

CHAPTER 5

GRENIER, MYSTICISM AND RELIGION: TOWARDS COMMITMENT

Taoism had a particular interest for Grenier because it offered a historical example of a doctrine of the Absolute taken to its logical conclusion in terms of an attitude of total indifference. Other religions and philosophies of the Absolute all seemed to him to reveal serious compromise when compared with Taoism. That did not mean, however, that he lost interest in them. Indeed, he was well aware that Taoism represented an esoteric Oriental attitude, and he did not propose either to become a Taoist himself or to encourage other Westerners to follow that path (*EBL*, 72–74). His study of Taoism encouraged him to explore elements of more accessible Western traditions that showed similarities with it, especially in the areas of an immediate contact with the Absolute and of an accompanying attitude of indifference to the world.

When Grenier writes about mystical experience in the Christian and Islamic traditions, he feels himself to be both attracted and disappointed. The attraction comes from the hope of enjoying an immediate contact with that Divine Reality which corresponds to his own intuition of an Absolute underlying the contingency of the world. In 'Un Soir à Biskra' he interprets two texts of Jalâl-ud-Din (Rûmi) in this way: 'C'est qu'un être attire tous ces êtres et les force à le proclamer' (*IM*, 33 (35–36)). He accepts willingly the suggestion that 'il suffit parfois de détourner la tête . . . il suffit de "l'écart" d'un cheval' to attain the desired end of a mystical contact with 'ce que nous cherchons' si infatigablement et à travers tant de déceptions . . . l'Unité' (*IM*, 36, 38 (38, 40)). This disappointment, on the other hand, is inherent in that same hope. There is the real possibility that one will fail to attain the desired end, and indeed be worse off than before. 'Un beau texte d'Al Hallâj nous révèle qu'une allusion divine est cachée au sein de l'ivresse la plus animale, et que ce qui devrait nous entraîner le plus haut risque aussi de nous faire tomber le plus bas' (*IM*, 32 (35)). If ecstasy may miss the target, so also may the way of renunciation favoured by other mystics, which often leads to barrenness and *acedia*. 'Durant quinze ans la Mère Angélique eut beau transporter ses familiers, elle souffrit d'une complète privation de la présence divine' (*IM*, 153 (158)). Not only that, but the enjoyment of mystical union is inevitably followed by an even greater disappointment. In *Le Choix* Grenier notes that in

their descriptions of union, the mystics 'insistent sur son caractère éphémère, sur les afflictions qui le suivent parfois, sur la dérégulation dans laquelle ils se sentent après ces états trop élevés' (*C*, 41 (44)). In the much later *Troisième Lexique* he comments: 'L'extase, oui. Mais comment parvenir à relier entre elles les extases? Or la vie mystique, c'est cela' (*TL*, art. 'Mystique'). This is not merely a theoretical problem for Grenier. Without ever claiming to be a mystic, he evidently sees close parallels between certain of his own experiences and those of the mystics. It is through the in-betweenness of his own experience, never able to settle either for a total indifference or for a firm commitment, that he explores the nature and the meaning of what it is to be human in the world: the mystics are also 'in between'.

Grenier's experiences of what he calls *états*, *instants* and *moments* have already been discussed to some extent in the context of the Absolute and the basic 'sentiment philosophique', and in that of possibility, and they will require further consideration in the context of artistic creation. At this point it will be useful to relate them to the field of mystical experience in order to draw out certain similarities and certain distinctions. Without listing the references exhaustively (*Inspirations méditerranéennes* and *Les Grèves* are the richest sources), it may be suggested that the corpus of experiences described by Grenier comprises two major types. Both are induced by, or at least closely associated with, the contemplation of nature, but one type is characterized by a sense of belonging, of *plénitude*, of victory, of union, while the other is a revelation of alienation, of emptiness, of loss, of separation. The first type is associated with an intuition of the necessity of existence, the second with an intuition of its contingency. Examples of the first may be found in 'Interiora rerum': 'Une minute devient sacrée quand elle est une ouverture sur l'immuable, un contact avec le nécessaire . . . Certains prétendent à épuiser la plénitude de l'instant. Le peuvent-ils?' (*IM*, 131 (135)) and in 'Les Îles Fortunées':

Et lorsque lentement sonnaient les coups de midi et que tonnait le canon du Fort Saint-Elme, un sentiment de plénitude, non pas un sentiment de bonheur, mais un sentiment de présence réelle et totale, comme si toutes les fissures de l'être étaient bouchées, s'emparait de moi et de tout ce qui était autour de moi (*LI*, 88–89 (89–90))

and of the second in 'La Nuit à la Medina': 'Le vertige métaphysique prend l'homme et lui fait douter de sa condition d'homme. Rien ne compte plus de ce qu'il est. Il faut passer par ces états de suprême dénuement pour savoir ce que c'est que le néant' (*IM*, 39–40 (41)), and in 'L'Attrait du vide': 'j'ai vu ce ciel basculer et s'engloutir dans le vide: ç'a été ma première impression du néant' (*LI* (2), 12 (25)).

These two types of experience appear to correspond to what Marghanita Laski has called 'intensity ecstasies' and 'withdrawal ecstasies' respectively.¹ It

is interesting to note that Laski associates certain features of withdrawal ecstasies with the Eastern mystical tradition and with those mystics in the West, like Eckhart, who came closest to the Eastern tradition (pp. 71, 74). The cast of Grenier's thinking is heavily influenced by the East. He follows the Vedântists in preferring to speak of the Absolute in negative terms, and his intuition of absence and of *le Néant* is not compensated for by an equal stress on presence and *l'Être* for that very reason. The withdrawal ecstasy, for him, is associated with the realization of the absence of the Absolute, the absence of that necessity which underlies his contingency. He is unable to go on from that point to rejoice in the assurance of either a pantheistic union ('adamic' for Laski, 'pan-en-henic' for Zaehner)² or a union with the personal God of the Christian or Islamic tradition. He prefers to see his experiences as metaphysical rather than as mystical (*MIX*, 77–80; *C*, 6 (9–10)), but the area with which he is most concerned would seem to correspond to Zaehner's third category, that of the 'monistic' mystical experiences. At the same time, his sustained interest in Quietism, despite its obvious failure to measure up to the extreme criteria of Taoism where the Absolute and indifference are concerned, suggests that his 'metaphysical' perspective may at times overlap with the 'mystical' even as far as theism.³ Is this the point at which a bridge may be discerned in Grenier's thought between indifference and commitment? Two possible lines of investigation here are, firstly, Grenier's interpretation of Quietism, and secondly, his own religious experience (where he may be prepared to allow that it is more than just 'metaphysical').

In the section of the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté* devoted to 'Le Non-agir d'après le Tao', Grenier makes the point that in Christianity

la quiétude est un état mystique ignoré par le simple fidèle; elle ne dispense pas des devoirs d'obligation; et même, en tant qu'état mystique, elle est une étape dernière à laquelle on n'a le droit d'accéder qu'après avoir traversé l'étape de la méditation (où la pensée est agissante) . . . Oui, c'est naturel, c'est même indispensable, mais seulement pour l'âme qui est parvenue à un certain degré. (*EBL*, 140–41)

Even then, the passivity of the soul bears only a superficial resemblance to that of the Taoist. The *laissez-faire* of the Christian mystic 'réalise le paradoxe de l'oisiveté agissante'. It is a question of cooperation, of allowing the personal God to move the soul as He wills. Piny and Fénelon, whom he quotes,⁴ may be suspect from a strictly orthodox Roman Catholic point of view, but they are none the less still in the mainstream of Christian tradition in their emphasis on the will of God as the principle of action on the part of the believer. Action as such is not condemned. Elsewhere Grenier points out that Meister Eckhart himself had the same doctrine.⁵ He is less certain about Molinos, whom he understands to be putting forward the possibility (though not the necessity) of making no effort in the act of union with God. Although Molinos speaks of

God in personal terms, as do other Christian mystics, he seems to Grenier to be closer than most to the mystics of non-theistic (particularly monistic) traditions, and a link may also be perceived with his own experience. In his introduction to *Le Guide spirituel* (Paris, 1970)⁶ Grenier singles out for comment the passage (III §§iv–vi) in which Molinos contrasts two types of purification: ‘1° par les afflictions — qui consistent dans la souffrance due à l’absence; 2° par le feu d’un amour ardent et insatiable — qui consiste dans l’accablement par présence (*sic*). La deuxième est le privilège de quelques-uns qui savent se détacher de tous liens et marcher vers l’anéantissement.’ In this summary he has suppressed the personal element — for Molinos speaks of ‘l’absence du Seigneur’, ‘l’âme éloignée de son Bien-aimé’, ‘Sa Présence’ — and he is left with the abstract concepts of *absence* and *présence* which are of frequent occurrence in his own writings.⁷ His conclusion is equally impersonal. The heresy of Molinos, he maintains, was not that he insisted that the soul should make no effort, but that he claimed that ‘*elle peut ne pas faire effort dans l’acte d’union à Dieu*’. In that case, ‘il s’agit plutôt d’une vue théorique et métaphysique de la plus haute importance que d’une question de morale et de casuistique’. Grenier is concerned with the attitude of indifference as a viable possibility, just as in his investigation of Taoism. Indeed, in ‘Le Non-agir d’après le Tao’, his claim that ‘on a vu en tout cas combien, même avec Fénelon, le catholicisme était loin du quiétisme véritable, et combien celui de Molinos lui-même était loin du quiétisme taoïste’ (*EBL*, 153–54), is simply without basis as far as the second half of it is concerned, and Grenier’s introduction to the *Guide spirituel* does little to strengthen the argument. Grenier’s interest in Quietism leads back to Taoism and indifference rather than on to an exploration of religious commitment or even of the possibility of faith. R. Campbell’s suggestion that

cette indifférence, totale et définitive, dont Grenier nous entretient au cours de son œuvre, n’est que la transposition sur le plan métaphysique de l’attitude de l’Amant délaissé . . . ; la position philosophique de J. Grenier pourrait être . . . caractérisée comme *discours sur l’absence de Dieu* (art. cit., pp. 696–99)

may prove to be perceptive, but so far little evidence has been found to support it.

Christian Quietism, however, is by no means the only religious tradition to which Grenier was exposed. Many of the major influences on his thinking throughout his life were associated with religious traditions. His schooling took place entirely within a particular Christian tradition, that of the Marianites. Lequier and Renouvier both adopted a Christian framework for their thought, one remaining a Roman Catholic and the other yielding to the attractions of liberal Protestantism. Grenier’s philosophical training gave him, in addition, a certain familiarity with the work of Aquinas and the Scholastic theologians,

and he was also acquainted with the Neo-Thomists of his own day.⁸ Beyond Christianity, he was interested in the mystics of all traditions, and in Eastern metaphysical systems which are as much religious as philosophical. What then was his attitude not only to elements of these various traditions which he incorporated into his own personal meditation, but to the whole issue of religious faith and commitment?

We possess two important testimonies to his reaction to the kind of faith that was preached at his school, in *Les Grèves* and the *Mémoires intimes de X*. The Institution Saint-Charles in Saint-Brieuc was a Marianite foundation, run officially since the Separation (about the time that Grenier started there) by diocesan clergy, but still with about one third of the staff consisting of lay brothers of the Order.⁹ The religious education which they dispensed was 'd'un rigorisme quasi-janséniste' (*MIX*, 21). Much of what Grenier has to say about it is concerned with the preparation for the solemn first communion at the age of eleven. The emphasis on the *examen de conscience* aggravated his natural tendency to over-scrupulousness and feelings of guilt, to the point of being at least partly responsible for his later nervous illnesses (*MIX*, 20). His attachment to the religion in which he was brought up (at school, if not so much at home) was based in some measure on fear of death and hell (*MIX*, 64). At the same time, his natural sense of pessimism found confirmation in religion, the joyful side of which was never apparent to him as a child. If it held positive attractions for him, they were to be found in the aesthetic qualities of the liturgy and the poetry of the cult of Mary (*MIX*, 55–56). There was enough, then, in the Roman Catholic tradition that was sympathetic to Grenier's character for him to feel at home in it. In the *Mémoires intimes de X*, he says in passing: 'Comment je me détachai de la religion pour ensuite y revenir est une autre question' (*MIX*, 64); that period seems to have come later.

For the 1920s we possess several contemporary testimonies to Grenier's religious evolution in the form of letters, and also later passages in *Voir Naples* which clearly refer to this period. Lambert's letters contain phrases such as: 'une certaine couleur protestante', 'étrangement protestant', 'ô pasteur parpillot', 'sensibilité catholique me disiez-vous? Creusez là', and 'Dites, pendant quelles heures de la journée vous passez-vous du désir de Dieu?'¹⁰ while on the other hand Max Jacob, writing to Cocteau in 1926, says of Grenier: 'Il est pétri de sentiment et de foi en toutes choses (sauf peut-être en Dieu).'¹¹ Grenier offers a personal perspective on his attitude while in Italy (1924–26) in a passage in *Voir Naples*. The demonstrative nature of religious practice in Italy shocked him, as a man of the north accustomed to the emphasis being placed on the inner life. 'Maintenant je me demande si dans notre religiosité n'entre pas un certain esprit de routine . . . Pour moi ma religion était tellement spirituelle, elle était si bien sublimée qu'elle ne me gênait plus du tout.' The religious practice of his Italian fiancée, however, reassured him. 'Je pense aussi

que j'étais touché par un idéal . . . Et cette religion même dont je m'étais écarté par suite de cette usure qui détruit mieux une croyance que n'importe quel doute — cette religion avait gardé sur moi son prestige dans les cérémonies et les rites' (*VN*, 231–32). It seems, then, that in the 1920s Grenier abandoned formal religious practice but retained a deeply spiritual, if not necessarily religious, sensitivity. Despite what he says in the *Mémoires intimes de X.* about his aspirations being more philosophical and intellectual than religious, he was well aware of the inadequacy and the dangers of intellectualism (*MIX*, 62, 64) (as indeed was Lambert, e.g. in letters of 4 May 1925 and 10 October 1925). The passage in *Voir Naples* quoted above concludes with a *caveat* in that sense. 'L'"intellectuel" croit . . . dégager le sens caché des mystères des religions; il se juge supérieur . . . Or c'est cet "intellectuel" qui a des chances de se tromper le plus lourdement' (*VN*, 233).

Grenier's discovery of Greece and India in the 1920s helped to fix this undogmatic spirituality as the climate that was to continue to inform his thought in the next decade. Indeed, the nature of Grenier's religious beliefs is not something that can be isolated from the rest of his thought. The basic datum for him is the Absolute, 'cette notion d'un être qui ne doit son existence qu'à lui-même' (*ELF*, 64–65). The Absolute is not definable or knowable, and it is for that reason that Grenier is reluctant to introduce a false impression of human knowledge of the Absolute by using the term 'God'. Moreover, his meditation on the Absolute is by no means confined to the Christian or other theistic traditions, as has been shown. The realm of the Absolute is the realm of unity, of perfection, of value, of eternity, and it has been seen how the logical response to it takes the form of an exclusive cult, which would present to the world a mask of total indifference. However, while allowing himself to be fascinated and attracted by the various instances that he found of what promised to be such an exclusive cult of the Absolute, in practice Grenier himself never followed that path. He recognized that he was not 'né impunément dans un pays où l'on est fixé au sol depuis des siècles, où les traditions ne sont pas effacées, où les institutions nous entourent depuis la naissance jusqu'à la mort' (*IM*, 98–99 (101): cf. *ELF*, 73–74). His contact with Islam in North Africa led him to think that 'élevé dans cette religion où le dogme est réduit au minimum et où Dieu est si éloigné de l'homme, j'y aurais adhéré et persisté dans cette adhésion avec plus de conviction' (*MIX*, 62), but the initial condition was of course not fulfilled. The only authentic way forward for him was to accept the framework of his own heredity and environment, the *cadre* that was his, and seek to work out his intuitions of ultimate reality within those dimensions. Two possibilities then seemed to be open to him.

One possibility was to accept the inaccessibility of the Absolute, or at least the practical inability of man to prolong or link together those momentary experiences of mystical or metaphysical illumination which seem to represent a

union with the Absolute. Grenier cannot escape from the nostalgia associated with such an acceptance, but within the *cadre* of the Mediterranean heritage claimed by Grenier as his own he finds that he can express a limited faith in a certain humanism. The nature and the limitations of this faith will be seen in a later chapter. Grenier expresses his understanding of the problem in an important statement which appeared in *Messages* in 1942 under the significant titles 'Actes de foi':¹²

- 1 Il y a quelque chose de divin dans le monde.
- 2 Qui est inévaluable, et par contre évalue toutes choses.
- 3 Nous ne pouvons le toucher que par l'instant; mais nous pouvons le faire.
- 4 Convertir cet instant en durée c'est l'œuvre de la grâce (artistique) et de la grâce (religieuse).
- 5 Jamais nous ne sentons mieux qu'à cet instant que tout nous est donné.
- 6 Le spectacle de l'*élémentaire* (le sommeil d'un enfant, le reflet du soleil dans une vague, le vent dans la forêt, l'ivresse du sage) nous rapproche de lui.
- 7 L'*élémentaire* n'a pas de commune mesure avec l'*humain* qui est un mixte.
- 8 Et pourtant l'*humain* existe et se manifeste dans la rapprochement et le déchiement.
- 9 Mieux que cela: On n'a pas le droit de choisir entre la vérité et la vie, entre une pureté irréelle et une réalité sans valeur:
- 10 Aussi le divin aspire-t-il à travers nous à Dieu.

'On n'a pas le droit de choisir entre la vérité et la vie': the two must be recognized and accepted together, although they never coincide. That is also the message that comes through *Le Choix*, published in the previous year. It is a message of tension taken to the extreme of *écartèlement* (C (1), 49, n. 4; C (3), 5). The way of Mediterranean humanism is not an easy way for Grenier, and it leads him back, as will be seen, to the painful way of the creative artist.

But there is also a second possibility. In 'Actes de foi' Grenier speaks not only of 'la grâce (artistique)' but also of 'la grâce (religieuse)'. Can religion in its more orthodox acceptance, as opposed to Grenier's rather cerebral and eclectic spirituality, not provide some help at least, if not an actual solution? Does historic Christianity not in fact claim to bring together the two terms represented by *vérité* and *vie*? Grenier more than once recognizes explicitly that that is so. In an admittedly much later passage in the *Mémoires intimes de X.* he writes: 'Qu'est-ce que l'essence de la religion, sinon le fait de donner l'importance suprême à des sentiments qui, du point de vue de l'absolu, demeurent sans valeur?' (*MIX*, 107). Yes indeed, and therein lies the difficulty.

Tout mon problème est de savoir comment l'une et l'autre positions peuvent être vraies — comment Dieu le père, synonyme d'Absolu, peut engendrer le Fils, Dieu

qui se fait homme à telle époque et dans tel corps, comment de l'indifférence totale peut naître l'amour et le sacrifice.

Once again, he avows himself 'écartelé' and 'plein d'angoisse quand je subis au-dedans de moi ce conflit' (*MIX*, 107–08). He had used the same term *écartèlement* in an essay published in *La Table ronde* in 1950, 'Sagesse et christianisme':¹³

l'équilibre que le christianisme essaie de maintenir entre des facultés très différentes de l'homme, est instable et toujours menacé . . . La sagesse chrétienne consistera-t-elle donc dans un compromis? Non, au contraire, elle consistera à pousser jusqu'au bout l'homme dans le sens de sa misère et dans celui de sa grandeur, comme font les deux branches de la Croix.

Ce n'est pas une neutralité, c'est un écartèlement de toutes les puissances de l'être.

However, in that essay he was prepared to go one step further and envisage a solution. That very *écartèlement*, 'par un paradoxe inouï doit aboutir au bonheur et à la paix parce qu'il a pour centre d'unité et comme point de rassemblement non pas un principe abstrait mais un médiateur, un Dieu-homme' (art. cit., pp. 58–59; *APH*, 79–80). It is only in the concept of a mediator, which he allows himself to glimpse from time to time,¹⁴ that Grenier sees any hope of a resolution of the tension. In the Preface to the third edition of *Absolu et choix* (1970) he came as near as he ever did to a positive statement of this belief:

Je ne crois pas qu'il faille atténuer ces contrastes: ce sont les signes de la misère et de la grandeur de l'Homme. Mais je ne crois pas non plus qu'il faille passer sous silence comme je l'ai fait la solution religieuse d'un Médiateur, proposée par Pascal. Elle respecte les extrêmes, mais à un écartèlement elle substitue une union. (*C* (3), 5)

It was because Grenier was at least able to envisage that solution, even if he could not fully commit himself to it, that the 'usure qui détruit mieux une croyance que n'importe quel doute' (*VN*, 232) was to some extent counteracted. He was to remain a member of the Church in which he was brought up. In the *Mémoires intimes de X.* he wrote: 'Quelqu'un disait de moi que j'étais un croyant mais pas un *dévo*t' (*MIX*, 68). His faith was 'une conquête sans cesse à reprendre', and he felt himself to be far removed from those who accepted a whole body of doctrine along with their faith (*MIX*, 100).¹⁵ His faith, however, was a genuine response and not merely a question of habit or intellectual acknowledgement of facts:

Il est souvent vrai, il n'est pas toujours vrai, que l'on soit attaché à la religion par faiblesse — habitude du passé, espoir de salut — on peut l'être *aussi* parce qu'on se sent appelé à croire, parce qu'on est touché par quelque chose qui n'est pas simplement humain mais qui n'est pas non plus inhumain. (*MIX*, 148)

Can one then speak of a religious commitment in Grenier's case? Commitment is not necessarily the same as choice, or rather, as is becoming clear from this study, choice is not necessarily to be seen exclusively in its starkest form, that of a first beginning, a voluntary act set against a background of *vide*, a creative act which is at the same time destructive of possibility. It is legitimate to choose a path to which one is already destined, to work on the material that is already there in order to prepare a *cadre* for the spark of divine revelation which will come sooner or later.¹⁶ Grenier's religious commitment is a choice in that sense. While remaining fully open to the attractions of more firmly uncompromising metaphysical traditions, he has adopted that to which his own character and upbringing have predestined him (see *C*, 119–20 (98–100)). Within that commitment he remains free to express his doubts and uncertainties, thus making provision for his double need: 'J'ai beau croire à la nécessité de courir un risque et de choisir parmi les incertitudes, je n'ai qu'un désir: c'est que la vérité me soit imposée' (*MIX*, 146). An entry in the *Nouveau Lexique* (1969) sums up this position and, from the vantage-point of Grenier's mature years, corrects the perspective of the demand for the preservation of possibility:

SOLLICITUDE 'C'est une sollicitude intolérable d'être toujours contraint d'avoir une volonté quand on ne sait pas sur quoi la régler.'

Sénancour a raison: le manque de contrainte intérieure est pire que l'existence d'une contrainte extérieure.

P. Lelong, in his homage to Jean Grenier,¹⁷ claims that he was in no way 'un chrétien plus ou moins marginal'. In evidence he quotes a number of short prayers written by Grenier, and compares them to Pascal's 'Memorial'. They are in fact by no means all of Christian inspiration, some of them being frankly pantheistic, and others monistic, but there are lines which reveal at least a religious aspiration that is not incompatible with the Christian revelation:

Au Dieu inconnu: Dis-moi pourquoi tu te refuses à m'apparaître et ne me laisses pas ignorer ta présence.

Mon Dieu, je suis affreusement tenté de croire que ce n'est pas le même dieu qui règne à la fois sur les immondices et sur les étoiles.

Puisque tu m'inspires le besoin d'aimer, permets-moi de te découvrir dans tout ce que j'aime; empêche-moi de confondre la sécheresse de cœur avec la vérité.

Dans la journée: Donnez-moi la confiance en vous qui me permettra d'avoir confiance dans les autres.

Si les autres se détournent de moi,
Que je ne me détourne pas de vous

and the longer 'Prière pour obtenir de passer du Dieu des philosophes au Dieu des chrétiens'.¹⁸ There are other similar prayers or thoughts in Grenier's unpublished notebooks (and therefore not quoted by Lelong):

A Jésus Toi qui n'as voulu naître que pour m'empêcher de mourir, fais que chaque instant de ce jour soit une naissance avec toi.

Priez avec le peu de lumière qui vous a été donné.

Le doute emplît la nef de son obscurité, mais un rayon de lumière suffit non à le dissiper mais à permettre de voir.

Je crois, Seigneur, venez au secours de mon *incrédulité*.

(Marc IX, 23)

Je m'éveille, le brouillard se dissipe —

Tout est égaré, rien n'est perdu.

Mon Dieu, éclairez-moi dans les ténèbres.

Je prie avec le peu de lumière qui m'a été donné.

L'heure la plus obscure de la nuit

est celle qui précède le jour.¹⁹

These examples seem to point to a different kind of faith from that claimed for Grenier by Lelong. Lelong speaks of a confidence in eternity, and he even sees Grenier's emphasis on indifference as the other side of such a confidence. That is his interpretation of Grenier's dying words 'Comme tout cela est inutile! Comme tout cela est superflu!' (cf. *EM*, 51). It is perhaps because of this interpretation that he does not draw attention to the significant theme of grace that runs through Grenier's writings. Grenier does not see grace exclusively or even primarily in orthodox Christian terms. He uses the word in the context of poetic inspiration, of a momentary experience of acceptance of self and the world, and of artistic creation.²⁰ Robert Campbell is to that extent justified in noting that 'son "style" est celui de la *Grâce*' (art. cit., p. 890). But if that is the style of his creative thinking, it is also the style of his religious awareness. His comment on the diametrically opposite style of the preparation he was given for his first communion is relevant to more than that isolated instance: 'je pense maintenant que cette gymnastique de l'effort était mal appliquée dans un domaine qui aurait dû être celui de la grâce avant tout' (*C*, 222). The distance between Creator and creature is too great to be bridged other than by what he calls 'une générosité' on the part of the former (*G*, 223).²¹ There is, in one of Grenier's unpublished notebooks dating from 1945, a meditation on Christmas which sums up his faith, in a comment on a local turn of phrase used in Egypt: 'Avec un merci, c'est bien cela qu'il faut vous répéter, car nous ne tenons rien de nous-mêmes, avec un merci.' In a letter to Roger Quesnoy in 1968 he expressed in terms of freedom and grace the mature preference noted above: 'je mets la grâce au-dessus de la liberté'.²²

It would be misleading, however, to conclude on that note. Grenier's understanding of grace, real though it undoubtedly was, never outweighed his expressions of uncertainty, doubt and anguish. It must be seen in its proper context. Two complementary volumes published together in 1957, *L'Existence malheureuse* and *Sur la mort d'un chien*, provide that context. Both end with

tentative expressions of hope, but not as a conclusion: rather, as one element in a broad, complex meditation in which the problems of freedom and choice are once again considered, this time from the point of view of the question of suffering and evil.