

THE HOPE OF FRANCE

'We, the writers, friends, readers of "Temps Nouveau" do not pretend to consider ourselves the only or the sufficient expression of the hope of France; but we are firmly convinced that our "little flock" is one of the armies—of the vanguards—of the reconquest and the restoration of France . . .'

My purpose, in this article, is to say something about this 'little flock' with whom I was privileged to work up till the capitulation, and whose activities I have tried to follow in spite of the prison walls which to-day surround their country.

On June 18th, 1940, I was driving south towards Bayonne. A little way ahead, on a hill, a small boy-scout was directing the traffic. He beckoned us on. And as we continued down the long, straight, poplar-studded roads of the Landes, I knew that that little boy would go on with his job, and that he represented the real France—youthful in its enterprise and energy and courage, mature in its perseverance and devotion. We talked then, my friends and I, of all those other young people whom we had seen or of whom we had heard,* who were directing refugees, housing and feeding people, giving information, carrying luggage, delivering post, in fact, governing—that is, doing the real work of administration—a country whose official bureaucracy and civil service had collapsed. For those who knew the French youth movements this was less a cause for surprise than for admiration: it was to have been expected that France's Catholic Action should fulfil its magnificent promise at the moment of France's greatest tragedy.

Nothing is more ludicrous than to maintain that Vichy France is responsible for a Catholic revival. On the contrary, it was the fruits of a very long-standing 'Catholic revival' which made it possible for Vichy to govern at all. The men of Vichy found, ready to hand, a great body of young people whose one aim is service, whose watchword is generosity, and who are ready to make all the sacrifices necessary to help their suffering fellow-countrymen. And when Vichy talked of moral 'redressment,' religious revival, spirit of sacrifice and the rest, these young people recognised words of which they already knew the meaning—though it may legitimately be doubted whether less fervent Christians were any more impressed by the wave of governmental ascetism than were the English in the sixteenth century when Queen Elizabeth imposed an additional abstinence day (for the revival of the fishing trade!).

The Jocistes (Young Christian Workers), Jécistes (Young Christian Students), Jacistes (Young Christian Landworkers), Scouts, Guides, Compagnons de Saint François, and so many others, had their work cut out for them: millions of refugees—especially from the North and from Alsace and Lorraine—needing lodging and food and clothes and every sort of attention; thousands of skilled and unskilled workers needing work or training; everyone needing a sort of spiritual tonic to counter the despair generated by the capitulation . . . But to say that, because these youth movements have helped to satisfy as many as possible of these needs, they are supporters of the Vichy Government, is entirely to miss the point of the situation. The question was not a political one: 'shall I support Pétain and Laval?' but an immediately human one: 'shall I, now, offer my room (if I have one) and my bread and my clothes, and shall I give my time and my love to this particular needy person?' And for Christians, of course, there are no two answers.

Turning, now, to the political side of the picture, it should be remembered that Pétain was not by any means the first to think that Christianity and Christian legislation are good for France. The Radical Daladier, for instance (who recently came up for trial before Pétain under that extraordinary parody of a court of justice known as the tribunal of 'political justice'), said several years ago to M. Champetier de Ribes (one of his Catholic Ministers) '*il faut rechristianiser la France.*' And it was under Daladier—for whom I hold no political brief, but this is significant—that the thoroughly Christian 'Code de la Famille' was finally enacted. And in this connection, let me quote from a very recent number (August, 1941) of *Temps Nouveau*:

'It is not those who say: Lord, Lord . . . It is not those who loudly approve of all the measures of national restoration who contribute most effectively to the rebuilding of France; it is very often those who, obscurely, obstinately, work to maintain, to restore, to recreate the true French traditions. Traditions of frankness, of generosity, of clear thinking, of courage; traditions of order—but of a human order; traditions of dignity and honour; so many other traditions for which no Frenchman has ever had to blush . . .' To which should be added this further quotation from an earlier number: '*What Joan of Arc came to say to her friends, to her enemies and to their collaborators, was that heaven found it unbearable that things should go so badly in the land of France and that people should stand it . . .'* If St. Joan were here to-day, continues the writer, '*she would make us see that the Kingdom of Heaven is intimately concerned in the liberation of the kingdom of France . . .*

When we hesitate to engage in the temporal struggle, when we take shelter behind our hyper-spirituality, in times like our own, I think that we are refusing to put our bodies at the service of this two-fold kingdom . . . Salvation is in the example which St. Joan of Arc gives us, with her sword, her banner, her war-like costume . . . Small wonder that after this particular outburst the Vichy authorities suspended *Temps Nouveau* for a month : their notion of ' Christian revival ' has no use-that was clear from the outset-for St. Joan !

I have touched on the social and political aspects of the situation of **Catholics** in France : but it is the intellectual aspect which is the key to the whole tragedy, a tragedy which is religious as well as national, because it turns upon Truth-upon the meaning of words like honour and dignity and justice and good faith-upon the meaning, in the last resort, of the Word of God.

I shall begin with distinguishing on the one hand between those ' intellectuals '—philosophers, novelists, publicists, sociologists, lawyers, etc.—who see Christianity as a life, a life to be lived first of all by themselves and in whose light and through whose action they have a universal-catholic-world-view and devote themselves to a universal-catholic-reconstruction : and, on the other hand, those who, profiting by the logical coherence and beauty of Catholic teaching, try as ' professional ' Catholics to ' use ' it. This distinction is unpleasant but necessary : it had also to be made two thousand years ago between the Pharisee ' professionals ' and the ' amateurs ' who preferred to obey God rather than man. And for ' whited sepulchres ' whether Jew or Gentile, the condemnation is the same.

In the light of this distinction one sees clearly two conflicting intellectual tendencies. The one, universalist (Catholic) sees France and the world as a whole and seeks for measures which will integrate all men of whatever class or race or creed into the political and international community (this conception has been fully worked out by Jacques Maritain under the heading ' pluralist state '). The other, closed (and therefore, for all its lip-service to Catholicism, by its very nature hostile to the universal spirit of the Church), trusts in the efficacy of ' order ' to heal all social and political ills, but an order which would isolate France from her neighbours and which, inside France, would ' liquidate ' or expel those Frenchmen who, because they are Jews or Communists, are tainted with a special and unforgiveable sin. (We have heard the same theory from the other side of the Rhine.) These two tendencies find their fullest expression in two papers, each of which is a ' movement ' far more than a paper, *Action Française* and *Temps Présent*.

Action Française, founded and directed by Charles Maurras, preaches 'integral nationalism' and favours the hierarchical organisation of the Church because of its 'usefulness' in keeping 'order.' It was condemned by Pope Pius XI in 1927, and the ban of excommunication was only lifted in the summer of 1939 after an explicit retraction of error: a retraction which was followed, within the next couple of days, with a renewed attack upon the Jews. To say that **Pope Pius XII** approved of the movement which was condemned by his predecessor is as false as to say that Pope Pius XI approved of National Socialism when he signed the concordat with Hitler on the latter's assurance of respect for Christian ethics, Christian youth movements, and the Church in general. To-day *Action Française* is in its element: its opponents are proscribed, suppressed, silenced: communists and 'progressives' are arrested, Jews are discriminated against, and now, greatest of all triumphs, *Temps Nouveau* has been suppressed.

Temps Présent preached what Maritain calls 'integral humanism.' Its aim was to animate people of every class and profession and political party with a new, integralist (and therefore fundamentally Christian) outlook; a sense of responsibility; a habit of clear thinking—even in political and social matters: above all, a spirit of community and friendship such as is creative of 'new men' who, in their turn, can effect the necessary reforms. This intellectual aspect of Catholic Action coincided with, and gave expression to, the extraordinary flowering of the specialised movement; of social Catholic Action. It is not irrelevant to recall that in 1937, on the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the French J.O.C., some 500,000 young workers came to a congress in Paris as *representatives* of their respective sections all over France.

Temps Présent soon found its way to the heart and the intelligence of an ever-increasing number of Frenchmen, outside as well as inside the Church. Its success is attested not only by the number of conversions for which it was responsible, nor by the enormous increases in its circulation (especially during the war), but above all by the boundless and effective charity of the *Amis de Temps Présent*. Throughout the war, for instance, an unending stream of voluntary helpers sent letters and books and parcels to the soldiers; at the front the *Amis* became the natural leaders and animators of their fellows; during the invasion and the collapse, civilian *Amis* gave each other hospitality and every sort of material and moral assistance, quite literally one could say that they 'held all things in common.' I had personal experience of the most generous material assistance of this sort,

The writers and friends of *Temps Présent* did not need Vichy to tell them about Christian regeneration. For years they had preached it and applied it in social, political and international affairs, while Maurras proclaimed *Politique d'abord* and scoffed at their 'idealism.' To-day Maurras and the rest of the official Vichy press fill their columns with 'repentance,' 'regeneration,' 'religious revival,' 'the spirit of poverty,' 'the value of suffering'—while *Temps Nouveau* and all those priests and laymen who suggest that suffering and poverty are admirable if one chooses them for oneself, but that a Government has no business to impose them upon its people (since its first duty is to see to the material welfare and security of the community), and that anyway it is impossible to expiate past sins by collaborating in the enemy's infinitely more deadly present sins, are now styled, not 'idealists,' but dangerous revolutionaries.

Reason and experience vindicate sufficiently the political intelligence and clear-sighted idealism of the writers of *Temps Présent*. We owe them more than gratitude for what they have done in the past: we owe them tremendous admiration for their steadfastness to-day. It is not so hard to keep one's end up in the face of sheer contradiction: it is agony to go on championing truth, honour, dignity in the presence of people who use these self-same words which they have robbed of all meaning by their own attitude of falsehood, deception and servility. To-day national unity, social justice, discipline, order—all these excellent things which *Temps Présent* has always championed in the service of a *free France* and of God, are parodied-fancy speaking of 'national' regeneration when two-thirds of the nation have been surrendered and the remaining third is entirely dependent upon France's avowedly worst enemy!—in the service of an enslaved France and of evil.

A year ago I received a letter from one of the *Temps Présent* writers. 'Needless to tell you that nothing is changed in our attitude,' he wrote. Quite needless indeed. But for a number of months the Vichy authorities did not fully realise all the implications of that attitude. And so, week after week, *Temps Nouveau* has given hope and spiritual and intellectual strength to thousands of French. Because of the censorship it could not openly oppose the Vichy régime and 'collaboration.' But it was building up the positive content of national resistance, positive love of the whole of France, positive love of all Frenchmen, positive faith in the vocation of France in the community of nations, positive, conscious choice not of un-Christian resignation, but of Christian heroism; not of un-Christian masochism, but—if need be—of Christian martyrdom.

MIRA BENENSON,