

MODERN SPIRITUAL MASTERS

Robert Ellsberg, Series Editor

This series introduces the writing and vision of some of the great spiritual masters of the twentieth century. Along with selections from their writings, each volume includes a comprehensive introduction, presenting the author's life and writings in context and drawing attention to points of special relevance to contemporary spirituality.

Some of these authors found a wide audience in their lifetimes. In other cases recognition has come long after their deaths. Some are rooted in long-established traditions of spirituality. Others charted new, untested paths. In each case, however, the authors in this series have engaged in a spiritual journey shaped by the influences and concerns of our age. Such concerns include the challenges of modern science, religious pluralism, secularism, and the quest for social justice.

At the dawn of a new millennium this series commends these modern spiritual masters, along with the saints and witnesses of previous centuries, as guides and companions to a new generation of seekers.

Already published:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer (edited by Robert Coles)
- Simone Weil (edited by Eric O. Springsted)
- Henri Nouwen (edited by Robert A. Jonas)
- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (edited by Ursula King)
- Anthony de Mello (edited by William Dych, S.J.)
- Charles de Foucauld (edited by Robert Ellsberg)
- Oscar Romero (by Marie Dennis, Rennie Golden,
and Scott Wright)
- Eberhard Arnold (edited by Johann Christoph Arnold)
- Thomas Merton (edited by Christine M. Bochen)
- Thich Nhat Hanh (edited by Robert Ellsberg)
- Rufus Jones (edited by Kerry Walters)
- Mother Teresa (edited by Jean Maalouf)
- Edith Stein (edited by John Sullivan, O.C.D.)
- John Main (edited by Laurence Freeman)
- Mohandas Gandhi (edited by John Dear)
- Mother Maria Skobtsova (introduction by Jim Forest)
- Evelyn Underhill (edited by Emilie Griffin)
- St. Thérèse of Lisieux (edited by Mary Frohlich)
- Flannery O'Connor (edited by Robert Ellsberg)
- Clarence Jordan (edited by Joyce Hollyday)
- Alfred Delp, SJ (introduction by Thomas Merton)
- Karl Rahner (edited by Philip Endean)
- Sadhu Sundar Singh (edited by Charles E. Moore)

MODERN SPIRITUAL MASTERS SERIES

ROMANO
GUARDINI

Spiritual Writings



*Selected and Translated
with an Introduction by*
ROBERT A. KRIEG



ORBIS BOOKS

Maryknoll, New York 10545

Founded in 1970, Orbis Books endeavors to publish works that enlighten the mind, nourish the spirit, and challenge the conscience. The publishing arm of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Orbis seeks to explore the global dimensions of the Christian faith and mission, to invite dialogue with diverse cultures and religious traditions, and to serve the cause of reconciliation and peace. The books published reflect the views of their authors and do not represent the official position of the Maryknoll Society. To learn more about Maryknoll and Orbis Books, please visit our website at www.maryknoll.org.

Copyright © 2005 by Robert A. Krieg

Published by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY 10545-0308.

All rights reserved.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Matthias Grünewald Verlag (Mainz, Germany) for permission to translate the copyrighted material contained in this book.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Queries regarding rights and permissions should be addressed to:
Orbis Books, P.O. Box 308, Maryknoll, NY 10545-0308.

Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Guardini, Romano, 1885-1968.

[Selections. English. 2005]

Romano Guardini : spiritual writings / selected and translated with an introduction by Robert A. Krieg.

p. cm. – (Modern spiritual masters)

ISBN 1-57075-589-2 (pbk.)

1. Spiritual life—Catholic Church. I. Krieg, Robert Anthony, 1946-
II. Title. III. Modern spiritual masters series.

BX2350.3.G83 2005

248.4'82—dc22

2004026570

Chronology

- 1885 Born on February 17, in Verona, Italy. Moves with his parents to Mainz, Germany.
- 1903–10 University studies in Tübingen, Munich, Berlin, Freiburg, and Mainz.
- 1910–12 Ordained a priest and enters into pastoral ministry.
- 1912–15 Studies at Freiburg lead to a doctorate in theology.
- 1915–20 Resumes full-time pastoral ministry. Writes *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (1918).
- 1920–22 Studies at Bonn lead to his “Habilitation” (second doctorate) in theology.
- 1923–39 Professor at the University of Berlin and chaplain to Quickborn at Burg Rothenfels. Writes *The Church and the Catholic* (1923), *The Conversion of St. Augustine* (1935), and *The Lord* (1937).
- 1939–45 Dismissed from his professorship; “retires” in Berlin and then Mooshausen. Writes *The World and the Person* (1939) and *The Rosary of Our Lady* (1940).
- 1945–47 Professor at the University of Tübingen.
- 1948–63 Professor at the University of Munich. Preaches at St. Ludwig’s Church. Named a papal prelate by Pope Pius XII in 1952. Writes *The End of the Modern World* (1950) and *Rilke’s Duino Elegies* (1953).

- 1963–68 Retires from the University of Munich; his academic chair is given to Karl Rahner. Writes *The Virtues* (1963) and *The Wisdom of the Psalms* (1963). In 1965, declines Pope Paul VI's invitation to become a cardinal.
- 1968 Dies on October 1. Leaves a literary corpus of more than sixty books and a hundred essays.

Chapter 1

Living in Relationship with God



O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you.

— Psalm 63:1

When children are learning to walk, they resist their parents' efforts to help them. They push adults away as they crawl, run, and climb stairs. This drive for independence stays with us, and makes us reluctant to get close to other people and even to God. According to Romano Guardini, we desire intimacy with God, but we hold back from God because we wrongly fear that closeness to God will stifle our freedom. We must experience a paradox: trust in God does not keep us infantile but enables us to mature and simultaneously to remain faithful to God and others. The first step to freedom is to surrender to "the higher power."

As Guardini describes in his memoirs, he struggled for many years to come to a true sense of himself and his calling. Drawing on this painful journey, he reflected throughout his life on the complexities of being human. In particular, he considered how every man or woman can move to self-acceptance, to becoming an "I" in relation to God and to other men and women. Near the end of his life, Guardini considered how God offers each of

us wisdom, “the gift of being able to distinguish between what is worthwhile and what is valueless.”

GOD’S WORD TO EACH OF US (1964)

Last night — it was well toward morning when dreams often come — a dream came to me. I do not recall any longer what occurred in it, but something was said either to me or by me; I do not remember which. It was said that when a human being is born, he or she receives a word from God. What is said is important. It is not only an inspiration, but a word. This word is uttered in the infant’s very being; it is a guide for everything that will happen in one’s life. This word is both a strength and a liability. A mandate and a promise. A guard and a challenge. Everything that then occurs in the person’s life is somehow related to the realization of this word. A human life is an elucidation and a fulfillment of the divine word which influences all aspects of this life. This word is spoken to each human being. It understands each of us, and comes into harmony with us. This word is perhaps the basis on which God will eventually judge each human being.

— BML, 20

FINDING ONE’S CENTER (1945)

If young people were to read my memoirs, they would surely be amazed that someone could be as unclear about himself as I had been. The primary cause for this confusion lay above all in me, in the complexity of my personal being which only slowly found its center point.

What brought about my own religious life was also what put great pressure on my religious life until my university years.

I was always anxious and very scrupulous. For a young person, this condition is more difficult than an easygoing sense of life. An easygoing sense of life is at least a life, while the self-preoccupation of the anxious conscience is destructive. Help for this condition can properly come only from an older person who sees the anxiety. As a youth, however, I did not meet such a person. Added to this condition for me was the tendency toward depression which later became acute. Nevertheless, this tendency was also a source of creativity for me.

My scrupulosity and tendency toward depression could have led even in my early years to an intense inner life, full of strong experiences. But this did not happen. When I look back on my life, I am not able to see the entire time up until my university years. Nothing comes to me from my early childhood memories — memories which usually make the beginning of an autobiography worthwhile. I do not want to suggest that those years were empty. What unfolded later in my life must have had its roots in my early years. But everything from my childhood lies as though under water. I have never had the sense of a happy childhood nor the desire to return to my childhood. I would not like to return to my childhood. I wish to add, however, that my parents truly loved us, and we them. We four brothers were closely united despite all conflicts, tensions, and difficulties, and it has remained that way even to this day.

When I finally arrived in Freiburg in 1906, I experienced an indescribable despondency. The prospect of becoming a priest threw me into a dark depression. I no longer understood myself. Today I know that what expressed itself in this despondency was the resistance of an entirely un-lived out nature to the necessary deprivations of the priesthood. Also, since birth, I have borne the inheritance of the depression that my mother experienced. Such an inheritance is not in itself bad; it is the ballast that gives a ship its ability to travel the deep seas. I do not

believe that there is creativity and a deep relationship to life without having a disposition toward depression. A person cannot eliminate it, but must include it in his or her life. As part of this, one must accept it in an innermost way from God, and must try to transform it into a good for other people.

I did not have this insight into depression when I went to Freiburg. After I arrived there, the flood waters of depression climbed so high in me that I thought I was sinking, and I considered putting an end to my life. I found peace in a few specific places; this sounds pathetic, but it is true. In Freiburg's cathedral, the Münster, the altar for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament stood to the right of the main altar. When I knelt on the steps of this side altar, the despondency lessened — only to return soon afterward. How long the depression continued I no longer know. In my memory it seems endless. It was in fact not more than a couple of weeks. But it is not only the external duration which makes time seem long.

One day I was going to St. Odilien Church, where a natural spring of water bubbles up, which is a pleasure to watch. On the return way, on the beautiful street that passes the Carthusian house, I prayed the rosary. The sadness lessened, and I became peaceful. It was my first real encounter with this prayer, which I later prayed so frequently. Since that moment I have never doubted my call to the priesthood. The dark flow of depression has always continued in my life, and more than once it has climbed very high. It was clear to me, however, that I was being called to the priesthood, and I have kept this conviction into the present.

I must say more about Wilhelm Koch, who was one of our professors of theology in Tübingen. Above all, I must recall that Koch was the person who freed me from the demands of scrupulosity. As I said earlier, scrupulosity had afflicted me since my childhood; during my first semester in Tübingen, it became

unbearable. I attribute this senseless self-preoccupation in good part to the fact that my nerves were so sensitive and have never entirely healed. Scrupulosity is connected, too, to my tendency toward depression, and it can to a certain extent have a positive effect because it makes one serious. But it can also destroy judgment and energy, to say nothing of the danger of inner panic that can drive anxious persons in the wrong direction so that they throw aside all moral and religious restraints.

In any event, Koch had the custom of hearing the confessions of a few students. Some of us — Karl Neundörfer, Josef Weiger, and I — asked him for this favor, and he agreed. He heard someone's confession in the following manner. At the agreed upon time, the confessee arrived at Koch's room, and walked back and forth with him in the room. This allowed the penitent to tell all that he had on his heart — whether about studies or practical matters, religious questions or moral issues — and to say what he thought about these things. Then Koch put on his stole, asked the penitent to give a summary of all that was discussed, and then gave the absolution. In this way, I experienced what a wonderful source of life the sacrament of reconciliation can be when it is performed properly. I learned to stand at a distance from my anxieties, to distinguish unimportant concerns from important ones, and to see the appropriate tasks of my personal and religious formation.

Since Koch was a good person, he offered us some advice that we followed. At that time, we had no knowledge of human sexuality, and he saw how this ignorance burdened us. So he sent each of us to a professor of psychiatry, who was empathetic to us and recommended a good book about sexual matters. This endeavor was a bit risky since Professor G. was not a Christian. The book was entitled *Die sexuelle Frage* (The sexual Question), by Forel. It treated sexual matters with a matter-of-factness and detail that served us well. We read the book aloud together and found that the whole subject became demystified.

These steps to inner freedom had the net effect of turning the semester into a good experience. I cannot say that my anxiety totally disappeared. Since it is really part of my very makeup, it always runs as a possibility beneath the surface of my life. I have attained, however, a critical distance from it and now am able to distinguish among its demands and assess each of them.

In the course of my last year at the University of Bonn, I was invited to accept a faculty position at Bonn in practical theology and liturgical studies. I had the intuition, however, that I should not deviate from my inner sense of direction, and therefore that I should not take this position. As I mention this, I would like to say that, since the awakening of my spiritual life, I had come to trust my inner orientation, and I have made my life's various decisions concerning professional, spiritual, and personal matters on the basis of this inner sense of direction.

— BML, 57, 61, 76–77, 81–82, 35

At the age of thirty-eight, Romano Guardini as a professor at the University of Berlin and as a chaplain to Quickborn developed key elements of his Christian humanism in his lectures and sermons. He gave much attention to the challenge of personal development.

BECOMING A PERSON (1925)

A human person is not solely an individual entity, not solely a private reality. Along with having autonomy, each human being exists in relation to other people. For the Christian, the social aspect of human life springs from the fact that the true or proper “person,” God — of whom a human being is an image — is both individual and social. God has revealed to us

that his personal being exists in a communal reality. The first divine person is the one who is “Father,” hence, one within a community. The second divine person is “Son.” The third divine person is “Spirit,” who is community-affirming love. The communal reality of God is not secondary to the individuality of each divine person, rather the autonomy of each divine person is grounded in the unchangeable uniqueness of each person within God’s communal being. The divine community is constituted by these unchangeable persons. We can understand God’s personal reality only by starting with our experience as human persons. However, in the order of being, the divine persons are the primary reality, and human persons are reflections of the divine being. Thus for Christians, God’s self-revelation is the religious basis for insights into the personal existence of every human being.

—LLB, 152

BEING IN THE WORLD (1928)

“The world” consists not of things in themselves alone, but of that which comes about as we encounter these things. When we see things and experience them, when we approach things and come in contact with them, we become involved with them, dwell and live with them. What comes about then is the authentic world. The world is not only outside of us and also not only within us; it is that reality which is interiorly unfolding outside of us and which is also reaching out from within us. It is this world that God intends since God creates both things and human beings.

There are not “things” and “human beings” in general. There is this particular cypress tree that has grown up here — at this spot on the slope where the breeze strikes it every evening. And there is this specific human being, me, who walks near the cypress. There is also my life as it has unfolded until now and

as it includes what I have inherited and somehow carry in me. I now walk along the slope. I see the cypress, and an encounter occurs between the cypress and me. If I approach the cypress appropriately, who knows how the cypress may respond? Is it only “make believe” when in folk tales a tree sees people and speaks to them? In any case, the “world” comes about, at this moment, in the encounter between the cypress and me. When human beings truly encounter things, the world emerges as God intends it. This world is always new. —TAO, 18–19

During the Third Reich (1933–45), as Hitler was depriving Germans of their civil rights and human dignity, Guardini highlighted the sacred character of every human being.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT HUMAN LIFE (1937)

We cannot bring forth justice if we want justice alone. We can be just only when we act from a point which lies beyond justice. We cannot oppose injustice when we seek to preserve only the norm of justice. We must act out of the power of love, which lacks nothing and is gracious and creative. Then true justice becomes possible. —HE, pt. 2, ch. 1, p. 92

Satan is neither an abstract principle nor a primal force, but a fallen creature, estranged because of rebellion. Satan seeks to establish a desperate kingdom of appearances and disorder. Satan has power only because we have sinned, and he is a power against the human heart which exists in truth and humility. . . . Jesus exists in a struggle against Satan and aims at entering into our souls, ensnared by Satan, in order to enlighten our consciences, to awaken our hearts, and to release our good energies. —HE, pt. 2, ch. 7, pp. 130–31

Between God and us stands a wall: sin. As the Holy One, God is angry at us and rejects us. Yet the Holy Spirit takes down this wall. The Holy Spirit arises out of God's heart. To be more accurate, the Holy Spirit is God's heart, God's eternal inner life. The Holy Spirit brings God's divine life to us and restores us to what we were in the beginning. There comes about in us not a mixture of sin and holiness but a new existence in an unspeakable inner life. We who are creatures share a community of life, a community of heart with God. We know that this new existence has taken place not because we have reasoned to it but because we believe in God's word.

—HE, pt. 2, ch. 12, p. 169

Justice is good; it is the basis of human existence. There is however something beyond justice: the free opening of one's heart to kindness. Justice is clear; but when it goes a step further it becomes cold. But kindness — genuine, heartfelt kindness, arising from one's character — warms and frees. Justice orders things, but kindness brings them forth. Justice does what suffices, what is. By contrast, kindness creates something new. In justice the human spirit attains the satisfaction of good order. But out of kindness springs the joy of a creative life.

—HE, pt. 4, ch. 7, p. 310

THE INVIOLEABLE SELF (1939)

Personal existence means that I can ultimately be possessed by no one else because I belong to myself. I could have lived in an age when slavery was permitted so that someone could buy other human beings and have control over them. An owner exercised power, however, not over these slaves as persons but over some of their physical and psychological elements. Moreover, the owner did so falsely, regarding the slaves as animals.

A proprietary relationship does not extend to the reality of personal existence. . . . To be a person means that I can be used by no one; I am an end in myself. I may work at a job in which the managers treat me solely as a functionary in a machine. If so, then it is only my performance or output which they make use of; they do not make use of me as a person.

The personal existence of a man or woman is threatened when the individual is loosened from those realities and norms that safeguard personal existence; among these are justice and love. Human beings deteriorate as persons when they relinquish justice. This personal erosion takes place not only when people act unjustly, but also when they do not pursue justice. The pursuit of justice entails both the acknowledgment that something or someone is its own reality and also the readiness to protect the rights of this reality and the relationships appropriate to it.

—WU, ch. 1, sec. 4, pp. 93–94, 97

As West Germany became a vibrant democracy, Guardini elucidated the link between personal development and belief in God.

THE RELATIONAL SELF (1952)

The likeness of human beings to God penetrates all aspects of human life. The truth and mystery of this assertion is evident in the fundamental ways in which men and women exist, and in a basic understanding of human life.

At the beginning of his *Confessions*, St. Augustine gives a permanently valid expression of this human reality when he writes, “You have made us for yourself, O God.” This statement is meant not to be primarily enthusiastic or inspirational

but to be descriptive. God has created human beings in a personal relationship with God, and without this relationship we can neither exist nor make sense of our lives. We do not truly understand human life if we think that men and women can live as self-enclosed individuals. On the contrary, a human being exists through a primary relationship — a relationship from God and to God. This relationship with God is not secondary to someone's life as though the individual could exist apart from it. In fact, every human being lives in relationship with God.

Men and women can relate to other human beings in various types of relationships: colleagues, friends, and assistants. Human beings mature in these relationships, but they do not primarily depend on them. Someone remains a human being even without knowledge of this or that other person, or without helping a specific individual. A person's relationship with God is of a different sort. A bridge is the arch which a builder constructs from one bank of a river to the other bank. It cannot be said that this structure is a bridge if it does not reach from one side of the river to the other. Something similar must be said in any discussion about human existence and God. A human being exists only in relationship with God. The movement "from God" and "to God" occurs in every human life.

This reality becomes clearer when we focus on that which differentiates human beings from all other earthly creatures, namely, personal existence. That someone is a person means that he or she exists in a unique way. Someone may act on his or her own initiative and may have self-control. If asked, "Who has done this or that?," the person can answer, "I have," thereby accepting responsibility for this action. God has created each human being in this way. However, God has created human beings not only so that they exist in themselves but also so that something more can come about. God has made human beings to be God's "other," God's "you." Further, God has determined that God should be the "other," the proper "you," of

human beings. The human essence is anchored in this “I-you” or “I-Thou” relationship with God. It is only because God has created men and women to live in this relationship of I-you with God that they can enter into personal relationships with one another. That one human being can say to another, “I am aware of you, . . . I respect you,” is possible only because God has granted to each of us the ability to say to God, the Lord, “You are my creator, . . . I pray to you.”

—MEN, 48–50

SELF-ACCEPTANCE (1953)

Self-acceptance is an act of asceticism. I must renounce my wish to be other than I am, to be someone other than who I am. The persistence of the human desire to be something other than oneself is clear in the ancient myths and fairy tales, which are found among all peoples, that recount how a man or woman is changed into something else — into a star in the heavens, an animal, a monster, or a stone. . . .

At the heart of everything human is the act in which I accept myself. I must agree to be who I am. Agree to have the qualities that I in fact have. Agree to exist within the limits that were given to me.

I cannot explain how I am as I am. I cannot understand why I must be so. I cannot make sense of my life according to laws of nature or history, for my personal existence is not a necessity but a fact. It is simply the most decisive fact for me. It is how it is, and cannot be otherwise. It is, though it also could not be. Nevertheless, who I am defines my whole existence.

All of this means that I cannot explain my identity, nor can I somehow prove myself. Rather I must accept myself. And the clarity and courage for this self-acceptance shapes all that exists in my life.

I cannot fulfill this challenge to be myself solely through my own efforts alone. I can accept myself only in relation to something or someone higher — and with this recognition we are in the realm of faith. Faith means here that I understand my finitude in relation to the highest reality, in relation to God's will.

God is a reality and a necessity. God is meaningfully grounded in God's very self and needs no explanation. The explanation of God is God alone. God is so because God is so. And God exists because God is God. God is the absolute self-comprehending One. We must accept that the "self," whose understanding is spoken of here, is God's.

This God is the Lord, and God is the Lord because of the divine essence. This means not only that God is the Lord of creation, but also and primarily that God is the Lord in God's very self. God abides in divine sovereignty. This mystery is conveyed in the name which God communicated to us. At the start of salvation history there is the vision on Mount Horeb. "But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" What shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I am has sent me to you" ' " (Exod. 3:13–14). What is the meaning of the name that God has told us? It means: I am the One who exists in reality and power, and I am now acting. . . . This name also means: I accept no name from the world but receive my name from myself alone. . . . Further, in its deepest sense this name expresses God's message: My name is the manner in which I am I myself. I alone exist in this way, simultaneously in pure necessity and complete freedom.

This God is the One who created me. We remain in this awareness: God is the One who has given me to myself. With

this recognition, my questioning comes to an end. It is in relation to this acknowledgment that one might ask, why has God given me to myself, as this individual, here and now? But this question makes no sense; it shows I have not truly recognized who and what God is. I could answer, God has created me because it is correct in the whole of the world, or because I should do this or that, or because it was meaningful to create me. But this answer says not more, but less, than simply to say, God made me because God wanted to create me.

A highly respected account of how a human being comes to personal existence is Dantes's *Divine Comedy*. This great work tells of the journey from earth through hell and all its depths, through the place of purification with all of its stages, through the spheres of heaven into the ecstasy of God. At the conclusion, one reads how the mystery of Christ is revealed to the traveler; it is through Jesus Christ that our humanity is assumed into the existence of the Son of God. In the presence of Christ, the traveler apprehends what is situated not only beyond everything earthly but also beyond himself. He now knows who Christ is and also who he himself, Dante, is. He also knows now all that God intends for him.

The reality of our relationship with God is profound, even when I understand it properly.

Who I am I can grasp only in relation to what is beyond me. No; it is better to say that I can understand myself only in relation to the One who has given me me. I cannot understand myself only in relation to myself. Questions about human life which use the word "why" and the word "I" cannot be answered by an individual alone. These questions include: Why am I as I am? Why can I have only what I have? Why do I exist? These questions can be answered only in relation to God.

— AS, 17, 18, 20–22, 30–31

CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE (1963)

Human beings exist in the image of God. But how do they resemble God? According to the Bible, God governs creation on his own authority, and God has simultaneously willed that human beings should also govern it. It is important to understand the meaning of this "also." God governs by his very nature because God is God. Human beings govern, however, by grace because God gives them the ability to do so. Insofar as human beings govern the world according to God's will, they direct the world to obey God as well. By understanding, judging, acting, and forming, men and women fashion creation into God's kingdom. Insofar as human beings exist in the service of the highest Lord, the world becomes the kingdom of God. This then is how men and women should exist in the image of God.

If human beings had remained obedient to God, they would have become increasingly similar to God. They would have shaped the world more and more perfectly and offered it back to God in increasingly purer love. But they rebelled against God. They tried to govern the world by their own powers and to make it for themselves. As a result, they became enslaved to the world. They betrayed the true Lord and regarded the world as their god. Thus they generated the gods, the concentrations of the power which gained control over human beings after they abandoned God. Human beings, who should exist in the image of God, have become similar to gods. What this means is evident when one looks not only at the gods like Apollo and Athena but also at the dark, terrifying, and horrible figures whom human beings have regarded as gods. When we take note of these gods, we become disillusioned enough to see the empty coldness, the anonymous "it," of even the most attractive Olympian figures.

This is a truth that we must take very seriously. What we are is ultimately defined not by us but by the God or the gods in whom we believe. Rationalists insist that we make our gods according to our own character, disposition, and needs. To an extent, this is true. But it is more the case that we become similar to what we believe in. When we believe in nothing, then we find that we have no identity, that we have nothing at the core of our being.

When I am conscious, for example, of how God has created me by his call to me so that I experience myself as an individual who is called by God, when I see the different situations of my life as modes which express God's call to me and see my responses to these situations as my answers to this divine call, then I find that my personal identity becomes stronger, more confident, and freer. In this process, I discover myself richer and more connected to what's eternal.

By contrast, when I think of God as pantheism does, that is, as the universal spirit, or as the primal mystery, or as the essence of the world, then I become not a clear and responsible self or "you," but only a vague, indefinite being. Indeed, this indefiniteness penetrates my innermost being and deprives me of the ability to say yes or no to the decisive questions of human existence. . . .

The most basic decision of our lives consists in acknowledging who God is in relation to the gods and godlessness of politics and culture and poetry and other things. Only because God has defined human beings in their very essence are we what we are. Only by receiving ourselves from God do we remain sure of ourselves. Only because we are addressed by God can each of us really say "I." For the whole existence of each of us is nothing other than our answer to God's creative call: "You, exist!"

What then is wisdom? It concerns how life can attain its proper meaning, how it can participate in that which endures. Wisdom

ensures that at the end of life we do not stand with empty hands. It relies on the gift of being able to distinguish between what is worthwhile and what is valueless, between what lasts forever and what passes away, what is genuine and what is phoney. According to Psalm 90, the distinction which is the basis of all other distinctions is this: God alone is God, eternally existing, holy and living, and human beings are only human, created and passing. Yet human beings are capable of acknowledging the truth and experiencing what has true value. They are obligated to pursue the good and to be responsible to God for how they use their lives. . . .

When we ask, “What should I do? Wisdom, advise me!” Wisdom answers: “You must learn to distinguish. You must bring into your life that which God values — not that which is seemingly impressive or exciting, but that which is authentic.”

And what is authentic? Wisdom answers: “The good!” When I have fulfilled an obligation, although it was unpleasant for me, the situation changes, the issue no longer exists, but something remains: the good that was done. This good is what God values.

Or when I act with love toward someone whom I do not like, seeking to understand and to help the person, I fulfill a divine commandment and something comes about which lasts. Surrounding this act are many things that fall away: the encounter itself is over, the stimulus ceases, the individuals involved — both the other person and I — will eventually die. But at this moment I conveyed love, and this love is what remains since this is what God values.

Or I may have a friend who, like every human being, possesses good personal traits and also unattractive ones. Much about the person brings me delight, but some things turn me off. It is easy to say to myself, I will accept my friend’s delightful qualities but not the unattractive ones. However, wisdom says: “You cannot do that! You cannot be selective about a person’s

traits for all of them belong to this individual. Your friend's best qualities are connected with his or her deepest weaknesses. If you do not accept everything, then you lose this person." Acceptance of another person requires patience. God values patience. God is patient with me and with every person. You too must be so, and permanence will come to your friendship. You may seek to influence your friend, trying to encourage some qualities and to lessen others. But first you must say yes to the whole person.

That which is most beautiful in the world is brought about when one person loves another. I do not mean passion, although this has its good aspects. Rather, I mean the wonderful phenomenon in which one human being, who by nature is self-oriented, opens to another person, and welcomes the beloved into his or her heart. When we love in this way, we make the beloved as important to us as we are to ourselves, and perhaps even more important. As a result, the one person feels secure in the other.

Wisdom says, however, that it is foolish to try to force one person to respond to another's love. It is foolish to demand that this love should exist. To insist that this love should last forever. To get demanding when the other withdraws. To want to somehow buy love with special deeds and favors. . . . All of these efforts would be foolish because love can exist only in freedom. It must be a gift and must always be given anew. If love has been given over ten long years, it does not mean that it will necessarily be given during an eleventh year. To be sure, love has the desire to persist because it possesses an eternal character. But love unfolds not out of necessity but always anew out of freedom. For this reason, love dies when it is not honored with freedom; it dies when one person senses that the other person is taking the love for granted and is no longer working at loving well. While one person cannot compel another to reciprocate

in love, a person can nourish love and nurture it with attentiveness and courtesy. Then love can flourish. When someone understands all of this, the person has attained wisdom.

—WP, ch. 3, pp. 146–49; ch. 12, pp. 239, 240–42

During his last years, Guardini wrote a manuscript on Christian discipleship; this book was published after his death.

IN DIALOGUE WITH GOD (1976)

The creative act, which revelation presents to us as the basis for being a person and for existing as a specific person in the nonpersonal world, presupposes an I-you dialogue between a human being and God — a dialogue that God initiates. The book of Genesis speaks in images. It is not a scientific presentation but a proclamation springing from the Holy Spirit. When we correctly understand the verses that speak of the creation of the world (Gen. 1–2), we see how the creation of nonpersonal things — earth, sea, light, plants, and animals — utilizes the image of crafted realities. God “made” these things, in that God ordered that they should exist. Even in the creation of human beings such an image appears: God forms the human body out of the earth as a potter forms vessels on a wheel. What makes a man or woman a human being — namely, the life of the soul, the interiority of the spirit, the freedom of the person — comes about however through God’s breath and through God’s speaking the name, “Adam,” which may mean “human being out of the earth.” Here God’s creative act itself takes on a personal character so that we may say that a divine call creates the personal existence of every human being. God calls: “You”; each of us responds by becoming an authentic human person. The

personal existence of every human being is in its deepest sense one's answer to God's call, "You."

When Genesis says further that human beings exist in the "image" of God (Gen. 1:26–27), it is assumed that this similarity is a man or woman's personal existence. The fact is that each human being not only answers God's call, but is the answer itself to this call. A human being exists only in the I-you relation with God. It is the ontological order in which someone lives. In light of this reality, we become aware of the absurdity of the assertion that God does not exist. —EC, 475–76

A PRAYER ON OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (1948)

O God, you have created us and wonderfully established our being. You have desired that we should live according to the principles of your wisdom, so that our energies unfold in ever new encounters with these principles and become empowered for their proper freedom. Our interactions with the things of this world should prepare us for our encounter with you. You are the only One. For each of us, you are the ultimate "you," the only One who truly fulfills us. We are orientated to you, and only in you will our true essence come to fulfillment as you have desired it.

You are the truth that gives validity to every finite truth. You are the holiness that makes every good thing sacred. You are the heart for which we long. "You have created us for you, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

My value is anchored in the respect that you, O God, have for me. My honor is based on your honor. If I were to leave you, I would be like one of those people of whom the apostle says: "For if any are hearers of the Word and not doers, they are like

those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like” (James 1:23). You are the sacred mirror in which I alone am certain of my eternal countenance and aware of my obligations. If I were to depart from you, I would be separated from myself. Moreover, if I were to depart from you, this world’s powers, which are meant to serve me, would become masters over me.

Embrace me in a sacred intimacy with you. Make my heart incorruptible so that it can perceive what leads away from you. Just as emergency medical teams immediately awaken when life is endangered, so strengthen my innermost self to go immediately against everything that would separate me from you. Amen.

—TG, ch. 7, pp. 18–19