

29. *The watermark*

After writing you that one of the fundamental attitudes of mental prayer is to offer oneself to the Lord, I have had second thoughts. Am I perhaps leading you into an error so common that it is surprising that anyone has escaped it?

Each of us likes to believe he is his own master—autonomous and free. And we think the most beautiful act is precisely to renounce our independence, to proclaim our dependence upon God by giving ourselves to him. Some of us are even close to thinking that the Lord really owes us something in exchange for this gift—a certain esteem and gratitude.

It is true that there is nothing nobler than for a free person to agree to depend on another through love. Such, for example, is the case of a bride on her wedding day. But it is not true that we are our own masters in our relations with God.

Hold a piece of bond paper up to the light, and you will read the name of the manufacturer in the watermark. Look at a man in the light of God, and you will discover the name of his Lord inscribed in the very fabric of his being.

Man is made by God and belongs to him in the same way a crop belongs to a farmer, or a sculpture to an artist. And not merely “the same way,” but much more so. Things belong to a man because they are the fruit of his labors, but they do not owe their total being to him. He did not create them. Man receives everything from God. He therefore belongs to God far more completely. He belongs to God totally, definitively, and exclusively. Everything in man belongs to God: his intellect and heart, his body and soul, his actions and possessions. Whether he knows it or not, whether he consents to it or not, the reality of his origin remains. He comes from God, and he belongs to God. This dependence does not result from any self-giving on his part.

What, then, do we mean by “giving oneself” to God? Certainly, not what these words mean in our human relations. With God, to give oneself is to recognize the irrefutable, indisputable, “non-modifiable” fact that we all belong to him. It is to acknowledge it with our intellect, consent to it with all our heart, and ratify it with all the fervor of our will. In this way, an essential change comes about in us. The bond of dependence is transformed into a bond of love.

The damned belong to God no less than do the saints. This dependence makes the happiness of the saints, because they accept it. It tortures the damned because they obstinately persist in rejecting it. For the saint, it is a communion of love, for the damned it is hell. But both for the saint and the damned, it *is*.

When you pray, make sure you avoid the naive and pretentious attitude of the person who wants to *become* dependent upon God through a glorious gift of himself. Rather, realize that you already belong to God, down to the innermost fibers of your being. This attitude will give you a deep and humble joy, a sense of total security. When you experience it, consent to this belonging to God with your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole mind. That is giving yourself to God.