

CHRISTIANITY AND THE PHILOSOPHIES OF EXISTENCE

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WHEN we deal with the relations of existentialism with Christianity, two excesses ought to be avoided. On the one hand, most of the existentialist philosophers develop their thought independently of Christian references, as though existentialism was something entirely new in European thinking, born outside the realm of influence of Christian ideas. On the other, a number of theologians or Christian philosophers in these past few years have taken it for granted and have endeavored to show that Christian thinking was itself radically existential, and that existentialism had only stressed and sometimes biased points of view that were already extant in Christian theology. Both views are excessive. If existentialism brought nothing new, why did it not exist, as such, before our time? If existentialism is foreign to Christianity, why are some of its great names convinced Christians?

In reality, the basic relevance of Christianity to every reflection on human existence, and specifically on my own existence, on the existence of the man who himself exists and tries to experience being as the subject of his existence, is that Christianity claims to have changed the meaning of existence. It claims this by asserting that man's existence had been doomed by its own weight, that it had been estranged from its ultimate sense, that it had swerved from its innate direction, until precisely the inauguration of Christianity by Christ the Son of God. It not only claims this amazing "good news." It did in fact (whether one like or dislike it) change the meaning of existence by relating it, or by revealing its relation, with a God who is both transcendent and immanent. The transcendence of God (symbolized by the expression, "Our Father, the One in heaven," as Simone Weil insisted it should be translated) explains and justifies man's estrangement from Him. God is the All-Other, the One who is in and by Himself, whereas man's existence is entirely contingent and experienced as such, even if we do not relate it to an Absolute. In the light of Christianity, the human existence is even more contingent, more miserable

and forsaken than any philosophy of pessimism could paint it; for only by seeing the greatness of the Absolute can one gauge the abyss of our separation from Him. This contingency shows itself in personal existence through sin; in communal life through the fortunes and misfortunes of history; in society through our slavery to the "elements of the cosmos," those social forces that Simone Weil, after Plato, called "the Beast." No wonder that in some cultures which caught glimpses of that utter Transcendence, philosophies of nihilism and annihilation were in favor. Many lacked the courage to follow the intuition of the Buddha that, since every act here below is tied down to the wheel of suffering, the wheel of suffering has to be stopped by abstention. They then felt that nothing could halt the everlasting cycle of misery, the destiny, the fatality, the *eimarmené* by which we are all trapped. Hence the cyclical history of the Greeks.

Christianity broke the cycle, straightened history into a lineal pattern, crushed the spell of destiny, when it taught that Transcendence itself, God in His own Person, had become one of us, leading the very existence of mankind. Christ the Lord Incarnate, the Second Person of the Trinity present in the flesh, has subjected Himself to the conditions of human existence. Henceforth He is immanent to creation. Existence receives its meaning from our solidarity with the existence of Christ here below and from our participation in His existence in the Father. This is ensured through the sacraments, by which Christ becomes present to individual existence. It is ensured through the Church, by which He is present to society, that is, to the social dimension of human existence. The two of these, the Church as institution and the sacraments of faith, guarantee the Christian transformation of the two major dimensions of our existence: its depth, by reaching to the innermost recesses of the soul; its breadth, by embracing all social relationships, from the simple relationships of friendship and of marriage to the complex tangles of relationships that we call society.

PATRISTIC CONCEPT OF CHRISTIAN EXISTENCE

The outline of the fundamental achievement of Christianity in transforming the meaning of existence would probably not be questioned by any Christian. Those, however, who like to consider Christianity only or mainly in the Bible, rather than in its providential de-

velopment in history, may overlook some elements in the Christian philosophy of existence; for Christianity did not develop according to our reading of the Gospel now, but rather as the men of the first centuries did read the Gospel. Two elements of this reading may be emphasized.

In the first place, the Fathers of the Church made a sharp distinction between existence as sinful, and existence as Christian. There are two kinds of existences here below: existence in the city of God or in the city of the world, as St. Augustine phrased it; existence in Christ or existence under the dominion of evil, as the Greeks would express it. Following St. Paul on the New Being in Christ, and St. John on "being born not of the flesh but of God," the Fathers taught that the sacraments of initiation to Christianity (baptism, sealing, Eucharist) achieve a true ontological transformation of man. From the region of dissemblance man passes to that of resemblance (Augustine). He is not only saved; he is divinized. That is—however shocking the expression may seem to a Protestant mind¹—he partakes here below of eternal life when the liturgical experience of the community raises him to the liturgy of heaven. He anticipates on the other life when he partakes of the Body and Blood of Christ in a communion that sums up time ("in memory of me," that is, of the fulness of time) and transcends it ("until He come," that is, making eschatology present). Whence the expression of the Creed on the "holy Catholic Church": she is the realm of holiness, where human existence is transformed in the very holiness of God. Because they were keenly aware of this aspect of Christianity, the Fathers of the Church considered Christian existence as anagogical, that is, it is a sacrament (in the Catholic sense of efficacious sign) of the divine life. In it we reach God Himself by going up the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Human existence becomes anagogical in Christianity.

In the second place, this entails a position on human existence as such, in the twofold sense that existence is a possible ground for this transformation, and that some elements of existence nevertheless hamper it. Whence the two attitudes to the world that we find in the

¹ Yet see Luther: "We become divine through love, which causes us to do good to our neighbor; for divine nature is nought else than the sheer doing of good" (Weimar ed., 10, 1, 100).

Fathers. At times it is a frankly optimistic humanism. The Word is seen as already present somehow in creation; the cross is painted on many a pagan symbol (St. Justin). The soul is naturally Christian (Tertullian). The heathen philosophies of Plato and the Neoplatonists obtained an inkling of the true revelation. From this point of view, human existence already escapes the circle of fate by its expectation of salvation. The soul of man has a certain knowledge of truth and it is saved by Christ if it does the truth: "who does the truth comes to the light" (St. John). At times, on the contrary, the Fathers are pessimistic on human existence. This trend is largely due to St. Augustine and his anti-Pelagian reaction. Then the human existence, apart from Christ, is enmeshed in sin and damnation. Mankind is a *massa damnata*. The good actions of pagans are sins; their virtues in reality are vices. Human nature was not only deprived of God's friendship by original sin. It was, moreover, intrinsically vitiated.

DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE AGES

If we now look at the development of Christianity in the Middle Ages, three points are relevant. Of the pessimistic and optimistic views on human existence, the pessimistic one (human existence totally estranged from God), which itself had been a late-comer in Christian thought, was definitely on the wane through the Middle Ages, until it was revived, still more excessively than Augustine had formulated it, by Luther and Calvin. The question is, why? From a philosophical standpoint one can answer that in St. Augustine's thought this pessimism proceeded from his Manichaean antecedents much more than from his Christian experience. Centered as it is on the "wonderful news" of the Gospel as constantly reenacted in the liturgy, Christian experience reveals the depths of the sacramental order, with its roots in creation and the human existence. The "world," which is the kingdom of sin and the devil, is not the natural world. It is, in the outlook of St. Gregory of Nyssa, subnatural, fallen from the natural state in which it had been created. Human existence as such is good. It postulates God. It represents Him. If baptism makes us "likenesses" of God, by creation we are already "images" of Him. Our existence knows depths where we are "like" God.

The second remark is that the anagogical conception of the Chris-

tian man as developed by the Greek Fathers soon opened the way for the application to the natural man of a philosophy of analogy. This systematizes the idea that man is made to the image of God. Analogy is the philosophical way of defining the correspondence between God the Creator and His creatures. In a word, it means this: the being which man enjoys is neither identical with, nor heterogeneous to, the being of God. Instead, their relationship is analogical. Being is one, yet it develops intrinsic differentiations according as it is actualized. Those differences are related one to another according to a scheme of proportionality. If we conceive of being as a relation between essence (that which is) and existence (the way it is), the connection between this essence and this existence corresponds to the connection between that essence and that existence. Being is realized proportionally at all its degrees. Dry as it always seems at its face value, this point of view, which has antecedents in Greek, especially Aristotelian, philosophy, was ultimately worked out by Christian thinkers in a vital reflection on the Christian experience of existence. The liturgy, the life of God present to us through the sacraments, the general sacramentality whereby nature offers a way of ascent to God, show man as living within a sort of gamut of higher and higher existences. God is at the summit. Underneath we have, going from the lowest to the highest, "traces" and "shadows" of God's existence (in inanimate nature); "images" that reflect it (in the human soul); "likenesses" of it in the soul where God inhabits. All this is thought out in the Word of God, where the exemplars of all created beings are precontained. Exemplarism is thus the philosophy of the Middle Ages. The meaning of human existence consists in ascending the degrees of exemplarity. The medieval man sees a bridge between the purely human and the highest degrees of mystical transformation into perfect likeness of God. Medieval mysticism is inseparable from the medieval conception of existence. It is not due to extra-Christian influence (Plato, Plotinus). It is strictly an outgrowth of the Christian Gospel as successively experienced by the Fathers of the Church and their medieval successors.

The third remark bears on the introduction of Aristotelianism into Christian thought. All that has been said so far needs no reference to Aristotle. References to Plato, although enlightening, are not essential. Simply, the Christian life was so enshrined in elements that were

vitaly related to the experience of each one that its theology implied an active reflection on points of philosophical interest where these points were not separated, hardly even distinguished, from strictly religious views. When we say that Scholasticism was cut off from life, this may have been true of the decay that followed the Great Western Schism, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It was emphatically not true of the great Middle Ages. Reflection was then as "existential" as at any moment of the Christian era before or since. Its focus was all on the experience of the Christian man.

In the middle of the thirteenth century St. Thomas "christianized" Aristotle. From the standpoint of Christianity and existence, this meant a shift of the dominant stress from the singular to the universal elements in Christian existence. But when we say "universal" in Aristotelianism, we precisely mean "abstracted from actual existence." In the team essence-and-existence, essence now dominates. It follows that by comparison with the philosophies of the exemplaristic tradition, like those of St. Bonaventure or Duns Scotus, the Thomistic line of thought shows a certain lack of interest in the existing subject, in the concrete existent. The object holds the field. The trouble is (and this is the basic quarrel of modern existentialism with Thomism) that as soon as we make existence an object it vanishes as the existence of a subject. It is no longer existence, but thing, *chose*; no longer dynamic, but static.

LUTHERAN REACTION

Touching only the main summits of the development of Christian thought concerning existence, we ought now to mention the Lutheran reaction to excesses in objectivism. It is often contended, especially in Lutheran circles, that Luther's concern for personal religion, for a relationship between man and God through Christ which by-passes an objective sacramental order (to express it more pointedly than Luther would have done), greatly restored in Christian thought and life the sense of man's own existence. The Lutheran act of faith is thus described by a recent writer: "Primarily and essentially, it is personal commitment; it is confident trust in the amazing, irrational wonder of forgiveness, God's redeeming love in Christ. It is the risk, the self-abandonment, the leap—the agonized, despairing, joyous leap—across

the abyss of sin and guilt, despair and death.”² Indeed, it may well be that Luther’s emphasis on faith as trust opens the way to a more existential experience of faith as my-own-faith than the previous Catholic trends allowed. Yet this was also a radical innovation in Christian tradition; for to the eyes of the great patristic or medieval thinkers the greatness of faith is precisely that it is not my faith but the faith of the universal Church. “Look not upon my sins, but upon the faith of thy Church,” the Roman liturgy asks. The difference does not lie, I venture to suggest, in the opposition of a faith-assent to a faith-trust, of a faith as objective knowledge to a faith as essential commitment. These two elements, with shifting emphases, are common to both types of faith. The difference lies in the structure of the existential experience which underlies faith. The Catholic experiences his being-in-himself as utterly transformed by his being-in-Christ. For Luther, on the contrary, our being-in-Christ condemns our being-in-ourself, which nevertheless subsists. This paradoxical coexistence of two beings in the Christian man entails both the appealing depth and risk of the Lutheran faith, and its inner contradictions. The thorough integration of the Catholic act of faith universalizes the existence of the single Christian man: his existence comes up to consciousness in the awareness of being-one-of-the-Mystical-Body-of-Christ. On the contrary, the Lutheran emphasis tends to stress and exacerbate the misery of man alone, crushed and saved by the greatness of God. Its protest *for* the transcendence of God necessarily entails a protest *against* His immanence in the sacramental order of the world and the Church.

SOREN KIERKEGAARD

By no mere coincidence, the father of the existentialist philosophies, Soren Kierkegaard, was himself largely indebted to the Lutheran form of Christianity. He was not an entirely new phenomenon in the Lutheran tradition. Prof. Tillich likes to insist that Schelling anticipated many aspects of the Kierkegaardian dialectic. Being occasioned by a reaction against Hegel, the thought of Kierkegaard was itself Lutheran, not only owing to the dialectical structure of Kierkegaard’s faith, but furthermore because the target of its shafts was largely a Lutheran phenomenon (Lutheran being taken here in a broader sense; the theo-

² J. S. Whale, *The Protestant Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1955) p. 18.

logical dialectic of Lutheranism had been secularized in the philosophy of Hegel). The anguish so acutely analyzed by Kierkegaard (the anguish of the existential leap which gives meaning to existence and yet remains unjustifiable to reason) is germane to Luther's strenuous efforts to hold the two horns of the dilemma of Law and Gospel. Our leap into the Gospel saves us from the crushing power of the Law. At the same time it justifies the Law as that aspect of God's pedagogy that pushes us to a despairing trust in the saving grace of Christ. This is far from the serenity of the Catholic faith. Here we are not caught between Law and Gospel: the New Testament is entirely Gospel, entirely Law of Love, grace or graciousness, whereas the Law belongs to the Old Testament. We are saved from sin through the sacraments of faith. No leap is needed; for there is nothing to escape once we are assumed in the Mystical Body of Christ which is the Church. The Law is abolished by its very fulfilment. The type of existential experience to which Kierkegaard witnesses may indeed be understood, it cannot be fully shared, in the Catholic tradition. It runs, on the contrary, like a thread through all Lutheran theology.

This preliminary remark will help us grasp the basic distinctions between a Protestant and a Catholic existential thought today; for although Gabriel Marcel, the great Catholic philosopher, rejects the expression "existentialist" as applied to himself, he certainly claims to have an existential type of thinking. How and in what sense can he be related to existentialism? As for the Protestant side of the picture, the theology of Paul Tillich uses existentialist categories to no meagre extent. We will therefore try to see how the Lutheran and the Catholic experiences of existence have now given rise to two varieties of existential thinking.

I am not particularly interested in the jargon of existential philosophers. However, in order to understand Marcel or, for that matter, Heidegger or Sartre, it is important to keep in mind that they all have adopted for their investigations the method of "existential phenomenology." The transcendental phenomenology of Husserl consisted in analyzing phenomena of consciousness in such a way as to discern their hidden intentionality, this itself pointing to the meaning of reality. Consciousness is the consciousness of something. This orientation of man toward otherness provides the basic motivation of existential

phenomenology. Phenomenological investigation is then extended to all the fluent attitudes that keep life on the move, in the flow of successive existence. The intentionality of our actions reveals the general intentionality or direction of existence. This avoids the "weakness" of classical metaphysics: reflection grasps no noumenon under the phenomenon; but the phenomenon itself, in its dynamic orientation, unveils the meaning or non-meaning of existence. "It is not in I know not what retreat that we will discover ourselves: it is on the road, in the city, amid the crowd, a thing among things, a man among men."³

GABRIEL MARCEL

What does Gabriel Marcel look for? Is there an Absolute in human existence? This is the existential question, asked in various forms by all existential thinkers. Gabriel Marcel's analysis meets first what he calls the existential beyond-doubt (*l'indubitable existentiel*): this is an element, or aspect, or implication of existence which cannot be doubted because it is apprehended by intuition. It is for him a sort of ground that underlies every human experience: an experience of participation, an openness to a non-ego which is yet present in the ego. It cannot be directly analyzed, since it is itself the ground of every attempt at analysis. It cannot be objectivized without ceasing to be personal participation. Yet it forms the basis of Marcel's philosophy; for this participation points to something that is participated. This is the ontological mystery revealed by the phenomenological analysis of existence. In a twofold movement, reflection first reaches the fact of participation; second, it reaches, in what Marcel calls the second reflection (*la réflexion seconde*), an Absolute Thou in which existence participates, the divine Absolute. This Absolute is not reached by way of an intellectual affirmation, as it would be in the proofs of the existence of God, but through participation in an absolute Love, an unconditional gift of being. The fact that we participate, that we are given something, namely, existence, orientates us toward the evidence that we are related to an Absolute who bestows on us the unrepented gift of being. The Absolute is thus perceived in a movement of thought that interprets experience as absolute Love, absolute Giver and Gift. Is this

³ Sartre, *Situations* 1 (Paris, 1947) 34-35.

natural theology? No; "a love which bans all reflection has received the mediation of the divine."⁴ Rather, Gabriel Marcel's existential analysis joins hands with one of the great traditions of Catholic thought, the tradition of the improperly called ontological argument of St. Anselm, St. Bonaventure, Pascal, Malebranche, Newman, Edouard Leroy, and especially Maurice Blondel in his *Essay on the Requirements of the Modern Mind in Apologetical Matters*. Existential reflection postulates, orients toward, the Christian faith, but toward the Christian faith precisely as communion, that is, in its Catholic understructure.

PAUL TILlich

We now turn to the existential theology of Paul Tillich. It will provide us with a good Lutheran instance of existential analysis in the light of Christianity. Marcel is first of all a philosopher. He analyzes the datum of experience, and finds that it points to a transcendence in which it is given the grace to participate. Tillich, at least in his latest phase, is a theologian. His concern is not to establish a philosophy; it is to witness to the Gospel. But he wants to witness to it in the real situation of man today. This leads him to an existential analysis of the human situation. The whole meaning of his theology is that it tries to formulate the Christian faith today in such a way that it fits in the existential mold of today's man, and answers the questions now raised by man's existence. Existential analysis of the human situation and existential explanation of the Christian faith match like question and answer. In short, Tillich finds that human being, human existence, human life, remain meaningless and sources of despair as long as they do not meet ultimate Being, ultimate Existence, ultimate Life, that is, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit of the Christian revelation.

There are two questions here: what sort of analysis brings this in, and what kind of faith grasps the answer?

To start with, not any kind of existential analysis will do. Neither Heidegger nor Sartre asks the question of ultimate Being, ultimate Existence, ultimate Life, though both are in search of the Absolute that underlies human experience. The existential analysis of Tillich is guided by the answer which he knows he will give. From one standpoint, this shows his apologetical method as being vitiated by a loaded

⁴ Marcel, *Journal métaphysique* (Paris, 1927) p. 66.

argument; but this is the plight of most, if not all, apologetics. From another, it points to what Tillich calls the "theological circle" which forms the paradox of theological reflection, namely, the fact that faith is both departure and arrival. A theology that does not dare to choose its theological circle is self-destroying; for it does not take account of the fact that grace is anterior to the first movement toward faith. Here, however, is the crux of Tillich's thought. Summarizing Heidegger's conception of the relation between faith and thought, Henri Birault writes: "The answer of the believer does not answer, does not correspond to, the question of the philosopher."⁵ Tillich is aware of this. His theology does not raise the philosophical question as such, but the same question in so far as it becomes a matter of "unconditional concern." The believer answers on the basis of a revealed datum, the Person of Jesus Christ the Savior. But the philosopher is not in quest of salvation. He asks, in Heidegger's terms, the more fundamental and "disinterested" question: "Why is there being rather than no-being?"

This bares the dilemma of Tillich's existential theology. Given the analysis of the situation as already theological, Tillich does nothing more than successively emphasize the two extremes of the Lutheran faith, which is both despair and trust, question and answer. His system is an existential commentary on the coexistence of estrangement from God (sin) and justification by faith. If it is this, however, it cannot be truly correlative or apologetic in the sense that Tillich wishes; for it answers the despair of those for whom despair is not ultimate, for whom it implies an answer of those who already trust in a known or unknown Christ. There are those who ask only the philosophical question. Provided they ask it with "infinite passion," with "unconditional concern," Tillich would think that the question is no longer purely philosophical and that the Christian answer is valid.

At this point Tillich lies open to criticism. In the first place, the philosophical question ("why is there being rather than no-being?") cannot be asked with infinite passion. Even when it calls for practical commitment, philosophy means detachment. Léon Brunschvicg was a good witness to this when he remarked that his own death was philosophically irrelevant and moreover uninteresting to himself. In the

⁵ H. Birault, "La foi et la pensée d'après Heidegger," *Recherches et débats*, March, 1955, p. 116.

second place, whether asked with unconditional concern (were it possible) or not, the only answer to the question of being is to be found in an analysis of being and its characteristics. Since God is Being Itself, the Ground of Being, the Power of Being (to use Tillich's idiom), this answer implies a natural theology, describing the characteristics of being, but essentially distinct from a theology of faith and grace. As a result, the existential theology of Paul Tillich wavers between a mere analysis of faith in its Lutheran understructure (where the question is patterned on a preexisting answer) and a mere philosophical meditation on being (where the question implies a merely philosophical answer). The lesson, which could have been learned from medieval exemplaristic reflection, is that an existential theology is valid only within the framework of the Christian existence.

RUDOLF BULTMANN

A like conclusion could be drawn from a study of the existential theology of Rudolf Bultmann. In the Auburn Lectures Series of Union Theological Seminary in 1952, Paul Tillich spoke on "The European Discussion of the Problem of the Demythologization of the New Testament." In spite of temperamental divergences, he showed significant congeniality with Bultmann, the present promoter of such a demythologization. On the basis of Heidegger's analysis of the human situation, Bultmann asserts the need for unburdening the existential core of Christianity from the mythical framework in which it was cast. Under Bultmann's selective eye, the New Testament is reduced to a simple existential description of man's possibilities and impossibilities. Christianity as faith becomes the God-given transformation of man's despair into man's hope. Christ is Word of God in so far as this transformation is revealed in Him.

Bultmann wants to demythologize the New Testament. However, by grounding his interpretation of Christianity on Heidegger's purely philosophical anthropology, he bogs himself down in the myth that mankind is the measure of all things and the existentialist of today the measure of mankind. This is no less fallacious and far more pernicious a myth than New Testament imagery; for while Bultmann proclaims the philosophical necessity of Christianity, his existential Protestant-

ism goes a long way toward forgetting its historical nature.⁶ Some critics of Tillich have leveled the same reproach at him. Tillich's professed emphasis on the historicity of Christ does not escape a certain gratuitousness when replaced in his ontological investigations of being (our being) and Being Itself (God). Actually, the similarity between Tillich and Bultmann lies deeper than their differences. Both cases compel us to the same conclusion: an existential analysis of the human situation becomes the ground for Christian theology at the expense of the latter's transcendence. Only an existential analysis of the Christian experience in its totality may open the theological field to phenomenological reflection.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

The attempt to build an existential theology has proved to be an ambiguous experiment. Not only has it been focused on opposite poles, with men like Marcel on the one hand, Bultmann or Tillich on the other. Existential reflection has, furthermore, gone two separate ways: that of the Christian faith, opened by Kierkegaard; that of unbelief, followed by Heidegger or Sartre. In quest of an Absolute within human existence, the existential philosopher has discovered two: the Absolute Thou of Marcel and the absolute liberty of Sartre. There is an atheistic existentialism.

The expression "atheistic existentialism" is, however, a misnomer. Heidegger is an unbeliever; yet he clearly perceives the existential meaning of faith as "a specific manner of standing in the truth."⁷ Whether faith is objectively true or false is to him irrelevant. Likewise, Sartre does not believe in God. This is not because he is unconvinced of God's existence; rather, God, whether He is or not, makes no difference to the human situation. "Man must rediscover himself and be persuaded that nothing can save him from himself, not even a satisfactory proof of the existence of God."⁸ The drama of faith, for Sartre, is that if God becomes the Absolute he is Otherness made absolute; the

⁶ L. Malevez, S.J., *Le message chrétien et le mythe: La théologie de Rudolf Bultmann* (Paris-Brussels-Bruges, 1954); R. Marlé, S.J., *Bultmann et l'interprétation du Nouveau Testament* (Paris, 1956).

⁷ M. Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen, 1953) p. 5.

⁸ F. Jeanson, *Sartre par lui-même* (1955) p. 178.

cause of our estrangement, the other, is multiplied infinitely. Sartre has devoted special attention to the phenomenological analysis of man's relationship to the other. "The others, that is, hell," provides the topic of his drama, *Huis-Clos*. For under the look of the others man is revealed to himself as alienated, as belonging to and transformed by those who are not himself. Every relationship contributes to "annihilate" man as subject. It makes him an object to others. Sartre aspires to a reconciliation of subject and object. Human liberty, he believes, furnishes us with the principle of such a reconciliation—a liberty that is to be reinvented and reassumed day by day. "Such is the man that we envisage: a total man. Totally committed and totally free. Yet this free man one must *free* by increasing his possibilities of choice. There are situations with room only for an alternative, one side of which is death. One must act in such a way that man may, in any situation, choose life."⁹

By his liberty man can assume the basic contradictions of existence, and specifically the inner tension of being subject and object at the same time. But if God is (as Sartre sees Him), the other who limits my liberty becomes unlimited. The ultimate obstacle to liberty is our attitude before an Absolute which is not ourself. This makes the hell of otherness perennial. From this point of view God is unnecessary. "What do we need God for? The other is enough—any other."¹⁰ Moreover, if mankind wishes to reach adulthood, it must integrate otherness into oneness and thus end forever man's slavery to man. This implies denying God, the All-Other. Exactly at this point, Sartre's existentialism joins the proletarian movements of our time; they also aspire to the adulthood of every man. Yet this "fellow-traveling" remains paradoxical and self-contradictory. Jean-Paul Sartre is lucid and courageous enough to see dialectical materialism as the philosophical destruction of the liberty which the Revolution expects to achieve. "To choose the USSR amounts to foregoing formal freedoms with not even the hope of acquiring material freedoms."¹¹

The limit of existential analysis as practised by Sartre is reached. Sartre is in search of liberty as Marcel is of participation. The latter's

⁹ Sartre, *Situations 2* (Paris, 1948) 28.

¹⁰ *Situations 1*, 237.

¹¹ *Situations 2*, 313.

analysis brings him to the Christian God. The former's reflection ends with the conclusion that in proportion as we are free God is dead to us. Obviously Sartre is not referring to the God found by Marcel. He is not speaking of the Absolute, but of an image of his neighbor prolonged into infinity. When he applies to God what he discovers in the one-who-looks-at-me, Sartre takes it for granted that if God is, He simply is One-who-looks-at-me. He has no conception of what Marcel calls participation,¹² of what the Scholastics entitled analogy. The God that he denounces as irrelevant is made in the likeness of man; he is not God. When Sartre and a believer argue, they talk at cross-purposes. Faith, as experienced in Christian existence, is not a relation to Another who happens to be transcendent. It is a relation to the One "who is more intimate to myself than I am." Of the two poles of the God reached in Christian existence, transcendence and immanence, Sartre ignores immanence. As a result, the transcendence that he caricatures as otherness apes the true transcendence of God.

CONCLUSIONS

The relation of the philosophies of existence to Christianity is not simple. It goes from complete acceptance to complete rejection. This is not surprising; for existence itself is ambiguous. Under analysis it unveils an expectation of the divine which the classical philosophies of Christianity have exploited and which forms the core, in diverse forms, of the thought of Soren Kierkegaard and of Gabriel Marcel. It also contains elements that can be explained without reference to Christianity and which even, to certain minds, are better explained without Christianity.

If we now consider the question from the standpoint of faith, two attitudes have been adopted. Some find that the philosophies of existence have added nothing to man's knowledge of the human situation. Existentialism, for them, may be by-passed as an unimportant freak in the history of the modern mind, as a craze that will pass with the present world crisis. Others, who come infinitely nearer to the truth, see in the various forms of existentialism a powerful apprehension of

¹² P. Colin, "La phénoménologie existentielle et l'absolu," *Recherches et débats*, March, 1955, pp. 91-107.

the radical mystery of man—the separation of essence and existence, of object and subject.

Some of the existential thinkers have been able, with the resources of their phenomenological method, to achieve a passage from the immediate datum of experience to its absolute meaning. This shows that the phenomenological method of reflection as such is fully compatible with faith. It can be a good instrument at the service of theology. The most consistent attempt at an existential theology has, however, in my opinion, failed to do justice to the originality of the Christian, as distinguished from the merely human, existence, to the difference between the New Being in Christ and the old being in sin. This failure was to be expected if, as I think, the principle on which it was carried out by Paul Tillich (the “Protestant principle” extended to the realm of the intellect) was precisely not valid as an instrument of analysis of Christian existence; for by implication it levels the Christian revelation to the rank of all and any unconditional concerns in human experience. It is, rather, essential to faith that it be distinguished from even the highest artistic emotion, the most altruistic social commitment, or the most profound philosophical conviction. However important it is for theology to be acquainted with a phenomenological reflection on human existence, the specific elements of our existence in Christ belong to another structure.

The insight of even the non-Christian existentialists is extremely useful. It points to an aspect of the human dilemma which has never before been analyzed with such relentless clear-sightedness. Here theology has to show, however, that even at the moments of its purest perception a reflection on existence that takes no account of man’s openness on God has foregone a whole realm of experience, the most significant of all; for the religious experience, as being the deepest, is the most likely to hold the key to existence. In its Christian form alone will it finally provide the means to surmount at last the dichotomy of subject and object. It will put an end to the hell of otherness by achieving from man to man the communion of thought and love which is given us as a grace in the Mystical Body of Christ.