

"Le témoignage intellectuellement manifesté" "THE INTELLECTUALLY MANIFESTED WITNESS"

Jean-Louis Allard

Un événement d'une très grande importance vient de prendre fin à Rome, à savoir le Synode des Evêques sur la vocation et la mission du laïc dans l'Eglise et dans le monde.

A la lumière du Concile Vatican II et de l'expérience post-conciliaire, les délégués au Synode ont approfondi *la vocation chrétienne* qui découle du baptême et de la confirmation, *la dignité* fondamentale des membres du Peuple de Dieu ainsi que l'agir chrétien qui lui correspond:

"Tout ce que vous faites trouve son sens dans ce que vous êtes", affirmait Jean-Paul II, lors de sa visite en terre canadienne, le 15 septembre 1984.

Le Cercle d'études Jacques et Raïssa Maritain (Kolbsheim) a voulu profiter de cette occasion privilégiée pour autoriser la publication d'un texte inédit de Jacques Maritain sur l'apostolat des laïcs, plus spécifiquement sur la mission spirituelle des laïcs.¹

Dans cette brève allocution, je ferai une courte présentation du texte de Jacques Maritain, puis, je le mettrai en relation avec certains extraits du *Court traité de l'existence et de l'existant*, portant sur la question de la philosophie chrétienne; enfin je soumettrai à votre attention quelques-unes des questions qui me sont venues à l'esprit à la lecture de ces textes.

I

May I, first of all, recall the circumstances which have led Maritain to the writing of this text on lay apostolate. In presenting the text, Professor Bernard Doering explains:

The following text, previously unpublished, is a memorandum written by Maritain at the request of Paul VI and presented to the Pope in the early months of 1965. It was composed following an interview on December 27, 1964 with Jean Guilton and the private secretary of Paul

VI, Monsignor Macchi (with whose authorization this text is being made public), who had been sent by the Pope in the course of the Council expressly to consult Maritain. These pages then are posterior to the promulgation of the dogmatic Constitution "*De Ecclesia*" (*Lumen Centium*), which is dated November 21, 1964, and whose fourth chapter concerns the laity.²

Those who are familiar with Maritain's writings are aware that he has given much attention to the temporal mission of the Christians, more particularly in *Integral Humanism*, a "prophetic book" in which he describes the ideal of a new Christendom "as a temporal regime or as an age of civilization whose animated form would be Christian and which would correspond to the historical climate of the epoch into which we are entering."³

Such an ideal will be realized only through deep changes resulting from "making a real *refraction* of the Gospel pass into the cultural and temporal order. It is a question of changes in the regime of human life which are at once internal and external, which are to be accomplished in the hearts of men and in the body politic and in its institutions, and which affect together, though by different titles, the social and visible domain and the spiritual, moral, and invisible one; and first of all, the spiritual domain."⁴

This means that the mission of the laity is both temporal and spiritual, and these cannot be dissociated; they flow from the same source. Consequently, the theme of the spiritual mission of the laity has been for Jacques and Raïssa Maritain an object of reflection and a constant subject of experience. The Foreword to *Le Journal de Raïssa*, the *Carnet de notes*, the *Paysan de la Garonne* contain many thoughts on this subject.

The memorandum of Jacques Maritain to Pope Paul VI on lay apostolate seems to flow directly from the very doctrine of Vatican II. It treats specifically of "the spiritual mission of the laity in the Church", an expression which Maritain prefers to the usual expression "lay apostolate."

The following quotation indicates quite clearly Maritain's perspective:

The Christian laity as such, - independently of any participation, in certain given cadres, in the apostolate proper to the hierarchy, - has a *witness* to render and a *spiritual mission* in the Church. And those who share the common condition of the laity receive this mission, not from a special call or a special mandate from the hierarchy; they receive it from their baptism and their confirmation, in other words from the very fact that they are *members of Christ*.⁵

In relation with this spiritual mission of the laity, Maritain mentions three different levels of commitments: the intellectually manifest witness, the level of family life and Christian marriage, and the organizing of social groups.

The first level, a very special one, says Maritain, refers to the *intellectually manifest witness*: the Christian intellectuals (writers, artists, scholars, etc...) who, without any particular mandate, had a profound influence in the expression of their personal experience; among those mentioned by Maritain, we find Pascal, Bach, Rouault, Tolstoy, Bloy, Claudel, Chesterton, T.S. Eliot. To this incomplete but impressive list we could certainly add Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, Yves Simon, Charles De Koninck and many others we have known.

This raises again the complex problem of Christian philosophy which will be the object of the followings part of this paper.

A more general level of Christian commitment, "at the foundation of the life of the faithful people of God" is found in family life and Christian marriage:

A marriage is a sacred community where the spouses should mutually help each other to strive toward *the perfection of charity*. (...) Even on the level of sexual life and the perpetuation of the human species, that vocation of bearing witness to which marriage and domestic society are essentially called with regard to eternal life - to eternal life already begun here below, - is, I believe, the primary mission, in the midst of storms and high tides, with which the layman *as a Christian*, as constituting an essential part of the Mystical Body, is charged above all else"⁶

A detailed analysis of what Maritain has written concerning the spiritual mission of the family would lead us beyond the limits of this paper. But I cannot resist the temptation of bringing to your attention a part of the text in which he describes the kind of equality that exists between parents and their children within the realm of spiritual growth, an equality which situates them in the same psychological universe:

In this context a number of things should be noted: on the one hand, the transcendence of our Heavenly Father is such that in the presence of this transcendence, and of His divine mercy, parents and children are pretty much on the same level. On the other hand adults have been told that in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven they must become like little children. Finally the intuitivity of childhood makes contemplative prayer easily accessible to

children, and with regard to the mysteries of the faith, childhood often (without reflex conceptualization) enjoys astonishing illuminations that adults may very well envy. The result of all this is that not only should parents and children strive to establish an exchange of thoughts and feelings, a mutual openness and communication, but there should develop naturally between them even a kind of equality - which is impossible anywhere else - in their progress toward union with God and the perfection of love.⁷

The third level of witness Maritain refers to, concerns the initiatives of layman, in the spiritual order, in organizing groups "for the service of souls and of the Church"; he mentions, in particular the "Equipes sociales" of Robert Garric, the groups who bring aid to the underdeveloped countries; he includes in this level of witness the founding by Etienne Gilson of the Institute of Mediaeval Studies of Toronto; may I suggest that groups like ours (The American Maritain Association and the Canadian Jacques Maritain Association) are, in their limited way, humble efforts in the same direction.

The first and the third levels of witness mentioned by Maritain include the spiritual mission of the Christian intellectuals, either as individuals or in groups, and this leads us to a very important question: as Christian philosophers, can we acknowledge that we have such a mission without betraying the very specific task of philosophizing.

We are confronted again with the problem of Christian philosophy which Maritain has discussed lengthily in his works and to which he refers in the last chapter of *Existence and the Existent*.⁸

II

C'est donc dire que le texte de Maritain sur l'apostolat des laïcs nous renvoie à la question de la philosophie chrétienne et qu'il est ainsi vitalemment relié au *Court traité de l'existence et de l'existant* dont quelques pages résument d'une façon saisissante sa pensée à cet égard?⁹

Il serait téméraire de vouloir traiter ici d'une façon quelque peu approfondie de cette question complexe mais combien vitale pour nous. Qu'il me soit permis toutefois d'en évoquer les grandes lignes pour ensuite réfléchir avec vous sur quelques-unes des interrogations qui ont germé à mon esprit à la lecture comparée du texte sur *La mission spirituelle des laïcs* et du *Court traité*.

"Distinguer pour unir," tels sont les deux versants d'une vision réaliste de cette question: distinguer nettement la philosophie de la foi chrétienne et de la théologie pour ensuite montrer comment ces "habitus" sont dynamiquement reliés dans la vie de l'esprit.

Ainsi, Maritain affirme en premier lieu *l'autonomie de la philosophie*; le renouveau de la philosophie dépend de cette autonomie, de l'authenticité de l'oeuvre philosophique, tant en principe qu'en pratique. D'ailleurs, cette autonomie implique la reconnaissance de la valeur propre de la théologie comme sagesse supérieure.

Or, "jusqu'à présent, - en ce qui concerne la pensée chrétienne, - ni en métaphysique ni surtout en morale les thomistes ne se sont appliqués avec beaucoup de zèle à dégager pleinement la structure propre de leur philosophie des voies d'approche et de la problématique de la théologie."¹⁰

D'autre part, si l'on tient compte des conditions existentielles du philosophe chrétien, les principes qui l'inspirent "nous obligent à voir comment, au noeud immatériel des énergies de l'âme, la sagesse mystique et la sagesse théologique vivifient et fortifient la sagesse métaphysique de la même façon que celle-ci vivifie et fortifie les activités philosophiques de rang moins élevé."¹¹

Maritain ne fait que réaffirmer sa position relative à la philosophie chrétienne, position qu'il avait déjà amplement expliquée à plusieurs reprises.¹²

Disons tout d'abord que l'expression *philosophie chrétienne* lui semble équivoque: "J'emploie ce mot de philosophie chrétienne, et comment faire autrement? A vrai dire il ne m'enchanté guère, il arrive au moment où tous les mots semblent trahir, et celui-là risque d'évoquer dans les esprits - dans les esprits prévenus (et nous le sommes tous) - je ne sais quelle hybridation ou atténuation de la philosophie par le christianisme, je ne sais quel enrôlement de la philosophie dans une confrérie pieuse ou dans un parti dévot."¹³ En effet cette expression ne peut être employée que dans un "sens matériel" pour signifier la philosophie occidentale même lorsqu'elle trahit la pensée chrétienne car ses thèmes s'inspirent de cette pensée. Si l'on considère la philosophie dans son "sens formel," elle est proprement une activité de la raison naturelle et elle n'est pas plus chrétienne que païenne; dans sa nature propre, la philosophie "ne dépend que des évidences et des critères de la raison naturelle."¹⁴

Cependant, l'acte philosophique est l'acte d'une personne humaine qui, de fait, peut être pré-chrétienne, chrétienne, a-chrétienne; par voie de conséquence et sans changer sa nature intrinsèque, cet acte philosophique est dans un "état" pré-chrétien, chrétien, a-chrétien selon le cas. De cette situation concrète peuvent résulter des tensions. Par exemple, le philosophe chrétien peut et même doit philosopher en tenant compte de l'apport de sa foi; il doit en même temps respecter les exigences de la philosophie. Des tensions peuvent également surgir entre philosophes chrétiens et philosophes non-chrétiens; il faut tenter de diminuer ces tensions, de surmonter la suspicion mutuelle qu'elles recèlent sans oublier que l'accord entre philosophes ne sera jamais complètement réalisé, car "the natural condition of any philosopher seems to imply that he can be in agreement only with

himself. Even this kind of agreement seems rather difficult and due to some infrequent kind of luck."¹⁵

S'inspirant de la pensée de Thomas d'Aquin selon laquelle "la grâce ne détruit pas la nature; elle la suppose et la perfectionne", Maritain peut affirmer l'authenticité de la philosophie même lorsqu'elle est vitalement jointe "aux lumières supérieures de la sagesse théologique et de la sagesse des saints."¹⁶

III

As mentioned in the preceding part, my intention, here, is not to initiate a new debate on the problem of Christian philosophy. I would simply propose to your reflection some of the interrogations that have come to my mind concerning the spiritual mission of the Christian philosophers, as described by Maritain, and within the context of his views on Christian philosophy.

1. A first question of great importance can be raised: How do we achieve the dynamic unity between our Christian beliefs (and values) and the specific demands of philosophy? How can we be authentically Christian while authentically philosophizing?

It seems to me that this is a question of maturity. A mature person, according to psychology, is the one in which there is a growing unification of the driving forces of human nature. Aren't we accepting too easily the kind of intellectual schizophrenia the functionalized and pragmatic civilization of ours seems to impose upon us?

Isn't it true that the situation of the Christian philosopher is, on that score, in an analagous situation with the so-called non-believer: both live by *a faith* which vitally affect their philosophical acts. Nevertheless, Christian philosophers seem to have, at times, hidden so to say their faith in order to appear *at par* with their non Christian colleagues...

One cannot underestimate the deep influence of his faith and of the values he lives by, on his philosophizing; to be unaware of this fact might be a way to be unfaithful to the very demands of philosophy as well as to the exigencies of a living faith.

2. The second question concerns the decline of philosophy and of the teaching of philosophy in the contemporary Christian world.

Philosophy as a discipline has lost much of its importance in University programs in general, and in Catholic universities in particular.

Psychology, sociology, etc... have become, in many instances, the new "wisdom" replacing philosophy, even in relation with theology.

Maritain has expressed great concern about the tragic situation of modern civilization which does not come from the prodigious developments of science which is a definite progress, but from the fact that our civilization prefers science to wisdom.¹⁷

What is the responsibility of Christian philosophers in this regard?

3. Thirdly, has the Christian philosopher a particular responsibility to be present to the many debates of our times?

The crisis of our western civilization appears to be a metaphysical crisis and a moral crisis more than an economic one.

Do Christian philosophers have something to contribute for the "salvation of the intellect"?

4. As philosophers of being, of analogy are we as vitally opened to the given of our faith, to the Documents of the Church, as hypotheses to reflect upon, as we are (and should be) to the acquisitions of science, history, art, etc...?

Many other questions could be raised in relation with this paper of Maritain on the Mission of the Christian intellectuals and of the Christian philosophers. May I say, in concluding my address, that the debate on Christian philosophy appears to be of a crucial actuality, and that beyond the theoretical debate, it presents itself as a challenge to the Christian philosophers.

If the Christian philosopher wants to philosophize without a mask, he does not have any other alternative than to philosophize "dans la foi", and to show through his acts of philosophizing that the "Christian state of philosophy" might mean something valuable for himself, for the Church, and for the world. Could this not be his proper manner to fulfill his "spiritual mission"?

In *Integral Humanism*, Maritain calls for the transformation of a "decoratively Christian society into a vitally Christian society." Maritain himself has given us the example of a vitally Christian philosopher.

If our Associations contribute somehow in helping us become more and more vitally Christian philosophers, they would have achieved a worthwhile purpose.

président
Association canadienne Jacques Maritain
Université D'Ottawa

NOTES

1. Au Canada, le texte a paru en français dans *Eglise et Théologie*, Vol. 18, no 3, octobre 1987, p. 305-313 sous le titre "L'apostolat des laïcs" et dans *L'Eglise canadienne*, Vol. 21, no 3, 1er octobre 1987, p. 83-87, sous le titre "La mission spirituelle des baptisés dans l'Eglise."

In the United States, the same text has appeared in English (Translation and Notes by Bernard E. Doering) in *Communio*, Vol. XIV, Number 2, Summer 1987, p. 183-202, under the title "The Spiritual Mission of the Laity."
2. *Communio*, Vol. XIV, No 2, p. 193.
3. Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism*, newly translated by Joseph W. Evans, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968, p. 132.
4. *Ibidem*, p. 213.
5. In *Communio*, Summer 1987, p. 196.
6. *Ibidem*, p. 197.
7. *Ibidem*, p. 198.
8. *Existence and the Existent*. (English version by Lewis Galantière and Gerald B. Phelan). N.Y., Pantheon Books Inc., 1948, p. 136-141.
9. *Court traité de l'existence et de l'existant*, Paris, Paul Hartmann Editeur, 1947, p. 217-226.
10. *Ibidem*, p. 220-221.
11. *Ibidem*, p. 224.
12. Voir surtout *De la philosophie chrétienne*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1933. 166p. et *Science et sagesse*, Paris, Labergerie, 1935, 393p.
13. *Science et sagesse*, p. 136.
14. *Ibidem*, p. 138.
15. *About Christian Philosophy*, dans Barduin V. Schwarz, éditeur, *The Human Person and the World of Values*, N.Y., Fordham University Press, 1960, p. 10.
16. *Court traité de l'existence et de l'existant*, p. 225.
17. See *Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle*, Paris, Alsatia, 1956, p. 170.

Jacques Maritain Center



University of Notre Dame

**For reference only:
Do not remove from this room.**

JACQUES MARITAIN
The Man and His Metaphysics
Edited by John F. X. Knasas

The spirit and animation of the French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain is celebrated in this collection of essays, the first in a series to be published by the American Maritain Association as a continuing project. *Jacques Maritain: The Man and His Metaphysics* recognizes the legacy of Maritain's vision, i.e., the engagement of the ideas of St. Thomas Aquinas with the 20th century. By publication of this volume, the American Maritain Association continues to not only offer the insights of the renowned thinker but to make the Association more widely known as a fellowship that welcomes and engenders the Thomistic vocation.

Articles by noted biographers comprise the first section and offer readers a glimpse of the forces that led Maritain with his wife Raissa to devote their lives to Thomism. The second part features an assessment of Maritain's study *Existence and the Existent*, which celebrated its fiftieth anniversary of publication in 1987. The essays here are grouped thematically to correspond with the chapters of that famous work, and contemporary philosophers critically discuss their main points or creatively utilize their doctrines to address other issues. Finally, the appendix is a collection of inspiring addresses given by the Presidents of the American and Canadian Maritain societies.

John F. X. Knasas teaches in the Department of Philosophy and at the Center for Thomistic Studies of the University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas.

AMERICAN MARITAIN ASSOCIATION