

'THE GREAT PITY' OF FRANCE

MAURICE BARRÉS, that great Frenchman whom the Church buried as a Catholic although he had not officially returned to her fold, had written of 'The Great Pity of the churches of France.' It was at the time of Waldeck-Rousseau and Combes's iniquitous anti-clerical laws for which France is paying with her heart's blood to-day.

How many Catholic hearts are now again aching for the great pity of the Church of France! Not that, as yet, the iron heel of anti-Christ is pressed home on that Church. Hitler has had, so far, to restrain the tactics of open persecution so long followed in Catholic Germany and that have reached their unashamedly sadistic peak in Poland. But it seems as if the great Catholic renaissance operative in all ranks, those of the intelligenzia and of Labour alike, had availed nothing for the salvation of Church or country.

France, of late years, had come back from that wild policy of stamping out religion born of the Great Revolution of 1789, whose legacy issued into the anti-clerical laws of the dawn of this century. In many parts of the country the revolution had acted as drastically as the penal laws had succeeded in doing in Great Britain and Ireland. In places, notably in the central provinces, priests were non-existent, and the peasants lapsed into semi-paganism. In other parts, as in Brittany and the big towns, the flame had been beaten down but never extinguished; the anti-clerical laws of nearly fifty years ago had been designed to extinguish that flame, but they did not succeed. The religious Orders, including the teaching bodies and those that cared for hospitals and institutes, were expelled, many finding refuge in England.

Meanwhile, the government's action, as such action has a way of doing, fanned the flame of faith where it still existed, relit it where it had seemed to expire. The country districts which lacked pastors, however, remained obdurately un-Christian, helped by the avarice of the small-holder. Materialism had gained a peculiarly tenacious hold on those whose ruling passion—possession of land—was threatened by Catholic teaching. By the *Code Napoléon*, the law of France, all property must be divided equally between the children of a family, hence the un-Catholic rural population refused to have more than one child per household, or even any child, sooner than divide its possessions. With contraception, in the seventies, began the shortage of man-power which helped to lay France at the feet of her conquerors in 1940.

The intelligentsia had caught the infection of disbelief more definitely than any other body except the government, and to be a writer was, broadly speaking, to derive from those who, like the Encyclopedists, had undermined the Faith of the people. Catholic writers of eminence had, however, always existed in France, but since the revolt typified by Alembert, Voltaire and J. J. Rousseau, to go counter to this tradition of revolt demanded from French writers an effort of resistance.

Yet slowly the revival of Catholic thought was making itself felt. The Great Schools of Paris, where the intellect of the nation was forged under the impact of its dynamic students, veered towards belief; other influences were working besides—intellectual France was becoming Catholic and, a few years since, Leopold Levaux was able to write of French literature: 'In every class a galaxy of (Catholic) names imposes itself.' This return to Christianity, that is to Catholicism, of the French intellectual world was of such outstanding importance to the cause of God and of civilisation that it cannot be sufficiently emphasised.

But danger lurked behind the phenomenal progress of the revival; politics, that temptation, old as France, threatened it with disunion. 'Let youth take heed,' wrote S. Fumet, one of many who most emphatically warned the rising generation of the danger which disastrously threatened this Catholic revival. 'Youth,' he goes on, 'is sincere and ardent, but politics will not fill its immense capacities. It is not bread which will fill the soul of youth.' E. Mounier, director of *L'Esprit*, wrote that Catholics too often have the habit of judging events and people on behalf of Providence. Unfortunately the remark was in many cases painfully true, for instance, it is easier to realise to-day than it was even at the time, how right the Papacy was in its bitterly criticised condemnation of Maurras's paper, *L'Action Française*. That contempt for any who differed from themselves, which Maurras taught, had grown upon the members of the Catholic renaissance. It issued, at least until *Action Française* submitted to the Church, in a most un-Christian hatred. That hatred, be it said in parenthesis, was then directed with a demoniac ferocity at the hereditary enemy: to-day Maurras is one of the German collaborators . . .

The world knows too well how disastrous a part 'politics' played in the downfall of France. It is true that, for Catholics, politics had consisted too largely in standing aside, but extremists among them, on the other hand, started and fostered the famous groups which, united and wisely led, might have helped to save their country instead of completing its disunity. It is difficult for us to realise

the chaos this disunity produced. 'For long,' writes Georges Hourden, one of the young Catholic intellectuals, 'I own I had believed that the disease which had attacked us was less profound than it was. I saw the divisions which lacerated us. I saw quite well the excesses to which we, one as much as the other, abandoned ourselves. I thought: But let the hard blow fall and from the depths of their conscience, from the depth of their thousand years of history, patriotism will emerge. Once more the knowledge of outside danger will silence their partisan quarrels. They will recognise themselves suddenly as one.' But it was not to be so. In vain writers like Daniel Halévy in his *Decadence of Liberty* or *Vox Populi* diagnosed the chasm over which France leaned, in vain warnings poured from the saner presses; France was rushing on her doom.

It seems, in fine, that the great achievement of the Catholic revival in France has been wasted, it seems that the cause of Catholicism in that country, and therefore in Europe, has been set back for an indefinite time, that the fall of France has engulfed the writers and thinkers who were to save a century. That pride with which the Catholic world could claim as Catholics the intellectuals of the most intellectual of countries seems laid in the dust. In the confusion and weakness apparently consuming the soul of France which of us dare invoke the return of its men of letters to religion, or expect, by doing so, consideration from the thinkers of other countries? The whole position seems the cruellest of ironies, a catastrophe trying to faith, crushing to hope. So much was achieved, so much has gone up, we think, in smoke.

These conclusions are weak and false. The battle is not over; history shows a series of apparent defeats—and resurrection. The great movements of youth and intellect, of Labour and social reconstruction, which were re-making France, are not dead. All that energy which tended to stray into polemics and hatred is undergoing a perhaps necessary purging, it is having, most certainly, a quite priceless breathing space for reflection and redirection. Vichy is not absorbing much that is useful or of account. What seems to us the great pity of the Cause in France—a thousand times intensified since Barrés wrote—may prove in the not too distant future to be even the *reward* for the effort, the heroism (so real a feature of French character) that had so largely brought France back to the truth. When the mists clear and the dawn of liberation comes to nations, as to minds, the great Catholic revival may bear fruits we, at our most hopeful period, had not dared to expect in our own day.

To give substance to our hope, at the moment when our hearts had sunk to their lowest, the text of a *Message to the world from*

the French Intellectuals has appeared in *France*, the French newspaper published in London by the devoted journalists serving their country in exile.

It is not said that the senders of the Message are Catholics, but obviously many must be, many must have endorsed the fine and spirited text protesting that if it has taken till now for the protest to appear, it has not been the fault of those who repudiate with horror the Germanising of their country, the dishonour of its submission, 'above all the doctrines' of the invader. 'Do not let yourselves be misled,' says the manifesto to the outside world, 'the real France is not the minority which suffered, if it did not instigate, a capitulation without honour, which abandoned and betrayed a faithful companion in arms . . . she is not the herd of politicians and journalists which, in the service of a bought press and radio, adulate the victor of to-day and insult the ally of yesterday.' The framers of the Message may be of differing views, but writers like Mauriac, who in the constantly suppressed *Figaro* defy the conquerors, will have been at one with their fellow intellectuals in voicing their abhorrence of treachery and dishonour.

From exile other Catholics of eminence do likewise; Jacques Maritain denounced from the United States the errors of totalitarian leaders; Georges Bernanos speaking from Buenos Aires has warned and encouraged his countrymen; quite recently, even, the author of those startlingly best sellers, the *Curé de Campagne*, *Le Soleil de Satan*, and others, has addressed any of his fellow Catholics who may be wavering towards collaboration in terms as scathing as even he has ever used: 'Do not hope to mystify the world,' he cried, 'by a pretence at Christian restoration signed "Philip" but which, one day or other, will have to be countersigned "Adolf." . . . French Catholics rallied to the enemy,' he went on, 'spare yourselves now the disgusting imposture of a crusade against Stalin to which you would contribute, in any case, merely bombastic declarations reminding us unpleasantly of those you have made for the last ten years against Hitler. The real peril is in the centre, in the heart of Europe. . . .' Against the clergy of France in general, the German 'occupiers' never cease to fulminate for their lack of 'loyal collaboration,' indeed for their outspoken sermons. If we hear much of an almost nonagenarian Cardinal of Vichy tendencies, we hear little of the many high ecclesiastics whom prudence rightly keeps silent in face of all but impossible conditions. *La Croix*, however, the Catholic newspaper believed by many to hold Free French views, has suddenly sprung into an amazing popularity; it has now the largest circulation of any paper in France. The famous Dominican

review, *Revue des Jeunes*, is appearing at Lyons in unoccupied France; in spite of the utmost disapproval of the non-Christian invader, other Catholic periodicals like *L'Esprit* have reappeared; Stanislaus Fumet has even started *Temps Present* under the new title of *Temps Nouveau*.

A further reinforcement of hope is the fact that Labour as represented in the Free French contingent under the Catholic leadership of General de Gaulle, has also spoken. Henri Hauck, *Conseiller au Travail des Forces Françaises Libres*, issued an appeal over the air to Labour, oppressed and in chains, in France or deported to Germany. M. Hauck, representing workers who are free, speaks, he says, for every shade of opinion, for every social category; however much they may have lost in the downfall of their country, they still possess one thing—their dignity as producers and citizens, they have 'forgotten their divisions of yesterday to think only of their effort to-day, their victory of to-morrow.'

The one fact that Labour, both abroad and in France, has 'forgotten its divisions' is of itself a most hopeful augury for the future of France which may well have its most solid foundation in its own strong and tenacious workers. Hitler seems to be already marching to his doom which will mean the freedom of the French nation; that it should be a united nation is essential to its welfare and that of Christendom.

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JACQUES MARITAIN AND 'THE DISASTER'

THE illustrious Catholic philosopher has not been idle during his enforced exile in New York. He left France at Christmas, 1939, to undertake his usual lectures in the Universities of Toronto and America, and then came the fall of France. He sojourns in a free country and believes it his duty to aid his own country to rise again, and to help to bring about the triumph of the universal human ideals and values symbolised by Christian Democracy. To this end he is writing books, articles and lectures. His students are the great public of Europe and America; his studies and ideas converge upon the philosophy of modern politics. He is not enclosed within the narrow confines of any party, but soars to the heights, untrammelled