

Expectation and Search in the Spiritual Life

We are revealed in our essential truth in the last stages of our lives

Our spiritual success will only be truly revealed in the way in which we live out the last stages of our mission. As we approach the end of our lives, these final stages will be increasingly dependent on what we are. They will reveal us devoid of any self-protecting veil and therefore far more completely than our past thoughts, words and actions have ever been able to do, since we may unconsciously have concealed these from ourselves and from others behind it. In the past, we were more energetic and constantly developing. Our mission prompted us to take initiatives, raised our activities to a higher level and was in itself successful. At that time, we occasionally thought of our final state and sometimes, when we were very weary, even wanted it to come quickly. When we envisaged it, we saw it as nothing but a brief pause in our activity, not as the climax of our active life. Even if we asserted forcefully, in the light of a conscious spiritual life, that knowledge and activity were only means, we still did not know that it was the end and attributed an almost total value to those means. It is not possible to believe, in the true sense of the word, until we have been driven back to the point where "being" is not identical with "knowing" and "acting" and where "being" is in fact more important and is spiritually effective with others. At the most, it is possible to uphold the argument.

The last stages of our mission will therefore always be radically new if we have been spiritual persons, as our lives have gradually announced them to us and prepared the way for us to conform to them. They will always come upon us unexpectedly, however late they come. That is why they often cause a serious crisis in our life. This happens especially when they arrive early. They check our movement forward and deprive us forcibly of what had been for us the center of our life. Whether they occur early or late, however, these final stages have little in common with what has previously been achieved in faith

and faithfulness, but they are necessary to our human fulfillment. When they are not suitably experienced, we do not find the keystone to our life and, even before we die, enter the void and sink into nothingness.

This is the time when everything can be called into question

When we, who are carried away at every moment by current events, have only lived on the surface of our being, the physiological and psychological growth of old age will end by simply lulling us to sleep. Contentment in our final days is achieved by our becoming resigned to our fate. Apart from our fear of dying, nothing else is called into question. This is because we have simply existed from day to day without really living at a deeper level and living as it were outside time and autonomously. We who have lived a more intense spiritual life, however, are too conscious of our own existence to react in this way when the active period of our life is over. We have constantly tried to move toward greater clarity and greater authenticity and this has in turn led us to make fundamental decisions about faith in ourselves and faith in God. Now, in the final stages of our life, because of our past and because of what we have become, we are bound to persevere. If we do not, our way will become a dead end, in which we will cease to understand what our conversion to humanity and to God had meant in the past.

In these last stages, we are often without a visible part to play in society which would keep us busy and help us not to feel useless. We are indeed frequently reduced to an almost ludicrous level of interior activity and are lost, as it were, at the bottom of a deep pit. Because of this, it is important for us to confront the end of our lives upright and not drag ourselves toward it. To be sure of doing this, we must be constantly in touch with ourselves and with God at the most personal level. Who could lay claim to this, even after leading an active and generous life? Such a life usually leads us away rather than encouraging us to such an attitude, even if it is the result of a true inner experience. At the final period of our lives, which often sets in very early, we are unable to look at the void that seems to us to be a way that we have to follow for a long time ahead simply by making use of our own means and our own spiritual vitality. We fear this fate more than anything else and even more than the immediate approach of death, since we can only give ourselves a childish or pain-killing idea of this before it takes place.

There is a great temptation to confuse mission and action, to lose sight of the meaning of mission and to hinder its progress by clinging to activity, even though, in the last stages of life, it is no longer possible to be active in a suitable way and one's activity is in the main interior. Sometimes, moreover, we are powerfully urged to question our past and in this process we may find our-

selves believing that it has no intrinsic value. Despite the consistent and lasting aspects that we have gradually discovered in ourselves, despite the many contingent features of our daily life, our existence seems to us to have been as exposed to chance and as unreal as a pure construction of the spirit, so that we come to doubt the reality of the foundations on which we have built it up.

On the other hand, however, how would it be possible for us to believe that we have in the past always decided and acted under the influence of an illusion or that we have again and again been deceived by what seemed to us at the time to be certain, with a certainty that had been confirmed every time that we reflected on it? Unless we deny ourselves, the spiritual part of us cannot believe that we have built up our life on a fantasy that was seductive, but in the long run disastrous, a fantasy that has led us, by an implacable and underground form of logic, to the total loss of everything that we might have been able to experience. We are now, at the end of our life, painfully conscious of this loss.

Denial of oneself is in contrast with affirmation of oneself

Recognition of this failure forces us to deny ourselves and this denial is of the same absolute nature as the affirmation of ourselves that opened us to the spiritual life. Both the denial and the affirmation are suggested to us with the inevitability of a radical choice. Stealing away is still choosing, because it is a denial of oneself. Neither choice is a simple intellectual proposition as they both would be if we had remained at a superficial level and not a personal one. On the contrary, because of the route that we have followed and the gradual deepening of our experience, we are faced with our denial of ourselves as we were in the past with our affirmation of ourselves. This denial bears down on us with the full weight of a life built up on a series of choices made necessary by our faithfulness and our voluntary personal sacrifices, precisely because of this affirmation. The possibility of such a radical and consuming denial points to the reality and effectiveness of our affirmation of ourselves.

This denial of ourselves continues to hang over us for as long as we do not reach the level of being which we are able to glimpse in the obscurity of faith because of our affirmation of ourselves. Because of its absolute character, this affirmation makes it possible for us to reject a denial of ourselves as an irreversible failure, without at the same time enabling us to be at one with our faith in ourselves and to make that faith the central act of our being. This affirmation and this denial are contrasted with each other in us who are faithful and who have lived in faith. They take us, because of this polarity, to the peak of our humanity and bear witness to the fundamental demand of transcendence, despite a natural impotence.

An intimate and solitary struggle

In this struggle against ourselves, we sometimes go forward and sometimes are forced to retreat. It is a solitary struggle, because we have already taken our deepening of our personal experience too far and have become too remote from our own environment, even if the distance cannot be perceived, for any real help to be received from it. All that we can find outside ourselves are allies in our weaknesses, by abandoning ourselves to empty secrets and to betraying what is most valuable. We are alone on this path, more alone in fact than we have ever been because our solitude is shown, now and forever, by a clear isolation. Whatever happens, we have to go forward without any companion, however many friends we may have. Otherwise the building that we have raised day by day throughout our entire life by means of our faithfulness will collapse to its very foundations.

In the last stage of our mission, then, we reach an ultimate boundary that we must cross if we are really to retain our humanity. We can no longer rely on action. We have to be satisfied with what we are. This is a necessary, yet untenable position. The new stage that presents itself is quite different from all those through which we have so far passed on our spiritual journey. We are not helped in it by any instinct such as love and parenthood. In this extreme situation, we cannot find in ourselves any exceptional spiritual resources. Although we may have an almost physical reaction which will call forth such resources when death approaches, we have no such reaction now. On the contrary, too violent a leap forward may prevent us from adapting ourselves gently to the new conditions of life and embracing them. It is not by raising ourselves up violently, but by reflecting patiently in a state of inner recollection that we will be able to find our way forward from now onward and receive the inspiration and the means that we need to enter the intimate state that is suitable for this phase.

In spite of appearances and through intimate crises, people experience a fundamental stability

There are times, then, when everything is called into question. There is always temptation, but even more there is dizziness. Believers have, however, never been closer to fulfillment and further from failure. They have a fundamental stability which they may not recognize even though they have played a part in establishing it by their faithfulness over the years. They also have ineradicable memories which can continue to be spiritually effective when they have the opportunity to refer to them. These memories are seeds of the contemplation that is necessary if people are to persevere and they tend to rise up in them when they are most deeply engulfed in that extreme state.

Although the conditions that it imposes are very difficult to accept, this situation is nonetheless very steady. What is required of all men and women in this final stage is that they should be conscious of the basic meaning of their lives. They should also be firm and direct in their judgments and certain of their own way. They should not be dependent on the opinions of others, even those who are nearest to them. They must be unfailingly tenacious and in control of even the most compelling or testing events in their lives. All this should be possible for them without outside help, especially when they are beset by a fundamental weariness and the anguish that it causes and nourishes. In fact, although it may seem unlikely, they will know in the most intimate part of their being and sometimes even when they are full of doubts that these resources will be given to them. The whole of their past life of faithfulness has prepared them in secret to keep abreast of the demands made by their present life. At such times, then, at least when they are sufficiently free of themselves and far more easily than in the past, they are able to seek and to expect.

Expectation and search

Expectation and search go together from the very beginning of the spiritual life. They become more closely associated as each is intensified as our humanity reaches a deeper level. Seeking leads us to expect what is bound to make our search more effective and expectation is what goads us to seek further. Without expectation, search treads in its own footsteps. Without search, expectation is passive and idle. The one causes the other to appear. In the perfect state, they are one and both are directed toward the imminent future. They are very well suited to measure our real vitality. They reveal what we are and can do this much better than we can by our affirmations or actions. They are born of faith and were present even before faith revealed itself and declared its name. They are the way that leads to faith and they are not the consequence of its absence. They are both the buds and the fruit of that faith. Every affirmation that is made because of expectation and search, even if it is wrong, is beneficial. Without them every affirmation, even if it is correct, is ultimately an obstacle to the spiritual life.

Expectation and search enable us to make slow progress toward our own humanity and to see God in a more intelligible form. It is possible to catch a glimpse of the size of the history of these expectations and searches, which are both human and divine, through which we come closer to God via their own humanity and through which God fashions that humanity in his own image via the experience of all of us, as the fullness and complexity of human development are discovered. The pre-history of expectation and search may perhaps be no more than the first stage that is relatively short and simple of

the long and tentative march toward the transcendent future of humanity and the human growth of God.

The continuous abasement of search and expectation

This history can only be known from outside, by the ripples caused on the surface by expectations and searches. This is because they, themselves, remain concealed in the intimacy of those in whom they take place. Whenever they arouse a sufficiently powerful echo in the mass of human beings, they give rise, in accordance with the attitude prevailing at the time, to ideologies that are either religious or secular, but are usually political and social. These ideologies form the basis of beliefs which openly or in a hidden fashion claim to be absolute. They never, however, succeed in persuading us to follow them for very long. These broad movements that are born of search and expectation begin very auspiciously, but soon lose their original impetus. They forget their origin and deteriorate into a self-satisfied dogmatism that is systematic, closed, introspective and remote from life. They become fixed in the immobility of practices and customs and soon decline into pharisaical attitudes. They only continue to exist by slowing down and becoming less and less spiritual and because of the solid structures and the relative inertia of the masses. Their existence ends as soon as they are challenged and replaced by new ideologies.

This continuous abasement, which is certainly a lowering of humanity, is always combated by those of us in whom search and expectation continue to be felt. By their reaction against this decline and their struggle to be reborn, they open new ways of the spirit for which their predecessors made preparations in secret. Even if they go against the traces of these earlier ways, the new paths may be in accordance with the needs of the later period, when people rediscover these paths and sometimes extend them.

Although it is again and again thwarted by an open or a concealed movement backward, this gradual discovery continues to be made, but only by relatively few persons. Many benefit from this discovery but only passively and almost unconsciously, so that they are not stimulated to seek and expect themselves. Even more people do not follow this path at all, because they are not even personally awakened. Many are crushed by the inhuman conditions of their lives. Others are weighed down by negative traditions and customs which are no more than the dried-up remains of what was in the past truly human. Many others are swept along in the whirlwind that will destroy them and the deluge of corruption.

Search and expectation converge

All who are moved by this secret expectation and devote themselves in their own way to this search will come closer to an inner state which will reflect, in its intensity and diversity, their greatness and the greatness of God. In reaction to the continuous decline of what is destroyed, they respond to the appeal made by what is attempting to develop and gradually discover their true being and fulfill themselves. They become what they are potentially in contact with the reality that they grasp with the help of their faith. All persons do this in accordance with their own temperament and at the same time according to the geography of their own country, the past and present history of their own people and the ancestral qualities of their family and their race. Despite fundamental differences that are often so great that all people are at least externally strongly opposed to each other and despite the extreme divergence of their individual destinies, all come from every point of the global compass, converge and move toward what is essential. This essential element is hidden in the depths of everyone. It is the indelible seal imprinted in each individual by the transcendence of God. All people proclaim it silently by their lives and in their efforts to accomplish their mission, even if they violently reduce its scope. Indirectly and in a manner that is veiled because it is marked by the contingency of time and place, some proclaim this essential element by their words and work, thus using the gifts that they have inherited from society. Most of those who bear witness to it, however, remain unknown. Some are recorded in the archives of history because of their important social position. Others are remembered because they were a stumbling block or a sign of contradiction and therefore achieved prominence.

The history of these solitary beings is truly marvelous. In their ascent to their own height, their descent into their own depths and their gradual movement toward becoming truly themselves, they come closer and closer to the unthinkable being who draws them and all then reflect that being's great and many-sided glory in their own individual way!

Persistent search and expectation ask for more than human beings are capable of doing on their own

All these faithful people have to live, without sparing their lives in the slightest, to the uttermost limit. Those who are most clearly aware, however, know that, despite all their resources, they will never reach the end. The final threshold that they believe they must cross as their humanity reaches a deeper level and their mission leads them higher and higher up to the human heights is always something that they can neither foresee nor think of in it-

self. As they come closer to their goal, their path overhangs the abyss of what is impossible and it is precisely at this time that their strength becomes less and their faith, which has become increasingly tenuous as it has grown in purity, needs to be even more brightly illuminated if it is to be seen at all. Through everything that it is and that it senses, their whole existence calls for help. Many of these faithful people expect this help to come directly from God, whatever name and face they may give him on the basis of what they know of people and the world.

To insure the growth of the spiritual life from a certain level, we have to go beyond techniques, wisdom and the possession of an ideal

The higher the spiritual life is raised above its instinctive foundation and point of departure and is drawn upward by the promises that were revealed at the beginning, the more imperiously it calls for a form of help that will give it orientation and strength in its unlikely ascent. This help is of quite a different kind from the help that we can acquire from learning a technique, adopting a form of wisdom or following an ideal. However necessary these means may be at the outset, they soon reveal themselves as insufficient, not only because of their great imperfections, but also because of their very nature. If we are at all generous and strong, we will quickly become deformed if we confine ourselves exclusively to these means. If these means are possessed, they gradually reduce us who entrust ourselves blindly to them or who are unable, because of fear or hesitation to criticize or control them, to a state of slavery. They force us into a pattern which ends by distorting us. All that remains in us as time passes are certain habits of feeling, ways of thinking, manners of speaking and a regular way of life in which a large part is played by routine. All these are deceptive. Instead of stimulating us to new initiatives that would be more and more necessary to our growth as persons, these means paralyze us. They impress themselves brutally and totally on us from outside instead of taking our situation, our needs and possibilities as well as their development and what we are urged to become into consideration, not only with increasingly refined delicacy, but also in a flexible and at the same time demanding way. The growth of the spiritual level from a certain level depends on our going beyond technique, wisdom and the possession in advance of an ideal.

The help that now becomes necessary will not weigh down on us and our activities from outside. On the contrary, it will fit deftly into the use that we make of our freedom. It will not exempt us from looking for ways to express our faithfulness, but will suggest them to us by making us gradually more conscious of ourselves. It must inspire us in such a way that we will find ourselves as though we were discovering them by our own means. These ways are difficult even though they are in accordance with what we are and we have to

persevere in following them. If we are to do this, we must have more than merely light. This radically new help must also give us power. The more deeply we have penetrated into our humanity, the greater need we have of this light and this power. Thanks to this deep penetration, however, we are better able to long for this light and this power and better able to expect and receive them. We are also more capable of responding to them.

The part played by the spouse and the child in the deepening of our spiritual life

We receive this help from those whom we love in the first stages of the spiritual life, when love and parenthood prevail. These are active in us more by the way in which they are inwardly present to us than by what they ask of us. In marriage and parenthood, this presence is the fruit of an intuitive and loving knowledge that we acquire of our spouse and child, who are special beings who are separate from us despite the family bonds that unite us and our normal closeness and mutual openness to each other. It is the result of our personal deepening of our own humanity, because it grows in us and we become more consistent. On the other hand, this presence also helps us to fulfill ourselves by means of the actions that it prompts and the reactions that it provokes.

This presence forms such an integral part of us that we would not really be ourselves without it. It is at this point that the least important object that has ever belonged to these beings or even the least important fact which they brought about or witnessed and which has been preserved in the memory can, because of this intimate and active presence, make us once again vividly conscious of their existence and our own. When we reflect about those beings in a state of recollection, they make us once again alert and vital, bursting into life like an ember blown into flame beneath the ashes by bellows.

Thanks, then, to the intimate presence of spouse and child, we who have a sufficiently rich inner life and are faithful to what rises within us may become, with the passage of time, more fully a spouse and a parent and at the same time more completely ourselves, as we ourselves develop by an extension of our own inner nature and instincts. If, however, we are left alone to our own individual possibilities and even if we are helped by a favorable social environment, we will hardly be able to achieve such human depth.

The more closely we come into contact with the human condition, the more urgently we need a parent according to the spirit, who, having followed it personally, will be able to show us the way ahead

The spiritual life calls for even more when we are confronted with the apparent failure of everything that we have ever believed and everything on

which we have built up our lives. This failure would crush us if nothing else intervened to enable us to bear this defeat in faith and therefore to overcome it and make it disappear. Sometimes, confronted with spouse or child, we find ourselves in an extreme situation where married or parental faith is faced with an apparently definitive separation or lack of understanding that undermines the meaning of life. When we are raised to the level of mission, the more that mission is conceived as spiritual, the more we are led to the extreme limits of human experience at which the meaning of life is directly called into question. The more we understand the human condition, the more irrevocably engaged we are, by our own perseverance, in a struggle against powerful forces that are inextricably interlaced, inherent in our animal and social nature and always threatening to enslave us. This inability to overcome individual and social obstacles tends to convince us of the fanciful nature of the foundation on which we have built up our life as well as everything that we have ever tried to achieve. It seems to us to be the failure of our entire spiritual activity. It urges us to consign it to the utopian sphere of experience and to regard it with suspicion as a hidden escape from reality. There can in fact be no real maturity without a deep experience of this impotence. We are only able to be wise at the level of appearances and in the ordinary circumstances of our lives and this wisdom is quite different from faith. It has hardly anything to do with reality, which is something that only faith can confront. Only faith can triumph over reality without denying its objective character by giving a human meaning to what is alien and even hostile in itself.

Success in the spiritual life means that we must continue to believe in our mission and to devote ourselves to it to the very end, despite the distance that separates us from the goal toward which we are aiming and despite a failure, the scope of which we are more and more able to measure and with an inevitability that we can recognize more and more clearly. From the human point of view, this failure will sooner or later provide an explanation of our work, just as we will be explained by our death. This intimate struggle and real suffering are of exactly the same dimensions as we are as well as our gift of ourselves and our activities until the present. In certain extreme cases, believers are even led to see their own death taking place within the line of development of their lives, as their last action and to expect it to be the testimony which they could not give during their lifetime, but which their mission requires so that it will be ultimately fulfilled. When this expectation is experienced, it reveals a knowledge, an acceptance and a firm grasp of the created reality, together with a real communion with the divine action. It also bears witness to everyone's spiritual fullness. In these conditions, which are superhuman because they are also fully human, we know, through our faith, how to respond to the creative power that makes the impossible possible. We

are united with God and therefore make our death an action that is more divine than human.

We can go beyond our natural and spontaneous gifts and be helped as a spouse and parent by the presence of our spouse and child. Similarly, if we are to go further than the ultimate frontiers of humanity without losing heart when we come close to a failure equal in size to the spiritual greatness of our mission, we must support the presence of a being who has also experienced this failure. This other being will have encountered failure with a violence that corresponds to its extreme power. He will also have crossed this superhuman threshold after having carried out his mission in faith to the end, despite frequent defeat of a very radical kind.

This parent according to the spirit must be more than a forerunner or a master; this presence in us must have an absolute character and must help us to be

This parent who has gone ahead of us on our path can only help us by what that parent is. Neither the teaching that has been disseminated nor the example that has been given is in any way sufficient. These are no more than beginnings. As such, they are very important, but it is essential to go beyond them. In this event, although less than in any other, it is not enough to command in order to secure obedience or to be a model in order to be imitated. These external and extrinsic relationships between us are not enough even in the early stages of our spiritual life. They can only indirectly help the disciple to perceive the greatness of the teacher, to revere the parent and to receive from this communion between one being and another the strength to become totally oneself. It is in fact only if these conditions prevail that all their human possibilities—those indispensable means by which they are able to pass through the extreme and even superhuman difficulties that they encounter at the end—can be stimulated in them.

The intimacy of love and parenthood should form a link between these two beings. This link should be even more intimate if it is to be able, by its exclusively spiritual character, to be effective and useful to the disciples in their freedom, to renew that freedom in its practical expression and to raise them above their normal possibilities and make them creative. What unites the disciples and the teacher and helps the disciples is therefore a very deep inner understanding of the kind that is required by a direct and face to face encounter with themselves and with God in the solitary possession of their own being. Thanks to this perfect form of relationship, people are able to use their own spiritual experiences at the apex of their intuitive sense and in this way perceive and even understand completely who it is who guides them and goes ahead of them on the way. They can also welcome and receive from that

teacher the strength to follow that teacher as far as they need to. Thanks to this parenthood that is uniquely and fully adapted to what they are and to their needs and aspirations, the latter are developed in a way that they would never have been able to develop them simply by their own means. They also receive the strength to respond fully to their mission and to go on responding to the end, despite failure, at the spiritual depth of that mission that they have to recognize and accept. This relationship and this parenthood are based on the absolute because of their unlimited intimacy at the level of people's fundamental solitude. The extreme nature of human situations, including death, is also something that has to be borne by absolute relationship and parenthood.

The more fully spiritual persons are dedicated to their mission, the closer they are to fulfilling themselves and the more able they are to measure the insuperable distance between themselves and their goal by their own means, the more necessary this truly human, but also superhuman help seems to be. It is for this reason that expectation and search become more and more important and, thanks to the depth of their own inner, spiritual life, assume in them the force of a fundamental demand. They come from the very substance of persons of faith. They are at one with them. They can only be borne in silence if they are not to be betrayed. They are crowned by a silent hope that transcends time and the events of history. In this extreme situation, however, hope and proclamation are one, since the first cannot exist without the second. The second is still obscure and not yet fully discerned.

This forerunner, master and father according to the spirit is Jesus of Nazareth

For almost two thousand years, the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth have regarded him as this ultimate Master. They no longer expect him in time, but their expectation is still total and it inspires their search, which is entirely directed toward the mystery of that man, whom they see as the greatest of great men. They are able to recognize him sufficiently by what he has revealed of himself and what has been handed down to them to know that they still do not know him. They would think of it as artificial and inadequate to limit themselves to an understanding of him like that of those who lived during his own time, even though those people received him with their whole being. They were, however, fundamentally limited by their intellectual horizons and by their human and religious environment. Even if they are really pious, modern believers would be restricted by this kind of understanding of Jesus to a spiritual life that would be condemned to nourish itself more by ideological fervor than by a real knowledge of him.

In fact, this Jesus is really more in the future, ahead of us, than in the past, behind us. Through their faith in their Master, the disciples can ap-

proach him intimately despite the great differences between their situation and his. Because of these differences, moreover, it is not possible for them to be satisfied with a merely external resemblance to him and a simple reception of what he literally taught during his own time, since that would be really unfaithful to him and no response to his fatherhood. In their search for who Jesus is and what he experienced through their own spiritual experience, they inevitably discover themselves more and more and become themselves more fully. Because of their Master's mission, their own mission is better able to fulfill itself. In faithfulness to the spirit of Jesus himself, they continue with their mission, which extends his by making it present here and now and by developing it further. Following the footsteps of their Master, they inevitably meet with failure. Despite the natural despair that they feel, this failure can be borne, but only by faith. The irrevocable end of this failure is death and Jesus' disciples have to approach the last threshold that lies ahead of them. The more closely they have followed Jesus and the further they have continued after him, the more dangerous this threshold seems. But Jesus calls to them beyond it, because he has crossed it before them so that he could be present with them in the most personal way when they in turn have to cross over.

For almost twenty centuries, Jesus has exerted such an influence that it is difficult to say that people would have found the ways leading to his humanity and to the very end of that humanity without that influence, despite the spiritual heights that some of the greatest persons outside the Christian tradition have reached and described.

Thanks to this influence, we can be sure that even those who have never heard of Jesus or who only know him because of a religious teaching that is abstract or else based on feeling are more likely to follow these ways now than they were in the past, because they are better prepared collectively for it, even though the ways are not clear to them. For twenty centuries, this influence has been received and known explicitly or has made itself secretly felt in social attitudes. Insofar as they are not experienced exclusively in a sealed container, but are received with openness, all religions and even the most a-religious and antireligious ideologies have been influenced by what this Master was for his first disciples, by what they said about him and by what they built up on him and what teachings of his they have either accepted or rejected.

The wonderful element was undoubtedly less important in the life of this man than many Christians have believed in an attempt to give support to their teaching, satisfy their imaginations and give sustenance to their piety. Nonetheless, his life was extraordinary, but in particular more extraordinary at the human level than Christianity has ever dared to assert, because it has not been able to understand its Master outside the dimensions that it gave to peo-

ple and those that it accorded to God at the beginning of its history. The more fully we discover Jesus by discovering ourselves and dedicating ourselves to our own mission, the more easily we shall be able to understand the need for his coming and the more clearly we shall perceive the depths of the mystery uniting us to God.