

MY CORRESPONDENCE WITH JESUS

My
Correspondence
with Jesus

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It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift . . . if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame (Hebrews 6:4-6).

Foreword

Around the beginning of the nineteenth century, the American Methodist Church had a highly gifted preacher: one Lorenzo Dow.

A person who had been robbed came to him one day requesting that he find out who the thief was. Dow gathered all the suspected persons into a certain room. On the table was a black pot under which he put a rooster. After darkening the room, he made every person touch the pot with his fingers, explaining that the rooster would crow as soon as the guilty person did so. When the light was restored, it was seen that one person present had no soot on his fingers. He had been afraid to touch the pot. The guilty stood condemned.

We believers can speak freely about the events of Jesus' crucifixion 2,000 years ago. We were not there. But when we are reminded of his being crucified afresh today (Heb 6:6), we prefer not to touch the subject. We are all too conscious of having fallen away from the light we have received, and the thought of crucifying Christ afresh makes us more than a little uncomfortable.

I can easily understand why no importance has been attached to this unsettling text of Scripture.

One can hear thousands of sermons and read innumerable books about the crucifixion on Golgotha; one can be

a Christian all one's life and never hear about the many crucifixions that have followed because saints have not remained true to the light they had.

While in prison, I became oppressed by the thought of this possibility, especially when I saw Christians fall away (not everyone could bear the torture and suffering) and contemplated my own weaknesses. The pain of knowing that my Lord suffers repeatedly in heaven has filled me with a chronic sadness all these years, till I finally felt constrained to set my thoughts in writing.

Prisoners under Communism were forbidden either to write or to receive letters. In fact, it was strictly forbidden to possess writing materials of any kind. It was next to impossible to obtain even a bit of paper or a pencil. I had none during my fourteen years in jail.

Notwithstanding, some of us wrote. We smeared soap on the sole of a shoe and wrote on it with a piece of wood. I possess 350 Romanian poems written like this that I learned by heart and later transcribed. Other prisoners learned from one another such things as foreign languages, mathematics and chemistry by writing their lessons like this. If caught doing so, they were harshly punished.

It did not matter. We needed some diversion in our monotonous lives. Even an earthquake would have been preferable to the dull greyness of our confined existence.

To understand what follows, the reader must also know that men practically never saw a woman, nor women a man, except for brutal guards with whom there was no communication on a human level.

In her book *The Pastor's Wife* my wife (who was also in jail) tells the story of an imprisoned teenager who would write passionate love letters to a boy she imagined to exist. Then she would write a letter as if from him reciprocating her love. The exchange of love letters became more and more burning. She would weep on receiving his letter, which she had written, and would

cherish and kiss it. Once, he wrote that he had found another girl, whereupon she wept bitterly. Then she entreated her imaginary but more-than-real lover to come back to her. His 'no' was definite, and the poor girl lost her mind.

In different ways many of us carried on such imaginary discussions. We came to believe in these creatures of our mind and did not doubt that the replies came from them rather than our own imagination. The voices we heard were from without, not within.

Psychiatrists would have concluded that we had become schizophrenic. Little wonder, for prisoners were sometimes kept alone in a subterranean cell for years on end, hungry, beaten, tortured, never hearing a human voice, not even a whisper. Or at other times crammed together like sardines, a hundred in a room that might accommodate thirty, with people fainting for lack of air.

Perhaps it was sheer schizophrenia. I do not know. But I remembered at that time a biblical text, which I visualised in Hebrew script as contained in the holy scrolls. In it God called, 'Abraham, Abraham' (Gen 22:11). These two words occur in our translations. But in Hebrew there is one thing more: a disjunctive sign between the two Abrahams. This also appears in the Hebrew when the Lord called, 'Samuel, Samuel' (1 Sam 3:10). It did not have to be so. When we read, 'Moses, Moses' (Ex 3:4), the disjunctive line is not there.

The two 'Abrahams' with the disjunctive line between them should really be translated, 'You, the two different Abrahams co-existing in one person.' Like us, he also had the outward and the inner man, the manifest man and the hidden man of the heart, the id, with its impulses, instincts and low desires, and the ego, the super-conscious with high longings.

Psychologists speak about neuroses, psychoses and complexes. The Bible speaks about a hidden man—a whole man, with his own desires, thoughts, emotions,

will and love—who lives in the heart of the outer man, just as there are toy eggs that contain a smaller egg. This inner man is so hidden that men often live a lifetime without discovering him.

But when he is discovered—in my case, the Richard known only to me, distinct from the ordinary Richard known to others—real dialogue (or in prison circumstances, correspondence) between the two can arise.

Friedrich von Schiller once wrote, 'Two souls live within my breast.' They should be able to communicate. Gestalt psychology recommends that we arrange for dialogue between the two. They should at least know each other. 'Can two walk together unless they are agreed?' (Amos 3:3).

Usually the two 'Richards' are at loggerheads with one another. Therefore God speaks to them as with two different beings. In the case of Moses, a harmony had been established. Thus there is no disjunctive sign when God says, 'Moses, Moses.'

Men are commanded to love one another, which means that the different Richards in me should also love one another. The holy Richard should love the Richard who is still sinful in me, the Richard with worldly thoughts and inclinations to sin. (An analysis will show that the worldly Richard is softer towards the holy Richard than the holy Richard is towards the sinful one.)

Then there exists a third Richard who judges both with haughtiness.

It is desirable that we understand each other and love God with all our heart, which, the Kabbalah says, means to love him with both sides of our nature, good and evil. The Richard of only one aspect is nothing but a mask.

The different Richards in me must love one another. The good Richard must allow the bad Richard at least the right to self-defence. He must sometimes give him the benefit of the doubt. The good Richard must fight the bad Richard, but only with kindness and understanding.

It becomes apparent that there is ample opportunity for rich discussion or correspondence between these different men in myself.

Thus arose the idea for this present book. Eventually I decided that I might better correspond with the One who bears the responsibility for the existence of all the Richards within. Hence I wrote to Jesus and 'received' replies.

When Theodor Herzl, founder of modern Zionism, wrote in one night his first book, *The Jewish State*, he seemed to hear the fluttering of angel wings in the room. Uneasy about his sensations, he went with the manuscript to his friend Dr Max Nordau, a psychiatrist, and said to him, 'Judge if this is the work of a madman or the truth.'

There is no doubt in my mind that this book was conceived when I was at least on the verge of madness. But should not a Christian's thinking under such abnormal circumstances be made known?

The Bible speaks about the 'foolishness of God' (1 Cor 1:25). St Laurence Justinian says, 'Wisdom has become infatuated by love', by a completely unreasonable love for sinners. Hosea observes that 'the spiritual man is mad' (Hos 9:7). It is normal that he be abnormal. He bears the pain of the great iniquities and enmities in the world.

Whenever wrong is done to a little one anywhere in the world, it hurts me. The prophet says that whoever touches God's holy people touches the light of his eye. Somehow it touches mine too. I felt the pain of the world most intensely when in prison. It was a quasi-physical pain. I have known saints in prison who grieved unbearably over the sins of the world, as every member of the body of Christ should. If this is madness, so be it.

Perhaps the believer who is too intellectual to feel the pain of the foot or the hand is himself unbalanced. We are all part of the same body of Christ.

In fact, Christian books are usually too reasonable, too

logical, too concerned with being clear and intelligible. Therefore their influence is minimal. Life is not like this. It is tempestuous, as is the human mind. Lie down on a couch to daydream, observe the thoughts that pass through your mind, and see if they are reasonable and moral.

Formulated thoughts bow to standards and social conventions. Only the unbidden, the vague, the unformulated nuance reflects the real self.

Why should not the unreasonableness in our relationship with God also have a voice? Job, David and Jeremiah, for example, expressed displeasure with God, some of which bordered on blasphemy. Yet God allowed these thoughts to be canonised in Scripture. He even complimented Job for speaking 'what is right' (Job 42:7,8).

Everything should be committed to God. It is written, 'Love God with all your heart.' The Kabbalah asks, 'How can this be done? We have within the heart both good and evil.' The reply is: 'Love him also with your bad inclinations.'

This is what Job and David did. At one point Job says, 'What have I done to you, O watcher of men: Why have you set me as your target?' (Job 7:20, 21). Later he complains, 'He multiplies my wounds without cause; he will not allow me to catch my breath' (9:17, 18). David says, 'God gave his people over to the sword' (Ps 78:62). 'You have fed your people with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink with great measure' (Ps 80:5). Jeremiah is even less charitable: 'Standing like an enemy, God has bent his bow; with his right hand, like an adversary, he has slain all who were pleasing to his eye. He has poured out his fury like a fire' (Lam 2:4).

Moses, at a certain moment, had no doubt that God does evil, and he says as much, asking, 'Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people?' (Ex 5:22). Elijah

asked God, 'Hast thou brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn?' (1 Kings 17:20).

Pastors may find occasion to comment on such verses in their pulpits and to explain them away. One can also publish books excusing them, but who among us dares to speak to God like this today? Who expresses to God any discontent over his ways? What publisher would print a Christian book with similar accusations against God?

Jeremiah aired his complaints and lamentations when the Jews were deported to Babylon. The Jews under Hitler and Christians under Communism have suffered more than the ancient Israelites. Should not their words of madness be known too?

This book can be understood only if, in imagination, you join your suffering brethren in prison and enter their tortured minds. We are enjoined to feel their chains 'as if chained with them' (Heb 13:2). We should feel not only their physical chains, but also their doubts, their moments of despair, their mental anguish, the tempests that pass through their souls.

This is the concern of the present book.

I had no Bible in prison. I lived only on what I remembered of it, which was much in the beginning, but very little afterward, when hunger and doping had taken their toll.

One verse of Scripture obsessed me all during those years. I saw some Christians, even some renowned ones, falling away and passing to the Communists because they were not able to bear the torture. Some even became Judases.

Day and night I thought about the words in Hebrews 6:4-6:

It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to

renew them again unto repentance; seeing *they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh*, and put him to an open shame.

Those who fell away had once been my friends. Now they assumed terrible roles, which they tried to play with bravado, justifying themselves by serving their new cause enthusiastically.

But the pain I felt most intensely was the pain of Jesus. '*Jesus crucified afresh*' was too much for me. This thought was the greatest single suffering that I endured.

It is the subject of my correspondence with Jesus.

It has been easy for me to reproduce the correspondence. I wrote the present pages without having notes before me or even a plan.

I acknowledge that I lead two different lives: one that is the usual life of a sinner who loves Jesus and strives in much weakness to serve him, and another that is hidden.

The moment I am alone, I am in prison. Every day, every night, I relive bodily and spiritual tortures. I hear the cries, the coarse words. I see the ashen faces of the sufferers. My dreams too are usually about prison. Therefore my books and my sermons are out of the ordinary.

I know of only two individuals with similar experiences: Dostoevsky, who all his life carried this same burden; and Erasmus of Rotterdam, who wrote the book *The Praise of Folly*.

And so I did not have to remember what I thought and felt in prison. I relive the experiences every day.

And now, the correspondence.

My First Letter to Jesus

Dear Jesus,

God could have used any number of ways to communicate with mankind. I can very well imagine communication by means of alternating colours, or painting, or music, or variations in fragrance or even taste. Sex, of course, is a means of communication, wherefore it is written, 'Adam knew Eve his wife' (Gen 4:1).

Gestures, facial expressions, what we today call body language, are all splendid vehicles of communication. In fact, while watching church services on TV, I sometimes turn off the sound so as to concentrate on the physiognomy of the preacher and members of the congregation. When in church I am also very attentive to these changes.

It is almost as if the different words of God and of prayer take shape in the expression of the eyes and in the whole musculature of the face. When the congregation is made up of true believers, the changes are simultaneous, like the music of an orchestra.

If the words 'Blessed be ye poor' are read or chanted, one can see a hush of blessedness on the faces of the poor, who may have felt outclassed by the better-dressed believers. At the words 'Blessed are ye that weep', tears come to the eyes of the sorrowful. Why lose this

blessedness? 'Rejoice ye in that day.' Smiles blossom as the meaning is communicated.

In a religious service, God intends to shine his face upon us, that we might see how he looks upon us. His expressions vary, too. He does not stare at us without sentiment or emotion. In fact, his expressions might range from wrath and disgust to passionate love and a longing to identify with us.

Well, Jesus, though you had the choice of so many means of communication, you elected to reveal yourself to us through the written word.

The written word! You even asked John to write to angels. You could have spoken to them directly, but you preferred to have John write letters to the angels of the seven churches (Rev 2 and 3). Perhaps you liked his manner of writing (though I don't know why, because his Greek is awful) and therefore assigned him this work. Perhaps his calligraphy pleased you. It is hard to say.

In my thoughts, Jesus, I have looked to you often. My eyes, my whole face, my bodily positions have all tried to communicate with you. I have spoken to you in words and in songs. Now I have decided to write to you, because this is the most exquisite manner in which you addressed yourself to me. Perhaps in this way you will understand me better.

I write to you on the presumption that you are alive and can read, as well as answer, my letters.

Please don't be offended. You would expect me to say that I *know* you are alive, not simply that I presume it.

You were once a reader, that I know. You read the book of Isaiah and praised it. Perhaps for variety you have spent some time on a Wurmbrand book, too. If so, you might have read my book *Christ on the Jewish Road*, in which I prove your resurrection. So you see, I do not doubt it.

But . . . there are a few 'buts'. I will mention just two of them.

There is sufficient proof of the fact that you were resurrected after the crucifixion on Golgotha. But since that time you have been crucified many times afresh (Heb 6:4-6). This happens every time a man illuminated by the Spirit falls away, which means many times a day. The Bible does not tell us, but I imagine that you are also resurrected every time afresh.

How long will this go on? Can you bear an unlimited number of crucifixions, with attendant resurrections, and still be capable of reading and answering letters? We all have a breaking point in suffering. Have you none at all? Are you still alive in the plain sense of the word?

The prophet says, 'Ye have wearied the Lord' (Mal 2:17). If God can weary of sins, can he not also get tired of crucifixions? Jesus, you sat by a well in Samaria, weary and thirsty. A peaceful journey from Judea had worn you out. Won't an endless crucifixion have an even worse effect?

A second 'but'. You are the living Son of a living God. How are we supposed to understand your being alive? We are confronted with the same problem we have with beauty. Plato believed that beauty is an inherent quality of persons or things. Hume objected. 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,' he claimed. 'Nothing is always beautiful and nothing is beautiful for all.'

Is being alive an objective notion?

You characterise certain men, whom everyone would consider very much alive, as being dead in trespasses and sins. You write to the angel of a certain church, 'You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead' (Rev 3:1). Apparently what is considered life for some is death for others who see life differently or give it another meaning.

If you consider certain living men to be dead, surely you are not angry that Nietzsche and some modern theologians said, 'God is dead.' Perhaps they used the word 'dead' in a relative sense, as you do.

I don't know what it's like to be a glorified Saviour, to sit with the Father on the throne from which universes are created and ruled, and then to be dragged away and crucified in heaven. On earth you were crucified near a garden, which must have heightened the pain.

Who can imagine the pain of being crucified in Paradise? Does your holy mother stand there, too, weeping near the foot of the cross, along with Magdalene and John and the others?

I don't know the answers. Therefore, I will presume that you are alive in the sense in which I am alive and can write and read.

I believe that there exists objective, real truth, that there are things intrinsically beautiful, and that you truly exist, a fact only madmen and nihilists can deny. I also believe that you are constantly resurrected, because goodness ultimately conquers, not only evil but also physical laws. Death cannot hold you.

Therefore, since you are and I am, we will now correspond.

In the USA, there is a tombstone with the following inscription: The body of Benjamin Franklin, printer [like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding], lies here food for worms. Yet the work itself shall not be lost. For it will [as he believes] appear once more in a new and beautiful edition corrected and amended by the author.' If the work 'Benjamin Franklin' can appear in a new edition in heaven—whatever worms will have done to him—I certainly believe that you too appear again and again, whatever evil men do to you and however often they do it.

You can take cognisance of this letter.

The first thing I wish to tell you may sound banal, but it is the simple truth: I love you.

I love pudding, I love a dog, I love men, I love you. I have to use the same word because of the poverty of

language. There is simply no adequate expression for the sentiment I have for you. So let us conclude with this: you are my love.

I also trust in your immense power.

When the Wright brothers made their first flight, the engineer Octave Chanute wrote an article in *Popular Science Monthly* in which he said: 'This machine can even transport mail in certain cases, but also in limited quantity. It can become faster and then could be used for sport, but it is unimaginable that it will serve for commercial transport.' Eleven years later, in 1911, the regular air transport of passengers started. A short time before World War I, the astronomer William Pickering wrote, 'Popular imagination fancies gigantic planes flying over the oceans and transporting crowds of passengers. It is scarcely necessary to say that these are only phantasmagoric visions. Even if we could suppose that such a machine could make the traverse with one or two passengers, the price would be such that only a millionaire could afford it, as he could afford his own yacht.' Today, even the speed of sound at high altitudes has been surpassed.

If men underestimated their own potential, no wonder they underestimate yours. You can do anything because you are God. In addition, nothing is impossible for you because, as man, you believed wholeheartedly in the Father.

Then why don't you do the many things we expect of you, that are the subject of our prayers—not to mention those you have promised expressly in your word?

Pascal would have an explanation for your negligence: 'Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world.' An agonising being might be a giant, but he is still helpless. When you had died on Golgotha, even the centurion said you were the Son of God, but then you were a dead Son of God. You could feed no hungry, wipe away no tears, caress no children.

Considering the many defections of believers over the centuries, Pascal, like me, would have meditated on the many crucifixions you have endured since Calvary. I believe that the respite between one crucifixion and another must be minimal. How aware are you between them? Certainly you are an agonising almighty Being.

If that is the case, then most of our prayers to you seem wrong, foolish. The Virgin Mary, John, and the woman who served you did not pray to you while you hung on the cross.

I wonder if it ever occurred to them to try to alleviate your thirst (even a Roman soldier did what he could), or bathe your bloody feet, or at the very least whisk away the flies from your wounds. I don't know why they did not try, even if the soldiers objected. However, the gospel records tell us nothing, one way or the other.

Your life as a servant ended with a painful, saving death. You had desperately needed their services.

Since you are still in agony, our prayers should not make demands, not even claim the fulfilment of your promises. Rather, we should stand in mute adoration before the grandeur of your sacrifice and, if possible, help you.

If Pascal was right that you are in perpetual agony, and if you are crucified afresh daily, there is little chance you will be able to read the present letter. (How should men in agony, even if they are sons of God, too, read and understand?) I come back then to what I said in the beginning. I write to you on the presumption that you are alive, in a normal state, and that we can correspond like this.

These two ideas, one from the Bible that you are crucified again and again, the other from Pascal that for thousands of years you have been in agony, torment me.

When I look up to heaven I see you. Stephen saw you, too. What expression did he see on your face? Was it one of triumph or of atrocious suffering?

At the end of a religious service I often hear the words, 'May God make his face to shine upon you.' I do not leave the church until I see a face. Usually, I see the face you had when you bowed your head in death on Golgotha, as painted by Fra Angelico. I know that the resurrection followed, but it was only to occasion your offering yourself in new crucifixions.

More than one-third of the earth's population lives below the poverty line; 570 million are undernourished, 800 million children are not enrolled in school, 1.5 billion have no access to effective medical care. Millions of innocents have been slaughtered in Nazi Germany, Russia, Red China, Cambodia, Lebanon. So many suffer in prisons and labour camps. You, an almighty Being, love them all, but you endure terrible suffering yourself. The reality of a suffering God is probably the best answer to the question of why a good God allows such tragedy to befall his creatures.

I suppose that the heavenly Father shares your suffering. You and the Father are one, which means you are of the same essence, though you do not always share the identical suffering. When you sweated blood in Gethsemane and begged the Father to spare you the bitter cup, 'it pleased the Lord to bruise [you]' (Is 53:10). Strange thought!

Thérèse of Lisieux describes her joy when at the age of only twenty-three she first spat blood (she had tuberculosis), an experience she looked upon as one step nearer to heaven.

God can go beyond Thérèse. He can find pleasure in the painful death of his Son, knowing it was one step nearer to your own glorification and a giant step toward the salvation of mankind. But does he enjoy all your crucifixions? Do you suffer all the pain while he does all the rejoicing? It is difficult to accept. The Father must also feel intense sadness. Such tragedy incapacitates the whole of Godhead to relieve the groanings of unhappy mankind.

I have entered a risky path. Cardinal Newman once said, 'To write theology is like dancing on the tight-rope, some hundred feet above the ground. It is hard to keep from falling, and the fall is great. The questions are so subtle; the distinctions so fine, and the critical, jealous eyes so many.' The last danger does not exist in my case. This letter is addressed to you. If you read it, it will not be with a critical eye.

I will leave all these considerations. I will simply tell you what I consider my main task in life: it is to decrucify you.

Surely, this task is not given by you. You called Peter 'Satan' when he advised you not to suffer. You willed the crucifixion. I imagine you will these new crucifixions, too. They must also play a saving—or at least a useful—role.

I suspect there is a deep, perhaps hidden, meaning to your new sufferings.

Much of Beethoven's beautiful music would not have been written if he had not gone deaf. John Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* as a blind man. With sight, he might have been distracted and even lost sight of Paradise himself. Louis Pasteur made great discoveries after suffering a stroke.

Many of the most beautiful songs in our hymnals were written by William Cowper between spells of insanity. Some of the greatest books—like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*—were written or conceived in prison.

We can see a connection between suffering and greatness, much as we recoil from the idea.

Well, in the end, Peter understood you, more or less. Please understand us too. You are God and your capacity for suffering might be unlimited, whereas our capacity for looking at it without intervening is limited.

David commented, 'I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous man forsaken' (Ps 37:25). It was because he had not seen *the* Righteous.

You were forsaken when you hung on the cross. Are you forsaken on your new crosses? Do you cry out again in agony and despair?

Sometimes I feel the temptation to give you complete peace and to discuss all matters with the holy mother or with saints, as Catholics do, except that I feel sure Mary stands weeping at the foot of heavenly crosses too. As for the saints, Rachel wept when a few children were killed in Bethlehem. Do the saints not weep for the many killed in world wars, revolutions, Auschwitz, Gulags and countries ravaged by famine and disasters of all kinds?

There was a time when I considered heaven a place of supreme joy. When I contemplate your repeated crucifixions there, I realise it is a place of supreme sadness. In the end, these two notions fuse in my mind and heaven remains only a place of supremeness in all things. And you are the most supreme among supremes.

I have to come back to you.

I desire one thing: to decrucify you. How? Well, I am very tired from writing such a letter. If you have read it, you must be very tired, too. I will write to you again.

My Second Letter to Jesus

Dear Jesus,

I stumble at certain Bible verses like 'Rejoice evermore' and 'In all things give thanks.' Did St Paul really mean 'always'? How much did the Virgin Mary and Magdalene and John rejoice standing at the foot of the cross? How many Hallelujahs of thankfulness did they shout when the nails were being driven into your hands and feet? Hearing you cry, could they rejoice?

With a stretch of the imagination, I might suppose that these heroes of the faith were able to sing praises on Golgotha—assuming they understood the necessity of your redeeming sacrifice and wanted to encourage you by their expressions of joy, even if partly feigned.

In Nazi and Communist prisons I have seen Christians acting. Though deeply troubled and even doubting their own faith, they encouraged fellow-believers who passed through torture by singing to them and quoting words of promise from Scripture. But I can see it would be much harder to do this when a God-man, a completely innocent person, dies an atrocious death on a cross.

Your pain on Golgotha had been predicted; it had meaning. For this you had come into the world. You yourself decided to lay down your life for the sheep. The blood shed on the cross saved mankind.

But with your crucifixions in heaven things are different. To my knowledge there has never been a prophecy that you will have to endure endlessly. What purpose do these new Calvaries serve? Could we not get to heaven without them? Can the saved enjoy heaven when, on inquiry, an angel informs them that you do not rule, you do not sit on a throne, but you are crucified afresh, age upon age?

Will those arrayed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, who themselves come out of great tribulation, hear the news that you are entombed awaiting your resurrection, but that meanwhile the news of the falling away of another saint means you will be crucified again . . . and again . . . and again?

What are the nails made of in heaven? Perhaps there is iron there. The heavenly Jerusalem has an abundance of gold. Are the nails golden?

In Hebrews chapter 6 we are only told the cause of your new crucifixions, not the purpose, as in the case of your earthly Calvary.

A Chinese student suffering for his faith in a Communist prison composed a poem:

Lord, I am afraid of my fear,
I am afraid of deserting Thee.
Lord, I am afraid of my fear—
I am afraid of not holding out clear to the end.

I have held out in prison, but I wonder if I can stand the terrible suffering of your repeated crucifixions, especially since I myself, while enlightened, have yet fallen away several times. Your death on Golgotha is a fact of ancient history, but now I am a participant.

Cosmic rays from outer space can affect us here on earth. Likewise, what happens on earth can influence heaven. We are told that the conversion of a sinner gladdens the angels, and the spiritual decay of a sinner sets in motion events in other spheres that can crucify you anew.

When I was in solitary confinement, in great suffering, I could dance, despising the things through which I had passed. After I was freed, I danced, though I was aware that other brethren and sisters were still enduring terrible tortures. But I comforted myself with the thought that they would soon be in heaven. I had been taught to think about heaven only as a place of comfort and gladness, except for the thought expressed in Hebrews that there you are crucified afresh over and over again. This image haunts me.

How does this crucifixion take place? Does it also start with someone selling you? On earth you were granted a trial by both Caiaphas and Pilate. Does my sin simply crucify you without any sentence being passed upon you, without a court establishing first the reality of my guilt and accepting you as sin-bearer?

The Romans always flogged those who were to be crucified. Are the crucifixions in heaven preceded by floggings? I hope at least you are spared this indignity.

Do you hang on the cross alone or do some saints renounce the pleasures of heaven and share your sorrow? Do you endure only physical pain or do you again feel rejected even by the Father?

Do you utter the words 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'? If so, there exists the possibility of return even for those fallen after illumination, in spite of what the apostle says to the Hebrews. Do you cry out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me'? And do you say the words again in the Aramaic language, in which *sabachthani*, a homonym, has a double meaning and can also be translated, 'How much have you glorified me'?

Today some people talk in terms of a new black theology. (No wonder, the majority of Christians today are coloured; in fact, 40% of Anglicans are black.) Others embrace a theology of liberation. For myself, I am against anything new in theology. In Christianity,

everything that needed to be said has been said already. No new revelation has intervened, and I am not open to human speculations.

But I do believe that a new dimension must be added to our theological thinking: the fact of your crucifixions in heaven. This has been revealed to us in the Bible, but has passed unmentioned. It is of the utmost importance.

Goethe said to his friend Eckermann on 4th February 1829, 'If I work indefatigably until my end, then nature is obligated to offer me another form of existence when the present one can no longer endure my spirit.' I also believe in life after death. But I shudder when I read in the Bible such expressions as 'crucified with Christ', 'sharing the passion of Christ', 'being buried with him.' If the Bible is literally true, can it be that these events, which have obviously not taken place during our earthly existence, will be relegated to the hereafter?

Once I baptised a Jew who was ninety-one years old. He told me he had a dream in which he saw heaven. Out of curiosity he asked an angel, 'Which is Wurmbrand's place?' But before receiving an answer, he awoke. Was the answer withheld because in heaven mine is the place of crucifixion? If so, do I strive for this, do I run to embrace it? I have fourteen years of Communist imprisonment behind me. How much more suffering will I have to bear?

Every one of us has passed through the prison of childhood, when our frame is small and weak, our powers of comprehension minimal, and all we say is treated lightly. Then comes the bondage of self imprisoned by wrong desires and stubbornness; sometimes there is the prison of bondage to evil spirits. Finally, there is the hardest prison of all—bondage to Christ. In this prison, we all undergo the torture of waiting to be holy and Christlike, while suffering the pain of frustration and failure.

In addition to the foregoing, I endured Nazi and

Communist prisons. For decades, I had thought about heaven as a place of release from all these things, but now I have discovered instead that heaven is a place of suffering, too. As it is on earth, so also in heaven: a servant cannot be above his master. If you must endure suffering, so also must we.

It is written in 1 John 3:2 that when you appear, we will be like you. Does this mean crucified in heaven like you?

I am approaching death. Bede, the first translator of the New Testament into English, when almost blind asked his amanuensis to re-read to him carefully what he had translated. He said, 'I will not have my scholars read a lie after my death.'

Neither can I allow the many who have listened to my sermons and have read my books, which have been translated into more than fifty languages, remain with the impression I have called them to a paradise that is all joy and happiness, as Mohammed describes it in the Koran.

The Bible says it is the dwelling place of a God who knows sadness, of saints like Rachel weeping about greater tragedies than she had known on earth (Mt 2:18); it is the setting of a terrible war going on for ages (the sword is not a human invention; Eden was guarded by angels with a flaming sword (Gen 3:24). Now I learn that it also has a place of crucifixion, where you suffer anew.

The thought might not be pleasant, but it is true. The injunction 'Take up the cross and follow me' refers to a very long period, much longer than our earthly life.

I try to repress a question that arises in my heart again and again, but my efforts do not succeed. I am told that even in my dreams I shout loudly, *Maduah* ('Why?' in Hebrew).

An American newspaper published an article entitled, 'Conversion to Hindu Faith is Torturous.' It gave the following details: 'A West German businessman has completed his conversion to the Hindu faith by piercing

himself through the cheeks with a quarter-inch-thick, four-foot-long steel rod and pulling a chariot for two miles by ropes attached to his back and chest by steel hooks. . . . Others walk through 20-foot-long pits of fire, don shoes with soles made of nails, or hang in the air spread-eagle from hooks embedded in their backs.'

We Christians would have told this German that all this suffering is not necessary. Salvation is easy, through faith alone. Some would have added that a few commandments have to be kept. But all the tortures are certainly senseless.

You are a Being apart. You had to endure suffering for us all. But is it really necessary for you to endure crucifixions endlessly? If we take up our cross, will we share them with you in the world to come? Then the Hindu way of salvation, so horrible to our minds, is still easier than ours.

One day, Bede's disciples read him the translation, 'It is finished.' He commented, 'Yes, it is finished,' and chanting 'Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost,' he died. I wish to finish these letters before I die. It is good for us both to have come to a mutual understanding through correspondence before actually meeting in circumstances I presume will be dramatic.

God buries his workmen but carries on his work. Therefore, I do not have to worry about what will happen after my death to the specific work of Christ that you have entrusted to me—the Christian mission to the Communist world. Neither do I have to worry about my name after I die. Whose name does not enter into oblivion sooner or later?

As for my corpse, what of it? Wycliffe's bones were dug up and burned into ashes forty-four years after his death. Then the ashes were thrown into the River Swift, whose waters carried them into the Avon, which feeds

into the Severn, which empties into the ocean, which circles the globe.

My corpse will not have even this honour.

But it is about the future that I am really concerned. What kind of heaven awaits me? What kind of heaven awaits those converted under my ministry?

Since gaining my freedom, I have had many occasions to speak in churches. Once, after describing the humiliation and torture Christians are subjected to in Communist prisons, I spoke about heaven and asked, 'Would you come with me to paradise?' A lady answered loudly, 'No—in any case not your way, because it implies too much suffering.'

How many—if any—would come with me to paradise if I told them that paradise itself, not only the road to it, entails suffering?

The renowned Swiss Protestant theologian Karl Barth said in a lecture, 'When the angels sing for God, they sing Bach; when they sing for pleasure, they sing Mozart, and God eavesdrops.' Mozart wrote an unfinished Requiem, the story of which may have a deeper significance than appears on the surface. Perhaps this Requiem is unfinished because it is for an infinite Being whose death never ends.

Experience is the one perch no one can be knocked off. Perhaps some of the information God obtains about our ordeal is distorted. Perhaps he sometimes descends to earth himself, as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:21), to ensure that what is reported to him is correct. The rumours about their wickedness might have seemed exaggerated.

Reports and theories constructed on them often crack, like plastic wrapping; experience has the resonance of solid oak. Knowing this, you might have chosen to suffer with us all the way, for as long as we suffer. The best throne on which to rule over a crucified race is a cross. Then you appreciate all the sufferings mankind endures.

Perhaps you believe in our free will, though Luther, Spinoza and Einstein did not. But you are not a Lutheran. You consider us responsible for our sins. Bernard de Clairvaux said, 'Remove free will and there will be nothing to save; remove grace and there will be nothing to save with.' You believe that we often sin wilfully, that even our ignorance is wilful (2 Pet 3:5), and therefore punishable.

After the crucifixion on Calvary, many continued in rebellion. Some were enlightened, but even these sometimes fell away. Then you took upon yourself new crucifixions and the indignity of being put to shame again.

The best explanation for a man's actions is found in the atmosphere in which he lives. In heaven, a place of supreme love, your reaction to an offence against you is to take upon yourself suffering for the offender. Do you hope that these new crucifixions will do what you yourself declare to be impossible—bring the once-enlightened but lapsed Christian to repentance?

I dreamt one night I was in an Orthodox church, where the priest had prostrated himself according to their ritual. I prostrated myself to the earth, too, and felt the sins of the whole congregation burdening me.

I imagine it is not easy for you to read such a letter in the state in which you are. Neither is it easy for me to write it. So I leave you for now. I will write again.

My Third Letter to Jesus

Dear Jesus,

Only now do I realise that I have written to you twice without first introducing myself.

You might say it is not necessary to do so when you address a God. He knows everything.

I am not convinced that it is superfluous to introduce oneself to you. The Bible is surely true, and it says in various places that you forget some things, remember others and appreciate it when you are reminded of still others.

Unlikely as it may seem, there are some men, among them even individuals who have been very active in church life, whom you, though omniscient, have never known.

You once taught that on the Day of Judgement many will say to you, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?' And then you will profess unto them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity' (Mt 7:22,23). So you are a God who does not know and has never known many of his creatures.

I do not wonder about it. If we are created after God's image and in your likeness, he must have a subconscious

as well as a conscious. Therefore, you sometimes called the Father a power (Mt 26:64), like instinct and the unconscious complexes, and at other times a person, the heavenly Father. You called the Holy Spirit a power, but also described him as a person. If God has neither instincts nor a subconscious but only reason, then we were not created after his image.

God knows those he created and has led consciously but might not know what emanates from his subconscious, just as we do not know the persons of the unremembered dream life.

And so my name is Richard Wurmbrand, and I was born on 24th March 1909, in Bucharest, Romania. Now you will not be able to tell me on the last judgement that you had not known me. I have introduced myself to you.

I will not tell you the many works I did for you. This was the mistake of those you rejected. I am simply a grievous sinner who has believed in your grace. I also believed that, having been washed in your blood, I would enjoy heaven with you for all eternity. But now I have grave doubts. I am deeply troubled because I have stumbled on a Bible verse that says you suffer many crucifixions in heaven, which makes me think that heaven is not at all a place of enjoyment (Heb 6:4-6).

Probably the best thing for me to do is to fulfil the most mystical exhortation ever written: 'Be still, and know that I am God' (Ps 46:10). One does not put questions to God. We are not to write him letters or trouble him, but only to kneel quietly in adoration. However, I am far from perfect. Please do not expect me to have perfect attitudes.

I am a pastor. Close association with the clergy causes many people to become anti-clerical. I have been acquainted with pastors more than most; I am very well acquainted with one pastor—myself.

I believe that pastors, even the best ones, are less qualified than one might think for a life of perfection.

Wesley delivered some 40,000 sermons and travelled 250,000 miles on horseback to accomplish this. The end result today is empty Methodist churches. Luther and Calvin tried to reform Christendom. Later, others tried to reform the new institutions that had arisen, until today we find ourselves in a chaos of sectarian confusion. Vatican Council II will succeed as little as King Josiah of Judah's thorough purge of all religious practices.

Josiah destroyed all idolatrous altars and the renegade priests, but 'the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah' (2 Kings 23:26). It was because the changes were only external. Under Josiah's successor, three months were sufficient for the complete return of heathendom.

If only Wesley had ridden less and Luther preached less! If they had been still and silent, the work of the Lord would have prospered. I know it to be so, but I am like them. I can restrain myself from outward activity only with great difficulty. Much of my outward activity may serve to suppress my Jewishness, which is a difficult burden to bear. And so I feel impelled to write these letters. Please bear with me, listen and reply.

What is heaven like? I know it is a storehouse of blessings, but Augustine said, 'God asks our leave to bless us.' Not many give him permission, but those who do bring him much fruit. They have what the Catholics call supererogatory works, that is, they have done many more holy works than would normally be expected even of a saint. God might have the problem of the rich man of your parable: 'I have no room in which to put my fruit' (Lk 12:17). Your Father might wish to apply the merits of the saints to others, but those keen to have them are rare. An overabundance of blessings in heaven is not desirable. It might produce a crisis like the overabundance of riches in America.

I have followed the advice of a sculptor who carved your likeness in a great statue. People admired it from

different angles, but the artist said, 'If you want to see it in its right proportion, you should kneel.' I knelt in the hope I would see a serene heaven. After years spent in a prayerful posture, I still see a heaven full of complicated problems.

Among them, the greatest concerns the crosses on which you are crucified again and again. The New Testament never uses the noun 'resurrection' about anyone but you. Jairus' daughter, the young man in Nain and Lazarus were all brought back to life and had to die again. You, on the contrary, were resurrected and ascended to heaven.

Your resurrection was an event apart, for time and eternity—but what about this crucifixion in heaven? Or do you not die on your heavenly cross? Do you just suffer on it endlessly, with every sin committed by an enlightened Christian being an additional wound? Or was this being 'crucified afresh' about which the author of the epistles to the Hebrews writes just a psychological experience, a figure of speech, not a physical reality in your glorified body?

I am confused. Every question is a hindrance to obtaining an answer.

There is an old Muslim legend about a man who was stripped to the bone by robbers. He was asked, 'Why did you not defend yourself?' He replied, 'I could not because I had a dagger in one hand and a pistol in the other.'

There is a deep sense to this story that does not appear mystical on the surface. We have too many questions and therefore cannot receive light in our minds. We have so many arguments that we cannot be right. We cannot have happiness because the search for it is too intense. America could not defeat Vietnam because the USA had too many weapons, including the ultimate. Our reason is too well armed and therefore cannot fathom your depths.

If I allow the dagger and the pistol to fall from my

hands, if I abandon reasoning and follow the invitation given by Isaiah, 'Look unto me, and be ye saved' (Is 45:22), I begin to see that heaven could not be without a crucifixion.

The French writer Rabelais said, 'I am prepared to stand for my convictions up to but excluding death.'

In heaven you represent eternal truth, not only on the basis of your passion on Golgotha, but also your readiness to be involved in new sufferings. On this earth, sufferers for your name have repeatedly exposed their lives for you in prisons and under persecution. In heaven, you must sustain truth even if it means being crucified afresh. Your new crucifixions are the guarantee that you hold eternal truth.

Therefore, St Paul hinted that something was lacking in the earthly afflictions of Christ on the cross (Col 1:24). It is only in heaven that you represent the real sacrifice. On Golgotha you yielded up the vile body of a Man of Sorrows who took upon himself the sin and sickness of mankind. Some of the church fathers say that you were very ugly, yes, even a leper. No wonder! You were the Messiah 'wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities' (Is 53:5). But in heaven you yield to crucifixion the glorified body of the Son who was intended to sit on his Father's throne.

How could such a sacrifice not be efficacious? How should truth supported by such a sacrifice not persuade and convict?

I begin to realise that this being crucified afresh is absolutely necessary, just like the sacrifice on Golgotha, and that we have to resign ourselves to it as the Virgin Mary and Magdalene and John resigned themselves to what happened on Good Friday. They had a Saviour but one who could not be of any immediate help.

He could not caress children, nor wipe away tears; he could not heal, nor feed the hungry. His hands and feet

were immobilised by the nails that pierced them. He could bring a thief into the kingdom, but no more. He had no power for lengthy and convincing sermons. He died and then became a corpse which others had to handle, wash, wrap and bury.

It seems that Bonhoeffer was right when he said in one of his prison poems that we are involved not so much with a Saviour to whom we can appeal in our needs, but one whose sufferings we have to share.

Five billion men live in the world today. After thirty years it will be 7 billion, unless nuclear weapons, which are already sufficient in number to kill every living man twelve times over, are put to use. Every day there are 180,000 more individuals to be fed, educated, instructed in spiritual matters, healed. Proportionately, the number of those who can meet such needs daily becomes less. Hundreds of millions go hungry, and their number will only increase. The rulers of mankind cannot solve this problem. To put a man on the moon or to construct bigger and better bombs has priority over famine.

They have not known the poverty of your childhood, nor the hunger and thirst and oppression of your adulthood.

It might just be chance, but I have never met a church leader deeply concerned about the fact that every day there are 180,000 more souls to be saved, that Communist tyranny closes churches in Communist countries, and that even more churches are closed in Britain by Christian apathy.

Your Father has given us a beautiful world with a natural abundance that we could have subdued and utilised to provide for all our needs. But in nature there is not one animal species that preys on its own. Man is the only exception.

Since Cain killed Abel, the envy, greed, exploitation and murder have continued. In the words of Shakespeare,

(man's) . . . offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon 't,
A brother's murder. (*Hamlet*)

Einstein once remarked, 'I do not know with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with clubs and stones.' We desperately need an active Saviour, a Prince of Peace who will really rule.

We cannot afford the luxury of having a Saviour crucified even in heaven. Our most urgent task is to decrucify you, however important your cross might be.

I suppose if I had lived in Palestine 2,000 years ago I would have done what the prince of Saxony did to Martin Luther. Since Luther had boldly challenged the powers of the Inquisition, the prince had him kidnapped and kept forcibly in the Wartburg castle to save him from death. I too would have organised a group to take you in spite of yourself to a place where you would have been safe. Such a friend must not risk death, even if Isaiah did foretell it and he himself desires to sacrifice his life.

The secret Orthodox magazine *Nadezhda*, which had been published in the USSR by Zoia Krahmalnikova (afterwards jailed for this 'crime'), tells the story of the conversion to Christianity of the Koriaks, a primitive tribe on the Kamtchatka peninsula in Siberia.

The priest Nestor opened the first church. The queen of the Koriaks, who had opposed the new faith violently, attended the inauguration. Among the Russians attending, Father Nestor was the only man who knew the Koriak language.

During the liturgy, as he walked through the church with the censer filling it with the smoke of incense, the queen began to shout. With clenched fists, she threw herself toward the ikon of the Crucified, before whom stood the Virgin and St John. Suddenly aware of what was taking place, the priest interrupted the service

to quiet the congregation, in which there were many Russian sailors.

'Silence!' he commanded. 'Here a work of God is going on. I will explain later.'

The Korniak queen continued to shout, 'What have you done? Why do you torture him? Take him down immediately.' She had seen him living.

Father Nestor had to explain that these two, his mother and a beloved disciple, were not at all guilty but sympathised with him.

The queen had had a natural reaction. She had not wanted him to suffer.

Peter once had a similar reaction and you called him 'Satan'. Later he tried to defend you against arrest with his sword. Again you chided him. You wanted to die, and you took pains to assure the disciples that after death a glorious resurrection would follow.

But did you know then that you would be crucified again after your resurrection? Would you have objected to Peter's attitude if you had known?

It is not simply that I love you. Your lover could allow you to be martyred if he realised that this is your strongest desire. But I repeat, mankind cannot afford this luxury any more. Wars and famines in times past were trifles compared with modern holocausts. And though men might have had false religions, at least they believed in a Creator, which is less and less the case in the most civilised countries today. We need not only a living but a fulltime Saviour.

The Jews of 2,000 years ago could not accept the idea of a crucified Messiah. Only a short time was needed to prove how wrong they were. This Messiah was resurrected, and millions all over the world have believed in God and have found peace of mind because of your death.

But must we rely on a Saviour who is crucified again and again? Which Bible verse compels us to do this? And

do you not believe that even the prolonged suffering of the greatest saints has a limit?

We can rationalise the terrible drama in heaven. I fear that by the end of this book I will find some rationalisation myself, but I know that man's reason—the 'beast' as Luther called it—is little more than the servant of his desire. We all want to escape nagging problems, so we find reasons for the most unreasonable things.

You are the only one who can save mankind. Since you cannot do so while eternally nailed to a cross, you must be decrucified. I have decided to undertake the task, with or without your consent.

When I had a heart attack, my son said, 'We must get him to the hospital right away.'

I said, 'No.'

He rejoined, 'You are not in any condition to make decisions.'

I was transported to the hospital.

I do not believe that even a Saviour crucified again and again by human sin for 2,000 years can be allowed to make decisions independently. Your love and compassion are so great that you would continue to suffer endlessly in the hope that sinners might obtain eternal life in the hereafter.

They need a new kind of life now, materially and spiritually. A kingdom now—this is what the Jews expected from the Messiah two millennia ago. I do not agree with them. I understand why you desired to suffer and die, but enough is enough.

The bride says not only 'I am his' but also 'He is mine' (Song 2:16). I have to say something, too. Not only do you possess me; I possess you, as well.

Christians are usually satisfied with knowing you, the one. Eddington observed, 'We often think that when we have completed our study of "one" we know all about "two", because "two" is "one and one." It is not so. Two being "one and one", the knowledge of the "one" is

not sufficient to understand it; we also have to understand the word "and".

We know you in some measure; likewise, we know ourselves. The 'and', the connection between us two, remains to be investigated. We give you all honour and praise for your readiness to suffer without limit. You will probably say, 'All honour and praise to those who wish to decrucify me.' We will have to find the missing link between these two attitudes.

I will write about this next time. I know there is little time. But a decrucifixion, to be successful, presupposes planning. I will take only the shortest possible time for reflection. You will hear from me soon.

My Fourth Letter to Jesus

Dear Jesus,

Dostoievsky wrote, 'Man needs the unfathomable and the infinite just as much as he needs the small planet which he inhabits.' I can prove this. I have plenty of trouble on earth, but I cannot remain quiet knowing that somewhere else, very far away, the Son of God is crucified afresh.

I need not only daily bread and health; I also need your decrucifixion.

This task is not comprehended in the covenant you established with us through your blood. But if I limited myself to what I owe you according to the Bible, I would judge like Portia, who told Shylock when he asked for the pound of flesh owed by his creditor:

Tarry a little, there is one thing more—
This bond does not give thee one jot of blood,
The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh':
Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh,
But if in the cutting it, thou dost shed
One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods
Are (by the laws of Venice) confiscated
Unto the state of Venice.

I owe you more than you ever asked or expected of me. I owe you more than what I understood at my

conversion. But I have not sought an object of love in vain; I found in you my heart's desire. Wherever I look, I see you, and I see you crucified and in pain.

As light belongs to the flame, so you belong to me. Between us there can be no bargaining about obligations. Your happiness is my only happiness. I am sure you would be much happier reigning steadfastly over mankind than suffering again and again on a cross.

I should think heaven would be the one place whose air is too pure for any sufferer to breathe. In heaven there should be no death penalty nor even vicarious death. Heaven is your dwelling place. It is imperative that your suffering cease.

The event on Golgotha, a hill where the innocent Son of God died after crying out 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' was already stranger than any man of any religion could ever imagine. But a Son of God crucified in heaven is stranger by far. That goes beyond the limit. Here faith comes to the end of its tether.

The farthest the telescope can reach out into the universe is ten billion light years. Your place of fresh crucifixions might be further still, but the cry from there has reached me and pierced my heart. It is too much.

For thirty-four years you were a man of sorrows on this earth. I say thirty-four, not thirty-three. The Chinese calculate the age of a man from the moment of his begetting. This is what the Bible teaches, too. Therefore your genealogy in Matthew says: 'Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob,' instead of 'Sarah gave birth to Isaac, and Rebekkah to Jacob.' The child exists from the moment of procreation.

If John the Baptist leaped for joy in his mother's womb, you probably felt the pain of sinners from the time you were an embryo.

I have suffered since before I was born. My father was far off in another country when I first saw the light of day. My mother told me that as a baby I cried the whole

time. So I did during my whole childhood, with or without cause.

About St Sergius, called 'the Protector of Russia', it is said that he cried so loudly while in his mother's womb during a church service that everyone heard.

Catherine of Siena said, 'There are moments when silence could accomplish anything.' Unfortunately, no one taught me this. How much energy for good I would have gathered as a child and a young person if I had not cried and later expressed rebellious thoughts! If only I had been silent!

You kept silent, but you suffered for thirty-four years. You had an exemplary mother, whose custom was to say to God, 'Be it unto me according to *thy* word,' when all around her lived by the motto, 'But it unto me according to *my* word.' How much your mother must have suffered because she was different from others.

People said about St Luitgard of Wittichen, 'She has the devil in her. She is a deceiver and a heretic.' They said the same things about St Joan of Arc and many others. Perhaps Mary was often mocked, too. But she would not have trembled; she would have kept her peace, and her joy.

She knew she had an assignment from God and did not allow herself to be disturbed by what others said. Archimedes, the Greek mathematician, would not allow himself to be upset, not even when the Romans entered Syracuse. His only comment was, '*Noli turbare circulos meos*—Do not touch my circles.'

Mary had been given the assignment from God to spread in this world the fragrance of heavenly roses and the beauty of heavenly violets. She remained quiet.

But your heart must have gone out to her, as you suffered for all sufferers.

In your childhood you surely knew about Herod and the children he had killed. When you visualised him in your imagination, you saw the shadow of death at his side and his blood-stained hands. He needed your crucifixion in order to be saved.

You grew in stature and wisdom. You knew many sinners for whose trespasses you would have to atone. You would also have to atone for the goodness of saints.

Israel must have had many saints from whom no one ever heard an angry word, who were always patient, whatever evil befell them, who developed cheerfulness and equanimity under all circumstances. But goodness extended even to tyrants and religious charlatans usually results in cruelty to their victims. Such passivity makes crime and exploitation possible. And so saints need redemption as much as despots.

You were always humble. You asked John the Baptist to baptise you, and you washed the feet of the apostles, including Judas Iscariot. You maintained your purity though doubtless many girls loved you passionately because of your love and kindness. Perhaps you loved one, too.

Then came Golgotha. My beloved, you have suffered so much. Was all this not enough? You said about your crucifixion on earth, 'It must be so.' Is there a 'must' attached also to your heavenly sorrow? Is there no other option?

On earth there was not only a flogged and crucified man; there were also floggers and crucifiers, the henchmen. Without their complicity the whole event could not have taken place. If as a result of our sins you are crucified afresh now that you are in heaven, paradise must contain not only noble martyrs but also cruel torturers, just like the garden of Eden, which was inhabited not only by the innocent pair but also by the evil serpent.

But how can there be crucifiers in heaven? Nazism, Communism and other similar regimes in the past have proved that it is enough to create hell; there will be no lack of devils to people it. Create a totalitarian regime, and it will have its butchers. But how can heaven produce them? Do they appear whatever the external environment?

I know I have put questions that no one has asked you before. Long before I wrote them down, I had them in my

mind. They have troubled me for many years in solitary confinement. But I understand why you do not answer.

It could be that your suffering has incapacitated you to answer.

I write, as I already said in my first letter, with the supposition that you do read. Even if this is true, the fact that I receive no answer is understandable.

A Swiss professor held a seminar in Japan and, as is customary, put questions to the students. No one answered. Taken aback, he asked why and was told that Japanese students take every question as a subject of prolonged meditation. A question that can be answered immediately is considered less than serious; so is the questioner.

Your own nature and your life is so deep that perhaps you yourself cannot fathom it. Therefore you said, 'No man knows the Son, save the Father' (Mt 11:27). It may take an eternity for an infinite Being to know himself fully. Perhaps you meditate on my questions.

The Dakota Indians consider it impolite to answer a question because by doing so they would show themselves superior in knowledge to the questioner. Since you are humble, it may be that you do not wish to assert any superiority over me. Perhaps this is the reason for your silence.

But we do not dwell in the sphere of philosophy, and it is difficult to wait for answers.

Your pain must be terrible, but it is far away from our experience. I know what ours is.

I have just read the account of a Lithuanian lady who was deported to Siberia with her three children, ages three, five and seven, only because she is Lithuanian and the Soviets want to Russify her country. Unable to bear the hunger any longer, she threw herself and her children into a river. Meanwhile, in Britain charitable organizations like Oxfam and Christian Aid contributed about 64p per person a year compared with £24 per person spent on tobacco.

We need an immediate Saviour. You must be de-crucified. There is no alternative.

You are God, but you yourself taught that God is not the only reality. You said there is also an enemy who sows tares among the wheat. It is perhaps not at all the will of your Father that you should be crucified afresh for the sins of the enlightened. Perhaps the Father has established a paradise only with good things in it and that your new crucifixions are from the devil, unlike the crucifixion on Golgotha, which was in God's plan.

Peter was called 'Satan' because he opposed your death as ordained by the Father. I am not at all in the same situation. I am against these new pains of yours because they are provoked by the devil.

The circumstances of my life are maddening. Perhaps all my reasoning is mad. Perhaps I have misunderstood everything.

It is written that you spoke with many parables, and you never spoke without a parable (Mk 4:33,34). Paul might have learned this manner of speech from you. He might have abhorred cool, academic objective speaking about matters that involve suffering. Loving the sufferer, one might fantasise his pain in extreme magnitude in order to communicate it to others and evoke their sympathy and love.

Can it be that in Hebrews chapter 6 Paul only desired to show the great disturbance produced by the sins of those once enlightened regarding the moral order of the universe and how great a crime they are against love and righteousness?

Since you, the Son of God, stand for everything that is good, beautiful, and lovable in the world, then every trespass against the light is like crucifying you afresh. Perhaps, after all, these words do not have a literal sense.

The words might have an altogether different meaning. I was in the same prison cell with Christian Florea. Paralysed because of the many beatings he had received,

he could move only his neck. We had no water to wash him, no sheets to change his bed (a slatted bunk with a dirty pallet). He lay in his dirt, immobilised, and shone for joy in the Lord. When we took Holy Communion in the cell, we found his breast to be the most suitable altar on which to place the bread we had saved and the wine a sympathetic guard had smuggled in. After Communion, we asked him to say a word.

He had had no theological training. In fact, he must not have had more than a few primary classes. But he shared with us these profound sentiments: 'At every Communion we pronounce the words "This is my body." What body of Christ do we mean? Jesus is a being apart: one person with two natures, perfect God and perfect man. He is also the only being with two bodies: that of a Jewish carpenter of 2,000 years ago, who was crucified, resurrected, and now sits on God's throne; and another body, his church. We are as much his body as the one that walked through the villages of Palestine. We are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.

'Now, when we say, "This is my body broken for you," which body do we mean? Surely the body broken on Golgotha, but also his church which in every generation has given thousands of martyrs. Their bodies broken and their blood shed are also the body and blood of Christ. He is bodily in prison wherever a Christian is in prison.'

What Florea said was certainly true, but the conclusion is that when the sin of a brother hurts me, like the piercing of the heart with a dagger, it is—poetically speaking—permissible to say that your body suffers again the pain of crucifixion on Golgotha.

I don't believe we can really differentiate between you and us, your church. We are one. When Paul writes that sinners crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, he probably means the crucifixion of your martyrs and of all those who suffer the pangs of death when they see or hear something evil. Not only the historical Jesus but also the saints are the Son of God since they are the body of Christ.

So it is ourselves that we have to decrucify, which means we have to free the church from a despised, rejected situation and make it triumphant. We have to hasten your coming, when the church will be victorious.

There are laboratories that contain the cultures of micro-organisms for the purpose of experimentation. We in our turn belong to a micro-world for angels. They both learn from us and teach us. For them we are a laboratory. All my contradictory thoughts, which I have shared with you, have brought me to this conclusion.

It is written that the 'acts of Ahaziah which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?' (2 Kings 1:18). Why is this simple statement put in the form of a question? It is to make us realise a dilemma is before us. The life of Ahaziah exists, and the chronicle that recounts it exists. Which came first? The whole Bible is witness to the belief that all our thoughts and deeds, yes, our whole lives were written before. 'In thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them' (Ps 139:16). 'Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate' (Rom 8:29).

For reasons known only to you, in my heart you raised a tempest, you brought me near to agony thinking about your being crucified in heaven, until you calmed me: you are glorious in paradise. It is your church which is crucified afresh in every century. Saints 'fill up that which is behind' of your afflictions in their flesh for your 'body's sake, which is the church' (Col 1:24).

So my next letter will be about how to decrucify your church.

Until then, good morning, my Beloved.

My Fifth Letter to Jesus

Dear Jesus,

Some time has passed since I last wrote to you. The time was first spent in thinking about how to decrucify your church, which is the prolongation of your incarnation and in which you suffer crucifixion again. This is what I have learned about the church from Scripture.

But then I looked around, and somehow I could not find much of a church to be decrucified.

In the free world, there are millions of Christians who enjoy Christianity as people enjoy the other amenities of life. Some churches have evening dances, potluck dinners, social parties. They discuss whether women should be ordained, as if you never said long ago that we are a people of kings and priests, which means that every female believer is already a priestess and needs nobody's ordination. They debate the theology of liberation, the literal or general inspiration of the Bible, the rights of homosexuals, the permissibility of providing terrorists with church funds. All of these are discussions that crucified men cannot engage in.

What offends me most in these debates is the clarity of the arguments adduced by both sides. But purity of heart is not bought with the coin of clarity in philosophical and theological systems.

The pure in heart live on earth for heaven. The brides prepare themselves for the encounter with the Bridegroom. His last judgement will not be an examination in dogma, but only a question about love, which does not think systematically.

I once spoke to a pastor of the Soviet underground church, who had suffered much. He had never studied theology. I was with him for only two days, during which time I had to teach him everything I could. Among other things, I shared with him the tenets of systematic theology. He listened without understanding and finally asked, 'Did those who constructed the system ever bear heavy crosses, as Jesus commanded us? No one carrying a heavy burden with the prospect of imminent death nor anyone nailed to a cross can think systematically. Even Jesus thought unsystematically on the cross. In his seven words on Golgotha, he jumped from one subject to another. Systematic theology is the product of men who are not cross-bearers and therefore it is valueless.' I could not make him listen further.

His observation could apply to much of what is preached and debated in churches of the free world today.

There are some in these churches who sincerely confess their shame and failure. They regret the fact that they have hurt and disappointed and failed people who had hoped in them. The words are prescribed in the missal and the *Book of Common Prayer*. But they confess their sins in such a nice, orderly manner, without even creasing their face muscles. They may suffer for their sins, but the suffering does not amount to a crucifixion. Therefore they do not need a decrucifixion.

Then there are other Christians, those persecuted in Muslim, Communist and animist parts of the world, who can be classified in two groups.

In some lands, but especially in European Communist countries, the fashion has arisen among Christians, as among political dissidents, to grumble and protest

publicly about any perceived injustice, great or small. Through my hands have passed thousands of pages of petitions to their own governments, to the United Nations, to the World Council of Churches—and the list could go on—about such grievances as house searches, confiscation of religious books and fines they are forced to pay. True, they also complain about the killing of believers, but their main concerns are personal. There are many such Christians.

I am reminded of the story of two men who were walking home together in bad weather. They had a long way to go, and the blizzard was fierce, blowing snow and sleet in their faces and chilling them to the bone. One mumbled continually, 'It is terrible! I cannot bear it any more. Nobody could imagine anything worse than this.' His companion replied, 'I can. Just fancy walking in such weather with a complaining friend.'

Then there are other Christians who are crucified indeed. They suffer intensely, even unto death, for their beliefs. They take up their cross willingly, understanding its meaning. They bear their sorrows with serenity and patience. There are some who bear the pangs of crucifixion, but while the body may ache, the spirit seemingly feels nothing. As a mother ignores her own pain if her child is suffering, so these transcend their own horrible suffering in the fellowship of your passion. Their speech is not about the wounds they have, but about yours.

The Orthodox make the sign of the cross with three fingers. I saw them when they were subjected to atrocities in Communist prisons; some of them passed spontaneously to signing themselves with all five fingers, as the Catholics do, in remembrance of the five wounds you had when crucified, one at each hand and foot and one in the breast.

And it is not simply that these believers are crucified. Such a fate can befall a criminal too. But they are kind

and forgiving to their torturers, praying for them as you have done. They are blind to their faults, as you have been.

You knew long before Calvary the ugly role Pilate and Caiaphas would play in your death; you knew the Roman soldiers would drive nails into your body. Now, everyone in Palestine criticised them all for their exploitation and oppression, but you were the only one who never had a bad word to say about them.

Such modern saints have to be decrucified. Many have died already, and for them it is too late. But all your true followers under Islam, Communism and animism are in grave danger. The task is monumental.

The first difficulty is one you already mentioned 2,000 years ago: the job is formidable, but the labourers are few. Most of those we count on are greedy for the things of this world. They never have enough.

A girl was reproached by her mother: 'I left two cakes in the cupboard yesterday. Now I find only one. How come?'

The child replied, 'I must have overlooked it in the dark. Otherwise I would have eaten it, too.'

Even Christians rarely refuse some pleasure that offers itself.

Rare are the believers who, like a seismograph, register the slightest quaking of another's soul and are ready to jump to his aid. They are so insensitive they would not register even the pain of the Son of God.

But enough about others. Cato said wryly, 'I can pardon everybody's mistakes except my own.' If there are not many labourers, the work has to be done by a few. And if I am the only one who thinks in terms of decrucifying the saints, I must not worry about others' neglect of duty while I fail to reproach myself for not doing *my* best.

'Well,'—I say to myself—'I can't perform miracles. I can't turn the world upside down all by myself.' But then

I think 'How is it I can't do wonders? The first disciples could. I have the same Spirit they had. The Lord has promised he will be with us always and will enable us to do even greater works than he himself has done.' I have no excuse. I must decrucify your church, your body, through which you continue to bear crucifixion, though you are already in heaven.

I hear the voice of the Tempter: 'It is good that you demand great tasks. There is no greater one than to be a saint. So be one—cheerful like Francis when it is hard to be cheery, patient when it is hard to be patient, aggressive when you want to be still, silent when you want to talk, pleasant when you feel disagreeable, optimistic when you are down. The kingdom of heaven is within you. Don't look at what is happening to others. In this world, you are pilgrims and strangers. Those who pass through tribulation here will be comforted in heaven.'

'Get thee behind me, Satan,' I haste to reply. 'I refuse this consolation. If I prefer Rachel among the mothers of Israel, it is because, when she saw the slaughter of children in Bethlehem, "she would not be comforted" (Mt 2:18). Comfort is the worst enemy when one is passing through a catastrophic experience. Rachel wanted the innocents restored to life. We also should never be content just to say nice words to those who mourn. The cause of the weeping should be eliminated. Jesus might have said that we must bear our cross daily and accept sorrow as our lot. And this is all right, as far as I am concerned. But the church has suffered enough. I have to decrucify her.'

In the other world I will live eternally. Through this world I pass but once. If I am to accomplish anything, it must be now. And the maximum of kindness is not to sympathise with sufferers, but to stop the suffering. If I cannot do this, life for me is not worth living.

Pessimists always see the worst in life; cynics find disappointment on every hand. Those who live on the

edge of a cliff, like me, are chronically tense. Jesus, I do not ask you for relief from tension, but rather its exacerbation until I achieve my goal.

A pastor was asked, 'Is it lawful for a Christian to smoke?'

He answered, 'It is altogether wrong for a Christian to smoke: he must be on fire.'

Lord, it is my desire to be, not simply a burning log in the fireplace, however warm and pleasant, but a flaming torch in your hand.

You once said, 'I have come to send a fire on earth, and how I wish it would burn' (Lk 12:49). You meant a fire brought from other realms where even our suns are looked upon as dwarfs. All the evil should be burned; it has reigned enough. If I am counted among the evil, I will burn too. But your bride, the elect saints, should be set free, should be decrucified.

Jesus, you have given me a mind and a will to think about nothing less than this. But you have not yet shown me the way to reach this goal of mine. Is it sufficient for me to repeat endlessly, 'Thy kingdom come,' without making it come? When I add, 'Give us *this day* our daily bread,' you might answer, 'Why "this day" for your demands, and why do you show so much patience regarding the advent of my kingdom?'

I write to you in despair of my cause. Before addressing you, I tried to speak to many others but had only disappointments, bitter ones.

I once heard about a postman who, while delivering letters to everyone else, never received one himself. His great longing was for someone to write to him. After many years, he received a letter. It informed him that he was being made redundant.

An actor who suffered great heaviness of heart went to share it with pastors, with psychiatrists, with acquaintances. On meeting him, they all congratulated him for his roles and asked for free tickets to the theatre. He could

speak to no one. I can never speak to anyone about what torments me. Instead, people have the idea, for some reason, that I can give them advice. This is why I am writing to you.

How can I accomplish my task all by myself? You said that where two or three are gathered together, you are among them. But I was kept for years in solitary confinement. I was absolutely alone, without another for communion or fellowship. So you could not be with me if your minimum is two. I imagined your presence, I even experienced it, but it was all subjective. I knew the whole time that you do not share your fellowship with the solitary. I do not understand why some Christians of past eras chose to become hermits.

Now, while I embark on this enterprise, I will again be alone—alone in the absolute sense of the word. You are crucified one way or the other, either in your own person in heaven where you sojourn, or in the church whose suffering you share and whom therefore you are unable to succour properly.

But since you have given me relief in so many other things, you will give it to me again. You will help me live without anyone else, without the church, and without you, panting for you, burning for you, loving your church, and having one desire only—to decrucify you.

When you went to Calvary, the apostles forsook you and fled. When you died on Golgotha, you were almost alone. Yet Joseph of Arimathea, who till that time had managed without you, took you down from the cross and cared for your poor body, without any assistance from God, angels, or the church. So it will happen again.

I have not the slightest idea how to start so great a work. I am already on my fifth letter. The previous ones have remained without reply. There is no one to counsel me. The only thing I know is that doing little things well is a step towards doing big things.

So I have decided to begin with decrucifying little

beings who suffer. Perhaps this will eventually give me some idea of how to get to the point of decrucifying you.

There are so many unhappy beings around me. It is not that they are unhappy only on occasion. There are some who have never known a sunbeam. The Orthodox monk Michael Ershov was in Soviet prisons for forty years. I have known Indians and Africans who as children never had a toy or a piece of candy; they received no schooling and never had enough to eat all their lives. I have known men who were never loved, not even by their own mothers. They find no solace in their religion, for even that is only sadness. They bow before a statue of the goddess Kali, garlanded with the skulls of men. She speaks no word of comfort to their longing hearts.

And so I will practise decrucifixion on these to prepare myself for the great adventure of decrucifying you.

I shudder because of the terrible decision I have made. It is as if someone tried to help you by removing a nail from one of your hands while you hung on the cross. While relieving the pain of one hand, he would have made your situation worse, because your weight would now be suspended from a single nail. I do not believe in partial decrucifixions.

But it seems I have to pay my dues to what remains in me of human nature. As Christians we are partakers of the Divine nature. But still, the words spoken by Diogenes to Plato apply to us: 'I see the lion, but not the lion's characteristics.' Without these, I can decrucify you only partially.

Perhaps your decrucifixion, the one noble task for which life is worth living, is a problem without a solution, like the squaring of a circle or perpetual motion. All that has been written about Christianity in the past fails to satisfy me. We seem to share the problem of youth down through the ages. We turn our back on the past and start from scratch, unwilling to build on the learned wisdom of previous generations.

Unlike Olympian runners, who pass on the flaming torch from one to another till the targeted site is reached, we begin our marathons alone and stumble along, learning as we go, falling and rising again, till finally we collapse, always short of the goal. Our children will do the same, in spite of our cautions. They too will start from square one.

And so we turn our back on theologians and philosophers. None has the answer, and your body remains crucified.

Should I begin with little tasks? What else can I do?

This is my fifth letter. Perhaps I will get an answer.

My Sixth Letter to Jesus

Dear Jesus,

God has many sons and loves them all. About you he said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Mt 3:17). He is not always pleased with the others. He uttered those words just after you had spoken on the Mount of Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah about your death. Did you discuss with them all the details of this death? Was the Father pleased also with the despair you manifested on the cross? Does he continue to be pleased with your actual crucifixion?

To be pleased seems to be a characteristic of Deity. You yourself, eager to create a worldwide church and to find a multitude of St Pauls and great teachers, nevertheless said, 'I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou has hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight' (Lk 10:21). Whatever God decides, you accept as good, just because he has decided it, even if it crosses your desires.

And if God, who decides all and without whose will not even a sparrow falls to the ground, has willed your crucifixion and that of the church, which has lasted almost 2,000 years, I too should express thanks and find my pleasure in them.

A concert pianist who was asked how much time it had taken him to become a virtuoso replied, 'Eight hours a day for twenty years.'

You have to be God for all eternity. And you have promised, 'To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me on my throne.' For all eternity we too will be on the throne from which universes are created and ruled; we will be virtuosos in being good.

To have been crucified for only three hours is not preparation enough for such a tremendous task. Perhaps this is why you had to be crucified again, symbolically in your new body, the church.

The Zohar, main book of the Kabbalah, which contains the mystic tradition of the Jews, asks why God led the chosen people for forty years through a terrible wilderness 'wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions' (Deut 8:15).

The explanation is that such wildernesses are the very realm of the devil. The Jews have to pass through it in order 'that the evil power might be broken and the ruler of the regions of darkness be crushed, that it might rear its head no more.'

Without Golgothas evil cannot be conquered. What really defeated Nazism once and for all were not the Allied armies, but the innocents who were gassed or burned in Auschwitz and Dachau and who there sanctified the name of God.

The Zohar adds these deep words: 'There can be no true worship except it issue forth from darkness and no true good except it proceed from evil.'

St Paul would not have been the zealous apostle without his fervid, murderous past; St Mary Magdalene would not have stood faithfully at the foot of the cross without her sinful, adulterous youth. The ultimate triumph of good can come only from prolonged and repeated crucifixions.

If everything is predestined, then my desire to

decrucify you is also predestined. I have to go ahead with it; but since you are well pleased with all things, this must please you too. If only I knew how to start the decrucifixion.

As you were aware, John the Baptist lost his head because he spoke out against the king's sin. You knew that if you spoke against the sins of men, you too would be killed. But since you *are* the truth, how could you not have spoken? For you to try not to speak is like a man trying not to breathe. All your disciples are in the same predicament. They have to utter the truth, and therefore they have to suffer. The situation gets worse and worse instead of better.

But did John the Baptist do the right thing?

Historians tell us that Herod Antipas was guilty of terrible crimes. He killed and exploited savagely. His whole life was dissolute. It is strange that when John pointed out to the king his sinfulness and the means of salvation, he stressed only the one particular sin to which Herod was most attached: his illegitimate liaison with his brother's wife. Would it not have been wiser and more efficacious if John had chosen to expose the whole complex of Herod's sinfulness instead of hammering specifically on one area alone? John's insistence on this point might reflect the area of his own greatest temptation, since unlike Herod he lived the life of an ascetic. Listen to what a preacher criticises most in others and you will know the preacher's most besetting sin.

Why did you say that, though John the Baptist is the greatest among those born of women, the smallest in the kingdom of God is greater than he? Is it because heirs of the kingdom refuse to become ensnared in details but maintain a vision of the whole?

You attacked evil on a variety of fronts, showing that ultimately the heart—the character—is the source of individual sins. You went beyond the Baptist, but I have to question you, too. I suppose that if you had been

low-key in condemning the hypocrisy and profit-seeking of the religious rulers, they might not have crucified you.

The Reformers would also have fared better if they had not pointed to the fat bellies and moneybags of the monks. So said Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Even without hitting where it hurts the most, the witnesses for truth have to suffer. The story is told of a rabbi who sought to retain his position in the synagogue after boasting that he had already served twenty-five years in that capacity. He was refused with the words, 'You look too healthy. Our tradition says that a true teacher of Scripture who works devotedly soon begins to suffer from heart disease, gall-bladder trouble, ulcers and consumption.'

Perhaps the solution is to deal with generalities, to avoid what gives offence, to respect people's sensitivities, to be tactful, to remain silent about a few things that are touchy in order to be able to speak about all other things. So many Christians fare well in society, much better than you fared. Perhaps they know how to behave better than you did. Let us imitate them and there will be no more Golgothas.

As for pure truth, much of it would remain unsaid.

With whom should we share it? In New Guinea, there are men who worship in the 'cargo cult'. During World War II American battleships that landed there used the natives for unloading cargo. They memorised this word, which meant to them a multitude of dainties. When the Americans finally left, they continued to worship the cargo-god who came from afar. They expect him to come again.

Even some Christians have given up their beliefs and joined the down-to-earth cargo cult.

Many people in the civilised world also have a cargo religion. They love you for what you promised them: forgiveness of sins, peace of mind, eternal life and material blessings as well. Suppose you had been only the

good teacher from Galilee with no paradise to grant, they would not have been your disciples.

Is it good to be crucified as punishment for having thrown pearls to swine?

You were happy when you found some young fishermen mending their nets, and you called them to be your disciples (Mk 1:16-20). Perhaps we also have to mend our nets. A breed of fishermen who for twenty centuries have been eaten by sharks instead of bringing home much fish are not only entitled to our compassion but must also be told they need to learn their trade.

Have we been so much concerned with logic, consistency, purity of doctrine and absolute truth that we fail to observe that they tear the nets and enlarge the holes?

Those who fight for principles will never be content to give up this 'holy' crusade. I myself prefer those who live according to principles rather than those who fight for them.

Herod did not object to John's living an ascetic life without women; the Pope did not object to Francis of Assisi's becoming a reformed man. The problem arose when John stepped on Herod's toes and when Francis tried to reform the church. Those who fight for principles without being thoroughly reformed themselves are often prone to crucifixion.

My conclusion is that we should make certain we have truth as fixed as the multiplication tables and the axioms of geometry, along with ardent love, strong faith, gentility, the right intuition; then let us speak with great circumspection.

'A living dog is better than a dead lion,' said the Preacher (Eccles 9:4). The rabbis maintain that almost anything is permitted when in danger of death; then why not silence?

This seems reasonable, but it is not reason that decides our attitudes. Bacteria lodging in my lungs are not aware that they belong to the inner world of a man who can

decide to kill them with some drug. We belong to your inner world, and it appears that you predestine some, the most beloved, to oppose evil openly and become crucified.

This opposition to evil is not a mere verbal battle. You did not preach against demons; you banished them, which is a terrible pain for demons, somewhat like that of a violinist who loses his Stradivarius. In centuries past, there were pastors who spoke out against slavery; there were others who worked to free the slaves. It is natural that slave-holders would resent the latter and seek revenge.

Buddha explained to lepers that their condition was the result of guilt in former incarnations and that contentment in their present life would prepare them for nirvana. By way of contrast, you healed the lepers. It was the money-changers and merchants in the temple you took action against, overturning their tables and chasing them with a whip.

You and your followers are adamant about what you consider just, and you act accordingly. Crucifixion is the result. So my advice—how strange it is to give advice to you whom Isaiah called 'wonderful Counsellor' (9:6)—is for you to slow down.

It is all so tragic. When I was in jail, we were not allowed to correspond with our families. We also had no writing material. In quiet desperation we would scratch a love-letter to a sweetheart on a piece of soap and weep over its touching content. Then the futile message would be erased. No one but the author ever read it.

Is this true of our correspondence as well? Even if you do not reply, can you not give at least some little sign that you are aware of it, that I do not write in vain?

Perhaps the Sufite poet Gilt al-Halladah (surely you know him) was right:

I saw my Lord with the eyes of my heart
And said, 'Who are you?' He answered, 'You.'

....

I am the one whom I desire lovingly,
And the One whom I desire lovingly is I.
We are two spirits inhabiting one body.
Who sees me, sees him.
Who sees him, sees us.
Your spirit has mixed with my spirit,
As the wine mixes with the clear water.
Whatever touches you, touches me.
You are me, in every situation.

Could it be that these are not even my letters to you, but letters that you write to yourself on the tablet of my mind? If so, then you are the one who will never have a reply. Perhaps there is no 'you and I'.

A chasm opens before me—or is it before you? My thoughts blur. It is enough for today. Goodbye until next time.

My Seventh Letter to Jesus

Beloved Jesus,

I can admire the Sufite poet. But I wonder if he really meant what he wrote. If the oneness between himself and his Lord were truly perfect, why did he write his poetry?

When you asked your first disciples what men said about you, they disinformed you out of politeness. It was not true that their contemporaries considered you a prophet, John the Baptist or Jeremiah. Those who might have thought so were certainly an insignificant minority.

Even today, there are some for whom you do not exist, or to whom you are remote, like the China Sea, and therefore of no significance. To others you are a great man, an initiate, a revolutionist, a madman, a false prophet. To many you are the umbrella under which they propagate their own ideas. To Judas you were a source of income. To a few you are the Beloved, their own true 'I'.

For some there exists only God. A Russian Orthodox priest asked that his tombstone bear the inscription 'Father Alexei is no more.'

It was not that he did not believe in eternal life, but he had learned the secret contained in the Hebrew of Solomon's Song: 'My beloved is mine, and I am his.' The words in Hebrew are *Dodi li veani lo*. The last word,

lo, has two meanings in the spoken language: 'not' and 'his'. The phrase could just as well be translated, 'My beloved is mine, and I am not.'

His love for his Saviour caused Father Alexei to be no more. For him there was only Jesus, only he.

For some there exists both God and the 'I'.

There is a sense in which I may speak about you as about another person, though you live in me. In cases of inner conflict between two powerful tendencies within a person, Gestalt psychology recommends an open discussion between them. Set an armchair before you, imagine your other personality sitting before you, and talk things over.

This is particularly wholesome when God and a human being co-exist in one person. I imagine you communed with yourself many times in this manner.

'You in me' does not comport with 'me in me'. You did not come to be ministered unto—not even with a decrucifixion—but to minister.

Caesar Augustus was the richest man of his time, while you did not own so much as a coin. But you told clergymen accustomed to taking from God and from Caesar, 'Give to both.' Your life consisted of giving, and you gave all.

But if you delight only in giving, should I then become only a taker, or should I learn from you to be, like you, only a giver?

Or should we both forget about giving and taking, about the practical aspects of life, where crucifixions take place and plans for decrucifixion can be elaborated?

A peasant dug in his field and discovered a jar containing what he believed to be peas. He tried to cook them, but they remained hard. Being a practical man, he went to a neighbour and exchanged his find for peas that were edible. As for the neighbour, he had recognised that the supposed 'peas' were pearls.

On a practical level, we must seek the most edible peas,

the most comfortable situation. Thus decrucifixion becomes the main order of business.

But what if I were to deprive you of jewels by decrucifying you? St Ignatius begged the early disciples to do nothing to keep him from being thrown to the lions, because he did not want to lose the martyr's crown. You yourself told Peter to put his sword back in its sheath when he tried to defend you.

The best do not seek liberation.

I will remind you about one of your most beloved saints, Mina, the only girl who was a 'male' saint.

A Christian, whose wife had died, decided to become a monk. His only daughter, unable to bear the thought of abandoning him in his old age, obtained his permission to enter the order with him, disguised as a young man. She served all monks, washed and cooked for them, and soon became the favourite of the monastery. Who else sang like her? Before long she had won the confidence of the abbot.

One day, he sent Mina, together with two other monks, to make some purchases for the monastery. En route, the three rested in an inn. It so happened that the innkeeper's daughter, in an affair with a soldier, had become pregnant. To protect him from her father's wrath, she accused Mina, 'the handsome young monk', of rape.

The innkeeper complained to the abbot, who confronted Mina. Thinking that perhaps one of the other monks might have been guilty, Mina made no defence. If she asserted her innocence, the suspicion would fall on another, who would be expelled from the monastery. If he could not control his impulses while a monk, how would he resist the temptations of the world? 'It is better if I am expelled,' said Mina to herself.

For years she stood at the gate of the monastery and begged forgiveness from the abbot as often as she saw him. In the end, she was received back into the order, but

the lowliest jobs were given to her, and she was despised by all.

Mina lived like this to the end of her life. When she died, the monks who washed her corpse saw that she was a girl saint who had borne innocent reproach without ever saying one word in her own defence.

Mina would have objected to a decrucifixion. She preferred to be despised and stand begging at the gate in order to protect the guilty.

Should I decrucify such persons by using force? Luther defied danger. When he went to the Diet of Worms, a prince kidnapped him to save him from his foes and kept him locked in his castle. Should we do such things? To please whom? To serve whom?

Stephen, the first martyr for your name, did not defend himself at all when threatened with stoning. Perhaps he could have saved his life by denying the accusations brought against him. But he delivered a speech in which the personal element is completely absent. He had nothing to say about the slander that victimised him. Rather, he lost himself in the vision of the Father and you.

Since you were born a Jew, you will have no difficulty in understanding what I meant when I said Solomon's words: 'My beloved is mine, and I am his,' also translated, 'My beloved is mine, and I am not.'

It is true that *lo* in one sense is written with the letter *ayin*, whereas in the other case it is written with *aleph*. But was not the spoken language, in which these distinctions could not be made, much earlier than the written language?

Then the ideal is that you should be mine and I should no longer be, just as Stephen ceased to be. His instinct for self-preservation had disappeared. He had fulfilled your first command: 'Whoever wishes to come after me should deny himself.'

If I should do this, all my worries, even the worry of

decrucifying you and yours, would disappear. I would pass away beneath your ardent kiss. Tradition tells us that Moses died by a kiss of God.

If only I knew! But why do I keep the 'I' that wants to know? Well, though Moses died on Mount Pisgah, centuries later he appeared to you on Mount Tabor at the transfiguration, and spoke with you about your departure from life.

What did he say to you? I imagine he reminded you that when he arrived at the borders of Canaan, he had asked to be allowed to enter the Promised Land, if only briefly. God replied with an unequivocal 'No.' Moses believed that even such a categorical denial of his request could be overruled. Prayer is a mighty weapon. But Moses died with only a view of the Promised Land.

Fifteen centuries passed. Now he was with you on Mount Tabor, which was in the land of Canaan. He had entered the land in spite of God's absolute 'No.'

You were human at that time. No doubt he said to you, 'Do not fear crucifixion. If you die with the words, "Father, into thy hands I surrender my spirit," you will be resurrected gloriously.'

This is probably true also of your crucifixions in heaven and the crucifixions of all who are yours. The end will surely be good. Therefore, plans to decrucify you may seem strange.

If through some means I might have arranged that Moses be spared the pain of dying without having entered the Promised Land, his triumph centuries later might have been less beautiful.

Triumph in spite of unconquerable difficulties is surely more admirable than triumph in the midst of favourable circumstances.

I conclude, then, that you do not want decrucifixion, for either yourself or those who love you.

What if they die? The greater part of a man is invisible; at death the remaining part becomes invisible,

too, joining what has always been invisible. That is all.

Moses defended an innocent man who was being beaten, and for this lost for forty years the possibility of helping a whole nation of slaves. As a prince he could have done much. Morality in small things is sometimes the enemy of morality in great things.

When Joseph was sold by his brothers as a slave, a man with my turn of mind could have fought and saved him. Then Joseph would have been spared years of prison in Egypt, but he would have been denied the opportunity to become Egypt's prime minister and to save a whole nation, plus his own family, from famine. In this he prefigured you in type.

If Peter had been able to save you from crucifixion on Golgotha, he would have deprived mankind of the possibility of being saved. Can it be that your new crucifixions in heaven might also serve some great purpose? As for the sufferings of your church on earth, Tertullian once observed, 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.'

Maybe this whole idea of decrucifying you, which sounds so beautiful, might be wrong.

And if this is wrong, then much of my thinking in other religious matters might also be wrong. Is this possible? Can a child of God go astray easily even in matters of faith? Do we not have the promise that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth? Have I not been instructed by your holy church to whom you have entrusted the whole truth in your word?

How do I know that the road I travel in the future is the correct one?

I await your reply.

My Eighth Letter to Jesus

Dear Jesus, my love,

You remain silent, as ever. And I have no criterion for truth.

Should I say the Scripture is this criterion? Is it the original manuscript, which no contemporary has ever seen? Among those we have, which version is correct? There are hundreds of manuscripts that differ from each other.

The simple fact that there are so many interpretations of the Bible shows that it is not easy to put the mind at rest by saying, 'I follow the Bible.' Two individuals equally sincere and assiduous in their studies come to entirely different conclusions.

Is the church the proper guide? Then which church?

You would have done well to forbid Christians to study church history, except for the biographies of saints and martyrs.

The first to call the Pope of Rome *Pontifex maximus* (the chief of priests) was Tertullian in the beginning of the third century, but he did so with bitter irony, comparing him to his pagan counterpart of the same name.

Pope Callistus I (217-222) set up a bank and induced church members to desposit their money with him. He failed and then fled.

When Stephen I (254–257) claimed for the first time in recorded history to be Peter's successor, St Firmilian of Caesarea compared him to Judas Iscariot and censured his insolence. St Cyprian called him a 'deceitful worker, false apostle, false Christ'.

Pope Marcellinus (269–304) was charged by the church with being a traitor, since, it was said, he delivered Bibles to the heathen government to be burned, and he himself burned incense to the gods.

And so on and on. Are these your vicars from whom I should learn?

You must have abhorred the Catholic Inquisition as much as I do, as well as the subsequent killing of Catholics by Protestants.

Should I seek the truth from the Reformers? In some ways they were Deformers, committing acts that Protestants should repent of in sackcloth and ashes.

When the peasants revolted during the Reformation, thousands were killed, many of them under torture. Luther wrote, 'I, Martin Luther, slew all the peasants in the rebellion, for I said that they should be slain; all their blood is upon my head.'

With his accustomed hyperbole, he also wrote these blasphemous words: 'We must put the whole Decalogue entirely out of sight and out of our hearts. If Moses harasses you with his stupid Ten Commandments, say to him at once: "Take yourself off to your Jews. To the gallows with Moses!"' In addition, Luther was a determined anti-Semite.

To cap his highhandedness, he wrote: 'Whoever teaches otherwise than I teach, condemns God and must remain a child of hell. I can bear and endure nothing which is against *my* teaching.'

So I can learn neither from the Popes nor from their opponents in the Reformation.

I will tell you a Christian's vision. He saw himself ascending the steps toward heaven. He saw many men,

one more shining than another. Then he saw angels and bowed before one. The angel forbade him and pointing upward said, 'The one to be worshipped is higher.' The man then saw a much more beautiful angel, who also would not accept worship, but smiled and also pointed higher. Finally the man saw God himself, before whom all knelt. When he was about to join them, God pointed downward and said, 'Worship there.'

Looking down, the Christian saw the most wretched man hanging on a cross. He wanted to bow before him but was told, 'There exists something even more precious. I am the eternal, sinless Son of God. Since I am love incarnate, it is no wonder that I love and sacrifice myself. Descend lower.'

Then, descending to the depths, the man saw in subterranean prisons simple people, sinners, and even former criminals, all of whom had become Christians and who now endured torture for the truth and long years in jail, and he worshipped the Godhead residing in them.

Long ago I decided to learn from the chain of martyrs and saints.

For many years I was with them in jail. And to my sorrow I discovered that they were divided. Everyone is convinced he has the whole truth and does not accept peace at the expense of it.

One of these fellow-sufferers said: 'The word "toleration" must be cut out of the church's vocabulary. It cannot be found in the Bible. It is not a nice word. Under its cloak have been hatched conspiracy, treason and heresy.'

Though hundreds of Christians were together in the same prison cell, they would not take Communion or even say an 'Our Father' together. 'How can we?' they asked. Some believed in transubstantiation, others in consubstantiation, others in symbolism. Is it a matter of indifference (went the argument) if a loving soul

offers truth or an error that can destroy the soul for eternity?

From whom should I learn? In despair I said I would learn from the dying saints. In their last moments they would give up their vanities.

Paul had had many debates. His swan song was 'I have fought the good fight. . . .' Mozart wrote to his father, 'Death is the end of our lives. I have become acquainted over a period of years with this true, this best friend of men, so that its image is no longer a matter of dread for me, but of touching comfort. I thank God that he has given me the happiness to discover in death the key to our true blessedness.'

Some day I too will die. You who have been silent so long, grant me in my last moments serenity. No river has ever despaired of emptying into the sea. I have my sure course, which leads to a sea of light. 'More light!' said Goethe when dying. Though I am confident of reaching the true light, my sin is my impatience. It is my desire to have the truth *now*, perhaps before I am ready to receive it.

Truth is not given all at once because we might squander it.

I think I understand why you cannot write to us. You would have to put thoughts into words, as you did when you wrote to the angels of the Asian churches. Words not only convey thoughts but also limit and distort them. If we cannot say tunes or landscapes in words, how can Deity express itself adequately in such flimsy vehicles of thought?

In English you yourself are called the Word, but this is not so in your own language. In Hebrew you are *Davar*. The Hebrews have no word for 'word', though the Word of God was entrusted to them. *Davar* means 'the real thing'. Therefore, you the Word—'the real thing'—were in the beginning.

Goethe's *Faust* was really not criticising the Bible but

rather its German translation when he said, 'I cannot value the simple word so much' as to say with John that 'in the beginning was the Word.' Then he inclines toward 'In the beginning was the sense'—exactly what the Greek name *Logos* means—arriving in the end to 'In the beginning was the power', and lastly, 'In the beginning was the deed.' He felt that you are not only 'the Word', but the real thing.

Your seven short letters in the Book of Revelation have drowned in a multitude of religious words. Real things cannot be reduced simply to words alone. Therefore you caused the Hebrew Bible to contain musical notes as well. You prescribed a certain architecture for a place of worship and ornaments for the temple walls. You gave directions for the making of a brazen serpent and the embellishment of beautiful multicolour garments for the priesthood. The eyes as well as the mind should read your will.

You have not left me without reply. It was much more ample than an answer in a letter. The whole of reality is your reply. Scripture says of you, 'Jesus answered and said' when no one had addressed you in words. You were replying to the reality of men and events confronting you.

You replied, *Hallelujah*. You showed me where to find truth: it is in facts. There is no reason to believe that the whole truth is contained only in an old book, even if inspired by you. It lies in the totality of facts. I know now where to seek solutions to what torments me.

Hegel said, 'Everything that exists is reasonable,' which is obvious because there is nothing reasonable except facts, and the totality of facts.

Now I understand your saying: 'All must come to pass' (Mt 24:6). Anything that does not happen does not belong to the all. I think of it as a reel of film entitled 'The all' or 'The everything, material and spiritual, of all times.' If only part of the film appeared on the

screen, it would be mutilated. This film is the only truth.

Until the time of Luther a clear-cut distinction was made between religious and secular life. To be in church or to be a monk meant to serve God. All other things were worldly.

Luther tore down this barrier.

A story is told of a pastor who, in explaining some difficult parts of Scripture to a cobbler, used without thinking some rare theological terms. To his surprise, the cobbler was familiar with them. The pastor said, 'With such a mind and such knowledge you should be in God's work.'

The cobbler replied, 'I am in God's work. I repair the shoes of poor people who have no means of transport. They walk miles to their place of work. I fear their feet might become wet and they might fall sick. Who will then care for their families? I pray therefore for God's grace before taking a pair of shoes in my hands, just as you pray before you start preparing your sermon.'

'My desire is the same as yours: that, on the day of his judgement, God might look at the shoes I have repaired and say what he will say about your sermons, "Well done, good and faithful servant." My profession is not secular.'

Jesus, now you have thrown the ball into my court.

Everything is your reply: what preachers say, the work that plumbers do, their spiritual or material tools, the smile of indifference with which their wives receive them when they come home, the sunshine they enjoy, the tempests they encounter, the cosmic rays that alter their moods, the play of children in school and the interplay of elementary particles, things in this life and the next, what happens in the stars and in the space between them, angels, animals, micro-organisms. Everything is your revelation, your reply to our questions.

Twenty-four centuries ago, the Greek philosopher

Metrodotus of Chios suggested that intelligent life existed on worlds far from earth. He wrote, 'It goes against nature to find in a large field only one shaft of wheat and in an infinite universe only one living world.' Everything that happens in field or universe is part of your reply.

Even the questions we ask belong to your answer. There exists nothing apart from your replies, freely given. You once said, 'Before they call, I will answer' (Is 65:24).

Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk observed, 'Man is the language of God.' Not only man, but the whole of reality is his language. Everything is your reply.

Now that you have provided me with this insight, I feel I must formulate your reply in words. I might try. I'll write to you again.

My Ninth Letter to Jesus

Dear Jesus,

For years I have had no response and now all at once I read your reply as if it were posted on every wall and every tree. No other voice is heard, no other writing is to be read. The whole world, its whole history, all its events and all its thoughts, great and small, are your answer to questions I have already asked and those I have not even thought to ask.

You speak to me in the language of quality, so little known.

I showed many people a picture of a cow and asked them what they saw. Almost all replied, 'I see a cow,' which was a wrong reply. Rarely did one state the simple fact, 'I see a picture of a cow,' not a cow.

At the initiation into Zen religion, disciples spend months meditating on the question put to them by the master: 'What is the sound of clapping with only one hand?' Rare are those who find the only correct answer, though it is obvious. The obvious is the Cinderella abandoned in the scullery of our thoughts. The sound of clapping with only one hand is the sound of clapping with only one hand.

Prophets as well as ordinary men have said about God that he is love, he is revenge, and so on. He himself when

asked gives the only complete reply: 'I am what I am.' St Paul introduces himself with exactly the same words.

The reply to any question can only be the reply to any question. The reply to a specific question is the reply to a specific question. You insist, 'Which is the reply?' It is, 'Which is the reply?' Life is an echo. He who puts questions will always remain with questions as his reply.

So the person who wants replies must not ask questions but give replies. It is written about you, 'He answered and said,' though no one had questioned you. It is because only by answering does one obtain answers. Raising problems raises problems. Only finding solutions finds solutions. In all matters, you know what to do when you start doing.

Every leaf of a tree, every flower and sunbeam, the pretty face of an American baby and the swollen belly of a starving baby in Africa, all reality tells me you are the life.

There is sense in life because if we investigate its origins, we see that at its beginning was a Mind.

How foolish I have been to wait for a written reply from you! I had no writing material in jail; I composed letters in my mind. Who knows if you can get paper and ink in heaven?

But whence come pebbles and jewels, thistles and roses, sun and moon, every man and every animal? Is it not from you who are the Word? Children of the Word are words. You were the Word who had become flesh in a special manner, but everything is a witness to you. Your speaking to men was implied in the plan of creation.

We have unanswered questions only because we are deaf, and even our deafness is a reply. Things and events carry your word; even more, it is carried by the connection between them.

It is written about you that you came full of grace and truth. Which of the two is more important? It is the 'and' that connects them. In the original Hebrew, the books of Judges, Samuel, Ezekiel and Jonah begin with the word 'And', written in Hebrew simply with the letter 'v'—*vav*. Therefore the Kabbalah says the universe was created by

the letter *vav*, by the 'and'. One event or one thing might not be clear. But when we listen to what connects them we will know.

Now I understand the words of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus: 'The Logos is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, abundance and hunger. Like the fire he is in continual transformation.' The ancient Indians had said, 'The Himalaya is the god Vishnu in a very solid form.' The Bible says, 'In God we have our life, being and movement.'

The beautiful flower comes from a seed without beauty. This is possible because the unattractive seed comes from a beautiful flower. We individuals with our unreasonable thoughts come from you, the Word, the supreme reason. Therefore I found you, the supreme reason.

How great you are! All things were made by you. How many they are. Someone estimated that it would take a person 80,000 years to count every living creature in a cubic kilometre of water. And God knows each of them.

Goethe wrote, 'Believe in life; it is the best of books.' It is as much your book as the Bible.

The Archangel Gabriel told the prophet Daniel what is written in 'the scripture of truth' (Dan 10:21). He could not have meant the Bible as we know it, since it did not exist at that time. Neither were the things the angel revealed written in any book, as with ink on parchment. But there exists the great book of life. Indians called it 'Chronicle Akashah', which is simply the all of all times and everywhere, all events and beings connected by the holy word 'and'.

I am beginning to read everything that happens as pages of this holy book, inspired by you as really as the Scriptures are inspired.

An Indian once said to a missionary, 'I always knew him [God]; you told me his name.' Likewise, I can say I have always had all your answers. But I had not known that quality is your answer. The Hindus had the sacred formula: *Ta tyam asi*—'This also is you.'

The Jewish Hassidim have a Sabbath evening song:

You, you, only you,
 You, you, you, nothing else than you.
 You, you, you, again you,
 You, you, you.

They sing this for hours. Everything is your reply. I had not known it.

A beautiful legend is written in *Sefer Ierahmeel*: When a child is to be conceived, God gives a sign to the angel over the spirits and tells him, 'Bring me a certain soul hidden in the garden of Eden, whose name is so-and-so and who looks thus-and-so.' When the world was created, all souls were prepared for men, as it is written, 'There is nothing new under the sun.'

The angel brings that spirit, which prostrates itself before God. God then says, 'Enter this seed.' The spirit replies, 'Lord of the universe, I am satisfied with the world in which I have lived since you created me. Please do not make me enter this impure being, because I am holy and clean.' God replies, 'The world which I make you enter is better than the world in which you have lived since I formed you. I created you only for this purpose.'

Two angels are put to guard the embryo during pregnancy. Every morning the child is taken into Eden and is shown the righteous who sit in glory with crowns on their heads. The angel asks the soul, 'Do you know who these are?'

'No.'

'These are men formed like you in a mother's womb. They went into the world and kept God's commandments. Therefore they have part in this blessing. You also, at the end of your days, will leave the world. If you fulfil all the commandments, you too will sit in these places.'

Every evening the child is taken to Gehenna. He sees sinners whom evil angels beat with red-hot sticks. They cry but no pity is shown them. The angel asks, 'Do you know who these are who burn?'

'No.'

'They had the same origin as you. They did not obey

God's statutes. Therefore they came to this place of punishment. You too, my child, will one day have to forsake the world. Remember!'

The angel also shows him all the places through which he will walk and finally his tomb. When the child is born, he forgets what he has seen. So ends the legend.

Another Jewish tradition tells us that the indentation between the nose and the lips is from the angel putting his finger on our mouth as a sign we have to keep silent about what we have seen.

There is nothing new under the sun. In every event of life I seem to see again the places through which I walked with angels and I seem to hear again words previously spoken for which I had had a luminous explanation by angels. Heaven is a goal and yet a place where I seem to have been before.

Things are clear. There are no questions to ask. How foolish I was to yearn for your replies. You speak through everything, or we could as well say you are mute, having nothing more to say.

God had long since given fragments of truth through the prophets. Questions remained open. But then you came. You are the whole truth. Henceforth it is an offence to seek visions and revelations. Any new revelation would be false. Every novelty would be wrong. You are God's only Word in which everything has been said once for ever.

Thank you, thank you.

I would like to tell you more, but I remember the poor tailor, St Gerard, probably the only canonised tailor. He did not make many suits because he loved prayer too much. We was overheard crying out, 'Lord, let me go, I pray you. I must make some trousers too.' Others take some time from their work for conversation with you. He took some time from prayer for work. I too am sorry I cannot spend my whole time with you, questioning or shouting Hallelujah about having found the answer.

Goodbye, for the time being.

My Tenth Letter to Jesus

Dear Jesus,

'*Ti emoi kai soi?*' You have taught me not to question any more; though when you were a man, reduced to our level of weakness, you asked questions.

'*Ti emoi kai soi?*'—'What is between me and you?' you had asked your mother. You wondered what fluid circulated between you and her. The narrator does not even give her name, as would have been natural, but only calls her your mother. The only thing which counted was this mysterious fluid, this full coincidence between your intentions and hers.

You were united by a spiritual umbilical tie with your earthly mother, as she was tied to you, her Master and Lord. She had given you a human body; you had made her full of divine grace.

There is also something *emoi kai soi*, between me, Richard and you, Jesus. There was first the wilful sinning against you, then my intemperate questioning. But I must say you were no better. You questioned me, too, even about sensitive things that gentlemen never bring into discussion. Now there is the calm.

The wedding in Cana was on the third day.

In ancient initiations into mystery religions, the first day one relived his past and the past of mankind; the

second day one saw his actual duties and the present of mankind; the third day was that of the mystical marriage.

The bride is quiet in the bridegroom's embrace. She receives his holy kiss. How wonderful it is to have a God untroubled by wrath or weariness, but rather a God who rejoices at weddings.

Bernard said rightly, 'A quiet God quiets all things; to see him rested means to be rested. A joyful God gladdens one.'

Such a God are you to me now, and I guess such a disciple am I to you.

I know that what I experience now is a sentiment and sentiments fluctuate. I have known many moments of deep joy with you, as well as repeated doubts, times when we were not even on speaking terms, and moments of utter despair about our relationship. Now I know calm. I could not call it perfect calm, because I know that, like everything human, it is transitory.

I enjoy reading the lives of the greatest saints. None of them was constant and stable in sainthood.

Perhaps tomorrow all the questions will torment me again. But why should I heed tomorrow? Tomorrow will take care of itself.

Lincoln said, 'Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.' On earth, no one can set far-reaching goals of happiness. But instead of brooding about the unhappiness that might overcome me tomorrow, I wish to obtain the fullness of joy with you which this day can give. I made up my mind to be happy today.

I possess the most precious but much despised jewel: today. People squander it on regrets about the past and utopian dreams about the future. God says, 'Today have I begotten thee.' God does not miss the todays, or he might have missed begetting you.

A Chinese story tells of Pineiho, who found a piece of uncut jade and presented it to Emperor Wu. He in turn asked a jeweller to assess it. 'Just an ordinary stone,' said the jeweller. In a rage, the emperor cut off Pineiho's foot.

When the emperor died, Pineiho presented the jade to his successor, Wen, who also took it to a jeweller. His opinion too was that it was just a stone. Pineiho lost his other foot. Weeping bitterly, he said, 'I am not grieving about the loss of my feet, but because a jewel has been called an ordinary stone.' Under a third emperor the jade was polished and found to be very precious.

Dreamers, including religious dreamers, fancying a kingdom of God far away, cut off the feet of those who offer them the jewel 'today', with the best it can bring and the best opportunities it offers.

When you took on humanity with all its human features, you might also have taken this disregard for today. The bride had invited you with words not many brides use: 'Our bed is green. The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir' (Song 1:10,11).

You renounced the delights of love today in order to die on a cross to save in all the tomorrows many who will never care about you. You left those who loved you in order to prepare mansions in heaven. What kind of mansions are these that take two thousand years to prepare? Our modern architects build great cities in no time.

The delay might not be because of technical difficulties, or because it takes so much time to build these habitations, but rather because you might wring your hands after laying each brick and ask yourself in tears, 'When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? Will he find inhabitants for these heavenly palaces?'

Peter had said to you, 'Don't think about tomorrow. You have here today those who love you. Do not die. Stay with those who are yours.' You wounded his heart for ever by calling him Satan. Perhaps without this one bitter experience, he would not have wavered in Gethsemane. I have seen many faltering or even falling away in prison. It was not simply cowardice. Could it be that you neglected them on some today while you were in search of that glorious tomorrow for all?

Away, away, questions! Now you have come again. No, Bridegroom, I have turned them away. Make me forget everything with a kiss of your mouth.

Please do a miracle for me. In Bible times, you caused prophets to see into the distant future. You restored to Hezekiah ten hours of his past. For me, make past and future melt in the one today of your embrace.

You can do so. When life first appeared in a purely mechanical universe, something new arose with new laws. Plants that grow and animals that move are wonders to inanimate nature. Likewise, man is a miracle to animals and you to man.

Come, put your left hand under my head and with your right hand embrace me (Song 2:6). You showed in your everyday life here on earth that you can be both delicate and forceful. So I wish you to be as I relax in your arms.

I cannot overcome fully the thought of tomorrow. Perhaps you will leave me when I fall asleep exhausted.

As a bottle of perfume retains its fragrance even months after it has been emptied, so your mother kept the fragrance of your presence within her long after you were born. Saints who have known you *in extasis* keep the afterglow of your brightness long after they descend from the heights. Ellen White says that the devil is not ugly, as he is usually depicted in paintings, but retains some of the grandeur he once knew in heaven.

In the warmth of your embrace, I believe there will be no tomorrow. But if there is, it will be suffused with the loveliness of today. I will have known experimentally what Plotin said: that object and subject are no more two principles, and that the beatified soul can no longer distinguish them. I am no more I. I have become the one whom I contemplate.

I once contemplated you with rebellion and hatred, then with incipient faith, then with doubts, sometimes with indifference. Now when I would know how to contemplate, there is no one outside myself to contemplate.

St Gertrude said, 'I am you; you are I. I am not you, you are not I. You and I are a new person: *You-I*.' Perhaps it is you who take the initiative and apply to me the words of the bride in Solomon's Song, 'My beloved is mine and I am not'—*Dodi li veani lo*.

I desire the fullness of pleasure in your love. You inspired the erotic imagery of the Song of Songs and of the mystical writings of other religions. Your first miracle was performed at a wedding in Cana. Is a Puritan asceticism the best way to thank you for your generosity?

If a hostess works hard to prepare a dinner for her guests, will she rejoice if they proclaim a fast and refuse to eat? Puritans walk through the beautiful garden of life gathering thorns and throwing away roses. They imagine they thus please God, the gardener who planted the flowers for them.

The bride in Solomon's Song was not a Puritan in her relationship with you; neither am I. Let us both forget about ourselves in an eternal embrace.

Come!

It is such an ardent embrace, a full one, like those in bridal chambers, but, strangely, you were never seen other than fully clothed.

If anyone had a reason to walk nude, it was you when you were resurrected from the dead. You had left the linen in which you have been wrapped in the tomb. Perhaps, in anticipation of resurrection, you prepared beforehand garments for your needs. We do not know. But it is certain that you were always clothed.

Your embrace is always circumspect, but still you are able to communicate to your bride the intensity of your unfathomable love.

It is for this that I long.

My Eleventh Letter to Jesus

My beloved Jesus,

There exists a strange subjunctive world into which the devil tried to introduce you. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, addressing you. The very word 'if' shows that all the rest of the sentence is nonsense. Reality knows no 'ifs'. Pilate used the interrogative mood when he asked, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' Wherever there is a sign of interrogation, there is no truth.

I acknowledge only the declarative mood. 'My Beloved is mine, and I am his.' I am the bride of the King of kings.

An author used the following sentence: 'Proper writing [and you have heard this a million times] avoids exaggeration.' He did not realise that he was exaggerating.

Those who teach 'truth' often are unaware that they lie. When I was a child I was told this classic story.

As a father and a boy walked together, the boy said, 'I saw a dog as big as an elephant.'

The father replied, 'We are now approaching what is called the liar's bridge. When a liar passes over it, it collapses and everyone dies.'

Now the boy was afraid. After a few steps, he said, 'Well, the dog was as big as an ox.'

They drew nearer. The bridge was already in sight.

Finally, the boy conceded, 'The dog was really as big as a dog.' With this the story ended.

The truth is that the father would also have fallen into the water, because he told a lie about an ordinary bridge. Rather, the author of the story would have had to die, because everything he recounted was a fabrication.

So in the world one is condemned for lying in the name of a moral system which itself is a lie. Immorality is a lie, too. The world's assertions and denials of truth are all wrong. 'Every imagination of the thoughts of a man's heart is only evil continually' (Gen 6:5). *Every* imagination, including what we label as good.

I do not need this world and its systems of thought.

If I alone had been a sinner and the whole world were righteous, you, in whose embrace I am, would have come to be crucified only for me.

There I go pronouncing the word again. I started this whole series of letters with the concern of decrucifying you or, if Paul's assertion that you are also nailed to crosses in heaven is only a metaphor, of decrucifying your oppressed little brethren who suffer here.

Then I had a sudden illumination and spent, not time, but something outside of time with you in the inebriation of love. Your hands caressed me, as I lay at your feet. Neither the bride in Solomon's Song nor I observed any wounds.

How could that be? You are said to be 'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world' (Rev 13:8), then slain again on earth, then slain in heaven. Slain, slain, and again slain. This seems to be your whole existence.

But you never had to be slain. In Gethsemane you said you could have called twelve legions of angels to your defence, though it was written that you have to die. So you yourself acknowledge that there was an alternative to what was written.

But before the foundation of the world there were no Scriptures. In Gethsemane you had a problem: 'How

shall the Scriptures be fulfilled if I call upon angels?' (Mt 26:54). This problem did not exist before the foundation of the world. Why were you slain then? And what Scripture do you now fulfil in allowing yourself to be crucified again and again?

I dare even to reproach you for not being as respectful of Scriptures as you were in Gethsemane. Scripture says your role in heaven is to be seated on the throne near your Father, to rule the world and to intercede for us. Why are you not mindful of this? Why do you depart from Scripture and endure the cross again and again?

The hours spent in loving embrace vanished as if they had never been. We had been one. Now we discuss. Dialecticians say discussions are the midwives of truth because they shed light from many quarters. But I am not interested in truth obtained by this method.

One question alone remains for me: why has my Beloved been torn from my side? Why did you—why do you—suffer with so much stubbornness, in spite of your bride's longing after you, yes, in spite of Scripture which required only one crucifixion?

I guess I will not persuade you to renounce your sufferings willingly. You are the King of the Jews, who were called in the Bible a stiff-necked people. You are the most stiff-necked of all. To try to keep you from crucifixion is like trying to convince the sea not to ebb and flow or the pine trees on mountaintops not to bend in the tempest.

You have a heart of stone. It could not be otherwise, since you are the express image of God. And John compares the Father to a precious stone (Rev 4:3). Precious, precious, but still a stone. It is not what lovers wish it to be. Never has a precious stone yielded to a poor girl's legitimate desire to ornament her neck. You also do only your own will. If on occasion it seems that you do ours, it is because—with the unfathomable means at your command—you inspired us to will what you had

already decided. We are caught in a net from which there is no escape.

What about me? I intend to publish these letters. But I am a pastor who is supposed to spread faith, not doubt. It is the devil who sows doubts.

Another question arises: Why did you choose Judas, a devil, for an apostle? He must have realised at times that he was a devil. I have known pastors and even bishops who were clearly conscious of being devils. Why did you choose such men? Is it because you did not want to conquer, but to suffer? Could you have been crucified without the Judases, Caiaphases and Pilates?

Well, I have an inspiration. I have found at least one method to decrucify you, to keep you from being put on crosses any more: a general strike.

My life should be dedicated to convincing men not to betray, or sell their fellowmen, or sentence innocents, or whip, or mock, or crucify. If I succeed in organising such a strike, your divine decision to be crucified again and again will be foiled by me, a small creature indeed.

Hallelujah, Amen! I know, I know! A successful mission to torturers will eliminate crucifixions, either on earth or in heaven.

I dreamt in 1958, thirteen years after Hitler's suicide, that I told him about you. He showed signs of accepting the message, though only intellectually. This would be the first step, though it was only a dream.

But there are all kinds of Hitlers living today, national leaders as well as minor functionaries. I was once a tormentor of others and was saved. So this is the way to achieve my goal: win tormentors to the way of love.

If Abels would not sacrifice lambs to God who does not need them but would offer them to Cains as a sign of friendship; if Jacobs would not deceive Esaus in order to obtain blessings but would be happy about Esaus receiving them; if all would yield like Jonathan their legitimate right to the throne in favour of Davids who

are surely worse than they—then love might disarm crucifiers.

In the past, love has not proved that it has this power.

Once when a house was on fire, a man threw a cup of water on it, only to see it burn to the ground. 'Water does not extinguish fire,' he concluded. The fool! A cup of water does not quench it, but fire engines with water-hoses do. The little love we have shown until now has not succeeded. Flames of love might very well.

The fact is, I was once a crucifier, till an encounter with your all-forgiving love changed me. If I could be transformed, others can too.

I will dedicate my life to this.

My Twelfth Letter to Jesus

Dear Jesus,

The story is told about King Kansa in India, who sent soldiers to arrest Krishna. The latter, seeing the soldiers, smiled and said, 'I know who you are and why you come. I am ready to follow you to your king, but let me speak to you first about the king of heaven who is my king too.' And he told them about Mahadeva, his glory and revelations.

When he finished, the soldiers gave him their weapons and said, 'We will not take you as a prisoner to our king, but rather we will follow you to yours.'

When the soldiers failed to return, Nysumba, Kansa's wife, said to him, 'Send the noblemen.' These promised the king they would not listen to Krishna. But when they saw the shining of his eyes, his warm presence, and the respect shown by the multitude, they changed their minds.

He spoke to them about the inner slavery of those who do evil and of the heavenly freedom of those who do good. The noblemen then said, 'We promised the king to bring you bound in chains, but we cannot do so, because you have broken ours.'

The Jewish prophets were not alone in their expectations regarding you. The Krishna legend also knew about your coming.

At one time, officers were sent to arrest you. Unable to fulfil their mission, they defended themselves with the words, 'Never did any man speak like this man' (Jn 45,46).

You spoke. At that time it was as true as it is today that the whole of reality is your speech, but we are so deaf to truth that you considered the shouting of reality not enough but added to it your own voice in human language.

Are men today less hardhearted than they were then? If not, why are you silent now? Why do you allow your church in half the world—under Communism and Islam—to be silenced? Many of the preachers in the West find themselves unable to speak out about important issues. They are silenced by the attractions of the world.

I had escaped this nagging question for a short time. Now it has come back, but I will shrug it off. I love you and surely do not wish to quarrel.

I can understand how foreign it must have been for you to become a historic person. Like Melchisedek you are without father or mother, temple, people and human habits (Gen 14:18–20; Heb 7:1–4). Because of the brevity of life on earth, we have historicised you too much. I understand you to be entirely other.

I will make no claim on you. My only desire is to organise the strike. As a matter of fact, I should not have disclosed to you this secret, since there is a fundamental misunderstanding between us. For too long we have beaten around the bush.

Please realise that for humans who think, it is incomprehensible that we have to pray endlessly to the Almighty to have his name hallowed, his kingdom triumph and his will fulfilled.

I love you without understanding. You might want to suffer. I want to ensure that there will be no one to satisfy your desire. You will have to be happy.

You remember how, when I was in solitary confinement, I drew your face with chalk on the door. You

looked sad. Then I erased the drawing and made another with your lips curled upward. I made you smile. Some can make God rejoice with singing (Zeph 3:17). We can make the Man of Sorrows smile. This is my ambition.

You can use any excuse with me. You said to men, 'How long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?' (Mt 17:17). We are your suffering. One translation says, 'How is it I even talk with you?' You express impatience about having to suffer us, but nevertheless you desire to suffer.

I want to cut this tangled knot. You should no longer have to suffer, nor your disciples, nor anyone in this world. Hell should remain empty.

We cannot accept the situation in the world today. The Talmud Berahot records these words of Rabbi Papa: 'It is better for a man to throw himself into a burning oven than to make someone blush in public.' To insult a person is like killing him, because you cause his blood to shed itself upon his face. Human blood should not be shed anywhere, in any way, with malice.

Unfortunately, on this sin-cursed earth a knowledge of good co-exists with the results of the Fall. And so the lofty principle of respect for human life co-exists with preparations for nuclear war. While some sing songs praising you, millions of human beings are born each year, most of them in areas of widespread poverty and malnutrition, where the possibility of hearing the gospel intelligently set forth is virtually nil.

There are those who try to account for human suffering with high-flown explanations. Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizensk supposed that it comes from God as a veil, because man is too weak to accept divine charity which is absolute. But such rationalisations are of no avail to ignorant, starving children whose bellies are swollen with hunger, nor to their mothers who have no milk in their breasts.

It took scientists decades to reconstruct the pithecanthropus, the monkey-man whose past existence can in no way be proved. But many women might testify that their husbands belong to this species, and sub-human pithecanthropuses like Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Amin and Bokassa have ruled half of the world in this century.

In any case, in all those who suffer, whether physically or spiritually, it is you who suffer.

I do not know if I will succeed, but I will try together with others to change all this, to make your sufferings cease or at least to diminish them greatly for a time.

It is futile and unrealistic to attempt to change the world. Therefore I will try gentle changes. They will be accepted more easily.

Among many primitive peoples, a woman accused of adultery had to prove her innocence by putting her hand in boiling water or taking poison. Needless to say, all were found guilty.

God knew the ancient Jews were a superstitious people. He also knew that in such cases it would have been too much to demand understanding and forgiveness. So he undertook a devious solution. He ordered that the suspected woman drink plain water in which a writing had been put and upon which some formula had been pronounced (Num 5:11ff). If her belly swelled, she was to be pronounced guilty; if not, she was innocent. Obviously, a glass of water does not cause one's belly to swell. With such a system, no woman was ever proved adulterous. The husbands were satisfied and the women went free.

I do not know yet how I will fare in this undertaking. Perhaps I will tell those who inflict suffering to be satisfied with less than crucifixion.

You must have much fellowship with Francis of Assisi. You remember how he accomplished his ends. When robbers who lived in the forest surrounding his monastery assaulted worshippers, the friars wanted to call the police.

Francis said, 'No, but rather take them some food and beverage; tell them I give them my blessing and that I ask for only one thing: they should rob but not kill.' The thieves consented. Then he obtained from them the promise not to rob on Sundays and great feasts. Gradually he changed them into good men.

This might be a workable method. Well, I will not discuss these questions with you but with my fellow-believers.

For the time being, I will curtail my correspondence with you in order to speak to my peers.

My besetting sin is pride. I know. Some of it is inherited. I am presumed to be a descendant of Rabbi Dov Ber of Meseritch, a great personality of the Hassidic movement.

It is said that at the age of five he saw his mother crying because, when their house burned down, they lost their family tree proving they were descendants of King David. The future Maggid told her, 'Do not cry. I will give you another lineage. It will become an honour to be my descendant.'

Forgive me for writing to you in such a presumptuous manner. I boasted about what I would do. Surely you will forgive. Let us just remain in love. And until I write again, 'Be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether' (Song 2:17).

My First Letter to Christians

Dear brethren and sisters,

I submit to you a series of twelve letters I wrote to Jesus. I think they are self-explanatory.

They started with the grandiose plan of decrucifying him. But I think I will have to come down to earth. Some of the major problems of our planet, such as famine, housing, unemployment, drug addiction, prostitution, pollution, overpopulation, alcoholism, revolution, racism, the danger of war, terrorism, are all too much for our small minds without adding the task I proposed.

We can solve problems only one by one and step by step.

History has shown that revolution is not a magic word that makes problems disappear. If this were the intended outcome, all revolutions have failed. By the same token, there is no possibility of an instantaneous Christian revolution that would satisfy the heart of our Master. He could never be satisfied with less than the whole creation being wholly his.

I am sure he has a good plan to achieve this end. He taught us never to start a war unless we have calculated in advance the size of our forces compared with the enemy's, and never to build a tower without being sure that we have the wherewithal to finish it (Lk 14:28-31).

He must certainly follow his own advice. God surely did not create the earth nor did Jesus start to build his church without first calculating all the consequences.

In our human realm we do not launch a satellite without the full assurance that it will reach its target and, if so desired, return to earth safely. The One who gave us the mind to accomplish such feats is surely far more intelligent than his creatures. He knows every sparrow and the hair on every head.

An office manager would be fired for incompetence if he spent money on useless statistics. God knows not only how but also why such minutiae are accounted for in such detail.

Hebrew, the language of his revelation, does not contain the word 'to think'. For this the Jews use the word *likshav*, which really means 'to count'. There may be a deep significance to the fact that God gave 'Numbers' as the title of one of his books in the Bible.

More than this, God saw to it that in the three languages of the Bible, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, every letter also represents a figure. The apocalyptic beast has no name but a number: 666 (Rev. 13:18). Jesus has a number, too. The numbers of letters of his Greek name are 888. In the language of symbolism, six is the figure for pettiness. The beast is 'almost nothing to the cube'. As for 777, it represents the superlative of human holiness, 888 the superlative of divine holiness on earth.

Well, in the Bible everything is calculation. Christ calculated his final victory and reunion with the Father in glory in a state without any crucifixions or other sorrows.

The Zohar asserts, 'No blessing from above can rest on anything that is counted. . . . Blessing does not rest on what is numbered.' The intention of the writer is good. He wants to teach that with God quality counts, not quantity. But God's world is permeated with mathematical concepts. Among other things, God commanded Moses to number the Jewish people (Ex 30:11).

Everything is counted, including the troubles through which we have to pass, but these transitory troubles should not disturb us.

The Hebrew word for 'parable'—*mashal*—has two other meanings: to reign, and song of mockery. In all Jesus' parables, good triumphs in the end. The prodigal son returns and the lost sheep is found. The fruitful seed brings forth so much that it makes up for what is lost. Jesus will also triumph in the end, and evil will be mocked.

Faith looks beyond the painful present to his last triumph and is patient. But none of us is all faith. We are humans with faith, which means we are often impatient. Not knowing his calculations, we long to accomplish things now.

In my letters to Jesus, I made the mistake of overstating my intentions. I now feel that we should rather do concrete things; we should be pragmatic, down to earth, realistic.

When I write to you, I do not have the same feelings I had when I wrote to him. Then I felt terrible pain sharing the sufferings he must endure while being crucified again and again.

Now I am having second thoughts. During his earthly life, he had reduced himself to our level and must have felt the sting of the whip and the crunch of the nails just as we would under such circumstances. But there exist among humans those who exercise mental pain control.

Yogis have this ability; there are rare persons who practise a sort of religious anaesthesia. I have known badly tortured prisoners who really experienced the concept that the rest of us hold only intellectually. 'They are not beating my back or my soles. They beat a back. This back belongs to a body. I happen to inhabit it for a time, but I have left it many times in the rapture of love, in the ecstasy of prayer, in identifying with the beauties of nature, in dreams. Therefore I can leave it again.'

Such individuals endured torture of their own bodies as if they were spectators in a theatre observing a performance

of *King Lear*, in which characters had their eyes gouged out.

Under scientific control yogis have been known to spend many hours in boxes with so little oxygen that anyone else would be asphyxiated. I have seen 150 prisoners stacked in one cell, in wretched heat, with neither windows nor ventilation but only the stench from barrels of human excrement. Specialists say this ability to survive depends upon the brain's capacity to produce the alpha waves that accompany full relaxation and inner quiet. We are forced to acknowledge that there are things that defy human logic.

What some human beings are able to endure, Jesus can surely surpass. What if these crucifixions in heaven about which St Paul speaks are not painful at all?

Divine feelings are so different from ours. It is written that the heavenly Father found pleasure in bruising his Son (Is 53:10). What breaks our hearts with grief has an entirely different effect upon him. Perhaps this is also true of crucifixions. Perhaps Jesus re-enacts them painlessly, bloodlessly, as is done in every Communion service, just for the instruction of the saints.

If this is so, then instead of decrucifying him and others, I would have to take myself down from the cross of ignorance, which measures heavenly events with a human rod. We could abandon the tremendous assignment to decrucify the Son of God and concentrate instead on producing changes in ourselves.

We possess amazing letters from Christians in Communist prisons, suggesting that some of them have transcended the threshold of sorrow and grief and feel positive joy in enduring tribulation. Their suffering is something like the re-enacting of Jesus' passion in Oberammergau.

Let us too become more and more Godlike, fulfilling Jesus's words, 'You are gods' (Jn 10:34). Does the possibility of becoming one exist? Then I will have no 'He' about whom to care, no 'He' with whom to share.

Eckhardt teaches that the real believer does not even have a God to worship because he is one with God.

Can there be unity with God? We are so different. He likes angelic music and wisdom. We prefer jazz and fun. He is serene and earnest. We enjoy laughter. He feels at ease sitting on a throne age after age. We have never enough of jogging and sports. He is 'the entirely other'.

But God is not limited to the role a Calvinist theologian assigns him. Who invented music and sex? Who gave us the organs with which to laugh? Sometimes he himself laughs (Ps 2:4). And it is not true that he spends endless ages sitting on a throne. Sometimes he takes a ride, at other times he flies. He flew long before men, though on cherubim, not in a jet (Ps 18:10).

We can be united with God, with Jesus. Then he will be no problem to us any more, unless he is a problem to himself, a matter for later discussion.

The Bhagavad-Gita contains the prayer: 'You alone know what you are by the light of your innermost nature. Therefore teach me now and hold back no word in the telling.'

We have sought for less than unity with him because we were not mature. It became a habit to indulge our petty preoccupations. Habit is like a cable of which we weave a thread each day. But if it is possible to fall into habitual neglect, becoming alienated from God or worshipping him from afar, it is also possible to reverse the process and make it a habit of spending time with him and becoming one with him in thought and feeling.

Then his crucifixion in heaven, if it is real, will be my crucifixion. And since the crucified cannot decrucify himself, there will be no one to decrucify him. We will have to live with this. And the worst pain will have passed, because it is surely much more difficult to see one's beloved suffering than to suffer oneself.

Can this be the solution to what torments me? We will have to speak about this again.

My Second Letter to Christians

Dear brethren and sisters,

Jesus' contemporaries were concerned that he might be a suicidal type. They once asked, 'Will he kill himself?' (Jn 8:22). We also know that, though he was only thirty, he must have looked almost fifty (Jn 8:57).

These are the only physiognomic clues about Jesus that we find in the Gospels. We can infer from them that on Jesus' face one could read tragedy when he thought and spoke about men dying in sin and missing the mark of becoming one with God. A mother does not joke when speaking about a child who is deathly ill.

(A face gives many clues to character. Those who encountered St Catherine began to weep, as they sensed the nearness of God in a holy person. The same observation was made about Charles Finney, last century's renowned American evangelist.)

We have to become one with him. The divine Bridegroom has but one consuming passion, the desire to become one with his bride, the church, of which we are members.

This passion for oneness is also the supreme desire of the bride. (And in this context the converted male is also a bride, not a bridegroom, and partakes of female characteristics. In Hebrew the word for 'you' addressed

to males is *atah*, to females *at*. In the Hebrew of Deuteronomy 5:27, Moses, with the soul of a bride, is addressed with the feminine *at*.)

In no domain is change possible without differentiation. Inequality is the motive force of the universe. Energy manifests itself only where there is a difference of level, otherwise the universe would be static. The difference between God and us may necessarily exist, but through his gracious condescension it can be bridged as his energy flows to us with transforming power.

A religion of 'I and thou' creates by its very nature a relationship of master to servant. The Christian religion unites the 'I' with the 'thou'. There is no more difference of level.

Already during Old Testament times, the Jews had the feeling that as long as God remained a 'he', we would always have to forsake him, in order to fulfil the needs of the 'I'. Therefore, God had to become an 'I' within the believer.

This is the mystery contained in the Hebrew expression *Ani-Hu*, which we find in Isaiah 48:12: '*Ani—hu ani arishon, afani aharon.*' The literal translation is, 'A me—he is the first and an only me is the last.'

Even now, at the Feast of the Tabernacles, there is a procession every day in the synagogues, during which these words are sung: '*Ani ve-Hu hoshana*'—'I and you save me.' *Ani-Hu* is the ineffable name of God which Jesus made known to his disciples (Jn 17:21–23).

The resurrected Lord appears to the persecutor Saul of Tarsus and asks him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' (Acts 9:4). Now, the truth is that Saul had never touched Jesus with so much as a finger. He had fought against his disciples. But Jesus—even though he might be omniscient—does not know that there is a difference, a distance between himself and his disciples. When he talks about them, he says, 'Me'.

God does not create apart from himself. All his works

become by the fact of creation a part of his being. We form God's inner world. God chooses to be one with his creatures.

The Hebrew name 'Jehovah Sabaoth' cannot be translated simply as 'Lord of Hosts'. In many parts of the Bible 'Sabaoth' is not a genitive but an appositive to Jehovah. 'Sabaoth' (Hosts) is an independent name of God. The literal translation would be 'Jehovah-Hosts'. God has the name 'Hosts'.

We have only a pallid image of what this means. Curiously, when Jesus asked a fallen angel what his name was, he replied, 'My name is legion' (Lk 8:30), indicating that some angels apparently have no consciousness of their individuality. They have a feeling of unity that we lack and do not regard themselves as isolated individuals, separate from their comrades.

God has a sense of unity to the superlative. He sees himself as being all the hosts, all the antithetical forces that collide in the world he created and rules. Therefore his name is 'Hosts'. He perceives himself as the only reality.

The believer also comprehends him in terms of this unity, while acknowledging that he speaks to us as to separate individuals. But do we not often talk to ourselves internally as to another person?

'I live, yet not I, but he lives in me,' says St Paul. He is me.

Let us not allow ourselves to be turned away from this. A thief was once arrested and badly beaten by the police. When he was thrown into my cell, his first words were: 'It is useless for them to beat me. I love stealing. As soon as I'm released, I'll try again.'

I love and desire nothing more than this unity with God. I have not attained it, but I will continue to strive for it. I want to become oblivious of the outside world, which is an inside world ignorant about its true nature.

When bereaved of very dear ones, I could remain quiet

and serene. I am not sure if it was callousness on my part, but I felt that my beloved ones were in Godhead. They continue to be there, though in another dimension. Death is not final. The Dakes and the Irish used to dance at funerals.

I realise my letter becomes incoherent. I speak about the infinite, and the written word cannot contain it. In order to see a tuberculosis microbe, one must destroy, stain, and bombard it with photons, which makes it impossible to see the organism as it is *in vivo*.

A God bombarded by our meditations, contemplations, and speculations becomes very interesting but ceases to be the 'I am what I am'. Perhaps, independently of my thoughts, everything that torments me about him and the whole plan of decrucifixion might be senseless.

This business of setting down everything in words is not good. Even God does not like to put in words all that he has to reveal to us. It is true he gave us the Bible. But why? When asked about one of the Old Testament commands, Jesus said it was given because of our hardness of heart. Those with upright hearts need no commands. Ultimately they need no words either.

The real language of God finds expression in holy men. God provided first an Enoch, then a Noah, an Abraham, Isaac, Rachel, Moses and others like them. When it became difficult to find men of this calibre, he gave many words.

We must transcend the sphere of words. Then we will realise that realities are frightening only when they are put in words, when they are labelled. Otherwise they just are. Even to say 'they are' is too much said. We say too much even if we say only that God is, because he exists in a special sense like no other, which means that the word 'is' is a misnomer when applied to him. He is the force beyond all force.

Hegel wrote, 'God is, in the highest and most unique sense of the word, force, ie, the primal force of all forces, the soul of all souls.'

We perceive him as a 'he'. He perceives man as an 'I'. Therefore he can love us without measure. If we would consider him also an 'I', the I and he would both burn with fire and yet remain unconsumed, just like the bush Moses saw in the desert.

The 'I' is a part of my psyche, but my lungs pump air, the vocal cords modulate themselves, and the tongue and the lips articulate the sound. All these which are not the 'I' work together to pronounce the word. They usurp the name 'I' which does not really belong to them. But my whole being robs the 'I', which is the name only of God. There is only one 'I' and no one besides him to trouble the waters, either to crucify or to decrucify him.

He is me, and I am he. When I understood this, every deed that served and kept my own life became hallowed, since it served the well-being of the Divine. Our deeds are sanctified by the real doer.

Rabbi Baruch of Medzebosh said, 'To attain truth, man must pass forty-nine gates, each opening onto a new question, only to arrive finally before the last gate, beyond which he could not live without faith.'

The unbeliever is all questions; the believer needs no answers. When the veil before the Most Holy Place in the temple was rent at Jesus' death, it was seen to be empty. It had been completely empty since the ark of the covenant disappeared in the Babylonian captivity. In Mithraism, after long exercises, the initiate is brought before the most holy place. When the veil is drawn aside, it is seen to contain nothing.

There is no reply because the questioner, the questioned and the question are one.

Apart from unity with God, all religion, even beautiful plans for decrucifying Jesus, is just imagination and fantasy.

What are we worried about? The soul is a slave if it smiles only when bathed in light; it must continue to smile when it passes through darkness as well.

In Cambodia, the Communists brought a group of

men before the statue of Buddha with his ineffable smile and said, 'Pray that he will save you.' Buddha remained silent and smiled. They were all slaughtered. The smile on his lips never ceased. Did the victims understand that one can smile even under such circumstances?

A free soul sings also when his material body is destroyed. The Creator, the Preserver, and the Destroyer are the same Deity.

It is wrong to weep about not having achieved unity with God. Jesus, reduced to human nature, felt our sinfulness so much that he looked like one who could commit suicide. In his glory God remains serene even if we sin.

The Lamaist *Book of Golden Teachings* says, 'If your blossoming soul bows its ear to the noise of the world, if it finds pleasure in the fun of the great deceit; if, frightened of seeing the burning tears of pain and deafened by cries, it hides itself fearfully in the shell of consciousness of the I, know, O disciple, that your soul is unworthy of the silent God.'

I started the letters to Jesus and to you as a sick soul. I was not living in unity with him.

Now I realise that the great importance of Jesus consists in the fact that he had the highest comprehension of the absolute unity of human and divine existence. It is rather the metaphysical, than the historical, in Jesus which saves.

In the metaphysical, it was not wicked men who slew Jesus. He was slain before the foundation of the world, when there were no unjust judges, greedy kings, Judases, or raging mobs. Who slew him then? What does the slaughtering of a lamb mean there?

Abel slaughtered a lamb as a sacrifice to God. Would not God have preferred to see this lamb playing in a meadow?

Only if I understand these things will I be able to think fruitfully about decrucifying him.

I will have to consider all these things again.

My Third Letter to Christians

Dear brethren and sisters,

I wish to free Jesus and those who bear his name, but only a free man can free others.

If I want to help sick men, I cannot start by doctoring them; I have to study for a few years and become a physician first.

The story is told that an English king gave an architect a great deal of money to build St Paul's cathedral. Years passed while the architect did nothing. When the king asked why, he replied, 'I have to work on myself first to eliminate from my heart all greed for money.' After a few more years, he excused himself again: 'I had to fight against the desire for fame.' Only after cleansing himself did he do the work.

He who wants to decrucify Jesus should not attempt the task till he has learned in depth what is required. Or rather, he should start by unlearning the many wrong things taught for centuries in the churches.

If one approaches the task of unlearning first, learning will be easier. It is obviously easier to recognise error, which is on the surface, than to reach truth, which is in the depths beneath.

When we unlearn the things we have known before learning the new, when we have swept away all the

fancies that populate the mind and that have been accepted on the basis of hearsay, we realise that we all are what John the Baptist was said to be: a voice. We are the voices of other superior beings.

Demons have spoken through men. Satan used even the voice of an apostle to suggest to Jesus a false thought.

But Deity also speaks through us. On one occasion Peter expressed what he thought was his opinion about Jesus. The Saviour told him his observation was inspired by God, not his own mind.

No doubt many of the biblical authors did not know that God was speaking through them. Was the author of the Book of Esther aware of it? He never even mentions the name of God in his book. But notwithstanding he was a voice for God.

Let us empty ourselves of human thoughts and seek an awareness of God's presence such as Jesus possessed. Then we will be able to say, 'It is not I that speak, but the Father.' No physical laboratory has ever possessed a more exact physical apparatus for conveying another's voice than a man controlled by Jesus.

We must become pure like Jesus to decrucify him. But if we become like him, will we not be crucified ourselves? So many saints have ended like this. The saints are crucified together with Jesus, yes, buried with him (Rom 6:4). Where do they get these foolish ideas about decrucifixions and great liberations? Do they think in their graves? Do the dead think, if they died with Jesus?

It is as if I were going mad, as if this were my swan song before I lost my mind.

I am surrounded by so many mysteries.

Jacob had thirteen children that we know about: twelve sons and Dinah. We are told the story of twelve tribes. Where are Dinah's descendants? Why are we not told their fate?

When Jesus died, many saints arose from the dead and entered Jerusalem on resurrection day (Mt 27:52; cf Is

26:19). Their appearance must have produced quite a stir. What did they have to say? What happened to them afterward? Did they die again? Did they ascend with Jesus?

Why do all these questions come into my mind?

If we do not decrucify Jesus and his followers, soon nothing will be left of this old world but rubble and corpses. It is urgent that we ensure the triumph of good.

Instead of doing so, I have to start the long process of accomplishing what I had neglected all my life: becoming like Jesus. I am not even sure I will help him by doing so or will just become one more crucified victim. True, with the prospect of a glorious resurrection, but where? In heaven where there are still more crucifixions?

Meanwhile, mankind runs to its doom, and I cannot help.

I look up for succour. I find only the sweet smile of Jesus, who assures me of his perfect unity with the Father. The Bible speaks of this unity in many places.

In Revelation 6:17 we read about the day of *his* wrath, though in the preceding verse two beings are the subject: the one who sits on the throne and the Lamb. The two beings are one. Revelation 11:15 says the same thing: 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ'—two persons. 'And he [not they] shall reign for ever and ever.'

God and Jesus do not form a plural, even from a grammatical viewpoint. Neither do God and I.

My consciousness of my 'I', though it is only a little part of my being, extends itself to the whole person and considers everything as 'I'. Even more does God consider everything as his 'I'. The godlier we become, the more we will think like him.

I was convinced I could do something to end Jesus' pain. His one great pain—what hurts him again and again like a crucifixion—is that the world is alienated from the Father.

I will do away with this alienation. But the world is too

enormous a task for me, and even for the church universal. The church is out of contact with at least one half of mankind. Well, I could start with the country in which I live. But the United States of America is too big for me. My city, Los Angeles, is also inhabited by millions who speak a multitude of languages, English, Spanish, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, Samoan, Romanian and so on. Even my street is too big.

So I have to start with myself. I will be one with God as a house with its foundation, as a branch with the vine, as a bride with the bridegroom, as an arm to the body.

The limbs without the body are just pieces of meat. The body without the limbs is just a stump. The Kabbalah says, 'God with Israel is God; God without Israel is not God.'

But wait! The hand never thinks about what to do for the head, not even how to serve it. It was wrong for wicked men to crucify him. My endeavours to decrucify him are wrong too. Jesus said, 'I will come in such an hour as ye think not' (Mt 24:44). Thinking is his exclusive prerogative. It is a sign of sickness if the foot contracts without the head's will, or when the hand cannot carry out the orders of the head.

It is not for me to do even nice things like decrucifying him without his first ordering me to do so. My brain, too, is only a member of his and should think only his thoughts. Jesus rebuked Peter for a thought which did not savour as being of God, though it was a loving thought (Mt 16:23).

Once when Jesus gave sight to someone born blind, the Pharisees, instead of admiring this great work of God, were offended at a trifle: that the miracle had been performed on the Sabbath day. Please, do not do the same thing. Do not find fault with some vagary in my writing.

I believe I am close to an important truth that I can share with you. Consider the time when Jesus, wanting to give sight to a blind man, first made clay and anointed

the man's eyes with it (Jn 9:5), making him even more blind. When Saul of Tarsus the persecutor, blinded by hate, first met Jesus, he also became physically blind. This also happened to Milton when he started to write *Paradise Lost*.

I had an encounter in depth with Jesus and became blind. 'Who is blind but my servant?' (Is 42:18), the prophet asks. Jesus caused me to abandon a multitude of notions I had had before. I am open now to new ones. Only when I have received them in clarity, will I be able to wash myself in the pool of Siloam. I am now at the important stage of unlearning what I knew before.

I have to unlearn to 'think Jewish', feeling obliged to do so because I happened to be born into this nation; but I must be careful at the same time to continue to love my nation. If Jesus had a preferential love for his nation, who am I to strip myself of nationalism? I must keep it, without allowing my mind to be biased by it.

I have to unlearn to be Protestant because this happened to be the first form in which I knew Christianity.

I will have to unlearn to be anti-Communist, for the fact that the Communists made me suffer is not sufficient reason to be their foe.

I will have to be a member at Jesus' disposal, without any intention of my own, not even to decrucify him. Let him decide. He might decide that I should pass through agonising sufferings, too.

We are stones in a building of which he is the foundation—an image of rest. We are branches where he is the vine—an image of life. We are united to him as spouse to husband—an image of love. But there are still two lives.

I love most the metaphor about the body and its members. It is the clearest, bespeaking only one life. A husband can travel far away from his wife, but the members are inseparable from the body. A man whose head is at a distance of even an inch from his body is dead. Neither we, nor our head, can live even one second without being one. Christ and we are both in danger of

death if we separate from each other for even one moment. He cannot rejoice in glory without us. Perhaps this is what is meant by his crucifixions in heaven.

John the Baptist's head was on a charger while his body lay in a prison cell. Jesus must not pass through such a tragedy. This is what decrucifying him would mean. Nothing less than our perfect union with God can help.

Luther says in his *Commentary on Galatians*: 'The Christian is Christ.'

This is his position. It must become a fact of experience.

Leslie B. Flynn, in *Dare to Care Like Jesus*, wrote: 'A Christian baroness, living in the highlands of Nairobi, Kenya, told of a young national who was employed as her houseboy. After three months he asked the baroness to give him a letter of reference to a friendly sheik some miles away. The baroness, not wishing the houseboy to leave just when he had learned the routine of the household, offered to increase his pay. The lad replied that he was not leaving for higher pay. Rather, he had decided he would become either a Christian or a Mohammedan. This was why he had come to work for the baroness for three months. He had wished to see how Christians acted. Now he wanted to work for three months for the sheik to observe the ways of the Mohammedans. Then he would decide which way of life he would follow. The baroness was stunned as she recalled her many blemishes in her dealings with the houseboy. She could only exclaim, 'Why didn't you tell me at the beginning!'

Well, the young Kenyan did not warn her, but the best Christian teachers had said that she is Christ and has to behave accordingly.

Let us stop here for a time.

My Fourth Letter to Christians

Dear brethren and sisters,

I imagine many Christians will say my thoughts are not in Scripture. But what does the conductor of an orchestra do? Does he not extract from the score what is not written?

When the renowned Toscanini was conducting a piece by Verdi, he inserted his own *rallentando* in the score. Later he asked Verdi if he liked his execution and approved the fact that he had added the *rallentando*. Verdi thought a moment, certain that he had indicated the rubric. Toscanini had read into the music the composer's intention.

The Talmud relates that Rabbi Akiba, while teaching, once remarked, 'This is what Moses intended when he said these words.' Moses, standing near God, protested: 'Shut his mouth! Those were not my thoughts.' God replied, 'Keep quiet! He knows better than you the meaning of your words.'

Every orchestra conductor must be allowed to add something to the music, just as every executive must allow his secretaries and typists, and every author his translators, to give rein to their own ideas and emendations.

A preacher and a Christian writer also have the right to let the thoughts come. I had no outline in mind for this

book, nor any prefatory notes, when I sat down to write. I had not the slightest idea of what would follow after writing the first page. Thoughts came, and I allowed them to flow.

Once while walking on a street in Bucharest I felt a strong impulse to stop. Leaning near a shop window, I wrote down almost as if under dictation the main contents of a book. It has been considered one of my best. I have also dreamt whole articles and sermons, which were much appreciated.

Spurgeon's wife says he once arose from bed in sleep, went to his desk, wrote out a sermon, then went back to sleep. Next morning he knew nothing about what had happened.

There must be some purpose in this book of mine. As yet I know not what.

A false teacher or a false messiah uses extraordinary caution in the way he acts, speaks, and writes. The true Messiah, on the other hand, did not behave as the Jews expected of a messiah. He permitted himself words and attitudes that offended and, being genuine, did not need to act his role.

The man who cries after knowledge, who seeks her as silver and searches for her as for hidden treasure (Prov 2:3,4), may use an unorthodox manner of speech. But whatever leads to truth is truth.

This should be enough by way of introduction.

I must arrive at such a unity with God as to be able to have the assurance that God is where I am. If you had asked Jesus for his address, he could have given you the street and number where the Virgin Mary lived or the street and number of the house in Bethany.

If my desires are fulfilled, I will be united with Christ in my future destiny as well. How could I die if he is alive? A man whose head is above water does not drown. This is true of us, however deep we might have fallen into misery and sin, since Jesus, the head, is always above

the water. If a prisoner who tries to escape can squeeze his head through the bars, he will be able to get his whole body through also. How could Christ remain only as an isolated head in heaven without taking with him the body as well?

In the ancient Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, long ago this was written: 'As truly as Osiris lives, this man will live. As truly as Osiris did not die, it is true neither will he die. As truly as Osiris did not perish, neither will he perish.'

The sign that one has achieved this unity is that he no longer has doubts about being with him in heaven. A son whose father promises him something does not say, 'I hope you will keep your word,' because this would be an insult.

If salvation is by faith, perishing is by doubt.

Thus far I am clear. But is it a beautiful perspective to be with him in heaven when he is crucified there again and again?

This must be settled too. Paul was very lax in his manner of writing. He described believers in whose houses he stayed as being crucified, dead, and buried with Christ, and at the same time they were joyous Christians. He included himself among those crucified and yet could say to Christians, 'Always rejoice.'

So the phrase about Jesus being crucified in heaven afresh is also a metaphor and has an entirely different meaning. When I meet Paul in heaven, I will chide him about the many hours of sadness he has produced in me. I could have been spared if he had been more explicit.

I can well imagine how he will reply. He might use a parable of Spurgeon, whom he must have befriended:

A man cultivated in his orchard world-renowned apples of exquisite flavour. Once he invited his friend to visit him, saying, 'You will eat apples such as you have never eaten before.' The friend excused himself. After the second and third time, the man wondered and asked him why. The friend confessed, 'I had heard about your apples. Once when

passing by your orchard, I picked up some apples that had fallen on the ground. Never had I bitten into such a sour one. I made sad reflections about the difference between advertising and reality.'

The man laughed: 'My apples are so good I had to protect them from naughty children and thieves. Therefore, I planted around the fence two rows of bad apples. My guests enter through the gate. The good apples are for them alone.'

God has prepared a paradise of beauties and joys such as the human mind cannot even imagine. Perhaps he had to shield it from unworthy intruders and therefore enjoined Paul to use language that would frighten them away. Heaven is all glory.

A stone was taken from my heart when I understood this. Perhaps this is the whole answer to my quest about decrucifixion. Heaven surely shares with concern and love our sorrows and above all our falling short of unity with God. But this does not dim its happiness.

Well, it seems that I do not have to decrucify Jesus—but what about his disciples who suffer and die on crosses in many parts of the world? Do we not have to decrucify them?

We strive for unity with God. How does he feel about the pain of his children? He is so unlike those who have not become one with him.

When Lazarus died, his sisters suffered and wept. Jesus said, 'I am glad for your sake, that you may believe' (Jn 11:15). Faith, which ultimately leads to union with God, is so valuable that transitory sorrows, which serve to increase faith, are not worthy even to be mentioned. What does the weariness of a journey matter when it leads to a wedding with the much Beloved?

A Christian who was told that his son had died in a Communist jail broke the news to his wife in this way: 'I have heard news about our child. He sings and praises the Lord.'

After eight years of prison, during which time I had no

knowledge about my wife, I met a believer recently imprisoned whom I had known in liberty. I asked him about her. He said, 'I have been in your home. She smiles and sings as usual.'

Death, even death on a cross in unspeakable torture, does not destroy life but only sins and the dangers to which they expose us.

Let us not confound death with non-existence and life with existence. There are men who exist without being alive. Some have only a name that they live and are dead (Rev 3:1).

Prolonged life in jail is good preparation for the state after death. There the hours are not counted. Life is not measured in days and years; one loses the notion of time in prison. Death means to be freed from shadows; it means entrance into the kingdom of truth. Henceforth the soul is out of peril. A believer becomes irrevocably an heir of the kingdom.

I myself have suffered much. I possess 350 poems that I composed in jail. They are not of artistic value, but as I re-read them I wonder about the deep quiet, serenity, and joy that is in most of them. They could as well have been composed in moments of delight amid the beauties of nature. When I conceived them, I was thirty feet under the earth, hungry, in chains, with never a view of sun, moon, stars, rain or snow.

It seems that for a time I had forgotten my deprivation, and I suffered about the sufferings of others as I had not suffered about my own.

The Soviet Christian Jakob Loewen wrote, when freed from jail, 'I must confess I never dared to pray for being freed from prison. God led me to be there. I considered my state as being willed by him. We desire to be his witnesses everywhere through word and attitudes. In prison we are, by our simple presence there, a call toward the living God. God knows how long I must serve him in this capacity. Therefore I asked of him only to be kept in the faith.'

In my plans for decrucifying Jesus and his church, I have gone too far. This is dangerous.

The Talmud says four men forced an entrance into the highest heaven. One died, one went mad, one became an apostate; only one was illuminated.

Rabbi Yaakov-Yitzchak of Lublin and his two friends Mendl of Riminov and the Maggid of Kozhenitz devised a strategy to constrain the Messiah to come and put an end to exile. They all died in the same year under mysterious circumstances.

We are small; let us not adventure too far.

I finish this letter with high aims. When I write again it will be about more immediate things.

My Fifth Letter to Christians

Dear brethren and sisters,

Does the end justify the means? Well, if not the end, what else could justify means?

When the Jewish high priest said, 'It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people,' he did not speak of himself, but prophesied (Jn 11:50,51).

It is not respectable to find pleasure in the violent death of your own son, but if this serves the salvation of mankind, the feeling is justified (Is 53:10). God was pleased but only because he saw what lay beyond.

The end of becoming one with God has as its means the imposing of great hardship upon family and loved ones.

How did poor Zebedee feel when his sons James and John, his hope for old age, left him in a ship with his hired servants? (Mk 1:19,20). They went because a stranger had called them.

Spurgeon's last sermon before his death was about unity with God. He finished it with the words, 'This evening I spoke to you in some kind of Dutch, and you did not understand me at all.' During the last period of his life, he spoke repeatedly from Ephesians 5:30, where it is said that 'we are bone of his bones'.

This teaching about unity with God is very little

known in Christianity, though the New Testament often alludes to it. Jesus says, 'In that day you shall ask me nothing' (Jn 16:23). We will ask him nothing because he will not be someone apart from us. 'He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit' (1 Cor 6:17).

I myself have known these verses for almost half a century. Notwithstanding I started this book with many futile questions. Who addressed them, and to whom? The questioner, the questioned and the question are one.

When I left prison, someone said, 'Wurmbrand does not look to God any more.' I wish it had been true then. To a believer this is a compliment. How could someone look to a Being with whom he has become one? What can one ask him? He has become identified with the believer. 'Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?' (Is 42:19).

Meister Eckhardt, the renowned German medieval mystic, insists repeatedly on the teaching that God's intention is for men to lose their God, because as long as one has a God, knows him and speaks with him, he is separated from him. The purpose of God is to abolish himself in the soul. The name of God is not fit for him. He received it from creatures. His preferred name is 'I'. This is the name that Jesus manifested to the men whom the Father gave him out of the world (Jn 17:6).

The idea of the unity between the believer and God is an essential part of Christian thought.

The apocryphal Gospel of Eve says, 'I stood on a high mountain, and I saw a tall man and another who was short. I heard something like a thunder, and I approached to hear. Then he spoke to me and said, "I am you and you are I, and wherever you are, I am too, and I am alike in all things. You can pluck me from wherever you wish. And if you pluck me, you pluck yourself."'

Augustine had some hesitations, but he too wrote,

'How should I call you, seeing I am in you? From where could you come to me?'

John Chrysostom wrote, 'This is true love, not to see in the lover and the beloved two separate beings, but only one.'

Therese of Avila writes in *The Inner Castle*: 'Unity with God is like water which when it falls from the sky into a river or fountain confounds itself so much with it that they cannot be separated any more. Neither could one distinguish which is the water from the river and which from the sky. For it is like a river entering the sea, which cannot be separated any more.'

If you choose to walk this way of oneness with God, men will blow trumpets at your every misstep. Do not wonder! In this world, the wind is always in Christ's face. The world agrees with true religion only in the measure to which God agrees with the devil. You will have to suffer.

John Bunyan, who advanced with great steps toward the heavenly city where the wedding between Christ and his church is celebrated, sat in jail for over twelve years, knowing that his four children, one of whom was blind, were starving. Since then thousands have had to suffer and still do.

This is what prompted me to be so preoccupied with decrucifying them. Somehow the sufferers themselves do not think about this. I also did not worry about such things while I was in prison. I don't know why I am so tormented now.

Bunyan passed his time in prison not thinking about how to escape and make others escape, but writing books, some nine in all. Among them was the classic that has been a spiritual guide to millions, *Pilgrim's Progress*.

While non-conformists were driven from home, ruined by fines, and locked up, he wrote, 'Persecution of the godly was of God never intended for their destruction, but for their glory, and to make them shine the

more when they are beyond the valley of the shadow of death.' And again: 'I have often thought that the best Christians are found in the worst of times; and I have thought again that one reason why we are no better is because God purges us no more. I know these things are against the grain of the flesh, but they are not against the graces of the spirit.'

Pilgrim's Progress was not a book that Bunyan had premeditated. It was begun as a kind of relaxation. Neither did I plan the present letters. At a certain point my mind collided with his. I wanted to decrucify him. He does not wish to be decrucified.

Bunyan had to suffer not only from the king and bishops. Baptists denounced him as a devil. They heaped upon him scurrilous abuse and ridicule. In addition to writing books, he also made hundreds of long lace tags, which were sold to provide for the bare necessities of his home and himself.

When he had to decide whether to submit to the authorities or go to jail, he said, 'I was as a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children, yet, thought I, I must do it, I must do it. . . . I have determined, the Almighty God being my help and my shield, yet to suffer, if frail life might continue so long, even till the moss shall grow on my eyebrows, rather than to violate my faith and principles.'

What is behind this willingness to suffer, even this joy in tribulations?

Human language is poor and cannot make the right distinctions. On the one hand there are the facts: to be tortured, jailed, deprived, crucified. On the other hand is one's personal perception of these states. The objective situation in which a man finds himself, and the feelings or thoughts of a man about his situation are not always the same.

A man might not feel bad while suffering from a deadly disease such as leukemia. Mind has some sway

over matter. I know of a man in my own experience who overcame a fatal illness in prison, though all physicians had said that he must die. Men with certain religious beliefs also walk on fire without experiencing pain. Those who have faith and confidence that God is a very present help, who see some sense in bearing heavy crosses, who do not yield to anxiety and depression, overcome great physical suffering.

One who has a deep desire to enjoy his life with God can enjoy it under the most adverse circumstances. He needs no decrucifying.

He is happy because he is one with God, as Angelus Silesius says: 'I am not I, neither you you. You are the I in me. . . . He who wishes to be like God must become unlike all things else.' Thus it is possible to fulfil 1 John 2:6: 'He that says he abides in him, must live as Jesus himself lived.'

The idea of identification with God belongs to the essence of the Christian faith, but not to it alone.

Some primitive peoples identify strongly with their totems. In South America tribesmen claim they are big parrots. Jung reported that they say about parrots: 'Parrots are we; we are parrots, only we have no feathers.' They cannot be convinced to the contrary.

They have a pre-logical mentality. All adherents of a purely materialistic philosophy are on approximately the same level. They identify themselves with their idol: matter.

In Congo Brazzaville, thousands of natives considered themselves leopards, walked on four legs, threw themselves upon men, and tore them apart with artificial nails. They opened the jugular vein, exactly as leopards do. They identified themselves with the bestial within.

We identify ourselves with God. This also is not logical, but beyond logic, super-logical.

God is love. We identify ourselves with love. But love and suffering are the same thing. The value of love is the

price we pay to enjoy it. If we obtain it for less than suffering, we receive a cheap substitute.

If God is love, there must be crucifixions in heaven. The Lamb must be slain from the very beginning. If Christians love, there must be Golgothas even now. To decrucify means to extinguish love.

I have been wrong from the very beginning.

I will have to rethink this whole matter.

My Thirteenth Letter to Jesus

Dear Jesus,

I have left you for a long time without a letter from me. Instead, I wrote to my fellow-Christians. All seemed to go well for a while. In my letters to them, some thoughts were shared, some knots untied.

But now I find myself in a cul-de-sac. My last letter was no longer correspondence, but rather some kind of theological treatise at out the unity of the believer with you.

To many Christians nowadays it sounds like a new teaching. To you it is old. You have with you John of the Cross. Writing about spiritual marriage, he said that it means to be transformed completely in the Most High. Alphonse di Liguori taught likewise.

John of the Cross was a monk. It is true, a monk who suffered terrible abuse from his brethren in the monastery, but still a monk, which means he lived in a place propitious for contemplation and meditation.

I live in the real world. I meet people, read newspapers, watch TV. I have been in Communist prisons, probably the worst place in the world for spiritual life.

I start the day by reading with John of the Cross that the soul becomes, through spiritual marriage, one with God, that it becomes, in a manner of speaking, God

through fellowship. I read that we are God's shadow, that a substantial transformation has taken place.

Protestants are taught to believe that the elements at Communion do not change their substance. They remain bread and wine. But all believers have changed their own substance. They have become one with God. The work of God and that of the soul are one. We give God to God.

After being nourished with such sublime thoughts, I open the newspaper and read:

In an amphitheater in Chicago, where 3,000 attended a rhythm-and-blues concert, twenty men in the audience attacked an eighteen-year-old girl. They stripped her of all her clothing and violated her, in full view of the crowd. She was sodomized and raped, even with a bottle after the whole gang had had her. The injuries were severe enough to require surgery. In all that crowd listening to music, a number certainly witnessed this savagery. No one intervened (*Los Angeles Times*, 7th January 1982).

This is just a little thing compared with what has happened in Romanian Communist prisons for years. And that was a little thing in comparison with the slaughtering of half the population in Cambodia or the holocaust of Jews in Nazi Germany or of the Armenians and Greeks in Turkey.

John of the Cross says that the soul united with God can give God to everyone, as one can share a possession, and that, by doing this, the soul is filled with delight and great joy.

Then why in the world did he not give God to everyone, even to those who mistreated him? Or was there a hindrance? What hindrances can God encounter?

I would like to unite with you but my heart is torn. Uniting with you means entering into serenity. But this girl sodomised by a gang cries, and with her thousands of other innocent victims. And so I feel the pull to unite with her and be on her side, even if in her despair

she rebels against you, as I have seen so many sufferers do.

In the eighteenth century the Jews of Eastern Europe were divided into two big parties: the Hassidim and the Mitnagdim. The former had a religion that was all joy and exultation in the Lord, while the latter strictly obeyed their laws and regulations.

A Mitnagged gave his daughter to a Hassid on condition he break away from this movement and not visit his rabbi any more. The young man consented and kept his word for a while. But then he began to visit his rabbi once more, at first in secret and then in the open, siding with him again.

The outraged father-in-law went to his own rabbi, who consulted what the books say about the breaking of contractual promises, and pronounced the divorce. The young man was driven out of the house and died soon after of a broken heart.

When the Messiah comes—Rabbi Dov Beer of Mezeritsh said—the resurrected young man will complain about his father-in-law. But the latter will be able to prove he was right. He had obeyed his rabbi's decision. The rabbi will claim too that he was right. He stuck to his law.

But the Messiah will say, 'The law was right, and the rabbi and the father-in-law. But what have I to do with what is right? I care about the young Hassid with a broken heart.'

You, God, are right in all you do. And theologians are right in justifying you and providing satisfactory explanations for suffering. The girl might also have been rightly punished for who knows what past sins and for being at such a wicked concert. But I am little interested in who is right. The only thing that concerns me is who suffers.

I have just found out that you do not suffer and that your being crucified even now is just a figure of speech. But that girl suffers, and with her millions of others.

I identify with all the sufferers of the world, even if they are in conflict with you.

Perhaps I am totally wrong again. As death is the name given to a profound sleep by those who do not know how to resurrect, suffering might be the name given to a thrilling experience by those who do not know how to change tears into pearls which comfort and crown the martyrs of life.

In the beginning, you saw all the things you had made—including the possibility of suffering—and behold, all was very good (Gen 1:31). Well, I believe, but please help my unbelief.

I will repeat to you the words you said to the heavenly Father: 'All mine are thine,' all these my torments and tribulations, 'and thine are mine,' all your serenity and glory (Jn 17:10).

I will say with Catherine of Genoa: 'God is my I, and I know no other I than this my God.' Or to come back to Meister Eckhardt: 'The eye of God and my eye are one single eye.' 'The humble has as much power over God as God has over himself.' 'Some simple men imagine that they must see God as if He stood there and I here. It is not so. God and I are one.' 'The fire transforms into fire whatever you put into it. So does God.'

Yes, he says even more: 'I stand in the depth of eternal Divinity; here God does all his works through me and I am all that is to be understood. God made all things through me, while I was in the bottomless depth of God.'

It seems senseless to recite before you words of faith which you yourself must have inspired. These words express the highest level a heart can reach.

Ah, I am torn in two—but wait, I could use Paul's expression: 'I am crucified.' I love you and long for perfect union with you. I love also those who suffer on earth, in hell, and in heaven. I feel their pain as mine. I feel every pain, that of innocents and of their henchmen.

The latter suffer too. A Communist officer was in the

basement of the Secret Police headquarters with a mass of corpses, the men he had just shot. He began to cry aloud, as he went from corpse to corpse: 'Please say something! Move! I did not mean to do you ill. I did not even know you. I shot you, but did not desire that you be so completely dead for ever. Please speak! Please move!' His comrades first put him in an asylum, then, to silence their own conscience, finished him off.

The pain of this criminal is also mine. To be very honest with you, I must say there is in me a voice that says 'I hate God' because of this tragedy. I do not silence the voice, fearing that if it is repressed it will become louder.

I ask you the question you asked your mother: 'What is it between me and you?'

I might tell you what no one before me dared tell, not because they were hypocrites, but because the circumstances of their life did not allow them to probe the depths I reached in years of intense sufferings in a Communist prison cell.

God might answer here and there a prayer. He has done so for me, too. But he never fulfilled the great requests of his church, though endlessly presented to him for thousands of years.

He did not cause his name to be hallowed in all the world, he did not bring his kingdom, he did not see to it that his will was fulfilled.

Millions are without a crust of bread. We have the consciousness of many sins unforgiven (this is why Catholics believe in purgatory). We meet temptations every day, and we are not delivered from evil.

Why? What is wrong? It is hard on me to continue this letter today. Farewell till another time.

My Fourteenth Letter to Jesus

Dear Jesus,

I broke off my last letter on a very sore point.

I had even gone so far as to say, 'I hate God.'

Well, there are no pure metals in the earth. Pure metal is an intellectual concept. Instead, we find iron, gold, silver, etc, always in alloys. Similarly, no one has pure love. It is always mixed with other elements. David, Job and many other saints have chided God with harsh words.

God has chosen as the vehicle of his revelation languages in which words have contradictory meanings. In Hebrew, *Baruch* is used for 'bless' and 'curse'. *Kadosh* means 'holy' and 'sexually perverted'; *kedeshah*, 'saintly woman' and 'prostitute'.

In Greek, *afes* means 'to forgive' and 'to leave'. In the original of the 'Our Father', we pray 'forgive us our sins' and 'leave us our sins.' Who among those who ask forgiveness does not cherish also the desire to keep them? In Greek we express both desires in one word.

The Kabbalah asks, 'How can one love God with all his heart, seeing he has in his heart both good and bad impulses?' It replies, 'Serve God with both.'

The lover of God is also a critic of God. In the Book of Lamentations are reproaches against God of a kind that Communists can use in their atheistic books.

Such criticism is wrong, and we have to say so even if the guilty are biblical authors. Criticism should never place blame, insult, hurt or retaliate. It should be constructive. But even God should at least listen to criticism, even if he does not take it.

We have a good God and a bad world. Loving God without reservation might mean resigning oneself to a bad world, with all the suffering this involves. Siding with the world in its pain brings one into conflict with God, who has predestined all things, including this pain.

We reproach God; he very justifiably reproaches us. What he demands of us also remains unfulfilled.

You are the middleman. A mediator is not partisan. You did your best to make peace between God and us. You tried to tear down the wall of partition between us. And you suffered for it, as it is written, 'Whoso breaks a hedge a serpent shall bite him.' You were crucified by men, and the heavenly Father found pleasure in your being bruised. He was the last to determine your crucifixion.

Now you continue with your work of peace-making, though much of your loving energy has been squandered.

Generally, good teachings are beautiful, but most are wasted. They were wasted on Lucifer and his angels, on the Jews, and now on Christendom.

But you are love, and love continues to strive.

One of your principal objectives is to teach us the value of suffering, knowing that if rebellion against it ceased, the path of our union with God would be cleared.

What would Beethoven have been without his deafness? His sonatas for piano, his late string quartets, and the ninth symphony became possible only because of his deafness. The absolute concentration, this ascending into other worlds, the complaints never heard before, and the song of joy could be expressed only by a deaf composer. Beethoven created many works before being stricken, but he reached the peak of creativity as a deaf man.

You want us to accept suffering—ours, that of our fellowmen, and yours. Then we will be one with God. Who will then complain about his not fulfilling the demands in the 'Our Father'? Who will even say the 'Our Father', and to whom? Who knows what might happen then? We might be united with God even in his finding pleasure in the bruising of his Son.

All problems would disappear.

You must be the One who inspired this deep longing for unity with God even in the pagan religions.

Just as you appropriated the sayings of the Jewish prophets while in Galilee and simply repeated the words of your predecessor John the Baptist, 'Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near,' so you have humbled yourself to repeat the words of the mythical Krishna.

I read with interest in the Hindu *Kurma Purana*: 'Yoga is divided into two parts. One is called *Abhava* [a word akin to the Hebrew *Ahavah*—love], the other *mahayoga*. *Abhava* is the state in which you meditate about your own I as a zero, lacking qualities. *Mahayoga* is the state in which the own I is seen as full of delights, totally righteous and one with God. . . . Other kinds of yoga of which we hear and read are not worthy to be put on the same level with the wonderful *mahayoga*, in which the *yoghin* knows himself and the whole universe as God.'

I know both states, but my trouble is that I am fixed in neither of them.

Mai-Trajana-Brahmana-Upanishad says: 'Water in water, fire in fire, air in air—no one can distinguish them. Likewise, one cannot distinguish from the great I the man who has entered into him. This man has reached liberty.' 'The One who is in fire, and the One who is in the heart, and the One who is in the sun are one and the same. The man who knows it becomes one with the Unique.'

If this unity were a fact of existence for me, I could say like Jesus, 'I am the way.' Paul felt himself to be like this.

A missionary to Africa relates how he followed a black

guide through the jungle during the night and asked again and again, 'Which is the way?' The guide, who did not know Scripture, replied, 'I am the way. You just follow me.'

But I have not become one with you. Water in water may be indistinguishable, but I can be distinguished from God.

I had the privilege of spending years in solitary confinement. I could practise what is called 'the yoga of six kinds', the restraint of respiration, meditation, fixed attention, research, and absorption. It did not achieve for me my aim.

Perhaps now I understand. A legend says that once while walking with Peter you saw a small coin on the road and told him, 'Pick it up.' He replied, 'It's not worth it. What can you buy with such a coin?' So you picked it up yourself. A merchant gave you eighteen cherries for it. While continuing the walk, you dropped one after the other. Peter, thirsty, bowed to pick them up. He bowed eighteen times because he had not bowed once at the right time, at your command.

Men spend decades practising yoga because they have not followed your calling. Neither did I. I did not take the one big step of faith that makes one hated by the world, as you were hated, but that unites a man instantly with God: the erasing of the consciousness of a separate I (except perhaps for conversational purposes). 'I do not live, but you live in me.' I have no other I than you. Then you are I and I am you.

I am reminded of an amusing incident recounted by a Slovak nun. A teacher in primary school, she gave the children candy on St Nicholas' Day. But one child, Stanko, was ill, so she gave another boy, John, a slipper full of candy to take to him.

When Stanko recovered, she asked him if he had enjoyed the present; he said he never received it. She confronted Stanko and John together.

'I gave them to you,' said John, pointing to himself.

'I received nothing,' Stanko protested.

But John repeated, pointing to himself, 'I gave them to you. Don't you call me "you"? Well, I gave them to the one you call "you". I fulfilled my assignment.'

We smile at this little story. But in our relationship this is reality. You always call me 'you'. I have become a child again, as you taught. You did not even tell me to become a good child, but simply a child. I became a naughty child that takes candies belonging to you. You call me you. I am you. And I have the candy. In a relationship with Godhead this is acceptable.

You told us to become like children; you also taught us that we are gods. In the manger, you were a child-god. But a child-god is also God in all his supremeness.

You are the heart of my desires. I do not simply throw away my self. I thrust it like an arrow toward the goal. There goal and arrow become one.

For a while you were one body with the blessed Virgin. She bore within herself the wonderful Friend. You went with her wherever she walked. So you live within every one of us.

How magnified was your mother! You say that whoever will do the will of your Father who is in heaven is your mother (Mt 12:50). So we too are magnified.

Protestants object that Mary is almost deified by Catholics, instead of comprehending that every Christian is deified. The Hebrew biblical *ani-hu* (I am he) shows that the *ani*-I and the *hu*-he have ceased to exist as separate beings.

The two have merged. The new being has no problems, no torments. He is serene, he smiles, he lives above the turmoil of this world.

I understand now. Help me to consummate my chief desire.

My Fifteenth Letter to Jesus

Dear Jesus,

You once wept over Jerusalem in great wracking sobs. At the tomb of Lazarus it was only quiet weeping, or just a welling of tears. I surely would not like to add to your grief.

I also hope that in the end everything will be clear, that saints will not be disappointed. The last words of Moody at death were, 'The earth gets further away. Heaven opens before my eyes. If this is death, it is sweet. God calls me and I have to go. This is my triumph, the day of my coronation.'

He had assured his converts: 'Once you will read in the newspapers that Dwight Moody of East Northfield has died. Don't believe it. Then I will be more alive than now. What is born of the flesh can die, but what is born of the Spirit will live eternally.'

He must have been right. Some organ in his body failed to function well. The whole universe would be unreasonable if a splendid spirit would have to disappear because of some disorder of the flesh.

In music every note is played separately. A melody exists only because we can retain in our consciousness a piece of time. Man is superior to time. We think and we make projects. We are superior to this world. We will survive it.

All this I believe, and I am thankful that you gave us this eternal life through your sacrifice on the cross.

But—if only these hellish *buts* did not plague me. . . . The Jew Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof* said to you, 'God, I did not complain that you gave me five daughters in my poverty. But why did you let my only horse go lame just on Sabbath eve?' I have no reply to this.

When innocent men are taken to prison, parting with their wives and poor children is like pulling the flesh from their bones.

But the miracle happens. There are saints among the innocents. Bunyan told his jailers, 'If I were out of prison today, I would preach the gospel again tomorrow by the help of God'—the almighty God in whose world he spent twelve years in jail for preaching his gospel.

Tevye puts daring questions to God but sticks to the Jewish tradition, even if he knows almost nothing about it.

Men in pain, trying to forget their suffering, invented the old, old story: A young man who loved a girl to madness knocked one night at her door, begging admittance. She asked, 'Who is it?' He said, 'It is I.' She replied, 'I cannot receive you, because my room is small and my bed narrow. Only one person has a place in it.'

Knowing the girl loved him dearly, he could not understand her refusal. For many years he wandered in the world, yearning for the girl. And then the inspiration came.

One night, he knocked at her door again. She asked from within, 'Who is it?' This time he replied, 'It is you.' The door opened immediately, and the beloved embraced him.

In heaven, too, there is place for only one. This I understand. Everyone who comes there as an 'I' will be rejected. The one who asks for entrance at the gates of heaven must be able to say to God, 'I am you.' Then he will be received.

I am you, which means I have to abandon all questions and problems belonging to the 'I'. Does God worry about decrucifying Jesus? If not, why should I?

St Claire, when she lay dying amid great sufferings, was asked how she could bear such pain. She answered joyously, 'Ever since I learned of the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ through his servant Francis of Assisi, no suffering has troubled me, no penance has been hard, no sickness too arduous.'

You ask me what all my letters are about? I suppose they are from the unbelieving part in me. For the other part, it would have been enough to give heed to what I myself preach and to the many illustrations I use in order to renounce everything that troubles me.

Consider one of my favourite parables: A dwarf who was also a hunchback decided to commit suicide. Who could ever love him? He would ascend a mountain and throw himself off a cliff. While climbing he met a girl of exquisite beauty. She had made the same decision because her loved one had opted for a rich bride. They decided to commit suicide together.

Continuing the ascent, they met a police officer who told them he was after a notorious robber and murderer. The king had promised a great reward to whoever caught him, and the police officer was sure he would find him. There was an unmistakable identification: the murderer had six fingers on his right hand.

Near the peak was a monastery whose abbot, though only recently tonsured, had already achieved the fame of a great saint and had brought many to conversion. At the very entrance to the monastery the trio saw the abbot. The girl bowed to kiss the right hand. She observed it had six fingers.

The former murderer was now the renowned saint.

With this, my story ends.

The audiences always objected. 'The story is not

finished yet. What happened to the girl, and the dwarf, and the police officer? Was the abbot apprehended?’

Well, the story was a test. The elect fall in adoration before the One who changes murderers into saints. Beside this miracle everything else pales into insignificance.

I believe this response is the only right attitude. Our minds are too preoccupied with many childish questions.

A children’s class was shown a painting of the Nativity and they were told, ‘The holy family was very poor.’ A child asked, ‘Where did they get the money to pay the photographer?’

Another child who was taught how Adam became a living soul when God breathed his spirit into him sighed, ‘So God is dead.’ He could not be convinced otherwise. ‘Everyone who gives up his spirit is dead.’

We smile about such childish sayings and questions. I suppose you smile about my incoherent thoughts.

I am uncomfortable with attempts to put coherence into our thoughts on religious matters. To what purpose? You see everything. You knew my thoughts in their incoherent state. You know that their being systematised is only superficial or cosmetic. It does not belong to the essence.

But—and I come back to my first thoughts about decrucifying you—is there any sense in these thoughts?

In Mahayana Buddhism, there is a belief in Boddhisatvas, men who have achieved perfection and thus at death can enter into nirvana. But as they look at their fellowmen, who are like victims going to the slaughter, immense compassion grips them and they refuse nirvana until they have brought in all these unfortunate souls.

They take upon themselves the burden of sorrow, the pain of all men living. If they were to renounce suffering, they would defraud the world of the root of good.

Like the writings of the Jewish prophets, these hopes of India were forebodings of your coming—you, the

Messiah of the Jews, whom Indians might yet call the greatest, yes, the unique, Boddhisatva.

Decrucifying a Boddhisatva is like taking away from a surgeon the tools with which he can save lives. When Communists in China chopped off the fingers of pianists, how could they then make music? Suffering is the melody with which Boddhisatvas heal mankind.

Instead of decrucifying them, should we not rather unite with the Boddhisatvas? Don't we all have this priestly calling to bear another's sins and griefs?

Thinking about this role we have to play, John Chrysostom said, 'Speak not of royal purple or diadems, of golden vestments; all these are but shadows more frail than flowers of spring compared with the glories and powers of the priesthood.'

Instead of decrucifying you and others, I should rather hasten to be crucified with you. Then I will be able to write like Paul: 'Those things which you have both learned and received and heard and seen *in me*, do' (Phil 4:9). At first glance, these are the words of an egotist. Paul gives himself as a model of truth and pattern of life. Paul, a former persecutor, a man who confesses even after conversion, 'Nothing good is in me,' and 'I am the chief of sinners.'

It would have seemed natural for him to write, 'Those things which you have learned and seen *in Christ*, do.' But he does not say, 'Follow the example of *Christ*.' His words are, 'Follow *my example*.'

If I were able to ask Paul about this, he would not understand the question. 'To follow Christ' or 'to follow me, Paul'—what is the difference? Do these not express the same thought? What is the difference between himself and Christ for a man who says, 'I do not live any more, but Christ lives in me'?

Working for a very backward tribe, a missionary doctor cared for a sick woman and told her about Christ. She could not understand his words but saw his goodness.

Once she asked, 'Tell me, what is this Christ like about whom you speak?' He, in a moment of supreme spiritual courage, replied, 'He is like me.' Then she said, 'If he is so, I love him and trust in him.'

I resolve, therefore, to become like you, and then I will no longer grieve about your being crucified. Like all the great saints of all the centuries, I will have the desire to be crucified with you. I will find my delight in suffering for others.

My Sixteenth Letter to Jesus

Dear Jesus,

I realise the fallacy of all-or-nothing thinking. In jail I composed a poem that began with the words, 'Give yourself fully to me or leave me completely.' I realise now that my statement was wrong.

Innumerable factors shape the relationship between two beings. There are some things in you that make me love you passionately. About some of your activities I have reservations. If I said otherwise, you would know I am lying. Regarding some matters, I would like you to make a U-turn, to which your reply is, 'You turn.'

But in faith I apply a mental filter. All men have such a filter. If a man received ten nice letters and one bad, he would fret over the bad letter and ignore the rest. I use the filter in the opposite sense. I erase from my mind everything about which we might disagree, or—to put it mildly—which I do not understand, and I keep only the positive.

I bracket some of the thoughts that occur to me. It is probably too early for me to come to a conclusion about your character. We know only an infinitesimal part of it. For love one does not need more.

Romeo and Juliet fell in love after one glance at a masked ball in which they had scarcely seen each other's

face. The next thing they knew was that they belonged to families committed to a blood feud. But the love produced by even such a tenuous knowledge of each other was sufficient to overcome all barriers. It is a love that flouts reason.

The heavenly Bridegroom tells us, 'You have ravished my heart with one single glance of your eyes.' I could say this about you. Many years ago, before I had even read your Gospel or heard a sermon, an inner voice said to me, 'Jesus is a friend. If you would talk over all things with him, you would obtain the peace for which you long.' At that time I had not the slightest idea that you had died for me.

How much did Magdalene know when she kissed your feet and washed them with her tears?

I love you for the little I know of you. Juliet's parents could have brought many telling arguments against an affair with Romeo. And they would have been perfectly right, as the outcome shows. They would have told her that emotional reasoning is not to be trusted, that it is wrong to magnify one pleasant feature in a man, to label someone an ideal lover because he is attractive at first glance. But all such counsel would have been to no avail.

The essence of my life is to praise you. Good men become better when praised; bad men become worse. You cannot become better because the very word 'God' means a being whose better cannot be imagined. I praise you not because of your need, nor because I wish to obtain something from you. I praise you because a voice in me, overcoming all objections, tells me you only are praiseworthy.

I told you the story of the murderer with six fingers on his right hand who had become a saintly abbot. When you were a child, the Virgin Mary told you stories. Why should I not do the same? This story belongs to the Christian tradition, though the Jews have a similar one.

Two impoverished children walked around begging.

A blind man who gave them alms said, 'Become like me.' Then they received something from a deaf man, who repeated the same words. And so it went with a stutterer, a man without legs, and other handicapped individuals.

It took the children many years to understand, but eventually they had an illumination: only the blind see. Men with sight have their attention absorbed by so many things that will prove to be mere will-o'-the-wisps that they are blind to the one reality: you. Only the deaf hear. Those with hearing are distracted by useless noises and things hardly worth hearing. (I know. I was like a deaf man in a jail in which perfect silence reigned. Then I heard your voice and the song of celestial spheres.) Only the stutterer expresses well the contradictory, conflicting, chaotic things he sees and sentiments he experiences. The man who speaks smoothly falsifies incoherent reality in order to be systematic and to speak well.

With this the story ends. What happened further with these children and the men they had met, is no more important. Whoever does not learn from the little that is said will not learn even if he hears the whole story.

At any rate, I do not have to know your whole story. Who could know it?

The Bible says that God created the sun and moon to give light upon the earth. We think of the sun as useful to us, but only a minuscule fraction of its light reaches the earth. It has many more functions.

So we know you as the Saviour of mankind. You are much more than Saviour of one species on what in the universe is only a speck of dust. We know your career only in its relationship to us. Even this we do not know fully, because you continue to live in a glorified human body. Your task is not yet finished.

We even hear about new crucifixions you endure. We do not know their details, nor the resurrections by which they are followed.

To us you are a mystery, but a mystery we love heartily.

It is such a joy to see you. In a certain sense you are unseen, but you are also seen. It is written that the children of Israel at Sinai saw the voice. Blindfolded dolphins find coins thrown into the water. They can even distinguish between different metals, thanks to the echo of the sound produced by their falling into water. The sound becomes a picture in their mind. Bats, too, 'see' with their ears. They can find insects without seeing them with their eyes. They also hear high-pitched sounds that we cannot perceive.

Nowadays we transform soundwaves into images in our clinics through the use of ultrasound technology.

You also speak to us on a pitch that can be caught only by your own sheep. Atheists are right when they say they hear nothing.

Those who guard the borders in Communist countries communicate with their dogs with whistles at a pitch unperceived by human ears. The one who tries to cross the frontier secretly hears nothing.

We have no quarrel with atheists. We understand them. They lack our privilege. They do not hear what we hear. Your words become images within our minds and hearts. We see you; we can always evoke you.

In this sense you are as near to us as you were to the disciples of the first century.

A renowned pastor wrote that at the age of three his grandson wanted to be a monkey, sit on a tree, and eat bananas. By the age of six, he had decided to become an astronaut. So also does mankind change in a few short years.

But you have remained the same. I can evoke you as did John on Patmos.

You are here. All I need is the eye of faith. God gives the milk but not the pail. Faith is a gift of God, but our will also plays a part. I can see you. A power emanates from you toward me, as it did to the woman who had a loss of blood. I can take more power than she did.

Some believers are satisfied to receive from you only enough power to obey the words of God. But I listen to what you have said through the men who wrote the word of God and can go beyond the mere reading. You can make *me* a channel of wisdom and guidance for others.

Furthermore, I can sing an entirely new song. The Talmud says, 'Angels never repeat their litanies.' Even when the angels sing 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Sabaoth,' they do not repeat themselves. In Hebrew the words of the Bible have musical notes. Every 'holy' in this verse is sung on another note. So you wish to have the Song of the Lamb sung on the Wurmbrand notes.

Mozart wrote his compositions almost without corrections. Beethoven wrote and rewrote his, innumerable times. He never ceased changing. My thoughts evolve, too. A while ago there was a deep conflict between us. I had wild plans for decrucifying you, even against your will. Then I had the idea of organising a strike of all crucifiers. Then I began to wonder if you really are still crucified.

Now all these thoughts have disappeared. Only love remains.

It is so easy to love you, because you are very much like us. Karl Barth calls God 'the entirely Other'. So he is. But who is not entirely other? A man once said to Rabbi Yakov-Itzhak of Pshiske, 'I would like to know what the birds are singing.' To which the rabbi replied, 'What you yourself are saying. Do you understand?' I am myself entirely other than what I believe or would like myself to be. By being entirely other, you are like me.

A youth was told, 'Don't watch TV so much. You should read the Bible.'

He asked, 'Why should I not watch TV?'

'Because there is so much sex and violence in it.'

The youth said truthfully, 'There is more sex and violence in the Bible. On TV you cannot see the slaughter

of whole nations, including women and children, and even animals, or sodomy and incest.'

For everything having to do with man, there is a counterpart in heaven. There is a war going on in heaven. Angels had swords before men invented weapons. You wished so much to be like us that you became sin for us, even the most abject sin. No wonder so much in your revelation is like our thoughts and instincts.

In jail, I had a vision of a female angel who had come to lead me to heaven. With surprise, I found myself descending stairs. I was told, 'You thought heaven was above. Well, because many cannot reach the heights, not being able to bear the icy cold of the peaks, heaven has descended below men. No matter how far you descend, heaven is still below you.'

I am in your embrace. All other thoughts have disappeared. Your words have proved true: 'The Son of man will come in an hour when you think not.' We become one.

The Hindus and Sufites, being human, were wrong to say, 'I am he.' I as God would be a godhead to no purpose. But in the Bible God is the one who says, '*Ani-Hu*'—'I am he.' This is condescension. But whichever way it happened, we are one. My I is denied, my sinful I, as well as my own righteousness, and the compassion my I has for you.

It is wrong for a caterpillar to remain a caterpillar, and for a seed to remain a seed. An embryo is not meant to remain an embryo, nor should children remain children. Adolescents must develop further, as must adults and even the aged. We are all called to godlikeness, to such a likeness with him that we may almost be mistaken for each other, like twins. It was not in vain that apostle Thomas was called in the Bible 'Didymus', which in Greek means 'the twin'.

Blessed be thou, Jesus, my beloved *Ani-Hu*. I advance toward you.

The ancient Greeks believed in Neptune as god of the seas. It is said that a sea captain caught by a storm in the Aegean shouted, 'Father Neptune, if you will, sink me; if you will, save me; but whatever your decision, I will keep my rudder true.'

Some you accept, some you reject; some you help, while others encounter great hindrances on their way. I do not know how it will be with me. But I remain true to my resolve: to be united in love with you.

The First Letter from Jesus

My beloved disciple,

I inspired the apostle John to write about 'a beloved disciple'. Many commentators have tried to guess who this might have been and have attached a name to this title. I did not intend that this be done.

I am the only Teacher and I always have only one beloved disciple—you, no one else but you. Everyone can run for the position of *the one* beloved disciple by seeking me as teacher.

You are my beloved disciple, but make sure you are convinced of this without any hesitation.

In the sixteenth century I had a unique beloved disciple in Germany, prior John of Landsberg, who wrote the classic *A Letter from Jesus Christ*. It really was my letter. I lived in him and inspired the letter, but he apologises in the beginning for daring to use my name. He says it is only a literary device, though he should have been convinced of his union with me.

He wrote these words, attributed to me:

When I stand knocking at your door, I shall be very weak and shivering with cold and shall need you very much. When I stand at your door, I shall be as I was when they freed me from the pillar they bound me to, to whip me and wound me

for your sake. When I show myself to you, I show myself in the form of a man weak, degraded and insulted. I want to impress my image on your mind as one suffering and wounded, so that you take pity on me and lift me up and embrace me, and hold me with the arms of your love.

How could he have doubted that these words were really mine? What reasonable man would doubt the authenticity of Moses' record of the words spoken by an ass to Balaam? The first words of an ass allowed to speak would certainly be these: 'What have I done unto you that you have smitten me?' (Num 22:28). Certain words have the ring of truth. One can rely on their authenticity.

My way of speaking to men is to insinuate myself into their psyche. When this happens to a beloved disciple, he knows that when he speaks, I speak. Peter was certain of this when he made this recommendation: 'If any man speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God' (1 Pet 4:11).

Now *I* speak. Listen to me.

You are getting old and useless. You feel frustrated because of this. Therefore you write so many letters.

Not many feel the need of me either. It is still an open question if, when I return, I will find any real faith on earth. But there is a beauty in uselessness.

I like Chuang-Tzu's story: A wandering carpenter examined an old oak tree standing near an earthen altar on a field. He said to his apprentice, 'This tree is no good. Make a ship out of it and it will rot. Make tools and they will break. That is why it has become old.'

That same evening, the oak tree appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Why do you compare me with fruit trees that are useful? Even before the fruit ripens, people attack them. They break the branches and tear the twigs. Because such trees are so productive and bear tasty fruit, they do not live out their natural span. Therefore I decided to become useless. Nothing useful reaches my size. What do you, mortal man, know about useless trees?'

Next day the carpenter told the apprentice, 'Altars would not last if they were not erected before long-lived, useless trees.'

False gods are widely trusted and continually bothered. I am not as men would like me to be. I leave no prayer unanswered, but often my answer is 'No.' God still says 'No' to multiplied prayers of the church for over 2,000 years that his name be sanctified, his kingdom come, and his will be done on earth.

And so some people say it is useless to pray. Therefore I live and can quietly throw my shadow and give my rest to the one disciple who never even thought of using me, but bows in awe at my altar. This, my beloved disciple, this you are.

On earth, I always said 'I am': 'I am the bread of life'; 'I am the light of the world'; 'I am the door of the sheepfold.' Paul, too, said, 'I am what I am.'

Peter said, 'I am not.' He said it when he denied me.

You say boldly that *I* live in you, that *I* write in your writings, that a letter written by you is *my* letter.

The heathen have had more courage to identify with their gods than Christians have to identify themselves with me, though I have taught them to do so.

You mentioned yourself that in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, the man who has died, after passing through judgement, becomes one with Osiris and is addressed as God. Toth, secretary of the gods, says this about the dead man Hunifer: 'The heart of Osiris has been weighed, and his soul was a witness for him. He was found truthful.' What a witness! This, fourteen centuries before my birth.

The Bhagavad Gita teaches something similar: 'A man bears within himself a wonderful friend, whom he does not know, because God lives within every man, but few find him. The man who sacrifices his desires and works for the being from whom all things come and who created the world, reaches through this sacrifice perfection—because the man who finds

in himself joy and happiness and light is one with God.'

The most beautiful words in a heathen religion are from the Lamaist *Book of Golden Teachings*: 'Where is now your individuality, O Lanoo [disciple], where is Lanoo himself? A spark united with the fire, a drop sunk in the ocean, the always-existing ray become the full and everlasting light. Now, O Lanoo, you are the one who acts and the witness, you are the one who emits and you are the emitted beam, the light in the sound and the sound in the light.' 'If you succeed in arriving at the seventh degree, you most happy, you will not see before you the Holy Trinity any more, because you yourself will be this trinity.' 'Before the mystic force can make a god out of you, you must obtain first the capacity to destroy, at your pleasure, your lunar form.' (The moon is the symbol of fantasy.)

The Book of Revelation says, 'The earth and heaven fled away' (Rev 20: 11). The theoretical world, which is a fiction, has to disappear so that the one reality might remain.

Identify yourself with me and write my letter to the beloved disciple.

I in you will be different from I in others. But everywhere it is I, just as every pine is still a pine. But the growth of some pines is obstructed by a stone; some have better soil, some are on a slope, others on a cliff; some get more sun, others more water. Every pine is different from its comrades, just as every man is unique.

Remember this from the poem you conceived in prison:

When God made me in the secret place,
He made me to be a 'me';
To be in my own way the herald of his glory,
To be unique as God is.

May your uniqueness and your being challenged by those who would judge you not make you doubt that I am you,

that I speak in you. The Galatian Christians received Paul 'even as Christ Jesus'. They were no fools, neither was Paul a fraud for accepting honours not due to him. They equated—and they were right—receiving Paul with receiving me.

You may have two sure signs that it is I who speak: first, that every word is inspired by love; second, that my talk is not systematic, that I will jump from one subject to another. (By the way, I like the way you do so yourself.)

System is a product of reason, a minuscule part of man. Emotion, the irrational, has its part when I speak. Love itself does not belong to reason, but even contradicts it.

I taught that when a king sees that he has only 10,000 soldiers, whereas the enemy has 20,000, he would do well to make peace. This is what reason dictates. But I, abandoned by all disciples except you, the one beloved, took up the fight, did not yield, did not make peace with darkness, and was crucified. No one should expect my letters to be always reasonable, systematic.

In Thomas Aquinas, everything is reasonable. I was nice to him and said, 'You have written well about me.' But he realised his shortcomings and said at the end, 'All I have written is only straw.'

You remember what a Russian Baptist pastor of the underground church said when you tried to teach him systematic theology: 'Did those who founded this science bear a heavy cross? Jesus did not think systematically when crucified. Every one of his seven last words on Golgotha is on a different subject. It is dangerous to think systematically. Those who do so have not fulfilled the first commandment: to be crucified with Jesus.'

Just leave my thoughts to me; allow them to pass quietly from one sphere to another. My thinking is not subjected to any law.

The value of laws has diminished even in natural science. In microphysics, laws provide only a statistical average, indicating how particles in great numbers

behave. Every single particle is unique. How it will behave is unpredicable, indeterminate.

So you are unique; even more am I. I do not fit into any system. I the founder of the Christian religion do not fit even into the category of its founder. I am beyond any such pigeon-hole.

Systematic thinking is clear-cut: either/or.

There was once a king who was hungry. His servants brought him bread and two jars, one with peanut butter, the other with jelly, so as to fix him a sandwich. But he could not decide which he preferred and in an agony of indecision grew hungrier and hungrier. His wise men urged him to eat, some advising peanut butter, others jelly. The hunger increased until finally a girl taught him the magic word 'and'. Make the sandwich with peanut butter *and* jelly.

I come with truth and grace, though normally the two do not go well together. I am the truth and the life. I satisfy both demands. Therefore the Kabbalah says, 'God made the world through the latter *Vav*,' which in Hebrew stands for 'and'.

With me there is room for the whole of life, including all its contradictions. Therefore I can give peace.

Learn from your grandson Alexander. Once he was told he would be taken to the doctor for a cough. He came back happy: 'The doctor does not have a cough.'

Men come to me with sins and sorrows. They look to me and are happy when they leave, because I am sinless and serene. Be like me.

Well, this whole correspondence began because you did not believe me to be serene, but agonising again on crosses. We will speak about this next time.

The Second Letter from Jesus

My beloved,

Be sure of what you write in my name. Luther was never sure whether his break with the Papacy was inspired by me or arose from his own pride and obstinacy. He knew about union with me. He had written in his *Commentary on Galatians*, 'The Christian is Christ', but he did not live up to his own teaching.

He had the excuse of not having read Pushkin's words: 'I write what I live and I live what I write.'

How could Luther have united with me, the King of the Jews, while remaining a Jew-hater? How could he have united with the God of love when he loathed the Pope, priests, monks, Baptists and peasants?

But if you are rooted and grounded in love, you can write and speak with confidence in my name.

If you will purify yourself, what you write in my name will not only be beautiful, it will be me. This letter is mine. I have condescended to inspire it in the hope that you will be clean.

You wish to decrucify me. I came to earth to decrucify you. I said so in my first sermon in Nazareth: '[God] has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance of the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised' (Lk 4:18).

Because you were crucified in sin and sorrow, I too was crucified. The Father could have given me twelve legions of angels to fight for me, but he did not. I never asked him why. Not all his experiences with angels were good. A third of them rebelled with Lucifer. Even now he finds many a mistake with them. Perhaps there was a chance angels would not have obeyed. Apparently they did not volunteer.

You endure your lot, and I endure mine. When you say 'I wish to decrucify you,' this 'I' does not represent your whole person, but only a part of your conscious ego. You have in yourself the shadow that says 'No' to all to which the ego says 'Yes.' Half a man cannot decrucify me. No one is yet more than half a man.

Paul was a beloved disciple, yet even he had to confess that he was divided between two laws (Rom 7:21-23).

Your plans for me did not succeed. My plans for mankind worked out only for a few. We both have to endure crucifixions quietly, confident that the words 'all things work together for good' apply to us, too.

The Koran borrowed a story from the Jews and beautified it. According to this tale, Moses met Khidr, the first angel of God, in the desert. Khidr agreed to show Moses his works on condition that Moses would express no opinion about them. If he did, Khidr would leave.

The first thing Khidr did was to scuttle near the shore a fishing boat belonging to poor men. Then he killed a handsome young man. Then he restored the wall of a wicked city. Moses, unable to contain himself any longer, protested. Before leaving, Khidr explained: 'Pirates wanted to steal the boat. They would have slaughtered the men too. I saved them. They can salvage the boat later. The young man was on his way to commit a crime. I saved him from infamy. While digging in order to strengthen the wall, two pious youngsters found a treasure.'

There is sense behind even the most foolish things.

There is a sense behind the folly of Golgotha, behind your pain, and behind my being crucified afresh in heaven by saints who sin.

At a certain moment, you told me, 'I love you' but also 'I hate you.' This is nothing new for me. I know that human love might well be called 'love-hate', because every man has the ego, the self, the Id, the conscious and the unconscious. Every man has a shadow that resents what the ego embraces.

How I loved the Rabbi Levi-Itzchak of Berditchev! And he loved me. But he made the same mistake you do. You are preoccupied too much with mankind's sorrows and my sufferings. This leads to melancholy and madness.

I would have preferred that the evangelists describing Golgotha chronicle not only my pain, but also the details of the garden nearby, with its roses and carnations, the children enjoying butterflies, the birds that flitted about, as well as the many who feasted the Passover in quiet and genuine faith. They should not have pictured only the darkness, but also the bright sunshine before the darkness. And they might have acknowledged the genuine, if sorrily misled, faith that made some vote for my death sentence. Evangelists should be more serene.

You commit the same error. The Communist countries are not all prisons full of torture. They also produce love and song and enjoyment of life.

Rabbi Levi-Itzchak of Berditchev, too, had been trapped in the web of suffering. He proclaimed on the Day of Atonement, 'Today all your creatures stand before you so that you may pass sentence. But I say it is you who shall be judged today.'

He refused to blow the ram's horn on New Year's day, as prescribed by Moses' law, shouting, 'Let Ivan do it, since you side with him.'

I shout to him and he shouts to me, not realising what he is really doing. He shows he has my character; he is

one with me. Together we share the cosmic pain and the reactions it produces.

Buddha said life is all evil. He was wrong. Man is not only sin, as some preachers declare in my name. God is not all wrong in denying many human petitions.

You and I, Godhead and man, both live. To live means to evolve toward something higher, to be in a state of tension, to be in conflict with what opposes you. You do not realise that when you are in opposition to me, you are one with me, as I am one with you when I chide and punish you. You are one with my tension.

Our unity is ontological, not psychological. Tao-te-King said it rightly: 'The man with Tao [the supreme God] is identical with Tao as the man with De [matter] is identical with De.'

If you identify with me, think like me. On Golgotha there were more flowers and saints than crosses. Even if I am crucified in heaven, it is in a splendid heaven that I suffer. So do not be obsessed only by the sufferings that happen here, but admire also the unspeakable beauties in which there is some suffering.

Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav, another darling of mine, once asked a Jew, 'Did you see the sky today?'

He replied, 'I have been too busy. I have a family to feed.'

'Did you see people today?'

'I saw lots of them. Men and women, and children and cabs and shops.'

'Well, after hundreds of years there will be other men and other shops on other kinds of streets. Only you and I will not be any more. So what is the good of looking at so many things and not having time to enjoy the sky?'

I am the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. I suffered in Abel and in all the saints since. I hung on a cross in Jerusalem and have been crucified since. Everything passes. These things will pass, too. In the end I will

triumph. The eternal beauties and truth and love are unmoved. Look to them and you will have joy.

You cannot decrucify me because you have taken upon yourself too big a task.

You are like St Christopher. Proud of his strength, he was desirous of helping only the strongest. He served a king, but the devil subdued the king, so he served the devil. Then he found out the devil trembles before Christ. So, following a priest's advice, he waited for Christ at a river crossing. It would be something splendid to carry across the stream no less than the Son of God.

But then a little child came. As a pastime, bored by so much waiting, Christopher volunteered to carry the child on his shoulders. But with every step in the water, the child became heavier and heavier, until Christopher realised he was carrying the weight of the whole universe.

There are so many children on Golgothas. In the USA alone, 100,000 living children have been abused sexually. Others are battered, abandoned. Do not concern yourself with decrucifying me. Take upon yourself the suffering of one child, make him happy, and it will be enough. Whoever receives one child receives me. Then you will no longer have the heavy problems that torment you.

Instead of decrucifying me—how can a drop in a bucket solve the problems of an ocean?—decrucify a fellowman.

To raise Lazarus from the dead I gave the command, 'Loose him and let him go' (Jn 11:44). You also loose some man. Make him forget the sins I have forgiven him; do not condemn a sinner whom I have acquitted; do not chide a man whom I love. It will be enough for you.

I was happy that the first Christians liked the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, which they considered a

guarantee that they themselves would be resurrected. They were sure I would loose them, too, as they painted and carved the episode on their tombs. Some even had statues of Lazarus in metal or ivory.

You cannot resurrect a dead man, but you can loose one I have resurrected. Do this and I will be fully satisfied.

Saints are not men who do tremendous things. Dreams about unachievably great works are pernicious. Saints are those who do small things well.

Not every David can kill a Goliath—and, in the end, even killing a Goliath is not a big thing. The Philistines continued to be a major source of trouble to Israel for many years. But every David can do one small thing exquisitely, like Thérèse of Lisieux. I need no more from you.

And even if the one little thing you do is not quite exquisite and even if my Father is not able to tell you on the last day, 'Well done', he will at least say to you, 'Well tried, good and faithful servant.'

David's great desire was to build a temple for God. He was not allowed to do so, but God did say, 'Thou didst well that it was in thine heart' (1 Kings 8:18).

Do, or at least try to do, one little thing well and I will be satisfied.

A young girl applied to a missionary society. When she was called, she was sure she would be sent to some interesting field, perhaps Central Africa or Thailand. The director gave her an envelope and told her, 'You will find in it your first assignment. Open the letter at home.' It contained the words, 'Bring your father to Christ.'

Always think about me as a modest God.

When Lord Byron began to write, he knew Walter Scott was the leading protagonist of English literature in his time. One day, an article appeared in the press stating that after the appearance of Byron's brilliant poems, Scott could no longer be considered pre-eminent.

Walter Scott was the man who had written that article. Such nice gestures of modesty and love please me more than expansive plans for cosmic decrucifixions. Think along these lines.

The Third Letter from Jesus

My beloved,

I see that you cannot dedicate yourself to the one child or the one sufferer who needs you, because you are worried about my being crucified afresh in heaven.

In reading the words of Paul, you have wrongly put the emphasis on the word 'crucified' instead of the phrase 'in heaven'.

Crucifixions in heaven and of the heavenly on earth are entirely different from pains as you know them.

My companion Buddha (do not wonder that I call him so; this is how the bride in Solomon's Song [1:7] refers to the founders of other religions. They are not my competitors; I have none)—my companion Buddha once was abused. He listened quietly and at the end asked his enemy, 'Friend, to whom does a present that is offered to me belong if I refuse it?'

'To the one who offered it.'

'Well,' said Buddha, 'you offered me insults, which I refuse. They belong to you.'

This is how far Buddha could go. I can go further. There is a spot in my heart which cannot be reached by crucifixion. I do not accept murder at the hands of anybody. Death cannot hold me. I mock it. The blood falls back on those who shed it.

So do not pity me. I am serene.

You know about the seven words I spoke on the cross. I hung there for three long hours. What did I do the rest of the time? Why has no one inquired into this?

I admired the flowers. I listened to the voice of the birds. I rejoiced that the Jewish people kept the Passover. I foresaw the beautiful day when they would know about an even greater liberation, which I prepare for them through my sacrifice.

I had sunlight on my face till darkness came.

Then, all other preoccupations being gone, I felt with gladness the wind and I listened to the noise of the leaves.

Some soldiers had fallen asleep while I hung on the cross. I strove not to disturb them.

I saw before my eyes all people of every nation and tribe who would be saved. Do not wonder that I mentioned the flowers before mankind. You always think about me as I am in relationship with men. But man was the last of earthly creations.

It has been asked what God did before there were men. He walked in gardens amid the flowers, enjoying tulips and nightingales.

Isaiah was right: 'It pleased God to bruise me' (Is 53:10). It pleased Buddha to be insulted; God knew the devil would lose by crucifying me.

And the Father knew that in my human form I, too, had an outer and a hidden man, or what today's psychologists would call the 'ego' and the 'shadow'. What I consider my real 'I' went singing to Gethsemane. To this the apostles were witnesses. But when I was alone in the prison cell, I sang again. And there was an unspeakable joy in my heart as I suffered on Golgotha, too.

A man can be at the same time in heaven and in hell. You experienced this yourself in jail, while singing to the accompanying cling-clang of chains between tortures.

Therefore I could tell the penitent thief, 'Today you

will be with me in paradise.' My body was that day in a grave, nowhere else. A part of me was in hell preaching to those who were long since dead (1 Pet 3:19). But my real 'I' never ceased to rejoice. It could not die.

I was and am all right. There was real passion on Golgotha. 'Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, wherewith the Lord has afflicted me in that day?' (Lam 1:12). This sorrow repeats itself when saints fall away. It is like being crucified again.

But there is not only sorrow. The suffering is palliated by joy. The pain on the cross was eased greatly by the thought of the result.

I cried on the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' I put the verb in the past tense, though the being forsaken was actual. Normally, the words should have been, 'Why do you forsake me (now)?'

The explanation is that by an act of will one can place his present sufferings in the past. Then they do not hurt so much. The bad things occurring in your life today hurt deeply. But though worse things have occurred in your past, they are easily bearable.

For the Jewish king Hezekiah God turned back time on his sundial (2 Kings 20:10). It was again ten hours earlier, when he had not yet become deathly sick nor committed certain sins.

You can place present pains in the past just as you can place future joys in the present.

'The joy that was set before me' I really had before it was given (Heb 12:2). I have it even now when my heart breaks about the trespasses of the elect.

There is no need to decrucify me! By doing so, you would deprive me of the great satisfaction of saving mankind by bearing its sin.

I have warned you all: 'Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves' (Lk 23:28). It is blasphemous to treat me as a pitiable God.

I did not come to be ministered unto, but to minister. I do not need your ministrations.

Give up your ideas about decrucifying me. Instead, make an unhappy child rejoice. Give aid and comfort to a suffering man. This will do.

In one respect, heaven is a little like prison, where you passed whole nights listening to everyone's story. This is what saints and angels do, too.

Former robbers are unanimous in claiming that they were more alive when in the act of burglary than at any other time in their lives. That they risked being shot and killed did not count; the thrill outweighed every danger.

Those who work in the persecuted underground church do so because they love me, but also because of the exquisite pleasure of conspiratorial activity.

This is what a Saviour feels when he redeems men even while enduring crucifixion.

In the measure to which I endure passion, your compassion is justified, which means sharing with me the cross with its ultimate joyous outcome. If it were not a joy, I would not have called you to be my companion in suffering.

For those who understand it, my cross exudes strength, confidence and an all-encompassing serenity.

Live on it and convey its meaning to others.

The Fourth Letter from Jesus

My beloved,

I told the penitent thief, 'Today you will be with me in paradise.'

Paradise is no paradise for me if I cannot share it with someone. I came to earth to obtain companions for the heavenly joys.

This same relationship exists between me and the other persons of the Trinity. God is a being of the highest imaginable perfection. But a person who would keep this perfection for himself without sharing it in its fullness with another would not be the highest being imaginable. He had to share it with his eternal Son who is of the same essence as himself.

But there is an even higher dimension to divine perfection: the sharing of mutual love with another Being equally immaculate, so that each shares with a third person the love he receives from another. Therefore God must be at least a Trinity.

I needed the thief for my own supreme joy. I need you. Learn from me and find your delight in one other man. Bring him to a state of paradise. Do it today. Decrucify him, not me.

An atheist once ranted, 'We will destroy everything that is a reminder of God: churches, holy books, priests.'

A believer replied, 'I wonder how you will pull heaven down.' The atheist has no need to do so. I brought heaven down to the level of criminals and thus gave them its joys. You, too, should open your heaven to your fellow-men.

It need not be for a criminal. It can be for a very honourable person.

Many years ago the British Court News related that Queen Victoria asked a pastor if there was any assurance of salvation and received this reply: 'I know nothing which would warrant it.' A Pastor Townsend sent a letter to the queen asking her to read John 3:16: 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life'; and Romans 10:9: 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.'

Queen Victoria replied, 'I have carefully and prayerfully read the portions of Scripture referred to. I believe in the finished work of Christ for me and trust by God's grace to meet you in that home of which He said, "I go to prepare a place for you."' Signed Victoria Guelph.

I like an event in Japan. The Oriental Missionary churches decided to set aside a day on which everyone would do his best to win one soul for Christ. That evening, the superintendent's wife, Nakada, went to bed sad. She had not succeeded.

Suddenly, her sleep was interrupted. A bandit who had broken into the house bent over her and threatened her with a dagger in his hand. 'Now, be quick and give me all you have or I will kill you!'

She was happy and said to him with a smile, 'You might be the one for whom I prayed and waited. I had to win one soul for Christ today. You must hear the story about the Friend of robbers, the Holiest of all who did not hesitate to compare himself with a thief (1 Thess 5:2),

who chose a man just like you, a bandit, to be the last person to take with him to heaven when he died.'

The bandit was converted. The story became known, and thousands of conversions followed in many lands.

This woman did something practical. Dreaming about great plans for decrucifying me does not help.

Take practical steps to improve your own behaviour. A young Christian employed in a pawn shop once wrote this resolution:

I do promise God that I will rise early every morning to have a few minutes, not less than five, in private prayer. I will endeavour to conduct myself as a humble, meek and zealous follower of Jesus and be a serious witness and warning. I will try to lead others to think of the needs of their immortal souls. I hereby vow to read no less than four chapters in God's Word every day. I will cultivate a spirit of self-denial and will yield myself a prisoner of love to the Redeemer of the world.

The young man was William Booth. I liked his resolution and his sticking to it. It helped him become the founder of the Salvation Army.

In Communist countries some Christians have turned traitor for some thirty pieces of silver like Judas. I can give more than silver. I can make men shine like stars in the eternal kingdom of heaven, for bringing souls to me.

Luther dared to say that preaching or simply telling the gospel is more important than what I have done for the salvation of men, because my sacrifice would be of no avail without this human activity.

I became angry at some other sayings of his in which there was hatred, but not at this. His intention was good: to challenge men to win souls.

When Luther explained the Apostles' Creed, he stressed, 'God created *me*. . . Jesus was crucified for *my* salvation. This gives *me* a tremendous obligation to represent him in the world, making him known.'

Luther's saying is acceptable as long as it is understood that salvation does not come through preaching, through accepting the truth, or through faith, but only by what my Father accomplished through my sacrifice on Golgotha.

Bring at least one man from the world of deceit, not from deceit in the world. It is not true that some things in the world are wrong. The world as a whole is wrong. 'The whole world lies in wickedness' (1 Jn 5:19).

There is deceit even in the belief that there is a world. Science has searched for the ultimate stuff out of which the universe is made and has come to the conclusion that there is no such thing. The sub-atomic particles are energy, which means they are not a something that acts. There exists no energy apart from its action. Actor and action are the same. And in its research, human reason can find some answers only if it admits that there are realms beyond what reason can accommodate; otherwise it too is deceived.

If two particles are caused to collide, they are destroyed and two new ones are created. These decay spontaneously into two additional particles, making them four, out of which two are those with which the experiment began. This defies reason, or at least the accepted laws of physics.

In Gethsemane I asked the Father to spare me from the bitter cup. He found pleasure in bruising me. On the cross I asked to be given at least an explanation of why I was forsaken. I was ignored. The Holy Spirit whom I had called the Comforter did not comfort me. He waited for my departure from the earth in order to descend. Not one angel come to my defence.

To you it looks as if Golgotha was an internal drama in the Trinity and in heavenly spheres. You might say, a collision. But our new Trinity is the same Holy Trinity, united in love as ever, magnified by the new birth of millions of children of God.

The laws of the microcosmos are entirely different from the usual laws of physics. In the heavenly spheres, things are also very different from what you experience on earth.

Atheists ask themselves if God is real. But is reality real?

I will quote Heisenberg, one of the most renowned physicists. (Do not wonder that I, Jesus, should quote him. Remember that I quoted Isaiah, too, to support my claims.) Heisenberg stated, 'In the light of the quantum theory elementary particles are no longer real in the same sense as the objects of daily life.' Gravity, matter, energy are ultimately only curvatures of the space-time continuum or, better said, they are all constructs of the human mind.

You need them for practical purposes, but if you reach toward the heights, you should realise that the whole notion of 'world' is an illusion.

Starting with the assertion that $1 + 2 = 4$, you can construct a coherent mathematical system, but it will ultimately be all wrong because the premise is wrong. Everything in this world deceives.

Therefore, I have shown preferential love for thieves, prostitutes, criminals, prodigals, those who, though wrong themselves, have the one advantage over other men in that they are brave and daring and enterprising, and reject the standards of the world outright.

In this respect, learn from them. Take up the burden of children of God. Do so without being concerned about the minimal abilities you might have. The brains of Anatole France and Walt Whitman were half the weight of Turgenev's brain, but they could write as well as he. David was only a child but could defeat a Goliath.

But do reject the world, acknowledging as false *all* its whispers. Once you have done this you will confound the wise and the mighty, even if you are foolish, weak, base and despised (1 Cor 1:27,28).

Yes, I have chosen even criminals, who can be compared to the fanatical henchmen of Nazism and Communism. Saul of Tarsus was one of them.

Lombroso claimed to have had a flash of inspiration while examining the skull of a famous brigand. He saw in the criminal 'an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals.' So he explained anatomically their enormous jaws, high cheekbones, prominent superciliary arches, solitary lines in the palms, extreme size of the orbits, handle-shaped ears and insensibility to another's pain.

He was wrong. Saul of Tarsus had been insensible to the pain of the first Christians whom he had questioned with a whip and put to death, 'He had breathed slaughter' (Acts 9:1). That same man wrote afterward the love song of 1 Corinthians 13. Lombroso was wrong because he had imputed ferocious instincts to primitive humanity. He had not known Adam and Eve.

Diseased brains can be healed by me and made to serve a good cause.

I repeat again, reject the world. Its thinking is abominable even when it seems benign.

Darwin launched the theory of evolution, a scientific hypothesis that seemed not to have moral or religious implications. But Marx and Stalin embraced it, with chilling consequences.

Ferri stated it simply: 'The universal law of evolution shows us that vital progress of every kind is due to continual selection, by the death of the least fit in the struggle for life. . . . I would therefore be in agreement with natural laws that human society should make an artificial selection by the elimination of antisocial elements and incongruous individuals.'

Darwin concocted just a scientific hypothesis about what in the past led to the appearance of men on earth. He launched this seemingly innocent hypothesis in a

fundamentally, intrinsically wicked world. Ferri, a man of law, drew from it the conclusion that criminals should be sentenced to death. Marx, Lenin, Stalin drew from it the conclusion that millions should be killed, because everyone who impedes the rule of Communism is a criminal. Nietzsche and Hitler saw that whatever thwarts the triumph of the superman—ie, the Aryan race—must be slaughtered.

The possibility that man evolved from primitive organisms is not so important as the evolution from Darwin to Lenin to Hitler and Stalin, the ultimacy of which will be the wiping out of mankind in a nuclear war.

In this world all acorns are bitter. Therefore there are only bitter oak trees.

Arouse your conscience, that inner voice that tells you someone is watching. Consider as sin any minute of life spent on something other than saving souls for eternity from this world doomed to destruction.

Use every opportunity, knowing opportunity is a bird that never perches.

Do not appeal to reason, which is like a courtroom in which I and Judas Iscariot are equals, with the odds in favour of Judas. Appeal, rather, to the heart.

Do not repel youth by posing as the voice of experience and the fount of wisdom. A father told his child, 'Son, when Lincoln was your age, he was earning his own living.' The son replied, 'Yes, father, and when he was your age, he was president of the United States.'

Come with earnestness as one who has a foreboding of the destruction of the whole web of this deceitful world. Point to me as the only Saviour.

Allow for the widest diversity.

Communists say I was the first communist. Terrorists claim me as their predecessor. German Lutheran pastors have described me as an Aryan Jew-hater. Tyrannical monarchs have used me to legitimise their power. Black

theologians say I belong to their race. Catholics characterise me as the only lover in the world whose bride needs a vicar. And so I could go on and on.

In a sick world, faith too can only be sick. Colour is the illness of light, because it tears apart its whiteness, its wholeness.

There are 35,000 kinds of orchids, plus 30,000 man-made hybrids. Some resemble swans, others moths, butterflies, mums, pansies, scorpions, tigers, doves, dancers, slippers. Some have flowers less than one-tenth of an inch in diameter. Others are as broad as ten inches across. But they are all orchids.

In the diversity of flowers lies their beauty. My believers should be one. Since they cannot seem to agree as yet, become many things to many men.

For some time I can be only the Lamb of God, for others rather the Lion of Judah; some are happy that I used the whip, others that I forgave. Some like the sweat of the carpenter or the blood of the innocent victim; others prefer to bow before me as king. Be a Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greeks and by all means save souls.

Remember Daniel Webster's words:

If we work upon marble, it will perish;
If we work upon brass, time will efface it;
If we rear temples, they will crumble to dust,
But if we work on immortal minds,
If we imbue them with principles, with the just
Fear of God and love of our fellowmen,
We engrave on those tablets something which
Will brighten to all eternity.

You asked me one series of questions. You told me your thoughts. I cannot be obliged to enter into conversation with you on the topics you choose.

The foregoing is my message to you.

The Fifth Letter from Jesus

My beloved,

You probably wonder if the last letter was really mine or just an ordinary product of your own mind attributed to me. It was so down-to-earth. A lecturer could have said some of those things in a Bible school. If he were a gardener, he would not have permitted so many varieties of orchids in his garden.

What comes from me, you are certain, must have deep spiritual significance, must be of lofty mystical import, must startle through novelty.

This is not so. My spoken words as recorded in the New Testament cover only forty days of my life. If they are all read slowly with a loud voice, it will not take more than half an hour. I surely spoke much more than that, but the rest was not thought important enough to be recorded.

When I changed water into wine at Cana, it took but a moment. Do you think I sat there mute during the rest of the celebration?

Usually, I spoke about practical things: buying wood and carpenter's tools, shopping, selling, the news of the village and of the world we knew, a loving word to my mother and to acquaintances, the weather, a joke, small talk, or elementary things from the Bible. Learn to see me in the ordinary thoughts.

There is nothing elaborate in my speech. Much of it is made up of incomplete, interrupted and unfinished sentences.

The 1943 report of the President of Colombia University contained one word-group, punctuated as a single sentence, that filled 11 pages and consisted of 4,284 words. I was never a university president, nor even a university student.

I never recorded my thoughts on paper. I merely spoke. In spoken language there are no capital letters to show where a sentence begins, nor fullstops to show where they end. Spoken language flows like life, without punctuation marks. In my language—Aramaic—capital letters and punctuation marks do not even exist.

Accept as inspired by me a very ordinary letter with very common thoughts. Accept everything I tell you, without asking questions.

Once a grasshopper stopped a centipede and asked him if he really needed so many legs. 'I have only six legs but I don't know what to do with them. That is why I hop about. How do you manage with so many legs?'

'It is so simple,' replied the centipede. 'Watch how I do it.'

The grasshopper waited and waited, but all in vain. Finally, he had to drag the centipede along, because his question had totally unnerved the creature, to the point of paralysis.

You believers have so many things to do only because you ask me so many questions. I would like to minister to you constantly, but you interrupt me with all the problems you raise in your minds. Instead of being useful to you, I have to explain myself in many words, which in turn require further explanation because of the inadequacy of language.

There are two hundred definitions for the word 'sentence' alone. How then can human language provide clarity?

Some languages are privileged. Tamil has a multitude of words for 'laughter'. Whole-hearted, malicious, ironic, sympathetic, innocent laughter—all are called by the same word in the English tongue. Malayalam has different words for every kind of 'yes'. Gaelic has eighty-two words for 'love'. It is surely wrong to call human sentiments for apple pie, a dog, a child and God by the same name. In Malayalam there are also many words for 'banana': every variety is called a different name. Similarly, the Eskimos have many words for snow (new snow, crusty snow, frozen snow are not the same), as Arabs have for 'camel'.

In English there is the one word 'God' for a multifaceted Being, whereas the Jews have Elohim, Jahweh, Adonai, El Shaddai, Sabaoth, El and many others.

Your language does not have words enough to formulate questions properly, let alone give replies.

Do not ask me so many things, but strive to make me loved, using the little you know and can say. Whoever has me as his theme, who speaks about me with the awe and devotion with which my holy mother spoke about me, and sings for me with the same joy with which angels sing, cannot err even if he is far from being wise. I give sense to your words, even if they are a lullaby sung to a child.

I have promised that the righteous will shine like the sun. The sun draws moisture from all over the earth and returns it as rain from the clouds.

Like my servant David, you see me as the Rock. But a rock in a stream can be an impediment to the flow of water, which must then go around on either side. Like the rock surrounded by water, I find myself in your embrace, a prisoner of your love.

I named a prophetess of mine Deborah, which means 'bee', because the bee gently collects nectar from many flowers and produces honey that men take away for food. Look at these insects and believe in God.

I have inscribed in their genes the dazzling ability to construct honeycombs of geometric perfection. They can sense the earth's magnetic field and instinctively know how to make a structure that takes it into account. They agree as to which way the comb should face, without a 'foreman' to tell them. I have given to every bee its own plumb-line.

In addition, bees construct their cells as hexagonal prisms, this being the best shape to hold a given volume using the smallest amount of material. The cells are tilted back at a grade of thirteen degrees to keep the honey from running out.

Believe that I have inscribed in your genes, too, what makes you most useful. But you philosophise too much. It looks as if there might have occurred a catastrophic mutation in your genes. Be still. You will accomplish what I have destined you to do. If bees began to brood over what they do, their honeycombs would be far from perfect.

May my love be uppermost in your mind, rather than condemnation of sin. Fighting sin in yourself and others can become a very dangerous occupation. Some dogs trained for heroin detection have become addicted from sniffing the stuff and eventually died.

To combat sin constantly is also a means in wallowing in it. Instead, look upon it with contempt. Do not attach importance to it.

There is a great deal at stake in the ascension toward the ultimate heights.

In times past, the time it takes the earth to go around the sun was divided by men into 31, 536,000 units called seconds. It is barbarous to cut time into pieces. Furthermore, the revolution of the earth is not uniform. Consequently, the operation did not provide exact time. The moon's gravity pulls on the oceans and causes friction. In some years the effect is greater than in others. In addition, paleontologists who have measured fossils of

ancient coral, which had annual growth rings like trees, have concluded that 600 million years ago a day on the earth was only 21 hours long.

Now, your notion of a second has changed. Caesium atoms perform an electromagnetic flip. Their electrons, which spin like tops, suddenly point the axis of their spin in a different direction. A second is the time that passes until an atom of caesium flips, the time of 9,192,631,770 photon pulses. A second is thus no longer a limb of the corpse time. It is a period rich in events. Billions of pulsations take place in it. And they happen not only in the caesium atom.

A second is a highly valuable jewel. It is so rich you cannot even think about it. And if you cannot comprehend a second, you certainly have to give up any attempt to grasp the exceeding riches of eternity, which I have promised to the faithful.

My counsel is that you reach toward eternal values. Ascend at a steady pace. Use every second well. A Talmudic writing says, 'Every second presents itself to man first, gets the mark of men, and then goes to tell God what man has done with it.'

Many highly valued frescoes are in grave danger of deterioration. The damage is caused by the fact that the churches are heated on week-ends but left cold during the week. Condensation takes place, and the resulting dampness in the walls is very harmful. In the temple of Jerusalem the same light had to burn uninterruptedly.

Burn for me with equal flames of love until we become one, just as your two eyes unite to produce normal vision. Be mine in your work and mine in your play, mine in your activity and mine in your leisure—not considering the latter as less important.

You have written me much. You yourself asked if I read your writing. You suspected that I cannot read because of being crucified afresh in heaven. I have written to you but am not sure I have satisfied you.

Correspondence never satisfies lovers. Even the Bible cannot satisfy believers. All the talk between Romeo and Juliet was only preliminary. They both desired the embrace of love.

No other image than that of sexual union is adequate to describe what we both are longing for. It is not true that such a relationship is profane. King Solomon's Song of Songs hymns it, and the Talmud says rightly, 'All Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is most holy.'

Because sexual union is a religious act, Isaiah says, 'I took unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. And I went unto the prophethess; and she conceived, and bore a son' (Is 8:2,3).

Sometimes evangelists who claim to represent me have given birth to spiritual children without first having had such an intimate union with me. Therefore they sometimes bring forth monsters.

Nothing less will satisfy us both than replacing practical or lofty talk with a union as sacred as that between man and wife, where each becomes both. I will not be a riddle for you any more, because you will be you *and* I; you will be as much I as I am myself.

While on earth, I was an 'I' limited to being a Jewish carpenter of the first century. I could not become abstract man. I had to become man of a certain social class in a certain epoch.

You can become my 'I' of another period with another outlook and another assignment.

It is foolish to assume that imitating me means to imitate my dress and customs in another age.

A boy of eleven once played the role of Joseph, my adoptive father, in a Sunday school Christmas programme. When he discussed with his parents what kind of shoes he should wear, they suggested sandals. He wanted cowboy boots. When the father said it was unlikely that Joseph would have worn western boots, the

son replied, 'Yes, but then he did not have braces on his teeth either.'

Everything in the world has changed over the past 2,000 years. But while I am the same yesterday, today and for ever, this permanent 'I' has no permanent form. Isaiah knew this and prophesied, 'He has no form' (Is 53:2). Mark says about me, 'He showed himself in another form' (Mk 16:12). I live in you. Luther said rightly, 'The Christian is Christ.' Be yet another form of mine.

When I took upon myself the limitations of humanity, my power was necessarily limited. But to you I have promised all power, which is mediated to you by the Holy Spirit. I said that my disciples will do greater works than I have done, which is obvious, because they will have at their disposal all my power plus the knowledge and experience accumulated during the centuries.

As you use this power, remember above all to be ardent in love.

I mean really ardent.

It is a fact scientifically established that Tibetan Buddhist monks can raise their body temperature through *tum-mo* yoga, a meditational practice. They can raise the temperature of fingers and toes by 15 degrees Fahrenheit in a matter of minutes. During cold Himalayan nights, they can dry icy-wet sheets draped over their bodies.

Why not use Christian meditation to increase the heat of your love? It is known that erotic imagination increases the heartbeat and produces physiological changes. Use your imagination and take a seat in the heavenly mansion that I am preparing for you.

See me suffering, and see me joyous and peaceful and triumphant because I have the privilege of suffering afresh as often as saints fall. My incarnation was needed in order to acquaint men with God so that they might love and adore in a realistic, personal manner. Since my

ascension to heaven in a glorified body, I feel I may seem remote and less personal again.

By being in you and in other believers, by being present in the world in the form of the poor and persecuted, by the image of my new pains in heaven, I am with you again, softening your heart with my compassion and filling it with the assurance of victory.

Soon we will see each other face to face. Then you will be satisfied.

It is wrong for you to be troubled about anything, even about my being crucified afresh. This indicates that you have not yet entered fully into the relationship you so desire.

When I was on earth, people asked themselves if I were God. They had doubts. Instead of giving them a direct reply about myself, I told them, 'Ye are gods' (Jn 10:34). Discover Godhead in yourself and you will not question my role. Discover who you are in this sphere by setting aside the usual tools of logic. Simply recognise that you dwell in heavenly spheres.

I am God in the supreme sense of the word and know that I am God. You are also god, though in another sense, which you do not realise as yet. You know me in images which are diverse. The contemplation of different images gives you different moods. You see me sitting at the right hand of the heavenly Father and you are happy. Then you think about me as suffering crucifixion afresh and you are despondent. You see me as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and you are quieted. Then you see me as the Lion of the tribe of Judah who will devour sinners and you are frightened.

Rest from these images and see me once and for all as the Divine Lover reclining in the innermost chamber of the heart. Then you will have obtained your heart's desire.

The Sixth Letter From Jesus

My beloved,

This will be my last letter to you, since it is time we concluded our correspondence.

Let me summarise my teaching in one proposition: In English, 'I' is written with a capital letter, but you should write it with a small letter and write 'Love' with a capital.

If you do so, you will not be alarmed by the sight of a lover crucified. You will not have the impulse to decrucify him but will try to strengthen him to endure to the end. And you will take up a cross, too.

Every painter who does not love is only a picture-maker; every musician who does not love is only an instrument-player.

On earth there is so much anti-culture, anti-art, anti-politics, anti-marriage, anti-religion. People are against, not for. They do not love.

The martyrs were highly honoured in churches in times past; now we have the heroism of bent backs on which the enemy can ride. It is all because of the lack of love.

A Christian girl who was to be martyred sang heartily the night before. Someone asked, 'Aren't you afraid?' She replied, 'Why this silly question? I am human and experience all emotions, including fear. But if you cannot

laugh and rejoice and sing while you live and have courage, how can you understand a person who sings when she expects to be executed?’

If an individual cannot rejoice while looking for a heaven filled with gladness, how will he understand the deep joy of one who is crucified in heaven again and again, knowing what this suffering will bring to the world?

Do not reproach atheists, but rather ask yourself why they are what they are.

Darwin has destroyed the faith of many. In his *Voyage of the Beagle* he provides a clue as to what shaped his thinking. He writes:

Near Rio de Janeiro I lived opposite an old lady, who kept screws to crush the fingers of her female servants. I have stayed in a house where a young household mulatto daily and hourly was reviled, beaten and persecuted enough to break the spirit of the lowest animal. I have seen a little boy, six or seven years old, struck thrice with a horse-whip (before I could interfere) on his naked head, for having handed me a glass of water not quite clean. . . . And these deeds are done and palliated by men who profess to love their neighbours as themselves, who believe in God and pray that his will be done on earth. It makes one's blood boil, yet heart tremble, to think that we Englishmen and our American descendants with their boastful cry of liberty have been and are so guilty.

Love needs to be spelled not l-o-v-e but s-a-c-r-i-f-i-c-e.

You cannot live more or less ardently just by willing to do so. Our love depends upon many circumstances. Do not be dismayed that you cannot love as the great saints have done.

Physical deficiencies can affect the quality of love. Those who have a pituitary deficiency or who have undergone brain surgery are unable to experience passionate love. An exploration of the brain in the future might explain why some individuals are demonstrative lovers while others are lukewarm. Those who lead

dangerous lives can love better than those whose lives are commonplace. The presence of amphetamines also makes a difference.

Natural phenomena can also affect human behaviour. Arson increases 100% during a full moon. Murders increase too by a significant percentage. Because 50% of the human body is composed of water, it is influenced by the gravitational pull of the moon, like the sea with its tides.

But learn from the Jews: they feast the new moon with solemnity. The bad days of the full moon have passed, when ardent love was almost impossible.

No one, not even a genius, can think well twenty-four hours a day; no athlete is fit for competition at any hour. Geniuses and athletes are men who use well their best moments.

Instead of worrying about the times when your love cannot be at the desired fervour, maximise the great moments. Be quiet; you have time to grow in love.

I once said, 'Let tares and wheat (the children of the wicked one and the children of the kingdom) grow together until the harvest, which is the end of the world' (Mt 13:29,30,38,39). The children of the kingdom will grow until the end of the world, which at that time was 2,000 years away. It was thought that men have only the short span of earthly life for growth. This causes them to be in a hurry and not to grow properly.

It is only because believers have much time for growth in love that they can afford to engage in conflict instead of acts of love.

I am not for peace at any price. The Bible teaches that God ordered some terrible destructions rather than suffering evil to continue. God sanctifies armies to destroy incarnate devils. I repeat what I have said before: 'I came not to bring peace but a sword.'

Using a sword is terribly risky for men who have only this short lifespan for growth in love. Only those who know there is an eternity for embracing and kissing can

afford to spend their time in battles. In my short ministry I took time to expel the money-changers from the temple.

Love as much as you can, and fight the right battles. Do not decrucify me, but be ready to be crucified near me.

If you had lived in Jerusalem and had been in the mob confronting Pilate, what would you have replied to his question, 'Whom should I release, Jesus or Barabbas?' The only right answer, as events have proved, was 'Free Barabbas.' His death would have profited no one. But my suffering and death profited the whole human race. Without my sacrifice you would have no hope of spending eternity with me.

When you started writing your letters, first of all you really did not expect a reply. Letters to me were a literary fiction. When you started getting replies, you never thought that I would contradict your plans. Well, I give showers of blessing but usually not those my devotees expect from me.

Your letters are of much loftier spirituality than mine. You feel it a duty to venture to higher realms to speak with me, but the texture of the eternally valuable is woven on the loom of temporal things. You are on earth and have to remain there for the time being.

On earth practise love toward me. The Narada Bakhti Sutras contain some beautiful truths. They state that love for God can manifest itself in eleven ways: love of God's qualities, love of his enchanting beauty, love of worship, love of his remembrance, love of service, love of him as a child, love of him as the Bridegroom, love of total surrender, love of total oneness and love in the form of anguish or separation from him.

There are many more forms of love, but no one has shown me higher love than did my holy mother. I like Luther's words: 'Mary is after Christ the most precious jewel in the whole of Christendom; she is never praised

too much. No one can say about her more than that she is the mother of God. We have to consider also in our hearts what it means to be God's mother'.

Protestants nowadays shun even the mention of her. They would not call her 'mother of God'. They might call a woman 'the US president's mother', though she did not give birth to a president but merely brought forth a child who eventually became president. A queen mother also did not give birth to a king. The glory later acquired by these children is somehow shared by the mothers.

No one, therefore, should avoid calling my mother 'mother of God', because I was God from the first moment of conception in her womb. I have been this from eternity. She was mother only of my human body, except that my humanity cannot be separated from my divinity.

Love me as she loved me. I said, 'Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, *and mother*' (Mt 12:50).

Many have grasped the fact that they can be my little brethren and sisters. Few grasp that they can be mothers to me. They challenge the designation 'mother of God' because they themselves do not strive to fill this role.

Motherly love is the highest form of human love. Every other kind of love is mingled with self-interest. Individuals love their parents because they provide them with the necessities of life. Mother also gives sweets, and father pocket money. Husbands provide security and protection, wives maintain the home and provide loving care.

Mothers just love, whatever their children do. I remember the heartrending attitude of a mother whose grown son had hit her on the head with an axe, then dragged her by the feet to the cellar. The door slammed on his finger. Hearing her criminal son utter a profanity, the expiring mother, who had not died instantly, gasped, 'Is it very painful, my son?'

My mother had no easy lot and spent many a night in tears because of me. It is not easy to be a Saviour's mother. Nor is it easy to be God's bride.

Once in history the sons of God united with the daughters of men (Gen 6:1). Giants were born of this union, giants in wickedness. The world eventually had to be destroyed because of them. After such negative experiences, it was quite an undertaking for the Holy Spirit to unite with a human virgin.

By virtue of my divinity, I must have been a child difficult to rear, difficult to master, though I always tried to be her joy and to show obedience. She loved and loves me with a love than which there is none higher.

You too can be to me a mother. I can be as real to you as I was to my mother when she carried me in her womb or held me in her arms, as real as I am to her now when she stands near my throne.

She is near me not only when I sit on my throne. She is near me also when I am crucified afresh.

The words so often sung, '*Stabat mater dolorosa/Juxta crucem lacrimosa*' (The sorrowful mother stood in tears near the cross) are actual even now. But she only weeps. She does nothing to decrucify me or to ease my suffering, because she understands and consents.

It was only through my death on Golgotha that the sins of men have been erased; it is only through my crucifixion afresh that the repeated sins of saints who have lost their salvation and whom no man can help any more are dealt with. Do not imagine that I accept these fresh crucifixions just because I could not do otherwise. Do not think that they are senseless. Roses will blossom on these new crosses, too.

My mother desires that none should perish and encourages me in what I do. She suffers with me and rejoices in hope with me. In this you do your part: take upon yourself the cross of poverty and renunciation.

A king said to a monk, 'Ask a boon of me.'

The monk replied, 'I will not ask a boon from one of my slaves.'

'How can that be?' queried the king.

The monk explained, 'I have two slaves who are thy masters: covetousness and expectation.'

Renounce covetousness and greed. Take up your cross. The upright post of a cross stands for the 'I', the crossbeam represents the cancelling of the ego.

My memory is entirely submissive to my will. I can forget completely what I wish to forget. You would do well to make use of my ability by asking me to forget your past sins. I will do so gladly. Then you are as one who never sinned. 'Justified' means 'just as if I'd never sinned'.

The wine I made in Cana was said to be the best wine. Now only old wine is considered the best. When I changed water into something else, it was not a liquid that from then on was wine, but that had been wine. I made it as if it had not been water. So it is with the sins you confess.

As in the case of Hezekiah, I set back the sundial (Is 38:8) so many degrees and he was again the man he had been before he had committed that day's sins.

I have forgotten all your offences and sins. You do wrong to remind me of them on occasion. It is not good for you, and it diminishes my ability to forget fully.

On the other hand, you should not abuse the privilege in appealing to my forgetfulness, or I might forget to take good care of you. Instead, spend your energy seeking union with me. Give up your you-ness.

When human medicine cannot invent a cure, it invents a jargon. Doctors say nowadays that pain is a figment of the imagination. It is an imbalance in the mind-body complex.

Call it what you like and attribute it to whatever you wish, the fact remains that I am a Man of Sorrows. I knew terrible physical pain when whipped and crucified.

I still have very real pain now. But I can rejoice in spite of it, in fact, because of it. It is a great joy to endure pain willingly in order to benefit others.

So my counsel to you is to forget about decrucifying me. Instead, share my pain in all its intensity, together with its unspeakable joy.

This is what I have to tell you for the time being.

Truth is not proved by terms and demonstrations,
Nor seen when hidden by concrete relations.
The 'Canon' is no 'cure' for 'ignorance'
Nor can 'Deliv'rance come from 'Indications'.

If at each 'Stage' thy course diverted be
To different 'Goals', true goal thou'lt never see.
And till the veil is lifted from thine eyes
The Sun of truth will never 'Rise' for thee.

Strive to cast off the veil, not to augment
Book-lore. No books will further thy intent.
The germ of love to God grows not in books.
Shut up thy books, turn to God and repent.

(Nuruddin Abdur Rahman Jami,
translated by Whinfield and Kazvini)

If you would like to write to Pastor Wurmbrand, please send your letters to:

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