

Prefatory Note: Monsier Marcel died in October 1973. Les Etudes Philosophiques is preparing a special issue on him. The following piece was written in February 1974 as a contribution to this issue.

Le Recueillement et L'Accueil

It was an autumn afternoon in New England long ago. Sunlight streamed across the desk in my colleague's study. Though the window was wide open not a paper stirred. As we were musing there in the autumnal still there came a rustling in the ivy at the window sill. A squirrel appeared. He hopped confidently to the desk and dropped into an open drawer. In a trice he was out again and atop the desk with a nut in his mouth. For an instant he perched on a book and examined the nut. Then as quickly he was gone. As if hatched of this fleeting apparition, the title of the book leapt forth: "The Mystery of Being," it proclaimed. "What's this?" I exclaimed. "Oh, I read anything," my colleague chuckled. Whereupon he loaned me the book.

One book of M. Marcel's leads to another. And to him. For surely in his reflective works one comes to feel almost as if one had met the man. And so it was that when a student of ours was going to Europe on a fellowship for a year and needed solid advice for the pursuit of his studies there, it seemed that M. Marcel might not mind being asked out of the blue to help this student.

No one of the many who frequented that fourth-floor apartment at 21, rue de Tournon, would be surprised at what ensued. With no advance notice the student phoned. M. Marcel invited him to the apartment immediately and dwelt anxiously on the directions, for the concierge, it was to be feared, would disclaim any knowledge of such a tenant. After giving thorough consideration to the young man's prospective studies, M. Marcel turned back to the letter of introduction and explanation which his visitor had brought. It wasn't long before I had

a letter from M. Marcel in direct reply. Would I send him more that I might have written? The student had shown him an essay of mine and it had interested him.

Truly, had I known of the sheaves of manuscripts which, bidden or unbidden, came into his hands, I would have been more reticent about it. But the warmth and the thoroughness of his prompt response to the manuscript I did send more than allayed the misgivings I had felt over sending it. And soon, it seemed, I must come to France. We met at Cerisy and talked for a week. Then, with a trip to Mont St. Michel, there began that introduction to France which M. Marcel later resumed in behalf of my wife and myself through a whole year of constant companionship.

And what a companion! Beset with ailments--as I knew him--the familiars of his nights and intimates of his getting about day by day; yet ever rallying to meet and to greet the exact circumstances, the persons, the places which each day would bring. One could just see him getting underway of a morning, laboring low in the water as it were, then gathering momentum in the resurgence of that zest for setting out anew, until he would mount into the planing pace of dialogic encounter, the play of wit, of quickening commentary and reflection. Few could be the persons whom he met who could have failed to register the quality of attention with which he would receive them. Yet what places too unfolded under the aegis of his appreciation and hospitality. Perhaps more than his writings in the main suggest, and more than his frail condition would permit occasion, it was also characteristic of him to receive the natural order out of the very depth of his life. This was at last definitively brought home to me when we went about alone together through vast reaches of mountains, of river valleys and along the seaboard of the Pacific Northwest.

At work in all of M. Marcel's reflective writings, the force of what he meant by 'recueillement' had come to seem pivotal to me. And now, the more I became acquainted with him in daily life, the more I was struck by that consonant

note of 'accueil' which he imparted to it. Indeed it was basic to that life in which I came to share with him that it took on the experiential consistency of filling out and realizing in both a complementary and a confirmatory way the force of recollective reflection at work in his writings. And never was this clearer than on those musically precise occasions in which celebration abounded, when the intimate detail of event and of extant actuality would conspire as if of its own accord in the composing of the concrete occasion. That the world could thus make itself known in an essentially dialogic manner becomes a deliverance of experience commanding recurrent meditation.

How is it that beings may come to 'speak' to us in a decisive manner-- coordinately with our coming to receive them in a decisively responsive way? And how is it, too, that this may not come to pass?

In the Tenth Book of his Confessions St. Augustine tells of his inquiring of the earth, the sea and the deeps, the living creeping things, the moving air and all the things surrounding him; and he tells of their response to him. Through their response to him they univocally attest their creatureliness and to that dependent mode of being through which they compose a world. The world they compose is a created world, and the beings thereof are creaturely. Concerning this exchange he explains, "My questioning them, was my thoughts on them: and their form of beauty gave the answer." The explanation parallels an observation he makes in Ps. 144, sec. 13: "The earth's form of beauty is a sort of voice of the dumb earth. Thou observest and seest its beautiful form; thou seest, and by thy musing as it were, askest it, and the very enquiring is a questioning." Yet inquiring of itself does not suffice: "But men can ask, so that the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; but by love of them they are made subject to them: and subjects cannot judge. Nor yet do the creatures answer such as ask, unless they can judge: nor do they change their voice, (i.e.

their appearance), if one man only sees, another seeing asks, so as to appear one way to this man, another way to that; but appearing the same way to both, it is dumb to this, speaks to that; yea rather it speaks to all; but they only understand, who compare its voice received from without, with the truth within."

(From the 10th paragraph of Bk. X of the Confessions.)

What is to be said of this 'love' of creatures through which we may become subject to them and incapacitated to 'judge', so that their 'voice' is lost upon us? And what is to be said of that 'truth within' in its interplay with the way in which creatures may speak to us--making known their creatureliness? If creatures can come to speak to us in consonance with 'the truth within', that can only mean that they may properly elicit our concern and exert evocative power under a qualification upon our concern which they do not originate, but which can only be bestowed by 'the truth within'. And without that crucial qualification upon our concern then our concern with creatures would assume the character of that 'love' of them through which we would be subject to them--even while enjoying a "vagrant liberty" in subservience to the dictates of such a 'love'. Correspondingly our power of reflective judgment would be stultified, if not in point of capacity for what M. Marcel means by "primary reflection," yet in point of the power of "secondary"--or "recuperative reflection" which may stand us in stead.

"Mais ici il convient de rester aussi concret que possible, et je veux dire par là de rester comme à l'écoute de l'expérience la plus intime. Il ne s'agit en effet au fond de rien moins que d'apercevoir la façon dont il est possible de concevoir l'articulation de la vérité et de la vie." (Le Mystère de L'Être, I, Paris, Aubier, circ. 1951, p. 207.) M. Marcel is here speaking of what he takes to be a nodal juncture of the ontological issue, but the remark fits as readily with Augustine's placement of us at the heart of that issue.

"Comme à l'écoute" An absolutely precise expression, I think. For it is only in that disposition of ourselves--as in an attentive listening--that we come to know ourselves as beings who are called upon, and are thus nurtured in the power of invocation which evocation summons. One may say that invocation occurs by way of response upon evocation already effective--enabling and requiring the enactment of invocation--the primordial modality of our speaking. And, since it is in the mode of presence, according to M. Marcel, that beings register as beings, let us note: "La présence ne peut être au fond qu'invoquée ou évoquée . . ." (Le Mystère de L'Être, I, p. 224.) And also: ". . . la présence ne peut être qu'accueillie (ou refusée) . . ." (Ibid., p. 223, italics in text.)

We have asked how it is that beings may come to speak to us in a decisive manner--how it is that they may be given in the mode of presence--coordinately with our coming to receive them in a decisively responsive way--in the mode of 'un accueil'. And we have asked what Augustine's "truth within" may have to do with the qualification of our concern with beings in potentiating the way in which we can receive them and the significance which they may hold for us.

Augustine, comme à l'écoute de l'expérience la plus intime, speaks again and again of a movement of 'return' into which we are recalled, and also of a 'turning back' of our affection. The return is "to myself . . . even into my inward self" (Conf., Bk. VII, par. 16), into "the heart" (Ibid., Bk. IV, par. 18), but the turning back of affection is in effective allegiance and acknowledgment of the sponsoring 'truth within', beholden to that truth. And for Augustine, it is clear, the truth which may thus enlighten the consenting and acknowledging heart--with respect to the whole manifold of human concerns and the beings implicated in them--is responsively invoked in the name of God:

"Be not foolish, O my soul, nor become deaf in the ear of thine heart with the tumult of thy folly. Harken thou too. The Word Itself calleth thee to

return: and there is the place . . . where love is not forsaken, if itself forsaketh not." (Ibid., Bk. IV, par. 16.) "If bodies please thee, praise God on occasion of them, and turn back thy love upon their Maker . . . If souls please thee, be they loved in God: for they too are mutable, but in Him are they firmly stablished." (Ibid., Bk. IV, par. 18.)

For M. Marcel le recueillement is essentially a matter of 'return', implying a certain withdrawal or *dégagement* from the affairs of everyday life, and a renewal of sensitivity to that life of potentiality and aspiration which I bear 'within me', and by the measure of which I may find the actual life I lead to be wanting. From 'my own depths' I become subject to "une exigence de transcendance" and at the same time a 'turning inwards of my awareness of the outer world' through which my given circumstances no longer simply fall into the aspect of contingency they may so readily assume in everyday life. The 'turning inwards' is not a matter of introversion, and still less of introspection. "Le recueillement est sans doute ce qu'il y a de moins spectaculaire dans l'âme; il ne consiste pas à regarder quelque chose, il est une reprise, une réflexion intérieure. . . ."

(Position et Approches Concrètes du Mystère Ontologique, Paris, Vrin, 1949, p. 64.)

"Au sein du recueillement je prends position--ou plus exactement je me mets en état de prendre position,--en face de ma vie, je m'en retire en quelque manière, mais non point comme le sujet pur de la connaissance . . ." (Ibid., pp. 63-4.)

"C'est essentiellement l'acte par lequel je me ressaisis comme unité: le mot même l'indique, mais ce ressaisissement, cette reprise affecte l'aspect d'une détente, d'un abandon. Abandon à--détente en présence de--sans qu'il me soit en aucune façon possible de faire suivre ces prépositions d'un substantif qu'elles commanderaient. Le chemin s'arrête au seuil . . ." (Ibid., p. 63.)

"Rentrer en soi, cela ne signifie pas être pour soi et se mirer en quelque sorte dans l'unité intelligible du sujet et de l'objet. Au contraire, dirai-je,

nous sommes ici en présence de ce paradoxe qui est le mystère même en vertu duquel le moi en lequel je rentre cesse, pour autant, d'être à lui-même. 'Vous n'êtes point à vous-mêmes', cette grande parole de saint Paul prend ici sa signification à la fois ontologique et essentiellement concrète; c'est celle qui traduit le mieux la réalité autour de laquelle nous rodons en ce moment." (Ibid., pp. 64-5.)

So then, at the heart of le recueillement lies a willing acknowledgment of ourselves as claimed, or called upon, in such a way that we are not our own. And the whole manifold of concerns through which we participate in the world stands under a qualification of concern obtaining in the most radical manner. We become reflexively mindful of ourselves as rooted in a source of life wherein we become decisively animated--sponsored evocatively in a way underlying our very responsiveness. Our awareness of this is essentially reflexive, bound up with our awareness of ourselves in this precisely dependent mode of being, able to be as we might more truly be on the strength of our being called upon and claimed in an utterly unconditional manner. But the quickening of responsiveness in question at the same time exerts itself as a quickening and a truing of responsiveness to the beings of the world occupying our manifold concerns. The light dawns upon us in the light of which we become enlightened in our relationship with them, and they dawn on us as given-in-that-light. And in that Johanine light one may come to meet them anew, in renewed life. They become implemented in evocative power, and their mode of being--the kindred of one's own--invites participation with them afresh. Their power to call upon us and our capacity to receive them in their rightful claim upon our concern obtain alike in function of our being discovered to ourselves in our relationship with them within the embrace of a claim upon us which neither they nor we engender. The deeper the silence in le recueillement the more abundant in the fullness of being becomes the flow of dialogic interplay with the beings of the world into which, in turn, we are returned. Appel et réponse, as the style

of our true participation in being with beings, gathers up the fullness of being into the realization of living speech. The temporal takes on the resonance of the perennially telling.

"Je suis convaincu pour ma part qu'il n'y a d'ontologie possible, c'est-à-dire, d'appréhension du mystère ontologique, à quelque degré que ce soit, que pour un être capable de se recueillir--et de témoigner par là même qu'il n'est pas un pur et simple vivant, une créature livrée à sa vie et sans prises sur elle." (Ibid., p. 63.)

"Plus le sens de l'ontologique tendra à disparaître, plus l'esprit qui l'a perdu verra s'illimiter ses prétentions à une sorte de régence cosmique, parce qu'il sera de moins en moins capable de s'interroger sur les titres qu'il peut avoir à exercer cette régence." (Ibid., p. 73.)

The power of truth to liberate life becomes known to one as also the power of truth to place one in question. The genius of the parables of Jesus is in no small part their plain and simple trapping of the hearer in a position that does not leave him with the option of deciding where he stands within the alternative possibilities of life dramatically unfolded in the narrative. In his response to what he hears he is revealed to himself as one who can rejoice in the truth--perhaps even at his own expense--or as one who is caught in resistance to its placing him in question and challenging the legitimacy of claims on which he has been inclined to insist: claims to a kind of governance harboring prejudice and pretension. These parables themselves are as a word spoken unto us which the more recall us into le recueillement the more we take them to heart in meditating the varied and unfolding situations in which we find ourselves placed. Their promise to surmise is recurrently confirmed in surprise. They nurture and inform the soul with the meaning of grace, that fore-giveness to ourselves on the strength of which we can move to meet and to greet that with which we are provided in the

actual circumstance of our lives.

The logic of that dialogic mode of existence in question here seems to warrant particular reflection on the meaning of "disponibilité" in the thought of M. Marcel. In ordinary parlance, the expression suggests 'to be receptively disposed', and M. Marcel is very careful to differentiate it from 'being suggestible' --at the random suasion of influences that tend successively to take over a merely impressionable soul. The disposition in question stands in definitive contariety to self-centeredness and the whole set of interests on which self-centeredness symbiotically feeds. 'L'être disponible' is discovered to others as available to them and he is open to the opportunities which life brings. Even as events tend to assume opportuneness, so correlatively with the disposition in question, the resources of the person tend to come into play opportunely and to make for 'handiness' in the style of response to them. So far forth those resources themselves tend to be transfigured from the register of having--of resources one has, into the play of powers gracing the occasion and themselves enjoyed as gifts. After all it is through them that our participation with other beings in being can come to pass, and we are their beneficiaries in this. But implicitly, in this account of disponibilité, we have moved from considering receptivity in relation to other beings into a consideration of a companioning element of reflexive receptivity. And the suggestion now to be made more explicit is that disponibilité is necessarily twofold: It embraces receptivity to beings given into perceptive attention and the engagement of our concern with them; and it embraces receptivity in the radical reflexive engagement of attentive concern 'from within'. The former is a matter of 'responsiveness to'; c'est le moment de l'accueil des êtres dans la vie de l'esprit. The latter is a matter of 'responsiveness in, upon, and from'; c'est le moment du recueillement dans la vie de l'esprit.

In the strongest complementarity of these distinguishable but inseparable moments in the life of the spirit one knows oneself the beneficiary of that love

in which one is able to receive creatures as fellow creatures--in their telling significance. Our relation with all creatures receives definition as mutual. And our relationship with one another comes to definition in full reciprocity and solidarity, which is at the same time a sharing together in the mutuality of creatures as such. Accordingly the force of être is that of coesse, participation in being with beings; and it registers as such, with the force of an 'il faut', une exigence ontologique, at the heart of le recueillement. C'est pourquoi "l'être n'est pas séparable de l'exigence d'être." (Le Mystère de L'Être, II, p. 62.) This exigence qualifies and transfigures the whole life of concern in the manifold facets of our engagement with fellow creatures, imparting to it a vocational unity, even to the vital exigencies of everyday life, as in eating and drinking and drawing breath--together.

In drawing this reflection to a close, let us dwell more particularly on la disponibilité du moment du recueillement. The receptivity here in question seems precisely what one might understand by humility if that expression is liberated from pejorative and spurious connotations. Or even more primordially, 'poverty of spirit' comes to mind, something very close, I think, to what M. Marcel means--near the close of the Gifford Lectures--by "the spirit of prayer." One's intentional pursuits in the world are placed in abeyance and in that sense recueillement involves a withdrawal--"dégagement réel, détachement réel, non point abstraction . . ." (P.A., p. 62.) But that dégagement seems to be in favor of concentration in une engagement réflexive in which one becomes responsive to the source in depth of one's very life. One intends attentiveness to what may address one from the depth of recollection as it may speak to one's concerns more pertinently than one's intentions can control or interpret. One agrees to forego the treatment of the life one leads as a province over which one exercises administrative jurisdiction and opens oneself to the instruction to be received

from its own depths in meditation. The things that come back to one in remembrance have a way of their own with one, asking to be entertained and followed up as they may speak to one afresh, rather than to be pronounced upon and pressed into the service of presently imposed intentions. Experience which may be normally constricted under the strictures of intention may thus come to unfold in an amplitude of meaning antecedently obscured. Memory, in the mode of recueillement, permits the present of things past, which is full of life, rather than seeking the past of things present, which is dead; and one is gathered into the flow of genuinely destinate existence--which ever comes as asking and prompting our participation in the fulfillment of its potential and as renewing the anticipation, the sense of promise in which hope can obtain.

Once again, M. Marcel characterizes the movement into recueillement in terms of a sense of "abandon à . . . détente en présence de . . . sans qu'il me soit en aucune façon possible de faire suivre ces prépositions d'un substantif qu'elles commanderaient. Le chemin s'arrête au seuil . . ." Why? Not because there is a something to which we might refer but which is obscured from our regard and reference. Rather because the preposition "à" in the role of requiring a substantive would be basically misleading. That on the strength of which we are sponsored in our reception of beings to which reference can be made comes home to us reflexively or not at all. And thus it must be with the life of lives, ordaining us afresh into participation in being with beings.

How steadfastly and with what animation our friend bore witness to that. If anything his infirmities, his fragility only made the matter more clear.