steve pointed out.

This is the song I heard in my childhood
when kneeling in front of my grandfather's bed.
'God or Satan, God and Satan.'

Then I heard a murmur and my relatives put a few coins
on my grandfather's bedcover, saying,
'Have you had any luck with booking your flight?'

PSALM 89

It is unfair.

There are no fair plays in the world except in stadiums;
I am not interested in them.

What is fair play, in my opinion?
 I wish I could enjoy the same privileges as others,
 all others.

They have jobs, prosper,
 buy cars, become famous and immortal.
 I see them on TV.

I am excluded.
 I am not exulted, contrary to what You might think.

You think everyone is happy
 because the Earth is a beautiful place
 where one can find lakes, seas, beeches, restaurants
 and many stars attributed to hotels.

You consume one star, then another.
 You are satisfied when you get to the fifth star.
 I am not satisfied because I am neither Paris Hilton
 nor any other Hilton.
 I am not Hilton at all, alas and alack.

I am just Somebody.
 If I were Nobody, I would be Odysseys –
 better than any number of Hiltons put together.

I am not.
 I am just Di;
 or rather Sissy.

PSALM 90

The Lord reigns, let the Earth be glad;
 let the distant shores rejoice.

I am neither the Earth nor the distant shores.
 Why should I rejoice?

I shall never see the distant shores where the billionaires

rejoice at the reign of God and in the Sun.

‘This is a joint reign, you know,’
as they say nowadays.

Of course this does not mean that God and the Sun
have a joint bank account.

But there are many joint ventures between
American and Japanese companies.

The Americans supply the Sun and the Japanese provide
some quantity of wisdom and also martial arts studied by many Americans
and their wives.

You say to the Americans they have to praise God’s salvation
day after day, night after night.

They answer, ‘We’re talking care of our salvation
‘ourselves.

‘Let God take care of God.’

And they consult their aerobic teacher.

And the teacher says, ‘You’re my children. I’m your God.

‘You are on my planet and my planet is on you
‘and under you.

‘Lie down on my planet. Fly up to it.’

And his children, alias disciples, fly to the distant shores
where they hope to rejoice with God,
with the real thing, real being.

With the only One,
forever.

What women do in the fifth month of pregnancy?

They wait.

Let us wait for the Messiah.

PSALM 91

O Lord! Today is a day of joy.

I woke a few minutes ago and now am looking at the ceiling.
 And the ceiling in question is not very beautiful.
 But I think it is beautiful.

Whatever I look at is beautiful.

Even my dirty linen is beautiful. And I am sure it smells
 of roses;
 or of pinions.

I look at my walls and see a few pictures I do not like.
 But I do like them today;
 and I am sure I shall like them tomorrow,
 O Lord!

I am sure that,
 weather permitting,
 I shall like them the day after tomorrow.
 And even if it rains and many dogs run around,
 barking and biting whatever
 can be bitten,
 I am sure to like it.

You see, I like life because You gave it to me many years ago.
 And I am already in love with the next life of mine,
 for I shall be assigned a guardian angel.

Well, today is a day of joy.
 I am an old woman and I do not laugh every day,
 given my infirmities.

But today there are no infirmities – only firmitites, You know.
 Thanks to You, my Lord.

One of the firmities allows me to drink my tea with milk,
 without sugar.
 The other firmity allows me to go to the bathroom.

I go to the bathroom,
 take a bath
 and brush my teeth.

Someone has wiped their dirty hands on my nice clean towel!

PSALM 92

I wish I could be allowed to write more psalms.

I am not.

I am allowed to write, 'Glory, glory, glory, glory.'
 I am also allowed to sing it. I am also allowed to sing, 'Lord my God,
 You are very great.'
 I am even allowed to sing, 'Lord my God, You are just great.'

God does not really need our adjectives and praises.
 I know God wraps Himself in light
 as with a garment.

Unfortunately, any singer does it today.
 If you go to their concerts, you see only lights and hear:
 'BBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBB.'

You can hear other letters or meanings if you wish,
 but you wish nothing.
 Neither do I.
 I just sit in my chair and listen.

I have no idea to whom I am listening;
 to what.
 Perhaps to not, to knot.

I am neither a Taoist or any other adept who hears the world
 in a grain of sand.

I listen to a grain of sand and hear nothing at all.

And if I listen to the world,
I hear a few sounds.

They do not reveal anything.
Nor do they tell me they are just sounds.
I am sitting in my armchair and the world or whatever it is
stays where it is;
it neither comes nor goes.

Nor does it stay.
It is just.

The word 'just' is perhaps the right word Flaubert was looking for.
He might have written, 'Madame Bovary is just,'
and she would have stayed alive,
marrying three men at once.

PSALM 93

I can hear something buzzing, O Lord.
Is it a fly?
Is this Satan himself?

What shall I do?
I pray of course saying, 'If it is the Devil in person,
'I have nothing to do with Him.
'I'm neither His son nor His nephew;
'nor am I His niece.'

I really have nothing to do with Him.
And even He has something to do with me, I say,
'I don't understand what's all this about. I know neither the Devil
'nor His daughter
'and so whatever happens
'concerns neither my soul nor my body.'

But if it is a fly, I just swat it with a rolled-up newspaper.
I take a newspaper and roll it up. What else

can you do with it?
And I swat the fly in question.

And if there are no questions, I swat flies everywhere,
as many as I can see on my wallpaper.
And then I swat the fly in question because there is always
a fly in question.

So I look for it and swat it with my rolled-up newspaper.
And I roll up the fly and this new breed of flies
will captures other flies, I am sure.

O Lord,
O Lord.

PSALM 94

My Lord! What is this?
What is that?

I am lost.
I have always been lost but this time I am lost
once and for all.

What is this time?
Is time really time?

It flows, it goes
and I go with it.

Then I stop but time goes on going.
Why? I do not move so time should not move either.
Why is it going somewhere?

Where can it go?
Without me?

If it were not for my presence or absence,
time would not go anywhere.

Yet it goes somewhere or nowhere.

It goes and that is what counts.

Why does it go?

Could You enjoin it to stop?

Well, I think it has just come to a standstill.

Has it?

O Lord! I do not know what Time is

and I do not care.

But I wish to know Who *You* are.

I know You are Who.

I also know You are Who is Who.

You know, today you cannot say 'Who'

without adding

'is Who'.

So I add 'Is Who' and that is what You are perhaps.

Is Who.

Can I write it in one word?

Iswho.

Or ISWHO.

PSALM 95

O Lord, *niet, niet, niet.*

This is out of the question too, although

no one doubts

Your magnificent presence.

But what is happening is out of the question.

I have endured a lot; this time it is

too much.

It is just unbearable.

How could You create such horrors and morons?
 They eat my flesh and thoughts;
 and also my bowels.

They are inside my body, these morons,
 these pharaohs.
 I show them Your miracles and they do not understand
 anything.

If one sees a lot of villas instead of
 huts,
 one realises one is in the presence of God.

All right, I, for one, shall understand everything.
 So if You choose to offer me a hut
 instead of a palace,
 I shall say, 'Thank You very much indeed, my Lord.'

And if You offer me a desert
 instead of a hut,
 I shall say, 'Thank you, O Lord, my Lord.'

And if You offer me a grain of sand
 instead of a desert,
 I shall suck this grain eternally.

And if You offer me Your doomsday
 instead of eternity,
 I shall say, 'Thank You, O Lord, for this birthday of mine.'

But, to tell the truth, I cannot bear this *niet*,
 This fishing net of Yours at all.

Even if You used only one *n(i)et*,
 I would not bear it.

Whenever You utter five *niets* in a row,

I die an everlasting death.

PSALM 96

There are enemies.

They are here,
there,
over here
and over there.

They are devils, demons
and so on.

This demon says, 'There's no God.'

I am supposed to say to him
there *is* God
and *one* God *only*
at that.

I say, 'You're Satan.
'And there's God.

'There's only one God, you know.
'And this God is mine.

'I press Him against this and that.
'This is just my breast
'and the rest is of no importance.

'I love my God, you know.
'You know a lot, I'm sure,
'because You're Satan.
'And Satans know a lot.
'That's why they're Satans;
'otherwise they would be gods.'

They *are* gods in a way, for there is
nothing else in the world.

The world is divine and beautiful,
and if it is, it is full of gods.

And if there are gods,
there is only *one* God
because there is only one *God*.

And this God is You.

So I say, 'I am Thou.'
I am Th, Th, Th.
I am O. I am U.

PSALM 97

My Lord,
Your enemies,
my enemies.

They eat Our flesh.
They eat Our arms
and shoulders,
my Lord.

What could We do without
Our shoulders and elbows,
my Lord?

PSALM 98

Is that how You are?
You are just that and at.

You are questions and answers.

One should not say,
'God is *niet, niet*,
'*ni, ni, ni, ni.*'

One cannot know You but that is not the question.

You are neither to be or not to be.

You are neither between a be and another be.

And, to tell the truth,
there are bes.

There are bees, thank God.
Thank *You*, in other words.

So I thank You for bees.
I do not care whether they are busy or not.
Let them go on a holiday.

All our bees will be on holiday,
on eternal holiday,
forever,
dreadful sorry.

They will live like bees,
so will we.

From now on the question is,
'To bee or not to bee.'

Don't you love honey?
Our land of milk and honey?
Our skimmed milk?
Our bio, dear, *dio, deo* honey?
Our runny, money, honey honey?

PSALM 99

So it is whatever if you go
on you go and you go and so what becomes

of you, of rest, of Everest, go and
not west, not east
no directions, no protections,
off you, off with you, in you, in, in

AUS DEM NACHLASS

I haven't forgiven you yet. All right, punish me, punish me. I'm waiting for this proverbial brick. Let it fall on my head. My head is ready, my bare head. Where's your brick? Your nasty trick?

There are no enemies. You're my only enemy. Plus your life, the one you gave me some time ago. Apparently I can't do with it whatever I like. I can't take it, my own life. I will not. It is there for the taking but I won't take it. Take it, if you wish.

You promised me a land. Well, I'm still waiting for this land. Where is it? Give me an acre, one house. You don't give me anything because you don't have anything. You're a poor god or guy. You're just a make-believe and I believe in your believe; but not in your make.

Well, come down and hide in a bush. There are many bushes in the world and I ask you to hide in one of them. Why don't you do it? Let's play hide-and-seek. You hide yourself in a bush and I seek you in the same bush. A nice game, isn't it?

Let me pray and say something along the lines of, 'O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord. O my enemies, O my fragility.' Can you hear me? Do you hear my fragility? You can have it, if you wish.

Let's play the same game again. This time I hide and you seek me. Well, I'll lay my cards on the table or rather under a chair. I'm hiding under that chair over there. O Lord, pick me up and hold me in Your arms. Kiss me, my Lord. Kiss me on both cheeks; on the lips. I'm Your son, am I not? Your prodigal, prodigal, prodigal son.

II

SERMONS

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

If you talk to yourself for hours and hours, you get tired for nothing because you can't teach anything to yourself and you're a bad pupil anyway so that even if you had a good teacher or preacher, you wouldn't learn anything. So you don't learn anything, but you continue to talk to yourself unless you have someone else to talk to, which doesn't mean that the person in question can protect you against the catastrophes you're bound to encounter in your life, given that no life can flow or fly without coming across many obstacles that bar the way to Paradise.

But whatever they say – and they do say something – you continue to talk to yourself and others as if the life you live and ruin as you do what shouldn't be done could be endowed with a meaning you're supposed to discover in words, in speech, in other people's mouths, lungs, hearts, brains and aspirations. Of course, for the moment, you content yourself with your own lungs and words, and they may satisfy you unless you're too ambitious and consequently wish to get to the top of the world, to the top of the Tower of Babel that some individuals manage to build in their minds and even in their lives, bequeathing to humanity an example to follow. But you don't necessarily overreach yourself whenever you indulge in daydreaming or acting outside your brain – in your office, during a conference or a world championship at the end of which you may find yourself in hospital if you're not prudent enough and do what can only be done by *real* champions. And you may find yourself in a lunatic asylum if you insinuate you're in a class of your own and unique to the extent of beating everybody hands down, including Flaubert, Joyce and Proust.

It is therefore wiser to talk to yourself, even if you know in advance what you're about to say in the *heat* of the moment, for interior monologues often sound like a heated debate in the course of which its participants come to blows on a regular basis. You shout, you pinch yourself, and you don't pinch yourself to make sure you're *not* dreaming, although the whole thing is somewhat akin to nightmares, given the temperature of your interior dialogue. If this temperature might succeed in invading your body – not only your soul, as it usually happens – you would end up in another hospital situated in the vicinity of the lunatic asylum I touched upon some time ago. But for once your body doesn't care about your brain where debates of this kind take place before or after dinner – or even in the afternoon unless you're snowed under with work and can't afford to avail yourself of your imagination and fiery temperament.

I don't know whether I'm keen on much-vaunted 'communication', but I'm pretty sure that what they mean when talking about Antonioni or the Internet has nothing to do with the inner debate I endeavoured to describe in the previous paragraph. I vaguely recall the play I read about in my youth and my memory doesn't seem to be assisted by the huge number of chairs I've got at home as if I was anxious to stage the play I'm talking about. Had I read the beginning of this book instead of writing it, I would already have guessed what play I have in mind as I write about *my* chairs, obliterating the rest of my furniture which, incidentally, is so beautiful I never fail to admire it when moving around my house. Of course the play I have in mind – and in my text – belongs to the movement which, in the middle of the last century, united absurdity and theatre. I refer to Ionesco's play *Les chaises* and I wonder now if the author was in any way influenced by *Waiting for Godot*: after all, both plays enlarge upon anxiety and impatience, upon the absence of those with whom one might play cards, devour ice cream and drink champagne. Of course you can drink champagne on your own, ignoring the only remark I recall as I visualise an interview I saw on TV many years ago; Bernard Pivot was talking to Marguerite Duras who warned her admirers against drinking in solitude. 'Why did you drink?' asked Pivot. 'Because God doesn't exist.'

I wish I could discuss the death of God with Duras, but she is dead and buried as if she was a goddess herself. (Do we *bury* God and goddesses?) But we shouldn't forget that not only God and goddesses are in the habit of dying whenever philosophers of genius and second-rate writers do their utmost to dispose of them in their books or in front of a television camera. These philosophers and writers – and also ordinary citizens – die as well, proving that somehow they're made in the image of God, for otherwise they would live forever despite the advent of Christianity and the victory of the Industrial Revolution.

The protagonist of Ionesco's play hopes that a multitude of people will occupy the chairs he contemplates in front of him because, but for their participation in his interior monologue, he might be robbed of the future on which he counts a lot, being as ambitious as Napoleon and Raskolnikov. Following in Godot's footsteps, these people do not show up and he makes a speech to the empty chairs, to the air, to God Who is supposed to listen to whatever we say so as to punish us *justly*, in full accordance with our deeds and misdeeds, our thoughts and words. Why not put just one chair – or rather an armchair, a throne – in the middle of the hall where you intend to make a speech that might and should resound throughout centuries, notwithstanding the death of humanity?

If asked about the meaning of such a chair, Spinoza would answer, 'This is God. He doesn't listen to you, but his throne is in your house. It is an empty throne, there's no denying it. Nevertheless it is a throne or rather the universe. Don't you wish to talk to bushes and distant planets? What do you care for the multitude? One empty chair is bigger than the Earth or the universe, for God also dwells *outside* the universe, however colossal it may turn out to be in the light of the latest hypotheses that physicists shower upon us and other physicists.'

Why should I speak to one chair only, even if this chair I may put in the middle of my house or in the middle of nowhere – in the middle of the void, of chaos – faithfully depicts God and His emptiness that we encounter whenever we count upon Him and his proverbial mercy? I have other pieces of furniture which are able to help me overcome my fears related to my interior dialogues and their sterility, their inability to teach me how to live today, tomorrow and next week without going mad, without the word 'dead'. What do I learn from them as I listen to quarrels and squabbles – their symphonies inside my brain? These are not unfinished symphonies, contrary to what concert goers might conclude upon reading this unfinished novel of mine, any of my sermons.

This is a series of sermons but no sermon is ever finished, for every sermon must fly all the way to heaven, otherwise it's bound to remain on earth, in the vicinity of the church where a preacher continues to talk as long as he can talk, as long as he isn't ready to drop. Shortly afterwards he *is* ready to drop and no one knows exactly where he drops and how he manages to drop without being shattered into a thousand tiny pieces. Actually, every piece of him talks for hours and hours; it also flies to heaven, eager to converse with God Who sits in an empty chair and turns a deaf ear to the pieces' requests. You try to adorn this empty chair – or God, for that matter – as you continue to preach your gospel or your morsel of truth. Nothing doing: the chair remains empty.

Dante might have thought he was actually going from Hell to Paradise as he continued to write the *Commedia* in spite of what he saw and heard around him, for he was convinced his words would coincide with the Way leading from the bowels of the Earth to its upper end – to the stars nailed to the vault of heaven. In other words, he thought he could get to these nails and whatever they sustained – by the strength of their religious faith – through poetry which was a sermon addressed to his soul; his book talked to him as he wrote it, as he learnt from it his future and way of life. But I shouldn't limit my ambitions to my soul, for I talk to myself continuously and whatever I say in this manner – within the bounds of my substance – comes to nothing as if only my neighbours

could take me to another planet or plane of being where everything is as clear as day and not as clear as mud. In other words, I should talk to *others*, be they chairs, mares or nightmares.

I'll talk to my furniture, to my chest of drawers where someone – a dwarf, for instance – may hide to listen to my sermon, to my dialogue with empty chairs, mayors and presidents who map out the future and print a lot of maps on which we don't recognise anybody or anything. My map is limited to my brain and one empty chair I'll single out for special treatment; an empty chair is both God and humanity. What is negative theology? An empty chair. What is humanity? A piece of chewing gum.

SERMON 1

I must begin somewhere because in the beginning was the word and my sermons will do justice to this word and words in general: you can't always pat someone on the shoulder to intimate you'll go away if such and such event doesn't leave its vestiges in the history of humankind. You might say to the person you don't touch, 'You should repent. Roman Catholics go to confession to purge their souls from sin.'

What are the sins I'm about to analyse in the course of my life, of the years I'm supposed to devote to suffering until doomsday, until any other day that will put an end to my suffering and joy, to my sermons and the games I play with myself as I move kings and queens on a huge wooden chessboard? I don't ask myself if this chessboard is my life – or anybody's life, for that matter – because life is neither here nor there; perhaps it is nowhere and no king, no rook will ever enliven it. But I hope I'll touch the hearts of those to whom I'm talking in the middle of the night; at least I might touch the veins or sinews that lead to these proverbial hearts without which neither love nor life are permitted to gambol around in the spring sunshine.

A few months ago, I bought a house where my books lie in their boxes as they wait for my hands that will put them where they belong – along my walls, under my ceiling, inside my cupboards. Soon I'll be able to consult them in order to write my sermons, my analyses, my thoughts and moods, my words and their derivatives, their prerogatives. Whatever happens in the world and elsewhere will also weave through stationary traffic on a bicycle to land up in my private church. The events I read about in newspapers are so distant I don't hear them, but I realise they reach me in spite of their inborn remoteness, for neither I nor anybody else can live without these events or any other events, otherwise life may become uneventful, losing its characteristics – losing its *life*, as it were.

And what can you do without life that you trust whenever you go to one of those Disneyland's where you forget about death and agonies thanks to the puppets you encounter as you make your way to yet another puppet waiting for you in a distant pavilion? If you put this puppet in a box and keep it in a museum, it will survive any tree in Versailles and even the chateau itself that may be plundered and destroyed by another generation of revolutionaries, by young or old nihilists who are not a thing of the past. (A thing of the present.) Why not sleep in a box or any other receptacle where you may find peace and quiet and the proverbial 'it' on which you can sleep forever? One day or night you'll wake and come

up with a new way to use up words, deeds, time and myths. And people will say about you, 'His career has been on the up and up since he died.'

There are many boxes around me and I might sleep in any of them if I was sleepy this night I'm spending in my new house where I've already come across the walls within which I'll live for many years, I hope: I have a long way to go before I can say to myself that all is over at last, that all has been done forever. A few sermons don't seem to be out of place at this stage of my progress towards whatever I may come across during the years I'm allotted on this earth, on this hearth where I'm sitting now, anxious to contemplate the fireplace, the flames about which so many philosophers talked with gusto as if water had been inferior to fire, to my huge fireplace and my inspiration. I need this fire to write the sermons I don't need because I follow my way day in day out, and nobody else will ever follow it, whatever I might say in my church or in any courtyard, provided the courtyard in question is a cemetery inhabited by the dead and enlivened by our common resurrection, our second birth. Yet I need to talk to you, to my furniture and heirlooms, to hiding places and no-man's lands, to wastelands and my waste thoughts. Waste thoughts talking to waste thoughts. A vicious circle, isn't it? Or a vicious black square.

Every sermon begins in your library where the Bible often has pride of place, and many hotel rooms offer you the same entertainment in the hope that you'll mend your ways and consequently land up in Paradise where there's only one book – the Book – and therefore libraries do not exist on account of the Fall and its consequences. Wasn't the Tree of Knowledge just a library instead of being a collection of fruit you could eat on a bench while looking at some angel or other? Apart from the Bible, there were many books on that tree and all of them came under severe censure, being out of place, as it were: in Paradise you need neither Sherlock Holmes nor Harry Potter. Do you really need them on Earth, on your divans where you can indulge in amorous games instead of following the adventures of a hero who doesn't remind you of your soul and the trials to which it will be subjected if you don't pay enough attention to it while sitting on your divan?

There are writers – Dante is of their number – who write in order to perfect their nature and become wise, pure and fit for the level of responsibility they've been given by whoever presides over our destinies and tribulations, over our births and deaths. (Whenever you say 'death', you're tempted to add 'birth', and vice versa.) No writing of mine has ever made me better because I can't improve my performance when talking to myself: you need to be *outside* yourself to judge your life and its ramifications that are reflected in the *celestial* Bible where the geography of your otherworldly wandering lies in wait for you and others: your friends and relatives. I need to dwell outside myself – if only for a few hours – in order to know myself and my doings which do not exist on their own and have their brothers and sisters elsewhere, everywhere, for we aren't alone in the world, even if there are no extraterrestrial creatures above us – in the sky, amidst the stars. So I need these sermons – let us call them 'sermons' for the sake of simplicity – thanks to which I'll know who I am, even if I'm doomed to ignorance as to your identities: I'll never know who might have sat down in my chairs, had my destiny been more benevolent and humane.

My new house is in a mess and I can't find any of the Bibles I used to consult in my former flat where I had as many as seven Bibles in four languages, which is a feat in itself, given that I don't regard the Bible as the Book excluding other books and theories from my field of vision. On the other hand, I've got my collection of the Fathers – the one I bought in Oxford 35 years ago; and consequently I can write my sermons without feeling destitute and miserable. Jesus Christ is the founder and managing director of human history, for he *walked* towards his Cross and Death instead of sitting on his divan and waiting for some cancer or other; and cancers are always in the wings unless you have a pile of them on your desk. If you sit on your divan, you don't create history or your own salvation because you *contemplate* the universe instead of walking through it to reach your name and destiny – *yourself*, as Pindar put it. You should become what you are, he thought, and he was right, I think; yet I'm not sure I wish to become myself, given that I trust neither my instincts nor my consciousness, let alone my unconscious where I might find *everything*, if I tried to explore it *conscientiously*. Aren't we likely to find the universe and its suburbs in our unconscious where myths and symbols have been stored for millennia? Don't we lie at the bottom of ourselves? On the top shelf?

The Fathers of the Church are downstairs: I'm sitting on the first floor of my new house and my happiness knows no bounds, even though I can't see my garden from where I'm sitting and writing this rigmarole; besides, I'm in the middle of the night and so wouldn't see anything, even if I was sitting elsewhere – in another European house, on the Moon. What do you see on the Moon? Your own reflection and our Mother Earth.

I have no wish to go downstairs and so the truth escapes me as I try to write my first – but not last – sermon which is supposed to give birth to a book where births and their ends will alternate to create an appropriate atmosphere for the final discovery of oneself, whoever this self or One may turn out to be in the course of my inquiry. All this is outdated, but I'm not outdated yet; so I have every reason to take care of myself as I talk to others, to my neighbours whom I'll never know, for they live in other towns and centuries, putting their trust in some guardian angels in whose pockets you may find a lot of agendas and schedules.

This night has already engulfed my house and myself; I'll sleep forever if I follow the example of a hero who falls asleep at the beginning of a fairy tale. As he wakes up, he hears a voice that tells him he has slept for a hundred years and might have died, but for the timely intervention of the voice.

SERMON 2

'I think that before all other things we have to inquire what sin is, – some substance, or wholly a name without substance, whereby is expressed, whereby is expressed not a thing, not an existence, not some sort of a body; but the doing of a wrongful deed. I suppose that this is the case; and if so, how could that which lacks all substance have possibly weakened or changed human nature?' Alas, I have no alternative but to quote a heretic because my numerous Bibles are out of my reach, resting on their laurels in some box or other, waiting for my return to the daily routine to which I'm accustomed, given my age and

bitter experience. Of course I could quote St Augustine in whose book I found Pelagius' doctrine, but this doctrine and the wording of his train of thought suit me perfectly and add a finishing touch to my own train of thought which I push along its rails as I gradually unravel the mystery of sin and other things we encounter daily in our lives.

Last night I went to a friend of mine – a French countess who lives in Belgium, not far from Waterloo – and imprudently parked my new BMW in front of the gate beyond which a pack of wild dogs began to bark upon hearing the music of my horn. First I saw a man, a kind of servant; he isn't a servant, for not every jack-of-all-trades could and indeed should be regarded as a servant: you can still be fêted as a master even if you just hammer a few nails into your doors and walls, from time to time. She does treat him like a servant, although she says 'Far be it from me –', whenever I bring up the issue and upbraid our dear countess, for I think that even psychological slavery was abolished at the end of the 20th century.

This man often comes to my new house which is a complete shambles, and for once I'm not to blame for such a state of affairs on account of my recent departure from France where my flat was so used to chaos I ended up hating the floor I was walking on. Dirty clothes littered the floor of my bedroom and also that of my living room where I was in the habit of taking my clothes off as if unable to reach a more appropriate place for such a ritual – my bathroom, for instance. In my new house, however, the mess is wholly due to my recent journey from France to Belgium: you can't put your belongings where they belong if there are no shelves on your walls and no holes for screws. So no one has said to me yet, 'Your house is always spick and span.' But my new car is a perfect example of a brand new car marred neither by scratches nor bruises, and you may be tempted to say it shines more perfectly than the sun, for there are spots on the sun and even the soul of a saint often looks pockmarked, doing justice to the expression 'Nobody's perfect'.

The quasi-servant greets me heartily as I leave my car and walk towards the gate beyond which there are a few dogs and the servant to whom I intend to talk about my GPS: I can't handle it properly, for all my efforts and patience. I'm always overwhelmed by a feeling of helplessness when I find myself in the presence of modern technology, and the expression 'Try as I may' is ideally suited for any description of the way I fiddle and tamper with these apparatuses. So I humbly ask the so-called servant to help me tame this wild horse and he doesn't refuse my request, although two hours before he said to me while putting down yet another box temporarily destined for my new library: 'I'm getting a bit tired now – shall we call it a day?'

He scrambles into the car and pushes a few buttons of which I was unaware as I drove through two towns separating me from the countess and her abode that always reeks of dogs, even when her five wild pets go on holiday to kennels. At last the countess herself appears in one of the doorways and starts walking towards my car, ill-treating the air through which she storms as she continues to shorten the distance between her body and my car inside which two brains are discussing the intricacies of my GPS.

The countess stormed out of the house, slamming the door as she went, and she threw the door of my car open as if bent on destroying my brand new BMW and killing its occupants who were engaged in conversation, absorbed in a 200-page instruction manual. On its way to the total openness, the door bumped into a small wall – a border, an edge – on which a row of red tiles seemed to await a battle with any car parked in front of the garden where a pack of dogs disported themselves, struggling with nature and hoping to thrust their teeth into some leg or other. The countess said ‘Sorry’ and made a short speech during which I kept thinking about the wounded door and my immaculate, virginal car, its former purity and chastity – a thing of the past, as Proust often said. The speech I didn’t pay attention to was actually focused upon a bunch of keys that the countess held in her right hand, swinging them in close proximity to my face. She might have chosen her servant’s face, had it been a little bit closer to her fingers, for it is him she usually gives orders to and not to her old friend and former lover whose incapacity to recall this particular part of the past speaks volumes about his ardent desire to forget it.

As soon as the servant disappeared behind a row of bushes, I began to talk to the countess with a view to making her realise to what extent her behaviour violated the laws of hospitality and many other laws: for once, we’re not in the domain of physics where, according to the latest theory, there are no laws at all. ‘Didn’t you see we were busy?’ I said.

‘I didn’t see you at all,’ she answered.

‘How so?’

‘I was too far away to see anything.’

‘But you did see us before opening the door, otherwise you wouldn’t have opened it.’

‘So what?’

I staggered out of the car – I was wounded as well – and examined the door; I instantly saw a red spot which, if transferred to a human face, would have alarmed many a doctor. I put my index finger on it and, forgetting all my struggles with stains of all kinds, began to rub it instead of saying to myself, ‘I rubbed at the stain on my trousers and made it worse, much worse.’ The red colour vanished into thin air, yielding up its prerogatives to a white spot which looked even more sinister than its red counterpart. Looking elsewhere, the countess said, ‘There’s nothing.’

‘Why do you think my car is still immaculate?’

‘Because it didn’t go bang.’ She was already sitting by my side.

‘The big bang is a thing of the past,’ I said. ‘There are only small bangs now.’

‘I heard nothing at all.’

‘Nor did you see anything.’ By way of an answer she nodded enthusiastically as if going blind was her lifelong dream. ‘Why didn’t you take the trouble to look at the spot?’

‘What spot?’

‘The red spot.’

‘Oh, my dearest – be a good sport and stop quibbling over trifles.’

‘When you buy a BMW, you try not to damage it immediately, almost on the spot.’

‘You mean in the garage?’

‘I bought it only five days ago.’

‘So what? Anyway, my insurance will pay.’

I shouldn’t pay attention to such occurrences because they don’t seem to trace their roots back to original sin about which Pelagius speaks in the excerpt from the sermon I quoted some time ago, probably yesterday, which doesn’t really matter when you speak of eternal questions and problems. But something *may* appeal to your sense of justice if you think about how my countess handled the whole business, leaving aside her education, genes and other attributes of nobility about which we used to talk even in the middle of the 20th century, before the Second World War. And then nobility (or aristocracy) suddenly relinquished its claim to the throne, so to speak; now they might occasionally speak about the Queen of England or the King of Spain, but the air is different and almost everything happens in the air, hence the expression ‘Love/Change/Spring is in the air’.

My countess destroyed the air as she stormed towards my car that had no alternative but to wait for her impetuosity because our possessions are often far more polite than we are on account of their immobility and submissiveness: they don’t contradict our intentions unless they’re kaput and no amount of energy can bring them back to life. We need this life of theirs to go shopping or reach the beaches where our bodies are sure to find as many sunbeams as necessary to increase the quantity of health and beauty in their veins. She also destroyed many of my ideas that I used to associate with aristocracy and the ways an aristocrat adopts to cope with life and its obscurity, for blunders are not the only solutions to the problems we encounter in everyday life and may occasionally come across in the Hereafter, provided this other world doesn’t differ much from our parks, castles, skyscrapers and Russian women who are so beautiful you have to fight the temptation to settle down in Petersburg for the rest of your life.

My countess – she isn’t really mine – was born into a family which could be exposed in a museum of nobility if such a museum was compatible with our notion of the 21st century and its egalitarian verve that can’t be compared to any other verve or wit, considering that we’re determined to give every right to everybody; and to give a number of bodies to every right. Never mind – I’m talking now about the incident I had to deal with yesterday or rather the day before, for time doesn’t wait for my prose and inspiration; it has other things to do and I have no idea what these things are, considering that I’m no prophet.

So the countess was surrounded by aristocrats from her very childhood and so her genes found their reflection and continuation within the bodies of the people who came to her parents’ castle situated on the outskirts of Belgium, which means that you had to spend almost two hours in your car to reach it and enjoy its old-time atmosphere. Why does she flout tradition for the sake of a bunch of keys that dangle in close proximity to my face, my mind, brain and thoughts of which this countess knows nothing, for she is solely preoccupied with her house and some alarm system? ‘Do you think your genes will always do the job?’ I said.

‘What job?’

‘Do you think that’s enough?’

‘What are you talking about?’ I often hear this question.

‘Your upbringing counts too.’

‘What’s wrong with my upbringing?’

‘You should have looked at the white spot instead of saying “There’s nothing”. You shouldn’t have questioned my description of the colours. Do you know that any paint crumbles if you scratch it? A tiny little spot. My car will become white if I leave it as it is. Or rusty. Rain is forecast for tomorrow.’

‘It’s up to you not to leave it as it is. Or buy another car.’

Let us go back to the beginning of my sermon. ‘How could that which lacks all substance have possibly weakened or changed human nature?’ The air ill-treated by my countess on her way to my car doesn’t lack substance, for there are many atoms in it; and atoms aren’t void, contrary to what many people think as they look at the air and see no castles, no skyscrapers and no money. But the white spot I see on the door of my car is a sort of substance that may cause much trouble, if I don’t deal with it appropriately tomorrow or the day after – before the end of the week. Otherwise it is likely to weaken my car’s nature so this car of mine will be damaged beyond repair and recognition, if I don’t pay enough attention to this spot and the paint which surrounds it on all sides – for the time being. (I wrote, ‘If I don’t pay enough attention to this spot and the *pain* which surrounds it on all sides.’ My pain does surround it on all sides, as a matter of fact.)

Let us analyse my countess’s behaviour; let us probe the depths of the abyss, in other words. Did she really have to open the door of my car in order to speak to her servant? She might have looked at me through the window which was made for this purpose: if you don’t *look* through windows, you can break them, for they serve no other purpose except that they isolate you from noise and people who shout rather often, when displeased with their lives and other features of the universe. She might have looked at me and I would have responded to her glance, given that I make use of my genes and upbringing whenever reality barges its way to my flat, house or life, determined to pester me to the best of its abilities. I would have opened my window to hear what she had to say either to me or to her servant who was still struggling with my GPS system and geography in spite of his knowledge of whatever could happen to you in your everyday life and even outside it: our lives don’t end where they seem to end, otherwise there would be no Hereafter, let alone Eternity.

I open my window and she talks to her servant about the keys that remain in her possession and consequently dangle in close proximity to my face, as I usually say in spite of the fact that the word ‘proximity’ is formal and therefore shouldn’t be used on a regular basis. The countess says something about these keys – she may also talk about other keys or houses – and I shut my window in order to listen to my guru’s explanations without which I’ll never be able to go anywhere except the nearest shop where I’ll find sole, salmon and a Thai soup I’ve been fond of for at least three years.

I don't listen to my guru because he doesn't talk, contrary to what might have been expected. My countess talks and destroys my car which doesn't seem to like intruders, otherwise it wouldn't have reacted so mournfully to the countess' ferocity. As a result, I still don't know how to handle my GPS – or any other GPS, for that matter; and I can't find my way either in Brussels or anywhere else because I get lost whenever I find myself in front of the steering wheel that I admire so much I'm not even tempted to go places: let me remain forever in my car, in the front seat, in front of the steering wheel I don't need to describe in details. Everybody knows how the steering wheel of a BMW looks like and I know it too, although I'm sitting now in front of my computer and not in the garage where my car sleeps and enjoys a number of sweet dreams in spite of the wound inflicted on its door by my dear countess.

'Do you really need a wide open door to talk to your servant?' I said to her in the heat of the moment.

'He's not my servant,' she said.

'All right. Why did you throw the door open? A wide open door.'

'Oh, we don't do things by halves round here,' she said.

'How could that which lacks all substance have possibly weakened or changed human nature?' The Bible speaks of original sin. The Book doesn't lack all substance, for it is a book you can hold and lay on your bedside table – your pillow book, as Sei Shônagon might have put it. Besides, my car bears witness to the wound inflicted on it by a countess who forgets her genes now and then, eager to behave like a servant or a maiden born in a cowshed. My nature is weakened and changed, which proves that original sin comes into play every night and every morn.

SERMON 3

Is there anything in the world that lacks substance to prove that no original sin will ever mar our lives to the point of making us feel guilty whenever we divert our own attention from our offices and the people who talk about money and the fun they're used to when they forget for a while their worries and investments? I wrote, 'They forget their millions,' but they never forget their money which allows them to have fun on a large scale without thinking about tomorrow and the end of the 21st century when their grandchildren will need a lot of castles and Ferraris to build their own city of God.

Substance is everywhere and I even recall the definition I unearthed when writing one of my books devoted to our psyche: 'Our soul is solid,' which is probably true if we look at the wounds inflicted on the world and the things we're used to calling 'impalpable'. They become palpable as soon as they're wounded and such a thing happens all the time because our world and its accessories are covered with wounds from head to foot, and such a number of wounds can't appear, grow and mature overnight; they are the result of many attacks, onslaughts and acts of ill wills that multiply and replenish the earth despite our protestations such as, 'I bear them no ill will.'

Today I'll speak about the way that leads us away from sin and whatever is linked to it, even though we may come to a hasty conclusion that not *everything* is connected to sin so we can escape from

it, from the world of sin, and plunge into the sea of innocence. 'Man is most wisely commanded to walk with right steps, on purpose that, when he has discovered his own inability to do even this, he may seek the remedy which is provided for the inward man to cure the lameness of sin, even the grace of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Well and good. I'm unable to walk with right steps because I can't distinguish between right steps and wrong ones; and yet my house is a playground where you may easily learn the topography of our world as you trip and fall over while walking through it. The point is my new house – an English cottage – is full of steps and people trip over them all the time; I mostly eat alone, after having called an ambulance and assisted two male nurses who don't know my garden through which they have to carry yet another victim of my steps. And I always recall the title of Hitchcock's movie in which they speak of 39 steps over which they trip now and then unless I am confusing one plot with another, one life with another, for there are many lives around us, many, many lives; alas, we can't choose the only life we would like to live and enjoy, for it is always hidden from us as if playing a game we cannot win.

Anyway, today I'm quoting St Augustine himself and consequently my steps are right, leading me in the right direction towards the goal; and I wonder to which goal these right steps are prepared to drive me, for I've set myself a *series* of goals to achieve by the end of the month. To achieve these goals, I have to remove a multitude of boxes I trip over as I try to reach the entrance door of my house in order to leave it for the sake of a few products I can buy in the nearby shops which offer whatever you can wish, provided you don't wish the moon and the stars fixed overhead, all over a starry night.

I don't know whether I can take a couple of steps towards the stars or the bench on which St Thomas of Aquinas writes his books, but I'm entitled to move around my house without thinking about original sin and its derivatives and consequences as a result of which we fall every day when washing our dishes or eating our T-bone or sirloin steaks. Let us ponder over these right steps together, otherwise we'll never move from where we're lying as we wait for the end of the world, which will never come because our life expectancy is totally dependent on Jesus Christ's bounty and His bounty is immeasurable, imponderable.

The countess – she is renowned for the way she ill-treats all sorts of doors – vindicates her behaviour by a remark which reminds me of the saying I find obnoxious and harmful: '*C'est l'intention qui compte*'. Within her head, she treats her servant like a lord (or a god) and her benevolent thoughts and *intentions* prevent her seeing and judging the reality where she bullies almost everyone into doing what they don't want to do for the simple reason that they want to do something else – to have forty winks, for instance. Her intentions erect a barricade, determined to protect their owner – a Prince Siddhartha in her own right – against the intrusion of conflict and acts of great malevolence that may in the long run infringe upon basic human rights. What are these rights? Her peace of mind for the sake of which she forgets reality to the point of losing friends, servants and money – whenever she buys or sells her property. She doesn't know the first thing about money and transactions so that her only knowledge in this domain is limited to the amount of money she loses every month: her notebook is peppered with

numbers. Does she also lose God on account of this barricade which screens her eyes from the bright light traditionally associated with the Trinity, its bounty, spiritual energy and truth?

Whenever she talks to me about her thoughts and *their* bounty, I say to her, 'I'm not a mind reader and, to tell the truth, I don't care about your thoughts. But your actions speak much louder than your thoughts, especially when you slam a door after you and slam your numerous bags down on my chest of drawers with a smack.' It is rapidly becoming clear that the countess should get out of her own mind – she is currently both out of her mind and inside it – and take a few steps in the real world without, however, damaging cars and other contraptions designed to help us impose strict controls on space and time which are used to spinning out of control whenever our cars break down. And the right steps taken by St Augustine's admirers and followers do not resound within their *minds*, for they all perform the play entitled *The Pilgrim's Progress* and obviously this sermon of mine is inspired by the famous novel that adorns any history of English literature.

'But St Augustine speaks of the *inward* man,' you may object.

'As inside, so outside,' I say to you. 'If you spend too much time in your own brain, you end up hearing your inner voice and not that of God, of the Almighty. Your brain is identical to the Internet and the computer in whose company you spend so many days and nights. You may also call it an iPod, if you wish. You should meet your friends and foes instead of sending them text messages. You should leave your house and take a number of right steps. They'll lead to both your fellow creatures and God.'

'But St Augustine speaks of the *inward* man,' you tell me once more. 'A musician doesn't need a piano or an orchestra to enjoy a piece of music – it may resound in his head, in his inner ear. Instead of music, you can also hear the voice of God, your Master's voice, provided you strain your ears to hear what He is saying.'

'Can you compare what you hear inside your proverbial ear to Furtwängler's interpretation of Beethoven's symphonies?' I say to you. Of course you're at liberty to stay at home and listen to your inner ear and Furtwängler's recordings. From whom have you received this freedom of choice? From God, no doubt. "Well, but that which God bestows is certainly good," as St Augustine puts it.' And once again I quote the saint:

'On what principle, then, is a thing proved to be good, if it is more prone to evil than to good? For it is more prone to evil than to good if by means of it man can be with sin and cannot be without sin.' The answer is this: It came by the freedom of choice that man was with sin; but a penal corruption closely followed thereon, and out of the liberty produced necessity. Hence the cry of faith to God, 'Lead Thou me out of my necessities.' With these necessities upon us, we are either unable to understand what we want, or else (while having the wish) we are not strong enough to accomplish what we have come to understand.

‘You don’t have the wish, do you?’ I say to you. ‘So you’re not strong enough to have the wish. You’re therefore doubly weak.’

‘We wish to stay at home and read the Bible. By the way, you haven’t found your Bibles yet, have you?’

‘I haven’t.’

‘Why don’t you look for them?’

‘I do, but I can’t lay my hands on them. Actually I don’t really know where to look for them. There are so many boxes in this house and even outdoors, in the chalet.’

‘The point is you don’t walk with right steps. If you did, your legs would immediately bring you to the Bibles. Quoting St Augustine isn’t enough. Besides, you often quote Pelagius instead of St Augustine.’

This morning I was thinking about the Soviet Union and other countries where people had no freedom of choice and consequently ought to have preserved the goodness bestowed upon them by the Almighty and His emissaries – our guardian angels, in other words. Instead of goodness, however, many Soviet citizens did all they could to put up a good show of evil qualities and tendencies, informing on their neighbours and even on those friends whose careers seemed to them disproportionate to the relatively small size of their own careers. And the hiding places where they kept money and gold trinkets also looked miniscule in comparison with their thriving colleagues’ cars and country houses.

Indeed, not only Soviet leaders and rulers were evil; to some extent, Reagan was right when he enlarged in his speeches upon the ‘evil empire’, meaning that even ordinary citizens didn’t behave in accordance with the Bible’s precepts – probably because they could find the Bible neither in bookshops nor in hotels. In other words, God was unable to free them from sin as if He had also been deprived of freedom by Stalin or Khrushchev who outdid everybody in the domain of religious destruction: Khrushchev demolished even more churches than Stalin whose anti-architectural (and antihuman) ferocity knew no bounds. Stalin had the freedom to do what he wanted and in the long run this freedom produced the necessity about which St Augustine speaks in one of *his* sermons or books. In spite of the saint’s conclusion, however, Stalin was perfectly able to understand what he wanted – killing, killing, killing – and he was powerful enough to commit as many murders as was necessary to quench his (unquenchable) thirst for destruction.

The only person who, for a while, managed to deprive Stalin of his absolute freedom was Hitler whom almost everybody equates with Satan, which means that God bestows freedom upon Man and Woman, whereas Satan deprives them of it. Stalin was a murderer and a robber: he robbed his subjects of freedom and was therefore branded as Satan. But what about the Politburo that bestowed upon Stalin absolute freedom? Did it have any affinities with God?

SERMON 4

I left France for many reasons and one of these reasons is related to the number of friends I had there: even if solitude is in your genes, you do have *some* friends, if only to ask them to bury you properly, without undue familiarity. But all your friends are likely to let you down at the wrong moment – when you most need their help, compassion and even love, for they’re supposed to love their neighbours; after all, I’m one of their number, of their neighbours. Of course, upon hearing your reproaches, they would answer you thus, ‘You want us to bury you properly, but you’re not at death’s door yet, are you? By treating you mercilessly, we just make you realise you’re the picture of health, alive and kicking, and that’s the biggest compliment anyone can pay to a human being and an animal, an insect. Even plants need our encouragement and flattery.’

Your friends come to you and say they won’t stay for more than five minutes; and they stay for two hours as if the weather didn’t allow them to leave, whispering in their ears, ‘It’s cold and wet outside so you’d better stay here, in your friend’s house,’ or ‘Stay until the rain has stopped.’ But rain is forecast for tomorrow and today the sun outshines its recent performances so that your chandelier – let alone your candles – cannot rival the sunbeams you see in your room, on the trees under which you like to sit, getting the best of both worlds: the sun and the shadows cast by your trees. So you’re tempted to say to your friend who always outstays his welcome: ‘Have you nothing urgent to attend to? No business, nothing? You have a wife and lots of children. Why don’t you go home? They’re missing you terribly. And your little son is very ill. Why don’t you call a doctor? Not from here, needless to say. My telephone is as busy as my mind. But you could give him a ring from a telephone box. There are such things as telephone boxes, you know. People don’t really have to stay indoors to ring their doctors up. Suppose my telephone is out of order. It is, as a matter of fact. So you have to go out and call your doctor from a telephone box. There are none at my place, as you can see. But there are lots of them in the streets. Hurry up, otherwise your son and daughter might pass away. So many children die nowadays.’

‘The feared epidemic of cholera hasn’t materialised,’ he answers, shaking his head.

‘There are other epidemics in the world and you can’t really stem them. At least you can’t do it yourself. You have to call a doctor. You should have your children immunised against diphtheria. There’s an epidemic of diphtheria in our town. So call your doctor. Quickly! Can you run fast enough to save your child from death? Why are you standing in the middle of my room? Do you like my room so much that you can’t bring yourself to leave it? Well, I’m flattered. Actually I decorated it myself. I bought the furniture and the paintings you see around you, on the walls. But there are many more paintings in the museums for which our city is renowned all over the world. Why don’t you go to one of those museums? I’m sure you haven’t visited *all* of them. One or two perhaps, four at the most. There are dozens of museums in our city, a thousand and one. They’re everywhere but my flat isn’t of their number. To tell the truth, not all of the paintings you see in this room are authentic. Some of them are fakes, I’m sorry to say. *All* of them are fakes, actually. No point in looking at them. And my furniture is modern, just modern copies. Even I never sit down in these armchairs. I try to avoid unpleasant feelings in life. Don’t you? What’s more, my house is quite unhealthy. I mean the air in my house. I smoke too

much. Do you want to die of lung cancer? By the way, this particular cancer can be easily prevented. You just have to get out of my room as quickly as possible. If you don't care for your own life, you must remember that your children need you. They're likely to die this afternoon, if you don't call the doctor urgently. And you have to survive until then – I mean you can't afford to die before making that telephone call. And of course you'll have to open the front door of your flat. The doctor doesn't have your key, I presume. Does he?'

'My sister is at home,' he says.

'And your children won't be able to do it,' you go on. 'They can't leave their beds and walk *all* the way to the front door. They're very ill, no doubt about it! And your wife died a long time ago of lung cancer, if I'm not mistaken. No, she never came to my apartment, to my room. Your wife was faithful to you, whatever scandalmongers might say about her. There are other smoking areas in our city. And your wife spent too much time in one of those areas, I'm afraid. What did she do in that area? Did she wait for someone to help her? Well, she ought to have asked for help in a *non-smoking* area. Why didn't she call a doctor from a telephone box? It's not very expensive, is it? Anyway health is much more precious than money, as you must know. Do you want to share her sinister fate? But don't forget you've got two little children to take care of. On her deathbed she entrusted her children to you, her faithful husband. That's why she died in peace. She thought you would look after them. Both children are bound to become orphans – after your death. Do you really want that? Were *you* an orphan in your childhood? Of course not. Your father and mother lavished their loving care on their only son and showered him with presents of all sorts.'

'Not always,' he says.

'Why do you want to deprive your children of presents?' you ask. 'Do you think they'll be given many in children's homes and orphanages? I'm sorry to disappoint you but I think the idea you've formed of those places is quite erroneous. Children are given presents only at Christmas time. Perhaps, I'm not sure. I hope they do get something at Christmas time. And they're undernourished. And beaten black and blue with a stick. You don't beat your children, do you? Do you want them to be beaten up? They have little chance of surviving life in an orphanage. It might be better for them to die of diphtheria after all. Have you ever read Dickens' novels? Well, let them die of diphtheria. But do you wish to die yourself? You could live without your children, you know. Life is wonderful. You can drink old wines and make love to young women, especially since your wife's dead. You're free, aren't you? I would re-marry, if I were you. Or I'd go on a spree. Or just to a brothel. There are lots of sexy women in brothels. There are none in here, I'm afraid. I'm not a pimp.'

I can hardly advocate such a way of treating your neighbour or even a man you don't know and on whose help you'll never count because he lives in a distant country so that if you ring him up, he won't fly to your rescue either in a plane or in his car. So I say to you, 'You should love him as if he were your bride or dearest wife whose cooking you admire to the extent of forgetting the restaurants where you used to spend your time when you were a bachelor. Love him as much as your heart allows

you such an exercise of Christian virtues, for too much love can make your heart explode, putting you in your tomb before the rest of your body is prepared for this ritual.’ Some people advocate the return of capital punishment, but I recommend love, considering that neither electric chairs nor orders such as ‘Off with her head!’ are likely to ennoble our characters, nature and ways of life. And yet I’m not a priest who, at that point, might quote Clement of Alexandria: ‘For what further need has God of the mysteries of love? And then thou shalt look into the bosom of the Father, whom God the only-begotten Son alone hath declared. And God Himself is love; and out of love to us became feminine. In His ineffable essence He is Father; in His compassion to us He became Mother. The Father by loving became feminine; and the great proof of this is He whom He begot of Himself; and the fruit brought forth by love is love.’

If asked what all this means, I would be hard put to analyse God’s metamorphosis that is said to turn Him from man into a woman, from God into a goddess. Do you need to become a woman in order to feel the sentiment of love thanks to which anyone can reach the Kingdom of God in the twinkling of an eye without hiring a Ferrari or buying what is termed a ‘private jet’? Are only women capable of *real* love about which men know nothing or next to nothing, being too absorbed in their books and bank accounts, porn movies and sexual fantasies? These don’t *always* need the physical support provided by porn movies and so indulge in this pastime all the more enthusiastically since they have to *create* the images their libidos respond to eagerly, making them forget both God and *real* love. I don’t say that real love is utterly divorced from sensuality and sexuality, but it is first and foremost centred upon heart where true or real love finds its eternal abode and fountainhead, God and the Mother about which our Clement of Alexandria speaks so eloquently in his sermon.

I don’t say you have to undergo an operation and really become a mother or a maiden at least, anxious as you are to experience the wonderful feeling of love about which you read in Russian novels and in Clement of Alexandria’s sermons which should lie on your bedside table day and night to deserve the appellation ‘Pillow Book’. You don’t need female breasts to love your neighbour more than yourself, for real love doesn’t blossom in big tits or other organs associated with women; as I pointed out earlier, the seat of love is located in the heart and not in the rest of the body, in its nether parts. You just have to *embody* Clement’s Mother in order to give birth to harmony, beauty, love of God, love of men, love of insects you maltreat whenever you rise from your bed and go to the kitchen, hoping to quench your thirst with beer or orange juice. You should be both Father and Mother, which means that you don’t necessarily need a wife or a husband to enliven your house with lots of real children – not only with beauty, harmony, music and paintings; otherwise Clement of Alexandria’s sermon makes no sense.

In the light of what I said at the beginning of *my* sermon, you may think you’re wholly justified in chasing your neighbour out of your house because you need neither men nor women: you can beget as many children as you wish, provided you follow Clement’s advice. But the next morning, in the cold light of day, you’re likely to realise what a complete idiot you were a few hours before as you dismissed from your life your neighbours, relatives and distant cousins who *may* fly to your rescue, even if they

happen to live in New Zealand. So, on second thoughts, you decide to welcome your numerous neighbours, to call them back, saying you love them all and therefore can't live without their bodies and minds which you see as the only instrument of your lifelong happiness. They don't believe you at first – in the light of what you've been saying to them from time immemorial; but you insist and one of your distant cousins takes a plane to join you at your dinner table covered or rather embellished with dainty dishes of which so many kings partook in days of yore. During the meal you say to your cousin:

'I hope you'll stay with me as long as you're allowed to live away from your family. Actually my house is big enough to accommodate not only the members of your family, but also your friends and the friends of your friends, if you see what I mean. The quantity of love I've stored in my heart since October is so big I can't bear its weight unless I share it with many people, giving them the sunbeams of my love. You see, my heart is now producing large love surpluses.'

'We produce enough vegetables for our community,' says your cousin, 'and any surplus is sold to local shops.'

'I'm speaking about love, and money is the worst enemy of love, according to St Francis.'

'I have a wife and four children to support.'

'I'll support them if they come to my place in the country.'

'They love New Zealand.'

'It's a different kind of love, isn't it? Only human beings and their eyes provide a real solution to the problems we're facing in our guilt-ridden world.'

'And what if I fall ill?' your cousin says to you. 'I've got no insurance in your country.'

'We'll have you back on your feet in no time at all. And you'll be able to proclaim our Christian truth from the rooftops: "The love of my family and friends sustained me through my ordeal."'

'I believe in doctors, not in God and His love,' your cousin says to you. And he adds with a grin, 'Nor do I believe in *your* love.'

What could you answer to such an individual? Of course you're not as important as God and so have no power over elements and bugs that wreak havoc on crops and human bodies: there's no love lost between bugs and what our doctors call 'good health'. In your cousin's eyes, you're not even as important as the doctors to whose art he can resort, if he eventually succumbs to a disease known as fatal and listed alongside life terminators such as poisons and bombs. Never mind – you felt it was your duty to talk to your distant cousin about love and its ramifications; besides, it is surely the duty of the stronger members in a society to help those who are weak on account of their indifference to love and its bearers.

Now it is just liberty itself that is promised to believers by the Liberator. 'If the Son', says He, 'shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.' For, vanquished by the sin into which it fell by its volition, nature has lost liberty. Hence another scripture says, 'For of whom a man is overcome of the same is he brought in bondage.' Since therefore 'the whole need not the physician,

but only they that be sick;’ so likewise it is not the free that need the Deliverer, but only the enslaved.’

Am I already enslaved to love? But, whatever Clement of Alexandria says and thinks, I have no wish to be free in the kingdom where love is located in the centre – like God Himself whose centre is everywhere and circumference can’t be found, however stubbornly you may search for it. Am I a slave of God? I talk about God too much, according to some of my friends or enemies who might think that actions speak louder than words; but I can’t spend my life on my knees as if I was a slave of God, waiting for His orders and cursing hourly the disorder of my soul. Running errands for God on my knees. Perhaps I’d better become a slave of God, for the freedom about which you talk too much is often found in slavery and not in a life of debauchery, in a chaos of thoughts and gestures, in whirlwind romances and so on.

Let us suppose I *am* a slave of God – for argument’s sake, needless to say. There are so many arguments in this world of ours that you can play with them to your heart’s content, occasionally doing something for their sake because any sledgehammer argument deserves your sacrifices and loss of energy. I run errands for God – on my knees or otherwise, for it is important to be at His service round the clock so that even if you happen to be in your bed, you listen to whatever your Master says to you, assuming that He vouchsafes to pay attention either to your bended knees or running legs or flying thoughts.

My prayer sounds thus, ‘Put me in chains, dear Lord. Never let me go. You don’t have to be politically correct, for it is beneath Your dignity to model Your behaviour on that of today’s politicians who can’t say “deaf” and “blind”, even if you’re both. You’re deaf, but they say, “hearing-impaired” and no one understands who they’re talking about because there’s a deaf person in the middle of a square and this person can’t hear either lorries or the policeman blowing the whistle on him, on her and on their protruding ears. “These ears are not impaired,” we say to the politicians. “They’re done for.” “Hard of hearing,” say the politicians. “They’ve been deaf and dumb since birth,” we say. “Hard of hearing and taciturn,” say the politicians. “A reserved, taciturn person.”

‘Put me in chains, dear Lord. I know You sent Your son to Earth to make us free, saying “You shall be free.” It is true that my nature has lost its liberty since I knelt down before Your feet. I have no idea what incited me to worship You on my bended knees, but what counts is the result and not the origin of my worship. Volition, sin – these words no longer mean anything to me because I see only Your legs and they’re not sinful and, according to Spinoza, they have no will of their own. In other words, they won’t trample me to death or kick my arse since I abandon myself to my slavery, to my worship, and chain myself to Your legs in protest against the world’s depravity and stupidity. I don’t need a physician, alias Your Son because I’m not sick – slaves are often healthier than their masters because they work mainly outdoors, in gardens and fields, breathing fresh air day in day out, whereas their masters sprawl in armchairs in front of TV sets, smoking cigars and drinking wines, beer, whisky

and vodka. I know You don't smoke because sometimes You *are* politically correct. What's more, You live in heaven – no air pollution, no noise pollution. And we continue to issue manifestos that include tough measures to tackle road congestion and environmental pollution. In heaven there are neither road congestions nor environmental pollutions. And yet the once azure skies of Athens have been ruined by *atmospheric* pollution.'

SERMON 5

I shouldn't spend my time at the Almighty's feet because His Son brought history to our world, following in the footsteps of Prometheus who, as everybody knows, offered us fire and many other things about which they talk in the books devoted to Greek mythology. I've got a few books devoted to the subject in one of the boxes I'm reluctant to open because, if you open a box full of books, you must put these books somewhere: you can't leave them where they are, otherwise there's no point in opening boxes or anything else. And I have no wish to tackle this problem right now, after dinner, after drinking a bottle of Bâtard Montrachet.

After drinking this bottle, I ensconced myself in a deep armchair with a book and a glass of cognac. Why should I look for a book on Greek mythology and its heroes? Jesus Christ offered us history and many other things about which I know a lot so I don't really have to look for the Bible and the books where they discuss the matter in detail, saying what *exactly* Jesus put in our lives and on the surface of the Earth. Some theologians say that Jesus put *everything* at our disposal and it is up to our minds and hands to make use of the material he supplied us with as he walked on waters and on the grass, talking to his disciples and the crowds, for as soon as he made His appearance outdoors, out of His study, crowds of people poured into the streets.

Well, suppose that whatever you see around you was brought to Earth by Jesus Christ so that one might say the world was created by Him and not by His father: after all, according to the Council of Trent – or any other council, for that matter – the Son was born together with the Father. But the Father was older than the Son, for the simple reason that fathers are *always* older than sons, otherwise the problem analysed by Turgenev in *Fathers and Sons* wouldn't have seen the light of day. So the Father was much older than the Son and He was so tired when He got home from work that He had a quick nap during which His Son created the universe, saying to Himself, 'This is only a rough draft – the finished world will have freedom as well.'

I'm hopeless at history and that's why I get it all wrong, confusing fathers and sons, the Big Bang and the deliverance from our sins for which you must pray day and night in spite of the Deliverer – alias the Son – and His mission dating back to the beginning of our era. It is the Father Who created the world, but the Son was to liberate us from the bondage of sin and blindness so that now we enjoy all sorts of freedoms about which our politicians speak on TV, on stage and occasionally on the radio. But today I'm free to choose what I feel like talking about and therefore I won't talk about freedom, for I don't really have to talk about it day in, day out: after all, I'm neither a politician nor an American.

I did find a book on Greek mythology – without looking for it because it was lying almost at my feet as if I were a god of sorts. I opened the index where Prometheus is listed on account of his participation in the history of men and women. Apparently there were two brothers: Prometheus (forethought) and Epimetheus (afterthought). The latter was a scatterbrained person who invariably followed his first impulse and then changed his mind. Before making men he gave all the best gifts to animals: strength, swiftness, courage and shrewd cunning. In addition to these more or less *spiritual* qualities, he also gave them fur and feathers and wings and shells – until no good was left for men. Prometheus took over the task of creation so it is he and his brother that you should be grateful to for our planet and whatever can be found on it, including animals – who are still much better than humans – plants and waterways along which boats and ships continuously sail, bringing to humankind all sorts of goods and comfort food. The Earth is the playground of the rich and famous; all you have to do is become both, buying villas, swimming pools, Bentleys and other examples of what is termed ‘the ultimate status symbol’.

Prometheus fashioned us in a nobler shape than the animals, upright like the gods – according to the book I found on the floor of my study. But I don’t agree with its author – Edith Hamilton – because I think that animals and their shapes are far nobler than humankind; and the upright position is inferior to horizontality and crawling on all fours. When you crawl on all fours, you see the Earth much better than in an upright position which takes you away from the Earth – from the grass, stones and insects – without pushing you closer to heaven which is doomed to remain out of your reach till Doomsday, as they say. It is actually you who are doomed to remain far from heaven, whatever you do, however swift and sophisticated your planes and spaceships are in this 21st century or in any other century, in the distant future.

You crawl on all fours and suddenly see the legs of God or rather His feet – the end of the journey you undertook with the aim of improving the quality of your life that wholly depends on God’s grace and even on your proximity to His legs: you shouldn’t endeavour to look God in the face for fear of being burnt to cinders. Even Moses wasn’t allowed to see the face of God; even *he* would have been burnt to cinders had he attempted to do so, failing to observe the legislation enacted by God and His assistants.

You don’t abase yourself when you resolve to crawl through your life instead of walking proudly up and down the streets of your native city – or only *up* the streets, given the upright position of your head which doesn’t condescend to look down and watch out for the numerous steps you come across in the course of your wanderings. No wonder you often fall as if to demonstrate the importance of humility and modesty in human history which can’t run its course without God’s support and daily interference in individual lives. It is advisable not to be as proud as Lucifer and being on all fours may remind you of this truth much more efficiently than a pair of legs walking up the main street where only sports cars and BMWs can be seen on a Sunday afternoon.

When crawling towards God's feet, don't say to yourself every minute or even every second, 'I've never felt so humiliated in my life' because this illusory humiliation is the only way to salvation; and the rhyme you may take advantage of, if you happen to be a poet, proves it linguistically: 'humiliation-salvation'. In the beginning was the word; in the beginning was the rhyme. And don't forget that the gods of antiquity have crawled to our threefold God ever since the birth of Jesus Christ Who, as I said earlier, inaugurated a new era of spiritual and economic prosperity.

As I said earlier, you should continue to move, even if you see God's feet which may become an ingredient in your field of vision on condition that you behave properly and never slacken your pace that is sure to bring you closer and closer to the final deliverance. Christians should never stop, even if they arrive at their destination and therefore might – such logic seems utterly incontrovertible – to rest on their laurels. That's what the Buddhists do, by the way, as they renounce life and the passions they might have experienced, had they stayed within the bounds of life, and attain their nirvana or any other state related to it so that they look like the dead deprived of coffins and tombs – like the living dead, so to speak.

'Therefore is it that the threefold wisdom of the Brahmins, wise in their Three Vedas, is called a waterless desert, their threefold wisdom is called a pathless jungle, their threefold wisdom is called destruction' (Tevigga Sutta). You don't have to be a practising Catholic to realise that Three Gods – our Trinity, in other words – are far better than Three Vedas, whatever they are; and the water drunk by monks in their monasteries allows them to worship God even beyond the deadline of death, whereas the Brahmins sit in their deserts and slowly die of thirst, their thoughts bent on destruction. Anyway they cannot move, for they sit in a pathless jungle where plants and animals have pride of place to the detriment of revelations and the stigmata you can deserve if you wash the feet of God day and night, wasting no time on coffee breaks.

And passing out of the consciousness of no special object he fell into a state between consciousness and unconsciousness. And passing out of the state between consciousness and unconsciousness he fell into a state in which the consciousness both of sensations and of ideas had wholly passed away.

Then the venerable Ānanda said to the venerable Anuruddha: 'O my Lord, O Anuruddha, the Blessed One is dead!'

'Nay! Brother Ānanda, the Blessed One is not dead. He has entered into that state in which both sensations and ideas have ceased to be!'

Mahā-Parinibbāna-Sutta

I, for one, would be unable to write anything if I was in the state described by our anonymous author (or authors) whose poetic qualities might merit your attention, but for the utter inanity of his or their comments on the way our life should adopt to cope with the obstacles you light upon in any novel –

even in a worthless bestseller. Of course, as I pointed out earlier, it is not enough to write a work inspired by the *Divina Commedia*: you won't reach Paradise if you write for yourself instead of talking to your congregation, to your brethren who need your light and your hymn to Creation and its Author. But whatever you do for the world and its inhabitants, you must be fully *conscious* of your aims, capacities and eloquence, otherwise your thoughts will never reach out to local communities, let alone to a large proportion of the world's population.

What indeed would you write or talk about if you found yourself inside 'that state in which both sensations and ideas have ceased to be'? How could you write without ideas which are a dependable source of information and inspiration? Or is it the other way round? Do *ideas* originate in what has always been defined as 'inspiration' associated with Pegasus and his innumerable flights through the air and the universe? But inspiration and its ingredients depend solely on sensations without which you're unable to welcome the world inside your body and mind; and even if you're determined to keep the world at bay, you have to take into consideration many things such as steps and suchlike. In other words, you should *mind* these things, otherwise you're likely to fall all the time and eventually land up in a waterless desert or a pathless jungle where you're bound to die of starvation or fall prey to the greediness of tigers. And how could you *mind* these things without your *mind* which immediately passes away if deprived of both sensations and ideas?

Apparently John Paul II said that Buddhism couldn't be taken seriously because it puts the void on the spot where God has always been standing, his feet being rooted to the spot from the day (or night) of his birthday. But the void yearns for content. And what content or being is worthier than God Who can settle in the void all the more efficiently since all the passions we are enslaved to have already withdrawn from it, making us free from their turbulence and nuisance? Our God, however, is rather cramped for space in our soul where our passions, lewd suggestions and other pernicious desires devote their time to all-night, open-air rave parties; and yet they seem to live *inside* our body and soul. In point of fact, they're so boisterous and immeasurable they can't limit monkey business to the dimensions of our ego and superego which are unable to control them in spite of their duty and function assigned to them by Freud. So they go on a spree and wreak vengeance on society and the Church that endeavour to keep them under restraint – under wraps, as it were, for fear of contamination: our churchmen fear they might engulf the whole planet and thus prevent Jesus Christ from paying us a second visit. How indeed could our second God march through lives of debauchery, through the space where no disciples, no decent people will ever be found and recruited?

The Buddhists, however, know how to cope with the situation I described in the previous paragraph, for their monks clear all passions and material aspirations away as soon as they begin to loom on the horizon, paving the way to the void that stalks furiously out of the Christian world and invades the souls prepared to welcome it warmly or rather indifferently: the soul of a Buddhist is neither hot nor cold, whereas our Christian souls are supposed to be either hot or cold, but never lukewarm, never ever. So why did John Paul II advise us against the void on which you can always count because the Messiah

is sure to feel better in an empty house than amidst the furniture you've purchased over the last twenty years, trusting your taste and purse?

Recently I sold a flat situated in the neighbourhood of the chateau de Versailles which was actually half-empty – or half-full, like the proverbial bottle – when I first paid it a visit in 1974 after having spent four hours in my friend's car: we set off on our journey in Brussels. As for my flat, I had to get rid of it in order to settle in Belgium where taxes aren't as devastating as in France. In the agency I went to, there was a woman who told me I could sell my *appartement* for a huge sum of money, provided there was no furniture in it – only white walls, as she put it. 'Why?' I asked.

'Because people don't like bizarre ideas. And whatever doesn't take root in their heads seems foreign to them – or bizarre, if you wish.'

'But my old furniture is beautiful, very beautiful.'

'They wouldn't care about *your* beauty.'

The same goes for God: He doesn't care for *our* beauty, thoughts and even prayers that may not be consistent with the role of a true Christian – with the holding of a high-ranking job, as a French priest put it.

'How do you mean?' I said.

'It's a tragedy that so many young people are unable to find jobs,' he said after a pause.

'Unemployment has risen again for the third consecutive month,' I said thinking about our new government and its policies.

'I'm speaking of God,' he said. 'To tell the truth, I always speak of God.'

'Why do you speak about looking for jobs?' I asked.

'Because keeping the garden tidy is a full-time job.'

'You mean the Garden of Eden?' I asked.

'That's right,' he said.

The priest's contribution to our dialogue reminds me of Zen koans which are enigmas you must probe into to find a way out of yourself, of your mind cluttered with inappropriate subjects and objects, misgivings and nonsensical conclusions. 'One clears the weeds of idiocy and is enlightened by Buddha's teaching so that one can see one's nature. Now where is human nature?' What would you say to the master whose wisdom is rooted in Buddhism and also in one of its branches traditionally called 'Zen' or 'Zen Buddhism'? You're likely to say, 'An Englishman's home is his castle and my nature holds a more elevated position in the world than whoever lives in huts or in a block of flats. So my nature is in Windsor Castle.' Actually the answer you should give may sound like another enigma in its own right, for you can't answer a koan by means of humdrum words, even if they allude to important castles where kings and queens receive their honourable guests. Here's the *right* answer to the koan I quoted a few minutes ago:

I only know that I am in the middle of this

*mountain,
But the clouds are so thick that I cannot
figure out where exactly I am.*

You look around as if resolved to find your nature which is as elusive as some memories on which you no longer can count in order to reconstruct your past, your infancy and the heaven that was lying about you, under you, at your feet. Now there's no heaven either at your feet or overhead, and so you have no alternative but to speak of a mountain that may help you recover the heaven you have irrevocably lost over 40 or 50 years. You're heartened to hear reports that your body and whatever accompanies it is currently located in the *middle* of this mountain, which means that your stuff and nonsense are halfway between Earth and Heaven, Hell and Paradise. Sure enough, your brain is still half-full of the most blatant human nonsense so that you realise the Buddha hasn't enlightened you yet. Your master says to you, 'Everything is filled with your nature, but you can't see it on account of the nonsense that occupies that upper half of your brain and the nether half of your soul. Sweep these ashes from your fireplace. Let the Buddha enlighten you.'

Actually, every one of us is the God of Spinoza, Who is not only a blade of grass, but also Time itself, contrary to what some think, banishing God from the kingdom of Time so that He finds Himself outside it as if He wasn't allowed to rule over Time and possess it entirely, everlastingly. These men are the scum of the Earth, for they don't understand that Jesus Christ brought to us not fire and bonfires, but the very essence of history because you're not supposed to twiddle your thumbs, ignoring the Cross that awaits you at the end of the road – the Cross and your personal resurrection. There's no resurrection without this Path along which you must walk day and night; and this road of yours is marked by the Cross looming on the horizon, on every horizon you spot as you turn this way and that in the hope of finding tax loopholes, so to speak. You pay capital gains tax, don't you? And they're putting up the tax on cigarettes. But you think that you shouldn't give anything to God – no taxes, no jewels, no vital energy described by Bergson and Bernard Shaw. And the Cross I'm speaking about doesn't loom ahead of you, but blackens the image of the past so that this image we chance upon in the Bible is blackened with dirt, betrayal and cruelty. And you say to yourself, 'The Cross is the thing of the past and we have no wish to soil our hands by picking it up, by putting it on our backs, necks and buttocks.' And history is just this Cross without which there are no history and Napoleons, no triumphal arches and Rubicons, no Rubens, etc.

Do we need Rubicons, Ribbentrops?

SERMON 6

It was very difficult to encapsulate the story of history and its dependence on Jesus Christ and His Cross in a single one-hour sermon during which you were supposed to learn why you'd seen the light of day and not the dark of endless night. So I resolved to carry the Cross on; in other words, I'll devote yet

another sermon to history and Jesus Christ Who deserves your whole attention. And none of your books, none of the pages you cover with your handwriting or insert into your printer, should try and throw off the yoke of the Stations of the Cross, the embodiment of our history.

You shouldn't do things by halves when you deal with the Cross or human history, which amounts to the same thing as you might have realised in the course of my previous sermon. Even now I can't help talking about them or it because there's nothing else to talk about, frankly speaking: everything is either our history or Jesus Christ or both. And there's no loophole in this law of life which can't be disregarded on account of its utter improbability, for the world disappears if the Cross slips from your grasp and falls down like an ordinary glass of champagne.

You shouldn't *stay* as you *carry* the Cross to where it belongs, otherwise you're likely to entangle yourself in a series of contradictions in terms – or vicious circles, come to think of it. Suppose you put the Cross on your back and stay where you are, apparently rooted to the spot for some obscure reason or for no reason at all because you should *carry* the Cross, *walking* along the Stations of the Cross, otherwise neither the Cross nor your back make any sense in the light of what I'm saying about our history.

Suppose, however, that you stick to your guns and stubbornly remain where you are as if you couldn't see the Way, the Path leading to Golgotha. What would happen if someone saw your posture and the Cross on your back and your legs on which the whole construction relies as if you were Atlas or Hercules? This individual might say to you, after a while, 'What are you doing here? Is this your way of doing aerobics? Or are you just a weightlifter?' What would you answer him or her – the onlooker watching and judging your conduct? This onlooker may also say to you, 'I thought I'd meet you at Golgotha. Don't dillydally – just get your things and let's go! Hurry – there's no time to lose! Don't you care about human history? Don't you want us to rise from the dead? Why do you murder humanity once and for all by staying motionless instead of moving towards your tomb? Do you think your health is more important than that of humanity, of your fellow creatures? Or is this cross of yours too heavy and you can't carry it? You should then put it down because it's not the Cross, contrary to popular opinion. It's just *your* cross or a thing you play with every morning, training for some race or other. Are you a bodybuilder? Have you ever heard of Jesus Christ and *His* Cross?'

I take the instance of a young man, or an old man, who has died in a region where he could not hear of the name of Christ. Well, could such a man have become righteous by nature and free will; or could he not? If they contend that he could, then see what it is to render the cross of Christ of none effect, to contend that any man without it, can be justified by the law of nature and the power of his will. We may here also say, then is Christ dead in vain, forasmuch as all might accomplish so much as this, even if He had never died.

St Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*

Suppose this young man is a Buddhist and he put the cross on his back for the fun of it because he doesn't realise what this ritual means within the framework of Christianity where everybody should think only in terms of this cross or any other cross, for as soon as you see a cross somewhere, you say to yourself, 'This is the Cross on which our Saviour talked to His Father.' Even if you see just a plank of wood, you picture to yourself the Cross erected in the centre of human history so that you add to this plank three planks, permitting the Cross to come into being by means of addition and construction. But the Buddhist stands there – at the spot where we left him – without thinking about either the cross he's got on his back or our history that is cluttered with crosses and other geometrical figures the presence of which prevents us from buying new houses and cars, for we must think about suffering, death and resurrection. And if we do think about our resurrection, this thought of ours shouldn't necessarily include a new car, a sports car or whatever may come into our head as we dream about status symbols and other symbols which have nothing to do with the Stations of the Cross, being more akin to petrol stations.

So this young man – the one I've been talking about for some time – stands in the middle of the road, a huge cross looking at pedestrians and cars from his back: every cross looks at you, stares at you, examines you and makes you confess your sins. But he is a Buddhist monk and so his main aim in life is to be a good disciple of the Buddha who didn't care about our Cross and whatever is connected with it – the number of nails, for instance; and also a number of resurrections. After a while, this young man puts his cross down – it is *his* cross, not *ours* – without budging from where he stands because he doesn't have to go anywhere, deprived as he is of our history and its benefits. And what are the benefits of the history to which we belong thanks to Jesus Christ and the Stations of the Cross? Resurrection, salvation. These are not the empty words we may discard as we think of our pleasures, saying to ourselves that nothing can be done beyond this life of ours where there are bottles of vodkas, roundabouts, girls, handsome young men and other attractions for the sake of which we're likely to forget our life, afterlife and beforelife – our union with God.

So this Buddhist of ours puts his cross down and stays where he is, focusing his thoughts upon existence as such and trying to get rid of passions that should be banished from his consciousness for the sake of so-called nirvana or the void or the chaos that lies outside the beginning of the Bible. Then any thought of his dwindles to a tenth of its former size and he empties himself of many crosses implanted in his body and soul by our Saviour and his volunteer helpers who know more about Creation and its Author than all our Buddhists put together. He contemplates his inner world that he calls 'Mandala', if I remember rightly – *Mandela*, says my computer – and the void he has created by obliterating his passions and other things seems to satisfy him to the point of making him forget the cross lying at his feet. Suddenly, the cross disappears, vanishes into thin air, because this Buddhist of ours doesn't deserve it; nor does he deserve our history which is on the move all day, anxious to reach salvation before it is too late. Some people run their lives according to the movements of the stars or the London Stock Exchange; we run our lives according to the Cross.

But Master Eckhart says that God has nothing in common with history, not even one minute or second, let alone the Stations of the Cross which are eternal, provided you understand them rightly and carry the Cross from your bedroom to your kitchen, from your flat to our one-way street. Why does Master Eckhart insist on our studying God *apart* from His Creation that unfolds *within* human history, given our attachment to ways and motorways, to birth and another birth, the second birth – the only birth we can count upon as we think about death and the end created by it? Because Master Eckhart thinks we should exclude *everything* from our lives with the exception of God Who doesn't move even when He flies over His own creation to make sure everything goes in accordance with His orders and wishes, with His mathematics and Kepler-oriented laws.

What does Master Eckhart actually say? He says that God doesn't become anything or anyone, be it a man or a woman, some androgynous creature or God, but He is what He is because He can't be otherwise, and if there's any movement inside or outside Him, this is the movement of His harmony and immobility. Bernard Shaw says God is in the making, but you're not as presumptuous as to maintain that you can actually make God, are you? You can make idols and other statues of no interest, but you can't make God, even if you pray to Him every two hours, hoping to join the club whose members are permitted to bask in the warm sunshine or rather in God's grace that may descend upon you if you're wise enough to solicit donations for a charity, so to speak. Even a small donation can do a lot of good on condition that it comes from God and not from a reputable charity.

If a carpenter was perfect, he wouldn't need any material for his creations: it would be enough to *think* about them. Well, God does create His works by merely thinking about them and they appear in front of Him in the twinkling of an eye because they can't do otherwise: God would send another flood to our world if the things He dreams about weren't at His disposal, day and night. So God thinks of our tragedies, of our Hamlets and Lears, Cordelias and Ophelias, and one day, out of the blue, they say to us, 'We live in your midst and we expect to be treated with respect.'

Master Eckhart says there's a subtlety in God that doesn't call for any change because there aren't many subtleties in the world, and if God seeks another subtlety, being unsatisfied with the one He has at hand or rather *inside* His own being, He may lose the one He's got as a result of His reign over the universe and other kingdoms of which we know nothing. This subtlety, according to Master Eckhart, flouts both conventions and traditions as it refuses to welcome any change, however infinitesimal, for it is bent on keeping its own peace and quiet, its immobility and permanence which might be destroyed through the intervention of Time and its whims. 'I did ask my dad if I could have a big party, but the old spoilsport refused,' says this subtlety, from time to time.

So God is motionless, which doesn't mean we should put our cross down and stop at a roadside café for lunch or anything else – for ice creams or chocolate-chip cookies. We are not God; we are not even one of the gods that used to pollute the atmosphere of our planet and cosmos before the advent of the *real* God on Whose shoulders we can cry as long as we wish because His shoulders are large and patient. They coincide with our grievances, so to speak. In a way, they *are* our grievances, moans,

groans, diseases, cancers – our answers to the challenge we meet whenever we wake up and face the world, its mobile phones, emails, hustle and bustle and muscle. The world is always flexing its muscles so that everyone can admire them.

SERMON 7

You put the Cross on your back and carry the Cross towards its destination, for you have nothing else and there's nothing else to do in this world of ours above which there stands the Cross and whatever has been related to it over the centuries that separate us from the Cross. A passer-by stops in *her* tracks – I'm very fond of feminists – and says to you as she looks alternately at the Cross and your body, 'What are you doing?'

'I'm carrying my Cross.'

'What for?'

'For the sake of human history and resurrection.'

'What are you talking about?'

'History, resurrection, tomb, disciples, Thomas.'

'Do you want to sell it?'

'Do you remember the merchants?'

'What merchants? The merchants of Venice?'

'The ones our Lord took the trouble to expel from –'

'Why expel merchants, businessmen, multimillionaires?'

'Because they worship idols. Master Eckhart says –'

'Ten years of incompetent government has brought about the virtual collapse of our country's economy.'

'I don't care about money.'

'Aren't you going to sell the Cross?'

'No.'

'Aren't you going to the Market?'

'No.'

'Where *are* you going to?'

'Golgotha.'

'What is that?'

'My death.'

'Why are you going towards your death?'

'I'm yearning for another birth.'

'Isn't one birth enough for you?'

'No.'

'What about karma and nirvana? What about taking a short cut?'

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘Cutting a long story short?’

‘You can’t cut this story short. It’s an everlasting story.’

‘What’s this Cross made of? Gold, silver? (God, Saviour.) I can’t see it properly from where I stand.’

‘You should see it properly from wherever you stand or lie or crouch. It’s a wooden cross.’

‘I wouldn’t pay anything for it.’

You should pay *everything* for it because this Cross is your life and whatever goes with it: your homes, castles, wives, concubines and many other things about which you don’t speak round the clock despite their permanent presence in your lives that are encumbered with baubles and trinkets. Whatever you have around you, inside you and anywhere else are baubles and trinkets in comparison with the Cross you should carry on your back or in your suitcase; otherwise you won’t carry anything, anywhere. Don’t forget that whatever we encounter in this life of ours or in the vale of tears about which many poets speak and write is in the shape of the cross carried by a man who imitates Jesus Christ – often without knowing what all this means. That. What? The Cross and our holy life. That’s why they say, ‘Imitation of Jesus Christ’ and they say many other things because we can’t speak at all if we don’t mention Jesus Christ in every sentence we utter whenever our mouth is wide open or even half closed.

You carry your cross, which is our common cross, by the way, up hill and down dale because you shouldn’t think there are only motorways in our world or any other world you may come across in the course of your wanderings. Isn’t so-called human history punctuated by wars and periods of peace, the latter being more akin to dales than hills and mountains? You go up and down the streets of the City of God and every step of yours is an event they speak of in newspapers and elsewhere, for history is permanently recorded for the sake of future generations that are supposed to draw lessons from whatever happens. Why, then, did Master Eckhart say: ‘The Almighty is *outside* our history’? As if He was an unbiased observer, akin to what Epicurus and Spinoza describe in their works which are condemned by Christians and Jews. God joins you as soon as you put His Cross on your back because He loves His son and whoever imitates His son’s life and torments so that for once you should agree with Master Eckhart and his assertion, ‘Christ was born in our body, within our being, our substance.’

In one of my sermons I spoke to you about the emptiness you should create within this body of yours that belongs to Jesus Christ and nobody else except His Father Who is never far away, provided we talk about His Son Whom He loves as much as He loves every human being. So you shouldn’t unduly dwell on the remark dropped by His son during the last suffering He endured in the company of two thieves, ‘Why hast Thou forsaken me?’ (I still don’t have my Bibles on the writing desk in front of which I’m sitting this morning and therefore I don’t know what *exactly* Jesus said on the Cross and elsewhere – in the temple bustling with economic activities.) Once again I propose to study this emptiness which is a sine qua non of our religion, centred upon the Cross and Jesus Christ Whose body you cherish and take care of as you say to yourself every night, ‘Why not pamper myself after a hard

day with a hot bath scented with oils?’ You wouldn’t say anything of the kind if your body was just a human body and not that of God on Whom your wellbeing depends so much you can’t swallow a morsel of fish without seeking the celestial help provided by the Son of God and His Father. But don’t forget that your body should be empty, otherwise you won’t be able to welcome Christ – let alone His Father – inside your substance, in the midst of your sinews, doing justice to Master Eckhart’s comparison that I eventually found in one of his sermons, ‘You should build a castle inside you and this castle will belong to God.’ Sure enough, Master Eckhart compares your body to an empty castle where God can settle once and for all with a view to nursing your sick, sin-burdened soul.

That’s right, you should *empty* yourself, getting rid of thoughts and even of internal organs which obstruct Jesus’ driveway, so to speak: He can’t get as far as your body and very substance unless you offer Him the space He needs, for Jesus Christ isn’t supposed to live in a cramped house or castle or whatever you happen to build inside your body. Even if you build a modest hut, God will come to you on condition that this hut of yours is empty and doesn’t look like my cluttered desk on which I keep the books I resort to as I write these sermons, hoping they’ll be of benefit to everyone concerned.

You now face the daunting task of removing your internal organs from your body which isn’t worthy of the guest you must welcome sooner or later to save your soul from eternal damnation, as described by Dante and his followers in the books I can’t lay my hands on because I haven’t yet opened all the removal boxes. They still await their owner, prepared to inspire him, paving the way to yet another bout of creativity. Do you cherish your liver more than Christ’s helping hand? Do you think He can give you a helping hand if you continue to rely on your bowels and prostate? And what if your doctor says you suffer from prostate cancer? Wouldn’t you aspire to remove this treacherous organ from your body and mind? Why dwell on this cancer of yours? Get rid of it tonight!

What Master Eckhart seems to insinuate boils down to the following remark: ‘Your whole body is a cancerous tumour and you should cut it off.’ When should I cut it off, you wonder? ‘The sooner the better,’ I answer. Don’t forget that Jesus will put His hand *inside* your body to find out if *everything* has been removed from it in expectation of His Second Coming on which you should rely whenever you focus your thoughts and hopes upon the everlasting bliss associated in your mind with Paradise, its gardens and fountains. What if Jesus’ hand grasps your lungs instead of making the most of the void you must create within your substance in expectation of this Royal Guest? But don’t forget that this void has nothing in common with the nirvana you encounter as you read Buddhist sutras where *another* kind of bliss is depicted in minute detail.

‘Now this, O Bhikkhus, is the noble truth concerning the destruction of suffering.’

‘Verily, it is the destruction, in which no passion remains, of this very thirst; the laying aside of, the getting rid of, the being free from, the harbouring no longer of this thirst.’

‘This then, O Bhikkhus, is the noble truth concerning the destruction of suffering.’

'Now this, O Bhikkhus, is the noble truth concerning the way which leads to the destruction of sorrow.'

Should you prick up your ears when you hear a sermon devoted to the end of suffering without which you'll never be able to identify with Christ Whose tears are unparalleled in the history of torments? The Buddha – or one of his cronies – says to you that the only truth you must pay attention to concerns the end of sorrow associated in your mind with the Cross and our cross-shaped history. Do you think there are triangles and other geometrical signs? Where? In our history? They may be found in Buddhist treaties, but our history has been steeped in blood for many centuries – ever since our Lord was nailed to the Cross.

So I say to you that you shouldn't destroy your sorrow, let alone your suffering, for only *they* are in a position to teach you the lesson you need in order to go through your life without tripping over rugs and roots, without falling and grazing your knees. Put a cross on your writing desk and contemplate it in the hope that you'll feel a *portion* of Christ's suffering – you can't feel the *whole* of it – for only through the Cross, through the wood of which it was made, can you reach eternal salvation and avoid the pitfall of Hell. And you should say to yourself while staring at the Cross, 'The sorrow I felt over the death of Jesus Christ was almost too much to bear.' But this infinite sorrow shouldn't make you forget His Resurrection. So you constantly say to yourself and others, 'I'm elated at Christ's second birth. I go into ecstasies about His Second Coming.' We need a few people in the congregation to sing the harmonies and not just the simple hymn tune. What do I mean by the word 'harmony'? If you sing only the tune, you experience *one* feeling – that of joy, for instance. It is true that you were flooded with joy when you heard the news about Christ's resurrection, about His impressive victory over death and putrefaction. But what about the Cross and Christ's numerous wounds? Your mind should reveal the duality of your nature, the joy and hope, the fear and despair.

SERMON 8

You may wonder why I speak to you only about God – as if there was nothing and nobody else in the whole world: no objects you handle and dust, no subjects to whom you talk about business, money and creature comforts. Our world is brimful of wonderful surprises and from time to time you forget God and His angels as you get carried away by *material* emotions where you find no room for *spiritual* energy and devotion to Christ's way of life. To tell the truth, you don't even *look* for the spiritual realm in the middle of which there stands the Cross because it is the centrepiece of our history and, as everyone knows and understands, any centrepiece must be situated in the centre of the world.

What's more, Christ Himself doesn't look for a niche in your being, for He says to Himself, 'These men and women are too preoccupied with their own thoughts and careers to notice anything wrong,' and Christ is right as usual. Anyway He can't be wrong, even if you think He is, as you compare your own ideas and conclusions to His lofty ideals in which a lot of swords and other weapons come to

the fore, testifying to the truth of the Bible, in particular to the words, 'I've brought you a sword, not a scythe, a hammer, not a sickle.' Actually Jesus Christ brought both: hammer *and* sickle, resolved as he was to inflict massive injuries on the people who, for many years, for decades, had to experience what is rightly termed the 'communist yoke'. These people know how frightful it is to sustain human or even plant life when God punishes the infidel and traitors, for they did betray the Almighty, saying that religion was the only opium of the people. They destroyed a lot of churches and icons where Jesus Christ seemed to have sought refuge from persecution, from our folly aimed at influencing public opinion to the detriment of God and His everlasting word.

Well, you can't destroy God, even if you use nuclear weapons because the celestial army is out of your reach whatever you do with a view to reaching God's heart and piercing it with your own sword which was produced in a human factory. When Nietzsche says, 'God is dead,' he doesn't mean you killed Him yesterday because you can't so much as touch God's hair, let alone His heart and other vital organs that He is said to have discarded many centuries ago, being wholly sustained by spirituality, by His *ethereal* body. He *may* be weary after His long journey through time, and the journeys he undertakes *outside* time or inside Master Eckhart's doctrine are even more wearisome, given that there are no landmarks outside time and space, and therefore you have no idea where you are and in what direction you should go. So suppose God *is* weary and at some point He allows Himself to recline elegantly on His celestial sofa situated outside heaven and earth; and as He does so, he closes His eyes and falls asleep, making theologians believe He is dead, for many theologians, mystics and philosophers compare death to deep sleep. Never mind – we should continue to see God everywhere in spite of His death, deep sleep, coma or other states of which we know nothing, according to the same theologians who are fond of negative theology and, generally speaking, of the word 'not': God is *not* this, God is *not* that. Well and good – say whatever you wish, but I see God *everywhere* as if He was alive, eternal; as if He kept a watchful eye on my soul to see that I behave myself.

Inside Master Eckhart's doctrine you find not only the thesis, according to which God is divorced from time and even from reality – do I confuse our Master with Epicurus? – but also the face of God, so to speak, for you aren't supposed to eat unless you see His face in the dishes strewn over your dinner table. Eckhart says that you shouldn't touch a faceless dish even if you're dying of hunger and know for sure you can't hold out much longer under this sort of stress and indigence. Does he mean to say that a true believer turns all his meals into the well-known ceremony based on Jesus Christ's last meal with his disciples? Do you know what I'm speaking about? Do you realise I'm alluding to the holy bread and wine used in this ceremony? The Eucharist, Holy Communion, the face of God. You should sit back for a minute to ponder your next move in the game of life.

Master Eckhart says a true believer doesn't put anything on her body – women are more interested in clothes than men – unless she is allowed to contemplate God's face inside the fibres woven into fabric. Any woman, be she faithful to God or unfaithful to her husband, dreams about clothes, fashion designers and summer balls, for any woman except Teresa of Avila is such a show-off, she always wants to be the

centre of attention. Suppose she stands in the centre of Harrods and looks at the clothes hanging around her so that, whenever she twists her head round, she is dazzled by colours and seized by emotions, temptations and unquenchable desires: she can't buy the whole shop, can she? But if this woman believes in God *authentically* and not for the sake of public opinion, she won't buy anything at all; what's more, she'll strip her own clothes off and walk out of the shop stark naked unless she feels the face of God on the dress she has been wearing for an hour or so.

And what if she doesn't see God's face on her own skin? In this case, she shouldn't undress, exposing her body to voyeurs' lascivious glances, for the Scriptures forbid us to join striptease clubs and similar establishments; anyway I'm not the sort of person who'd do a striptease. And yet some men devote their time and energy to this activity that is condemned by numerous councils and proscribed in any God-fearing land. Master Eckhart says that faceless – or faithless – clothes shouldn't be worn, even if you run the risk of freezing to death in Siberia or any other place of this kind where snow is not in the habit of melting despite the vigorous action of sunbeams. And any woman – or man, for that matter – should walk stark naked around her room until she sees a face of God either on her dress or trouser suit.

The man also should see the same face on his walls, otherwise he isn't likely to reach the gates of Paradise where St Peter asks everyone the same question: 'How many faces of God have you seen in your life?'

'God has only one face,' you answer, 'because there's only one God.'

'And what about the Holy Trinity?' asks St Peter.

'All right, I've been looking at these three faces ever since my childhood.'

'So how many faces have you seen?' asks St Peter.

'Three.'

'Have you seen them only in your plate?'

'On my plates, on my dresses, on my trouser suits, on my pantsuits and on the walls of my castle.'

'So how many faces have you seen?' asks St Peter.

'One thousand and one.'

'Are you fond of fairy tales?' asks St Peter.

'Yes.'

'Do you think the Gospels are just fairy tales?'

'Every Gospel is a gritty description of urban violence.'

'Magical realism?'

'No one could fail to be charmed by the magic of Christ's lifestyle.'

'What about your own life and its story?'

'Honestly, it's the story of my life – I meet a totally gorgeous bloke and he's leaving for Australia the next day!'

St Augustine says you may become a faithful servant of God on condition that you serve Him faithfully and judge your own insignificant life only in terms of His honour, forgetting about what John

Falstaff says about honour in Shakespeare's immortal play. (Is it *really* immortal? Only God's plays are immortal.) Don't you know that God has been serving you ever since your childhood? Even in your mother's womb God served you faithfully, which means you should serve Him now in return for His promise to support your wild claims about being able to become a saint in the near future. But you should forget what Hegel says about slaves and masters: in *his* fairy tale a slave becomes his master's master, which is not likely to happen in the domain of your relationship with God Who will always be your master, even if He occasionally might condescend to serve you.

Master Eckhart says you shouldn't implore God's help whenever you're in dire straits – in dire need of His help, in other words, because God can't give in to His children's demands all the time despite the fact that He dwells outside time and so doesn't depend on its flow. God showers His children with presents not only under Christmas trees but also all over the surface of the Earth – in wintertime, in summertime, in springtime and so on. Let's not forget that He dwells outside *any* time, however infinitesimal, and so has no idea whether it is Sunday or Monday, the spring or the autumn, lunchtime or dinnertime or just high tea.

Nor should we forget that some of God's presents are poisonous and therefore may come to you in the shape of a fatal disease: liver cancer, cancer of the cervix/stomach, breast/bowel/lung cancer and so on and so forth. Master Eckhart says you just have to grin and bear it; better still, you should be grateful to God for these diseases, for such is His will and whatever God wills is meant for your good and for the benefit of humankind, plants and animals. And what about your own will? You should just will yourself not to panic.

You may wonder why I quote Master Eckhart on every corner of my private city of God. Well, I might quote someone else for a change, taking leave of Master Eckhart and St Augustine:

Wherefore I admonish your Fraternity to endeavour not to be burdensome to your subjects, and, if they have any grievances, to abate them, seeing also that you ought not to have departed from what had once been determined. For you will be seeing to your own interest both in the future and the present life, if you keep those who have been committed to you free from grievance.

St Gregory the Great, *Epistle XVIII*

What about *my* burden, *my* grievances?

SERMON 9

In spite of my unshakeable faith I've got a lot of troubles and these troubles accompany me wherever I go, even if I follow my path that leads me straight to the kingdom of God or at least to its suburbs where you can find whatever you need with the exception of God's grace, of His *ultimate* pardon. What do these troubles of mine amount to, you may ask? I'm a human being and whatever is human in this world of ours belongs to me either in the domain of torments or in that of joys, which amount to the same thing

because our joys are torments in disguise and vice versa. There's always the other side of the coin, otherwise we wouldn't judge the world in terms of other sides: we would see only *one* side of everything, given that we can only enjoy *one* side of the moon, which doesn't prevent us putting this instrument of love in poems and elsewhere on condition that we're longing to speak about love and human unity.

My troubles and grievances are related mostly to women because I'm not homosexual and have no intention of falling in love with men and handsome boys, even if so many people I encounter are prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sake of a beautiful teenager, of a Narcissus of sorts. Narcissus looks at the surface of a pond where his reflection seems to disport itself and says to himself, 'I'm in love with this handsome young man,' for he doesn't know it is God he meets through an intermediary, so to speak: the pond is the substance thanks to which Narcissus comes to know not only himself but God, the Almighty. But there are no ponds in the neighbourhood of my new house, and even if there were two or three ponds destined to reveal Narcissus' identity to its owner, I wouldn't look at them because I know who I am and love myself to the detriment of the demons that the infidels fall in love with whenever they see their hordes in parks, ponds and other geographical sites.

I was robbed two days ago and I know who committed this robbery; yet my house isn't a bank and consequently the sentence I hear so often on the radio doesn't seem to be relevant within my private city of God: 'The gang admitted they had committed four recent bank robberies.' I kept my money – a negligible part of my fortune – in one of the drawers you can pull out in order to examine its contents or rather its treasures, if you happen to pay a visit to my new house where you may quench your thirst for jewels and other valuables that are bound to help you cope with the vicissitudes of life and afterlife. (Don't forget that the Egyptians used to put a lot of valuables into their pharaohs' coffins.)

Well, I was robbed and I've no wish to complain about what happened in my new house only two days ago; but I think you may draw comfort from the fact I was robbed because this kind of thing didn't happen to you, to your houses, flats, garages and the villas you own in exotic countries. You leave your money in a drawer of your chest of drawers, hoping that people are honest and unwilling to transgress God's rules, for these are the rules, not the exceptions, and anyone who transgresses will be severely punished. But these people – criminals in disguise – think they can outwit the hunters, alias God's emissaries, getting away with murder or with *it*, whatever 'it' may mean within the framework of what I'm speaking about. Again you chance upon a sentence that seems to exonerate thieves and robbers from all responsibility for their deeds or rather misdeeds: 'Everyone thinks he's guilty of the robbery, but it looks like he's going to get away with it.' But what do all these sentences mean within the kingdom that belongs to God? Why *do* we speak about the Kingdom of God?

I know who committed this robbery because only one person could commit it, given that you can't open all the drawers in my house unless you spend at least two hours in it without being watched either by its owner or a charwoman. I've got a charman – not a *chairman*, perish the thought – and this man often stays *alone* in this house of mine as if he was its owner, its only master; as if the ownership of a house could depend upon the number of hours spent within its walls by a man or woman using a

vacuum cleaner. He also irons my shirts and trousers, which doesn't entitle him to a decent standard of living, I suppose; to lead a life of luxury, he needs to steal my money and jewels.

This time he stole 4,000 euros and I say 'this time' because I'm sure it's not the first robbery they must imprison him for, otherwise they wouldn't speak so often about genes and hereditary diseases. His parents must have been inveterate thieves, for all I know, and his sister *is* a thief, judging from what a friend of mine told me as she sang the praises of her servant, alias my charman, saying he was above suspicion. 'His sister stole a lot of jewels from my chest of drawers, but her brother is innocent. He's pure and simple.'

'Like Parsifal?' I asked.

'Don't talk to me about Wagner,' she said.

So I engaged him without asking for his academic or household credentials, and I repent my foolishness which has always cost me dear, judging from the amount of money I lose every year; and the money I lose goes neither to local or international charities because they land up in the pockets of swindlers, embezzlers and other representatives of the scum of the Earth. I suppose we can also call them the 'scum of the Moon', for such people are the same everywhere – at least within the solar system of which we know a lot, thanks to our telescopes and spacecraft.

So one day I open the drawer in question and realise the money has gone, although I've made no attempt to spend it either in shops or in restaurants where I used to spend a lot of time, anxious to ingratiate myself with my stomach and bowels that don't always treat me with respect. I no longer go to restaurants, which doesn't entitle my servants to rob me of the money I put in my chest of drawers instead of hiding it under the floorboards or in my socks where Dostoevsky's characters usually hide their money. I mean, they hide the money in their *own* socks, not in *my* socks, shoes and boots, but this detail shouldn't distract us from the theft that took place two days ago – in my new house, of all places. I wasn't killed prior to the robbery – the thief doesn't belong in Dostoevsky's universe – but nevertheless I can't forgive him, even though I'm supposed to use my other cheek to placate him and pacify his irate soul.

Of course I know he wouldn't have committed this robbery, but for God's explicit directions on how to get to my house and what piece of furniture to tamper with so as not to waste too much time on making a fortune. What's more, I should say to God, assuming that I'm allowed to speak to Him at this point of my narrative or sermon, 'Thank you, my Lord. You could have smitten me with a great many cancers, but You chose to rob me of my possessions. Why? Do you think I'm not empty enough to welcome you in my abode, alias in my body and soul? Perhaps. You expect me to bow down to You and do everything You tell me. You say, "Your servant will rob you because he's your master," and I bow down to you because I have no alternative but to bow and scrape to Your Majesty. After all, I can't slap Your face even if you're prepared to offer me as many cheeks as You've got. And I'm sure You've got more cheeks, faces and arms than the Buddha.'

I'm sure God wants me to draw comfort from the fact that I lost a lot of money and, whatever *I* think about this theft, I must accept it because, as I said earlier, God was acting in good faith for His son: I *am* His son, as Master Eckhart thinks, in his sermons that you can buy in any bookshop do not lie. I am God's son and all sons of God should obey their Father Who creates them whenever He gives birth to His favourite Son going by the name of Jesus Christ – according to Master Eckhart. We were born 20 centuries ago and we'll die at the age of 33 so that no one can say, shaking one's head, 'I have a suspicion that they're Jesus Christs, though I don't have any concrete proof.' 'Here's the proof you're looking for,' we'll say to this person, pointing at our bodies, souls and minds. 'Are you another Doubting Thomas?'

A friend of mine told me a story which reminds me of *my* story in spite of the discrepancy one is bound to notice between my new house and the house where my friend's mother used to live before her untimely death. Once she invited a few friends of hers – these friends have nothing in common with mine – and next morning she opened a drawer where she had put a lot of money, hoping no one would steal it; after all, she wasn't in the habit of inviting thieves and robbers to her house. This time, only a dozen friends graced her dining room as they sat around the table on which a lot of so-called *zakuski*es – hors d'oeuvre – could be seen thanks to a huge chandelier and its quasi-celestial light. None of these friends had any vestige of kleptomania in their genes so the mistress of the house had no niggling doubts whenever her thoughts moved towards the money hidden in the chest of drawers which she was to open next morning to find the money in question – and this occurrence was out of the question, as it were – had been stolen. Had she been *sufficiently* prudent, however, she would have removed the money from where she had put it to prevent a virtual thief from laying his hands on the banknotes that her husband earns at his office, slogging his guts out.

'How come?' she said to herself as she opened the drawer where she used to keep so much money she could have bought two Italian villas, had she wisely resolved to *spend* this money instead of *keeping* it. She could believe neither her eyes nor her hands: they didn't touch anything except the void on which she hadn't counted when opening the drawer, when looking at it in expectation of another dress or piece of furniture or villa. 'They're not traitors, are they?' she asked herself, thinking about her treacherous friends, although only *one* of them was actually a traitor; at least he betrayed her trust.

She had no wish to punish this traitor because only God is able to punish whoever He pleases to keep a watchful eye on Creation: universal harmony is certainly a possibility and I wouldn't dismiss it out of hand. And this harmony, if achievable at all, should include both punishments and rewards, for without them there are no opposites, no love and strife, no struggle for life, no victory over death. Anyway, she had no intention of struggling for life as she decided to find out who had taken her money, destroying the harmony she had endeavoured to create within her household and also within her personal life which wasn't far removed from her house, husband and children: she had no lovers, no other preoccupations. So she put another wad of banknotes in the drawer from which somebody had removed a portion of her financial or material bliss.

She hid this wad – sometimes you have to be prepared to act on a hunch – and invited the same friends to another dinner, for she was keen on cooking and couldn't adorn her dinner table with the dishes served on another occasion: she was keen on variety, in other words. So her guests were sitting around the same dinner table – like the proverbial knights who are always mentioned in the chronicles devoted to King Arthur and his ideas, his victories and defeats, without which no past is conceivable and trustworthy. She thought about the money hidden in a hiding place of sorts and this money disappeared once more in spite of her watchful eye and the ears she pricked up, determined to find out who was bent on depriving her of her creature comforts and status symbols.

The money had gone; she put her hand into the drawer several times and was still none the wiser as if using one's hand couldn't be compatible with any truth, any discovery worthy of its name. Our Doubting Thomas put his hand into Jesus Christ's wounds and he knew whose body he was touching and exploring at dawn, at break of day or nightfall, as the case may be or might have been. Where's the money? Our Thomas didn't ask such a question because he knew who was standing before him as he tried to piece together the details of His death – I'm speaking of Jesus Christ now. And now I'm about to speak of the housewife who was desperate on the day when she found out that one of her guests – one of her dearest friends – was a traitor, a thief and a man whom God must condemn to everlasting torture in order to re-establish our world's harmony, melody and counterpoint.

The new money – the wad she had put in her chest of drawers – was gone too as if anxious to follow the old money's example, and no one knew anything about the thief, his life and bank accounts, his conquests in the domain of sex and eroticism. You may take a short cut across my Elysian fields and realise that the thief in question will never be punished unless God Himself interferes in the universe's work and does what He pleases in order to extirpate the dissonance I'm speaking about from our perception of reality – from our *conception* of it.

Does this story have anything to do with my predicament or discomfiture? (You may use *any* word to describe and define it, provided your word is as sad as I am tonight.) I don't think so because I have no intention of putting another wad of money in the same drawer of my chest of drawers – or indeed in any drawer located within the house I bought five months ago in the hope of turning over a new leaf, an old leaf, a middle-aged leaf; in order to turn over *something*. It seems I didn't turn over *anything* except the money found and made use of by another traitor of human rights, of the freedom they speak so often about on television that protects human thoughts and deeds from any outside interference. In other words – and there should always be *other* words in your life, otherwise you can't enjoy any freedom – the money was stolen and the thief did me a *good* turn, warning me that I shouldn't keep money in my drawers, in my bathroom and filing cabinets.

Let me talk to you about the emptiness I touched upon in my previous sermon – in every sermon of mine, to tell the truth – for there's nothing else in our life which can be defined as 'the state of things as they are, rather than as they are imagined to be'. In other words, your life is what it is and there's fullness in it made up of cars, garages, houses, furniture and those trinkets that are of vital importance,

as you say to yourself whenever you look at them or touch them. But I have no wish to talk to you about the fullness you can enjoy in the quiet of your room or life, or whenever you say to yourself, ‘I love the hustle and bustle of the marketplace.’ I wish to talk to you about emptiness, notwithstanding the fact that I’ve already talked to you about it many times as if there was nothing else to talk about. I don’t care about your attention span, about the sense of suspense my story is supposed to create in you, because I care only about God and His face – or ‘figure’, as Meister Eckhart puts it – and this figure will guide me through the labyrinth of life and death, of doubt and despair, of joy and strange forebodings.

I said you should empty yourself in expectation of a guest and so you begin to remove from your life and body whatever can obstruct the traffic leading to your heart, soul and whatever you hide within your substance and elsewhere – in your chest of drawers, for instance. Well, let me turn my train of thought towards myself – at this point of my narrative, at this point of no return, for there are no returns within one’s narratives, given the importance of so-called suspense and the *deus ex machina*. So you empty yourself and realise you’re still brimful of desires and other things that are incompatible with salvation; and other things are *compatible* with salvation and whatever you have in mind when you say to yourself ‘on target’. What target? Where? How? I’ll throw some light on these questions in my next sermon, within my new leaf.

SERMON 10

I was talking to you about emptiness and I hope you’ve emptied yourself and whatever you call your ‘substance’ to receive God or anybody else in your abode, provided this somebody or nobody isn’t destined to rob you of your money, prosperity, future and eternal life. How do I empty my life, you may ask yourself, and you’re entitled to put such questions to a man who teaches you the ways of life. And these ways are the only ways you should pay attention to as you go through life, death, birth and other incarnations of which we know next to nothing, given the shortness of our memory and the shortness of our gift for prophesying.

We’ve got a general idea of what we want, but nothing concrete at the moment: no emptiness awaits us around the corner or behind a cupboard or a chest of drawers, come to think of it. So there’s no emptiness within our reach, which means we should create it by removing whatever we’ve got in our substance and even outside it, for there are many things outside our substance, and this substance of ours yearns for things to the point of making us unable to resist the temptations imposed on our body by this substance and its longings. I can’t say the woman I wish to remove from my substance and anything related to it gives rise to the longings I hinted at in the previous sentence: she is old and ugly, and I’m not keen on ugly women. Yet I’d like to remove her from my life, even if the room she stays in – within the framework of my life – is very small and plays no role in my staging of *King Lear*, *Hamlet* or *Othello* which are the plays I constantly perform within my life and even outside it – in the suburbs of my life, to be exact. Why do I care about these suburbs of mine? Because they speak to me of the Hereafter, another life, another incarnation.

I wish I could face my emptiness to the point of enjoying it *everywhere* – even *outside* my own being which is universal enough to include the suburbs I’m talking about and also other universes about which we learn a lot when reading Giordano Bruno’s books. It’s not for nothing he was burnt at the stake in Rome or in another Italian city where they used to burn heretics – their bodies and ideas – for the sake of the purity of their doctrine which was upheld by our last Pope and his colleagues. He said Giordano Bruno *had* to be burnt and he was right. If I’m read in the 24th century, they should provide a commentary on the popes I’m writing about, otherwise nobody will understand that my German-born pope retired after serving humanity for less than ten years.

Let us go back to my emptiness which welcomes God and His angels as I sit in front of my computer, determined to tell you the story of my conversion to Christianity, for to some extent I’m a born-again Christian; I don’t yet know to what extent I’m a newborn Christian, an oldborn Christian. I don’t even know whether I’ve ever been born at all because Jung says there are people who don’t deserve to be called either people or human beings, being *unborn*, as it were. Let us not talk about these unborn individuals because I *was* born 66 years ago – and my cat was born 6 years ago, if you catch my drift (666) – and I talk about God to you and many other individuals who seem to have been born, judging from what I see on TV and even in the streets where I walk to stretch my legs.

There’s a woman in my life – and she invites eternal strife, as the saying goes, assuming I understand these sayings used by so many people I can’t count them as if they were put in my chest of drawers where I used to keep my money without counting it. I know I put an envelope in this drawer of mine, but I don’t know what was hidden *inside* this envelope, which doesn’t really count in the context of my life: this context is larger than any envelope, be it designed for money or an immortal masterpiece.

SERMON 11

I’m sorry. Even a saint should apologise now and then if he makes mistakes as he talks to those who don’t understand what he says so that he has no alternative but to raise his voice and shout his truth from the rooftops, from any top he’s got at his disposal. What’s the top I use whenever I find myself in this predicament? I just drink a few bottles of wine and shout in my room where no one listens because I’m not in the mood for inviting anybody to my house which listens to me as I talk and shout to myself; at least my house – anything, for that matter – knows how to live and believe in God.

I was drunk and I shouldn’t have talked to you in this state of mind and body, and I’m aware of the impact my drunken words might have had on your psyches, given that I know *something* about psyches and humans in general; I know what *I* experience when a drunkard talks to me either in the streets or in a pub. What do I do in those pubs situated in Brussels, Paris and Vilnius where I spent a few days, talking to poets and their hosts? (There are still a lot of people who are interested in poetry, in rhymes and reasons.) I drink wine and beer in those pubs, and I also perform this ritual at home where many bottles await me as if they knew I’m willing to empty them, one by one, going from health to death, from my liver to liver cancer.

I continue to talk to you about emptiness and I give you examples of what can be done with this emptiness and the ways leading to it because there are always ways and goals, and we shouldn't forget our duties that are prepared to lead us along these ways to the radiance described in many Sacred Books. So I empty a bottle of wine and I know that this ritual of mine leads me to salvation, if I agree with Master Eckhart and what he says about emptiness and God's place in our lives. I empty a bottle of wine and wait for God to settle in the empty bottle where He may find His refuge and creature comforts, for I know that only emptiness may be called 'God's castle', wherever this emptiness takes place, making fullness withdraw from this place and the universe where there are too many things, too many heretical ideas.

I empty a bottle of wine and my glass which isn't *always* full, contrary to what you may think when reading my sermons and listening to them in your heart of hearts, otherwise I wouldn't have to *fill* this glass of mine; and nothing in the world gives me such pleasure. Filling my glass, emptying my glass and other glasses I come across as I go through my life and other lives I may call my incarnations or karmas or whatever words you're tempted to use in order to describe my path, my way, my day, today.

I empty these bottles, glasses and lives, and I say to myself I should get rid of the woman who endeavours to fill my life to the brim, resolved as she is to tame me as if I was a shrew that any admirer of Shakespeare is tempted to tame as soon as he sees a woman – even if she is as demure as the Madonna. She comes to my new house and says she's got everything I need: paintings, cutlery, curtains, charwomen, phone numbers and so on. I'm not eager to go on for the simple reason that the list of her kindness is endless and whatever I write or say falls short of what she can offer to my life, smiling and fiddling with my keys.

So she says, 'I'm here to help you and you make a terrible mess when you're cooking.'

'I won't cook anything,' I say to her.

'Anyway, your house is always in a mess.'

'You dropped a wine glass –'

'If you say anything like that, I'll leave you forever.'

'Please do whatever you wish.'

'I'll forsake you!'

'Yes, yes,' I said to her and she left my house, the kitchen where we were talking to kill time and whatever there's to kill in this world where there are so many births you yield to the temptation to kill whatever and whoever you can kill, even the thing you love, hate and take no notice of. She left and when I came out to relish a part of my garden that I don't see very often, I saw the gate of my house or rather its absence: it was wide open. There was a hole in my garden and I might call it emptiness if God was willing to settle down in between my garage and my garden where I won't have my meals, considering that it's too close to the street renowned in our district and even in Belgium for its creature comforts and many other comforts I'm unwilling to enumerate and adumbrate right now: I have other things to do, other sermons to deliver.

We've got rid of the old computer system, and good riddance to bad rubbish is what I say. The old woman I'm talking about is tantamount to this system or to the rubbish, whatever the context where this rubbish may appear to make things easier for your preacher who is bent on making you understand what he's talking about. He's talking about rubbish because whatever isn't related or connected to God is really rubbish, according to what Master Eckhart says, and we should listen to him – even *I* should listen to him – otherwise we're not likely to understand what God means when He speaks to us.

The woman I'm speaking to you of thinks she's got cancer and she says I might be responsible for this terrible mess, for the crop failure – not for the crop failure, God forbid, because I'm neither Stalin nor any other president of the Soviet Union. She says: 'I'm dying, but I didn't want to put you in the picture about my death.'

'Are you really dying?' I ask for argument's sake. Now that we've heard all the arguments for and against the proposal, shall we vote on it? I say 'No'.

'Yes.'

'OK.'

'What?'

'OK, no problem.'

'You're going to Vilnius, right?'

'Yes.'

'Here's the only phone number I know.'

'What is it?'

'Taxi. You call them and they take you to the airport.'

'How much?'

'Fifty euros.'

'I'm a little short this week – could you lend me fifty euros?'

'I can't.'

Why should I talk to a woman like that?

So I should empty my house where there are many boxes on which somebody wrote what I'm supposed to understand unless I drink too much, which means I can't understand anything unless someone comes to my house and says, 'This is the trout you should eat today, at lunch, and you also have a slice of another fish.' I eat many slices, thinking about God and the space where He could install Himself without bothering about dishes, slices and whatever can prevent Him from delivering His truth to my soul and other internal organs which await this truth and many other truths because there's nothing else to do in this world or any other world: we should search for truth.

There are boxes on which someone wrote, 'Books.' This man or woman might have written 'CDs' on this box or any other boxes I trip over as I walk through my garden, house, cherry orchards and many other cherries where I'll never find the peace I aspire to, for there are too many wars and struggles for life, eternal strife and whatever an angel gets into his or her head, saying to himself (or herself), 'The

ultimate harmony.’ But I was talking about emptiness and God’s niche – call it whatever your wish – and I’m not likely to tear myself away from this subject because my very life depends on it, let alone your lives and the wives you have to take care of, if you fear the punishment designed for those who don’t love their neighbours, families, children, wives and concubines.

God has carved a niche for Himself as a professional owner of the universe and we should bow in front of this niche, and then go down on our knees to show to what extent we venerate the Almighty and listen to His laws among which we find many golden rules. One of these rules says, ‘You shouldn’t kill anybody or anything,’ and we don’t wound either humans or plants as our consciousness directs our steps and acts, saying to our mind, ‘The universe is precious and fragile. You shouldn’t touch it for fear of destroying anything.’ So we don’t touch anything because even our unconscious says something to us, something along these lines, ‘Don’t touch anything and if you do, you’ll be punished forever by God and His cronies who fly over you, overhead, under your ceiling.’

The woman I talked to you about several hours ago is no longer in my house and I say to this house of mine, ‘You’re empty now. Why not invite God to this empty space of yours? Do you really need it? Don’t you think you’ll feel much better in the presence of God Whose warmth and light will tide us over till 2015? Electricity is expensive, so is an oil-fired boiler. Why should we spend *our* money on these systems?’

This woman has gone, but there are memories that fill my brain to the brim, and I can’t trust my substance, let alone reward it for its years of service with a grand farewell party and several presents, if I’m not doubly sure it’s empty of frivolous and useless thoughts. And the thoughts related to her are useless, harmful and superfluous so I’d better get rid of them tonight, otherwise God will fall dead in His tracks instead of knocking at my door and listening to my footsteps that will resound through my house: I’ll reach the front door in no time at all to welcome God into my abode.

Once this woman committed suicide near Brussels because she lived near the capital of Europe, thinking it was cheaper to live there than in France and other countries of the Union about which they always talk in newspapers, especially when they have to blame Greece for anything related to the euro. She didn’t really commit suicide, otherwise I wouldn’t have asked her to leave my house, for she would have been dead for many years – for 33 years, to be exact. In point of fact, she is alive and kicking to the point of saying about herself, ‘I’m an extrovert,’ meaning that she kicks whatever she finds on the path she follows in the hope of dying in her sleep and not of any imaginary cancer which is her *idée fixe* and a major problem.

We bought a flat in France and I offered her a bottle of champagne in a restaurant near the Versailles Chateau: a bottle of champagne is a must whenever one finds oneself in the city where Louis XIV used to enjoy himself in the company of his numerous concubines. We bought a flat and she died three days later as if we hadn’t bought anything, not even a bottle of champagne you can buy in any shop – even in Lithuania which joined the European Union many years ago.

She would have died, had I not come to her place after ringing her up for two days at least: I knew we should have a lot of meals together before going to France to settle there once and for all, for centuries to come. We loved France and whatever was related to it – even the French Revolution – and I thought she was eager to leave her house and feather her own nest in France instead of rotting away in Belgium, near Brussels.

I come to her place and knock on the door because there's only one front door to this house and there are no bells except the ones for servants who bring this countess of mine a few dishes, now and then. Add '-ed' to all these verbs to put them in the past tense: I should empty the present to preserve its purity. (The Immaculate Conception, I call it. Isn't the present the future abode of God?) I knocked on the door and nobody answered as if there had been no countesses, no servants, no counts, no duchesses and dukes indoors. I had no intention of helping myself on that occasion, mind you – I wished to save the countess from death, although I didn't know for sure she was dying at that particular moment, on that particular day. There are many days on which one can die, and one might say there are only days like that in one's life, meaning that every day one sees as one wakes up in the morning or in the evening is the day of one's death because even one's bicycle is a deadly weapon in the hands of the Almighty. You get on your bicycle and a lorry kills you as if you were an insect and not a human being who is said to reign over animals, plants and other things we come across as we walk through our Earth, thinking we are lords, masters, kings and not servants, insects – *infects*, as my friend puts it when speaking about the scum of the Earth.

I come to her place and realise the front door is locked. But there's a garage where a car is taking its rest whenever its owner doesn't need it; and when you're determined to die, you don't use your car unless you think it can convey you to Paradise. I open the only door one can open under the circumstances and go to her room where I must have spent a few blissful nights many years ago, hoping I might carve a niche for myself as a professional gigolo.

I hear her breath; I neither hear nor see her breasts, for even in those days I wasn't keen on her breasts which were beyond my ken, my attention and concentration span – even beyond the concentration camps I might have landed in, had I continued to live in Russia where I was born in 1947. Who cares about my birth and death? There's a gradual build-up of suspense throughout the novel, until it comes to an unexpected ending; and this ending is death, as anybody understands, even if this body, anybody, any liver, any bowels don't understand anything, anybody, any bowels. You don't have to understand anything, provided you live your lives and walk through your woods. Your health is more important than death.

SERMON 12

Last time I was speaking about her breasts, deaths and many other things which come to me as I try to recall my life and whatever must have happened in it, otherwise I wouldn't speak about it or anything else. If nothing happens in your life, you don't live; and if you don't live, you'll never rise from the dead

– or come back from the dead – because you cannot die if you’re already dead and almost buried, as the saying goes. Well, she was almost dead when I found her body lying on the bed I knew by heart, although we never made love in that bed in spite of my desire and sexual longings: even this ugly woman was capable of exciting me to the point of making me do justice to the ritual known as ‘love’ or ‘mating’. Tigers mate repeatedly over a period of several days; so did my concubine and I to some extent, even though we seldom spent several days together, being separated by space and even by time. We didn’t live in the same area and she often went to India where she played the piano and mated with the people I’ve never met because I’m not interested in these people who are certainly more handsome than I am, considering my age and the number of wrinkles I have to struggle with after looking at myself in the mirror.

I call another old lady who says something to my ear pressed against the receiver: ‘Is she dead? Is she breathing? How often do you hear her breath?’

‘It’s so airless in here – I can hardly breathe,’ I say to her.

‘What about *her*?’ she asks.

‘She must be breathing her last or first. I don’t know.’

‘How would you describe her state, her body? Would you say, “Her eyes fluttered open for a moment and then she breathed her last”?’

‘I don’t think so. You’re a novelist, I’m not.’ This lady *was* a novelist; she died 15 years ago.

‘You have to call the police. You should assist the police with their enquiries.’

‘There’s a scrap of paper on her cushion.’

‘What does it say?’

‘It says I’m guilty.’

‘Does it say you’ve got a guilty conscience – that’s why you can’t sleep?’

‘No.’

‘Destroy this scrap of paper. Burn it!’

‘Should I call the police?’

‘You should call an ambulance. An ambulance crew was called to her home, but she was dead by the time they arrived.’

‘Was she?’

‘Is she?’

‘I don’t think so.’

‘What about her breasts?’

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘Can she heave a sigh of relief?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Do her breasts move?’

‘I can’t see her breasts.’

‘What a pity!’

I called an ambulance and they conveyed this body – these breasts, among other things – to a hospital where they put it in bed and did their best to resurrect it, snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. Napoleon was defeated by the Duke of Wellington at the battle of Waterloo and death – Napoleon in disguise – didn’t triumph in the hospital where a host of doctors took care of her breasts: they finally heaved a sigh of relief as the steady drip, drip, drip thanks to which our pains are said to disappear did its job. Do you know what she said to me as she opened her eyes and heaved a sigh of relief? ‘Do you think I did it for you? My poor friend! I love somebody else, and you know this somebody, nobody, my Ulysses. You met him at the flea market.’

I remember the flea market she talked about and I even visualise the man I met there one afternoon because I had no alternative but to meet him in the midst of the crowd: she introduced him to me and vice versa. She enjoyed the play we performed for her sake, although neither this handsome old man nor your faithful and obedient servant were aware of what was going on: none of us knew *anything* about the beds where the body I described in detail some time ago was making love to the male population of our Earth.

Do you want me to keep this woman in my memory? What for? Even if God never comes either to my soul or my house, I refuse to keep this woman by my side, within my reach, within shouting distance – or within striking distance, come to think of it. I should empty my house, my substance, my ego and super ego so that the spiritual energy I’ve been waiting for since my birth is permitted to knock at my door and invade the music scene of my personality with her style and image. (Energy is feminine in both Russian and French.)

This time I’m talking to you about emptiness which should help you get rid of women, men and other substances you know, meet and greet as you go through many streets, many deeds, many loves, hates and so on. There are so many ‘so ons’ in our lives we’re unable to get rid of them at once, in the course of one afternoon at the end of which we can drink a cup of tea, saying to ourselves, ‘I dunked a biscuit in my tea. I’m such a creature of habit – I always have to have a biscuit and a cup of tea at bedtime.’

SERMON 13

What does this mean, all this? I don’t know what *this* means and *that* is even further from my brain in comparison with *this* so *that* I don’t know what to say to you today. And even if you stay with me until tomorrow, I won’t be able to say anything to you or anybody else. But this incapacity of mine is no longer fashionable, given that we live in the 21st century and not in the middle of the last century of which I know next to nothing because of my memory, its size, its bad turns and so on. I do know, however, that they talked a lot about languages and their weaknesses, and I’m not eager to repeat their mistakes, grievances and what not, because I’m determined to speak to you, whoever you are and whatever you can think about as you sit in your armchairs and watch your eternal television.

Are you prepared to empty yourself? You should remove from your substance – or this instant – whatever has nothing to do with my spiritual energy and its origin of which I’ve spoken to you many times because there’s nothing else in the world. I mean there’s only God Whom you see even in your plates when you consume your meals so that you eat God and His emissaries, not partridges and salmon. What do you say to me? ‘I understand what you’re saying but I don’t understand the relevance to this discussion.’ All right. You mean that salmon has nothing to do with my sermons. What else do you say? ‘And what is the relevance of your claims to this matter?’ I am a prophet. What else do you need to know? What else do you need to say? ‘His teachings are of great relevance to modern life.’ That’s right, that’s right.

SERMON 14

Do you need my sermons? You don’t. What about a breath of fresh air, a journey? Why not go to Vilnius? Instead of listening to my nonsense, you go to Vilnius and breathe its fresh air because its inhabitants don’t invest in any company that pollutes the environment. Why should you read Master Eckhart, St Augustine and other Fathers, Mothers, Sons and Daughters? Read the brochure supplied by your travel agency:

Walking around Vilnius one doesn’t notice anything extraordinary at first – similar things can be seen in all European cities – similar architecture, similar lifestyles, only the tempo of life here may be a bit slower. But that’s not all quite true. On the Green ((Zalasis) bridge one can still see Stalin-era statues, of the kind not seen in most other European cities, and through them the different layers of Vilnius history: the baroque-style Church of St. Raphael; the Brezhnev-era ‘construction of the century’, the Hotel Lietuva (now the refurbished Reval Hotel Lietuva), and nearby the newest Vilnius skyscrapers. Such multi-layered vistas can probably be seen in many post-communist cities.

I didn’t want to finish my sermons last night: I don’t like a baker’s dozen.

PART TWO

SERMON 15

I thought I had to finish this book of mine, for you often seek to end your life by drinking vodka, whisky and other liquids enclosed in the bottles you buy in shops with a view to putting an end to your misery. But your misery pursues you like the hound of the Baskervilles and you can't escape from it, even if you take pills or listen to my sermons which are destined to make you healthier and more suitable for our eternal life. What do I teach you? Suffering, eternal bliss, another way, another day, another night? Am I a knight of the Round Table? Actually I don't recall if this proverbial table was round, square or rectangular, but it doesn't really matter, considering that I'm a knight, a preacher, and wherever I find myself I preach the only truth you can count upon, for this is the only truth you come across in our vale of tears and fears. Why? Because God walks by your side, day and night, and even in your dreams.

So I have no intention of putting an end to this book which can't reach the proverbial happy ending without my help, my participation in its growth and forthcoming maturity. I've no idea whether I'm speaking to myself or to you, whoever you are, because I think Pascal wrote for himself and not for humanity; and yet humanity – at least a part of it – is reading him even in the 21st century which has nothing to do either with Pascal or any other great thinker we were accustomed to in other centuries. I wish I could speak to humanity and even to our children who continue to run and play in courtyards without pricking up their ears when I endeavour to teach them a few noble truths, paths and whatever is really noble in our universe.

The other day I spoke to you of Master Eckhart who says God engenders His Son in our body, soul, psyche and unconscious; but we shouldn't think He will ever debase the coinage, so to speak. Our world view has become debased, as almost everybody knows, because we no longer have a sense of the sacred. But God *has* a sense of the sacred so His view, thoughts and acts will never become debased, whatever He does or thinks about *our* ways.

According to Master Eckhart, God gives birth to His Son *within* our body, *amidst* our internal organs, souls, hearts and eternal truths. What's more, He gives birth to *Himself*, which means we're God Himself – every one of us is God Himself, otherwise we wouldn't be humans, for without God we can't become *anybody*, not even the humblest animal. We always speak about *His image* – not only when looking at ourselves in mirrors, looking glasses and other surfaces that pay attention to the world we enjoy so much as we pray in churches and go to Disneyland. Well, whatever you contemplate *inside* yourselves is God and you should take care of Him because He needs you as much as you need Him or any of His Christmas bonuses about which you might have heard in other churches: they always speak about Christmas and its eponymous tree. Actually you don't need to *look* inside your body; no X-rays are needed, contrary to what might be presumed. You just *touch* your body and thus you manage to touch the Almighty, the Cross, the Trinity and the history of humanity.

By the way, did you go to Vilnius? If you empty yourself, you can even go to Moscow, provided you don't let this city – or any other city, for that matter – invade your body to the detriment of Jesus Christ and His colleagues, as they say today. The world is your mirror so all you have to do is look at

God reflected everywhere, even in my sermons, for all their imperfections. Don't you know that a human being can't be perfect? Of course he is God Himself, but God has never sinned – not even in the Garden of Eden: you shouldn't confuse Him with Adam, although Adam was created in God's image and not in the image of Satan, in spite of his sin – of Adam's sin, I mean. By the way, I wish I could see Satan Himself – not only His image, mind you – which might allow me to assassinate Him once and for all. What would happen if my sacred knife pierced one of His photographs? At long last.

Actually I wonder why we're always talking about God as if resolved to talk exclusively about ourselves, for God is identical to our selves, which means He doesn't only *walk* by our side or *talk* to our mind, contrary to what John Paul II presumed, but He is truly *ourselves*: our bodies, minds and sinews. And talking about oneself is not the done thing – at least in civilised countries where we live, pray and read our numerous Bibles and sermons.

