Things in their Identity

A TREE GIVES GLORY TO GOD
first of all by being a tree. For in being what God means
it to be, it is imitating an idea which is in God and which
is not distinct from the essence of God, and therefore
a tree imitates God by being a tree.

The more it is like itself, the more it is like Him. If
it tried to be like something else which it was never
intended to be, it would be less like God and therefore
it would give Him less glory.

But there is something more. No two trees are alike.
And their individuality is no imperfection. On the
contrary: the perfection of each created thing is not
merely in its conformity to an abstract type but in its
own individual identity with itself. This particular tree
will give glory to God by spreading out its roots in the
earth and raising its branches into the air and the light
in a way that no other tree before or after it ever did
or will do.

Do you imagine that all the individual created things
in the world are imperfect attempts at reproducing an
ideal type which the Creator never quite succeeded in
actualizing on earth? If that is so they do not give Him
glory but proclaim that He is not a perfect Creator.

Therefore each particular being, in its individuality,
its concrete nature and entity, with all its own charac-
teristics and its private qualities and its own inviolable
identity, gives glory to God by being precisely what
He wants it to be here and now, in the circumstances
ordained for it by His Love and His infinite Art.

The forms and individual characters of living and
growing things and of inanimate things and of animals
and flowers and all nature, constitute their holiness in
the sight of God.

Their inscape is their sanctity.

The special clumsy beauty of this particular colt on
this April day in this field under these clouds is a holi-
ness consecrated to God by His own Art, and it declares
the glory of God.

The pale flowers of the dogwood outside this win-
dow are saints. The little yellow flowers that nobody
notices on the edge of that road are saints looking up
into the face of God.

This leaf has its own texture and its own pattern of
veins and its own holy shape, and the bass and trout
hiding in the deep pools of the river are canonized by
their beauty and their strength.

But the great, gashed, half-naked mountain is an-
other of God’s saints. There is no other like it. It is alone
in its own character; nothing else in the world ever did or ever will imitate God in quite the same way. And that is its sanctity.

But what about you? What about me?

Unlike the animals and the trees, it is not enough for us to be what our nature intends. It is not enough for us to be individual men. For us, holiness is more than humanity. If we are never anything but men, never anything but our natural selves, we will not be saints and we will not be able to offer to God the worship of our imitation, which is sanctity.

It is true to say that for me sanctity consists in being myself and for you sanctity consists in being your self and that, in the last analysis, your sanctity will never be mine and mine will never be yours, except in the communism of charity and grace.

For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self.

Trees and animals have no problem. God makes them what they are without consulting them, and they are perfectly satisfied.

With us it is different. God leaves us free to be whatever we like. We can be ourselves or not, as we please. But the problem is this: since God alone possesses the secret of my identity, He alone can make me who I am or rather, He alone can make me who I will be when I at last fully begin to be.

The seeds that are planted in my liberty at every moment, by God’s will, are the seeds of my own identity, my own reality, my own happiness, my own sanctity.

To refuse them is to refuse everything: it is the refusal of my own existence and being: of my identity, my very self.

Not to accept and love and do God’s will is to refuse the fullness of my existence.

And if I never become what I am meant to be, but always remain what I am not, I shall spend eternity contradicting myself by being at once something and nothing, a life that wants to live and is dead, and a death that wants to be dead and cannot quite achieve its own death because it still has to exist.

To say I was born in sin is to say I came into the world with a false self. I came into existence under a sign of contradiction, being someone that I was never intended to be and therefore a denial of what I am supposed to be. And thus I came into existence and non-existence at the same time because from the very start I was something that I was not.

To say the same thing without paradox: as long as I am no longer anybody else than the thing that was born of my mother, I am so far short of being the per-
son I ought to be that I might as well not exist at all. In fact, it were better for me that I had not been born.

Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self.

This is the man that I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God does not know anything about him. And to be unknown of God is altogether too much privacy.

My false and private self is the one who wants to exist outside the radius of God's will and God's love—outside of reality and outside of life. And such a self cannot help but be an illusion.

We are not very good at recognizing illusions: least of all the ones we have about ourselves—the ones we are born with and which feed the roots of sin. For most of the people in the world, there is no greater subjective reality than this false self of theirs, which does not and cannot exist. A life devoted to the cult of this shadow is what is called a life of sin.

All sin starts from the assumption that my false self, the self that exists only in my own egocentric desires, is the fundamental reality of life to which everything else in the universe is ordered. Thus I use up my life trying to accumulate pleasures and experiences and power and honor and knowledge and love, to clothe this false self and construct its nothingness into something objectively real. And I wind experiences around

myself and cover myself up with pleasures and glory like bandages in order to make myself perceptible to myself and to the world, as if I were an invisible body that could only become visible when something visible covered its surface.

But there is no substance under the things I have gathered together about me. I am hollow, and my structure of pleasures and ambitions has no foundation. I am objectified in them. But they are all destined by their very contingency to be destroyed. And when they are gone there will be nothing left of me but my own nakedness and emptiness and hollowness, to tell me that I am a mistake.

The secret of my identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God.

But whatever is in God is really identical with Him: for His infinite simplicity admits no division and no distinction. Therefore I cannot hope to find myself anywhere except in Him.

Ultimately the only way that I can be myself is to become identified with Him in Whom is hidden the reason and fulfillment of my existence.

Therefore there is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace and my happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. If I find Him, I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him.

But although this looks simple, it is in reality im-
mensely difficult. In fact if I am left to myself it will be utterly impossible. For although I can know something of God's existence and nature by my own reason, there is no human and rational way in which I can arrive at that contact, that possession of Him, which will be the discovery of Who He really is and of Who I am in Him.

That is something that no man can ever do alone.

Nor can all the men and all the created things in the universe help him in this work.

The only One Who can teach me to find God is God, Himself, Alone.

3 Pray for Your Own Discovery

THERE EXISTS SOME POINT AT which I can meet God in a real and experimental contact with His infinite actuality: and it is the point where my contingent being depends upon His love. Within myself is a metaphorical apex of existence at which I am held in being by my Creator.

God utters me like a word containing a thought of Himself.

A word will never be able to comprehend the voice that utters it.

But if I am true to the concept that God utters in me, if I am true to the thought of Him I was meant to embody, I shall be full of His actuality and find Him everywhere in myself, and find myself nowhere. I shall be lost in Him.

What one of you can enter into himself and find the God Who utters him?

If, like the mystics of the Orient, you succeed in emptying your mind of every thought and every desire, you may indeed withdraw into the center of yourself and concentrate everything within you upon the imaginary point where your life springs out of God: