incarnation' And 'desincarnation' In The Thought Of Georges Bernanos

Michael Robinson Tobin

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LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE NOUS L'AVÔNS REÇUE
INCARNATION AND DESINCARNATION IN THE THOUGHT OF GEORGES BERNANOS

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The University of Western Ontario
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ABSTRACT

Even as a youth Bernanos had expressed disdain for disincarnate idealism which he opposed to incarnate virtue and truth. As evidenced in early correspondence and articles, and quite in contrast to the abstractions of Republican rhetoric, he placed great importance on the living out of what one professed as true and good.

In his fiction this principle of incarnation was to assume primary importance and he related it more and more to a specifically Christian context. His fictional heroes, whose faith is expressed by action in their daily lives, exemplify the Christian vocation of making the presence of Christ manifest on earth. They are frequently opposed in the novels to lip-service Christians or Christians whose faith is but a cultural habit and therefore disincarnate, stripped of that love and action which would make it authentic.

While living in Majorca Bernanos' experience of the Spanish Civil War finally prompted him to create the neologism "désincarnation" to denote what he perceived as modern man's general tendency to prefer abstraction and disincarnate ideals to incarnate reality. Further, in Les Grands cimetières sous la lune, the key phrase "la désincarnation du
Verbe" specifically identifies the process which Bernanos saw as the root cause of the dechristianization of Europe: the refusal of Christians themselves to incarnate the charity of Christ.

As Europe fell prey to fascist and Nazi barbarity Bernanos continued to reflect deeply upon the "désincarnation du Verbe" as the real cause behind the disintegration of Christian Europe. In his view, the true object being attacked by the unleashed forces of evil was nothing less than the continuation of the incarnation of Christ by believers. The War ended, Bernanos turned his attention to the dehumanizing effects of technology, identifying still another aspect of this process of "désincarnation."
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ABBREVIATIONS


INTRODUCTION

In 1936, while writing _Les Grands cimetières sous la lune_, Bernanos finally coined the term "désincarnation" to describe a process of which he had long been aware, but which he had not yet been able to label. Even in his adolescence, as attested in his correspondence at that time, he had developed a disdain for high-minded Republican rhetoric and idealism which, it seemed to him, remained impotently confined to the abstract. Moreover, even at that young age, the importance of incarnate virtue seemed clear to him. It is not surprising therefore to discover that the necessity of living out what one professes as true or good became a leitmotif in Bernanos' early correspondence and in his pre-World War I writings—whether political articles or fiction.

In his fiction this principle of incarnation was to assume primary importance as he deepened his understanding of this theme, relating it more and more to a specifically Christian context. His fictional heroes, whose faith finds tangible expression in their daily lives, exemplify the Christian vocation of making the presence of Christ manifest on earth. They are frequently opposed in the novels to lip-service Christians or Christians whose faith is but a cultural habit and therefore disincarnate, stripped of that love and action which would make it authentic.
While living in Majorca Bernanos' experience of the Spanish Civil War finally prompted him to create the neologism "désincarnation" to denote what he perceived as modern man's general tendency to prefer abstraction and disincarnate ideals to incarnate reality. Further, in *Les Grands cimetières sous la lune*, the key phrase "la désincarnation du Verbe" specifically identifies the process which Bernanos saw as the root cause of the dechristianization of Europe: the refusal of Christians themselves to incarnate the charity of Christ.

As Europe fell prey to fascist and Nazi barbarity, Bernanos continued to reflect deeply upon the "désincarnation du Verbe" as the real cause behind the disintegration of Christian Europe. In his view, the true object being attacked by the unleashed forces of evil was nothing less than the continuation of the incarnation of Christ by believers. The War ended, Bernanos turned his attention to the dehumanizing effects of technology, identifying still another aspect of this process of "désincarnation."

We therefore propose to trace Bernanos' thought in regard not only to incarnation but also to what he termed "désincarnation," hoping thereby to show the thematic cohesiveness given by this double concept to all Bernanos' work, whether fiction or non-fiction.
Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 OE II, p. 522.
2 Ibid.
CHAPTER I
BERNANOS AGAINST THE DISINCARNATE IDEALS
OF THE THIRD REPUBLIC (1916-1926)

1. The Young Catholic Royalist

The fact that Georges Bernanos was, and always had been, both religiously orthodox and steeped in Catholic tradition was for him a source of great pride. As a burgeoning young novelist he was solid in his faith, a fact unchanged since childhood, and in the curriculum submitted to his editor at Plon on the occasion of his first published novel in 1926 he wrote, in defiance of the fashionable flurry of celebrated conversions around Jacques Maritain:

[... ] catholique depuis son baptême, pas même converti!

Moreover shortly thereafter in an interview with Frédéric Lefèvre he was to exclaim:

-Mon Dieu! Je suis né catholique. Je suis de formation catholique.

Bernanos' religious formation had as its immutable foundation, the catechism learned at his mother's knee. Yet his adherence to the religion of his ancestors, cultivated by attentive maternal nurturing, was by no means a thoughtless,
mimicry. Evidence of a remarkably deep conviction may be found in a letter written as a teenager where Bernanos reflects on the impact of his first communion at age eleven:

Au moment de ma première communion, la lumière a commencé de m'éclairer. Et je me suis dit que ce n'était pas surtout la vie qu'il fallait s'attacher à rendre heureuse et bonne, mais la mort, qui est la clôture de tout. Et j'ai pensé à me faire missionnaire et, dans mon action de grâces, à la fin de la messe de première communion, j'ai demandé cela au Père, comme unique cadeau.

As a boy this missionary inclination took the form of preaching, perched high atop a pine tree, to imaginary congregations, and solitary liturgies in which he played the role of celebrant. His early life was surrounded by the trappings of Catholicism and permeated by a clerical presence, whether in the form of a clutter of photographs of priests on his father's desk or the frequent visits to his parents' home of clerical friends. In 1899, he was moreover sent to the Jesuit school on the rue de Vaugirard in Paris. When it was closed as a result of the anticlerical legislation of 1901, he was next sent as a boarder to the petit séminaire of Notre Dame des Champs in Paris and thence, on the advice of a priest-friend of his mother's, to the petit séminaire at Bourges. There he was drawn to one of his professors, Abbé Lagrange who was invited to spend the summer holiday of 1904 with the Bernanos family at Fressin. It is in his correspondance with this young priest, while attending his last school at the college of Sainte-Marie d'Aire-sur-le-Lys, that we first glimpse the young Georges Bernanos already at grips with questions of the deepest spirituality.
In that correspondence the seventeen-year-old Bernanos was already preoccupied with the full meaning of his Christian calling. He confides to the priest that by the grace of sudden inner clarity, as if it were a "révolution"¹² in his understanding, he has come to see clearly that life has no meaning without the constant participation of God:

[...]

Indeed, in his awareness of the need for a divine presence in all elements of man's life, for the absolute union of the visible with the invisible, is it not possible to see the beginning of what was to become Bernanos' life-long exploration of one of his greatest themes, one which in later years gave a cohesiveness to his work when viewed as a whole: the necessity for the incarnation of the presence of Christ in the Christian life?

For even at such a young age Bernanos made no attempt to limit the intensity and absolute nature of the religious experience either to the hidden life of the monastery or to the clerical calling. For, while denying that he himself had a priestly vocation, he emphasized that God seeks to participate in all spheres of man's activity:

Mais Jésus nous a montré lui-même qu'on pouvait faire son salut aussi bien dans la vie publique que dans la vie privée. Puisqu'il a été charpentier ignoré, mais aussi prédicateur... ¹⁴
In a later letter to Abbé Lagrange we moreover find the teenage Bernanos, still meditating on the mystery of his own calling, stating a similar conviction:

Si je n'ai pas l'intention de me faire prêtre, c'est d'abord parce qu'il me semble ne pas en avoir la vocation, et qu'ensuite un laïque peut lutter sur bien des terrains où l'ecclésiastique ne peut pas grand-chose.  

Bernanos thus deliberately chooses the lay calling, not simply because of the absence of any priestly one, but because it is through the lay vocation that he sees the greatest possibilities for personal witness in secular society, for, as it were, bringing Christ into the "market place."

Thus one may conclude that the adolescent Bernanos had already clearly indicated his desire to be deeply involved in the spiritual witness outside a specifically ecclesiastical vocation. A year later, in the autumn of 1906, he began his university studies in Paris where he was to seize every opportunity to translate this conviction into action.  

It is not surprising that Bernanos, the product of a Catholic, royalist family, whose father read daily to the young Georges from Eduard Drumont's La Libre Parole, should be immediately attracted to the Action Française. In this neo-royalist movement he found a reflection of his own political-social creed. Under the leadership of the intellectual Charles Maurras, the Action Française claimed to champion the values of l'ancienne France, supported the Church, and sought to bring down the anti-clerical Third Republic in order to restore the monarchy.
Yet what most attracted Bernanos to this nationalist movement was its preference for action over purely verbal opposition, its willingness to engage in open combat with the Republic rather than rely solely upon intellectual persuasion.

Thus in a letter to Abbé Lagrange he expresses his enthusiasm for the men of Action Française:

Merci d'avoir acheté les livres en question. Qu'en dites-vous? Avez-vous lu celui de Lemaître, avez-vous lu la lettre de Paul Bourget? Pour moi, j'admière de tout mon cœur ces vaillants de l'Action française, ces vrais fils de Gaule, avec du bon sens et de la foi, qui ne reculent devant aucune idée, qui s'imposent gaillardement, qui se définissent sans phrases. Comme c'est clair! On y croit, ou l'on n'y croit pas, mais on les entend toujours.

These are the men whose doctrine finds its expression in their lives, who have no fear of the vague abstractions of their enemies, who incarnate their commitment to the truth without long argument.

To these true "fils de Gaule" Bernanos contrasts the members of Marc Sangnier's Le Sillon, the Catholic democratic movement seeking reconciliation with the Republic. By virtue of their platonic idealism, the Sillonistes fail to take into account the fundamental reality of man as a fallen creature:

Eh! qui songe à blâmer, au point de vue des principes, toutes les longues phrasés du Sillon! Mais pourquoi diable vouloir appliquer ça en ce monde! Il faut croire au perfectionnement indéfini de l'espèce humaine, il faut passer par-dessus le péché originel et la commune dé- tresse. Pourquoi bâtir des nuages en l'air! Guerre aux nuées.
2. The "Camelot du roi"

Bernanos had great hope for the Action Française and believed that it would provide the coup de force necessary to topple the Third Republic. As Joseph Jurt indicates:

Il espère que l’Action française ne se contente pas d’une révolte purement verbale, qu’elle combatte la démocratie par une action grande et forte qui restitue la monarchie.

Indeed, it was not the intellectual prowess of Charles Maurras that caught the imagination of the young Bernanos. As he was to write years later: "J’ai cru à seize ans, qu’il était l’homme du coup de force, qu’il descendrait dans la rue." In this spirit, shortly after his arrival in Paris, he joined a group of like-minded students who brought the royalist struggle into the streets and who were known as Les Camelots du roi. Ernest de Malibran recalls this band of young idealists:

Nous nous intitulions "les hommes de guerre" pour marquer à la fois notre goût pour l’action poussée jusqu’à l’ultime sacrifice et notre horreur de tous les conformismes. A l’intérieur de notre groupe Bernanos était véritablement l’aîné, le mentor, par ses sarcasmes parfois violents il nous maintenait dans cette voie exempte de compromission que nous nous étions tracée.

The Camelots du roi sold copies of the Action Française newspaper in front of churches, disrupted Republican ceremonies and mutilated statues of Republican heroes. Bernanos was himself arrested at Montparnasse in 1908 for disturbing a cérémony honouring the memory of Gabriel Sylveston and again in March of 1909 during the Thalamas Affair in which the
hommes de guerre disrupted the Sorbonne lectures of François Thalamas whom they accused of insulting the memory of Jeanne d'Arc. 26 There was also the Bernstein Affair in which the anti-Semitic protests of the Camelots forced the closing of a production of a play by the Jewish playwright, Henri Bernstein, at the Comédie-Française. 27

As Maxence de Colleville was later to recall, these young men were engaged in a frantic search for the means "de courir l'Aventure." 28 Disgusted by empty Republican idealism, and the humanist dreams of the Catholic left, their interest did not lie in pure ideology but in belief, which would be lived out. Eugén Weber writes:

Probably most of them, like Georges Bernanos, were not much concerned with the theoretical or "Maurrassian" ideas they were supposed to defend. 29

What is more, this thirst for adventure and their commitment to the defense of the Catholic royalist cause did not restrict itself to France alone. In 1912 a new episode erupted:

Un noble Portugais était venu en France racoler des Camelots du Roi pour rétablir sur son trône le roi du Portugal. Tandis que la révolution éclaterait à l'intérieur, un vaisseau débarquerait les renforts venus de France. Bernanos s'était engagé dans l'aventure [...] L'Action Française avait eu vent de l'histoire, et rappelé à l'ordre les troupes royalistes sur le point de partir vers la route de Lisbonne. Le vaisseau n'avait jamais quitté le port. 30
Though Bernanos' enthusiasm was reined in by the better judgement of his superiors in the Action Française, the Portugal Affair demonstrated that he was a thorough-going monarchist, willing to make the ultimate sacrifice not only for the King of France, but indeed for any king.

All of this frenzied activity during the first years in Paris would seem to be rooted in certain convictions that were to become pivotal to Bernanos' thought during the turbulent years to come: there must be no split between a man's beliefs and his life; rather, the latter must incarnate the former. In this light Jean de Fabrègues writes of the deep spiritual influence a middle-aged Bernanos had upon him and his own generation of royalists: two decades after the first World War:

[...] il nous enseignait que le premier pas dans l'acceptation du divorce entre la figure de l'homme et son être est un pas qui ne pardonne pas: tout y passe bientôt et l'homme disparaît.

3. A Writer's Beginnings

In 1907 Bernanos published his first short stories in Le Panache, a bi-monthly royalist magazine. There are seven romantic historical sketches of pre-revolutionary France and of chevalresque devotion to the person of the King. In these first attempts at fiction Bernanos confirms his commitment to the monarchy and gives a glimpse of his reasons for a devotion that might have carried him to Lisbon and death.
In "On passera! . . ." a marquis, at the request of his father, gives his life freely in battle so that the King's charge might succeed: "Monsieur le Marquis, s'écria le duc à son fils, le Roi vous demande votre vie." The Marquis' sacrifice is total and unquestioning. In "Pour préserver les lys . . ." five soldiers die rather than allow an enemy charge to trample a field of lilies, the flower of the royal household, and in "La Pitié du Chouan," he tells the story of a royalist peasant who helps a young wounded revolutionary because the child reminds him of "Le petit garde du Roy n'ait maît!' In the same vein "Les Deux Fils" recounts the unequivocal loyalty of a general to the cause of his monarch:

Mais pour sauver la fortune du Roy, si j'avais dix fils je voudrais les offrir aux balles, et s'il ne restait plus que moi pour défendre le sol, contre l'ennemi; je voudrais avancer toujours, dussé-je marcher sur leurs tombes.

But it is perhaps in "Le Geste du Roi," the account of a young king whose courage alone overcomes defeat, that Bernanos touches directly upon the reason for the centrality of the monarch in his romantic vision:

Il sanglotait les dents serrées, les yeux fixés, la main crissée sur les rênes, vaincu par la passion royale du danger, et ce petit corps sentait, tremblait de plaisir et de fureur, toute une race l'emplit et le dompter.

And again:

Et tout son frêle petit corps où brûlait le sang d'une race haletait de bravoure et de colère.
To the future novelist, a king, unlike a president of the Republic, is not simply a leader of the nation. He is, rather, the living personification of his people; he is the incarnation of his race. It is for this reason that the heroes of these seven stories "s'élèvent au-dessus de leur taille en se vouant à un grand idéal qui s'incarne dans la personne du Roi." 38

For their part, the dashing aristocrats who have vowed their lives to their sovereign do not offer lip-service. These intrepid characters, like the Camelots du roi of the Quartier Latin, are willing to put into action all their noble intentions. There are no empty ideals among them.

As for the king, he is not only the father of his race, he is its son. Thus for Bernanos, at nineteen years of age, the monarchy can never die, for it is a natural and perennial line coming forth from the people. For this reason, "Ce qui ne meurt pas," a story about the imprisoned son of Louis XVI, ends on a note of hope:

Il comprenait que pour une Majesté la souffrance humaine est peu de chose, puisqu'elle est assurée de revivre dans sa Race, et que si le Roi peut mourir, la Royauté ne meurt pas. 39

The pathetic child, though doomed, exhibits, even within the confines of his cell, the ancient greatness of his race.

"Mais c'est pauvre enfant maltraité," writes Joseph Jurt, incarne quand même la France. 40
This ancienne France of a time when high ideals took flesh in the heroic self-denial of Frenchmen and in the person of their king, would continue to be contrasted by Bernanos with the empty abstractions of his age. His preference for monarchy thus provides us with a concrete example of his early attachment, even as an adolescent, to what is incarnate.

4. L'Avant Garde de Normandie

In the autumn of 1913 Bernanos moved to Rouen to become editor of a royalist weekly under the auspices of the Action Française. He used his position at L'Avant Garde de Normandie to open a new front in his war against the Third Republic and its supporters.

Again vigorously taking up his defense of royalty, his vitriolic editorials echo the themes of the short stories in Le Panache. The people, he insists in one such article, have a deep need to see their tradition mirrored in the flesh and blood of their king:

Lorsque jadis la foule parisienne presse autour des grilles du Louvre ou de Versailles, acclamait l'héritier du trône, elle ne saluait pas un dieu, ni même un maître: seulement l'image du pays, par conséquent la sienne propre, la plus haute manifestation des goûts, des sentiments, des idées; des traditions, que chaque Français sent au-dedans de lui, à certaines minutes graves de son existence.
At the same time he launched vigorous assaults against the false mysticism of French democracy which stood in stark contrast to his romantic royalist vision:

[. . .] depuis un siècle, une demi douzaine de brillantes images mènent comme des reins le peuple français, liberté, égalité, fraternité, démocratie, progrès social, laïcité—j'accuse la lâcheté conservatrice lorsqu'elle donne à ces mirages une autorité qui leur manque. Ils sacrifient à ces idoles; ils y sacrifient à regret, par indolence, par habitude, et par ambition.

Nearly all of the Republican ideals seem to gleam by the brilliance of their optimism. But it is the remarkable naïveté of this optimism, according to the young polemicist, that is the great scandal. How are these "images" to be realized? What power exists which could possibly lead them into reality? Are they principles which lie within man himself as he evolves toward perfection? Is it the Republic which, somehow, through political force, will cause the great Revolutionary ideals of brotherhood to come into existence? Bernanos, of course, scoffs at all of these "mirages" precisely because they have, as he sees it, no source, no authority. Like all false gods they are incapable of being incarnate.

It is to this question of authority that Bernanos had addressed an earlier article in L'Avant Garde de Normandie. He had spoken of:

[cette fameuse Déclaration de 1789] [qui] ne contente aucun cerveau. L'intelligence veut une union parfaite entre le Droit et les garanties du Droit, sinon ce Droit même n'est qu'un mot, un bruit dans l'air. Sur quels
To Bernanos the highest ideals, unless rooted in God, the
source of all virtue, are a chimera, for it is precisely
through the fulfillment of our duty toward Him that all noble
things flow. To the young editor, the mistake which the
Republic has made is that of cutting virtue off from its source,
of seeking justice without the Just One, of producing a
secularized, impotent, disincarnate Christianity.

This conflict between what is concrete and real on the
one hand and democratic abstractions on the other thus forms
a leitmotif in these editorials in which the Republic is
portrayed as always ready to sell out France for the sake of
its "idoles":

La thèse libérale est une thèse philosophique:
elle a la rigueur d'un système. Aux réalités
concrètes (la patrie), vous avez l'obligation
de préférer ces principes auxquels le sanglant
jacobin voulait qu'on sacrifiât nos colonies.

Further, Bernanos claims that the high ideals of democracy
have little meaning for the poor whose hunger is quite concrete,
not at all abstract:

Contre eux, qui tiennent toute les avenues
du pouvoir, et même la caisse des pauvres,
--oui, leur pain--, quel recours? Menteurs,
vos livres parlent de justice, mais en dépit
de juges dont vous détenez le sort dans vos
mains, il y a une loi au-dessus des lois,
c'est celle de la faim.
In light of the political power of the democratic ideologues Bernanos sees the Action Française as the only hope and its leader, Charles Maurras, as one of France's true heroes. But Maurras is not a hero so much for what he says, but, as the youthful Bernanos perceives it, for what he incarnates:

Honte aux doctrinaires en qui ce nom sacré [la France] n'évoque qu'un petit nombre de principes groupé en système: ceux-là, pour servir leurs froides idoles, sont prêts à porter sur le corps maternel une main sacrilège, à répandre, pour des chimères, son vrai sang, son sang vivant et fumant. Mais Charles Maurras contre l'Etranger, défendit tout l'héritage: les claires images de nos poètes, la méthode de nos philosophes, la politique de nos rois [...] [Charles Maurras] a maintenant partie liée avec la France Eternelle: il partagera son destin.

Thus Maurras, in defending the values of "la France Eternelle," is also the living, incarnate representative of these values. Again then, already in the nascent stages of the Bernanosian vision, we clearly see him preferring incarnation over dis-incarnate ideals.

Bernanos was also drawn to another powerful personality in the ranks of the leadership of the Action Française, Léon Daudet, who would be the best man at his marriage. In a reverential review of one of Daudet's novels, La Fausse Etoile, Bernanos warns of the dangers of the purely cerebral:

Dans un de ces moments d'angoisse et de contradiction intérieure, dont il a le secret, Barrès s'écriait: "L'intelligence, quelle petite chose à la surface de nous-même!" Il est sûr que sitôt qu'elles ont échangé les claires solitudes du froid royaume platonicien pour...
un cerveau vivant et pensant, les idées perdent leur netteté géométrique. Par un travail aussi mystérieux que celui de la génération matérielle, les conceptions de l'esprit s'amalgament au fond obscur de l'instinct: elles s'assouplissent, elles deviennent assimilables. Ce n'est pas vainement que dans les détours de la substance cérébrale, elle se sont comme mêlées au sang, groupées et ordonnées à la cadence du cœur. Dès lors, elles peuvent aller ailleurs chercher d'autres asiles: 'elles sont formées pour la conquête.\(^{50}\)

The disincarnate idea, never plunging deeper than the intellect, is thus condemned to a meaningless existence on the surface of the human experience. The incarnate idea, however, translates itself into action and conquest. It demands far more than mere intellectual assent: the total gift of self is required. Bernanos writes again concerning Léon Daudet:

Un autre inspire notre action, quelques-uns la guident. Il est le premier de ceux qui entretiennent le feu sacré. Nos travaux monotones s'en trouvent ennoblis: il les oriente chaque jour dans le sens de l'héroïsme. Comme il peut être fier d'agiter ainsi les coeurs! Quand nous courons le risque de nous endormir sur nos textes, l'écho de sa parole, pareil au reflet du sabre nous rappelle que la meilleure doctrine est encore tributaire des bras qui la défendent, et que le don de soi-même peut seul rendre le mot vivant.\(^{51}\)

True doctrine is thus indistinguishable for Bernanos from him who professes it, incarnation being the only sign of authenticity. Its antithesis Bernanos thus sees as profoundly evil.

As Joseph Jurt has observed:

La pensée bernanosienne se rapproche de celle de Péguy pour qui l'idée centrale est la liaison du spirituel et du charnel, de l'éternel et du temporel qui se symbolise par le mystère de l'incarnation. Pour Bernanos, l'incarnation est au centre de sa politique et de son esthétique [\ldots].\(^{52}\)
5. The War and Afterwards

As Bernanos engaged in his fiery polemics Europe was on the brink of devastating war. It was to be the four years which he spent in the mud of the trenches which were to deepen his understanding of this central theme of incarnation and which would now become more spiritual, more clearly centered in the Christian mystery of the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ even as his innate distaste for disincarnate ideas and doctrines increased. Without hatred for the enemy and sustained by prayer he saw the war as "un drame surnaturel."

In a letter dated August 1918 to Dom Bessé, his Benedictine spiritual director, Bernanos reasserts a conviction which had already emerged so forcefully in his early fiction and polemics: belief in a doctrine or cause demands the total gift of self in the service of that doctrine or cause. In the spiritual realm, he is aware that there could be no compromise in his relationship with God:

Hélas! pareil à un autre Ribot, moi qui fait le fier, ne suis-je pas encore du parti just-milieu et, au spirituel, une espèce d'opportuniste? Certes, je n'ignore point que Dieu me veut tout entier [. . . .] 56

What he had praised in Maurras and Daudet he now sees in a more purely religious light. Faith in God demands more than lip-service; more than intellectual assent; it requires all:

Ma résolution est prise cependant. Après quatre ans de solitude, de rumination, de vaine dispute intérieure, on n'a, voyez-vous,
même plus la ressource d’être médiocre. La
guerre a mis la sensibilité sur les genoux. Il
n’y a plus moyen de s’en servir. Il faut un
rétablissement de la volonté, qui, je le sens,
même loin. Tout ou rien, voilà le mot d’Ordre. 57

For Bernanos then the religious experience must be incarnate,
it must be authenticated by the total consumption of the person,
body and soul. It was for him a choice of either giving
nothing or everything.

All the more disillusioning then was Bernanos’ return
home at the war’s end to encounter the Arrière. Those who
had stayed at home and had not fought at the front now sought
to exploit the victory and the pollus to their own advantage.
Through the press they spouted their disincarnate, high-
mined ideals whose real meaning was actually completely
lost in their own feverish post-war search for bourgeois
security and comfort:

[...] nous les avons vus rôder jusque dans la
fosse creusée pour nous, ces bonneteurs! Ils
épiaient notre désespoir. Ils profitaient de
notre silence, ils parlaient pour nous.—Soldats
de l’idéal, de la Paix des Peuples, de leur
Liberté, de leur Justice [...] ils osaient,
ils osaient nous nommer! Ils concluaient sur
nous leur fameux pacte d’union sacrée [...]. 58

It can be imagined then how great was Bernanos’ disgust
and disillusionment when it became apparent that the Action
Française itself had begun to abandon its pre-war anti-
democratic principles and adopt an attitude of co-operation
with the political system. Indeed, immediately after the war,
in 1919, the Action Française presented candidates for election
to parliament and, though the results were poor, Léon Daudet did get elected in Paris. 59

For Bernanos this was the first hint of compromise. Léon Daudet, whom the young editor of L'Avant Garde de Normandie had perceived as the incarnation of pre-revolutionary France and who two years before had been his best man, was now seated among the despised champions of democracy. This was not the spirit of the Camelots du roi. The royalist movement seemed no longer willing to live out its doctrine unequivocally. Thus disenchanted, Bernanos quit the Action Française in 1920. 60

Yet already Bernanos was seeking new modes of expression for his truth and his spiritual vision, both enflamed and deepened by the War: in 1919 he had begun to write the first pages of Sous le soleil de Satan. 61
CHAPTER I

1. Bernanos, Cor I, p. 203.
4. Bernanos, Cor I, p. 75.
6. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 29.
12. Bernanos, Cor I, p. 76.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 79.
18. Ibid., p. 64.
20 Ibid., p. 89.
21 Joseph Jurt, op. cit., p. 64.
22 Bernanos, OE II, p. 593.
24 Robert Speaight, op. cit., p. 36.
25 Ibid.
26 Joseph Jurt, op. cit., p. 66.
27 Ibid., p. 71.
30 Jean de Fábregues, Bernanos tel qu'il était (Tours: Mame, 1964), op. 51-52.
31 Ibid., p. 20.
32 Bernanos, OE II, p. 1740.
33 Ibid., p. 1741.
34 Ibid., p. 1745.
36 Ibid., p. 1746.
37 Ibid., p. 1747.
38 Joseph Jurt, op. cit., p. 60.
40 Joseph Jurt, op. cit., p. 61.
41 Robert Speaight, op. cit., p. 46.
42 Bernanos, OE II, p. 1017.
47 Joseph Jurt, op.cit., p.83.
49 Robert Speaigh, op.cit., p.56.
50 Bernanos, OE II, p.945.
51 Ibid., pp.1013-1014.
53 Ibid., p.40.
54 Bernanos, Cor I, p.122.
55 Joseph Jurt, op.cit., p.137.
56 Bernanos, Cor I, p.146.
57 Ibid.
58 Bernanos, Le Crépuscule des vieux, p.188.
59 Joseph Jurt, op.cit., p.145.
60 Bernanos, Cor II, p.646.
61 William Bush, op.cit., p.35.
CHAPTER II

DEMOCRACY AND PROGRESS AGAINST

THE INCARNATION OF LOVE (1926-1931)

1. Sous le soleil de Satan

In four texts appearing shortly after the 1926 publication of Sous le soleil de Satan Bernanos discussed his intentions in writing that first novel: the "Lettre à Frédéric Lefèvre" (1926), "Une Vision catholique du réel" (1927), "Satan et nous" (1927), and the 1926 interview with Frédéric Lefèvre. It is clear in all of these texts that this first novel was rooted in the depths of suffering he had experienced during the war as well as his anger as he watched the Republic and its organs of democracy deform and desecrate the meaning of that suffering.

Such unprecedented devastation should, he felt, have generated a corresponding examination of conscience and renewal in French society as a whole. Yet the Republic seemed intent upon simply exploiting the experience, shamelessly using it as further fuel for the state propaganda machine. Speaking for his fellow veterans he writes:

Pour moi je dirai simplement mes intentions. Ce ne sont pas là des paroles en l'air! Il est vrai que la guerre nous a contraints à une révision complète des valeurs morales.
Il est vrai, absolument vrai, que nous nous sommes sentis révoltés, soulevés de haine contre la mystique que les grands quotidiens offraient à ce pauvre peuple surmené: la religion de la déesse France et de saint Poilu.

The spiritual significance of the vast misery of modern warfare was lost in the jumble of mindless journalese, and the national soul-searching it should have engendered, as it had in Bernanos himself when he made his all or nothing choice for God, was drowned in a chorus of democratic idealism. The "Poilu" thus emerged from the carnage to find, in response to his sacrifice, nothing but the old rhetoric of Republican ideology. Had they then suffered and died, Bernanos asked, only to sustain the religion of the false gods?

Again, as he had done as the young editor of L'Avant Garde de Normandie, Bernanos levelled his criticism against State idealist vocabulary where catch words like "progress" signified no corresponding reality, existing purely in the realm of the abstract and denoting nothing incarnate:

La guerre m'a laissé ahuri, comme tout le monde, de l'immense disproportion entre l'énormité du sacrifice et la misère de l'idéologie proposée par la presse et les gouvernements... Et puis encore, notre espérance était malade, ainsi qu'un organe surmené. La Religion du Progrès, pour laquelle on nous a poliment priés de mourir, est en effet une gigantesque escroquerie à l'espérance. [. . .] Tout le vocabulaire idéaliste, décidément déprécié n'aurait pas payé une croûte de pain noir.

Thus Bernanos accused the idealists of creating a language consisting of words to which they gave any meaning they chose:
L'homme se croit aisément maître des choses, parce qu'il est maître des signes abstraits du langage qui les représentent... Les quatre fers du tonnerre de Dreu peuvent ruer dans le ciel, l'idéaliste a le coeur à l'aise tant qu'il peut dispenser aux mots du vocabulaire le sens qui lui plaît.

Certainly Bernanos indicates that his concern about the prevalence of this kind of empty vocabulary in post-war France was one of the reasons he wanted to become a novelist. He understood that words which should have signified the deepest mysteries of man and, indeed, of God Himself, had instead come merely to represent disincarnate ideals of modern society.

Traqué pendant cinq ans, la meute horrible enfin dépistée, l'animal humain rentré au gîte à bout de forces, lâchait son ventre et évacuait l'eau fade de l'idéalisme puritan. Lequel d'entre nous ne se sentait alors dépossédé? L'idéologie démocratique était encore supportable, dans notre pays latin, parce qu'elle avait pris jusqu'alors le masque jovial, bon enfant, de l'arrivisme politique. Pour la première fois, nous avions vu sa vraie figure. On nous avait tout pris. Oui! qui conçonnaient une plume à ce moment-là s'est trouvé l'obligation de reconquérir sa propre langue, de la rejeter à la forge. Les mots les plus sûrs étaient piégés. Les plus grands étaient vides, claquait dans la main. On traitait communément, je ne dis même pas de héroïs, mais de saint, l'adjudant engagé, tué par hasard au créneau. La douleur et la mort étaient devenues une espèce de monopole, d'État. La patrie divinisée recevait l'encens de tous les cultes comme si le règne dont l'oraison dominicale implore l'avènement était celui de la Démocratie Universelle.
In the mêlée of words the true meaning of "sacrifice," of "pain," of "hero" and of "saint" had been seriously compromised. Indeed, even the catholic bourgeoisie, the "médiocres" as Bernanos calls them, had been only too willing to reduce all, even the most sacred religious values, to the common denominator of humanist idealism. It is these "catholiques par omission" who profess but are unwilling to incarnate their faith, who piously and absurdly preach "la conversion en série par l'hygiène et les sports [. . .]."

Essentially, then, what is, in Bernanos' view, the most sinister symptom of the degeneration of modern society is that the notion of the "Good" itself has been obscured and emptied. The state, the one and only absolute, had solemnly and convincingly promulgated to a credulous populace the dogma of "progress," taken to be the only good. This being so, Bernanos rhetorically asks why such a dogma and such a dilution of meaning had been so readily accepted by the vast majority of his contemporaries:

Pourquoi? Parce qu'un idéalisme équivoque dans la Politique, la Morale et l'Art, a d'abord obscurci la notion même du Mal.

The proof of this contention, asserts Bernanos, lies in the fact that the bien-pensants and the idealists had failed completely to understand the significance of five years of carnage with their terrible unleashing of human passions costing the lives of millions. The notion of evil, seemingly beyond the comprehension of modern man, had instead been reduced to a kind of psychiatric abstraction:
On m'avait fait croire, notamment, que les passions humaines étaient ces sortes d'abstractions, classées par ordre et par genre, dans nos traités de psycho-physiologie, et que M. Lévy-Bruhl en avait le contrôle et le commandement. Mais quoi! Impossible de reconnaître de tels objets de laboratoire, dans ces grandes choses hurlantes et désespérées qui venaient de frapper à tort et travers sur toute l'étendue de la planète, et qu'on voyait encore fumer à l'horizon.14

In conceptually reducing evil to the status of an emotional aberration, modern man eliminates the necessity for any true and heroic goodness in order to overcome it. For Bernanos these psychiatric explanations will not do, however, for the ferocity and depravity of human passions on the one hand, and the potential heroic greatness of the same passions on the other, signal something beyond the human spirit altogether. It is to this mysterious and invisible struggle between the forces of "Evil" and "Good" that Bernanos wished to address himself as a novelist and attempt to regain for those two concepts their deepest meaning:

Etant né romancier, j'avais naturellement le goût de peindre les passions, mais j'aurais voulu les saisir, les surprendre dans leurs rapports et leur mouvement, enfin je les voulais vivantes. C'est alors que la nécessité m'est apparue de les remplacer dans un plan qui fût à leur mesure, dans cet univers spirituel dont les pions mélancoliques avaient jadis prétendu nous interdire l'accès. . . . Et sitôt le seul franchi de ce monde invisible où ces forces mystérieuses ont leurs racines, j'y rencontré le diable et Dieu.15

The war, Bernanos felt, should surely have taught France and the world that facile explanations of human behavior and reduc-
tive interpretations of the nature of evil were seriously inadequate. Rather, a more profound analysis of human passions, ought to lead to an awareness of a terrible force beyond man himself: "[.. .] l'humaine faiblesse n'explique pas tout [.. .]". That force, of course, is Satan, the pervasive source of evil who lends his name to the title of Bernanos' first novel.

The modern world, intent upon overlooking the real nature of evil, becomes a dupe for the Evil One since by denying the invisible roots of evil, it remains oblivious to the need for holiness. It is, after all, the saint whose vocation it is to confront and conquer the darkness of sin by the incarnation of the goodness of God in the world.

Thus, Sous le soleil de Satan had a dual purpose for its author: it was both to expose the Kingdom of Darkness and, in its midst, set up a hero who would show the redemptive power of God. Indeed it was clear to Bernanos that the saint was the only possible answer to the sterile ideals and the dangerous naïveté of the shallow optimists:

Je savais bien que ce n'étaient pas les grandes choses, c'étaient les mots qui mentaient. La leçon de la guerre allait se perdre dans une immense gaudriole. C'était la descente de la Courtille. On promenait, comme à la mi-carême, des symboles de carton—le boeuf gras de "L'Allemagne païera," le Poilu, la Madelon, l'Americain Amis-des-Hommes, La Fayette... tous des héros! [.. .] A quoi contraindre les mots rebelles, sinon à défiir, par pénitence, la plus haute réalité que puisse connaître l'homme aidé de la grâce, la Sainteté.17
In his attempt to refute abstractions Bernanos sought to create a saint who, by his life and not simply his words, would give flesh to the reign of grace. Thus, in his hero, Abbé Donissan, Bernanos hoped to regain the meaning of the most profound realities which had become disincarnate, mere concepts in the minds of men. As he was to say to Frédéric Lefèvre:

Je désirais simplement—mais passionément, j'avais passionément besoin—de fixer ma pensée, comme on lève les yeux vers une cime dans le ciel, sur un homme surnaturel dont le sacrifice exemplaire, total, nous restituerait un par un chacun de ces mots sacrés dont nous craignions d'avoir perdu le sens.18

Donissan and Incarnation

It seemed to Bernanos that the dogmas of the optimists and the idealists demanded little from their adherents since "progress," both moral and social, was held to be inevitably unfolding as if by its own power, and those Christians who believed that the Christian life could be nurtured "en série par l'hygiène et les sports" felt absolved from any dynamic personal commitment to the Gospel. Optimism might then be seen simply as an excuse for inactivity and uninvolvelement.

Bernanos sought thus to create a fictional hero whose desire to live out his belief in the face of the power of evil, would be complete and uncompromising. Thus Abbé Menou-Segréais, affirming the young Donissan's call to sanctity, underlines its "all or nothing" nature:
La Sainteté! s'écria le vieux prêtre d'une voix profonde, en prononçant ce mot devant vous, pour vous seul, je sais le mal que je vous fais! Vous n'ignorez pas ce qu'elle est: une vocation, un appel. Là où Dieu vous attend, il vous faudra monter, monter où vous perdre.20

Donissan responds wholeheartedly:

C'est qu'il avait pris peu à peu sur tous l'irrésistible ascendant de celui qui ne calcule plus les chances et va droit devant.21

For Berranos' young saint sin is not simply a symptom of human weakness, but also the fruit of the Evil One's labour. Donissan's response, for the sake of the salvation of his parishoners, engages the totality of his person:

[...] le jeune vicaire silencieux qui venait de s'offrir pour la première fois, dans les ténèbres et le silence, à l'homme pécheur, son maître, qui ne le lâchera plus vivant.22

Aware of the cost of adherence to the Gospel, aware too that his religion is not an abstraction, he incarnates fully his belief by the total gift of self for the sake of sinners:

[...] Pour leur salut, j'ai offert tout ce que j'avais ou posséderais jamais [...]23

Thus the "saint de Lumbres" is, in his old age, empty of self:

Ce soir, il ne se défendra plus: il n'a plus rien à défendre; il a tout donné [...]24
In this act of total and painful self-giving Donissan more than reflects the love of God, he incarnates it by a mystical union with the redemptive self-offering of God-made-Man. Thus Bernanos writes to Frédéric Lefèvre in a letter in which he meditates on the meaning of his first novel:

Quand le péché n'était qu'une transgression à la loi, sa répression si sévère était incompréhensible, mais il est d'abord un crime contre l'Amour. Le sacrifice de la Croix n'est plus seulement un sacrifice compensatoire, car la justice n'est plus seule intéressée, n'étant pas la seule outragée : au crime contre l'Amour, l'Amour répond à sa manière et selon son essence : par un don total, infini.25

Donissan's anguish, born from his love for sinners, is then a sharing in the sacrifice of Christ Himself who died not so much for juridical reasons but rather out of love.

Satan warns Donissan of the spiritual torment that he will have to endure for his Christian love:

Pour que tu sois ! je n'ai pas fini de m'emplir de sang chrétien. Aujourd'hui une grâce t'a été faite ... Tu l'as payée cher. Tu la paieras plus cher!26

He is destined to suffer at the hand of sinners who despise the saints,27 who have reserved for God's Holy Ones their most passionate hatred.28 But it is precisely in his loving acceptance of this suffering that the priest will enter fully into the Christian mystery of the Incarnation. In his preface to the integral edition of Sous le soleil de Satan, William Bush writes:
Bernanos identifies the sanctity, not to the individual but to the interior experience lived by the individual during those brief moments, where he would have said "yes" to God. After all, at the moment when one accepts the death of one's child—assuming she is not able to perform this premeditatedly accepted state of creature before the Creator—she is a saint and, therefore, a Christ.

In Donissan we are far from the lofty but unattainable ideals of the Republic and the pious indifference of the bien-pensants. Bernanos makes it clear that it is because of Donissan's willingness to accept this kind of martyrdom and because his faith is fully lived out that the Word once again able to take flesh in the life of this simple country priest. Again, in writing to Frédéric Lefèvre, Bernanos touches upon this central theme:

[... ] Dieu demande à ses amis privilégiés ce qu'il a donné lui-même, une souffrance de surcroît. [ ... ] Il n'avait à donner qu'une parole. Il a donné sa Vie. Certes, l'auteur du Mal n'est pas l'homme. L'Ange rebelle n'a dit non qu'une fois, mais une fois pour toutes, et dans un acte irréparable où toute sa substance est engagée. La partie ne se joue plus aux enfers; elle se joue désormais au coeur de l'Homme-Dieu, où l'Humanité à sa racine.

Moreover, the suffering Donissan endures in his struggle with Satan is a suffering that, like Christ's, is redemptive and actually continues the great act of Redemption. In this sense, as Ernest Beaumont has pointed out, the principle mission given Donissan by Bernanos is the salvation of Germaine Malory. As Bernanos himself writes of his hero in "Satan et Nous":
Comprenons-nous bien, le dogme catholique du péché original et de la Rédemption surgissait ici, non pas d'un texte, mais des faits, des circonstances et des conjectures. Le problème posé, aucune solution n'était possible que celle-là. À la limite d'un certain abaissement, d'une certaine dissipation sacrilège de l'âme humaine, s'impose à l'esprit l'idée du rachat. Non pas d'une réforme ni d'un retour en arrière, mais du rachat. Ainsi l'abbé Donissan n'est pas apparu par hasard; le cri du désespoir sauvage de Mouchette l'appelait, le rendait indispensable. C'est ce que Paul Claudel a exprimé dans une de ses magnifiques sentences: "Tout votre livre s'ébranle, m'a-t-il écrit, pour venir au secours de cette petite âme écrasée." 32

Whence the importance of the Cross for Donissan, the sign of the redemptive suffering and death of Christ, as evidenced by three references to Donissan's gazing upon the crucifix within a brief twenty pages of text. 33 For Donissan understands that sin is not a simple transgression against divine law, "une pauvre abstraction," 34 but, rather, a "décidé." 35 He also understands that true sanctity has little to do with the romantic and wholly disincarnate ideals of the pious:

"Nous ne sommes point ces saints vermeils à barbe blonde que les bonnes gens voient peints, et dont les philosophes eux-mêmes envieraient l'éloquence et la bonne santé." 36

In contrast to this popular image, there is nothing ethereal about the fully substantial holiness of Donissan. Indeed, it serves to set into relief the meaning and pure intellectual approach of other central characters in the novel. William Bush writes concerning Donissan's sanctity:
It was for these latter characters, those whose lives revolve around concepts alone, that Bernanos indeed reserved his fiercest wrath, but it was particularly in his development of Saint-Marin that he reveals his thought.

**Antoine Saint-Marin and Intellectualism**

Antoine Saint-Marin, a satirical characterization of Anatole France, lives almost solely in the insubstantial world of his own intellect. His pilgrimage to Lumbres to see the famous confessor-saint is not at all an attempt to break free of the circle of his own emptiness since his nihilism allows for no solution to what he perceives as the futile circuit of life. Saint-Marin's own life Bernanos describes as a kind of nothingness precisely because he refuses real commitment of any sort, preferring rather the role of disdainful observer:

Il pensait à la fuite circulaire de toute vie humaine, au chemin vainement parcouru, au suprême faux pas. [.] Jamais le patriarche du néant, à ses meilleures heures, ne s'éleva plus haut qu'un lyrique dégoûté de vivre, un nihilisme caressant. 39
Old age, he asserts, is a time to ruminate the worn abstractions of youth, to repeat its empty words, to seek its lost secrets. He comes to the saint in order to eat of what he calls Donissan's "pain de l'illusion" and awaits a miracle, an "événement libérateur" which he himself admits is but a dream. Saint-Marin's life is a sort of chimera; he incarnates no creed for he believes in none; he gives himself to no cause for his nihilism allows for none.

Indeed, he comes to Lumbrés, not to explore the mystery of sanctity itself, but simply to observe and then, he hopes, assume for himself the trappings of sanctity:

Emprunter à la sainteté ce qu'elle a d'aimable; retrouver sans roideur la paix de l'enfance; se faire au silence et la solitude des champs, s'étudier moins à ne rien regretter qu'à ne se souvenir de rien; observer par raison, avec mesure, les vieux préceptes d'abstinence et de chasteté, assurément précieux; jouir de la vieillesse comme de l'automne ou du crépuscule; se rendre peu à peu à la mort familière, n'est pas un jeu difficile, mais rien qu'un jeu, pour l'auteur de beaucoup de livres, dispensateur d'illusion.

There is nothing, however, among his illusions, dreams and abstractions capable of taking flesh. For Saint-Marin has certainly no real desire to incarnate, nor undoubtedly is he capable even of understanding, the great love of God which finds such powerful expression in Donissan's life. The renowned intellectual's approach is rather profoundly disincarnate since nothing in the game is worth seriously embracing.
Writing to Frédéric Lefèvre Bernanos asserts that men like Anatole France do not know how to choose. Since choosing antecedes commitment, we understand why Bernanos' académicien has consistently refused to give of himself. Indeed in the world of the meaningless games of nihilism, choice is an absurd concept. Yet, when at the very end of the novel, Saint-Marin decides that confession might be psychologically therapeutic, he imagines that such an insincere act would be his first gesture of self-giving:

Alors... Alors, il est beau qu'une fois, par hasard, ce don précieux de lui-même, qu'il a toujours refusé, il le fasse au premier venu, comme on jette une poignée d'or à un mendiant...  

Yet, as Donissan's life has clearly demonstrated, a true gift of self must be a complete act of love for the sake of others. As such it is redemptive. Donissan's suffering as therefore a testimony to the authenticity of his giving. Saint-Marin's life, in contrast, offers no such testimony but witnesses instead to a deep aversion to any true gift of self and its ensuing pain. By thus refusing both self-offering and the suffering which accompanies it, the intellectual rejects reality itself. As Bernanos writes:

On ne peut pas vivre hors du réel. Et le réel, le positif dans la vie, ce n'est pas quelques instants d'exaltation sensuelle ou intellectuelle, ou même de vague religiosité, c'est cette nappe profonde de la douleur qui tout à coup jaillit à la surface, comme l'eau d'un fleuve souterrain.
Bernanos thus views pain as man's most intimate and most mysterious communion with God. It is the redemptive pain of the Cross, a suffering freely accepted in love and incarnate in the lives of the saints. It is the reality of life itself.

The Mediocre Catholics

Besides the "incredul fate" Bernanos reserves perhaps an even greater wrath for still another type of individual: he who claims the name "Christian" while neglecting to realize his belief in his day to day living. These are they whose faith is abstractly doctrinal and thus purely intellectual. It is merely a comfortable and comforting assent to a reassuring set of social ideals and bourgeois values couched in religious terminology. To these the author of Sous le soleil de Satan delivers one of his strongest reprimands:

Je parle de ces médiocres incurables que j'appelle, faute d'un vrai nom, d'un nom d'homme, les catholiques par omission. Car il y a une offensive des médiocres. Il y a les gens de petite âme, il y a les gens de petit esprit, il y a les gens de petite santé [...]. N'ayant rien en propre, ni la doctrine qu'ils empruntent naïvement aux partis triomphants, ni même le langage calqué bizarrement sur celui des rapports et des mandements, [...] ils se trainent à la suite; ils ramassent les métaphores usées de l'adversaire, ses paradoxes démolis, un idéalisme éculé.  

Their Christianity is characterized by nothing positive nor by any act, but rather by what they do not do. These "médiocres"
do not incarnate Christ as, does Donissan indeed, writes Bernanos, quite the reverse:

En somme, vous lui [à Dieu] laissez le gouvernement de l'autre monde, et il vous suffit de posséder celui-ci, bien décidés à repousser toute incursion de la divinité dans le domaine temporel... 50

Further, these bourgeois Catholics who will not allow God to take flesh in their own lives, disapprove, as well, of such incarnation when it occurs in the lives of others. At worst they take exception to true holiness; at best they regard it as a touching, if irrelevant, phenomenon:

Je crois que mon livre scandalisera d'abord ceux-là même auxquels il a quelque chose à donner. Que de baptisés n'ont gardé du catéchisme oublié que le souvenir vague d'un ensemble de règlements et de symboles imaginés pour faciliter l'observance des préceptes moraux [...]. Le saint, supportable s'il est humanitaire fait figure d'exalté sitôt qu'il passe. les bornes de la sagesse bourgeoise: Car la soeur de charité, excellente à moucher les gosses, devient au Carmel, pour les uns une fanatique et, pour les plus indulgents, une fleur rare et décorative, un précieux bibelot humain... Alors quoi? Que vient faire ici Jésus crucifié? 51

Indeed where is the Cross and where is true Christianity in this self-satisfied moralism, Bernanos asks. Is the Christian distinguishable by his readiness to make the Redeemer present to the world through sharing His suffering? Is Bernanos not suggesting by his question that these mediocre catholics, whose bourgeois morality, which they mistake for true religion, compels them to seek only social stability and security, cannot accept
the presence of Christ, the "Suffering Servant," whom they perceive as a threat to the quiet normalcy of life. The supernatural is simply unacceptable to them because, once penetrating the lives of men, it disrupts their complacent contentment.

Thus it is that Donissan, once he has received the spiritual gift of clairvoyance during a terrifying encounter with Satan himself and has read into the guilty heart of Mouchette, is destined for official censure. Says Menou-Segrais, the young priest's mentor:


Modern society cannot understand the spiritual struggle and the "sagesse bourgeoise" reduces the elements of the Christian life to empty concepts that have little to do with the very real and incarnate experience of the supernatural. Again Menou-Segrais warns the naïve Donissan about what he may be up against:

Que font-ils de la vie intérieure? Le morne champ de bataille des instincts. De la morale? Une hygiène des sens. La grâce n'est plus qu'un raisonnement juste qui sollicite l'intelligence, la tentation un appétit charnel qui tend à la subordonner [. . .]. Dans un pareil univers d'animaux sensibles et raisonneurs il n'y a plus rien pour le saint, ou il faut le convaincre de folie.33
Thus when Donissan carries the bleeding and moribund Mouchette Malorthy to the church he, having offended his superiors' middle-class sense of order, is sent to a clinic where his excessive religious zeal is diagnosed as "une grave intoxication des cellules nerveuses, probablement d'origine intestinale." Donissan had understood his vocation to save Mouchette and had thus acted unreservedly. His bishop, however, disapprovingly writes that "De tels excès sont d'un autre âge, et ne se qualifient point."  

Bernanos thus satirically suggests that it was not advisable for his hero to make God too present, to incarnate too fully the Redeemer, since such behavior risked seriously offending the "médiocres" in authority. Certainly Abbé Sâbriroux, the mediocre priest of Sous le soleil de Satan and a man of his age, would never have been guilty of such excesses.

The Curé of Luzarnes

In his letter to Frédéric Lefèvre Bernanos declares his hatred for

le prêtre érudit capable de raisonner sur l'amour de Dieu, en vingt volumes, avec un sang-froid de collectionneur d'espèces rares.

Indeed the disincarnate religion of the rationalist priest was for him worse than the mediocrity of the false Christian or the haughty disbelief of the intellectual atheist. It is
the priest, after all, who is called to be Christ, the shepherd among his people.

Abbé Sabiroux, Curé of Luzarnes, is the quintessence of the self-proclaimed intellectual priest, always anxious to subscribe to the newest theories and ideas of the secular intelligentsia for fear of appearing behind the times, and embracing what Bernanos regarded as a particularly inane form of pseudo-religion:

C'est un bon prêtre, assidu, ponctuel, qui n'aime pas qu'on trouble sa vie, fidèle à sa classe, à son temps, aux idées de son temps, prenant ceci, laissant cela, tirant de toutes choses un petit profit, né fonctionnaire et moraliste, ami de l'hygiène, et qui prédit l'extinction du paupérisme--comme ils disent--par la disparition de l'alcool et des maladies vénériennes, bref l'avènement d'une jeunesse saine et sportive, en maillots de laine, à la conquête du royaume de Dieu.57

He believes in the myth of "progress" and, indeed, understands the "Kingdom of God," not as Donissan, who knew it to be the reign of grace, but as the advent of social advancement. Resenting anything that "trouble sa vie," it is wholly unlikely that he would ever wish to incarnate the true Gospel message, leading as it does to the Cross. Sabiroux is the clerical version of the bourgeois optimist. Even the unbelieving Saint-Marin perceives how sadly inadequate is the rationalist religion of Sabiroux and his fellow "intellectual" clerics, so devoted to the heritage of the Renaissance:
Further, the Curé of Luzarnes has no real interest in a personal experience of God. His encounter with Donissan, which centers on the latter's attempt to resurrect the dead child, clearly demonstrates that, as William Bush writes, "Sabiroux veut connaître non pas la puissance de Dieu mais celle du saint de Lumbres." He encourages the Curé of Lumbres to perform a miracle that would simply satisfy his curiosity about the renowned holy man.

Again, during the dialogue between the two priests, concerning primarily the mystery of suffering, Sabiroux demonstrates to what point his Christianity is cerebral at best. Seizing upon the comparison Donissan has drawn between the dead child and Christ on the cross, the intellectual priest takes the opportunity to begin to expound his own views on what he calls "Le drame du Calvaire." But he is unable to continue for Donissan angrily cuts him short:

Le drame du Calvaire, dites-vous... Mais il vous crève les yeux, il n'y a rien d'autre... Tenez! moi qui vous parle, Sabiroux, j'ai entendu—oui—jusque dans la chaire de la cathédrale... des choses... je ne peux pas dire... ils parlent de la mort de Dieu comme d'un vieux conte... Ils l'embellissent... ils en rajoutent. Où vont-ils chercher tout ça? Le drame du Calvaire!
Donissan objects because he understands that Sabiroux sees the Incarnation itself as a purely historical event and the mystery of the redemptive suffering and death of Christ as entirely consummated in the past. The Curé of Lumbres, however, is profoundly aware that the Cross must necessarily form an intégral part of the life of the Christian, called as he is to be another Christ:

Prenez bien garde, Sabiroux, que le monde n'est pas une mécanique bien montée. Entre Satan et Lui, Dieu nous jette, comme son dernier rempart. C'est à travers nous que depuis des siècles et des siècles la même haine cherche à l'atteindre, c'est dans la pauvre chaire humaine que l'inéffable mortre est consommé. 62

In his vision of the "Suffering Servant" incarnate in the lives of believers, Donissean again articulates the Bernanosian theology of Sous le soleil de Satan:

C'est en nous qu'il est saisi, dévoré. C'est de nous qu'il est arraché. 63

Certainly, Bernanos believes that, because of the mysterious and eternal union of God and Man in Christ, the Incarnate God shares intimately in the suffering of all mankind and that Satan pursues his hatred of God in and through "La misérable foule humaine." 64 But it is specifically the saint, as evidenced by Donissan's life, who suffers most acutely in communion with the God-Man, who experiences most intensely the assaults of the Evil One: "Sa haine s'est réservée aux saints." 65 The more thoroughly the saint seeks to incarnate Christ, the more certainly he will share in his sacrifice.
Sabiroux's ability, on the other hand, to abstract himself from the Incarnation by imprisoning it in history absolves him from any real participation in this central mystery of the Christian faith. By his rejection of the Cross this priest, "qui n'aime pas qu'on trouble sa vie," dimly prefigures yet another intellectual priest, the far more sinister and lucid Abbé Cénabré who would appear in Bernanos' second novel. Indeed, in the next two novels, L'Imposture and La Joie, Bernanos will continue to deepen this dual theme of the suffering saint participating in Calvary on the one hand, and on the other, the rejection of such participation by those in spiritual darkness.

2. L'Imposture and La Joie

Bernanos began L'Imposture in 1926, the year of the publication and successful reception of Sous le soleil de Satan. La Joie was begun a year later in 1927. The two novels, sharing as they do a number of central characters and thematically united by the dark and pervasive presence of Abbé Cénabré, can profitably be studied as a whole.

Ernest Beaumont has pointed out that "à mesure qu'avec les années la vie intérieure du romancier s'enrichit, une personne se met davantage en lumière: c'est la personne du Christ."
Indeed it is precisely the redemptive power of Christ which the novel's saints clearly attempt to bring into the lives of those around them who have fallen into darkness. Most specifically, their supernatural destinies call them both to an ultimate self-offering for the salvation of the apostate priest Cénabré. Yet, again, before we can profitably reflect on what place Cénabré occupies in Bernanos' spiritual vision, we must first turn to his fictional incarnations of living faith.

Chevance and Chantal

On the night that the famous intellectual and hagiographer Abbé Cénabré suddenly and traumatically becomes aware of his loss of faith, he summons, in a panicked gesture of desperation, the aged Abbé Chevance in whose holiness he perhaps perceives some glimmer of hope. From that point on, Bernanos makes it clear, concern for the salvation of the great author who has apostatized becomes the secret and perhaps unique preoccupation of the declining Chevance's life. It is the secret which he carries to his deathbed and which, in his last agony, takes the form of anguished phantasmagoria. It is a secret, moreover, of love:

Mais ce don suprême [son humble agonie] était déjà réservé, il n'en pouvait plus disposer sans trahison... Un autre! un autre! [...]. Le suprême secret du vieux prêtre, était un secret d'amour.
Yet Bernanos indicates that this love which Chevance bears the scholar-priest is not solely his own. Indeed, during their first violent encounter, the old priest begs Cénabre to confess his sin since the sacrament would allow Chevance to become "transparent": "Laissez-moi céder la place à Dieu." Moreover, throughout the scene, it is the fact that Chevance has been absorbed into the very life of God that distinguishes him as a saint—he gives flesh and expression to an eternal power:

Déjà sa main se levait pour bénir, et à travers la miséricorde divine dont il était plein frémissait dans sa gâume, confondue à l'effusion de sa propre vie.

The novelist emphasizes that Chevance's presence on the night of Cénabre's apostasy is an incarnation of the Divine and, as always in such a case in Bernanos' work, an incarnation of love:

Sa voix était rendue et pleine d'une piété si divine que l'orgueil le plus subtil, s'en fut trouvé ému.

It is this same "ordre de la charité" which Bernanos wished, above all, to illustrate in Chantal de Clergerie. Thus it is that, as he develops Chantal's personality from L'Imposture to La Joie, Bernanos makes it clear that it was not through any experience of the world that it became gradually comprehensible to her, but, rather, through her great love.
It is further apparent that a profound transformation takes place in Chantal between the fourth part of *L'Imposture*, where we meet her attending Abbé Chevance on his death bed, and the first part of *La Joie*, where we encounter her running her widower father's household. Her sorrowful memory of the difficult last agony of the old priest and her offering to him at that time of her joy at the end of *L'Imposture*, have left her marked by a "tristesse surnaturelle."  

Bernanos' implies as well that what Chantal had witnessed in Chevance's agony was perhaps the agony of God himself, of Christ crucified. It seems, in fact, that it is in such a vision that her new-found maturity has its source:

Ainsi Mlle Chantal pouvait croire que rien n'avait troublé sa paix, terni sa joie, et déjà la plaie mystérieuse était ouverte d'où ruisselait une charité plus humaine, plus charnelle, qui découvra Dieu dans l'homme, et les confond l'un et l'autre, par la même compassion surnaturelle.

Thus Chantal's love becomes less a slightly naïve disposition and more a substantial entity, more charnelle, more incarnate. Chevance's death would seem to have marked the point at which she begins to seek to share more fully in human suffering. Thus the narrator makes this observation with respect to the heroine's deepened spirituality:

Qui cherche la vérité de l'homme doit s'emparer de sa douleur, par un prodige de compassion, et qu'importe d'en connaître ou non la source impure.
Chantal's mysticism is not other-worldly; it is thoroughly rooted in the suffering of those around her and is thus, in Bernanos' vision, completely authentic. She penetrates
d'un coup, d'un élan, comme par un jeu divin; si loin dans la douleur des hommes. 80

Again, Bernanos emphasizes that, in the suffering of those in the Clergerie household which she shares, Chantal encounters the suffering of still "another":

Et néanmoins sa propre souffrance ne lui appartenait déjà plus, elle n'eût su la retenir en elle; c'était comme l'effusion hors de sa chair, bêisée, anéantie, du sang précieux d'un autre coeur. 81

Bernanos leaves no doubt as to whom this "autre coeur" belongs; Chevance had already declared in L'Imposture that "dans notre pauvre petit monde, voyez-vous, la douleur c'est le bon Dieu." 82

As Chantal approaches her own violent end, freely allowing herself to be consumed by the hatred and suffering around her, she enters

les ténèbres d'une Agonie dont le seuil n'a encore été franchi par aucun ange [...]. 83

It is, of course, the agony of Christ which she shares:

[... ] l'Agonie divine venait de fondre sur son coeur mortel et l'emportait dans ses serres. 84

By freely accepting the Cross, as did Christ, she becomes an incarnation of Him: "[...] la souffrance surnaturellement
acceptée divine, " Bernanos was to write. What is more, by participating in the suffering of the Incarnate Word she participates as well in the universal act of Redemption. W. Bush puts it thus:

Souffrir est participer à la rédemption universelle. Victime, l'homme s'identifie avec La Victime qui vit en lui, tandis que lui, par ses souffrances, vit dans le Christ souffrant.

Her particular redemptive sacrifice will result, at the very end of the novel, in the salvation of Abbé Cénabre.

Abbé Chevance and Chantall de Clergerie thus represent a further deepening, begun with Donissan, of Bernanos' meditation on the meaning of the Saint as an incarnation of Christ. Abbé Cénabre, of course, represents the converse of this vision, for his is a life of refusal, not Christian acceptance.

It should be noted that Abbé Cénabre did not actually deny his faith. Rather, Bernanos clearly indicates that it "s'était évanouie" or "s'était [. . .] détachée de lui." In short, the faith that he had, as limited and shallow as it ever was, simply atrophied and died. So it is that the night of terror which he shares with Abbé Chevance at the beginning of L'Imposture is really only a recognition of this fact. We must then ask what was the cause of this spiritual death.
In answer, Bernanos gives us, throughout L’Imposture and La Joie, occasional glimpses of the young, even adolescent, Cénabre. As a devout and determined seminarian we learn that, despite a rigorous adherence to the spiritual life, he had never allowed faith to take root in his life. It was, rather, something which existed purely on the surface of his being:

Comment imaginer, par exemple, que l’élève du séminaire de Nancy, qui s’astreignait, non pas en apparence, mais réellement, aux pratiques les plus élevées de la vie spirituelle, n’en tira jamais profit? Sans doute il refusait son consentement intérieur ne livrant que cette part superficielle de l’âme qui s’appelle l’intelligence.

His belief in God, thus a purely intellectual entity, finds its expression, in adulthood, in an impassioned erudition by which he hopes to comprehend the mysteries of the spiritual life by the sole light of reason.

As a famous hagiographer his intense curiosity seeks to unravel the secrets of sanctity, but these are closed to him forever. In Bernanos’ view, intelligence alone cannot hope to plumb what essentially transcends it. To be sure, the “secrets” of holiness which Cénabre so desperately wants to uncover are there before him in Chevance’s secret of love and in Chantal’s compassionate self-offering. The priest futilely attempts to seize conceptually what is an incarnate reality and not purely an intellectual one.

Indeed Cénabre’s “religion de la raison” lacks the one thing which, according to Bernanos, gives flesh to faith and makes it authentic—love. He himself confides to Périchon:
Pardonnez-moi ce mouvement d'humeur: je ne suis pas un apôtre, je ne saurais l'être. L'esprit critique l'emporte chez moi, ou plutôt il absorbe toutes les autres facultés. Une extrême attention finit par consumer la pitié.  

The pitiless ascent of the intellect condemns the rest of his being to what Abbé Chevance terms the coldest of hells.  

His scholarly life represents "le sacrilège d'une curiosité sans amour" while his disincarnate faith imagines the existence of "un ordre spirituel découronné de la charité." All of his intellectual creativity Bernanos characterizes thus:

L'art, ou plutôt la formule heureuse, de l'auteur, exploitée à fond, peut se définir ainsi: écrire de la sainteté comme si la charité n'était pas.  

Further probing his character's personality, Bernanos reveals that Cénabre's unwillingness to love, his inability even to comprehend the compassionate self-offering of the saint, has its roots in a childhood humiliated by poverty and, further, in a deep hatred of self:

Il se méprisait, se haissait dans sa détresse et dans sa honte, mais il ne pouvait, non! il ne pouvait se prendre en pitié.  

The novelist emphasizes this fact with block letters:

**IL NE S'AIME PAS.**  

Bernanos wishes thus to indicate that it is clearly impossible for one who has not achieved a fundamental love of self to incarnate the great love of God. Nor is it possible, certainly
not in Cénabre's case, to experience compassion for others.

Thus, as Joseph Jurit indicates, Cénabre "se ferme devant le monde extérieur."\textsuperscript{100} In part three of \textit{L'Imposture}, Cénabre shows no pity for the wretched vagrant whom he harasses and finally turns over to the police. He also first sows the seeds of despair in Pernichon and hastens the latter's suicide by coldly ignoring his last appeal for help.\textsuperscript{101}

Unlike Chantal, whose sharing in the pain of those around her is a participation in the very life of Christ, Cénabre refuses to share the suffering of others and thus rejects "la substance même du coeur divin: la douleur."\textsuperscript{102} Indeed, the famous author and expert on Christian spirituality has a horror of the crucified Christ. In this regard it is interesting to note the striking contrast Bernanos creates between Chantal and Cénabre using the essential image of the Cross.

Throughout \textit{La Joie de Chantal}, as it will be remembered, did Donissan in \textit{Sous le Soleil de Satan}, frequently casts her gaze toward the crucifix hanging on her bedroom wall:

\begin{quote}
Et tel était alors le bienheureux épuisement de sa charité, sa suave détresse, qu'elle courait se réfugier dans sa chambre, refouant ses larmes et là [...], n'osant quitter des yeux son crucifix, elle croyait glisser lentement, puis tomber tout à coup dans le sommeil [...]. Seulement elle tombait en Dieu.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

And again:

\begin{quote}
Elle leva vers le Christ pendu au mur un regard avidé [...].\textsuperscript{104}
\end{quote}
Cénabre, as well, often looks at the cross in his study which is, significantly enough, devoid of any corpus. Even in conversation his eyes wander compulsively toward it:

Et plus d'un sceptique eût été bien embarassé de convenir que l'interlocuteur invisible, au moins selon toute vraisemblance, c'était la croix nue pendue au mur.105

Whereas Chantal's crucifix is a symbol for her of the love of God, Cénabre's response to the cross is derisive, even diabolical:

Et il aperçut, à l'extrémité de là pièce, dans le réduit plus sombre, contre là paroi blanchie à la chaux, la Croix. Aussitôt il entendit son rire.106

Further, Bernanos indicates that Cénabre's preference for the "croix nue" and his profound distaste for the bleeding Christ of the crucifix manifested themselves even in the young seminarian who had confessed

[... ] sa répugnance, son horreur invincible de la Passión de Notre Seigneur, dont la pensée fut toujours si douloureuse à ses nerfs qu'il détournerait involontairement le regard du crucifix.107

If, in the Bernanosian saint, the redemptive acceptance of suffering in love is an authentic incarnation of Christ crucified, in Cénabre the refusal of the Passion is an equally clear sign of inauthentic Christian faith, that is, of a disincarnate one. To be sure, Bernanos indicates that Cénabre's principal blasphemy is his denial of the love of God made manifest on the Cross:
Nul n'est abandonné qui n'ait d'abord commis le sacrilège essentiel, renié Dieu non dans sa justice mais dans son amour. Car la terrible croix de bois peut se dresser d'abord au premier croisement des routes, pour un rappel grave et sévère, mais la dernière image qui nous apparaîsse, avant de nous éloigner à jamais, c'est cette autre croix de chair, les deux bras étendus de l'ami lamentable, lorsque le plus haut des âges se détoure avec terreur de la Face d'un Dieu déçu.

The esteemed scholar had, as William Bush points out, sold, like Judas, the Incarnate God "pour la petite monnaie de sa raison, de sa vie intellectuelle."

Pernichon and Catholic Society

In Bernanos' vision, incarnation, in the most general sense, is, as we have seen, the full and passionate living out of belief, while, in the most specifically Christian sense it is a participation in the Incarnation of Christ. Pernichon, the harassed Catholic journalist, is incapable of either.

In the first instance, incarnation demands commitment as a vital prerequisite. Yet Pernichon, as well as the other members of the "Catholic society" which Bernanos satirizes with such vehemence, are notable for their carefully contrived intellectual and moral neutrality:

M. Pernichon rédige la chronique religieuse d'une feuille radicale, subventionnée par un financier conservateur, à des fins socialistes. Ce qu'il a d'âme s'épanouit dans cette triple équivoque, et il en épuise la nature substantielle, avec la
patience et l'industrie de l'insecte. Presque inconnue aux bureaux de l'Aurore Nouvelle, sa silhouette déjà usée, maléfique, encore déformée par une boiterie, est la plus familière à ce public si particulier d'écrivains sans livres, de journalistes sans journaux, de prélats sans diocèses, qui vit en marge de l'Eglise, de la Politique, du Monde et de l'Académie [...].

This race of men which Pernichon represents "ne sait pas choisir." and, in their scandalous indifference to the truth, oppose "tout ce qui dans l'Eglise garde le sens de l'honneur."

It is not the gift of self, that hallmark of the Bernanosian saint, which Pernichon seeks but, rather, a strangely perverse and secret desire for the destruction of self:

Le peu qu'il a de doctrine politique ou sociale est commandé par ce même besoin pathétique de se livrer à l'ennemi, de livrer son âme. Ce que les niais qui l'entourent appellent indépen-
dance, hardiesse, n'est que le signe visible, bien que méconnu, de sa morose nostalgie de l'abandon total, d'une définitive liquidation de lui-même.

He has, deep within him, a nostalgic yearning for the true destiny of the human spirit, holiness, but lacks the vision and the heroic faith that would allow God to realize it in his life. Thus, for Pernichon, self-offering takes the form of self-annihilation, a demonic version of the former.

His religious piety, Bernanos assures us, is not pure hypocrisy, yet has its secret source

dans la crainte obscure du mal, le goût sournois de l'atteindre par un biais, avec le moindre risque.
Pernichon is neither hot nor cold, but only lukewarm; he is as incapable of giving himself wholly to evil as he is to good:

Une seule fois, en danger de mort, il a tenté l'expérience d'une confession générale, et d'avoir remué ce passé sans histoire, cette fièvre aigrie, il a connu avec effroi que toutes ces fautes ensemble ne faisaient pas la matière d'un vrai remords. 115

In this state of indifference between good and evil, 116 Pernichon, as Cénabre reveals to him with cruel perspicacity, allows himself "seul l'illusion de la vie." 117 The young Catholic journalist is the quintessence of the Bernanosian médiocre who, unable to incarnate either the demonic or the divine, exists in a limbo of indecision.

Among others in this Catholic circle, of which Pernichon is the most junior and most vulnerable member, is the Vicomte who "plaid pour le rationalisme en matière de religion." 118 For him and M. Guérout, who harbours a sinister hatred for all humankind, religious faith is an intellectual exercise with certain profitable political applications. As Joseph Jurt writes:

Tout le milieu Guérout est infecté de cet esprit moderniste. On y croit devoir ajuster la foi à la critique rationaliste, adapter la morale aux résultats de la psychiatrie, conformer les attitudes politiques à l'esprit démocratique. 119

Bernanos thus, once again, harkens back to his youthful opposition to the disincarnate idealism of democracy disguised as progressive religion.
It is perhaps though Mgr Espellette, the clerical member of this milieu, who most personifies the emptiness of such a position. He assents to the doctrine of progress and proudly declares, "Je suis de mon temps." He subscribes fully to the rationalist version of religion and believes not so much in the power of God as in the power of the state which has become "plus puissant que jamais." Espellette awaits, not the promised "Kingdom" of Christianity, but

le rayonnement de l'oeuvre achevée
amenée à son point de perfection:
L'Eglise et la société moderne enfin
d'accord... réconciliées..."

Yet, again, the surest indication that the Bishop's faith is but the wishful thinking of a feeble intelligence in his refusal to love. It is true that he imagines himself to be "un prêtre irréprochable," a benign peacemaker who believes that it is "si simple et si doux de vivre en paix avec les hommes." However, it becomes clear that such pretentions are simply expressions of his bourgeois partiality for tranquility and security at minimum cost and risk. For when a despairing Pernichon approaches him for help, he, like Cenabre, brushes aside the young journalist and

d'un geste de sa main gantée, il écartait,
il dissipait déjà ainsi qu'une légère fumée,
ainsi qu'une odeur inopportune, ce drame où
il avait failli entrer, auquel il venait de
fermer son âme, le tragique Pernichon.
Always ready with pious bonhomie, Mgr Espellette is, in the final analysis, unwilling to share the suffering of others. His faith, never lived out, is ultimately meaningless.

The de Clergerie Household

M. de Clergerie, the psychiatrist La Perouse and the other guests of the de Clergerie household in *La Joie*, Abbé Cénabre and Mgr Espellette, are really an extension of the sinister Catholic circle already encountered in *L'Imposture*. Again, in Chantal’s father, we meet a prototype of that genre of men so scorned by Bernanos, the progressive, modernist Catholic.

M. de Clergerie insists that he is a "catholicque irréprochable" and yet Chantal describes the lives of those with whom she lives and, we may assume, particularly her father’s, as

[. . .] étroite, têtu, calculatrice, sans honneur, sans amour, d’une gravité sournoise, d’une décence suspecte.

It is the fact that M. de Clergerie is "sans amour" which is perhaps at the heart of his tormented, neurotic personality. Chantal herself understands that her father’s spiritual sterility, like that of Abbé Cénabre, has its origin in a deep hatred of self:

[. . .] l’infortuné petit homme, enragé d’on ne sait quel dégoût de soi-même [. . .].
M. de Clergerie's ambition, the search for a social stature which might, he hopes, compensate for his lack of self-esteem, supersedes all considerations, even his daughter's happiness. Without love for himself, he is incapable of accepting his daughter's love or, indeed, of returning it. Yet he insists on the integrity of his faith, a faith which he mistakenly confuses with a kind of moral idealism. Speaking to his psychiatrist La Perouse, he asserts:

Tout croyant que je m'honore d'être, je n'ai garde de sous-estimer les services rendus à un catholicisme modernisé, progressif, par des savants tel que vous! Aujourd'hui la psychanalyse—une psychanalyse assagie—, hier le pragmatisme de James, l'anti-intellectualisme bergsonien... et pourquoi pas? M. Renouvier lui-même! .. un certain idéalisme, en somme, réconcilie toutes les croyances! 130

We have already demonstrated Bernanos' impatience with frivolous idealism. In M. de Clergerie he has created a character who, not only confuses Christianity with intellectual theory, but also places it among and gives it equal weight with a variety of such theories.

Like him, his psychiatrist La Perouse, though not a believer, has never given himself fully to anything. He cannot understand Chantal's insistence upon the gift of self:

"Oh! s'écria La Perouse, le vocabulaire d'un vieux médecin n'est pas riche, excusez-moi... Se donner, se refuser, ce sont là pour moi des expressions vides de sens. 131"
Indeed, perhaps more lucid than his host, he is conscious of his lack of real commitment to any cause or anyone:

Récemment, je n'ai rien aimé...
qu'aurais-je aimé?\textsuperscript{132}

These are the creatures, for whom one feels Bernanos has great pity, who live almost completely within the infecund realm of intellects uninformed by love. So consumed by an inner reality of conjecture and abstraction, they do not incarnate, but are incapable of even comprehending the truth which Chàntal proclaims so clearly in their midst. As Fernando, the Clergère coex, proclaims: "Il me semble qu'ils font semblant de vivre."\textsuperscript{133}

Bernanos' burning indignation manifested in his satire of Espellette, and the members of \textit{le cercle Guérou}, all of whom use religious faith rather than live it, was at this point in his creative life to take a new form. He was to pick up where no young editor of \textit{L'Avant Garde de Normandie} left off and seriously assume the role of polemicist:

It may be said that with \textit{Sous le soleil de Satan} Bernanos had taken up the pen, and that with \textit{La Grande Peur des Bien-Pensants} he had taken up the sword.\textsuperscript{134}
3. La Grande Peur des bien-pensants

Bernanos ostensibly wrote this long and vitriolic polemic as a "biography" of the hero of his youth, Edward Drumont, author of La France Juive. It is, of course, much more than that. La Grande Peur des Bien-Pensants is a reflection on the causes of the spiritual disintegration of modern France and an anguished plea to French youth for a new vision and a new future.

The main object of his anger is the bourgeoisie, the avaricious, dominant class which had gained ascendance through terror during the Revolution and had sealed its victory by a vicious repression of the Commune in 1870. Indeed, according to Bernanos, 1870 marked the historical point at which the bourgeoisie of all political persuasions joined forces and, in collusion with the government and its financial backers, crushed the spectre of a powerful proletariat. They thus established what Bernanos sarcastically refers to as the "victoire de l'Ordre," that is a social order meant to maintain the privileges and power of the middle class. Perhaps even more importantly, he feels that the same year marks the triumph of a force which he strongly censures and was more clearly to condemn later as contrary to the Gospel of Christ:

Quelque soit, un jour, le jugement de l'Histoire sur ce bref et flamboyant épisode de nos guerres civiles, il est impossible de nier qu'il ait fourni des indications très précieuses sur un phénomène mal connu, ce nouveau classement,
regroupement des forces sociales, qui a rendu possible, presque sans nouvelle crise apparente, le triomphe des pouvoirs d'argent.137

Prophet as well as polemicist, Bernanos declares that the primacy of the economic,138 as he calls it, or the "dictature de l'Argent."139 "met en péril tout l'essentiel de notre civilisation [. . .]."140 "L'Immense classe moyenne,"141 whose rule is order and whose power is money, has lived, since the Commune,

dans la hantise du premier mai, d'une nouvelle insurrection des faubourgs, et dans le culte de la gendarmerie qui la protège [. . .].142

It is in this context that the veins of anti-semitism found in La Grande Peur des Bien-Pensants must be understood since Bernanos perceived Jewish financial power as simply another symptom of the moral vacuum which existed among the bourgeoisie.143 He felt that the ancient people of God, having abandoned their pact with Yahweh, had instead opted to worship the golden calf. Their blasphemy is that they had developed a new messianic hope to replace the one of old—the mystique of Progress and the advent of scientific solutions.

It is in this same spirit that Bernanos reserves his most scathing indictment for the conservative bourgeoisie, the bien-pensants who piously claim to champion the Monarchy and the Church while allying themselves firmly with the political powers in order to maintain their position of privilege:
[... ] Mais la surprise cesse lorsqu'on réfléchit que ces sages, dont le réflexe politique naturel n'est pas même celui de l'homme d'affaires, mais du simple commerçant, ne souhaitent, au fond, que garantir leurs intérêts, à l'égard du gouvernement, quel qu'il soit, par une espèce d'assurance, payée son prix. Tant pour la patente, tant pour la liberté de conscience, tant pour les successions, tant pour le droit de conduire sa femme à la messe, d'envoyer ses enfants chez les Pères. 144

As with the Jews, Bernanos believed that the conservative bourgeoisie had broken its covenant with God, not the Yahweh of the Old Testament, but the Christ of the New. Their religion, a further means to maintain social stability and order, is inspired not by a genuine commitment to the message of the Gospel, but by a childish fear "de la mort, du jugement, de l'Enfer." 145

What is of course worse, from Bernanos' point of view, is that this frightenend self-serving piety is, as it was for the bien-pensants of L'Imposture and La Joie, a purely conceptual entity which never translates itself into Christian action:

[... ] cette dévotion superstition, à peine supérieure au fétichisme des sauvages, qui dispense d'agir, au sens surnaturel, c'est-à-dire d'aimer. 146

The love by which Christian truth is made incarnate in the lives of the fictional Bernanosian saints is clearly lacking in the mercenary bourgeoisie. These have given their hearts to the power of money, their allegiance to the Republic and have placed their hope in Science: "La Science vaincra la Mort [... ] c'est sûr." 147 The Redemption of Christ, though
they give it some kind of intellectual assent, occupies no place in their social vision, a fact which leads Bernanos to ask, "Qu'est-ce que l'ordre social chrétien, d'ailleurs, hors du plan de la Rédemption?" Indeed, given the tenacity of the middle-class belief in the inevitability of a scientific and social evolution towards some future state of perfection, the popular imagination is no longer capable of even conceiving of the Redemption.

Bernanos goes further still by accusing these "lip-service" Christians of granting their loyalty to a social order which, not only does not seek to incarnate the divine presence but, worse yet, emphatically rejects it:

[La société moderne] a pris ses précautions contre le divin, simplement. Elle assiste sans comprendre à ce phénomène capital, unique: l'altération, peut-être désormais sans remède, du sens religieux dans l'homme moderne, qui fausse tout l'équilibre de la vie sociale, commence à développer d'énormes passions collectives dont la contagion menace de s'étendre d'un bout à l'autre de la planète.

However, that is not all, for, even more perverse, the social order created by the bien-pensants and their allies is a kind of demonic attempt actually to undo the Incarnation: in modern society it is not God become man which is the essential reality, but rather the reverse—man's attempt to become God. This endeavor to invert the divine order of things Bernanos sees as an inherent component of the new religion of progress, extolling the apparent ascent of Man.
What is more, Bernanos adds, this new religion, abounding in Christian vocabulary and sentiment without any of the essential compassion or love, and awaiting as it does the reign of Science, also rejects the mystery of human suffering:

[la] société [. . .] a complètement perdu le sens chrétien de la Douleur, au point de la hâir, et même de ne hâir qu'ellê [. . .]. 152

In a civilization which naively seeks temporal perfection, human pain is perceived as an intolerable blemish. Since Bernanos clearly and consistently asserts that it is in "la douleur" that Christ manifests his presence in a particular way, 153 such an attitude marks a further rejection of the Word Incarnate.

It is in this context that Bernanos concludes La Grande peur des bien-pensants with a long meditation on poverty and its place in modern society. He accuses modern society of reductively classifying poverty as a social evil to be rooted out by numerous programs and government legislation. The result, he contends, is that the poor are stripped of their dignity and poverty is transformed into "la Misère" 154 that is "la pauvreté devenue folle." 155

Thus, in the modern state, the poor become the "unemployed," 156 washed, clothed and fed from the benevolent hand of the state, their master. 157 They are encouraged to aspire to the lofty heights of middle-class affluence and, thus, to substitute for the Christian virtue of charity the modern virtue of envy, so essential to the proper functioning of the wheels of progress. 158
What Bernanos finds particularly offensive about this degradation is that the poor are, as he says, "l'image vivante de Jésus-Christ." They are the sacred incarnation of Him who stripped himself and became poor. By desecrating the sacred image of "la pauvreté" the iconoclastic bien-pensants further attempt to impede the entrance of the divine into the natural, launching still another assault upon the God-Man:

[La pauvreté] qui fut, deux mille ans, parmi les hommes, une autre présence réelle, l'enfance divine elle-même, le mystère d'un regard triste et pur, vous l'aurez chassée du monde, poursuivie à travers toutes les routes du monde, comme une bête enragée, idiots que vous êtes.

What medieval society honoured as Christ himself, modern society seeks to eliminate by a process of dehumanization.

It is not simply that the religious faith of the conservative bourgeoisie is utterly disincarnate, and also devoid of love as of resultant action, but that they reject as well Christ the Incarnate God. This is perhaps the central theme of La Grande Peur des bien-pensants, a theme which Bernanos was to articulate even more clearly in later works.
Notes

CHAPTER II

2 Ibid., p.21.
3 Ibid., p.48.
4 Ibid., p.62.
5 Ibid., p.11.
6 Ibid., p.26-27.
7 Ibid., p.24.
8 Ibid., p.66.
9 Ibid., p.49.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., p.50.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., p.29.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p.83.
17 Ibid., p.68.
18 Ibid., p.73.
19 Ibid., p.50.
21 Ibid., pp. 114-115.
22 Ibid., p. 118.
24 Ibid., p. 220.
26 Bernanos, _Sous le soleil de Satan_, p. 16.
27 Ibid., p. 132.
28 Ibid., p. 205.
30 Bernanos, _Le Crépuscule des vieux_, p. 19.
32 Bernanos, _Le Crépuscule des vieux_, pp. 57-58.
33 Bernanos, _Sous le soleil de Satan_, p. 112: "Puis ce regard rencontr[...]." Ibid., p. 113: "Alors il regarde la Croix." Ibid., p. 132: "Alors il regarde la Croix."
34 Bernanos, _Le Crépuscule des vieux_, p. 16.
35 Ibid.
36 Bernanos, _Sous le soleil de Satan_, p. 304.
39 Bernanos, _Sous le soleil de Satan_, p. 281.
40 Ibid., p. 297.
41 Ibid., p. 275.
42 Ibid., p. 279.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., p. 298.
46 Bernanos, *Sous le soleil de Satan*, p. 299.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., pp. 49-50.
50 Ibid., p. 38.
51 Ibid., p. 15.
52 Bernanos, *Sous le soleil de Satan*, p. 201.
53 Ibid., p. 204.
54 Ibid., p. 213.
55 Ibid., p. 214.
57 Bernanos, *Sous le soleil de Satan*, p. 228.
58 Ibid., p. 285.
61 Ibid., p. 244.
62 Ibid., pp. 244-245.
63 Ibid., p. 246.
64 Ibid., p. 245.
65 Ibid., pp. 131-132.
66 Ibid., p. 228.
68 Ibid.
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Ibid., p.343, note #1.
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101 Bernanos, OE I, p. 479.
102 Ibid., p. 252.
103 Ibid., p. 568.
104 Ibid., p. 681.
105 Ibid., p. 324.
106 Ibid., p. 367.
107 Ibid., p. 364.
108 Ibid., p. 381.
109 William Bush, Souffrance et expiation dans la pensée de Bernanos, p. 149.

110 Bernanos, OE I, p. 312.
112 Bernanos, OE I, p. 313.
113 Ibid., p. 315.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid., p. 316.
116 Ibid., p. 320.
117 Ibid.
118 Joseph Jurt, op. cit., p. 196.
119 Ibid., p. 200.
120 Bernanos, OE I, p. 388.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid., p. 422.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid., p. 395.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid., p. 424.
127 Ibid., p. 592.
128 Ibid., p. 563.
129 Ibid, p. 593.
130 Ibid., p. 645.
131 Ibid., p. 664.
132 Ibid., p. 668.
133 Ibid., p. 674.
136 Bernanos, OE II, p. 93.
137 Ibid., p. 99.
138 Ibid., p. 179.
139 Ibid., p. 180.
140 Ibid., p. 342.
141 Ibid., p. 99.
142 Ibid.
143 Joseph Jurt, op.cit., p. 316.
144 Bernanos, OE II, p. 8.
145 Ibid., p. 311.
146 Ibid.
Ibid., p. 334.
Ibid., p. 339.
Ibid., pp. 346-347.
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Ibid., p. 333.
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CHAPTER III

"DES MONSTRES DÉCHAINES" 1931-1936

After the publication of La Grande pour des bien-pensants in 1931, Bernanos began what he would later refer to as "une nouvelle période de ma pauvre vie d'écrivain." The second phase of his creative life would prove to be the most fecund, including as it did the five remaining novels he was to write and stretching from 1931 to 1940: Un Crime, Un Mauvais rêve, Journal d'un curé de campagne, La Nouvelle histoire de Mouchette, and Monsieur Ouine.

What then distinguishes Sous le soleil de Satan, L'Imposture and La Joie from these last five novels which, along with the polemical works, form its substance? William Bush has proposed in his study of Un Mauvais rêve that the first three novels were primarily concerned with the salvation of great individual sinners—Mouchette and Cénabre—while the subsequent works adopted a broader and specifically social perspective. The "nouvelle période" was to be characterized by Bernanos' desire to direct his attention to the problems of contemporary society and, in particular, to contemporary youth. In response to what he viewed as the perverse influence of Gide on the postwar generation of the twenties Bernanos set out to plumb more deeply the social malaise of
his age. The results were to comprise perhaps his most brilliant literary output.

1. Un Mauvais rêve and Un Crime

The rather intricate interconnection of Un Mauvais rêve and Un Crime, sharing as they do a halting evolution, fused together and then separated at various complex states of revision over four years, has been thoroughly examined and is not the primary interest of this work. Yet, it would be of interest to begin with a study of the primitive layer of the two texts—what now comprises the first five chapters of Un Mauvais rêve, written in 1931, used briefly by Bernanos but then rejected as a portion of the second part of Un Crime and then expanded and reworked to become once again the first part of Un Mauvais rêve in 1934. This will allow a glimpse at Bernanos' initial approach to two essential problems: the meaning of literature, and the spiritual malaise of the post-war generation. The first essentially involves the writer, Emanuel Ganse, and his literary world, the second the tortured personalities of Olivier and Philippe. We will finally examine the later development of the character of Simone Alfieri.
Emanuel Ganse

Emanuel Ganse represents Bernanos' own concerns about the significance of literature, about its relation to reality and, ultimately, to the "Truth." His characterization of an aging, worn out writer is perhaps as much an exercise in self-examination for an author always wary of the "tentation littéraire" as it is a response to what Bernanos viewed as a disturbing Gidean influence among the young.

Ganse, for his part, offers a clear personal definition of "literature." In a conversation with Olivier, his disillusioned secretary, he admits to the indispensability of his assistant, Simone Alfieri:

Oui, Simone m'a servi énormément, je lui dois le meilleur de mes derniers livres, pourquoi le nier? Peut-être expliquerez-vous un jour... On pourrait expliquer ça, quel beau sujet! On échange bien des idées jeune homme--les idées ne m'intéressent pas. Pourquoi n'échangerait-on pas des rêves et surtout des mauvais rêves? On peut bien porter à deux les mauvais rêves, les mauvais rêves sont lourds.

Literature, in his view, is not even an intellectual exercise concerned with the communication of ideas either great or mediocre but rather something less substantial still: the articulation of the dreams of the disenchanted and despairing, and of the festering spiritual and emotional wounds of his characters. Literature is the exchange of dreams and, more precisely, of bad dreams.
Given such a view it becomes clear why Ganse sees no meaning in literature other than, perhaps, its own perpetuation and the glory it offers. As Hans Urs von Balthazar has observed in his monumental study of Bernanos:

Le poète authentique va à la vérité par son rêve créateur; le méchant au contraire aime l'apparence pour elle-même et s'enveloppe dans le rêve du mal comme dans un cocon: ses rêves s'orientent vers le néant.¹⁰

In Ganse's view literature is not at the service of the "Truth" or even of a truth. Nor does it seek to serve man himself, quite the contrary:

Je ne crois pas à la jeunesse, dit-il. Je me demande si j'y ai jamais cru, et d'ailleurs, je m'en fiche. Je ne crois qu'à la littérature—un point, c'est tout. La littérature n'est pas faite pour les générations successives, mais les générations pour la littérature [. . .] qui les dévore. Elle les dévore toutes, et les rend sous les espèces du papier imprimé, comprenez-vous?¹¹

What Bernanos would see as demonic about this perception is that it represents a reversal of the true order of things: not literature for man, but man for literature. Since there is nothing but the "dream" Ganse imagines its primacy to extend even to the living creatures who are the inexhaustible source of its subject matter. Ganse's conception thus represents the subordination of that which is incarnate, man, to that which is purely disincarnate, the bad dreams of literature.

Thus it is that those who compose Ganse's circle are but grist for his literary mill. Olivier is but the prototype for some future character:
Simone Alfière is, in her turn as well, the rough draft of a more polished fictional création, a new mauvais rêve. She understands that Ganse exploits her for the sake of literature, that he seeks to empty her, like the others, "de sa substance." The aging novelist has, in some sense, abandoned the real world of incarnate beings for the ghosts of his fiction. He is even prepared to offer his own life as incense at the altar of littérature as he contemplates a future work: "Souvenirs d'enfance d'Emmanuel Ganse." Simone is prompted to affirm accusingly: "Vous ne sortirez jamais de là littérature." Just as Abbé Cénabre was incapable of moving beyond the intellect, so Ganse is incapable of transcending his dreams. One is as hollow and as sterile as the other. Bernanos further indicates that, within this phantasmal universe which he inhabits, Ganse's own being has become in some way unsubstantial, itself fading into a kind of unreality:

We may presume that his own life has been emptied of its substance and is so accustomed to dreaming that it itself has assumed the characteristics of a dream, reduced to an indistinct image.
Olivier and Philippe

Both Olivier, young assistant to Ganse, and Philippe, his nephew, belong to that "nouvelle génération" born in the aftermath of World War I which Olivier describes as follows:

Je suis né comme ça, en petits morceaux, en poussière. Pour me voir, il faudrait un œil à facettes, comme les mouches. Et toute ma génération me ressemble. 17

This sense of spiritual fragmentation, of a purposeless existence without any single compelling vision, is one which he shares with the more percée, yet more cynical, Philippe. Through these two characters Bernanos expresses the moral malaise of the youth of his day upon which Un Mauvais rêve is meant to focus.

Olivier, like Ganse, has spent the greater part of his short life wandering within the realm of le rêve. He does not live his youth, as he himself admits in the letter to his aunt which opens the novel, but rather simply plays a role in "la comédie de la jeunesse." 18 There is no honest substance or conviction in his behavior and the shadow-like existence which he leads is thoroughly rooted, like Ganse's, in the disincarnate:

Mais sa jeunesse n'en continue pas moins à se prodiguer tous les jours, inlassablement, à des fantômes, à peine plus solides que les images de ses rêves. 19
With no particular spiritual focus he abandons the palpable reality around him for an inner illusion.

One is led to wonder if he had ever enjoyed any conviction, religious or otherwise, and Bernanos supplies the answer in a brief allusion to the years Olivier had spent as the protégé of a humanist intellectual priest, that most despised of Bernanosian characters:

Avait-il la foi? se demande quelquefois Mainville. En tout cas celle d'Olivier s'est effacée jour après jour et il n'a même pas pris la peine d'en informer son vieux compagnon, qu'il accompagnait chaque dimanche, en bâillant, à la chapelle des Dames de Sion, dont il était l'aumônier, et qui réservaient pour lui les meilleures bouteilles de ce vin gris dont il était si friand. Trop friand, hélas! car il est mort d'une crise foudroyante d'urémie, un soir d'été, dans un fauteuil, tenant serrée sur sa poitrine une précieuse édition des Fables de La Fontaine, un exemplaire unique qu'il tenait du marquis Charnacé, son prédécesseur à la présidence de la Société archéologique de Saumur.²⁰

Bernanos thus suggests that whatever faith Olivier may have had, it, like Cézabre's, had failed to take root in his life through indifferent neglect. He further suggests that Olivier's loss of faith had been perhaps due to the example given by the priest who, it seems, was more committed to the pursuit of learning than to any genuine attempt to incarnate the gospel of Christ. This brief allusion to Olivier's religious background makes his bitter monologue later in the novel about the disintegration of Christianity in contemporary society less gratuitous than it might otherwise seem.
Further, since he recognizes no truth, Olivier becomes, like his predecessors Mouchette and Cénabre, an expert liar. Indeed, Bernanos tells us that "il excelle au mélange artificieux du vrai et du faux." Like Ganse's fiction, his life is a clever mixture of both and he himself acknowledges to Simone that "Nous ne sortons jamais de la littérature."22

Yet, never content with surface analysis, Bernanos' compassion for his characters seeks out the core of their despair. If the disillusioned Olivier is certain that he has no reason to live, and Simone quietly assures him that he has not,23 Bernanos pushes us still deeper into the "why" of the hopelessness of a whole generation.

It is perhaps surprising for the reader to discover, well into the novel, that young Olivier does indeed have a profound yearning for heroism though it is only vaguely defined in his mind. Perhaps his most deeply felt frustration is that he finds himself in a society which undermines heroic aspirations and discourages, if not forbids, the heroic gesture. He confides his anguish to Simone:

"Je serai un héros!" disait le gosse, à peu près comme il eût souhaité d'être le géant Adamastor, ou Merlin l'enchanteur. Mais le truc est débile, ma chère! Un héros maintenant, nous savons ce que c'est! C'est un grotesque en zinc, avec un casque de zinc, un fusil de zinc, une capote et une culotte de zinc, des molletières de zinc, et une femme nue, elle-même en zinc, couchée à ses godillots de zinc ou lui posant sur la tête une couronne de zinc. Voilà ce que nous pouvons voir, nous autres, depuis 1920, sur la plus minuscule place de plus pouilleux des villages français.24
This is Bernanos' familiar cry, the one that surfaced in the youthful letters, the early short stories, the editorials of L’Avant Garde de Normandie and which continues throughout his fiction: to be fully human and fully alive man must aspire to the heroic, to the uncompromising incarnation of what is good and true. Such self-sacrifice is what constitutes man's very dignity. Yet, as Bernanos had already stated in Le Crépuscule des vieux, modern society, with no understanding of the nature of evil, sees no necessity for heroic goodness to overcome it, and that post-war society, in France, with its mindless idealism and bourgeois materialism, had effectively created a social and moral climate that denied this idea of their proper human destiny to the young. This is perhaps the basic thrust of Un Mauvais rêve.

Certainly Philippe, Olivier's contemporary, shares his friend's frustration. He too simply plays roles in preference to any commitment; he too finds nothing in life worth living for and, consequently, kills himself. Yet, as he tells Olivier, he also is fully aware of the nature of man's most sublime calling:

Oui, vous vous figurez tous qu'il n'y a de naturel que la recherche du plaisir. Ce sont là des vues d'enfants, mon cher. Je pense au contraire qu'un être doit se dépasser ou se renier. Vous, vous vous êtes renier une fois pour toutes, oh! sans douleur, je l'avoue. Il n'en reste pas moins qu'un homme réellement supérieur est naturellement sacrificiel, qu'il tend naturellement à s'immoler pour quelque objet qui le dépasse, qu'il risque de devenir ce que nous appelons un héros ou un saint.
Philippe understands that heroism, of which sanctity is the purest expression, is characterized by the gift of self. Yet he understands as well that his social context provides him with little opportunity and little reason for such self-immolation:

J'ignore toujours si, en d'autres temps, j'eusse été un héros ou un saint. Je déclare simplement que celui où j'ai la disgrâce de vivre ne me fournît pas la moindre occasion de tenter l'expérience avec la plus petite chance de succès.27

Both Olivier and Philippe feel the instinctive need to choose the incarnate over the disincarnate, the heroic act over the bad dream. Still, it seems to them impossible. There is nothing left for the young, says Philippe, but vice,28 sterile illusions and the frenzied rituals of escape.

Pursuing his analysis of this thirst for pleasure further still, Bernanos allows Olivier a burst of unexpected and devastating lucidity. In the passionate monologue addressed to Simone near the end of the novel's first part, he asserts that the voluptuousness of his generation has spiritual, indeed religious, roots:

C'est horrible, ce que tous ces gens travaillent pour désobéir aux commandements de Dieu. D'un Dieu auquel ils ne croient plus. Car ils ont beau s'efforcer d'être canailles avec naturel, se bourrer de drogues, de pharmacies, on croirait que le vice exaspère au lieu de l'apaiser ce vieux sang chrétien qui les dérange.29
Olivier expands his vision further by contending that Christianity, disintegrating rapidly in a society hostile toward it, has left only a residue of itself. What remains, in Olivier’s words, is “la notion de péché sans la grâce.”

Even Lipotte, Ganse’s malevolent psychiatrist in _La Joie_, had earlier come to a similar conclusion:

> Le christianisme a beau se dissoudre peu à peu de lui-même, notre monde occidental n’arrive pas à éliminer les plus subtils, les plus venimeux de ses poisons.

The poison, of course, is a residual sense of guilt and sin without any corresponding sense of redemption.

This is perhaps what Bernanos views as the essence of the malaise of the post-war generation. If the young engage in an orgy of self-destruction from which they draw a kind of joyless pleasure, and the heroin addiction of Simone and Olivier is a case in point, it is because they are seized by a curious self-directed hatred. Again, Olivier is the porte-parole of his creator when he makes a telling accusation against Simone and her contemporaries:

> Vous haïssez votre plaisir. Oui vous haïssez votre corps, d’une haine sournoise, amère. [...] Vous méprisez votre corps parce qu'il est l'instrument du péché.

Bernanos sees tragic irony in a generation which so passionately pursues carnal pleasure and yet so deeply despises the body, implying thereby a distaste for the incarnate and a preference for illusion.
In Olivier, of course, this hatred extends beyond the body to include his entire self. He declares, "Je ne m'aime plus. Je ne peux pas vivre sans m'aimer." In him Bernanos but touches upon this theme of self-hatred; in the second part of the novel, which deals exclusively with Simone Alfieri, he will plumb its depths.

Evagéline and Simone Alfieri

Simone Alfieri, like Philippe and Olivier, had strongly experienced the need for a kind of heroism in her life, to give herself fully and completely to the realization of a goal. Like them too, she found that contemporary society, the reign of the banal, had successfully discouraged the heroic as excessive:

C'est vrai que je me suis crue, voilà dix ans, une femme supérieure. Je ferai face, disais-je. Face à qui? Surmonter la vie! Pourtant, ils l'ont bien aplanie. Rasée comme un terrain de manœuvre, la vie! Rasée comme une cour de caserne. Rasée comme un ponton.34

Bernanos is undoubtedly alluding again to earlier critiques of disincarnate republican idealism in post-war France. It is entirely possible that he means to suggest that such bankrupt idealism was one of the sources of Simone's disillusionment, for she bitterly declares to Olivier:

Et d'ailleurs je ne crois pas plus que vous aux majuscules, mon petit.35
At any rate, it is clear that she regards as her fundamental frustration her inability to consummate any undertaking:

Alors que la malédiction de ma vie, c'aura été justement de ne pouvoir venir à bout de rien! Solitude et silence, silence et solitude, je ne serai jamais sortie de ce cercle enchanté. 36

This sense of impotence is therefore, in part at least, the reason for her rejection of the real world in favour of her heroin-induced dreams and the pervasive lie.

Indeed, the dream and the lie, insists Evangéline, Simone's literary spiritual sister in Un Crime, are really two aspects of the same illusion:

Rêver, c'est se mentir à soi-même, et pour se mentir à soi-même il faut d'abord apprendre à mentir à tous. 37

The same is true of Simone who uses both drugs and the illusions she creates as a "merveilleuse évasion." 38 Indeed, so thorough is her willed withdrawal from the substantial world around her into the disincarnate domain of her reverie that

[. . .] le monde réel ne parvint à sa conscience qu'au travers d'une fente étroite, semblable à celles qui laissent passer une seule raie de lumière par une pêrsienne close. 39

The extent to which the illusion assumes control becomes clear when we learn that her life, like Ganski's, is being devoured by the lie, becoming in some sense as disincarnate as the fantasies she contrives.
Pouvait-elle même se flatter d'avoir jamais vécu?
Oui, elle s'était crue à peine distincte, à peine plus réelle—ou moins vivante peut-être—que les personnages qu'elle sentait grouiller comme des larves au fond de ses ruminations monotones [ . . . ].

To emphasize this insidious metamorphosis, Bernanos uses one of his favorite images, that of the proliferation of cancer:

Ils [ses rêves] avaient envahi sa vie, étouffé son âme, sa volonté. [ . . . ] les mensonges, volontaires ou non, [ . . . ], étaient sa substance même, ainsi que les hideuses proliférations du cancer.

What is important to emphasize is that Simone's new "substance" is no substance at all. The problem is that Simone, and we include Evangeline, has never been successful in dominating her dreams which, in the words of William Bush, "elle préférait aux actes." We thus again discover the basic polarity between the disincarnate and the incarnate, the illusion and the act.

Yet, within the drug-induced delirium and willed phantasmagoria in which she dwells, Simone does experience an anguished, if generally impotent, desire to act:

[ . . . ] elle sentait renaitre en elle cette impatience passionnée de l'acte à accomplir [ . . . ].

She continues to feel, despite her entanglement in a web of illusions, the almost instinctive need to give herself entirely for the accomplishment of some end. She is still quite aware that the act is infinitely superior to the dream.
She expresses the need to prove herself, that is to demonstrate to herself, particularly, that she is indeed a flesh and blood creature and not merely a literary phantom haunting Ganse’s novels. This need may be seen, on one level at least, as an explanation for her desire to commit a crime, a truly incarnate act. This is the intention she expresses in conversation with Ganse himself:

Oh! naturellement, nous savons tous ce que c’est que commettre un crime en pensée. Mais cette fois, mon ami, ce n’est pas avec la machine à rêves que je l’ai commis! Il est là derrière ce front—et pas un de ces désirs qui n’ont plus de consistance qu’une gelée, non. Un vrai crime, bien constitué, bien vivant, avec tous ses membres, un bébé-crime, quoi, et qui ne demande qu’à venir au monde!45

Again, though, Bernanos draws us further still into the mind and, more particularly, into the soul of his character. For, beyond this need to act, the compelling motive for Simone’s decision to murder Olivier’s aged aunt is the desire for self-destruction. She herself, she understands, is the true victim of her crime which is for her a kind of suicide, a definitive rupture with society and a descent into “le néant.”47

By thus revealing his character’s intention to annihilate herself vicariously through the murder of the old woman Bernanos brings us into the very depths of Simone’s interior life where lurks a fundamental element of her personality—her consuming hatred of self:
La seule haine qu'elle eût vraiment connue, éprouvée, consommée jusqu'à la lie, c'était la haine de soi. 48

Still, it must be kept in mind that Un Mauvais Rêve is a work in which Bernanos intended his characters to reflect broader social realities. He therefore moved from the particular to the universal, from Simone Alfiieri to humankind itself:

Toute folie, à son paroxysme, finit par découvrir dans l'homme, ainsi que la dernière assise de l'âme, cette haine secrète de soi-même qui est au plus profond de sa vie—probablement de toute vie. 49

This observation of Bernanos, as William Bush has pointed out, goes far when put into the context of his theological vision. "The hatred of self is symptomatic of man's separation from God, of the creature's futile attempts to become creator:

Les tentatives de l'homme moderne de se faire, de se créer, d'exister à part de toute idée d'un Créateur, loin de déboucher sur la perfectabilité de la race humaine, ne font que souligner la faiblesse de la race, sa vulnérabilité, son besoin des illusions créées quotidiennement par les moyens de diffusion, ainsi que par des confesseurs-psychiatres, et des échappatoires dans la drogue, la promiscuité, la violence et la mort [...]. Le génie de Bernanos lui a permis d'ailleurs de comprendre que le remède à ce vice était celui de s'aimer "comme n'importe lequel des membres souffrants de Jésus-Christ. 50

The Bernanosian vision allows for no remedy for modern man's hatred of self, including his hatred of the body, save in the Incarnation itself.
In the case of Simone, Bernanos leaves the reader, at the end of *Un Mauvais rêve*, with some reason to believe that she is not beyond salvation but that she has indeed some capacity for generosity of spirit. Suddenly she experiences pity for her lover, Olivier:

Mais le mensonge de son triste amour, se dissipant peu à peu, elle comprit qu'elle avait chéri en celui-ci [. . .] une sorte de faiblesse complice. Et une pitié, jamais ressentie, crevant son cœur, parut inonder sa poitrine d'un jet si brûlant qu'elle y porta les deux mains avec un cri de douleur. Les larmes jaillirent de ses yeux.51

If indeed it was Bernanos' intention in *Un Mauvais rêve* to present his vision of modern man without God, a new social order in which Christianity had reached a frightening level of dissolution, the solution he implicitly offers is, again, quite evident. In this regard William Bush offers this exegesis of Simone's new-found gift of tears:

Le secret que Bernanos nous livre à la fin, à propos de la vie intérieure de Simone après le crime, nous semble donc une image tout à fait remarquable, enracinée dans l'expérience de l'isolement criminel de la race humaine et du besoin de découvrir la grâce des larmes à travers nos liens avec une personnalité humaine qui, pour le chrétien, ne peut être à la fin des fins que celle de Jésus-Christ. D'où l'importance chez Bernanos de l'incarnation de Dieu: ce n'est que par des rapports avec cette personnalité humaine de Jésus-Christ que l'homme arrivera à comprendre l'étendue de son exil, et sa propre déstitution.52
This preoccupation of Bernanos with the relationship between Christianity and contemporary society begun in Un Mauvais rêve and in Un Crime, was to acquire even greater depth in subsequent works. Indeed his next, and perhaps most celebrated novel, in exploring this theme, will allow Bernanos a much fuller expression of his spiritual vision.

2. *Journal d'un curé de campagne*

The Curé d'Ambricourt and the Incarnation

Although, as we have shown, the presence of the God Incarnate of Christianity permeates Sous le soleil de Satan, L'Imposture and La Joie (and it might be said that the terrible absence of such a presence permeates in equal measure Un Crime and Un Mauvais rêve) it is, as Earnest Beaumont has pointed out, only in *Journal d'un curé de campagne*

que le Christ domine pour la première fois dans l'œuvre bernanosienne; et un approfondissement spirituel, une orientation plus positive, la réalisation que le Christ seul importe, se trouvent à la base de là réussite esthétique de ce roman.
Indeed, Beaumont indicates that, as Bernanos' inner life developed, it is Christ who may be seen to be more and more clearly occupying a position at the centre of the author's work.  

At any rate, it should be noticed that the Curé of Ambrièrcourt, the priest-hero of this, Bernanos' most popular novel, emphasizes with repetitive insistence what he views as the essential truth of his religious faith: the Incarnation. The centrality of this mystery for the Curé, the character perhaps most dear to Bernanos, is evident from numerous entries in his diary, such as:

"Je ne suis pas l'ambassadeur du Dieu des philosophes, je suis le serviteur de Jésus-Christ."

What is paramount to the priest is that, by becoming man, God has fully entered into the human experience and thereby overcome the estrangement between creature and Creator. This, then, is a far cry from the divine pedagogue of the moralists or the distant cosmic intellect of the deists:

"A nous entendre on croirait trop souvent que nous prêchons le Dieu des spirituallistes, l'Être Suprême, je ne sais quoi, rien qui ressemble, en tout cas, à ce Seigneur que nous avons appris à connaître comme un merveilleux ami vivant, qui souffre de nos peines, s'émeut de nos joies, partagera notre agonie, nous recevra dans ses bras, sur son coeur."

But
The Incarnation connotes a relationship of total intimacy between the human and the divine:

Car le Maître que nous servons ne juge pas notre vie seulement--il la partage, il l'assume. Nous aurions beaucoup moins de peine à contenter un Dieu géomètre et moraliste. 58

The capable and worldly-wise Curé of Torcy understands that, in fact, all history turns on one pivot:

[... le seul, l'uniqué drame, le drame des drames--car il n'y en a pas d'autre--s'est joué sans décors et sans passementeries. Pense donc! Le Verbe s'est fait chair [...]. 59

What must be remembered, though, is that for Bernanos this "drame des drames" is by no means, as Dohsson's strong castigation of the Curé of Luzarnes in Sous le soleil de Satan has already emphasized, a dràma that has been entirely consummated in the past and thus imprisoned in history. It is, rather, one that is living and ever present. So it is that the Curé of Ambricourt is acutely aware of "l'effrayante présence du divin à chaque instant," the mystical marriage of God and man in Christ, which Bernanos views as the central fact of the human experience.

The Incarnation is not a past, though significant, event, but a vital, living mystery in which the priest is called to participate. As Earnest Beaumont has written:

[... il se conforme [... à la vie chrétienne, il se laisse pénétrer par le Christ. 61
In short, the invisible presence of God-made-man becomes incarnate in the Curé.

Indeed, if, as the young priest has pointed out, the God of Christianity is infinitely more difficult to please than would be the god of the spiritualists, it is undoubtedly because Christ demands from his followers nothing less than what he has already himself given: everything. Thus, like the teenage Bernanos who insisted to Dom Besse that God requires all or nothing, and like the priest's fictional predecessors, Donissan, Chevance, and Chantal who refused to bargain with God, the hero of *Journal d'un curé de campagne* unequivocally declares:

> Calculer nos. chances, à quoi bon? On ne joue pas contre Dieu.\(^62\)

Again, for the Curé, as for all the other Bernanosian saints, authentic faith is fully lived out, requiring the total gift of self in love, the key to any participation in Christ's redemptive self-offering. Therefore, the suffering the young priest endures stems from his communion with both God and with man—the two being inseparably fused in the Incarnation:

> Une douleur vraie qui sort de l'homme appartient d'abord à Dieu, il me semble. J'essaie de la recevoir humblement dans mon coeur, telle quelle, je m'efforce de l'y faire mienne, de l'aimer. Et je comprends tout le sens caché de l'expression devenue banale, "communier avec," car il est vrai que cette douleur, je la communie.\(^63\)
If, as Earnest Beaumont indicates, Incarnate God is in some sense the central character of the novel it is only because the Curé of Ambricourt makes him so. The attempt by Bernanos to identify his hero with Christ is much more than a powerful metaphor; according to Bernanos' mystical theology, the Curé is Christ for those dependant upon him. It is for this reason that, by giving himself fully to the service of his parishioners and by making of himself a kind of receptacle for their pain, and even their hatred, the priest experiences suffering of a very particular kind:

La vérité est que depuis toujours c'est au jardin des Oliviers que je me retrouve [. . . ].

He, like Chantal, is a prisoner of "la Sainte Agonie." By offering himself completely he mystically enters into the redemptive agony of Christ himself. This is indeed a central mystery around which Bernanosian spirituality moves.

Thus, as the Curé believes that it is on the Cross that Christ accomplished "la perfection de sa Sainte Humanité [. . . ]," it is on that same Cross that he himself fulfills his own destiny and discovers the plenitude of his own humanity:

[. . . .] et c'est vrai que parfois j'imagine qu'il [le village] m'a cloué là-haut sur une croix, qu'il me regarde au moins mourir [. . . ].

Earnest Beaumont writes:

Bien que le prêtre meure d'un cancer, il est non moins crucifié par sa paroisse.
Thus the Curé of Ambricourt's life, by demonstrating that for him there is no authentic Christian faith save an incarnate one, demonstrates an experience of the Incarnation itself, continuing the pattern already established by others of Bernanos' heroes. Unlike those who have gone before him, though, the Curé of Ambricourt is not destined for immolation for the sake of the salvation of one particular sinner. In this sense he differs from Donissan who suffered that Mouchette might be redeemed or Chevance and Chantal who offered themselves for Abbé Cénabre. There is no rigid one-to-one ratio in the supernatural economy in Journal d'un curé de campagne. Certainly the Curé d'Ambricourt suffers in and with Christ, but his "Sainte Agonie" has a broader significance. His Gethsemane is the sad and godless modern society we have already encountered in Un Mauvais rêve and he is crucified by and for the creatures who inhabit it.

Modern Society

At the very beginning of Journal d'un curé de campagne, the Curé, in the midst of a reflection on the nature of the malaise afflicting his parish, meant undoubtedly by Bernanos to be a microcosmic representation of French rural society, makes the following statement:
Ma paroisse est dévorée par l'ennui, voilà le mot. Comme tant d'autres paroisses! L'ennui les dévore sous nos yeux [...].

A page later the priest goes further, carrying his observation beyond parochial boundaries, beyond even French society itself:

Je me disais donc que le monde est dévoré par l'ennui.

The position these observations on ennui occupy at the onset of Journal d'un curé de campagne and the repetition of this theme within the first few pages of the novel obviously underlines its significance. The question of course is: what does ennui imply for Bernanos? Why is it of such importance?

It is apparent that the particular type of ennui of which he writes is less significant in itself than as a symptom of a new and utterly modern phenomenon—the dechristianization of society:

On dira peut-être que le monde est depuis longtemps familiarisé avec l'ennui, que l'ennui est la véritable condition de l'homme. [...] Mais je demande si les hommes ont jamais connu cette contagion de l'ennui, cette lèpre? Un désespoir avorté, une forme turpide du désespoir, qui est sans doute comme la fermentation d'un christianisme décomposé.

As the Curé of Torcy points out, if modern society is sad and vapid it is because it is no longer a Christian society. What then has it become?
In answering Bernanos picks up again the thread of a relentless theme begun in *Sous le soleil de Satan* and *Crépuscule des vieux* with the angry indictment of the médiocres, explored more thoroughly in *L'Imposture* and *La Joie* with a scathing satire of *le cercle Guérin* and the de Clergerie household, strongly implied in the study of the post-war generation in *Un Mauvais rêve*, and exploding in fiery condemnation in *La Grande peur des bien-pensants*: modern society is fundamentally bourgeois.

As *La Grande peur des bien-pensants* has already clearly indicated, Bernanos understood a bourgeois social order as one structured so as to maintain the wealth and privilege of the middle class. This does not mean that all members of modern society are bourgeois but rather that the values which inspire its organization are. As we have already seen in chapter two, the worst of it, as far as Bernanos was concerned, was that Christianity itself had become embourgeoisée, simply another component in the structure.

Since, as Henri Giordan has pointed out, *Journal d'un curé de campagne* represents in large part a meditation on the social problem, it is appropriate that Bernanos devote large segments of his hero's reflections to a critique of bourgeois values and particularly of bourgeois Catholics. The diarist's experience has taught him that bien-pensant Christians have reduced their faith to the level of habit or, worse, to mere words at the service of social stability:
Que serais-je, par exemple, si je me résignais au rôle où souhaiteraient volontiers me tenir beaucoup de catholiques préoccupés surtout de conservation sociale, c'est-à-dire en somme, de leur propre conservation. Oh! je n'accuse pas ces messieurs d'hypocrisie, je les crois sincères. Que de gens se prétendent attachés à l'ordre, qui ne défendent que des habitudes, parfois même un simple vocabulaire dont les termes sont si bien polis, rognés par l'usage, qu'ils justifient tout sans jamais rien remettre en question? C'est une des plus incompréhensibles disgrâces de l'homme qu'il doive confier ce qu'il a de plus précieux à quelque chose d'aussi instable, d'aussi plastique, hélas, que le mot.  

This leitmotif of the reduction of religious faith to empty habit or abstraction is, as we have seen, primordial in Bernanos' thought. In the case of _Journal d'un curé de campagne_ the adoption of religion as a conservative principle is quintessentially exemplified by the Comte who, though technically a member of the nobility is, as his uncle confides to the Curé, a "bourgeois honteux." The Comte characterizes religion thus:

> La religion a du bon, certes, et du meilleur. Mais la principale mission de l'Eglise est de protéger la famille, la société, elle réprouve tous les excès, elle est une puissance d'ordre, de mesure.

Similarly, the Comtesse, also an essentially bourgeois character, insists that her home is a Christian one yet, as we discover, has no love for God. Her religion is com-
posed of a series of external acts designed to justify herself and to satisfy her sense of social obligation:

Je vais à la messe, je fais mes Pâques [. . .].

This particular conception of Christianity is shared as well by the people of the village who, though not necessarily middle class, have, through successive generations, totally assimilated the spirit of convention. In response to the Curé's query about her enthusiasm as she awaits her First Communion, little Seraphita replies: "Ça viendra quand ça viendra." The Eucharist is for her like any of the other required adolescent rituals. In like manner, old Arsène expresses to the Curé a respect for a religious tradition which has shrunk to nothing more than a cultural habit:

Un curé est comme un notaire. Il est là en cas besoin. Faudrait pas tracasser personne.

Convertir . . ., a-t-il repris enfin, convertir . . . J'ai septante et trois ans, j'ai jamais vu ça de mes yeux. Chacun naît tel ou têt, meurt de même. Nous autres dans la famille, nous sommes d'église, Mon grand-père était sonneur à Lyon, défunte ma mère servante chez M. le Curé de Wilman, et il n'y a pas d'exemple qu'un des nôtres soit mort sans sacrements. C'est le sang qui le veut comme ça, rien à faire.

The problem, of course, is, as always, that such a faith is entirely disincarnate. It lacks substance and what Bernanos refers to as "l'héroïsme surnaturel." It is not
a lived faith; it is wanting in the gift of self which Bernanos understands as the stuff of genuine commitment. Says the priest:

Je crois, je suis sûr que beaucoup d'hommes n'engagent jamais leur être, leur sincérité profonde. Ils vivent à la surface d'eux-mêmes [. . .].

As with Abbé Cénabre the problem is not, as the Curé sees it, that these people have lost their faith but, rather, that "elle cesse d'informer la vie [. . .]."

[. . .] on ne saurait donner le nom de foi à un signe abstrait, qui ne ressemble pas plus à la foi, pour reprendre une comparaison célèbre, que la constellation du Cygne à un cygne.

Ironically enough, the most articulate defender of this bourgeois and disincarnate version of Christianity is another priest, the polished and sophisticated Doyen de Blangermont. He is a politically astute advocate of a church of compromise. The Doyen is willing to accept, even to defend, middle-class materialism and avarice for the sake of a social order which, in its turn, guarantees ecclesiastical stability. He, like the members of the cercle Guérin and the countless médiocres who people Bernanos' work, affirms the necessity of a political atmosphere in which the institutional Church might be left free to perpetuate itself in peace. As for those, like the Curé of Ambricourt himself, who heroically seek to incarnate their faith, entering fully into the Christological experience, he condemns them quite unequivocally.
Dieu nous préserve des saints.91

Despite the Doyen's contention that the saint is a danger because he is apt to disrupt the tranquil order of things; the Curé of Ambricourt knows that there is no true order save one:

 [. . .] nous savons qu'il n'est qu'un ordre, celui de la charité.92

Je ne refuse pas leur ordre [. . .] Je lui reproche d'être sans amour.93

The Curé is aware, as are all the Beranosian saints, that love is the essence of incarnate faith and that to love one must participate in the very life of God Himself. As the Curé declares to the Comtesse:

 Il [Dieu] n'est pas le maître de l'amour, il est l'amour même. Si vous voulez aimer, ne vous mettez pas hors de l'amour.94

The young priest observes that bourgeois Christians, on the other hand, reject this necessary communion of the human and the divine, a communion that has its full and ultimate expression in the Incarnation, because they are, in fact, afraid of the divine,95 because, in their obsessive preference for "order," they are horrified by the prospect of "risk" and especially "le risque immense du salut, qui fait tout le divin de l'existence humaine."96 The Curé of Torcy put this perhaps more clearly when he observes that modern society has turned from Christ, not as an historical personage, but as the living God who is "la Voie, la Vérité, la Vie."97
In light of all this it becomes clear why the Curé, in the last entry in his diary, stresses the importance of recognizing one's place within the living Body of Christ:

Il est plus facile que l'on croit de se haïr. La grâce est de s'oublier. Mais si tout orgueil était mort en nous, la grâce des grâces serait de s'aimer humblement soi-même, comme n'importe lequel des membres souffrants de Jésus-Christ.98

If man is to find salvation, Bernanos suggests, he is to find it at the centre of the mystery of his relationship with Christ.

The Mythology of Christendom

To this dechristianized society and to the disincarnate faith of the bien-pensants Bernanos, throughout Journal d'un curé de campagne, opposes another kind of social structure, one dear to his heart and which took on mythical proportions for him: medieval society. The world of thirteenth century Europe, Christendom, has three ardent spokesmen in the novel: Olivier, Dr. Delbende and, especially, the Curé of Torcy.100 Throughout the novel these three establish a clear contrast between the age in which they find themselves and the age for which they nostalgically yearn and in which they perhaps feel they truly belong.

Olivier, the légionnaire, delivers a long monologue on the vocation of the soldier, no longer understood in modern
world. The true soldier, he explains, accepts poverty willingly, serves with honour and, like the true Christian, stands ready to give all.101

Car la loi du monde est le refus--et nous ne refusons rien, pas même notre peau [...].102

On the other hand, the modern world, which, as we have already seen, despises risk, has shown itself hostile to any chevalresque order which would require it. It was, Olivier insists, only medieval society, the age of Christendom, which understood this "gendarmerie du Seigneur Jésus ...",103 a military brotherhood united in the service of Christ, disposed to make the ultimate sacrifice for those whom they served. One is reminded of the fearless knights who peopled Bernanos' early short stories—not men of noble thoughts alone, but also of noble deeds.

Yet the age of the chevalier is past, just as Christendom faded into mythology. The reason, according to Olivier, is quite simple:

Ces soldats là n'appartenaient qu'à la chrétienté, la chrétienté n'appartient plus à personne. Il n'y a plus, il n'y aura plus jamais de chrétienté.—Pourquoi?—Parce qu'il n'y a plus de soldats. Plus de soldats, plus de chrétienté. Oh! vous me direz que l'Eglise lui survit, que c'est le principal. Bien sûr! seulement il n'y aura plus de royaume temporel du Christ, c'est fini. L'espoir en est mort avec nous.104
What does he mean by the "temporal kingdom of Christ"? More, certainly, than an ecclesial fief with Roman administration. He is suggesting, it would seem, that the Middle Ages represented a social order in which Christ was, in fact, integrally woven into its fabric, a kind of social incarnation of God. This is precisely what modern society is not, for such an order requires, according to Olivier, "des soldats,"¹⁰⁵ those willing to risk all, to give all. It is interesting that he closely allies such a "soldat" with the saint:

Le dernier vrai soldat est mort le 30 mai 1431 [. . .]. Le dernier d'une telle race ne pouvait être qu'un Saint.¹⁰⁶

Just as the death of Joan of Arc marked for him the death of a kind of military nobility—the soldier-saint—so the Renaissance marks, he asserts, the beginning of a new period of paganism,¹⁰⁷ the era of avarice, the age of the bourgeoisie and its "protecteurs."¹⁰⁸

Et les dieux protecteurs de la cité moderne, on les connaît, ils dînent en ville, et s'appellent banquiers.¹⁰⁹

Dr. Delbende also recognizes the modern era as one of economic exploitation¹¹⁰ and he too, though not a believer, strongly challenges the Church to create a social order which would incarnate the divine order it professes:

Vous me répondrez que le royaume de Dieu n'est pas de ce monde? D'accord. Mais si on donnait un petit coup de pouce à l'horloge, quand même?¹¹¹
It seems that the doctor will not believe in the divine until he sees a tangible demonstration of its existence in the lives of believers.

However, it is, above all, the Curé of Torcy who most eloquently invokes the spirit of medieval Christendom. Like Olivier, he is particularly attracted to the concept of a society whose substance might have been so imbued with the presence of God that it would have become His collective incarnation:

La faim, la soif, la pauvreté, la jalousie, nous ne serons jamais assez forts pour mettre le diable dans notre poche, tu penses! Mais l'homme se serait su le fils de Dieu, voilà le miracle. Il aurait vécu, il serait mort avec cette idée dans la caboché--et non pas une idée apprise seulement dans les livres,--non. Parce qu'elle eût inspiré, grâce à nous, les moeurs, les coutumes, les distractions, les plaisirs et jusqu'aux plus humbles nécessités.112

Still, the Curé of Torcy, like Olivier, is aware of the irrevocable dissolution of Christendom. Despite their nostalgia, or perhaps because of it, they are conscious of living in a post-Christian age, where society is already in full decline.
3. M. Ouine

Just as Journal d'un curé de campagne is filled with the light which the Curé of Ambricourt brings to its sinners, M. Ouine, a novel which took shape throughout this most fecund period in the author's creative life, is unsparingly tenebrous and rich in prophetic utterances about the doom of a society resolutely seeking the realization of its own death wish. It will in many ways represent the apex of Bernanos' vision of our civilization.

Like Journal d'un curé de campagne, M. Ouine is about a "dead" parish, one of the early titles of the novel actually being Une Paroisse morte. Much more so than Journal d'un curé de campagne, though, its characters are highly metaphorical and the almost allegorical setting in which they move is Bernanos' microcosmic study of a moribund civilization: Medieval Christendom had indeed disappeared and M. Ouine represents the author's terrible depiction of the cité moderne in the fullness of its gloom with its legacy of the Renaissance, its ascent of the intellect over faith, and of science over God. What we have already seen in La Grande peur des bien-pensants, where the ultimate presumption of man is to make himself God and his ultimate blasphemy to deny that God has become Man, is also true of M. Ouine. For it is not divinization by grace but, rather, the sham
of divinization by knowledge through the seemingly limitless 
exercise of the intellect that Bernanos shows us in M. Ouine. 
In this regard, the retired professor of modern languages who 
is the novel's eponymous hero is a supreme metaphor of the 
"civilisation du savoir." 114

M. Ouine

By abandoning himself to the primordial temptation of 
Satan's false promise made to Eve in the Garden to grant 
knowledge of Good and Evil, M. Ouine becomes the prototype 
of his age. As in the Adamic myth, when the Evil One assures 
his victims that by eating of the Tree of Knowledge they will 
become as gods, M. Ouine is devoured from within by intellec-
tual curiosity to discover the meaning of every mystery:

[. . . ] le principe était en lui, la 
conscience du bien et du mal pareille 
à un autre être dans l'être -- ce ver. 115

The thirst for knowledge for its own sake and for the 
power it accords, is the secret of M. Ouine's malevolence. 116 
and brings us full circle in Bernanos' creative vision, back 
to the beginning, back to Sous le soleil de Satan:

Conpaitre pour détruire, et renouveler 
dans la destruction sa connaissance et son désir -- â Soleil de Satan! -- Désir du 
néant recherché pour lui-même, abominable 
effusion du cœur. 117
Certainly, M. Ouine succumbs in full measure to Satan's empty promise for, despite the fact that he is almost an invalid, he assumes the posture of a god. It is thus that Jambe-de-Laine describes him:

Aveuglement servi—honorable, servi à l'égal d'un dieu. Son caprice dispose de nous. 118

William Bush indicates that "le péché de M. Ouine est celui de la pensée." 119 His career as a professor of language had afforded him ample opportunity to expand his intellect, accumulate knowledge and, most of all, to use words:

Car bien parler, jadis c'était son fort. 120

In M. Ouine himself, Bernanos demonstrates a use of words which become mere abstractions spinning in orbit, and an egotistical pursuit of the illusion of mastery.

To be sure, M. Ouine is the personification of what Bernanos understood as the spirit of the Renaissance, the image of the modern era, lost in the abstract. Thus, even as a young boy, his reading of Spinoza did not signify the beginning of an intellectual quest with any goal in mind:

Et certes, ce n'était pas la vérité qu'il souhaitait d'atteindre au terme de ces formules abstraites, d'ailleurs presque toujours incompréhensibles, car il ne se sentait nul appétit de vérité, quelle qu'elle fût. 121
Indeed, the very name which Bernanos accords the old professor, "oui-ne," conveys the basic state of equivocation in which his mind dwells—both "yes" and "no" to everything, a cold indifference to the truth.¹²²

Similarly, though, his intellectual prowess accords him a certain knowledge of good and evil, it does not lead him to a commitment to either. He is a secular, infinitely more perverse version of Abbé Cenabre, dwelling in a limbo of amoral detachment:

[. . .] ses mains qui font indifféremment le bien et le mal, comme celle d'un dieu [. . .]¹²³

Without regard for truth or goodness, yet rapaciously intellectual, M. Ouine aptly and with uncharacteristic truthfulness defines himself as a kind of human receptacle for the storage of information:

Comme ces gelées vivantes, au fond de la mer, je flotte et j'absorbe.¹²⁴

This is of course disincarnate intellectualism, a self-contained, self-perpetuating exercise which exists apart from, and fails to inform, the rest of the person. But worst of all, it is totally devoid of any love.¹²⁵

Thus, sublimely indifferent, the retired professor of modern languages duly refrains from any significant involvement with his fellow man. He observes others from what seems to him "un autre planète,"¹²⁶ his only interest to uncover
"Yeux mobiles secrets," his only goal to vainly attempt to satisfy his insatiable curiosity. As for love, he makes his views quite clear to the Curé of Fenouille:

A la première égratignure de cette main compatissante, je crains bien que toute cette saleté ne vous remonte jusqu'au cœur... Oh! Oh! la sympathie, la compassion, souffrir avec. Pourrir avec, plutôt. 128

Interestingly enough, though the cold workings of M. Ouine's mind have some basis in reality, they are quite often indistinguishable from his dreams. Indeed, his penchant for le rêve which he deliberately nurtures and, as well, which he has in common with many of the other characters of the novel, adds another dimension to the strangely unsubstantial nature of his existence.

Indeed, so important to him are his dreams that he deliberately creates an environment conducive to their development. It is in these terms that he speaks to Steeny of his little room in the chateau where he resides:

C'est moi qui ai voulu son denuement, sa pauvreté grossière si favorable à un demi-sommeil, riche en rêves. 129

Steeny tells Madame Marchal that the dying professor "prétend qu'il s'ouvre au rêve comme un vieux bateau pourri s'ouvre à la mer." 130 Indeed, during the last scenes of the novel, M. Ouine can no longer distinguish dream from reality:
Evidemment, M. Ouine vient de reconnaître que le soir mystérieux qui lui versait sa fraîcheur n'était qu'un rêve, après tant d'autres, un des mille rêves qui remontent, de plus en plus nombreux—innombrables—des profondeurs de sa mémoire.

Bernanos thus picks up the thread of a major theme begun in Un Mauvais Rêve with his study of Emmanuel Gâse and his associates who wandered aimlessly about in their imaginations. This idea of a whole civilization cursed by its dreams is indeed seminal to the author's vision. M. Ouine himself tells us that "on meurt toujours d'un rêve," and this is surely so because the dreams of modern man are an agonizing cul-de-sac. They are the preface to madness.

The Dead Parish

This cancer of le rêve reaches well beyond M. Ouine himself, permeating the dead parish. Jambe-de-Laine is pursued by the phantoms of her madness. Arsène, the mad mayor, dreams of purity, lost innocence and redemption without God, the ultimate human fantasy. Devandomme also is the tormented victim of

[... ] le rêve orgueilleux qu'il avait vainement nourri tant d'années, presque à son insu [...].

He has been devoured by the chimera of the mysterious "petit homme vert" and becomes tragically aware that
le mal vient du cerveau toujours en travail, l'animal monstrueux, informe et mou dans sa gaine comme un ver, pompeur infatigable. 135

Miss and Michèle too lead a kind of fanciful existence in genteel isolation which seems almost to be gathered from the plots and settings of Victorian novels. They find reality offensive. 136

Indeed the parish as a whole, as demonstrated by Bernanos, seems, like M. Quine, to have succumbed entirely to the disease:

Non, personne n'eût pu croire que ce petit village boueux avait une âme et pourtant il en avait une, si pareille à celle des bêtes, lente, rêvuse, toute travaillée d'une curiosité sans objet, pleine d'images à peine distinctes et dont le déroulement presque insensible s'accélère tout à coup, afofe et martyrise le cerveau. 137

The parishioners of the Curé of Fenouille, like those of the Curé of Amricourt, have been consumed by an ennui already defined in Journal d'un curé de campagne as "la fermentation d'un christianisme décomposé." 138 They no longer belong to Christ—the Curé accuses them of having lost even the idea of love. They belong instead to their mortal dreams. 139

Bernanos therefore creates throughout this novel a polarity between the incarnate and the disincarnate. Indeed, it would seem that, in some sense, the preponderant choice by the characters in novel in favour of the disincarnate is made at the expense of the incarnate. This is certainly so in the case of M. Quine:
D'au
d's loin qu'il se souvienne, souffrir
et penser, pour lui, ne font qu'un. Tou-
jours il a fallu au travail de son cerveau
l'accompagnement de quelque blessure,
volontaire ou non, de sa chair. 140

In fact, the theme of the corruption of the body per-
meates the novel. M. Ouine is being "devoured" 141 by illness.
Anthelme dies slowly of a creeping gangrene. Steeny des-
cribes for us Jambe-de-Laine's withered body. 142 The ruined
chateau itself becomes a powerful symbol of physical disinte-
gration. 143 Indeed, death is everywhere, extending beyond
the three inhabitants of the chateau who all die before the
end of the novel, to include the little farm boy, Arsène,
the mayor, and the daughter of Devandomme and her husband.
The priest compares the parish to a body whose blood has
ceased to flow. 144

This polarity is further reinforced by the fact that
several of the major characters actually hate their bodies.
As William Bush writes of M. Ouine:

Indeed, the old master has always had
a singular distaste for the carnal—a
characteristic rather common with "purely
cerebral" individuals [. . . ]. 145

As for Jambe-de-Laine, she admits, speaking of M. Ouine,

Je le déteste autant que mon propre
corps, telle est la vérité. 146

The tormented Arsène, who drifts into madness and
finally kills himself also experiences a profound "dégout" 147
for his body which he furiously and obsessively scrubs in a tub of water. 148

This, of course, repeats the theme of the hatred of the body begun in Un Mauvais Rêve. We recall Olivier’s outburst to Simone in that novel:

Oui vous haïssez votre corps d’une haine sournoise, amère [. . . ] vous méprisez votre corps parce qu’elle est l’instrument du péché.149

Our modern, scientific age, represented in this as in so many of Bernanos’ novels by a doctor, has robbed man of the very idea of redemption and forgiveness without, on the other hand, being successful in liberating him from his sense of guilt, despite all psychiatric efforts.

Thus, though the village doctor refers disdainfully to the mayor as an “obsédé sexuel banal,”150 Arsène himself realizes that his hatred for his body indicates a primordial disorder requiring a remedy in which he does not or cannot believe: “L’eau n’y fait rien, faudrait autre chose.”151

Indeed, the character of Arsène is central to Bernanos’ vision of the future. The Curé of Fenouillet mixes prophecy with bitter accusation during his encounter with the doctor when, in the following long passage, he envisions the advent of countless Arsènes raging against their own flesh:

Oui [. . . ], lorsque vous aurez tari chez les êtres non seulement le langage mais jusqu’au sentiment de la pureté, jusqu’à la faculté de discernement de pur de
l'impur, il restera l'instinct. L'instinct sera plus fort que vos lois, vos moeurs. Et si l'instinct même est détruit, la souffrance subsistera encore, une souffrance à laquelle personne ne saura plus donner de nom, une épine empoisonnée au coeur des hommes. Supposons qu'un jour soit consommée l'espèce de révolution qu'appellent de leurs voeux les ingénieurs et les biologistes, que soit abolie toute hiérarchie des besoins, que la luxure apparaisse ainsi qu'un appétit des entrailles analogue aux autres et dont une stricte hygiène règle seule l'assouvissement, vous verrez!—oui, vous verrez!—surger de toutes parts des mœurs de Fenquille qui tournent contre eux, contre leur propre chair, une haine désormais aveugle, car les causes en resteront enfouies au plus obscur, au plus profond de la mémoire héréditaire.¹⁵²

The Curé adds another, more abstruse, prophecy when he declares that even if modern society, by its systematic elimination of religious concepts, will have rendered nearly impossible any legitimate incarnation of the religious instinct, a perverse incarnation will inevitably take its place:

Et si toute autre issue lui est fermée, il en trouvera une dans la chair et le sang—oui, monsieur—vous le verrez paraître sous des formes inattendues et, j'ose le dire, hideuses, horribles. Il empoisonnera les intelligences, il pervertira les instincts et... qui le sait? pourquoi le corps, notre misérable corps sans défense, ne paierait-il pas une fois de plus la rançon de l'une de l'autre? une nouvelle rançon?¹⁵³

This is perhaps the most mystical aspect of Bernanos' prognosis for the future found in M. Quinc, and one rooted in the idea of incarnation, regardless of the form it takes,
For, according to Bernanos, so powerful is the supernatural reality in man that ultimately it cannot but express itself corporeally.

In the final analysis the Curé Fenouille understands his parishioners as the Curé Ambricourt understood his. They both pastor dead parishes, eaten from within by ennui and sustained, if at all, by "de simples conventions survivant aux croyances."¹⁵⁴ The parishioners of Fenouille too are tenacious subscribers to the fundamental value of the bourgeoisie, that is, "l'argent qui est la dure, l'implacable roi"¹⁵⁵ of their lives. They believe in Science—hence the important position occupied by the doctor who, in his role as psychiatrist-confessor, displaces the priest—and await its total reign; they believe in the mastery which knowledge promises and so M. Ouine enjoys a curious esteem in the village. Yet it is this same Science, as represented by M. Ouine and the doctor, which proclaims the primacy of curiosity over love and which offers them optimism in place of hope. Their faith, like Abbé Cénabre's is an imposture.
In 1936 Bernanos wrote what is perhaps, stylistically, his most successful novel. Its heroine, Mouchette, the daughter of a smuggler, joins the ranks of those other Bernanosian characters—from the first Mouchette to Simone Alfieri—who abandon themselves to "le mensonge, l'unique privilège des misérables." Yet, her pathetic imposture is really a kind of ancestral legacy, a family inheritance. For her lying had been quickly and easily learned as a child:

Tout son petit visage exprime maintenant la résignation et la ruse. Que de fois déjà elle a dû mentir aux gens de la douane! [. . .] Elle était si petite en ce temps-là. Aujourd'hui, sans doute, elle saurait mieux mentir.158

Imposture is the context in which Mouchette has developed, the principle which governs her milieu. It is as much a part of her humiliation as it is a part of her childish vice.

And, as always with Bernanos, le mensonge is accompanied by le rêve, two facets of the same tragic illusion. Indeed she is one of those "nés sous le signe du rêve [. . .]."159 It has worked its destructive magic upon her by which real life recedes and illusion takes on a pseudo reality:

'S'il lui arrive de s'échapper souvent d'elle-même, grâce au rêve, elle a perdu depuis longtemps le secret de ces routes mystérieuses par lesquelles on rentre en soi.160
Hans Urs von Balthazar has suggested that le rêve represents, as well, a kind of eternal call for Mouchette. This may be so. But what is surely significant for Bernanos is that Mouchette's dreams, like Philippe's dreams of heroism in Un Mauvais rêve, the mayor of Fenouille's of purity or Devandhomme's of some ancestral dignity in M. Ouine, are all fated to despair. They are sterile dreams because they have been robbed of any Christian context and meaning. In Bernanos' vision it is only in Christ that dreams, as expressions of man's deepest yearning, may ultimately be realized.

Mouchette, for her part, would seem to have no awareness of her essential dignity as a child of God, which would transform her rêve from hopeless escapism into Hope itself, and so no words sufficient to articulate her vague longings, no concepts to give them meaning. Thus, after her encounter with Arsène, she realizes that she had not really been the dupe of any man but, rather, of her own dream of noble love, and that

[...]

tout ce grand espoir n'était donc que le pressentiment d'une humiliation pire que les autres, bien que de la même espèce.

Created in the shadow of the events which led Bernanos to write Les Grands cimetières sous la lune, Mouchette dies of a dream emptied of meaning (and M. Ouine has already assured us that we do, in fact, die of our dreams), and from a disappointment of her deeply spiritual yearnings because her society has absolutely nothing to offer which might save
her from despair. At school there is only the "Société de gymnastique" and the "leçon de morale du mardi," embellished no doubt with a vestige of Christian vocabulary and sentiment. At home and in the village as a whole nothing remains of Christianity but the empty and habitual gestures of religion:

L'heure qui précède la grand-messe, comme jadis, une heure de recueillement. Il faut des siècles pour changer le rythme de la vie dans un village français. "Les gens se préparent" dit-on, pour expliquer la solitude de la grande rue, son silence. Se préparer à quoi? Car personne ne va plus à la grand-messe. N'importe. A neuf heures, le père n'en passe pas moins sa chemise au plastron raide, en jurant le nom de Dieu, la tête enfouie sous la toile qui se déploie avec des craquements bizarres. Et la mère, qui épluche les légumes pour la soupe, a posé soigneusement sur le lit sa jupe de laine noire à grands plis et ses bas.

Mouchette, like many other characters in Bernanos' novels deprived of their dignity, hates herself. What is significant is that, this self-hatred wholly expresses itself in an intense hatred of the body in particular. This is especially so after her rape at the hands of Arsène:

[. . .] ses mains ne pardonnent pas, refusent de toucher le corps haï [. . .].

[. . .] elle déteste sa figure, elle la méprise.

Elle se mit à haïr cette main comme si elle ne lui eût pas appartenu, comme une chose étrange et détestable.
Why such passionate hatred? It is because she too, like the characters in Un Mauvais rêve and M. Quine, views her body as an instrument of sin. Yet, it is she who has been sinned against. Still:

Quelle faute a-t-elle commise? Hélas! plutôt au ciel qu'elle en eût commis, en effet! Quel remords vaudrait la honte qui la ronge et à laquelle sa pauvre logique ne saurait trouver aucune raison intelligible, car c'est la honte aveugle de sa chair et de son sang. Tout en marchant, elle crispe les deux mains sur la poitrine blessée, la déchire sounoise-ment à petits coups rageurs, comme pour tuer. 170

Despite her innocence, Mouchette, after the rape, perceives her body as a sign of guilt, of deception. With the loss of her virginity she accounts herself as blemished and, like the mayor in M. Quine, she feels she cannot wash it away. "ô souillure ineffaçable." 171 Shortly before the girl's suicide it is the strange old woman who assures her that "Tout ce qui vit est sale et pue." 172

Perhaps Bernanos is attempting to underline the supreme irony of modern angoisse where the incarnate itself has become a sign of despair. In Christ the incarnate is the emblem of man's dignity because the Redeemer himself has taken on the human form, wedding it to his divinity. Without faith in Christ, though, it may indeed seem that what is soiled is forever soiled, and what is lost, forever lost.
Notes

CHAPTER III

1 Bernanos, Cor II, p.86.


3 Ibid.


5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p.6.

7 Ibid., p.7.


9 Bernanos, OE I, p.911.


11 Bernanos, OE I, p.937.

12 Ibid., p.932.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., p.919.

15 Ibid., p.928.

16 Ibid., p.932.

17 Ibid., p.966.

18 Ibid., p.888.

19 Ibid., p.897.

20 Ibid., p.902.

21 Ibid., p.906.
22 Ibid., p.965.
23 Ibid., p.904.
24 Ibid., p.959.
25 Ibid., p.901.
26 Ibid., pp.909-910.
27 Ibid., p. 954.
28 Ibid., p:910.
29 Ibid., pp.968-969.
30 Ibid., p.969.
31 Ibid., p.941.
32 Ibid., p.969.
33 Ibid., p.966.
34 Ibid., p.963.
35 Ibid., p.959.
36 Ibid., p.919.
37 Ibid., p.860.
38 Ibid., p.989.
39 Ibid., 1004.
40 Ibid., p.1021.
41 Ibid., p.1020.
43 Bernanos, OE I, p.994.
44 Ibid., p.964.
46 Ibid., p.1005.
47 Ibid., p.1021.
48 Ibid., p.1020.
49. Ibid., p.1017.


54. Ibid., pp.88-89.


57. Ibid., pp.1050-1051.

58. Ibid., p.1097.

59. Ibid., p.1192.

60. Ibid., p.1034.


63. Ibid., p.1096.

64. Ibid., p.1187.

65. Ibid., p.1187.

66. Ibid., p.1255.

67. Ibid., p.1061.

68. Ernest Beaumont, *op.cit.*, p.91


70. Bernanos, OE I, p.1031.

71. Ibid., p.1032.

72. Ibid.

Bernanos, OE I, p. 1061.

Ibid., p. 1175.

Ibid., 1181.

Henri Giordan, op. cit., p. 102.

Bernanos, OE I, p. 1153.

Ibid., p. 1160.

Ibid., p. 1160.

Henri Giordan, op. cit., p. 102.

Bernanos, OE I, p. 1051.

Ibid., p. 1182.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 1115.

Ibid., p. 1115.

Ibid., p. 1126.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 1084.


Ibid., p. 1147.

Ibid., p. 1216.

Ibid., p. 1158.

Ibid., p. 1105.

Ibid., p. 1116.

Ibid., p. 1046.

Ibid., p. 1258.

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Ibid., p. 95.

Bernanos, OE I, p. 1217.

Ibid., p. 1218.

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Ibid., p. 1218.

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Ibid., p. 1219.

Ibid., p. 1221.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 1094.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 1045.

Ibid., p. 1889.


Bernanos, OE I, p. 1471.


Bernanos, OE I, p. 1423.


Bernanos, OE I, p. 1532.

Ibid., p. 1472.


Bernanos, OE I, p. 1417.

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Bernanos, OE I, p.1472.

Ibid., p.1466.

Ibid., p.1464.

Ibid., p.1362.

Ibid., p.1537.

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Ibid., p.1461.

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Ibid., pp.1442-1452.

Ibid., p.1483.

Ibid., p.1032.

Ibid., p.1486.

Ibid., p.1472.

Ibid., p.1470.

Ibid., p.1361.


Bernanos, OE I, p.1424.

Ibid., p.1518.

Ibid., p.1436.

Ibid., p.969.

Ibid., p.1525.

Ibid., p.1440.
152 Ibid., p.1525.
153 Ibid., p.1510.
154 Ibid., p.1495.
155 Ibid., p.1484.
156 Ibid., p.1305.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid., p.1278.
159 Ibid., p.1240.
160 Ibid., p.1282.
161 Hans Urs von Balthazar, Le Chrétien Bernanos, p.92.
162 Bernanos, OE I, p.1311.
163 Ibid., p.1304.
164 Ibid., p.1265.
165 Ibid., p.1317.
166 Ibid., pp.1326-1327.
167 Ibid., p.1300.
168 Ibid., p.1289.
169 Ibid., p.1340.
170 Ibid., p.1320.
171 Ibid., p.1305.
172 Ibid., p.1332.
CHAPTER IV

THE GLOBAL CONFLICT (1936-1945)

We have seen that there exists, throughout Bernanos' fiction, a fundamental polarity. On one side there are those who are true Christians: by giving of themselves in love for the sake of Christ they make Him incarnate in their own lives, attempting to participate intimately, and from their hearts, in the experience of Calvary, indeed in the very act of Redemption itself. On the other hand there are those who devote themselves to a loveless and disincarnate intellectualism or, worse perhaps, to disincarnate Christianity, a cultural and social form of religion stripped of that personal involvement which Bernanos calls "la charité du Christ."¹

We have seen too that, in his later novels, Bernanos attempted to portray dechristianized modern society. The atmosphere is cold and full of despair and without love, like that hell described by the priest of Ambricourt: "L'Enfer [. . .] c'est de ne plus aimer."² As for the causes of dechristianization, the Catholic bourgeoisie and intellectual priests peopling Bernanos' fictional world need look no further than themselves. Where is their love, Bernanos would ask them, where is the presence of Christ visible in their lives? Where is their participation in the act of Redemption?
Certainly, by the mid-thirties, that Catholic bourgeoisie Bernanos describes in his novels had, throughout Europe, become horrified by the increasing popularity of socialism among the working class, and was in fact becoming more and more vocal in its admiration for totalitarian regimes. Bernanos was outraged by pious Catholics openly applauding Mussolini's murderous adventures in Abyssinia. At the same time their Spanish cousins were flocking to France, decrying the "dechristianization" of the working class and calling for a new "Christian Order." With the scandal of Munich and the beginning of World War II the French Catholic elite would in great numbers turn to Marshal Pétain and themselves also announce a program of "rechristianization."

The free use of such terms as "dechristianization," "rechristianization" and "Christian Order" by a people failing to understand their meaning enraged Bernanos. His own view had always been that dechristianization occurred when Christians failed to love as did Christ, while rechristianization necessarily implied a conversion among Christians themselves to the Gospel imperative of love—that is, to charity. The violent totalitarian rhetoric of hate thus seemed to him hardly compatible with a new "Christian Order."

Ironically, it was to be that hypocrisy of the Catholic bourgeoisie which would serve to crystalize Bernanos' own thought and, virtually abandoning the novel after 1936, he would largely devote himself to a non-fictional articulation of his Christian vision.
1. Les Grands cimetières sous la lune

The Catholic Bourgeoisie in Spain

Bernanos' stay in Majorca from October 1934 to March 1, 1937 coincided with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. In this conflict he recognized a rehearsal for the great confrontations to come.

Majorca, like his experience in the trenches during World War I, proved to be a pivotal event in his life, marking him deeply while adding clarity and depth to his Christian vision, as well as new precision in his expression of it. He himself witnessed to the great personal impact of the events in Majorca when, years later, in 1945, he wrote:

La vérité m'a prise au piège, voilà tout.
En écrivant un livre comme Les Grands cimetières sous la lune, je me suis trop engagé dans la vérité. Je n'en pourrais plus sortir désormais, même si je le voulais.

This first-hand viewing of the tragedy in Spain was indeed to inspire him to formulate in even clearer terms the Christian faith he professed and to define more unambiguously the dual vision of incarnation and "déincarnation" which, as we have seen, had always pervaded his writings.
The Catholic bourgeoisie in Spain, along with the clergy and the episcopacy had been watching with growing alarm as an increasingly vociferous working-class turned from the Church to communism for the answers to their problems. Indeed communism was the specter the bourgeoisie saw looming on the horizon everywhere in Europe during the thirties and their rallying-cry became, as Bernanos records, "le communisme ou nous." Sound instinct warned them, and correctly, of the danger of any radical social reform which would fate them "au néant."  

It is not surprising then that the Spanish middle class saw in Franco and totalitarianism the solution to social unrest. Nor is it surprising that, as they ferociously rose to guard the "Ordre Etabli" of their privileges, that they should don the righteous mantle of religion. Institutional religion was, after all, an important part of the "Ordre" and an indispensable social stabilizer. An alliance of clericalism and Francoism seemed to be the needed bulwark against unwanted upheaval. They therefore denounced the dechristianization of Spain and the godlessness of socialism and began a program of violent, vengeful evangelization.

The cry thus came for a new "Croisade" in defense of "l'Ordre Chrétien," a term which Bernanos had already indicated was synonymous with middle-class affluence and the "dictature de l'argent." What was subsequently launched, by the Spanish bishops, the clergy and the bien-pensants, and
what Bernanos was to witness first hand, was a clerical "Terreur." Thus the clergy, allied with Franco's fascists, authorized the executions of those unable to provide proof of having made their "Easter Duty"---that is, going to Confession and Communion in the Easter season. The shooting of hundreds of such "Suspects," according to Bernanos, was done with the full awareness, and undoubtedly with the tacit approval, of the Archbishop of Palma. This Terror was thus given a "caractère religieux," becoming a sort of purge for Christ.

It did not take Bernanos long to react to this remarkable imposture. This was the hypocrisy he had been decrying in every novel and in every essay he had ever written. It was not communist elements in society which required purging, but the lives of the purgers, not the subversion of unbelievers that posed a threat to Christianity and the Church, but the "esprit de cupidité" of Churchmen themselves. Indeed, Bernanos insists that what was truly obstructing the Kingdom of God was their own love of money:

Vous ne pouvez pas servir Dieu et l'Argent. Oh! je les connais. Si, par miracle, ma réflexion chagrine l'un d'entre eux, il courra chez son directeur qui lui répondra paisiblement, au nom d'innombrables casuistes, que ce conseil ne s'adresse qu'aux parfaits, qu'il ne saurait par conséquent troubler les propriétaires. J'en tombe volontiers d'accord. Je me permettrai donc d'écrire avec une majuscule le mot "Argent." Vous ne pouvez servir Dieu et l'Argent. La Puissance de l'Argent s'oppose à la puissance de Dieu.

The remedy required therefore was not executions of the other side but conversion of the Churchmen.
But then did the Christian bourgeoisie hope to rechristianize the working class? Bernanos sees the idea as preposterous since dechristianization itself was due, not to forces from without the Church, but from a failure from within. He reminds the Catholic middle class that "le christianisme réside essentiellement dans le Christ." It follows that dechristianization is the process which ensues from a neglect by any Christian to make Christ present to the world by a life of love.

Car à la fin des fins, si Dieu se retire du monde c'est qu'il se retire de nous d'abord, chrétiens.

Bernanos labels the "Ordre Chrétien," which the Spanish Bishops and their bourgeois flocks claimed to be defending, a sham. How can there exist a Christian order without Christ? If the working classes are turning to communism, Bernanos asserts, it is because such is their way of expressing their disapproval of a "faux ordre." Indeed, in the second part of Les Grands cimetières sous la lune he gives to unbelievers an eloquent spokesman in an imaginary atheist who delivers a sermon to a congregation of "dévots" and "dévotes" and who lays bare the essence of their imposture. This imaginary unbeliever will also give us the first articulation of Bernanos' key expression "désincarnation."
The Sermon of the Unbeliever

On the feast day of St. Thérèse de Liéieux, the saint closest to Bernanos and on whom he modeled his own Curé of Ambricourt, Chantal de Clergerie; and even to a certain extent Abbé Donissan, Bernanos imagines this unbeliever climbing the steps of the pulpit and delivering a sermon such as he, Bernanos, would like to give.

The incroyant begins by asserting that the faith these Christians profess has had no effect whatsoever upon their lives. They entirely lack the heroism "sang lequel M. Léon Bloy affirmait qu'un chrétien n'est qu'un porc [ ... ]." Where, he asks, besides the external practice of religion, is the evidence of their belief:

Lorsque vous sortez du confessionnal vous êtes "en état de grâce." L'état de grâce ... Et bien, que voulez-vous, il n'y paraît pas beaucoup. Nous nous demandons ce que vous faites de la grâce de Dieu. Ne devrait-elle ravonner de vous? Où diable cachez-vous votre joie?

As the sermon continues the incroyant, ever more the porte-parole of Georges Bernanos, focuses exactly on the essential error of bourgeois piety, so righteous in its rhetoric and so unsubstantial in fact. The problem is fundamental indeed: these dévots and dévôtes do not in fact understand what Christianity is. In response to their distorted understanding, Bernanos sets forth his own vision, radical in its simplicity and entirely orthodox: Christianity
is Christ, and to be Christian requires nothing less than to make Him visible through oneself:

C'est vous, chrétiens, que la liturgie de la Messe déclare participants à la divinité, c'est vous, hommes divins, qui depuis l'Ascension du Christ êtes ici-bas sa personne visible.²⁵

The prayer from the Roman liturgy alluded to is one in which the priest, while pouring water into the wine in the chalice at the Offertory of the Mass, prays that the faithful might come to share in the divinity of Christ even as He has shared in their humanity:

Deus, qui humanae substantiae dignitatem mirabiliter condidisti, et mirabilia reformasti: da nobis, per huius aquae et vini mysterium, eius divinitatis esse consortes, qui humanitatis nostrae fieri dignatus est particeps, Iesus Christus, Filius tuus, Dominus noster: Qui tecum vivit et regnat in unitate Spiritus Sancti. Deus: per omnia saecula saeculorum. Amen.*²⁶

This prayer was one which had particular importance for Berthanos and he would refer to it more than once in the years to come. Indeed, within its few lines, it sums up his whole theology of divinization and the goal of perpetuating the Incarnation of Christ, providing that solid theological basis

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*O God, who didst wonderfully create, and yet more wonderfully renew the dignity of man's nature; grant that by the mystery of this water and wine we may be made partakers of His divinity, who vouchsafed to share our humanity, Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord: who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God: throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.
upon which he constructed the lives of his great spiritual heroes from Donissan to the Curé of Ambricourt.

If Christianity demands participation in the Incarnation then, clearly, dechristianization excludes such participation. With the neologism "désincarnation" Bernanos would therefore coin a term by which he tried to express the essence of dechristianization. He is quite unequivocal: the "désincarnation du Verbe"27 is the very cause of modern Man's misery. Religious faith among believers had become more and more abstract and less and less an incarnation of Christ. In short, for Bernanos, dechristianization is equivalent to "désincarnation," as is seen in this key quotation from the unbeliever's sermon:

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\text{Faute de vivre votre foi, votre foi n'est pas vivante, elle est devenue abstraite, elle s'est comme désincarnée. Peut-être trouverons-nous dans cette désincarnation du Verbe, la vraie cause de nos malheurs.}^{28}
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Indeed, with the phrase "la désincarnation du Verbe" Bernanos not only captured the essential malaise of Spanish Catholicism, but also invented a term which quite succinctly serves to describe the sin of Abbé Cénabre and all the intellectual priests and pious bourgeoisie of his novels. For it was not that the forces of darkness had emerged victorious over Christianity but rather that Christianity, like the slowly disintegrating faith of Abbé Cénabre, had degenerated into a disincarnate idea. By failing to love, to engage what was deep-
est in themselves, the Catholic bourgeoisie had failed to make Christ incarnate and present in their midst. We see thus that the whole of Bernanos' explanation for the decay of European civilization and of the Christendom of old may be found within his coined expression of the "désincarnation du Verbe." Not only does it encompass all of the great Bernanosian themes which the reader of his fiction had hitherto come to know—"mensonge, imposture, don de soi, honneur et enfance"—but it also serves as the foundation for his meditations as Europe stumbled towards war.

2. Munich and Appeasement

In March of 1937 when Bernanos and his family returned from Majorca, he discovered that in his own country, as well as in Spain and Italy, powerful conservative Catholic elements were looking to the European dictators to stem the tide of "déchristianization" among the proletariat, with Charles Maurras' Action Française providing the rhetoric for the fascist cause in France. Like the Spanish fascists, Maurras and his disciples hoped to re-establish the Ordre Chrétien by force. The Action Française had thus expressed strong admiration for Mussolini's Abyssinian campaign of 1935 and supported Franco's cause.
Though the intense Germanophobia of some within the movement surfaced in virulent opposition to the "Hitleromaniacs of the Right," other members sympathized with Nazi goals.

The Action Française had in fact declined from an organization committed to action as in its pre-war years (1899-1914) to one of the principal forces of reaction in France before World War II. Bernanos understood that the devotion professed by Maurras and his disciples for the traditional institutions of France was unequal to the ferocity of their hatred not only of communism but also of any other potential source of social upheaval. Indeed, the fear of anarchy had rallied them to the bourgeois republic they had once vowed to destroy, exposing, beneath the mask of royalist conviction, a conservative preoccupation with "Order." The militant activism which the young Bernanos had so admired prior to World War I had disintegrated into a passive policy of accusations and denunciations.

It was clear to Bernanos that the French Catholic bourgeoisie was now prepared, just as their counterparts in Spain had been, to use religion to lend a mystique to the politics of repression. His writings of this period seethe with angry reaction as he pursues that opposition he had established in Les Grands cimetières sous la lune between the Incarnation and the "désincarnation" of the Word of God. And, as his wrath was always more eloquent when focusing on a personal object, Charles Maurras, as leader of the Action Française, was to take much of its brunt.
Charles Maurras

On the twentieth of July, 1938, Bernanos embarked from Marseilles with his family for Paraguay, though they finally decided to settle in Brazil where they would live throughout the years of the war. From his exile he therefore continued to reflect deeply upon the catastrophic events taking place in Europe, producing large numbers of articles and essays. Indeed from 1938 until after his return to France at the war's end, Bernanos would write, with the exception of the last chapter of M. Quiné in 1940, only non-fiction.

With the election of Charles Maurras to the French Academy in June of 1938, Bernanos could see him becoming the most eloquent spokesman of those trying to "rechristianize" France, that is, as they understood it, to establish a reign of rigid clericalism. What, they reasoned, could be more certain of arresting social upheaval, particularly among the working classes, than firm ecclesiastical authority allied with strong secular government?

Already in 1932, at the time of their bitter public break, Bernanos had clearly identified Maurras as an articulate apostle of disincarnate Christianity. As Bernanos understood it, Maurras preached the necessity of a formalistic Catholicism at the heart of which Christianity itself lay rotting. In this tragedy, of course, lay the roots of dechristianization as Bernanos perceived it: the Maurassian vision of the Ordre Chrétien had nothing whatsoever to do with Christ Incar-
nate or the Gospel imperative of charity since, ironical as it may seem, Maurras himself firmly rejected both Christ and the Gospel. 40 What Maurras advocated in fact had little at all to do with a Christian order, but rather envisioned, as Bernanos put it, "le monde aux mains des clercs, le monde instruit, régi, dominé par les prêtres." 41

Thus in September of 1938 Bernanos had begun to write Nous autres Français which contains a large measure of anti-Maurras invective. However when Maurras was elected to the French Academy Bernanos interrupted that work to write, in January of 1939, a stinging anti-Maurras pamphlet, later entitled Scandale de la vérité, which he hoped to see published in France before Maurras' official reception into the Academy on June 6, 1939. 42

The bourgeois intellectual par excellence, Maurras advanced an intellectualized Christianity, bled of its substance. Its goal was ostensibly to save France from political, social and moral chaos. What it lacked, however, was not only the love of Christ, but even Christ Himself:

En proclamant le bien-fait social de l'Eglise, la majesté de sa hiérarchie, la prudence de ses diplomates, la profonde psychologie de ses casuistes, les services rendus par elle aux humanités gréco-latines, l'opulence raffinée de ses Papes de la Renaissance, croit-on que M. Maurras ait beaucoup de chances de ramener le peuple au catholicisme? C'est par la charité du Christ que les pauvres diables sont introduits dans son Eglise, l'autre voie restant ouverte aux hommes d'Etat et aux banquiers. 43
Maurras imagined "rechristianization" to be a socio-political process, or perhaps nothing more than socio-political theory. This is perhaps what Bernanos viewed as essentially wrong, not only with Maurras' eurious brand of agnostic Catholicism, but with all his other social and political doctrines as well: Maurras had always remained exclusively the theorist and the intellectual. What Bernanos viewed as particularly demonic was that this intellectualism had an almost autonomous life, quite separate and distinct from the man who generated it:

On ne comprend rien à M. Maurras dès qu'on juge l'homme par l'oeuvre car l'oeuvre n'est pas l'homme. C'est pour lui, pour sa propre sécurité que l'auteur de l'Enquête a construit ce vaste système défensif, dont il est à la fois le maître et le prisonnier. Sa doctrine ne l'exprime nullement, elle s'efforce seulement de le justifier, elle travaille inlassablement à fermer toutes les brèches par où nous pourrions pénétrer jusqu'à sa personne, jusqu'à sa vérité profonde, cachée soigneusement à tous, et probablement, hélas, oubliée de lui-même. Sa doctrine le définit comme les théologiens définissent Dieu, non par ce qu'il est, mais par ce qu'il n'est pas.

In this same regard, Bernanos continues, 'Maurras' thought was rarely translated into action:

Et certes on peut trouver que nous attribuons à M. Ch. Maurras un rôle historique que l'histoire ne reconnaîtra pas. Hélas, il n'est en effet que trop vrai: sa pensée ne se marque guère dans les faits. C'est justement pour n'être jamais accomplie, réalisée, pour n'avoir jamais été fécondée par l'acte, qu'une part de cette pensée se décompose sous nos yeux, empoisonne notre air.
What is perhaps most significant is that Bernanos believed he understood why Maurras' intellectualism seemed entirely limited to a theoretical plane. Maurras, he felt, rejected love, and particularly seemed unable or unwilling to love what he preached:

Le malheur de M. Ch. Maurras est de ne pas aimer réellement sa pensée, --à laquelle il s'est lié par des chaînes de fer, --sa force est de haïr la pensée d'autrui, d'une haine vigilante et sagace dont peu d'êtres sont, évidemment, capables.46

Within this analysis of Maurras' disincarnate intellectualism may be found of course the same critique which Bernanos applies to the disincarnate Christianity of the Catholic bourgeoisie, whose spokesman Maurras had become. Their call for rechristianization was inspired by hatred and an obsessive fear of socialism. They neither loved the religious faith they preached nor those to whom they preached it. Again, as he had done in Spain, Bernanos would continue to insist that any rechristianization would have to begin within their own lives, starting with a conversion to the Gospel imperative to love and, consequently, a commitment to participate in the life of Incarnate God.

The Catholic Bourgeoisie

Just as Bernanos attacked Maurras' disincarnate intellectualism, so also did he attack the disincarnate Christianity
of the bourgeois Catholics who comprised a large part of Maurras' following. In fact it may be assumed that Bernanos found the pharisaism of the bien-pensant Catholic more scandalous than Maurras' emasculated Catholicism. He at least had never claimed the name "Christian."

In light of the capitulation at Munich Bernanos pointed accusingly at the Catholic bourgeoisie, along with their allies among the clergy and within the episcopacy, whose monomaniacal fear of socialism far outweighed any reservations they may have had about Nazi barbarity. As he had done in Spain in 1936 he now, in 1938, decried the use of religion as a mantle to camouflage the egoism of a privileged group, for he recognized only too well the French Catholic Right's call for a new "Christian Order." The author of Les Grands cimetières sous la lune, who had seen for himself the corpses of the victims of the new "Order" in Majorca, was not about to be duped in his own country. He recognized their "Chrétienté de carton" for what it was: a simple principle of social discipline:

> Car enfin, je vous le demande: Quelle idée ce peuple peut-il se faire de la Chrétienté, de l'Ordre Chrétien? A la rigueur, les plus curieux savent quelque chose de nos dogmes. Je vous le demande: L'idée peut-elle leur venir que l'Eglise est autre chose que le Temple des Définitions du Devoir, une vaste Ecole de Morale et de Religion? "Et nos œuvres" me direz-vous. Oh! pardon! L'assistance aux malades, aux infirmes, aux vieillards, aux chômeurs, l'instruction des enfants, l'éducation postscolaire--l'État moderne prend à charge tout cela.
These "Christians" of the Right lacked, as always according to Bernanos, love. Had they, he laments, but "une once de charité," it would have saved them from their terrible imposture. Their tragedy was that they disregarded their very reason for being: "Il n'y a qu'une erreur et qu'un malheur au monde, c'est de ne pas savoir assez aimer." Love in the sense in which Bernanos means it, as we have seen many times, is synonymous with the gift of self:

Les vrais chrétiens disposent d'un moyen très efficace de se distinguer des autres, ils n'ont qu'à pratiquer la charité, celle du coeur, la seule que Tartuffe ne puisse feindre, car s'il est capable de faire l'aumône, il ne sait pas aimer. Le don de soi-même est un témoignage assez éclatant de la vérité qu'on prétend servir.

The true Christian distinguishes himself from the pharisee by love put into action.

Bernanos specifies moreover that this actualized love is in fact an incarnation of the love of Christ himself and that "Sans la charité du Christ, un chrétien n'est pas chrétien." Bernanos puts it quite simply when he indicates that what Maurassian Catholicism lacked was Christ:

À nos yeux la France maurrassienne est aussi creuse, aussi vide que son catholicisme sans Christ, son Ordre catholique sans la grâce.

It becomes clear that Bernanos saw the crisis in France at the time of the Munich humiliation, when the middle class
seemed more and more inclined to seek shelter in totalitarianism, as essentially a spiritual crisis. The bien-pensant bourgeoisie was, ironically, attempting to create a "cardboard" Christian social order to hide their fundamental dechristianization.

Indeed Bernanos believed that dechristianization was at the very root of France's pre-war moral collapse and he had already arrived at equating dechristianization with the "désincarnation du Verbe" among Christians. It is thus to be expected that in 1939, on the very threshold of the Second World War, he places the European crisis plainly within this familiar perspective:

Nous répétons sans cesse, avec des larmes d'impuissance, de paresse et d'orgueil que le monde se déchristianise. Mais le monde n'a pas reçu le Christ--non pro mundo rogo--c'est nous qui l'avons reçu pour lui, c'est de nos cœurs que Dieu se retire, c'est nous qui nous déchristianisons, misérables!

As Bernanos meditated upon the great political and moral crises of the immediate pre-war period, he recalled that the most humble of human truths, imperiled by the pervasive "lie" of Maurassian France, shared in the divinity of Christ:

Mais moi, je ne me lasse...
The quotation in Latin from his favorite liturgical prayer, which we have already encountered in *Les Grands cimetières sous la lune*, is thus again used here to recapitulate in three words Bernanos' very orthodox theology of man's perpetuation of the Incarnation of God by sharing in Christ's divinity even as He has shared in our humanity. Therefore, Bernanos suggests that, in order to determine his authenticity, each Christian, called as he is to be an incarnation of Christ, must ask himself this question: "Quelle opinion peut se faire d'ù Christ et de sa doctrine l'homme de bonne volonté qui m'observe et me sait chrétien?" 58

Wherever Bernanos writes of the Incarnation of Christ, dark warnings about the "désincarnation du Verbe" are usually found in close conjunction. The importance he accords this phenomenon of "désincarnation," as he attempts to understand a disintegrating Europe lunging toward the precipice, cannot be too strongly emphasized. Having already written in regard to Spain that "désincarnation" was the true cause of modern human misery, in Brazil he unequivocally reaffirms this conviction concerning the modern world:

Le malheur et l'opprobre du monde moderne, qui s'affirme si drôlement matérialiste, c'est qu'il désincarne tout, qu'il recommence à rebours le mystère de l'Incarnation. 59

For, at the farthest limits of "désincarnation," Bernanos envisions a demonic incarnation:
La force et la faiblesse des dictateurs est d'avoir fait un pacte avec le désespoir des peuples. J'oserais dire, faute de mieux, dans le langage des dévots: Ce pacte est précisément celui de Satan. Les peuples ont fait de leur désespoir un dieu et ils l'adorent. Nous avons assez vécu pour voir le désespoir prendre chair—et incarnatus est. Nous le verrons peut-être mourir et ressusciter le troisième jour, car le diable est un habile singe de Dieu. 60

Into the vacuum created by the absence of Christ among dechristianized modern man has surged despair, and he, in desperation, turns toward the new Messiahs of totalitarianism. Hitler, Mussolini and Franco were not seen by Bernanos as manifestations of new resolve and national vigour, but rather as demonic incarnations of the despair of whole peoples.

In the face of German militarism and intimidation at Munich, France, morally enfeebled and unwilling to accept "les risques immenses du baptême," 61 seemed to Bernanos prepared to accept defeat before the battle had begun. The willingness to risk had given way to the penchant for security, honour had acquiesced to fear. If the dishonour of Munich had grieved Bernanos, we might well understand how deeply the events of the next two years were to affect him.
3. The "Drôle de Guerre"

The first year of the war, the so-called drôle de guerre, was a period which saw the German invasion of Poland, Norway and Denmark, aggression which provoked little reaction on the part of the Allies. Bernanos was painfully aware that the spirit of appeasement was still flourishing and sapping his country's resolve to fight. As usual in his polemical works, his prose during this time became most passionate when he reflects upon "la bourgeoisie française catholique" whom he continued to see as abdicating the responsibilities of their Christian calling and who, by their open admiration for European totalitarian dictatorships, were contributing to France's moral paralysis.

It is clear that Bernanos believed that a collusion between "l'opinion catholique" and "la politique romaine" had been largely responsible for creating a climate of appeasement in the name of peace, and widespread support for fascist movements throughout Europe in the name of Church and Country. The State, with its promises of a prosperous and stable future had become, indeed, for many Catholics, the new Messiah. This explained, for example, the unqualified support that had been accorded Mussolini's adventures in Ethiopia and why "[. . .] la bourgeoisie française catholique [a] regardé froidement bouillir des nègres [. . .]."
What was perhaps worse, in Bernanos' judgement, was that Church policy, the politics of "le Moindre Mal," seemed ready to lend its official support to this duplicity among the laity. That Pope Pius XII, for example, could condemn Soviet aggression in Finland in 1939, while having remained silent about Italian aggression in Abyssinia or Spanish aggression in Albania, was intolerable to Bernanos who saw the half-truth as perhaps worse than the outright lie. When the War erupted he remained incredulous before the seeming refusal of official Church organs to condemn the Nazi drive into Poland unequivocally:

[... ] si Pie XI n'était pas mort, à temps, le nazisme eût peut-être commis la folie de provoquer les martyrs. Maintenant tout est rentré dans l'ordre, et il est infiniment probable que les articles un peu sibyllins de l'Observatoire Romano n'auraient pas empêché les soldats catholiques allemands de fêter joyeusement leur entrée à Varsovie, ni même d'y trouver la bière fraîche.

For their part, the Catholic bourgeoisie, the "Bons Messieurs" and "Bonnes Damés," justified by the casuistry of "les Bons Pères," wished for nothing more than an era of tranquility favourable to their prestige and profits. Bernanos was scandalized by their attraction to the allurements of the totalitarian state, inspired by their fear of socialism, and led by Maurras and the Action Française. He points out the supreme irony of this alliance: whereas the Catholic bourgeoisie saw dechristianization everywhere, except within themselves, the Modern State, whose goal remained the ultimate destruction
of Christianity, feared nothing from the pious middle class, whom it considered as already thoroughly dechristianized:

L'Etat moderne est financièrement anti-chrétien, il n'a été anti-clérical que le temps qu'il a fallu pour obtenir, par ce chantage, votre neutralité bienveillante. [...] Il n'espère plus détruire le christianisme, ou du moins il reconnaît que l'entreprise sera beaucoup plus longue et difficile que ne l'avaient imaginé les démagogues. En attendant, fort des expériences passées, soyez sûr qu'il ne perdra plus son temps à chagriner des citoyens paisibles, respectueux, qui ne demandent, en somme, que de pratiquer une religion dont l'un des préceptes est celui de la soumission au pouvoir établi.73

The real motivating force in the lives of these "citoyens paisibles," in both politics and religions, was their predilection for security above all else. Bernanos again stresses the point that the Catholic bourgeoisie had become dechristianized precisely because their much vaunted piety was a matter of appearances only, and he sarcastically suggests that they had done well to turn to totalitarianism, making a god of the State, since only a miracle of divine intervention could possibly give substance to their disincarnate Christianity:

Il ne faudrait pas moins d'un dieu, en effet, pour donner une réalité à des apparences et faire quelque chose de rien.74

Indeed, Bernanos asserts, it was, ironically, the very disincarnate nature of their Christian faith which allowed the Catholic bourgeoisie the remarkable illusion that not only was a Catholic renaissance taking root throughout Europe but also that the "world"—that is the secular powers—seemed once again
open to "Catholic" ideas:

Tout au long du dernier siècle, il [le monde] a feint de n'imposer qu'une idéologie à l'autre [ . . . ]. Or le monde a probablement ses raisons de traiter avec vos idées. Ce ne sont pas vos idées qu'il craint [ . . . ]. Bref, vos idées, jadis bafouées, sont maintenant "prises au sérieux," comme vous aimez à dire, et cette espèce de renaissance coïncide mystérieusement avec la plus hideuse crise morale que le monde ait connue, et qui témoigne d'un obscurcissement si universel de la charité du Christ qu'elle évoque, même à vos imaginations réalistes, la tribulation des derniers temps.

C'est de la sainte charité du Christ que le monde a peur, non de vous, ni de vos "idées." 75

That Christianity for most had become an abstraction and no longer an incarnation of the charity of Christ explained for Berñanos why an apparent revival of the popularity of Catholic "ideas" in intellectual and even political circles could be accompanied by such violence and hatred. Such was especially the case in Spain and Italy.

The fact is that Berñanos felt that the "world" (meaning everything which is not of Christ) and certainly the "prince" of this world (that is Satan himself) had reached a new intensity in their conspiracy against Christianity. It was not a conspiracy which involved direct persecution of Christians but rather, more insidiously, an erosion of the all-important incarnational nature of the Christian faith. By accepting, or appearing to accept Christian "ideas" and ignoring Christian holiness, the "world" was seducing mediocre believers who found it less taxing to espouse abstractions than to live the Gospel:
Le monde sait bien, au fond—du moins le prince de ce monde—que le christianisme n'est pas une idéologie, mais il agit constamment, systématiquement, comme s'il en était une. Il épargne sa chair et son sang, parce qu'il ne veut plus lui reconnaître, publiquement, ni sang ni chair.76

Again it is not the rejection of Christianity by the working class which is seen as the source of European dechristianization but rather this treacherous transformation of Christianity itself, much to the delight of the "world," into an ideology. For Bernanos Christianity could never be a mere concept, nor simply a code of moral living, nor even the repository of the teachings of Christ. It is the living Christ, incarnate and manifest in the lives of believers.

It is therefore important to make clear that, whatever the political crisis on which Bernanos reflected during these turbulent years, all was viewed in terms of the problem of "désincarnation." Certainly there can be no question that Bernanos considered each succeeding disaster, whether the war in Spain, the dishonour at Munich, or the general moral paralysis in France engendering the spirit of appeasement—as certain symptoms of European dechristianization.

Thus, however important the various circumstance of world affairs sparking Bernanos' numerous polemical writings, one is almost tempted to see them as topical pretexts for repeating that recurring and compelling leitmotif. William Bush puts it most strongly in his commentary on the writings of this period: "C'est la volonté de perpétuer dans le temps l'Incarnation de Jésus-Christ qui obsédait Bernanos."77
4. **Vichy**

With the fall of France in 1940 and the establishment of a collaborationist government under Marshal Pétain, Bernanos turned his fury from the scandal of Munich to the scandal of Vichy, though he placed them on the same plane: "L'esprit de Munich est devenu l'esprit de Vichy." From the little café in Barbacena where he tells us he composed most of the hundreds of articles which comprise his war-time writings, Bernanos fought his own war against those who had brought dishonour to France.

To Pétain and his associates in government, as well as to the "bourgeois élite" who supported Vichy, Bernanos applied epithets which in his mind characterized their ignominy: "imposteurs," "tartuffes," "pharisiens." Throughout the writings of this period these terms appear with regular frequency. Vichy, though Christian in appearance, is judged as synonymous with self-righteous hypocrisy, dishonourable and cowardly in substance.

Indeed Bernanos was aware that many of the "grand bourgeois" and "intellectuels" who had allied themselves with Pétain and his regime were "des gens d'église," a pejorative term Bernanos applied to the modern Pharisees of the Roman Church. They are the spokesmen of the "opinion catholique," a bourgeois and largely formalist Catholic perspective:
Vichy's highly moralistic and religious facade enraged Bernanos. He perceived it as a terrible misrepresentation to the world of France's true spiritual richness. The regime's promotion of a patriotism of almost mystical proportions and its emphasis on moral renewal became a particular object of the polemicist's scorn:

[... ] leur prestige est celui de l'Ordre, de la Morale, de la Religion. Beaucoup d'entre eux ont été élevés dans le catholicisme; les gens d'Eglise les en ont d'ailleurs honnêtement instruits. Malheureusement ce ne sont pas leurs leçons qu'ils ont retenues -- la plupart restent de médiocres paroissiens -- c'est l'esprit des gens d'Eglise qui les a marqués [...].

That spirit, of course, was the spirit of pharisaism. Bernanos cynically suggests that, despite the religious veneer, the pious bourgeois of Vichy served only one "Sainte Trinité": "Propriété, Travail, Epargne."

Indeed, it was, according to Bernanos, its devotion to this particular "trinity," and an obsessive fear of the "menace révolutionnaire" which had driven the French bourgeoisie into the arms of Hitler, as it had already driven the Italians to Mussolini, the Spaniards to Franco and the Portuguese to
Salazar. The slogan of the French middle-class had become: "Plutôt Hitler que les réformes sociales qui nous coûteraient tant d'argent!"  

Bernanos thus saw Vichy's claim to be attempting to reintroduce social order and moral rectitude into the fibre of French society as spurious. Nor did he accept Pétain's pious claim that France's defeat and subjugation provided her the opportunity to exorcise her sins of the past. Beneath the moralistic rhetoric Bernanos believed he detected the same fear of risk among those who had hitherto refused "de mourir pour l'Autriche", de 'mourir pour les Tchèques', de 'mourir pour Dantzig', who, in fact, were unwilling to put their lives in peril for any cause, and who were more than content to live quietly "sous le protectorat nazi, pourvu qu'il assure la sécurité de leurs personnes et de leurs biens."  

The emergence of a cooperative French satellite of Nazi Germany undoubtedly represented for Bernanos the most horrifying manifestation of the European crisis, a crisis which he continued to see in essentially spiritual terms--"une crise de la conscience européenne déchristianisée [. . .]." And it must always be remembered that the term "déchristianisée" is synonymous in Bernanos' mind with Christians' firm refusal to attempt to participate in the Incarnation through charity.  

In fact, so thoroughly absorbed had Bernanos become by the problem of "désincarnation" that he had come to see Nazism itself not only as essentially a challenge to the Christian conscience but to Christ himself, since for Bernanos the
Christian conscience is Christ made incarnate in the lives of his disciples:

L'Allemagne a porté ce défi à la conscience chrétienne, mais la conscience chrétienne, c'est le Christ, et le Christ ne répond pas aux défis ; ce sont les chrétiens qui les relèvent [...]. Pour tout chrétien digne de ce nom, le mystère de l'Incarnation n'est pas celui de l'Exaltation des dévots, des dévots et de leurs pasteurs, mais celui de l'Humiliation divine. En daignant se cacher parmi nous, chrétiens, Dieu n'ignorait pas -- si j'ose dire -- qu'il n'y serait pas facilement reconnu. ... 98

Bernanos thus supplies the key to his vision of the true nature of the global struggle between Nazism and its foes. It is a struggle between the powers of darkness and Christ, made incarnate in the lives of true Christians. Any true victory over Nazism would therefore be a victory of the Incarnate Word of God. Conversely, defeat, the "désincarnation du Verbe," would necessarily be measured by the failure of Christians to incarnate Christ by lives of heroic charity. This is precisely what he meant when, in a letter to Jorge de Lima dated January 1941, he insisted that all of the great political and military issues of the war were in fact nothing but camouflage to hide the essential conflict:

Il faut distinguer dans toutes les formes des guerres actuelles le but principal des puissances du mal -- le Christ incarné 99

This consequently explains Bernanos' deep concern about Vichy which represented for him "la peste de Pharisaïsme," 100
"cette forme supérieure de l'imposture." The hallmark of the Pharisee is his passion for the letter of the law and his conscious neglect of its spirit, in this case a formalistic adherence to Christian observance and law without any attempt to live the mystery it preaches. It is for this that he condemns the "élites françaises" who advocated Pétain's regime:

Ils donnent à notre peuple le scandale de prétendre restaurer le Travail, la Famille, la Religion, avant d'avoir restauré l'Honneur. Ils se disent docteurs en morale chrétienne, et ils prêchent la contrition sans le ferme propos, l'absolution sans restitution ni réparation. Ils vénèrent la Lettre et ils trahissent l'Esprit.

Skill in moral duplicity enabled these "Pharisees," while professing "d'admirables vertus," to exterminate their political opponents in the name of "la Morale, la Propriété, la Religion." It was, for example, their much practiced casuistry, Bernanos suggests, which allowed the "gens respectables" of Vichy, guided by "des Bons Principes, des Bonnes Mœurs," to suppress divorce while legalizing political murder.

Bernanos points out that, characteristically, Vichy's Pharisees made extensive use of Christian rhetoric and exploited certain Christian ideas. Yet, alluding again to the essential idea of ejus divinitatis esse consortes in his favorite liturgical prayer, he accuses them precisely of having betrayed the very essence of the Christian mystery, the Incarnation itself. Busy justifying themselves they chose deliberately
to ignore the human suffering around them, that is Christ still hanging on the Cross:

L'humanité rachetée, rendue participante à la divinité comme nous l'enseigne la liturgie de la messe, est pendue à la croix par des clous, mais qu'importe aux Pharisiens puisqu'ils ont payé la dîme et respecté le Sabbat?\textsuperscript{112}

Bernanos' criticism of this type of formalistic Christianity must be seen, in part at least, in terms of its refusal to participate in, or even to recognize, the suffering of the incarnate Body of Christ. Their unwillingness to love the members of this "Body" is at the source of their denial of the Incarnate Word and, consequently, of the "désincarnation du Verbe" in their own lives.

It is in this light as well that we must see his further condemnation of influential Catholic elements in Vichy for their announced intention to "rechristianize" France and to purge it of anarchistic and atheistic influences. This so-called "Catholic renaissance" which Vichy was attempting to foster, Bernanos asserts, was in reality nothing more than a political-social creed designed to appeal to the bourgeois imagination and the conservative intellect:

\begin{quote}
De cette Renaissance catholique je parlerai un jour plus longuement. Qu'il suffise pour aujourd'hui de noter qu'elle semble avoir plus excité les cerveaux qu'elle n'a réformé les cœurs et les volontés. Chacun reconnaît, avec le Maréchal Pétain, que l'esprit de sacrifice a manqué aux générations de la dernière guerre. Je me permets d'en conclure que certains milieux ecclésiastiques égarés.
\end{quote}
Again he declares that a Christianity which is not prepared to risk, to suffer for the sake of love, which is not lived, is patently false.

Vichy's pseudo-Christian veneer irked Bernanos but it did not surprise him. The bien-pensants are consistently guilty of this kind of opportunism in his writings and the pious bourgeoisie of Pétain's regime were no exception:

Lorsqu'elle a un besoin pressant de moralé, elle en emprunte au christianisme, juste ce qu'il faut, ni plus ni moins [...].

In order to camouflage their self-serving materialism the "Pharisees" exploit "le vocabulaire du Moral et du Spirituel"; they put "le vocabulaire chrétien au service de leurs intérêts et de leurs prestige"; they extract maxims from the Gospel and extol certain selected Christian principles. Yet Bernanos reminds us that disincarnated principles are totally inefficacious:

Mais les principes à eux seuls ne sauraient sauver personne; les principes ne sauvent pas sans les hommes.

What Vichy's bien-pensants lacked was a willingness to act. They apparently failed to appreciate that the Christian
faith is "une vie entière à engager, un risque à courir [. . .]."

The virtuous rhetoric which the Catholic bourgeoisie borrowed from the Church and the Gospel was sound in itself: it was they themselves who were wanting:

Les principes valent; c'est eux qui ne valent rien. Ils font ce qu'ils ont toujours fait: ils définissent au lieu d'agir. 120

There was certainly no shortage of calamities on which Bernanos might have focused his concern during the early years of the war. Yet it is interesting to note that, in 1941, amidst all the terrible tragedies which had befallen his beloved France and a subjugated Europe in general, Bernanos was able to write that the great misfortune of that unhappy period was the preponderance of such disincarnate Christianity. 121 It was a bitter irony that those who called most loudly for the "rechristianization" of France were in fact the ones most in need of rechristianization:

Ce sont les chrétiens qui auraient besoin de se "rechristianiser," c'est-à-dire de vivre leur foi, de la vivre réellement, substantiellement, héroïquement, au lieu de la compromettre dans toutes sortes de combinaisons politiques, comme s'ils désiraient s'en servir au lieu de la servir. 122

For Bernanos the Catholic élite moreover had failed in its attempt to bolster the moral fibre of French society. They had argued and reasoned too much and loved too little 123 , failing to practice what they preached:
C'est pourquoi nous devons regretter de voir s'accroître sans cesse le nombre de ceux qui sollicitent, réclament, exigent la vénération non pour ce qu'ils valent, ni pour ce qu'ils ont, mais précisément pour ce qu'ils devraient être et ne sont pas, pour ce qu'ils "représentent" et n'ont malheureusement pas le courage "d'incarner." 124

With the rise of the totalitarian "Etat pâles" 125 and the unabashed willingness of many Catholics to surrender to such a State, ironically in the name of moral order, Bernanos felt increasingly obliged to emphasize this distinction between bourgeois Christianity and orthodox Christianity. Thus, in November of 1941, in the last long essay in a collection later published as the Lettre aux Anglais, he was able to conclude this lengthy series of meditations on Vichy and the new European order with a definition of the essence of the disagreement between himself and the "Catholic elite":

Car voilà bien le noyau du débat. Nous parlons tous ensemble de la Justice, mais ce n'est pas à la même Justice que nous pensons. La mienne est celle de l'Evangile et j'admets volontiers qu'elle puisse paraître singulièrement paradoxale aux professeurs de Droit, d'Economie Politique et de Physiologie. C'est sur ce paradoxe que se fonde notre liberté. Le Christianisme divinise l'homme. 126

It would seem that the last sentence sums up Bernanos' orthodoxy which he sets in opposition to the hypocrisy of Vichy. Certainly it recapitulates, with its verb "diviniser" the preceding 200 pages of text, as well as summarizing the much repeated theme dominating Bernanos' writings of this period. For the centrality of the saving union of God and Man in the
Incarnation is always there with the true Christian being called to share in the divinity of Christ by manifesting the charity of Christ so as to perpetuate His Incarnation. That, quite simply, was what Bernanos meant by "living" one's faith.

5. With Victory in Sight

Beginning in approximately 1942, a new optique seems to emerge in the war-time polemical articles as Bernanos cast his prophetic gaze toward the post-war period. The United States had entered the war on the side of the Allies at the end of 1941 and Bernanos appears to have felt, as did many, that an Allied victory would henceforth be simply a matter of time: "[...] il faut d'abord comprendre que Hitler ne compte plus gagner la guerre [...]".127

The nature of the coming peace thus began to preoccupy him, especially after the Allied advance in French North Africa in 1942 when the Americans began openly to seek the cooperation of Général Giraud, de Gaulle's rival, and of Admiral Darlan, Pétain's deputy and heir apparent. Bernanos suspected that a dishonourable peace, "une paix allemande"128 was in the wind. He believed that the spectre of compromise was again arising, as it had at Munich.129 All of these
concerns, imagined or real, gave him cause to be anxious about the period which would follow the military collapse of Germany.

Still, perhaps the most important factor in the development of this anxiety was Berghaus’ awareness of America’s faith in her vast industrial output as she confronted Nazi Germany. He was being forced, by the fact of American military dominance of the Allied effort in the West, to consider the presence on the international scene of an immensely powerful modern state, bound to influence the future of Europe, and appearing almost religiously materialistic. At the same time, he was aware that, on the Eastern Front, the might of the Russian Bear was also growing with each passing month.

The war thus seemed to him to be becoming more and more an economic struggle and less and less a moral one. He clearly foresaw the rise of the two modern “superpowers,” the United States and the Soviet Union, and feared that their materialism, “la prémauté de l’économique” would dominate the world of the post-war period. There was no appreciable difference, he felt, between the capitalist state “dominé par les trusts,” and the communist state, “l’Etat devenu l’unique trust, le trust des trusts”:

Nous comprenons déjà, nous comprendrons mieux encore demain, que les États-Unis et la Russie peuvent parfaitement s’entendre et se passer d’intermédiaire, car leur actuelle conception du monde, de la vie, du bonheur, d’une civilisation égalitaire et materialiste aussi bien que leur foi également naïve en l’idole Machine et en son prêtre l’ingénieur, les rapprochent beaucoup plus que ne les séparent des nuances idéologiques qui d’ailleurs tendent chaque jour à s’effacer.
Bernanos used the term "machine," it would seem, to sum up in a word the increasingly arrogant primacy of technology in a positivist age. Already in 1942 he had written:

Ce n'est pas assez de dire que le Monde des Machines doit être sauvé. Il devrait d'abord être racheté. Racheté est bien le mot qui convient car sa situation vis-à-vis de l'argent est exactement celle du débiteur insolvables que la loi romaine faisait esclave du créancier. L'Homme des Machines n'est pas seulement menacé d'appartenir un jour aux Machines, il leur appartient déjà, c'est-à-dire qu'il appartient à son système économique qui lie de plus en plus étroitement son sort à celui des machines, à la construction des machines, au développement et au perfectionnement des machines.134

As the war continued, and with the increased emphasis on industrial production and technological advancement as the means to total victory, Bernanos began to feel that both war and peace in modern society had become the products of economic, and not human forces. His growing fear was that the post-war period would bring the advent of a powerful world technocracy, administered by the United States and Russia, and well suited to contemporary man's fear of commitment. Thus in 1944 he wrote:

Mais les politiques n'osent pas avouer qu'après avoir subi la guerre, ils sont déjà résignés à subir aussi la paix, que la guerre ou la paix ne sont plus maintenant des œuvres humaines, voulues par l'homme, mais deux aspects de la même fatalité qui entraîne vers d'autres catastrophes une humanité qui ne veut plus ni le mal, ni le bien, ni la vie ni la mort, et dont le rêve inavouable,
Bernanos viewed technological absolutism as the most recent development in a long process of dehumanization begun with the nineteenth-century bourgeois devotion to Science. Thus in an article written in 1944 he castigates this "religion de la Science" and once again places his concerns about contemporary man in the, by now familiar, context of the dialectic between incarnation and "désincarnation":

Thus in 1944 we find this indirect reference to the liturgical phrase, *ejus divinitatus esse consortes*, which seems to have haunted Bernanos since he first alluded to it in 1936. But then does it not stress the importance accorded Man by the
Christian God who willed to become Man, emphasizing the primacy of Man over all abstractions and all other forms of creation, animate or inanimate? Moreover, by associating this prayer, which recalls Man's primary vocation to participate in the Incarnation, with his own prognosis of technocratic and economic totalitarianism, Bernanos demonstrates, yet again, his prevailing preoccupation with the Incarnation. In fact, there seems to be no concern of Bernanos which, either directly or by association or implication, does not find itself related to this fundamental concept.

The movement toward the ascendancy of the Machine over Man, and of the economic over the human, is actually seen by Bernanos as the inevitable consequence of the modern tendency to sacrifice the incarnate to the disincarnate. Indeed Bernanos seems to be suggesting that modern man despises himself as an incarnate being, preferring to create a hierarchy in which abstractions—Nation, State, Humanity, Progress, etc.—occupy a place of honor far above man himself. This is surely the very kind of thing Bernanos had had in mind when he had written five years earlier:

Le malheur et l'opprobre du monde moderne, qui s'affirme si drôlement matérialiste, c'est qu'il désincarne tout, qu'il recommence à rebours le mystère de l'Incarnation.

Indeed, the religion of science—and particularly its most recent form, economic dictatorship—is seen by him as an assault upon man and upon Christianity, the religion of God-made-Man.
As the war drew to a close Bernanos asked probing questions. Was the choice for mankind to be between "la dictature des faux dieux et la démocratie des robots"? Had the democracies fought the dictatorships only subsequently to sacrifice their liberty to "les véritables maîtres du monde moderne, les tout-puissants contrôleurs des marchés du blé, du fer, de la houille ou du pétrole [. . .]"? Was liberty, in fact, doomed in a "civilization technique"?

Though Bernanos' prophecies seem pessimistic he himself did not despair. Instead, his pleas for freedom become even more impassioned as Germany's fall appeared imminent and peace within sight. Without liberty man would be destined to become the very image of the machine he serves, for "L'homme libre, seul, peut aimer." 

This, in fact, is the key to understanding the important role freedom plays in Bernanos' spiritual vision—whether it be freedom from economic, technological or political tyranny. For Bernanos understood that freedom is precisely the freedom to love, and it is by loving that we can participate in the Incarnation of Christ. Thus freedom itself is seen as a vital prerequisite to this participation:

Il ne s'agit pas de savoir si elle [la liberté] favorise plutôt le mal que le bien, car Dieu est maître du mal comme du bien. Il me suffit qu'elle rende l'homme plus homme, plus digne de sa redoutable vocation d'homme, de sa vocation selon la nature, mais aussi de sa vocation surnaturelle, car celui que la liturgie de la messe invite à la participation de la divinité—divinitatis consortes—ne saurait rien renoncer de son risque sublime.
After the war, in Bernanos' view, the democracies would have to fight, with as much, or greater courage and intensity as they had demonstrated in the struggle against totalitarianism, to guard their freedom. It will not be enough, he writes in 1945, simply to talk or write about freedom:

Il existe aussi des gens qui se paient d'idées. Qu'importe l'idée inscrite sur un froid papier, ou dans un cerveau presque aussi froid que le papier! Il faut qu'une idée s'incarne, qu'elle s'incarne dans nos coeurs, qu'elle y prenne le mouvement et la chaleur de la vie. C'est un point de vue qui devrait être familier à tous les chrétiens, si la plupart n'avaient depuis longtemps préféré la Lettre à l'Esprit--le Verbe de Dieu s'est fait chair. Lorsque l'idée de liberté ne sera plus que dans les livres, elle sera morte.144

It is significant that, as the war drew to a conclusion and the "false" peace he feared seemed more certain than ever, Bernanos purposely chose thus to draw together two of the most consistent and important themes of his entire work: the sterility of disincarnate ideas and the scandal of loveless pharisaical religion which is the source of the "désincarnation du Verbe," the true cause of dechristianization.

It is perhaps even more worthy of note that he very clearly, once again, opposes these two themes to the pivotal leitmotif of the Incarnation of Christ. On the natural plane all man's noble ideals must transcend pure abstraction and be made incarnate in order to survive, even as, on the supernatural plane, God himself must share in the Incarnation in order to find salvation. And this sharing in the Incarnation
can only be accomplished through man's ability to love, to participate in "la charité du Christ." But in order to love, Bernanos knew that man must be free.
Notes

CHAPTER IV

1 Bernanos, OE II, p.691.
2 Bernanos, OE I, p.1157.
4 Bernanos, OE II, p.559.
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6 Ibid., p.393.
7 Ibid., p.434.
8 Ibid., p.484.
9 Ibid., p.180.
10 Ibid., p.434.
11 Ibid., pp.443-444.
12 Ibid., p.431.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., p.425.
15 Ibid., p.531.
16 Ibid., p.380.
18 Ibid., p.486.
19 Ibid., p.484.
20 Ibid., p.508.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., p.510.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., p.516.
26 Roman Missal (Benziger Brothers, 1964), p.351.
28 Ibid.
31 Ibid., p.380.
32 Ibid., p.420.
33 Ibid.
34 Jaques Chabot, "Notice" in Bernanos, OE II, p.1494.
37 Ibid.
38 Bernanos, Cor III, p.359.
41 Bernanos, OE II, p.1296.
42 Georges Bernanos, Cor III, p.359.
43 Georges Bernanos, OE II, p.676.
44 Ibid., pp.644-645.
Ibid., pp. 594–595.

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Bernans, Lettre aux Anglais, pp.194-195.

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Ibid., p.205.

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Ibid., p.127.

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Ibid., p.137.

Ibid., p.116.


Ibid., pp.106-107.

Ibid., p.103.
Ibid., pp. 65-66.

125 Bernanos, Lettre aux Anglais, p. 204.

126 Ibid., p. 205.


128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid., p. 464.

131 Ibid., p. 460.

132 Ibid.

133 Ibid., p. 459.


136 Bernanos, La France contre les robots, p. 214.

137 Ibid., pp. 214-215.


140 Ibid., p. 498.

141 Ibid., p. 498.

142 Bernanos, La France contre les robots, p. 170.

143 Ibid., p. 265.


145 Bernanos, OE II, p. 691.
CHAPTER V

THE LAST STRUGGLE (1945-1948)

1. The Global Factory

Upon returning to France after the War, Bernanos' impassioned plea continued to be for freedom, and for the same reason: only a free man could love, and only by loving could he realize the full dignity of his supernatural vocation -- communion with the divine. Thus while various political groups -- the Gaullists, the Catholic socialists, the Marxists -- were all trying to marshal popular support for political-social systems, Bernanos firmly rejected all such systems as anti-human. Much to the dissatisfaction of many on the political right or left who wished to claim him as their own, he, as implacable and angrily prophetic as ever, denounced as diabolic any attempt to set the rights of a system against those of man.

In 1945 his concern was still with the explosion of industrialization and what he perceived as an international conspiracy, transcending ideological boundaries, to create a world controlled by, and at the service of, "la Technique":

"Chaque jour, en effet nous apporte la preuve que la période idéologique est depuis longtemps dépassée, à New York comme à Moscou ou à Londres."
Nous voyons la Démocratie impériale anglaise, la Démocratie plutocratique américaine et l'Empire marxiste des Dominions Soviétiques sinon marcher la main dans la main---il s'en faut!---du moins poursuivre le même but, c'est-à-dire maintenir coûte que coûte [. . .] le système à l'intérieur duquel ils ont tous acquis richesse et puissance. [. . .] Bref, les régimes jadis opposés par l'idéologie sont maintenant étroitement unis par la technique. [. . .] Un monde gagné pour la Technique est perdu pour la Liberté.1

Vast industrial forces, the "dictature de l'argent" which he had identified years earlier, were attempting to form Man in their own image and likeness as raw material for their own consumption. And the imbéciles---either the liberal capitalists who believed in inevitable scientific progress or the Marxists who placed their faith in the dialectical process---were content to abdicate their freedom and responsibility as they passively awaited the world order to come. For his part Bernanos saw freedom as something which, to a greater or lesser degree, is incarnate in the lives of human beings: "[. . .] la liberté n'est pourtant qu'en vous, imbéciles."2 Consequently, it is necessary to combat the inclination of those willing to surrender to the "system" or to the allure of progress which it offered. Otherwise freedom is destined to recede to the status of an abstraction.

What seemed apparent to Bernanos was that the mechanization of the world, the "invasion de la Machinerie,"3 was creating a social environment much more suited to the survival of the machine than of man. It was not that he opposed machines as such but rather their rampant multiplication and
the modern obsession with the mechanization of every aspect of human society. This tendency could only assure the ruthless domination of man by what should, in its proper order, serve him. The rhythm of human existence itself in the age of the machine had come to be measured according to the "rotation vertigineuse des Turbines, et qui d'ailleurs s'accélère sans cesse." Bernanos viewed industrial science's preoccupation with building bigger, faster, more efficient machines as profoundly evil. Thus the atomic bomb had for him a prophetic quality—a "machine" of destruction of unimaginable efficiency which augured of even more efficient, more destructive machines.

Again, Bernanos regarded the problem essentially as one of freedom: the machine was usurping man's rightful position as steward of creation; the human had become subservient to the mechanical. The world of tomorrow, he writes in a post-war letter, "sera le monde des robots, le monde sans hommes." This was not to say of course that humankind would not have a role to play in that world order but that its significance would be dependent upon the needs of the machine it served.

From Bernanos' Christian perspective this represented a colossal inversion of the proper order when man, abdicating his position as a divinely appointed trustee of creation, surrendering to the machine, and allowing human freedom to become absorbed by industrial necessity, actually encouraged the evaporation of the human presence. This constituted a calamity. But for Bernanos, as a Christian whose religious
faith centered upon the Incarnation its consequences were far greater still.

For, as the human presence receded, so did the presence of God-made-Man. Bernanos thus again raises the problem of the "désincarnation du Verbe." By becoming spiritually enslaved Man renders the process of divinization impossible, for only free men may choose to love, and love was necessary to make Christ present to the world. We may say then that Bernanos objected to the industrialization and mechanization of society principally because the machine, as it usurped the place of humankind in creation, in some sense "inverted" the ongoing incarnation of the Word of God:

L'homme a fait la machine, et la machine s'est faite homme, par une espèce d'inversion démoniaque du mystère de l'Incarnation 8

Man has thus been robbed of even the idea of his supernatural destiny, and reduced to a purely economic role—"homo economicus" 9—in the vast "Usine Planétaire." 10 The modern "system" has thus deprived him of any real hope of freedom:

Qu'il s'intitule capitaliste ou socialiste, ce monde s'est fondé sur une certaine conception de l'homme, commune aux économistes anglais du XVIIIe siècle, comme à Marx ou à Lénine. On dit parfois de l'homme qu'il était un animal religieux. Le système l'a défini une fois pour toutes un animal économique, non seulement l'esclave mais l'objet, la matière inerte, irresponsable, du déterminisme économique, et sans espoir de s'en affranchir, puisqu'il ne connaît d'autre mobile certain que l'intérêt, le profit. 11
Modern industrialized society is therefore perceived by Bernanos as fundamentally anti-Christian because its vision of l'homme économique, subjugated and irresponsible, opposé the Christian homme divinisé who employs his freedom to answer the call for participation in the Incarnation of Christ:

L'homme est-il tel que le Christianisme le définit, c'est-à-dire un être déchu par le Pêché, mais divinisé par la Grâce, un être dont la propre contradiction donne un sens à l'Univers, car l'Univers est cette contradiction même qui ne peut être résolue que dans l'homme? Ou un simple animal industriieux mais irresponsable? Je crains que, d'un moment à l'autre, l'explosion atomique vienne nous démontrer qu'il est dangereux de faire la bête, lorsque on porte le signe de Dieu sur le front.12

2. The Marxist Temptation

Since he saw both Capitalism and Marxism as holding fundamentally similar perceptions of Man's role as this "simple animal industrious," Bernanos must undoubtedly have seen great irony in the immense prestige enjoyed by the communists in France after the war. Though they proclaimed the need for a "new regime,"13 a "people's democracy,"14 it was apparent to Bernanos that any Marxist state would be as totalitarian as the recently fallen fascist regimes and as oppressive as the capitalist systems they denounced: "Capitalistes, fascistes, marxistes, tous ces gens-là se ressemblent."15
Particularly irksome to him was the post-war emergence of a new and vocal Catholic left. François Mauriac, "enthusiastic for the prospects of a Christian socialism," as well as the catholiques de gauche, seemed prepared to grant Hegelianism the status of a divine revelation, espousing an optimism which Bernanos perceived as particularly mindless. For his part, he angered those of all political persuasions by the relentless and thunderous nature of his criticism. For Bernanos did not view the great problems of modern Man as political, and he was not interested in the apparent solutions which various political systems offered.

He was infuriated to see, as he perceived it, those Catholics who had once so enthusiastically flocked to the political right, now embracing the social philosophy in vogue and heading zealously in the other direction:

Il y a dix ans, la masse catholique penchait dangereusement vers le totalitarisme de droite, avec une élité jeune et dynamique déjà gagnée au fascisme. Aujourd'hui, la même masse penche vers le totalitarisme de gauche avec une élité jeune et dynamique déjà gagnée au marxisme.

He made no distinction between the Marxist and the Catholiques de gauche, "les trainards de la tribu marxiste en marche vers la terre promise." They appeared to ignore the fundamental reality of Original Sin with their belief---bizarre to Bernanos' mind---in the earthly perfectability of humankind. They seemed moreover as willing as their Marxist exemplars to sacrifice human freedom to historical determinism.
For his part Bernanos saw no possibility for any coalition between Marxist philosophy and Christianity. And what irreconcilably separated them was of course the Incarnation, that watershed event in human history which forever altered the destiny of mankind and the meaning of man's very existence:

Si je voulais témoigner à un communiste de ma sympathie pour sa cause, j'estimerais peu loyals de m'en tenir à d'éloquents tirades sur l'injustice, comme si le mot d'injustice avait exactement le même sens pour un homme qui venant du néant, s'apprête à retourner au néant, et pour un homme qui croit à l'incarnation du Fils de Dieu et à la divinisation de l'humanité sur la croix.  

While Marxism views man as the object of forces beyond him, Christianity perceives him as endowed with free will and a potential participator in the very life of Incarnate God.

At any rate, the idea of Catholics seeking the establishment of a socialist state, "la forme démocratique de la dictature," representing the apogee of the evolution of the Technique, and standing in stark opposition to individual freedom and responsibility, was a scandal for Bernanos. He thoroughly distrusted Christians who felt the need to keep pace with secular trends and modish ideas so as not to seem irrelevant or regressive, and on whose lips now appeared the popular byword "social justice."

The notion of social justice Bernanos compared to the "whitenend sepulcher" of the Gospel because it was an entirely empty and worldly concept which saw justice in terms of socialization, not freedom, of social reorganization, but
not love. 23 "Social justice" had become for the Catholic Left what "social order" had been for the Catholic Right: a bourgeois idea given quasi-religious status by Christians who were spiritually dead and who had abdicated their inner freedom, hoping to find in popular socio-political creeds the germ of an earthly Kingdom:

Cette liberté intérieure [...] c'était Lui: nous l'avons perdue, c'est Dieu que nous avons perdu avec elle, et pour la retrouver il ne suffira pas de la désirer de nouveau, ou de gêner, sur sa perte, ou de chercher dans le pharisialisme de la justice sociale une espèce d'alibi dont Dieu n'est pas dupe. 24.

Thus was Bernanos' perception of the crisis of modern Man dependent upon another crisis: the crisis of freedom. Christians who hoped to find justice in socialist "totalitarianism" were deluded. There is only one Justice according to Bernanos, and that Justice is incarnate in Christ. It thus can only be realized then by free men participating in the Incarnation through their love:

La seule justice [...] c'est la divine justice des Béatitudes, la Justice incorruptible, le corps glorieux de la Justice ressuscitée [...]. 25

Beyond the empty rhetoric of social justice, Bernanos also condemned Catholic socialism for attacking poverty as if it were an economic problem and not a central mystery of the Christian faith. His concern about poverty was, interestingly enough, clearly related to his concern about freedom:
What was therefore truly iniquitous about socialism in this regard was that by eliminating poverty it would destroy the freedom which poverty represented, indeed perhaps one of the last vestiges of freedom, and transform the poor man into a citizen like the others, who is not distinguished from the others, who does not participate in the scandal of intolerable waste of life lived without comfort, to appear thus to despise comfort, a comfort that stands on the idea that occupied the other idea of health, the comfort of which the state pretends to dispose of our goods, our works, our lives, our consciences and make of us, at the end of the account, robots. But the robot, for the modern world, is the saved man.  

Bernanos thus warns Catholics of the Left that socialism would bring not the liberation of the poor but, quite the contrary, their transformation into docile slaves of the state. Clearly Bernanos recognized Christianity and the modern world as fundamentally in opposition one to the other, with no hope of compromise or cooperation between them. The modern world fostered the enslavement of Man from which only Christianity could save him since Christianity alone understands the purpose and importance of freedom. And freedom is essential for love to exist, that love which is the only means to man's divinization as a participant in the Incarnation.
Consequently Bernanos' program for the liberation of the poor, which he outlined in a letter to Stanislas Fumet in 1946, quite unlike the political and social restructuring which the Catholic socialists proposed, prescribed voluntary poverty and loving service:

Je continue de croire que la meilleure, pour ne pas dire l'unique manière de libérer réellement le pauvre, c'est de devenir volontairement pauvre à sa place, et de le servir.28

In his Christocentric universe Bernanos saw almost everything in terms, either of its opposition to, or its participation in, the Incarnation of Christ. This certainly applies to his understanding of social justice and poverty, so much a subject of discussion in political and intellectual circles of the time. In Bernanos' vision, the poor are in fact a very unique manifestation of Christ Himself29 and, indeed, poverty is perceived as a sacred state precisely because the poor are Christ:

Le difficile pour un chrétien est de servir Jésus-Christ dans le Pauvre, et le Pauvre dans Jésus-Christ.30

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28 It should be noted that Bernanos makes the following important distinction between those whom he calls "les misérables" and "les pauvres":

Le misérable dégradé, déshumanisé par la misère ne peut plus porter témoignage que de l'effroyable injustice qui lui est faite, mais le Pauvre est le témoin de Jésus-Christ.33
The socialist approach to poverty was deficient at best because it ignored this essential fact: The only legitimate approach is the Christian one which lovingly embraces Christ in the poor so that, by sharing His suffering in theirs, believers might themselves become Christ: "[...] un Messie foueté et crucifié qui nous invite à nous faire fouetter et crucifier avec lui [...]." Thus Bernanos writes in 1941 that "[...] la souffrance surnaturellement acceptée divinise," one of the themes which was to be developed in his last literary creation, Dialogues des Carmélites where a whole community of Carmelites freely offers itself in love to die on the scaffold.

For Bernanos, what the Gospel demanded was personal holiness, not political commitment, but for holiness to exist the freedom to love was essential. How in fact could free men survive, Bernanos wondered, in a new world order where even Catholics were espousing socialist theory?

3. The Eclipse of Freedom

Given the encroachment of technology and the prestige in Europe of Marxism and Socialism, Bernanos, unlike many of his contemporaries who saw fit to rejoice in the defeat of Nazism and the "liberation" of France, was convinced that
the real eclipse of freedom had only just begun in 1945 and, the more prominent the post-war rhetoric of justice and liberty became, the more Bernanos suspected that high-minded phrases were being substituted for incarnate reality. The theme of disincarnate freedom therefore pervades his reflections during this period:

Oui, cher lecteur, je craigns que vous ne vous imaginiez pas la Liberté comme de grandes orgues, qu'elle ne soit déjà pour vous qu'un mot grandiose [. . .].

Imbéciles! vous vous fichez éperdument de la vie intérieure, mais c'est tout de même en elle et par elle que se sont transmises jusqu'à nous des valeurs indispensables, sans quoi la liberté ne serait qu'un mot.

The post-war period seemed to Bernanos rife with those who eloquently spoke the language of freedom but who suffered from "une universelle stérilisation des hautes valeurs de la vie." Consistant in his Christocentric approach to fundamental human problems, he sees the movement from substance to pure rhetoric as a kind of universal undoing of the Incarnation itself:

J'affirme une fois de plus que l'avilissement de l'homme se marque à ce signe que les idées ne sont plus pour lui que des formules abstraites et conventionnelles, une espèce d'algebre, comme si le Verbe ne se faisait plus chair, comme si l'Humanité reprenait en sens inverse, le chemin de l'Incarnation.

It is the Incarnate Word which is always before him and all considerations seem subsumed by this mystery of the union of
God and Man in Jesus-Christ. So much so that there is to be found in the texts of this period, a unity of vision in which everything, visible or invisible, great or small, has meaning only by virtue of its participation in the life of the Incarnate Word. Focused thus on Christ, he more and more views any trend toward the désincarnation of simple human virtues and values, on any plane whatsoever of the human experience, as representing an entirely demonic assault upon the Incarnation. Put another way, the ultimate prototype of the proper human striving to give flesh to all that is good and valuable is found only in the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ: God who is spirit had become flesh. Therefore the incarnation of the "hautes valeurs de la vie" cannot really be distinguished from Man's vocation to participate in that one Incarnation.

Among these "hautes valeurs," Bernanos continued to place primary emphasis upon freedom because it is a prerequisite to true charity, which he terms the "chemin de l'Incarnation." In an extraordinary text written in 1947, the year before his death, and delivered as a lecture to the Little Sisters of Jesus in Tunis, Bernanos offered perhaps his most searching reflection on these themes of freedom and love which so preoccupied him during his last years. In this text, entitled Nos amis les saints, he insists that the great scandal of the universe is not suffering, but, in fact, freedom, since it allows the human choice which may engender either great good or great evil, the Original Sin of Adam and Eve being of course the primary example of the latter. So it is that
suffering, though inherently evil, is but a fruit of that
great dignity of freedom bestowed by God upon Man. The true
scandal of creation however is freedom and not suffering.
And, though freedom may make evil possible, it is the only
means to genuine love:

Il y a en ce moment, dans le monde [ . . . ] tel pauvre homme qui joint les mains
et du fond de sa misère, sans bien savoir ce qu'il
dit, ou sans rien dire, remercie le bon Dieu de
l'avoir fait libre, de l'avoir fait capable
d'aimer. Il y a quelque part ailleurs, je ne
sais où, une maman qui cache pour la dernière fois
son visage au creux d'une petite poitrine qui ne
battrait plus, une mère près de son enfant mort,
qui offre à Dieu le gémissement d'une résignation,
exténuée [. . .].

This man and this woman, by assenting freely and lovingly to
God as their Creator through their recognition of themselves
as His creatures, actually make Christ incarnate according
to Bernanos:

Oui, au moment où cet homme, cette femme
acceptaient leur destin, s'acceptaient
eux-mêmes, humblement -- le mystère de la
création s'accomplissait en eux, tandis qu'ils
couraient ainsi sans le savoir tout le risque
de leur conduite humaine, se réalisaient
pleinement dans la charité du Christ, devenant
eux-mêmes, selon la parole de Saint Paul,
d'autres Christ. Bref, ils étaient des
saints.

In thus becoming Christs, or in allowing Christ to become
incarnate in themselves, they sum up the whole of Bernanos'
Christian faith. His wholehearted adherence to this mystery
of the necessity of freedom in order to incarnate God by love
explains his impassioned plea for liberty during the post-war period, as well as his denunciation of technological tyranny, and his rejection of political solutions to human problems.
Notes

CHAPTER V

2 Ibid., p.89.
3 Ibid., p.86.
4 Ibid., p.98.
5 Ibid., pp.88-89.
6 Ibid., p.115.
7 Bernanos, Cor II, p.721.
9 Ibid.
10 Bernanos, Cor II, p.632.
11 Bernanos, La France contre les robots, pp.20-21.
12 Bernanos, Cor III, pp.436-437.
14 Ibid.
15 Bernanos, La France contre les robots, p.34.
16 Thomas Molnar, op.cit., p.148.
17 Ibid., p.149.
19 Ibid., p.135.
20 Ibid., p.141.


Ibid., p.134.


Ibid., p.244.

Bernanos, Cor. III, p.429.


Ibid., p.250.

Bernanos, Cor II, p.631.


Ibid., p.243.


Ibid., p.132.

Ibid., p.60.

Ibid., p.111.

Ibid., p.106.

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Ibid., pp.280-281.

Ibid., pp.281-282.
CONCLUSION

Bernanos' insistence upon the Incarnation, and the necessity for the Christian to perpetuate it, provides a remarkable unity to his creative vision. The Incarnation of Christ, being the principal mystery of the Christian faith, was thus indeed central to Bernanos' life and work, responding perfectly to his penchant for the incarnate, a penchant which had already surfaced during his adolescence. Thus, the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ responded to his basic predilection for action over rhetoric, for the concrete action over the abstract idea.

In Bernanosian theology, the life of Christ is not simply to be imitated but, rather, intimately shared. Bernanos' Christocentrism echoes St. Paul's statement, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me," and his fictional saints therefore participate mystically in the redemptive act of Christ.

The other pole of Bernanos' spiritual vision is "désincarnation." It was in fact the author's experience of the Spanish Civil War which finally prompted him to name the process of dechristianization which he saw at work among modern Christians as the "désincarnation du Verbe." By this expression he described modern Christians' refusal to participate in the Incarnation of Christ through a personal charity.
All the modern forces of evil, whether fascism, communism or technological tyranny, came to be seen in terms of this attempt to pervert the Incarnation of Christ in Christians.

This double polarity provides the basic tension in Bernanos' thought and creative vision. Indeed, the opposition between incarnation and "désincarnation" offers a solid basis for understanding his entire work.
Notes

CONCLUSION

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