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# World War II and the Anti-Democratic Impulse in Catholicism

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On 12 June 1940, as apparently invulnerable Panzer divisions rolled across Belgium and France, Yves R. Simon, a militantly anti-Fascist French philosopher in exile at Notre Dame University, wrote a remarkable prophetic letter to his mentor, Jacques Maritain, who had just fled to New York. Simon thought that though Paris might probably be burned "the Nazis will not win the war. The war will be won by the USA"; but he warned Maritain since arriving in South Bend some months earlier he had discovered, to his great shock and dismay, that the struggle against Fascism was not being supported by the Catholics in the United States as one might have assumed. In fact, he told Maritain, the most important counter weight to the anti-Fascist movement in the United States was "centered in the American Catholic milieu." Recalling for Maritain their struggles in France a few years before against Catholic sympathizers of Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, or Franco's coup against the Spanish Republic, he concluded that the situation was "*Just the same!* All of the countries will have been betrayed by their Catholics." "Imbeciles have been in key positions [in] the Vatican, the bishoprics, the universities, the Catholic press," he charged, and they simply gave "free reign to criminals."<sup>1</sup> Simon and Maritain soon discovered that their uncompromising anti-Fascism isolated and alienated them from their fellow Catholics in the United States as well as in Europe, to a painful, and unexpected, degree; but, in those days, there was such a concern for defending Catholicism's public image that we are only now discovering the fierce

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<sup>1</sup>Yves R. Simon to Jacques Maritain, 12 June 1940.

secret battle being waged for the Church's soul by men like Maritain and Simon, and Free French leaders like Charles de Gaulle.

Rather than burn, Paris surrendered; and on 15 June 1940, as the French Prime Minister, Paul Reynaud, appealed to the U.S. for support, Jacques Maritain telegraphed Roosevelt, whose guest he had been not long before. The philosopher urged the President to make a public declaration against Nazism to support French morale or that country would make a separate peace. He begged Roosevelt to act "that the great American democracy assure the triumph of democracy over barbarism."<sup>2</sup> Thus Maritain went on record opposing the surrender and neutralization of France even before Charles de Gaulle's famous, historic appeal on the 18th of June.

Since Maritain was considered the world's most important Catholic thinker at the time, his call for resistance had a certain importance--although de Gaulle's appeal seemed to have little effect, at least in the United States. While often sympathetically interested in Maritain's opposition to the armistice, Frenchmen in the U.S. overwhelmingly refused to support de Gaulle's claim to represent France for the same reason that Roosevelt (with Maritain's support) withheld his recognition of the General's movement: political legitimacy required the support from the people. Prominent Frenchmen in America--Alexis Leger (the poet Saint-Jean Perse)<sup>3</sup>, the great *Europeanist* Jean Monnet, Antoine de Saint Exupery--as well as Maritain--confirmed Roosevelt's perception of this unknown young general as a potential dictator.<sup>4</sup> A lonely exception to the indifference to de Gaulle was Yves R. Simon who urged his mentor Maritain to find out more about the General and to consider backing him if he and his compatriots seemed worthy of confidence.<sup>5</sup> Simon was following a sort of Jacobin instinct since information about the de Gaulle movement was very scarce, and it was years away from being equated with the "Re-

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<sup>2</sup>Jacques Maritain to President Roosevelt, 15 June 1940.

<sup>3</sup>Leger was one of France's most important diplomats, having served as secretary of the *Quai d'Orsay* during the prewar period. He fled to the U.S. just days before the armistice, and felt the armistice "did not invest the General with any political power."

<sup>4</sup>Raoul Aglion, *Roosevelt and De Gaulle: Allies in Conflict* (New York: 1988), 35.

<sup>5</sup>Yves R. Simon to Jacques Maritain, 26 June, 10 August 1940.



sistance" as a whole. The American government concluded that de Gaulle was simply not that important—his movement was a mere symbol of resistance capable of a negligible military contribution.<sup>6</sup> So the General's movement came under the tutelage of Churchill (who identified with the romantic "prophet in the wilderness" side of de Gaulle) while it remained "an unfortunate diversion" for Franklin Roosevelt.<sup>7</sup>

In the United States, only a few prescient individuals, such as Yves R. Simon, remained vividly interested in the Free French as, from Notre Dame, he prodded Maritain to seek more information about them in New York; but Maritain answered that "things are more complicated here than you seem to think....And sadder. France has not only been betrayed in a terrible way, she betrayed herself; and the French bourgeoisie actually has the government they deserve." Their own role in the United States, Maritain suggested, was not to search for charismatic leaders to overturn the government in France but rather "to prepare the moral and political revival of the French *population* itself, which is much more complicated than struggling against a government." Among their most urgent tasks was the preparation of the "political philosophy and social disposition and practical politics which France will need--in two or three years perhaps."<sup>8</sup> So, while the two men may have differed on de Gaulle, both had already refused the possibility that, in the long run, totalitarianism would prevail.

In September 1940, Maritain decided to lecture at Columbia University in the first semester and Princeton in the second, as he learned that the Gestapo had searched his home in the Parisian suburb of Meudon; and so Paris was closed to him.<sup>9</sup> That same month also brought news of de Gaulle's first, spectacular, failure: in September the General had persuaded Churchill that the people of Dakar would rally to him if he launched an Anglo/French attack. So, after that ill-conceived fiasco, the self-proclaimed leader of the Free French lost credibility, as it was then

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<sup>6</sup>William Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble* (Hamden, CT: 1965), 289-99.

<sup>7</sup>Julian G. Hurstfield, *America and the French Nation, 1939-1945* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1986), 29.

<sup>8</sup>Jacques Maritain to Yves R. Simon, 10 August 1940; 31 August 1940.

<sup>9</sup>René Mougel, "Les Années de New York," *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, 16-17 (April 1988), 15.

clear that the French army and navy were behind Vichy, not him. Thus, in the short term, de Gaulle was completely useless, apparently incapable of any significant military or inspirational contribution to the war effort.<sup>10</sup>

On 27 September Maritain wrote Simon about what he called "the Dakar escapade," remarking that it "reawakens an old instinct in me which tells me that generals...are bad politicians (with Bonaparte an exception)...In the end one is always brought back to hoping...in the people. But our poor people without star and without guide!" Maritain also signaled "the discrete warnings being given to the *New York Times* by its London correspondent. He has called the Dakar adventure a tragedy-comedy. And seems to suggest that de Gaulle is an export-item for the English" and that their confidence in him does not go beyond inviting him to official ceremonies, dinners, and receptions.<sup>11</sup> As for Maritain, his book, *A Travers le Désastre*, composed from September to October 1940, was a decisive and inaugural text,<sup>12</sup> as with that book Maritain became "the moral beacon for those in exile."<sup>13</sup> In it he maintained that "it is not in a man, it is in the people of our country that we have our best hope."<sup>14</sup> Thus Maritain placed his confidence in "the people" and not in a savior on horseback, neither in Pétain...nor in de Gaulle. So with the philosophers and the majority of Frenchmen in the U.S. against de Gaulle (85% according to an estimate made as late as May 1942), the already weak prospects of recognition for his movement became even more remote.<sup>15</sup>

Yves R. Simon remained interested in de Gaulle, but from a different, intensely personal perspective, as he wrote to Maritain on 20 December:

I am in the midst of effecting...in the depths of my soul,...a work of political adjustment, a great revision, and I don't yet know the results. I am more and more persuaded that even the healthiest

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<sup>10</sup>Raoul Aglion, *Roosevelt and De Gaulle*, 115.

<sup>11</sup>Jacques Maritain to Yves R. Simon, 27 September 1940.

<sup>12</sup>Charles Blanchet, "Jacques Maritain, 1940-1944: le Refus de la Défaite et ses Relations avec le Général de Gaulle," *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, 16-17, 40.

<sup>13</sup>Raoul Aglion, *Roosevelt and De Gaulle*, 36.

<sup>14</sup>Jacques Maritain, *A Travers le Désastre* (New York, 1944), 115.

<sup>15</sup>Raoul Aglion, *Roosevelt and De Gaulle*, 115.



results. I am more and more persuaded that even the healthiest theoretical work can...contribute to disasters in the immediately practical realm because when the house is burning with the inhabitants locked inside, what is important is the immediate practical...[W]hat has been subtracted from the heritage of the French Revolution, from the rights of man and the citizen, has gone, not to St. Thomas, but to Hitler. I had my small part of responsibility in that game and I intend to participate in it no longer. ...The spirit of lies and treason is flourishing in the catholic center where we live. It breaks the heart to think that it is fortunate, for the...U.S.A., that there are only 23 million Catholics in that great country....There is no encyclical to say how a state which is betrayed by its Catholics ought to react.....<sup>16</sup>

Maritain's *A Travers le Désastre*, which appeared during January 1941, gave him a very high profile. That same year it was published in South America, in Spanish and Portuguese, and appeared in German in the United States. It was translated into Polish by the great poet Czeslaw Milosz who explained how it constituted a powerful, lucid analysis of the French defeat by "the most celebrated representative of contemporary Catholic philosophy" which would serve a world in the throes of an *international civil war* as a powerful antidote to the Hitlerite claim that France fell because of the decadence of democracy.<sup>17</sup>

In France Maritain's book was copied, mimeographed, and printed several times in the southern zone, before being reprinted at Paris--the second publication of *Editions du Minuit*, the famous clandestine Resistance publishers.<sup>18</sup> Back in France, a Catholic journalist sympathetic to the Resistance recorded in his diary how he "read Maritain's *A Travers le Désastre* in a copy which came from America, slipping into France under the nose of the customs officers at the Pyrenees frontier. Many, here, had confidence in the author, but it was difficult to imagine that a compatriot

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<sup>16</sup>Yves R. Simon to Jacques Maritain, 20 December 1940.

<sup>17</sup>Czeslaw Milosz, "'A Travers le Désastre,' Clandestin Varsovie," *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, 16-17, 29-33.

<sup>18</sup>René Mougel, "Les Années de New York, 1940-1945," *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, 16-17; cf., *Le Bataille du Silence. Souvenir de Minuit* (Paris: Vercors, 1967).

outside the country could put himself in our place so perfectly."<sup>19</sup> As *Le Désastre* gave Maritain immense moral authority, officials of the Free French from London visited him on their way through New York to Washington to organize the services of the *Comité Français de Liberation*. He was invited to communicate directly with the head of the Free French, and charged with directing the *Université française libre* just being founded in New York.

Yves R. Simon quickly noticed and told Maritain that what he had written about the de Gaulle movement in *A Travers le Désastre*<sup>20</sup> seemed "terribly embarrassed."<sup>21</sup> Maritain responded:

One must show that Thomism is what is strongest against false democracy....It is a question of aiding America to (discover?) a new democracy....one must distinguish clearly democracy as a general political philosophy founded on respect for the human person and the vocation for liberation rooted in human personality (in this sense... St. Thomas was a democrat, in this sense... the Gospel works in history in a democratic direction).

Simon, who had rarely contradicted his *maître* in the past, could not agree that Thomism was the best instrument in the circumstances, and contended:

...if St. Thomas were alive today he would be for Franco, for Tizo, for Pétain; that's evident. St. Thomas, that's Garrigou. To do something practical in 1941, with St. Thomas, in politics, is a joke. And that is why...late in the night...I am reading 'The History of the French Revolution'...trying to understand practical things which my understanding of Thomism doesn't explain to me....

If Simon's Thomistic background had failed him, so had many of his contemporaries who had been influenced by Thomism:

I surely hope to find...a political spirit not made to please Franco,

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<sup>19</sup>Pierre Limagne (30 July 1941), *Ephemerides de Quatre Années Tragiques, 1940-1944, I* (Lavilledieu, 1987), 218.

<sup>20</sup>Jacques Maritain, *A Travers le Désastre*, 115.

<sup>21</sup>Yves R. Simon to Jacques Maritain, 11 February 1941.

Tizo, Pétain and Garrigou....But you know that the [notion of] 'the democracy of the person' has always seemed very vague to me. And...I am strongly discouraged by the...political gestures of the most intelligent Thomists during these last years.

These things led Simon to a critical analysis of his own past:

There was my idiotic, but so Thomist, book on the war in Ethiopia where I dismissed with a virtuous severity...clairvoyant people who...wanted...an antifascist crusade. — Perhaps that is what has contributed the most to separating us for the last two or three years: I broke with my past...while I don't think there has been an analogous rupture in you....I don't see a break in you. There is one in me.<sup>22</sup>

Maritain responded by arguing that, contrary to what Simon had glibly suggested, he had accomplished *a break* with his past—one which opened up in the mid-1920s:

To have believed for a certain time in a parallelism of action between the people of the *Action Française* and the Thomist renaissance is one of the greatest scourges of my life....I had an instinctive horror of those well-dressed savages, but had never read the books of Maurras, and I confided myself to the wisdom of my director, he who introduced me to St. Thomas. I dearly paid for that error. The rupture in question began a bit before the condemnation [of the *Action Française*], and...since that time I have undertaken the liquidation of the errors of the past with perseverance.<sup>23</sup>

Simon, however, would not let the issue die; raised questions not only about the "democracy of the person" but also about the larger implications of the *Christian Personalism* which was becoming fashionable in Catholic circles. "Last winter," he wrote Maritain, "our seniors did a treatise on the subject: Thomistic personalism: true internationalism. It

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<sup>22</sup>Yves R. Simon to Jacques Maritain, 16 July 1941.

<sup>23</sup>Jacques Maritain to Yves R. Simon, 31 August 1941.



was polished folly: everything idiotic was individualism, everything nice was personalism';<sup>24</sup> and so, Simon implied, in an international civil war between authoritarian powers and the liberal democracies, good Thomist Personalists would be inclined to side with "anti-individualist" forces. Two months later, on November 6, commenting on Cardinal Baudrillart's speech describing a "Holy War" against the Communists in Russia, Simon claimed:

...totalitarian regimes,...above all in the apparently less radical forms which they have taken on in Italy, Spain, in Slovakia, in France, are accomplishing with a growing efficacy a more redoubtable infamy than any persecution: *the corruption of the Catholic world from within, what the Patriarch of Lisbon called the dechristianization of the Church itself*....[W]e are in full Catholic crisis. The thought that one of my sons could be called to the sacerdotal vocation, and that that immense honour could be accompanied by the danger of seeing him tied hands and feet to those corrupters of conscience, the thought that I could be the father of priests like Alfred Baudrillart, Gillet, Gemelli, Tizo, O'Brian, etc. sends a chill down my spine. I would rather put my daughter in a bordello.<sup>25</sup>

Some weeks later, Simon added that, in his view:

'Catholic democracy' is condemned to only producing rubbish... Better to work in the framework of just plain democracy. There at least we have dynamic and normative facts: the French Revolution, the American Revolution, Italian independence, etc.; these facts are generally of a questionable Catholicism; this is the problem we have to face. Garrigou never even tried.<sup>26</sup>

In a lengthy and thoughtful letter to General de Gaulle, which was dated on 21 November, 1941, Jacques Maritain outlined his views of the French political situation. He began by warning the General that the Vichy government was pursuing a policy which, despite appearances,

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<sup>24</sup>Yves R. Simon to Jacques Maritain, 3 September 1941.

<sup>25</sup>Yves R. Simon to Jacques Maritain, 6 November 1941.

<sup>26</sup>Yves R. Simon to Jacques Maritain, 26 December 1941.



could have disastrous effects on the Church in France. For, he argued: ...the Vichy government is the blind agent of incalculable disasters. In officially compromising the French Church...with the regime and the myth of Marshall Pétain, it is preparing popular resentments in the wake of the victory, and perhaps a religious war, which will be a second catastrophe for the country....It invokes the teachings of the popes and of the social Catholic school which it corrupts in dechristianizing and in tying the errors to a Maurrasian, or fascist, or childishly reactionary political philosophy, and class revenge. [Thus it] risks ruining in advance all effort of reconstruction capable of reconciling the French in a work of political and social regeneration with a truly, and authentically and vitally Christian inspiration.

Maritain told de Gaulle that the resistance movement should not only be concerned with military victory, but focus on deeper aspirations of the masses of the French population as well:

...it is in the French people, in the young and healthy elements of a bourgeoisie which has experienced a horrible bankruptcy as a class, that all of our temporal hope now resides....It would clearly be vain to propose a return to the pre-war regime to France; but it is no less evident that it would be folly to renounce the victories, hopes and historical ideal of democracy,...fundamentally renewed ..., reestablished in its evangelical sources and with a new self-confidence....We need a new language...a new declaration of the rights of man, the hope of a new Republic....[S]uch a promise could ...reawaken our people and help them to regain their energies and virtues. These hopes are centered in Free France and its leader.<sup>27</sup>

The philosopher urged the Free French to disprove the anti-liberal

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<sup>27</sup>This admonition to de Gaulle was similar to those made in the same period by Simone Weil who also thought that the imperious General often missed the point of resistance against Fascism and authoritarianism. Cf. John Hellman, *Simone Weil: An Introduction to Her Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 27-43.

rhetoric of Vichy by demonstrating that an attachment to French religious traditions and to the French revolutionary and democratic traditions were not incompatible but complementary:

...I think that the immense mission which Providence has delegated to the movement which you lead is to give to the French people, in this unprecedented historical conjuncture...an opportunity to reconcile...Christianity and liberty...those two traditions of spiritual fidelity and temporal emancipation, the tradition of Saint Louis and that of the Declaration of Rights,...opposed the one to the other...for so many years, but where there are...truths...precious to us in a parallel way."<sup>28</sup>

While Maritain was appealing to de Gaulle to embrace revolutionary and religious traditions, Roosevelt's advisors were warning him that de Gaulle was less a Resistance General than a radically ambitious politician who threatened the future of French democracy;<sup>29</sup> and soon Maritain, too, was tending toward that point of view.

When Maritain's admonitory letters to de Gaulle in late 1941 and early 1942 recently came to light, Maurice Schumann, voice of the Free French in London and resolute champion of de Gaulle's legacy since that time, tried to explain and minimize their significance. In 1941-1942, Schumann explained in 1988, Maritain had been "un gaulliste inconditionnel" (an unconditional Gaullist)... "but, rather than obscuring his liberty of examination, his gaullism impelled him to make scrupulous use of it to the point of meticulousness." Schumann admitted there was a striking change in tone in Maritain's letters to the General between autumn 1941 and spring 1942, but he blamed it on two or three self-styled Maritain disciples who had escaped France at the time. These men had gone neither to London nor Algiers (like the quasi-totality of such refugees) but to the United States where they justified their itinerary by arguments which Maritain repeated practically word for word: "the missionaries sent out from England are too often men of the extreme-right"; Free France seemed oriented toward "a sort of Moral Order"... "the

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<sup>28</sup>Jacques Maritain to Charles de Gaulle, 21 November 1941.

<sup>29</sup>Leahy to Hull, 12 September 1941, in *Papers of the Foreign Relations of the United States: 1939-1945*, I, 2: 431.



domestic politics of the Marshall without the Marshall." Those tales did not convince Maritain, Schumann insisted, but "they bothered him to the point where a real disagreement grew up between him and de Gaulle," even leading Maritain to write those harsh words that while "*Il est vrai de dire que la France Combattante represente moralement la France, il serait vain de pretendre qu'elle la represente Politiquement,*" but, Schumann implied, Maritain soon learned better and went to work for de Gaulle like everyone else.<sup>30</sup>

In fact, however, these Maritain letters were written in a climate of tension between the United States and the Free French precipitated by the Saint Pierre and Miquelon incident in December 1941. On the spur of the moment de Gaulle ordered Admiral Muselier to seize the Vichy controlled islands off the North American coast without informing anyone. On 17 December he had told the American Foreign Office in Canada, preoccupied with America's sudden entry into the war, that a proposed Muselier mission to Canada would not proceed without prior American approval, but seven days later he ordered Muselier to proceed without consulting them. Muselier's subsequent resignation from the French National Committee precipitated rifts among the Free French, and de Gaulle's moral and diplomatic standing with the U.S. understandably plummeted once again.<sup>31</sup>

Just after the Saint-Pierre and Miquelon incidents, on the seventh of January 1942, de Gaulle wrote a peculiar, highly charged letter to Maritain. He agreed that France should have a new "interior national ideal" and insisted:

But it is in this area above all that we have much to expect from you, Jacques Maritain. You have begun so well! You must continue. There should be one basis for salvation: disinterestedness and people have now been prepared to embrace it by disgust and holy misery....Each person will only find his place in each person's self-abnegation. We need a people in workers' smocks, laboring in the light and playing in full sunshine. We will try to

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<sup>30</sup>"Temoignage de Maurice Schumann," *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, 1617, 36-37.

<sup>31</sup>Julian G. Hurstfield, *America and the French Nation, 1939-1945*, 120-125.

draw that out of that war-revolution. I know that everything which is young wants it. We don't expect anything at all from academies.

Did de Gaulle's glowing vision of war-revolution, in any way, disturb Maritain? The General sought to reassure the philosopher: "I am not worried about democracy. Its only enemies at home are puppets. I am not at all afraid for religion. The Bishops played the wrong game, but the good cures, the simple priests, are saving everything."<sup>32</sup>

When Maritain did not respond, de Gaulle cabled him to come to London as soon as possible: they had many things to discuss.<sup>33</sup> Maritain cabled back, politely but cryptically, that he was prevented from dropping everything and going to see the general by his obligations to American universities.<sup>34</sup>

On 21 March Maritain explained himself to de Gaulle sternly and at length. From the information he had received, he wrote:

'Gaullism' has not summoned as profound and vast a movement of sympathy as is necessary; a large part of resistant elements, notably in workers' milieu, are keeping their distance. I am told that the slogan: deliver the *patrie* from the Nazi oppressors, does not suffice...because that same slogan is employed by the partisans of Marshall Pétain, who represent him as...gaining time and in fooling the Germans....And the milieu of which I speak are asking themselves if the political ideal of Free France isn't oriented toward a sort of moral Order which would continue...after the... liberation, the interior politics of the Marshall without the Marshall....I am also told that the very way in which the propaganda of Free France is conducted in France gives credence to this, and that the missionaries of Free France sent from England are too often men of the extreme Right.

Once again Maritain confronted de Gaulle with the need for a firm and clear commitment on the part of the Free French to democracy, rather than raw political power:

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<sup>32</sup>Charles de Gaulle to Jacques Maritain, 7 January 1942.

<sup>33</sup>Charles de Gaulle to Jacques Maritain, 3 March 1942.

<sup>34</sup>Jacques Maritain to Charles de Gaulle, 6 March 1942.



I am convinced that the essential factor...is the French people itself, notably the workers and peasants, because I believe that the bourgeoisie as a class are bankrupt. But the people need leaders to act in concert with them; if such leaders are to come forth, I suppose one must expect them from worker and peasant elites and individual elements coming from the former directing classes and decided to work with the people.

So Maritain's ideas were similar to de Gaulle's (and Vichy's<sup>35</sup>) *elitism*, but different insofar as Maritain declared the potential bourgeois elites corrupt. Maritain, more of a democrat and populist, told de Gaulle:

...it is a question of proposing a renewed democratic idea to France, *more* profoundly and *more* truly democratic, more fervent for liberty, for justice and fraternity, more truly republican than that of the old liberalism,...conscious of its spiritual principles and tied to radical reform of structures....If Providence give us the men required for that...they will stress the evangelical inspiration of democracy, in a new language accessible not only to Christians but also to unbelievers.

Maritain said that a question which seemed more and more urgent to him was the "ideological refurbishing of the French people," and he encouraged the General to familiarize himself with Yves R. Simon's *La Grande Crise de la République Française* and the books in the forthcoming *Civilisation* series by Simon, Catholic trade union leader Paul Vignaux, and himself.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Especially in Vichy's institutions such as the National Leadership school at Uriage. See John Hellman, "Maritain, Simon, and Vichy's Elite Schools," *Freedom in the Modern World: Jacques Maritain, Yves R. Simon, and Mortimer J. Adler*, ed. Michael D. Torre (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 165-180.

<sup>36</sup>He also recommended the "*Temoignage sur la Situation en France*" by the anonymous *Dirigeant de l'Action Catholique* (in fact, Pierre Limagne, *Ephemerides de Quatre Années Tragiques, 1940-1944, I*) published by Claude Hurtubise at the Editions de l'Arbre in Montreal. In that forthcoming collection, *Civilisation* Maritain cited the books *Les Droits de*

On 21 April de Gaulle, again, urged Maritain to come to London,<sup>37</sup> and then on 22 May telegraphed the Free French delegation in Washington to go to see Maritain in New York and press him to join the *Comité National* which was being set up (as almost a "government in exile"). This provoked another, even more cutting, response from Maritain who raised questions about the Resistance's general political inspiration:

...it would be in my opinion an irremediable fault to confuse [your] political *inspiration* with the political *power* or with a government in exile or with a provisional pre-government governing in the name of the French people. Because the will of the French people will only be able to express itself in a political way after France will be delivered from German oppression and the Government of Vichy.

Or, as he put it in another way:

[while]...France *Combattante* represents France *morally*, it would be vain to pretend that it represents her *politically*. There is no mission more noble than such a moral mission, no mission more suited to arousing vast forces, but on the condition of not falling from what Péguy called the *mystique* into what he called the *politique*, and on the condition that even the hint of a demand for political power be excluded. Can one imagine *Jeanne d'Arc* being concerned with taking on political power and of preparing a government?

Maritain even implied that de Gaulle might have missed the great lesson of the 1930s:

It is from their own will and their own experience that the reconstruction...ought to spring up. On that question of the confidence of having or not having confidence in the French,...there is a

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*l'Homme et la Loi Naturelle*" by himself, Yves R. Simon's *La Marche à la Délivrance*, and what became Paul Vignaux's *Traditionalisme et Syndicalisme*. Jacques Maritain to Charles de Gaulle, 21 March 1942.

<sup>37</sup>Charles de Gaulle to Jacques Maritain, 21 April 1942.



primary choice to pose in the depths of the conscience. As for me, I have chosen confidence.

While Maritain did express his gratitude to the General for the latter's speeches to the French people he also warned him that:

...a certain spirit of arrogant authoritarianism shown by many subordinate administrators, a certain concern for prestige among them ... a certain tone of moralizing superiority...are of the sort to undercut the movement in a serious way.

Maritain also warned about the Free French attitude toward the Americans:

If the State Department finished by accepting the *fait accompli* at Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, it would not be by democratic weakness, but by virtue of realistic considerations, and it has certainly retained a profound resentment.

This was not an isolated instance of de Gaulle's lack of politeness and judgment:

Since this letter [is]...written in complete frankness, allow me to tell you that the allusion to the *Gribouille*[short-sighted idiot] in one of your recent talks seemed catastrophic to me.

Political inspiration to the exclusion of ... concern for political power,--liquidation of the idea of a diplomatic recognition of the movement--revision of the general attitude regarding America, --*voilà mon Général*, the three fundamental points on which I wanted to clarify my thinking for you.<sup>38</sup>

So Maritain's long letter of 25 May 1942 showed deep reservations about de Gaulle and the Free French which made it unthinkable for him to rejoin the *Comité National* in London, but de Gaulle did not break with Maritain even when the latter refused to adhere to the Gaullist group *France Forever* in June.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Jacques Maritain to Charles de Gaulle, 25 May 1942.

<sup>39</sup>Charles Blanchet, "Relations," *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, 49.

At about this time, Maritain himself was reproached from a very different quarter. On 24 May 1942, the *prieure générale* of the Ursulines, returning to Rome from France, wrote of "disquiet" aroused in certain French and Roman milieu by "his current ideas."<sup>40</sup> (She seemed to mean, particularly, his criticism of the Church's involvement with Vichy.) Maritain's response was much harsher than his rebuke to de Gaulle:

You could answer [those who are worried about me]...it would be more appropriate for them to worry over...Cardinal Baudrillart associating his prestige...with the worst policy of collaboration with the enemy, Father Garrigou-Lagrange militating politically for the government of Vichy, a handful of traitors trying to corrupt French Catholic opinion by radio and the press. Moreover Father Louis of the Trinity (Provincial of the French Carmelites) had chosen, in his conscience as a religious and disciple of Saint John of the Cross, to continue the fight alongside General de Gaulle, and I haven't heard of his being asked to abandon his battleships for mystical studies.

Finally, you know as I do...it is not only a question of our fatherland, but of the Holy Church, which is made vulnerable today by those who would compromise it with the fascist 'new order' a crisis no less serious than that of the great schism in the middle ages; it is no longer a question as it was at that time of choosing between a legitimate Pope and an illegitimate Pope, but rather between conceptions which maintain Christian truth in souls and those which lead..., as the Cardinal of Lisbonne said, to 'de-Christianize the Church herself.' When a Christian has understood that, he has to choose at the price of risks and perils, and not take refuge in a patronizing neutrality.<sup>41</sup>

De Gaulle then responded to Maritain's position via a spokesman, Christian Socialist André Philip. Maritain reported the result to Simon:

I have just received a letter from André Philip who the general as-

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<sup>40</sup>Charles Blanchet, "Relations," *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, 42.

<sup>41</sup>Jacques Maritain to "Une Religieuse," 3 June 1942, reprinted in *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, 16,17, 93.



signed to respond to me. The thesis is directly opposite [to that in my letter to de Gaulle]. The future provisional government is to be presided over by de Gaulle and created by him: that is the only way to save France from anarchy. (In my view that plan is good for a Lenin or a Maurras, when one wants to impose a revolution or a *coup de force* on a country. But I don't see the necessity in the present case.)<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile de Gaulle tried to mollify the Americans. On 26 October 1942 he tried to explain to them (for the first time) the moral and political principles of the movement he had founded in June 1940. His letter to the State Department innocently announced that the newly formed French National Committee was obviously "bound" by the laws of the Third Republic because he was "not a political man." Not only was de Gaulle's avowal two years late, but his claim to be devoid of political ambitions contradicted two years of pursuing a recognition that was unrelated to military goals.<sup>43</sup> It also gainsaid the intentions clearly set out to Maritain...(who was probably confiding in Roosevelt).

Through all of this Jacques Maritain was trying to affirm his own democratic credentials. When a mutual friend sketched an outline of what he saw as the two main periods of Maritain's intellectual evolution, the philosopher admitted to Simon that he:

...would have preferred that he expose my...political philosophy... as a doctrinal synthesis,...in my 'second period.' Before that I was only concerned with metaphysics and speculative philosophy.... Even *Three Reformers*<sup>44</sup> was written from that point of view and political and social questions were...not the direct object of study. ...There is not, strictly speaking, a *Political Philosophy* of J.M. before *Religion et Culture*. I...admit the 'two periods' but the first was commanded by metaphysics, the political ideas were only a sketch. I hope that [he] will be able to indicate that....

If our friend could further accentuate the democratic and 're-

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<sup>42</sup>Jacques Maritain to Yves R. Simon, 21 August 1942.

<sup>43</sup>Raoul Aglion, *Roosevelt and De Gaulle*, 132, 134.

<sup>44</sup>This is an early *anti-individualistic* monograph done by Mari-



publican' character of my present positions I would be happy for it.<sup>45</sup>

Meanwhile, by the end of 1942, Roosevelt tried to deal directly with the duplicitous and ambitious Vichy figure Admiral Darlan, instead of de Gaulle, who went into a 'violent rage'<sup>46</sup> --thus further exasperating Maritain. On 4 December Maritain wrote Simon that, in his view:

...The Darlan affair is terrible for France, and it is possible that in a few months that wily character could create a dictatorship with democratic trappings,...he is consolidating his power....During that time de Gaulle is ...ruining his own cause. Philip's visit to the White House was catastrophic, as he played a game of prestige and insolence with the president. After that, when the President invited the general, the General, rather than arriving as quickly as possible, posed conditions....[I]n the meantime our friends are given over to the Gestapo, famine, and terrorism....<sup>47</sup>

Darlan's threat to de Gaulle's political power abruptly ended on 25 December when the Admiral was assassinated by a young Gaullist, Fernand Bonnier de la Chapelle. Did de Gaulle order Darlan's assassination? Roosevelt could not know and appeared with armed bodyguards for his meeting with de Gaulle at Casablanca a month later.<sup>48</sup> On 22 January 1943, the first day of that conference, de Gaulle told Roosevelt he conceived his role to be that of Jeanne d'Arc, and the next day remarked: "I must frankly tell you that I am no longer a military leader. I am the leader of a great political movement. I am today in the position of Clemenceau." When the amused Roosevelt asked who he wished to be, Jeanne d'Arc or Clemenceau, de Gaulle answered: "I am both," thus

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tain which, as Yves R. Simon pointed out, was being approvingly cited by reactionaries at Vichy.

<sup>45</sup>Jacques Maritain to Yves R. Simon, 1 November 1942.

<sup>46</sup>Cf. Jacques Maritain to Yves R. Simon, 4 December 1942.

<sup>47</sup>Raoul Aglion, *Roosevelt and De Gaulle*, 147-48.

<sup>48</sup>Raoul Aglion, *Roosevelt and De Gaulle*, 148.

confirming the President's impression that he was a potential dictator.<sup>49</sup> Churchill commented to an approving Roosevelt that de Gaulle "has undoubtedly Fascist and dictatorial tendencies. At one time he represents himself as the sole barrier against Communism: at another, as enjoying Communist support."<sup>50</sup>

In the light of these developments, Maritain wrote Simon:

...The primordial position taken by de Gaulle...makes him more precious to us than ever, and obliges us to be more and more attached to the spirit (which ought to be, or might have been, that) of his movement. But at the same time he ruins all that by his absurd errors [of judgment]. The two great dangers which I see are: 1) Chauvinistic nationalism and demands for prestige; 2) Absurd anti-Americanism and anti-British feelings. To quarrel with a man as devoted to France as Churchill is a masterpiece of a gaffe for which France might have to pay the costs....There is one of the major reasons for American opposition to de Gaulle...<sup>51</sup>

In response, Simon granted that "there were in Gaullism, at its beginnings, people who would have liked a Pétain regime without the *Boches*" but now one had to focus on the common fight for the good cause, and how to revivify France. He recalled that the *Commune* shot less than 500 people while the victorious bourgeois who put it down shot over 17,000. While he hoped that Fighting France would not indulge in indiscriminate massacres he charged that the executions:

... would be more than 17,000. Incontestable traitors, plotters against state security, torturers, calumniators responsible for the deaths of a number of good people, dishonored characters who have to disappear from public life if public life is to be possible on French soil,...an enormous mass of Frenchmen. 100, 000, 500,000?

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<sup>49</sup>*For the President. Personal and Secret: Correspondence Between Franklin D. Roosevelt and William C. Bullitt*, ed. O.H. Bullitt (Boston: 1972), 568.

<sup>50</sup>Julian G.Hurstfield, *America and the French*, 194.

<sup>51</sup>Jacques Maritain to Yves R. Simon, 13 April 1943.

We will not shoot all of them, but all must disappear or France will not be restored to life.

But who are these dozens, these hundreds of thousands of people who *will be* liquidated if fighting France isn't prevented from effecting the *great rupture* that it has promised? One finds an astonishingly high proportion of people belonging to the good, to the high society. Admirals, Generals, Bishops (with the exception of Msgr. Saliège, who among them hasn't been dishonored?)--if we can't reintegrate men like Darlan then neither can Cardinal Gerlier ...Cardinal Lienart, whom I loved so much....

May God have pity on his Church! The more I think about it, the more it seems to me that Catholic responsibilities in that war take a place immediately behind those of the Nazis.

...Among the factors blinding people...what was more efficacious than Catholic propaganda against Communism? Without that propaganda there would not have been the war.

In a letter several months later, Simon mused about "Social Catholicism," informing Maritain that he was, as he put it, evolving in a more and more egalitarian direction: [Take the case of Albert de Mun,]

That former officer of the Versailles army, who opposed amnesty for the *Communards* [hence 17,000 *Communards* died for 500]...that handsome fellow claimed that Leo XIII had encouraged him in his taking action in favor of the directing role of dominant classes, and I am convinced he was telling the truth.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, President Roosevelt tried to recognize General Giraud as "the only French leader" in North Africa, but American attempts to prop him up failed. After Giraud and de Gaulle were appointed co-presidents of the French Committee of National Liberation on the insistence of Roosevelt, de Gaulle quickly relegated Giraud to military considerations and established near absolute political control,<sup>53</sup> and from that summer of 1944, de Gaulle continued to make as much trouble for

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<sup>52</sup>Yves R. Simon to Jacques Maritain, 9 August 1944.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. Raoul Aglion, *Roosevelt and De Gaulle*, 155.



Roosevelt and Churchill as he possibly could.<sup>54</sup>

While de Gaulle was consolidating his power over the Free French movement, in May 1944, Maritain resigned from the presidency of the [Free French] school in New York--despite the urging of the Free French authorities to continue, pleading a need to return to philosophy; but a few weeks later General de Gaulle, in New York to coordinate Free French military initiatives with the Americans, urged him to accept the French ambassadorship at the Vatican.<sup>55</sup> On 28 July 1944, Maritain wrote to Simon: "I saw de Gaulle at New York and I had an *excellent* impression. But I am afraid that they will ask practical tasks of me."<sup>56</sup>

The consistent refusals of Roosevelt to recognize de Gaulle as the head of a provisional government of France, even after the liberation, only ended in October 1944 when Eisenhower conveyed his hope that a French government contribute to international efforts to subdue Germany. De Gaulle's visit to Washington in July was for reasons of military expediency as the State Department complied with Eisenhower's request for recognition.<sup>57</sup> In sum, the fears over de Gaulle's dictatorial tendencies were only overridden by military considerations.

Maritain returned to France on his way to Rome, but he was disappointed by what he saw. On 9 January 1945, Simon wrote to Maritain: "...what bothers me the most is that [same] lack of renewal which struck you [on your visit to France]....Social Catholic types, Duthoit [Bishop of Arras], Lienart, and company will always only do the dirty work for criminals."<sup>58</sup> Maritain "went to work for de Gaulle" but with a particular, consistent perspective on the situation, as he told Simon: "What the general has in view is less success in such or such diplomatic negotiation as the gesture of choosing me to represent France to the Vatican and which he regards as significant in itself."<sup>59</sup> Thus Maritain and Simon were disappointed by the lack of democratic renewal, of a break

<sup>54</sup>Cf. *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence*, ed. Francis Loewenheim, et. al. (New York, 1975), 534.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. René Mougel, "Les Années," 18-19.

<sup>56</sup>Jacques Maritain to Yves R. Simon, 28 July 1944.

<sup>57</sup>Timothy Maga, *United States, France, and the Refugee Problem. 1933-1947* (Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 1981), 262.

<sup>58</sup>Yves R. Simon to Jacques Maritain, 9 January 1945.

<sup>59</sup>Jacques Maritain to Yves R. Simon, 29 January 1945.

or "rupture," in postwar France; but their lonely stance against the fascistization of the Church was vindicated by the philosopher's symbolic appointment to Rome.

What are the most important lessons of this episode? It is strikingly significant to learn how, in 1940-42, the "orthodox" Thomists were favorable to an authoritarian Europe. Maritain, who was the leading Thomist intellectual, was shocked by the comportment of American Catholic leaders as well as by great French scholars like the Pétainist Père Garrigou because it suggested where Thomism led, politically; and how and why had Maritain come to be so different? He had a Jewish wife, was a convert from Protestantism, had his house searched early in the war, his friends placed under surveillance, and he had been the object of a violently partisan attack for his very moderate *neutralist* stand on the Spanish Civil War. It was *not* his study of Thomism, much less Catholic doctrine, which led him--or Yves R. Simon--to oppose Fascism any more than Marxism led Walesa, Havel, or the other heroic Eastern Europeans of '89 to oppose totalitarianism. It was more a sense of human dignity and of right and wrong. De Gaulle had his own reasons, acted accordingly, and, on the surface at least, prevailed. The important point is that, as Yves R. Simon concluded, Thomism was the wrong formation to stimulate resistance to Fascism in 1940. So it was important to examine the tradition, and oneself, to find out what went wrong. As Havel has said, there is no point blaming others: self-examination is the prelude to inoculation against the poison of totalitarianism. Here it is not so much the fine points of the philosophy as the whole mental structure which was behind it: the seminary training, the dogma, the notion of authority, the sense of the human condition never essentially changing, the deference to authority of all sorts. A new kind of Christian democratic thinking would come out of this realization.