

God's Frenchman: Recent Autobiographies from France

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by Louis Allen

Apud barbaros. With this acid phrase Julien Green began his diary when a student at an American university some forty years ago. Feeling himself to be an embittered exile from Europe, a cultured man among philistines, his alienation was completed by the onset of sexual torments which, in a world of evasive hints and implications, gradually led him to realize he was much more radically different from his society than he had suspected. He was a homosexual. Riding on a country buggy to one of the splendid Southern homes owned by members of the American branch of his family, he turned towards the young driver and found his heart gripped as if in a vice: 'Why do we suffer so when we look upon a human face? We can look and look, suffer and suffer more, but there is in that suffering a cruel happiness which ravages the heart. I did not know what to think, I almost wanted to die. No doubt that will seem exaggerated, but you must have gone through what I went through to understand what I mean.' The 'jeunesse merveilleuse' of the American South of those days captivated him, and inevitably made him think of the Greek statuaries the college authorities had disturbingly and unwittingly placed at frequent intervals along the corridors. All the more aware of this misery and unhappiness because he was, as his sister stormily told him, in a society where you had to do as everyone else did, he could not resist the revelation of himself that came through Greek poetry and Virgil. 'I realized that the strange passion of which Virgil spoke dwelt also in me. A ray of light illuminated my whole life. I had a great fear of this revelation which showed me that I was like the young men of the ancient world. So I carried the shame of antiquity [this had been a lecturer's phrase] in me, in myself alone. I was alone in the modern world because of this . . . ' The silence into which the lecturer's words had fallen should have hinted to him, as he later realized, that he was far from being alone in this discovery of his nature. Some of his class-mates were making similar discoveries about themselves, but of this he was only made aware gradually.

The moral support he derived from being a Catholic – another form of exile in a largely Protestant community – was in turn sapped by what he had learnt about himself. The religious conflict and the sexual conflict make up the most interesting part of the third volume of his autobiography (*Terre lointaine*, Grasset), although no doubt as far as French readers are concerned Green suffers from

coming so long after Gide and Proust in the exploration of this particular world. But because much of Gide's work reflects the sloughing-off of a puritanical Protestant conscience under the impact of homosexual desires and the new-found permissiveness of a North African setting, neither his case nor his revelation of it can be regarded as typical. Julien Green differs greatly from Gide, particularly in that he has none of the proselytising aggressiveness of *Corydon*. The theme of homosexuality still obsesses him, and his book gives the impression, through a brilliantly translucent prose, of a turbid encounter with a much feared aspect of the self, consented to with immense difficulty. Reading him, I was very much reminded – but by contrast – of what seems to me still the best account of self-discovery of homosexuality in English, John Morris's *Hired to Kill*, in which he relates how he came to realize, as a British officer in contact with Gurkha soldiers, what his real sexual nature was, and the sudden peace which full awareness, quite unconcealed, brought him.

Julien Green, of course, is more than a mere self-discoverer. His autobiography has more than anecdotal interest precisely because it gives us the point of departure for the sombre work of a considerable literary artist. And it points up the same conflict between two types of society which we find in Claudel's play *L'Echange*, also the fruit of an American exile. Claudel, though, was writing about Boston and what seemed to him the brash obsession with money and newness of the American East Coast in the 1890s, when he was first sent there as French consul, young, very miserable, and very homesick. The society of Julien Green's family is that of the Southern States, an apparently very comfortably off and very self-satisfied aristocratic survival of pre-Civil War days. He lived with an uncle who was proud of his touch of French ancestry and of his descent from a general who had fought in the Civil War: 'On the right side, of course, he made that quite clear, on the side of the South.' The civilization of his uncle and grandfather went up in flames one night when the family house, *Lawn*, was burned to the ground, but *Terre lointaine* evokes with both love and lucidity the past it stood for, as seen by a French cousin, tormented both by his desires and, as parts of the book make plain, by an unappeasable need for God.

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I suppose the most obvious description that comes to mind when reading Pierre Henri Simon's declaration of faith, *Ce que je crois* (Grasset) is 'a man of honour'. The declaration is autobiographical in form, and honour and integrity are the keynotes of what has been – and is – a vigorous life as university teacher, novelist, publicist and critic. A certain stiffness is evident in Simon's rejection of much that has been in the forefront of French literature in the past two decades; but it is a stiffness mixed with sympathy, the rejection being based on a Catholic world view in which the idea of the absurd has no place

but which can nevertheless realize the anguish felt by those of his contemporaries – Sartre, Camus, Saint-Exupéry – who have fought their way through a darkness which he can recognize but not really acknowledge as inevitable. His political development, which has been directly affected by his religion, is most instructive. Coming from a comfortable provincial bourgeois background, there was little to differentiate him at school from his ‘country squire’ friends, other than the insistent play of ideas. Tempted, like many of them, by the extreme right in his days at the *Ecole Normale* which, as a body, looked almost entirely the other way, it was not long before the hunger for justice prevailed over the appetite for wearing riding breeches and cavalry boots in the Latin Quarter. The condemnation of the *Action Française* in 1926 was the justification, as he points out, of the ideas of Lamennais a hundred years before, of the emancipation of the Church from its links with order and property. The same hunger for justice made Simon speak out, in the agony of his patriotism, during the war in Algeria, in a famous pamphlet *Contre la Torture* and in the novel *Portrait d'un Officier* in which he depicts the conflict of conscience in the decent French officer face to face with the reality of what his army is engaged in.

A collaborator of the Dominicans who ran *Vie Intellectuelle* and *Sept*, Simon recounts a very interesting story which is not without a certain contemporary resonance. When Professor of French Literature at the *Facultés catholiques* of Lille, Simon published *Les Catholiques, la politique et l'argent* ‘to show how the reactionary conservative attitude customary in Catholic circles is linked to a capitalist morality and money interests’. The book appeared a few days after the Popular Front elections, at a moment of social and industrial unrest, and Simon declared in it that a Catholic’s electoral duty was to support a left-wing candidate – even an anti-clerical one – so long as that candidate stood for a programme of social justice. He was taken to task in the columns of the *Echo de Paris* by General de Castelnau, the president of the *Fédération nationale catholique*, i.e. the quasi-official head of Catholic laity in France. De Castelnau accused the young professor of being a snake insinuating itself by cunning into the Catholic household, the secret enemy of the Church at work in the Catholic University, and hinted to wealthy Catholics who supported the latter that they should do something about the viper in their bosom. Town and university were divided. Simon was hissed at in the corridors of the university by the law students, of bourgeois origins and traditions, and applauded by his own students, most of whom were intended for teaching and so more cultured and better informed (I wonder if the distinction would be the same in England?). Several financiers, who were members of the University Council, threatened to cut off funds if Simon were not removed from his chair; a spectacular confirmation, he wryly adds, of the accuracy of his book’s thesis. He was summoned before the bishop of Cambrai

who gave him a dressing down for having written 'an absurd work which is an affront to both good sense and tact' and then concluded, to Simon's great astonishment, that he had read the entire work and had found nothing in it against Catholic doctrine or morality, that Simon had restricted himself to opinions in the natural order and questions which remained doubtful, on which a Christian was free to write nonsense if he chose. 'It was a particularly serious thing to deny the freedom to do so to an intellectual and a university teacher, and it was above all quite improper for an ecclesiastical authority to take a doctrinal and disciplinary decision on the injunction of a layman writing in a political journal, even if that layman happened to be a general.' Given the bishop's known right-wing views and doctrinaire frame of mind, it was a gratifying example of professional integrity on both sides of the fence.

Simon's readers will not be surprised to learn how his very forward looking Catholicism – in the political sense – goes with a rejection of a good deal of the experiment in his own professional field – literature – that has taken place since the war. Although he is suspicious of the nihilism of a literature that derives its chief value from the exploration of itself and from the act of writing – a mirror reflecting a mirror – he doesn't, as a praiser of the times when he was young, casually and contemptuously throw the new novelists aside. As he does with Sartre, he sees very well what they are trying to do, but cannot bring himself to consent to their view of life and art.

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A writer with whom, on the surface, Simon might be said to have affinities, and yet, in depth, is separated from by great distances, is Jacques de Bourbon Busset, a pillar of the right-wing Catholic *La Table Ronde*, an ex-diplomat, whose autobiography of the past two or three years is given to us in the terms of lengthy Pascalian *pensées* or anecdotes rather than as a continuous text. A country squire of the type Simon describes at his school, Jacques de Bourbon-Busset uses the natural background of his country home as a means of interrupting what might be a too metaphysical or introspective sequence of themes.

One of our four baby swans is always away on his own. I found him shivering with cold this morning, in the midst of nettles and tall grass. I caught him and put him back in the moat with his parents and brothers. An hour later, he was lost again. Scapegoat, neurotic, or solitary vocation?

And the contemporary note lingers when the little swan is found dying:

He was at his last gasp. He died, quite warm, in a basket in the kitchen while a band was playing outside the house. I wonder if my own last moments will be as splendid! His whole body was spitted with beak bites. This is what comes of being the weakling

of the family. We all know that the prisoner chained up in prison arouses more blows than pity . . .

And the picture contains not simply the life of his sons and the people of the surrounding villages, but the person of his wife, referred to by a simple initial, whose relationship with himself he explores in the most delicate, discreet and yet deeply hazardous way, involving speculations of the profoundest kind on a marriage that is not simply felt but thought:

L. is the equivalent, for me, of the harpooner for the narrator of *Moby Dick*. A calm companion, good, daring, faithful. The very opposite of the vague and woolly Parisian comrade, irritable, backbiting, cowardly and unfaithful.

Or this memory of the solution to a painful past:

Return to Le Saussay, to the cool greenness crisscrossed by jackdaws in flight. The damp undergrowth recalls the mountains and the way they smell after a flood, the smell of the Grande-Chartreuse forest. In 1936, L., utterly worn out, demoralised, had taken refuge here, bringing nothing with her but her copy of Pascal. What had he given her, who thought of herself as a clear-sighted atheist? The notion that faith and belief are distinct, that faith is a personal commitment, a word given which cannot be withdrawn, even during the hours, days or perhaps months of doubt. A doubt unknown to those who are walled up in negation and pride, who refuse to admit their ignorance of the essential. I have myself been one of those self-sufficient people who see bad faith in allusions to faith. They are not always wrong. Yet they should understand that between God and man it is up to man to make the first step, or at least the first half-step, as girls do with boys.

It is all the more surprising that the marriage is between two people who are clearly constantly articulate about their Catholic belief, at times backward-looking, at times extremely speculative:

I know nothing sillier than the attacks of certain intellectuals against 'mariolatry'. There's no better way of cutting the branch which keeps you up. Popular devotion to Our Lady is the very essence of religion, a rope-bridge with which man spans the abyss towards an unknown shore. To deny the intercession of Mary is to opt for an abstract deism, and rationalism pure and simple is preferable to that. The ridge between the pagan slope and the jansenist slope passes right through the Catholic Church. It is the function of Catholicism to recreate a human landscape.

He is occupied, as might be expected, with problems of politics, persons, religion, seen in terms of relations to be coped with and adjusted. It is the diplomatic habit surviving:

I've begun reading Alain again. He was like a cart-horse. He used to come into the courtyard of the lycée Henri IV with a roll of the shoulders, heaving his cart-load of ideas behind him. He would tip it up, and then we'd all start pecking away at it. He was

a man who taught rejection and contempt, an anarchist. The Evil he fought against was Authority. And yet he didn't dislike the authority he wielded over us. He had the physique of a drum-major, but the soul of a commander-in-chief. I once knew a colonel with the same temperament. His superiors, in their notes, called him 'a difficult man to command.' 'That's their affair,' he would point out. 'Not mine.'

Subject for a book: the absolute and politics. On the one side those who place their absolute in politics, or on the other those who put it elsewhere. As a believer, I place my absolute in the Absolute. Politics being the technique of government of men, and man not being good by nature, it is quite natural that machiavellianism should prevail. For good to win the day as often as possible, we must purify the source and choose our leaders with care.

As Power corrupts, we must alternate the teams who are in Power and strike a balance between the party of order and the party of progress by setting one off against the other. The essential thing is that liberty should be given to each man to enter into relation with the Absolute, with God. So any pressure on the mind is perverse. Totalitarianism – of whatever kind – is the real enemy. If the Christian is antimarxist, the reason is that marxism rests on a philosophy in which the essential relationship is not love, but violence in the name of justice. Marxism, by monopolising the idea of progress, throws Christians back on the side of order, whereas the presence of Christians in *both* camps would make obvious to the eyes of all the purely relative character of political commitment.

The whole impression is one of a calm, lucid, well-nourished mind and sensibility, a feeling of balance and justice such that one doesn't really grudge the silver spoon which has made it all possible.

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Henri de Montherlant (*Va jouer avec cette poussière*, Gallimard) is a very different proposition. He too has set out to publish his daily jottings in segments containing a few years at a time. He too breathes an air of aristocratic refinement. But love is utterly absent. He has the very great intellectual virtue of astringency. He is not fooled, and he does not suffer fools at all. But the keynote is disdain and contempt, relieved by flashes of admiration for the rare moments of heroism or abnegation of which the human race is capable, and then a grim, wry smile as we begin to wallow again.

I watch him go to the counter, then to the pin table, and stay there for a quarter of an hour. Back to the counter for a drink and then back to the pin table. From the pin table again to the bar, and then back again, etc . . . As I lurch in a room at the side, I can count how long this takes – a whole hour. The man is between 30 and 35. Don't say that's just human nature – it's human ordure.

Then something cracks. There's a war, a revolution. Someone falls into a crevasse, or throws himself into the Seine. Then man bursts forth from his human ordure, blossoms like a flower, shines with courage and sacrifice, is worthy of admiration, respect, love. For a moment. Then he withers for ever and becomes human ordure once more.

He dwells over and over again on his past works, gives snippets from them, recounts their genesis and gestation, the reviews they received, the necessary rectification of misunderstandings. So two whole pages go to clear up a statement supposed to have been made by Jouvet about Montherlant's use of the word 'damné' in relation to Molière. (The remark had been reported by Julien Green in one of the volumes of his *Journal*.) 'I would never have used the word' writes Montherlant, 'because once my adolescence was over I never believed in any religion at all.' A useful reminder for those critics who are taken in by Montherlant's fondness for what one might call a certain Catholic mental 'furniture' in *Le Maître de Santiago* or *Port-Royal*. But even more interesting is that it shows the true function of these *Carnets*. Montherlant is supremely scornful (and one can sympathize with him) of the pettiness and gossiping vulgarity of Parisian literary life. But he realizes nonetheless that it holds reputations in its hands; and with his reputation he is completely obsessed. So the *Carnets* become a substitute for participation in that life of literary gossip and *médiasance*. The rumours reach his ears from the memoirs of other writers and he at once sets to, recounting his own version of an episode to be sure posterity hears the right one. There is an attractive appetite for honesty and self-scrutiny in all this, but also a frightening aridity.

And with age the complacency comes increasingly to the fore. He prints a page of English reviews of his novel *Le Chaos et la nuit*, pre-facing them with the statement 'They are by far the most intelligent which have been written on this book.' The adjective acquires a certain piquancy as we begin to read the first review: '... it has a brilliance . . . a pervasive charm all its own; the wit and imagery are dazzlingly precise . . .'

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Some of Jacques de Bourbon-Busset's comments are very relevant to the Catholic-Marxist debate now under way in several European countries. Interest continues to be shown in Roger Garaudy's attempted rapprochement between the best of Catholicism and the best of Marxism, and the glossy review *Réalités* published an interview with him in its May issue. The interviewer seems to have been both more intelligent and better informed than Pierre Jancard, referred to in *New Blackfriars* (April 1966), and some of Garaudy's answers are correspondingly more illuminating. The interviewer, Tanneguy de Quénétaïn, was first interested in finding out what could have

started Garaudy along this path in the first place, since he is not merely a pure theoretician but a highly placed member of the French Communist Party's Central Committee and Political Bureau, as well as being Director of the Centre for Marxist Study and Research.

Garaudy speaks of an evolution in the thought of both Marxists and Christians which has made some kind of dialogue possible. On the part of Christians a loosening from traditional conservative opinions (presumably in social matters) and a dissociation of the faith from an ideology which acted as a brake on rational and scientific thought. He holds the view that the Church, from Constantine to Salazar, has been on the side of privilege, in theory as well as in practice: St Augustine justified slavery as a consequence of sin, St Thomas justified serfdom and Bossuet the slave trade; and the Sacré Coeur basilica in Paris was, he reminds readers, built in the first place to 'expiate' the Commune. While the Church as an institution was doing this, the faith itself was animating a whole series of revolts against social and political injustice (Huss, the Peasant Revolt). *Pacem in Terris* was a turning point in the conversion of the 'Constantinian' Church of the *patrons* to the church of the workers.

Ideologically, Garaudy has taken a great interest in the demythologizing of Bultmann and the evolutionary theories of Teilhard de Chardin, who has freed the Christian message from a fixed vision of the Universe to an 'evolutionism' which gives a cosmic dimension to Darwinism. Teilhard was no marxist, and Garaudy ruefully adds that he said some silly things about a philosophy he was ignorant of. But Garaudy finds in him an exaltation of human work and of the future of human history which links him with Marx, and with Engels' *Dialectic of Nature*. Teilhard refused, says Garaudy, to build an apologetic on miracles, on the classic ploy of enclosing God within the provisional gaps of human knowledge which, as they are filled, destroy the apologetic itself.

Marxism had been congealed by a text of Stalin in the years 1935/1936 in which materialism was summed up in three principles, the dialectic in four laws and historical materialism in five stages. This crude simplification claimed a definitive status, whereas Engels had shown that materialism should take on a new form whenever any great discovery opened a new stage in the evolution of the sciences. Nowadays Marxists acknowledge the problems of subjectivity, whereas before the only problem was the construction of a new social order. It is clear that new human relationships will not automatically occur as a result of new social relationships: the coming of socialism has not seen the occurrence of new forms of love.

At this point de Quénétain saw what any Christian might regard as a crucial issue. 'What then' he asked, 'is the use of changing social relationships if human ones are not improved as a result?'

Garaudy:

'Changes in social relationships represent, if I may say so, the negative aspect. They are salutary because of what they suppress. Socialist society suppresses the commercial aspect of love: marriage for money, the prospect of dowries and inheritance. It suppresses prostitution, the curve of which follows that of unemployment in capitalist societies. There were 110,000 prostitutes in Cuba before the Castrist revolution. There are 10,000 now. Prostitution has almost entirely disappeared in the USSR: what remains represents a psychological problem and not a social one. So conditions have been realized for the passage to new historical forms. But man is not the mere resultant of the conditions in which he lives'. 'Isn't this' asked de Quénétain, 'precisely the main difference between Marxism and Christianity, and one which shows the latter to advantage? We can see in Marxists the aspiration to justice, brotherhood in struggle, class solidarity; but is not absolute, unconditional love the Christian's prerogative, his trump card?'

Garaudy:

It is true that there is a Christian sublimity, and Marxism would be impoverished if it didn't take this into account and failed to enrich itself from what is best in the Christian heritage. But it must be said that in practice that appeal to love has often served as a pretext to condemn the just revolt of the oppressed. And when, on the pretext of love, you condemn the revolt of the slave, you become the accomplice of those who hold him in chains.

De Quénétain then reminded Garaudy that two years previously he had publicly attacked a report by Ilytchev, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Party in the Soviet Union who had recommended a renewal of the war against religion. Garaudy's reply is of the highest interest.

I condemned the report because it was a re-appearance both of the idealist atheism which derives from the French 17th century and of the pseudo-scientific atheism of the 19th. The atheism of the Encyclopedists considers religion to be a fable invented by tyrants and priests. The atheism of the 19th century flows from the pseudo-scientific belief that science can resolve all questions. Now that is simply not true, at any rate at the present stage of human knowledge. Science does not bring us the answers to our deepest concerns: the meaning of life, for instance, our attitude towards death. And religion attacks these questions directly. That's why it's no longer adequate to say, as Bichat did, 'I haven't found God at the end of my scalpel' or as Titov did 'I didn't find God in the cosmos,' to eliminate the religious problem. Marxist atheism attacks this problem from another angle, that of freedom. If God exists, is my freedom diminished? Does God alienate us as far as my freedom is concerned? And Marxism answers, Yes, God does alienate in so far as He is conceived as a Moral Law existing before

the creation of man, as a heteronomy opposed to the autonomy of man.

Having made it clear that marxist theory of religion is not limited to the 'opium of the people' formula, which he seems to regard as an historical observation, Garaudy considers religion as a pre-scientific, irrational 'model' with which man grasps reality, and, as such, as the beginning of man's 'great speculative adventure.' Beyond science lies the domain of philosophy, a rational domain, and myth, the irrational. But myth provides man with the initiative to free himself from a given situation:

Nothing expresses this infinite possibility better than the resurrection of Christ. By his resurrection Christ crosses the absolute limit of man, which is death. I would add that the Jewish faith and then the Christian faith – when dissociated from the Greco-Roman ideology – are particularly apt for rescuing man from the given, for hurling him into action, by their exaltation of the historical process. For the prophets of Israel as for the early Christians, God is He Who comes. He presents himself as a call, a permanent future. To believe is to open oneself out to the future, to respond to God by tearing ourselves away from the past. You can find this notion today in Teilhard, for whom God is not *above* but *ahead*. In Rahner too, for whom God is 'the absolute future' whose acting and demanding presence is in every man.

In contemporary Christianity, there is a very strong current in the direction of a distinction between faith and religion. Religion is a way of thinking whereas faith is a way of acting. Paul Ricoeur goes so far as to say: 'Religion is an alienation from faith.'

What benefit can the Marxist derive from a dialogue with Christians, asked de Quénétain. Garaudy:

Christianity raises questions which, even when they are vulnerable to mystification, expect answers. There are domains which Christianity has explored and the fruit of its experience may be enriching for Marxist thought. Take, for example, the problem of death. I am invited to a colloquium with some Dominicans on this topic. Well, I turn up – with empty hands. Perhaps as a Marxist philosopher I may learn a good deal from the Christian experience on this matter. Without beating about the bush, I myself believe that every answer given by religion to this question is out of date, and that certain of the questions are vulnerable to mystification. But I believe that the human experience which lies beneath these questions cannot be ignored by any doctrine, Marxism included. Perhaps the role of religion is to keep on putting questions, and the giving of answers constitutes a perversion of it. By the questions it raises, Christianity keeps the Marxist awake. And I find that very beneficial.

'And Marxism keeps Christians awake,' answered de Quénétain. 'I hope so' replied Garaudy:

That's what makes dialogue possible. For it bears witness to the fact that each side can bring something to the other. The faith of the Christian is purged of its platonism thanks to the criticism of the Marxist, and Marxist atheism is enriched by an obligation to answer the objections of faith.

On the more down to earth political issue, Garaudy seems to have been very frank – and perhaps a good deal in advance of current practice in Eastern Europe, to say no more. 'After the Marxists have come to power in any given country,' asked de Quénétaïn, 'will the Church retain her right to exercise her apostolate throughout the whole of society, using the normal methods of propaganda?'

Garaudy:

I will answer this directly: Yes. The coming of socialism must not result in making atheism a State religion. Lenin always set himself against writing atheism into the party statutes, saying that that was an anarchist proposition. Without doubt the party can and must, in a communist society, fight against religious ideology in the name of marxist philosophy and with the weapons of theoretical criticism and example. But what is the party's duty is not the state's.

We must distinguish between their respective roles.

Several of the issues raised by Garaudy, in connection with Teilhard de Chardin, have of course already been the subject of discussion, in particular at the Pax Romana Colloquium in Venice in 1962, the proceedings of which were published last year by Editions du Seuil. We are all in debt to this publishing house for the variety and frequency of Teilhard publications which it undertakes. The Venice report, *Teilhard de Chardin et la pensée catholique*, and the fifth *cahier* of the Fondation Teilhard de Chardin (*Le Christ Evoluteur and Socialisation et Religion*, Seuil, 1966) throw light most usefully on Garaudy's views. One of the debates at Venice centred on the *Esprit-Matière* concept which is central to much of Teilhard. The Dominican Fr Cottier, discussing the formulation of *Esprit-Matière* as Spirit (or Mind) and Matter being presented as two states of the same cosmic *éttoffe*, pointed out that a Marxist might well reply to this: 'your view is the same as mine, at bottom, but I put it better, because I economize on one term. Why talk about matter and spirit, if spirit is presented to me as matter in process of constructing itself?' M Claude Cuénot, in reply, stated that the economy of one term (*Esprit*) is only possible if one telescopes the metaphysical plane and the phenomenological plane. As far as phenomenology is concerned, we simply describe a universe which we look at in two ways. Teilhard's vision, at its culmination, opens on to a metaphysic, added Mme Barthélemy-Madaule (author of a vast thesis on Bergson and Teilhard, also published by the Editions du Seuil); and we must remember that the idea of *person* is at the centre of Teilhard's universe, the intention being to explain the universe in its coherence, taking the human person as centre and as direction: 'It is from the experience of the

human person, and direct experience, that we have values which, in us, are in opposition to matter; it is from our own spiritual experience that every human phenomenon can be explained infinitely better in the perspective of matter undergoing a spiritualizing evolution. We can see the difficulty Marxists have in founding a morality and values, in explaining human behaviour . . . The world can be explained better from the point of view of Spirit-Matter than from Matter.'

'I would like to quote Garaudy on the relations between Marxism and Teilhard' intervened Dr Paul Chauchard. '“We are in agreement on essentials,” he said, “Why do you add all this useless metaphysical superstructure?” For Garaudy, the essential is the whole dialectic of nature culminating in man and his task, and here the Marxists see the link between Teilhard and Engels, the latter based on Darwin. But we know quite well that the important thing is the metaphysical level. So that although they seem close to Teilhard, they are in reality at a great distance from him, for, in the Teilhardian unity, they try to cut science from metaphysics, which means they understand nothing about Teilhard for whom the dialectic of nature is an evolving creation culminating in the redeeming Incarnation and the Mystical Body. While the Marxists, buried in the immanent, illogically refuse a transcendental metaphysical significance to the emergent, Teilhard shows us that the apparent materialism of science, and therefore of Marxism when it is faithful to science, emerges upon a thomist metaphysics and Christian faith.'

L'abbé Lavocat made a less wordy distinction: 'I think there is an exactly opposite movement in either case, leading from the same data. Both record, as a phenomenon, a close connection between the evolution of matter and the rise of thought. For the Marxists, matter is observed at the beginning and then thought occurs, and the reason given is that everything comes from matter and thought is explained by matter. For Teilhard, since we are given that thought arises as a culmination, the reason given is that thought is there from the start and explains the whole development of Matter linked to thought, i.e. the same movement is susceptible of two diametrically opposed explanations. Next I would just like to point out that we must not forget that for the Marxists the spirit does, in a certain way, exist, – not immortal, certainly, but possessing the activity of a thinking human being, reflecting, having without any doubt the characteristics we attribute to spirit . . . They say that the activity of the spirit can be explained in a certain way by physiological activities, but is not reduced to them.'

Perhaps the most interesting intervention on the topic came from a Pole, Mme Anna Morawska, speaking on behalf of a country where Teilhard's thought was only just beginning to be translated, and where the confrontation between Marxism and the Church is a daily reality. 'Simple, ordinary people, by no means intellectuals, write to

us,' she said, 'and put questions about the faith. We feel that there is on all sides a need to find a meaning to life, a meaning to nature and history, history in a wider sense than the Marxists understand by it. Atheism and all sorts of religious difficulties in Poland today revolve not around the question of whether God exists or not, but on the question of whether life has a meaning, whether any direction for it can be perceived or not. This is where the questions begin . . . I think Catholics have a need to think out the world and life and the place of man in nature, and to acquire a total vision of the world constructed in scientific terms, close to the language of modern man and the way in which he thinks about his daily life . . . We are right to look on Teilhard's work in this perspective, particularly in Poland where the situation is more complex than elsewhere, and where the Marxist influence doubtless exists and is exerted in a wider zone than the world of the communist party.

And indeed that influence is quite different from what our friends in the West seem sometimes to imagine. People take some things from Marxism but not the system as a whole. So in the ordinary man in the street, in Poland, one notes a dialectical way of thinking, of conceiving of things and problems in movement and not in a static way. One notices too a sense of history, an idea which is no doubt one of the characteristic features of the way of thinking of ordinary people of today: not a Marxist way of thinking, but simply a historical vision of things. And people want a wider view of history which will include the history of nature, and a total vision of the human condition and the place of man in history.

Teilhard's vision has another, quite practical, value in Poland today. That vision is an answer not only to the unease of modern man, but to his deep despair. This despair is probably not as strong with us as it is in the West – the anguish of living. But people are beginning to doubt the value of human effort, of the possibilities of human action, and are more conscious of determinism than they used to be, a determinism brought to them by science, and the displacement of man's planet from the centre of things. We are being led as a result to a pragmatic materialism or nihilism. So a vision which gives back dignity to man, and shows him a hope that his efforts have some meaning, and the Teilhardian vision does just this.' And another pragmatic value lay in the possibility of using a Teilhardian ethic as a meeting-ground for discussions with Marxists who would automatically refuse Christian morality as a common ground for discussing moral questions, teaching, the models of behaviour proposed by films, books, television, etc. On a phenomenological basis Teilhard can provide a minimum terrain of understanding, with unbelievers, not all of whom are marxists . . .

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1966 is not only the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, it has also seen de Gaulle presiding over a vast ceremony of remem-

brance for the dead at Verdun. That de Gaulle should be head of the French State at the moment for such an anniversary has the completeness of destiny about it, since the hero of Verdun is the man who, as head of the French State a quarter of a century ago, condemned de Gaulle to death. There has been, inevitably, a good deal of re-thinking about the whole relationship of Pétain to de Gaulle. J-R. Tournoux (*Pétain et de Gaulle*, 1965) has studied the curious ways in which their careers crossed throughout Pétain's later life, and now Jules Roy, who as a French Air Force pilot went over to de Gaulle in North Africa after two years of faithful unquestioning service to Pétain and an agonizing crisis of conscience, publishes his own very important witness, as a soldier imbued with an exacting ideal of honour and fidelity, to what he calls 'the great shipwreck' of Pétain's life (*Le Grand Naufrage*, Julliard, 1966).

The book is a vivid recreation of the atmosphere and events of Pétain's trial, interspersed with Jules Roy's own memories of what he and officers like him were doing at the time of the events of 1940-44. His conclusion is evident from the beginning: though he went over to de Gaulle once the Allies landed in North Africa, he sees no inconsistency in Pétain's position (or in his own of service to Pétain) and thinks the time has come for France publicly to acknowledge the healing of the great wound in her historical sensibility which is implicit in the de Gaulle/Pétain antithesis. He would like to see this, with the healing of time, as a necessary synthesis, the de Gaulle sword and the Pétain shield of Pétain's own (later) conception.

Jules Roy brings the heat-fazed courtroom of August 1945 vividly to life, and it is not difficult to feel, through his reinterpretation of the files of the *Journal Officiel*, a necessary sympathy for an old man, whose entire life had been dedicated to his country, and who was now being tormented by men who, in some cases, had been his warm supporters as recently as a matter of months before. 'I owe nothing to Marshal Pétain,' said the crusty old major Loustaneau-Lacau, who had been deported and had only recently returned from Mauthausen, 'but that doesn't stop me being sickened by the sight of those who, in this courtroom, are trying to foist on to a man, nearly a hundred years old, the burden of their own mistakes.' And there are times when Roy's interpretation of the record adds a sharp and telling detail. At the very start of the trial, my own record of it as published by Albin-Michel in 1945 (a shorthand account edited by Maurice Garçon) contains the Presiding Judge's opening phrase to Pétain, after the legality of the trial had been questioned and then affirmed: ' "I declare the proceedings open." As soon as he had pronounced these words, the Presiding Judge proceeded to the establishment of identity: "What is your name, first names, age, and status?" "Pétain, Philippe, Marshal of France".'

But Jules Roy observed more. A tiny difference of phrase, but heavy with menace and drama: 'Then the presiding judge declared

the proceedings open and, lowering his glance to the Marshal, pronounced a terrifying command: "Prisoner at the bar, you will rise!" The Marshal stood up. His face suddenly lost its pink complexion and went pale. The light which fell on his left shoulder shone on his *Médaille militaire* . . . It was King Lear, hunted from his own palace . . .'

But, let us be frank, Jules Roy omits as well as adds. One of the most shameful episodes of the German occupation was the foul assassination, by shooting in the back, of the Minister Georges Mandel who had been Clemenceau's right-hand man. He was killed by one of the thugs of Darnand's militia which, however distastefully Pétain may have viewed them, did operate as an official agency of the Vichy government. Just before Loustaneau-Lacau's vigorous deposition, the *procureur-général* read out a letter from Mandel's daughter. This is how Jules Roy describes that brief moment; 'Then the *procureur-général* read out a short letter from Mlle Mandel, fifteen years old. She offered her excuses for not presenting herself to the court for, unable to make any request, she would only be able to weep.

"What's all that about?" the prisoner asked the defence. Then he took some papers from his pocket and read them. They were loyal messages which had arrived, that very morning, from America.'

Now the full shorthand report gives the text of the letter, and makes it quite clear why Mlle Mandel felt able only to weep. This is what the record says:

'The *Procureur-général* Mornet then reads out a letter which he has received from Mlle Mandel who has been called as a witness.

Monsieur le procureur-général,

I beg you to forgive me for not presenting myself before the High Court of Justice. I am still very young, and I feel, you see, that in front of the man who brought so much suffering to my father, I would only have the strength to weep. Today, I am only an orphan and I ask for nothing.'

Jules Roy is too much a man of honour consciously to suppress evidence. But this letter is clearly of a flavour such that it would damage the exculpation he requires, and it is glossed over.

His book is, of course, only one of many attempts to rehabilitate the memory of Pétain. *Paris-Match*, as might be expected, devoted three issues to the Marshal's career, with the highlight of Verdun and a photo-documentary of the trial, and commentaries by Raymond Cartier. Cartier points out quite rightly the injustice of Pétain's being kept prisoner long after the most iniquitous figures of the Vichy régime had been liberated:

'Alone of them all Marshal Pétain was kept to the end, at Le Portalet, then on the Ile d'Yeu, in the most rigorous captivity. It is not necessary to be one of his blind admirers to feel, before the memorial of his long agony, a poignant compassion, a feeling of humiliation and also an irritated curiosity. We admit with repugnance, but we do admit, that in 1945 reasons of state should have

demanded his condemnation. It is more difficult to understand how any of the governments which followed in the next six years did not even make the gesture of altering his detention into house arrest . . . His remains lie still in exile in the little cemetery by the sea on the Ile d'Yeu. There is no doubt that, sooner or later, it will begin the journey to the grandiose tomb he claimed: Douaumont.' Most surprising of all was a passionate declaration by that most forthright and honest of left-wing Catholic journalists, Georges Suffert, in the columns of *L'Express*. 'At ten o'clock on the evening of May 28th, de Gaulle must certainly be pondering within himself the role Philippe Pétain played in his life. He, and every average Frenchman, in whom there is a de Gaulle in embryo, admits that this anniversary is a moment of capital importance in French history. It is the end of the *après-guerre*. Both sides produce a dialogue in the heart of every Frenchman, one arguing a common destiny for Pétain and de Gaulle, the other dismissing it all as "literature", the sort of phony twinning you get in school essay subjects: Corneille and Racine, Rousseau and Voltaire. But the success of Tournoux's book shows that its arguments take place in the heart of every Frenchman. "Let us say at once, quite frankly. Every Frenchman was a Pétainist in 1940, and a Gaullist in 1944. There had to be an armistice, didn't there? You had to be far off in London, far from the disaster on the French roads, with whining children and soldiers who had lost their rifles looking for something to eat while the German tanks rolled on, to think you could do anything other than cry 'Halt'! And then, in 1944, we had to have a voice on the winning side, and avoid the occupation of France by the Americans. Two heroes were needed, one for defeat, one for victory. Now, de Gaulle at Verdun is like the sponge on the blackboard, effacing the past. And after all, didn't he do in 1958, in Algiers, just what Pétain did in 1940, spin out the time to let passions cool and preserve the strength of France?"

Whatever the course of the dialogue, one voice still hotly proclaiming treason and the death of Frenchmen at the hands of Frenchmen, the other proclaiming the virtue of cunning and sleight-of-hand which finally saved the body of France in time for another to save its soul, this last of all the civil wars must end before the great ossuary at Douaumont. The average Frenchman wants the "misunderstanding" of 1940 to come to an end. The gaullist, desirous of national unity, wants the idea of France to efface the treachery of the past.

And Charles de Gaulle needs peace. His epic is drawing to a close. Shadows are beginning to lengthen all around him. Friends and enemies sup together and think of the future. Strange alliances are being formed. A long Passiontide is beginning in which the cocks will crow every day to announce the treacheries of the future.

De Gaulle knows this. He is in a hurry to clear up the accounts, to reconcile brothers who are enemies – he is making the inheritance secure so that, after him, the land shall endure . . .'