ABSTRACT.

The first section studies the history of the conflict of the Church and the French Republic which provides the political context of Bloy's work. It analyses the statements and forms of the early polemic articles in which he expressed his rejection of the mediocrity and banality of contemporary Republican society, from which religious idealism provided a refuge. Of the religious options available, Bloy rejected those which seemed to him no more than compromise with secular ideals - Liberal Catholicism, or the uncritical orthodoxy of the mass of Catholic society, which reflected all the vices of the secular state - and gave his adherence to intransigent Catholicism. The traditionalist philosophy on which this was based confirmed his own denunciation of the habits of secular society and offered a new context in which the individual could create for himself a heroic existence within this society. This would take the form of a morally responsible engagement in practical experience (necessarily ascetic, given that the context must by definition negate present values). The justification and the motivation for the heroic option were found in a revision and renewal of the full dogmatic structure of traditional Catholicism.

The second section considers the importance of the dogmatic structure in Bloy's work. Like the Catholic hierarchy at this period, he became increasingly absolute in defensive response to positivist attacks on dogma (the Catholic supernatural). This can be seen with particular force in the campaign against Zola which he inherited from Barbey d'Aurevilly. The supernatural realm was presented by the intransigents as a transcendant order which

restored to human personality the dignity which had been denied by materialism. Bloy defended by reference to this the concepts of human freewill and responsibility and the validity of human reason which acknowledges its ontological source in God.

Despite his frequent appeals to the authority of intransigent philosophy (chiefly that of Blanc de Saint-Bonnet and Ernest Hello) his defence was not intellectually convincing, but one which relied on specious rhetoric to present its own case and crude polemic to discredit its opponents. In an attempt to establish the depths of human mind and experience, he appealed also to the example of the mystics - the Christological mysticism of Emmerick, Pascal, Angela di Foligno, Faber and Hello, and the via negativa of Dionysius the Areopagite. Heroic suffering, which denied the values of this life, was the basis for the accession to Truth (defined as intimate knowledge of God achieved through contemplation, initiated by God alone). Bloy's novels described the human condition which this implied; the truly conscious man, who is the man of religious convictions, must live in contradiction to the secular world, with all his forces and energies deriving from and tending to the supernatural. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Bloy can sometimes be seen to acknowledge the unsatisfactory nature of this division. A study of his treatment of the symbols encountered on the unitive way, compared with that of the Areopagite, shows that his ascetic renunciations are not always wholehearted.

Much of Bloy's apologetic is based on the reinstatement of the dogmatic images by which Catholicism represents the super-natural. In this he followed a movement already present in the Church which recognised the appeal of the image to the imagination

and emotions, which was more effective than one to discursive reason. He rejected the symbolist interpretation which reduced the specificity of dogma to the abstract moral truth it enclosed. He restored the traditional formulae expressing God's providential intervention in human history: on the general plane, introducing into history a sense of coherence and finality, and on the particular, using the contradictory nature of the image to carry his own ironic challenge to contemporary values. (The movement between the two moments of Fall and Second Coming is used to press for moral revival in individuals and society, and the need for national and moral unity to effect this revival. The imminent apocalyptic catastrophe is a vehicle for specific attacks on avaricious landlords and wartime profiteers as well as on general religious apathy.) Bloy's exegesis of the Catholic image includes references to other contemporary interpretations more familiar to his readers, as in his relation of the Second Coming to the Third Reign popularised by the Romantics and, more recently, by Lévi and Vintras. These, however, have only the status of imaginative supports to his Catholic propositions, and are in no way intended to detract from the orthodoxy of his doctrine.

Less direct methods of incorporating the concept of the super-natural include the use of Biblical and liturgical themes, and the exploitation of techniques also used by the secular poet. Here Bloy's treatment of the theme of death is especially important.

The central point of Catholic doctrine for Bloy was its emphasis on suffering. Suffering was the state which corporalised the ideal, mediating the supernatural into natural existence. He was brought to the theme by personal experience and by the general tendencies of his period, which are considered in detail. A

chronological account of the formation of his doctrine shows him indebted to de Maistre and Faber for the religious interpretation of suffering as expiation, having a co-redemptive function in conjunction with the sufferings of Christ, and to Blanc de Saint-Bonnet and Hello for the Romantic concept of suffering as the basis of heroic personality and of genius. These several elements were pulled together by Bloy around the theme of La Salette, where the meaning of suffering is set in the Passion of Christ in which humanity participates through the mediation of the Compassion of the Immaculate Conception. Bloy's doctrine is related to the secular experience which motivated its formulation (especially that of war) and to the contemporary formulations of the Church in the doctrines of the Sacred Heart and the Communion of Saints, which provided the background for the theology of the literary Revival. It is emphasised that this Revival in no sense exaggerated the contemporary sense of the Church; that stress on expiation and reparation often considered its peculiar property were commonplace in the theology of this period.

The last section studies Bloy's adaptations of his doctrine to his particular experience in the contexts of love, poverty and art. In the first, he created for himself an independent position detached from both a permissive literary milieu and a prudish Church. He was concerned to adapt to the ascetic doctrine the needs of his own passionate temperament; in this, he was strongly influenced by the work of Barbey, whose themes and attitudes he incorporated into his own work. An account of his experience and its transposition into imaginative forms (through Le Désespéré, the Lettres à sa fiancée and La Femme pauvre) shows Bloy exalting

the idea of carnal passion as the medium through which man accedes to spiritual love, and the creative rôle of the couple as the image of the Church's redemptive co-operation with Christ - in terms, however, ultimately ascetic, and within a framework whose high degree of elaboration suggests a recognition of the instability of the conjunction he has effected between the two concepts. A like pattern emerges from analysis of his treatment of the theme of poverty. Bloy perceived more clearly than many of his contemporaries the modern social problem of destitution, and was more willing to acknowledge the claims of the poor to recognition. At the same time he refused to relinquish the existing social order and dependent moral values which prevented the fulfilment of these claims. He attempted to reconcile the two poles of his thought with a eulogy of Poverty as a form of suffering, and the present means of incorporation into the mystic body of Christ. This offered only a gloss on the problem, and no useful solution - as is shown by a study of Le Salut par les Juifs, which was a purely verbal and aesthetic attempt to explain the religious significance of the economic inequality in society.

His treatment of the theme of art was probably the most important for the subsequent development of the Revival. He was intensely conscious of the similarity of artistic and religious aspirations, which made the artistic vocation an apt paradigm for the explanation of the religious. Romantic art provided the image of the prophet, both teacher and victim, and the cult of enthusiasm; symbolist art, the mediatory function of the sign, and the notion of synthesis - the idea of the final cause which alone gives meaning to the whole. The influence of Huysmans and Villiers

is considered, both for their theory and for the particular aesthetic impression made on Bloy by their work. His interest was generally aesthetic as well as didactic, though it must be admitted that the former often took second place.

Bloy's importance as a precursor of the Revival depends to a large extent on the aesthetic quality of his own literature, by which he won respect for Catholicism in contemporary intellectual circles, as well as on the intransigence with which he renewed and reinstated the dogmatic structure of Catholicism in its entirety. As the movement has progressed, the latter feature has been increasingly appreciated, both in its challenge to the contingency of human history and in its particular instancing of how a human life - Bloy's own - can acquire meaning within its framework. This has seemed to be the special interest of Bloy's work - its function as a point of convergence in a nexus of personal, social and religious formulations and concepts.

The Appendix contains an article by Bloy not so far reprinted, and extracts from an unpublished correspondence with Alfred Vallette and Rachilde. The Bibliography includes a table of Bloy's published correspondence.

Dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the University of Oxford.

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# THE IMAGINATIVE EXPLOITATION OF THEOLOGICAL DOCTRINES IN THE WORK OF LÉON BLOY (1846-1917)

VOL. I

Jennifer Birkett

Linacre College, Oxford

May 1973 MT

... Il était revenu devant la chapelle des Morts, en face du grand Christ de carton peint, de la grandeur d'un enfant de dix ans, qui agonisait avec une vérité si effroyable. Les clous imitaient le fer, les blessures restaient béantes, atrocement déchirées.

"Jésus qui êtes mort pour nous, cria-t-il, dites-lui donc notre néant! Dites-lui que nous sommes poussière, ordure, damnation! Ah! tenez! permettez que je couvre ma tête d'un cilice, que je pose mon front à vos pieds, que je reste là, immobile, jusqu'à ce que la mort me pourrisse. La terre n'existera plus. Le soleil sera éteint. Je ne verrai plus, je ne sentirai plus, je n'entendrai plus. Rien de ce monde misérable ne viendra déranger mon âme de votre adoration."

Il s'exaltait de plus en plus. Il marcha vers Albine, les mains levées.

"Tu avais raison, c'est la mort qui est ici, c'est la mort que je veux, la mort qui délivre, qui sauve de toutes les pourritures ... Entends-tu! je nie la vie, je la refuse, je crache sur elle. Tes fleurs puent, ton soleil aveugle, ton herbe donne la lèpre à qui s'y couche, ton jardin est un charnier où se décomposent les cadavres des choses. La terre sue l'abomination. . . . Et même quand tu dirais vrai, quand tu aurais les mains pleines de jouissances, quand tu m'emporterais sur un lit de roses pour m'y donner le rêve du paradis, je me défendrais plus désespérément encore contre ton étreinte. C'est la guerre entre nous, séculaire, implacable. Tu vois, l'église est bien petite; elle est pauvre, elle est laide, elle a un confessionnal et une chaire de sapin, un baptistère de plâtre, des autels faits de quatre planches, que j'ai repeints moi-même. Qu'importe! Elle est plus grande que ton jardin, que la vallée, que toute la terre. C'est une forteresse redoutable que rien ne renversera. Les vents, et le soleil, et les forêts, et les mers, tout ce qui vit aura beau lui livrer assaut, elle restera debout, sans même être ébranlée. Oui, que les broussailles grandissent, qu'elles secouent les murs de leurs bras épineux et que des pullulements d'insectes sortent des fentes du sol pour venir ronger les murs, l'église, si ruinée qu'elle soit, ne sera jamais emportée dans le débordement de la vie! Elle est la mort inexpugnable!... Et veux-tu savoir ce qui arrivera un jour? La petite église deviendra si colossale, elle jettera une telle ombre que toute la nature crèvera. Ah! la mort, la mort de tout, avec le ciel béant pour recevoir nos âmes, au-dessus les débris abominables du monde!"

(E. Zola, La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret, Paris, 1875, III, viii)

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine through the work of one particular author the formative period of the Catholic literary Revival of the late nineteenth century. It is an attempt to capture the moment when the theological doctrines on which the movement is based first entered the literary sphere; to consider how and why these doctrines were chosen; and to observe the literary vehicles and techniques which were adapted to present these to a public reared in an anti-clerical tradition.

Such a project has been made possible by the recent accumulation of monographs and general studies - still far too few - both on the Revival itself and on the thought and literature of the period, which is more difficult than most to hold in perspective. In the spheres of politics, literature and religion which have been considered, primary and secondary sources alike have tended to belong to minority camps. In consequence, their accounts and interpretations of points of fact, though possessing the virtues of immediacy and enthusiasm, have often been strongly coloured by personal or group prejudices which the historian is not always in a position to recognise. The literary circles with which this study has been concerned have been Romantic, decadent, Symbolist or even occultist outposts in a predominantly positivist era, deliberately cultivating fantasy, exaggeration and mystification. The Church, ostensibly forming a solid bloc on the principles of Vatican I, proves almost as infinite in variations. Modernist movements apart, there is still a wide diversity of opinion to be found in the camp to which the blanket label of "intransigent" is usually attached. This is particularly true of its literary representatives; a Veuillot, Barbey or Péladan might be in agreement on the bases of religion - the principle of authority, Papal infallibility,

and the primacy of the supernatural - whilst differing in their emphases and methods of treatment.

A growing ignorance among most writers of the period of the traditional contexts of theological discussion, and the extension of the new intellectual habits of positivism compound the confusion. The scientific study of religion, as pioneered by Quinet or Michelet, brings with it pseudo-scientific analyses, hasty conclusions, crude analogies and unsupported generalizations which rapidly harden into popular prejudice. Michelet's work on Oriental religions is probably responsible for many of the misconceptions which Bloy's contemporaries attached to the cult of the Virgin Mary. Doctrine so torn apart and capriciously reassembled loses much of the coherence which makes it amenable to objective study. In 1907, Loisy commented bitterly that: "L'orthodoxie, dans l'économie actuelle du catholicisme, est ce que le Pape a décidé".[1] Most of his contemporaries tended rather to be grateful for such decisiveness.

Finally, special difficulties are created by the fact that when dealing with writers of strong religious commitments the critic must always be prepared to recognise exaggerations attributable to neophyte enthusiasm as well as allowing for that licence traditionally granted to the poet.

The written part of this study has been restricted to the theological and literary aspects most relevant to Bloy in his lifetime. It could be argued that more cross-reference to other contemporary theological development and to the later movement of ideas in the Revival might have been desirable. On the other hand, a more limited approach

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[1] A. F. Loisy, Simples Réflexions sur le décret du Saint-Office "Lamentabili sane exitu", Ceffonds, 1908, p. 11.

makes it possible to examine in depth aspects of nineteenth-century theology which have not so far received attention commensurate with their significance in the Revival - such as the devotional current represented by F. W. Faber, with its cults of the Sacred Heart, the Immaculate Conception and the Precious Blood, which is important not only for the Catholic movement but also for an understanding of the retaliatory literature published by writers such as Zola. It has also provided a specific point of reference for discussion of the problems of general interest to the period: questions of grace and freewill, reason and faith, the existence and nature of the soul, and the rôle and interpretation of authoritarian doctrine.

Léon Bloy offers a convenient point of focus for this study. Though he cannot be considered a major writer, and though his ideas and forms are alien to the modern reader, his personal and literary influence in the development of Catholic literature is nevertheless undeniable. His effect on the general public has been minimal, but, as will be argued below, his presence can be felt in the work of Huysmans, Claudel, Bernanos and Green, and in the neo-Christian school inaugurated by Vallery-Radot in the early twentieth century. He is the necessary link between the Second Empire Catholicism of Veuillot and Barbey d'Aurevilly and the greater genius of Claudel's generation. In Barbey the two functions of the Catholic writer as defender of an absolute and integral faith and creator in his own right are acknowledged but never combined; as a recent critic has pointed out, he invariably subordinates religion to his own aesthetic.[1] In Bloy the first attempts at

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[1] R. M. Griffiths, The Reactionary Revolution, London, 1968, p. 98.

fusion are made, and from richer sources.

His literary capacities have been unduly neglected. His work acknowledges Romantic, Realist and Symbolist forms of literature; seldom achieving excellence, but nevertheless of some quality, judged by the aesthetic criteria of his time. For his apologetic purpose, he adapts and exploits a variety of genres ranging from the traditional Catholic forms of meditation, hagiographical study, or exegetical commentary to the secular vehicles of short story, novel, critical article, personal diary and historical study. His facility with all registers of language from rhetoric to argot, his fusion of disparate tones - humour, fantasy, sentimentality and violence - into a single polemic purpose, his use of the symbol, directly related to the Baudelairean tradition, and, most unfairly neglected, his use of irony, would all repay more ample study than they have yet received. In so far as this thesis examines these aspects, it is in subordination to the purposes of Bloy's religious and social polemic - a mark of the success of his practical rhetorical intention.

His thought, though often unrefined, can also be more intelligent and ingenious than is generally admitted. No imaginative writer before him, and few of his contemporaries, offered such a faithful and fully detailed representation of the intransigent and ultramontane doctrine of his period. His theology does not pretend to Scholastic accuracy and often shows inconsistencies or exaggerations which reach the point of heresy; nevertheless, it never renounces the basic ideals of intransigent orthodoxy, even for the sake of reaching a wider public. It was as uncompromising Catholic doctrine that it contrived to reach and impress the small but influential literary groups which had hitherto proved impervious to Catholic apologetic. Gourmont was pleased to

characterize his genius as "théologique" as well as "rabelaisien" - though admitting as he did so that his preference was for the second aspect.[1]

A rigorously Scholastic discussion of Bloy's theology would have been anachronistic and unsuited to the material of this study. Instead, the argument has been ordered around the personal experience which conditioned Bloy's religious options, and these explained in the context of the devotional theology of his time. It is the abstruse points of detail of the latter which have been elucidated.

Similarly, Bloy's own preoccupations have determined the structure of the work. The first section, which attempts to set the author in the perspective in which he appeared to his contemporaries, deals with the background of Church and Republic and describes the positions he adopts with regard to both. Under the general heading of the supernatural, the second treats of the nature and presentation of the spiritual themes which recur most frequently in his work. The third is concerned with his treatment of the theme of suffering, the moral centre of his thought; and the fourth and last, with those of love, art and poverty, aspects of his own experience which he uses as vehicles to present his religious doctrines.

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[1] R. de Gourmont, "Léon Bloy", Mercure de France, XXIV, No. 94, October 1897.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| Bernouard, 1948 (1949) | Oeuvres complètes de Léon Bloy: Inédits, Paris, Bernouard, 1948-49. |
| Boll.I-III | J. Bollery, Léon Bloy: Essai de biographie, Paris, 3 vols., 1947-54. |
| Bulletin Huysmans | Bulletin de la Société J.-K. Huysmans. |
| Carton | P. Carton, Un Héraut de Dieu: Léon Bloy, Brevannes, 1936. |
| CLB | Cahiers Léon Bloy. |
| Colleye | H. Colleye, L'Ame de Léon Bloy, Paris, 1930. |
| Invendable | L'Invendable (1904-1907), Paris, 1909. |
| La R. | Collection Joseph Bollery, Bibliothèque de La Rochelle. |
| Méditations | Méditations d'un solitaire en 1916, Paris, 1917. |
| Mendiant | Le Mendiant ingrat, Brussels, 1898. |
| Nouveaux Propos | Le Pal: Suivi des Nouveaux Propos d'un entrepreneur de démolitions, Paris, 1925. |
| OC I-X | Oeuvres complètes de Léon Bloy, Paris, Mercure de France, 1964-72. |
| Pèlerin | Le Pèlerin de l'absolu (1910-12), Paris, 1914. |
| P.H. | La Porte des humbles (1915-17), Paris, 1920. |
| Propos | Propos d'un entrepreneur de démolitions, Paris, 1884. |
| Quatre ans | Quatre ans de captivité à Cochons-sur-Marne (1900-1904), Paris, 1905. |
| Rouzet | G. Rouzet, Léon Bloy et ses amis belges, Liège, n.d. |
| RF | A. Blanc de Saint-Bonnet, La Restauration française, Paris, 1851. |
| S.Apoc. | Au seuil de l'Apocalypse (1913-15), Paris, 1916. |
| V.M. | Le Vieux de la montagne (1907-10), Paris, 1911. |

# THE IMAGINATIVE EXPLOITATION OF THEOLOGICAL DOCTRINES IN THE WORK OF LÉON BLOY

(1846-1917)

## Section I

## Léon Bloy, the Church and the State: A Study in Contradictions

In the interests of historical perspective, it is necessary to begin by describing the critical and apparently negative aspects of Bloy's work. In the first place, it is as polemical critic of contemporary institutions that he made his primary impact; in the second, a detailed account of the attitudes which he rejected throws into relief those elements which constitute the positive aspects of his thought, and the reasons why these were chosen.

### 1. Criticism of the Republic

The critical principle which recommends immediate recourse to a writer's political and social context for the explanation of his philosophical position can in some cases lead to distortion and over-simplification of issues. In this instance, however, the writer himself has indicated that the bases of his adherence to Catholicism lay in his disillusionment with the modern forms of Republican moral and social philosophy;[1] and in addition, the fact that the principle of the inter-relationship of philosophy and politics was repeatedly formulated at this period implies a general political consciousness on the part of both author and reader which must be invoked when analysing the adoption and presentation of particular ideals.[2]

From the middle of the nineteenth century to the First World War, the most explicit confrontation in France on moral, political and philo-

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, ch. xi.

[2] See Barbey d'Aurevilly's Introduction to Les Prophètes du passé, Paris, 1851.

sophical levels was that between the Republican State and the Catholic Church. The historical detail of the development of the conflict is seldom of importance in Bloy's writings, and for this reason some critics have refused to look for political references in his work. It is, nevertheless, the crucial points in the historical opposition of the two ideals which partly condition his thought, closing some options, such as that of liberal theology, and imposing the development of others - credal Catholicism, which it becomes imperative to restate and represent in its original imaginative structure.

The 1860's, which was the period of Bloy's first interest in politics and, subsequently, in religion, saw a widening of the gulf between the Church and the nascent democratic states. Threats to the temporal power of the Pope became general not only in France but over the whole of Europe, and, in self-defence, Vatican authoritarianism increased. In the Gallican Church, this was the high period of confrontation between intransigents and liberal Catholics, represented respectively by Veuillot and Montalembert - the latter, head of a very small Catholic minority, but viewed with favour by his atheistic and Republican compatriots. The eightieth proposition of the encyclical Quanta cura of 1864, declaring total antagonism between the papacy and modern liberal and socialist doctrines, was an expression of the divorce of Church and people. It coincided with the revival of freemasonry under the aegis of positivist doctrine, which soon became the occult religion of the Republic, set up in formal opposition to the Church. The description is borrowed from contemporary Catholic witnesses, and clearly exaggerated; but it is true that from 1865 to 1877 the lodges became increasingly atheistic and gradually removed from their statutes all references to God, or even the "Etre suprême", and that they supplied the Third Republic with some

of its most anti-clerical ministers, including Léon Bourgeois in 1395, and Emile Combes in 1902. Antagonism reached a peak in the violent anti-clericalism of the Commune in 1871, which was the date at which Bloy's conversion from what he later dismissed as an early rabid socialism to an equally rabid form of Catholicism was confirmed.[1] It was this period of upheaval and extremist assertion which conditioned his own intransigence and partly explain its later expression in the striking but anachronistic images of a martyr cult.

The Third Republic, set up in 1871 with a monarchist majority in the Assembly, began like the Second on a note of reconciliation, with the government urging the nation to acts of repentance and reparation for that abandonment of the traditional religious and political order which was said to have brought about the crushing defeat by Prussia. This again was short-lived; the two attempts in 1871 and 1873 to restore the monarchy, and the Catholic agitation for intervention in Italy to save the Pope from Garibaldi were clearly not to popular taste, and when in 1877 the Republicans, under Jules Grévy, took over the Assembly, relations with the Church rapidly deteriorated. Of the two periods of most strain - 1879 to 1886, and 1898 to 1907 - the former provided the background and inspiration for Bloy's first important literary activity, with the composition of Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, Le Révélateur du globe and Le Désespéré, and his two-year collaboration on Le Chat Noir, whilst the second saw a conspicuous and embittering fall in his sales, for which he blamed atheist hostility.

Despite constant alarms, threats and hysterical predictions, physical persecution was limited to the expulsion of the congregations and

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[1] Propos, OC II, 16-17.

to comparatively isolated acts of intimidation such as occasional attempts to break up Church services, which became more frequent immediately after the Separation of December 1905. The real struggle was conducted in the legislature, over the Republican proposals for reorganisation of the educational system which appeared in the 1880's. Primary education had already been redefined by Paul Bert as "l'ensemble des connaissances élémentaires dans le domaine des sciences positives, en dehors de toute hypothèse religieuse et de tout enseignement des dogmes";[1] Jules Ferry, on taking office as Minister of Education in 1879, made it his task to extend the campaign for secularisation to the secondary schools. On the 29th March 1880, decrees were promulgated forbidding unauthorised congregations to teach; in June, the Jesuits were expelled, and in October and November most of the other teaching congregations followed. The law of 21st December 1880 provided secular state education for girls, and laws of 16th June 1881 and 29th March 1882 established the principle of free, compulsory and secular primary education.

Other hostile legislation included laws allowing divorce and lifting the exemption of the seminarists from military service. The budget of the Ministry of Cults was severely reduced.

None of this proved sufficiently irksome to provoke the mass of Catholics, who answered with the scornful and blinkered intransigence typified by Veuillot, Bailly and de Cassagnac but were too weak and apathetic to take active counter-measures. Le Désespéré describes Marchenoir's abortive efforts to encourage the congregations to revolt; and letters written by Bloy at this period express frustration with the

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[1]Cit. A. Dansette, Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine, rev. ed., Paris, 1951, II, 68.

lack of organised opposition in the French Church.[1] The energy of the moment lay only in the Vatican, from which came both provocative and reconciliatory moves.

Between 1884 and 1889, after the death of Pius IX, the See made some effort at compromise. With the "Kulturkampf" in Germany, Russian persecution in Poland, liberalism dominant in Belgium, and England and the United States openly indifferent, the Pope felt his isolation and looked to France for support. The encyclical Nobilissima Gallorum gens of February 1884 encouraged closer links between Church and French state, whilst Immortale Dei, November 1885, on the constitution of Christian states, although it asserted state protection of the Catholic Church as the ideal, admitted tolerance of all cults to be preferable to that of none and encouraged Catholics to greater involvement in national politics. Libertas followed to similar effect in 1888; and in November 1890, Cardinal Lavigerie's toast to the Republic from the French naval base at Algiers paved the way for the "Ralliement" encyclical of February 1892, Au milieu des sollicitudes. However, mistrust of the Pope's intentions among Catholics and Republicans alike soon ended the brief relaxation of tension. The Dreyfus case, which reached a climax in the years 1898-99, marked a turning-point at which the identification of

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 22. Letters of this period expressed Bloy's support for the idea of a Catholic "Ligue" [to the abbé Anger, 20th July 1879 (La R.); to de Gobineau, September 1880 (Boll. I, 446-48)]. A correspondence with a Jesuit friend, Aymer d'Abzac de Ladouze, in Poitiers at the height of the crisis, kept Bloy in direct contact with events (La R.). D'Abzac considered Republican insistence on using strictly legal methods as more pernicious than overt persecution: ". . . parce que bien des bourgeois que révolteraient des confiscations et des supplices, trouvent bien simple qu'on disperse les moines, qu'on les fasse plier de force sous l'empire de la loi" (20th October 1880).

Church and authoritarian ruling class was reasserted. In 1899, Charles Maurras founded his Action française.

In July 1901, persecution recommenced, with Waldeck-Rousseau's promulgation of the law demanding that religious congregations apply for authorisation or be dissolved and forbidding members of unauthorised congregations to teach. Combes' ministry (1902-1905) put the law into effect, refusing both right to teach and requests for authorisation.[1] Protest came only from the See, to which Pius X had acceded in July 1903.

The process of separation of Church and State began in November 1904 with a law tabled by Combes. In December 1905, Briand secured the passage of what was intended as a moderate proposal to secure freedom of cults and of conscience. Though refusing State patronage to the Church, it allowed religious bodies to retain their identity and their property on the proviso that they change name and function as "associations cultuelles". On the 10th August 1906, Pius X rejected this in the encyclical Gravissimo, which marked a final split. Opinions on the opportuneness and the terms both of the separation and of the Pope's reaction were varied. Loisy was disappointed by the refusal of what he considered generous conditions, and prophesied a period of administrative and financial difficulty for the Gallican Church which might well lead to the end of Catholicism in France; whilst the intransigents, including Bloy, were delighted by the Pope's firmness, but apprehensive of unpleasant reprisals.[2] In the end, Church discipline profited by the

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[1] See Quatre ans, 20th July 1902.

[2] A. F. Loisy, Quelques lettres, Ceffonds, 1908, No. 23 (20th December 1906); L'Invendable, 16th August 1906.

restoration to the See of the right to nominate bishops, and the quality of the priesthood improved as Gallican administrative abuses were corrected; but there was a period of some unease before the outcome became clear and hostility calmed, though the general public remained on the whole ill-disposed up to the outbreak of war in 1914.

Bloy's reaction to these developments sometimes took the form of discussion of specific social or political events, as with his criticism of Henri Didon's Les Allemands, published in 1884, or the account in his diary of the events of the Separation. More usually, however, he chose to imitate Barbey in directing his attention to the philosophical and moral attitudes underlying these phenomena. In his discussion of the activities of the Republic, he concentrated on setting out the rejection of disinterested idealism, individualism and heroism which he believed were the source of the anti-clerical decrees.

He saw the moral and political degeneration of France as directly connected with her adoption of materialist and positivist doctrines. His unpublished article "Héroisme", composed in 1870, gave this as the cause of the Franco-Prussian war: "la plus inconcevable tiédeur et le plus universel mépris des choses du ciel dont l'histoire soit capable de nous présenter le tableau"; and proposed as a solution the reintegration of moral values through the penitential cult of the Sacred Heart.[1] A letter to Veyri of May 1876 similarly contrasted the ideas of heroism, enthusiasm and aspiration which are the life of the individual soul with the ideas of Comte and Darwin, summarily dismissed as atheistic commonplace, which had procured the decay of French civilisation - "il vous est loisible de prononcer syphilisation". Renewal would

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[1] Boll. I, 138-43.

come from rejection of the latter and resort to tradition for the rediscovery of morality and heroism.[1] 1876 was the date at which Bloy first came across Arthur de Gobineau's mediaeval epic Amadis, which he characterised as "la Beauté dans la Grandeur".[2] Apparently oblivious of the poem's pro-German content, he used it as an imaginative pattern to carry his own predictions for French democracy:

> Eh bien! voici venir maintenant, non plus les Barbares, mais les sauvages de la démocratie. Que le bon Dieu les bénisse, car ils vont nous faire table rase de toute civilisation et de toute sécurité. Alors, comme le genre humain a besoin de vivre, après tout, il nous viendra peut-être la Révolution des héros, après les révolutions des lâches et la Renaissance des martyrs de l'abnégation après la Renaissance des voluptueux et des apostats.[3]

The same preoccupations inspired his interest in 1884 in Verdaguer and Mistral, whose nationalist praise of Provençal and Catalonian poetry was praise of the last bastion of Latin civilisation, and in Joséphin Péladan's cycle of novels on the decadence of the Latin races brought about by the decline of aristocracy.[4] Bloy added to the latter that the decline of Catholicism had also been a contributory factor.

This interpretation of the Republican ethos was the central idea of the early polemical articles by which Bloy first became known. A chronological review of these shows no refinement or development of the theme; Bloy works not by careful analyses, but by repetition of a limited number of simplified general points. The refinement is in his

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[1] Ibid., pp. 250-60.

[2] Ibid., p. 277.

[3] Ibid., p. 276.

[4] "Le Dernier Enfant d'Homère", Le Chat Noir, 31st May 1884; "Finis Latinorum", ibid., 11th October 1884.

control of the rhetorical techniques through which these points are presented, and whose elaborations impose on the reader an assent which could not have been given to the unadorned assertion.

The seven articles written in 1874 for the two Catholic journals, L'Univers and La Restauration, consisted mainly of book reviews in which Bloy, following a common nineteenth-century critical practice, used the book under discussion as a pretext to set out his own intransigent views. Barbey's influence can be felt in both content and in style,[1] which, in deference to the strictures of Barbey and Blanc de Saint-Bonnet, is simpler and more objective and less imaginatively coloured than Bloy's usual manner.[2] Not that Bloy was totally dependent on the older writers; writing to ask Barbey for information on Gaspard de Coligny to incorporate in his review of a new biography, he declared that, the book in question having been weak - and he having been instructed to treat it charitably - he had already decided his approach: "me rattrapper [sic] sur la Ligue qui n'est pas une chose faible ni petite dans l'histoire de France".[3] The finished article was an enthusiastic apology for Catherine di Medicis and the Saint Bartholomew massacre.[4]

Since the subject matter of the books Bloy reviewed was mostly historical, his apologetic soon took the form of a restatement of the

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[1]For a discussion of the influence of Barbey on Bloy, see J. Petit, Barbey d'Aurevilly critique, Paris, 1963, pp. 673-81.

[2]Undated letter from Blanc de Saint-Bonnet [CLB No. 1 (1st Yr.), Sept-Oct. 1924, p. 52].

[3]Letter to Barbey, 11th December 1873 (Boll. I, 179).

[4]"Gaspard de Coligny", L'Univers, 21st April 1874.

traditionalist belief in the importance of the past as an experimental guide to the best way of dealing with the problems of the present. He presented history in the words of Donoso Cortès as: "ce clair miroir où Dieu regarde extérieurement ses desseins"; a demonstration of the way in which Providence operates through social events and institutions towards the gradual redemption of man.[1] In another review, he quoted Léon Gautier's phrase: "L'histoire est le récit des efforts de Dieu pour conduire l'homme à l'éternelle béatitude"; adding this time his own pessimistic description of the resistance which God's efforts encounter from men. This is described as a product of the perversity of original sin, compounded by what would seem to be the inescapable cumulative effects of moral and historical determinism but for which Bloy uses an Augustinian metaphor of final attraction to maintain personal responsibility:

> . . . l'histoire est en même temps le récit des résistances perpetuelles de l'homme à Dieu, les annales terribles du péché. Cela commence à la chute et, en vérité, s'il y a dans les mots quelque métaphysique, la chute continue dans les aggravations effroyables du temps et de l'espace. Le genre humain, tombé des plateaux lumineux de l'Eden, tombe toujours, suivant sa loi de gravitation spirituelle, vers son nouveau centre ténébreux, et Satan l'attirerait invinciblement, si Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ n'avait pas diminué sa force et allégé notre pesanteur.[2]

The facts of history were an empirical demonstration of Catholic truth: "un enseignement sauveur pour les faibles et pour les petits".[3] Bloy referred to Saint-Bonnet's dictum: "La vérité se formule humainement

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[1] Ibid.

[2] "Variétés", L'Univers, 23rd June 1874.

[3] Ibid.

en trois grandes manières: objectivement, par la théologie et la morale; subjectivement, par la philosophie, et expérimentalement par l'histoire".[1] In consequence, these facts were the best matter for the apologist, whose task it was to give them the necessary arrangement and interpretation to make their moral plain. Republican historians, who deliberately distorted or evaded the Catholic meaning in events, were sent by God as a punishment for humanity, to withdraw the teachings of his Justice - a difficult and contrived argument, presented in the equally artificial classical topos of Divine Pity leaving the earth to take refuge in heaven. Bloy gives as an example the Republican opposition to the proposed sanctification of the Princess Louise, describing Jules Soury's celebrated article in La Revue des Deux Mondes, which attributed the proposal to ultramontane political machinations, as a deliberately misleading misinterpretation of the Princess' expiatory vocation and an attempt to undermine the solidarity of Monarchy and Church, which is the only hope left to Society.[2]

The Republican thesis that history is an account of human progress was summarily dismissed as a half-understanding of the theology of redemption: "une obscure perception du fait énorme de notre rachat".[3] Bloy considered the idea of the necessary progress of the species one which was antagonistic to the notions of liberty and of the progress of the individual. This point was later given imaginative development in historical studies where the point of interest in an epoch was declared to be the individuals through whom Providence effects its designs. The concept of predestination restored dignity to Man:

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[1] "La Maison de France et la maison Buloz", La Restauration, 10th September 1874.

[2] Ibid

[3] "Variétés".

> "La personne de Colomb et sa découverte, dit le comte Roselly de Lorgues, étaient les deux termes d'une céleste mathématique." Rien ne suffisait, humainement, pour la découverte. Il fallait la personne de celui qui portait, inscrite jusque dans son nom, cette vocation miraculeuse. Je sais que cela est tout à fait incompréhensible et, par conséquent, tout à fait absurde pour la plupart des hommes de ce temps d'égalité, qui, voulant ressusciter l'antiquité en haine du christianisme, n'ont réussi à substituer au polythéisme païen qu'un polythéisme ridicule de vanités exaspérées et impuissantes. Il faut être trois fois docteur pour savoir aujourd'hui ce que c'est que la personne humaine, cette gigantesque royauté solitaire que l'Eglise avait reconstruite tout entière des reliefs déshonorés du festin de Tantale, ramassés dans le sang du Fils de Dieu. La personne humaine n'est plus rien désormais qu'une unité mathématique sous l'aveugle despotisme du Nombre. Que voulez-vous que comprenne aux vocations surnaturelles et aux divins esclavages de l'amour, cette abjecte esclave de l'opinion, et qu'espérez-vous produire en elle en lui parlant de sa grandeur et des éternelles particularités de sa prédestination?[1]

The logic of history showed that society decayed in the absence of a strong central principle. This was implicitly acknowledged by modern enthusiasm for socialist ideas: "il faut absolument, pour ne pas mourir, se jeter dans les bras d'une réalité quelconque". The disorder of modern society was the product of the progressive rejection of Catholicism. After de Maistre, Bloy described the satanic origins of the Republic, which was sent to procure the expiatory sufferings of France by undermining the stable order of Authority and Family based on religion. According to Bloy, the prolonged period of decadence which had succeeded the Revolution was part of this expiation - a point which neither de Maistre nor Bonald could have foreseen. He distinguished three stages in post-revolutionary society. In 1789, man substituted his interests for those of God in the laws and Code of France; in 1830,

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[1] Le Révélateur du globe, OC I, 102.

with the abolition of the aristocracy, in social life; in 1840, in the economic sphere.[1] In its emphasis that the last substitution is still in progress, the schema points forward to Bloy's later investigation of the symbol of Money as the modern substitute for Christ; while the rationalisation of the accelerating decadence of the present age as a variant form of penitential suffering reappears in Le Désespéré and Le Salut par les Juifs. In both cases, more elaborate presentation veils the crudity of the original schematisation, which is here clearly apparent.

In a review of Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's La Légitimité, Bloy supported the writer's exhortation that the present order be replaced by the old aristocratic régime, which he described as establishing on a three-fold basis of capital, order and aristocracy a nexus of social duties presided over by Providence to unite men and lead them to God through their individual acts of choice. No material proofs were offered; merely the assertion that the philosophy was deduced from experience.

Most of these articles expressed their criticisms in general and abstract terms. That on Carlyle's History of the French Revolution stands apart in its introduction of stylistic concepts which detach Bloy from the sphere of Barbey's influence and justify his own preference for polemic based on domineering and flamboyant imagery.[2] Bloy began his review by stating his two intentions of reawakening

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[1] "Variétés".

[2] "L'Histoire de la Révolution française", L'Univers, 20th May 1874. A translation of Carlyle's book was published in Paris in 3 vols., 1865-67. See also J. Barbey d'Aurevilly, "Thomas Carlyle: Histoire de la Révolution française", Le Pays, 23rd July 1865 (rpt. Le XIX^e siècle, ed. J. Petit, II, Paris, 1966, pp. 57-61).

interest in good, virile literature and revealing the moral evil of the Revolution. He praised Carlyle's denunciation of the Revolution, except in its few heroic representatives, who were to be preferred to the last mediocre representatives of the Bourbons; his eulogy of natural and heroic simplicity, as opposed to the artificiality and insincerity found in both Revolution and degenerate monarchy; and the objectivity of his treatment, which compared favourably with the "biaised" approach of Michelet. Most of all, he admired Carlyle's style, for its pictorial qualities, its icy violence and its irony: "majestueuse et biblique". He was doubtful whether Carlyle's use of caricature was justifiable, since it constituted a blasphemy against the liturgical significance of the redeemed body, but finally decided that, like his own polemic violence, it was a permissible weapon against impiety.[1]

A dedication to Martineau admitted conscious imitation of Carlyle in Bloy's first sustained critical work La Chevalière de la Mort.[2] There is a similarity of theme; both represent the Queen as a victim, suffering to expiate the sins of France and the Bourbons - set by Carlyle in Biblical imagery, whilst Bloy prefers the patterns and phrases of the liturgy and the Way of the Cross - and both attribute the decline of the monarchy to the degenerative effect of eighteenth-century philosophy on the aristocracy, and describe the Revolutionary state as the reign of mediocrity, anti-heroism and mob-domination, with all true values replaced by moral and verbal cant. Most important,

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[1] See also "L'Inquisition en littérature", Le Figaro, 6th April 1884.

[2] For the dedication, see CLB No. 3 (6th Yr.), Jan.-Feb. 1930, p. 105. Most of Bloy's book was written in 1877; "Un Dernier Spectre" was added in 1881; "Le Fumier des Lys", 1889; and "Le Prince noir", 1891. The book was published in Gand by Siffer in 1891.

however, are similarities in presentation; Bloy refers specifically in his book to his admiration for the style of Carlyle: "le Jupin tonnant de l'épithète empoisonnée".[1] La Méduse-Astruc of 1875, written as a poetic exercise in hyperbole, already showed signs of his influence, but its rhetoric was still comparatively formal and restrained. That of the second work breaks free of the conventional terms into new patterns strongly reminiscent of Carlyle's rhythms and idiosyncratic imagery.

In La Chevalière de la Mort, the long rhetorical blocks of La Méduse-Astruc are broken for greater impact by interjection and apostrophe and split into brief paragraphs consisting often of a single aphoristic sentence or telling image.

The resources of metaphor are called into play to sharpen the focus of ideas. Abstract concepts or comments are summarised and vivified by translation into images; the transformation of the revolutionary court of justice into the arena of Christian martyrdom represents simultaneously the injustice of the Queen's trial, her victimal rôle, the hypocrisy and mediocrity of her judges, and the bloodthirsty bestiality of the mob:

> . . . tout le peuple. . . demande qu'on le fortifie du spectacle de cette fête expiatoire. Expedit UNAM mori pro populo.
>
> Le peuple souverain est assis dans l'amphithéâtre immense et vocifère à pleine gueule pour que la lionne lui soit amenée. Car ce n'est plus, à cette heure, de "chrétiens aux lions" qu'il s'agit, mais de lions et de lionnes aux fils rénégats des anciens chrétiens.
>
> Parfois, on lui jette aussi un crocodile, un Danton énorme ou quelque autre monstre sanguinolent et phraseur. Il y donne un coup de sa dent superbe, mais il est insatiable surtout de lions et, malheureusement, l'espèce en est rare.

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[1] La Chevalière de la Mort, OC V, 36. See J. Holloway's chapter on Carlyle in The Victorian Sage, London, 1962, to which this section is indebted.

> Fouquier-Tinville, le belluaire de l'innocence, y pourvoit de son mieux. Mais il n'a pas eu, jusqu'à cette heure, un aussi grandiose combat à offrir à son maître sans-culotte, à son César vermineux et omnipotent, aux aboiements innombrables: le combat de la Reine et de la Mort! de la Reine plus forte que l'extrême infortune et de la Mort plus faible que l'Amour, dit le Saint Livre.[1]

The moral anarchy of the Revolution is echoed by the reversal of familiar order, in the throwing of the lion to the former Christians, and by the constant metamorphosis of the humans into animals, or monsters, with the image caught at the turning-point: "le peuple . . . vocifère à pleine gueule"; "un monstre sanguinolent et phraseur"; "un . . . combat à offrir à son maître sans-culotte, à son César vermineux et omnipotent, aux aboiements innombrables".

Sustained imagery carries the elaboration of an argument, as when Bloy, describing the abjection of the eighteenth century, "un aplatissement universel des âmes", adds that this derives from the refusal to consider the notion of God as amenable to philosophical discussion, which must result in the loss of the dynamic principle of action:

> C'est le ventre à terre de toute une société devant Dieu, non pour l'adorer, mais pour qu'il passe sans toucher personne, comme le tourbillon de feu d'une batterie qu'il faut emporter d'un seul coup, quand elle ne tonnera plus.
>
> Seulement le sol était si détrempé où cette société s'était couchée et le ventre avait tellement adhéré à la fange, que les trois ou quatre générations qui avaient pris cette attitude ne purent jamais se relever.
>
> Les canons et les cavaliers passèrent dessus et la victoire de Dieu s'en alla plus loin chercher des poitrines.[2]

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[1] La Chevalière de la Mort, OC V, 47.

[2] Ibid., p. 28.

The sustained image is associated with both writers' predilection for hyperbole, which Bloy believed an artistic necessity for the clear portrayal of evils and abuses.[1] It also includes a tendency to bombastic exaggeration, as in the following movement, where the eighteenth-century's antagonism to the heroic is shown poisoning the whole of social and moral life. The only new point made is in the concluding twist of the metaphor from the social landscape to the moral plane:

> Le XVIII$^{e}$ siècle eut une haine furibonde auprès de laquelle les haines du XIX$^{e}$ ressemblent à de l'amour, la haine de l'Héroïsme.
>
> Cette haine atteignit des proportions puniques et ce fut là, si on veut, sa manière à lui d'être grand, son unique grandeur.
>
> Ce fut une haine sauvage, une exécration endémique et désepérée qui mâchait les balles, empoisonnait les fontaines, incendiait les campagnes, embuscadait les peuples et les rois, et les entassait comme des cloportes venimeux, dans les ravins, dans le fond des bois, sur le rebord de tous les sentiers du coeur humain.[2]

Caricature is used to give a summary denunciatory tableau of a character or a whole era in a manner directly imitated from Carlyle. An evocation of the philosophical and artistic superficiality of the eighteenth century presents its representatives as functions of the pallid pastoral genre, set in a nature neatly enclosed by Encyclopaedist hypotheses and reduced to toy dimensions - "de petits moutons blancs et de petits arbres bien découpés sur de petites aurores fleur-de-pêcher" - and continually re-digested and transformed by a succession of philosophers: "le miel sauvage des Géorgiques. . . découle du bec jaune de Fontenelle":

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[1] Le Pèlerin de l'absolu, 11 September 1912.

[2] La Chevalière de la Mort, OC V, 28-29.

> Une espèce de paganisme mollasse se combine avec je ne sais quels détritus infects de Port-Royal. Greuze tempère Lucrèce, et le miel sauvage des Georgiques, recueilli dans les flancs entr'ouverts des taureaux d'Aristée, transformé en une mélasse impure, découle du bec jaune de Fontenelle sur la palette rose de Boucher ou de Fragonard.
>
> Les hommes de ce temps grandissent dans une espèce de lumière lavée et trouble à travers de laquelle ils aperçoivent le ciel comme le frontispice turquin d'un poème encyclopédique, et la nature comme une idylle à la Deshoulières ou à la Florian, pleine de petits moutons blancs et de petits arbres bleus découpés sur de petites aurores fleur-de-pêcher et se prolongeant ainsi indéfiniment sous les horizons.
>
> La vie entière devient une pastorale ou un madrigal pour ces mortels allégoriques auprès de qui les prostitués Byzantins du XV^e siècle prennent dans l'imagination terrifiée les proportions titanesques des prosopopées eschyliennes".[1]

Personification is used to characterize the empty rhetoric of the Revolution, which rises into prominence through a series of metamorphosing images: "cette interminable queue de poisson de toute sirène révolutionnaire. . .cette rhétorique innuable et indestructible, . . . qui bave ses identiques formules sur trente siècles de civilisation . . .cette cantatrice déplumée du morne théâtre de la Rengaine".[2] Elsewhere, the figure makes a philosophical point; in the following passage, it lifts onto the same plane political forces ("la Révolution"; "l'Autorité"), moral concepts ("les Intentions. . .bonnes et mauvaises") and their human embodiments to demonstrate unrecognised implications in the execution of the single person of Louis XVI:

> La Révolution, en pieuse fille qu'elle était, ensevelit son Progéniteur inconscient et mutilé dans une nécropole plus vaste que la crypte traditionnelle

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1 Ibid., p. 29. See also the caricatures of Louis XIV and Louis XV, pp. 33 and 39.

2 Ibid., p. 31.

> des rois de France, obituaire immense sans inscriptions fastueuses ni lampes funéraires, où descendirent silencieusement, tête coupée, les Intentions innombrables, bonnes ou mauvaises, qui s'étaient agitées, sous forme humaine, dans ce crépuscule vespéral de l'Autorité.[1]

Irony appears in aphoristic form: "Ce fut une époque merveilleusement superficielle où il semble que tout le monde naissait avec le don de ne rien entendre aux choses supérieures",[2] or sustained, as in the spectre's address to the people enumerating the Queen's crimes and the virtues of the Republic. He elaborates a eulogy of the Republican principle of fraternity, shown in the process of degenerating from its first purpose of resisting tyranny into uncontrollable self-destruction. It gradually emerges from the movement of his speech that the principle has been redefined:

> De tous les points du territoire, les tyrans qui nous guettent voient monter vers le ciel la sanglante fumée de nos holocaustes fraternels! Quiconque refuse d'être un de nos frères est assuré de mourir, car nous n'entendons pas qu'on puisse être autre chose et nous avons exterminé la clémence pour épouvanter les rois qui voudraient abolir la fraternité![3]

In another instance, an accumulation of rhetorical figures eventually proves to have the ironic function of denouncing revolutionary rhetoric:

> Le feu des bûchers de l'Inquisition, les ténèbres du moyen-âge, la poison des Borgia, le couteau de la Saint-Barthélemy, le glaive d'Harmodias et d'Aristogiton, la chute des Trente Tyrans et la draperie stoique des deux Brutus, l'hiératisme franc-maçonnique de Weishaupt et le vicariat savoyard de l'évangéliste Jean-Jacques, la fédération des peuples par-dessus les océans étonnés et l'apostolat transatlantique des insurrections trois fois saintes! etc. Le génie déclamatoire de toutes les

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[1] Ibid., p. 44.

[2] Ibid., p. 29.

[3] Ibid., pp. 56-63.

> races sublunaires concourut à l'agrégat surhumain de cette rhétorique miraculeuse qui inscrivit dans l'Histoire la déclaration des Droits de l'Homme . . .

A sudden fall from the ironic tone in Bloy's conclusion underlines the seriousness of subscription to this rhetoric, whose images mask the inadequacy of man, figured by Bloy in the terms of Catholic doctrine:

> Et cependant, à travers cette immense Courtille de têtes coupées, dans la poussière de tous les effondrements, apparut, indigente et triste, la faible nature de l'homme, plus dépouillée et plus distincte qu'elle n'était jamais apparue.
>
> Sous le masque sanglant d'une rhétorique transcendante poussée jusqu'à l'égorgement et jusqu'à la terreur suprême, l'homme immuable, le misérable Homme de la Chute, suait et haletait dans son éternelle lamentation.[1]

Such sudden changes of tone are frequent; as the shift from violence to sentimentality when Marie-Antoinette makes her first appearance from a chaos of rhetoric and cant "comme ce délicieux arc-en-ciel du matin qui présage, dit-on, le mauvais temps".[2] They support the accumulation of metamorphosing imagery and disjunctive syntax in creating an impression of the dynamism inherent in the contradictions of the Revolution, which is exactly that of Carlyle's work.

The writing of this book was preparation for the satire of modern society which Bloy undertook in his articles for Le Chat Noir in 1882.[3] He adopted here a lighter approach, allowing artistic exploitation of the polemic genre to take precedence over his serious Catholic intention,

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[1] Ibid., p. 32.

[2] Ibid., p. 33.

[3] Introduced to Le Chat Noir by his cousin, Emile Goudeau, Bloy supplied copy regularly from August 1882 to November 1884.

and indulging in lengthier and more fanciful critique of contemporary event and direct attack on named individuals: "il fallait m'ajuster à mon siècle d'une façon quelconque et je n'ai trouvé que celle-là".[1]

The collection of these articles, published in 1884 under the title Propos d'un entrepreneur de démolitions, was presented as a denunciation of post-Revolutionary society; "le plus terrible livre qui puisse être inspiré par le sentiment despotique d'une irrémédiable décadence".[2] Bloy offered a spectrum of criticisms.

"Le Neveu prodigue", which appeared in December 1883, uses a text lifted whole from La Chevalière de la Mort to attack the materialism inherited by modern society from the previous century.[3] In contrast with the superficiality of the earlier period, Bloy describes the complex disillusionment and despair of the present: "la société la moins superficielle qui fut jamais, . . . une société de damnés, qui trempe ses fils dans le mépris comme dans un Styx de ténèbres, pour les rendre invulnérables à l'espérance". The sources of heroism - religion, patriotism and art - have been systematically diverted:

> . . . le sang rouge et le sang bleu ayant coulé ensemble dans le même ravin révolutionnaire; les anciennes larmes amoureuses de la foi chrétienne ayant été détournées par de modernes ingénieurs pour l'irrigation du potager dramatique; la noble gloire militaire ayant servi, comme une chandelle de deux sous, à graisser les bottes nauséeuses de l'Allemand; la littérature, enfin, ayant réussi, en moins de soixante ans, à exténuer si complètement l'esprit français que ce malade en est réduit aux liquides de Zola ou de M. Catulle Mendès; tout ce qui pouvait faire palpiter un généreux homme étant, à cette heure, éteint, déteint, bafoué, profané, déshonoré, vomi, balayé comme du crottin de journaliste . . . .

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[1] Propos d'un entrepreneur de démolitions, OC II, 16.

[2] Letter to Stock, September 1884 (La R.).

[3] Cp. La Chevalière de la Mort, OC V, 29.

Bloy borrows Adolphe Willette's Pierrot (the bourgeois preoccupied with pleasure, although he knows that it is empty and that it ends only in death) to represent the tragic duel between materialism and the ideal: "le duel de la Poésie et de l'Argent. Duel inégal et bête, comme tous les duels, où la Poésie est toujours frappée à mort".

The Republic is anti-art ("L'Ecrasement de l'infâme"), anti-poverty ("La Frénésie du médiocre") and anticlerical ("Notre linge sale"; "Le Cent-unième Chacal"). In the last, a review of Flor O'Squarr's popular novel, Bloy's metaphors attack the materialistic vulgarity of middle-class anti-clericalism:

> D'après les idées belges, tout homme qui dépose un excrément contre le mur de l'Eglise est nécessairement un héros, un tonneau d'Heidelberg de toutes les vertus, un martyr même, mais surtout et avant tout, c'est une âme religieuse de la plus sublime élévation. "De tous les croyants de son époque, cet insurgé, cet hérétique était peut-être le plus fervent. Il adorait l'Etre suprême, mais ne lui souffrait pas d'autels humains." Voilà le reste de gigot philosophique que M. Flor O'Squarr se croit, en son âme et conscience, obligé de nous servir.

Against the incursions of freemasonry, the unpublished article "Léon XIII et la conspiration des imbéciles", inspired by the encyclical Humanum genus of 1884, gives a brief history of the rise of the Order, ridiculing its rites and dogmas, and the hypocrisy of its claim to benevolent intentions, but also pointing out its political subversiveness. Bloy quotes the Pope's reassertion of divine right which contradicts Revolutionary principles: "Dieu est l'auteur de la souveraineté et de la société civile; - ceux qui sont revêtus de la souveraineté doivent être regardés comme les coopérateurs ou les ministres de Dieu; - il est absolument faux que les peuples aient le droit de secouer l'obéissance selon leur bon plaisir".

In "Le Fond des coeurs", published in October 1884, Bloy reaches Rabelaisian heights in his criticism of "la salauderie nationale". The heart of the French public, the source of their response to any form of heroism or idealism which challenges their own standards, is compared to a chamber-pot; and the image elaborated to a fantastically concrete reality:

> Ce qui se promène de ces vases sur nos boulevards est incroyable. Pour peu qu'ils soient bousculés, l'infâme contenu s'en élance avec tout son parfum et telle est, en deux mots, la très exacte configuration littéraire de toute émotion contemporaine.

The same article contains the first stage of the scatological image elaborated in Le Désespéré to condemn Léo Taxil's attack on the Church in his Vie de Jésus.[1]

It was the obscene polemic image which Bloy at this time most readily developed in his own short-lived revue Le Pal, published in four numbers from 4th March to 2nd April 1885, and in Le Désespéré. In the latter, Marchenoir explained its necessity, given his view of society:

> Il voyait le monde moderne, avec toutes ses institutions et toutes ses idées, dans un océan de boue. C'était à ses yeux, une Atlantide submergée dans un dépotoir. Impossible d'arriver à une autre conception. D'un autre côté, sa poétique d'écrivain exigeait que l'expression d'une réalité quelconque fût toujours adéquate à la vision de l'esprit. En conséquence, il se trouvait, habituellement, dans la nécessité la plus inévitable de se détourner de la vie contemporaine, ou de l'exprimer en de répulsives images, que l'incandescence du sentiment pouvait, seule, faire applaudir.[2]

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 210-12.

[2] Ibid., pp. 264-65.

Bloy's revue, mostly devoted to criticism of fellow journalists, whom Bloy held responsible for the present state of society, pushed the method to its limits in the brief but cogent description of the social state which is "La République des vaincus", using images of disease and decay which reappear to the same purpose in the later Revival writers, but at no point with such violence and clarity.

Since the disaster of 1871, the Republic, eldest daughter of the Church, become "la Gueuse du monde", "Jézabel de lupanar", is leprous, deliquescent and putrefying:

> - Tu es pourrie, ma chère fille, avait dit une voix maternelle, et la première patte bestiale qui s'est avancée contre la reine des nations l'a rendue fluente comme le cadavre de ce vieux sodomite empoisonné par son vice que je vis un jour porter en terre et qui déferlait sinistrement dans sa bière, avec un clapotis de futaille secouée et d'irrévélables suintements noirs! ...

Bloy fuses the charges of personal and public moral decadence with the image of sodomy, which he declares widespread among the public figures of France, whom he names, and the general populace. He sketches the signs of decay - unemployment and prostitution, and a government of tired old men. The climax is an ornate reworking of the traditional image of the Republican temple:

> Au fronton, une mixture présidentielle d'Harpagon et de Prudhomme curulaire, pagode occidentale, vespasiennement accroupie sur des excréments d'or.
>
> A ses pieds, l'indicible fripouille gouvernante des voleurs, des faussaires, des agioteurs, des saltimbanques et des inexpugnables crétins par lesquels M. de Bismarck est l'empereur des Français;
>
> Au dessous, la colonnade phallique des fonctionnaires publics, innombrables complices résignés de cette architecture de dégoûtation;
>
> Plus bas, s'il est possible, le mur de soutènement du Clergé, masse étonnament friable de médiocrité, de bassesse, de lâcheté ou d'infamie, rendue moins consistante encore par le mélange de quelques rares silex de vertu;

> Enfin, dominant tout, flottant dans l'azur,
> claquant dans les vents, les torcheculatives
> oriflammes de la littérature contemporaine.[1]

The tone of these articles differs from the heavier and more sober style of those written for Le Figaro in the spring of 1884. Bloy pronounced here on specific political issues: in "L'Héritier de Polyphème", the anticlerical decrees of Paul Bert; "La Guerre des mercenaires", the Anzin miners' strike, which he believed was machinated by the socialists; "Les Cadets du suffrage universel", the current agitation for universal suffrage. He deplored the "laicisation à outrance" of schools and hospitals, which had resulted from the recent elections, and rejected Clemenceau's latest minimum wage proposals as: "L'extermination de toute liberté pour la capitale, la grève universelle, une équitable répartition de la famine et de fraternels massacres pour finir". Republican promises of universal happiness were pipe-dreams.

Bloy's later criticism preferred to embody its charges of mediocrity in caricature of individual contemporaries or representative types within the dramatic context of his novels and contes or in the paradox of his Exégèse des lieux communs, all of which are of more literary significance than these early articles. The latter, however, remain of some interest as the medium in which to observe the elaboration of Bloy's polemic technique in its experiments with baroque imagery and ornate language and in its invocation of a violence not yet blunted by over-use. It is as much the nature of his descriptive method as the enumeration of the targets against which it is directed

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[1] "La République des vaincus", Le Pal, No. 3, 23rd March 1885.

which gives an indication of the intense contempt in which Bloy held the secular state, which induced him to turn to confessional religion for a higher idealism.

## 2. Criticism of the Church

As he explained in his preface to the Propos d'un entrepreneur de démolitions, Bloy soon found anti-heroic attitudes equally well represented within the Church itself. The article of 1885, "Le Christ au dépotoir", the product of his disillusionment with his Catholic contemporaries, castigated the ignominy of the religious community which made necessary a theology based on the ignominy of God. Bloy intended his own Catholic critique to be a refinement on and rebuttal of the dream of the Romantic Jean-Paul Richter, in which Christ in his Agony challenged God for an answer to the evil of the world, and, like the rest of humanity, received none. Bloy suggested a configurative response of self-humiliation and acts of reparation for Christ's state, which is the fault of Man:

> C'est le Père qui répondrait à ces âmes dolentes et sans asile:
>
> - Si vous avez besoin de mon Fils, cherchez-le dans les ordures. C'est le tabernacle que lui ont fait ses derniers adorateurs, mille fois plus lâches et plus atroces que les bourreaux qui l'avaient couvert d'outrage et mis en sang.
>
> Moi-même, aujourd'hui, je ne pourrais plus le reconnaître.
>
> Arrangez-vous de ce Rédempteur souillé dont vous avez contemné la fournaise de douleurs et qui ne peut plus que vous restituer en désespoir la fécale défiguration de son Sacrifice![1]

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[1] "Le Christ au dépotoir", Le Pal, No. 4, 2nd April 1885.

His disappointment caused Bloy to take up critical positions against the Church equal in violence to his denunciation of the Republic. Rosny, in his Mémoires, concluded from this that he practised total independence of Church discipline:

> Bloy fut un des hommes qui me fit le plus réfléchir au problème de la foi. Il est difficile d'imaginer qu'il ne croyait point, il est plus difficile encore de déterminer sa croyance. Il se voulait catholique et sa conduite fut un démenti permanent à cette volonté; sa conduite est le plus étrange salmigondis d'actes manifestement contraires à la catholicité. Il se confessait, il communiait constamment, sans pratiquer ni le pardon des injures ni la douceur évangélique, et presque aucun précepte fondamental. Il ne s'inclinait pas du tout devant les décisions de l'Eglise; il considérait tout le clergé, y compris le pape, comme un assemblage de fripouilles faites de fange, de m... et de crachats. Il s'était créé une croyance toute personnelle qu'il retouchait selon les sauts de son humeur et de son imagination.[1]

The argument jumps rapidly from the evidence of a violence and a flamboyance which were largely literary pose to the conclusion that Bloy was totally unorthodox. A review of his position with regard to the various options open within the Church will begin to clarify this issue and help establish the proper context of his thought.

i. Intransigent Catholicism

Bloy's conversion through Barbey automatically introduced him to the intransigent Catholics, ultramontane, authoritarian and monarchist by profession.

The group's main interests were political. After the Franco-Prussian War, the middle-class and aristocratic Right was responsible for the inauguration on a national scale of penitential practices

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[1] J.-H. Rosny aîné, Mémoires de la vie littéraire, Paris, 1927, pp. 238-39.

such as the pilgrimages and confederations of reparation connected with the cult of the Sacred Heart, which were inspired by the national need for new enthusiasm and a new moral framework rather than any deep religious convictions. Both the masses and the leaders of the party were preoccupied with the restoration of the legitimate monarchy - the theme repeated, with variations, from de Maistre to Blanc de Saint-Bonnet. After the elections of February 1871, this seemed a possibility, but was prevented first by disputes over the respective claims of the comte de Paris and the comte de Chambord, and then by Chambord's insistence on retaining the symbols of his kingship in the form of the white flag and the fleur-de-lys, which lost him potential Republican support. This tenacity with regard to the traditional symbols, presented in the traditional way, constantly reappeared to compromise the efforts of the party to reimpose itself on national life, and provided Bloy with an object lesson.

Bloy had little faith in legitimist professions and purposes. Writing to Madame Hello in 1876, he contrasted their idea of social regeneration through institutions with his own belief in salvation of and through individuals.[1] The cause became of interest to him only when woven into his religious interpretation of the total degeneracy of France.

He brought to the forefront a point admitted by several traditionalist philosophers, but played in a minor key: that the Bourbon

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[1] Boll. I, 268. See also undated letter to Huysmans [1884]: "Je dîne ce soir avec Meckenheim et je ne sais combien d'imbéciles. Il faudra beaucoup d'éloquence pour soutirer un subside de cette congrégation d'idiots qui trouvent de l'argent pour de sottes et inutiles propagandes mais qui sont pauvres comme Job aussitôt qu'une grande chose leur est proposée." [CLB No. 1 (11th Yr.), Sept.-Oct. 1934, p. 18].

line was incapable of effecting its own restoration, and that of France, and that its replacement by Napoleon was therefore providential.[1] He refused to predict Napoleon's successor, and at times seemed doubtful whether any political solution was left apart from total destruction of the state. This point, which he made as early as 1871, in a letter to Daussin, is later rephrased in his parables of the Coming of the Spirit.[2]

Already in 1877, La Chevalière de la Mort was not only a critique of the Revolution, but also the Dies irae of tradition. In 1891, Savine considered accepting the work for publication as three prose-poems on the death of monarchy.[3] "Le Fumier des Lys", composed in 1889 during a resurgence of Orleanist hopes, denounced the superstitious prophecies and cults of the Royalists and their political ambitions, which prevented them from recognising the powers of renewal in God:

> Ce qui est tout de même confondant, c'est l'impossibilité absolue de rencontrer dans le compartiment catholique, Naundorffiste ou Philippiste, un seul être capable de respecter assez son Dieu pour lui supposer le pouvoir d'agir à sa volonté, d'en finir avec une Race qui paraît avoir indigné la terre et les cieux, de se passer, une bonne fois, des traditions qui tombent sous le laminoir de l'entendement humain et de créer des choses NOUVELLES, s'il lui plaît ainsi.[4]

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[1] Barbey made the same point with regard to Louis-Napoléon (letter to Trébutien, 9th December 1851). In an article added to Les Prophètes du passé in 1880, he criticised Blanc de Saint-Bonnet for failing to recognise the shift of power to Napoleon and the people. See also Barbey d'Aurevilly, Omnia, Paris, 1970, p. 132.

[2] Boll. I, 140-41; and see below, pp. 157-59.

[3] Letter from Landry to Bloy, 3rd May 1891 (La R.).

[4] La Chevalière de la Mort, OC V, 72.

"Le Prince noir" extended the charge of degeneracy to the Napoleonic dynasty. The removal of the Prince Imperial, like that of Naundorff, was part of the Providential plan to wipe France clear of her great men in order for God to operate his own incontrovertibly miraculous renewal. Bloy drew this conclusion in June 1879, when news of the Prince's death was brought to the Basilica where he was taking part in a Bonapartist service for his safe return.

Despite his reserves, Bloy still allowed himself to become involved with the legitimists on at least two occasions and introduced their themes into his work.

Towards the beginning of his career, he met the count Henri de Meckenheim in Charles Buet's salon, described by Huysmans in Là-bas as a favourite Naundorffist haunt. The Bollery collection contains five letters from Meckenheim to Bloy. One of 1884 attempts to persuade Bloy to use his influence on the Figaro to place a legitimist article; another praises his revue Le Pal; a third, and most important, dated 1st February 1889, expresses displeasure with Bloy's project for "Le Fumier des Lys", and the certainty that present Bourbon abjection is only a Providential expiatory prelude to divine intervention restoring both God and King. Meckenheim offers the standard legitimist slogans and commonplaces: Gesta Dei per Francos; De stercore erigens pauperem ("C'est son dénuement moral et matériel qui doit nous donner confiance dans la restauration de notre maison royale légitime"); the example of David's humility and penitence; and the parallel between the elevation of Louis XVII and that of France, the Magdalene - Gallia poenitens et devota - ("J'ai appris à votre école que Dieu aimait les prostituées").[1] All these Bloy later lifted into Le Fils de Louis XVI,

[1] See Appendix III.

to interpret his own thesis of the coincidence of the spiritual restoration of Louis XVII and of France with their continued temporal penitential abjection.

In February 1886 Bloy was inscribed with Huysmans and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam as collaborator on Daymonaz' Naundorffist revue Le Légitimiste, which appeared weekly from 1883 to 1887, offering a programme based on traditional but non-despotic monarchy and on the Catholic religion.[1] Neither Huysmans nor Bloy published work in it, and none of the three seems to have taken its pretensions very seriously, looking on the cause more as a pretext for heroic attitudinizing and a source of poetic imagery than as a serious political issue.[2]

This is equally true of Bloy's second period of Naundorffist activity in 1897, during the composition of Le Fils de Louis XVI.

Otto Friedrichs, whom Bloyhad known since 1884, agreed to finance the work in exchange for Bloy's relinquishing his original intention to republish "Le Fumier des Lys". The facts of the case were provided by Friedrichs and by Provins,[3] but the interest Bloy brought to bear was strictly personal. He had wanted for some time to write a book on the Naundorff "drama",[4] for which he intended an imaginative slant;[5] and was determined to retain in the present work his own interpretation

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[1] See also Ed. Gros, "Léon Bloy et la question Louis XVII", CLB No. 2 (3rd Yr.), Nov.-Dec. 1926. In La Légitimité, No. 2 (3rd Yr.), 10th-17th April 1886, Villiers published his "Droit du passé", which had already appeared in Le Figaro, 16th July 1884, and on which Bloy drew for part of the documentation of Le Fils de Louis XVI.

[2] See letter to Villiers [1885/86] in Correspondance générale de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Paris, 1962, II, 105-106. Most of the reviews of Le Fils de Louis XVI recognised this point. Among 8 articles collected at La Rochelle, only reviews by M. Demolins in the monarchist Le Pays de France, December 1900, and Paul Adam, writing in Le Journal, 25th October 1900, gave any serious consideration to Bloy's political statements

[3] Mon journal, 31st March 1897.

[4] Ibid., 20th March 1897.

[5] Ibid., 29th September 1897.

of the mystery of Naundorff, as he had described it in "Le Fumier des Lys"; like Napoleon's, one of propitiation by the sufferings of exile and rejection.[1] "Il faut maintenant qu'un artiste indépendant et fort fasse entrer dans les coeurs cette vision de magnificence morale et de douleur".[2]

Letters to Provins complaining of the difficulties of composition help with the interpretation of the finished work. Much of the inspiration was subjective. Bloy explained that he was writing his own sufferings into his account of Naundorff's in order to gain his readers' sympathy; otherwise, the disappointing mediocrity of Naundorff "tuait la compassion".[3] He would obviously have preferred to write a Romantic plea for pity for the rejected hero, but found the facts inimical. Following these through, he discovered a new apologetic point in Naundorff's mediocrity, which represented both the present state of France and the failure of God to reach his people; the implications of these two concepts, he claimed, were so terrifying that he dropped work on his book after the first two chapters.[4] The figure of Naundorff became another imaginative vehicle for Bloy's own original description and interpretation of modern mediocrity, inimical to attempts at artistic or heroic treatment.

This is confirmed in the second chapter of Bloy's book, where he explains in the light of the threats of La Salette the parallel images of France, God and the representative monarch, who acts as mediator between the two. France, created to reflect the Glory of God to the

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[1] Mon journal, 20th March 1897.

[2] Ibid., 10th March 1897.

[3] Ibid., 26th June 1897.

[4] Ibid., 23th November 1897; Quatre ans, 22nd July 1900.

nations, now presents an image of abjection which implies some change in the divine project for man. At first, Bloy's terms are vague and obscure, expressing only the loss of some preferential relationship; but his meaning becomes slightly clearer with the analogy he draws between the mediation of Naundorff to France and that of Christ to the Jews. Naundorff represents God's last attempt to demonstrate his goodwill to creation, and his holocaust, together with that of the society structured on religion which he represents, is as preordained as that of Christ. God has abandoned the monarchy, the visible representation of his power to allow his creation complete freedom in deciding its position towards him. Bloy fears that the rejection of Naundorff figures the imminence of a wrong choice:

> Celle-ci [la race des juifs] crucifie son Dieu parce qu'il est le fils de ses Rois, celle-là [la nation française] fait mourir le fils de ses rois, parce qu'il est la plus claire image du Fils de son Dieu, et le dénouement du drame de l'Homme est à leur merci. Mais ce dénouement est inconnu, et voilà pourquoi les larmes de La Salette ont coulé.[1]

Apparently the pessimism of this approach did not alienate Friedrichs, with whom Bloy remained on friendly terms. He wrote to him again in 1906 to confide a new project for an intimate study of Louis XVII, based on the Correspondance recently published by Friedrichs, which was to complement a volume of historical studies on Byzantium.[2] The series of titles given at the same time to another correspondent - "Les Deux Epopées: I. L'Epopée de la gloire II. L'Epopée d'ignominie. La première sera 'Byzance au X^e siècle', la seconde 'Louis XVII étudié dans sa Correspondance'" - suggests an attempt to carry out Marchenoir's

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[1] Le Fils de Louis XVI, OC V, p. 97.

[2] La R.

project in Le Désespéré for an elucidation of historical patterns, in which Naundorff would represent the modern anti-heroic period of expiation.[1]

With the literary sector of the intransigent group, represented by Louis Veuillot and his collaborators on L'Univers, Bloy's relationship was shorter-lived and less amicable.

> . . . si une chose me donne de l'horreur et du dégoût, c'est bien le journalisme catholique tel que je le vois pratiqué ici. Le Saint Père et l'Eglise sont la propriété exclusive de MM. Veuillot et Cie. Nul autre qu'eux, s'appelât-il Saint-Bonnet ou d'Aurevilly n'a le droit d'en parler ou d'en écrire.[2]

In 1873 Bloy obtained employment on L'Univers through Blanc de Saint-Bonnet. He was offered the position of literary and art critic, with the promise of a free hand and no political pressure.[3] Since only a few of his articles were accepted, he soon withdrew, attributing his lack of success to his outspoken independence: "Je trouve la politique de M. Veuillot ridicule et son mérite littéraire personnel me semble médiocre".[4] Later he claimed that Veuillot thought his writing "trop vibrant" and was jealous of his success.[5]

He continued to support Veuillot against his atheist critics, and in October 1877, in his review of the editor's Molière et Bourdaloue, appreciated his contention that faith and Church are the only bulwarks

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[1] La R.

[2] Letter to Saint-Bonnet, 27th May 1873 (Boll. I, 159).

[3] Letter to M. and Mme. Bloy, 28th January 1874 (Boll. I, 184-86).

[4] Letter to Bloy's father, 22nd June 1874 (Boll. I, 188-89).

[5] Letter to Mme. Ch. Hayem, 1st September 1883 (Boll. II, 64).

of human reason, and his criticism of the immorality of Molière and his "dévotion humaine et traitable".[1] But on joining Le Chat Noir, he made clear his separation from Veuillot and the "parti catholique". The article "Les Obsèques de Caliban", first published in 1883, appears at the head of the Propos to confirm the distinction.

Bloy asserted that none of Veuillot's ideas was original. The best of his thought - in Le Droit du Seigneur and L'Esclave Vindex - was lifted without acknowledgement from the neglected intransigent philosopher Raymond Brucker. His Catholicism was sincere in its way, but partly inspired by a vanity which he himself, a "Tartuffe croyant", never recognised, and though he fought vigorously for the cause, he never understood its ideals.[2] He had no respect for genius or goodness. His almost Jansenist refusal to acknowledge any good outside the Church strengthened the force of his attacks on the free-thinkers but was of no positive value. His bigoted rejection of the Romantic poets and those modern Catholic writers whose work was not reducible to strict Catholic formulae dishonoured the Church.[3] (There is the echo here of the sustained feud which the innovator Barbey had conducted against Veuillot.) His crude and naive apologetic had the approval of the seminarists, though it was totally platitudinous.[4]

The best part of his writing was his style, which had challenged the apathy of his contemporaries by its intensity.

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[1]See art. "Molière et Bourdaloue", refused by L'Univers and published in La Revue du Monde Catholique, 25th April 1878.

[2]See also Au seuil de l'Apocalypse, 7th February 1913.

[3]See also Le Désespéré, OC III, 220. The same points are made in a sketch for an article on Veuillot, which Petit tentatively dates April/June 1873 (rpt. in J. Petit, Barbey d'Aurevilly critique, Paris, 1963, pp. 667-69).

[4]Boll. II, 47n.

It is usual to point to the influence of Veuillot on the development of Bloy's polemic technique. There is a certain similarity, especially with regard to the articles which Veuillot composed specifically for his newspaper; but on close examination, this can be reduced to the fact that both are writing in the Juvenalian convention of vicious direct attack on named opponents. If the comparison is made with Veuillot's Les Odeurs de Paris of 1866, criticised in Bloy's "Les Obsèques de Caliban" for its excessive intransigence, the difference is even more marked. The introductory image of the writer as prophet of destruction to a pleasure-seeking society is as violent as similar images in Bloy, but the tone of the subsequent discussion is calmer and more rational and relies far less on obscene denunciatory imagery. A substantial part of the book consists of reasoned analyses of theist and humanitarian propositions, which form a striking contrast to Bloy's sweeping general condemnations. In the more properly polemic pieces, the syntax is balanced and controlled and the irony restrained. The influence of La Bruyère is evident, especially in Veuillot's tableaux where there is less physical caricature than depiction of significant action and gesture and interchange of dialogue.

For the ideals of the intransigents, as opposed to their actual representatives, Bloy has more sympathy, particularly for the traditionalist philosophy which at this period they make their own.

Over the middle years of the century, interest had been growing in the work of de Maistre, Bonald, and the early Lamennais, Donoso Cortès, and Blanc de Saint-Bonnet. Numerous re-editions of their works appeared, together with newly-discovered opuscules, which

received a fair amount of critical interest.[1] Their particular appeal for Bloy's generation lay in their emphasis on the practical effects of philosophy in society and their prophecies of the imminent destruction of modern society, merited by its adoption of socialist principles. The various writers offered statements in epistemological, social and political contexts on the rôle of authority in the establishment of principles, stressing the supreme authority of religious doctrine. Their philosophies were based on the dogmas of Fall and Redemption; and in consequence gave a large place to asceticism and suffering.

Interest in the traditionalists was generally biassed and ill-informed, and they were usually referred to en bloc and with little sense of their individual interests and interpretations. Borrowings in the form of tag and commonplace took the place of objective and analytical study of their work. Sainte-Beuve remarked on the gulf between the original de Maistre and his disciples, citing the case of Barbey, who imitated "seulement par ses excès. De Maistre serait, certes, plus étonné que personne de se voir un tel disciple; il en serait honteux".[2] Barbey's studies did in fact make some attempt to differentiate between the various traditionalist stands, and Bloy had studied the writers individually before finding their synthesis in Blanc de Saint-Bonnet; but the results of both men's studies admittedly still lack refinement.

Among the older writers, Bloy's primary debt was to de Maistre, the most popular of the traditionalists at the latter end of the

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[1] See especially Ch. de Sainte-Beuve, Le XIX^e siècle: Philosophes et essayistes, OC I-III, Paris, 1930; J. Barbey d'Aurevilly, Les Oeuvres et les hommes, Vol. I, Paris, 1860 and Les Prophètes du passé, Paris, 2nd rev. ed., 1880.

[2] Sainte-Beuve, op.cit., I, 118n.

nineteenth century.[1] He began reading his work at the end of 1869, at the instigation of Barbey. A list of books sent on to Bloy by Victor Lalotte, 9th August 1871, includes a comprehensive selection of de Maistre's political and mystical writings: Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg; Examen de la philosophie de Bacon; La Russie and Div.(sic).[2] He also read Du Pape, and the short study De La souveraineté, first published in 1870. Marginal notes reading de Maistre's doctrine into Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's De La Restauration française indicate the major points of interest for Bloy.[3] With the exception of comments on his doctrine on suffering, which will be considered below, these were mainly political.

Bloy followed de Maistre's hostility to socialist doctrine, quoting from the second chapter of Considérations sur la France his description of the Revolution as a purifying and expiatory force sent by Providence.[4] In La Chevalière de la Mort, he took also the commonplace of its satanic nature, which he later retained even when claiming to have rejected the rest of de Maistre's doctrine.[5]

Though approving Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's denunciation of Caesarism in the second edition of his book:

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[1] Du Pape and Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg were frequently reissued in the 1870's and 1380's. A new edition of de Maistre's complete works, including his unpublished correspondence, was published in 14 volumes by Vitte, Lyons, 1884-86.

[2] La R. The last two references are possibly to Lettres à un gentilhomme russe sur l'Inquisition Espagnole, Paris, 1822, and Sur les delais de la justice divine dans la punition des coupables, Lyons, 1816.

[3] Bloy read the first edition (Paris, 1851) in 1871, adding marginal notes in 1872 on receiving a copy of the second edition of 1872, sent by Blanc de Saint-Bonnet. These marginalia appear in the Cahiers Léon Bloy, No. 6 (5th Yr.), July-August 1929; No. 1 (6th Yr.), Sept.-Oct. 1929; No. 2 (6th Yr.), Nov.-Dec. 1929.

[4] Notes to RF I, xxxii [CLB No. 1 (6th Yr.), Sept.-Oct. 1929, p. 3].

[5] La Chevalière de la Mort, OC V, 52; L'Invendable, 29th August 1906.

> Il y a dans la pensée de l'auteur une distinction évidente entre le droit divin des Aristocraties, qui est une loi immuable, et le droit divin des rois, qui peut devenir une usurpation;[1]

he still emphasised, after de Maistre, the political necessity of monarchy and aristocracy, demonstrated in Du Pape (III, ii)[2] and the Etude sur la souveraineté - "étude fort curieuse".[3] The latter bases the principles of sovereignty on the status quo of society, for which, after Montesquieu, de Maistre allowed a variety of forms. It is Providence which establishes the form best fitted to the political unity of a nation, to which the people give voluntary agreement. For France, the monarchic form is best, as exemplified in the moral excellence of the reign of Louis XIV; de Maistre refuses to consider the later degenerate representatives of the line, and rejects altogether democratic modes of government. Bloy later explained these by the same appeal to Providential permission, pointing out the doctrinal limitations implicit in de Maistre's failure to do so. A strong central authority is morally necessary to direct and control the weak wills of individuals. Bloy maintains this principle in later work, although in a passage in Le Sang du Pauvre, introduced by a reference to the Maistrean apology of the executioner, he points to the flaw in the system in the licence given to authority to exploit the weak:

> Né d'une fiction légale, essentiellement surnuméraire et parasitaire, mais invocateur constant des hauts principes de l'Ordre et de la Justice, le

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[1] Notes to RF I, xxxiii [CLB No. 1 (6th Yr.), Sept.-Oct. 1929, pp. 5-6].

[2] Ibid., I, xxxvi; I, xlvi; II, v [CLB No. 1 (6th Yr.), Sept.-Oct. 1929, pp. 9-10; p. 17; pp. 21-22].

[3] Ibid., III, xxxix [CLB No. 2 (6th Yr.), Nov.-Dec. 1929, p. 69].

> propriétaire est précisément l'ennemi le plus redoutable de la Famille, telle que l'avait constituée le christianisme.[1]

De Maistre also provided doctrine on the relation of reason and the social order, with his argument that the only sound and productive moral and philosophical arguments are those built on the theological prejudices on which Western civilisation was established: "Le plus beau livre qu'on ait écrit sur cette matière est l'Analyse [sic] de la Philosophie de Bacon, par M. de Maistre" also qualified as "amusant comme une comédie de Molière".[2]

As the last points indicate, it was de Maistre's intuitive methods of thought and the colour, vehemence and wit of his presentation which appealed to Bloy as much as the content of his philosophy. He had this in common with the rest of his generation; Barbey, for example, distinguished de Maistre's intuitive qualities from the sober rationalism of Bonald.[3]

It is probably Bonald's systematic, rational and dull presentation which explains Bloy's lack of enthusiasm for his work. In his marginalia to De la Restauration française, he makes three references to important statements in the Législation primitive of 1802, on the decadence of the nobility and the purifying effect of the Revolution, the political significance of L'Esprit des lois, and the function of an aristocracy in offering a motivating goal to social aspirations and a context in which to exercise responsibility and self-renuncia-

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[1] Le Sang du Pauvre, OC IX, 124.

[2] Notes to RF I, xli [CLB No. 1 (6th Yr.), Sept.-Oct. 1929, p. 13]; ibid., II, xxxiii [CLB No. 2 (6th Yr.), Nov.-Dec. 1929, p. 53].

[3] Letter from Landry to Bloy, 3rd May 1870 (La R.).

tion;[1] but these are all points he also finds elsewhere in more interesting formulations, and eventually Bonald is rejected. Les Dernières Colonnes de l'Eglise condemns his Malebranchian rationalism, which excludes the supernatural, and his obsession with the preservation of social order based on family and aristocracy.

Of Lamennais, Bloy had read by 1872 the Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion (1817-23), described by Vidler as the seminal work of traditionalist philosophy, in which Lamennais had rejected empiricism and the Cartesian rationalism of the then theological schools for reliance on tradition and the authority of sensus communis, pioneered the study of the effects of religion on society rather than on the individual, and attacked the libertine assumption that there is no necessary dependence of ethics on dogma or of conduct on belief.[2] There is nowhere in Bloy's work any specific acknowledgment of Lamennais' contribution in these fields, though the rationale of his own apologetic is clearly indebted to Lamennais' re-orientations and his insistence on taking the terms of Catholic discussion as strictly axiomatic; the arguments in favour of this position reached Bloy rather through the mediation of Hellé[0] and Blanc de Saint-Bonnet.[3] It was again Lamennais' presentation of his material which immediately impressed Bloy. He linked the theologian's criticism of modern degeneracy with Joséphin Péladan's imaginative version in Le Vice suprême: "depuis l'implacable préface de l'Indifférence en matière de religion on n'avait pas entendu tinter sur le monde un aussi lugubre tocsin",[4] and quoted with appre-

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[1] Notes to RF I, xxxii; III, ii; III, vii [CLB No. 1 (6th Yr.), Sept.-Oct. 1929, p. 3; No. 2 (6th Yr.), Nov.-Dec. 1929, p. 59; ibid., pp. 61-63].

[2] A. Vidler, Lamennais. Prophecy and papacy, London, 1954, ch. iii: "New Apologetics (1817-24)".

[3] See below pp. 83-89.

[4] "Finis Latinorum", Le Chat Noir, 11th October 1884.

ciation Lamennais' rhetorical descriptions of Providential action demonstrated in the historical developments of society, such as the punitive rise of socialist half-truths: "Quand, par une terrible permission de Dieu, l'enfer prépare au genre humain de pesantes calamités et le spectacle de quelques grands crimes, il jette une erreur dans le monde et laisse achever au temps".[1]

Donoso Cortès' Essai sur le catholicisme, le libéralisme et le socialisme, published in Paris in 1851, provided standard traditionalist doctrine on the deduction from history of providential patterns and intentions for the future, and on the errors of socialism and of rationalism, its source;[2] and also the example of an exploration of the traditionalist axiom that dogma is the law of the moral world which examined both the inner coherence of the dogmatic structure and its reference to contemporary activity more systematically than any of Donoso Cortès' predecessors. The meaning of freewill, sin and suffering were selected for special discussion, and suffering defined as mediatory, sanctifying, and agent of unity in the dual perspective of the Catholic dogmas of Incarnation and Passion and the socialist theories of Proudhon, Fourier and Saint-Simon - the link being the concept of solidarity in the human race and in the Communion of Saints, which the Catholic philosopher showed founded on the doctrine of the reversibility of merits acquired through suffering. This technique of annexing supporters from other faiths by reinterpreting their opinions in a Catholic sense is one which Bloy frequently employs in his own work.[3]

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[1] Notes to RF I, xxxv; I, xxxix [CLB No. 1 (6th Yr.), Sept.-Oct. 1929, pp. 8 and 11]. Bloy adds his source: Indiff. I, vi.

[2] Notes to RF I, xxvi, xxvii [CLB No. 2 (6th Yr.), Nov.-Dec. 1929, pp. 46 and 48-49].

[3] See below, Section IV, 2,3.

The work of Blanc de Saint-Bonnet pulls together for Bloy the themes of the individual traditionalists; but the debts here are so substantial as to be more usefully reserved for discussion under separate heads in the sections below. The points made above are sufficient to show Bloy in the early 1870's familiar in some detail with traditionalist philosophy and, like his contemporaries, usually laying most emphasis on the social aspects of religion, expressed in metaphysical and political authoritarianism, and claimed to be derived from historical patterns.

It is not true to say, with some critics, that at a later stage he relinquished traditionalism. His shifting of his attention to the presentation of the doctrine in contexts which he thought as important as the simply historical sometimes led him to modify slightly the original doctrine; but these modifications were generally more developments than outright rejection, as in Le Désespéré, where Bloy added evidence of his own cult of individualism in the form of the autobiographical basis of the novel to a traditionalist social study seen in the two perspectives of history and the contemporary situation.

ii. The Liberal Catholics

On this front, Bloy's attitude was unequivocally hostile.

Liberal Catholicism began at the start of the century as an ultramontane-orientated effort to release the French Church from the constricting ties with the establishment contracted in the Gallican era. At this stage, this orientation compensated for the movement's co-operation with Revolutionary principles in the demand for political freedom and freedom of thought; Lamennais, Lacordaire and Montalembert, its principal exponents, jointly founded their

journal, L'Avenir, which appeared in 1830 and 1831, on the slogan "Dieu et la Liberté". In 1832, however, the enterprise was condemned in view of the possible danger of compromise felt to be inherent in its social principles; and a similar fate met Lacordaire's L'Ere Nouvelle of 1848-49 when it tried to move towards a more organised form of Christian democracy.

By the period under consideration here, the first coherence of the movement was lost, and, despite the attempts of the original founders to define an orthodox liberal position, the title of liberal Catholic attached at random to a variety of anti-intransigent groups demanding doctrinal or political reforms in the Church.[1] The rationalist and Gallican positions of Gratry, Loyson and Didon, which enjoyed popular favour under the Third Republic, were held representative, and it was these which were condemned by the Pope in his speech against liberalism in July 1871:

> Mes chers enfants, ce qui afflige votre pays et l'empêche de mériter les bénédictions de Dieu, c'est ce mélange de principes.

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[1] Si, par catholique libéral, on entend un catholique qui accepte les dogmes qui lui plaisent et repousse ceux qui le gênent; qui admet que toutes les religions se valent et, qu'en principe et en thèse, l'erreur et la vérité sont égales; qui professe un souci médiocre des droits de l'Eglise et du respect qu'elle mérite; qui, sous prétexte de conciliation, est disposé à transiger quand il s'agit de la foi; oh! je le reconnais, aucun catholique ne peut être libéral. Ce libéralisme est, en effet, une apostasie à peine déguisée. Si, au contraire, on entend, par catholique libéral, un croyant qui unit, à l'intégrité absolue de sa foi, un sincère attachement aux libertés politiques; le respect pour l'opinion des adversaires pour lesquels il réclamera la même liberté que pour lui; la conviction que la liberté pour tous est la meilleure garantie de la liberté pour l'église; la sagesse dans l'exposition de la vérité religieuse qui lui inspirera, comme aux apologistes dont je parlais tout à l'heure, le tact et la mesure qui tiennent compte des circonstances et des nécessités du temps; pourquoi, je le demande, un catholique ne serait-il pas libéral? (V. Maumus, La Crise religieuse, Paris, 1902, pp. 310-11).

> JE DIRAI LE MOT: Ce que je crains, ce ne sont pas tous ces misérables de Paris, vrais démons de l'enfer qui se promènent sur la terre . . . Ce que je crains, c'est cette malheureuse politique, le LIBERALISME CATHOLIQUE, qui détruirait la religion.[1]

Bloy condemned both the movement en masse[2] and its individual personalities. Among the latter, he distinguished Lacordaire, Maumus and Didon, all members of the innovatory Dominican order. Against Didon, he conducted a systematic campaign on the model of Barbey's against Hyacinthe Loyson.[3]

His first article for Le Figaro, "Un Savonarole de Nuremberg", 27th February 1884, was a critical review of Didon's Les Allemands, an attempt to foster Franco-German rapprochement by incorporating into the French system the new political, educational and theological ideas gathered by Didon from his studies at the University of Berlin in 1882. The move was appreciated by fashionable Paris and by the press, impressed, like Didon, by the advance of German thought and eager to borrow from it to renew French intellectual life; Bloy, who felt his patriotism under attack, was in a minority. He slanted his patriotic prejudices through his Catholicism. Didon was accused of trying to challenge religious authority with ideas which were democratic, sacreligious, pedantic and platitudinous:

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[1] Cit. notes to RF II, xxvii [CLB No. 2 (6th Yr.), Nov.-Dec. 1929, p. 47].

[2] Le Désespéré, OC III, 134-87.

[3] ~~R.~~ P. Henri Didon, O.P., fashionable preacher at the end of the century who, whilst preaching traditional ascetic doctrine, attempted to rationalise dogma in order to reach a wider audience. He incurred Church censure in 1874 for his part in the scandal of Dumas' Le Retour du Christ (see the article by Barbey collected in Les Bas bleus, for which Bloy originally corrected proofs, and Lettres de Barbey d'Aurevilly à Léon Bloy, Paris, 1903, 11th-24th July 1874). He was exiled after the publication in 1890 of his book Jésus-Christ.

> Cet homme a tout englouti, tout engouffré. La divinité de la science, l'infini des connaissances humaines, la suprématie absolue de l'intelligence, l'égalité de l'homme et de la femme par l'instruction, le triomphe de l'expérimentalisme, la tolérance sage, le respect de toutes les croyances, l'harmonie de la science et de la foi, l'installation terrestre de la paix et de la fraternité, etc; toutes ces viles rengaines écaillées et poussiéreuses, bonnes tout au plus à conditionner un boniment électoral, il nous les rapporte de l'Allemagne, dans un livre de néant dont l'unique supériorité est le plus effrayant ennui qui puisse être senti par des hommes.

The article provoked six replies in the Press, all criticising the crudity and lack of judgement in Bloy's approach, which went even further than L'Univers and La Croix. Didon was thought to have deserved a more serious approach; Ritter's article on Bloy in the Mercure de France, September 1892, deplored such an attack on a book that was both necessary and useful.

Didon's second book, Jésus-Christ, made a much-publicised appearance in 1890; an extract appeared in La Revue des Deux Mondes on 1st October. The introduction emphasised the divinity of Christ, which was a necessary doctrinal accompaniment to his humanity - Didon clearly making an effort to distinguish his own approach to the meaning of the personality of Christ from that of Renan - and declared the elementary creed sufficient for salvation, offering philosophical and historical enquiry as a purely complementary line of discussion. The text proper, however, gave most of its attention to the latter with a historical and comparative account of the content of the Gospels; though Didon took for granted that these were objective and faithful narrations of fact, and referred their interpretation to the Church, who he believed was prepared to recognise their conditioning by the historical background of their authors. He

acknowledged the facts of Christ's life, of his nature, and of his moral and theological doctrines as miraculous and cited miracles and prophecies as historical evidence of his mission, amenable to rational criticism. The book as a whole obviously tried to reconcile innovation and orthodoxy, with the overt emphasis laid on the latter.

Bloy thought it an infuriating attempt at compromise. He opened his retaliatory article, "Le Révérend Père Judas", by firmly characterising the Dominican as an "héterodoxe furtif"; in this, the type of his order.[1] Using the techniques of Taine, Renan, Dumas fils and Ledrain, he had invented a new apologetic based on the secularisation of Scripture. His enterprise was futile, since the supernatural content of Catholicism was irreducible and must always repel unbelievers, and could only produce unattractive doctrine which would alienate the potentially receptive sectors of modern society in search of a certain philosophical framework: "les affamés de l'infini". Bloy gave his own summary of Didon's doctrine, making no allowance for Didon's introductory disclaimers.

The Dominican denied the divinity of Christ and the Church, and reduced Christ to an historical figure explicable simply by his Jewish <u>milieu</u>. His literary approach to the Scriptures diminished their meaning:

> . . . remplacer invariablement le mot Parabole
> par le mot <u>allégorie</u>, en ayant l'air de les supposer

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[1] Ce livre inqualifiable, inexpiable, tout à fait sans nom, fut livré au public avec l'<u>imprimateur autographié</u> de trois autres prêcheurs et le silence de l'Eglise est une telle honte que je n'ose y penser . . . .

Je n'ai pas seulement accusé Didon, mais son Ordre entier, qui donna, autrefois, un assez bon nombre de très grands saints, mais qui, dans ce siècle, paraît avoir épousé les plus sottes et les plus méchantes filles du Démon.

Le stupide libéralisme de Lacordaire n'a peut-être pas ravi moins d'âmes à Notre-Seigneur que le Péché même qui s'oppose au sixième commandement [Letter to Ed. Bernaert, 1899 (La R.)].

> identiques; . . . qualifier d'anecdote l'histoire de l'Enfant prodigue et . . . justifier les divines Assimilations par des "emprunts littéraires" que le Verbe de l'Eternité aurait faits, par indigence, à la rhétorique du Temps.

He considered the Incarnation and the Transfiguration the only essentials in Christ's life - "ce qui met la Croix au rang d'accessoire de grand opéra" - and claimed that Christ was the only innocent creature to exist - "ce qui réduit à néant le dogme de l'Immaculée Conception". (These are doctrinal innovations which threaten the sense of the traditional structure which Bloy had been at some pains to incorporate as basis of his own philosophy.) In addition, his style and his moralising reflexions were in the worst tradition of Romantic apologetic. The Church was to be blamed for delaying her inevitable condemnation: "la lente Eglise qui n'envoie généralement ses sapeurs-pompiers que lorsque la maison est réduite en cendres".

Critics have remarked in this instance again on the unfairness with which Didon is treated, not in his own right but serving as whipping-boy for liberal Catholicism in general.[1] The vigour and immediacy of Bloy's attacks against other philosophies often depend on the presence of an individual figure as peg for his criticism, on whom he can set the salient points of the school of thought;[2] often, it must be admitted, at the expense of giving a just account of both school and representative, which is ultimately to the detriment of his polemic effect. The method is also limiting; here, the figure of Didon pro-

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[1] "Le jour même, où paraissait le Jésus-Christ du P. Didon, Léon Bloy écrivit, dans L'Evènement, un article, éblouissant de verve et d'injustice, où il dénonçait, de confiance, l'apostasie du livre qu'il n'avait pas encore ouvert" (H. Bremond, L'Inquiétude religieuse, 2e Série, 3rd ed., Paris, 1921, p. 183).

[2] R. M. Griffiths, The Reactionary Revolution, London, 1966, pp. 79-80.

vides no great opportunity to discuss the political allegiance of liberal Catholicism, which Bloy finds in fact more offensive than its doctrinal innovations. It is noticeable that for its later offshoot, modernism, which produces no such highly-publicised controversial figures, Bloy offers nothing approaching systematic criticism, even though the doctrinal challenges it presented were far greater.[1]

iii. Catholic society

Although rejecting the liberal attempts to renew Catholic doctrine, Bloy had no intention of lapsing into the passivity of his fellow-orthodox: "Tout le long de sa vie, Bloy s'est battu pour la maturité spirituelle de ses corréligionnaires, pour les tirer du ghetto étouffant où ils s'étaient enfermés, par peur des idées modernes et de la libre vie des enfants de Dieu".[2]

His struggle was not without its positive elements, but its first and most conspicuous appearance was in critical and destructive forms. Bloy's detailed and imaginative criticism of the whole state of Catholic society into which he had entered after conversion completes the assessment of modern society which explains and conditions the doctrinal options he finally adopted.

His theme was the lukewarmness of modern Catholicism: "l'ineffable ordure des hypocrisies, des reniements, des lâchetés et des sacrilèges".[3] This, as he explained to Maurice Dullaert, derived from lack of doctrinal consistency and failure to conform to evangelical prescriptions:

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[1]See below p. 174n.

[2]P. Van der Meer de Walcheren, Rencontres, Paris, 1961, p. 66.

[3]Propos, OC II, 17.

Je n'ai jamais prétendu, comme il vous plaît de l'affirmer, que les deux cent millions de catholiques répartis sur notre planète soient tous des saints, des héros ou des génies. Ce serait un globe à dégoûter le Seigneur Jésus qui déclare n'être pas venu pour les justes, mais pour les pécheurs. Je ne suis pas un janséniste, monsieur, et mes pires ennemis daignent accorder que je ne suis pas absolument un idiot. J'ai simplement dénoncé la médiocrité affreuse des catholiques, depuis Léon XIII, le pape de la conciliation politique, jusqu'à feu Freppel prostituant sa robe d'évêque dans l'écurie parlementaire et jusqu'à l'ignoble Didon que les protestants admirent. . . .

Un athée m'inspire beaucoup moins de dégoût qu'un admirateur de Didon, par exemple, et le riche chrétien qui se croit le propriétaire, le maître de sa richesse me paraît exactement au-dessous des voleurs et des assassins.

Voici le madrigal que j'offrais dernièrement à une dévote austère: "Quand les choses cachées seront révélées, selon la promesse, il arrivera très certainement que des prostituées infâmes seront couronnées de lumière, et que de très pures dévotes seront couronnées d'excrément". Ce sera la grande surprise.

- Domine, quando te vidimus esurientem et sitientem, aut hospitem, aut nudum, aut infirmum, aut in carcare et non ministravimus tibi?
Qui potest capere, capiat.[1]

Le Désespéré reviews the development of Catholic spirituality in France which was responsible for the present state.[2] Bloy describes modern spirituality as based on a sense of scruple and discretion, and circumscribed by a heavy reliance on authority and direction which suppresses all spontaneous and natural instincts; and attributes this to Jansenist asceticism, aimed at "l'abolition de la nature humaine", and to Jesuit preference for self-analysis rather than contemplative practices.[3] He claims that the decline of the Church

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[1] Letter to Maurice Dullaert, 13th January 1892 (La Revue Catholique des Idées et des Faits, 1st June 1934).

[2] Le Désespéré, OC III, 174-93. See also the analyses of E. Renan, Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse, Paris, 1883; H. Guillemin, Histoire des catholiques français au XIX^e siècle, Paris 1947, pp. 372 ff.

[3] See also Le Mendiant ingrat, 1, 21, and 30th September 1895.

began with the German Reformation and the Italian Renaissance, when the harsh mediaeval doctrines of the fallen nature of man and the necessity of suffering were replaced by sentimental piety, and the Church, losing its spiritual orientation, allowed itself to be used for political ends. The ideas are Revivalist commonplaces, whose point is renewed by Bloy's presentation of doctrinal compromise:

> Pour subsister, [le christianisme] se fit agréable, huileux et tiède. Silencieusement, il se coula par le trou des serrures, s'infiltra dans les boiseries, obtint d'être utilisé comme essence onctueuse pour donner du jeu aux institutions et devint ainsi un condiment subalterne, que tout cuisinier politique put employer ou rejeter à sa convenance.

A series of caricatures sketches the course of Catholic decline. François de Sales appeared to complete the travesty of asceticism - "juste au bon moment, pour tout enduire. De la tête aux pieds, l'Eglise fut collée de son miel, aromatisée de ses séraphiques pommades" - and to adapt dogma to modern sensibility: "[les] explorateurs du Tendre . . . dilatèrent aussitôt leur géographie pour y faire entrer un aussi charmant catholicisme..." Even Jansenism is now corrupted by compromise with casuistry and by rationalism and by Gallican interests.

Christian art and literature reflect this degeneracy, transforming through their sentimental forms the heroic virtues of innocence, simplicity and humility into childishness and cretinous stupidity: "Bêtise horrible, tuméfiée et blanche. C'est la lèpre neigeuse du sentimentalisme religieux".[1] The forms of modern art, which offer to operate

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[1] See also "Le Siècle des charognes", Par le Scandale, 9th January 1900.

a revival - "infuser un peu de sang jeune à la carcasse desséchée de [son] aïeule" - are rejected by timid orthodoxy. Literary and theological attitudes are fixed in the Classical sterility established by Bossuet's Gallican doctrines. Bloy refines on La Bruyère's tableau:

> Toute philosophie religieuse dut se configurer à la sienne et l'on a vu cet inconcevable sacrilège d'un immense clergé, le cul par terre sur l'Hostie sainte et la tête perdue dans le bas vallon de sa soutane, adorativement prosterné devant une perruque pourrie, en obéissance posthume à la consigne épiscopale d'un valet de cour.[1]

The seminaries live on Gallican capital, afraid to take up the intellectual challenges of the secular world. Their lack of initiative is self-diminishing, and a negation of the real purpose of doctrine, which is to push towards surer knowledge of God:

> A chaque fois que l'impiété se montrait plus insolente ou l'antagonisme philosophique mieux équipé, l'enseignement religieux se rétrécissait d'autant et le sacerdoce rentrait ses cornes. Le téléscope théologique se rapetissait en avalant ses tubes, dans l'inexpugnable espérance de n'avoir plus d'étoiles à découvrir.

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[1] Bloy's childhood diary recorded his first reading Bossuet in January 1861. He owned and annotated a copy of the Hachette edition of his collected works [undated letter from Landry to Poulthier (La R.)]. He rejected the Cardinal's Gallicanism (Le Désespéré, OC III, 181; Quatre ans, 14th December 1903) and his opposition to papal infallibility (Quatre ans, 2nd January 1902) and considered his Histoire universelle inadequate by reason of its moral and non-eschatological interpretations. He approved, however, his attacks on Protestantism in L'Histoire des variations and Les Avertissements à Jurieu (Mon journal, 30th June 1899) and the imaginative qualities of his work. Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition is closely linked to Bossuet's Mariology, and his asceticism picked up in Le Révélateur du globe (OC I, 113) and "Molière et Bourdaloue". Interest in Bossuet was general among the Revival writers, especially Brunetière, Baumann and, later, Mauriac. Most emphasis was laid on his ascetic doctrine, as set out in the Traité de concupiscence. Bloy differed in giving more weight to the grandiose rather than the rigorous aspects of seventeenth-century doctrine (see also notes to RF III, ix, referring to Bourdaloue's Sermon sur la Conception, which assert that grandeur is the basis of sanctity).

The Church tries to win back dwindling congregations by slackness and compromise, instead of by rigour, and offers devotional practices as a substitute for piety. Bloy concludes that martyrdom and persecution are the only remedies for a religion degraded by its adherents.

His diary gives glimpses of the adoption of similar attitudes throughout Europe. In his isolation in Denmark, he noted the total and irremediable apostasy of the Scandinavian countries, rendered anaemic, he claimed, by tolerance of atheism and Protestantism.[1] The lethargy of the Dutch was shown in their rejection of his work for its doctrinal intransigence; his defence of the truths of the Incarnation and the exclusive authority of the Church, his refusal to compromise with the world, and his claims for the necessity of poverty and of martyrdom were dismissed as exaggeration, blasphemy, obscenity and immorality, anticlericalism, and lack of charity.[2]

These are judgements based on a personal sense of grievance; but they also have analogies in critical analyses produced within the Church itself. Mgr Isoard, in his book De la Prédication (Paris, 1871) described modern Catholic complacency as connected with the acceptance of a minimal and easy doctrine. The sense of worship and of the magnificence of God had vanished, together with the concept of eternal reprobation or bliss as the sole end of the trials of this life,and that of the holiness of God, his Church and his priests and of the evil of sin. As a result, the moral and theological meaning of suffering was no longer understood: "les idées de satisfaction,

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[1] "Johannes Joergensen et le mouvement catholique en Danemark", Mercure de France, XXXVIII, No. 138, June 1901.

[2] Au seuil de l'Apocalypse, 20th April 1914.

de pénitence, de mortification sont à peu près éteintes. De là, l'inintelligence du mystère de la souffrance . . . l'espèce de révolte que causent les épreuves des justes"; and, most important, there was no longer any acknowledgement of the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ which dignifies Creation, and which is not the same as the simple historical fact of his life: "cette personne unique prenant en soi les âmes, par les âmes les corps, par les corps le monde, et reportant en Dieu la création nouvelle et sanctifiée".

Isoard attributed ultimate responsibility for the lack of interest in Catholic doctrine to the priesthood, whose inadequacy was most evident in their misuse of the sermon, the traditional apologetic form. Bloy levelled similar charges; as early as 1872, he had remarked on the need for "un nouveau Bossuet",[1] and charged contemporary preachers with the unoriginality of their presentation and their lack of colour and spontaneity.[2] (Lacordaire, who had shown both in his sermons at Notre-Dame, was ruled out of consideration as "un trombone libérâtre"[3]). In La Femme pauvre, Bloy offered an example of better technique in his own sermon on the parable of the two debtors, which remains closely related to the Scriptural text at the same time as

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[1]Notes to RF III, xxv [CLB No. 2 (6th Yr.), Nov.-Dec. 1929, p. 67]. Criticism of the clergy is also a main theme in Blanc de Saint-Bonnet, where social decay is directly linked to the decline in quality of the priesthood. The charges of Melanie's Secret belong to the same topos.

[2]"Le Christ au dépotoir", Le Pal, No. 4, 2nd April 1885.

[3]Le Désespéré, OC III, 187.

it elaborates the theme of poverty in a modern situation. Its effectiveness derives from the priest's pre-emption of his congregation's reactions by his portrayal of their responses to his challenge, together with his own fury and despair at their inertia; Bloy himself having already pre-empted judgement on the whole sermon by presenting it as one heard and ratified by Clotilde in her heart.[1]

An illuminating comparison can be made of the different accounts of the fire at the "Bazar de la Charité" of 1897 given in the sermons of the fashionable preachers Monsabré and Ollivier, and in the chapter in Bloy's Le Sang du Pauvre entitled "La Dérision homicide". All are built on the same harsh thesis of reparation, and all select equally horrifying descriptive detail; but the rhetoric of the two priests is cold and formal, an objective account of the virtues of the victims of the disaster, whilst Bloy argues his case with a clearly personal sadistic and vengeful interest, and presents his admonitory points in images constructed from the raw material of the event. The victims had effected their own destruction:

> Elles avaient fait de l'Evangile grand ouvert et planté debout, une haute muraille d'airain pour protéger leur plaisir et cette muraille, devenue rouge, est tombé sur elles. Il a fallu des pelles et des tombereaux pour les mettre au lit. Leçons bien inutiles pour les autres et nullement profitables aux indigents qui continueront à être secourus de la sorte jusqu'au Jour de Dieu.[2]

The concluding pretence not to draw a moral, or at the most, one which will inevitably go unheard, is a familiar ploy for attention;

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 252-56.

[2] Le Sang du Pauvre, OC IX, 117.

Bloy uses it in sustained form in the sermon in La Femme pauvre referred to above.

Bloy comments on other aspects of the clergy's inadequacy: its reluctance to admit the supernatural, its Gallicanism, and its calculated disobedience to the Pope, and its eagerness to conciliate the rich and total rejection of poverty.[1] The caricature of Mgr Bolo makes the last point in a light vein reminiscent again of La Bruyère:

> Mgr Bolo appartient à une autre école et me fait penser à un de nos évêques, de cheminée, lui aussi, qui les pieds en l'air devant un bon feu et fumant un gros cigare après un copieux repas, rotait, en se gaudissant, cette véridique parole: "Dire que nous sommes les successeurs des apôtres!" Bolo est pour la "royauté des salons", pour les parfums, pour la bonne cuisine surtout, estimant que la gourmandise est un plaisir essentiellement intellectuel et que "plus on est intelligent, plus on doit être délicatement nourri", ce qui nous met à quelque distance des Pères du désert, envisagés probablement comme des animaux. Bolo est un "régénérateur". De tels prédicateurs sont ordinairement procurés à la veille des catastrophes.[2]

More usual, however, are more violent accounts, as those of Bloy's own confrontations with the bourgeois clergy given in his Quatre ans de captivité à Cochons-sur-Marne. Well-known clerical figures are selected by name as scapegoats; Bloy charts with increasing dismay the ascent through the hierarchy of Amette, bishop and archbishop of Paris and finally Cardinal, hostile to La Salette, and noted for his obeisances to the rich.[3]

Among the regular clergy, Bloy admired the contemplative orders of Carthusians and Trappists, who observed rigorously the precepts

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[1] Le Mendiant ingrat, 30th June 1895; Au seuil de l'Apocalypse, 14th May 1913.

[2] Ibid., 13th April 1913.

[3] See for example Bloy's comments in his diaries 20th May 1903; 18th and 31st December 1911.

of victimal intercession;[1] at the start of his career, in 1877 and 1878, he made two attempts to join the Trappist order. As was shown above, he rejected the Dominicans and Jesuits, and was particularly hostile to the Assumptionists and their representative P. Bailly, editor of Le Pèlerin and La Croix and head of the publishing house La Bonne Presse, who, according to Bloy, should have supported him in the literary mission he undertook with the encouragement of their collaborator, Tardif de Moidrey.[2]

This systematic denunciation of the clergy has as its corollary a high ideal of the priest's proper rôle as leader and exemplar within the social order and as the victimal representative of Christ the mediator. The concept, which appeared in a number of theologians of the period, became more common in the next generation of the Revival; Claudel and Bernanos, for example, were able to give it more imaginative development than was possible in Bloy's context.[3] In the absence of

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[1] "La Maison-Dieu", Le Foyer Illustré, 4th and 25th April 1879; Le Désespéré OC III, 91-107; 108-26.

[2] Letter to Ed. Bernaert, 7th June 1899 (La R.). For Bloy's comments on Bailly, taken as the type of the worldly priest, see especially his diaries for 9th May 1897; 9th January 1900; 14th and 16th December 1912. The Franciscan abbé René Tardif de Moidrey (1828-79), a Hebrew scholar also acquainted with the Greek Fathers, who had twice visited Jerusalem, collaborated with the Assumptionists in organising pilgrimages from 1873. He associated Bloy with his work of publicising La Salette in 1879. According to Rouget, he published a book La Salette et le sens mystique des Livres Saints, Paris, 1867, as well as the better-known Introduction au "Livre de Ruth", Paris, 1871/2 (2nd ed. 1893), which inspired Claudel. He had a strong influence on Ernest Hello, who introduced him to Bloy in 1876, and quotes his exegesis of eucharistic doctrine (Le Siècle, Paris, 1896, p. 330). He also had links with the Belgian "prophet" Vercruysse, and Huysmans' mentor, the abbé Boullan, to whom he wrote in September 1873 to ask for help in exorcising the demons tormenting his senses. [See G. Rouze "L'Abbé René Tardif de Moidrey et Léon Bloy", CLB No. 3 (11th Yr.), Jan.-Feb. 1935, p. 92n; S. Fumet, La Mission de Léon Bloy, Paris, 1935, p. 92n: R. M. Griffiths, The Reactionary Revolution, London, 1968, p. 132].

[3] See R. P. Giraud, Prêtre et hostie, Paris, 1935; J.-L. Prévost, Le Prêtre, ce héros de roman, 2nd ed., Paris, 1952-53.

satisfactory models, Bloy was forced to adopt a critical approach, drawing a distinction between the incumbent and the independent sacramental character of his office.[1] In the sermon on the two debtors, the distinction is a means of giving Bloy's independent interpretation the stamp of orthodoxy; although mediated through Clotilde, the sermon is also the priest's secret meditation, and therefore founded in the Church.

Even higher is Bloy's concept of the Papal office - and as a result, the incumbent even more open to charges of inadequacy. Le Révélateur du globe discusses the origins of the Papacy, which Christ himself established, and the character of the Pope. He is inspired infallibly by the Spirit, "Pasteur suprême et indéfectible", entrusted with the salvation of all mankind, and vowed to perpetual humility and martyrdom in expiation of the first Peter's defection. Bloy accepted wholeheartedly the Vatican I doctrine of papal infallibility and, like de Maistre, would have welcomed its extension.[2]

Papal pre-eminence, together with the sovereignty of France, was the corner-stone of his politics; he praised the theocratic principles of Boniface VIII and the Bull Unam sanctam.[3] In the event of a conflict between the two divinely-established authorities of Church and State, Papal authority is supreme; in the chapter "La Tiare", in L'Ame de Napoléon, the Pope, as agent of Providence, sets the limits to the Emperor's ambitions for himself and France.

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[1] Le Mendiant ingrat, 6th July 1899.

[2] Le Révélateur du globe, OC I, Pt. I, ch. vii.

[3] Le Désespéré, OC III, 139; Mon journal, 19th May 1897; 28th December 1899.

Individual Popes are treated less respectfully. Bloy had little to say of Pius IX, of whose intransigent policies he approved. He repeatedly rejected the liberalism of Leo XIII, his support of democratic principles and his willingness to accept the allegiance of a Brunetière, his encouragement of modern exegetical studies, and his failure to speak against persecution in France and against the Armenian massacres of 1903.[1] The elevation of Pius X in 1903 was a disappointment. Bloy had hoped for a younger man, who would be the ignis ardens of Malachi's prophecy, sent to revive the Church.[2] He revised his opinion as he observed the Pope's efforts to assert his authority during the cults controversy of 1906 and in the condemnation of Marc Sangnier's democratic principles in 1910, and noted his strictures on clerical wealth, his support of Thomism against modernist philosophy, and his prescription of the practice of daily communion throughout the Church.[3] Bloy sympathised with the failure of the Pope's efforts, and with his "persecution" by liberal elements both outside the Church and within.

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[1] Quatre ans, 22nd December 1900; 18th August 1901; 17th January 1902; 15th July 1903; see also "Ferdinand Brunetière de l'Académie Française" in Les Dernières Colonnes de l'Eglise.

[2] Ibid., 4th and 11th August 1903. Adrien Péladan claimed to have been the first to publish in France the Prophecy of the Popes, which first appeared in Ferrara in 1794 (A. Péladan, Dernier mot des prophéties, 2e partie inédite, Nîmes, 1880). This consists of 112 latin devices, attributed to the inspiration of Saint Malachi, eleventh-century bishop of Armagh, one for each Pope to reign before the end of the world. After crux de cruce (Pius IX) and lumen in caelo (Leo XIII), there remain ignis ardens, religio depopulata, fides intrepida, pastor angelicus, flos florum, de medietate lunae, de labore solis, de gloria olivae, and the Holy Pontiff of the Last Days, who has no device, who is to reign through the period of tribulations dominated by Antichrist. A Great Monarch is also prophesied, who will rule France and the world during the reign of the Holy Pontiff. This part of the prophecy was taken up by the Naundorffists and referred to the Pretender.

[3] Le Pèlerin de l'absolu, 31st August, 8th October 1910; 1st January 1911; 6th November 1911; 24th August 1910.

In the next Pope, Benedict XV, Malachi's prophecy of the ruin of religion (religio depopulata) appeared about to be fulfilled. The Pope was both sympathetic to the liberal cause and reputed to be supported by Austrian interests - the alleged reason for his neutrality in the First World War. Bloy's diary recorded his enraged opposition to the encyclical to the Belgians urging their submission to the Emperor for the sake of preserving social order, demanded an Interdict against Prussia, and expressed sympathy with the Pope's atheist critics, including even Clemenceau.[1] For his collection Dans les ténèbres, he wrote two meditations attacking the Pope: "L'Amertume suprême", and "Où sont les clefs?", suppressed by his friends when the book was edited for posthumous publication.[2] He printed one virulent article, "Pilate XV", in Les On-Dit, 28th September 1917, which was provoked by the August message from the Vatican pleading for peace and laying on both sides equal responsibility for the war. Bloy claimed that the Pope, no longer even professing neutrality, had passed to the enemy, and that his pacifism was the conscious instrument of Austrian and Boche politics. He expressed the disgust of a substantial section of French Catholic opinion:

> Si on peut dire que rien n'est plus douloureux pour des enfants que la démence ou l'imbécillité de leur père, que penser de l'Eglise universelle prévaricatrice ainsi châtiée dans la personne incomparablement auguste de son Chef? Je sais des âmes pieuses qui en sont affligées jusqu'à la tristesse de mort. Il y en a d'autres - et en quel nombre! -

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[1] Au seuil de l'Apocalypse, 10th December 1914; 6th, 22nd January and 2nd, 4th February, 29th May, 24th June 1915.

[2] See letter from Pierre Termier to his daughter, Résurrection, N.S., Nos. 7-8, 1944, p. 22.

> qui s'éloignait résolument de toute obéissance religieuse, ne voulant pas qu'on suppose leur adhésion même restrictive d'une résignation stupide en présence d'une iniquité colossale.

From the evidence so far accumulated, it would seem that Bloy's chief motivations, preferred attitudes and forms of expression are destructive ones. Irony, distortion, exaggeration and formal denunciation are employed to stir his contemporaries into awareness of the inadequacies he has found in their various philosophies. His adoption of a Catholic position might well be reduced simply to the search for a different perspective and a new set of images to apply to the destructive purpose.

At the same time, it seems possible to claim that there are aspects of the imaginative structure of intransigent Catholicism which provide Bloy with the most satisfactory vehicle available at the time for the expression of two more positive themes, which condition his attitudes to a greater extent than may immediately be apparent. The first is the rejection of the limitations imposed by materialism and deterministic philosophy in favour of a reassertion of human grandeur, considered to lie in individual moral responsibility expressible only in non-material standards - hence the necessity of the other-world imagery of the traditional Catholic supernatural. The second is the assertion that responsibility is dependent on engagement. Perception of the importance of practical human experience is felt to be lacking in both materialist and modern Catholic systems - hence the charge of apathy. The emphasis Bloy gives to his harshly ascetic doctrine of suffering is in part an attempt to restore this perception.

These are not the only uses made of the ideas of suffering and of the supernatural, nor even the ones which always come across most clearly. At times the system itself proves recalcitrant; at times, Bloy's own preoccupations take on more pessimistic colouring. The next two sections will be devoted to analysis of the complex of ideas attached to each, and to seeing how their Catholic form is adapted to Bloy's arguments to clarify these or to present them more persuasively.

## Section II

## The Concept of the Supernatural

> La négation du surnaturel est devenue un dogme absolu pour tout esprit cultivé.
> (E. Renan, Marc-Aurèle et la fin du monde antique, Paris, 1882)

The originality and importance of Bloy's defence of a supernatural element in experience are confirmed by the slowness with which its place in his work was recognised by his readership. Most early acknowledgements were nullified by their expression in terms as incorrect or vague as those of Emile Verhaeren who, in 1887, set a false trail with the discovery in Le Désespéré of the "lueurs vertes du satanisme".[1] The first full critical study, Stanislas Fumet's La Mission de Léon Bloy, did not appear until 1935.

Julien Green, who met Bloy's work towards the beginning of 1918,[2] was one of the first imaginative writers to see the properly Catholic context of his presentation of the supernatural and, in his Pamphlet contre les catholiques de France of 1924, to take up its main themes in the polemic key for which, so far, the older writer had best been known. Human nature, he asserted, could be understood only in the supernatural perspective of Catholic Revelation: "Votre grandeur, vous ne la comprendrez qu'en enfer, au purgatoire, ou au ciel, car le monde vous aveugle, et il faut que vous quittiez ce monde pour savoir qui vous êtes".[3] He criticised his contemporaries for their

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[1] E. Verhaeren, "Léon Bloy: (Un) Désespéré", L'Art Moderne, No. 5, 30th January 1887.

[2] J. Green, Journal, Paris, 1961, 8th November 1941.

[3] J. Green, Pamphlet contre les catholiques de France, 2nd ed., Paris, 1963, p. 53.

failure to acknowledge that: "Avant d'être raisonnable, vous êtes surnaturel".[1] He painted the supernatural as a total and violent rejection of natural or everyday perspectives and standards, and its most efficient mediation as that effected through the channels of the Church: "Un des caractères les plus étonnants de la messe, c'est qu'elle ne tue pas les personnes qui y assistent".[2]

Later entries in Green's Journal, made after he read Fumet's book in May 1942, continued to note Bloy's attacks on bourgeois Catholicism but recognised also the lyrical contrast made between this and the magnificence of God: "On lui oppose une invincible tiédeur, mais pour peu qu'on cède sur un point, c'est le ciel tout entier avec ses gouffres et ses millions d'astres qui se rue en nous".[3] Green was also impressed by the successful fusion in Bloy's work of the two kinds of experience; enveloping his temporal activity, the supernatural had become an atmosphere in which he moved with ease and familiarity: "Quand on lit Bloy, on est transporté aussitôt dans ces régions surnaturelles où il se promène comme sur une grand-route en y faisant sonner des souliers à clous". It was in this fusion of the two realms that Bloy's appeal for Green's generation was greatest.[4]

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[1] J. Green, Pamphlet contre les catholiques de France, 2nd ed., Paris, 1963, p. 63.

[2] Ibid., p. 36.

[3] J. Green, Journal, 23rd May 1942.

[4] Ibid., 19th January 1946. During this second phase of interest, inspired by Fumet, Green gave a series of lectures on Bloy and on Péguy, and the shepherdess Melanie in New York and Oakland, California (Journal, 15th June and 3rd August 1944).

The nineteenth-century's concept of the supernatural was broad and confused, blurred by materialist and positivist habits of thought. The end of the century was marked by a variety of attempts to disinter and restate the problems which the concept represented. The 1880's saw the re-emergence in literary circles of the symbolist and occultist undercurrents of the earlier years of the century, and of the neo-Christian humanitarianism discovered by de Vogüé in the Russian novelists. Theologians and philosophers began to probe the problem of inspiration, recast into more acceptable epistemological terms as problems of illusion and of the origins of ideas.

Discussion centred both on the actual existence of a supernatural realm and on the manner of its interaction with the natural. Within the Church two opposite hypotheses had developed to explain the latter. The immanentist theory of the moderns (based on the theories of the German Protestants and a handful of French Catholic theologians, including Laberthonnière and Maurice Blondel, whose thesis L'Action was published in 1893) was chiefly concerned with establishing as evidence of man's spiritual nature his moral and psychological activity. On the other hand, a newly-revived traditional transcendentalism stressed the primacy, separateness and integrity of the supernatural plane, which gave support and substance to the natural but only by attribution.

The academic detail of the controversy seldom touched the writers of the Revival except to drive them by the simple fact of its existence into increasingly intransigent positions. Most took up an unreservedly transcendentalist line, partly to preserve the sense of moral freedom implied by a realm divorced from physical determinism, partly for the

sake of moral order, which was felt to depend on the existence of the realm as an extrinsic source of authority, and partly to retain the imaginative colours of the traditional Catholic formulations by which the realm was opened for discussion. Immanentist doctrines were totally rejected; Barbey, in 1869, challenged "Un Christianisme suspect":

> Le surnaturel! La notion du surnaturel! Voilà ce qui vous manque à tous, gens d'esprit et de science de mon siècle, qui parlez de catholicisme, même avec respect. Sans cette notion du surnaturel, le catholicisme n'a plus son caractère absolu, infaillible et divin. Il n'est plus qu'une institution religieuse morale et politique quelconque;[1]

and Bloy wrote in similar terms from Denmark in 1891:

> J'ai beau faire, je n'arrive pas à découvrir la ligne de démarcation entre l'athéisme pur et simple et ce soi-disant christianisme qui rejette le surnaturel. Ici l'orgueil le plus bête et l'ignorance la plus épaisse ont fait un pacte pour abolir toutes les notions essentielles.[2]

The intransigent attitude becomes easier to understand in the context of the embattled conditions of the Church in the nineteenth century, when the concept of the supernatural was under constant attack by the materialists as the chief obstacle to the liberation and progress of humanity.[3] Bloy singled out for special comment the work of Ernest Renan and Jules Simon[4] and, following Barbey, that of

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[1] Le Gaulois, 5th August 1869.

[2] Lettres aux Montchal, 16th-17th June 1891.

[3] See R. Ternois, Zola et son temps, Paris 1961, ch. iii.

[4] On Ernest Renan, see "La Configuration du savantasse", Le Chat Noir, 1st September 1883; "Sépulcres blanchis", L'Evénement, 23rd December 1890; "La Fin d'une charmante promenade", Gil Blas, 8th October 1892. Jules Simon, Minister of Education from 1871 and afterwards Minister of Religion until 1877, was the author of La Religion naturelle, Paris, 1856, and La Réforme de l'enseignement secondaire, reviewed by Bloy in L'Univers, 3rd April 1874. He attempted to conciliate the Vatican whilst discreetly introducing natural religion.

Zola. He held that the latter's Trois Villes (1894-1898), depicting the progress to atheism and socialism of the liberal abbé Pierre, and Les Quatre Evangiles - especially the first volume Fécondité, published in 1899 - represented a formal campaign against the philosophy of Catholicism.[1] An account of his pamphlet against Zola, Je m'accuse..., published in 1900, gives a useful indication of the situation in which Bloy and his fellow-intransigents felt themselves to be, and the points of their doctrine which were most threatened.

It is usual to place the main point of the pamphlet in its critique of the Dreyfus affair, but close analysis provides some justification for Bloy's claim in a letter to Rachilde, 29th October 1899, that the work is not political, but a literary and religious tour de force challenging the philosophy of Naturalism:

> . . . il y aussi l'apostolat d'athéisme que vous n'avez même pas eu l'air de voir en ce hideux pourceau et qui est sa tringle ou son support pour ne pas tomber tout de suite en putréfaction. . . .
>
> Songez que Je m'accuse... est une oeuvre exclusivement littéraire qui vous comblera d'allégresse et qu'il n'y est parlé de Dreyfus, dans un ton, d'ailleurs, assez neutre, que par rapport à Zola pour qui j'étale peu d'enthousiasme.[2]

Zola's positivist apostolate began with Lourdes, published in 1894, discussing the meaning for contemporary society of the centre of pilgrimage, which Bloy himself dismissed as the "gouffre central

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[1] On this aspect of Zolds work, see the collection of letters in the fonds Zola, B.N., n.a.f. 24519; especially letter of 19th August 1883, from Maurice de Fleury, an ex-disciple of Bloy's.

[2] Appendix, p. 33. The context of the letter - Bloy's desire to conciliate Vallette - is such that special pleading might be invoked; but see also letters to Deman, 24th July 1899: ". . . l'auteur des Rougon-Macquart remplaçant Jéhovah, désormais, non, c'est trop idiot, trop antifrançais, trop cochon!" (La R.), and to Bernaert, 5th October 1899: "Zola est un ennemi tel que même les catholiques affreux dont vous parlez ne peuvent pas l'être plus que lui." (Boll. III, 302).

de la sentimentalité contemporaine".[1] The book renewed general interest in spiritual phenomena, especially in the miracles controversy. In public, Zola made claims of good faith, but his preparatory notes indicate a clearly hostile bias: "Dans Lourdes, je pourrai montrer le besoin d'illusions et de croyance qu'a l'humanité. Le besoin de bonheur, et, ici-bas, l'amour de la vie, car Lourdes n'est pas autre chose".[2] The novel itself moved along two lines of attack. In the foreground was demonstrated humanity's need of illusion, in the miracles of Lourdes which Zola, after Charcot, attributed to mass suggestion; behind this lay a more general criticism of the Catholic philosophy of suffering and renunciation as represented by Bernadette and the abbé Pierre. The two themes were developed and finally rejected in conjunction, with an appeal for involvement in the life of this world.

Bloy's reaction was expressed in two stages; in the article "Le Crétin des Pyrénées", published in the Mercure de France for September 1894, and in the final brochure, for which this provided an important introductory movement.[3]

The first article sets the context of the discussion as that of the miracles controversy, and its purpose as explaining the significance of Zola's dismissal of the supernatural. Zola is presented as the founder of a new cult of effort - "la Religion du Travail" - which is a synthesis of materialist commonplaces: "C'est toujours, invariablement, l'expérimentalisme grossier d'un Bacon de table d'hôte,

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[1] Mon journal, 17th February 1900.

[2] E. Zola, Lourdes, OC XXXII, Paris, 1927, p. 548.

[3] "Aucune de mes oeuvres ne m'a plus coûté et j'espère avoir réussi d'obtenir, avec différentes matières, un projectile homogène, dense, puissant, que le vent ne réduira pas en poussière." [Letter to Bernaert, 29th November 1899 (La R.)].

l'horreur du mystère, la science, l'évolution, le travail, le saint coit, l'éternelle resuçée de l'atavisme, de l'héridité, de la dégénerescence, etc. . . . cette vacherie d'idées". His attacks on the Catholic religion similarly take the form of the cliché:

> "La foi aveugle, - l'obéissance sans examen, - le total abandon de la raison, - la foi qui étouffe le torturant besoin de la vérité, - les phénomènes prouvés qui démolissent les dogmes . . . le miracle par suggestion, - la volonté de croire . . . la dévorante illusion de l'amour divin . . . les prêtres châtrés, - le suicide volontaire, - la vie libre et virile du dehors," etc. etc.

His ideas, Bloy tries to claim, are so banal and so badly presented that serious refutation is not necessary; and in any case, most of his charges are less an expression of sincere concern for humanity than of concern for his own sales, threatened by the revival of interest in idealist literature. Nevertheless, his attempts to bypass dogma, which Bloy quotes verbatim - "A quoi bon croire aux dogmes? Ne suffit-il pas de pleurer et d'aimer?" - and his claims that the Church fosters superstition for her own ends constitute a real moral danger which must be resisted.

It is this point which is stressed in the second article, "La Dernière Enfance de Zola". The defence of the miraculous is still important here, but the pivot of Bloy's thought is the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the moral ideal of a redeemed humanity which this connotes. He contrasts with this Zola's morally degrading philosophy. Against the Christian ideal of Virginity, the Naturalist sets his own cult of the fertility of Woman and of the Earth: "La décisive victoire de la maternité féconde sur la virginité tueuse de vie".[1] He leads a blasphemous attack on the sterility not only of

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[1] Je m'accuse..., OC IV, 219.

ascetic religious vocations, but of Christ himself and of the whole Christian ethic. The climax is a denunciation of Zola's attempt to transpose the terminology of this ethic into his own humanitarian ideal, turning the suffering of Dreyfus into that of a martyr in the socialist cause. Bloy's "Postscriptum", commenting on the recently-announced project of Les Quatre Evangiles, describes this voluntary distortion of Catholic truth as the reign of Antichrist, implying the imminent end of humanity: "Tout cela dépasse infiniment le capitaine juif et ressemble au prodrome du Cataclysme".

Once again, he offers no formal analysis to refute Zola's ideas, relying on the distorting comic effect of carefully-chosen crude and hyperbolic quotations from Fécondité, coupled with his own brief and indignant reactions. Nor does he attempt to explain at any length the deeper significance he claims to find in the Christian ideal, preferring to convey incisively his own sense of some important principle at stake, and to leave to the reader, once challenged, the task of examining its intricacies for himself.

In the face of intrusions of this kind, it was inevitable that Bloy should try to defend the existence of the supernatural in terms which set it firmly in the Catholic context and beyond the critical reach of natural criteria. The moral and philosophical dualism which resulted from this, rather than causing him embarrassment, offered positive advantages to his apologetic.

In a letter to Landry, dated 14th September 1872, he describes his discovery of the world of souls, a new theme for modern literature, and one which strains available modes of expression; he apologizes for his "langage . . . fantasmagorique et même un peu guindé". This

world is one distinct from and superior to the world of bodies. It exists in a redeemed hierarchical order ruled over by God "par une politique réelle et infaillible sans que rien ne sorte jamais de sa place et dérange l'Ordre primordial". As such, it provides the underlying sense and substance of what Bloy considers the irremediably disordered activity of natural life. Social and individual attitudes should be related to this ideal system rather than to empirical circumstances:

> Lorsque l'oeil humain se retourne et se reploie vers ces profondeurs, il commence seulement alors d' apercevoir les linéaments divins de l'ordre suprême et les dérèglements modernes viennent de ce que les hommes ont perdu ce regard. Nous l'avons dit cent fois. La seule Education, la seule Politique est celle qui regarde les âmes, parce que dans le problème de l'Homme, on ne doit pas évincer l'homme.[1]

The juxtaposition of the two worlds, commonplace of traditionalist theology, is the basis of Bloy's imaginative study of Man. The meaning and origins of Napoleon's activities are presented as the result of higher spiritual "forces", consisting in pressure from the souls of predecessors and contemporaries; clearly, an attempt by Bloy to find dogmatically acceptable terms for unpalatable but incontrovertible truths of historical determinism.[2] Elsewhere, the concept is used to assert the freedom of the individual from the pressures of heredity and environment. Personality is set inviolable in the centre of the soul, as in Clotilde, described after her seduction:

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[1] Lettres de jeunesse, No. VIII.

[2] L'Ame de Napoléon, OC V, 291-94.

> La profonde personalité de la jeune fille continua de subsister par-dessous les ensablements monotones et les marécages désolés de son apparente vie terrestre, et par-dessous les effrayantes eaux souterraines de son repentir, - semblable à ces cryptes miraculeuses qui sont cachées au centre du globe et qu'une seule goutte de lumière ferait autant resplendir que les basiliques des cieux.[1]

Attention is given to the problem of mediation between the two realms. L'Ame de Napoléon offers the neo-platonist view that the way to the soul (the full self-awareness for which man strives) is barred by the senses, and only available when these are bound, by asceticism, sleep or death. These are not states which can be induced by human effort, but depend on external inspiration.[2] The fullest mediation, however, is in the Divine Passion, which meets natural man on the common ground of suffering or enthusiasm, which are two faces of the same coin. The letter to Landry referred to above makes this point. Although the human soul has in itself a supernatural part of perfection, beauty, and moral excellence, this is unimportant and of no merit compared with the part of love, or religious enthusiasm, which is the bridge between heaven and earth.[3]

The sufferings of Christ, being incarnate in human nature and human history, are felt to provide a substantial mediation. Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition first makes this explicit, describing the Blood of Christ and the tears of Mary as the two most perfectly human things.[4] This is a point central to contemporary discussions

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 48-49.

[2] L'Ame de Napoléon, OC V, 296-97.

[3] Letter to Landry, 1st September 1871 (Boll. I, 147-52).

[4] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 16.

of the theology of the Sacred Heart and one which Bloy, in the imaginative context of his writing, is able to make more forcibly than the theologians.

With the elaboration of this point, Bloy touches one of the sensitive issues of his period. His prose réplique of Henry de Groux's picture, "Le Christ aux Outrages", - "un Seigneur Dieu ruisselant de sang"[1] - is aimed at the modern intellectual searching for moral fulfilment in an incarnate ideal. Huysmans' conversion is made to fit this pattern, which, according to Bloy, indicates a doctrinal shift with eschatological implications, having its parallel in the Messianic expectations of the Old Testament:

> Le Sphinx est revenu, mille fois plus formidable. Son énigme ne porte plus sur l'homme maintenant, mais sur Dieu, et aucun Oedipe ne se présente pour répondre
> . . . .
> . . . nous sommes à l'extrémité de tout. Le catholicisme ne suffit pas [à Huysmans], parce que la présence eucharistique réelle n'est pas assez, il lui faut la présence sensible, quoiqu'il ne le dise pas et quoique, peut-être, il l'ignore. C'est le mal étrange et nouveau des êtres supérieurs de cette fin de siècle si mystérieusement exceptionnelle. On ne veut plus d'un Dieu qui se cache. On commence à vouloir d'un Christ visible des yeux du corps, éclatant, fulgurant, terrible, incontestable.[2]

The analysis which follows will try to show this as the central point of Bloy's discussion of the supernatural: the paradox of its independence of the natural realm and its existence in substantial reality, effected practically by the mediation of Christ and of his Church.

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[1] Le Mendiant ingrat, 26th February 1892.

[2] "Les Représailles du Sphinx", Le Chat Noir, 14th June 1884.

## 1. The Necessity of the Supernatural

Bloy's conversion was a result of his disillusionment with the promises of socialism, which had begun to appear incompatible with the picture of natural man built up from his own experience. Catholicism offered a more satisfactory alternative in the form of dogmatic patterns which confirmed his pessimistic description and offered a means of renewal not wholly dependent on the human element. Bloy welcomed the premise that fallen and redeemed natures co-exist in man, who can only be discussed in the dual context, and praised:

> . . . ces deux grands dogmes lumineux sans lesquels il est impossible d'expliquer quoi que ce soit dans le monde des faits ou dans le monde des sentiments, vous m'entendez bien. L'homme naît mauvais, très mauvais, non pas bon, très bon, comme le crie sur tous les tons l'orgueil des doctrines modernes, en un mot l'homme est naturellement mauvais - tout le prouve. C'est la Chute. C'est la loi originelle. Mais il est bon surnaturellement. C'est la Rédemption. C'est la Révélation. C'est la loi de miséricorde.[1]

The coexistence is a useful theoretical description of the human state, but in practice raises its own set of problems. Man exists in perpetual tension; "l'animal responsable",[2] promised final transcendence of his nature and endowed for this with the faculties of reason and of freewill, is made incapable of using these by the force of physical instincts and passions or by the pressure of external circumstances. Bloy is fully aware of this contradiction, and makes some attempt to justify it and explain its purpose.

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[1] Letter to Daussin, Spring 1871 (Boll. I, 134).

[2] Le Désespéré, OC III, 139.

i. The Problem of Freewill

By the end of the nineteenth century, this was posed for the Church in two separate contexts. On a social level, the revolutionary spirit of independence and individualism, gathering momentum in this century, had produced a series of European revolutions or revolutionary threats which challenged the temporal and spiritual authority of the Church and the moral and social stability which, to her supporters, seemed dependent on this. From the 1850's, encyclicals appeared in opposition to the demand for such freedom. The Syllabus of 1864 rejected the proposition that moral laws could be effective without divine sanction, whilst Quanta cura condemned "liberty of conscience" as "liberty of perdition" and claimed that release from the bonds of religion implied automatic enslavement to those of material wealth. From the 1870's, when the main challenge was to the temporal power of the Church, the emphasis was political: November 1873, a statement on the twofold power (Etsi multa luctuosa); February 1875, a defence of the liberty of the Church against the Prussian Kulturkampf (Quod numquam); April 1884 and November 1885, encyclicals having special reference to the French Concordat (Humanum genus and Immortale Dei). The latter opposed the "free licence for sedition" of the atheist state to the freedom from error and the passions guaranteed by the authority of the Church. Diuturnum illud, June 1881, whilst allowing variations in forms of government, insisted that these were all products of divine law and not of congenital freewill.

Barbey's generation, enlisting the authority of the Maistrean traditionalists, emphasised the link between liberty and social disorder. Its notion of freedom became increasingly circumscribed.

Veuillot's definition in L'Illusion libérale, 1366, making a distinction between liberty and freewill, rejected the atheist definition of freedom as unrestricted power of choice. Freedom lay uniquely in the ability to choose good and to act according to right reason, which was dependent on the possession of sound Catholic will and judgement and freedom from the appetites. This became standard doctrine, maintained even in the progressive encyclical Libertas of 1888.[1] Little subtlety was involved; with the exception of a liberal Catholic minority, both rationalist and Catholic camps made a simple opposition between freedom and dogmatic authority.

At the same time, the progress of theories of determinism, heredity and conditioning, which deny the existence of moral responsibility, forced the Church to reassert the existence and importance of freewill. Fonsegrive refers to the controversy in the novel in the 1880's, opened by the publication of Zola's Roman expérimental.[2] As early as 1865, in the preface to Une Vieille Maîtresse, Barbey had claimed that the responsibility contingent upon freewill should be the main theme of the Catholic novelist: "l'excès de la passion, c'est l'abus de notre liberté". In defence of human freedom, he embarked upon the campaign against Zola's determinist theories which Bloy later continued. Les Diaboliques were a rejection of the doctrine of the irresistible conditioning force of environment; whilst an article on Huysmans' A rebours, published in Le Constitutionnel, 29th July 1884, deplored the modern hero's lack of willpower and total physiological dependence

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[1] Art. "Liberté", Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, IX, i, Paris, 1926, cols. 660-703.

[2] G. Fonsegrive, L'Evolution des idées de Taine à Péguy, Paris, 1920, p. 41.

and argued that the human condition was more truthfully represented in Barbey's own romantic heroes: "ces héros de romans humains, passionnés et coupables". Bloy made a like attack on what he considered the vulgarity and artificiality of Zola's characters: "toujours, au fond, le même spectre irresponsable et plein d'inconscience, évoluant au gré de la fantaisie du narrateur, esclave passif d'impulsions héréditaires et ne résistant jamais à ses appetences bestiales".[1]

Bloy was first introduced to the problem in its political context, through Barbey and Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's criticisms of the effects of liberalism in the social order. He approved the latter's insistence that he was trying to establish not merely efficient political machinery but the best social conditions for the individual to develop freely and acquire the merit of independence; and welcomed his aphoristic distinction between "politique libératrice" and "politique libérale".[2] His own first formulations, however, were not political but related to his own moral dilemmas.

An account of his conversion and creed, written in 1869, rejected all notions of individual liberty as incompatible with the antagonism between the natural and spiritual selves and described both conversion and perseverance in virtue as products of an external force. In the natural order, the body, described with mediaeval contempt, usurped

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[1] "Les Funérailles du naturalisme", La Plume, 15th May 1891.

[2] Letter from Blanc de Saint-Bonnet, 16th July 1872 [CLB No. 6 (7th Yr.), July-August 1931, p. 156]. Bloy used the opposition in "La Maison-Dieu", with the paradox that the Carthusian Rule provides true liberty, whereas socialist freedom is an enslavement to the passions (Le Foyer Illustré, 4th and 25th January 1879; see also Le Désespéré, p. 120).

a destructive supremacy over the soul. The balance could be restored only by embracing the spiritual life of Christ: "Le Sauveur Jésus qui nous a rachetés en méprisant le corps dont il s'était revêtu pour nous ressembler". Obstacles to this were raised by physical desires, pride and passions, but could be overcome by the grace of God, the blood of Christ and the intercession of Mary and the saints, endowed with the material force which Bloy tried to deny to the body.[1] With such an uncompromising ascetic ideal, external aids become essential. Bloy admitted the need for social constraints and for Catholic devotional practices which induced new habits of behaviour.

In a letter to Lucile Lalotte, 7th December 1873, he claimed that co-operation with God, through the exercise of liberty, was the only means of salvation. On closer analysis, the human contribution proves merely a passive and humble acknowledgement of inadequacy. Free initiative is strictly limited to divine grace, which appears in exaggerated Augustinian terms:

> Toujours Dieu commence par envoyer aux âmes prédestinées, qu'il veut attirer à Lui, des douceurs extrêmes, Dieu s'approche un peu du coeur et le pauvre coeur se fond de délices. Alors on croit qu'on aime Dieu. Au fond, c'est Dieu seul qui nous aime.[2]

Bloy's description of the recipient of grace as a debtor, responsible, like the Biblical steward, for the return of capital and interest on his loan, would appear to imply a substantial measure of human co-operation; but this is contradicted as the letter continues. Similarly, a eulogy of Lucile's greatness of heart suggests at first the

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[1] Letter to Maria X, 15th February 1869 (Boll. I, 85-95).

[2] Boll. I, 172-73.

potential dignity of human personality which is invested in the concepts of liberty and responsibility, and represents an attempt by Bloy to bring inside the ascetic framework of Catholicism his own admiration for the heroic character; but again moves away to a pessimistic conclusion as to the fragility of the will rather than its heroic potential.

The individual's misuse of freedom was described hyperbolically as preventing the descent of grace and the incarnation of the whole supernatural order. Bloy explained to Michel Ménard, 9th January 1877, that God's generous permission of independence to his creatures, and his refusal to exert compulsion over human choices, except by the affective appeal of the crucifixion, laid on man the onus of answering with a voluntary abdication of his freedom of choice. He urged the necessity of this with an image of the pathos of God's permission of his own defeat and the brutality of man's rejection of God, which undermined by its violent and emotional rhetoric the freedom of choice he had asserted:

> La liberté, ce don prodigieux, incompréhensible, inqualifiable, par laquelle il nous est donné de vaincre le Père, le Fils et le Saint-Esprit, de tuer le Verbe incarné, de poignarder sept fois l'Immaculée Conception, d'agiter d'un seul mot, tous les esprits créés dans les cieux et dans les enfers, de retenir la Volonté, la Justice, la Miséricorde, la Pitié de Dieu sur ses lèvres, et de l'empêcher d'en descendre sur sa création, cette ineffable Liberté n'est rien que ceci: le respect de Dieu.[1]

The charge that the refusal of grace implies corruption of the will was taken up again in Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, where the affective appeal was made by the figure of the Dolorous Virgin.[2] Bloy

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[1] Boll. I, 291-97; rpt. Dans les ténèbres, OC IX, ch. ix. Cp. Le Révélateur du globe, OC I, 38-39.

[2] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 61-63.

argued that such an appeal respected the inviolability of human liberty; but in both cases its emotionality is so blatant and contrived as to make it impossible for the reader to accept its legitimacy.

Le Révélateur du globe shifted the discussion of the problem to a consideration of the external conditions which make the exercise of free choice impossible, demonstrating that these are the product of unconsidered exercise of "natural" liberty. Christianity asserts the existence of freewill and demands that the individual accept responsibility for his actions. But the freedom grace provides is limited. Although the will is able to evaluate the objects of its choice as good or evil, its actions are still motivated by concupiscence; the appeal of external objects is almost irresistible and is universally evil. Grace intervenes with forgiveness, but is unable to revoke the action and its consequences. These, unless ascetic - "la liberté crucifiée avec Jésus-Christ" - create a web of determinant conditions from which escape is finally impossible, except by supernatural mediation such as is symbolised by Columbus' mission to the Americas.[1] (It should perhaps be recalled that the composition of Le Révélateur du globe coincided with Bloy's own prolonged bouts of ineffective remorse over his affair with Anne-Marie Roulet.)

By 1884, Bloy had acknowledged both the Catholic doctrine of individual responsibility for freely-chosen actions, and the empirical evidence that many actions are governed not by rational choices but by the force of appetite or of external circumstance. He refused to admit that the contradiction implied any inadequacy in the religious

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[1] Le Révélateur du globe, OC I, 36-38.

doctrine, but the mystifications and evasions into which he was subsequently forced when the problem arose reveal his suspicion that this inadequacy existed.

The effects of historical determinism were catered for by re-definition as the effects of providential action. A letter to Jeanne, 27th September 1889, urged the virtue of: "subir la volonté de Dieu exprimée dans des faits et des circonstances invincibles". The complex of irrevocable events described in Le Révélateur du globe as a source of despair became an expression of the will of God to which the creature was invited to submit, and the sense of despair was justified as part of the human contribution to the Reparation of Christ's Passion, a ransom whose fulfilment was the single preoccupation of Providence. This emphasis made it impossible to accept the modern idea of freewill as self-determination: "cette liberté qui se félicite sans relâche d'avoir fait ce qu'elle a voulu".[1] True and natural liberty was the prerogative of the saint. By virtue of her sufferings and her purity, Joan of Arc had regained Paradise, the state of perfect nature in which her will was free because perfectly identified with that of God. This is the definition of freedom which Veuillot offered, but presented in a form less reductive of human dignity, with the independent and heroic figure of the warrior saint.

The problem of attribution of responsibility in a given situation was modified by changes of perspective. Le Salut par les Juifs blurred the question of Jewish responsibility for Calvary by variously describing the Jews' motivation as both voluntary and inspired - by

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 133.

both the devil and God.[1] In Le Désespéré, on the other hand, human responsibility was reasserted by Bloy's tracing back actions apparently dependent on force of instinct or circumstance to a point where free choice was exercised. (This was doctrinally necessary to make Marchenoir's victimal intercessions valid.) Before falling in love with the prostitute Véronique, Marchenoir coldly agreed to suffer temptation in the future in exchange for her conversion; and in the detachment of the Charterhouse he was able to ask for release. These free acts can, within the logic of Bloy's doctrine, be considered the real cause of both the physical necessity which later drove Marchenoir to try to violate Véronique and the providential organisation of circumstances which prevented him. A similar movement can be seen in the compensatory interactions of liberty and necessity within the Communion of Saints, where one man's free submission in prayer to the will of God is considered the legitimate motivation of the action of another.[2] Freewill understood in this sense is presented as the moving and harmonising force of the Communion, which in the last analysis ratifies all actions, whether ascetic or not.

Despite the ingenuity of Bloy's solutions, these switches between natural and supernatural perspective provide only temporary relief by introducing new terms of expression for the Catholic paradox of a responsibility which consists of acquiescence in the predestined and inevitable. Bloy admitted the paradox in his description of Napoleon's actions and function in history:

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[1] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 33, 48.

[2] Méditations, OC IX, 240.

> Ne sachant pas lui-même où le portait une Volonté mystérieuse de laquelle il ne songeait pas à discuter les exigences et ne se réservant que la responsabilité la plus totale qu'un mortel ait assumée.[1]

ii. The Function of Reason

Here again, Bloy accepted without dispute the intransigent position - mistrust of reasoning, whether operating inside or out of the Catholic framework, and reliance on authority alone. His statements on the rôle and nature of reason rest on two axioms: that the only constructive and right reason is that which is guided by faith, and that natural reason, operating outside the context of faith, is by definition corrupt, egocentric and wrong.[2] It was from this point of view that he described his own conversion as intellectual and claimed that, despite his expectation of conflict, his faith had established his reason on a firmer basis:

> Aujourd'hui, je possède un ensemble de croyances véritablement inébranlable, car je rapporte tout à Dieu, je fais tout découler de la foi et même, au pied de la lettre, j'ai complètement cessé de comprendre qu'on puisse avoir, je ne dis pas un doute, mais seulement l'ombre d'un doute sur toutes les choses que l'Eglise enseigne.[3]

The position, which is that of the first Vatican Council,[4] can be argued with some philosophical respectability within the Catholic tradition. Bloy found the most easily accessible arguments in support

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[1] L'Ame de Napoléon, OC V, 289.

[2] L'Invendable, 23rd March 1907.

[3] Letter to Bloy's mother, June 1869 (Boll. I, 104-105).

[4] The Proem to Dei filius, 24th April 1870 (Vatican I: Constitution on the Catholic Faith), attacked the cognate evils of rationalism, Protestantism and atheism.

of his beliefs in the works of Hello and Blanc de Saint-Bonnet.

The latter, who was described by Barbey as reconciling the realms of reason and faith, was the influence Bloy acknowledged most freely: "C'est un immense phare intellectuel placé sur le bord du plus profond des abîmes de la pensée moderne".[1] Bloy first approached him claiming to be in search of philosophical certainty and was at once introduced to Saint-Bonnet's campaign against the error of pantheism. A letter of 24th January 1872, from Saint-Bonnet, offered for this purpose his unpublished La Raison, together with L'Unité spirituelle, which introduced Bloy to the rôle of illumination in elevating the reason to the highest mysteries.[2] (This was also the philosophy of Pius IX, as Saint-Bonnet had explained in an earlier letter of November 1871.) He claimed to follow Malebranche in the assertion that human reason was an organic participation in Divine Wisdom which enabled man to receive from God direct inspirations which were mediated through the heart by intuition, or love. Such an argument stands best in the form of an equation between the intellectual activity of man and that of

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[1]Notes to RF III, i [CLB No. 2 (6th Yr.), Nov.-Dec. 1929, p. 58].

[2]CLB No. 5 (7th Yr.), May-June 1931, p. 125. Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's La Raison, précédé de L'Infini et l'Infinitésimal, Paris, Balitout, Questroy et Cie, n.d., of which 60 copies were printed, later appeared as Préliminaires du livre de la Chute, Paris, 1878; L'Unité spirituelle, ou "de la Société et de son but au-delà des temps", was published in three volumes, Paris, 1841.

God;[1] but Saint-Bonnet is suggesting that the "ideas" of God reach man as given propositions, accepted by the emotions in almost the same way as evidence of the physical world is accepted by the senses. The Christological context alone justifies what otherwise seems a specious positivistic argument but nevertheless the immediate certainties offered by the theory, and its appeal to emotion in the guise of intellect, encouraged Bloy to adopt it as part of the rationale of his approach, with his own qualification that the mediation of intuitive love was best expressed in suffering.

The letter of 24th January also proposed a fierce attack on rationalism: "Certes, j'aurais voulu écraser cette Révolution, qui est la destruction des sociétés modernes, et balayer en même temps la philosophie moderne qui a donné le jour à la Révolution". This was an aspect of Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's thought which Bloy followed through in detail in his marginal notes to La Restauration française.

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[1] It was with this argument that Gerbet defended the thought of de Maistre, Bonald and Lamennais, similarly preoccupied with healing the split between reason and revelation, against Friedrich Schlegel's misinterpretations:

> [M. Schlegel] a cru que M. l'abbé de Lamennais, en établissant le principe de l'autorité générale, a voulu faire reposer la loi de la foi sur la destruction de la science; méprise exactement correspondante à celle des protestants qui supposent que le Catholicisme, en proclamant la nécessité de croire aux dogmes chrétiens par voie d'autorité, a pour objet d'établir la foi sur la destruction de la science chrétienne. . . .
>
> Quant à l'opposition que les principes de M. de Bonald ont éprouvée de la part de quelques scolastiques français, elle est fondée sur une fausse notion de la doctrine de l'Eglise, avec laquelle ils confondent des questions philosophiques. L'Eglise, pour maintenir, contre les divers systèmes du matérialisme, la différence essentielle qui existe entre l'homme et l'animal, a constamment enseigné que l'homme, créé à l'image de Dieu, est fait pour connaître la vérité; d'où il résulte qu'il y a des rapports naturels entre la vérité et l'âme humaine. Elle a enseigné en second lieu que l'intelligence de l'homme est une participation, un écoulement de l'intelligence divine ou du Verbe. D'où il résulte que si l'homme est, par ses sensations, en rapport avec la matière, il est, par ses idées, directement en rapport avec Dieu, et c'est pour cette raison que les écoles chrétiennes ont toujours repoussé, même avant toute discussion et par une sorte d'instinct religieux, les systèmes qui, faisant dériver les idées de sensations, détruisent l'union de l'intelligence humaine avec le Verbe divin ("Coup d'oeil sur la controverse chrétienne", 1831; cit. H. Bremond, Gerbet, Paris, 1907, pp. 220-21).

Bloy agreed with the traditionalist's thesis that the rejection of the theological order implied in empirical philosophies inevitably brought chaos into the dependent orders of morality and politics, and that in the study of history in particular no proper understanding of events was possible without the illumination of faith. The atheist who substituted for this his own imagination and so-called erudition moved in his interpretation "de ridicule en ridicule, avançant au milieu des faits comme un mort au sein des vivants".[1] Bloy echoed the challenge in more striking imagery in "Gaspard de Coligny", and in Le Désespéré, which scornfully dismissed: "cette sciure d'histoire apportée, chaque jour, par les médiocres ébénistes de l'Ecole des Chartes, au panier de la guillotine historique où sont décapités les grands concepts de la Tradition".[2] The Revolutionary images, a transposition of the nearer experience of the Commune, clearly indicate the connection which Bloy makes between rationalism and social disorder.

The root of rationalism was said by Blanc de Saint-Bonnet to be the egocentricity of fallen man, whose reason, unreliable as all his other faculties, lost its stability when divorced from faith.[3] Bloy himself later brought the charge of egoism against any philosophy less clearly ascetic than his own, from Ignatian self-analysis to the Barresian individualism dismissed by the obscene imagery of the article "Petite Secousse".

The historical origins of rationalism were attributed to Protestantism and Cartesianism.[4] Bloy denounced the first in his caricatures

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[1] RF I, xl [CLB No. 1 (6th Yr.), Sept.-Oct. 1929, p. 12].

[2] Le Désespéré, OC III, 127.

[3] Notes to RF III, xlvi [CLB No. 2 (6th Yr.), Nov.-Dec. 1929, pp. 70-71].

[4] Notes to RF II, xxvii (ibid., pp. 47-48).

of Luther in La Femme pauvre, and in the conclusion of Jeanne d'Arc, where he quoted Maritain's derivation of German rationalism from Luther's principles, which were themselves mere justifications of individual passions: "[faire] de sa désordre même la règle générale". His point of attack in Cartesianism was the 'tabula rasa' principle, selected in order to make a clear-cut contrast with the comprehensive embrace of traditionalism. He saw the alternatives before modern philosophy as the Nicene creed, on the one hand, and Cartesian dualism on the other - his own dualism being of a less pernicious Platonic kind.[1] His understanding of the philosophy was deliberately partial; he treated it not as a matter for analysis but as a useful symbol of irreligion against which to build emotive rhetorical oppositions:

> Je crois qu'un esprit sage formulerait ainsi les pensées qui m'agitent:
>
> Le monde moderne a perdu la pure notion du VRAI et il ne lui reste plus que la notion de l'UTILE. C'est-à-dire qu'à force d'orgueilleux a posteriori, il est arrivé à détruire l'idée surnaturelle d'un Dieu révélateur, que l'esprit humain n'avait jamais dégagé qu'a priori, et il n'a pu retenir que le hasardeux concept des matérialités ambiantes dont il niait l'artisan.
>
> Tous les doctrines funestes de ce temps sont cartésiens.
>
> Dieu, surnaturalité, Vérité sont des mots exactement synonymes qu'il ne faut jamais se lasser d'opposer comme barrière logique à l'envahissement de ceux-ci dont la signification n'est pas moins claire: Athéisme, matérialisme, réalisme.
>
> La question ainsi posée est d'une terrible conséquence, et par malheur personne ne le voit.[2]

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[1] Notes to RF II, v [CLB No. 1 (6th Yr.), Sept.-Oct. 1929, p. 22].

[2] Notes to RF II, ix [ibid., pp. 25-26].

Bloy was not in his element in the pseudo-philosophical tone inspired by Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's book. The same ideas appear with more force when cast into the colourful devotional terms of the letters he wrote to friends around the time of the Franco-Prussian war. Writing to Daussin in the spring of 1871, in the upheaval of the Commune and the aftermath of war, Bloy referred nostalgically to the mediaeval respect for tradition and the supernatural doctrines which provide the only proper philosophical perspective, and urged abandonment of the cult of reason for the folly of the Cross, expressed in acts of reparation and submission to rejected divine authority and its representatives:

> . . . nous périssons parce que nous avons trop de raison et il n'y a plus que la folie qui soit encore capable de nous sauver. J'entends la folie divine de la Croix . . . plus puissante que la raison qu'elle foule aux pieds parce qu'elle n'a pas de nom et qu'elle est surnaturelle, cette folie si croyable précisément parce qu'elle est absurde et impossible, comme disait Tertullien le Superbe, laquelle fit éclore dans la région de Galilée cette rose sanglante dont les parfums remplirent le monde d'une suavité inconnue et dont les épines mystérieuses percèrent le coeur des hommes.[1]

Ernest Hello confirmed Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's principles in more devotional terms. In his article of 1895 on Ferdinand Brunetière, Bloy contrived to avoid proper philosophical discussion of the relationship between reason and faith by reference to Hello's M. Renan, l'Allemagne et l'athéisme au XIX$^{e}$ siècle, which first appeared in 1859, as the final word on the subject.

The book, well received in traditionalist circles, argued that reason and faith were compatible because both had their source in

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[1]Boll. I, 138.

Being, which was the Christian God, and outside which no reason could exist. Christianity alone contained the fulness of truth and the rigorous frame of dogma which made valid and ordered thought a possibility.[1] The abstract speculation of Renan and the Hegelians (to which, to a certain extent, Hello's ideas are the Christian parallel), fell outside this sphere and were consequently worthless, or at worst diabolical.[2] The truths of Christianity were so elevated that accession could only be by illumination, through the intuition of love, which Hello described in terms of an exaggerated Augustinian epistemology later imitated by Bloy.[3] Truth was conveyed in ecstatic vision or mediated through the doctrines and sacraments of the Church, which were described as the channels through which the ideal became practical. The Church was incarnate reason, and her existence in her saints, her unity, her perpetuity and immutability was the only apologetic argument rationally valid.[4]

Neither the thought of Blanc de Saint-Bonnet nor that of Hello was any more than an attempt to justify prejudice, but Bloy found it convenient to accept both at face value and to use their terms as foundation for the attack on rationalism and defence of Catholic reason which runs through his own work.

In Le Désespéré, he used the figures of Paul Bourget and of Albert Robin (Alexis Dulaurier and Chérubin des Bois) to caricature the sterility and vacuity of rationalism. Hello's charges against

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[1] E. Hello, M. Renan, l'Allemagne et l'athéisme au XIX[e] siècle, I, iii.

[2] Ibid., II, vi.

[3] See also Hello's Les Plateaux de la balance, Paris, 1830, "Le Sphinx"; cit. Bloy, Lettres à sa fiancée, 8th March 1890.

[4] M. Renan, II, vi.

Renan were redirected by Bloy against Bourget, said to preach a similarly icy philosophy, devoid of 'nourishment'. The sacramental image was developed to describe "l'eucharistique succès de cet évangéliste du Rien", whose vacuous psychological studies catered only for the decadent tastes of an upper-class audience "engraissée dans tous les dépotoirs révolutionnaires, mais qui, précisément, expirait d'une inanition d'aristocratie".[1]

A letter to Letellier of 15th April 1910, reprinted in Le Vieux de la montagne, began as a more formal assertion that the source of all philosophy was the notion of God and that the Absolute, far from belonging to another world, was the foundation of all knowledge in this; even the philosophy of determinism found its justification in the existence of Providence. Natural philosophy was limited by its own premisses to the study of effects and for this reason its pretensions to make statements on metaphysical truths were absurd: "aussi absurde que de chercher les lunettes de Spinoza quand on les a sur le nez ou de fouiller un tas de fumier à l'aide d'un outil qu'on tiendrait à la main, pour y trouver ce même outil qu'on croirait avoir perdu".

In Le Pèlerin de l'absolu, 17th October 1912, Bloy noted with interest, but little understanding, Maritain's refutation of Bergsonian intuitionism - like Hegelianism, an expression of Christian truths nullified by its non-dogmatic forms. He pointed to Maritain's own discovery that the only use of natural philosophy was to show the inadequacy of reason and the necessity of submission to Revelation to achieve final certainty.

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 33.

In the context of conversion, reason was particularly irrelevant, as he explained in a letter to a prospective convert, "[une] pauvre brebis penseuse".[1] In 1874, the article "Variétés" reduced the idea of faith to "un enchaînement de réalités particulières à la portée commune des plus faibles cervelles". Faith was an acknowledgement of one's own limitations, in which the childlike submission to authority practised by Véronique was the surest way.

Bloy rejected, however, the suggestion that Catholicism had no room for the intellect, which cast doubts on the quality of his own work. The article "Raclure du Tiroir", of July 1884, distinguished the blindness of ignorance from that of illumination. Reliance on a simple affective link with God was inadequate; enlightened reason was the stable point of religion. Bloy discovered this after the catastrophic end to his affair with Anne-Marie, which produced a period of religious dryness: "Ma raison toujours intacte et toujours éclairée par la foi, n'a pas un seul instant vacillé , mais mon coeur, hélas! mon pauvre coeur!"[2]

The detailed accounts of Marchenoir's thought processes in Le Désespéré combine a refusal of rationalism with an assertion of the reasonableness of the Catholic's own thought. Bloy invokes that organic and intuitive sense of certainty in Catholic religion which incarnate Reason has provided and supports his arguments with pseudo-learned language and image-play, in which the analogy of the eucharistic Bread, a distribution of spiritual truth by organic means, is of particular importance.

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[1] Le Vieux de la montagne, 1st August 1909.

[2] Lettres à sa fiancée, 15th February 1890.

The non-rationality of Marchenoir's thought eludes the categories susceptible to rationalist criticism. His understanding of suffering owes nothing to milieu, education or mental unbalance, but is based on subconscious and instinctive certainties:

> Cela ne tenait à aucune opération discernible de l'esprit naissant. C'était le tréfonds mystérieux d'une âme un peu moins inconscient qu'une autre de son abîme et naïvement enragée d'un absolu de sensations ou de sentiments qui correspondît à l'absolu de son entité.[1]

His conversion was an ecstatic revelation from which he emerged paradoxically:

> . . . ivre de certitude . . . . Il lui semblait sortir d'un de ces rares songes, aux déterminables contours, qui feraient croire à quelque vision sensible de la Conscience, réflexement manifestée dans l'extra-lucide intussusception des dormants.[2]

The Romantic subjectivity implied by this hallowing of dream pervades his thought. He praises enthusiasm, imagination, invention, fantasy, originality and independence.[3] At the same time, he asserts that his visions have an objective truth, resting on their likeness to Catholic tradition, their inner logic and, most of all, their aptness to moral experience. The evolution of his philosophy of suffering at first sight seems fideistic and rooted in personal invention. Taking as axiomatic the poles of suffering and love: "A force d'amoureuse foi, il se fit de l'éternité palpitante avec une poignée de temps pétrie dans sa main et se fabriqua de l'espérance avec le plus amer pessimisme". Even here, however, the language used implies

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 56.

[2] Ibid., p. 57.

[3] Ibid., p. 62.

an organic and living quality in his truths, and as Marchenoir develops his argument - and, we assume, tests its strength by experience,- the conviction of his vocabulary grows. He moves from "il se persuada" to "il eut l'intuition", supported by "deviner", with its connotations of intuitive knowledge; and finally reaches certainty out of an image of shipwreck which implies simultaneously fideism and the substantial mediation of truth which is in the experience of suffering.[1]

Véroniques visions need no other confirmation than her own purity and humility. She incarnates the fulness of mystic vision, of which Marchenoir is only an observer.[2] Her admiration confirms the truth of Marchenoir's ideas, as does that of Clotilde in La Femme pauvre. In the second novel, this point is exploited at length to demonstrate the validity of Marchenoir's arguments. Before meeting Gacougnol, Clotilde was a creature of instinct, imprisoned by what Bloy, with deliberate perversity, calls the narrow ideas of her free-thinking background, and was neither fully reasonable nor responsible for her own actions. She had, however, a hunger for truth and simplicity which enabled her to acknowledge truth once revealed. She recognises in Marchenoir indisputable intellectual qualities:

> Instinctivement, elle devinait là de la profondeur et de la grandeur et, bien qu'elle eût à peine compris, elle sentit tout à coup la joie d'une pauvresse morfondue qui s'appuierait, sans le savoir, au mur d'un four seigneurial où cuirait le pain des mendiants.[3]

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[1] Le Désespéré, pp. 58-59.

[2] Ibid., p. 161.

[3] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 75.

Her responses are not intellectual but emotional and intuitive: "Elle écoutait des pieds à la tête, incapable d'une objection, configurant, comme elle pouvait, sa pensée à la pensée de ce pathétique démonstrateur";[1] and are justified by the intellectual flowering they produce: "Et voilà que, n'ayant jamais rien soupçonné de ses propres facultés intellectuelles, du premier coup, elle se voyait sous l'action du maître le plus capable de les dilater instantanément.[2]

Her adoption of Marchenoir's ideas is determined less by their content than by the enthusiasm of his presentation. Similarly, Gacougnol's educational programme succeeds because of the vigour and imaginative intensity in which he offers his 'heroic disorder' of facts.

Cognate with this whole question is Bloy's discussion of the theme of mystic knowledge, with which he bolsters his claim to intellectual certitude based on inspiration. It will be useful to open a digression at this juncture in order to treat this fully.

The references in Bloy's work to mystical illumination and mystical truths have attracted the attention of a number of commentators. Drieu La Rochelle, for example, groups Bloy with the various "pre-symbolists" who restored "mysticism" to French literature (Rimbaud, Barbey, Villiers, Lautréamont, Huysmans and Claudel) and then singles him out as a specifically Christian mystic - the first Christian since Pascal.[3]

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 77-78.

[2] Ibid., p. 88.

[3] P. Drieu La Rochelle, Notes pour comprendre le siècle, Paris, 1941, p. 120.

In order to understand what particular features in Bloy and in the contemporary Christian ethos merit this description, it will be useful to examine the term first in its contemporary context.

The epithet "mystical" makes a fresh appearance in France in the 1870's, at the height of positivism, when its most frequent use is to characterise attempts to move beyond the immediately apprehensible aspects of scientific reality. Outside the artistic or occultist minority, its meaning is usually pejorative, as when used by Bloy himself to dismiss Jules Simon's sentimental cult of free thought: "un mysticisme nouveau".[1] Among imaginative writers, mysticism is understood as vague nostalgia for an ideal, or the Romantic feeling of exile and aspiration. As such, it was picked up as common ground for apologetic by contemporary theologians such as Darboy, who, in the preface to his translation of the works of the Areopagite, gave a definition bringing out the Romantic antecedent: "Considéré dans son principe subjectif, dans l'âme humaine, le mysticisme est un soupir plein de regret et d'amour que nous poussons vers des cieux perdus mais espérés".

At the same time, he pointed out the unique objectivity of Catholic mysticism, certified by its divine inspiration and confirmed by dogmatic context and by the disciplinary controls of ascetic theology.[2] Mystic certitude based on dogmatic affirmation becomes the hallmark of this Revival, distinguishing its authors from the neo-mystics of

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[1] "La Réforme de l'enseignement secondaire", L'Univers, 3rd April 1874.

[2] G. Darboy, ed., Oeuvres de Saint Denys l'Aréopagite, Paris, 1845. See also A. Poulain, Des grâces d'oraison, Paris, 1890, which explained in the first chapter that the term was also used in a literary context to describe a work dealing in idealisms, enthusiasms and obscurities.

the 1830's; Huysmans, for example, stated in his preface to de Gourmont's Le Latin Mystique of 1890 that:

> La Mystique est l'âme et l'art de l'Eglise même. Or, elle appartient au catholicisme et elle est à lui seul . . . [elle] a une acception délimitée et un but net . . . [elle] cherche à étreindre un Dieu qu'elle connaît et qu'elle précise . . . .[1]

Contemporary mystic theology, in its infancy, offered uncertain guidance, but the little it had to say was observed and followed with interest by the writers of the Revival.[2] Borrowing began as the first crude attempts were made to map out the theological discipline. Villiers, Huysmans and Retté found inspiration and justification for their more elaborate fantasies in Goerres' La Mystique divine, naturelle et diabolique, translated 1854-55, and in the more respectable book by Canon Ribet, La Mystique divine distinguée des contrefaçons diaboliques et des analogies humaines, published in Paris in 1879, which offered as concrete evidence of the presence of divine truth the miraculous phenomena accompanying mystical experience. Bloy was acquainted with Goerres' work and at first interested, but later decided that this approach to the science was both unhealthy and inadequate.[3] He was also hostile to the Jesuit Jules Pacheu's attempts, which intrigued Huysmans, to estimate the value of mystical revelations through psychological analyses of the mystic made through literary

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[1] See also Barbey d'Aurevilly's definition of orthodox mysticism against Martinism, "Du mysticisme au XVIII[e] siècle", Le Pays, 23rd May 1853 [rpt. Les Oeuvres et les hommes, 1st Series, Vol. I, Paris, 1860].

[2] The section on mystic literature in the Manuel de la littérature catholique, ed. H. Bremond, Paris, 1939, pp. 433-35, dates the revival of mystic theology from the publication of Canon Saudreau's Les Degrés de la vie spirituelle in 1896; it was, however, the earlier writers quoted here who had the most influence on the literary Revival.

[3] Le Mendiant ingrat, 30th June 1895. H. Bremond wrongly suggests that all Bloy's mysticism can be reduced to this level ("Huysmans, Bloy et le baron Seillière", Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 8th October 1932).

texts; this, he held, was another misdirection of interest towards the human element.[1]

As the science developed, its interest centred on defining the nature of the mystic vision and the manner in which knowledge of God was achieved. For the traditionalists, including Bloy, this was infused and not acquired, passive and intuitive, and, in its lowest terms, affective, with the stress on divine initiative and inspiration:

> La façon dont la grâce illuminante vous touche relève de la Mystique car la Mystique, telle que Pascal l'a fort bien définie, c'est Dieu senti par le coeur. Vous n'avez pas eu à raisonner pour vous convertir parce que, comme il arrive dans la voie extraordinaire où vous étiez conduit, la présence de Dieu fit, pour ainsi dire, explosion au milieu de votre sensibilité.[2]

Léopold's conversion in La Femme pauvre falls into this pattern, expressing the violence and certainty of illumination, which elevates man to irrefutable knowledge of God.

Maritain, in his controversy with the Carmelites, who preferred a contemplation which is natural and acquired, argued that this view best safeguarded the awesomeness of God and the absolute certitude indispensable to religion.[3] From the human side, the only effort possible is Christological and configurative, taking the form of an acceptance of suffering keyed to devotions with a strongly imaginative

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[1] See for example J. Pacheu, De Dante à Verlaine, Paris, 1897. For Bloy's comments on the abbé, see Le Pèlerin de l'absolu, 27th May and 16th October 1912.

[2] A. Retté, Lettres à un indifférent, Paris, 1921, p. 44.

[3] J. Maritain, Les Degrés du savoir, 5th ed., Paris, 1946, esp. pp. 532-40.

content, in which mediations on the Way of the Cross and on the Passion provide the starting-point.

As an imaginative writer, Bloy was clearly likely to be most attracted to those mystics whose visions produced "knowledge" in the form of vivid and immediate portraits of the historical and suffering Christ. It would, however, be a mistake to limit his interest in these to the pictorial and to see him drawing too heavily on their simpler supernatural aspects. A review of his mystical sources and the use he makes of their content and methods reveals a richer and more complex system of reference than is generally recognised.

He drew very little from the more intellectual mystics such as St. Theresa, or St. John of the Cross. At an early stage, he appreciated the eloquence and the imaginative appeal of St. François de Sales, Bossuet and Fénelon; but his final preference was for the Romantics, to whom he was introduced by Barbey in 1868, and whom he read assiduously over the next few years, particularly during the war. Barbey offered little personal guidance but would seem to have been chiefly influential through the articles of his own early mystical period, collected in Les Oeuvres et les hommes, the first four volumes of which figure on a list of books sent on to Bloy by Lalotte in 1871.[1] Volume I includes studies of Saint Theresa, Saint-Martin, Pascal, Blanc de Saint-Bonnet, and L'Internelle Consolacion, a popular modern abridged version of the Imitatio Christi, which Bloy later recommended to Landry.

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[1]Letter from Lalotte, 9th August 1871 (La R.).

Bloy's strongest preference was for the writing of the nineteenth-century stigmatic Anna-Katherina Emmerick, whose "eye-witness" account of the Passion (translated by Cazalès as La Douloureuse Passion de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ) he read just before the war at the instigation of Barbey, in whose circles the German nun was much admired.

> Je n'avais pas beaucoup plus de vingt ans et je ne me rappelle plus rien, sinon qu'il y eut un torrent de délices, une pluie de larmes. Je me vis extrêmement à ma place dans la poussière et dans l'ordure, et je sentis passer sur moi la Beauté divine . . . .[1]

Both Barbey and Bloy drew attention to the emotive appeal of Emmerick's doctrine of suffering, in the vigour and violence of its expression, and to the inspired and miraculous quality of her visions. Bloy paid slightly more attention to the content of Emmerick's teaching, especially as regards boldness in prayer, the impetrative power of purity, and prayer for the dead; the central rôle of the priest in the Church; the meaning of simplicity; the paramount importance of the Church and her traditions; and the importance of suffering and expiation. His notebook of 1898, containing notes probably collected for the Life of Emmerick he planned to write at this time, stressed her victimal rôle.[2]

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[1] Mon journal, 15th March 1900. Emmerick's visions and mediatations, transcribed by Clement Brentano and translated into French by the abbé Cazalès from 1835 to 1860, went into numerous reprints and editions; K.-E. Schmoeger's popular biography was translated 1868-72. Buet quotes an extract from an unpublished article by Bloy on Emmerick in his Impressions et souvenirs de Barbey d'Aurevilly, Paris, 1891, p. 361. Barbey included a chapter on her in Les Bas-bleus, 1878. For the influence of Emmerick on Huysmans, see M. Belval, Des ténèbres à la lumière, Paris, 1968, pp. 210-15. See G. Rouzet, Dans l'ombre de Léon Bloy, Liège, 1941, for the fullest previous study of Bloy's debt to Emmerick.

[2] Mon journal, 12th September 1893; Carnet de notes (1897), published by P. Arrou [CLB No. 2 (5th Yr.), Nov.-Dec. 1923, pp. 21-31].

Bloy's interest in Pascal and Angela di Foligno was similarly centred on their presentation of the theme of suffering.

His treatment of Pascal, whom he first read in 1869, resembled at first that adopted by Barbey's article in the first volume of Les Oeuvres et les hommes, which analysed the special qualities of Pascalian fear ("terreur sainte du Dieu irrité et jaloux"), which was the foundation of Pascal's emotional and non-rational approach to religion; the sense of despair from which sprang his poetry and his theology; and his powers of poetic expression. In the article "Un Poète athée", 8th July 1874, Bloy praised Pascal's evocation of human grandeur, his warmth, and his optimism, distinguishing the superficial appearance of his disillusionment from the intuitive faith in God which enabled him to reject final despair. In another article of 1882, the theme of his suffering, mediator between man and the ideal, provided Bloy with an opportunity to illustrate the identity of poetic and religious activity.[1]

These references, however, are very brief; and Bloy later totally reversed his judgement and rejected Pascal's work for its "occulte médiocrité" and "scepticisme noir".[2] The suspicion of Pascal's rationalism is significant; it was probably this feature of his work which prevented Bloy from ever making as much as some contemporaries of the myth of his absolute and fideistic adherence to God from the "certainty" of despair.

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[1] "Maurice Rollinat", Le Chat Noir, 2nd, 9th, 16th September 1882.

[2] ~~Quatre ans~~, 9th February 1900.
Dix-Sept Ans en Danemark

In contrast, the thirteenth-century Franciscan nun, Angela di Foligno, first mentioned in 1874 and read in Hello's translation, is consistently used to demonstrate how knowledge of God is acquired by the configurative way of suffering. Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition quotes her description of the unitive way of the Cross and Passion in juxtaposition to a discussion of Denys' via negativa.[1] (The link was already made in Hello's Preface.) Bloy echoes the affective terms in which she sets the theme, and the particular idea of the permanency of suffering as the necessary condition and the proof of sincere love.

From the Marian mystics - Faber, Saint Bridget, and Maria d'Agreda - Bloy takes some of the fundamental ideas of his doctrine.[2] It was probably in Faber that Bloy met the work of Maria d'Agreda, the eighteenth-century Spanish visionary; the references to her teaching which appear in Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition are taken from Faber's book The Foot of the Cross. He read La Cité Mystique (which, in the abbé Boullan's abridged edition of 1853, reads as a eulogy of the Immaculate Conception) first in 1874 and again in 1899. On the second occasion, exiled in Denmark, he records his response to his re-discovery of her teaching on the rôle of Mary in the Second Coming in preparing the Body of Christ:

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 21, 43. See also Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 35, 55.

[2] References to Bridget appear in Le Révélateur du globe, OC I, 35; Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 103-104; La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 261. For Faber, see below, pp. 228-31.

> Lisant dans l'épître du jour que Saint Etienne devant le tribunal des Juifs vit la gloire de Dieu, ayant plein l'esprit des magnificences de Marie d'Agréda qui raconte qu'à ce moment, la Sainte Vierge en personne vint assister le Protomartyr; il me revient avec précision cette idée, autrefois si familière, que la Gloire de Dieu c'est Marie. Alors je songe amoureusement que la fonction de Marie est un mystère de force et de splendeur dont rien ne peut donner l'idée, qu'aucune image ne pourrait même faire pressentir; que Marie est un être absolument indevinable, inconcevable et que la plus vague, la plus indécise prénotion de ce gouffre d'éblouissements nous ferait mourir . . . .
>
> Me voilà un peu consolé. Il est dit que Jésus viendra "dans la gloire de son Père". Que se passera-t-il alors dans l'Absolu? Exactement ce qui s'est passé au moment de l'Incarnation: FEMINA CIRCUMDABIT VIRUM.[1]

He also follows the images of her teaching on the Compassion, in the conflation of Mary and the Cross which represents the manner in which human suffering contributes to the merits of the Passion of Christ.[2]

Bloy's most explicit attempts to justify through the mystical tradition the certitude of knowledge acquired by inspiration are made with regard to the work of Hello and pseudo-Dionysius.

Hello's thought, derived from the Areopagite and from Jan Ruysbroek, whose works he translated in 1869, is a justification of fideism. His Paroles de Dieu of 1877 described the Supreme Being as inaccessible to human thought and all attempts to reach him blasphemous. The visionary admits the gulf which he, in his wretchedness, is unable to bridge and lays the onus of providing mediation wholly on God. The pattern of union is Job's aspiration from absolute despair, or the psalmist's phrase, which Ruysbroek adopted: "l'abîme

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[1] Mon journal, 26th December 1899.

[2] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 72 (note by Bloy: Cité mystique, II^e Partie, VI, xxi).

appelle l'abîme". Union is achieved in passive states: "le sommeil du transport . . . l'extase de l'Esprit . . . l'oubli, le sommeil, le rire, l'ivresse [de l'Esprit]". Ignorance and simplicity are the marks of the visionary - but "une ignorance illuminée", which is a higher form of knowledge. Ways of union are practical, consisting of impetrative prayer, penitence and tears and the adoration of Christ in the Sacred Heart and the Eucharist. Solitude and contemplative detachment from the world are conditions of all these.

In 1880, in Les Plateaux de la balance, Hello changed emphasis, claiming that the highest way to God was through the fire of the Spirit, which is enthusiasm. Pseudo-Dionysius is referred to as source; the first chapter of the book quotes his via negativa, and the section "Le Feu" refers to his description of the fire of the Spirit as purification and life. This shift coincides with the change of attitude Bloy himself reported in 1880 during the composition of Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition.[1]

Notes to Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition suggest that Bloy studied Pseudo-Dionysius independently of Hello, preferring Dulac's translation to that of Darboy.[2] The late nineteenth century saw a revival of academic and literary interest in the Areopagite. Darboy's preface refers to his Platonism, which Bloy's minor images often echo; his consideration of modes of mystical description, in his study of the relationship between the image and the divine reality it tries to

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[1] Letter to Hello, 19th April 1880 (Boll. I, 430).

[2] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 42n. Dulac's translation not being readily available, references given are to Darboy's edition.

describe; and his description of the unitive way. The second chapter of Dionysius' Celestial Hierarchy (in Darboy's translation: "Qu'on donne très bien l'intelligence des choses divines et célestes par le moyen des signes qui ne leur ressemblent pas") which had already had a profound influence on early Romantic theories of the image [1] is the proper context in which to understand the audacity of Bloy's own imagery and its unexpectedly concrete and realistic aspects. The function of these is partly to shock, in order to excite curiosity and a sense of mystery and prevent the reader from becoming attached to the symbol rather than the truth it signifies; and partly to convey a particular theological view of the status of the material universe. Dionysius explained that ecstatic vision could best be conveyed in inappropriate or even seemingly blasphemous material forms:

> . . . ce n'est point abaisser, c'est relever au contraire les célestes beautés que de les dépeindre sous des traits évidemment inexacts, puisqu'on avoue par là qu'il y a tout un monde entre elles et les objets matériels . . . parce que la matière tirant son existence de celui qui est essentiellement beau, conserve dans l'ordonnance de ses parties quelques vestiges de la beauté intelligible.[2]

As a result, the whole universe was the mystic theologian's source material. The apparent incoherence of the symbols drawn from this variety of sources finds its sense in their spiritual reference. Dionysius lists the traditional images for God: Sun of Righteousness; Morning Star (Lucifer); Light; Fire; Water; and, most misrepresentative, the figure of the Worm. Bloy's own image of the Divinity as mendicant and pauper, drawn from Old and New Testament sources, belongs to this same tradition.

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[1] E. H. Gombrich, Symbolic Images, London, 1972.

[2] Oeuvres de Saint Denys l'Aréopagite, ed. G. Darboy, pp. 187-89.

Bloy's description in Le Salut par les Juifs of the contradictory nature of the Biblical images echoes the Areopagite's theory:

> . . . des voiles d'un tissu changeant au-devant du même tabernacle . . .
> On est tenté de les croire incohérents ou capricieux parce qu'ils se précipitent quelquefois les uns sur les autres et qu'ils semblent tour à tour se dévorer ou s'enlacer amoureusement . . . les miroirs énigmatiques de cet univers.[1]

The resemblance is borne out by the use made in Bloy's book of 'blasphemous' or misrepresentative images to convey knowledge of God. He accumulates for these modifying phrases reminiscent of the mystical writers: "quand on parle amoureusement de Dieu, tous les mots humains ressemblent à des lions devenus aveugles qui chercheraient une source dans le désert"; his symbols are identical only "dans l'extase béatifique" or "dans le perspective des gouffres".[2]

His evocation of the three Jews develops the second point of Dionysius' argument; that the blasphemous image has in itself some positive truth.[3] He forces the redemptive patriarchal and messianic heritage of his repulsive trio to the edge of actuality, recalling only at the last moment that his language is imaginative: "Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, descendus jusqu'à ces Limbes néfastes! . . . Car mon imagination, démâtée par l'épouvante, leur décernait instinctivement les Appellations divines". Immediately afterwards, the equation he suggests between Jewish gold and the Paraclete becomes complete, representing his sense of the historical function of Jewish avarice.

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[1] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 36-37.

[2] Ibid., pp. 60, 75, 58.

[3] Ibid., chs. v-vii.

Unlike the Neo-Platonist, he refuses to relinquish the image:

> . . . le vieil Hébreu sordide et crochu, dénichant l'or dans les immondices, dans les tumeurs de l'humanité, l'adorant enfin tel qu'un soleil de douleurs et un Paraclet d'amour, co-égal et co-éternel à son Jéhovah solitaire.[1]

Dionysius' unitive way - the ascetic penetrating and discarding of images to approach the Beatific Vision - made its first appearance in Bloy's work in Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition. The idea of adapting this to the theme of La Salette was borrowed from Giraud's Pratique de la dévotion de Notre-Dame de La Salette of 1875, but the elaboration was Bloy's own.

> On a remarqué que les trois poses de la Très Sainte-Vierge pendant Son apparition, correspondent symboliquement aux trois degrés ou ascensions de l'âme vers la charité parfaite, indiqués par les docteurs qui ont traité de la théologie mystique. Ces trois degrés, appelés vie purgative, vie illuminative et vie unitive, correspondent eux-mêmes aux trois vertus théologales marquées par saint Paul pour passer des énigmes à l'évidence béatifique et pour fouler aux pieds successivement les trois concupiscences qui résument, au témoignage du Disciple bien-aimé, tout le mal de ce monde: la concupiscence de la chair, la concupiscence des yeux et l'orgueil de la vie. Saint Denis, le contemplateur de Marie et le Docteur des docteurs mystiques paraît avoir épuisé cette doctrine et voici de quelle manière . . . .[2]

Bloy quotes the Areopagite's description in his Mystic Theology of the purification of the soul which enables it to study and penetrate the images of this world which are the attributes of God, with the aim of achieving final agnostic union.[3] He then transposes the Way

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[1] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, p. 28.

[2] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 41-42.

[3] Oeuvres de Saint Denys, ed. Darboy, I, iii.

into the images of Mary's Apparition at La Salette, which in their turn represent the Church's practices and doctrines: repentance and purgation (self-abnegation); the doctrines of the sacraments, the divine precepts and promises, and imitation of the Saints (illumination); and final union with God in the Way of the Cross - suffering and renunciation of the world in order to console Christ. The passage, an intermediate development between abstract exposition of the Way and the more elaborate transpositions such as the image of Marchenoir's ascent of the mountain in La Femme pauvre, marks an important experimental stage in the progress of Bloy's apologetic presentation.

In his imaginative work, Bloy generally moves away from direct reference to his mystic sources whilst preserving their patterns and style which add an extra plane of reference. In the novels, this plane is presented in a conflict with the natural which becomes part of the dramatic movement, as in the development of the theme of contemplative union in Le Désespéré and La Femme pauvre.

Le Désespéré poses the theme at the beginning of the second part, set at the Charterhouse, in a descriptive section which at first appears digressive but is in fact an intimate part of the work. Bloy picks up the ideas of intuition and inspiration presented in the first part as the source of Marchenoir's thought and confirms their truth by moving them into the context of Catholic tradition; and at the same time underlines that incompatibility of Marchenoir's attitudes with those of modern society which the rest of the novel is to develop.

The meaning of contemplation is explained with reference to the treatise De contemplatione by Dionysius the Carthusian, follower of Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas, Tauler and Ruysbroek, and to Hello. It is the final end of the human soul, achieved only by renunciation of the world. It cannot be described in words; its most satisfying images are those of night, which is not a negative state but the source of the dynamic motives of all action, and the Way of the Cross, whose terms Bloy uses to evoke the moment of ecstatic union.[1]

Within the isolating authoritarian Rule of the contemplatives, life is lived at a higher level of intensity where the everyday is not negated but fused with the life of grace: "La Vie mystique est ici, de plein-pied avec l'autre vie, et ces blanches âmes passent de l'une dans l'autre, tour à tour, comme de fidèles et diligentes ménagères dans les divers appartements d'un maître adoré".[2]

The life of the monastery and the activity of the secular world are compared at the testing-point of death, by an opposition of the peace of the Carthusian funeral to the noisy apotheoses of the Republican heroes, Hugo and Gambetta. Marchenoir acknowledges before leaving the monastery that any attempt to combine these two worlds can only result in failure, but sees it as his vocation to make the attempt.

In the context of modern secular society, failure to achieve the serenity of traditional mystic union becomes the mark of success. Agony, madness and death are the conditions in which the contemporary

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 109-10.

[2] Ibid., p. 120.

mystic exists. Véronique's ecstasy before her crucifix is distorted by the presence of Marchenoir's desire for her, and her detachment undermined. Bloy shows here the inadequacy of the traditional criteria in a reworking of a Theresan image in which the ideal of indifference is reduced to escapist retreat:

> A l'exemple de sainte Thérèse, elle se construisit "un château de sept étages", non plus, comme la réformatrice du Carmel, pour monter de l'initial détachement de ce monde à la parfaite consommation de la paix divine, mais pour transférer son âme navrée dans quelque prison lumineuse ou sombre, qui ne fût pas, du moins, ce tabernacle charnel si vainement défiguré, en passant par les successives geôles du renoncement suprême, - et tel fut le donjon de sa silencieuse agonie.[1]

Véronique's denunciation of God's harshness and her blasphemous offerings of her own salvation for that of Marchenoir are such an extreme adaptation of the mysticism of the Emmerick tradition and so tainted at source by her former desire for Marchenoir that her behaviour must appear as madness; but a madness which, within the structure of the novel, is the logical development of her identification with Christ in his dereliction on the Cross as a victim for others. In the final pages of the book, Marchenoir, writing to Leverdier just before his own configurative agony begins, glimpses the truth that knowledge of God in the modern context is Christological; the Beatific Vision is moral engagement in suffering:

> J'ai passé ma vie à demander deux choses: la Gloire de Dieu ou la Mort. C'est la mort qui vient. Bénie soit-elle! Il se peut que la gloire marche derrière et que mon dilemme ait été insensé . . . .[2]

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, p. 283.

[2] Ibid., p. 317.

La Femme pauvre makes similar points, changing only the manner of presentation from apparent rebellion against the conflicts within the unitive dispensation to overt acceptance. Clotilde's progress is identical with that of Véronique. A period of repentance and purgation, whose close is symbolised by Gacougnol's offer of a new robe to replace the one given by her lover, is followed by a period of illumination through the teachings of Gacougnol and Marchenoir, and ends in the final trials of the unitive way shared with Léopold in the suffering caused by the malevolence of the bourgeoisie and the triumphal consummation of union in the destructive and purifying fire of the Spirit. Unlike Le Désespéré, La Femme pauvre shows the last stage prolonged on the natural plane, with Clotilde existing in a transfigured and inviolable state of detachment.

In the second novel, the pattern of the mystic way is more clearly and more colourfully developed. In particular, the moment of union - "l'incendie des holocaustes spirituels" - contrives a violent but effective yoking of the two dimensions. The context of psalms and prayer is invaded by the blaze at the Opéra Comique, and Clotilde's experience of illumination juxtaposed to Léopold's physical immolation by transferred imagery:

> Cela commence par des étincelles volantes et rapides qui la font pâlir. Ensuite les grandes flammes s'élancent . . . . Déjà, il n'est plus temps de fuir, si elle en avait seulement la volonté. Impossible de s'échapper, soit à droite, soit à gauche, soit par en haut, soit par en bas . . . . Il faut qu'elle brûle, il faut qu'elle soit consumée. Elle se voit dans une cathédrale de feu. C'est la maison qu'elle a demandée, c'est la volupté que Dieu lui donne ....[1]

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 265.

Clotilde's ascension is doubled by the allegorical quest of Marchenoir's Pilgrim, searching for Paradise through its imperfect images in this life, illuminated by the ecstasy of traditional psalms and canticles, pursuing in faith and in joyful certitude an end which proves to be both life and death:

> Jugeant alors qu'il est arrivé, il s'arrête pour la première fois, et meurt d'amour dans un cimetière de lépreux, au milieu duquel est l'Arbre de Vie et où se promène, comme nous, au milieu des tombes, l'Esprit du Seigneur.[1]

In the whole of Bloy's work, the Beatific Vision which is the end of contemplation is seldom directly evoked. Sensitive to contemporary accusations levelled against the passivity of the mystic, for which he blames the images of stasis popularised by eighteenth-century theology, he prefers to show the progress of the mystic towards self-fulfilment:

> Le langage moderne, ce Bas-Empire de notre décadence intellectuelle, a trouvé le moyen de faire du mot mysticisme une injure. A le croire, ce mot qui exprime l'état le plus haut de l'âme, escortée de toutes ses puissances, quand elle gravite magnifiquement vers son centre, dans les splendeurs sidérales de l'inspiration: ce mot signifierait la béate et immobile stupidité d'une contemplation imbécile.
>
> En réalité, le mysticisme est l'activité suprême et les Mystiques sont les vrais clairvoyants de l'humanité.[2]

Hence the emphasis in Bloy on the creative energy of the poet-mystic, or the mystic as leader of men - Columbus, or Napoleon - and on the dynamism of the final vision. The man born blind opens his

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 262.

[2] "Les Artistes mystérieux", OC II, 157.

eyes on a vision of the active sufferings of Christ, with whom he immediately becomes identified;[1] the perfection of the Communion of Saints is that of a web of relationships perpetually reaffirmed by the interchange of merits.[2] The anguished movement of suffering, which is aspiration to God in this life, is taken as an illustration of the dynamism of the beatific joy of union in the next:

> Le fond du Paradis ou de l'idée de Paradis, c'est l'union à Dieu dès la vie présente, c'est-à-dire la Détresse infinie du coeur de l'homme, et l'union à Dieu dans la Vie future, c'est-à-dire la Béatitude. Le mode en est infiniment inconnu et indevinable, mais on peut, jusqu'à un certain point, contenter l'esprit par l'hypothèse fort plausible d'une ascension éternelle, ascension sans fin dans la Foi, dans l'Espérance, dans l'Amour. . . .
>
> L'union à Dieu est certainement réalisé par les Saints, dès la vie présente, et parfaitement consommée, aussitôt après leur naissance à l'autre Vie, mais cela ne leur suffit pas et cela ne suffit pas à Dieu. L'union la plus intime n'est pas assez, il faut l'identification qui ne sera elle-même jamais assez, en sorte que la Béatitude ne peut être conçue ou imaginée que comme une ascension toujours plus vive, plus impétueuse, plus foudroyante, non pas vers Dieu, mais en Dieu, en l'Essence même de l'Incirconscrit. Ouragan théologal sans fin ni trêve que l'Eglise, parlant à des hommes, est forcé de nommer Requies aeterna![3]

It is easy, and even, to a certain extent, justifiable, to level against Bloy's brand of mysticism charges of falseness and hysteria, mystification, needless exaggeration, and ascetic excesses - many of which will be further substantiated by what is said in the third section of this thesis. These are almost inevitable accompaniments

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[1] Dans les ténèbres, OC IX, ch. xxi, "L'Aveugle-né".

[2] Méditations, OC IX, ch. vii.

[3] Celle qui pleure, OC X, 128-29.

of Bloy's desire to affirm that the principles of knowledge he possesses are an irrefutable basis on which to found a philosophy which restores to human activity its lost heroic significance - a purpose which explains Drieu's admiration of his mystical assertions. The fact that his real certainty is in experience and that his own experience has been uniquely one of suffering leaves him defending as the source of knowledge an ascetic tradition which could easily degenerate into a negative philosophy; at this point, his choice of the more violent and energetic mystics as examplars becomes intelligible. Finally, it should be noted that his treatment of mystical illumination tends much less than that of other contemporaries - for example, Huysmans - to drift off into the realm of the miraculous; certain aspects of his use of the symbol illustrated above are attempts to found the search for God in the natural context and to retain something of this in the heroic transcendence. In practice, any union so achieved is arbitrary and imposed, an artistic effort sustained only by Bloy's imagination, and is contradicted by emphasis elsewhere that union is a product of renunciation. Nevertheless, the fact that Bloy makes the attempt, that he dwells at length on his symbol before being forced finally to abandon it, and, coupled with this, the fact that renunciation itself frequently takes the form of involvement in active personal suffering, indicate an interest obsessively returning to the context of natural experience despite the express determination to reject it. The concept of the supernatural as an external force certainly provides fixed moral and intellectual points; but Bloy would, again, appear to suspect that in the last resort they evade the reality they were intended to confirm.

## 2. The Mediation of the Supernatural: The Reinstatement of the Dogmatic Image

The imagery of the mystic way makes an important contribution to Bloy's effort to carry the supernatural into natural experience, but is not always immediately recognisable or comprehensible to the layman. It will therefore be helpful to consider his efforts to pick out from common experience aspects which correspond to more familiar Catholic dogmatic patterns. This section will discuss the particular dogmas Bloy chooses to illustrate, the contexts in which he applies them, and any innovations which he introduces, showing especially the extent to which he elaborates and readapts their traditional imaginative forms.

Up to the time of Bloy's literary generation, new developments within the nineteenth-century Church had been largely anti-dogmatic. At the beginning of the century, the first challenge to dogma came from the rationalist critics of Tübingen. These reduced to the status of "myths", defined as poetic vehicles invented for the expression of moral truth or collective national aspirations, those sections of the Bible (especially the Book of Genesis and the Gospels), regarded until then as historical fact and therefore certain bases for the deduction and representation of the relationship between God and man.[1] This approach was mediated into France from the middle of the century by Quinet, Littré, Renan and Cousin. Lamennais made the same point independently in his Discussions critiques et pensées diverses of 1841, which rejected the whole dogmatic order of external revelation and the traditional ascetic theology of Fall and atonement which derived from it.

[1] See L. Raynaud, L'Influence allemande en France au XVIII^e et au XIX^e siècle, Paris, 1922, esp. ch. iii.

Roselly de Lorgues' generation bore the brunt of this attack, with which it proved singularly incapable of dealing. The Count's popular apology De la Mort avant l'homme, Paris, 1841, which was known to Bloy, censured Lamennais' rejection of the doctrine of Original Sin and his claim that the Fall on which the doctrine was based was no more than a myth expressing popular aspirations to perfection, but offered in contradiction little more than pious horror.[1]

The Scriptural basis of dogma was also challenged by the natural scientists, whose theories of transformism and evolutionism contradicted the cosmogony of Genesis and the myth of Eden. Apologists tried to contradict the scientific explanation or, worse-advised, to reconcile it with the theological. Both methods led only to further discredit of the Catholic case.

In the second half of the century, German Protestant theology called into question a number of Catholic doctrines, especially that of confession, and the dogma of the Trinity, on the ground that they were not contained in the original Scriptural revelation but were later accretions from Church and scholastic tradition. Here the challenge to the authority of the Church in matters of faith and

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[1]The Count Roselly de Lorgues, historian and apologist, tried to renew Catholic apologetics by bringing to it the discoveries of modern science, in particular those of comparative religion (Le Révélateur du globe, OC I, 66). His doctrine was that of de Maistre, from whom he took especially the theme of sacrifice. It was presented in a loosely rationalistic form which Bloy later rejected as mediocre and pontificatory and less impressive than Roselly's content (Quatre ans, 19th October 1901). Roselly's popularity was at its height in the 1840's and 1850's. In the 1870's he began to produce new editions of his apologetic works, and to publish a series of books on the beatification of Christopher Columbus. For his study of this project in Le Révélateur du globe, Bloy referred to Le Christ devant le siècle, 1835; La Mort avant l'homme, 1841 (which he singled out for special praise); La Croix dans les deux mondes, 1845; and L'Histoire posthume de Christophe Colomb, 1879.

morals appeared at its most overt and most difficult to refute. The question of dogmatic evolution came to a head at the turn of the century when Harnack's Das Wesen des Christentums of 1900, translated in 1902 as L'Essence du christianisme, was challenged by Loisy's L'Evangile et l'Eglise - whose description of the development of doctrine within the Church was in its turn quashed by the Vatican. (Newman, in his Essay on the development of Christian dogma, had already offered the solution that the corpus of dogma be conceived of as a single substance, defined once for all in the original revelation but revealing new properties and taking on clearer definition under the impetus of controversy and with the guidance of the Spirit in the authorised Church. This compromise, however, took some time to win respectable assent; Bremond's translation did not appear until 1905. Brunetière's Progrès religieux du catholicisme of 1900 has echoes of Newman.)

In the Mercure de France, May 1898, Victor Charbonnel commented on the refusal of dogma by the neo-christian revivalists of the 1880's and 1890's - which, in his opinion, was inevitable, given the absurdities proposed by the hierarchy to the modern intelligence:

> . . . les articles d'un crédo cosmogonique terriblement démenti par les sciences naturelles et les sciences historiques, puis encore l'Immaculée-Conception, l'Infallibilité, le Sacré-Coeur. C'est la trilogie de Zola: Lourdes, Rome, Paris et sa basilique de Montmartre! Se trouverait-il un tel nombre d'esprits pénétrés de la libre intellectualité moderne, qui se résignerait pourtant à l'irrationnel d'une pareille dogmatique et à la foi intégrale?

In November, he applauded the move from discussion of dogmatic formulations to discussion of moral and social issues, referring in the sphere of art to the neo-christian humanitarianism of de Vogüé, which flourished from 1886, and in that of theology to the heresy

of Americanism, recently inaugurated by Hecker, Gibbons, Ireland and Keane, and promulgated in France by Charbonnel himself, Félix Klein, Naudet, Fonsegrive, and Georges Goyau:

> Plus de libéralisme intellectuel contre l'oppression dogmatique, plus de vie intérieure contre l'autorité et l'administration tout extérieure, plus d'action démocratique et sociale contre la routine purement dévotieuse et sacramentelle: voilà le fond de l'Américanisme. En somme, c'est un retour aux idées des catholiques libéraux de l'école Lamennaisienne.

In 1898, the Protestant theologian Sabatier published his Esquisse d'une philosophie de la religion d'après la psychologie et l'histoire, in which he distinguished between "foi", an emotional response, and "croyance", intellectual assent to dogmatic truths which he declared was of secondary importance; thereby making a virtue of fideism and nonsense of what had been considered until then the rational content of Catholicism.

Roger Martin du Gard's Jean Barois (1913) describes the situation which had evolved by 1886, considering briefly the virtues of the "symbolist compromise" offered by the rationalist theologians. These held that, although the rift between dogma and devotion had become absolute, it was as yet unrecognised by the majority of Catholics, and that dogma could therefore be retained for practical purposes as a solid and objective basis for individual moral progress and social unity. This was Renan's suggestion: "Garder du christianisme tout ce qui peut se pratiquer sans la foi au surnaturel". Barois himself rejected this approach as an immoral and unstable foundation for action, preferring outright atheism; and the Catholic hierarchy showed like intransigence in the Syllabus and in the decrees of Vatican I. Dei filius reasserted the dogmas of Fall and Redemption and the interpretation of human nature to which these

relate, and maintained the Tridentine doctrine of a closed deposit of faith which excluded the concept of dogmatic evolution and the elitism of the symbolist interpretation. Interpretation was only allowed in the sense of the Church, which to all intents and purposes was literalist.

Such intransigence was not always simply blinkered reactionism. Cardinal Mercier, inveighing against the priest who only preached secular virtues and neglected the dogmatic truths, suggested that the practice of the former was weakened by the loss of the dynamic inspiration of the latter:

> ... la morale de vos sermons et du confessional est trop la morale du devoir, des vertus, trop peu la charité surnaturelle répandue par l'Esprit-Saint dans les âmes .... C'est le Christ qu'il faut donner, c'est Lui, son Evangile, les richesses de sa grâce, sa présence et celle du Saint-Esprit dans l'âme, la paix intérieure, la paix de la toute-puissance dans l'union divine, c'est cela qu'il faut prêcher.
>
> Mais cela, vous ne le prêchez pas ou ne le prêchez guère, parce que cela c'est le dogme, et il semble que le dogme vous fasse peur. Et alors grandit une génération de chrétiens pour lesquels l'idéal est une honnêteté irréprochable, la respectabilité du gentleman avec quelques pratiques de religion ....
>
> Vous parlez de Dieu, mais c'est ... le Dieu de la raison humaine ... devant lequel Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Victor Cousin, Jules Simon, chez nous Rogier et Frère-Orban, s'inclineraient avec respect .... Mais le Dieu de notre foi révélée ... quand et avec quelle précision et avec quelle chaleur en parlez-vous?...
>
> Le Christ, oui, vous en parlez, c'est-à-dire que vous faites connaître son histoire terrestre ... autant d'événements qui annoncent la fondation du Royaume de Dieu; mais ce Royaume lui-même, qui prend date à la Pentecôte ...; son suprême sacerdoce ...; ces multiples aspects du Christ glorifié, dont le Jésus de la Judée nous préparait l'avènement, quelle place occupent-ils dans votre piété personnelle et dans votre prédication pastorale?...
>
> Et l'Esprit-Saint, qui dans la foule chrétienne le connaît, qui l'invoque, qui vit en intimité avec lui?...[1]

[1] Cit. Manuel de la littérature catholique en France, ed. H. Bremond, p. 425.

It was at this point that Bloy became relevant, by bringing into literature for the first time the complete dogmatic structure only met hitherto in the apologetic genres within the Church; and by trying to demonstrate the respectability of its intellectual content and the real truths represented by its imaginative forms. This aspect of his work at first passed for a mere reactionary curiosity. With the rise of de Gcurmont's branch of the neo-christian movement in the 1890's, to which Bloy became briefly attached through his connections with the Mercure de France, the dogmatic images in his work were accepted and appreciated; but it was not until 1910 and the advent of Vallery-Radot and the Cahiers de l'Amitié de France that the intrinsic value of dogmatic representation was realised and Bloy's part in asserting this acknowledged.

Vallery-Radot's introduction to his anthology of Catholic poetry, written in 1913, describes the new realisation of the moral utility of literature attached to the dogmatic realities:

> Nous avons . . . écarté tous les poèmes de vague spiritualisme, trouvant plus neuf, plus émouvant et aussi plus utile de rechercher dans notre littérature lyrique les vers qui célèbrent les réalités de notre foi: l'Etre personnel de Dieu, sa présence dans le monde et sa puissance, l'Incarnation de son fils unique, la Rédemption, la Communion des Saints, la Rémission des péchés, la Résurrection de la Chair et la Vie éternelle, en bref, les adorables vérités qui sont notre pain quotidien.[1]

He quotes Claudel's description of the Catholic artist's rôle in reconstructing the realities expressed in a cosmogony which the secular imagination no longer understands.

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[1] R. Vallery-Radot, Anthologie de la poésie catholique, Paris, 1933, p. 9.

There is the same invocation here of the persuasive powers of imagination as is made by Bloy in his introduction to Belluaires et Porchers, where he describes the power of imagination to create a world-picture, and in Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, where he explains that his presentation of dogma in Biblical images is one intended to reach his readers' emotions, not their intellect. According to Claudel:

> Le rôle de l'art . . . est d'autant plus important que le mal dont nous souffrons depuis plusieurs siècles est une scission beaucoup moins entre la foi et la raison qu'entre la foi et l'imagination devenue incapable d'établir un accord entre les deux parties de l'univers visible et invisible. Toute la représentation du monde (sciences, art, politique, philosophie) que nous nous faisons depuis quatre siècles est parfaitement païenne. Dieu est d'un côté et le monde de l'autre; pas de lien entre les deux. Qui se douterait à lire Rabelais, Montaigne, Racine, Molière, Victor Hugo, qu'un Dieu est mort pour nous sur la croix? C'est cela qui doit absolument cesser.[1]

Bloy's achievements are less refined than those of later writers, but the experiments he makes remain important.

He creates in his work two realities, of dogmatic pattern and natural experience, which lend mutual support. Direct dogmatic assertion runs parallel with its allegorical demonstration. In Le Désespéré, the Redemption, first described in abstract terms, is explained a second time in the experience of history and yet again, in Marchenoir's personal experience. Or, the opposite approach, the dogmatic perspective is used to give new meaning to temporal reality:

> L'Incarnation est la Création consommée. Ce monde étant un système de "choses invisibles manifestées visiblement", on peut dire que la Création

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[1] R. Vallery-Radot, Anthologie de la poésie catholique, p.13.

> se renouvelle chaque fois que notre oeil perçoit une réalité sensible. La Génèse commence par le Fiat Lux.[1]

Theology and history are firmly founded on the parallels of First and Second Creation and Apocalypse, patterns which are absolutely interdependent and inseparable.

The dogma of Redemption and the connected doctrine of Reparation offer to historical experience a unity transcending time and space and a vehicle through which the artist can simultaneously resurrect in its own right a lost historical past and draw out its present relevance. Bloy claims objectivity; but in practice, the re-creation is subjective ("en soutenant de mes mains faibles, au-dessus de ce grand vestige de mon âme, tout le firmament étoilé"):

> Fils d'Adam, notre solidarité est infinie. De même que nous avons tous péché dans le premier Désobéissant, nous continuons de pécher sans excuse dans tous les continuateurs de la Prévarication. De sorte qu'en ce négoce admirablement universel, il n'est pas une iniquité dont nous ne soyons à la fois les créanciers et les débiteurs . . . .
>
> Toutes les atrocités humaines, depuis le commencement, aussi bien que les plus saints actes, sont imputés avec justice à ce nouveau-né qui pleure en dormant dans son berceau. La postériorité de dix siècles, non plus que l'immensité des espaces, ne saurait constituer un alibi pour des immortels et des fils de Dieu.
>
> L'histoire est pour moi une ruine où j'aurais vécu de la vie la plus intense avant qu'elle ne devînt une ruine. Sensation douloureuse et paradisiaque d'avoir mis son coeur dans des choses très anciennes qui paraissent ne plus exister.
>
> Je visite Byzance comme Schlumberger visitait les ruines d'Ani, capitale antique des rois d'Arménie, en soutenant de mes mains faibles, au-dessus de ce grand vestige de mon âme, tout le firmament étoilé.[2]

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[1] Le Mendiant ingrat, 1st August 1894.

[2] Byzance et Constantinople, OC V, 249.

Individual dogmatic images appear applied in this way to secular reality and also studied and presented in their own right. Bloy follows the new Romantic apologetic of Faber and Tardif de Moidrey in developing the living and colourful reality of the image, which strengthens its affective appeal. In a sense, this is a weakness in his work in that it leaves his assertions vulnerable to historical criticism; on the other hand, the clearly imaginative interest of his developments, frequently criticised by the orthodox theologian, compensates with a poetic "realism" which rationalism might be held incompetent to judge, and which creates an atmosphere of a plausible "other dimension" even in the absence of intellectual conviction.

In the course of his adaptations, he makes some attempt to stay within the limits of orthodoxy. Defending Le Salut par les Juifs against a young reader's criticism, he writes to a friend:

> Votre "jeune homme" est en effet "très jeune". Je le trouve bien hardi de prétendre que "je prends des libertés singulières avec les dogmes".
>
> "Sa foi est inébranlable" ajoute-t-il "mais non pas son orthodoxie, ce qui est contradictoire dans les termes. Cela, d'ailleurs, ne me diminue pas à ses yeux. Evidemment, ce jeune homme n'a pas même entrevu mon absolu.
>
> Il croit que je prends ceci pour laisser cela et que, par conséquent, je suis une sorte d'hérétique, alors que tout en moi tend à l'Unité de doctrine, l'Unité absolue, éternelle, infinie. Ah! je suis habitué à cette injustice, à ce défaut de clairvoyance chez ceux qui me jugent et qui croient, à vingt ans, pouvoir comprendre un livre qui est le plus grand effort de ma vie intellectuelle et religieuse.[1]

He makes frequent reference to the credal standards of Nicaea and Trent and to the ascetic standards of "primitive" Revelation

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[1]Letter to Louis Jouin, 31st March 1906 (La R.).

which he claims govern his interpretations.[1] The latter naturally provide room for a highly personal understanding of doctrine; but even so, much of what appears particularly startling and original in his work proves to have close analogy with accepted contemporary theological slants and expressions.

Two theological constructions are particularly worthy of attention: the movement of Providence through history in Creation, Fall, Redemption and Apocalypse, and the image of the Trinity, to which is attached the figure of the Virgin Mary.

a) The Doctrine of Providence

As for de Maistre, the intervention of Providence in history offers Bloy a final cause which gives substance to human events. In the Providential pattern, his attention is mainly fixed on the end of history and the coming of Christ's kingdom; other parts of the dispensation acquire their primary meaning in relation to this.

i) The First Creation

Ottensmeyer has given an ample study of the theme of Paradise in Bloy, pointing to the popularity of the motif in contemporary literature to represent rejection of the modern world and nostalgic longing for a lost state of perfection.[2] The first is the most common function of the image in Bloy's work, giving opportunity for aggressively ironic attacks:

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[1] See Le Désespéré, OC III, 60, 84.

[2] H. Ottensmeyer, La Notion du paradis perdu chez Léon Bloy, Thesis, Paris, 1956.

> Le Paradis terrestre était nécessairement toute la terre. Autrement la terre n'aurait pu être maudite, puisqu'en supposant le Jardin de Volupté un lieu déterminé, tout, au-delà des limites de ce lieu, eût été ce que nous voyons, et par conséquent, n'aurait pas eu besoin de malédiction.[1]

Elsewhere, he exploits its lyrical and fantastic potentialities for bathetic ridicule of the socialist claim to construct on earthly Paradise:

> Dans le Paradis terrestre toute l'espèce humaine socialisée, unifiée dans la personne indiciblement féconde du Premier Homme était sainte, par grâce et par nature, inondée de la lumière béatifique, ruisselante de gloire et de beauté. Elle était comme un déluge de joie dans un déluge de splendeurs et se promenait au Jardin de Volupté, en la compagnie des tigres affables, des crocodiles suaves, des hippopotames conciliants, parmi des végétations divines dont le seul parfum guérirait tous nos malades et ressusciterait tous nos morts. Eh! bien, tout cela est restitué par le Suffrage universel.[2]

Against the modern belief in perfectibility he sets the former perfection of human personality in Adam, invested in Paradise with perfections analagous to those of Christ.[3]

A nostalgic and almost escapist note appears in the war years; in Au seuil de l'Apocalypse, 17th April 1915, a meditation on the theme of Paradise is given new significance by its juxtaposition to Bloy's graphic account of the sufferings of the first months of the war. Bloy asserts the real existence of the earthly paradise, declared by the liturgy, and sketches its nature, not with the naïve plastic images of the Romantics but with a series of negations

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[1] Le Mendiant ingrat, 18th December 1894.

[2] Le Vieux de la montagne, 19th May 1910.

[3] Le Mendiant ingrat, 18th December 1894.

which give the idea of a state at once fulfilling and transcending the natural senses - lifting the ideal beyond the limits of time and space which are the boundaries of suffering. But at the same time, in a reversion to the modern context which is the antithesis of escapism, the idea of suffering and effort is reinstated as the medium through which return to Paradise is possible.

The Conclusion to the second series of the Exégèse des lieux communs illustrates all these aspects. The image is used apologetically against the modern concept of an earthly paradise which is a state of material satisfactions. Progressing carefully from secular terms to the Catholic image, Bloy offers the traditional concept of Paradise as the lost ideal, the Atlantis of Platonic and poetic tradition, and, finally, Eden, now existing in occult mode, veiled by the sufferings of Disobedience, but visible and accessible through those of Penitence. Bloy evokes the intrinsic magnificence of these, which lies in their mediatory function, in a fusion of the mediatory figures of Mary (domus aurea - the "refuge" of the liturgy), Christ descending into hell, and the Good Thief who shared Christ's crucifixion:

> Une créature extraordinaire m'a dit un jour: "Ce que Dieu veut cacher, il le cache dans la maison du voleur."
>
> Il y a plus de trente ans que je vis sur cette parole qui a illuminé tant de choses pour moi. Chercher le Paradis terrestre, c'est chercher le Bon Larron. Mais où le chercher, sinon à la place même où il a disparu, c'est-à-dire au fond du gouffre où s'est engloutie l'Atlantide? Le Jardin de Volupté a dû descendre, lui aussi, comme Jésus, tout près des enfers jusqu'à cet endroit où les sondages les plus ambitieux ne peuvent atteindre. Il y est descendu avec sa glorieuse Lumière, avec les Flammes surnaturelles qui l'environnent comme un rempart et contre lesquelles ne peuvent prévaloir ni les ténèbres ni les eaux immenses.

From the mystery of Paradise, he moves in conclusion to the analagous mystery of the soul. Both are concepts, he suggests, which the bourgeois mind is unable to grasp. What began as a defence of the literal truth of a dogmatic image ends as a moralist's plea for repentance and renewal of idealism.

Like all the writers of the Revival, Bloy takes the Fall to have been an actual historical event, which offers the only satisfactory explanation of present moral and social conditions. He shows no interest in trying to explain its traditional theological difficulties, such as the logical possibility of Adam's sinning in a state of grace. In the meditation in Au seuil de l'Apocalypse, he adopts for this Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's solution, given in Part II of L'Amour et la Chute, which understands the sin of the Fall as one of pride, Adam trying to seize his divine heritage without the effort of the labour in the garden which was to be his apprenticeship for divinity. He rejects explicitly the traditional ascription of the Fall to the temptation of Eve, contending that modern irreligion is the result not of the sins of the flesh but of the arrogant refusal to recognise the need for redemptive effort which Christianity preaches.[1]

b) The Redemption

Despite his emphasis on the ascetic effort made necessary by the Fall, Bloy's treatment of the doctrine is markedly more optimistic than that of most of his contemporaries, especially Barbey or Huysmans, in its refusal to separate the two events of Fall and Redemption. In Mon journal, 6th September 1897, he describes the Incarnation of Christ taking up into itself from eternity the person of Adam and

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[1] See Roselly de Lorgues, De la Femme et du Serpent, Paris, 1842 (contr. De la Mort avant l'homme).

resolving in Christ's single person the problems of the Fall and of the judgement of humanity. In Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, the sufferings of Adam and Eve are fully merged with those of Christ. The evil of their disobedience is not denied, but their atonement is accepted from the start in the merits of the Passion. Adam drains the anguish of his lost grandeur from Christ's chalice. The beginning, or nativity, of his suffering is that of the Redemptive dispensation; his awareness of his nakedness is: "comme un glas funèbre annonçant à toutes les créatures la nativité de la douleur". The parallel is drawn between the naked Adam and the naked Christ at the Judgement, and between God's ironic clothing of Adam in garments of skin and the clothing of Christ in glory which, by Bloy's dialectic, the first irony necessitates. Finally, through the solidarity of the Communion of Saints, the parallelism is extended through time to cover all human sins, virtually accomplished in Adam and Eve and drawn forward into the redemptive bbod of the Agony and the Crucifixion. The pivot of his argument is the rigorously-constructed image of the mingling of the remorseful tears of Adam with the rivers of Eden and the rivers of Christ's redeeming blood:

> La tradition catholique parle d'une pénitence de neuf cent ans, pénitence absolument inimaginable en tenant compte des dons inouïs de vision prophétique et de commisération universelle inhérents à leur triple état de créatures immédiatement sorties des mains de Dieu, de testateurs pour la race humaine et d'ancêtres de Jésus-Christ. Les larmes durent couler vers les quatre points cardinaux de la terre comme ces quatre fleuves fécondants du paradis perdu qui représentaient les quatre plaies ruisselantes du Réparateur crucifié. Pour entrevoir la réalité de cette prodigieuse pénitence, il faut nécessairement supposer une nouvelle primogéniture humaine sur laquelle toutes choses soient assumées d'une manière absolue et inéluctable, c'est-à-dire l'Humanité sacrée du Verbe fait chair. La

> pénitence de nos premiers parents préfigure vraisemblablement l'Agonie du Jardin des Oliviers, sans les aggravations ineffables de l'assomption hypostatique; mais avec tous les accompagnements et tous les délaissements naturels ou surnaturels qui firent de cette agonie la plus terrible chose qu'on ait jamais vue sur la terre.[1]

In a letter to Jeanne, 2nd December 1889, the drama of the Fall is reinterpreted and used to explain the mechanism of Christ's Redemption. The universality of salvation is shown to be planned from the beginning by the imaginative equation of the Spirit with Eve and Creation, and, once again, in the fact that in the Fall of the two representatives of humanity there are already the images of Redemption:

> La femme, figure de l'Esprit Saint, représente tout ce qui est tombé, tout ce qui tombera. L'homme, figure de Jésus, représente le salut universel par l'acception, l'assomption libre de toutes les chutes, de tout le mal <u>possible</u>, et, par le miracle d'une tendresse infinie, il consente à perdre la lumière de son innocence pour partager le fruit de la mort en vue de triompher un jour de la mort elle-même, quand la <u>douleur</u> aura prodigieusement aggrandi sa liberté. Alors, tous deux s'aperçoivent qu'ils sont <u>nus</u>, parce que la Rédemption - déjà commencé - devant un jour s'accomplir sur un arbre dont celui de l'Eden n'était que la préfiguration, il faudrait ce jour-là, que la victime, que l'holocauste universel de la Liberté et de la Pudeur fût contemplé tout nu sur la Croix adorable de l'universelle expiation.

There is no suggestion that this redemptive union of the Word and Creation has any relation to the Scotist doctrine revived at this time by Faber and Gay that God had planned the Incarnation from the beginning in order to perfect his Creation, and that its purpose was not primarily remedial and contingent upon the Fall. Bloy's doctrine is never optimistic in this sense, unlike that of Péguy, for

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[1] <u>Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition</u>, <u>OC</u> X, 49.

example, who rests a substantial part of his work on the Incarnation alone, proclaiming in his Fernand Laudet of September 1911 the superior virtue of the hidden life of Christ as opposed to his martyrdom. Bloy's is an Incarnation which moves at once into suffering and Passion.

The doctrine of Redemption through blood is the basis of his thought. He begins with the Maistrean assertion of the final efficacy of Christ's bloody sacrifice; and then goes on to assert that this alone is of less importance than the human contribution to the sacrifice, which takes the form of Marian compassion. (This is an attempt to make, within the limitations of the ascetic context, the same assertions of the unity and divinity of creation and the significance of its activity as is made by the Scotist teaching on the Incarnation.)

Both Bloy and contemporary theologians such as Giraud, writing on La Salette, or Lyonnard, on the Sacred Heart, make the dual assertion that the redemption effected by the Passion is of itself sufficient, but that there is a human need to see its visible effects in Creation. Bloy never queries the first point, which is stated in Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition and in the Introduction à la "Vie de Mélanie", where the Immaculate Conception of Mary is its proof. To carry his revivalist plea, he uses language which seems to imply stretching or challenge of the dogma, speaking of the apparent insufficiency of Christ's sacrifice or its outright failure, but on analysis these assertions prove always qualified.

He works in two modes. Marchenoir's theory of the symbolism of history is a direct explanation of the way in which Christ's sacrifice can be made "complete" by human suffering, which mediates the

fullness of Redemption from natural to supernatural plane. In Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, the primacy of his atonement is conveyed through the parallelisms of mediaeval exegesis, showing the Cross as the centre of the stages of Creation, including that of the Second Coming.[1] The same point is made of secular history in Le Désespéré, where the image of "le Pauvre" is the pivot.

The negative image of a "failed" Redemption is used polemically to describe and condemn the atheism of modern society. In Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, the vehicle is the standard devotional tableau of the Deposition, in which Bloy draws the redemptive identification of Christ and the Serpent: "l'Hostie sainte sous les espèces de la Mort". The pose is necessarily static - this is dictated by the form - and it is the temporal semblance of sin working continually through the Mystic Body in expiatory suffering which is stressed. At the same time, the appearance is described as a divine fiction, permitted by God for his own purposes:

> . . . la malédiction contre le Serpent devait s'accomplir en lui dans toute la mesure de l'Incarnation et jusqu'au point précis où la Divinité lasse de ce travestissement d'infamie interviendrait pour faire éclater tous les sépulcres des pécheurs par la seule Résurrection de ce Christ glorifié que Saint Paul appelle les Prémisses des Dormants.[2]

"La Vigne abandonnée" takes the parable of the Master and the vineyard to state what seems to be the total bankruptcy of the Church; but this proves only a prelude to its being handed over to the Spirit.[3]

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 51.

[2] Ibid., p. 100.

[3] Le Mendiant ingrat, 8th March 1894.

Only in the sixth chapter of Celle qui pleure, which moves closest to the contemporary context, does Bloy, provoked by the defection of the priesthood, briefly offer the image as literal truth. Even here, the language is ambiguous; the state is reduced by description of it as a mere phenomenon and its resolution implied by its inclusion in the previsions of Christ's Agony.

c) The Second Coming

The consoling Promise of a Second Coming and the establishment of a new and irrefutable supernatural order are elaborated to compensate for God's apparent failure. The viability of Marchenoir's philosophy of suffering is confirmed by the imminent prospect of an end:

> D'ailleurs, il regardait comme fort prochaine la catastrophe de la séculaire farce tragique de l'Homme. Certaines idées qui lui vinrent sur l'histoire universelle, - et qu'il déroula jusqu'à leurs extrêmes conséquences, - lui faisaient conjecturer, avec une autorité d'exégèse quasi prophétique, l'imminent accomplissement des scripturales Vaticinations.
>
> L'exaltation des humbles, l'essuiement des larmes, la béatitude des pauvres et des maudits, la présence paradisiaque des voleurs et le couronnement réginal des prostituées, enfin cette venue si solennellement annoncé d'un Paraclet libérateur, - tout ce que la fratricide surdité des argousins de la Tradition a conspué, tout ce qui empêche les orphelins et les captifs de mourir d'horreur, il ne croyait pas possible qu'on l'attendît longtemps encore et il donnait ses raisons.[1]

The imaginative centre of his - and Bloy's - work becomes the longing for the advent of the Spirit in renewal: "l'Esprit rénovateur dont nous n'avons que les prémices".[2]

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 59.

[2] Ibid., pp. 149-50.

Bloy's presentation of the doctrines of the Second Coming and of the Kingdom of God is probably the most difficult part of his work to interpret and, in consequence, that which has given rise to most of the charges of heresy which have been made against him. The theme, adapted to a variety of purposes throughout the century by both theologians and poets, reaches Bloy with a complex set of references attached, most of which he uses as illustrations for his own interpretations. Having first established the nature of these references and the relationship between them and Bloy's own synthesis, it will then be possible to trace the development of the latter through his work and, finally, to consider in what contexts of practical experience the dogma is most often invoked.

The first context to examine is the theological, and Bloy's claim that within the context of modern Catholicism his treatment of the themes of Apocalypse and Christian renewal is unique. This ignores altogether that doctrine of a third era in the Church of simultaneous persecution and revival, culminating in final triumph, which was preached by the Marian theologians - Giraud, Faber, and Grignon de Montfort - and by the theologians of the Sacred Heart, especially Lyonnard. As in Bloy's doctrine, the aims were unity and ascetic revival, and the imagesused, those of the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God and the formation of the Mystic Body of Christ through the mediation of Mary and of the Holy Spirit. The devotion to the Spirit recommended was one of tearful tenderness, sympathy and humility, as to Jesus in his Passion; it resembled closely that which Bloy considers most his own and which he represented in the figure of Naundorff appealing for penitence and compassion.[1]

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[1]See Short Readings on the Holy Ghost: Extracts from F. W. Faber, London, 1903.

The Marian imagery in which Bloy commonly presents the theme is derived from Grignon de Montfort, whose Traité de la vraie dévotion à la Sainte Vierge, re-discovered and published in 1842, came into prominence in the second half of the nineteenth century.[1] It is probable that Bloy met the work through Faber, and then again in Tardif de Moidrey; certainly, it acquires particular relevance for him in the context of Tardif's interpretation of the eschatology of La Salette.

The Traité is a simple devotional manual setting out the redemptive and eschatological rôle of Mary. Chosen by God as the pivot of the Redemption, designated "the terrestial Paradise of the new Adam", treasure-house and mediatrix of all God's graces, she is the means by which the elect are to be conformed to Christ in preparation for the Last Days. In particular, she is the means of purification for the "Body of Splendour" to be formed from a clerical élite for Christ's coming - the ascetic order Grignon calls the "Apôtres des derniers jours", which is to practise poverty, humility, charity, adherence to the pure Gospel and contempt of the world. Its act of consecration is an exercise in humility and self-abandonment in the admission of the need for a second mediator, who is Mary. A prescribed series of Marian devotions accompanies this, most of which reappear in Bloy. Signs are predicted of the Last Days which form easy parallels to the predictions of La Salette. There is to be an era of hypocrisy and confusion, when the distinctions between good and evil will be blurred. At this time, there will be revival within the Church and Mary will be revealed to oppose Satan - in might, against the enemies of Christ, heretics and Jews, and in grace, to sustain and animate the Church.

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[1] Grignon de Montfort (1673-1716); beatified 1888. Bloy owned a copy of his Traité (Paris, Oudin, 1868), and recommended to friends the abridged version, Le Secret de Marie (see Lettres à Pierre Termier, 7th February 1906).

Bloy ties in both the last points to his own work on La Salette. Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition refers simply to Mary's reign as a sign of impending Judgement, and to her agency in the Spirit's work of renewal. Celle qui pleure quotes at length from the Traité Grignon's description of the Order of the Apostles of the Latter Days, which is compared to Melanie's Order: "ce seront de vrais disciples de Jésus-Christ, qui, marchant sur les traces de sa pauvreté, humilité, mépris du monde et charité, enseigneront la voie étroite de Dieu dans la pure vérité, selon le saint Evangile, et non selon les maximes du monde".[1] His Introduction à la "Vie de Mélanie" emphasises the compatient rôle of the Apostles, who are to share with Mary what Bloy describes as the Passion of the Holy Spirit - the sufferings of enthusiasm which represent the translation of the Redemption onto the earthly plane and atone for other Christians' refusal to participate.

The Spirit provides the dynamic force of revival and Mary the affective appeal which makes this force humanly effective. This is the sense of Bloy's conflation of the two images of the Marian era and the Reign of the Spirit in Jeanne d'Arc, to present the Apocalyptic rôle of the Virgin in France as revealed at La Salette:

> Dès le commencement tout est promis à la Femme et c'est par la Femme que tout doit être accompli. Entre elle et le Saint-Esprit il y a une telle affinité qu'on peut humainement les confondre et qu'il est difficile de ne pas imaginer, avec certains Mystiques, le Troisième Règne, c'est-à-dire le triomphe du Paraclet, procuré par Celle dont il est dit qu'elle "rira au Dernier Jour".[2]

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[1] Celle qui pleure, OC IX, 181.

[2] Jeanne d'Arc et L'Allemagne, OC IX, 162.

Bloy's preoccupation with the mystery of La Salette adds another element to his synthesis, in the more popular concept of the Kingdom as the catastrophic abolition of a terrestial order rejected by God. The traditionalists had frequently used the theme to carry their condemnations of modern materialism.[1] The latter half of the century saw in currency a quantity of prophetic pamphlets and tracts, typified by the works of Adrien Péladan, which castigated the moral and spiritual decadence of France and urged repentance.[2] As might have been expected, production of these accelerated just before the First World War; in January 1916, in an attempt to check alarmism, the Vatican was compelled to issue an edict forbidding further discussion of the prophecies of La Salette.

These prophecies set a fashion for search after signs and portents of the Apocalypse. Bloy often invokes these in their lowest terms, with a naïve credulity; but is also more capable than many of his contemporaries of emphasising the moral behind the portent as, for example, in Le Salut par les Juifs, where the Gospel sign of the recuperation of the Jews is welded into his thesis of the universalisation of compassionate suffering.

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[1] See J. de Maistre, Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg, 11e Entretien; letter to Bloy from Saint-Bonnet, 24th January 1874. [CLB Nos. 3, 4 (8th Yr.), Jan.-April 1932, p. 82].

[2] See for example, A. Péladan, Dernier Mot des prophéties. 2e partie inédite. La prophétie des pontifes romains ... la vie de Saint Malachie ... Suivent plus de 200 textes sur les temps présents, parmi lesquels les prédictions complètes de la V. Anna-Maria Taïgi, le véritable secret de Mélanie (de la Salette), et beaucoup d'autres révélations du plus grand intérêt, etc., avec un discours sur la proximité des événements et la grande rénovation sociale d'après des prophéties contemporaines, par Adrien Péladan, ... Nîmes, 1880. Bloy had read Adrien Péladan's prophecies, officially approved by the Pope, which he considered less ridiculous than his son Josephin's theories (La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 57). See G. Rouzet, "Joséphin Péladan et Léon Bloy", Mercure de France, CCXIV, No. 990, 15th September 1939, p. 737.

For his presentation of the Catastrophe Bloy draws heavily on standard Biblical images, particularly the violence and colour of the Old Testament prophecies of the Day of the Lord, imitated after Hello, which is one of the main sources of his fire symbolism. Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition refers to the Jewish prophecies, including those of Christ himself, which look beyond the salvific "immolation d'un Dieu possible" to the purifying baptism of fire which puts this salvation into effective practice.[1] The discussion culminates in Bloy's own interpretation of Maccabees, chosen to show the Kingdom inaugurated through the purifying fire of persecution and martyrdom, through the mediation of the Dolorous Virgin of La Salette.

In Le Sang du Pauvre, the image translates effectively into a polemic context to bring a note of divine retribution to the fire at the "Bazar de la Charité".[2] These are posed at the start in a vicious evocation of the fire itself:

> . . . des personnes tout à fait exquises, devenues, en un instant, des torches vivantes et hurlantes, au milieu d'une impraticable fournaise . . . . Elles avaient fait de l'Evangile grand ouvert et planté debout, une haute muraille d'airain pour protéger leur plaisir et cette muraille, devenue rouge, est tombée sur elles. Il a fallu des pelles et des tombereaux pour les mettre au lit;

and then allowed to persist as background to a decadent pastiche of the prophetic promises to become, by implication, part of the final consolation of the poor:

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 77.

[2] See above p. 55.

> . . . le Jour de Dieu - enfin! . . . le jour de la dérision en retour, de la Dérision grande comme les cieux que le Saint Livre nomme la Subsannation divine. Ce sera la vraie fête de charité . . . . Ce sera tout de bon la fête des pauvres, la fête pour les pauvres, sans attente ni déception. En un clin d'oeil, ils recueilleront eux-mêmes, sans intermédiaires, tout ce que les riches peuvent donner en s'amusant et encore bien au-delà, prodigieusement et à jamais.
>
> Pour ce qui est de l'incendie qui terminera le gala, il n'y a pas de créature, fût-ce un archange, qui pourrait en dire un seul mot.[1]

At the end of Le Salut par les Juifs, apocalyptic images of cosmic upheaval are employed in a florid pastiche reminiscent of Lamennais to set out the paradox of the reign of Christ in poverty, which shocks the bourgeois Christian:

> Ce Visiteur . . . sera le fumier même où l'indigent Iduméen raclait ses ulcères. On se penchera sur lui pour voir le fond de la Souffrance et de l'Abjection.
>
> A son approche, le soleil se convertira en ténèbres et la lune en sang; les fleuves superbes reculeront en fuyant comme des chevaux emportés: les murs des palais et les murs des bagnes sueront d'angoisse.
>
> Les charognes en putréfaction se couvriront de parfums puissants achetés à des navigateurs téméraires, pour se préserver de sa pestilence, et, dans l'espoir de s'échapper à son contact, les empoisonneurs des pauvres ou les assassins d'enfants diront aux montagnes de tomber sur eux.[2]

The same book contains a reworking of the Judgement (derived, according to Bloy, from a parable by Hello), which at first sight diverges radically from the traditional sense.[3] Bloy appears to be following the Romantics - Edgar Quinet, Michelet, and de Vigny and Jean-Paul Richter - in rejecting God's accusations against humanity

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[1] Le Sang du Pauvre, OC IX, 117.

[2] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 74-75.

[3] Ibid., pp. 61-62.

and in suggesting the primacy of charity and forgiveness in the universe rather than draconian Justice. It is clear, however, both within the passage itself, where the power of the Cross is set above the simple intercession of Mary and the Saints, and from the tone of the rest of the book, that Bloy is consciously invoking the Romantic interpretation to draw attention to his own thesis that love and reparation, or penitence, are identical.

This point demands further consideration, as it leads to a third series of references which Bloy, we would argue, deliberately adapted in this way as poetic vehicles for his own arguments. To see these as carrying into his own thought the sense of their original contexts is to mistake his meaning.

Such a misinterpretation is the basis of Raymond Barbeau's book, Un Prophète luciférien: Léon Bloy (1957), which tries to establish analogies, pushed to the status of direct influences, between Bloy's concept of the coming of the Paraclete and the Luciferan doctrines of the occultist Eliphas Lévi, the former abbé Alphonse Constant.

Most critics have rejected Barbeau's thesis, though without necessarily clearing up the suspicions it casts over Bloy's intentions. A review by Auguste Viatte even suggested it might have grains of truth:

> . . . ses imprécations contre Satan peuvent fort bien s'accommoder d'un luciférisme à la manière de Victor Hugo, pour qui l'Ange du Mal redeviendra un jour le Porte-Flambeau de la Liberté rédemptrice: Satan est mort; renais, Ô Lucifer céleste![1]

[1] A. Viatte, "Barbeau, Raymond. Un Prophète luciférien, Léon Bloy", The French Review, XXXI, No. 5, April 1958, pp. 454-55. See also E. Beaumont, "Léon Bloy and feminine mythology", in Studies in French Literature presente to H. W. Lawton, Manchester, 1968; and H. Amer, "Raymond Barbeau: Un Prophète luciférien, Léon Bloy", Nouvelle NRF, No. 54 (5th Yr.), June 1957, pp. 1104-7, who argues that Bloy's ideas are closer to Origen's doctrine of apocatastasis - the final restitution of all things and the absolution of Satan - which has links with the Hegelianism of Quinet and Constant and with Berdaiev's Orthodox gnosis. This is untenable in view of Bloy's insistence on the necessity of asceticism and expiation and on submission to the authority of the Church, which are alien to both systems.

Without rejecting out of hand all possibility of occultist overtones in Bloy's work, it seems possible to show here that the Luciferan context is totally alien.

Jules Bois defines Luciferism as the exaltation of Lucifer, principle of light and goodness, in opposition to the Jehovah of the Old Testament, who is redefined as the principle of evil. It is a kind of "haute franc-maçonnerie", specifically and systematically opposed to Catholic hierarchy and dogma.[1] In the works of Lévi to which Barbeau refers, it takes a strongly humanist line. His book La Mère de Dieu: Epopée religieuse et humanitaire, published in 1844, before he was expelled from the Church, culminates in an allegorical tableau of the Judgement as a reconciliation of Christ and Lucifer under the aegis of Mary, which is a plea for the primacy of human effort and the necessity of individual search and error. Le Dogme et rituel de la haute magie expresses a cult of knowledge and of the individual search for self-perfection of the kind that Bloy elsewhere denounces. It can be usefully compared with the doctrine of Stanislas de Guaïta, which aimed at "l'anéantissement métaphysique du Mal". The crux is the interpretation given to the problem of the Fall, for which de Guaïta rejected solutions based on expiation and atonement - the philosophy of a Moloch or a Jehovah - for a Hegelian dialectical movement which envisages the Fall as the necessary condition of progress: "Dieu

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[1] The definition of Luciferism here has been established from Jules Bois' Les Petites Religions de Paris, Paris, 1894, and Le Satanisme et la magie, Paris, 1895, and the evidence of Eliphas Lévi's own writings. Bois' definitions are notoriously unreliable, but are the only ones available; Hastings' article in the Encyclopedia of religion and ethics is based on Bois.

ne tolère le <u>péché originel</u>, cette infraction au <u>Bien négatif</u>, qu'à titre de gestation ténébreuse et transitoire, d'où doit éclore le <u>Bien positif et superlatif</u>: la Rédemption. <u>La Rédemption aboutit à la Réintégration, qui est le Paradis!</u>"[1] It is in this sense that the Fall for de Guaïta is eternal, and a "felix culpa"; and that he can describe Adam as sinning for the sake of freedom.

In Bloy, and in Blanc de Saint-Bonnet, his main source on this point, the Earthly Paradise is not a negative state. In it, Man was created as a potential, but was also created good,[2] and the Fall was an unnecessary sin of presumption on his part which required expiation. That this expiatory effort should also lead to restoration of perfection is a gratuitous act of mercy by God - hence the felicity of the Fall, in that it gave Him an opportunity to show greater love by greater forgiveness. The exaggerated place Bloy gives to expiation by involuntary effort, or slavery, in his work shows its markedly anti-humanist line. Similarly, descriptions of man's Fall as still continuing, and accelerating, should not be read as expressions of lack of confidence in the effects of theRedemption but primarily as opposition to the humanist viewpoint which would reject the need for redemption.

To the most cursory glance, the terms of reference of the two systems do not appear to coincide.

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[1]Cit. O. Wirth, <u>L'Occultisme vécu</u>, Paris, 1935, p. 178. For the same ideas in a more philosophical context, see F. de Lamennais, <u>Esquisse d'une philosophie</u>, Paris, 1840-46, II[e] Partie, II, vii, "Du Mal dans l'homme".

[2]Blanc de Saint-Bonnet, <u>De la douleur</u>, Lyon, 1849, p. 198.

Some of Bloy's formulations present a certain difficulty. The passage in Le Salut par les Juifs, referred to above, speaks of a conflict of interests within the philosophy of Christianity, later described as a conflict in the Trinity between God's Justice and His Mercy, which is resolved by a vision of the Second Coming in which the Paraclete and Lucifer are almost identified:

> Jésus n'avait obtenu des Juifs que la haine, et quelle haine! Les Chrétiens feront largesse au Paraclet de ce qui est au-delà de la haine.
>
> Il est tellement l'Ennemi, tellement l'identique de ce LUCIFER qui fut nommé Prince des Ténèbres, qu'il est à peu près impossible - fût-ce dans l'extase béatifique - de les séparer ...[1]
>
> Que celui qui peut comprendre comprenne.

Bloy explained that the image is the image of the liturgy for Saturday of Holy Week: "Lucifer, INQUAM, qui nescit occasum" and that it is used not to make a doctrinal point, but to mark the presence of a mystery.[2] He needed also to explain that the mystery he is concerned with is not the mystery of evil, but that of the Church's lack of interest in renewal; in this sense, the modern Church looks on the Paraclete as its greatest enemy, the rôle traditionally reserved for Antichrist.

Other images which likewise seem to abuse doctrine, such as the presentation of the heretic Naundorff, or Napoleon, the opponent of the Pope, as figures of the Paraclete, find proper perspective as Bloy's discussion of them develops and the selected points of true analogy emerge to subordinate the original points chosen to surprise. The Catholic distinction between good and evil remains absolute; the

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[1] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 75.

[2] Ibid., p. 75n.

two are distinct even on the Cross, where Christ is identified with sin. The Cross is not a canonisation of error, but a means to abolish it.

Closer analogies exist between the thought of Bloy and that of Eugène Vintras, the early nineteenth-century prophet who declared himself commissioned by the Archangel Michael to proclaim the end of the reign of Christ and the imminence of the Third Reign of the Paraclete, a kingdom of earthly bliss. He organised in preparation works of redemption, reparation and purification, principally his "Oeuvre de la Miséricorde", a group of victims chosen to expiate the sins of others through a series of elaborate rites. Women, as priestesses and victims, held an important place in the cult, which was essentially a deformation of traditional Catholic teaching on Reparation and on the meaning of the Immaculate Conception.[1]

The resemblance to Bloy's work derives from this common source of doctrine. Other similarities which have been suggested can often be ascribed to critical misinterpretations. Albert Frank's query in La Revue Sincère, 1st November 1925: "Léon Bloy s'est-il inspiré d'un auteur belge?" is fairly typical. Frank traces an affiliation between Bloy and Vintras through the Belgian prophet Vercruysse, friend of Tardif de Moidrey, whose dating of the Second Coming for 19th September 1879 was responsible for Tardif and Bloy's joint pilgrimage at that date to La Salette.[2] The parallels he draws between Le Salut par les Juifs and Vercruysse's Régénération du monde par les XII tribus

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[1] R. M. Griffiths, The Reactionary Revolution, pp. 125-29.

[2] Lettres de jeunesse, No. II.

d'Israël are all commonplaces of the Jewish theme; and the "Vintrasian elements" he sees in Bloy rest on one misinterpretation of Bloy's meaning and two failures to recognise such standard nineteenth-century devotional themes as "la quasi-identification de la Vierge et du Saint-Esprit".

Bloy must have become familiar with Vintras' ideas from 1886 at the latest, through Naundorffist acquaintance (Vintras had taken up the cause of the Pretender after a vision which he claimed confirmed his authenticity). In Le Fils de Louis XVI he specifically rejected this aspect of Naundorffism, condemned in 1843 by a Bull of Gregory XVI.[1]

Huysmans' Là-bas, published in 1891, gives a description of the coming of the Paraclete and the Third Reign, referring to Vintras, which Bloy indignantly refutes as a distortion of his own ideas.[2] That Huysmans' source was in fact Vintras' self-elected successor, the abbé Boullan, is irrelevant; the main point remains Bloy's fury that Huysmans should have chosen to publish a parody of the dogma rather than a Catholic interpretation. His

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[1] Le Fils de Louis XVI, OC V, 121.

[2] The image of a Third Reign of the Spirit, which expresses dissatisfaction with present moral or social conditions and desire for a new order to replace these, is a Joachimite term passed into common use among the Romantics; see for example de Vigny's poem "Pur Esprit", where the theme is the isolation of the intellectual in a materialistic and mediocre society. At the period now under discussion, disproportionate attention was given to literalist interpretations of the image (by Vintras, Hello, and, briefly, Bloy himself) but according to Huysmans, in Là-bas, the concept of an incarnation of the Paraclete was a naive misunderstanding of the doctrine. From Bloy's Catholic perspective, the heresy of current interpretations consisted in interpretation of the Reign as one of temporal bliss - a variation on the socialist theme.

account of the Vintrasian reign of bliss, the end of the victimal period of humiliation and expiation, is exactly the opposite of Bloy's kingdom, in which universal humble acceptance of an order of expiatory suffering is in itself beatitude. This is developed in detail in the article "L'Expiation de Jocrisse", published in the Gil Blas, 24th January 1893, during the controversy over the death of Boullan, when Huysmans' debt to the occultist became public. Vintras and Huysmans are said to be incapable of a proper understanding of doctrine: "des gens qui ne savent pas ce que signifient le mot Obéissance, le mot Prêtre, le mot Eglise, le mot Absolu". Huysmans' pretensions to preach a glorious kingdom are mocked, and the emphasis laid on unclarified hints at the sexual content of Boullan's doctrine, which, Bloy surmises, must have been the main attraction for the Naturalist. The revival Huysmans represents is a "religion cochonne".[1]

Ironically, immediately after his attack on Huysmans Bloy is himself accused of Vintrasism by a Catholic reviewer, who claims to find in Le Salut par les Juifs a Vintrasian Incarnation of the Paraclete, used by Bloy to solve the antagonism between Christ and the Jews which perpetuates the Crucifixion.[2] Bloy rejects the charge: "Cette vieille hérésie, bien antérieure au misérable Vintras, m'a toujours fait horreur, et mon livre n'en dit pas un mot".[3] Raïssa Maritain retails his later explanation that the Third Reign does not consist of a new Gospel, nor of a personal Coming of the Spirit, but

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[1] For an account of Boullanism, see R. M. Griffiths, The Reactionary Revolution, pp. 130-38; M. Thomas, "L'Abbé Boullan et l'Oeuvre de la Réparation", Tour St. Jacques, May-June 1957. It is generally held that Huysmans was in fact unaware of the carnal element of Boullan's doctrines.

[2] Calamus, "Le Salut par les Juifs, par Léon Bloy", Bulletin de l'Université de Lyon, 15th February 1893.

[3] Le Mendiant ingrat, 30th March 1893.

is rather the invisible Passion of Love manifested in the Church and in men's hearts.[1] Le Désespéré confirms this, presenting unambiguously the Passion of the Spirit as the sufferings of the persecuted Church.[2] This again is a devotional topos, to be found in Grignon de Montfort.

The idea of the imminence of an apocalyptic catastrophe which will either renew or destroy the whole of a decadent society first appears in a letter to Landry of 26th July 1871, where the catastrophe is held to be a fitting divine response to European indifference to the decrees of Vatican I on Papal authority and infallibility. The doctrine develops to fulness from 1876, when Bloy comes into contact with Hello's private interpretation of the Coming of the Paraclete and with the prophecies of La Salette, which eventually become the dominant motif. These elements take some time to settle into proportion; analysis of the genesis of Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition gives an indication of the process.

At the beginning, Bloy was little more than a ghost writer for Tardif de Moidrey,[3] under whose direction he echoed Grignon's description of the diffusion of the penitential Spirit in the Marian era and Melanie's revelation of the imminence of apocalypse, to take the form of a period of apostasy, especially among the priesthood,

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[1] R. Maritain, Les Grandes Amitiés, Paris, 1956, pp. 146-47.

[2] Le Désespéré, OC III, 221-22.

[3] Bloy's book was based on conversations with Tardif and notes on his sermons, lent by the Assumptionists, together with his own study of the Biblical figures of the Dolorous Virgin [letters to M. de Moidrey, October 1879 (Boll. I, 415), and Roselly de Lorgues, 5th January 1880 (ibid., p. 419)].

followed by trials of fire. At this stage he referred very little to the period of indifference later given an elaborate rationale in Le Salut par les Juifs and Le Fils de Louis XVI, being clearly less aware of the extent of modern apathy; and gave no explanation of the particular historical references of the Secret such as appear in L'Ame de Napoléon. The originality of his apology rested on its superior literary qualities rather than its content.

In the spring of 1880, during a period of depression after the death of his patron and increasingly troubled by his relationship with Anne-Marie, Bloy became interested in Hello's expression of the Coming of the Spirit as a Third Reign of bliss, to occur at a clearly-prophesied time, marked by unmistakeable signs. He had known this aspect of Hello's work from 1876, as a letter written by Hello on 14th April of that year indicates:

> Un jeune homme nommé Bloye (sic) prenait l'habitude de m'amener d'autres jeunes gens. Cela formait une petite troupe. Je leur ai dit l'autre jour le De Profundis de Salomon. Il est difficile d'imaginer son Admiration. Il vibrait des pieds à la tête. Il m'a amené ses amis devant qui j'ai redit la chose, et, la veille de mon départ, j'ai dû la redire devant Barbey d'Aurevilly qui en avait entendu parler. Barbey, sans comprendre aussi profondément que Bloye, a été violemment frappé par la magnificence de la forme et a dit: 'Je ne connaissais pas encore M. Hello'.[1]

The "De Profundis", an emotional and rhetorical poem, employs a number of themes later imitated by Bloy: the futility of earthly love, possessions and knowledge; the promise of pardon for the Jews; the failure of Calvary, prophesied by Solomon; the imminence of cataclysm; and Christ's appeal for resolution to the compassion of a suffering earth.

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[1] Cit. G. Belluot, "L'Illuminisme de Hello", La Revue Hebdomadaire, No. 3 (44th Yr.), 19th January 1935.

This doctrine of an earthly reign did not become integrated with Bloy's other ideas until he began to prepare, in March, an article on Hello, probably inspired by the recent Paroles de Dieu and Les Plateaux de la balance, in which Dionysius' motif of suffering through fire and the image of the Woman of the Apocalypse figure prominently as bringing both purification and punishment - a rationalisation of Hello's own sufferings as rejected genius and desire for revenge on the "godless" society that performed the rejection. At this point Bloy stopped work on his book, unable to reconcile Hello's concept of a Kingdom in which suffering was abolished with that of Tardif.[1]

The solution developed through the visions of Anne-Marie, conditioned and interpreted by the suggestions of Bloy and Hello. Writing to Hello, 14th March 1880, Bloy retailed her account of the Third Reign, giving details of the signs of its approach - as, for instance, the rise in devotion to Saint Joseph, protector of the Virgin and Child - and linking the Spirit's advent with Israel. The latter was probably inspired by the general influence of Tardif's exegesis and the particular influence of Hello's Paroles de Dieu, which gives a summary of Old Testament types of expectation of the liberator in poverty, suffering and desire. Bloy's interest in the mission of the Jews developed gradually from this period.[2]

The triumphal descent of the Paraclete, expected for March 1880, failed to take place. Anne-Marie blamed for this Bloy's lack of purity.[3] The disappointment led to a slight re-consideration of the

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[1] Letter to Hello [14th March] 1880 (Boll. I, 424-27); 19th April 1880 (ibid., pp. 427-31).

[2] Letter to Mme. Hayem, 14th September 1880 (Boll. I, 443-44); Lettres à Véronique, 5th September 1879.

[3] [May 1880] (Boll. I, 431-34).

literalist interpretation of the Kingdom, inspiring further meditation on "le mystère de l'impuissance divine" and its human remedy, in which the theme of voluntary human co-operation in Christ's sufferings began to replace the expectation of a physical Coming. Anne-Marie expounded the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in the terms in which it later appears in La Femme pauvre, as a promise of hell for those who reject the duty of suffering.[1]

Bloy resumed writing in May, after a vision which resolved the "opposition" of the doctrines of his two mentors within the framework of La Salette. Anne-Marie claimed that her Secret was the same as that of the two children. The symbolism of the Virgin's Discourse, impenetrable to the world, related to the Coming of the Spirit, which had been revealed to the angels in heaven: "C'est le secret du feu et c'est le secret de la Croix et ces deux secrets n'en font qu'un d'où doit sortir cette colère de la Colombe dont parle Jérémie".[2]

An earthly kingdom was still envisaged, but in terms of an identification of Cross and Fire, representing the renewing force of the Spirit through suffering and its end in Judgement. This ultimately weights Bloy's ideas further towards traditional revivalist imagery than to the unorthodoxy of Hello's Third Reign. As Bloy pointed out, whilst Hello expected the advent of a Saint and his own glorification, Bloy himself looked for the coming of Christ. His emphasis was on a prolonged co-operative process of renewal rather than the naïve concept of a sudden transformation.[3] In Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, Christ

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[1] 19th April 1880 (Boll. I, 427-31).

[2] [May 1880] (ibid., p. 433).

[3] 18th August 1880 (ibid., p. 434).

brings fire to inflame men to enthusiastic suffering on earth:

> . . . nous savons par ses propres paroles qu'il porte l'eau dans une main et le feu dans l'autre, mais cette eau qu'il nous donne, c'est une boisson pour la vie éternelle, tandis que ce feu, c'est un incendie pour la vie présente, c'est pour faire flamber les hommes d'ici-bas, et c'est ainsi que doit être entendu cet accomplissement de la volonté du Père Céleste qui fait l'objet de la troisième demande de l'oraison dominicale.[1]

From this point, Bloy's concept of the kingdom developed along two lines. He continued to expect a final Catastrophe and Judgement to close the historical working-out of the Kingdom. Like many of his traditionalist Catholic contemporaries, he developed this at times to disproportionate importance in an effort to use it as a check to modern apostasy. He brought a certain originality to his own presentation through the figure of a vengeful Mary as agent of cataclysm and by some reinterpretation of the theme into more literary vehicles; an entry in L'Invendable, 25th August 1906, made on pilgrimage to La Salette, adapts Poe's image of the rotting social body discovering its decay in its sleep and awakening to destruction.

Along with this he describes the sustained and perpetuated state of the Kingdom, which is the formation of the temporal Body of Christ. Out of the esoteric language of Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, this is expressed as the work of the Spirit transforming the individual and moulding historical event.

La Femme pauvre gives an account of the preparation of the Kingdom in the individual. The movement is the same as that of the cosmic apocalypse: a period of accelerating misery, culminating in ignominy

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 77.

and destitution, induces total self-abandonment to God, answered by an infusion of grace which is final purification and glorification. The pattern is clearest in the conversion and sanctification of the heroine, whose progress is marked by the shifts in her attitude to and understanding of the image of flame, which represents the Spirit and his Kingdom in its dual mode of suffering and glory: "L'Esprit du Seigneur ne Se promène pas seulement dans les cimetières. Ceux qui Le connaissent peuvent Le rencontrer partout, fût-ce en enfer, et Il dit Lui-même que le feu marche devant Sa Face".[1] The image is tentative and unexplained at the beginning of the novel, where the pale melancholy of Clotilde represents the incompleteness, in her life, of the redemptive work of the Cross:

> On sentait si bien qu'un peu de bonheur l'aurait rendue ravissante et qu'à défaut de joie terrestre l'humble créature aurait pu s'embraser peut-être, ainsi que la torche amoureuse de l'Evangile, en voyant passer le Christ aux pieds nus![2]

It develops through the flames of martyrdom promised by the Missionary,[3] which are imposed by the vicissitudes of her own experience and finally, vicariously, by Léopold's death by fire.

In history, the primary evidence of the kingdom is to be found in the Bible, in the mission of Israel as agent of universal revival.[4] This is, however, an esoteric mission difficult to explain to the general public; the complex exegetical arguments of Le Salut par les Juifs were intended for a limited audience of rabbis and priests.

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 263.

[2] Ibid., p. 38.

[3] Ibid., p. 45.

[4] See below pp. 349-61.

For the ordinary reader, Bloy prefers the traditionalists' method of searching for signs of the kingdom in secular history, which might well be considered his best presentation of the orthodox eschatological thesis. The exaggerations of an uniquely apocalyptic perspective are toned into a prolonged study of the dual rôle of Providence in history, controlling both its development and its end. Through the sufferings of Creation, which is Christ's Mystic Body in evolution, unfolds the practical revelation of the weight of sin in man disclosed and assumed by Christ on Calvary. History is given substance and meaning as the mutual revelation of God and man.

The project in Le Désespéré for a symbolical study of history plans a synthetic view in the two perspectives of extended temporal suffering and the final catastrophe.[1] Marchenoir sees history not as Bossuet's regular linear progression, a simple demonstration of the finality of Providence, but as an infinite series of repetitions of the action of submission and sacrifice brought to perfection on Calvary which simultaneously explain and fulfil Christ's sacrifice. Three separate periods are distinguished. In the Old Testament are the sacrifices foreshadowing Calvary, their significance not at that time fully understood. In the New, after Calvary, the meaning of sacrifice is understood but not always accepted or taken as the basis of action. This era is divided into the two periods of mediaeval enthusiasm and modern apostasy, each having its peculiar form of suffering to contribute to the total ransom. This summary explanation is offered to Marchenoir's contemporaries in the hope of obviating need of further

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[1] Le Désespéré, Pt. II, chs. xxxiv-xxxv.

demonstration and inducing them to accept at once their share in the universal expiation. Rejected, it becomes a formal denunciation of human disobedience which Marchenoir offers up as an appeal for immediate final judgement.

In his own historical studies, Bloy picks out characteristics in men and eras representing his own concept of the proper mode of life, which he describes as prefigurations of the manner in which the Spirit will appear to establish his kingdom. The greatness of the Spirit will be disclosed in his poverty, exile, rejection and ignominy - a restatement of the virtues of Christian asceticism and, at the same time, Bloy's own comment on the moral inadequacy of his era which inevitably imposes these forms on greatness. The historical figures of the Spirit vary in accordance with the aspect they represent; humble and obscure, sharing the penitence of Creation, or disclosed in final triumph. They can be creative, or agents of destruction.

Columbus, the earliest figure, begins as a glorious image. His revelation of the New World of the Americas is the image of the Pope's revelation of the fullness of Christian dogma in the New Creation which is the Immaculate Conception, the perfect creature. He figures also the liberating powers of the Spirit, carrying the Gospel to the pagans. Later, however, Bloy dwells rather on his rejection, in an attempt to reattribute responsibility for the failure of heroic enterprise. In the article "Jésus-Christ aux colonies", published 19th April 1903 in L'Assiette au Beurre, this absolves Providence for allowing the abuses of colonialism, which Bloy blames on the depraved capitalist Church. The liberty he offers having been misused by his ministers, the Spirit suffers in sympathy with those who, by no fault of his own, have become his victims.

Naundorff represents the sufferings of the Spirit accompanying his creation in the exile of this life, where he still possesses rights which could be restored: "roi des catacombes dont la voix triste serait venue du sein de la terre . . . . Instinctivement, quoiqu'ayant les pieds dans la mort, il tentait de s'élancer vers l'Absolu du Droit Divin de ses Ancêtres . . ."[1] The brilliant figure of Napoleon is marked by the traditional signs of parousia. His function is to perform: "Un geste de Dieu par les Francs, pour que les hommes de toute la terre n'oubliassent pas qu'il y a vraiment un Dieu et qu'il doit venir comme un larron, à l'heure qu'on ne sait pas, en compagnie d'un Etonnement définitif qui procurera l'exinanition de l'univers".[2] This vocation is marked by ambiguity; at times he seems Antichrist or demon, an agent of wholesale destruction who prepares the way for renewal. Bloy invokes his plan for a unified Europe, representing Catholic unity, and the hostility which confronts it in the form of an heretical England. His return from Elba to Paris and Notre-Dame acknowledges Mary's mediation in the establishment of the Kingdom, and the splendour of his return is that of the Second Coming of Christ.[3] The conflation of these images not only provides colour, but also makes it clear that the kingdom figured by Napoleon must be one of penitential suffering.

In the history of France, Bloy finds the closest parallel to the Kingdom of the Spirit. He adopts a nationalistic approach which to

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[1] Le Fils de Louis XVI, OC V, 159.

[2] L'Ame de Napoléon, OC V, 274.

[3] Ibid., p. 280.

a large extent is a rationalisation of the decline in French political prestige, particularly after the defeat by Prussia in 1870. France is the soul of Europe, to whom other nations look for guidance, the mirror of God's "gestes" and the physical image of his kingdom.[1] Her repeated falls from grace, punishment and restoration are permitted by God to demonstrate his faithfulness and mercy to his creation. In the years of the First World War, this pattern is called upon as an assurance of eventual victory: ". . . l'amnistie plénière de cette Madeleine du Jardin de la Résurrection étant aussi nécessaire à votre magnificence que l'équilibre du firmament!"[2] Her present abjection marks the imminent end of the world; properly interpreted, it would give that complete vision of the redeeming Agony of Christ which the whole of history has been trying to paint.[3]

In the war years, the idea of the Kingdom established through penitential suffering imposed by catastrophe is Bloy's focal point of interest. It is this rationalisation, answering a popular need, which wins him the reputation of "spiritualiste de la guerre".[4]

The patterns of La Salette - period of apostasy, followed by the catastrophe and a new kingdom - offer a means of reconciling his nationalism and anti-republicanism. The European war is not the end, but a preliminary "grimace atroce du Démon, une singerie".[5] France

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[1] Le Fils de Louis XVI, OC V, 94-97; Jeanne d'Arc et l'Allemagne, OC IX, 163.

[2] Jeanne d'Arc et l'Allemagne, OC IX, 179.

[3] Le Fils de Louis XVI, OC V, 96.

[4] Ed. Barthélemy, "Méditations, par Léon Bloy", Mercure de France, CXXII, No. 459, 1st August 1917.

[5] Lettres à Pierre Termier, 10th September 1914.

must be victorious in order to destroy German materialism and to set up the conditions of her own martyrdom in the aftermath of war. Bloy prophesies the further deterioration of the Republic, the postwar destruction of Christianity and sectarian civil war, and quotes Viviani's promise to bury the young Catholic generation in the trenches.[1] He sees the state of France worsened by the infiltration of the democratic and atheistic principles of her English allies or by the Orthodoxy of the Russians, which is as pernicious as atheism, as well as by the activities of the wartime profiteers, and patterns into this the withdrawal of the protection of the Church in the inexplicable neutrality of Benedict XV. Au seuil de l'Apocalypse concludes on a note of destitution:

> Toute grandeur est exilée au fond de l'Histoire et si Dieu veut agir manifestement, il faudra bien qu'Il s'agisse de Lui-même, victorieusement comme il y a deux mille ans, lorsqu'il ressuscita d'entre les morts.

For his Méditations d'un solitaire en 1916 and for Dans les ténèbres, Bloy employs apocalyptic imagery to represent the horror of war and to create the atmosphere of doom which the patriot feels as an acute reality. A letter to de Groux, printed at the end of the Méditations, sympathises with the painter's fantastic and exaggerated vision of the ruin and desolation of war, expressed in his exhibition of November 1916. Both de Groux and himself are criticised by a censorship anxious to maintain morale and accused of deliberately darkening their approach; but theirs is the only mode of expression open to the artist conscious of how far present-day reality falls short of the ideal:

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[1] Letters to P. Raoux, 7th October 1914, 2nd January 1915; to Léon Bellé, October 1915, 11th April 1917; Au seuil de l'Apocalypse, 6th March 1915.

> . . . il faut avoir un appétit formidable d'innocence et de beauté pour voir et pour montrer, comme vous le faites, ce qui est hideux et ce qui est atroce. Il me semble même qu'une autre impulsion chez un artiste tel que vous est absurde et insupposable.
>
> Puis, comment exprimer autrement les réalités inexpiables de cette guerre sans se condamner au ridicule et sans être un imposteur?

The imagery of Bloy's two books tries to restore grandeur to a war more usually described as the most unheroic ever undertaken. It fulfils the prophecy of La Salette of the unchaining of the devil:

> La guerre actuelle, qui n'est qu'un prodome, s'accomplit sur la terre et sous la terre; elle s'accomplit sous les eaux et dans les airs, par des moyens épouvantables inimaginés jusqu'ici . . . . Tous les savants du monde, chimistes ou mécaniciens, sont exclusivement acharnés à la recherche de l'homicide multitudinaire par l'écrasement, la submersion, la déflagration ou l'empoisonnement. Le mal a des aspects si surnaturels que les matérialistes les plus bas sont forcés d'avouer que ce qui se passe est diabolique.[1]

Prussia is opposed to France as the Kingdom of the Beast:

> Une imagination religieuse peut se représenter l'Europe actuelle, c'est-à-dire le monde, comme une pyramide au sommet de laquelle est accroupie la Prusse ennemie de Dieu et des hommes. C'est de là que viennent les influences néfastes, les conseils de perdition, les sentences de mort. C'est le lieu du mensonge, de la perfidie, de l'orgueil bête, de la folie furieuse des grandeurs, c'est le paradis de Satan qui s'y fait adorer sous les dégoûtantes espèces d'un empereur en putréfaction.[2]

The violence of the poetic image sweeps even its German subject into an heroic context which tempers the effect of Bloy's propaganda. Of de Groux' portrait of the Prussian soldier, he comments:

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[1] Méditations, OC IX, 275.

[2] Ibid., p. 280.

> Il y a dans cette figure de soldat pris au filet de la bataille, le symbolisme hautain de l'arrogance germanique portée au point extrême où elle confine à la beauté redoutable que peuvent avoir certaines émissions ou émanations de l'enfer.[1]

The balance is restored by Bloy's own portrait of the Emperor William, which recalls Lamennais' kings in the Paroles d'un croyant: "Il suppure sous sa couronne et la mort lui envoie de temps en temps quelquesbaisers du haut de la potence que les bons Anglais lui préparent". An apocalyptic text taken from Maria d'Agreda describes the whole universe rising up to curse William at his death.[2] The exaggeration is deliberate, to make more compelling Bloy's appeal for holiness, which is the final refuge. In an overwhelming rhetorical image he shows it offered to Christianity, the beleagured city, in the form of suffering voluntarily accepted as penitence - submission to traditional values which will bring victory; the alternative being the disorder of panic suffering which will be imposed by defeat.[3]

A similar appeal is made in a more muted tone in the image of the descent of the Spirit, which Bloy ties to the contemporary commonplace of the need for an "homme-drapeau" to rally and reunite the Republic against external aggression. Frequently he discusses the need purely in terms of the commonplace, and usually with the conclusion that such heroes no longer exist in France. On another plane

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[1] Méditations, OC IX, 286.

[2] Ibid., pp. 282-83.

[3] Ibid., p. 276.

altogether, he uses the image to present the need in France for moral and religious rather than purely political renewal. In bringing this, the "man" is distinguished from previous saviours of the nation, and as such can be described as a special figure of the Spirit of the last coming.

This is most fully developed in the fourth chapter of Bloy's Méditations. Napoleon is dismissed as an inadequate figure for Bloy's purposes, being too predictable in the historical order and his ambitions, merely political, too banal. The Stranger, sent by the Spirit in the poverty and ignominy which are signs of the Godhead, is to overturn all familiar orders and values. He appears to save France in answer to her appeal for Justice, but his Justice is in terms unrecognisable to Bloy's contemporaries. The salvation he brings is of a moral order; an appeal for penitential recognition of humanity's destitution when left to itself and for return to the divine order: "Comparés à lui les miséreux ordinaires ressembleront à des rois, et pourtant, la misère la plus parfaite le reniera, parce que l'Infini d'elle-même lui sera montré par ce Visiteur dans les Plaies du Christ". Bloy hints at the traditional parousia symbols marking his arrival - the sudden reversal of familiar order, the fulfilment of figures, the presence of fire on earth - but without asserting finally whether the Stranger is the Spirit himself or a last figure. It is clear from the ambiguity that the image of an historical Advent is subordinate to the central plea for a return to the ascetic spirit of the Gospel.

The group of four texts on the Coming in Dans les ténèbres (chapters 11-14) pulls together the several aspects Bloy has set in the theme. The Stranger's power to exterminate the whole of Germany,

"un préalable à l'inventaire du monde", also threatens the France who invokes him without recognising her own shortcomings. There can be no political triumph without a return to Catholic devotion. This is the message of the final text, L'Avènement inimaginable, in which description of the doctrine takes precedence over discussion of the war itself. The present decay of France is the sign given at La Salette of the imminence of the Kingdom, for which the Spirit is now suffering with the whole of creation. The kingdom becomes visible through this suffering; for the expiatory tears which signify the occult presence of the Spirit in this life extend into his visible reign. Bloy runs together the two eschatological perspectives:

> Les larmes sont tellement le don de l'Esprit-Saint qu'elles ne peuvent pas couler sans que Dieu s'approche, puisqu'il a dit qu'il viendrait les essuyer lui-même de tous les yeux. Elles sont si précieuses qu'il n'est pas permis de les répandre en vain.
>
> - Ah! Seigneur, donnez-moi de pleurer dans ma veille et dans mon sommeil, de pleurer toujours, comme faisait votre prophète. Si mes larmes ne sont pas pures, changez-les en sang et si ce sang ne vaut rien, qu'elles deviennent des ruisseaux de feu; mais, n'importe comment, faites que je pleure, puisque c'est le moyen d'être bienheureux, l'infaillible secret d'attirer le Consolateur!

b) The Trinity and Mary

We have already remarked on the direct challenge of modern theology to the definition of the Trinity, claimed to be a later addition by the Church to the primitive revelation. In Bloy's article on Didon, Le Révérend Père Judas, the group became the symbol of dogma threatened by the rationalisations of modern liberal Catholic thought. Le Salut par les Juifs asserted its Scriptural basis in the traditional interpretation of Genesis XVIII, 1-2, Abraham's confrontation with the three strangers before his tent, in which the addition of the mediator Abraham, figure of Mary, forms the group which gives the

paradigm of the history of creation and of the Church militant.[1]

i. The Trinity

References to the group of Persons within the Trinity are scattered through Bloy's work. The cumulative impression is of a solid doctrinal background, which is, however, belied by closer analysis; attributes and functions overlap or come into direct contradiction, and the images are played off against one another to make apologetic points. Béguin has suggested that an exegesis of Bloy's Trinity might help in clarifying his concept of, for example, the Third Reign. This it does, in so far as it encourages caution in thinking of this reign as a rigorous concept which can be pinned down in strict dogmatic images.

Introduction of the idea of unequal power among the Persons enabled Bloy to portray simultaneously the apparent failure of God's plans on the natural plane and his actual Providential control. In Le Mendiant ingrat, 30th September 1894, Christ and the Spirit are nailed together and powerless, and only the Father left free to provide resolution. Similarly, in a letter to Jeanne, 2nd December 1889, the Word and the Spirit, fallen and in conflict, are lifted up by the Father. Another hierarchy carries a revivalist plea for humility. In Le Mendiant ingrat, 5th June 1892, the primacy of the Spirit of Charity coincides with the abjection of Christ; or, 14th August, the publican Spirit, confessing his sins, is opposed to the bourgeois Pharisee Christ, unaware of the need for repentance. Impatience for revival is expressed by the rejection of one Person for another -

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[1] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, ch. xxx.

Christ's reign for that of the Spirit - or the unexpected attribution of empire over sins to the various Persons, in which the Paraclete's realm is that of lust, the figure of unsatisfied spiritual desire.[1] Set against Father and Son, the Spirit ratifies that which is outside the normal experience of Bloy's contemporaries and therefore rejected, such as poverty or genius;[2] represents the gulf between the modern concept of poverty and the real dimensions of the problem; or shows the unrecognised depths of forgiveness in God: "la Passion du Fils de Dieu préfigure la Passion plus effrayante encore de l'Esprit-Saint". Traditional distinctions are adapted to Bloy's own purposes, such as Augustine's epistemological attributions which he uses to present the primacy of love and charity, or, even more radically reworked, his desire for the Kingdom.[3]

Dealing with the individual Persons, Bloy tends to neglect the First for the Son and the Spirit. He refers briefly to the providential <u>rôle</u> of the Father but very seldom takes up the theme of his majesty, which contemporary theology also played down. His interest focusses chiefly on God's hiddenness in modern society, not treated in the Jansenist manner but turned to polemic account as a criticism of the modern Catholic's lack of interest in the spiritual realm, which precludes a proper understanding of the temporal:

> [Dieu] est absent des villes, des campagnes, des monts et des plaines. Il est absent des lois, des sciences, des arts, de la politique, de l'édu-

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[1] <u>Le Mendiant ingrat</u>, 20th August 1895; 2nd January 1893.

[2] <u>Ibid.</u>, 10th May 1892.

[3] <u>Lettres à sa fiancée</u>, 31st October 1889; <u>Le Mendiant ingrat</u>, 26th November 1893.

> cation et des moeurs. Il est absent même de la vie religieuse, en ce sens que ceux qui veulent encore être ses amis les plus intimes n'ont aucun besoin de sa <u>présence</u> . . . .
>
> Certes, les chrétiens ne manqueront pas de protester que Dieu est partout, au ciel, sur la terre et dans les enfers. Mais cette ubiquité rassurante pour des multitudes qui ne croient plus au ciel, ni à l'enfer, et qui ont même cessé, par contre-coup, d'avoir une notion précise de la terre, équivaut, en sa formule, à une absence infinie.
>
> Cette absence est devenue l'un des Attributs de Dieu. Ainsi se trouve consommé le licenciement d'un Créateur, dont les hommes n'ont plus besoin, depuis qu'on a trouvé mieux que le Paradis. Dieu est absent de même sorte qu'il est adorable, au point qu'on dirait que c'est le contraire du catéchisme qu'il faut entendre et que la Béatitude éternelle consiste principalement à <u>ne pas le voir</u>.[1]

The figure of the Son was the most controversial, especially since the publication of Renan's <u>La Vie de Jésus</u>, querying the fact of his divinity. In <u>Les Dernières Colonnes de l'Eglise</u>, Bloy attacked Brunetière for raising the question and Didon for limiting his study of Christ to the historical figure. He himself never argued the problem of Christ's divinity or historicity, and, though exploiting the humanity of Christ, did so in a devotional context in the light of the mission expressed in his Cross and Passion. <u>Le Désespéré</u> uses the image of Christ crucified, or that of the Holy Face, to indicate the configuration with Christ which is implicit in all human suffering and gives it value. Christ intervenes twice in the action, once addressing Marchenoir from the Crucifix during Mass, and once through Véronique, in the words of the liturgy for Good Friday. In <u>La Femme pauvre</u>, he appears only at the beginning, in a transcription of a picture of his appearance in glory in a brothel, as to the Magdalene in the garden, offering a forgiveness which Bloy (adopting temporarily the legalistic position) implies incapable of fulfilment.

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[1] <u>Le Fils de Louis XVI</u>, <u>OC</u> V, ch. iii; <u>Méditations</u>, <u>OC</u> IX, ch. xvi.

The more consistent devotional stress in the second novel is laid on the Spirit, in order to emphasise the value of suffering of all kinds whether consciously accepted in a religious context or not, and its co-redemptive rather than merely configurative nature. This point had already been made in Le Désespéré by Marchenoir's study of the symbolic meaning of history, but attracts more attention in its new form.

The Spirit is defined in Dans les ténèbres as the source and end of life.[1] He is also the source of all idealist aspiration and of all heroic and artistic achievement, although not in an immanentist sense; the strength of the inspiration he provides is in its origin in a source outside the human.[2] In Le Révélateur du globe, the mission of Columbus figures the Spirit of unity and that of revelation, who discloses religious, moral and scientific mysteries.[3]

The Spirit is the mediator between God and man in their mutual desire for reunion, for he exists simultaneously within the Godhead and in Creation. Le Salut par les Juifs rests a substantial part of its eschatological arguments on this point.

Like Mary, the Spouse with whom he is associated, he has a variety of figures whose meaning relates to Bloy's concept of the Kingdom, discussed above; images of desire, in the needy, destitute and sinful, and light and dark images, representing destruction and forgiveness for sinners and faithful, or the two potentialities for good and evil which are in fallen creation - the serpent and the woman of the letter to Jeanne, 2nd December 1889.

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[1] Dans les ténèbres, OC IX, 316.

[2] L'Ame de Napoléon, OC V, 289.

[3] Le Révélateur du globe, OC I, 44.

ii. Mary

Bloy's fullest development was reserved for the figure of Mary. Whereas descriptions of the Trinity have to be collected from isolated references, his Marian doctrine is readily accessible in the three books on La Salette and appears frequently and consistently in his other imaginative work.

Marian devotion was revived in France from the middle of the nineteenth century through the series of miraculous apparitions preaching penitence and revival at La Salette, Lourdes and Pontmain, and reached its peak in the 1870's with the rise in devotion to the Sacred Heart. The revival contained a pronounced nationalistic element, though the body of theology to which the devotion was attached came mainly from the English ultramontanes, especially Faber, whose The Foot of the Cross, first translated into French in 1858, went into two editions and nine reprints in the following twenty years. (Faber in his turn drew on the spirituality of the seventeenth-century école française and the Marian doctrine of Grignon de Montfort.) The rise in Marian devotion was ultimately formally acknowledged by the hierarchy with decrees recognising the representative and mediatory mission of the Virgin. Octobri mense, 22nd September 1891, describing Mary as the "mediatrix to the Mediator" who represents humanity to Christ, quotes Aquinas: "Through the Annunciation, the Virgin's consent was looked for in place of all human nature"; Ad diem, 2nd February 1894, calls Mary "first mediatrix of graces".

Bloy derived most of his material from Faber, Ernest Hello, and Tardif de Moidrey. In an account purporting to summarise the

last sermon Tardif gave at La Salette in September 1879,[1] Bloy spoke of his emphasis on the grandeur of Mary, which rested on her patriarchal inheritance, and his relation of her Discourse at La Salette to the destiny of the world, both as sign of its imminent end and as appeal for repentance and configuration to her Compassion with Christ.

Bloy described the characteristic note of his own Mariology as devotion to the Dolorous Virgin, who appeared at first in a consolatory rôle. A letter to Landry, 25th April 1873, using Faber's image, described her as a refuge; another, to Henri Lasserre, 21st August 1877, developing the doctrines of Lourdes, suggested that Mary's disciples were absolved from the debt of suffering in this world because the pain of her Compassion had paid the ransom of Christ's Passion and of her Immaculate Conception. This was clearly belied by experience, and soon dropped for Grignon's notion of Mary's rôle as treasure-house and distributor of the merit of human suffering, which Bloy adopted at this time together with Grignon's formula of consecration to Mary of the continuance of his own sufferings.[2] The threats with which the Virgin of La Salette urged the need for compassionate suffering as a continuous act of reparation encouraged Bloy to add to the consoling figure of Mary the violence generally considered his original contribution, but in fact borrowed from Hello, who found it in the liturgical figure of Judith.[3] Both her threats and her tears were exploited to encourage universal conformity to the mystic Body represented by Christ and Mary.

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[1] "Le Pèlerinage de La Salette et le 34e anniversaire de l'Apparition", Le Pèlerin, No. 4 (4th Yr.), 13th September 1880.

[2] Le Vieux et la montagne, 16th September 1908.

[3] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 41; Paroles de Dieu, p. 237.

The figure of the Dolorous Virgin is naturally associated with that of the Immaculate Conception, which represents Mary's achievement of the redemption merited by her suffering. The doctrine, defined in 1854, was described in Le Révélateur du globe as the most important of the Papal definitions and paralleled with Columbus' discovery of the New World as showing the "transcendent harmony of Creation". The reference is to the cult of Mary as the image of creation fully restored to its first purity, in which participation in Mary is participation in a redeemed creation. This was not developed in detail until Celle qui pleure, where it became the mark of Mary's dignity, which Bloy's fellow-Catholics had not yet recognised. To underline the importance of the doctrine, Bloy's chapter on "L'Immense Dignité de Marie" used terms drawing the Virgin almost indistinguishably close to the Trinity, and fused these with a hyperbolic and decadent lyricism refining on the Romantic Mariologists. Bloy emphasised, however, that the Immaculate Conception was not a static but a dynamic concept, formed of perpetual suffering; the climax of his panegyric in this chapter is the declaration of the Discourse: "Vous aurez beau prier, beau faire, jamais vous ne pourrez récompenser la peine que j'ai prise pour vous autres". There are two perspectives to consider. The figure of "L'Immaculée Conception couronnée d'épines" represents Mary's redemptive compassion at the foot of the Cross making reparation on behalf of humanity;[1] whilst the image of Mary as repentant Eve, source of the human race, is

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[1] Celle qui pleure, OC X, 170.

intended to show humanity involuntarily participating in Mary's suffering from the beginning of and throughout history. The second concept, a refinement on the mediaeval tradition which declares Eve simply a mirror image of Mary, makes possible universal salvation based on suffering, and is perhaps Bloy's most significant utilisation of the Marian figure.[1]

Bloy's presentation of his doctrine is original in its attempt to combine doctrinal and devotional traditions with the stylistic techniques more usually associated with secular literature. Marian themes might well be said to re-enter imaginative literature in Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, written with an express purpose of restoring stylistic and intellectual quality to Catholic devotional works. Bloy described to Gobineau his rejection of the "néant esthétique" of modern Catholicism and his intention to "faire jaillir du fait de La Salette une nouvelle conception de la Beauté catholique", which appears in Romantic terms:

> Je suis devenu une sorte de poète mystique enfermé dans la sempiternelle contemplation des harmonies invisibles, ravagé de toutes les fureurs du Désir de Dieu et consumé dans son corps et dans son âme par toutes les famines de la terre et du ciel.[2]

The poetic possibilities of Marian imagery played an important part in this redefinition of Catholic Beauty, which is in effect an apology of suffering.

Despite Bloy's intentions, accession to the text is difficult for the novice. His assumption of an intimate knowledge in his

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[1] Celle qui pleure, OC X, 154. On the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, see also L'Invendable, 20th, 21st May 1905.

[2] Letter to Gobineau, 23rd September 1880 (Boll. I, 446-48).

reader of the commonplaces and images of Marian doctrine makes interpretation of his subordinate points complicated and slow and disrupts the proportions of the whole. This, seen in its proper perspective, proves like most of Bloy's work to have a tight and coherent construction with its own inner logic. The historical sequence of the Apparition is the framework which holds together a series of doctrinal and lyrical developments. The first part interprets the actions of Mary, whilst the second takes the form of a commentary on the Discourse. The context is set initially with a eulogy of Mary's tears posed against a brief polemic tableau of the state of contemporary France, which is attributed to the rejection of her call to penitence. Against the image of the seated Virgin in tears, the Catholic meaning of suffering is set out at length. In the third chapter Mary stands, and Bloy explains the doctrinal meaning of her accoutrements, which represent her part in Christian purification and contrition and the magnificence of her latter-day <u>rôle</u> as Mother of the Body of Christ. Bloy recasts the Scriptural images of the Woman clothed in the Sun, crushing the dragon, fusing them with the rose-crown and tears of suffering which are to effect the triumph. The Message itself examines in more detail Mary's instrumentality in inaugurating the Last Days, and the last two chapters, her Way of the Cross, recapitulate the meaning of penitence. The whole is given an appearance of substance by reference to the Bible and to the mystics, and coloured by imaginative development of Scriptural parallels. In the second part, exegesis of the Discourse makes similar points in a variety of forms. Mary's mediatory powers are figured in the dramatic tableau of Abraham interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah, and

in the type of the Mother of the Macchabees; in a reworking of the meditational form of the Seven Sorrows.[1]

Marian liturgy provides a source of lyricism and a doctrinal vehicle; Mary's own Compassion is illustrated by direct reference to hymns of the Dolorous Virgin - Quot undis, the Planctus and the Stabat - and the extension of her Compassion to the rest of humanity by the Magnificat, which is one of the devotions of Grignon's order.[2] The office for the feast of the Immaculate Conception contains most of the Old Testament and Apocalyptic parallels by which Bloy illustrates Mary's relationship to the sinful Eve, and which he later incorporates into his imaginative description of the rôle of woman and the meaning of human love.[3] Connected with the latter is also the Baudelairean reversal of the epithets of Marian litany which appear in Bloy's prose-poem "Le Cortège de la Fiancée".

As Bloy's work develops, he tends to transpose his original esoteric image into more accessible language and contexts. The Fifth Sorrow, the Station at the Cross, is taken from Le Symbolisme de

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[1]See below p. 245n.

[2]See "Les Artistes mystérieux", OC II, 154; "La Langue de Dieu", ibid., pp. 312-15; Introduction à la "Vie de Mélanie", OC X, 275-76.

[3]A reading from Genesis 3, 1-15, recalls the disobedience of Eve. In the 2nd Nocturne, Jerome's Homily on the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, offers the parallel between this disobedience and Mary's obedience before the Angelic Salutation; Jeremiah's prophecy is invoked (". . . circumdedit enim virum in utero, sicut Jeremias sanctus testatur") and the images of the Song of Songs of the Virgin as Paradise ("Hortus conclusus, fons signatus, emissiones tuae paradisus."). The Responsory refers to the Apocalyptic figure of Mary: "Signum magnum apparuit in caelo: mulier amicta solo, et luna sub pedibus ejus, et in capite ejus corona stellarum duodecim." In the 3rd Nocturne, St. Bernard's Homily points back to Solomon's query in the Canticle: "mulierem fortem quis inveniet?"

l'Apparition into Le Salut par les Juifs in the form of a simple and tender address by the Virgin to Christ; it appears as a broader concept in the prose reproduction of Felix Jenewein's picture "La Matinée du Vendredi-Saint", where the dramatic attitudes of the crowd carry their response of fear and rejection to the demand for their compassion; and in Le Désespéré, to justify anarchy among the modern poor, deprived of their faith:

> Ils se sont tenus debout, au pied de la Croix, depuis la sanglante Messe du grand Vendredi, - au milieu des ténèbres, des puanteurs, des dérélictions, des épines, des clous, des larmes et des agonies. Pendant des générations, ils ont chuchoté d'éperdues prières à l'oreille de l'Hostie divine, et, - tout à coup, on leur dévoile, d'un jet de science électrique, ce gibet poudreux où la dent des bêtes a dévoré leur Rédempteur ... Zut! alors, ils vont s'amuser![1]

He cannot, however, show the image completely integrated into the everyday context. In Le Mendiant ingrat, a score of scattered references to Mary and notes of her feasts, juxtaposed in startling contrast to everyday event, form in their sum total a body of Marian doctrine which the reader is implicitly invited to put together for himself to provide a new coherent perspective on Bloy's sufferings. By definition, the completeness of the Marian theme, like other devotional concepts, can only be perceived in contradiction to the temporal. ?

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 311. See also letter to Ch. Buet, 13th September 1881: "J'inaugure le cabotinisme sacré! . . . J'enlumine l'Antiphonaire des vêpres noires et je chante le Stabat des Désespérés! J'invente des phrases qui font vingt-sept millions de lieues à l'heure comme la Comète, des phrases qui ressemblent à des gueules immaginées (sic) et des mots qui sont comme des yeux ardents et tristes nageant dans un océan de larmes - larmes de feu, larmes de sang, larmes de bile et larmes d'encre qui ne deviennent jamais larmes de lumières! (Nouvelle N.R.F., No. 68 (6th Yr.), 1st August 1958, p. 377).

## 3. The Supernatural: Presentation of the Theme

The literary techniques by which Bloy recreates the sense of a spiritual dimension in his work are best reviewed under two heads: first, his exploitation of the imaginative potential of Bible and liturgy, the art forms proper to the Church, and second, his treatment of themes which the secular poet uses for the same purpose, in particular that of death. There will be no separate discussion of his so-called debt to contemporary occultist doctrine and imagery, since it should by now be clear that Bloy's work is a natural product of the Catholic doctrine of his period.[1] He frequently expressed contempt for the literary fashion of combining Catholic doctrine with occultist theory.[2]

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[1] This was not without its own superstitious element. Aymer d'Abzac de Ladouze writing to Bloy in the 1880's, during his Jesuit novitiate, asked him to obtain some works on magic for a sceptical friend: "Cet aimable garçon qui est plus sérieux que les autres, a l'esprit assez sceptique; il ne croit pas à l'intervention des esprits dans les choses de ce monde ni à leur action sur les objets matériels, et cependant il se croit très bon catholique et veut l'être", (La R.). See also R. Aubert, Le Pontificat de Pie IX, Paris, 1952, "Le Goût du merveilleux", pp. 468-69.

[2] Le Mendiant ingrat, 18th November 1894; Quatre ans, 12th, 22nd November 1903 P. Carton (Un Héraut de Dieu: Léon Bloy, Brevannes, 1936 ) attempts to show the "occult" bases of Bloy's doctrines; S. Fumet draws parallels between Bloy's ideas and the Cabbala (La Mission de Léon Bloy, pp. 147-64). It is true that some of Bloy's early acquaintance - Buet, Huysmans, Villiers and Joséphin Péladan - frequented occultist cenacles. Bloy met the latter in 1882 and subsequently introduced him to Barbey and to Le Chat Noir. Bloy claimed to be amused by Péladan's pretensions and stated his preference for his own orthodox standpoint [letter to Péladan, 21st August 1883 (Boll. I, 59 His review of Péladan's Le Vice suprême ("Finis Latinorum", Le Chat Noir, 11th October 1884) mentions its Catholic sentiments and ignores its occult overtones. This aspect of Péladan's work is later ridiculed in "Eloi ou le fils des anges" (Gil Blas, 10th December 1888), and in La Femme pauvre (OC VII, 55-57). The relationship, never close, ended in 1886, when Péladan refused Bloy a loan. In 1889, Bloy forbade Péladan Barbey's deathbed; in 1891, the two confronted one another in court during the dispute between Péladan and Rodolphe Salis (see G. Rouzet, "Joséphin Péladan et Léon Bloy", Mercure de France, CCXCIV, No. 990, 15th September 1939).

An unpublished correspondence in the Bollery collection casts some light on Bloy's relationship with Péladan's mistress Henriette Maillat, the model for Madame Chantelouve in Huysmans' Là-bas (10 letters from Maillat to Bloy; 1 letter from Bloy). A letter to Henriette Lhuillier, 22nd February 1887 (Boll. II, 242) implies she might at one point have been Bloy's mistress, though Madame Maillat's own letters show little interest in Bloy. She wrote to Barbey 5th January claiming to have been bewitched by Péladan and asking for Bloy's help (1887), but despite several notes Bloy was unwilling to see her. In July, she confided to Bloy her hopes of a liaison with Barbey and in 1888 turned her attention to Huysmans [letter to Léon Deschamps, 15th May 1891 (Boll. II, 421)]. In December 1888, she tried again to approach Bloy, who, with Huysmans' help, pretended to be in Geneva. He reluctantly agreed to a meeting in 1897 [letter to Maillat, 12th February 1897 (La R.)]. In June 1907, Henriette tried to contact him again through Rictus but with no success.

The adaptation of Biblical themes to literature, a standard Romantic procedure, was one of the distinctive features of the Catholic revival at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but not until Bloy was there any systematic attempt to incorporate into literature traditional Scriptural exegesis, and to claim this as not only an imaginative vehicle but also the foundation of the writer's thought. Bloy's treatment of Biblical texts provoked adverse comment from the theologians:

> Libéré des chaînes de l'exégèse bonnes pour les "théologiens pédants qui affirment que tout est éclairci", Léon Bloy s'élance dans des interprétations vertigineuses où ni lui ni encore moins ses lecteurs ne voient plus rien; si bien qu'après avoir lu deux fois ce livre [Le Salut par les Juifs], je suis encore à me demander: qu'a-t-il voulu dire? Par intervalles, de ce style orageux des éclairs ont jailli, mais l'obscurité, ensuite, n'en paraît que plus dense.
>
> Non, vraiment, les catholiques qui s'extasient devant cette mystique-là devraient être condamnés, avant de juger encore une oeuvre théologique, à copier de leur main toute la Somme de saint Thomas. Ils finiraient peut-être par comprendre que le dogme est assez beau en lui-même pour se passer de ces fulgurantes divagations et des abracadabrants commentaires.[1]

Even benevolent Catholic contemporaries have some difficulty in accepting his figurative interpretations. Dacien, for example:

> . . . a ceci de commun avec la multitude des autres qu'il lui est impossible de comprendre le fait de la continuelle SIMILITUDE ou du continuel PARABOLISME qui est la manière voulue de Dieu dans les révélations de l'Ancien ou du Nouveau Testament. Cette intelligence particulière qui m'a été donnée il y a longtemps déjà et dont je peux dire que j'ai vécu, je ne peux la donner. Quelques très-rares tels que les Maritain y entrent de plain-pied. Les autres me présentent un mur. C'est une sensation assez pénible d'avoir compté sur l'effet d'une belle trouvaille d'interprétation par laquelle il semble que tout soit illuminé et de se trouver tout à coup en présence des objections les plus misérables.[2]

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[1] P. Halflants, Etudes de critique littéraire, 3rd Series, Paris, 1928 (cit. La Croix, 28th November 1928). Halflants made similar criticisms of Claudel (La Libre Belgique, 21st April 1938).

[2] Lettres intimes, 26th September 1907.

However, he intrigued and amused his secular contemporaries, especially the artists, who found in his fantastic adaptations some echo of their own bizarre inventions. Villiers de l'Isle-Adam characterised his contribution to the anti-bourgeois banquet: "Pères de l'Eglise, en daube, sauce exégèse, par le professeur de scatologie comparée, Jérémie Bloy, dit l'extatique Tombeur-de-muffes";[1] Guiches described his preaching the mystery of the image with both literary and Scriptural references:

> Il entame la Symbolique de Creuzer. Il paraphrase éloquemment et même grandiloquemment cette pensée de Démétrius, citée par l'Allemand: "Ce que nous pressentons laisse en nous une impression plus formidable que ce qui s'offre, sans voile, à nos regards!"
>
> Mais il préfère l'exégèse et, abordant l'Apocalypse, "interprétant" la faune mystérieuse et sacrée de Pathmos, il affirme avoir pu acquérir, en approfondissant les textes, la certitude que le rhinocéros est, dans la pensée de l'Evangéliste, la figure de Saint Joseph . . . .[2]

Most important, he finally inspired the more gifted emulation of Claudel, who referred enthusiastically to the profundity of the exegesis in Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition and Le Salut par les Juifs.[3]

Bloy's assertion of the intellectual as well as literary importance of Scripture coincided with the hierarchy's own restatement of the authority of the Vulgate as infallible truth inspired by the Spirit. Both the infallibility of the original inspiration and of the interpretations given by the Church were asserted in the course of controversy, as was the historicity of the texts, against the modernist

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[1] Letter from Villiers to Huysmans, 25th October 1886 [ (Bulletin Huysmans, No. 50, (38th Yr.), 1965, p. 367) ].

[2] G. Guiches, Le Banquet, Paris, 1926, p. 85.

[3] P. Claudel, Introduction au "Livre de Ruth", Paris, 1952, p. 19.

critique.[1] Bloy's own reactions to modernism were brief but categorical - "Destruction de la simple foi par le doute sur la Révélation écrite".[2] It has been indicated above to what extent Bloy's system rests on both verbal and formal parallels between the patterns of Creation, Incarnation and Judgement, as well as on exegesis of the prophets, who must, for his purposes, be guaranteed infallible. In a letter to Philippe Raoux, 20th February 1914, he spoke of turning his whole attention to exegetical studies in the attempt to combat modernism.

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[1] Vatican I restated the Tridentine position, that interpretation of the Scripture in matters of faith and morals pertained only to the Church (Dei filius, 24th April 1870). The encyclical Providentissimus Deus, November 1893, conceded some possibility of figurative expression in the sacred texts, but the decrees of the Biblical Commission, set up in 1902, declared their literal and historical truth, pronouncing for the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (27th June 1906), the historicity and Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel (29th May 1907), the single authorship of Isaiah (29th June 1908), the authenticity of Messianic and eschatological prophecies and, eventually, the literal truth of Genesis I-III, especially the account of Creation and Fall (30th June 1909). The encyclicals Lamentabili and Pascendi (3rd July, 8th September 1907) reasserted against the modernists the inerrancy of the inspiration of the sacred authors.

[2] Le Pèlerin de l'absolu, 21st November 1903. Bloy's first reference to modernism is in Le Mendiant ingrat, 9th October 1895, to a "pedant" who had challenged his exegeses with the evidence of the Greek texts. He was incensed by the establishment of the Biblical Commission, which he thought unnecessary (Quatre ans, 17th January 1902). He condemned the modernists' rejection of the Vulgate and their challenge to the Mosaic authority of the Pentateuch (ibid., 26th December 1902, 13th September 1903, 15th January 1904). He let the anti-modernist encyclicals pass unnoticed, but showed interest 1911-13 as Maritain's neo-Thomist campaign began and Pius X's disapproval of the innovators became more explicit. He also criticised the anti-dogmatic pseudo-philosophy of "la mystique moderniste" (Au seuil de l'Apocalypse, 10th June 1913). See also his marginalia to Mgr. Turinaz' brochure of 1902, Les Périls de la foi et de la discipline dans l'Eglise de France à l'heure présente [CLB No. 4 (5th Yr.), March-April 1929] where the main threat in modernism was said to be its democratic adherence; Bloy confused the doctrinal with the political movement, as in his treatment of liberal catholicism. In 1904, he asked Vallette to take onto the Mercure de France the abbé Paradis, a moderate supporter of Alfred Loisy. The abbé published an article, "L'Abbé Loisy", in February 1904, defending in L'Evangile et l'Eglise the idea of the evolution of dogma within the Church, the symbolic interpretation of texts, and the theory of interpretation which makes the Church the final arbiter but leaves the texts accessible to historical criticism.

Bloy's own doctrinal themes refer directly back to Pauline texts: the primacy of Charity, which is inspired by the Spirit; the part of Judaism as the foundation of the new covenant of Charity, and the means whereby the whole universe is to be restored; and the rôle of the Church as the Mystic Body of Christ in whom all humanity is redeemed, as all once fell in Adam. The asceticism which Paul sets in the last proposition is not unqualified in Bloy. In Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, he refers to Paul's description of this organic relationship between Christ and his Church as founded on suffering,[1] and asserts that since Christ took on the sins of the world and suffered for its immorality and impenitence,[2] the world must suffer in its turn through the purifying and punitive fire of the Spirit.[3] But there remains a tension between this harshness and the traditional consolations of Marian doctrine, which seem to Bloy to have a higher authority ("le Fait de la Sainte-Vierge parlant avec autorité dans l'Eglise, fait absolument inouï jusqu-là, et qui semble contradictoire au précepte formulé par saint Paul"),[4] and to promise reconciliation. In the image of Mary as the Mystic City of the Apocalypse in which all the Biblical figures are reconciled and fulfilled, it is possible to maintain simultaneously, within a strict rhetorical form, the harshness of Divine Justice and the concept of all-embracing love and forgiveness:

> Enfin, Marie, cette Cité Sainte fondée par Dieu et attendue par Abraham suscitera une génération et une génération, c'est-à-dire les deux hommes que

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 21, Philipp. III, 10; ibid., pp. 25, 70, Coloss. I, 17.

[2] Ibid., p. 100, Gal. III, 13 and II Cor. V, 21; ibid., p. 89, Romans XII, 20.

[3] Ibid., p. 77, I Cor. III, 13; ibid., p. 86, Hebrews X, 35 and XI, 6, 26.

[4] Ibid., p. 30 I Cor. XIV, 34; I Tim. II, 11 (note by Bloy).

> David voyait naître en Elle et les deux Adams ennemis que saint Paul avec de si mortelles angoisses sentait militer en lui. Elle suscitera les fondements éternels des deux fils prodigues, le prodigue de la substance et le prodigue de la justice et elle sera cette Mère qui demeure cachée dans la parabole évangélique peut-être à cause du grand nombre de mercenaires qu'elle est chargée de nourrir dans la Maison du Père prodigue des miséricordes.[1]

The concept of forgiveness is never allowed to appear in isolation from the harsher doctrine. In later texts, where the emphasis is on charity and the virtues of the Spirit described in I Corinthians, it is still made clear that these coexist with and are equivalent to the values of suffering:

> Croix de saint Paul (I Cor. XII, 13). Nunc autem manent, fides, spes, charitas; tria haec; MAIOR autem horum est charitas.[2]

FIDES CHARITAS SPES

The simple Pauline doctrine held less appeal than the imaginative books of the Bible - the New Testament parables and the visions of the Apocalypse, or, in the Old Testament, Genesis, the Prophets, Psalms and Proverbs, and the Song of Songs, all of which provide Messianic and ultimately eschatological imagery. Bloy's interest in these was stimulated in part by direct reading of the Fathers - Bernard and Bonaventure, the Marian allegorists,[3] Jerome, whose exegesis, like Bloy's own, combined wildly imaginative figurative interpretations with strong consciousness of the literal truth of the text, and

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, p. 100.

[2] Le Mendiant ingrat, 10th October 1892.

[3] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 69.

Augustine, whose Homilies on Saint John Bloy consulted several times, although he felt their author wrongly neglected the anagogical sense of Scripture for the moral.[1]

For his exegetical method, Bloy declared himself indebted to Tardif de Moidrey and Ernest Hello. His debt to the former was in fact slight. Tardif's Preface to his Introduction au "Livre de Ruth" stated his primary concern to be the figurative sense of the text, which he adapted to his campaign for clerical reform as an illustration of the response of the ordained religious soul to Christ. In terms which were very confused, he tried to distinguish this mode of interpretation, which he called "moral", from the "allegorical" treatment of the Fathers; and he also claimed originality in his literary presentation of the historical figures with renewed colour and life which increased their persuasive and apologetic value. Bloy imitated this last feature in Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, but on the more important methodological points moved beyond Tardif in relating his allegory to the secular rather than the clerical context and in emphasising its eschatological rather than its moral sense. He fused the principles of Tardif's exegesis with those ideas of the meaning of history which he had acquired from the traditionalists, and asserted that the whole of secular history could, like the Bible, be considered a symbolic revelation, open to interpretation by the same methods[2] -

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[1] Bloy owned in-folios of both Augustine and Jerome [letter Victor Lalotte to Bloy, 9th August 1871 (La R.)]. The catalogue of the Loize exhibition records copies in his possession of Augustine's Traité sur l'Evangile de Saint-Jean et son Epître aux Parthes, Vols I, II, Paris, J.-B. Coignard, 1700, and his Soliloques, Rothomagi, apud Ludovicum Londet, 17th December 1607 [CLB Spec. no. (16th Yr.), March-April 1952]. See also Quatre ans, 4th April 1903; Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 22; Dans les ténèbres, OC IX, 335.

[2] Le Désespéré, OC III, 61; Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, ch. xiii.

thereby establishing a bridge to imply a religious mystery within secular images. The Providential rôle of France, for example, was confirmed by the presence on her coat of arms of the lilies of the parable, and the crowing cock which signalled Peter's betrayal.[1]

More important was Bloy's debt to Ernest Hello, who probably acted as intermediary for Tardif's doctrines.[2] The exegetical method of Hello's Paroles de Dieu was very close to Bloy's own. Hello asserted the depth of the simple words of Scripture, which the exegete was required to approach with faith and simplicity and respect for the interpretations given by the Church. His tools were personal illumination and the example of the Fathers, especially the more imaginative allegorists - Vincent Ferrier, Hugues de Saint-Victor, Albertus Magnus and Bernard. He argued the importance of every detail of the text, inspired by the Spirit - a grandiose concept echoed in Bloy's Le Salut par les Juifs, where each syllable of the Scriptural text is said to be a microcosm of Creation:

> On ne trouvait pas, dans le Livre, une syllabe qui ne se rapportât, en même temps, au passé et à l'avenir, au Créateur et aux créatures, à l'abîme d'en haut et à l'abîme d'en bas, - enveloppant tous

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[1] Le Fils de Louis XVI, OC V, 95.

[2] See G. Rouzet, "L'Abbé René Tardif de Moidrey et Léon Bloy", [CLB No. 3 (11th Yr.), Jan.-Feb. 1935, p. 69], who quotes from a review by Hello of Tardif's Introduction. Hello's exegesis had a mixed reception from his contemporaries; ridiculed by Féval (see his letters to Bloy in Ch. Buet, Paul Féval: Souvenirs d'un ami, Paris, 1887, pp. 134-55), praised by Charles Buet (Buet, op. cit., pp. 160-61), and strongly disliked by Huysmans: "(Hello) vaticine, les bras en l'air et les cheveux au vent, sur des versets de la Bible; il s'y empêtre dans d'enfantines étymologies et se noie dans un flot d'exclamations volubiles et d'apostrophes; mais, malgré leur ton solonnel, ses remarques sur les textes saints sont quasi-nulles" [J.-K. Huysmans, "Bouquins", Echo de Paris, 26th April 1899, in Bulletin Huysmans, No. 49 (38th Yr.), 1965, p. 293].

> les mondes à la fois d'un unique éclair, comme le tournoyant esprit de l'Ecclésiaste qui "passe en considérant les univers in circuitu, et qui revient en ses propres cercles.[1]

In practice, the method produces interpretations which appear strained rather than inspired, as in the meditation on "L'Aveugle-né" in Dans les ténèbres.

Hello's chapter "Le Symbolisme de l'Ecriture" provided most of the Marian figures of Bloy's Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition - Judith, Esther before the King, and the burning bush -, the paradoxical equation of the poor woman of Bethlehem with the triumphant figure of the Apocalypse, and the inspiration and the Scriptural types for Bloy's third section on the tears of Mary.

Bloy also described his methods as based on the principle revealed to him by Anne-Marie - for which he later admitted patristic authority[2] - that all Scripture was a figure of the Trinity: "Cette science, telle que je l'ai conçue ou inventée, partent de ce point que l'Ecriture - c'est-à-dire la Vulgate - n'est que l'Autobiographie divine, peut et doit se définir: l'ILLUMINATION, lieu d'embarquement de tout enseignement théologique et mystique".[3] This narrowed to the assertion that all the figures of the Bible, both good and evil, and finally all those of history, were resolved in Christ and his redemptive suffering on the Cross. This was the central point which all Bloy's exegetical fantasies aimed to elucidate.[4]

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[1] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 47.

[2] Au seuil de l'Apocalypse, 14th June 1913.

[3] Quatre ans, 4th April 1903.

[4] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 56.

Bloy planned a book on exegetical methodology as well as a series of commentaries on individual texts, but never brought any of his projects to fruition apart from the single meditation on "L'Aveuglé" and Le Salut par les Juifs, a commentary on Romans II.[1] This indicates partly a chronic shortness of breath, partly an ultimate lack of interest in theology without some basis in Bloy's present experience, and partly desire to leave mystery unclarified. In Le Salut, assertions of the difficulty of exegesis contribute to the atmosphere of mystification. The figures of Scripture are said to exist in apparent mutual contradiction, though known to relate to a single unity, giving light to the symbols of the world only in a series of "intermittents éclairs".[2]

In Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, Bloy maintained that Old Testament symbolism should be exploited for its persuasive qualities as well as its doctrinal content. The imaginative and affective potentiality of the Old Testament myths was a necessary corrective to the modern tendency to a sterile evangelical Christianity: "Le Nouveau Testament a des racines qui vont jusqu'à l'axe de la terre, et c'est par ces racines que la foi des apôtres et des martyrs doit être représentéedans nos coeurs". The images made an appeal to imagination and heart which was effective even in the absence of intellectual conviction. Bloy had tried in his book to use the Old Testament figures to draw the "new" doctrines of La Salette into the ratifying stream of Catholic tradition, investing them with Biblical majesty, poetry and tenderness.[3]

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[1] Letter to Termier, 21st June 1912; see also J. Maritain, Carnet de notes, Paris, 1965, pp. 79-80 (entry for 31st August 1909).

[2] Le Salut par les Juifs, ch. xiii. For an unpublished page on the mystery of Scripture, possibly and introduction to the projected series of commentaries, see CLB No. 1 (9th Yr.), Sept.-Oct. 1932, pp. 3-4.

[3] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 103-109.

He tried also to improve on this effect by imaginative reworking of the original figure. In Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, an account of Abraham's intercession on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, a type of Marian intercession, moves between an abstruse numerical exegesis and a familiar conversation between the patriarch and God.[1] A later work such as La Femme pauvre employs the technique more frequently. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is rewritten from a series of new perspectives: a colloquial interjection sets the point in the modern context - "Moi, je me fous des pauvres! dit le mandarin" - and Abraham is elevated to a major rôle in order to explain the moral in a direct address consoling the beggar.[2] In Marchenoir's Epithalamium, the wedding-guest of the parable has the new function of pleading the necessity of vicarious suffering:

> "Les pleurs et les grincements des dents du misérable étaient si forts qu'on les entendait à travers le mur et que les portes lamées de bronze tremblaient sur leurs gonds, comme si une rafale puissante les eût assiégées.
>
> Vous ne savez pas qui était cet individu et je ne le sais pas plus que vous, en vérité. Cependant, il me sembla que sa plainte remplissait la terre.[3]

The parable of the two debtors is first transcribed directly from the liturgy, and then reset as the modern problem of the exploitation of the poor by the property-owners.

Bloy develops the affective appeal of particular figures, such as that of the Virgin, and the pure poetry of others, as in the list

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 65-67 (rpt. Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 65-68).

[2] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 172-73.

[3] Ibid., p. 191.

of Septenary images in Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, which express the complementary relationship between the Virgin (Creation) and the Trinity.[1] In his remorseless account of the plagues of Egypt, turned to a sustained denunciation of the abuses of modern society, fusion of the Biblical image with modern symbols produces a repellent grotesque. The children of La Salette stretch out the prophet's rod:

> . . . sur les fleuves, sur les ruisseaux, sur les lacs, sur les marécages de l'opinion publique et les eaux stagnantes ou agitées que contenaient tous ces réservoirs de la frivolité du monde se sont changés en un sang corrompu et brûlé de concupiscence qui nous fait mourir. Ensuite par la même puissance de ce signe méprisé, ces enfants pleins d'ignorance ont fait pleuvoir sur nous dans une succession terrible, les grenouilles immondes de l'apostolat scientifique contre Dieu, les moustiques dévorants du vaudeville et de la calembredaine soi-disant française; les mouches gorgées et impures du coche social; la simple peste pour le gros du bétail humain et les ulcères turgescents pour l'élite des corrompus; le tonnerre des blasphèmes et la grêle de l'impôt; l'armée des sauterelles et de la spéculation ailée; ensuite, et subitement, les ténèbres palpables; enfin la mort inattendue et non moins soudaine de tous les premiers-nés de l'orgueil depuis le jeune héritier de notre dernier Pharaon impérial jusqu'à l'octogénaire planteur de nos arbres démocratiques, héritier lui-même des plus sordides ambitions révolutionnaires.[2]

Vulgate rhythms incorporated into Bloy's text consolidate the prophetic force of his imagery. As in Claudel, the effect is less one of genuine imitation than of a grandiose pastiche which combines the techniques of Biblical exhortation and classical rhetoric. Bloy's deliberate cultivation of this effect can be seen in a comparison of

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 70-71.

[2] Ibid., pp. 37-38.

the two states of the text of Mary's prophecy from Calvary, which appeared first in Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition and then in Le Désespéré reattributed to Christ on the Cross, with its form radically simplified, its imagery reduced and a colloquial rhythm introduced.[1] The types of Christ specified in the first text (Jacob, Joshua, Moses and David) are condensed in the second into a vague general reference, and the impression they create of the mysterious grandeur of Calvary, which has its origins in Biblical history, is derived from a more accessible and weightier symbolism. The torches carried by Christ's predecessors form an aureole around the Cross, their light at once illuminating and lit by his suffering face - the whole, an image of the mysterious interdependance of Calvary and history: "Il vous regardera avec la Face de sa Passion, mais ruisselante, cette fois, de la lumière de tous les symboles préfigurateurs que ce prodige allumera, devant lui, comme des flambeaux ...".

The syntax of the second passage is easier, with the long, lyrical sentences of the first book, which try to catch the domineering note of Biblical rhetoric, punctuated into smaller and more manageable units. Capitalisation and underlining emphasise those phrases of deceptive simplicity, lost in the first version, which Bloy considers merit the reader's thoughtful attention:

> Toute la terre apprendra pour en agoniser d'épouvante que cette Croix était son Amour lui-même, c'est-à-dire l'Esprit Saint caché sous un travestissement inimaginable. Cette Croix qui le dépasse de tous les côtés pour exprimer dans la folie de cet amour, toutes les adorables exagérations de votre Rachat, cette Croix va dilater sur toute la terre ses bras terrifiants, les montagnes et les vallées se liquéfieront comme la cire, et mon Fils véritablement

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 97-98; Le Désespéré, OC III, 279-80.

> délivré et descendu de son lit nuptial posera de nouveau sur le sol d'Adam ses deux pieds percés pour savoir si vous tiendrez parole en croyant en lui. (Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, pp. 97-98)
>
> Toute la terre apprendra, pour en agoniser d'épouvante, que ce Signe était mon Amour lui-même, c'est-à-dire l'ESPRIT-SAINT, caché sous un travestissement inimaginable ...
> Cette Croix qui me dépasse de tous les côtés, pour exprimer, dans sa Folie, les adorables exagérations de votre Rachat, Elle va dilater sur toute la terre ses Bras torréfiants. Les montagnes et les vallées se liquéfieront comme la cire, et votre Dieu, décloué de son lit sanglant, posera de nouveau sur le sol d'Adam ses deux pieds percés, pour savoir si vous tiendrez parole en croyant en lui. (Le Désespéré, p. 280)

Certain features which remain constant in both texts represent Bloy's debt to his Vulgate model; the nominal syntax ("une terreur inconnue recrutera . . . la multitude tremblante des mauvais troupeaux"; "votre liberté de pourriture"; "les adorables exagérations de votre Rachat"; "les épouvantes de Dieu militeront contre les hommes"); the formal and heavy rhythms, produced by the preservation of archaic forms such as the imperfect subjunctive ("Il ne m'a plus suffi que vous me ressemblassiez; j'ai senti, moi, l'Impassible, une soif divine de me rendre semblable à vous, pour que vous devinssiez mes égaux . . ."); affective displacing of epithet ("les adorables exaggérations"; "un puissant sommeil"); preference for vocabulary which comes close to the Latin original ("lessiver", "militer", "habitacle", "vermine", "châtier", "consommer"); stock Biblical phrases ("semblable à vous", "trois fois sainte"); and such conspicuous rhetorical features as the use of plurals or of personification to impose concrete quality on abstract nouns ("les repentirs du Père"; "les épouvantes de Dieu"; "ma Paternité n'aura plus d'entrailles, sinon pour vous dévorer"), periphrasis ("premier-né de l'Espérance"; "cette épouse d'ignominie" [the Cross], and litote ("toute justice sera consommée en vous dans les épouvantables Mains ardentes que vous aurez blasphémées!").

In the prophecy of Israel on which Le Salut par les Juifs draws to its close, Bloy contrives to retain the character of prophetic utterance which suggests the closeness of his exegesis to its Scriptural sources whilst at the same time maintaining in this the clarity and coherence which are necessary for polemic force.[1] In the central section, two direct translations strengthen the relationship, together with lengthy allusions which follow the text closely. Shorter phrases carry Biblical reminiscences ("le Seigneur des Seigneurs"; "Celui qui est"); whilst grammatical constructions imitate those of Vulgar Latin ("elles vivent toujours dans la pérennité du symbole"; "en cet abandon de Celui qui est votre force et votre espoir"; "Israel confident de l'Esprit de Dieu"; "le Promis appelé Consolateur"). Most important is the imitation of Biblical rhythms, in repetitions ("les deux soeurs prostituées dont parle Ezéchiel . . . ; qu'elles . . . et qu'elles . . ."), and in the two-part divisions of the sentences, which imitate the movement of the Psalms. In the following example, the increasing complexity of the subdivisions in the parts produces a surging assertive rhetoric:

> Celui qui est ne sait pas autre chose que se répéter Lui-même,/et le Seigneur des Seigneurs a toujours soif de souffrir ...
>
> Quand le Promis appelé Consolateur viendra prendre possession de son héritage,/il faudra nécessairement que le Christ vous ait quittés,//puisqu'il déclare que ce Paraclet ne pourrait venir s'il ne s'en allait auparavant . . .
>
> La Passion recommencera,//non plus au milieu d'un peuple farouche et détesté, mais au carrefour et à l'ombilic de tous les peuples,/et les sages apprendront que Dieu n'a pas fermé ses fontaines,// mais que l'Evangile du Sang qu'ils croyaient la fin des révélations était, à son tour, comme un Ancien Testament chargé d'annoncer le Consolateur de Feu.

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[1] Le Salut par les Juifs, ch. xxxiii.

The apologetic effectiveness of Bloy's new brand of rhetoric is vouched for by Valéry Larbaud:

> . . . à force de lire et de relire la Bible, tant en latin qu'en français (dans la version de Lemaistre de Sacy), il parvint à donner une forme personnelle à son style et à devenir un des grands maîtres de la langue française. Tel est le point de vue technique et c'est de ce point de vue technique qu'il convient de le juger. La substance de son oeuvre n'est qu'un 'rajeunissement' des vieux thèmes de l'art oratoire chrétien, tirés principalement des Epîtres de Saint Paul. Tant de maîtrise technique, tant d'art, mis au service de ces thèmes, ne pouvaient manquer de leur donner un aspect complètement neuf et de leur conférer une grande puissance en face de la platitude quasi universelle de la littérature de la "libre pensée". C'est ainsi qu'il réussit à convertir bien des gens: il m'a été d'une grande utilité en diverses circonstances, alors que je ne pouvais absolument pas digérer les commentaires 'officiels' des Epîtres.[1]

The liturgy of the Church lends itself to similar purposes. This had provided a standard source of poetic effect from Baudelaire onwards. Claudel described his first visit to Notre-Dame as an aesthetic investigation in the Baudelairean spirit: "Je commençais alors à écrire et il me semblait que dans les cérémonies catholiques, considérées avec un dilettantisme supérieur, je trouverais un excitant approprié et la matière de quelques exercises décadents".[2] Within the Revival proper, this exploitation became more complex, coinciding with a new interest in the liturgy among the hierarchy which produced a number of reforms: an attempt to replace local usages by a standard ultramontane form, in the interests of unity, and coupled with this, efforts to make the meaning of the liturgy more accessible to the general public and

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[1] Valéry Larbaud, Journal inédit, Vol. IX, Paris, 1954, p. 164 (entry for 24th November 1917).

[2] P. Claudel, Ma conversion, in Pages de prose, 2nd ed., Paris, 1944, p. 276.

to improve the presentation of the ritual in order to restore a sense of the dignity of the cult.[1] Huysmans was still interested in the aesthetics of the Mass, but in their own right, not as matter for decadent exercise,and acknowledged also the disciplinary effect of the liturgy, and its universalisation of subjective states which compensated for individual dryness.[2] Claudel and Péguy reversed the decadent procedure by using their poetry to explore the meaning of the liturgy. Péguy's discussion of the Sorrows of Mary in Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc, was an attempt to reinfuse into the liturgy the sense of everyday realities which Jeanne felt the Church was in danger of losing; the poem moves constantly between the magnificent Heavenly Queen of the litany and the simple, grief-stricken Mother of Nazareth.

In contrast to this, Bloy uses the liturgical forms as a means to impose a second perspective on natural experience; he planned at one point to link to the liturgy the stages of Napoleon's career, in order to show "l'ossature surnaturelle de sa destinée".[3] The existence of a liturgical reference transfigures the experience to which it is applied, giving it dignity and meaning. The contrast with experience not so treated becomes glaring - a strong apologetic point in the diaries. The simple presence of the liturgy, which is the mode of expression of a redeemed Church, introduces a note of optimism into the most recalcitrant experience. It is particularly interesting to see this deve-

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[1] See R. Aubert, Le Pontificat de Pie IX, pp. 471-74. The writers of the Revival took particular - if not always favourable - notice of dom Guéranger's L'Année liturgique, which was published in 9 vols., 1841-46.

[2] P. Cogny, J.-K. Huysmans à la recherche de l'unité, Paris, 1953, pp. 223-25.

[3] Le Pèlerin de l'absolu, 29th August 1911.

loped by means of the dark sections of the Calendar on which Bloy drew for preference - the liturgies of the Mass, of Holy Week, of the Dead, and of the Dolorous Virgin.

In Le Désespéré, the drama of the Mass is sustained through a transcription of the entire office, in which the universal reference of each stage is paradoxically brought out by the introduction of Marchenoir's personal suffering through his passion for Véronique.[1] He enters the Mass for refuge, in order to rest briefly in the stability of the liturgical forms: "Son âme religieuse, aux trois quarts submergée par le diabolisme de la passion, prenait pied quelques instants, sur ces formes saintes, au-delà desquelles il pressentait la gloire des pitiés divines". The motifs of sacrifice and union through which God speaks eternally in the Mass are echoed through Marchenoir's passion. From the Creed onwards: "Il trouvait, analogiquement, sa place dans les péripéties et les phases liturgiques du vaste drame de propitiation qui s'accomplissait sous les yeux du contemplatif obsédé". The oblation of the Host and Chalice recall his own weakness, paraphrased by the music of the organ. The Sanctus provides release, suggesting the intercessory offering of Véronique, whose redemption is partly his work. The hymn O salutaris, which speaks of Christ's substitution, provides final consolation. The whole is for Marchenoir a shattering emotional experience which the frankness of his responses invites the reader to share:

> Toutes les cérémonies, tous les actes particuliers de ce Sacrifice, que les théologiens regardent comme le plus grand acte qui puisse être accompli sur terre pénétraient Marchenoir jusqu'aux intestins et jusqu'aux moelles. Il se saturait de la Dilectation

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[1] Le Désespéré, Pt. V, ch. lxiv.

> supérieure et n'en devenait ensuite que plus abordable aux inférieures sollicitations de son animalité . . . . Il sortait enfin, les nerfs rompus, la tête sonnante, excédé jusqu'à défaillir.

The Office of the Dead inspires similar emotional turmoil by its reminders of the Pascalian paradox of the majesty and wretchedness of man: "la Liturgie mortuaire de l'Eglise, - la plus grande chose terrestre à ses yeux . . . il y avait dans l'appareil religieux de la mort une force de vertige qui le confisquait tout entier avec un absolu despotisme".[1] The majesty of death is the background note in La Chevalière de la Mort, where the patterning of Marie-Antoinette's life on the Dies irae expresses her rôle of expiatory victim for the failings of the Bourbons; whilst the events of La Femme pauvre are framed in two epigraphs from the Office taken from the Psalms for the dead, setting for the first part, "L'Epave des ténèbres", the theme of darkness and longing for redemption and for the second, "L'Epave de la lumière", that of judgement through fire.

In Holy Week, Bloy's attention centres on the offices of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. The central section and the main argument of Le Salut par les Juifs pivot on the Good Friday liturgy depicting the first High Mass on Calvary, historical and theological basis of the Catholic rite, which justifies Bloy's interpretation of the prevaricatory mission of the Jews.[2] Two appeals for repentance - the lamentation over Jerusalem, and Christ's objurgation from the Cross - are taken directly from the offices. Bloy adds his own graphic paraphrase of the account of the Passion given in the Epistle for Good

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 82.

[2] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 42-52.

Friday, which he imagines eternally suspended in the rite until the conversion of the Jews abolishes all the forms of the Church militant. The Prayer for the Jews in the liturgy for the same day carries the eternal expectancy of the Church. Extracts from the Office of the Dolorous Virgin are worked into this section to illustrate the compassionate sufferings by which the stasis is to be ended. The compassion which the Middle Ages offered to Mary is expressed in a conflation of the Gradual (Dolorosa et lacrymabilis es, Virgo Maria) and the key verse of the hymn for Lauds:

> Fac ut tecum plangere.
> Fac ut portem Christi mortem,
> Passionis fac consortem,
> Et plagas recolere.

Bloy's translation adds extra force to the appeal for identification with Christ's suffering: "Fais-moi le miroir de ses plaies".

Throughout all these adaptations, Bloy made a conspicuous attempt to retain the integrity of the "original" - ascetic - meaning of the liturgy. La Femme pauvre criticised severely the neo-Christian approach of Wagnerism, in which, Bloy felt, the liturgy was reduced to a conceptual vehicle for a purely personal philosophy or even to a mere source of literary effects.[1]

It was with his adaptations of Biblical and liturgical forms to the interpretation of human experience that Bloy broke most interesting new ground for Catholic literature. He was less original and less convincing when demonstrating the relationship between natural and supernatural elements with the tools of secular art. Most often, he accepted the fact that the reader would find his

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 155-62.

terms of reference unacceptable, and impenitently based plots, characters, attitudes and interpretations on his own prejudices. The action of his novels moves in a series of coincidental meetings and Providential interventions; in La Femme pauvre, Clotilde's fate depends on chance encounters with the missionary, Gacougnol and Léopold, and the dénouement is forced by Léopold's barbaric prayer offering his life in exchange for the punishment of the two bourgeoises. Action is interpreted in visions and dreams, and characters are endowed with supernatural virtues and gifts of prophecy and of magnetism. Lengthy digressions are employed for points Bloy considers too complex or too alien to his reader to bear incorporation into the main text, such as that on the angels in La Femme pauvre, or on mystic contemplation in Le Désespéré.

At the same time, he made some attempt to infuse plausibility into the supernatural dimension. Manipulation of the dimensions of time and space breaks the conventions of realism and lessens the contrasts between natural and supernatural action: "L'homme est si surnaturel que ce qu'il réalise le moins, ce sont les notions du temps et de l'espace".[1] Action is presented in projection, in prophecy, or in retrospect. New layers of interest are introduced through intercalated anecdotes, such as the story of the vegetarian in La Femme pauvre, or by historical parallels and comparisons, as Marchenoir's synthesis of historical symbolism in Le Désespéré, or, in La Femme pauvre, the digressions on the Middle Ages and Byzantium. Imaginative use of tenses makes its contribution; in Le Désespéré, Véronique's

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 130.

prostitute past appears to Marchenoir in a nightmare vision, frozen in a continuous imperfect.[1]

Bloy's language creates an atmosphere in which metamorphosis and exaggeration rapidly become commonplace. In Le Révélateur du globe, high rhetoric and Baudelairean lyricism are used to recreate the reality of the figure of the devil, blunted by decadent over-use, which Bloy needs at this point to illustrate by antithesis, in the hagiographical tradition, the importance of Columbus' redemptive mission.[2] He bases the kingdom of the devil on the Baudelairean concept of the irrevocable, which is the moral paralysis induced by materialist belief in the unchangeableness of past action and experience: "nuit d'impuissance . . . chaîne de ténèbres". The kingdom envelops the whole of natural experience; Bloy evokes the monstrous figure of Satan straddling the whole world:

> Il ceint la terre de ses deux bras immenses comme d'une écharpe de deuil et de mort . . . Satan est assis sur le haut de la terre, les pieds sur les cinq parties du monde et rien d'humain ne s'accomplit sans qu'il intervienne, sans qu'il soit intervenu et sans qu'il doive intervenir.[3]

In Le Désespéré, the caricature of the pornographic novelist Properce Beauvivier (Catulle Mendès) gradually builds up the likeness between the devil and the writer, "ce Salisseur d'âmes", into a case of near-possession. Marchenoir's frequentation of Beauvivier's literary circle is described as "L'Epreuve diabolique". The movement and the colours of the imagery of Mendès' physical portrait effects a metamorphosis of the man into Serpent:

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 107.

[2] Le Révélateur, Pt. I, ch. iii.

[3] A letter from Huysmans dated 1334 praises Bloy' depiction here of "un diable d'une splendide affreuseté" (Boll. II, 93-94).

> Properce, évidemment prêt à tout entendre, avait pris une attitude de séduction. Il s'était levé et accoudé à la cheminée, faisant face à Marchenoir assis devant lui. Celui de ses deux bras qui soutenaient sa désirable personne laissait pendre, au rebord du marbre, une experte main, fuselée par la pratique des nageantes caresses, et qu'on s'étonnait de ne pas voir membraneuse comme le pied d'un albatros. L'autre main complimentait sa barbe en mitre, dont la fourche soyeuse avait l'air de bifurquer sur quelque invisible croupion. L'une de ses jambes fines de Sardanaple accoûtumé à languissamment s'ébattre était ramenée sur l'autre, la pointe en bas, comme un serpent qui s'enlacerait à un autre serpent. Le torse flexible, tabernacle de son coeur pourri, transparaissait au travers de la fluide flanelle, couleur crême et lisérée de vert d'ortie, d'un pet-en-l'air matinal.[1]

The decadent concept of the diabolism of passion acquires new meaning in La Femme pauvre. Léopold's confession of his incestuous relationship with his sister, at which his "demonic" father connived, admits its diabolical status: "une chose inouïe, une frénésie de damnés . . . . Dès le premier regard que nous échangeâmes, je sentis que j'avais les fers aux pieds, les fers aux mains, et sur les épaules un carcan de fer".[2]

Clotilde's sense of being tormented by the demons as her baby dies carries conviction in its resemblance to a familiar psychological experience; in her sleep, she is half-conscious of phenomena which only she can feel and hear: "une voix panique hurlant à la mort . . . . Des heurts mystérieux d'impatience et de colère . . . la sensation d'une griffe dans ses cheveux". Her revulsion at the damp, darkness and filth of the apartment in the Petit Montrouge has already made room

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 234.

[2] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 185-86.

for the suggestion that the place is inhabited by the devil: "La puanteur est un fourrier qui court en avant des Larves cruelles, quand il leur est permis de remonter du fond de l'abîme, et la peur froide l'accompagne . . . . [C'était] un de ces lieux maudits . . . où l'Ennemi des hommes prend son délice et se met à califourchon . . . .

When the baby dies, the physical shock envelops the couple in a terrifying silence which opens windows into the unknown: "un silence énorme, un de ces silences qui font perceptible la rumeur des petites cataractes artérielles".[1]

The bourgeois malice which Bloy satirises in La Femme pauvre in the bigot Madame Chapuis, the voracious property-owner Mademoiselle Planude, and the respectable housewives Madame Grand and Madame Poulot, is easily transformed into diabolical forms. The malevolent exchange of the two housewives under the window of the sick Clotilde becomes a mediaeval grotesque of "mots monstrueux, rires diaboliques . . . une voix qu'on aurait pu croire évadée de la fosse . . . hurlait . . . croassait".[2] In other texts, the lethargy and indifference of secular life is offered as the particular form of the devil's presence in the modern world - the "non-being" which Hello's book on Renan had characterised as diabolical. The Exégèse des lieux communs resets the commonplaces of everyday intercourse in the cosmic patterns of Catholic redemption to point by contrast the inadequacy of their usual meanings and to justify by the Catholic context the use of Hello's epithet.

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 204-205.

[2] Ibid., p. 239.

The idea is given more sustained allegorical treatment by later authors - Bernanos, for example, in his Monsieur Ouine.

Finally, Bloy acknowledged the evocative quality of those mysteries of human experience which are accessible only to imaginative description. Marchenoir's interpretation of history in Le Désespéré is based entirely on these: "l'Amour, la Mort, la Douleur, l'Oubli, avaient mis en commun leurs paraboles pour un éternel négoce d'errata, où chacun tirait à lui toutes les ténèbres".[1] The theme of death in particular lends itself to new explorations:

> La Vie et la Mort. Tout le monde pense ou croit penser qu'il n'y a que ces deux mots qui aient un sens précis et indiscutable. Mais les imaginatifs et les poètes en ont tellement abusé qu'on ne sait plus exactement ce qu'il faut entendre.[2]

Bloy satirised the efforts of the nineteenth-century bourgeois to evade the mystery of death by a superstitious cult or by replacing the Church's teachings on the afterlife and the second death of the soul with the concept of total annihilation, and forced back on public attention the neglected majesty and horror of death:

> . . . la seule souveraine qui eût le pouvoir d'ennoblir tout de bon la fripouille humaine . . . . La charogne du plus immonde bourgeois se calant et se cantonnant dans sa bière pour une sereine déliquescence lui paraissait un témoignage surprenant de l'originelle dignité de l'homme. Marchenoir avait toujours été rempli de conjectures devant tous les signes funèbres.[3]

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 134.

[2] Dans les ténèbres, OC IX, 295.

[3] Le Désespéré, OC III, 82.

The conjectures Marchenoir offers prove in practice to be the standard Catholic teaching on the theme, which maps out the mystery with meticulous clarity. The impression of mysteriousness is retained by images of veils, shadows and darkness, but only as a gloss over dogmatic certitude. Bloy describes his own obsession with the doctrine of hell, an irrefutable fact:

> Dernièrement, j'ai vu dans mon sommeil un de mes amis en enfer, non pas l'enfer sans terreur et sans spiritualité du vieux Dante, mais un enfer inouï où je ne voyais souffrir que l'âme seule. La souffrance du corps restait dans une Ténèbre et dans un Mystère si monstrueux que je me suis réveillé ruisselant de sueur, glacé et tremblant. Je suis positivement hanté par l'Enfer.[1]

His inherent morbid disposition was intensified by his experiences in the Franco-Prussian war and by the shock of deaths in his own intimate circle, and encouraged by the images of contemporary devotion and, especially, of secular literature. The influence of the whole decadent movement, as represented by Baudelaire, Poe, Barbey and Villiers, filtered into Bloy's presentation of his theme.

The concept of the identity of love and death appears in his work both in its original Baudelairean context, to draw the destructive nature of passion, and also reworked in a Catholic sense in which death carries with it the hope of liberation:

> La mort est blanche, lumineuse, pleine d'espérance parce qu'il n'existe pas de néant futur. C'est ainsi, qu'oubliant le désespoir, Baudelaire l'a chantée un jour . . . . Dieu sait avec quels accents! La mort est une vierge blonde aux yeux baissés, la pureté inscrutable que les poètes les plus profanes ont célébré sans le savoir en lui donnant le nom étrange et hermétique de l'amour.[2]

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[1] Letter to M. Ménard, 9th January 1877 (Boll. I, 296).

[2] Letter to Rollinat, 8th August 1882 (Boll. II, 21).

The two are combined in Le Désespéré in Marchenoir's acceptance of his passion for Véronique, which he forecasts will effect his own destruction and herredemption.[1] The same concept is also expressed in the Pascalian paradox of the sleep of death as an awakening: "Réveillez-moi! crie l'âme vers Dieu. Réponse: Depuis la chute vous n'avez pas cessé de dormir profondément. La mort envisagée comme un réveil. Juste le contraire du lieu commun: le sommeil de la mort".[2]

Images of putrefaction and physical decay taken from the decadents are adapted to present doctrinal points. Poe's plague ship appears in the article "Le Siècle des charognes" to denounce the apparently healthy social and religious body of France as dead and rotting; Baudelaire's La Charogne is the model for the prose-poem in Le Désespéré on the decaying body of the beloved, where the formal exercise in poeticisation of recalcitrant matter is only a springboard from which to glimpse the indescribable agonies of the damned soul:

> Cette affreuseté de la putréfaction sépulcrale qui est à faire se cabrer les cavalcades de l'Apocalypse, - ah! ce n'est rien, c'est la beauté même, comparée à l'infamation surnaturelle de l'image de Dieu dans ce brûlant pourrissoir! . . . le diadème de crapauds, les yeux de feu luisant au fond des arcades de vermine, les bras visqueux, tuméfiés, pompés par les limaces ou les araignées, et l'épouvantable ventre plein d'antennes et d'ondulements . . .[3]

But the highest meaning of death is religious sacrifice! A meditation in Dans les ténèbres on the First World War ("La Frontière") describes the dead soldiers forming a bulwark against the incursions

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 80.

[2] L'Invendable, 22nd August 1905.

[3] Le Désespéré, OC III, 83-34.

of the Prussian barbarians by virtue of their dying agonies; the short story, "La Messe des petits crevés", in which the Eucharist is celebrated on the battlefield, brings out the ramifications of the Catholic symbolism in the identification of the soldiers' sacrifice with that of Calvary. This is also the aspect developed in Bloy's novels, where the theme of death plays a major part as a new perspective in which to regroup and reassess natural experience.

From the deathbed of Marchenoir's father the first part of Le Désespéré undertakes a review of Marchenoir's past sins and his conversion, and the conversion of Véronique. In the light of the isolation, detachment, and new scale of values which the presence of death implies, this can be a reinterpretation. Taken in isolation the death of Cain's father is an impenetrable mystery. During the death-agony itself, which perpetuated the silence and separation of their lifetimes, no reconciliation was possible; but with the completion of the agony Marchenoir is able to assimilate his father's death to the death of his son and his two mistresses, and from the whole group elaborate patterns of expiation and vicarious suffering which alleviate the sense of guilt in which he enveloped each relationship. He re-interprets this as concern for the final salvation of an atheist father and for mistresses damned by Catholic doctrine.

On the occasion of his father's funeral, Marchenoir challenges orthodoxy on the latter point, querying the rigorous ascetic division between love of God and love of creatures which consigns the dead women to hell for having offered him "consolation", but finding no ready solution here. The painful and humiliating deaths he devises

for both women suggest that he in fact agrees with their condemnation. His last statement is evasive; solution and problem are identified in the total enigma of death, where the only justifiable resort is to prayerful resignation and protracted remorse.

Marchenoir tries to see the passing of his father as marking the end of a stage in his life, from which he attempts a new start, destroying all his childish relics and memories. But the figures of the past are not easily rejected; like Véronique in the Bourbon tomb, Marchenoir is oppressed by their phantom presence, from which his own suffering is the only distraction. Remorse imposed by the dead, who represent past sins and errors, can be exorcised only by the protracted expiatory suffering of the living, and in this sense must inevitably condition the patterns and developments of their lives.

The guilt-ridden Marchenoir is fascinated by the peaceful death of the Carthusian, whose ascetic existence gives no occasion for remorse.[1] For him, death is the joyful passage into the presence of the Judge of a soul confident of its own merit. This confidence abolishes the disjunctive sense of time and with it all the anguish of death. The monk's sights have been set from the beginning not on the transient, but on eternal virtue:

> Pour ces âmes penchées sur l'abîme, la vie représente un certain poids de mérite et voilà tout. Au point de vue absolu "le Temps ne fait rien à l'affaire" de l'Eternité. L'essentiel, c'est d'être confirmé en grâce, au bout d'un siècle ou au bout d'un jour.[2]

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, pp. 121-22.

[2] Ibid., p. 123.

The suffering imposed on Marchenoir through the rest of the novel is the alternative to virtue. It culminates in his death agony, which is described in such a way as to bring out its conformity with the Agony of Christ in whose merits Marchenoir can at last be seen to share. The movement begins in a letter to Leverdier, which contains echoes of the farewell discourse on the Mount of Olives and references to the thirst of Christ's Agony which symbolises desire for the salvation of others. Véronique shares his Passion in a Marian rôle, her madness tormenting him to the end, as she fails to distinguish Saviour and tormentor; for the Virgin, who is redeemed by her compassionate suffering, these must be identical. The actual death agony is presented as the supreme paradox of mystic union - "Je convole maintenant aux angoisses nuptiales de ma définitive agonie"[1] - in which Bloy underlines Marchenoir's isolation, unconsoled by Leverdier or by the priest, which imitates Christ's dereliction on the Cross. The agony becomes enigmatic as the haunting sins of Marchenoir's past accumulate around his deathbed in the form of angels and demons struggling for his soul, but at last the enigma resolves. Christ descends to absolve the sufferer, and Marchenoir dies to the sound of the Angelus, symbol of the inauguration of a new kingdom.

As its epigraphs suggest, La Femme pauvre also takes the context of death as the condition of spiritual development. Clotilde's dream, closing the first movement, throws into relief the sacrificial deaths which are to contribute to her salvation. The cycle, inaugurated by an appeal from the dead in purgatory for Clotilde's compassion, moves from the phantom of Gacougnol, which disintegrates in the act of clothing her, to the vision of Marchenoir labouring through a protracted

[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, p. 314.

existence with his burden of suffering, and ends with Léopold's slow destruction by flames. The dream projects the main events of the second part, whose action is composed of a rapidly-moving narrative sequence of deaths.

It is reflected back by a parallel section near the beginning of the second movement where Clotilde considers, this time in retrospect, the symbolic sense of the same deaths. The inspiration for her review is a reading of the Lives of the Martyrs, which introduces the theme of vicarious suffering, deliberately related to the accounts which follow: "Alors elle se sent appuyé à une colonne et peut regarder en arrière .... Que de choses en ce court espace de cinq années!"[1] The death of Marchenoir in ignominy carries with it the promise of spiritual resurrection and renewal. (This is the same point as is made by the description of Léopold's baptism in the images of the sacrament of Extreme Unction.) The death of the baby, Lazare, brings the supernatural realm into the centre of human experience, being the closest image of humanity's loss of Paradisical innocence; whilst that of Bohémond de l'Isle-de-France (Villiers de l'Isle-Adam), accompanied to the grave by the demonic laughter of Madame Poulot and the prayers of Clotilde, reveals the unsuspected ramifications of human solidarity.

The pauper cemetery at Bagneux, where Marchenoir and the baby are buried, provides a pretext to halt the action and present a sustained meditation on the theme. As at the Charterhouse, it is life which is the illusion: "la mort existe si peu, qu'elle est, en réalité,

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 174.

une chose qu'on prend pour une autre".[1] The turbulence of the world is contrasted with the peace and repose of death, which is where true existence begins. Clotilde is not harassed by the dead, but instead asserts their existence and reality by a voluntary identification of their interests, guilt, and liberation with her own. The interchange of offices between living and dead bridges the limits of time and space; the past becomes benevolent as a result of her submission to it. The Missionary of the first part reappears as her mentor and protector:

> Mais je suis sûre de l'avoir vu, dans mes rêves, ce vieillard tout cassé, tout émietté par plusieurs mille ans de sépulture, et bien qu'il ne parlât pas, j'ai deviné que c'était un homme de mon sang qui avait dû être grand parmi les autres hommes, dans quelque contrée sans nom, antérieurement à toutes les histoires, et qu'il était chargé mystérieusement, de préférence à tout autre, de veiller sur moi ....[2]

His presence recalls the promise that Clotilde is to be fulfilled in flames, the image on which the novel closes, conveying the sense of purpose and achievement and of a new beginning which Bloy attributes to death. The note of conscious art here - as in the overall construction of the novel - is intense; suggesting an effort to align doctrine and experience which could imply a less wholehearted belief in the compatibility of the two than the overt statements of the novel would have us accept.

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 258.

[2] Ibid., p. 260.

## Section III

### The Theme of Suffering

> Trois dédicaces à un religieux.
> Vie de Mélanie: On demande un peu de pitié pour Dieu.
> Celle qui pleure: On demande quelqu'un qui pleure avec Notre-Dame de Compassion.
> Le Vieux de la montagne: On demande un peu de miséricorde pour le vieux pauvre qui souffre aux pieds de Marie sur la Montagne. (Au seuil de l'Apocalypse, 11th March 1913)

The autobiographical basis of much of Bloy's material has had the effect of leading many critics to concentrate almost exclusively on the personal element in that philosophy of suffering which is the most important aspect of his work. Petit writes: "De sa propre expérience, de sa méditation sur la souffrance humaine, Léon Bloy a tiré toute une mystique de la douleur . . . ."[1] Without wishing to deny the place of Bloy's personal suffering in motivating his choice of philosophical attitude, it is useful to consider this together with the other elements which provide the vehicles without which he could not have formulated and rationalised this experience - the secular experience of his period and the contemporary religious interpretation of doctrines and dogmas connected with the theme.[2] In Bloy's

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[1] J. Petit, Léon Bloy, Paris, 1966, p. 39.

[2] Bloy's thought anticipates those themes of the 1880's analysed in de Vogüé's Le Roman russe of 1886: the rise of pessimism, together with the nihilistic revolt which de Vogüé too considers the first condition of moral renewal; interest in the asceticism of primitive and Byzantine Christianity; and the idea of compassion, which the count interprets in a humanitarian context and to which he relates the notion of human solidarity in suffering. Huysmans' A Rebours appeared in 1884, with its study of Schopenhauerian pessimism. A less complex Romantic melancholy and sentimentality still had considerable vogue.

final presentation of his ideas, as the quotation above suggests, all three elements are fused.

One of the most striking features of Bloy's work is its consistent reference to forms and authorities outside the raw material of his own experience. His earliest literary formulations of his ideas on suffering are non-autobiographical. The article "La Maison-Dieu" of 1879 is a study of reversibility in the contemplative orders and its expressions are theological; Le Révélateur du globe is an historical and hagiographical work; and even Le Désespéré, where the structural point of interest is certainly autobiographical, emphasises resonances far beyond the personal. The ninth chapter of the novel, in which Bloy synthesises the problem of suffering in its nineteenth-century formulations before embarking on discussion of his own experience of despair, sets the context as universal: "tout ce qui a quelque qualité virile, depuis une trentaine d'années, se précipite éperdument au désespoir". Philosophers and writers, political and social commentators, join in acknowledging the decay of modern civilisation, accelerated by the publicity they themselves have given to the inadequacy of the Catholic and rationalist philosophies on which this had been built. Ignoring the more abstract discourses of the philosophers, Bloy concentrates on the emotional and imaginative descriptions of disillusionment given by the Russian historian and novelist Karamzin; the anarchist Alexander Herzen's analysis of the decrepitude of the old world; and Lautréamont's poetic admission of the hell humanity has created and its inability to save itself.[1]

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[1] See also "Le Cabanon de Prométhée", La Plume, 1st September 1890. A copy of Les Chants de Maldoror, by Isidore Ducasse (le comte de Lautréamont), first published in 1869, was sent to Bloy by Emile Verhaeren in 1885.

From within the two last, he extrapolates a Christian solution. Herzen's answer automatically looks to theological terms for its expression: "Prêchez la Mort comme bonne nouvelle, comme annonce de la prochaine RÉDEMPTION" and, as Bloy ironically points out, unconsciously skirts Catholic doctrine:

> Tel est le gravitant absolu de doctrine que nul cric religieux ne déplacera jamais plus!
> Négation absolue de tout bien présent et certitude absolue de récupérer l'Eden après l'universelle destruction. Enthymême délateur du néant de la vie par le néant de la mort, dernier acculement de l'Orgueil, sommant une suprême fois l'X de la Justice, au nom de toute la douleur terrestre, d'accorder enfin autre chose que le simulacre d'une rédemption ou de raturer, - comme un solécisme, - en même temps que la malheureuse race humaine, l'inexpiable Infini de notre nature!

Besides the Apocalyptic solution, Bloy poses the Eucharistic. The absence of Communion with God is the source of contemporary anguish, which is the desire for a tangible ideal: "Ils se souviennent de la tangible terre où ils sont forcés de vivre, au sein de l'ordure humaine, dans une irrémédiable privation de la vue de Dieu, - quel que soit leur concept de cette Entité substantielle, - avec un désir enragé de s'en repaître et de s'en soûler à toute heure!" The direct presentation of the Eucharistic solution to an atheistic age would be futile, but it remains possible to exploit the inverse of the concept, on which Bloy finds the age is living: "le besoin de la Justice, nourriture infiniment absente". This is not precisely the aspiration to Justice, but the anguish of this aspiration constantly disappointed - suffering itself, which is the common meeting-ground of modern humanity and Christ in the sacrament of the altar.

The chapter having set the two poles of Bloy's religious concept of suffering - the Eucharist in the present dispensation, and the Apocalyptic end - and their relevance to the contemporary context

established, it is possible for the rest of the novel to be devoted to their literary transposition; in particular, to an elucidation of the themes of compassion, expiation and reparation which contemporary ultramontane theology attached to the Eucharist, and to a demonstration of the way in which these doctrines impose meaning on the life of Marchenoir. The latter becomes less an autobiographical figure than a microcosm of the universal problem, and an effective means of concentrating and presenting apologetic points.

The interrelationship of Bloy's personal suffering and its literary expression makes an interesting study with regard to Le Mendiant ingrat and La Femme pauvre, diary and novel which have large sections of material in common. The writing of the diary from November 1896 to September 1897 overlaps with part of that of La Femme pauvre, and the same themes appear in both, as well as the same points of fact - especially the events of 1895, the illness of Jeanne and the death of André.[1] Bloy told his publisher Deman: "Les deux livres sont puisés à la même source, c'est-à-dire au trésor des souvenirs affreux de ma vie. A ce point de vue ils se complèteront et s'élucideront l'un l'autre admirablement".[2]

It would be wrong to play down Bloy's use of the diary form to give a personal account of his sufferings and to take revenge on the contemporaries he held responsible for these, especially since this

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[1]The history of the genesis, printing and distribution of Le Mendiant ingrat and of the completion of La Femme pauvre is given in Bloy's letters to Henri de Groux (Boll. III) and to his Belgian publisher Edmond Deman (La R.).

[2]Letter to Deman, 3rd March 1897 (La R.).

personal, often sentimental, element was for some readers one of the most attractive and original aspects of his apologetic. To de Groux, he described his book as "ma revanche de toutes les calomnies, l'explication et la justification de ma vie, en même temps que la plus poignante page d'histoire littéraire qu'on ait osé écrire";[1] whilst to Deman, he wrote: "Vous devinez bien que je ne recommence pas les Goncourt et que le journal du 'Désespéré' doit avoir un accent très particulier. C'est, en somme, le roman, quelque peu effroyable, d'un condamné à mort et d'un damné qui n'accepte ni le supplice ni la damnation, et qui parle dans les tourments".[2] But despite this, the most painful details, such as those of Jeanne's illness, are treated with reserve [3] and the personal themes taken up into a wider religious context, both by individual references and by the overall structure, in the frame of an introduction and conclusion which contemplate the sufferings of Christ. This is already one step towards the transpositions of La Femme pauvre, which are completely allegorical.

The two books' interpretation of the theme is essentially the same. Renunciation and suffering are the means to the spiritual life: "la femme n'existe vraiment qu'à la condition d'être sans pain, sans

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[1] Letter to de Groux, 12th November 1896 (Boll. III, 232).

[2] La R.

[3] In both books, for example, Jeanne's illness is skimmed over and no details given of its character, which appears to have been a form of religious mania. Jeanne was taken to hospital on 21st November: "Elle se jetait par les fenêtres. Elle est maintenant parmi les folles et traitée comme un chien anonyme, d'autant plus méprisée dans cette maison laïcisée que son délire a la couleur religieuse" [Letter to Louis de Saint-Jacques, 25th November 1895 (La R.)].

gîte, sans amis, sans époux et sans enfants, et . . . c'est comme cela seulement qu'elle peut forcer à descendre son Sauveur".[1] In Le Mendiant ingrat, 28th July 1895:

> Dans l'Absolu: L'Idolâtrie, c'est de préférer les choses visibles aux choses invisibles.
> Cas des protestants qui accusent précisément les catholiques d'être des idolâtres.
> Notre vie supérieure recommence en même temps que nous recommençons à souffrir. Vie sublime! Etre les enclumes de Dieu pour la joie et pour la douleur!

Suffering takes the form of misunderstanding and rejection by society, of the destruction of personal relationships by illness or bereavement, of financial hardship, or of desire for an ideal frustrated by circumambient mediocrity. This experience, personal in its origins, is presented in both books patterned into the suffering of Christ. Bloy points out particularly his weakness in the face of suffering. In Le Mendiant ingrat, 11th October 1895:

> Ma misère d'âme est à son comble, aussi bien que l'autre misère. Je ne me souviens pas d'avoir été plus malheureux, même à l'impasse. Ce qui est le caractère de ma souffrance actuelle, c'est le sentiment de ma faiblesse, la conscience de mon parfait épuisement. Je n'en peux plus.
> Le pauvre Sauveur est toujours en croix. Il fait ce qu'il peut pour des milliards de créatures, tout ce qu'il peut, en vérité, mais il est en croix, et même au fond du gouffre, il faut avoir pitié de lui.

La Femme pauvre stresses the weakness of Clotilde as the source of her power, as in her confrontation with Léopold in the Luxembourg gardens. The diary explains the psychology of the concept: "Y a-t-il rien de plus déchirant que la compassion de celui qui n'a rien et qui

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 263.

veut, pourtant, donner quelque chose? Et Dieu n'est-il pas le Pauvre des pauvres?"[1]

The purpose of suffering, to provide for the spiritual good of others, is explained in the diary in a letter to de Groux, 27th September 1895, on the death of his godson, André Bloy, now interceding on his behalf: "le Christianisme, c'est de souffrir les uns pour les autres". This is also the meaning of the death of the baby in La Femme pauvre, which saves the painter Lazare.

Both texts plead the necessity of humble acceptance of suffering. In the novel: "Tout ce qui arrive est adorable".[2] The diary uses the same phrase in letters to de Groux of 8th June and 12th November 1895, written before and during Jeanne's illness, which gives special force to the assertion: "Tout ce qui arrive est adorable, parfaitement adorable, et je suis brûlé de larmes ...."

None of these interpretations is the product of independent rationalisation by Bloy. Consideration of the chronological steps in the formation of his doctrine and the nature and proportions of its elements reveals more formative influence from recent and contemporary literature and theology than most critics are prepared to admit.

1. Doctrine in Formation: A Chronological Account

Béguin has pointed out the futility of attempting to explain the development and significance of Bloy's thought solely in psychological

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[1] Le Mendiant ingrat, 31st May 1895.

[2] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 267.

terms, on the grounds that such explanations often tend to bypass other literary or philosophical difficulties offered by his text.[1] It should also be added that basic material for such a study is scarce, especially for the period of Bloy's childhood and adolescence.[2] The only facts available are in the texts themselves, where they appear rearranged and reassessed in a perspective which is not that of the original experience. This is not necessarily a disadvantage, since it fixes attention on Bloy's work and that image of himself which he wishes to project; but the distinction must be kept in mind.

Le Désespéré recounts Marchenoir's childhood, which was a long series of humiliations caused by his dreamy disposition and Romantic inability to adjust to modern society.[3] (Preliminary sketches for this section bring out even more clearly the literary cliché, which has little basis in fact.[4]) It is the suffering produced by the disparity between heroic ideal and reality, rather than that self-revulsion and search for new moral standards more usually invoked by writers of the Revival, which Bloy presents as determining his hero's conversion:

> Il eut, tout enfant, la concupiscence de la Douleur et la convoitise d'un paradis de tortures, à la façon de sainte Madeleine de Pazzy . . . . C'était le tréfonds mystérieux d'une âme un peu

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[1] A. Béguin, Léon Bloy l'impatient, Fribourg, 1944, p. 71. See, for example, Jeanne Bohet, Léon Bloy: Essai d'étude psychobiographique, Montluçon, 1961.

[2] No letters are available before 1865 except for a few notes exchanged with Victor Lalotte in Paris (La R.). Bloy's childhood diary, published in part in the Cahiers Léon Bloy, 1925-26, gives evidence of an ordinary provincial childhood, enlivened only by the discovery of Romantic literature in the form of novels and feuilletons in 1862 (see M.-J. Lory, L'Enfance et l'adolescence de Léon Bloy, Thesis, Paris, 1953).

[3] Le Désespéré, OC III, ch. x.

[4] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

> moins inconsciente qu'une autre de son abîme et naïvement enragée d'un absolu de sensations ou de sentiments qui correspondît à l'absolu de son entité. Quand le christianisme lui apparut, Marchenoir s'y précipita comme les chameaux d'Eliézer à l'abreuvoir nuptial de Mésopotamie.[1]

Care is taken to show the two factors of personal experience and Christian doctrine as separate entities, neither of which has any influence on the development or interpretation of the other until the moment of conversion. Chapter 13 describes Marchenoir's first perception of his own nature and of the problem of suffering, and recognition of the doctrinal solution, as simultaneous and single occurences. Reading the New Testament on watch, in the heroic context of the Franco-Prussian War,[2] Marchenoir experiences a brief moment of revitalising and certain revelation, which brings into his life a new perspective: "le décisif concept de l'immolation". In the light of this, and with the help of the formulae of the mystics, he recognises for the first time the wretchedness of his own nature. He immediately sees that the problem of suffering lies solely in the gulf between the misery of the human condition and the glorified state to which he now realises he aspires: "Un double abîme s'ouvrit en cet être, à dater de ce prodigieux instant. Abîme de désir et de fureur que rien ne devait plus combler". Neither of these states can be related satisfactorily to the full personality of God, since each contradicts the demands of either his love or his justice; only Christianity can resolve their contradiction in the suffering of Christ, of which Marchenoir's own

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 56.

[2] Bloy dated his own conversion, which he attributed to Barbey, from June 1869 [Letter to Barbey, 11th December 1873 (Boll. 178-82)].

sufferings have been a figure. A rhetorical syntax pivots on the two aspects of the Face of Christ, to express his mediation between the helpless Marchenoir and an impassible Godhead: "Il la comprenait maintenant, cette fringale de souffrances de toute son enfance! C'était le pressentiment de la Face épouvantable de son Christ! ... Face de crucifé et face de juge sur l'impassible fronton du Tétragramme".

A purely figurative significance for his sufferings is not enough for Marchenoir, who probes further to find a more organic rôle for these within Christ's work of redemption. He explains that humanity is suffering in expectation of the fulfilment of a promise of beatitude so far witheld. His evocation of these sufferings is sufficiently sympathetic for a hint of criticism of Christian submission to seem implied: "Il faut que le genre humain soit terriblement constant pour ne s'être pas encore lassé et pour ne s'être pas assis dans la caverne de l'absolu désespoir!" - but in fact, his "il faut" is doubly ironic, ? and refers to the real necessity of compassionate suffering. The arguments he gives in support of this, described as his own intuitions, are the standard Catholic ones, renewed by his terms of expression. The love of God must be admitted as a basic principle, for which he, the former atheist, can offer the proof of personal experience. With this in mind, he urges God's good intentions in his present abdication of power. The impotency of the Cross represents God's eternal attitude to Man, before whom he humbles himself in order to concede man the privilege of voluntary co-operation in paying the ransom of Atonement:

> Il eut l'intuition d'une sorte d'impuissance divine, <u>provisoirement</u> concertée entre la Miséricorde et la Justice, en vue de quelque ineffable récupération de Substance dilapidée par l'Amour.

> Situation inouïe, invocatrice d'un patois abject. La Raison Ternaire suspend ses paiements depuis un tas de siècles et c'est à la Patience humaine qu'il convient de l'assister de son propre fonds. Ce n'est que du Temps qu'il faut au solvable Maître de l'Eternité et le temps est fait de la désolation des hommes. C'est pourquoi les Saints et les Docteurs de la foi ont toujours enseigné la nécessité de souffrir pour Dieu.

Finally, he preaches the imminent accomplishment of the Scriptural prophecies of renewal and liberation from suffering through the coming of the Paraclete, of which he claims to have a personal assurance, and for which he enlists the reader's sympathy by an assertion of the particular relevance of this to the poor, humble and rejected of the world.

The account here is noticeably synthetic; Marchenoir is attributed immediate intuition of concepts elaborated by Bloy himself over a period of fifteen years. Closer examination of the period from his conversion to the organised synthesis of 1885 shows a slower and less certain development. Three groups of material should be considered: Bloy's correspondence with Georges Landry, whom he met in Paris in 1866; the literary and theological sources on which he draws; and the matter derived from the theme of La Salette.

The Landry-Bloy Correspondence

Letters exchanged over the period 1869-73 deal at length with the theme of suffering. There is a convenient break in 1873, with a letter giving Bloy's doctrine at a point of synthesis.

His first letter to Landry, written soon after conversion, marks a period of calm. Serenity and indifference are preferred to revolt. Catholic doctrine provides a refuge from "goujatisme", and devotional practices, on which Bloy relies heavily, a refuge from what are des-

cribed as the evils of suffering. After Pascal: "La première (nature) subsiste toujours, mais la coutume est un rempart indestructible que la Providence met entre nous et la Douleur qui finirait par nous dévorer".[1] This serenity disappears when Bloy leaves Paris for Périgueux, where he finds that his intellectual isolation and his family difficulties - and probably also his religious exaltation - exert unbearable pressures: "si les pratiques religieuses ne me protégeaient pas, je craindrais sérieusement de devenir fou".[2] The approach of war provides distraction and a context in which traditionalist Catholic doctrine on suffering becomes more meaningful. References appear to appropriate books recommended by Barbey, especially those of de Maistre and Bonald.[3] 3rd May 1870, Landry takes up with Bloy the Maistrean concept of expiation as a justification of war:

> Ce que tu m'écris de la mission divine et parallèle du Prêtre et du Soldat, je l'ai très bien compris . . . Mais dis-moi, n'est-il pas remarquable que la Croix qui, dans la main d'un prêtre est l'Instrument de la Grande Expiation, devient, par sa forme même, une épée au bras du soldat.[4]

In a letter of 26th July 1871, Bloy picks up de Maistre's equation of the blood shed for God in battle and the salvific blood of Christ in order to explain to Landry the doctrine of reversibility. He suggests Landry reconcile himself to possible death by offering his life for the sake of his parents: "Tu sais que cette réversibilité

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[1] Lettres de jeunesse, No. 1, undated.

[2] Ibid., No. V, undated.

[3] Letter from Landry to Bloy, 27th November 1869 (La R.).

[4] La R.

des douleurs et des acceptations est la base surnaturelle de l'édifice chrétien. Il n'y a rien de plus sublime dans le monde".[1]

Ist September 1871, in the aftermath of defeat, Bloy deduces from the revelation of Christ in the image of the Man of Sorrows that divine love and suffering are identical, and that suffering is the essence and the sign of Christianity: "Partout où règne la doctrine surnaturelle du Fils de Dieu, la grâce suffisante en fait accepter et la grâce surabondante en fait désirer les surnaturelles pratiques, je veux dire les souffrances, car il n'y a que cela de surnaturel ici-bas: la SOUFFRANCE".[2] The practices Bloy originally considered were mere consolation, incapable of transforming human nature, he now understands in the light of the impulse to suffer which is their motivation, and which effects transformation of man's nature through configuration to Christ: "Le reste est humain. Il y a dans tout chrétien un homme de douleurs, et c'est celui-là qui est Dieu, l'autre n'est qu'une figure contingente, un decevant fantôme de sang et de boue que le soleil dessèche et que le vent disperse aux sillons de la terre". Bloy at first adhered to these doctrines with a firm confidence which continued through 1872. 26th March, he criticised Landry's gloomy tendencies and urged him to fortitude; referring to his own acceptance of his family problems in a meritorious spirit of self-sacrifice, and speaking of the "sublime" books and letters sent to him by Saint-Bonnet.[3] But in 1873, it became Landry's turn to offer philosophical consolations to Bloy, involved in an unhappy love-affair. His letter

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[1] Lettres de jeunesse, No. II.

[2] Boll. I, 150.

[3] Lettres de jeunesse, No. VII.

pointed out that, though Bloy had initially fled to Catholicism as a refuge from suffering, he had learned from Blanc de Saint Bonnet's De la douleur that suffering was a necessary and meritorious part of the Christian life. By virtue of his heroic soul, Bloy was "un des privilégiés de la Douleur" which was currently revealing through his trials his true nature. Landry suggested a sacrificial approach to Bloy's present problem, which would preserve his love in an ideal purity.[1]

The letters of 1872 show also the formal influence of Barbey and the mystics. Barbey's Romantic concept of suffering influenced a highly-coloured prose reconstruction by Bloy of a vision of the Face of Christ after his flagellation and awaiting death. The note is set by Tertullian: "Jésus veut se rassassier de la volupté de souffrir pour nous". Bloy concentrates on a voluptuous depiction of the beauty of the suffering Christ: "Endymion de la Pénitence et de la Veille". His picture centres on the devotional images of the Crown of Thorns and the Sacred Heart, from which the Redemptive blood pours over Christ's breast: "ce redoutable tabernacle du Sacré-Coeur, objet, disent les mystiques, de la dévotion suprême des derniers temps de ce monde". Mary appears here for almost the first time, still less important than the bloody Christ but already performing her Redemptive rôle as agent of the Crucifixion, being the source of the Precious Blood and mediator of the human contribution in Compassion, offered on the altar of her heart.[2]

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[1] Letter from Landry to Bloy, 4th June 1873 (La R.).

[2] Lettres de jeunesse, No. VIII, 14th September 1872.

Bloy's letter to Landry of 25th April 1873 synthesises the elements so far accumulated in an explanation of the moral and metaphysical perfections of suffering, which Bloy now centres on Mary.[1] The emphasis is on the suffering of the individual, with no attempt to consider wider social or historical contexts. (This aspect is covered by letters exchanged at the same period with Blanc de Saint-Bonnet.) After Blanc de Saint-Bonnet, quoted without acknowledgement, Bloy describes suffering as the impulse to self-perfection, equated with self-abnegation, which prepares the will for the act of faith. He urges the point to the logical conclusion, which contradicts the philosopher's intention, that martyrdom, the assumption of total suffering, brings the soul immediately into perfect love and faith: "sans passer par l'imitation laborieuse de la pénitence". The beauty of suffering is that it brings God closer. To Saint-Bonnet's doctrine of co-operation, Bloy adds the passive terms of Faber and the mediation of Mary, fusing the two in his image of "Sainte Douleur . . . libératrice, mère forte et attentive". The progression through suffering to God entails the renunciation of self and of distracting creaturely affections, and isolation with Christ on Calvary in the single will of God. This leads ultimately to a greater sympathy with the universe. Suffering, "l'auxiliaire de la création", enlarges the human faculties and heart and makes the individual, configured to Christ, more able to share Christ's perception of the total anguish of the universe through space and time. There is no increase in the individual's burden of suffering, already assumed by Christ; only in

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[1] Lettres de jeunesse, No. IX.

his sensitivity to it. After 1882, with his doctrine fully formulated, Bloy's work could well be read as a widening perception of the various forms of suffering, in history, society and other individuals. The most insiduous form of suffering is "le dégoût de la vie" (Baudelaire's "spleen" or the taedium vitae of the mystics), for which Communion is the only solution. Bloy holds with Saint-Bonnet that the heroic life is necessarily composed of suffering and disillusionment: "Le Coeur est toujours seul". The disillusionment is clearly Bloy's own, disguising and ratifying itself in the abstractions of doctrine.

## Sources

### i) Joseph de Maistre

It is the basic points of de Maistre's doctrine, slightly simplified, which Bloy takes as his own starting-point.

De Maistre traces the suffering and disorder of modern society back to the Fall and the pervasive effects of original sin. The tonic note of Creation, which was man's obedience to God, has slipped, and the whole universe is thrown into disharmony.[1] The fact of the Fall taken as axiomatic, he devotes his attention to drawing its effects and describing how they may be countered and order restored.

The most conspicuous effect is the change in the nature of man to an unrepentant viciousness for which the external authority of social structures is a necessary curb.[2] Another check is provided by suffering, which, according to Ballanche's thesis, is a Providential agent of

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[1] Considérations sur la France, OC I, Lyon, 1884, p. 39.

[2] Bloy picks up the Maistrean commonplace in "Le Christ au dépotoir", Le Pal, No. 4, 2nd April 1885, and in Le Désespéré, OC III, 176.

moral renewal. Every disaster has a corrective purpose; the aftermath of the French Revolution, the product of unbridled individual freedom, is the most conspicuous example.

Violent suffering is the rule of human existence and the source of all creative activity: "le sang est l'engrais de cette plante qu'on appelle génie".[1] War, a divine phenomenon, is the answer to the earth's demand for blood, and perpetuates her existence. There is special virtue in the blood of war victims, who are designated as consenting sacrifices.[2] These are the terms Bloy uses in L'Ame de Napoléon to describe the Emperor's mission: "il entreprit de guérir [la terre], de renouveler cette face moribonde en lui infusant une vie nouvelle. Il ne parvint qu'à la couvrir de sang et c'était sans doute la seule chose qu'il y eût à faire, puisqu'elle paraît avoir profité de ces soins terribles".[2]

The central point of de Maistre's doctrine is the virtue of sacrificial blood in eradicating the effects of sin. He bases this on the doctrine of sacrifice attached to Christ's Passion, which is the sum and completion of all ancient ideas of holocaust - an appeal to universal consent, as well as the establishment of a historical purpose in suffering. A similar connection is made by Bloy in Le Révélateur du globe between the human sacrifices of the pagan Americas and their final redemption through the sufferings of Columbus.[4] In neither

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[1] Considérations sur la France, p. 36.

[2] Ibid., ch. iii, Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg, 7e Entretien, OC V, Lyon, 1884, pp. 21-23.

[3] L'Ame de Napoléon, OC V, 309.

[4] Considérations sur la France, ch. iii; Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg, 9e Entretien, pp. 120-28; and cp. Le Révélateur du globe, OC I, 39-49.

writer is the concept used to deny the present existence of sin; on the contrary, Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg describe the Passion as a general indulgence whose effects are still countered in practice by the recalcitrance of human liberty, which is Bloy's "failure of the Redemption" in a less provocative image.[1] God's permission of this is justified by the doctrine of the reversibility of merits within the sufferings of Christ, on which de Maistre stands the whole of Christianity, explaining through it anomalies in the distribution of punishments and the suffering of the innocent.[2] Polemic stress is laid on the elect condition of the victim, whose suffering is only acceptable when voluntary and wholly pure; the religious orders have in this a particular privilege. This is the ideal Bloy maintains in theory, though finding that in practice, suffering appears in no such conditions and that the doctrine has to be devalued to accommodate suffering which may be "deserved", as punishment for sin, or rebelled against by the victim.

ii) Blanc de Saint-Bonnet

By the end of 1871, Bloy had read Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's De la douleur in the first edition of 1849.[3] On 19th December 1873, Saint-Bonnet sent him a copy of the second revised edition of 1878, in which the theme of suffering was set in a more traditional Catholic context.[4] Three extra chapters (xvi-xviii) described the love of Christ as the motive for the acceptance of suffering and revealed theology as its rationale.[5] A paraphrase of Faber's The Foot of the Cross described

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[1] Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg, pp. 209-10.

[2] Considérations sur la France, ch. iii.

[3] Letter from Blanc de Saint-Bonnet to Bloy, November 1871 [CLB No. 5 (7th Yr.), May-June 1931, p. 122].

[4] Letter to Blanc de Saint-Bonnet, 19th December 1873 (in G. Maton, Blanc de Saint-Bonnet, Paris, 1961, pp. 390-93).

[5] G. Maton, op. cit., p. 262.

the Passion as the key to the mystery of the Incarnation and imitation of the Passion as the mode of the Christian life; sketched the co-redemptive rôle of Mary; and explained the union of Christ, Mary and humanity in compassionate suffering.[1] An additional Appendix extended the original discussion of reparation and reversibility with new references to de Maistre's Eclaircissements sur les sacrifices - a change of context from the discussion in the first edition of Ballanche's theories, considering the rôle of Man as victim in the plurality of worlds, which is indicative of the general shift of ideas at this period.

Bloy had already met the themes of the second edition in his own reading of Faber, so that any statements as to the particular influence of Blanc de Saint-Bonnet in guiding Bloy's formulations of the problem of suffering must be limited to the evidence of the text of 1849. This was a lyrical apology for the Romantic concept of suffering as forming the heroic personality.

In the "Avant-propos" of 1848, which Bloy read carefully, Blanc de Saint-Bonnet stated his intention to give a moral analysis of "la sensibilité", the contemporary Romantic cult of suffering. He held that the psychological condition of melancholy began with the Incarnation and its revelation of infinite divine love, offering to human aspirations a new dimension and a new object which was, by definition, eternally impossible to achieve. He intended to redirect the secular phenomenon into a Catholic channel.

This kind of anguish, which produced the fully-fledged heroic character, was the first step to sanctity:

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[1] De la douleur, 2nd ed., Paris, 1873, pp. 146-48.

> J'ai surtout voulu établir la notion de la personnalité vis-à-vis de l'infini. Ce qui n'empêche point que le faîte de la perfection ne soit d'en faire l'abdication. La sainteté n'est que le don de la personnalité. Mais la personnalité est la question préliminaire de la sainteté: il faut être pour se donner! Il est vrai que la vertu, par laquelle la personnalité se forme, n'est déjà que le propre pas de l'amour.[1]

Suffering is a purification and a punishment, but, most important, is also a gift which moves man to co-operation with God in his own redemption. Sacrifice is a renunciation of egoism which gives man more scope to develop his true personality.[2] By this argument, the Fall can be seen as an act not of malevolence but of generosity on God's part, in that, by his grace and forgiveness, it allowed man the potentiality for free individual development:

> Lorsque Dieu créa l'ange, il lui remit toute sa nature; et cet être se leva ravi dans le Ciel. A l'être libre, Dieu ne peut remettre la sienne sans la violer. La liberté elle-même, il ne peut pas la lui donner: il faut que l'homme la prenne!
>
> Il la prend par le travail.
>
> C'est le travail qui produit la nouvelle et glorieuse Création des êtres libres! Sans le travail, nous reviendrions à cette première création d'Anges dont Dieu a fait tout le mérite ... et qu'il n'a point rachetés! Le travail est une source ontogénique de liberté. C'est par l'effort qui vient de lui-même, que l'homme se forme lui-même.[3]

Man left to himself has not enough will-power to seek perfection. Suffering imposes on him involuntary self-abnegation, as in ancient times slavery was used to produce the same results as voluntary service.

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[1] De la douleur, Lyon, 1849, p. v.

[2] Ibid., Pt. I, ch. ii, "De la douleur au point de vue de l'homme".

[3] Ibid., p. 104.

Saint-Bonnet considered the practical contribution made by the social hierarchy to the renewal of individuals. Its grades marked the points of individual moral achievement, and the duties of each class, which were those its members were capable of performing, taught self-renunciation.[1] The philosopher accepted in his system the advantages of holding a place in society inherited through the family, which represents an accumulation of merit and moral progress from which the individual benefits.

The climax of the book is the lyrical exposition of the doctrine of reversibility which occupies the final chapters, and deals with the problem of the disproportionate sufferings which some individuals, even the innocent, are asked to accept. The Church teaches that through the Communion of Saints the spiritual merit acquired by these can be shared with other souls on earth, in heaven and in purgatory:

> C'est ainsi qu'à la lumière de l'infini, tous les hommes reparaissent les membres les uns des autres. Les mérites de chacun se répandent sur tous, dans ce mystérieux corps, par le canal de la réversibilité, véritable rétablissement de la circulation du sang de l'humanité.[2]

To the orthodox Catholic thesis, Blanc de Saint-Bonnet adds a less usual concept taken from Ballanche of the Communion as a cosmic solidarity extending to all intelligent creatures in the plurality of worlds. The salvation of these depends on man, who alone has the ability to make the free response which obtains redemption:

> Car la liberté est quelque chose de si redoutable que l'Eternel a dû créer une race tout exprès pour en

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[1] De la douleur, Lyon, 1849, Pt. II, ch. ix, "Comment le travail applique la douleur aux différents états des âmes. Des positions de la vie", pp. 113-27.

[2] Ibid., p. 218.

> porter le terrible fardeau! Le principe ontologique de l'homme me semble aussi un principe cosmogonique fondé sur l'unité et la réversibilité universelle d'une même création au sein de Dieu. La liberté! cette merveille du relatif, me paraît l'axe de la création entière![1]

The praise of liberty is accompanied by the apology of suffering, its source. Saint and martyr are the centres of the universe. In making his point, Blanc de Saint-Bonnet over-emphasises the magnificence of man's co-operation, describing the mystery of Redemption as accomplished on earth in acknowledgement of the uniqueness of man's liberty and privilege of suffering. The appendix to the second edition acknowledges this by admitting the anomaly in the doctrine of the need for a human contribution given the all-sufficiency of the merits of Christ, and the contradiction in the fact that a creation which, apart from man, is technically innocent, has to depend on man for salvation. The whole is justified as the incomprehensible mystery of God's gratuitous desire for a universe united in love, in "un même lien de solidarité et de réversibilité", where men are allowed the dignity of sharing with him "ses propres joies de père, en les entourant d'enfants immortels".[2] This is the explanation which Bloy also adopts.

Bloy's marginalia to Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's De la Restauration française of 1851, which give page references to the first edition of De la douleur, indicate which parts of the theory he considered most important. Here he agrees that suffering is the only stable basis for a philosophy of existence.[3] He is particularly impressed by the account of the significance of involuntary suffering, and the idea that the

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[1] De la douleur, Lyon, 1849, pp. 221-22.

[2] De la douleur, 2nd ed., p. 250.

[3] Notes to RF II, vi; De la douleur, p. 203 [CLB No. 1 (6th Yr.), Sept.-Oct. 1929, p. 22] and Notes to RF I, i; De la douleur, "Les Temps présents" [CLB No. 6 (5th Yr.), July-Aug. 1929, p. 139].

slavery of the Gentiles was an acceptable substitute for true faith: "Voici l'axe merveilleuse de la philosophie de l'histoire. L'étonnante nouveauté de cet aperçu assigne à l'auteur une glorieuse place à côté de de Maistre et les Pères".[1] He is interested in the philosopher's equation of the social and metaphysical hierarchy in which suffering is expressed, and especially in his belief that hereditary nobility represents an accumulation of merit; but stresses that the moral order is more important, and that true nobility consists in sanctity.[2]

The cult of personality, which appeals strongly to Bloy, offers difficulties because of its overtones of Protestantism. Bloy underlines - as did Saint-Bonnet in the second edition - that self-development in the Catholic sense involves both individual works and the self-abnegation of love.[3] The exercise of charity, which compensates for individual inequality, unites the social communion.[4] In this context he makes no specific reference to the theme of reversibility, but a quotation taken from the heart of Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's discussion of its rôle in the plurality of worlds indicates his awareness of the wider context in which the topic had been considered.[5]

These are the aspects of Saint-Bonnet's philosophy which reappear with slight but important modifications in Bloy's own work. He accepts in principle the utility of the capitalist order;[6] but is not primarily

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[1] Notes to RF II, xxxvi; De la douleur, p. 268 [CLB No. 2 (6th Yr.), Nov.-Dec. 1929, p. 55].

[2] Notes to RF II, vi; De la douleur, p. 261 and RF I, xliv; De la douleur, p. 200 (ibid., pp. 23 and 14).

[3] Notes to RF IV, i; De la douleur, p. 4 [CLB No. 2 (6th Yr.), Nov.-Dec. 1929, p. 71].

[4] Notes to RF III, xlii; De la douleur, p. 254 (ibid., p. 70).

[5] Notes to RF I, xlvi; De la douleur, p. 221 [CLB No. 1 (6th Yr.), Sept.-Oct. 1929, pp. 17-18].

[6] ". . . sa merveilleuse trilogie du capital, de l'ordre et de l'aristocratie, avec la sublime série non interrompue de devoirs et de faits enchaînés qui relient tous les hommes entre eux, toutes les lois naturelles et toutes les lois de grâce et l'univers entier au trône de Dieu" (Bloy, "La Légitimité", L'Univers, 17th January 1874).

concerned with the structure in itself, and frequently criticises Saint-Bonnet for allowing it to seem to take utilitarian precedence over the metaphysical structures it represents. His reviews of Saint-Bonnet's books tried to correct their political slant, to the annoyance of the author.[1] To Saint-Bonnet's study of the importance of blood relationships and the meaning of family, he prefers consideration of arbitrary spiritual relationships within the Communion of Saints (except where the concept of family, or "race", serves his own purposes, as in the figure of Villiers, used to express the coincidence of aristocratic and Catholic tradition). In his novels, he rejects the limiting conditions of heredity. Clotilde owes nothing to her mother (though perhaps, it is hinted, something to an unknown father) and everything to the intercession of Eve, the Missionary, Gacougnol, Marchenoir and Léopold, and the unknown souls in Purgatory. Study of these particular relationships takes precedence over study of social and class situations; these are invoked, but only as a secondary theme.

Bloy takes both aspects of the philosopher's description of personality as self-creation and self-renunciation. For the first, which corresponds to his Romantic cult of the hero, he quotes La Légitimité: "L'homme est une liberté, un pouvoir de faire le bien qui se développe par son propre effort pour obtenir un mérite de l'ordre infini qui va jusqu'à solliciter l'amour et l'admiration de l'Infini lui-même, lui assurant une place dans sa propre gloire".[2] The heroic saint and

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[1] Compare with the article cit. above, the sketch suggested by Blanc de Saint-Bonnet in the letter received by Bloy 24th January 1874 [CLB Nos. 3-4 (8th Yr.), Jan.-April 1932, p. 31].

[2] "La Légitimité", L'Univers, 17th January 1874.

sinner inspire equal respect; hence Bloy's admiration for the heroines of Barbey's Les Diaboliques, and his placing of the interest of Léopold's character in the sudden capitulation to God of the decadent hero, warrior, and Byronic artistic genius. Though in the end, it is the second stage of self-development which Bloy claims most important. The cult of self is only complete in humble self-abdication inspired by love, such as is practised by Clotilde. Paradoxically, her renunciations are rewarded by a flowering of personality under the tutelage of Gacougnol and Marchenoir, both attracted in the first instance by her humility.

On the perfective rôle of suffering, Bloy follows Saint-Bonnet closely. He tells Andrée Montchal, in a letter of 18th October 1885, that man can find no peace until he attains "un certain degré de beauté morale". He claims this as:

> le résultat fort sérieux d'un examen religieux et profondément attentif des circonstances de mon extraordinaire vie. Au point de vue très peu mondain où je suis placé, la souffrance n'est pas utile mais nécessaire. C'est une contrainte providentielle sur le misérable coeur de l'homme pour le porter où il n'irait pas de lui-même.

In his treatment of involuntary suffering Bloy refines on his source by conceiving instances in the Christian era in which it might acquire merit, whereas Saint-Bonnet had limited his concept to a pre-Christian and pagan context. The minimising of conscious co-operation by the creature which Bloy's adaptation implies is partly due to his lack of confidence in human nature, especially his own, and partly an acknowledgement of the particular difficulties of the nineteenth century, hampered by long rationalist tradition, in accepting the Christian case. The anguish of the soldiers of the 1914 war, prevented by Republican

propaganda from setting their suffering in a Christian context, becomes a substitute for faith.[1]

On the Communion of Saints and the question of reversibility, Saint-Bonnet provided both a statement of the orthodox doctrine and the particular widening of the concept which was inspired by his eagerness to make the best case possible for the virtues of suffering and its contribution to the greatness of man in the universe. Without adopting his doctrine on the plurality of worlds, Bloy takes this as an image to convey the cosmic importance of the earth, confirmed by the Incarnation,[2] together with the philosopher's idea of the unity of the whole creation in the blood of the Passion, which poured out over the earth before flowing into the heart of man.[3] Bloy strengthens the original concept by showing the sufferings of innocent creation taken up into those of man: "sous lui, à cause de lui et par conséquent pour lui . . . . La masse énorme de leurs souffrances fait partie de notre rançon et, tout le long de la chaîne animale, depuis l'homme jusqu'à la dernière des brutes, la Douleur universelle est une identique propitiation."[4]

iii) F. W. Faber

With the influence of the Romantic theologian, first mentioned in a letter to Landry 25th April 1873, a more devotional element enters

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[1] Méditations, OC IX, 261.

[2] L'Ame de Napoléon, OC V, 307.

[3] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 93.

[4] Ibid., p. 76.

Bloy's concept of suffering.[1] Bloy responds both to Faber's poetry - "ce Shakespeare deuxième de l'Angleterre" - and to his theology - "le grand observateur ascétique".[2]

Faber's doctrine centres on the figures of Mary and Christ. The most important devotion, in his eyes, is to the Sacred Humanity of Christ, which is more helpful than devotion to his Divinity, since it is a model accessible to imitation. In the present dispensation, it necessarily involves suffering; blood and the Cross are the laws of the Incarnation. God presents himself in weakness in the Humanity of Christ, in the Crib of the Incarnation, and in the Eucharist, where he is a "mendicant for love", appealing for man's conversion.[3] The epilogue to The Blessed Sacrament ("Reparation") describes Christ's helplessness, outraged love and insulted abjection; the Real Presence is dishonoured by atheists and Protestants and by the coldness of believers. These themes, part of the cult of the Sacred Heart, re-appear in Bloy tied, as in Faber, to the Eucharist or, more often, to the image of Christ on the Cross, with particular stress on the ignominy of his rejection by the world. Faber's image of the "failure of God" is linked with the same concept. In The Blessed Sacrament, he lists

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[1] Frederick William Faber (1814-1863), ultramontane Anglican cleric engaged in the Oxford Movement, who was converted to Catholicism and joined the Oratorian order. His books, written mainly in the 1850's, were more popular in France than in England, enjoying considerable vogue in the 1850's and 1880's especially among the writers of the Revival (Huysmans owned a copy of The Precious Blood, Faber's work on Reparation; see M. Belval, Des ténèbres à la lumière, pp. 196-97). Bloy had read all Faber's works, translations of which first appeared as follows: Le Saint-Sacrement, ou les oeuvres et les voies de Dieu, 1856; Le Pied de la Croix, ou les Douleurs de Marie, 1858; Le Précieux Sang, ou le prix de notre salut, 1860; Conférences spirituelles, 1860; Bethléhem, ou le mystère de la Sainte Enfance, 1862. See also Bibliography.

[2] Lettres de jeunesse, No. IX.

[3] The Blessed Sacrament, London, 1858, p. 573.

the apparent failures and defeat of Providence throughout history, the products of human liberty, and deduces from these that weakness and humiliation are essential characteristics of omnipotent Divinity, claiming the paradox to be a mystery of faith and turning into an occasion of merit the need to look behind appearances for a hidden God.[1] Bloy uses the same theme, but with less caution, deliberately minimising the omnipotence of God in order to shock. He also adds to the image of the historical failure of Providence his historical - eschatological - solution, in which Faber is not interested.

Faber was the main proponent at this period of the cult of the Precious Blood. His book on the devotion, published in London in 1860, explains that there is no remission of sin without the shedding of blood, which is the unique way to God. Christ's blood opens this way by giving expiatory significance to all human suffering. The theologian concentrates on the beneficent action of the Precious Blood, which mitigates the effects of evil on earth and the punishments of Hell, figures the mercy of God, and sanctifies humanity; whereas Bloy approaches the doctrine from the perspective of man's rejection of Christ's blood - a more pessimistic line, and one which lends itself to more violent imagery. The difference is partly due to Bloy's presenting the doctrine in contexts more actual and realistic than those of Faber. Le Sang du Pauvre, introduced by an epigraph from The Precious Blood, poses the Eucharistic image as the prism through which to refract the whole range of human suffering imposed by religious indifference among the rich - the starving poor, exploited miners, prostitutes and child labour:

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[1] The Blessed Sacrament, London, 1853, pp. 387-95.

> Son Sang est celui du Pauvre par qui les hommes sont "achetés à grand prix". Son Sang précieux, infiniment rouge et pur, qui peut tout payer!
>
> Il fallait donc bien que l'argent le représentât: l'argent qu'on donne, qu'on prête, qu'on vend, qu'on gagne ou qu'on vole; l'argent qui tue et qui vivifie comme la Parole, l'argent qu'on adore, l'eucharistique argent qu'on boit et qu'on mange.[1]

This might also explain a certain flabby sentimentality in Faber's attitude to suffering, which is absent from Bloy.

Bloy's textual references to Faber relate chiefly to the problem of suffering and the rôle of Mary. In the letter to Landry of 1873, quoted above, the Englishman provides a devotional and doctrinal setting for the metaphysics of Saint-Bonnet, and in so doing changes for Bloy the end of suffering from the idea of self-perfection to the mystic vocation of contemplation of Christ in order to achieve configuration to him.

Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition draws heavily on Faber's The Foot of the Cross (1858). Resemblances, which are both formal and theological, include the division into a series of meditations on the Seven Sorrows, renewed in Bloy by the Macchabees image, the notion of violence in the figure of Mary who 'helped' slay Christ on Calvary, the history of devotion to the Seven Sorrows, the meaning of Mary's Reparation, in her compassion with Christ, and finally, the importance of freewill in taking on suffering. The latter is illustrated by the massacre of the Innocents, to which Bloy adds his own comment on the necessity of the sacrifice of the innocent in the Christian dispensation.[2]

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[1] Le Sang du Pauvre, OC IX, 37.

[2] The Foot of the Cross, London, pp. 250-51. See also B. H. J. Reid, The Literary Career and works of Léon Bloy, Thesis, London, 1950, pp. 357-61.

iv) Ernest Hello

Hello first mentions Bloy's interest in his work in a letter of April 1876.[1] By this time, the main lines of Bloy's own doctrine of suffering were already established, and it remained only for Hello to provide confirmation of these, with another justification, from Ruysbroek, of the function of suffering in providing a direct approach to God, and with fresh emphasis on the idea that suffering is essentially an indication of Man's divinity and a means of glorification. For the latter, Hello offered his image of "le Pauvre", who is simultaneously Christ and the genius rejected and made to suffer by the modern world.

Bloy's studies of Hello - "Un Brelan d'excommuniés" (1889) and "Ici on assassine les grands hommes" (1894) do not bring out the full extent of his debt. After mentioning briefly his apotheosis of the unrecognised genius, who, Bloy claimed, was Hello himself, he described only their mutual interest in the concept of a Third Reign, and Hello's belief that this was to be the end of suffering; Bloy himself, at first in agreement with Hello, had now come to see that suffering was an unalienable part of the human condition. The distinction is a true one, but pointed rather unfairly; Bloy quotes Hello's anguished prayers to be released from suffering, without mentioning that their violent and blasphemous challenge to God was in part paradoxical, and an approach which he used himself.

Hello's M. Renan casts the discussion of Redemption into Hegelian terms, describing the suffering of the Cross as the reconciliation of contradictions; in particular, those of the contradictory philosophical claims of active effort and passive contemplation as methods of approa-

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[1] See above p. 146.

ching God.[1] Hello, after Michelet, characterises this as the "Oriental problem". The second element is considered by both Hello and Bloy the one which requires introduction into the Occidental way of life in the form of acceptance of the exaggerated ascetic spirituality of the East. This is the concept of Eastern philosophy which Bloy presents in his Byzance et Constantinople, using the violence and colour of the Oriental framework to show asceticism as an active and dynamic condition.

The representation in Hello of suffering in the form of desire, which derives from his work on Ruysbroek, is one which Bloy also develops, as in his image of the Beatific Vision in the chapter "En Paradis", in Celle qui pleure, or in the transposed images of desire for human love, or for money, which have analogues in Hello's Contes extraordinaires. Hello argues that acute desire for the Absolute is the peculiar feature of the nineteenth century, produced by man's attempt to deny his need of God. He draws a parallel between Christ's desire for humanity, symbolised by the hunger and thirst of the Cross, and the reciprocal desire of man for God, and erects this parallel into a "rational" justification of the existence of a God who answers human need of him. (This becomes a popular argument with Revival writers; in a letter to Claudel of 24th October 1907, Jacques Rivière echoes many of his contemporaries in challenging its legitimacy.[2]) Desire becomes the mark of the elect. In Paroles de Dieu, suffering is no longer as described in M. Renan, only a contribution to the Body, but

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[1] E. Hello, M. Renan, II, ch. vii.

[2] Letter from P. Claudel to Jacques Rivière, 24th October 1907, in Correspondance, Paris, 1926.

pure mystic longing for God himself and despair at not possessing Him in absolute union.[1] Job is the image of Man left derelict by God, who offers his "blasphemous" cry of dereliction as a challenge to God for salvation. His appeal (a type of Christ's summons to God from the Cross) is the only valid form of expression left to the modern Church. Bloy takes and exaggerates the same image of Job to introduce his Propos d'un entrepreneur de démolitions, demonstrating man's dereliction in modern society. The closing pages of Hello's Paroles de Dieu elaborate the function of human tears as the mark of desire and, mediated through Mary, the force which ravishes God. This is the source of Bloy's concluding development in Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition ("Les Larmes de Marie").

The Theme of La Salette

In November 1846, Melanie and Maximin, two peasant children, claimed to have seen an apparition of the Virgin Mary on the mountain of La Salette in the Dauphiny. The Virgin addressed to both a Discourse threatening catastrophes for an apostate France and calling the nation to penitence, and in addition confided to each a Secret, to be published at a period in the future.[2]

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[1] Paroles de Dieu, p. 177.

[2] For the texts of Discourse and Secret, see OC X, 221-31. The style of the Discourse is naïve; Mary complains of blasphemy among the peasants, and threatens the harvest. The Secret condemns the failings of the priesthood, and speaks in apocalyptic images of political catastrophe in Europe, a reign of Satan and persecution for the Church, and a reign of Antichrist, which will be opposed by the ascetic order of the Apostles of the Latter Days.

At first, the Virgin's call to repentance was obscured by discussion relating to the contemporary controversy over the nature and existence of the supernatural - the question of the authenticity of the Apparition, the degree of credibility to be attributed to the children, and the interpretation to be given to the miracles said to have been performed subsequently at La Salette. The interested Catholic parties were mostly theologians: Dupanloup, Giraud, Gay, d'Hulst and Cardinal Pie. From 1847-54, Veuillot kept the controversy alive in L'Univers.[1] But with the exception of a few minor heretical sects who took up the themes of the Apparition - to the disadvantage of the orthodox devotion - interest in La Salette soon flagged, especially with the rise of the more popular devotion to the miracles of Lourdes which promised an end to temporal suffering.

From about the 1870's, La Salette regained a measure of popularity as a convenient form to express the national movement to reparation and atonement. This was partly due to the publication of Melanie's Secret in 1879, with the imprimatur of the Bishop of Lecce, and partly to the efforts of the Assumptionists to publicise the phenomenon. In 1863, P. Giraud published the first edition of his book La Pratique de la Dévotion à Notre-Dame de La Salette, a lyrical effusion explaining the 'spiritualité victimaire' of the Apparition and stressing the reconciliatory rôle of Mary.[2]

In this form the doctrines of La Salette attracted the interest of a small but significant group of the imaginative writers of the Revival. In 1880, Verlaine wrote his interpretation of the Discourse,

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[1] See V. Hostachy, La Salette dans les lettres françaises, Grenoble, 1945.

[2] See above p. 106.

"Du dimanche français", published in 1907 in Voyage de France and incorporated by Bloy into Celle qui pleure. Later, a poem on La Salette, published in Bonheur, brought out the patriotic overtones of the theme and the merciful rôle of Mary. Under the influence of the abbé Boullan, Huysmans embarked on an account of his pilgrimage to the shrine in July 1891, in which the controversy over the miraculous features of the Apparition was still of primary importance. He considered the motive of credibility offered by the transformation of the two children, and the prophetic content of their Secrets, explaining the prophecies which had been accomplished and indicating those still left to come, including European war and the catastrophic destruction of Marseilles. He made anti-clerical propaganda of the attempts of the French priesthood to play down the disclosure of their inadequacy and immorality; but at this point, Durtal was still indifferent, and since he doubted even the existence of the Virgin, the theological discussion did not progress far.[1] A shortened version of this account appeared in 1898 in La Cathédrale, still subordinated to Durtal's reaction, and reducing the events of La Salette to one of the minor and least comprehensible of Catholic phenomena, far less important than Lourdes. The Virgin having renounced La Salette, penitence, suffering and conformity to the Cross become optional accessories to the religious life. The sole purpose of the Apparition was to strengthen faith and to increase converts, through the condescension to the humble children of the gentle, not the sorrowing, Virgin, her appearance accommodated to their limited intelligence and experience. Durtal

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[1] Là-haut, Paris, 1965, pp. 173-86.

remarks the present substitution of the Virgin for Christ, who, since the revelations of the Sacred Heart, has only manifested himself as an inner presence; but makes no attempt to investigate the theological rationale of this, which lies to hand in the doctrines of compassion and reparation.[1]

Bloy's analysis of La Cathédrale, in the article "J.-K. Huysmans de l'Académie Gencourt", complains of the absence of doctrinal exposition. Huysmans does not recognise the importance of the symbolism of the Apparition and her accoutrements, summarised in the images at the shrine which he had dismissed as unaesthetic. He never mentions the Discourse, nor the significance of Mary's breaking silence for the first time since Cana to speak with authority (that is, inaugurating a new penitential era in the Church). In consequence, he misses the universality and the magnificence of her message of penitence. On Huysmans' admission of his failure to respond to the sinister mountain setting: "peut-être parce qu'il déroutait cette idée de l'infini qui est en nous", Bloy comments that: "la sorte d'infini qui est en Huysmans ne s'arrange pas des sites en casse-cou. Il lui faut l'azur plus calme des images de piété".[2] It should be pointed out that Huysmans' own equally vehement plea for reparation looks for different imaginative forms of expression, such as the hagiography of the Lydwine legend; but even here his approach is less elaborate than Bloy's, and simplistic in its emphasis on the miraculous.

Emile Baumann's La Paix du Septième Jour of 1917 ties the threats and prophecies of La Salette into its own plea for penitence, but

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[1] La Cathédrale, 6th ed., Paris, 1393, pp. 10-29. See also Les Foules de Lourdes, ed. P. Lambert, Paris, 1958, pp. 19-20.

[2] Les Dernières Colonnes de l'Eglise, OC IV, 259-60.

finally concludes that Mary's message is one of reconciliation. In his Mémoires, Baumann notes that, whereas he preferred to consider the aftermath of the 1914-18 war as salvific expiation, in the spirit of La Salette, Bloy held - on the same authority - that it was uniquely punitive (an argument untenable in the light of statements by Bloy quoted below).[1]

Jacques and Raïssa Maritain were in close contact with Bloy over the period of composition of Celle qui pleure, of which the chapter "En Paradis" is dedicated to Raïssa.[2] Maritain's own treatise on La Salette, which he presented to the Pope in 1918, was strongly marked by Bloy's Melanist arguments, and the doctrine of reparation which runs through Raïssa Maritain's Journal also owes much to Bloy. The latter draws simultaneously on devotions to La Salette and to the Sacred Heart, both said to be affective appeals from God for the freely-given penitent love of his creatures.[3] It seems likely that the Maritains may also have helped mediate Bloy's doctrine to Claudel, who had, in addition, direct contact with Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, which he read on its publication in 1925, noting particularly its theme of the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies on Calvary and its treatment of the Dolorous Virgin.[4] His brochure on Le Symbolisme de La Salette, published in 1952 with a cover-portrait of the Virgin

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[1] See below pp. 259-60.

[2] See Lettres à ses filleuls, 1906-1907, and R. Maritain, Les Grandes Amitiés, pp. 193-202, 470-73, 492-97.

[3] J. Maritain, Carnet de notes, ch. iii; R. Maritain, Journal de Raïssa, Paris, 1963, pp. 289-90.

[4] P. Claudel, Journal, Vol. I, Paris, 1968, p. 690.

wearing a death's head, shows some similarity to Bloy's approach. Though making no mention of the Secret, nor the anti-clerical themes, it gives a detailed exposition of the symbolic meaning of the appearance of the Virgin and of her Discourse ("le mépris de Dieu est le commencement de tous les malheurs sociaux") and of the meaning of her tears. Of special interest is Claudel's defence of the theologically incorrect depiction of passions in the spiritual realm, with the claim that imaginative presentation of doctrinal points through these is more telling than simple abstract statement:

> Eh quoi, on souffre donc dans le ciel? Elle retient les bras de son Fils! Eh quoi, n'est-il donc plus tout sachant et tout puissant? - Toutes choses qu'une théologie guindée a de la peine à justifier mais que le coeur comprend d'emblée. Toute la difficulté vient peut-être de l'idée que les théories classiques se font des passions, où elles voient des manques ou des imperfections, tandis qu'imparfaites en effet ou vicieuses le plus souvent dans leurs motifs, elles ont cependant la supériorité de nature de l'acte sur la puissance. Un être se réalise plus complètement dans l'état de passion que dans l'état d'inertie ou de tranquillité. La douleur aussi est une perfection. Pour comprendre ce que je veux dire, que l'on songe au 3e mouvement de la Symphonie avec choeurs ou la douleur la plus déchirante s'unit à la béatitude la plus ineffable. De même dans l'infirmité de notre intelligence, nous nous faisons peut-être une idée meilleure, quoique toujours ridiculement insuffisante, de l'état des saints et de Dieu même en le traduisant dans le domaine de la passion humaine que dans celui de l'abstraction métaphysique.

This argument could equally well be invoked for Bloy's own presentation; and the qualification made in both cases that it is not, as each claims, a question of presentation alone, but of an apology for acceptance of the passions rather than reason - activity rather than contemplation - as the basis of the moral life.

Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition

Gaëtan Bernoville distinguishes four themes in the Message of La Salette: the apparent failure of the Redemption, demonstrated by the continuation of human sin and indifference; the rôle of human solidarity in the Communion of Saints in perfecting the Redemption; the mediation in this of Mary; and the salvific necessity of vicarious suffering, with Mary as the model.[1] According to Bernoville, Bloy's originality in Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition lies in his having incorporated all four into his discussion of the Message, - particularly the theme of vicarious suffering - and in his presentation, which combines exploitation of the traditional image of Mary with that of the new symbols offered by the Apparition. (He could also have added, in his relation of the Message to its contemporary context, in the dramatic sketch of the luxury, materialism and mediocrity of Louis-Philippe's court which is the epitome of degenerate modern society.)

Through Tardif, the work comes into the sphere of the Assumptionists' efforts in the 1870's to publicise the themes of compassion and reparation. It differs from Bloy's later treatments in its more theological slant on the problem of suffering, though still pointing forward to later work on a literary plane in its lyrical praise of the beauty of suffering. Its origin within the Church discourages secondary points of clerical inadequacy, clerical persecution of Bloy, or Bloy's unique mission with regard to La Salette from detracting from the theological exposition, as in later work they tend to.

The subject of the book is the Compassion of Mary presented through the Apparition of La Salette. The unity of the work lies in the

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[1] G. Bernoville, "La Salette et nous", in La Salette: Témoignages, ed. M. Brillant, Paris, 1946, pp. 8-15.

figure of Mary; in Part I, the Woman of the Apocalypse and of the Latter Days, after Grignon and Hello, and in Part II, the type of the Mother of the Macchabees. In both rôles, the Virgin distributes equally threats of persecution and promises of renewal through suffering.

Bloy's two main points are the necessity and significance of suffering, and the end of suffering in Mary, which includes both the rationale of Compassion and the Apocalyptic message of La Salette. The message can briefly be summarised as an appeal for France to return to the gospel of Christ crucified, through the mediation of Mary.[1] In both cases, Bloy adds the commonplace of Marian theology that the fact of Mary's speaking signifies the inauguration of a new stage in the Providential scheme and the imminence of the End, and that the message of La Salette is a final call to penitence.

Part I considers the doctrine of Compassion, with an opening statement of the mediational privileges of Mary at La Salette shown in her suffering on behalf of and in compensation for humanity, as she suffered with and for Christ on Calvary.[2] Her task at La Salette is to restate

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 53.

[2] Faber explains that Mary's Compassion is the point at which human suffering is made necessary in the Providential dispensation. Her title "Coredemptress of the world" is a lawful one, since, by her part in the Incarnation and by her Sorrows, she co-operated more in the Redemption than any other of the elect, whose co-operation is dependent on her. Her Compassion on Calvary increased the pain of Christ's Passion, and hence its expiatory value; and her own grief made reparation for his Passion, thereby absolving humanity from guilt. She alone, as Mother and Immaculate, is properly entitled to offer Christ's sacrifice to God on behalf of the redeemed. Her Compassion is the point of identification between her and sinful humanity which makes her mediation possible. Devotion to her Compassion and to her Sorrows establishes the link of sympathy, and keeps men in perpetual contrition (F. W. Faber, The Foot of the Cross, ch. ix, "The Compassion of Mary").

the part of suffering in the Christian system in order to renew Christian fervour. To Bloy's contemporaries, the idea of suffering is alien and repugnant. Their Earthly Paradise is watered not by the four rivers of Genesis, which traditionally represent the moral virtues, but by the Pactole and the Rubicon(material wealth and the Republican cult of progress and perfectibility). Even Christians relegate suffering to a simple accident, passing over the Pauline definition of the Church as: "La Société de la Passion de Jésus . . . la Configuration à sa Mort".[1]

In order to assure man's independence, God adopted suffering on the Cross, reducing himself to the repulsive <u>rôle</u> of servant and victim, waiting on man's pleasure:

> . . . jamais, depuis la loi de grâce, Il n'a parlé aux hommes avec une autorité absolue, mais au contraire avec la timidité, la douceur et je dirai même, l'obséquiosité d'un solliciteur indigent qu'aucun dégoût ne serait capable de rebuter. . . . S'il veut nous avoir, il faut qu'il nous séduise, car si sa Majesté ne nous plaît pas, nous pouvons la rejeter de notre présence, la faire souffleter, fouetter et crucifier aux applaudissements de la plus vile canaille. Il ne se défendra pas par sa puissance mais seulement par sa Patience et par sa Beauté et c'est ici le combat terrible dont je parlais tout à l'heure.[2]

Man in his turn must accept a voluntary part in Christ's servile Passion to repair the wrong this did to God's majesty. This atonement by the creature is a necessary part of the Passion, through which the Members of Christ's Body are invested with the dignity and responsibility of joint Redeemers:

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[1] <u>Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition</u>, <u>OC</u> X, 21.

[2] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 22.

> En nous déclarant Membres de Jésus-Christ, l'Esprit-Saint nous a revêtus de la dignité de Rédempteurs et lorsque nous refusons de souffrir, nous sommes exactement des simoniaques et des prévaricateurs. Nous sommes faits pour cela et pour cela seul. Lorsque nous versons notre sang, c'est sur le Calvaire qu'il coule et de là sur toute la terre . . . . Lorsque nous versons nos larmes qui sont "le sang de nos âmes", c'est sur le coeur de la Vierge qu'elles tombent et de là sur tous les coeurs vivants. Notre qualité de Membres de Jésus-Christ et de fils de Marie nous a faits si grands que nous pouvons noyer le monde dans nos larmes.[1]

Mary at La Salette is the clearest example of the reciprocal redemptive suffering of God and Man. The saints had always sought supererogatory suffering, but never with such perception of its organic meaning in relation to the presence of Christ in history as is given by Mary, who is the image of humanity's contribution to his Deposition from the Cross:

> . . . le très profond enseignement des souffrances de Jésus-Christ marqué par le marteau et les tenailles de La Salette, c'est-à-dire par les instruments du crucifiement et de la Descente de Croix, ce rudiment authentique de la Folie Sainte n'avait pas encore été donné au monde aussi ostensiblement. Il fallait pour cela la Mère, la Mère aux Sept Glaives, Celle qui représente la Gloire de Dieu et en qui Dieu habite et on sait comment elle est venue. Seule assise sur cette pierre mystérieusement préparée qui fait penser à l'autre pierre sur qui repose l'Eglise, le Sein chargé des instruments de torture de Son Enfant et pleurent comme on n'avait pas pleuré depuis deux mille ans: "Depuis que je souffre pour vous qui n'en faites pas de cas", dit-elle.[2]

The instruments of the Passion here represent not the physical suffering of Christ on the Cross, which relates back to the simple concept of his single satisfaction for the sin of the Fall, but rather .

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 24.

[2] Ibid., p. 29.

his moral and spiritual anguish over the uncertain reception by humanity of the merits of his suffering and his gift of liberty - for which, according to Bloy, the Cross has also atoned. The hammer which fixed him represents: "Tous les actes librement déréglés de la pensée, toutes les oscillations criminelles de la volonté, toutes les palpitations de tous les coeurs, dans toute la durée des temps . . . ." and the pincers which release him, purification through the Eucharist and mortification.[1] This is the same division as is made in Marchenoir's synthesis of the symbolism of History between the era of physical sufferings which prepared Calvary and the moral suffering which succeeded exacted from Christians desiring the formation of the universal Body of Christ which secular society constantly defers.

The perfection of the Redemption is demonstrated by the relationship between the Trinity and the Immaculate Conception.[2] Mary desires the temporal extension of this to the whole of humanity, which can only be achieved by conformity to herself and to Christ. Part I ends on a note of liberation, with an evocation of the salvation to be had within the Communion of Saints and in devotion to Mary's Sorrows.

The second part exploits the emotive aspects of Mary's appeal for configuration to Christ, by her Beauty and maternal tenderness and by her threats to those who fail to respond to her. Her intercessionary rôle is pressed by an evocation of her roots in Jewish history through the Messianic generations of the Old Testament whose sufferings formed the Immaculate Conception.[3] The colour of Old Testament types

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 26.

[2] Ibid., p. 31.

[3] Ibid., pp. 31, 70.

and Septenary images is invoked to bring out the beauty of Mary's intercessionary suffering, and the doctrine explained through Marian devotions: in Part I, the Way of the Cross, and in Part II, the popular devotion to the Seven Sorrows of Mary, whose object is the spiritual martyrdom of Mary and her compassion with the sufferings of Christ. The latter, presented in a new vehicle - the martyrdom of the Macchabees - offer a neat doctrinal summary on which the section concludes.[1]

The sons of the Macchabees suffer for God under the aegis of their Mother. The purpose of their suffering is to "consoler Dieu". Christ is drawn in agonies of grief and human fear, unable to endure his own sacrifice without the comfort of Christian acknowledgement of the meaning and purpose of his redemptive action, and therefore unable to provide his people with strength to bear their sufferings in the subsequent historical prevarication. The second sorrow pleads the unique virtue of the sufferings of the innocent: under the Old Testament, to prepare the sacrifice of Christ, and under the New, to prepare the reign of the Spirit. Faber is invoked to show the necessity of freely-willed sacrifice, which must also be a rational act. The third urges obedience and humble acceptance of suffering; and third, fourth and fifth deal with the question of salvation or damnation in the next life, which depends on the acceptance or rejection of suffering in this. Damnation is justifiable for those who fail to ac-

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[1]The Seven Sorrows of Mary: the prophecy of Simeon, the flight into Egypt, the loss of the Holy Child at Jerusalem, the meeting with Jesus on the way to Calvary, the station at the foot of the Cross, the deposition, and the burial of Christ (Responsories of Matins, 3rd Sunday in September).

knowledge the self-humiliating efforts of God's love, presented in the Passion. (The affective appeal of humiliated love is exploited throughout Bloy's work: in Le Désespéré, the insulted Face of Christ presides over such central episodes as the account of the symbolic meaning of history, or of the death of Marchenoir.[1])

In the fifth sorrow, the Station at the Cross, Christ explains that his sufferings on Calvary represent forgiveness for apostates and sinners in their accomplishment of the curse on Adam, which he asks humanity to share with him, and mark the transfer of his intercessional rôle to Mary. Her threats back his appeal for conformity.

The sixth sorrow, the Deposition, is the most impressive pictorial evocation of humanity's compassion in Mary. Mary represents humanity resting in the perfections of Christ. This rest is as God's on the seventh day of Creation; that is, still active in providential and redemptive work. She mirrors the reconciliatory effort of his suffering and extends this to the rest of creation. Bloy presents this extension first in the form of a prophetic promise and then in the present state of penitence which prepares accomplishment of the promise. Mary, the Mystic City, is drawn in apparent desolation, like the Body of Christ; an appearance necessary while the curse of Genesis is expiated and removed from every part of the Body.

At this stage, Bloy is confident that the intercession of Mary and the appeal of her tears will be sufficient incentive for the conversion of humanity and sufficient counterweight to the wrath of God, providing the conversion is not delayed.

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 58, 316.

Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, Bloy's only attempt at systematic exhaustion of the Catholic doctrine of suffering, was never published in his lifetime. He may have realised the hermetic appearance which much of his doctrine had for the uninitiate, despite his efforts at simplification and imaginative re-presentation; he may also have been dissatisfied with some of the overtones of the rigorous system such as the need for voluntary adherence, or the logical difficulty of justifying the doctrine of atonement. He contrives to sidestep these whilst retaining his more important discoveries by using sections of his manuscript in later works, where they become more comprehensible.

The passage which describes suffering as the essence of the Mystic Body of the Church and explains the relation between suffering and liberty - "La simple vérité catholique est qu'il faut absolument souffrir pour être sauvé . . . ." reappears in Dans les ténèbres;[1] whilst that giving the doctrine of vicarious suffering is also used in Le Désespéré.[2] The intercessionary rôle of Mary, given in the parable of "Les Quarante Justes" and the tableau of her Station at the Cross are used again in Le Salut par les Juifs, where Bloy's attempt to combine through the figure of the Jewish Virgin the sacrificial doctrines and Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament and his own eschatology becomes more clear.[3]

With the change of context, the text is sometimes slightly modified, as when the maledictio matris, spoken by Mary in Le Salut par

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 22-25; Dans les ténèbres, OC IX, ch. ix (see also letter to Michel Ménard, 9th January 1877).

[2] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 79-80; Le Désespéré, OC III, 111-12 (see also "La Maison-Dieu", Le Foyer Illustré, 4th, 25th January 1879).

[3] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 64-67, 107-108; Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, chs. xxx, xix.

les Juifs, is reattributed in Le Désespéré to Christ on the Cross.[1] This does not always reflect any particular change in Bloy's devotional attitudes, though in the instance quoted it should be recalled that the composition of Le Désespéré coincides with the period of Bloy's disappointment at the non-accomplishment of the apocalyptic prophecies of La Salette.

The lengthy doctrinal elaborations of Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition are represented elsewhere by simpler imaginative forms. The theme of compassion, for example, is frequently invoked through the image of tears. According to the explanation in "Les Larmes de Marie", the third section of Bloy's book, all the tears shed through Biblical history are types of Mary's tears and acquire reparatory value through her. The remorse tears imply cannot be natural, given the evil nature of man, but requires a prior infusion of the grace which Mary mediates. From this point, it becomes possible to see all human tears, whatever their source, as contributing to the work of compassion. In La Femme pauvre, Clotilde's sinful tears are mediated by the presence of the sacrament,[2] whilst Marchenoir's are further transposed into the stars over La Salette and mingled with the sound of the fountain and the streams pouring down the hillside.[3] In both novels, the image lifts the love relationships into compassionate patterns; Marchenoir weeps over the mutilated Véronique, or discovers her in tears on his behalf in front of her crucifix, while Clotilde and Léopold inaugurate their union by tears of mutual compassion.[4] The anecdote of the Loire floods

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 97-98; Le Désespéré, OC III, 279-80 (see also Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 58).

[2] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 44.

[3] Ibid., p. 82.

[4] Ibid., p. 190.

sweeping the populace into the churches in a mediaeval spirit of penitence,[1] and the description of Clotilde's soul after her fall as a magnificent grotto hidden and preserved by ". . . les effrayantes eaux souterraines de son repentir"[2] are related to the same motif.

La Femme pauvre

The proper fulfilment of Bloy's intention to write an apologetic work of general interest on La Salette, which will show the Christian concept of suffering perfectly satisfying in intellectual and emotional terms, appears in the transposition of the devotional imagery of Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition into the anecdote of Marchenoir's pilgrimage to La Salette and his encounter with the vegetarian which is given in La Femme pauvre.[3] The episode seems at first sight digressive, as La Salette appears nowhere else in the novel, but in fact pulls together the ideas of suffering and expiation which are the basis of the book and is worked into the narrative by virtue of its contribution to Clotilde's "intellectual" development.

In a novel aimed at a public inclined to ridicule assertions both of the existence of supernatural phenomena and of the necessity of suffering, presentation is the first problem. Bloy solves this by reducing to a minimum the controversial aspects of the Apparition, such as the miracles question, and by beginning obliquely with a parenthesis on religious art which imperceptibly shifts the context of the discussion back to the "simple innocence" of the Middle Ages, a more

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[1] La Femme pauvre, p. 118-19.

[2] Ibid., p. 48.

[3] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, Pt. I, chs. xiii-xv.

sympathetic setting against which Marchenoir begins an emotive account of his personal experience of suffering, describing his first visit to La Salette after the death of his son André. This is a transposition of Bloy's own experience; in order to maintain the fiction that the doctrines he preaches have won his adherence by their objective truth, Bloy never mentions in the context of La Salette the feelings of guilt over his relationship with Anne-Marie Roulet which made the message of the Apparition particularly relevant for him. As it is, Gacougnol - in order, Bloy notes, to hide his own unease - challenges Marchenoir's objectivity, but is countered by the quiet assurance that Marchenoir's sensitivity to suffering is the product of his Catholicism and not the contrary, and by a description of the beneficent effect of suffering on the character - not an argument, but simply a change of perspective.

The doctrinal study of La Salette is still thorough, but simplified. Bloy hints at its apocalyptic overtones, but rather than the Virgin's threats stresses the idea of consolation. He refers briefly to the particular failing of priesthood and laity to respond to Mary ("les raisonnables chrétiens que le Surnaturel incommode"[1]), but without making these the main part of the Message. His main interest is in the general themes of reparation and expiation: La Salette as "le Sinaï de la Pénitence, le Paradis de la Douleur".[2]

Marchenoir's account opens with a description of the beauty of La Salette, linking the magnificence of the mountain and the storm

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[1] La Femme pauvre, p. 84.

[2] Ibid., p. 92.

raging throughout his ascent with the gloriousness of his own spiritual aspirations:

> Je suis monté vers ce gouffre de lumière, un jour d'orage, dans la pluie furieuse, dans l'effort des vents enragés, dans l'ouragan de mon espoir et le tourbillon de mes pensées, l'oreille rompue des cris du torrent .... Je compte bien ne pas mourir sans avoir fixé dans quelque livre d'amour le ressouvenir surhumain de cette escalade où j'offrais toute mon âme à Dieu dans les cent mille mains de mon désir ...."

He finds there not merely a refuge, but a dynamic transposition of his grief; in the isolation of suffering, he reaches a communion with God which is a baptismal renewal:

> . . . je pus croire que toutes mes larmes étincelaient dans les cieux, car il me semblait que toutes mes racines s'étaient retournées en haut.
>
> Autour de moi, le silence humain. Nul autre bruit que celui de la fontaine miraculeuse à l'unisson de cette musique du Paradis que faisaient tous les ruissellements de la montagne et parfois, aussi, dans un grand lointain, les claires sonnailles de quelques troupeaux.[1]

The beauty of suffering established, Bloy tackles the more difficult theme of expiation, which he deliberately casts into the most exaggerated terms. This at once crystallises the severe or ridiculous aspects most susceptible to criticism, on which Bloy capitalises.

The comic possibilities of the theme are exhausted in the figure of the vegetarian, the butt for lukewarm priests and laity, who are summarily dealt with by an outraged Marchenoir. The place is left clear for a review of the man's rigorous self-imposed penitences. Having killed a friend in a duel, over a trivial quarrel, he finds no atonement sufficient except the adoption of the ignominious sufferings of Christ.[2] Refused the refuge of religious vocation, he

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[1] La Femme pauvre, pp. 81-82.

[2] Ibid., p. 91.

has imitated the penance of the prophet: "je me suis marié pour souffrir tout mon soûl. J'ai pris une vieille prostituée de bas étage dont les matelots ne voulaient plus. Elle me roue de coups et m'abreuve de ridicule et d'ignominie ...." In this alliance with abjection, allegory of Christ's union with his creation, he finds the peace of submission to the providential dispensation which is also expressed in his devotion to the beasts. Their present inferiority symbolises that of the universal order, including the abjection of God, and at the same time promises renewal of this order, since their suffering is part of the universal ransom.

The purpose of the whole account, like the purpose of the Apparition, becomes that of demonstrating the identity of penitential suffering and renewal. The study ends on the theme of the whole creation sighing for redemption with which Marchenoir had initiated his argument. Human and divine suffering are mystically identified in disinterested love, with a description of the vegetarian in the images of Isaiah's suffering servant:

> Il représente pour moi la combinaison surnaturelle d'enfantillage dans l'amour et de profondeur dans le sacrifice qui fut tout l'esprit des premiers chrétiens, autour desquels avait mugi l'ouragan des douleurs d'un Dieu. Bafoué par les imbéciles et les hypocrites, indigent volontaire et triste jusqu'à la mort quand il se regarde lui-même, fiancé à tous les tourments et compagnon satisfait de tous les opprobres, ce brûlant de la Croix est, à mes yeux, l'image et le raccourci très fidèle de ces temps défunts où la terre était comme un grand vaisseau dans les golfes du Paradis![1]

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[1] La Femme pauvre, p. 95.

Celle qui pleure; Introduction à la "Vie de Mélanie"

Bloy did not return to the theme of La Salette again until 1906, when Pierre Termier, first attracted to Bloy's work by the section on La Salette in La Femme pauvre, suggested Bloy take up again the idea of a book on the Apparition, and accompanied him to La Salette in search of documentation.[1]

The motive for Bloy's renewal of his plea for penitence can be found in the anti-clerical developments of this period recorded in his diary. March 12th was the beginning of the Clemenceau-Briand ministry which made the destruction of religion in France a part of its platform. The election results of 8th May, with overwhelming Republican successes, indicated for Bloy the progress of national apostasy; and during his pilgrimage to La Salette, hostilities between the Pope and the French government came to a head. On August 16th the February encyclical Vehementer nos was published in France; the Pope rejected the "associations cultuelles" proposed by the French government as the only form for the legal survival of the Church in France. In his diary for the same day, Bloy forecast "une persécution sanglante et prochaine". 29th November: "Que sera décembre? Fermera-t-on notre chère basilique? Aurons-nous encore des messes? Il est bien remarquable que ce livre à faire sur La Salette et ces documents terribles sur le baîllon ecclésiastique mis à la Sainte Vierge me soient présentés en ce moment". The separation of Church and State became accomplished fact; on the 10th December, Bloy referred bitterly to the large numbers of Catholic laymen who welcomed liberation from Papal authority. The Papal nuncio was led to the frontier, and

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[1] L'Invendable, 17th January, 13th May 1906.

Cardinal Richard, Archbishop of Paris, expelled from his palace.[1] In the New Year, L'Invendable reported the European extent of persecution; 3rd January 1907, Bloy attacked the Polish Kulturkampf.

In these circumstances, Bloy's response to La Salette was no longer quite the same as in 1879. Supported by the accusations of Melanie's Secret, he added sustained polemic against the betrayal by priests and laity of Catholic principle by their lethargy in the face of oppression. Tardif had made similar charges, but was unaware of the real extent of the danger.[2]

Melanie's Secret forms the centre and originality of the new book Celle qui pleure, published in 1907. Bloy promised to show the identity of Discourse and Secret, proved by the miracles and by the efforts of the priesthood to suppress both, despite the favour of Pius IX and Leo XII, and Pius X, none of whomhad ever tried to condemn Melanie.[3]

The choice of such complicated and esoteric approach may partly be reaction to what Bloy considered the over-simplified and insufficiently Catholic forms of Huysmans, whose apology of Lourdes he was reading as he began to write his own book; but is partly also within the terms of his argument. Bloy needs the combined effect of the Virgin's authoritative denunciation of French society and Melanie's reiteration of this in more impressive apocalyptic images, together with her longer elaboration of the solution of vicarious suffering.

The resulting apology is easier to approach than Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition. The disarray of Bloy's thought is compensated by

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[1] L'Invendable, 12th, 13th December 1906.

[2] Ibid., 25th August 1906.

[3] Ibid., 12th August 1906; Le Vieux de la montagne, 6th April 1908.

division into short chapters which isolate the separate points. These are given unity by the theme of priestly mediocrity which, capitalising on present anti-clerical feeling, compensates for the intransigence of the Catholic dogma. Devotional points are made more succinctly; the long analysis of the Way of the Cross is concentrated into a simple image of tears and repentance, and heavy and detailed Biblical references are dropped for tableaux still Catholic in origin but more arresting and immediate, such as the evocation of the Beatific Vision in the chapter "En Paradis", Mary's confidences to Melanie, the elaborate image of the Sacred Heart crowned with thorns, and the long quotation from Grignon de Montfort describing his Apostles of the Latter Days which illustrates the virtues demanded by Melanie's Rule. Doctrinally, the dignity and sovereignty of Mary are still central; the text of the chapter of this title is taken verbatim from Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition. Her co-redemptive rôle is developed to give increased stress on the thesis of vicarious suffering.

Detailed exposition of doctrine as practised in the first of Bloy's works is no longer opportune. The immediate need is to inspire an energising sense of the need for moral revival in decadent France, for which the crudest and simplest methods of persuasion are justifiable. The voluntary victim is no longer considered; Bloy expresses total lack of confidence not in God, but in human nature and will-power:

> Si Dieu ôtait la "terreur" comment pourrait-on souffrir? Coepit pavere, dit saint Marc, racontant l'Agonie . . . .
>
> La confiance n'est pas ébranlée, mais il n'y aurait rien de fait si Dieu me privait de l'angoisse.
>
> Les hommes n'auraient pu être sauvés si Jésus n'avait pas sué le sang à force d'avoir peur et de s'ennuyer. Coepit pavere et taedere: Quel texte![1]

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[1] Letter to Raïssa Maritain, 10th May 1907.

During the writing of Celle qui pleure, Bloy felt an increasing sense of affinity with the shepherdess Melanie. Reading her recently-published correspondence in January 1907, he recognised formal resemblances between her ideas and his own, particularly in their prophecies of the End - scarcely surprising, since both draw on a common stock of Biblical Apocalyptic imagery, and given that extracts from Melanie's letters had been in circulation since 1880 in the second volume of Adrien Péladan's Dernier Mot des prophéties.[1]

Le Pèlerin de l'absolu, 18th March 1910, noted the first idea of a book to complement Celle qui pleure. On the 13th May 1910, Bloy told Raoux that the book was to be a Life of Melanie, for which he had promised an uncontroversial approach in order to gain access to unpublished documents held by her confessor. Despite this, the documents were witheld and in October, feeling he had nothing new to add to Celle qui pleure, Bloy dropped his project.[2] He began again 3rd May 1911, having found the "new" theme of Melanie's compassionate suffering, which he intended to present paradoxically as beatitude:

> Au pied de la Croix, Mélanie a trouvé le Paradis terrestre qui est la Souffrance et il n'y en a pas d'autre. En réalité l'homme est toujours dans le Jardin de Volupté. Seulement après la Chute, il s'est vu nu, il a vu nus la terre et tout ce qui est sur la terre; il a connu que la Souffrance n'est autre chose que la Volupté toute nue. Les étonnantes pages de Mélanie, la Bonne Année, ont fait naître en moi le désir de montrer sous cet aspect le Paradis terrestre et ce sera l'objet de mon Introduction.

To a correspondent, Bloy describes his work as: "un tison dans la poudrière catholique".[3] The inflammatory element is not the expected

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[1] Letter to Raïssa Maritain, 23rd January 1907.

[2] Le Pèlerin de l'absolu, 26th October 1910.

[3] Letter to Alfred Pouthier, 23rd December 1911 (La R.).

anti-clerical propaganda, but his unrepentantly dogmatic presentation of his theme.

He draws together the liturgical image of the Immaculate Conception as the Garden of Paradise and the doctrine of humanity's solidarity in Mary, as formerly in Eve, to show that humanity, dwelling in Mary, must logically dwell in Paradise.[1] This Paradise, like the Immaculate Conception, consists wholly of suffering. The Immaculate Conception was formed by the expiatory sufferings of all humanity, and now performs the function of mediator of these:

> Marie sans péché recueillit tout l'héritage de cette pénitence et en fit ce qu'elle en pouvait, c'est-à-dire une Douleur comme il n'y a pas de douleur au monde, la douleur de toutes les générations, de tous les hommes, de tous les coeurs, de toutes les intelligences, la douleur même des démons et des réprouvés, diraient quelques visionnaires.[2]

Mary's suffering is more than passive submission and obedience. It is an enthusiastic thirst for Revival, which alone can make the effects of Redemption visible. Bloy again makes the unexpected attribution of passions to the theological person: "L'Immaculée Conception n'était pas assez pour procurer le Salut du monde. L'Impatience et la Douleur de l'Immaculée Conception étaient nécessaires."[3]

Mary's perfect union with God makes her substitution for humanity logically sufficient. Morally, however, it is more satisfactory for men to have personal experience of the suffering which is acute desire for God. Bloy presents this contention in a plea for the extension

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[1] See above p. 169.

[2] Introduction à la "Vie de Mélanie", OC X, 270.

[3] Ibid.

of the Passion of the Holy Spirit: "l'ignominie de l'Amour . . . la Passion de l'Esprit-Saint, laquelle doit transformer toute créature en une fournaise".[1]

Condemnation of the heroic virtue of such independance is nowadays universal. This is a state for which Mary and her few disciples compensate by the example of their enthusiasm: "Elles seront ainsi comme des parties de vous-même et réaliseront avec vous la Rédemption qui ne peut être accompli que par votre Epoux, lorsque les chrétiens seront tombés assez bas pour lui décerner l'Ignominie inconnue."[2] Melanie's fulfilment of this rôle is exalted in liturgical and Biblical parallels which evoke: "la compénétration de cette pauvresse obscure, existante à peine, en l'éblouissante Mère du Fils de Dieu". She is praised in the language of the Magnificat, fulfilling the type of Abraham, the intercessor, and both prophetess and victim.[3] She is also the last of the line of compatient victims, in whose absence society must inevitably be destroyed.

The Melanist thesis in Bloy's work - that is, extreme stress on the notion of vicarious suffering - has attracted unfavourable critical attention from later theologians.[4] The image of Melanie in fact only becomes important for Bloy from 1907, as a focus for that description of the function of the members of the Communion of Saints in the work of Reparation which is already well-established in his thought, and is not much more exaggerated than images used by contemporary theolo-

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[1] Introduction à la "Vie de Mélanie", OC X, 271.

[2] Ibid., p. 273.

[3] Ibid., p. 276.

[4] See the controversy between R. P. Herbin, La Vie Spirituelle, Aug.-Sept. 1946; J. Maritain, ibid., October 1946; L. Massignon, Dieu Vivant, No. 7, 8th September 1946.

gians writing on the Sacred Heart or by writers such as Huysmans who chose less immediately controversial vehicles.

The War Period

References to La Salette made during the war years draw more often on Melanie's prophecies of catastrophe, though still generally avoiding the literalist excesses of other contemporaries which led to the discussion of La Salette being forbidden by Rome in 1915. At this point, the nationalistic overtones of the Apparition became more overt. In his first full-length study of the war, Jeanne d'Arc et l'Allemagne,[1] Bloy invoked the joint intercession of the sufferings of the warrior virgin and the Virgin of La Salette, who is also the triumphant Woman of the Apocalypse, together with the enforced sufferings of France, to argue that the triumph or "forgiveness" of France were assured, once the expiatory nature of these sufferings was acknowledged. As the war progressed, he advocated devotion to La Salette with increasing urgency as the only means to victory. In the eighteenth of his Méditations, directed at the soldiers at the front, he recalled his own experiences in the Franco-Prussian War and the encouragement and inspiration provided by the visions of Pontmain. Mary's prevision at La Salette of the present anguish and her intimation of her intercession offer similar hope and consolation:

> "Voici ton fils", lui dit Jésus, nous désignant du haut de Sa Croix. Quelque irrité qu'il soit, il le lui dit encore et toujours. Il le dit tellement que l'effrayant Consommatum n'a pas encore eu le temps de venir depuis bientôt deux mille ans, et que cette Parole suprême du Christ expirant ressemble,

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[1] Published 1915. The Introduction was written 14th-26th July 1914, just before the outbreak of war, and the rest of the work between 5th November 1914 and 6th February 1915 (see Au seuil de l'Apocalypse).

> dans l'Evangile, à une prophétie des psaumes qui ne serait pas encore accomplie. Maternité douloureuse, universelle, interminable autant que la Rédemption.[1]

Bloy poses a crude and sentimental but effective opposition which is a transposition of the two aspects of the Apparition; on the one hand, the "Consolatrice transpercée", whom the soldier recalls from his childhood, and on the other, the victorious Virgin of the triumphant Church, sweeping across the battlefront. But his appeal is ignored and in the end he reverts to Melanie's theme that salvation lies in widespread involuntary suffering ratified by the intercession of the few elect: "l'Eucharistie dans les Catacombes et l'attente du Libérateur inconnu que le Paraclet doit envoyer, lorsque le sang des suppliciés innombrables et les larmes de quelques élus auront suffisamment nettoyé la terre".[2]

In Dans les ténèbres, the failure of the hierarchy to disseminate the teachings of La Salette and that of the laity to respond to its appeal for reparation are rationalised as acts of Providence, a prevarication like that of the Jews on Calvary, whose end Bloy deliberately leaves unexplained but which is to permit the evolution of the Mystic Body in time. The success of Henri Barbusse's novel Le Feu, of 1917, which claimed the existence of suffering as not evidence but disproof of the existence of God and refused the Catholic attempt to give meaning to the anguish of war as impulse to heroism and proof of human dignity, demonstrated for Bloy the desolation and apparent

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[1] Méditations, OC IX, 263.

[2] Ibid., p. 284.

powerlessness of the Virgin and her compatients; which, however, he describes in terms of the mystery of the Nativity, implying an imminent reversal by God as magnificent and conclusive as that of Bethlehem, where the poverty of Mary was once before rejected:

> Qu'allez-vous faire? Je sais que vous ne pouvez plus vous opposer au déchaînement de la Colère, mais je sais aussi que vous ne pouvez pas non plus accepter que tous vos enfants périssent. Qu'allez-vous faire? Descendrez-vous de votre montagne pour venir pleurer à toutes les portes comme une vagabonde malheureuse? Recommencerez-vous ainsi votre imploration inutile de Bethléhem, lorsque vous cherchiez un abri quelconque pour enfanter le Rédempteur? Les ministres de Dieu vous rebuteraient avec ignominie. Les chrétiens et les chrétiennes qui font profession de vous honorer dans les églises vous accuseraient d'imposture et les superbes athées, qui pensent avoir effacé leur caractère baptismal, vous jetteraient à la face leur intellectualité de vomissement. O ma Dame de Compassion et ma Souveraine de pleurs, il faut décidément nous laisser mourir.[1]

## 2. The Contemporary Perspective

Having reviewed the sources on which Bloy drew to form his own synthesis of the meaning of suffering, it will now be useful to consider this in relation to two other syntheses which formed together a major part of the Catholic doctrine of his time: the cult of the Sacred Heart and the doctrine of the Communion of Saints.

### The Sacred Heart

The devotion to the Sacred Heart, which had reached unique if not disproportionate importance in France by the end of the nineteenth

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[1] Dans les ténèbres, OC IX, 325-26; see also ch. xvi, "Commémoration".

century, can be considered the popular parallel to Bloy's concept of suffering, dealing in exactly those themes which he makes his own by presentation through the vehicle of La Salette and, to a lesser degree, by harking back to the statements of the traditionalists.

The cult, Franciscan in origin, flowered in the thirteenth century as a private devotion, through Jacopone di Todi, Angela di Foligno, Gertrude and Mechtilde. The Heart is a second mediator between God and man through which the effects of the Redemption are renewed. Christ, complaining of his rejection by modern humanity, asks the individual for a response of reparation. With the visions of the Blessed Margaret Mary d'Alacoque at Paray-le-Monial (1673-1689) the doctrine changed shape to carry the overtones of national and political renewal familiar to Bloy and to the present day.

Christ's request through the nun for the French nation to be consecrated to his Heart and its sign marked on her flag, rejected at the time, was revived after the Franco-Prussian War, when the Heart became the symbol of Christian restoration, reinstatement of the Monarchy and national elevation, particularly for Naundorffists and Jacobins. National reparation was demanded for public unbelief and apostasy. Pilgrimages were organised to Paray, the climax being that of 29th July 1873, when the National Assembly dedicated France to the Heart.

Among the many works on the doctrines related to the cult which the period produced, two typical products may be selected.

The abbé Bougaud's Histoire de la bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie et des origines de la dévotion au Sacré-Coeur de Jésus, published in Paris in 1874, is a systematic rationalisation. The devotion is said

to be centred on the love of God, incarnate, merciful, and ever-present in the Eucharist, in the suffering and suppliant Christ. It was developed in order to check the increasingly pervasive influence of Protestantism and Jansenism, which challenge the concepts of God's absolute powers - his benevolence to all men and his freedom to forgive - and his presence within the temporal in the Eucharist. Rather than punish his people, God constantly abases himself to counter their increasing coldness, from Creation to Crib, Cross, Eucharist and Heart. A human response of equal self-abnegation is expected. Margaret-Mary's practices were aimed at this: monthly communion, in a spirit of reparation, and every Thursday, observance of the Holy Agony as expiation for the sins of the world and to console Christ for his abandonment. Bougaud states, without much elaboration, theheroic significance of suffering which the devotion expresses. Of the two poles within the Heart, of suffering and of joy, the second is the one which creates saints for eternity, though on earth it seems neither great nor fruitful. Devotion to the Heart of Mary is not mentioned, but the widespread cult of this at our period is a necessary complement. Her physical heart is worshipped as a symbol of her perfect mediational love of God and of man, resting on her divine Maternity of Christ, through the obedience of the Magnificat, and of man, to whom it is a more accessible model than the perfect heart of Christ and a means of fortifying his prayer by increasing his confidence.[1]

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[1] Arts. "Coeur sacré de Jésus" and "Coeur de Marie", Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, III, i, Paris, 1938, cols. 271-351 and 351-54.

A work giving a truer indication of the form in which the cult was incorporated into common experience is Father Lyonnard's practical handbook of 1867 L'Intercession perpetuelle au Coeur agonisant de Jésus, pour les quatre-vingt mille agonisants qui meurent par jour, which is an emotive and exaggerated plea for penitence. Perpetual reparation is necessary to console Christ for one's own sins and for the sins of others, and to win the grace of final repentance for the dying. The emotive aspects of the last point are played on without apology. Valid reparation requires a double apostolate of prayer and suffering, for which absolute purity of conscience is essential. This is acquired through the mediation of the Agonising Christ and the Saints, and, most of all, through Mary. The doctrine is explained as a mechanical series of balances and compensations. There is a confraternity of perpetual intercession by voluntary victims, working by rota, who have accepted total suffering and, if necessary, death. The Association ticket also explains the ultramontane and national implications of the devotion, described - inaccurately - as secondary features.

Bloy probably first met the devotion in its crudely affective terms through his mother, who was educated at a convent of the Sacred Heart. Her letters to him refer to ecstasies, to the cult of grief, and to the figure of Christ crucified.[1] In the early 1870's Bloy was caught up in the penitential pilgrimages organised by the Assumptionists.

He acquired the rationale of his doctrine from Faber. Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition quotes Bridget's formula, used in The Foot of

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[1] G. Rocal, Léon Bloy et le Périgord, Paris, 1934, p. 15.

the Cross: "Mon Fils et moi nous avons racheté le monde avec un seul coeur." In Bloy's book, this is recast into a more violent image which re-enacts the complex interdependence of human and divine suffering which is the basis of the doctrine: "Marie enfonce le glaive de Sa pitié maternelle dans le Coeur de Jésus qui s'en souviendra sur le calvaire et qui plongera à son tour dans le Coeur déjà brisé de Sa Mère, l'effroyable glaive de Sa Pitié divine."[1]

The violence was given new impetus in 1878 when Bloy made his first pilgrimage to La Salette, followed by a visit to Paray-le-Monial. The letter he wrote to Landry from La Salette, informing him of his movements, included an interpretation of Mary's message at La Salette concerning the Second Coming, which was not concerned with revealing the time of this, but, like the Sacred Heart, was an appeal for enthusiastic conformity to the sufferings of Christ.[2]

The two devotions are complementary and corrective. The image which the Heart gives of a loving God is prevented from degenerating into lazy sentimentality by Mary's challenge to co-operation at La Salette and her sanctioning threats. Bloy noted in his diary, 18th June 1909: "Fête du Sacré-Coeur. Il n'y en a pas de plus douloureuse. Malheur aux chrétiens qui ne voient là que du rose, alors que le Sang rouge de Jésus coule à grands flots. Sustinui qui simul contristaretur et non inveni." Elsewhere, he balances the concept of absolute and gratuitous forgiveness with admission of total guilt: "Je suis coupable de meurtre, d'inceste, de sacrilège et de parricide! . . . N'importe. Sa joie me brûle, s'Il le veut ainsi...."[3]

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 33.

[2] Lettres de jeunesse, No. XVIII, 16th October 1880.

[3] Le Mendiant ingrat, 21st June 1895.

Bloy developed the nationalistic element of the doctrine at length, giving its detailed history. The fourth chapter of Le Fils de Louis XVI shows how the cult refers to the whole nation, not in a religious or political but in a moral sense. Louis XIV's magnificent declaration of absolutism in the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (by which Henri IV had inaugurated the political and social decline of France) was nullified by the immorality he sanctioned in French society with his legitimisation of his bastards and his rejection of Margaret-Mary's appeal for repentance. His successors tried to impose the exterior practices she had asked for; but these are futile without inner renewal. The hypocritical acts of devotion made by Revolutionary governments have been equally ineffective. On 25th December 1883, France was consecrated to the Heart by Charles XI, son of Louis XVI and King of France in partibus latronum. The consecration was renewed in the Basilica 26th June 1889, exactly 200 years after Louis XIV had made his refusal. National obedience in the first instance would have saved Western civilisation. Bloy considers what effect the present vow can still have.

Its virtue lies in its author, whose exceptional poverty, a punishment suffered on behalf of his ancestors, gives him a direct claim on God's attention:

> Ce n'est rien de dire qu'un homme est pauvre, qu'il est inconnu, qu'il est seul ou presque seul. C'est le partage des innombrables. Mais savoir qu'autrefois, dans le personnage d'un ancêtre, on a pu manger trente millions d'hommes; savoir cela comme un démon famélique se souvient qu'il y a des tables dans le ciel! Et, en même temps, savoir que cette connaissance indubitable est une dérision, un châtiment![1]

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[1] Le Fils de Louis XVI, OC V, 106.

His remorseful awareness of his condition and his powerlessness certify Naundorff's sincerity and make acceptable his simple desire to offer reparation. He has also a legal right to dispose of France, as her King by inalienable vocation. Through his mediation, the Heart can accept the consecration of an apostate and impenitent France, incapable of renewal by her own merits. Christ decrees that the work of purification is to continue, with the perpetuation of the degeneracy created by the Bourbons and their successors.

The preceding chapter, "L'Absence de Dieu", prepares for the more esoteric expression here by an imaginative evocation of the apparent absence of God in the modern world. This is an illusion fostered by both atheists and Christians, who try to veil their mediocrity with religious formulae and practices, immorality, pleasures, and the myth of scientific progress. To reawaken the sense of the ideal, God sets up heroic images which are reflections of his glory. These are the great men of an era, who become, despite their inferiority, "les réceleurs de la Substance" to their contemporaries. This was the function of Napoleon, a "viaticum" to his soldiers, who, like Christ, in return for blind obedience, conferred on them new dignity by letting them share his victories. Later, in L'Ame de Napoléon, Bloy admits the widespread suffering which Napoleon imposed as the real root of the analogy with the Heart; suffering and the heroic life are equivalents.[1] The heroism of Napoleon represents the Heart in triumph. This is, however, a less useful image than the abjection

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[1] L'Ame de Napoléon, OC V, 309.

of Naundorff, which figures the present ignominy of the Heart and thus implies its imminent vengeful retribution: "une symbolique et préfigurative apparence du Dieu contumace . . . ."[1]

Celle qui pleure offers a more traditional presentation of the themes of compassionate suffering and reparation which are the bases of the doctrine. The important chapters are the introductory ones dealing with the devotional images, from which Bloy moves into an anti-clerical discussion and a plea for vicarious suffering, based on the figure of Melanie.

He decided early that a sentimental discourse on the loving Patience of God was to be the basis of the book, which led him immediately to the:

> Idée d'un chapitre sur le Sacré-Coeur, culte moderne envisagé comme suite nécessaire du Découragement de Dieu, de cette "faillite de la Rédemption" dont j'ai parlé au chapitre VI. Jeanne me parlait de la Couronne d'Epines tombée de la Tête de Jésus autour de son Coeur .... Il me semble qu'il y a là quelque chose de très-beau.[2]

There is an excessive tenderness in God which refuses to punish, but continues to absorb the effects of sin in himself; so excessive that the paradoxical violence of Mary must be invoked to force a resolution: "Il fallait la force de Marie à l'holocauste et il le faudra au châtiment, puisque la Victime, si valide pour l'Amour, semble infirme pour la Justice."

According to the liturgy, Mary gave Christ her suffering, which is the crowning dignity of humanity. The latterday devotion to the

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[1] Le Fils de Louis XVI, OC V, 100.

[2] L'Invendable, 15th, 16th June 1907.

Heart is in emulation of her action, in union with the longsuffering of Christ. Contemporary apostasy and God's apparent failure is the planned last mode of his redemptive suffering to allow the whole of humanity time to enter freely into this union:

> On dirait que la Face du Maître qui enivrait les Saints a disparu, à mesure que se montrait son Coeur. Alors le signe de sa Royauté, le signe essentiel qu'il tient de sa Mère, il a bien fallu qu'il descendît sur son Coeur et comme c'était une couronne fermée, surmontée de la Croix, ainsi qu'il convient aux Empereurs, la Croix est descendue en même temps, plantée pour toujours dans ce Coeur dévorant et dévoré qui "possédera toute la terre parce qu'il est infiniment doux"[1]

The cult must be represented only in the symbol given by Margaret-Mary of Heart crowned with thorns and Cross and preferably in the context set by Margaret-Mary of violent, bloody and humiliated suffering: "sur les étendards de France et <u>en abîme</u> au milieu des fleurs de lys".[2] Most contemporary representations are dogmatically as well as aesthetically pernicious. They pass straight to the benign and reassuring vision of the Heart triumphant and in glory, which is only a part of the truth, and omit the appeal to Creation to share Christ's glory by sharing also his temporal sufferings:

> Les horribles statues représentant un Jésus glorieux et plastique, "en robe de brocart pourpré, entrouvrant, avec une céleste modestie, son sein et dévoilant, du bout des doigts, à une visitandine enfarinée d'extase, un énorme coeur d'or crénelé de flammes"; ces honteuses et profanantes effigies doivent, en une manière, ajourner la Communion des Saints, la Rémission des péchés, la Résurrection de la chair, la Vie éternelle ....[3]

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[1] <u>Celle qui pleure</u>, <u>OC</u> X, 140-41.

[2] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 141.

[3] <u>Ibid</u>.

In the face of refusal, Mary indicates the historical catastrophes which will force membership of the Kingdom:

> Elle ne nomme pas expressément le Coeur de Jésus, mais elle nomme celui de Napoléon III, ce qui est étrange et terrible. Comment veut-on que Marie prononce le mot coeur sans que se produise le Déluge, l'immersion, l'engloutissement d'Elle-même et de tous les mondes en ce gouffre de sang et de feu qui est le Coeur du Christ . . . .

The balance is carefully maintained between the historical appearances and threats of disaster, for which - contradicting earlier assertions of providential necessity - Man alone is responsible, and the love and forgiveness of God underlying appearances. The mediation of Mary is promised explicitly ("l'engloutissement d'Elle-même et de tous les mondes") and indirectly in the image of the Flood, with which are associated the Marian type of the Ark, and the rainbow. Bloy's conclusion to this chapter emphasises this, with the paradox of her sufficient substitution: "N'est-elle pas Elle-même le Coeur du Christ percé de la Lance et déchiré par les Epines, où s'implante la Croix folle? Que croirait-on si cela n'était pas à croire? Un point est indicutable. Nous périssons pour ne pas l'avoir écoutée."[1]

The Communion of Saints

The Communion of Saints is defined as the spiritual solidarity which binds together the faithful on earth, the souls in Purgatory, and the saints in heaven in the organic unity of the same mystical body under Christ its head, and in a constant interchange of supernatural offices. It consists of all who partake in the Redemption;

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[1] Celle qui pleure, OC X, 142.

the damned are excluded. It is not limited to the visible membership of the Catholic Church; there is a permissible concept of members in desire.[1]

The dogma took on particular importance in the 1860's and 70's as a remedy against collectivism, which threatened the importance of the individual personality; against the excessively individualistic claims of modernism that religion is simply a phenomenon of conscience; and most of all against Naturalism, which tries to plead the independence and self-sufficiency of natural man.[2] True human grandeur is found only in participation in the mystic body of Christ, which is the whole creation. Cardinal Pie, in the 1860's:

> ... notre déification en Jésus-Christ est une vérité fondamentale du christianisme. Là sont nos titres de noblesse pour le présent et nos gages de félicité et de gloire pour l'avenir .... Plus le naturalisme enveloppe de ses ténèbres les sphères profanes, plus la science sacrée doit s'appliquer à poser dans la lumière le système complet du Christ, c'est-à-dire, le mystère de la nature humaine déifiée hypostatiquement dans la personne individuelle de Jésus-Christ, et déifiée adoptivement dans tous les membres du corps de Jésus-Christ qui sont ses élus; déification qui rejaillit sur toute la création angélique et terrestre dont l'homme est le centre et le trait d'union; déification obligatoire et commandée, tellement que celui-là sera trouvé trop léger qui, posé dans la balance céleste, n'y apportera pas cet appoint surnaturel et cet ajouté divin.[3]

Vatican I took up the theme in the schema given to the bishops, 21st January 1870, which defined the rôle of mystic body as the Church's primary characteristic and made a rigorous identification between this

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[1] Art. "Communion des Saints", Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, Vol. III, i, Paris, 1938, cols. 429-80.

[2] E. Mersch, Le Corps mystique du Christ, 2nd ed., Paris, 1936 (esp. ch. xi, "L'Epoque contemporaine. Conclusions").

[3] Cit. E. Mersch, op. cit., p. 347.

body and the visible membership of the Catholic Church. Leo XIII followed this line, developing associated doctrines on the Spirit as the source of the life of the body and the Eucharist as its centre (Satis cogitum, 25th June 1896). Pius X described the mediational rôle of Mary in the formation of the mystic body, as in that of the physical body of Christ in the Incarnation: "... pour ce surcroît de l'Incarnation qui est la formation du Christ dans les chrétiens" (Ad diem illum, 2nd February 1904).

Most important for our purposes is the concept of the body as the prolongation in the Church not only of the Incarnation, but of the sufferings of the Redemption. This was projected by Vatican I - that the satisfactions of Christ are united to those of Christians, since members and head are one - but not dogmatically formulated until Pius XI gave his declaration on the Sacred Heart in Miserentissimus Redemptor, 6th June 1928:

> La passion du Christ est renouvelée et, en quelque manière, continuée et achevée dans son corps mystique qui est l'Eglise .... Aussi le Christ, qui souffre encore en son corps mystique, nous demande-t-il d'être ses compagnons d'expiation. Au reste, notre union avec lui l'exige assez: 'Etant le corps du Christ et membres de membre (I Cor. XII, 27) tout ce que souffre la tête, il faut que les membres le souffrent avec elle'.

The doctrine first appeared as an expression of desire for the unity and solidarity of humanity, nation, society and family, as in Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's L'Amour et la Chute, written in 1841, and his De la Restauration française of 1851. Gratry's rationalist Philosophie du Crédo, 1861, spoke briefly in the Fifth Dialogue, on the Church, of the "solidarity" of humanity in sin and in salvation, mediated through

Mary. The doctrine here was advanced; Gratry emphasised that unity lay in the invisible and not the visible Church.

This was seldom unaccompanied by the idea that suffering within the body was the basis of solidarity. Two perspectives were taken; the configuration of individual to Christ, usually understood as reparatory, and the relationships between members, which is the province of the doctrine of reversibility - intercession, satisfaction, or transfer of merit through Mary, which it is possible for one member to undertake for the salvation of another. Despite Bremond's claim that configuration to Christ on the Bérullian model was the primary motive of the doctrine, it was the second element which was the most developed, as in Faber's All for Jesus, of 1854, or Hello's M. Renan, which argued through the image of the Cyrenian for the necessity of sharing one another's burdens. Worship of Christ and acceptance of suffering for others are synonymous. The unity of Christ's body is the only end of history; as the mission of the old world was to form his material body, so the task of the new is to prepare the spiritual by participation in its redemptive suffering. The Judgement will be an indictment of those who have refused participation.[1]

In the 1860's and 70's, the doctrine was formulated more clearly in texts such as Lyonnard's L'Apostolat de la souffrance, 1866, and Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's De la douleur, which had its success with the second edition of 1878.[2] Lyonnard's book rests the whole of Christianity

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[1] Hello, M. Renan, III, vii.

[2] See above pp. 220-24.

on the sufferings of Christ and Mary. The merits of the Passion have in effect disposed of all sin, but human suffering remains necessary because of the patterning of members and head, and in order to pay the temporal debt of one's own venial sins and to atone for the sins of others, convert infidels and strengthen the faithful. The kind of people to whom his doctrine applies are mothers, the sick and dying, priests, religious communities and corporations, and martyrs, who continue Christ's bloody sacrifice. In these apostate times, special victimes are needed, under Mary, to save France. The conditions of effective victimal suffering are purity, gentleness, obedience, faith, humility, love and zeal. Physical sufferings are effective as well as moral.

It is important to remember that the literary Revival found its doctrine already formulated in this background, and had no need to develop for itself: "that tendency to false emphasis typical of this age of neophytes".[1] Certainly, the false emphasis exists, and tends to exclude in their work all other aspects of the doctrine of the Communion - for Baumann and Huysmans in particular, though Huysmans, influenced more by Boullanism than by orthodoxy, is not really a typical case. (Bourget is the only writer to play down this aspect; L'Etape interprets reversibility as representing only the principle of heredity and family continuity set out by Bonald and Le Play; and Le Démon du midi expresses mistrust for the whole concept of the Communion, which the modernist Fauchon tries to exalt above the doctrine of Incarnation as an image of social solidarity.)

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[1] R. M. Griffiths, The Reactionary Revolution, p. 188.

Claudel interprets the grandeur of solidarity in the original sense of Cardinal Pie, arguing that the Communion is a help to deification, and reconciles the contradictory demands of individualism and the collectivity:

> . . . chaque élu pour être pleinement lui-même, pour satisfaire pleinement à ce devoir qui est sa vie d'engendrer de soi-même un fils de Dieu, ne pourra se passer de tous les autres, pas plus que se dérober à ce besoin, réciproque, qu'ils ont de lui, dans la plénitude de cette liberté dont l'excès est appelé amour. C'est ce qu'on appelle la Communion des Saints.[1]

The Mystic Body of the Church offers an accumulation of merit from the whole range of creation in time and space to supplement the individual's resources.[2] Suffering, which for Claudel is primarily reparation, is the lifeblood of the Communion. His Journal quotes Bloy's statement of the responsibility involved in the doctrine of reversibility: "L'homme qui produit un acte impur obscurcit peut-être des milliers de coeurs qu'il ne connaît pas, qui correspondent mystérieusement à lui et qui ont besoin que cet homme soit pur comme un voyageur mourant de soif a besoin du verre d'eau de l'Evangile."[3] The mystery of the links of reversibility is one of the basic motifs of Le Soulier de Satin:

> Chaque personnage de cette grande page peinte serait
> bien embarrassé de dire qu'est-ce qu'il y fait,
> Mais l'enfant qui regarde tout ça d'un seul coup est
> profondément satisfait.
> Le bonhomme que l'on martyrise et l'autre qui trace
> son sillon
> Tout cela va très bien ensemble ...[4]

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[1] P. Claudel, Paul Claudel interroge l'Apocalypse, 2nd ed., Paris, 1952, p. 202.

[2] P. Claudel, Un Poète regarde la Croix, 9th ed., Paris, 1935, pp. 98-101.

[3] P. Claudel, Journal, Vol. I, p. 612 (Nov./Dec. 1923).

[4] P. Claudel, Théâtre, Vol. II, Paris, 1965, p. 1472.

After Claudel, the most thorough examination of the doctrine is that of Péguy, whose Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc considers at length human solidarity in evil and in expiatory suffering, and probes more openly than the work of most of his contemporaries dependent theological difficulties: the paradox of the necessity of human reparation in view of the all-sufficiency of the merits of Christ, and the problem of the damned, whose exclusion from the Communion destroys its eucharistic harmony: "La grâce n'y coule plus pleine et pure, et entière comme elle était, comme elle fut instituée."[1] Véronique states the universality of the Communion, including both saint and sinner by virtue of God's temporal intervention in Incarnation and Redemption. All historical event touches and wounds the incarnate Christ:

> Le dernier des pécheurs, le plus infime des péchés fait à Jésus une blessure, et une blessure éternelle. Voilà du christianisme. Et moi l'histoire dans ma longue histoire je ne fais rien, je ne commets rien qui ne s'insère comme physiquement dans le corps même de Dieu.[2]

Bernanos justifies the "cruelty" of the suffering attributed to the characters in his novels by the need to forestall the problem of damnation, which is exclusion from the Communion:

> Je crois que Dieu tire de ceux qu'il a choisis toute la souffrance dont ils sont capables. Pour parler de cruauté, il faut oublier la collaboration de l'homme à la rédemption du monde. Le Père a-t-il été cruel envers le Fils quand il l'a poussé précisément à la limite du désespoir? (pourquoi m'avez-vous abandonné?...)

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[1] Ch. Péguy, Oeuvres poétiques, Paris, 1967, p. 1218.

[2] Ch. Péguy, Véronique, dialogue de l'histoire et de l'âme charnelle, Oeuvres en prose, Paris, 1957, p. 391.

> Il est facile de rabâcher l'amour, en donnant à ce mot le sens qui soulage mieux nos nerfs fragiles. Révélé même partiellement, je crois que la vision nous coagulerait sur place. Nous ne comprenons déjà grand-chose à la Justice, mais l'Amour! Le Christ n'est pas infirmière des âmes, il en est le ravisseur, et dans un certain sens le bourreau.
>
> J'ajoute, en finissant, que les épreuves du curé de Lumbres, ou même les ruses de Satan, me paraissent moins propres à scandaliser les âmes tendres que la perte irrémédiable, définitive, éternelle d'une seule âme. Quand je vous aurai consolé par quelque épisode imaginaire, des souffrances de l'abbé Donissan (dont on ne peut douter à la lecture qu'elles lui ont finalement valu le Paradis) il vous restera le problème autrement angoissant de l'éternité des peines de l'enfer.[1]

It is interesting to note finally the exaggerations of the literary revival returning to their source and in their turn influencing the theologians. Benson's Christ in the Church relies strongly on Huysmans' doctrines of suffering as set out in Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam. Souls exist only in union with Christ:

> . . . they are described in a mysterious phrase, lucid only on the Catholic interpretation, as filling up what is 'wanting of the sufferings of Christ' - carrying out, that is to say, on the stage of the world's history, the agony and death recorded in the Gospels, extending before the eyes of the world today - and, indeed, in every period of history - the bloody sweat, the nails, and the scourge seen in Gethsemane and Calvary.
>
> Suffering . . . is vicarious and redemptive. The whole human race is one, not many, and the suffering of one really balances the sin of another. This is the idea that M. Huysmans makes so much of continually - uniting all on to the Saviour who "bore our sins". In fact, this is the only conceivable explanation.[2]

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[1] Letter to J. Maritain, 14th February 1926 (G. Bernanos, Correspondance inédite, Vol. I, Paris, 1971, pp. 212-13).

[2] Ch. Martindale, Life of Robert Hugh Benson, London, 1916, II, 361-65. See also M. Belval, Des ténèbres à la lumière, pp. 204-206.

Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition reflects Bloy's awareness of the rising contemporary importance of the concept of the Communion. It includes both the perspectives distinguished above: the notion of Communion as disinterested imitation of Christ, and the newer idea, which interests Bloy more, of configuration through suffering contributing to the fulfilment of the ransom of atonement. The latter eventually leads to a concept of the Communion which goes beyond the limits of the visible Church.

The point of configuration, as in the cult of the Sacred Heart, is to a Christ awaiting Crucifixion, particularly in the Agony in the Garden, or to Christ abandoned on the Cross. Christ's fear, the proof of his humanity, is the chief source of his Agony; fear at his own impending pain (which consoles Bloy for his own reluctance to accept suffering[1]) and fear for the futility of his suffering, as he foresees the damnation of those who will reject him. In Chapter 5 of Dans les ténèbres, "La Peur", fear is redeemed by its incorporation into Christ's sacred humanity - "une peur triomphale, si on peut dire" - and identified by Bloy with his own agony of fear in prevision of the destruction or the possible damnation of the unenlightened.[2]

The appeal for configuration with Christ is usually presented at one mediational remove, in the example of the Compassion of the saints or of Mary. Bloy chooses as models those saints which best express both the beauty and heroism of Christ's suffering, and its acceptance

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[1] Le Mendiant ingrat, 23rd January 1894.

[2] See also Le Désespéré, pp. 111-12; Le Mendiant ingrat, 26th February 1892; and "La Langue de Dieu", Mercure de France, March 1893. The fear of Blanche de la Sainte-Agonie in Bernanos' Dialogue des Carmélites is a similar treatment of the theme.

of ignominy and rejection. His plea for the sanctification of Columbus, which best combines these aspects, defines the function of the saint as exemplifying the glory of God and sharing in his redemptive work:

> . . . les Saints sont une chair mortelle transpercée de Gloire et . . . les honorer, c'est rendre à cette divine Gloire elle-même la plus parfaite des adorations. En même temps, les Saints soutiennent le monde . . . . Dans le sens théologique le plus transcendant et le plus réel, les Saints coopèrent ainsi à l'oeuvre créatrice des Six jours et à l'Oeuvre réparatrice du Septième dont l'aurore ensanglanta le Calvaire et qui n'aura point de soir. Ils sont à la fois une oligarchie de Créateurs et une triomphante milice de Rédempteurs.
>
> Toutes les fois qu'un Saint a marché sur la terre, . . . toute une portion de l'humanité s'est remise à flamber et à resplendir. Il est donc extrêmement désirable que la Sainte Eglise multiplie le nombre de nos Ancêtres mystiques sur ses autels, car toute Gloire veut un culte, toute Beauté convoite l'amour, toute Grandeur appelle l'humiliation et nous avons un besoin infini de toutes ces choses.[1]

Bloy's Columbus, like Roselly de Lorgues' original, imitates Christ's heroic singularity in suffering and ignominy; in Part II, "Le Serviteur de Dieu", Bloy points out the failure of his efforts to save the Indians, his humility before his accusers, and his fearfulness. This suffering has a dynamic quality, which goes beyond simple imitation, and can fittingly be described in the Messianic imagery of Isaiah.[2] Christophe Colomb devant les taureaux lays even more stress on the redemptive power of his configuration to Christ, especially the chapter "Le Solitaire", whose concluding image is the Messianic type of Balder dead resurrected by compassion.[3]

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[1] Le Révélateur du globe, OC I, 135.

[2] Ibid., pp. 114-16.

[3] Ibid., pp. 340-41.

Whole eras of history are configured to the various aspects of Christ's suffering—the modern period to his ignominy, the Middle Ages, his dolorous Deposition, and the fall of Byzantium to his bloody sacrifice. The identity of configuration and redemption is perfectly presented in the prose-poem "La Matinée du Vendredi-Saint" after Jenewein's portrait of the Passion, which depicts the voluntary and involuntary incorporation of Mary and the Jews in Christ's Blood, splashing from the Cross over all the bystanders.

The doctrine of the Communion in Bloy contains most of the elements we have already seen discussed by other authors and theologians. The Communion provides for the deification of humanity, and is the organic source of human and universal solidarity, which at the same time preserves individual identity. Its unity is wholly based on reversibility. Bloy wrote to Martineau:

> On t'a sans doute parlé de la Communion des Saints, mais sans t'expliquer qu'appartenant à Jésus-Christ comme un membre essentiel de son Corps divin, étant dès lors non seulement participiant mais identifié, c'est-à-dire Dieu lui-même en cette manière et Dieu rédempteur, il y a des créatures humaines en nombre inconnu qui dépendent de toi, devant être secourus et sauvés par toi.
> La Communion des Saints, antidote ou contre-partie de la Dispersion de Babel, atteste une solidarité humaine si divine, si merveilleuse, qu'il est impossible à un être humain de ne pas répondre de tous les autres, en quelque temps qu'ils vivent, qu'ils aient vécu, ou qu'ils aient à vivre ....[1]

The earliest reference he gives to the doctrine is in a letter of March 1870 to Mademoiselle Delobelle. This maintains in equilibrium the two perspectives of the Communion as a configuration to Christ

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[1] Letter cit. R. Martineau, Léon Bloy: Souvenirs d'un ami, Paris, 1921, p. xx.

and an identification within him with the rest of humanity:

> J'aime Dieu, je l'adore de toutes mes forces, j'ai en lui une foi inébranlable, je voudrais souffrir pour lui, je suis touché jusqu'aux larmes quand je vois des personnes qui l'aiment et je ne puis me lasser d'en être étonné. Je vois que tous les vrais chrétiens peuvent et doivent vivre d'une vie toute surnaturelle infiniment au-dessus des préoccupations charnelles et qu'il y a entre eux comme parmi les anges un lien mystérieux et puissant qui fait que tous participent comme dans un seul corps aux défaillances aux douleurs et aux joies du moindre de tous.[1]

A letter to Landry, 26th July 1870, takes the notion of reversibility as suffering offered for a particular object: Landry's life for the conversion of his parents.[2] In a letter of 1st September 1871, the terms are more general. All suffering accepted in conformity with Christ is always supernatural, and has supernatural effects: "Toutes les fois que nous recommençons le Calvaire, nous recommençons la Rédemption; nos douleurs rachètent toujours quelqu'un ou quelque chose . . . ."[3] 16th October 1878, Bloy equates the Communion with the doctrine of Reversibility, which is described as the source of human deification:

> Il y a une loi d'équilibre divin, appelée la Communion des Saints, en vertu de laquelle le mérite ou le démerite d'une âme, d'une seule âme est réversible sur le monde entier. Cette loi fait de nous absolument des dieux et donne à la vie humaine des proportions du grandiose le plus ineffable.[4]

The principle depends for effectiveness on the victim's perfect religious devotion and purity of life. To Lasserre, 20th July 1877, Bloy bemoans the sin and guilt which make his offerings void (the result, at this period, of his liaison with Anne-Marie, which "makes" him

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[1] H. Colleye, L'Ame de Léon Bloy, Paris, 1930, p. 72.

[2] Lettres de jeunesse, No. II.

[3] Boll. I, 150.

[4] Lettres de jeunesse, No. XVIII.

responsible for his father's damnation). In Le Désespéré, the simple excess of Marchenoir's sufferings is felt sufficient to resolve the difficulty; in the letter, a more orthodox solution is invoked, in the intercession of Mary.[1] 14th August 1877, Bloy writes to Lasserre describing the release of souls from Purgatory by her intercession and expressing concern at the modern neglect of the concept of the suffering Church. Ignorance of the doctrine of the Communion of Saints - "le plus ignoré et le plus incompris de tous les dogmes de l'Eglise" - prevents realisation of the immense merit attached to prayers for the dead. It is the unique privilege of humanity to use the impetrative power of prayer to release God from the demands of his justice and to allow him to show mercy to the souls in Purgatory. For this reason, he appears in his image of weakness, begging for a co-operation for which in fact he has no need:

> . . . le Mendiant des siècles et le Prodigue de l'Eternité . . . .
>
> La main qu'il nous tend, c'est sa Patience et cette main avide d'âmes, surtout des âmes qui sont le plus près de lui, qui souffrent épouvantablement et pour le soulagement desquelles sa Puissance infinie est infiniment impuissante. Nous autres, nous pouvons tout, au contraire, pour ces âmes et, à cause de cela, la Cour céleste tout entière implore notre secours et nous demande l'aumône en haillons de lumière. Voilà à quelle point de vue il convient de se placer pour apercevoir la magnificence et la prodigieuse majesté du dogme catholique.[2]

These are essentially the ideas which reappear in Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition.

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[1] Boll. I, 317-19.

[2] Ibid., p. 319-21.

12th April 1877, a letter to Bourget uses the doctrine to illustrate Bloy's concept of the moral responsibility of the artist, in an attempt to re-channel Bourget's enthusiasm for the Romantics. Their greatness lies not in their "inquiétude" alone, but in their ability to transmit this to their readers, for whose souls they are responsible. Failure in this causes the artist to:

> . . . entraîner avec vous dans un affreux avenir, non pas tertiam partem stellarum coeli mais tout ce qui correspond directement à vous dans le monde spirituel et dans le monde naturel, la pesée de fait et de droit qui vous incombe en tant qu'être libre doué de telles et telles facultés dans le gouvernement universel de la Providence de Dieu. Le monde appelle cela du mot vague et bête d'influence personnelle, l'Eglise l'appelle nettement Solidarité. Au fond c'était la même chose.[1]

Representations of the Communion and its operations appear in both novels, but more systematically in La Femme pauvre. The epithalamium written by Marchenoir for Clotilde and Léopold takes the single physical focus of the bridal chamber and probes to reveal the spiritual world which bears upon this. The source of imagery is the doctrine of reversibility, which builds up to the figure of Christ on Calvary and his cry of despair for the souls he has been unable to save. There is definite attempt here to include in the Communion souls damned by orthodox dogma.

The prose-poem moves in a carefully-constructed series of perspectives and parallel images. It opens and closes on the sealed-off space of the marriage-chamber. Outside is darkness, but walls and doors are assailed by the cries of the excluded wedding-guest of the parable,

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[1] Boll. I, 235. See also "Fragment sur Barbey d'Aurevilly" [CLB No. 6 (3rd Yr.), July-August 1927]; L'Ame de Napoléon, OC V, 273; Le Pèlerin de l'absolu, 15th November 1912.

"qui n'avait pas la robe nuptiale", and whose clamour swells to become that of all captives and outcasts. To the couple, time appears uniquely their own. For a long moment, Bloy suspends the action on their behalf: "voici que votre maître, grelottant et pâle de désir, vous prend dans ses bras. Quelque chose d'infiniment délicieux, je le suppose du moins, va s'accomplir"; and then suddenly introduces the thousands of births and deaths, the 'grouillement' of suffering and tortured humanity, which accompany the lovers in the Providential order. The language might be taken directly from Lyonnard: "Dans une heure, il y aura six mille cadavres sous votre lit et six mille petits enfants, tout autour de vous, pleureront par terre ou dans les berceaux".

In the next movement, the order of suffering becomes the reality and the bride the appearance. The sufferings of the victims are rigorously paralleled with the bride's pleasure, for which they atone. A straight doctrinal statement of reversibility:

> Chaque être formé à la ressemblance du Dieu vivant a une clientèle inconnue dont il est, à la fois, le créancier et le débiteur. Quand cet être souffre, il paie la joie d'un grand nombre, mais quand il jouit dans sa chair coupable, il faut indispensablement que les autres assument sa peine;

is flanked by imaginative parallels of images regularly and strictly reflecting each other in the same sensual modes:

> Au moment même où vous bêlerez de volupté, des grabataires ou des suppliciés, dont il serait puéril d'entreprendre le dénouement, hurleront, comme en enfer, sous le dent de vos péchés . . . . Tenez! en voilà un précisément qui était sur le dos, - comme vous-même en cet instant, - non pas dans des draps de dentelles, mais dans la boue .... Il piquait au-dessus de sa tête pour détacher une de ces gemmes sombres et profitables qui font si tièdes votre alcôve. Un bloc de houille est tombé sur lui, et voilà que son âme est devant Dieu. Sa pauvre âme aveugle!... Le moment serait mal choisi, j'en conviens, pour réciter un De profundis.

The appeal of the dead, starved of prayers, is magnified, but, merely spiritual, slips back easily into oblivion, save for a brief threatening parallel between the wedding-night and the Betrothal of the Judgement, when Christ, in robes of crimson, will come to claim his bride the Church. Bloy admits ironically the weight of the commonplace objections: rigorous asceticism cannot be sustained indefinitely; man has a right to happiness; the Church allows conjugal love. The cries of the sufferers tail into silence; and then explode into the Lamma Sabachthani of Christ's unheard appeal from the Cross.[1]

Doctrinal subtleties are neglected for vivid pictorial and clamorous images which claim that the interpretation relates to real experience: "Je ne prétends rien, ô héritière de l'Eternité, sinon de vous suggérer une aperception telle quelle de l'Heure qui passe. L'Heure qui passe! Voyez-vous ce défilé de soixante minutes frêles aux talons d'airain dont chacune écrase la terre ...."

The period of the war offers a new vehicle for the doctrine, as well as the new problem of the disproportionate suffering which it has produced.

In the chapter "Les Larmes", Jeanne d'Arc et l'Allemagne pictures the solidarity of the historical and national sufferings of France which is confirmed and deepened by the solidarity which rests on reversibility. This is specifically related to the present-day threats of the Virgin at La Salette; the voluntary expiation for which she appealed is now exacted from the innocents suffering involuntarily through the war.

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, Pt. II, ch. vi.

The limits of the Communion are extended in chapter 7, "La Communion des Saints", where Bloy asserts the belief - shared, he claims, with the apostles - that only the demons are excluded from membership: "qu'aucun être humain n'est exclu de la Rédemption et que même les plus ténébreux païens sont virtuellement catholiques, héritiers de Dieu et co-héritiers du Christ".[1] This is the only interpretation which justifies the credal assertion that all men are saints. All created souls exist in an eternal harmony from which there can be no exclusion,and to which the doctrine of reversibility is the key. Méditations chapter 6 makes the same point: "Ego dixi: Dii estis et filii Excelsi OMNES. Vous êtes des Dieux et vous êtes tous les fils du Très-Haut". Bloy considers the responsibility this involves and the possibility of his being called upon to pay the ransom for the German Emperor.

He glorifies the vastness of the Communion, whose redemptive operations transcend time and space.[2] Only God is fully aware of its ramifications. Man obtains only at his death the revelation of the measure in which he has fulfilled his spiritual responsibilities; until then, he acts in blindness. Bloy draws the piercing of barriers and veils in the silence of the battlefield: "Des voix inaudibles, des visages d'âmes se reconnaissent pour toujours à travers les cloisons diaphanes des races et les translucides murailles des siècles ...."[3]

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[1] Méditations, OC IX, 240.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 241.

Dans les ténèbres gives a final simple statement of the doctrine in the meditation "La Douleur", taken from the letter to Michel Ménard of 9th January 1877. The standard terms are renewed in chapter 21 with a charge of simony against the soul who refuses his contribution to Christ's Ransom, which is repayment of the Blood which bought him. Outside the Communion, souls are bankrupt, withdrawn of their own volition from the circulation of divine values.

In attempting in conclusion to assess the significance of the theme of suffering in the literary Revival in general and the work of Bloy in particular, it is useful to take up the charge of dolorism which some critics have levelled in this context.

There are strongly masochistic overtones in Bloy's work, as in the following excerpt from a letter to Jeanne of 21st November 1889, which was left out of the Lettres à sa fiancée after the first edition:

> Ce que je vais ajouter est presque incompréhensible, mais ma conscience me pousse à te le déclarer, parce que ton innocence me gêne, me trouble, et qu'il est nécessaire que tu connais très bien l'homme que tu as le malheur d'aimer. Il m'est arrivé alors que je me sentais rempli de l'amour de Dieu, que "mon coeur brûlait dans ma poitrine", comme saint Luc le raconte des disciples d'Emmaüs, il m'est arrivé de m'indigner de cette joie, de lui déclarer la guerre, ainsi qu'un démon, et d'offenser Dieu, à l'instant même, de quelque manière atroce, parce que je savais qu'aussitôt après, je souffrirais inexprimablement et que j'avais soif de souffrir, à quelque prix que ce fût.

His correspondance with Clovis Prat illustrates the more disturbing by-ways into which the over-emotionality and the over-scrupulousness of the Sacred Heart devotion leads.[1]

[1] Eighteen-year-old postal clerk, who initiated a confessional correspondance with Bloy 19th October 1902, and who claimed to have been converted by Bloy's replies. There are 11 letters from Prat in the Bollery collection. An example: ". . . j'ai surtout péché . . . par l'orgueil . . . . Je n'ai presque point du tout péché par Luxure et par d'autres vices . . . . Je suis un naïf quoi! mais un naïf terrible! . . . je dois être puni, mortifié dans mon orgueil, mon amour-propre." He desires to ". . . me plonger dans les gouffres de Lumière, que sont les Cinq Plaies de Jésus et n'être plus guidé dans toutes mes actions, tout mon existence, que par la Sublime Folie de la Croix. Je veux crier de Compassion dans les douloureuses extases, heurter les dalles de l'autel de ce front où ne se reflèteront plus les rougeurs infâmes de l'Enfer" (25th November 1902). See also Bloy's diaries 11th September 1903, 16th March 1904, 23rd March 1915.

But as Baldick points out in his thesis on Huysmans, quoting André Thérive, the doctrine of dolorism itself has significant and useful features which rise above the pessimism and masochism of its tenants: "Le dolorisme n'est pas forcément un goût masochiste de la douleur, mais la conviction que la douleur est essentielle au salut de l'univers, que l'homme doit s'en tenir pour responsable".[1]

Most of the period is "dolorist" by this definition. The standard theologians - Lyonnard, Didon, Faber and Gay - develop doctrines such as the Sacred Heart and the Communion of Saints in senses identical to those of Bloy and Huysmans, and in some cases with even greater exaggeration. This is the most convenient emphasis for a rationale of the situation of a conservative religious and political establishment under attack from liberal elements; and, at the same time, one which allows the situation to be turned to positive account. The elaboration of theories of co-operation for personal and universal salvation aims to give more temporal significance within Catholic doctrine to the individual and to history as a whole. Paradoxically, it claims to be an attempt to assert the heroic importance of man - in his liberty, his possession of responsibility, and in his natural passions.

Thérive's definition could, however, equally well be invoked to describe many forms of Christian belief, which, whilst giving strong emphasis to the place of the Fall and the Passion, do not go beyond the limits of orthodoxy; it lacks the exclusiveness which in fact produces the heresy, and may well be the wrong term to use here.

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[1] R. H. Baldick, The Novels of J.-K. Huysmans, Thesis, Oxford, 1952, I, 7.

Jacques Maritain distinguishes the two heresies of dolorism and triumphalism. The latter, which conceives of God as reigning in majesty at the moment of his dying on the Cross and taking on the curse of sin, relegates the Cross to a mere accident, and the doctrines of compassion, co-redemption, and the Mystic Body to human presumption - imitation is a possibility, but not co-operative participation. Dolorism destroys the unity of the movement from suffering into redemption by concentrating uniquely on the first - Maritain refers to the Spanish representations of the tortured Christ.[1] These definitions, arising organically from the debates of the period, represent a distinction that was generally made, and, as such, offer the standard against which Bloy's own orthodoxy should be evaluated. The occasions on which he speaks of having a greater sympathy with the suffering of the Passion than with the joy of Resurrection can always be balanced against corrective statements:

> Lorsque vous m'écrivîtes en réponse à un conseil très-amical, vous vous déclarâtes sans appétit pour le bonheur - ce qui était évidemment absurde. Il n'est au pouvoir d'aucun homme de ne pas chercher le Paradis, fût-ce dans le désespoir. Mais alors, c'est le paradis terrestre. La Douleur n'est pas notre fin dernière, c'est la Béatitude qui est notre fin dernière. La Douleur nous conduit par la main au seuil de la Vie éternelle. Là elle nous quitte, ce seuil lui étant interdit. Vous-même l'entendez ainsi, quand vous écrivez: "Le fondement solide de tout grand édifice moral est le désespoir", parole qui se contredirait dans les termes, si vous n'aviez en vue que le seul désespoir philosophique lequel consiste à attendre Rien des hommes et Tout de Dieu, "le grand désespoir étoilé", comme vous dites avec magnificence. "C'est de là que l'espérance et la religion prennent leur essor vers les cieux". Nous voilà donc tout à fait ensemble. Une nouvelle édition de mon Désespéré pourrait prendre cette épigraphe tirée de Carlyle:

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[1] J. Maritain, De la grâce et de l'humanité de Jésus, Paris, 1967, pp. 32-35.

> "Le désespoir porté assez loin complète le cercle et redevient une sorte d'espérance ardente et féconde."
>
> Pour ce qui est de l'autre désespoir, le théologique, celui qui n'attend rien de Dieu, nous l'abandonnerons aux bourgeois qui cherchent la joie de leurs tripes.[1]

His whole impatience for the "reign of the Spirit" is in this corrective sense. Dismissing Saint Bernard to the "autels de l'Homme de douleurs", he declares his own preference for saints of the victorious Spirit: "parce que votre Gloire me presse encore plus que vos adorables Souffrances".[2] His emphasis on the fullness of the reference of the dogmatic image in his work acts as a built-in compensation; mention of the Dolorous Virgin always implies the connected figure of the triumphant Woman of the Apocalypse, or the glorious image of the Immaculate Conception. (There are no similar balances in Huysmans, who may much more properly be described as "dolorist".) Bloy maintains the paradox even down to the level of the interaction of his style and content, where confused and complex expressions of suffering and despair are carried in a controlled and coloured rhetoric: "Il importe que la Vérité soit dans la Gloire".[3]

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[1] L'Invendable, 8th February 1906.

[2] Le Mendiant ingrat, 20th August 1895.

[3] Ibid., 19th August 1894.

## Section IV

## Evasion into Reality

In the attempt to expound in some detail the doctrines which Bloy adopted to carry his moral philosophy, the preceding chapters have to some extent been restricted to the surface of his work. These can now be complemented by a survey of the themes of love, poverty and art, with which he was chiefly preoccupied, and which provide the foundation or pretext for most of his religious discussions.

### 1. An Inevitable Passion: The Theme of Love

> J'ai mis toute ma vie dans l'amour, l'amour divin et l'amour humain, que j'ai quelquefois étrangement confondus. Je n'ai vécu que pour cela, sans avoir jamais compris qu'on pût vivre pour autre chose. Je m'en suis enivré, saturé, je m'y suis baigné, noyé. Et quels effroyables dénouements! . . .
>
> Je suis un esclave d'amour à vendre au premier acheteur venu. Si c'est Dieu qui passe, j'appartiens à Dieu, si c'est une créature, j'appartiens à cette créature, et malgré les expériences redoutables de ma vie, le grimace même de l'amour est encore puissant pour me capturer.
>
> (Lettres aux Montchal, 21st March 1887)

To judge by Bloy's retrospective analyses in Le Désespéré, it is the painful personal experience of a series of affairs clearly incapable from the start of stable and successful conclusions, which provides much of the basic material on which his own understanding of Catholic doctrine is based. It is this experience which inspires his efforts to reassess the ideals of asceticism and of charity, in order to reconcile accepted doctrinal standards with his own passions and aspirations. The task is a difficult one in a system in which the ideal is so intimately linked with concepts of heroic and self-

denying suffering, and in which the value of such suffering rests on the innocence and purity of the victim. Bloy poses the problem: "Pourquoi . . . ce piège à peu près inévitable, de ses facultés rationnelles en conflit perpétuellement inégal avec ses facultés affectives?"[1]

This aspect of Bloy's work is perhaps the one which has attracted most critical interest. Attention has been focussed chiefly on biographical aspects,[2] or on the more startling formulations Bloy offers, as in the Marian images for female sexuality in La Femme pauvre.[3] Fumet has begun to probe the less blatant and potentially more significant related themes such as the doctrine of the redemption of the body, which is discovered through the vileness of Véronique.[4] There has, however, been no attempt to consider systematically the interaction of biographical fact and understanding of doctrine as expressed in Bloy's work, establishing how clearly he envisages his position at given points and what difficulties he finds; nor to view this in relation to the contemporary attitudes of Church and society in order to establish where Bloy begins to be original or particularly perceptive and how his particular attitudes set him apart from both a permissive literary milieu and a prudish nineteenth-century Church - an

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 73.

[2] H. Colleye, L'Ame de Léon Bloy, Paris, 1930; J. Steinmann, Léon Bloy, Paris, 1956.

[3] E. Beaumont, "Léon Bloy and mystical feminism in the earlier XIXth century", Downside Review, No. 246, Autumn 1958, pp. 378-400, and "Léon Bloy and feminine mythology", in Studies in French literature presented to H. W. Lawton, pp. 29-49.

[4] S. Fumet, La Mission de Léon Bloy, pp. 143-44.

enforced double perspective which accounts for the contradictions frequently ascribed to hypocrisy. The second point is best reviewed in a study of Bloy's relationship with Barbey and his share in the older writer's difficulties as a Catholic writer; after which a re-evaluation of Bloy's own work becomes possible.

## The Influence of Barbey

In his study of the influence of Barbey d'Aurevilly on Bloy,[3] Jacques Petit pays less attention than he might to Bloy's particular criticisms of Barbey's novels and theories of the novel, which call for study on several counts. In the first place, Bloy's articles on this theme account for a substantial part of his work and are among the more readable portions of his literary criticism; secondly, they fall into a contemporary polemic episode which requires elucidation; and thirdly, they shed light on Bloy's own novels, helping to explain the circumstances in which he wrote, the moral and theological points he tries to make, and his choice and formulation of the situations in which these are expressed.

Of his nine published studies on Barbey, Bloy devotes three to his theory of the novel: "Un Prêtre marié" (10th September 1376), "Le Dixième Cercle de l'enfer" (22nd December 1383) and "Un Enfant terrible", published in 1389 in Un Brelan d'excommuniés. Other articles relate indirectly to the theme, either dealing with hostile criticisms of Barbey's work ("Un Roseau critique" and "Enquêtes et curiosités", replies to the hard-line Catholic critic Pontmartin) or making passing reference to specific novels.

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[1] J. Petit, Barbey d'Aurevilly critique, ch. v: "Un Disciple: Léon Bloy".

He read and took notes on the novels produced by Barbey in the 1870's and 1880's,[1] helped with proof-reading, and defended Barbey's theories in public and in private.[2] Barbey rewarded his disciple with copies of his books and with the manuscript of Une Histoire sans nom.

His interest perforce took polemical form, directed in the first instance against Naturalist critics of Barbey's peculiar brand of realism, and his treatment of the supernatural in the novel (best studied in the context of the feud between Barbey and Zola, which Bloy inherited[3]); and in the second against Catholic criticism, which is the aspect which concerns us here.

The Catholic Controversy

Bloy's defence of Barbey and, later, his own excursions into novel-writing, necessarily engaged him in a controversy gathering momentum since the middle of the century. On both sides, writers were conditioned by the rigour of Gallican and Jansenist piety to maintain the same theory of the passions as sinful, noxious, and inimical to spiritual development, and to assert the total absence of useful interrelationship between body and soul. The idea was fostered on the literary plane by the Romantic concept of passion, which was held in theory to be naturally innocent, but treated for preference in contexts which introduced the dramatic idea of guilt. A number of Catholic critics attacked the Romantic principle of ineluctable, natural and therefore

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[1] See for example, "Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly par Alcide Dusolier et L'Ensorcelée annotés par Léon Bloy", [CLB No. 6 (3rd Yr.), July-August 1927, pp. 160-72].

[2] Ch. Buet, J. Barbey d'Aurevilly: Impressions et souvenirs, pp. 412-14.

[3] Ch. Buet, op. cit., pp. 216-22; J. Petit, op. cit., passim.

self-justifying passion as anti-Catholic; such an attitude brings out the audacity of Bloy in adapting shades of the Romantic thesis into his own view.[1]

The controversy in Catholic circles was not over any disagreement as to the fundamental nature of passion, but over the extent to which it was possible or desirable to represent this dichotomy in works of fiction. On the one side, Louis Veuillot headed a body of opinion conditioned by the cautious piety of the Second Empire which was ready to react against the slightest threat to an uneasy moral and social stability. His attack on Barbey's Une Vieille Maîtresse, in 1858, on the appearance of the second edition, criticised the writer's disavowal of responsibility for the social repercussions of his art, and his refusal to admit that the graphic and affective portrayal of vice affects the reader more profoundly than any belated moralising conclusion: "Prétendez-vous . . . que vous êtes moraliste à la façon des artistes et non à celle des magistrats et des prêtres? . . . le chrétien n'est pas seulement magistrat, il monte plus haut; il est prêtre". Veuillot saw a total opposition between Christian and artist: "le chrétien sent le besoin d'épaissir et de multiplier les voiles, l'artiste de les déchirer".[2]

Against this, an increasing number of Catholic artists demanded greater freedom for the novel. Buet describes one group: "Plusieurs écrivains contemporains . . . conservèrent très longtemps cette illusion de concilier avec la discipline de la foi les théories de M. d'Aurevilly,

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[1]See for example E. Seillière, Les Etapes du mysticisme passionnel, Paris, 1919.

[2]E. Veuillot, "Le Roman dans le christianisme", Le Réveil, 3rd April 1853.

d'autant plus qu'il n'a pas toujours été refusé aux catholiques de parler des passions humaines". Léon Gautier, the R. P. Delaporte, and the Belgian François Nautet all stressed the contribution to be made to the psychological novel by the Catholic drawing on experience of the examination of conscience and of the confessional and argued for the apologetic value of Catholic psychological studies which assert human liberty and consequent moral responsibility within the conflict of reason and appetites, as against amoral Naturalistic concepts of determinist conditioning. Nautet distinguished the Catholic novelist from his Naturalist counterpart on the basis not of subject matter, but of interpretation alone.[1] None of these, however, went as far as Barbey himself, who inclined to a wholly new moral and religious attitude: a condemnation of social hypocrisy and a greater sympathy for the failings of the fragility of humanity.[2]

Buet points out that the question of morality in literature remained unresolved at the time he was writing and had provoked no sustained controversy which might clarify it. Bloy himself was furnished with systematic presentations of each case by those works of Barbey and of Hello which he had the opportunity of reading in the first half of the 1870's - Hello's section on the novel in De l'homme, 1872, and Barbey's preface to the 1865 edition of Une Vieille Maîtresse.

Hello took the traditional view of the novel as escapist, immoral and anti-religious. The nineteenth-century novel, as typified by

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[1] Ch. Buet, op. cit., p. 426.

[2] Ibid., pp. 433-34. E. Ledrain recognised a similar approach in Bloy (L'Eclair, 3rd November 1904).

Balzac, was a deliberate attempt to "fausser le sens de la vie réelle", veiling the inanity of a Godless society with factitious passions which it tried to present as meaningful activity. The novel insinuated: "que Dieu est sans vie et que Satan est l'acte pur". The strength of these insinuations depended on the writer's style and treatment for which Hello, in opposition to Barbey, held him fully responsible.

In a letter to Madame Hello of November 1876, Bloy claimed that Hello had entirely missed the value of the modern novel, which, through its style, character studies, and choice of themes, could document and denounce an entire epoch: "Forme littéraire vraiment babélique et définitive, dans laquelle toutes les autres tiennent, et qui atteste avec puissance un étrange besoin nouveau de simplification, de centralisation à tout prix, dût-on crever". Without taking up directly the moral question, he referred Hello to his own article on Un Prêtre marié, and demanded that he distinguish between the significant novel and the feuilleton. He defended Balzac: "homme selon moi d'une colossalité effrayante".[1]

The article on Barbey to which Bloy referred quoted extensively the main lines of defence which the older writer had set out in 1865 in his preface to the third edition of Une Vieille Maîtresse, in order to justify his interest in the exaggerated and heroic passions.[2] The demands of realism necessitated portrayal of a total human nature;

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[1] Boll. I, 273.

[2] The article was at first refused by Chantrel, editor of La Revue du Monde Catholique, because of the immorality of Barbey's book. Bloy pleaded in defence the right of the artist to be judged by different standards [letter to Barbey, 22nd February 1876 (Boll. I, 213-17)].

the moral and intellectual virtue of Catholicism rested precisely in its universality and comprehensiveness. The artist's moral duty was to "faire vrai . . . crime ou vertu, montrer la réalité, vivifier jusqu'à l'idéal". The onus of extracting the moral lay on the reader. In a defense covering simultaneously both Catholic and secular novels, Bloy argued that artistic representation of the depravity of modern society provided the reader with the positive moral teaching he no longer received from the Church:

> Le roman - qui est, on ne saurait trop le répéter, la seule préoccupation littéraire moderne - expérimente, d'une manière consciente ou inconsciente, sur le vif des moeurs humaines, ce que la théologie, dans un ordre infiniment supérieur, a depuis longtemps formulé de l'âme et de ses mystérieuses facultés. Et ici, qu'on l'entende bien, ce mot de roman implique, dans ma pensée, tout ce que le génie moderne a pu révéler de cette grande tragédie de l'âme humaine aux prises avec le péché, - alors même qu'il n'a pas compris ce que c'était que le Péché - tout ce qu'il a pu faire jaillir du fond des coeurs agités de tous ses héros, depuis Rabelais jusqu'à Richardson et depuis Shakespeare jusqu'à Balzac.

The narrow Jansenist attitude which had cramped artistic and moral development was rejected in favour of the more generous precepts of the Italian Jesuits, and the freedom of Catholic literature claimed against the freethinkers, who are told:

> . . . qu'aucune prescription ne nous arrache des mains la passion dont le roman écrit l'histoire, et que le catholicisme étroit, chagrin et scrupuleux qu'ils inventent contre nous, n'est pas celui qui fut toujours la civilisation du monde, aussi bien dans l'ordre de la pensée que dans l'ordre de la moralité!

This was the only attitude capable of restoring lost intellectual souls to the Church, the purpose for which artistic vocations such as Barbey's were granted:

> Je sais bien qu'il faut que l'esprit s'humilie et que c'est un précepte divin de se rendre semblable à de petits enfants pour mieux entrer au royaume des cieux. Mais s'humilier n'est pas se mutiler, et les cisailles d'Origène ne firent d'Origène qu'un impuissant et un apostat. "Chacun de nous, dit M. d'Aurevilly, a sa vocation dans ses facultés." C'est une disposition providentielle. Dieu nous donne les facultés et l'attrait qui nous portent à faire ce qu'il veut que nous fassions; et, si nous le faisons docilement, quoi que cela puisse être, - fût-ce même de disséquer des cadavres, - nous remplirons certainement le précepte de nous rendre semblables à de petits enfants.

It might here be noted that such an argument, though liable to charges of speciousness, is in fact used by Bloy with perfect sincerity. He has no personal interest in its application; his own work seldom makes use of the licence it implies. In his own novels, he chooses situations which, initially, are neither as vicious nor as complex as Barbey's, and he takes care to treat these in ways which without neglecting altogether their human aspects play these down in the interest of their allegorical value. The vicious side of passion is most fully represented in condemnatory set-pieces and often with the sting removed by satirical treatment, as in Le Désespéré, or in the articles criticising Zola, the Goncourts, Péladan, Mendès, and Maizeroy.[1]

In "Un Enfant terrible", written in 1888 to defend Barbey's Les Diaboliques, Bloy moved from defense based on the apologetic potentialities of the novel to direct attack on those lukewarm and circum-

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[1] See for Zola, "Antée", (Gil Blas, 21st January 1889), "Les Funérailles du naturalisme" (La Plume, 15th May 1891), Je m'accuse ... (Paris, 1900); the brothers Goncourt, "Les Confidences du rien" (Le Chat Noir, 17th May 1884), "L'Idole des mouches" (La Plume, 15th January 1891); Péladan, "Eloi ou le fils des anges" (Gil Blas, 10th December 1888); Mendès, "Réflexions sur un patriarche" (Le Chat Noir, 8th March 1884); Maizeroy, "La Chanson de Lesbos" (Le Pal, No. 2, 11th March 1885). The last makes a distinction between works of pornography and works of art such as those of Barbey and Baudelaire; Bloy seems to rest this more on the opportunities offered by the artefact to Catholic apologetic than on its aesthetic quality.

spect Catholics who rejected in Barbey's novels not merely a moral attitude but the real heroic form of the Catholic religion, with its vivid colours and clear-cut moral concepts. These contributed to the moral weakness of the Church and of France by their refusal to face the basic problems posed by sinful human nature (symbolised by their preference for propitiatory pilgrimages and mechanical devotions to genuine expressions of remorse and efforts towards regeneration). The present agitation over sins of impurity was yet another symptom of the modern Church's failing to grasp the real significance of chastity and of charity:

> Le pardon des mains de Jésus en croix pleut à torrents sur les avares, sur les perfides, sur les bons chrétiens qui ne connurent jamais la pitié, maisil se refuse à bruiner seulement du côté des fornicateurs. Enfin, il est tout à fait permis d'être sans amour quand on est sans libertinage.

In this context, Barbey's books alone revealed the authentic misery of sin and the plight of the sinner:

> Il est, alors, tout de bon, un enfant terrible, puisqu'il est venu s'asseoir, pour dire ces choses, au milieu des docteurs de la panique et du coeur figé et de l'abominable innocence, qui veulent que l'homme authentique soit cadenassé dans les lieux obscurs, afin que la face désolé/de ce transgresseur du Sixième Commandement ne vienne pas détraquer les automates qu'ils ont engendrés.

The bases of discussion of the problem are completely reversed from the criteria of what is seemly or socially desirable to the premise that the extent of freedom granted to the novelist is a barometer of the spiritual state of society and the robustness of its faith.[1]

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[1] The prudery of Catholic literature is also criticised in "L'Art vertueux", Gil Blas, 11th February 1889, and "Une Crue extraordinaire de bêtise", La Flamme, 20th March 1910. Cp. J.-K. Huysmans, La Cathédrale, 6th ed., Paris, 1898, pp. 304-10.

Bloy's criticisms of Barbey's novels are as illuminating as his defenses of the writer's aesthetics, showing more sensitivity than might have been expected in their analyses of the situations studied by Barbey and the problems these set, as well as a more foreseeable tendency to push the implications into a more elaborate religious context. Sympathy for Barbey's "audacities" remains constant. In "Un Prêtre marié", Bloy admired the centring of the intrigue on a doctrine of expiation unadulterated by modern sentimentality. Among the relationships Barbey studied, all founded on the principle of suffering necessitated by the Fall, Bloy picked out the anguish of the father, Sombreval, caused by the daughter who is also the object of his love, and that of the innocent Calixte, who offers herself as a voluntary victim on behalf of her father. He is not particularly interested in the former priest's carnal fall, pointing out, like Barbey, the greater sin of his impenitent pride: "Ce ne sont pas les péchés de la chair, mais ceux de l'esprit, qui sont les plus grands." Similarly, all factual account of the affair between Alix and Calixte is suppressed and the episode considered as a device setting off the spiritual conflicts which are the main point of the work:

> C'est l'indéracinable passion terrestre, merveilleusement épurée, il est vrai, jetée en opposition à ces deux grands sentiments extra-terrestres, l'un qui touche le ciel et l'autre au fond de l'enfer, et qui nous les rend plus satisfaisants et plus compréhensibles, en faisant deux parts égales de nos sensations sur l'axe même de notre expérience et de notre faible raison.

At this stage, Bloy accepted from Barbey a total separation of the two loves which he himself later modified. His study emphasised the purity of Calixte, whose chastity lent the mystical overtones necessary to make passion acceptable, and to which Alix responded with a chivalrous adoration.

"Le Dixième Cercle de l'Enfer", Bloy's review of Ce qui ne meurt pas, published in Le Chat Noir (22nd December 1883) shortly after the painful loss of Anne-Marie, expressed more whole-hearted sympathy with Barbey's jaundiced denunciations of passion than most of Bloy's other work. The theme of the novel was described as theological - a grotesque allegory of divine love and compassion worked out in the realm of carnal love - but the interpretation is so strained that the reader suspects Bloy's interest to have been more personal: ". . . l'aumône de l'amour sans amour, la fornication par pitié, l'inceste sans la parenté et la désespérante inanité finale de tout cela . . . le cauchemar de l'impossibilité du bonheur, de quelque prix qu'on veuille le payer . . . ." Barbey's theme was the ugliness of passion which is purely human and consequently, a destructive force:

> Ce roman est le déshonneur voulu de la passion, cette usurière infernale qui nous fait payer de toute notre vie et de toutes nos facultés, l'atome de volupté qu'elle nous prête pour un atome de temps.

"L'Enfant terrible" discussed at some length the treatment in Les Diaboliques of a new modern concept of love in the decadent image of the "femme froide", exploited by contemporaries such as Rops, Mallarmé, Gourmont and Rachilde, and one of the several manifestations of the cult of egoism or individualism to which Bloy was firmly opposed. Bloy denounced the self-centredness which drove Barbey's heroines to manipulate the passions of others and, equally blameworthy, the hypocrisy in which these manipulations were clothed: "L'amour, ici, n'a plus même l'honneur mythologique de paraître un rapsode aveugle; c'est une cariatide de la maison du Silence, fagotée par les serpents du crépuscule, pour d'insoupçonnables attentats." At the same time, he admitted some sympathy for their viciousness, to which they were driven by the mediocrity of their environment, and added a new interpretation

of their sadism. This was both a plea for a new attitude to the moral phenomenon and a justification of Barbey's having introduced the theme into his book:

> Ce qu'on entend par sadisme est-il autre chose qu'une famine enragée d'absolu, transférée dans l'ordre passionnel et demandant aux pratiques de la cruauté le condiment des pratiques de la débauche? Pourquoi donc pas cette réalité, puisqu'il fallait que le Diable soufflât sur ce livre esthétiquement conçu comme le véridique miroir d'un état d'âme tout à fait humain et que, par conséquent, l'extrémité du Péché Mortel y devait être indispensablement déroulée?

A brief final summary of the main points of similarity in the two writers' theories of passion offers a useful guide to the terms Bloy is dealing in and an indication of the originality of his approach.

Barbey distinguished two kinds of human love: the mystical and idealistic, which is perfective, and the carnal, an irresistable and unreasoning force, which is evil and destructive. Bloy makes the initial distinction but is also eager to elaborate ways for the second love to be rechannelled and re-employed to good.

In both authors, virtuous and vicious affections are inevitably accompanied by unhappiness and suffering. Barbey dwells more on suffering of psychological origin, such as the impossibility of communication between Marigny and Hermangarde, in Une Vieille maîtresse, which finally drives him back to Vellini. Bloy combines psychological and religious motivation; in Le Désespéré, Marchenoir suffers equally from jealousy caused by Véronique's prostitute past and frustration at her present inaccessibility in her repentant chastity.

The interrelationship of love of God and love of creatures, a central problem for Bloy, is in Barbey the explicit theme of Un

Prêtre marié alone. Even here, the treatment and resolution are both unsubtle and there is doubt as to whether the problem is introduced for its intrinsic doctrinal importance or is merely a pretext for dramatic effects.

The problem of reconciling the Roamntic concept of the irresistible nature of passion with the Catholic fact of the liberty of the creature, a key question in Le Désespéré, does not exist for Barbey; though again, the fact of responsibility and the attendant theme of guilt are exploited for crude emotional effects.

Both accept the passions as the source of greatness. Heroic exaggeration in evil as well as in good is admirable, not to say necessary, in the novel. Bloy makes great play with the heroic past of Léopold and Véronique - compensating slightly by giving his picture of this past through a present repentance.

There is no direct resemblance in the two men's work in point of actual situations or choice of characters and character types. Bloy works out his themes on a wider social canvas and takes them through a greater complexity of sub-plot, whereas Barbey tends to be content with a single psychological intrigue. At the same time, it can be argued that within this greater complexity it is the passionate intrigue which provides Bloy with his unifying theme and with the vehicle in which to discuss his more important questions; and that this may well be a legacy from his early interest in Barbey.

## The Theme in Bloy

Le Désespéré describes Marchenoir's relationships with women as beginning only after the Franco-Prussian war and after his conversion.[1]

[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 64. See also letter to the abbé Tardif de Moidrey, 1877/78 (OC III, pp. 12-17).

Before this, poverty and timidity, as much as religious scruples, enforced a life of chastity. This is confirmed by Bloy's diary and by his early letters, where any mention of passions and emotions is in the most general terms. A letter to Maria X, dated 15th February 1869, advocated the ascetic ideal, with mediaeval contempt for the flesh - "ces chaînes de fange" - and the assurance that spiritual life consisted exclusively in "l'oubli absolu des sens" and that the only love was the love of God.[1] Writing to Landry, 1st September 1871, Bloy suggested that this conflict between body and soul could be exploited to provide a source of poetry; but had no opportunity to develop the idea.[2]

The misogynistic pose ridiculed by Bloy's friends, especially Barbey, was sustained until the publication of Le Désespéré, although with some difficulty, even before the affair with Anne-Marie. Landry, in 1873, urged Bloy to sacrifice a dangerous incipient passion:

> . . . sacrifice d'autant plus aisé qu'il t'est commandé par les lois divines et humaines. En l'offrant à Dieu dans son idéale pureté, tu pourras garder au fond de ton noble coeur, dans toute sa radieuse beauté et sans craindre les troubles de ta conscience, un délicieux souvenir d'amour que n'auront point altéré les désenchantements cruels qu'on trouve presque toujours au lendemain des passions assouvies.[3]

In May 1876, a letter to Veyri, self-consciously Romantic in tone, described love as one of the dynamic forces of life: "il est de l'essence spirituelle de l'amour d'abolir les temps et les espaces et de ne pouvoir être surmonté par le mode précaire et contingent de son objet".[4]

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[1] Boll. I, p. 90.

[2] Boll. I, 151.

[3] Letter from Landry, 4th June 1873 (La R.).

[4] Letter to Ed. Veyri (Boll. I, 250-60).

Bloy clearly meant by this "love" Romantic enthusiasm; nevertheless, the apolgy of instinct which this implies clears the way for extension of the theory to the carnal passion.

Bloy's first liaison, with Anne-Marie Roulé, Véronique of Le Désespéré, began in February/March 1877 and lasted until 29th June 1882, the date of her internment. For the most part, the affair remained secret. Bloy approached the relationship with a sense of guilt, evident in the recasting and reinterpretation of events in letters of this period and in Le Désespéré, but at the same time with the conviction of its necessity. An attempt to renounce Anne-Marie for a religious vocation, made at La Trappe 22nd September-2nd October 1877, proved a failure. At the end of 1877, he described to Tardif de Moidrey how remorse at his conduct had determined him to repent and to attempt the conversion of Anne-Marie. This had created psychological conflicts for which marriage seemed the only solution.[1]

During a second visit to La Trappe, from 22nd June to 10th August 1878, Bloy's confessor encouraged the project as preferable to living in mortal sin and expressed admiration for the nobility of Anne-Marie's character.[2]

Marriage, however, proved financially impracticable. In September 1878, Anne-Marie was converted at the Basilica and the relationship moved onto a new spiritual plane. Her visions began at this period, probably inspired by recent letters from Bloy which had begun explaining

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[1]Letter to Tardif de Moidrey, 1877/78 (OC III, pp. 12-17).

[2]Letter to Anne-Marie, 27th July 1878 (Le Désespéré, ed. J. Bollery, Paris, 1955, p. 465).

to her Tardif's doctrines. She was finally interned in Sainte-Anne in 1882, after which Bloy saw no more of her before her death on 7th May 1907.

In the winter of 1883-4, at a time when his literary career seemed to be showing some promise, Bloy met Berthe Dumont, whom he found begging in the streets. The affair was pitched in a lower and more peaceful key than that with Anne-Marie and allowed to become common knowledge. The two frequented Huysmans and Anna Meunier and Bloy referred to Berthe as his fiancée and even his wife. 5th March 1885, they set up house together at Fontenay-aux-Roses. During this period of relative calm Le Désespéré was conceived (September 1884) and the first number of Le Pal appeared (4th March 1885).

The structure collapsed on the night of 10th-11th May 1885 when Berthe died of tetanus. Bloy, already impoverished by the publication of his review, was forced to borrow money for her funeral. A letter to Montchal, 7th June 1885, expresses bitterness at Bourget's refusal of help - this is the score settled in Le Désespéré, with the funeral of Marchenoir's father.

Subsequent letters to Montchal describe Bloy's anguish after Berthe's death at the same time as they formulate the themes of Le Désespéré, built on a conflation of Bloy's two experiences: "Je désire la mort sympathiquement, comme je désirais, il y a trois ans, la folie, par un besoin étrange de conformité à l'être aimé."[1]

In the process of formulating this for the novel, Bloy's experience with Anne-Marie became primary. The sense of consolation found

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[1] Lettres aux Montchal, 3rd-5th August 1885.

in the second relationship was entirely lost and the stress laid on the bitterness and disillusionments of love, expressed in the book in a mixture of pathos and grotesque.

Chapters 20 and 21, describing the death of Marchenoir's son and his meeting with the prostitute Véronique, were completed by the end of the year. The preceding chapters build up to this episode, which is a transposition of Bloy's own sufferings: "J'ai tout arraché de mes entrailles." Bloy began to conceive of his book as an apology of human weakness: "Tu verras ce que j'ai mis à la place du Roseau pensant de Pascal qui commençait à m'embêter depuis quelque temps."[1] In a letter to Montchal written on 2nd August, he rejected the demands of perfection - "rengaines idiotes que tu as pu récolter dans le potager calviniste" - and stated mercy and humility to be the basis of his religious and moral doctrines. He had learned these from his own painful experience and from the teachings of Hello, who confirmed that Christ came for sinners. Bloy glosses: "Les pécheurs sont ses amis et il n'y aura pas de place dans l'enfer chrétien pour un seul d'entre eux, mais seulement pour les méchants." The unique quality of Catholicism was its generosity towards human fragility:

> La paix sur la terre aux hommes de bonne volonté. La Loi évangélique commence par là et l'admirable législation morale qui s'appelle le catholicisme est toute dans la donnée d'un être faible, souillé, brisé, qu'il s'agit de relever autant de fois qu'il tombe, de purifier et de fortifier par de lentes et successives ascensions vers la lumière. On peut être brûlant de foi et plein de faiblesse, de même que l'amoureux le plus fervent peut se sentir bassement troublé dans sa chair à la vue d'une autre femme que celle qu'il aime de toutes les forces

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[1] Lettres aux Montchal, 31st December 1885.

> de son coeur. Il n'est pas nécessaire d'avoir une centenaire expérience de la misère humaine pour avoir cela? [sic] Les incroyants ont beau jeu de reprocher à un pauvre diable de chrétien luttant contre les passions de n'être pas un saint! Je voudrais bien les y voir, les imbéciles ou les hypocrites![1]

At the same time, Bloy had no thought of relinquishing his idealism: "j'ai un idéal d'amour, de vie, et d'éloquence qui ne sert qu'à me désespérer parce qu'il est inaccessible".[2] Le Désespéré gradually becomes an attempt to give coherent expression to the conflict implied in these two attitudes.

From the time the work was first published, in 1886, critics have had difficulty in allocating it to a particular genre, due mostly to failure to agree on its principal theme. Its polemic function, recognised at publication, was certainly intended by Bloy from the outset: "J'ai décidément adopté la forme du roman. Je rêve un roman de misère et de douleur, l'Ecrasement d'un homme supérieur par une société médiocre . . . . Ce sera encore Le Pal, mais un peu plus solidement enfoncé";[3] but later, he writes to Montchal:

> Une chose qui m'ennuie dans ta lettre, c'est que tu parais n'avoir été frappé que de la partie épisodique de mon livre, lequel n'est pas un pamphlet, mais un roman psychologique des plus fouillés. Je donnerais tout le festin de Beauvivier, qui est pourtant, je le crois, une chose forte, pour le personnage de Véronique, les chapitres 23e, 63e, 64e, 65e et 68e, le séjour à La Chartreuse, le symbolisme et la fin de Marchenoir.[4]

These are all groups which relate either directly to the love affair or to passages with which it is imaginatively connected.

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[1] See Le Désespéré, I, ch. xvi.

[2] Lettres aux Montchal, 14th April 1886.

[3] Ibid., 19th November 1885.

[4] Ibid., 19th January 1887; see also Le Mendiant ingrat, 15th August 1894.

Maurice Dullaert's article in the Magasin littéraire du Gand directed attention to a structural feature of the novel which could cast light here.[1] He saw a disjunction between digressions and narrative; the latter - the love affair - provided only an artificial framework for the 'magnificent' pages on history, liberty, suffering and the failure of the Redemption which were the main source of interest. It seems legitimate to take up both these points and to argue that Bloy's development and exposition of his narrative is fuller and more significant than generally credited; and that this, and the digressions developed with it, are formally and thematically interdependent, as Bloy's own experience in love is interdependent with the development of his thought.

No mention is made of the theme which is to furnish the framework of the novel until chapter 16, by which point details have been given of Marchenoir's early life and his conversion and the main lines of his doctrine explained. In this way, the suggestion of special pleading in the formation of his thought is avoided.

In this chapter, whilst condemning his own behaviour by the standards of the "héroïques puretés qu'il avait rêvées", Marchenoir challenges the oversimplified concept of purity held both by Catholics and by freethinkers and the ease with which they feel the virtue can be achieved. This reflects an inadequacy in their understanding of Catholic doctrine and its aptness to human nature which he tries to correct by analysing the deeper understanding to which his own moral struggles led him, recounting: "l'exacte genèse de ce catholique ballotté par d'impures vagues au-dessus d'absurdes abîmes".

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[1] M. Dullaert, "Léon Bloy", Magasin Littéraire du Gand, No. 12 (12th Yr.), 1891.

The coincidence between the awakening of religious passion in Marchenoir and the development of his emotional sensibility is providential:

> Alors, comme si sa destinée se fût accomplie à cet instant, une soudaine et corrélative révélation s'était faite, en cet élu de la Douleur, de sa propre puissance affective, jusqu'alors inconnue de lui-même, enveloppée et flottante dans l'amnios ....

The violence of carnal passion provides terms in which to explain Bloy's new concept of religion as an enthusiasm: "le sentiment religieux est une passion d'amour". Like human love, it tears apart and inflames the personality; it is emotional and instinctive, allowing no controls or rational choices. Both loves are as involuntary and irrefutable as the instincts:

> . . . le christianisme <u>dérangea</u> sa vie, en le remplissant, - si tard! - de l'afflictive famine d'amour, surajoutée à l'autre famine. A moins d'un miracle que Dieu ne fit pas, comment cet ébloui de la Face du Seigneur, - Icare mystique aux ailes fondantes - aurait-il pu échapper au vertige qui l'aspirait vers les argileuses créatures conditionnées à cette Ressemblance?...

Both leave the creature vulnerable. The vulnerability created by passion softens the heart in preparation for grace by imposing the humiliation, suffering and self-revulsion which mould the religious character.

At Marchenoir's father's deathbed, the merit of Marchenoir's remorse at the recollection of past affairs is applied vicariously to relieve the suffering of Marchenoir's father in Purgatory. This is made feasible by the mediation of Marian imagery and by the fact that the affairs have ended. It is less easy to justify suffering derived from an affair still in progress with Véronique:

> Même en acceptant cette chape de flammes comme une pénitence, comme une expiation de tant de choses que sa conscience lui reprochait, c'était encore une absurdité de prétendre récolter la palme du martyre chrétien sur la margelle en biseau d'une citerne de désirs.[1]

The remainder of the novel is concerned with exonerating Marchenoir from as much responsibility for the situation as is convenient to Bloy's thesis, with showing the range of suffering arising directly and indirectly from the relationship, and finding terms in which this may be presented as meritorious.

The first encounter with Véronique is presented as providential.[2] The real-life rôles of the protagonists are reversed. It is Véronique who initiates the relationship; Marchenoir's past experiences had refined his nature into one of tender chastity. These, ironically, are the characteristics which attract the prostitute and eventually transform her desire into religious aspiration. At this point, Marchenoir cannot refuse responsibility for her, though he is aware of the threat she poses to his own spiritual status. The passage between the two is described briefly - despite a certain relief of comic realism in the account of the prostitute's unsuccessful attempts at seduction, such a histrionic exchange could scarcely have been sustained for long. The terms in which the relationship is established - her absolute submission, as poor servant, to a poor master - recall those in which Angela di Foligno, or Tardif de Moidrey, describe the relationship of Christ and the individual, or the Church.

At the Charterhouse, Marchenoir's confessor helps him discover in himself a carnal passion for Véronique which he had not so far suspected. Véronique is quite untouched by this; she is the "perle

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 105.

[2] Ibid., I, ch. xxii.

évangélique" which he has ransomed, the figure in whom, like Christ, he has reasserted the purity and dignity of the flesh of the First Creation: "cette misérable chair que nul mysticisme ne peut supprimer, qu'on ne peut troubler sans que l'esprit soit bouleversé et qu'aucun émiettement de la tombe n'empêchera de ressusciter à la fin des fins".[1]

He, on the other hand, like Christ, is degraded and disfigured in exact proportion to her past sins, for which he has accepted a responsibility which could not have been attributed to Véronique, creature of her environment. To justify this re-attribution, the physical and spiritual unity which the sacramental bond of marriage implies is invoked. By virtue of this link, which exists in intention if not in fact, Marchenoir can share Véronique's expiation in the flesh: "solidaire de la même balance, dans la parfaite ignominie des mêmes comptoirs".[2] (The complex argument aims to illustrate the validity of Christ's suffering vicariously for the Church.) In Marchenoir, Véronique's sins are made visible. The unconscious undermining of his will to chastity is a mirror-image of her former condition; and through the ugliness of his jealousy, he evokes the shame of each incident of her past in visions of nightmare acuteness, and the horror of alienation from God which this submission to carnality implied.[3]

The act of redemption, however, does not imply the passivity of the redeemed object. This is shown in digressions in which first the sufferings of the contemplative Church and secondly the sufferings

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[1] Le Désespéré, p. 103.

[2] Ibid., p. 103.

[3] Ibid., p. 106.

of the whole of History are presented as necessary contributions to support the redeeming Agony of Christ. The narrative takes up the theme in Marchenoir's appeal to Véronique for some heroic act of consolation and resolution to sustain him in his weakening efforts against the sins he has taken on for her. He emphasises her sacramental character of Woman, and her consequent special capability for expiatory sacrifice.[1]

In these conditions, the mission which Marchenoir proposes to undertake to the world with the support of Véronique is admitted to be a hazardous venture; but the Church, through P. Athanase, declares this hazardous quality reliance on faith alone and a reason for probable success, and allows the compassionate suffering of the couple to begin its evolution.

At this point, the necessity of the heroic thesis is queried by the well-meaning Leverdier, whose hostility to enthusiasm in any form blunts his perception of the importance of their asceticism:

> Que signifiait, par exemple, cette jalousie rétrospective chez un homme que ses actes et ses paroles jetaient en dehors de toutes les voies communes, et que l'opinion du monde ne pouvait atteindre? L'acte charnel touchait-il donc à l'essence même de la femme, que la souillure en dût être ineffacable à jamais? Sans doute, ce passé était un irréparable mal, mais, puisqu'on était si terriblement mordu, fallait-il, après tout, sacrifier sa vie pour des fantômes, et se précipiter en enfer, pour échapper à un purgatoire qui eût été le paradis de beaucoup d'hommes moins malheureux? . . .
>
> Enfin, il avait, en amour, des idées de sapeur-pompier, et pensait, en général, qu'il fallait éteindre les incendies, tout d'abord, à quelque prix que ce fût . . . .[2]

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[1] Le Désespéré, pp. 140-42.

[2] Ibid., pp. 169-70.

The act of self-disfigurement by which Véronique had hoped to disenchant Marchenoir adds a spiritual beauty to her unforgettable physical attractions. The combination of the two, described in a bizarre mixture of religious and profane terms - "cariatide de lupanar, transformée en un pilastre éclatant de la Tour d'ivoire"[1] - secures the necessary prolongation of their anguish on both planes.

From this point, the relationship becomes an increasingly explicit allegory of the redemptive compassion of Christ and humanity. The two share a martyrdom imposed by the hostility of lukewarm fellow-Catholics and the atheists of the literary circles at which Marchenoir's mission is directed:

> "L'Eglise est écrouée dans un hôpital de folles, pour sa peine d'avoir épousé un mendiant en croix qui s'appellait Jésus-Christ. Elle endure d'irrévélables tourments dans des voisinages à épouvanter les démons. Les docteurs, qui se sont chargés de veiller sur elle et qui déclarent ne prétendre que son plus grand bien, sont pleins de sourires et pleins de pitié, quand on leur parle de sa guérison . . . . - Et le mendiant qu'elle avait rêvé de faire adorer est, au loin, déchiqueté par les mauvais aigles et les bons corbeaux sur son gibet solitaire! . . ."[2]

Their martyrdom is not optional, but one set in the nature of things. Marchenoir's attraction to Véronique by carnal passion is as inevitable as Christ's impulse to unity with Creation; and equally inevitable is the suffering involved in both relationships. At this point in the novel, the violence of the language increases in intensity to express this necessity. Even Marchenoir's religious practices conspire to draw him closer to the body of his mistress:

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[1] Le Désespéré, p. 195.

[2] Ibid., p. 223.

> Tout le trahissait. Les eucharistiques tendresses de sa foi ne servaient qu'à pencher un peu plus son coeur sur cet abîme du corps de la femme, où vont se perdre, en grondant, les torrents humains dévalés des plus hauts cimes. Le Christ saignant sur sa Croix, la Vierge aux Sept Glaives, les Anges et les Saints lui tendaient l'identique traquenard de liquéfier son âme à leurs fournaises . . . .[1]

The two modes of love which Véronique inspires in Marchenoir - the ideal and the animal - are expressions of the two aspects of creation - the redeemed and the fallen - which Bloy shows can be joined in a real moment of human existence. This occurs to perfection in the episode in which Marchenoir's desire to seduce Véronique, painted in strongly sensual language, is transformed into pure compassion at the sight of her sufferings on his behalf.[2] This episode, potentially the most decadent in the book, is also the one which produces the most complete identification of the lovers with one another and with Christ, being the moment of most intense suffering. Véronique turns from her crucifix to address Marchenoir, hitherto the figure of Christ, with Christ's liturgical reproach to his people from the Cross ("Quid feci tibi, . . .").

After the writing of Le Désespéré, Bloy entered a period of insecurity and depression in which he felt the need of the security of marriage but could not see such a relationship as possible. His fate was too "funeste" to admit of being shared.[3]

From 1886 to 1888, a close friendship with Villiers encouraged a new direction in his concept of love.[4] Letters written to Montchal

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[1] Le Désespéré, p. 276.

[2] Ibid., V, ch. lxv.

[3] Lettres aux Montchal, 27th July 1886.

[4] A. Béguin, Bloy, mystique de la douleur, Paris, 1948, p. 143.

between May and September 1886 recommend L'Eve Future, L'Amour Suprême (especially "Akëdysséril") and the Contes cruels, in all of which Woman is portrayed as the earthly representation of the Ideal and the force which draws man to it. In his article "La Résurrection de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam", Bloy describes Villiers' heroines as images of the beautiful and the glorious and figures of the Woman of the Apocalypse. According to Bloy, the concept was epitomised in Villiers' novel L'Eve Future, which he greatly admired, and which may have had some influence on the formulations of La Femme pauvre, especially the offsettings of the three forms of Woman as prostitute, "honnête femme", or saint.

At this time, Bloy also showed fresh interest in the figure of Mary, especially in the "tender" aspects of her cult, which he thought had been neglected.[1]

Developments in Bloy's personal life encouraged the fusion of these new elements into the system of La Femme pauvre; chiefly, his meeting in 1889 with Jeanne Molbech, whom he married 27th May 1890.[2]

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[1] Lettres aux Montchal, 18th September 1887.

Adèle M. (Greek Orthodox) recommends a daily Ave Maria

[2] Before meeting Jeanne, Bloy had already embarked on a liaison with a peasant girl from Mamers working in Montrouge. A son, Maurice Léon, was born 4th July 1888, a sickly and backward child, who caused Bloy much concern. Bloy refers to the financial difficulties of his situation in a letter to Camille Lemonnier, asking for help in finding an opening on Picard's L'Art Moderne (Taylorian Institute, Oxford, Taylor MS. F/Bloy 5). The existence of son and mistress became an embarrassment when Bloy met Jeanne. With the help of a friend, the woman was persuaded to return to her parents in Mamers. Bloy visited the family [letter to Jeanne, Mamers, 4th October 1891 (La R.)] and sent money until the summer of 1896, after Jeanne's illness, and at a time when his own poverty was acute [letter to R. P. Lainé, 14th July 1896 (La R.)]. Maurice died 16th July 1900.

The relationship with Jeanne did not provide an easy refuge. The Lettres à sa fiancée, written between August 1889 and March 1890, are a determined effort to rationalise Bloy's love in a way which will justify its existence in the traditional ascetic system, by re-organising doctrine around the figure of Woman. Bloy is determined in this instance to force his problems to a satisfactory solution. A brief review of the collection casts some lightboth on his general attitude at this point, and on some particular problems of La Femme pauvre.

At an early stage, Bloy questioned whether this love could be reconciled with the necessity of his suffering. He justified its existence on the grounds that their meeting was Providential ("Ce que Dieu fait sans la participation de l'homme est toujours bien fait"); that Jeanne would provide moral and psychological support for his mission; and that their relationship would eventually lead to her conversion.[1] He undertook a re-assessment of the nature of human love (a process simplified in relation to Jeanne by the absence of the social and moral taboos attached to Berthe and Anne-Marie), defending the compatibility of the two loves of God and of creatures within the sacrament of marriage.[2] He rejected the bourgeois idea of marriage as a means to security, and emphasised the importance within the relationship of sexual love: ". . . une sorte d'enfantillage divin, une exquise et réciproque délectation qui suppose, jusqu'à un certain point, l'ascendant providentiel de la chair sur l'esprit et l'abdication momentanée de ce fier lord dont la lumineuse beauté serait inféconde s'il

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[1] Lettres à sa fiancée, 5th October, 5th November 1889.

[2] Ibid., (September 1889).

repoussait inexorablement sa compagne aveugle".[1] The doctrine is advanced for a time which still accepted a Jansenistic distinction of the two loves, even within the sacrament;[2] though it is noticeable that these ideas do not pass into Bloy's imaginative work, as later analysis of the relationships in La Femme pauvre will show.

An important group of letters provides statements on the rôle of woman which lift the concept of love into an elaborate religious context. These are an early formulation of the ideas of La Femme pauvre.

Bloy himself points out their "sublimity" in a letter to Jeanne of 27th November 1889, proposing an original theological interpretation of the Romantic commonplace of the quest for Woman.[3] Cults such as that of the Saint-Simonists for the Woman who is to save the world are important but distorted images of man's true aspirations. All unsatisfied desire - for riches, joy, glory, power, virtue, or even vice - is an expression in a fallen mode of the longing of creation for fulfilment, and an appeal to the Paraclete for redemption. This

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[1] Lettres à sa fiancée, 18th January 1890. See also ibid., Easter Tuesday 1890; and Lettres à P. Termier, 31st January 1908.

[2] In his Conférences de Notre-Dame, 1843-46, Lacordaire exalted chastity above the sacrament of marriage, and described love as obtained from creatures only in "une manière imparfaite qui fait saigner notre coeur" (OC, Paris, 1857, II, xxiii, III, xxxix); Claudel, rejecting the Tristan symbol, wrote to Jacques Rivière that: "L'amour humain n'a de beauté que quand il n'est pas accompagné par la satisfaction" (Correspondance, Paris, 1926, 29th May 1913); Mauriac, in his Souffrances et bonheur du chrétien, Paris, 1931, advocated a total asceticism, based on Bossuet's Traité de la concupiscence.

[3] A letter from J. Maritain to Retté, 2nd September 1922 (La R.) confided that Bloy's Lettres à sa fiancée had probably already been denounced to the Holy Office; the letters, obviously private, and written in the heat of enthusiasm, should never have been offered for publication. He refers particularly to the two discussed here.

is to be demonstrated in Bloy's next novel, La Prostituée, in an examination of the conflicts created by that close relationship of physiology and psychology in woman which make her particularly capable of representing the ideal of Incarnation. Every woman is the image of Mary, in whom the incarnation of the ideal appeared as historical fact.

> Toute femme, qu'elle le sache ou qu'elle l'ignore, est persuadée que son sexe est le Paradis . . . . La femme A RAISON de croire tout cela et de le prétendre ridiculement. Elle a infiniment raison, puisque cette partie de son corps a été le tabernacle du Dieu vivant et que nul ne peut assigner de bornes à la solidarité de ce confondant mystère.

There is no suggestion that the historical incarnation can be repeated. On the contrary, the interest of Bloy's prostitute is in her search for a perfection which cannot be fulfilled in this life and in her inevitable suffering, as she finds "juste à temps, pour désespérer, avant de mourir, un brave homme qui arrive trop tard, comme tous les braves gens de ce dérisoire globe où personne ne se présente jamais assez tôt pour sauver personne". The conclusion envisaged here would seem as overtly pessimistic as that of Le Désespéré, though the final interpretation must be the same: that this suffering of frustrated idealism is to be welcomed as the form of union with God in the fallen order.

Bloy's own pursuit of carnal pleasure was a transposition to a lower plane of his desire for the ideal, frustrated by the failure of Hello's and Anne-Marie's promises. In default of religious perseverance, such perseverance in the search for real human love is meritorious, though still unable to provide perfect satisfaction. There is no absolute resemblance between woman and the Holy Spirit

who is the true ideal. Even Mary in glory, his nearest figure, is inadequate, and many other female figures are only what Bloy calls "dark" images, negatives of the ideal.

It is helpful to make a distinction between Bloy's efforts in these letters to understand problems posed by the conflict of his love for Jeanne with his peculiar doctrinal options, and his use of the imagery of the sexual act to illustrate the meaning of Redemption. (It is failure to do this which has led some critics to see resemblances between Bloy's concept of Woman, and especially of Jeanne's part in his mission, and the messianic rôle of Woman preached by P. Enfantin.[1]) Bloy made the distinction plain in his letter to Jeanne of 2nd December 1889, before beginning to interpret the allegory in the second sense.

Woman is the image of fallen Creation, who exists in paradox; innocent de iure, since she was deceived in her ignorance by the serpent, and yet guilty de facto. Evil, in the form of original sin, is now a part of Creation, but this sin is not imputable until voluntarily and consciously embraced by the creature. The modesty of woman in the present order and the chastity of Eve before the Fall are linked together to make the point that ignorance and innocence are equally valid grounds for refusing responsibility for sin. Bloy's argument here is that in one sense the created order is indifferent, and not such that all activity within it must inevitably produce evil - a rejection of the extreme ascetic view.

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[1] P. Jury, "Le Secret de Léon Bloy", La Revue Catholique des Idées et des Faits, Nos. 18-26 (10th Yr.), 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th August, 2nd, 12th, 17th September 1930; E. Beaumont, "Léon Bloy and mystical feminism", Downside Review, Autumn 1958, pp. 378-400.

Adam, the figure of Jesus, represents human liberty, which is responsible for making a right and restorative use of Creation. In the spiritual order, Redemption depends on Man's voluntarily engaging his freedom in the vagaries of Creation, and accepting the contingencies of evil, death and suffering in order to dominate them. In the temporal order, Redemption depends on the modesty of the Woman. This modesty represents both the "refusal" of Creation to yield perfection, of which it is incapable, and its pointing constantly to an ideal out of reach. At the same time, Creation must allow its modesty to be violated; that is, it must relinquish its ignorance and accept responsibility. Redemption depends, then, on a universal engagement of liberty and acceptance of responsibility in the search for the ideal - which represents yet another variation on the theme of compassion:

> L'Amour, dans un mouvement ineffable et incompréhensible, tombe sur la terre, le Verbe, dont il est inséparable, tombe après lui, et le Père les relève l'un par l'autre, successivement, l'homme devant d'abord donner sa liberté d'une façon terrible pour sauver la femme et la femme devant ensuite livrer sa pudeur d'une façon plus terrible encore pour délivrer son époux. Quand tu m'écris que peut-être la femme est la seule riche, et l'homme le seul pauvre, tu exprimes - est-ce à ton insu? - une des plus adorables formules de l'exégèse la plus transcendante.

In his study of La Femme pauvre, Professor Beaumont's interpretation of the rôle of Woman in Bloy's thought serves as a useful reminder of some of the contemporary analogies which might be drawn on this point, but concentrates too much on the isolated figure of woman as object of desire, and too little - in fact, not at all - on the relationship of the couple which redeems the universe by its shared

suffering.[1] He misses the fact that there are other victims in the novel besides the woman, whose sufferings do not become meritorious until a first sacrifice is made by Man (Gacougnol and Marchenoir, who create in Clotilde a state of responsibility), and that the long climax of the novel is the dual holocaust of Léopold and Clotilde; and therefore fails to explain the creative function which Bloy holds is implied in renunciation of carnal love, and misses the richness and the fullness paradoxically represented by Bloy's conclusion.

This emphasis on the compassionate function of Woman is constant from Bloy's first idea for his novel. His original intention was to present this in a negative form, reminiscent of Barbey, illustrating the sacrilege in woman's selling her love. He wrote to the publisher Quantin that he planned to describe a fallen heroine, faced with the triple gulf of prostitution, suicide, or return to the banality of her former existence with "l'aggravation d'un idéal irréparablement saccagé". An "absurd odyssey" in search of a solution would take her through a series of sordid milieux and strange tragedies, which would be the imaginative centre of interest.[2] Writing to Jeanne, on the

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[1] E. Beaumont, "La Femme pauvre and feminine mythology", in Studies in French literature presented to H. W. Lawton. The article over-stresses heretical variations as possible sources for Bloy's ideas, when reference to contemporary French orthodoxy would have been more relevant. The Joachimite Third Reign is a less important image of renewal in Bloy than the idea of the Marian era, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, or the reign of the Sacred Heart. The introduction of the Orthodox Church's equation of Wisdom, the Holy Spirit, and Mary is equally unhelpful for understanding Bloy (cp. Dr. Beaumont's excellent article "Claudel and Sophia", in Claudel: A Reappraisal, ed. R. M. Griffiths, London, 1963, pp. 93-111).

[2] Letter to Quantin, 24th February 1887; see also letters to Georges Khnopff, 14th March 1887; to Louis Montchal, 21st March 1887.

27th November 1889, Bloy explained that he had chosen his theme and its presentation in order to introduce truth into literature, to publicise the cruelty of society's rejection of the prostitute, and to illustrate a doctrinal point (the beauty of self-abnegation and humility):

> De stercore erigens pauperem, dit le psalmiste, CXII, 7, ce qui veut dire que le Seigneur élève le Pauvre du milieu de l'ordure, et le pauvre, dans l'Ecriture, signifie toujours Dieu Lui-même. As-tu compris, chère amie, que je veux montrer, pour l'étonnement des âmes médiocres, la miraculeuse connexité qui existe entre l'Esprit-Saint et la plus lamentable, la plus méprisée, la plus souillée des créatures humaines, la Prostituée.

In the finished novel, this is condensed into the eight opening chapters describing Clotilde's fall and her period of despair before meeting Gacougnol. Against the background of the sordid relationship of her mother and Chapuis and the physical squalor of her surroundings, Bloy traces her chaste and humble progress to an inevitable seduction which she tried to convince herself was real love, but which the mediocrity of her lover and her mother's cupidity maintain inexorably on a vulgar and humiliating level. Bloy indicates briefly the acuteness of her remorse, in her realisation of the gratuitousness of her act.[1]

The odyssey of her search for a solution is reduced to the single episode of her engagement as artist's model, described as a second prostitution. The hysteria with which she approaches the proposition is more than mere prudery; it is justified psychologically by the tensions produced by her previous experience, and doctrinally in the symbolical sense which Bloy elucidates. Clotilde is being invited to

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 47.

join a conspiracy to deny the intrinsic dignity of the human body, which lies in its ability to engage all its faculties for an enthusiasm, passion, aspiration or ideal acknowledged incapable of fulfilment on the temporal plane. The artist makes no such acknowledgement but rather sees his art as an ideal satisfying in itself; and it is to illustrate this that he proposes to buy the body of Clotilde, who becomes a part of Creation turned aside from its real purpose.

> Les yeux des hommes sont aussi dévorants que leurs mains impures et ce que les peintres font passer sur leurs toiles, c'est la pudeur même qu'il a fallu renier pour leur servir de modèle.
>
> Oui, certainement, la pudeur même. On leur donne cela, aux artistes, pour un peu d'argent. On leur vend précisément l'unique chose qui ait le juste poids d'une rançon dans la balance où le Créateur équilibre ses nébuleuses . . . .
>
> Ruisselant de perles ou d'ordures, le vêtement de la femme n'est pas un voile ordinaire. C'est un symbole très mystique de l'impénétrable Sagesse où l'Amour futur s'est enseveli.
>
> L'amour seul a le droit de se dépouiller lui-même et la nudité qu'il n'a point permis est toujours une trahison.
>
> La profession de modèle . . . destitue la femme complètement et l'exile de sa personnalité, pour la reléguer dans les limbes de la plus ténébreuse inconscience . . . .[1]

At this extreme of humiliation, Gacougnol intervenes. The idea of sacrilege is dropped, and the novel turns to explain the positive function of the love which Clotilde gives.[2] Bloy moves from modern commonplaces related to the same theme - the bourgeois assumption that "tout est dû" to Woman, confirmed by Schopenhauer's "blasphemous" denunciations of female domination, and completed by the figures of the quest of don Juan and the search for Paradise - to his own severely

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 50; see also Lettres à sa fiancée, 2nd December 1889.

[2] La Femme pauvre OC VII, pp. 109-11.

Catholic interpretation. (Beaumont criticises his failure to transpose the latter into literary terms, which he holds evades the demands of the novel; but this overlooks the fact that it is the Catholic terminology which Bloy's apologetic is concerned to re-instate in the reader's mind.) Because of their physiological structure, all women are images of Mary, in her redemptive rôle as vehicle of the Incarnation, which she gained by the immaculate humility and submissiveness which caused God to desire her. Woman is wholly Love and object of desire. The only modes in which she can exist are beatitude and lust, in both of which she is an impersonal channel of pleasure or grace - "dispensatrice de la Joie". The two states are figured in the narrative in the character of Clotilde, whose childish innocence, coupled with a tender maturity, appeals to Gacougnol on a sentimental level which simultaneously inspires a pure idealism: "pauvre petite chair amoureuse . . . . Il sortait de cette physionomie comme une main de douceur qui tirait l'âme de ses enveloppes et la colloquait dans une prison de cristal."[1]

The desire she inspires takes immediate effect as the imposition of suffering on those associated with her. The compassion she inspires and the consolation she offers build up and sustain a nexus of mutual needs in which Bloy sees the image of the interdependent Creation which God intended.

This is illustrated in her relationship with Léopold. After the scandal of Gacougnol's murder, Clotilde draws away, afraid of imposing herself on her admirer. The renewing of the relationship is shown both as providentially planned and an act of free choice on Léopold's

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 59.

part. It occurs under the aegis of the triumphant Virgin, whom Clotilde has been imagining receiving the homage of a repentant France - with the implication that their own relationship figures this repentance. Clotilde refers to their mutual unhappiness and her compassion for Léopold, and then betrays her own need in a request for food. The joint appeal of her beauty and her distress mediate to him a moment of magnificence which is the first stage of his conversion:

> L'amoureux pensa que tout l'azur et tout l'or du ciel croulaient sur lui et autour de lui. Le sable du jardin lui parut une jonchée de diamants aux feux tabifiques dont il fut criblé. Une seconde, les fracas puissants de la Volupté, de la Compassion qui déchire, de la Tendresse infinie, tordues en un seul carreau, le foudroyèrent.[1]

The moment completes the restoration of Clotilde, who, like Mary at La Salette, hears Léopold's confession and absolves him, clearing the way for the infusion of grace which the Church accomplishes. The two lovers enter into married life mutually purified, to encounter the sufferings which are to compose their union. Léopold's blindness, continual poverty, the deaths of Marchenoir, Lazare Druide and their son André, and the persecutions of landlords and neighbours maintain in them the awareness that there is no final earthly happiness.

The high point of their terrestial union is the fire of physical and mystical suffering which confirms their perfect identity in sacrificial love, coinciding with the separation of their physical bodies. The last chapter illustrates the dynamism inherent in the separation. With the terrestial ideal of Léopold set eternally out of reach, Clotilde is left fixed in the state of frustrated longing which is

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, pp. 132-33.

the condition of perfective efforts and the final earthly state, which is to be accounted beatitude.

The pattern which emerges from analysis of Bloy's statements on the theme of love contains a paradox. As his own experience accumulates, his theological elaborations become more complex and cautious, and his interest in self-justification more marked. There seems a growing lack of self-confidence in dealing with moral experience rather than the increase one would have expected.

In his treatment of the prostitute, this eagerness to confine the human problem to its symbolic meaning is apparent from the beginning.

The theme was already by Bloy's time a literary commonplace, initiated in a Romantic vein, by Balzac's Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes, and exploited on ever-lower social levels by the Naturalists in search of new subjects, in Marthe, La Fille Elisa, and Nana. The emphasis in these was humanitarian, with the novelist extracting the pathos of the prostitute's situation. This line reached its peak with Charles-Louis Philippe's Bubu de Monparnasse in 1901, which Bloy disliked for its excessive sentimentality.[1]

Baudelaire's diaries introduced a metaphysical note: the self-giving of the prostitute (for Baudelaire, a reprehensible self-dissipation) was a useful critical image to make a philosophical point foreshadowing that of Bloy: "Dieu se prostitue". Villiers' L'Eve future made more elaborate use of the figure as a vehicle for

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[1] Quatre ans, 7th March 1902.

the study of illusion and the nature of idealism. Both humanitarian and metaphysical themes were linked by Lautréamont in his Chants de Maldoror of 1869. Maldoror destroys the "ver luisant", Pharasaic interpreter of the divine prescriptions, who demands the death of the prostitute: "Je te préfère à lui; parce que j'ai pitié des malheureux. Ce n'est pas ta faute, si la justice éternelle t'a créée".[1] Bloy's closest affiliations are to Lautréamont, in whom he admires the evocation of the mystery in all the aspects of prostitution:

> La Prostitution sous toutes ses formes est une idée fixe qui escorte habituellement, dans son livre, l'idée du Seigneur, comme un corollaire suit un axiome. Les très-rares individus capables de sentir le profond mystère évoqué par ce mot de Prostitution, pourront lire avec un étonnement sans bornes, en déplorant l'extinction de ce Lucifer, le poème incroyable de la page 15.
>
> 'J'ai fait un pacte avec la prostitution, afin de semer le désordre dans les familles .... Hélas, hélas! s'écria la belle femme nue, les hommes, un jour, me rendront justice; je ne t'en dis pas davantage. Laisse-moi partir pour aller cacher au fond de la mer ma tristesse infinie. Il n'y a que toi et les monstres hideux qui grouillent dans ces noirs abîmes qui ne me méprisent pas'. Qu'on le prenne comme on voudra, ce chapitre m'a totalement confondu![2]

The mystery for Bloy is not in the challenge to the divinity, which he omits from his quotation, but in the alliance between divinity and prostitute which is to overthrow the seemingly stable foundations of modern society: "semer le désordre dans les familles". The repentant prostitute who admits the justice of her social humiliation, and whose position is only partly the fault of society (both

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[1] Lautréamont, Les Chants de Maldoror, Paris, 1963, pp. 130-31.

[2] "Le Cabanon de Prométhée", La Plume, 1st September 1890.

Véronique and Clotilde acquire responsibility for their fallen state by their acquiescence in it), is qualified to suffer with Christ and to share in the work of universal redemption: "Le rachat du Pauvre par la Prostitution! Ah! si vous saviez où cela porte!"[1] The figures of Mary Magdalene and Eve are the paradigms; the former, representing immediate and heroic restoration to purity, is preferred for Véronique, but rejected in La Femme pauvre for Eve, who implies more protracted re-creative efforts within the nexus of temporal relationships.[2] In a degenerate society, the prostitute performs the mediatory function more successfully than does the traditional image of Mary in her purity. It is necessary for God - and the apologist - to approach the sinner through his sins, and to allow mediation to operate through these; in the parable of the taxgatherer who, according to Bloy, entertained Christ in his brothel, "le Seigneur affirme que le salut est accordé à cette demeure qui devient alors, aux yeux de l'Eglise, le type de la Maison de Dieu".[3]

(There is a clear analogue here between the redemptive couple of Prostitute and poor Christ and the compassionate union of creature and Creator in ignominy posed in the doctrine of the Sacred Heart. Parallels with the Romantic concept of the social outcast who ultimately redeems society are less helpful, since the Romantic redemption is not based on the guilt of the outcast, and does not perpetuate ignominy.)

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[1] Le Mendiant ingrat, 24th November 1892.

[2] Lettres à Véronique, 21st-22nd July 1873; La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 51-52.

[3] Le Mendiant ingrat, 12th December 1893.

It should be noted that the linking of Christ and prostitute is made solely on an allegorical basis, as Bloy explained to Jehan Rictus in the course of a controversy over the anti-clerical tag of a carnal attraction between the Magdalene and Christ, which Rictus had used in his Soliloques.[1]

The images of Woman as saint and as prostitute are complemented by the figure of the "jeune fille", popular theme among the writers of the sentimental school - including Bourget, Coppée and Jammes - and the symbol, according to Bloy, of modern religious and social hypocrisy. For Bloy, the modern virgin is an egotist who, in an act of calculated sacrilege, arouses desire as homage to her own person, not as material to be transformed into charity and redirected towards God.

Barbey had already treated this aspect of the contemporary moral state in Les Diaboliques, in which the special feature of his heroines' activity was their voluntary damnation of a world which deserved perdition for its mediocrity. Bloy prefers to point as more reprehensible the virgin's unconsciousness of the implications of her behaviour, which is an unwitting act of hypocrisy at which society connives. It is society's refusal to admit man's physical and spiritual needs which is that of its diseases most in need of cure.

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[1] Letter to Rictus, cit. Quatre ans, 26th February 1901. For Rictus' reply, 1st March 1901, see CLB Nos. 2-4 (9th Yr.), Nov. 1932-April 1933, pp. 37-38. See also letter to Rictus, June 1903: "Moi qui l'ai, la Foi, comment voudriez vous que j'acceptasse l'idée monstrueuse d'un Dieu incarné, d'un Dieu auteur de la grâce sanctifiante inspirant néanmoins des mouvements charnels? C'est la contradiction absolue, la démence. Autant dire que le soleil lance des ténèbres. Voici les belles paroles du bréviaire en l'office de Saint Agnès, 21 janvier: 'Quem (Christum) cum amavero casta sum; cum teligero, munda sum, cum accipero, virgo sum'. C'est le sentiment et la croyance invariable de l'Eglise depuis des siècles. Cela étant, comment voulez-vous que moi qui communie tous les jours et qui vis à cause de cela, dans la continence absolue depuis des années, je ne sois pas suffoqué des 5 derniers vers de la page 115?" (La R.)

Bloy gives a reassessment of the ideal of virginity in terms pointing forward to those of Bernanos, who distinguishes it from "niaiserie", timidity, and ignorance.[1] Absolute virginity exists only within the state of marriage; he explains, in a Marian context, that the true Virgin is also the Mother.[2] His best treatment of the theme, however, is in the critical descriptions of his neglected prose-poems: "Le Cortège de la fiancée" and "Les Douze Filles d'Eugénie Grasset".

In these, written at the height of the decadent movement, with the double intention of shocking the general public and intriguing the artistic milieu, Bloy produced the most erotic of his studies of the meaning of Woman.[3] The two poems are not acceptable to modern taste, being far too florid and hermetic in their imagery. Despite this, they compare favourably with those of Baudelaire in the meaningfulness of their combination of religious and sexual planes of reference. The complex Catholic reference of the images of Mary, Paradise, and the poor lover, who is Christ, give a firm foundation to the baroque development, and the conviction with which Bloy preaches through these the concepts of salvation and damnation renews their decadent context.

The requisitory of "Le Cortège de la fiancée" considers the Edenic image in its modern social context: "Jardin suspendu de la Volupté, que soutiennent toutes les colonnes sociales".[4] The virgin moves

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[1] G. Bernanos, Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune, Paris, 1938, p. 237.

[2] Le Mendiant ingrat, 22nd June 1894.

[3] A. Jarry invokes in his list of the elect, ". . . de Bloy, les cochons noirs de la Mort, cortège de la Fiancée" (Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, OC I, Monte Carlo, 1948, p. 212; see also pp. 205, 237).

[4] The poem is the second in the series Les Vendanges! conceived in collaboration with the painter Henri de Groux, of which only the first, "La Vigne abandonnée", appeared in the format originally intended (see Mon journal, 8th March and 30th June 1894).

through society in the ironic purity of her lownecked dresses, visits church and takes communion. Her half-conscious intention is to arouse passions she has no intention of satisfying, and which reduce her victim to a less than human level. Bloy stresses the destructive nature of the temptation, one of the human weaknesses for which Christ suffered in his Agony:

> Cette amertume sans nom, de concupiscence déçue, est la lie même du Calice qu'il lui fallut boire. Car c'est la plus hideuse des tortures. C'est le supplice qu'il est impossible de magnifier, celui de tous qui efface le mieux la Forme de l'homme, parce que c'est le seul qu'il ne peut choisir.

The climax of the poem is in an apostrophe to the virgin in a reversal of the litany of Mary, which shows her failure to fulfil her Marian redemptive <u>rôle</u>. From Mother of the living, she becomes Mother of the dead. She and her victims are given over to death and decay, which are the images of damnation.

By her insincere and impure acts of communion, she has also failed to dispense charity in the wider context of the Communion of Saints. The image of frustrated desire is transferred to the souls in Purgatory, allowing the entry into the poem of horrific images of retribution:

> Songes-tu, mignonne, que tous ces morts, tous ces lamentables morts, sans yeux et privés d'entrailles, sont incorrigibles de ta beauté, qu'ils ne cessent de hennir vers toi, du fond de la terre, et que les promesses d'une fille coquette sont, pour elle, d'authentiques et d'indissolubles fiançailles à la pourriture?
>
> Ils te réclament, ces putréfiés . . . Que tu veuilles ou ne veuilles pas, il faudra qu'ils te possèdent, ces incocufiables époux, car il n'est pas de promesse qui ne se doive infailliblement accomplir, à la fin des fins!

The cycle of prose-poems "Les Douze Filles d'Eugénie Grasset", was published in the <u>Mercure de France</u> for November 1903, unfortunately

without the Grasset illustrations, "Les Douze Mois", by which they were inspired.[1] Bloy admits that interpretation of these poems is difficult, and attributes this to the absence of the illustrations which would make clear that contrast between the apparent innocent insipidity of Grasset's heroines and the real horror of their moral and spiritual state which is his theme. It is, however, rather the abstruseness of the philosophy and the images which explain why their condition is condemned which provide the stumbling-block. A letter to Grasset indicates that each month has been re-set in the Calendar of Saints, which explains some of the references;[2] but the overall sense only emerges when thé reader recognises the theme of the appeal of "le Pauvre" for redemption, expressed in his desire for the Earthly Paradise. The image of the Garden, equated with the womb of Mary, is the final constant.

In this context, the relevance of the images from the Calendar of Saints becomes clear. March contains the mysteries of Creation and of Annunciation, in which Bloy speaks of sowing the seed of faith. April is Easter and the Passion, interpreted in the two senses of passionate love and suffering. In May, the month of Mary, and of Pentecost, to which Bloy adds reference to the judgement of the Apocalypse, the virgin is shown picking the flowers of the Passion for her own use and refusing them to Mary. June contains the image of the rose, Marian symbol of purity, the rosa mystica, source of the redeeming Blood of Christ; and also the image of the rosary, which leads naturally to an account of the legend of saint Francis and the rosebush. In August,

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[1] The first three were written in 1896, and the rest August-September 1900; the series was reprinted in Quatre ans, 14th August 1900.

[2] Cit. Quatre ans, 14th August 1900.

feast of the Decollation of the Baptist, the Herodias theme is developed; in November, the month of All Souls, Bloy presents the plea of the neglected and impoverished dead for prayers. The Nativity, in December, represents a "Pauvreté adorable" unrecognised by Grasset's blind and meaningless heroines - "simulacres impies . . . idoles éternellement aveugles". The sequence ends on a plea for their repentance.

Analysis of the February prose gives an example of Bloy's method. The virgin's pruning the trees of the garden is compared to the destruction of the martyrs, the flowers of the Church, thereby casting the gloss of martyrdom over the sufferings of concupiscence. Bloy's language becomes blatantly erotic as he picks up the liturgical analogies between the Annunciation and the Fall in Eden with the images of the Song of Songs:

> Voilà, certes, une jolie personne pour émonder ce célibataire dont la carcasse affreuse de poirier sans consolation me fait venir à la bouche une eau plus qu'amère. Cette fille de février n'a pas l'air de trouver la vie bien mauvaise et le reflet des cisailles dans ses yeux pleins d'attention suffit amplement, je suppose, à ses instincts de contemplative.
>
> Qu'elle prenne garde, cependant. C'est terrible d'être un jardin parfaitement clos où nul pauvre n'a le droit d'entrer.
>
> Je tremble vraiment que cette branche pointue qu'elle va couper ne lui bondisse au visage, ne lui crève un oeil et ne pénètre jusqu'à sa cervelle, jusqu'à sa petite cervelle où ne furent sans doute jamais admis les mendiantes pensées du ciel.

He corrects the modern misapprehension. The Tree the virgin is trying to destroy is the Cross, which carries redemptive suffering. He pleads for acceptance of a love which is suffering:

> Car on ne connaît aucun arbre, non plus qu'aucun homme. Il en est un qui est immortel et dont l'histoire est infiniment fameuse, mais que le Cheroub formidable a si bien caché que Dieu seul sait où il se trouve. Or il est toujours effrayant de voir une femme porter la

> main sur un arbre et quel est l'ange de ténèbres qui oserait dire que cet arbre-ci, précisément parce qu'il a l'air si malheureux, n'est pas celui qui fut nommé le Bois de la science du Bien et du Mal où s'enroula l'antique Serpent?

The March prose makes the same point in its assertion of the identity in Man of Sun and Serpent. The sexual act is lifted up to become an image of the inextricability of love and pain in the world, of which total acceptance is necessary.[1]

In both these instances, the pattern is still one of evasion. Bloy acknowledges the evil of the human situation, and attributes it - from his own experience - to the failure of society to recognise and make room for all the physical and spiritual demands of human nature; but he refuses to go further and challenge at its root the adoption by society of external structures and moral values (in this case, religious ones) on which this failure rests, preferring to describe the structures as a wrong interpretation by society of the values as originally given. Hence the contradictions in his own attitude, which, though preferring to stress the primacy of love, is forced to condemn as evil most of the manifestations of love, and to set them in an elaborate structure of suffering in order to justify their existence. Hence also this tendency to force experience into abstract images and symbols, refining it out of existence in the interest of the system.

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[1] See also Le Mendiant ingrat, 20th September 1894.

## 2. The Life of Poverty

> . . . une façon de magnifier sa misère
> que personne n'égalera.
> (Maurice de Fleury, Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 25th July 1931)

The strongest reaction to Bloy's treatment of the theme of poverty, by critics and general public alike, has always been to its autobiographical element. This was encouraged by Bloy's own detailing of his poverty, particularly in his diaries, where he made no secret of his efforts to obtain loans from friends, publishers and casual acquaintances in order to support himself and his family, in the belief that the work of the artist devoted to the interests of society required relief from the problems of economic subsistence with which it was society's task to deal. Such a position attracted some sympathy and more hostility, but in both cases, much publicity. Anecdotes and epigrams on the theme circulated from an early date.

The figure of the impoverished artist is a commonplace of Bloy's period: Huysmans, Villiers, Verlaine all experienced similar financial difficulties. Bloy, however, brought an original twist to the theme by consistently extending his personal difficulties into contexts of wider significance. The slow public recognition of this fact reflects partly the strength of Bloy's emphasis on his own sufferings but partly too a general insensitivity among the Catholic community to the presence and repercussions of the problem of poverty, which Bloy's work went some way to diminish.[1]

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[1] Bloy's position begins to be acknowledged in the 1890's: see J. Destrée, "Notes et Silhouettes: Jules Vallès et Léon Bloy", La Société Nouvelle, 30th April 1890; A. Guérin, "Léon Bloy", La Plume, 1st November 1890; E. Dermenghem, "La Femme pauvre", Durendal, June 1897; Sévérine, "La Femme pauvre", L'Eclair, 24th June 1897. Destrée, the Belgian Catholic socialist, remarks in Bloy's work the presence of the social gospel: ". . . le Christ humble que l'on voit rôder par les routes . . . Réformateur misérable et persécuté" and suggests that both Bloy and Villiers prophesy the imminent re-incarnation of the Divinity, descending in flames to "apaiser la soif de l'équité".

The history of the nineteenth-century Church shows increasing consciousness of the claims and the plight of the industrial and agricultural working classes. Its reaction, however, was complicated by the attachment of these claims to doctrines alien to its own philosophy, emphasising an improvement of the material standards of this life which excluded the interests of the next, and expressing confidence in natural human ability to bring this about. At the same time, the Church found its interests committed to the support and maintenance of the existing capitalist order - particularly in France, as a result of the Concordats. Though admitting the repression of the industrial workers and the justice of their complaints, its responses were limited by fear of the unknown consequences of disturbing the existing social order and a mistrust of the violence and uncontrollable egoism felt to be latent in the working classes. Veuillot's L'Esclave Vindex of 1849 puts both aspects of the Right-wing dilemma.

Some attempt to meet the problem in its own terms was made at the beginning of the century by the liberal Catholics. The Conférences de Saint-Vincent de Paul established by Lamennais' disciple Frédéric Ozanam in 1833 relied initially on individual elitist effort to set up and run "patronages" on a feudal model among the workers; but eventually were able to develop towards the properly political Christian democratic movement conceived in 1848 by Ozanam and Lacordaire, and represented by their newspaper L'Ere Nouvelle. This was condemned after the Revolution of 1848 by a hierarchy suspicious of any compromise with socialist principles, and nothing similar appeared until after 1890, when Georges Goyau brought into France Christian democratic principles which

had been developing in Germany since the 1870's.[1]

The solutions preferred were those of Le Play, Albert de Mun and La Tour du Pin, aristocratic and idealistic, and totally inadequate to deal with a problem whose full extent had still not been recognised. De Mun's Oeuvre des cercles tried to establish corporations on a feudal model which would improve relations between employer and worker, and to set the Christian moral order on a firm basis of family, religion and workshop. La Tour du Pin, joining the Oeuvre in 1881, introduced more concrete plans for legislation to limit working hours, but the basis still remained too personal and limited in scope.

Under Leo XIII, the Vatican made an effort to reach the working classes. From 1885 to 1891, the conferences of the Union of Fribourg, organised by the Bishop of Geneva, were viewed with favour. Léon Harmel organised worker pilgrimages to Rome in 1885, 1887 and 1891. Social Catholicism was allowed to develop in Belgium and America, and there seemed prospect of a return to Mennaisian principles. The encyclical Rerum novarum (15th May 1891) formulated a statement of the Church's position with regard to the class conflict which tried to reconcile the demands of order with those of social justice, and the Church's traditional reliance on individual charity with the pressing need for legislative solutions. The Pope expressed sympathy for the exploited workers and anxiety over class dissension, but was at the same time determined to protect the individual right to property and to oppose collectivism. Work should be considered as a necessary form of expiation, and the existing class system as imposing interdependence and the opportunity to practise the duty of mutual charity. He re-

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[1] A. Dansette, Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine, II, 30.

asserted the dignity of poverty and the moral duty of the rich to give away superfluous wealth. He preferred a framework of private institutions and corporations to one based on legislation, but also declared that economic equity for the working classes was desirable, and that the Government had a responsibility to protect the weak as well as to keep order and safeguard property. In his book of 1892, Le Pape, les catholiques et la question sociale, Georges Goyau tried to argue that the document was proof that the hierarchy admitted the importance of the people in the modern Church, the need for legislation on their behalf, and the insufficiency of the benevolent, feudal and theocratic solutions of the old régime; but in this he was soon proved over-optimistic. The Encyclical had little practical effect. Some initial enthusiasm led to such moves as the institution of worker priests, but these, badly-prepared and far too few, were soon overwhelmed by the difficulties of their task and tended to turn to socialism.[1]

The encyclical Graves de communi of January 1901, whilst accepting the term "Christian democracy", emptied this of all concepts of popular power, preaching general benevolence and stressing the charitable duties of the aristocracy. Huysmans, writing towards the end of the same year, reflects the general Right-wing despair of reaching a hostile populace:

> Le peuple est simpliste. Il ne voit le prêtre que pour un baptême, pour un mariage, pour un enterrement - et on le carotte et on le dupe. Il voit très bien que les riches sont choyés par les prêtres et,

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[1] See the curé de Torcy's account in Bernanos' Journal d'un curé de campagne in Oeuvres romanesques, Paris, 1961, p. 1075; E. Zola, Paris, Oeuvres Complètes, XXXV, Paris, 1929; G. Fonsegrive, Lettres d'un curé de campagne, Paris, 1894; Lettres d'un curé de canton, Paris, 1895.

> qu'à de rares exceptions, le pauvre est tout juste toléré dans l'Eglise. Il n'aime ni son curé, ni ses vicaires - et il a bien raison.
>
> Il faudrait donc que tout changeât, mais le moyen dont il faudrait user est plus qu'humain. Toutes les encycliques sur les relations des patrons et des ouvriers sont des aérostats de lieux communs qui planent et se dégonflent - sans profit pour personne; d'autre part, les associations, les confréreries, les conférences ne servent qu'aux réclamistes qui les montent - le résultat de ces agitations dans le vide est nul.[1]

As far as the Right-wing writers were concerned, the best the Church had to offer was the Christian concept of submission and an idealisation of the vocation of poverty as assumed by Christ, together with an exhortation to individual charity. This was the attitude represented by the popular devotions of the period and the popular devotional figures of voluntary poverty - the curé d'Ars, M. Dupont ("le saint homme de Tours"), Saint Benedict Labre, and Saint Francis, who experienced a sudden return to popularity.

It is clear in most of the Revival writers that treatment of the theme of poverty is closely tied to a desire to encourage the maintenance of social order. These are the terms in which Bloy first met the problem, in the early stages of his Catholic career, in the work of Saint-Bonnet. In the second edition of De la Restauration française, which he read in 1372, he observed with interest the addition of a whole new chapter on socialism and the middle classes - "un chapitre de lumières".

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[1] J.-K. Huysmans, "Paris retrouvé", Bulletin Huysmans, No. 51 (39th Yr.), 1966, pp. 427-23.

The traditionalist argued here a double thesis, which Bloy accepted; that the present abuses of the capitalist system, attributable mainly to the decadence of the aristocracy, were undeniable, but that the inherent excellence of the system was equally beyond doubt. He indicated the misuse of capital for spending on luxury goods, and proposed that this be re-invested in the land: "Il faut détruire le luxe! Il faut détruire le monde!" Bloy noted the similarities here to socialist doctrine, and the difference:

> Dépouillez ces lignes de leur contexte et vous aurez une épigraphe de Proudhon.
>
> La justice chrétienne qui réprouve les superfluités, et l'Envie, qui voudrait se les appliquer, se rencontrent donc en ce seul point.
>
> Je le savais.
>
> Notre-Seigneur n'a-t-il pas été traité de sans-culotte?
>
> Mais ce dernier mot ramène la pensée au pied de la chaire chrétienne.[1]

Tracing parallel histories of French morality and the rise of capitalism, Saint-Bonnet concluded that it was not the Revolution but the decadence of the wealthy nobility which ruined France - ideas which Bloy had already met in de Maistre and Bonald.[2] He blamed present social immorality on "les jouisseurs" - the atheist pleasure-seekers who refused the responsibility and duties which their wealth and position entailed. These were responsible for the present ill-odour of the capitalist system, and the new charge that property was theft (in which Bloy recognised the reference to Proudhon).[3]

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[1] Notes to RF I, xxviii [CLB No. 6 (5th Yr.), July-August 1929, pp. 154-55].

[2] Notes to RF I, xxxii [CLB No. 1 (6th Yr.), Sept.-Oct. 1929, pp. 2-3].

[3] Notes to RF I, xxxv (ibid., p. 8).

Despite this, the capitalist order had more to offer than the socialist, which was too idealistic to be practicable. Bloy added examples from his own experience to show that socialism taught only salutory disillusionment with reliance on human methods;[1] agreeing that human egoism and sloth were such that, as de Maistre asserted, some external force was needed to induce effort and progress: "Ou le christianisme ou l'esclavage", and accepting enthusiastically Saint-Bonnet's paradox that this external authority was more calculated to preserve human dignity than the socialist ethic which was not interested in individual effort.[2] Finally, he agreed with Saint-Bonnet that for the political salvation of France a single leader and doctrinal unity were needed, which socialism, by definition, could not provide.[3]

There is, however, an obvious inadequacy in Blanc de Saint-Bonnet's system, in its failure to consider the increasingly evident problem of absolute poverty. The philosopher takes for granted a certain economic independence and a minimum of intellectual ability, which he declares indispensable in the formation of the saint - who, in addition, should expect to find his saintliness acknowledged by a respectable position in the social hierarchy. Writing to Bloy, 1st November 1873, he stated his belief that absolute poverty was demanded only of religious orders. This is not the spirit of the revivalist Church,[4] nor that of Bloy, who soon recognised the stigma

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[1] Notes to RF I, xxxix (ibid., pp. 10-11)

[2] Notes to RF I, xxxvi (ibid., pp. 9-10); II, xxii (ibid., pp. 28-29)

[3] Notes to RF I, xxxix (ibid., p. 11)

[4] See Ch. Gay, De la vie et des vertus chrétiennes, Poitiers, 1874.

of absolute poverty as the real problem of society, and a stumbling-block to the cause of Catholicism:

> Ce n'est rien d'être pauvre, puisque la pauvreté peut être volontaire. Saint François d'Assise, est-il dit dans Le Désespéré, était un homme de faste qui se baignait dans l'or de ses lumineuses guenilles. Ce qui est quelque chose, et quelque chose d'effroyable, c'est l'indigence qui est toujours involontaire; mais les pauvres ordinaires ne peuvent pas comprendre ça qui est le mystère de Bethléem, à moins d'un coup de lumière ...[1]

In his own work, Bloy's attention is for the destitute, whose problems are insoluble without recourse to the universal adoption of evangelical poverty, and whose brutalising condition deprives them of the resources to effect their own improvement: ". . . le Sauveur, cloué depuis dix-neuf siècles, ne descend guère de sa Croix, tout exprès pour les pauvres filles . . ."[2] Clotilde, physically degraded by her work in the gilding shop, and morally degraded by economic forces which push her towards prostitution, is forced by society out of the reach of the Church until the intervention of Gacougnol, who offers first of all a baptismal restitution of social and economic status.

In her case, poverty had acted also as a "sieve", winnowing out the virtues of humility and gentleness which induced the painter's intervention. The majority of the poor are less fortunate - Chapuis, for example, the bourgeois once corrupted by wealth, whose subsequent

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[1] Letter to R. Roblot and L. Petit, 27th November 1902 (La R.). Cp. L'Invendable, 6th January 1906, in praise of Péguy's "De Jean Coste", with the qualification: "Péguy a raison de vouloir une délimitation entre la misère et la pauvreté, mais il ne montre pas la différence que voici: La Misère est le manque du nécessaire, la Pauvreté est le manque du superflu".

[2] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 33.

poverty accentuates the unpleasantness of his character, or the formless masses of industrial workers and peasants, for whom Bloy expressed a sympathy heavily overlaid with contempt. In an article on the Anzin miners' strike in 1884, he belaboured both selfish rich and godless poor. He described the industrial and agricultural workers as children, needing the guiding authority of the Church, and, like Balzac, blamed the influence of the press, the poor quality of the clergy, universal suffrage and the effects of industrialisation for their shortcomings; but at the same time, condemned the peasant in revolt as the barbarian threatening civilisation, and gave examples of the evil rife in the countryside which rival Zola's descriptions.[1]

He could not, therefore, remain long in the company of Blanc de Saint-Bonnet. He continued to urge resignation to poverty, but one which was universal and not limited to any one social class, arguing, in defence of the state, that poverty is the basis ofevery man's relationship with God and his fellows.

The impulse for this interpretation was not simply humanitarian. Bloy drew partly on that Romantic concept of poverty as an heroic vocation resulting from the conflict of individual ideals and values with those of a materialistic society, such as he had found in Balzac's Le Colonel Chabert, Hugo's Les Burgraves, or, most important, in Hello's studies in L'Homme, or Paroles de Dieu, where "le Pauvre" was the rejected hero or artistic genius, and figure of the hidden Christ.[2]

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[1] "La Guerre des mercenaires", Le Figaro, 19th April 1884. See also letter to Jean Lander (Boll. I, 267-68).

[2] Quoted by Bloy in Lettres à sa fiancée, 8th March 1890.

He was also impressed by the "heroic simplicity" of Paul Féval's Etapes d'une conversion (1877), an account of the life of Pierre Blot (Raymond Brucker), the impoverished Catholic writer rejected by the literary world, which he in his turn had disowned for its hypocrisy and mediocrity. There are clear resemblances between Féval's hero and the persona Bloy chose for himself.

The starting point of his own doctrine is the need to explain the present impoverishment of moral values expressed in the failure of the public to recognise his own merit. The form of his own suffering, through financial difficulties, dictates the form of answer required:

> L'amour, en Dieu, c'est la Nécessité absolue philosophiquement et théologiquement.
> Ma souffrance est nécessaire. Dieu est le Pauvre par essence et par excellence et il me demande cette aumône que j'aurais pu lui refuser en raturant quelque chose d'éternel . . . . Ma souffrance, à moi, c'est d'être captif et la forme de ma captivité, je l'ai écrit, c'est le manque perpétuel d'argent, la constante misère avec toutes ses conséquences.[1]

The doctrinal rationale of this is in the necessity of compassionate suffering with Christ, which can usefully be illustrated by economic images. Le Désespéré offers images of debt and credit which are a natural extension of the Pauline image of the ransom of the atonement. Calvary reveals to Marchenoir the apparent bankruptcy of God, and the need for humanity to supply him credit from its own funds of suffering. (Bloy puns on the double sense of credit, which is also faith; the perpetuation of suffering is also a stimulus for belief.) A series of economic images radiates from here through the novel to make cognate points. The humiliations involved in Marchenoir's

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[1] Letter to P. Raoux, 12th May 1907.

poverty, which he contributes to the Passion, qualify him to ask in return for a re-valuation of the divine capital from God's representatives, in the form of greater doctrinal rigour: "un croyant qui voulait contraindre les regrattiers du salut à repeser devant lui leur marchandise".[1] The substitutes for religion are considered as alternative investments - Véronique's flesh, for example, offered on the market place.[2]

In La Femme pauvre, the same doctrine is illustrated in terms which emphasises that Poverty - now personified - is the law of Creation and the essence of the Godhead. Bloy shows Creator, creation and Christ on the Cross linked by her to the point of identification, and adapts to her St. John's description of the creative word. The description occurs in the form of a digression, after the account of Clotilde's personal experience of poverty, to introduce the correct perspective in which to view this experience; there is no suggestion, as in Le Désespéré, of a doctrine whose elaboration is closely related to one man's experience, but rather of a revelation of a self-sufficient truth. Poverty is an essential part of the human condition to which men must adhere; she it is who imposes on men those reciprocal bonds of charity which link them to God (as in Saint-Bonnet's capitalist system). Refusal of these bonds is an act against nature, both in the moral terms in which this is usually understood, and in the economic terms of contract which have replaced morality for modern man:

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 60.

[2] Ibid., p. 73.

> Les riches ont horreur de la Pauvreté parce qu'ils ont le pressentiment obscur du négoce piaculaire impliqué par sa présence. Elle les épouvante comme le visage morne d'un créancier qui ne connaît pas le pardon. Il leur semble, et ce n'est pas sans raison, que la misère effroyable qu'ils dissimulent au fond d'eux-mêmes pourrait bien rompre d'un coup ses liens d'or et ses enveloppes d'iniquité, et accourir tout en larmes au-devant de Celle qui fut la Compagne élue du Fils de Dieu![1]

From the general, Bloy descends through his own interpretation of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus and that of the two debtors, identifying the causes of God and the poor in a conflation of Scriptural and contemporary contexts, to the particular case of the persecution of the poor by the rich - tenant by landlord - which is also his own:

> Ego sum Jesus quem tu persequeris! est-il dit à Saint Paul fumant de rage contre les chrétiens, qui étaient alors comme les locataires de la Cité du Démon et qu'on pourchassait de gîte en gîte, l'épée ou la torche dans les reins, jusqu'à ce qu'ils payassent de tout leur sang le logis permanent des cieux! Je suis Jésus que tu persécutes![2]

It is the abuse of the capitalist system which Bloy stresses, rather than the effective charitable interchange which are Saint-Bonnet's theme. His praise of poverty as the medium of its unification - the negative image of charity - admits the breakdown of the system, whose final state of unity is not to be one of liberation of individual perfections within the whole, but a levelling and confusion in universal deprivation and ignominy. This confusion is not rejected by Bloy, but justified as necessary involuntary suffering;

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 173.

[2] Ibid., p. 256.

poverty, in a materialistic society, performs the function of slavery among the pagans, in imposing the humiliation which prepares fallen man for the act of faith. Le Salut par les Juifs argues that the collapse of capitalist society procured by the greed of the rich belongs to a divine pattern, elaborated to deal with the problem of this society's being sunk too far in egoism and materialism for voluntary renewal to be feasible. The solution depends on the intervention of the Jews, traditionally the safety-valve, or scapegoat, of capitalism, whom Bloy presents as intimately involved in the ruin of France by their dominant place in its economic structure, and able therefore to share with France the promises of renewal implied in their own Scriptural and secular history. No new political forms are suggested; Bloy merely rationalises the collapse of the old by pleading the virtues of poverty.

Le Salut par les Juifs

The difficulty of this book, published by Bloy in 1892, justifies a separate and detailed analysis.

It is clear in the overall perspective of the book that Bloy's basic intention in writing is to argue the point described above; but this emerges only gradually in the course of reading, through a series of interwoven exegetical and doctrinal themes whose complexity frequently distracts the reader from the point they are meant to illustrate. A letter to the socialist Bernard Lazare described the motif of the work as "l'adoration du Pauvre",[1] but gave no indication

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[1] Le Mendiant ingrat, 15th October 1892.

of the form in which this adoration should find expression - submission or revolt - nor of the extent to which the Poor Man, here, clearly, chiefly a doctrinal symbol, could also be interpreted into the historical or modern social context. As Gourmont remarked:

> . . . c'est moins clair qu'un vaudeville et même cela devient assez obscur en telles pages du livre, lorsque M. Bloy, défendant les Juifs, les défend à peu près de la manière dont on défend les tapis contre la poussière.[1]

Notes in Le Mendiant ingrat on the genesis of the work make more clear the directions in which Bloy's ideas move. Drumont's anti-Semitic approach to the economic problem provided the imaginative point of departure for the book. Without playing down his own antipathy towards the Jews, whom he too rejected as the murderers of Christ and for their exploitation of the economic problem, Bloy proposed another perspective on the question - to consider the race as the source of the Redemption, suffering, like Christ, for the sins of the world, whilst at the same time possessing promises of an end to suffering and an entry into triumph which have not yet been fulfilled, and whose fulfilment, with the release of the Jews from ignominy, is to be the great miracle of Christ's present reign in abjection.[2] There is no suggestion that the triumph is to be effected in earthly terms, nor that it will include any end to earthly suffering. Links between Jews and Christians are explored. The Jews are both at the source of Christianity and hold promises relating to its end;[3] the

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[1] Le Figaro, 20th September 1892. For Gourmont's marginalia to Le Salut par les Juifs, see P. Arrou, "Léon Bloy et Remy de Gourmont", [CLB No. 2 (8th Yr.), Nov.-Dec. 1931].

[2] Le Mendiant ingrat, 12th June 1892.

[3] Ibid., 11th July 1892.

type of Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers, is invoked to represent the mediation of Christ on behalf of Jew as well as Gentile;[1] and the prostitutes Oolla and Ooliba, types of Synagogue and Church, show the identical ignominy of the Jewish crime on Calvary and of present Christian apostasy.[2] Bloy's argument here is that God's mercy to the outcast Jews, historically and Scripturally documented, demonstrates that, by analogy, his mercy can legitimately be invoked on behalf of the rest of Christian society.

The book works on the prejudice of the essential and inalienable unity of Godhead and creation, its arguments resting on the motifs of disjunction and unity provided in the history of the Jews. Disjunction is expressed in the antagonisms set up in creation by the Fall and by Calvary between Cain and Abel, Jews and Christians, sin and innocence, body and soul, symbol and meaning, and apparently within the Godhead itself: "le conflit adorablement énigmatique de Jésus et de l'Esprit-Saint".[3] Unity is confirmed through the violence of Calvary;[4] in the promises of universal judgement[5] and of recuperation by the Spirit (Bloy makes his point here by syntactical ambiguity - "quelque ineffable récupération de Substance dilapidée par l'Amour" - expressing

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[1] Le Mendiant ingrat, 26th July 1892.

[2] Ibid., 29th August 1892.

[3] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 58.

[4] Ibid., p. 59.

[5] Ibid., p. 62.

the Spirit's dual <u>rôle</u> in the dissemination and recovery of creation[1]); and in God's initial designs for man, which have not been abdicated since the Fall.[2] Bloy tries to show that the restoration of unity and order lies in the universalisation of suffering and poverty properly interpreted as the state of expiation which is the only possible form of relationship in this life between God and men. He indicates how this universalisation will be accomplished by forcing together into a redemptive pattern the two elements in which disunity is at the moment most apparent - the Jewish race, rejected by God, and the modern Christian who rejects the suffering Christ.

The doctrines he uses for this are those on which he habitually draws: the concept of the Godhead as perfect in unity, justice and mercy, and unchanging in its relationship with creation; the absolute control exercised by Providence over the development and end of history, which guarantees and justifies the necessity of every human action, including apparent sin; the place of the Atonement and of the Communion of Saints within history; and the importance for salvation of compassionate configuration to Christ in voluntary or involuntary suffering, which is the final state of the Church on earth. These are formulated in the traditional images of Scripture and Bloy's own economic images, reinterpreted in an ironic mode.

The theme is set by the prologue and epilogue of Old Testament texts - <u>De profundis</u> (Psalm 129, set for the office of the dead), and <u>In excelso</u>, the account in Ezekiel XXXVII of the restoration of life

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[1] <u>Le Salut par les Juifs</u>, <u>OC</u> IX, 60.

[2] <u>Ibid</u>.

by the Spirit to the dried bones of Israel. The first is the static appearance of suffering in apostate time, in which the dying Christ on the Cross and the Spirit held trapped within fallen creation sigh in compassion for release, whilst the second shows this release effected by humanity's realisation of the reviving power of the Spirit, made plain by the prophet.

The doctrinal principle posed, Bloy moves to consider the most conspicuous modern form of the suffering of the Spirit, which consists in the prejudice of anti-semitism. Drumont's crude economic interpretation of the phenomenon, the traditional Catholic hostility to the usurer, is disposed of in the first three chapters as mere cupidity: "l'enfantillage sans innocence d'une émulation mercantile".[1] The present economic supremacy of the Jews, like the whole Jewish mission, is shot through with ironic meaning. In the first ten chapters, sufficient evidence is offered - the Incarnation of Christ among the Jews, the mediation of the Patriarchs, and the mystery of their rôle on Calvary - to allow this ironic sense to pierce through Bloy's apparent adoption of the anti-semitic clichés. His horror of the Jews is not contempt, but religious awe: "Plus que jamais il est clair pour moi que la société chrétienne est empuantie d'une bien dégoûtante engeance et c'est terrible de savoir qu'elle est perpétuelle par la volonté de Dieu."[2] The ironic mode of their mission (an adaptation of the topos of Jewish blindness) made possible the preservation of moral truths which their carnal vision would otherwise have rejected. Their usury, which Bloy believes the essential vehicle of this mission and not a

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[1] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 33.

[2] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

simple accident, perpetuates a compelling image of the Christian dispensation they aim to destroy:

> . . . les Juifs ayant égorgé le Verbe fait chair, après l'avoir très jalousement gardé, aussi longtemps qu'il n'éclatait pas à leurs yeux charnels, épousèrent à leur insu l'effroyable pénitence d'être fixés à jamais dans leur sacrilège et de continuer avec rage sur l'indestructible Symbole ce qu'ils avaient accompli sur la chair passible du vrai Dieu.[1]

The trait of Jewish cupidity should be considered as an accidental variation of the mediatory essence of the race of Abraham, distorted since the Fall, but still effective.[2] The rest of Bloy's book shows in what ways the cupidity and usury of the Jews have helped demonstrate the Poverty of Christ, and how they are to serve historically to make this accepted.

Their rejection of Christ on Calvary is the archetype of the universal rejection of God. To the divine virtues of humility and self-denial, demonstrated by their agency on the Cross, they preferred their own concept of glory, which produces only that kingdom of corruption illustrated by their present possession and debasement of money:

> L'Eglise universelle née du Sang divin eut le Pauvre pour son partage, et les Juifs, retranchés dans l'imprenable forteresse d'un récalcitrant désespoir, gardèrent l'Argent, le blême argent griffé de leurs sacrilèges épines et déshonoré par leurs crachats, - comme ils eussent gardé sans tombeau le cadavre d'un Dieu sujet à la corruption, pour qu'il empoisonnât l'univers![3]

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[1] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 31-32.

[2] Le Salut par les Juifs, chs. xxix, xxx; cp. P. Claudel, Une Voix sur Israël, Paris, 1950, pp. 36-37.

[3] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 36.

They cannot abdicate this cupidity, which apparently fosters the disunity of Creation, until after long experience of the suffering it produces - which constitutes an involuntary submission to Christian asceticism. Bloy proposes the paradigm of Judas hanging on the fig-tree in ignominy and despair of redemption; which, according to Bloy's doctrine, are the two main points of configuration to Christ in his Agony.

The Church, not understanding the necessity of the Jews' recalcitrance, urges them to a repentance of which they are incapable. Their recalcitrance teaches her the virtue of humility, prevents her relaxation into sloth, and guards against too easy an interpretation by Christians of the ascetic demands of her doctrine. The problem of their salvation throws into sharp relief the paradoxical necessity of both faith and co-operative works of suffering in effecting salvation.[1]

The problem is restated as one of catering within the economy of universal salvation for those whose circumstances are such that voluntary conversion is an impossibility. The Jews are essentially incapable of believing in Christ until he descends from the Cross. It must be explained to them that his triumph and their acceptance of the concepts which the Cross represents are the same thing: that renewal is an inner and moral affair, not one of temporal condition. This is implicit within Catholic doctrine but not yet generally recognised. To illustrate his point, Bloy takes a series of three tableaux. In the first, the Church, who is also Mary, the Mystic City, in desolation, pleads for the conversion of the Jews in the

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[1] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 41.

traditional terms of the liturgy of Tenebrae. The second draws the conditions of true devotion in an evocation of the compassionate suffering of the Middle Ages which accepts and fulfils the crucifixion:

> La Pauvreté du Seigneur était sentie merveilleusement par ces tendres foules, et la compassion pour un Dieu si lamentable faisait quelquefois mourir d'autres pauvres qui prenaient volontiers, par-dessus leurs propres misères, tout ce qu'ils pouvaient porter de son fardeau.
>
> Pour mieux souffrir avec lui, ils se serraient contre la Vierge navrée qui tient sur ses genoux - comme sur une croix nouvelle - son grand fils mort et arrache de sa Tête, avec des tenailles précieuses, les dures épines qu'on y enfonça.[1]

The point of identification is to the ignominy of Christ on his Cross, cursed by God, in the poverty of his compatients, and in the humility of his incarnation. This leads to the next tableau, in which any form of ignominy or poverty becomes the starting point of configuration. The Jewish Virgin intercedes for the Jews and, with them, for all who are suffering in conditions of apparent apostasy. At the foot of the Cross, her tears, "armées . . . contre lui [le Christ] de la toute-puissance d'impétration pour un univers frappé de folie" offer up "toute la descendance misérable du premier Désobéissant, magnifiée par ma Compassion", in an account culminating in the sordid economic conflict both caused and shared by Israel:

> . . . buvez ces larmes de tristesse et ces larmes de colère . . . .
>
> Buvez ces larmes d'orphelins, de veuves et d'exilés;
>
> Buvez ces larmes d'adultères, de parricides, et de désespérés;
>
> Buvez encore ceci qui est l'océan des larmes de l'Avarice, de la Concupiscence charnelle et de l'Orgueil;
>
> Buvez enfin ces larmes d'argent qui seront désormais l'unique patrimoine en Israël, et qu'un

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[1] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 44.

> jour la dérision sacrilège des faux chrétiens répandra sur le catafalque vermiculeux de la vanité des morts.
>
> Tout cela, c'est ce que le Peuple de Dieu a gardé pour le rafraîchissement de votre seconde Agonie, et c'est par moi qu'il vous l'offre, parce que c'est moi que vous désignâtes cruellement pour vous en abreuver avant votre dernier souffle.[1]

The point of the final paragraph is again ironic. The Jews' offeringof gall to refresh the crucified Christ is paralleled with their present offering of involuntary suffering, which Bloy has shown is an acceptable contribution to Christ's Passion.

Bloy goes on to cement the identification of the interests of Jews and Christ in the image of the usury relationship, based on a legalistic necessity of response. Since the Fall, which deprived God of part of his creation, they, like all men, are his debtors (as is declared in the "Our Father"), and the prodigal sons of the parable who have wasted his substance. In their turn, they are "owed" by God the fulfilment of the promises made to them by the Spirit in the Old Testament. In default of these, they have a legal right to claim the body and blood of Christ, who "bankrupted" them of the sufferings they had endured to produce a Messiah, defrauding them with a figure who failed to answer their expectations. (The legality of this claim is based on an actual point of Roman law.) Christ's suffering, and the suffering of Christians through the ages, have so far proved inadequate compensation: "On avait beau produire des titres ou des cédules paraphés de ce précieux Sang et contresignés du sang de tous les Martyrs; on ne rencontrait jamais que l'odieux visage de ces usuriers du Con-

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[1] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 45-46.

solateur et la magnificence de Dieu restait close".[1] They demand an eternal extension of this anguish, by which, without their realising it, their own anguish is prolonged, and which only compounds God's debt to them:

> Ne s'agissait-il pas, en effet - pour ne pas sortir des comparaisons abjectes qui conviennent si parfaitement au Dieu de l'abjecte humanité -, de faire des frais au Consolateur pour le contraindre à satisfaire, avec une extrême usure, fût-ce dans vingt siècles, aux dépens du douloureux Christ qui continuerait à saigner et à mourir sur le bois d'opprobre, en attendant que les exacteurs cruels s'estimassent désintéressés?[2]

Their own debt to God is paid by their fulfilment of the ugly scapegoat rôle of usurer.[3] Through this, they have acquired the economic and political control of society which they were ironically promised, and drawn the whole of this into communion with their own corruption; a universal communion of suffering which must eventually release both parties from their debt.[4]

The new interpretation of eschatological doctrine and the revision of attitude to the Jews for which Bloy aims is summed up in his conclusion in the prophetic speech of Israel, to whom God's original promises were made and who is the "true" representative of the race (- an ideal figure, distinguished by Bloy from the Jews themselves). His is the voice of the Spirit, "Voix d'En bas", which answered Christ in the Prologue. From the beginning, he has fulfilled the office of victim, suffering on behalf of the universe. He condemns the Jews'

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[1] Le Salut par les Juifs, OC IX, 51.

[2] Ibid., p. 53.

[3] Ibid., pp. 57-58.

[4] Ibid., p. 70.

crime of deicide, the great stumbling block, but points out that this contributed to the Redemption, and has been atoned for. He now prophesies the imminent advent of the Spirit to revive and unite Jew and Gentile. The first movement, already accomplished, is one of an ignominous union in materialism. This implies the second, which is the rejection by worldly Christians of the evangelical spirit of poverty. In the contempt in which this spirit is held, Israel will recognise an analogy with its own position, and finally realise its redemptive historical rôle of compassionate victim.

It is to obtain this realisation that Bloy has strained through the book to reinterpret to the Jews the correct meaning of their own symbols - whether the Prophetic images, or the modern figure of usury. The success of the concluding appeal, with its simultaneous evocation of all the images he has used, depends on the reader's ability to recall the totality of their echoes. The final epigram rests on the multivalency which the word "descendre" has acquired in the course of exposition, referring to Christ's racial origin, his descent from the Cross, and his descent into ignominy:

> Il sera tout simple alors qu'il descende, le Crucifié, puisque la Croix de son opprobre est justement l'image et la ressemblance infinie du Libérateur vagabond qu'il appela dix-neuf siècles, - et, sans doute aussi, comprendra-t-on que je suis moi-même cette Croix, de la tête aux pieds!...
>
> CAR LE SALUT DU MONDE EST CLOUE SUR MOI, ISRAEL, et c'est de Moi qu'il lui faut "descendre".

In chapters 17 and 18 of Le Sang du Pauvre (1909), which transposes into practical terms the theory of the earlier work, Bloy asserts overtly that the Jews' abjection in their apostasy is less ignominious than that of the Christians, since they had less reason to

believe in the first instance, and since they possess salvific promises of final election and an accumulated reserve of expiatory suffering.[1] He describes how their progress from involuntary to voluntary suffering will be effected in the near future as the natural result of historical and economic conditions, since the wanderings of the Jew exiled from Israel have inevitably and inextricably involved him with the proletariat of the factories, with whom he shares the tribulations of the industrial age. The new poetry of Rosenfeld ("le poète des prolétaires - le Juif est essentiellement prolétaire") is at last an expression of compassion for people not of the Jew's own race, given force by the centuries of Jewish suffering from which it springs.

The unusual concept here of the Jew not only as capitalist, but also as identified with the suffering proletariat, similar to that stated by Péguy a year later in Notre jeunesse, is a negation of the anti-semitic prejudice otherwise current,[2] and also an addition to Bloy's own presentation in Le Salut of the Jews' dominant position within the social hierarchy. The change could perhaps be partly due to the influence of Bernard Lazare; but though Prajs has shown that the latter drew to some extent on Bloy's mystical formulations of the Jewish mission, there is no concrete evidence of deliberate borrowing in the opposite direction. It seems more likely that Bloy met the poetry of Rosenfeld through closer Jewish acquaintance (Raoul Simon, for example, to whom the relevant chapter in Le Sang du Pauvre is dedicated), and saw for himself its relevance to his own system.

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[1] Le Vieux de la montagne, 2nd and 21st January 1910; 25th July 1911.

[2] See L. Prajs, Péguy et Israël, Paris, 1970, ch. ii.

In any case, there is a marked change of emphasis in the later work. The Jews having at last acceded to the state of compassionate suffering to which they were exhorted in Le Salut, the time for the transformation of the social order is at hand. There is no suggestion that this will occur as a result of an uprising from the united poor; Bloy simply juxtaposes the two states of unity and transformation, with the return of the prodigal presided over by the gentle mediation of Mary ("le doux croissant de la lune"):

> Quand le Père voudra que l'Aîné reprenne sa place, j'imagine que la nuit la plus splendide éclairera le festin, le doux croissant de la lune marquant la place du Saint Sépulcre et les larmes de tous les pauvres brillant indistinctement, inimaginablement, au fond des cieux![1]

The ironic function of money in the capitalist order, which is the pivot of the justification of the domination of the Jews in Le Salut, appears elsewhere to explain God's permission of the existence of the rich Catholic who preys on the poor. As with the Jews, his adoration of money is legitimate in that it gives a dramatic illustration of true worship of God, and at the same time is illegitimate in that he recognises no distinction between the symbol and reality.[2] The portrait of the miser in Le Sang du Pauvre offers this explanation

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[1] Le Sang du Pauvre, OC IX, 143.

[2] The Scriptural equation of the Word of God with silver (Ps. XI, 7) becomes an ironic reality in contemporary society, where material wealth is substituted for God. Bloy recognised the imaginative possibilities of the symbol at an early stage (letter to Villiers, 7th April 1886, in Correspondance générale de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Paris, 1962, II, 116). For some time, he planned an exegesis in novel form, to be called L'Argent, a study of the Stock Exchange (A. Guérin, La Plume, 1st November 1890). According to La Plume, 1st March 1891, he also sketched an article on Zola's L'Argent. In 1903, a preparatory caricature for a chapter on landlords implies a more fragmentary form (Quatre ans, 3rd October 1903). Le Sang du Pauvre, the study finally produced, needs to be complemented by passages of Le Salut par les Juifs and the parables of the Exégèse des lieux communs for a full idea of the intellectual and imaginative development which Bloy finally evolved around the symbol.

in the form of a direct statement;[1] more effectively, the Exégèse des lieux communs exploits the ambiguity of the bourgeois' position by an account of the clichés by which he lives, in which the dual perspective adopted forces the reader to the effort of perpetually reassessing the value of the terms in which Bloy and his subject are dealing.

The cliché that: "Le Temps, c'est de l'argent" is an admission that Christ has been reinstated at the centre of human activity since Judas' betrayal fixed on him a monetary value, and demands a corresponding revision of all temporal values; as does the truism: "On ne peut pas vivre sans argent", which cannot be fully grasped without fresh understanding of "le sens du mot vivre".[2]

The asceticism which the bourgeois observes and imposes in his cult of money represents important theological truths. The prescription to: "faire travailler l'argent" is a theological necessity; the suffering of the exploited poor makes easier for them and the spectator the perception of the need for Christian values: "la Face PÂLE du Christ est plus pâle au fond des puits et dans les fournaises".[3] The principle of vicarious suffering is preached by the paradox: "Qui paie ses dettes s'enrichit".[4] Suffering from the absence of money makes the sufferer perceive that he suffers also from the absence of God; in this sense, to maintain that: "l'argent ne fait pas le bonheur" is a blasphemy. The bourgeois unconsciously adapts religious terminology to convey his anguish at material losses:

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[1] Le Sang du Pauvre, OC IX, 148.

[2] Exégèse des lieux communs, OC VIII, I, cxvii; I, x.

[3] Ibid., I, xi; see also Quatre ans, 5th August 1905.

[4] Ibid., I, clxxxi.

> - Oui, c'est vrai, songe profondément le Bourgeois, l'argent ne fait pas le bonheur, surtout lorsqu'il est absent . . . c'est l'occasion d'une tristesse infinie que d'être témoin de cette impuissance de l'argent qui devait assurer la félicité de ceux qui l'adorent, puisqu'il est véritablement un Dieu.[1]

Sometimes the reference is eschatological. The miser who refuses to spread the material benefits of his wealth is unconsciously contributing to a stasis of the charitable exchanges of capitalism which is Christ's temporal kingdom of suffering, and inducing the final cataclysmic intervention of the Spirit: "La Parole est d'argent, le silence est d'or".[2]

But unlike the Jewish mission, the ironic mission of the Catholic rich is not in itself sufficient to procure their salvation, since it represents their denial of the moral sanctions explicitly presented in the Gospels:

> Ah! que l'Evangile est mal compris! Quand on lit qu"il est plus facile à un chameau de passer par le trou d'une aiguille qu'à un riche d'entrer dans le royaume des cieux", faut-il être aveugle pour ne pas voir que cette parole n'exclut, en réalité, que le chameau, puisque tous les riches, sans exception, sont certainement assis sur des chaises d'or dans le Paradis et que, par conséquent, il leur est tout à fait impossible, en effet, d'entrer dans un endroit où ils sont installés déjà, depuis toujours! C'est affaire aux chameaux d'enfiler des aiguilles devant la porte et de se débrouiller comme ils pourront.[3]

Bloy's understanding of capitalism becomes the antithesis of that of Saint-Bonnet. The system offers to half its subscribers material satisfactions which instead of becoming material for charity are

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[1] Exégèse des lieux communs, OC VIII, I, xlv.

[2] Ibid., I, xliii.

[3] Ibid., I, v.

more liable to debar their possessors from Christian asceticism. Salvation from within the system is impossible for the upper ranks of the hierarchy, for whom it is consequently necessary to invoke the mediation from outside of the reformed Jews.

Although Bloy's thought represents an advance on that of most of his Catholic contemporaries in its perception of the extent of the problem of poverty and the inadequacy this reveals both in the accepted social order and in the moral attitudes of the wealthy Catholics, his limitation of the terms of discussion to the symbolic levels discussed above is insufficient. He admits that the virtues of poverty which he preaches receive no more than lip-service from the rich Catholic, but refuses to consider practical means of remedying this. He offers a literary solution - violent denunciations of offending order and persons, descriptions of abuses, and rhetorical threats of imminent revolt by the poor which, he hopes, will of themselves produce a reformist reaction.

There is little or no suggestion in his work, or his own career, of any impulse to treat the question in its original social or economic context, which might produce a real solution. His early interest in "Socialism", in Paris, in the mid-1860's, proves on analysis to have been prompted chiefly by boredom and frustration with his own circumstances, rather than any political or humane convictions, and to have taken the form of enthusiastic but juvenile - and purely theoretical - opposition to the Napoleonic <u>régime</u>. The experience is invoked in the introduction to <u>Les Propos</u> to confirm the basis on which he attacks the present Republican system as one of an idealistic belief

in heroic values which transcends social politics. Bloy's approach here has close affinities to that fashionable "literary anarchism" of the 1890's, which drew on the dynamism of anarchist terrorism in Paris, at its peak in the early part of the decade, in order to elaborate its own challenge in the name of heroism and individualism to bourgeois "muflisme".[1] Bloy's imaginative reconstruction of Laurent Tailhade's speech at the opening in 1894 of Ibsen's new play L'Ennemi du peuple, describes Tailhade's simultaneous indictment of bourgeoisie and masses:

> Il vilipenda la majorité, le suffrage de la cohue, la gloire salope consacrée par l'abjection ou la cafardise universelle et décernée à des mufles extra-fins par des mufles subalternes . . . .
>
> De sa voix calme et agréablement modulée, il mentionna "l'âme fétide et carnassière des honnêtes gens" et offrit, d'une main clémente, l'alexipharmique de la bienfaisante anarchie", activant, bravant ainsi, avec d'inexprimables délices, l'érethisme féroce de la stupidité et du maquerellage ambiants.[2]

Le Désespéré, written well before Tailhade's brand of anarchy became fashionable, similarly turned revolutionary themes into abstract discussions of justice and human dignity rather than exploit their more human element - even though the presence of the central figure of the prostitute Véronique offered ample opportunity for such treatment. The relevant chapter of the novel is an indictment of the Church for failure to accept full responsibility for the poor, which Bloy believes should be expressed in preaching self-renunciation to

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[1] See Appendix II, pp. 25-30.

[2] "L'Hallali du poète", Gil Blas, 13th April 1894, describes Tailhade as a disciple of Bloy's: "Laurent Tailhade est un ami - à peu près - et une sorte d'imitateur de Marchenoir. Il a parfois du talent, quoique trop musqué et tarabiscoté." (Lettres aux Montchal, 26th April 1893).

the rich.

To preach Christian resignation to the poor, most of whom have justifiably lapsed into atheism, is both futile and insulting. The revolt of the anarchists and nihilists - who, for Bloy's purposes, are identical - is the only moral response to their condition. Such revolt is a just judgement of the rich who have evaded their responsibilities, and a precursor of the divine Judgement: "où le plus pauvre et, par conséquent, le plus Criminel des hommes que la férocité des lâches ait jamais châtiés, - s'en viendra juger toute la terre dans le Feu des cieux!"[1] This use of the image of anarchy is never more than illustrative; Bloy had no faith in the effectiveness of anarchist activity to change the attitudes of either bourgeoisie or working classes. His comments on the aspirations of Jehan Rictus to stir the workers to revolt are illuminatingly anti-popularist. He criticises Rictus' use of colloquial language and argot in his poetry, which seems to him an affectation of egalitarianism to curry favour with the mob:

> Quelle misère! Quelle effrayante servitude! La nuit du 4 août, n'est-ce pas? Puis Tolstoï ou le Barine généreux! Renier son sang pour s'attendrir sur d'horribles êtres rudimentaires, éternellement incapables de concevoir ce qui n'intéresse pas du premier coup leur estomac ou leurs émonctoires.
>
> Moi, j'ai eu pour ancêtres des deux côtés de très humbles ouvriers et dès l'âge de quinze ans, j'en ai rougi de désespoir. Alors, je me suis fait marquis du marquisat de moi-même et j'ai bâti mon âme comme une tour.[2]

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 307-12. See also "L'Archiconfrérie de la bonne mort", L'Art Moderne, December 1892.

[2] Letter to Rictus, 3rd October 1900 (part cit. Quatre ans).

He is only mollified by Rictus' assurance that his attitude is elitist and includes a "realistic" - that is, aristocratic - view of the inadequacies of the populace, and the need to:

> . . . défendre le Peuple contre ses ennemis et, au besoin, contre lui-même . . . . Le mythe de la veuve et de l'orphelin est à ressusciter. Quoi que vous puissiez croire, je m'y emploie. Seulement, pour une telle mission, il me faut évidemment descendre dans les fosses d'aisances où vagit et se désole la masse, et si, en remontant, je n'en sauve qu'Un, un Aristocrate Inconnu, celui-là aura mérité la lumière et la vie et ma tentative n'aura pas été inutile.[1]

He finds insufficient the poet's humane assumption that salvation might lie in the mere experience of poverty and despair, which, Bloy argues, is inadequate without conscious Catholic direction of intention.[2] (The fact that he himself occasionally makes similar claims is not mentioned.[3]) He does, however, revise his stand when given a choice between Rictus' doctrine and Catholic opinion more conservative than his own. In his article on Rictus, "Le Dernier Poète catholique", which closes the series Les Dernières Colonnes de l'Eglise, following pieces on those fashionable Catholic authors said by Bloy to have rewritten doctrine for the rich (Coppée, Bourget, Brunetière, Didon and Huysmans[4]) he asserts that Rictus, despite his atheism, is the only

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[1] Letter from Rictus, 4th October 1900 (cit. "Le Dernier Poète catholique", OC IV, 300).

[2] Quatre ans, 26th February 1901.

[3] See below p. 386.

[4] See also "Histoire du cochon qui voulait mourir de vieillesse" (La Flamme, 20th April 1910), where Bloy rejects in Bourget's La Barricade what he describes as a revival of Bonaldian social doctrine, which supports the economic interests of the middle classes and encourages the oppression of the poor. Bloy paraphrases Bourget's immediate source - the theory of Georges Sorel that the preservation of class distinctions, by violence, if necessary, is the way to preserve individual identity: "Le Bourgeois ne sera vraiment beau et fort, vraiment intégral, que lorsqu'il assommera les pauvres, sans phrases".

modern writer capable of effecting moral and social reform in France by his appeal to the masses in their own language, and that his work can in fact be made to fit the framework of Catholic doctrine. The mediation of Mary, "Notre-Dame des Démolis", is implicit in his whole work, in its appeal for refuge, consolation, forgiveness, and maternal tenderness. "La Jasante de la vieille" is described by Bloy as a modern Pieta, and "Les Masons" as "la Maison d'Or invoquée dans les litanies". Bloy claims that the presence of the theme of compassion in the poems indicates that the Marian era of universal salvation awaited by the Church is finding its expression in contemporary history; and adds also that the violence of the anarchist mirrors the imminent triumph of the Immaculate Conception (which, as we have seen, is not a revolutionary but an ascetic and conservative concept in his work).

Even in Le Sang du Pauvre, which waxes most indignant over the inhuman conditions of social poverty, Bloy refuses to be pinned down to an assertion of the justifiability of revolt by the poor. He invokes against the rich the Indignation of God, and the threats of Mary at La Salette; but sees the poor as only "witnesses" of these: "Car la Pauvreté n'est pas moins que l'Epouse du Fils de Dieu, et quand se feront ses noces d'or, les Va-nu-pieds et les Meurt-de-faim accourront des extrémités de la terre pour en être les témoins." The Kingdom of God is one of poverty, but not one which is enforced (this contradicts the doctrine of Le Salut par les Juifs): "On a demandé souvent ce que pourrait bien être l'Iota du Sermon sur la Montagne, lequel iota doit subsister et s'accomplir avant que passent le ciel et la terre . . . . C'est précisément le Règne du Pauvre, le royaume des pauvres volontaires, par choix et par amour." The evils of wealth are so great as to be beyond human description or cure: "Le mal procuré par l'avarice est tout

à fait indicible, humainement irréparable. Tout ce qu'on peut faire c'est d'aggraver la damnation de Caïn en lui mettant sur la tête le sang de son frère. Et tout ce que peut faire le riche - si le démon lui restitue son âme - c'est de renoncer à ses richesses."[1]

It is the over-amplification of poverty into the metaphysical context which prevents Le Sang du Pauvre from developing beyond a literary tour-de-force and providing more than a general illumination of the problem. This in itself might be accounted achievement, were it not for the fact that Bloy believed he was in fact dealing in more human terms than other contemporaries. As "un Miserere chrétien où j'ai voulu ramasser la douleur universelle,[2] the book is in a sense intended as a corrective to the Tolstoyan vision of human wretchedness which Bloy had admired in War and Peace, but which he felt incomplete, because of the non-humanity of Tolstoy's Christ.[3] Bloy is not always able to avoid the danger that an impressive literary technique may detract from rather than point the criticism it is meant to serve.

In his book, Bloy's account of the problem is thorough. He denounces the economic exploitation of the poor by landlords and shopkeepers, or, on a grander scale, in the factory systems and in the colonies, and the tacit encouragement given to this by the Church, whose priests minimise the demands of charity. He indicates the cognate denial of moral values, with the poor left vulnerable to the temptation of crime and prostitition, and that of spiritual values,

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[1] Le Sang du Pauvre, OC IX, 148-50.

[2] Le Vieux de la montagne, 25th February 1909.

[3] Ibid., 11th January 1909. Bloy rejected Tolstoy both for his anti-dogmatism, and for nationalistic reasons - his hostility to France (ibid., 4th January 1909).

Son Christ ressemble à une image byzantine

which allows the impoverished genius to be patronised by the ignorant rich. The form is cruder and more violent than that of Tolstoy's carefully realistic delineation of details of social attitudes and behaviour; it involves melo-dramatic tableaux, such as the rich man waiting outside the pawnshop to seduce his victims ("L'Embarquement de Cythère"); blatant satirical devices, as when the same man drops his mask of charity and describes frankly his real intentions; rhetorical denunciations; sentimental appeals through the sufferings of women and children (Rictus' "myth" of the widow and orphan); and finally, a sustained fantastic and decadent range of imagery derived from the reference of the theme of economic exploitation to the religious context.

The commonplace of the rich man's devouring the substance of the poor is inflated to an image of the cannibalism of the rich, and this combined with the eucharistic image of the Host - the poor Christ - as spiritual nourishment to produce a complex ironic denunciation of the wealthy Catholic's selfishness:

> Ce qu'il y a de meilleur à manger, c'est le pauvre et non pas la langue, ainsi que prétendait Esope, à moins que ce ne soit la langue du pauvre, laquelle est eucharistique, essentiellement. Le Sang et la Chair du Pauvre sont les seuls aliments qui puissent nourrir, la substance du riche étant un poison et une pourriture. C'est donc une nécessité d'hygiène que le pauvre soit dévoré par le riche qui trouve cela très bon et qui en redemande. Ses enfants sont fortifiés avec du jus de viande de pauvre et sa cuisine est pourvue de pauvre concentré.[1]

The basic analogy, as explained in the first chapter, is that between the sacramental blood of Christ and the economic interests

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[1] Le Sang du Pauvre, OC IX, 94.

("l'Argent") which have replaced it as viaticum. By re-introducing the image of his Blood, which represents divine Charity, into the contexts which financial interests have usurped, Bloy throws the economic abuses into black relief. The Precious Blood becomes a leitmotiv in the work. The prosopopaeic figure of the Wrath of God - "belle pourtant, mais . . . toute en sang"[1] is the answer to the priest's encouragement to his rich and hypocritical congregation to "cacher leurs Idoles dans les Plaies adorables", while he neglects the bleeding mass of the poor.[2] The suffering of the latter is subsumed into the blood of the Sacred Heart:

> C'est comme si la très modeste lance qui perça Jésus avait percé tous les coeurs. Cette plaie ne se ferme pas depuis vingt siècles . . . . Tout ce peuple saigne, toute cette multitude jette sang et eau du milieu de la Croix de misère, en Orient, en Occident, sous tous les ciels, sous tous les bourreaux, sous tous les fléaux, parmi les tempêtes de la nature, - depuis si longtemps! C'est la pauvreté, cela, l'immense pauvreté du monde, la totale et universelle pauvreté de Jésus-Christ![3]

The financial transaction which is middle-class marriage offers an opportunity to rework the decadent theme of the affinity of the virgin and blood in a reductive economic context:

> . . . vois ces vierges de bourgeois, ces jeunes filles du monde aspirant au ciel, dont l'âme blanche est pleine de chiffres et de marchandises restées pour compte jusqu'à ce jour. Elevées avec une attention méticuleuse par leurs parents alignés et immobiles derrière elles, - comme des barriques sur le quai d'un entrepôt - elles n'ont plus rien à apprendre du côté de la pureté ni du côté de l'arithmétique. Il ne leur manque vraiment que du sang à boire, du sang humain de première marque et c'est précisément ce que tu leur donnes.[4]

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[1] Le Sang du Pauvre, OC IX, 94.

[2] Ibid., p. 86

[3] Ibid., pp. 108-109.

[4] Ibid., p. 111.

The shopkeeper's traffic is reinterpreted:

> Au fond, le commerce consiste à vendre très cher ce qui a très peu coûté, en trompant autant que possible sur la quantité et la qualité. En d'autres termes, le commerce prend la goutte du Sang du Sauveur donnée gratuitement à chaque homme et fait de cette goutte plus précieuse que les mondes, épouvantablement multipliée par les additions ou mixtures, un trafic plus ou moins rémunérateur.[1]

A chapter on the sweating system springs off from a second-hand reference to a pamphlet by Tolstoy on exploitation in the silk factories (Les Rayons de l'aube) but goes beyond Tolstoy in extending the context of the problem to Gethsemane, where it becomes part of the vicarious expiation of Christ's Agony. The theme of child exploitation introduces a sentimental lyric prose which invokes the Gospel of the Nativity:

> L'évangéliste saint Luc entendit tomber par terre, goutte à goutte, la Sueur du Sang de Jésus-Christ. Ce bruit si faible, incapable de réveiller les disciples endormis, dut être entendu des constellations les plus lointaines et modifier singulièrement leur vagabondage. Que penser du bruit, plus faible encore et beaucoup moins écouté, des pas innombrables de ces pauvres petits allant à leur tâche de souffrance et de misère exigée par les maudits, mais, quand même, sans le savoir et sans qu'on le sache, allant ainsi à leur grand frère du Jardin de l'Agonie qui les appelle et les attend dans ses bras ensanglantés?[2]

Despite all that has been argued above, Bloy's treatment of poverty remains one of the more satisfactory within the doctrinal terms he sets himself - compared, for example, to that of Bernanos, who acknowledged a substantial debt to him ("le dernier prophète du peuple

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[1] Le Sang du Pauvre, OC IX, 135.

[2] Ibid., p. 134.

des Pauvres"[1]). Bernanos' formulations, less insistently referred to the imaginative structure of Catholicism, are more immediately comprehensible, and seemingly more directly related to modern experience; but, as a result of this immediacy, the inadequacy of his doctrine tends to be more apparent.

Like Bloy, he declares the social problem insoluble, for inequality is the product of original sin, which is ineradicable - not, as the Marxist would argue, a simple invention of the exploiting class.[2] Attempts to eradicate poverty, like modern society's attempts to eradicate all suffering, are a mistake, since suffering is the source of virtue. Poverty imposes the involuntary suffering which finally produces liberty, dignity and independence. It is the poor who maintain real virtue in secularised society:

> La Pauvreté fait des hommes libres, d'une certaine liberté innocente qui n'est évidemment pas celle des saints, c'est-à-dire des pauvres en esprit, des pauvres volontaires, des victimes volontaires de la pauvreté, mais qui suffisent à entretenir parmi nous ce feu couvant sous la cendre où, de génération en génération, s'élève tout à coup la haute flamme du pur amour.[3]

A people - not a proletariat, and in this Bernanos differs from Bloy, who will acknowledge the force of the economic groupings - is a distinct and individual quantity. It is from the people's asceticism that the renewal of society should be expected: "On ne refera pas la France par les élites, on la refera par la base".[4]

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[1] "Dans l'amitié de Léon Bloy", in L. Estang, Présence de Bernanos, Paris, 1947, p. xvii.

[2] G. Bernanos, Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune, p. 51.

[3] "Dans l'amitié de Léon Bloy", p. xxi.

[4] G. Bernanos, Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune, p. 62.

Like Bloy (and Péguy, to whom he also refers), Bernanos accuses the Church of distorting the Gospel of poverty by which she seeks to attract converts, and which in fact she manipulates to preserve social order, abusing the patience of the poor and never preaching the doctrine to the rich, whom she flatters in the interests of her own temporal welfare and stability. This concession does not compensate for the fact that the Gospel itself - even the true gospel preached by Bernanos - is essentially an inadequate explanation of certain aspects of the problem of poverty. Bloy's perception of the more vexing problem of destitution, which cannot be treated in the same terms, and which, he admits, raises a serious challenge to the credibility of the divine order, is a more honest approach; and one which, by conceding this point to the critic, contrives to win a more sympathetic hearing for the idealistic and Utopian view of the virtues of poverty he elsewhere maintains.

## 3. Art and the New Creation

> Le défaut du christianisme apparaît bien ici. Il est trop uniquement moral; la beauté, chez lui, est tout à fait sacrifiée.
> (E. Renan, Marc-Aurèle et la fin du monde antique)

Renan's comment, a criticism of the overall development of Christianity, can be applied particularly to the Catholic aesthetic of the late nineteenth century. Religious literature caters chiefly for a public whose narrowmindedness and exaggerated sense of scruple are epitomised by Gide's Protestant Alissa, who prefers the mediocrity of modern apologetic to the suspect magnificence of Pascalian style. A weak and sentimental doctrinal approach is married to a style marked by cliché, cautious and prudish expression, and a flabby lyricism -

in the 1870's, the manner of Madame Craven, Féval and Buet. Novel and unfamiliar stylistic approaches are viewed with as much hostility and suspicion as doctrinal innovations. The authors of the Revival devote much of their energy to challenging this attitude, which had contributed to the intellectual discredit of the Church. Huysmans writes to Emile Bernard, 3rd January 1899, discussing his proposed foundation for artists at Ligugé: "A l'étranger, comme en France, l'art est pour le prêtre, une sorte de péché, et . . . partout les persécutions commencent, quand l'on veut tenter de sortir de l'ornière creusée par la rue Saint Sulpice". Among Bloy's most virulent tableaux and sustained polemic campaigns are those which treat of modern Catholic art.

A similar bloc of what seems essentially middle-class reaction fostered by the Second Empire faced the progressive secular writers from the publication of Les Fleurs du mal in 1857. In the 1870's, the more advanced of the Catholics - usually the converts - began to sink their philosophical differences and to join forces with this secular group in the interests of a revision of artistic standards. Bloy became involved in this first through Barbey, with the controversy over Un Prêtre marié, and later on his own account, as with his defence of Camille Lemonnier in 1888 during the trial of the short story "L'Enfant du crapaud", published in the Gil Blas 30th June. This provided both the material for Bloy's first article in the Gil Blas, "Les Eunuques du grand sérail", and part of the introduction to Belluaires et Porcheurs - the section which begins, "Mon Dieu, l'Art est une chose vitale et sainte pourtant!"

This sinking of interests in the common anti-bourgeois cause is the point around which Bloy's relationship with the world of contemporary literature falls into place, and which explains his attitude to the various schools and the ideas he evolved in contact with them. His stand incurred criticism from an orthodoxy which considered irreconcilable traditional Catholicism and the new experience of the artist: "l'Apocalypse et le Chat Noir, la Bible et la brasserie mixtionnées en une alchimie presque sacrilège qui rappelle les plus âpres pamphlets des guerres de religion".[1]

To defend his position, Bloy emphasised the "Catholic" idea of the unique origin of creative inspiration. In a reply to a hostile article published in the Danish journal Tilskueren, he objected to distinctions between "la littérature d'art" and "la littérature de mission", accepting only distinctions between good and bad writing. All art is sacred, because all derives from the incarnate Word. "C'est comme si on disait qu'il y a deux "oui" dont l'un s'appellerait Non . . . . Si donc il arrive à ces gens sans Dieu de proférer une syllable qui soit autre chose que du néant, c'est parce que la Parole blasphémée, conspuée, souffletée, flagellée, crucifiée par eux veut néanmoins qu'ils lui rendent témoignage en la torturant: Ecce homo.[2] The assertion is mainly polemic, and not as refined as, for example, Claudel's later developments, but important none the less in breaking ground.

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[1] W. Ritter, "Le Bourreau de la littérature contemporaine, Léon Bloy", Mercure de France, VI, No. 33, September 1892.

[2] Open letter to J. Joergensen, April 1899, Tilskueren, March 1900 (Boll. III, 294-300).

Confronting individual artists, Bloy concentrates on establishing the points of contact between their work and his own Catholic doctrine which elucidate the latter and justify the former. The single theme to which both are subordinated is the Romantic cult of enthusiasm:

> Que deviendront-ils, ceux qui, ayant aimé les belles choses de la terre, la Poésie, l'Art, la Guerre, la Volupté même, se trouveront tout à coup face à face avec l'Absolu, n'ayant rien préparé pour leur passage, mais sauvés quand même, les mains vides? Il leur faudra donc, sous peine d'inanition éternelle, réaliser aussitôt et absolument tout ce qui leur manque, et la Sagesse y a pourvu. La Beauté, devenue un vautour, emportera sans fin, pour les dévorer toujours, ceux qui l'auront vraiment aimée sous une apparence quelconque.[1]

Systematic study of the synthesis to be effected between art and Catholicism is one of the standard themes of Revival literature. The fullest elaboration contemporary with Bloy's own is probably that of Joséphin Péladan, an idealistic development on Pre-Raphaelite lines later attached to Wagnerian principles. Péladan's art criticism of the early 1880's had at first elicited grudging admiration from Bloy: "J'ai admiré votre Salon . . . oeuvre étonnante littérairement. Esthétiquement, vous admirez des gens que je vomis."[2] However, in the later forms of the Salons de la Rose✠Croix Catholique, established in 1891, it inspired only ridicule. The caricature of Zéphyrin Delumière in

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[1] Celle qui pleure, OC X, 129.

[2] Letter to Péladan, 21st August 1883 (Boll. II, 426). See J. Péladan, L'Art ochlocratique: Salons de 1882 et de 1883, Paris, 1888; L'Art idéaliste et mystique, Paris, 1894. Péladan advocated an abstract ideal of beauty divorced from carnal reality, and from the demands of morality. The task of the artist was to paint the essences, or angelic forms, of things. He claimed to be a Catholic artist, whilst believing that art was superior to confessional demands and that the best artists were unorthodox.

La Femme pauvre dismissed the art critic within a general attack on the occultist and the homosexual. Péladan's attempt to found a school on an exaggerated assertion of the importance in art of the spiritualised and the idealistic encountered a crude rebuff from Gacougnol, whose art - like, Bloy would assert, his creator's Catholicism - founded its spirituality on realism:

> Pour ce qui est de ton "Androgyne" ou de tes "Enfants des Anges", c'est de l'esthétique de pissotières et il ne m'en faut pas. Les maîtres n'ont pas eu besoin de toutes ces cochonneries pour sculpter ou peindre des merveilles, et le grand Léonard aurait été dégoûté de son oeuvre, s'il avait pu prévoir ta sale façon de l'admirer . . . sacrée littérature de gueusards prétentieux et tarabiscotés.[1]

Bloy himself is more indebted to the less well-known aesthetic theories of Ernest Hello.

Hello presents art as the image of the ideal offered to a fallen humanity: ". . . le souvenir de la présence universelle de Dieu".[2] For this reason, its forms are symbolic, in the enigmatic sense of the Areopagite:

> L'humanité moderne sait que le monde visible (ombre et figure, figura mundi) est taillé sur le modèle du monde invisible, suprême et idéale réalité.
>
> Ainsi l'art moderne, logique comme l'ancien, ne voyant plus dans la nature qu'un miroir et qu'une énigme (per speculum et in enigmate), la perce à jour pour découvrir à travers elle ce qu'elle cache. De là le type idéal manifesté par la forme matérielle; de là la poursuite et le désir.[3]

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 55-56.

[2] E. Hello, L'Homme: La Vie, la science, l'art, Paris, 1872, p. 367.

[3] E. Hello, M. Renan, p. 72.

It offers an image of the universal harmony and, by so doing, helps create this: "Pendant que la vie, égarée et haletante, est encore en travail de la beauté qu'elle poursuit habituellement sans l'atteindre, l'art, pour la guider et la soutenir, dégage d'elle l'élément de splendeur qu'elle contient, lui montre son avenir et son idéal".[1] Serenity, calm, elevation and profundity are therefore the characteristics of art. This precludes from its realm the depiction of evil, ugliness and distortion which is a feature of romantic and realist aesthetics; these are not true art, since they negate the ideal.[2] On this point, Hello and Bloy diverge; the principle would exclude writers such as Barbey, Baudelaire and Poe, whose contribution to modern literature Bloy ranks among the most important.

Hello re-annexes art to Christianity, from which it had been excluded by Protestant mistrust of the powers of the imagination;[3] art is a co-operation between man and God, in which God supplies ideas, through the medium of inspiration, and man the form and style: "Le style, c'est l'explosion de notre personne; c'est notre création".[4] He is nevertheless preoccupied by the potential conflict within the act of creation between the Christian demand for truth and the artist's primary desire for beauty. In this, the Christian must dominate.[5] It is the artist's moral duty to his reader which must condition the forms his imagination creates.[6]

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[1] E. Hello, L'Homme, p. 21.

[2] Ibid., pp. 368-71.

[3] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

[4] Ibid., p. 394.

[5] Ibid., pp. 353-54.

[6] Ibid., p. 19.

This idea is the point of special interest in the article "Le Fou", in which Bloy discusses Hello's theory of art. Asserting that the latter - like Pascal - has only enthusiasm to offer, he gives less a systematic review of Hello's ideas than an assessment of his failure to express his theories satisfactorily in the art forms he chose for his own work. Hello was wrong to neglect the profane artists' new discoveries and to try to pour his own enthusiastic and authentic Catholicism into the accepted platitudes, which are forms equally inept for dealing with religious questions and the problems of modern reality:

> Son style eunuque et flétri par le commerce exclusif de frigides pédants et de soutaniers tondeurs, aurait pu, je le crois, devenir tout à fait artiste, s'il avait su trouver assez d'énergie dans sa raison pour s'enquérir d'un autre milieu. Il n'osa jamais et sa punition fut d'être l'auteur des Contes extraordinaires, où la plus emphatique anémie déshonore d'obscures adaptations de sa philosophie religieuse aux dramatiques réalités de la vie. Voilà pour l'amoureux de l'art, hélas![1]

Bloy takes and exaggerates Hello's point of the self-sufficiency of art. Beauty makes demands on the artist which claim supremacy over his faith; only in the Middle Ages, the period, according to Bloy, of absolute faith, was it possible to subordinate art to religion. Since the Renaissance, the plastic qualities of art dominate the imagination.

But if the individualism of art is recalcitrant to Christian adaptation, more can be done with the individuality of the artist. Bloy argues that individual Christian artists may exist, if not a genre of Christian art, and that through the former it is possible to envisage art providing the materials for religious revival. In

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[1] Un Brelan d'excommuniés, OC II, 271.

this sense, art may prove the Eucharist of the modern world, which perpetuates the sense of aspiration and of reality and offers a new form of worship. These were points contained in Hello's theory, but Bloy's practical application is quite different. He weights the balance in favour of the demands of art rather than those of dogmatic caution:

> Il me semble, toutefois, que l'extrême incompatibilité de l'art moderne avec les exigences d'un catholicisme pratique aurait dû précisément avertir un pareil métaphysicien de la présence de quelque mystère. Cet expectant du règne de l'Esprit-Saint, ce millénaire impatient de tous les miracles et de toutes les consommations divines, ne se devait-il pas à lui-même de conjecturer un renouvellement de toutes choses analogue, par exemple,à la Transsubstantiation?...
>
> Et puisqu'il est démontré que les âmes les plus parfaites et les plus capables de laver les Pieds saignants de Jésus-Christ sont justement les plus quémandeuses de nard profane, ce rêveur ne pouvait-il pas augurer quelque céleste péripétie qui justifierait enfin les antichrétiennes pratiques de l'Art, en canonisant sa rébellion?

The dogmatic justification for this was already to hand in Hello's concept of "le Pauvre" which Bloy's article recalls - the melancholy Romantic outcast genius prevented from fulfilling a Christ-like mission of renewal by the indifference of the world. Studies of Barbey and of Verlaine flank the review of Hello's theory as proofs of Bloy's contention.

An account of the changing literary attitudes in Bloy's work indicates his sensitivity to the various opportunities for Catholic apologetic offered by contemporary artistic developments.

i) The Debt to Romanticism

From his conversion in 1868 to the end of his collaboration with Le Chat Noir in 1884, Bloy was most strongly influenced by the Romantic doctrines held by Barbey and his circle, and by their notions of the interrelationship of literature and Catholicism. But whereas Barbey was more interested in the problem of morality in art, Bloy preferred to develop the concept of art as an heroic ideal, and the figure of the artist, in a religious context, as enthusiastic visionary and prophet. In the 1870's, he attached these ideas to the figure of Barbey, whom he considered had successfully synthesised the vocations of artist and Catholic.

La Méduse-Astruc, a deliberately hyperbolic piece written August-September 1875, reworks the commonplace Romantic descriptions of the rôle of the artist. Lara and Mazeppa are wrenched bodily from their Byronic and anti-Catholic context, and on the basis of their heroic enthusiasms are equated with the saints:

> La jeunesse et la beauté, - l'orgueil de l'amour et l'orgueil de la vie, - et le roi de tout orgueil humain, l'Amour lui-même, passent devant eux comme les ombres mobiles d'une réalité transcendante dont ils portent en eux les mystérieuses intuitions. Et certes, on peut dire sans impiété que les Saints eux-mêmes sont à peine plus grands que ces irrésistibles Dominateurs de la vie, parce que la liberté morale est le plus puissant ressort et l'axe même de la force du genre humain. Hiérarchie prodigieuse! Saints et Poètes![1]

In a decadent age, each represents the free response of the individual to virtue, beauty, and glory, and by his enthusiasm awakens like responses in his contemporaries. Like the saint, the poet represents the suffering of humanity desiring the ideal, and suffering is the

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[1] La Méduse-Astruc, OC IV, 25.

source of his inspiration. Art, like sanctity, is a participation in the divine privilege of creation:

> . . . cette sublime puissance de féconder les esprits par l'éclatante et soudaine manifestation de la Beauté; cet étonnant privilège de l'Art de s'approprier et de mettre en oeuvre les essences mêmes des choses et de créer ainsi - à la façon humaine - comme Dieu crée lui-même - à la façon divine . . . .[1]

In a fragmentary study of Barbey begun in 1877, Bloy defended the importance of individualism in art.[2] The individual personality of the artist, or his soul, is the object of central importance in a work of art; the particular forms and images of a writer's style represent his peculiar vision of God, and so are a mirror of the divinity. (This is Hello's theory of style, and one which leads to some very partial and unhelpful literary criticism.) Developing this, Le Pèlerin de l'absolu, 1st February 1912, describes artistic progress as a perpetual and painful struggle for the best way of expressing personal identity[3] - a point which should be interpreted cautiously, since personal identity for Bloy consists in an ascetic archetype. He is constantly on his guard against the temptation to excessive individualism inherent in Art: "un miroir pour se regarder soi-même, alors qu'on pourrait faire éclater toutes les lumières du Paradis en ne regardant que Dieu".[4]

The study on Barbey compares the poet to the mystic, who can pierce the images of temporal reality to catch the spiritual truths beneath.

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[1] La Méduse-Astruc, OC IV, 26.

[2] "Fragment inédit sur Barbey d'Aurevilly", CLB No. 6 (3rd Yr.), July-August 1927; see also letter to Bourget, 12th April 1877 (Boll. I, 231-36).

[3] See also Le Vieux de la montagne, 15th April 1910.

[4] Mon journal, 23th December 1899.

The poet charts for his public areas of experience inaccessible to empirical observation - the spiritual needs which otherwise they fail to recognise:

> Nous savons que tout n'est pas dit sur nous quand la plus scrupuleuse histoire a parlé et qu'il reste toujours, dans l'hémisphère obscur de notre existence, un formidable contingent de pensées et de sentiments que l'oeil des historiens n'aperçoit jamais et qui sont, en somme, la plus importante partie de toutes nos actions et le plus pressant témoignage de notre conscience privée.[1]

The artist is only capable of transmitting these if they are part of his own experience and if he feels in himself the anguish of the conflict of body and soul which indicates the possession of a spiritual nature and is a necessary part of the process of sanctification. This anguish is intensified for him by a sense of his responsibility to declare it to the rest of the community. Poets, the leaders of humanity, are at the same time "les plus pauvres et les plus lamentables de tous les mortels, puisqu'ils ne puisent la force de nous précipiter vers le ciel que dans leur désespoir d'en être dépossédés". The Romantic concept helps explain Bloy's contempt for dilettante literature, and for writing which is purely imitative rather than an expression of the author's own personality.

In Les Propos d'un entrepreneur de démolitions, Bloy's first volume of criticism, consisting mostly of articles published in Le Chat Noir, the structure of the collection makes clear the centre of Bloy's interest. The dedication to Rodolphe Salis and the first article, "L'Enthousiasme en art", introduce a series of denunciations of secular and Catholic artistic mediocrity, balanced by two articles

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[1] "Fragment inédit sur Barbey", p. 155.

in praise of Barbey and a concluding study of Maurice Rollinat. This reverts to the principles of the first article and shows how these are implemented by the fashionable poet.

The dedication explains that Bloy's work is an expression of his Catholicism, since the violence of its attacks is dictated by his desire to save souls. He draws on the Romantic lyrical tradition for a picture of the poet and his public linked in a Bacchic inspirational frenzy, expressed in images of disorder and fury, and finally sweeps this into a Christian context with the Scriptural tag which becomes a favourite with the Revival prophets:

> . . . que l'âme humaine hurle sous vos pieds, dans vos bras étreignants et convulsés, dans votre propre coeur déchiqueté par le vautour de l'Inspiration . . . le Poète, quand il contemple la Poésie, doit perdre tout jugement, toute mesure, tout repli sur soi. Il ne peut que s'y précipiter et s'y perdre, comme un torrent dans un gouffre . . . comprenons enfin que l'étonnante Parole est vraie de toutes manières: Regnum coelorum vim patiunt et violenti rapiunt illud.

"L'Enthousiasme en art" makes the same points in the guise of a study of the mechanics of poetic creation, which depend on enthusiasm or "ivresse". This becomes a consideration of the identity of enthusiasm and suffering and finally an exposition of heroic Catholic doctrine. Barbey's idol, Madame de Staël, is the peg for an eulogy of enthusiasm, a virtue absent from modern art. Enthusiasm is the link between man and God, "un Dieu dans le coeur", a force elevating the artist beyond everyday reality into the higher reality of his own dreams - a genuine reality, and one in which his own hidden moral and physical potentialities are released. Enthusiastic literature must be oracular and chaotic in form to indicate an inspiration beyond the artist's control. Its pronouncements have authority, and are not

subject to the challenge of human reason, but above it:

> C'est un état d'ivresse, mais d'ivresse divine, qui n'altère ni ne déshonore la raison, mais qui l'emporte comme un aigle emporte un enfant de roi dans la tempête, dans le tonnerre, dans ces espaces illimitées qui prolongent jusqu'à notre planète le regard de Dieu.[1]

From this standpoint, the modern aesthetic of objectivity must be rejected. Without moral engagement, art is an enslavement to the commonplace.

Suffering and enthusiasm, the two supports of the aesthetic of Les Propos, are equivalents. Through suffering, the artist achieves the identification with the beauty of the suffering of the Cross which is the source of his ability to demonstrate and impose his ideals. In this, his mission and that of Christ are identical.

In other articles, Bloy qualifies his position slightly. Not all artistic suffering is capable of a Catholic interpretation;[2] and a certain amount of formal definition for this suffering is necessary to show the artist's consciousness of his having a proper relationship to it. These conditions are fulfilled in the work of Maurice Rollinat,

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[1] Madame de Staël's definition differs in envisaging a more serene form: ". . . l'enthousiasme se rallie à l'harmonie universelle: c'est l'amour du beau, l'élévation de l'âme, la jouissance du dévouement, réunis dans un même sentiment, qui a de la grandeur et du calme. Le sens du mot chez les Grecs en est la plus noble définition: l'enthousiasme signifie Dieu en nous. En effet, quand l'existence de l'homme est expansive elle a quelque chose de divin (De l'Allemagne, Bk. IV, ch. x).

[2] Bloy is inconsistent here; during a discussion of Verlaine's work, in 1888, he rejected the laments of Lamartine because of their non-doctrinal form (OC II, 277-78), though in 1883 he had attacked Veuillot for excluding from the Church the Romantic melancholy of Lamartine and Musset (ibid., pp. 33-35).

which is described in the article "Les Poètes Mystérieux" of 1882.[1] The musical setting of Rollinat's poems intensifies and therefore makes substantial aspirations which might otherwise seem vague and incoherent:

> . . . on pouvait croire vraiment qu'à force d'intensité et à force d'art, une nouvelle espèce d'art androgyne et miraculeuse, à la fois terrestre et angélique, venait enfin combler l'implacable abîme de deux milliards de coeurs humains qui sépare la réalité du rêve!

The tools are intensity and exaggeration; Bloy is no more explicit. The fixed forms in which Rollinat writes perform the same function. His sonnet on death is "un raccourci effroyablement rapide et poignant de tout le néant de ce monde, une sorte de constriction esthétique à la manière de Pascal . . ."

Under a superficial coating of fantastic and frenzied imagery, Rollinat's suffering is the universal "fin de siècle" sickness of the sense of a spiritual realm which lacks a formal religious frame in which to express itself and falls victim to "tous les dégoûts et tous les influences néfastes de la vie". It is unlike the suffering of previous poets - Heine, who accepts his condition ironically, Baudelaire and Poe, whose response is bitterness - in that it is melancholy and resigned and ready to look for a solution outside itself. In nature,

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[1] Some five years before writing his articles, Bloy had met Rollinat at Emile Goudeau's Club des hydropathes, where the poet appeared regularly from 1878-1891. He familiarised himself with Rollinat's work, expressing great enthusiasm [see E. Malbay, "J.-K. Huysmans, M. Rollinat et leurs amis", Bulletin Huysmans, No. 40, (33rd Yr.), 1960]. His articles began to appear in Le Chat Noir, 2nd September 1882, just before Wolff's article in Le Figaro, 9th November, describing the concert organised by Sarah Bernhardt on the 7th which brought Rollinat to popular notice; but after Barbey's article, "Un Poète à l'horizon", Le Constitutionnel, 2nd June 1882, which is very similar to Bloy's own. The article reprinted in Les Propos d'un entrepreneur de démolitions is described as the conclusion of an uncompleted trilogy, the first parts of which were to deal with Baudelaire and Poe.

it finds not pantheistic release but a like suffering to which it becomes united in a spirit of compassion. This is salvific in default of direct configuration with Christ, which is impossible in Rollinat's state of ignorance. The mediation of Mary, the theory of the poet-mystic, and Hello's idea of the mystical significance of unrecognised genius are used as supporting arguments.

The study, originally written for Buet's Catholic journal, Le Foyer, admits to taking a particular moral and religious angle in order to make Rollinat's poetic "holocaust" comprehensible to a Catholic readership, and to subordinating proper literary criticism to this intention. This remains a constant feature of Bloy's literary analyses, with the individual artist's work finally less important than the religious point to be made through it. In 1894, writing the description of Gacougnol's salon for La Femme pauvre, Bloy had no difficulty in reinterpreting those aspects of Rollinat's work he had previously designated as Christian - his use of the fantastic, his evocation of demonic black despair, and of "la plus basse peur". Clotilde dismisses his treatment of death as shameful and his sufferings as insincere and puerile acrobatics. The caricature of Rollinat indicates no personal animosity on Bloy's part; Bloy is simply using him to contrast the grimace of art with the real experience of suffering and death represented by Clotilde.

From the Romantic source also comes the concept of the poet as prophet, which Bloy makes his own by restoring the original Christian content of the image. The prophetic task is twofold: to disentangle and explain the patterns of history in order to find a guide for present action, and to offer criticisms of society and individuals. The impulse

to renew the image comes from revelations by Tardif de Moidrey and Blanc de Saint-Bonnet of the inadequacy of the priest, no longer open to fresh visions or capable of inspiring his flock. The poet takes over his rôle of teacher, victim, and mediator of sacrifice. Bossuet adds a new twist with the idea of the wilful and inevitable disobedience of the people to their prophet, who becomes to them a channel of curse rather than a help.[1]

Le Désespéré makes these points first at La Chartreuse, which implies ecclesiastical approval for Marchenoir's lay vocation, and secondly in a conversation prior to Beauvivier's banquet, where Marchenoir's own standards are contrasted with those of the popular writers, the accepted "prophets" of society. In the first passage, Marchenoir describes the irrefutable nature of the Prophet's inspiration and his mission; his poverty, which guarantees his integrity; his rôle of Witness and of Victim, inevitably rejected; and the curse he involuntarily brings to society. He is the prophet of Mary at La Salette, and heir to the Old Testament prophets:

> Je suis de ceux qui clament dans le désert et qui dévorent les racines du buisson de feu, quand les corbeaux oublient de leur apporter leur nourriture . . . Je souffre une violence infinie et les colères qui sortent de moi ne sont que des échos, singulièrement affaiblis, d'une Imprécation supérieure que j'ai l'étonnante disgrace de répercuter.[2]

In the second passage, he is both a judge and the defender of the weak, since his complaint to God must provoke the Divinity to self-

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[1] Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, OC X, 39-40 (note by Bloy: Bossuet, Méditations sur les Evangiles. Dernière Semaine du Sauveur, CVIII$^{e}$ jour).

[2] Le Désespéré, OC III, 147.

justification: "le blasphème par amour qui serait la prière de l'abandonné".[1] His prophetic clamour echoes the "ravings" of Lautréamont described in an earlier section:

> . . . ne semble-t-il pas à ceux qui l'ont lue que cette diffamation inouïe de la Providence exhale, par anticipation, - avec l'inégalable autorité d'une Prophétie, - l'ultime clameur imminente de la conscience humaine devant son Juge?...[2]

Marchenoir's prophetic and oratorical style is the tool of his mission. Leverdier is convinced of his system not by rational arguments but by "les volutations oratoires de son prophète".[3] Though only a pastiche of Biblical form, his flamboyant oratory, which needs oral delivery for its full effect, justifies by the prophetic context his violence and particularly his scatology, which echoes the Biblical phrases: "Je les appellerai par leurs noms, ces immondices, - comme le Seigneur appela les étoiles"; "avanies . . . dans l'exacte mesure de leurs lâchetés ou de leurs crimes"; "un crachat de plus sur la face ruisselante d'une société soi-disant chrétienne". Most often, Marchenoir finds Biblical imagery of insufficient vigour, and prefers to develop his own, as in his sketch for "La Sédition de l'excrément": "Ce qui pourrait casser les bras à la colère, - en admettant la métaphore sans génie de ces inefficaces abatis d'airain, toujours invisibles..."[4]

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[1] Le Désespéré, OC III, 226.

[2] Ibid., p. 51.

[3] Ibid., p. 131.

[4] Ibid., pp. 210-12.

ii) Incursion into Symbolism

The period of collaboration on Le Chat Noir and the publication of Le Révélateur du globe in 1884 gained Bloy an introduction to new literary milieux, where without losing contact with Romantic themes already developed he learned to express himself in more modern terms. Under the influence of Huysmans and Villiers, he became more open to avant-garde art, and particularly the nascent Symbolist movement.

He first became acquainted with Huysmans in 1884, when the latter returned Bloy's praise of A rebours with compliments on the artistic presentation of the Catholic doctrines of Le Révélateur du globe.[1] 14th June 1884, Bloy published in Le Chat Noir an article on A rebours, "Les Représailles du Sphinx", which saw in it a denunciation of the mediocrity of modern society, new source of anguish for "les âmes supérieures", who could no longer preserve their former ironic detachment. In view of this theme alone, Huysmans is held to have changed allegiance: "naturaliste naguère, maintenant spiritualiste jusqu'au spiritualisme le plus ambitieux, et qui se sépare autant du crapuleux Zola que si tous les espaces interplanétaires s'étaient soudainement accumulés entre eux". The originality of his style is praised briefly, in its exoticism, which carries a novel sense of organic life and mysterious vitality, and in its concise violence and its control of imagery and syntax.

In a second article, "J.-K. Huysmans et En Rade", published in L'Art Moderne, 8th and 15th May 1887, formal aspects are more important. Bloy praises the colder and more refined irony in which Huysmans' contempt is now expressed, and the delicate and original sense of analysis

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[1] Letter from Huysmans [1884], (Boll. II, 93-94).

which provides its subject-matter:

> . . . ce délicat inventeur, ce quintessencier d'idées et de sensations, cet aristocrate de l'analyse, qui fleuronne de son style une psychologie tortionnaire, à décourager le bourreau d'un roi! . . . Certaines explorations dans le noir des coeurs - en ces fourmillants abîmes où réside ce que Huysmans appelle "l'inconsciente ignominie des âmes élevées" - pourront donner le hérissement de poil et le frisson d'agonie d'une tombée dans un cratère.

Most interesting of all for Bloy is his adaptation of Naturalist techniques in the novel to represent through the concrete the neglected realm of spiritual reality. Bloy defines this new Naturalism:

> Ce qu'on a voulu désigner du nom mal façonné de "naturalisme" et qui représente pour la multitude quelque chose comme une prytanée d'ordures, n'est, en dernier analyse, qu'un récent effort de l'esprit humain vers un art nouveau, définitivement affranchi des paradigmes éculés de la tradition. C'est un négoce d'idéal, au même titre que le romantisme qu'il a remplacé, où l'essentielle et unique affaire est, avant tout, d'avoir du talent ou de n'en avoir pas. Cette primordiale question n'a jamais changé. Qu'importe l'oiseuse qualification de naturaliste, quand il s'agit d'un romancier transporté par sa vocation, dont le solitaire idéal est d'étreindre la réalité sensible comme on ne l'étreignit jamais, de refléter, de répercuter, de transcrire en haut relief les normales sensations ou les symboliques images de la vie, et qui n'a vraiment besoin des consignes d'aucune école pour être persuadé que toutes les couleurs sont nécessaires à l'artiste qui veut tout peindre?

What he objects to in Zola, but does not find in Huysmans, is an aesthetic which produces irresponsible characters manipulated to demonstrate the author's prejudices. He puts this down to Zola's refusal to admit that artistic representation of truth is always subjective and implies transposition of observed reality. In another article in similar vein, he describes Zola's guide as:

> . . . l'unique témoignage des sens - à l'exclusion formelle de l'imagination, de l'invention, de l'intuition et de toutes les facultés de l'âme jusqu'alors jugées indispensables à l'éclosion d'un beau livre . . . .
>
> Il aurait peut-être fallu démontrer d'abord que la nature elle-même n'est pas un profond mystère et que nos gros yeux charnels sont des instruments capables de la pénétrer. Et même encore après cela il eût été fort intéressant de savoir quelle sorte de lien pouvait exister entre ce prétendu système d'observation et l'enfantement de n'importe qu'elle (sic) oeuvre d'art.[1]

Huysmans' En rade is a storehouse of new forms which the reader finds puzzling and disturbing, but to which he must adapt. The novel has passed the stage of being simple narrative: ". . . comme si l'art du romancier devait obéir encore, de même qu'aux jours anciens du romantisme, aux méthodes clichées d'une mécanique fabulation".[2] Huysmans substitutes for straightforward dramatic narrative a new kind of psychological study of progressive hallucination, through which he can refract a new view of reality. He invokes dreams, nightmares, delirium, which reveal the subjective foundation of what the materialists take for observed truth. His faculties of observation are employed to fill in realistic background detail, to which the imaginative originality of his vision provides new relief.

In view of such detailed enquiry by Bloy into Huysmans' methods, it seems reasonable to ask whether these may have had some influence on the techniques Bloy used in his own first novel to achieve a similar re-contexting of reality. A letter to Montchal, 5th December 1885,

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[1] "Les Funérailles du naturalisme", La Plume, 15th May 1891.

[2] "J.-K. Huysmans et En Rade", OC IV, 342.

says that Huysmans read and approved the first ten chapters, but gives no indication that he helped in their preparation. After his quarrel with Huysmans, Bloy claimed that the latter supplied most of the material for the satirical passages; but an unpublished letter from Jean Lorrain in the Bollery collection, dated 30th June 1886, indicates that Bloy sought documentation from a variety of sources.[1] Stock's claim that he and Huysmans were responsible for the entire canvas breaks down in view of the fact that the novel is based on a love-affair which neither knew of, and certainly could not have appreciated in the terms in which Bloy presents it.[2]

If the points on which Bloy comments in his articles on Huysmans are followed through in the work of both writers, a number of similar attitudes comes to light; but none of these need be attributed to mutual influence, and all take distinctively personal forms.

Each treats the theme of the decadence of modern society and the frustrations it imposes on the self-conscious intellect. Bloy compares to A rebours the "blasphème par amour" of his own novel. Both invoke nihilistic attitudes; but for Bloy this is only a literary pose which finally serves an optimistic cause. He tries to impose the same meaning on Huysmans' novels - "l'espérance théologale du Nihilisme"[3] - but has to admit eventually the recalcitrance of the material.

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[1] "Je suis . . . disposé à vous donner toutes les informations désirées . . . . Adressez-moi la liste des noms et je pointerai discrètement d'annotations et d'anecdotes authentiques, qui pourront corser votre oeuvre de justicier."

[2] P.-V. Stock, Mémorandum d'un éditeur, Vol. I, Paris, 1935, p. 15.

[3] "J.-K. Huysmans et son dernier livre", OC IV, 347.

To represent the unexplored realm of spiritual reality, they use similar disjunctive techniques, but Bloy's implementation is less refined and his demarcation of objective and subjective reality more clear. Both slant their view of society through a single hero,[1] but Bloy is less interested in giving a shifting image dependent on the psychological states of his hero than in using him as a pretext to introduce a Catholic prejudice. Bloy's nearest approach to an adaptation of Huysmans' technique is his presentation of Marchenoir's half-sleeping state in the night train to Paris, where the confusion of perspectives fostered by the darkness and the noise and speed of the journey is used to introduce the new dimension of the Communion of Saints, and to hint at the complexity of relations within this. Marchenoir is identified with the old woman and the idiot sharing his carriage; the figure of Véronique insinuates itself into his mood; and their joint sufferings are linked to the present state of France, represented with a change of historical and geographical setting by the mouldering Bourbon crypt in which his dream ends.[2]

Le Désespéré shows less interest than Huysmans' novels in using the background of observed reality as a starting point to move to abstract themes. La Femme pauvre is slightly more naturalistic in this sense, though still only in isolated pieces such as the description of the furnishings of the Chapuis household. Reaction to Zola's aesthetics pushes Bloy closer to the Balzacian technique of isolating and juxtaposing different levels of reality; he quotes in an article Barbey's description of Balzac's alternating low-life realism with his

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[1] "Caïn Marchenoir est MOI dans Le Désespéré, comme Des Esseintes est Huysmans dans A rebours" (Lettres aux Montchal, 27th December 1885).

[2] Le Désespéré, OC III, 154-57.

own comment: "Le dialogue fini, le romancier reprenait son récit et sa page, y versant son style et sa pensée". From Balzacian realism Bloy also imitates the adoption of a wide canvas for satirical depiction of human society, and the assumption - which Huysmans would reject - that within the normal character of this society is included a measure of grandeur and heroic sentiment. This is the kind of realism praised in Les Romanciers by Barbey, who dezcribes it as founded by Balzac on closely-observed background detail and descriptions of a hero in conflict with contemporary social institutions, and by Richardson on close psychological studies.[1] The latter, descriptions of exaggerated moral conflict which derive their "realism" from carefully-accumulated external detail, are an obvious model for Bloy's own studies of moral behaviour. His own novels would seem to hesitate between this older concept of the novel as satire of manners or psychological study and the more complex investigations of Huysmans' form.

After their quarrel, Bloy systematically recants all praise of Huysmans, especially of his formal innovations, which are dismissed as pure artifice. His exotic vocabulary no longer indicates depth, but a denial of the simplicity of religious absolutes. His nihilism is a destructive force; and Des Esseintes' rejection of society and search for new sensations are a perverse refusal of truth and beauty. Huysmans may be looking for a Catholic style, but his natural inclinations lead him in the opposite direction. In Là-bas, he reverts to the crudest Naturalistic techniques, relying heavily on excessive

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[1] Les Oeuvres et les hommes, Vol. IV, Paris, 1878.

documentation, Schopenhauerian prejudices, stylistic tricks and pornography, and losing all individuality.[1]

In "J.-K. Huysmans de l'Académie Goncourt", published in 1903 in Les Dernières Colonnes de l'Eglise, Huysmans is described as a Catholic writer in the Sulpicean tradition, teaching "un catholicisme de bibelot". His attempts to introduce Catholic art forms into his novels are inadequate. The enumerative discussions of Catholic symbolism in La Cathédrale are unsuccessfully and tediously mediated through the abbé Plomb. His incorporation of the Scriptures is nullified by misleading and ill-informed moral exegesis; and his hagiographical subject matter, as in Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam, which might have carried him through, is distorted by his treatment. The Naturalistic manner in which he still writes succeeds only in debasing doctrine. Where a sense of realism might have served he abansons it; his presentation of Lydwina's suffering falls into maudlin sentimentality. The acute psychological perception praised earlier is now discovered to be purely self-centred. (There is in fact a shift from the Baudelairean drama of A rebours to a more mundane concern with the religious and moral scruples of the convert. Bloy is probably reacting simultaneously to the drop in heroic tone and shift of doctrinal implications.)

Such a total change of position casts doubt on the sincerity of Bloy's earlier analyses; but in no way detracts from the importance of these in indicating Bloy's sudden awareness of the question of form, which corresponds to a growing sense of the aesthetic as well as ideological aspects of literature, and interest in the way these might be brought together.

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[1] "L'Incarnation de l'adverbe", La Plume, 1st June 1891. See also the caricature of Huysmans as Folantin in La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 134-36 and 147-50.

Towards the work of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, his attitude is more ambiguous. His first formal reference to Villiers is in "Le Cytise des licornes en littérature", 29th September 1883, in support of his own contention that the public is incapable of recognising the true artist:

> "Il n'y a pas sur le globe terraqué, - disait avec une exaggération pleine de profondeur ce délicieux insensé de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, - il n'y a pas plus d'un cent d'individus par siècle (et encore!) capables de lire quoi que ce soit, voire des étiquettes de pots à moutarde!"[1]

From 1885, the friendship deepened. Villiers had read and admired Le Révélateur du globe, and Bloy a number of Villiers' novels and short stories.[2] In 1885, Villiers helped with the distribution of Bloy's satirical magazine, Le Pal, and also provided some of the copy.[3]

The writer offered an opportune new image in which Bloy could represent the suffering, rejected and impoverished artist, having the additional advantage of his aristocratic origins which, like those of Naundorff, gave extra weight and mediatory force to his suffering. But far more important than the passive function was his contribution to Bloy's aesthetics, in introducing him to a whole new concept of art.

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[1] Propos, OC II, 50. According to the doubtful evidence of Félicien Champsaur's Le Massacre, the two frequented Nina de Villars' salon in 1878, together with Emile Goudeau, Henri Rochefort, Maurice Rollinat, Barbey and Verlaine [see G. Rouzet, "Sources livresques de Sueur de sang", CLB Nos. 3-4 (12th Yr.), Jan.-April 1936, p. 185].

[2] Lettres aux Montchal, 2nd October 1885.

[3] Letter from Villiers, 16th March 1885 (Boll. II, 136-37). "Le Mulot" (Le Pal, No. 2, 11th March 1885) is based on one of Villiers' improvisations.

To the Romantic rejection of the sensible world and desire for a more perfect state, of which Bloy made him a symbol, he added the possibility of the poet's being himself the creator of the perfect condition. The theory rests on two anti-Catholic premises - that the order of this world is not providential and essentially unchangeable but that the artist is free to break and remould it at will; and that the faculties of memory and will in the artist are capable of effecting this without the supernatural assistance of grace. Bloy rejected the concept as a denial of the doctrine of the Fall, but it introduced an element of unease in his attitude to his own work and to that of Villiers, which otherwise he respected. He resolved part of this by concentrating his antagonism against Villiers' sources, Hegel and Wagner.

The former appears in Bloy's work as the type of the anti-Catholic German philosopher. Bloy owned a volume of his work, which he interpreted, after Hello, in inaccurate generalisations. For both, the point of attack in the Hegelian synthesis was its philosophical merging of good and evil, which was anathema to the antithetical moral postulations of Christianity.[1] Villiers defended his Catholic Hegelianism vigorously against Bloy's attacks (although at this time he also admitted to others a certain dissatisfaction with the position[2]). The final split in 1888, over a financial disagreement, was aggravated by the philosophical antagonism. Bloy wrote in accusation: "Quant à moi, tu ne saurais me passer la rudimentaire simplicité d'un catéchisme chrétien qui me fait mépriser les cogitations obscures de l'hégélianisme".[3]

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[1] See E. Hello, M. Renan, Pt. II, ch. v: "L'Allemagne et le christianisme".

[2] A. W. Raitt, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et le mouvement symboliste, Paris, 1965. pp. 237-39.

[3] Letter to Villiers, 20th May 1887 (Boll. II, 246).

In 1906, the brochure La Résurrection de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam offered a slightly tempered denunciation, in which Villiers' better instincts were said to have revolted against the philosophy. He could not fully accept the self-deification inherent in the Hegelian belief in the power of human conscience over matter: ". . . c'est l'antagonisme du chrétien de l'île de Rhodes et du philosophe allemand. L'enfant des chevaliers voudrait adorer hors de lui; l'écolier de la choucroute adore en lui-même". He could not deal with the solipsistic implications of the philosophy, and began to fear the imaginative and creative powers with which the artist was endowed. Bloy pointed to the dual potentiality of imagination which can obtain and transmit a vision of God by passive reception of his images, or raise a challenge to him by creating its own ideal.[1]

At this point, we reach the crux of the problem which Hegel represented for Bloy - the significance of the symbol which is the chief tool of the artist, and through which he gropes to a more or less adequate adumbration of the ideal. Bloy saw Hegel's doctrine as leading to a non-Christian form of the ideal - unjustifiably, it would seem, since for Hegel the emblems of mediaeval Christian art represented one of the most satisfactory symbolist achievements. It is in fact Villiers' adaptation of Hegel against which these charges can most justifiably be brought.

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[1] Rpt. from Belluaires et Porchers, OC II, 183-84. See also Le Révélateur du globe, OC I, 85, where Bloy rejects the creative originality of imagination. For Bloy, the faculty is either one of receiving the imprint of images and transmitting them undistorted, or simply a colouring faculty (Lettres à sa fiancée, 31st October 1889; Le Mendiant ingrat, 20th March 1897).

However, for the sake of the doctrines which can be illustrated by Villiers' work, he is at pains to re-interpret Villiers' imaginative vision. Since Villiers' concept of the glory of God, expressed in his portraits of Woman, can be interpreted to seem analogous to Bloy's own, Bloy is prepared to discount his explicit philosophy. He emphasises instead the formal presence of an aspiration to "la gloire excitatrice" and the beauty of Villiers' poetry, which provide subject matter for his own apologetics. The chapter "En paradis" in Celle qui pleure, written in 1906, makes a similar point. The artist who fails to perceive the Heart of Christ - true Catholic doctrine - is absolved because of his vision of Christ's Face - the desire for Catholicism which can be read into his work.

The episode in Gacougnol's salon, in La Femme pauvre, shows less tolerance of Villiers' ideas expressed in relation to Wagnerian aesthetics.[1] Bloy denounces Villiers' support, through the aesthetic, of what he thinks is Hegelian theory: "L'homme n'est que la pensée qu'il a, j'ai passé ma vie à le dire . . . . Si donc Wagner a pensé le Beau substantiel, . . . s'il a pensé Dieu, il a été Dieu lui-même, autant que le puisse être une créature".[2] The polemic moves to a criticism of Wagner and then to a general denunciation of symbolist art.[3] The terms are those of the article on Hello described above, with a more rigorous conclusion.

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[1]See also L. Guichard, La France au temps du wagnérisme, Paris, 1963.

[2]La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 152.

[3]See also letter to de Groux at Bayreuth, 23rd August 1894, refuting the latter's enthusiasm for Wagner; and Le Mendiant ingrat, 23th June 1893 and 23th January 1894.

Bloy allows the innocence of Villiers' intentions; the poet was misled by his powerful imagination. He admits his superior talents, attributing to him his own idea of the function of art as a "pressentiment de la gloire" and acknowledging the moving religious quality of his interpretations of Wagner.[1] But given the liturgical sources of his piece, this affective quality is inevitable and all the more pernicious; Wagner's closeness to the truth makes it difficult to see the extent to which he negates it. Bloy crystallises his point through Villiers' anecdote of the Jews' misappropriation of the Blood of Christ, which Villiers intends as a picture of the sufferings of the genius misunderstood and persecuted. Bloy implies a second level of interpretation as the more pressing problem of the misinterpretation of signs: "le terrible vin sophistiqué des figuratives épousailles". At the end of his story, Villiers is drawn in a pose which epitomises his eternal hesitation on the brink of revelation:

> Il s'arrêta net, immobile autant qu'un vaisseau pris dans les glaces du pôle antarctique, les mains étendues nerveusement à deux centimètres au-dessus de la ficelle de son pauvre pantalon fatigué par les automnes, la bouche close désormais, comme s'il se fût agi de retenir un irrévélable secret, et la flamme bleue de ses yeux pâles dardée magnétiquement sur son interlocuteur.[2]

Art forms which are not subordinated to the Church constitute an insurrection. Wagner's misuse of the liturgy is linked with his attempt

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[1] Bloy describes his emotion during a similar evening in a letter to Guiches, 15th July 1887 (M. Daireaux, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Paris, 1936, pp. 184-85). J. Destrée's "interview" with Villiers, for which Bloy supplied the material, describes Bloy encouraging the poet to give a paraphrase of Parsifal: ". . . une éblouissante paraphrase, avec de l'or, de l'encens, du rêve, la solennité des cathédrales, le mysticisme splendide, la profondeur des symboles!" (La Jeune Belgique, 15th January 1888).

[2] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 155.

to found a new religion. His interest in physical form is pagan and denies the doctrine of the fallen state of the temporal order. The Church needs artists to reassert her doctrines of the centrality of the Passion and the imminence of Judgement, but these should see themselves primarily as pilgrims and crusaders and remain constantly aware of the temptations of their artistic vocation.[1]

The Function of the Symbol

It would be wrong to suggest that Bloy's interest in the symbol originated with Villiers. Tardif de Moidrey and Roselly de Lorgues had already indicated its place in the religious context - the latter by the studies of comparative religious symbolism, after de Maistre, in his La Croix dans les deux mondes, which Bloy read around 1882 whilst preparing his study of Columbus. From Villiers he derived rather encouragement for the transfer of the discussion to the realm of art, which at this date became mediatory on this formal point as well as by virtue of its enthusiastic element:

> Savez-vous une fois pour toutes ce que j'entends par un catholique, c'est-à-dire par un vrai chrétien. J'entends un homme humble, qui croit fermément que l'infini de son désir correspond infailliblement à un Infini Substantiel lequel est Dieu, et qui, considérant la misère de sa condition présente, accepte raisonnablement de ne communiquer avec cet Infini que par des Signes et des symboles, au contraire de ce que les Protestants ont sottement prétendu. Si vous voulez y regarder de très près, vous verrez que l'histoire de

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[1] See also Le Mendiant ingrat, 2nd May 1895. For Bloy's doubts as to the legitimacy of Catholic artistic vocation, see letters to A. Dupont, 14th May 1905; R. Martineau, Easter Tuesday 1901, 15th November 1912; R. Simon, 9th February 1910. He finally accepts his own work as a literary apostolate undertaken through the virtue of his sufferings [letter to his confessor, the abbé Rastoul, 2nd January 1898 (La R.)].

> l'Art est là tout entière. L'homme qui ne comprend pas ou plutôt qui ne voit pas l'importance métaphysique, morale, esthétique, historique, politique ou scientifique du Signe est infiniment au-dessous de la bête, laquelle a du moins le mérite d'accomplir sa loi.[1]

This discovery of a point of coincidence with the new school established a contact which continued to win Bloy a hearing from its later exponents such as Remy de Gourmont, who helped him to a position on the Mercure de France, and Emmanuel Signoret, who asked for his collaboration on Le Saint-Graal.

Both in theory and in practice, Bloy contrived to preserve his own Catholic position whilst exploring and adopting the main symbolist premisses.

For the most part, his symbolism, like that of the rest of the nineteenth-century school, is not easily accessible to the uninitiate:

> Il y a des animaux paissants qui ne peuvent que brouter aux pâturages, d'autres tels que l'homme, qui peuvent se nourrir des fruits des arbres les plus hauts. Moquez-vous de moi, si vous voulez, mais je ne suis pas une pelouse. Il a plu à Dieu de faire de moi un palmier. Je n'y peux rien. A chacun sa tâche et sa langue. Si je m'efforçais de parler à la multitude, je perdrais aussitôt tous mes moyens, ayant été créé pour parler uniquement à des êtres d'une culture supérieure, à des prêtres, par exemple. Il faut comprendre cela . . . .[2]

The meaning of the work of art, whatever its subject, is the image which it gives of God. Bloy states the principle in a combination of Scriptural terms and the Romantic cliché of the revelation of the macrocosm by the microcosm of human personality:

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[1] Lettres aux Montchal, 27th September 1884.

[2] L'Invendable, 29th July 1907.

> Le mot de saint Paul: Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate, serait la lucarne pour plonger dans le vrai gouffre, qui est l'âme humaine.
>
> L'épouvantable immensité des abîmes du ciel est une illusion, un reflet extérieur de nos propres abîmes, aperçus "dans un miroir". Il s'agit de retourner notre oeil en dedans et de pratiquer une astronomie sublime dans l'infini de nos coeurs, pour lesquels Dieu a voulu mourir.[1]

The artistic theory becomes reality in the incarnation of Christ, which infused meaning into the figures of the physical world. His parables offer the artistic paradigm: "Celui qui est issu de terre, est de terre, et parle de la terre, avait dit son Précurseur, et c'est pour cela que le maître s'exprima toujours en paraboles et similitudes".[2]

The mission of the poet is to show how all figures point to Incarnation and Redemption: "On ne connait pas l'Amour parce qu'on ne voit pas la réalité sous les symboles".[3] To achieve this, he produces an artefact which is a perfect synthesis, in no way reducible to its individual symbolic parts, and clearly informed by the single concept: "N'avez-vous pas remarqué que nous ne pouvons apercevoir les êtres ou les choses que dans leurs rapports avec d'autres êtres ou d'autres choses, jamais dans leur fond et dans leur essence?"[4] Interpretation of a figure in isolation is impossible; given the diversity of creation, there can be no simple relationship between a symbol and the spiritual truth to which it points. Only partial connections can be made, directly, or by contrast and contradiction, with the full

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[1] Mon journal, 6th June 1894. See also Christophe Colomb devant les taureaux, OC I, 338-39; L'Ame de Napoléon, OC V, ch. vii.

[2] L'Ame de Napoléon, OC V, 308.

[3] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 93.

[4] Ibid., p. 78.

meaning represented by their final harmonisation in the work of art. This one of the basic tenets of the Symbolist movement, adopted against the Naturalists. Bloy differs in that his syntheses are not purely subjective in source, but are based on the common stock of Catholic images and doctrine.

It is interesting to see a similar argument reappear on a doctrinal plane to explain the purpose of the apparent particular evils in the universe which seem contradictions of the omnipotence of God, but which have all been atoned for and reconciled within the synthetic design of the Communion of Saints. Bloy accepts the reduction of human activity to a mere plastic material which this image of the artist-Creator connotes:

> . . . l'Homme intégral, ne devant être, selon la Parole créatrice, qu'une ressemblance ou une image, renouvelable par un milliard d'âmes à chaque génération, est donc forcé de l'être toujours, quoi qu'il fasse, et de préparer ainsi, peu à peu, dans le crépuscule de l'Histoire, un avènement inimaginable.
>
> Il y a sans doute, les bons et les méchants, et la Croix du Rédempteur est toujours là; mais les uns et les autres font strictement ce qui est prévu et ne peuvent pas faire autre chose, ne naissant et ne subsistant que pour surcharger le Texte mystérieux, en multipliant à l'infini les figures et les caractères symboliques.[1]

As Bloy suggests, the alternative treatment of symbolism - as practised by Huysmans - which offers simple lists of the forgotten emblematic meanings of traditional symbols, is no more than an aesthetic exercise. The virtues which the Middle Ages set in particular precious stones, for example, only become meaningful in modern terms in contradiction - sapphire and carbuncle, chastity and faith, most

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[1] L'Ame de Napoléon, OC V, 273-74.

often found "sur la gorge d'une avachie qui les paya de sa complaisance pour un affameur de vieillards". The Christological sense also needs explicit elucidation: for Bloy, the stone in Villiers' parable for the function of the symbol, fallen from heaven and lodged in the poet's mind "entre mes deux sourcils, juste à la place où réside mon pouvoir d'excogiter l'Absolu divin", is the redeeming Christ, "Celui qui voulut être la 'Pierre d'angle élue et précieuse', afin d'assumer la chute des hommes".[1]

It is in the creation of the internally consistent and self-explanatory artefact, constructed on a basis of Catholic symbolism, whether through accounts of historical situations or personal experience, or in the fictions of novels and anecdotes, that Bloy breaks ground for his more gifted successors. His technique in this shows an appreciable development, from the poetic exercise of La Méduse-Astruc, a simple accumulation of colourful rhetorical clichés, to the penetration and elaboration of a single image, as in the Romantic sigh of Dans les ténèbres, "Un Sanglot dans la nuit", or the dramatic and original brief imaginative sketch in "La Boue" of the decay and putrefaction of the French army. Longer works provide more opportunity to exploit the opportunities offered by contradictory symbols, to reconstruct immediate reality through paradox and metaphor - as in the treatment of suffering which evokes its Catholic beauty, or, to take a more specific instance, the transformation in Le Salut par les Juifs of the Jews' gold into the metal of the Paraclete.

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[1] "D'un lapidé à un lapidaire", Mercure de France, VIII, No. 42, June 1893.

Some debt to Villiers should also be noted for the allegorical form of the contes which Bloy wrote for the Gil Blas and later published in the two collections, Sueur de sang (1893) and Histoires désobligeantes (1894). Like Villiers' Contes cruels, Bloy's stories are descriptive or analytical critical set-pieces of contemporary manners.[1] Treatment is somewhat different, in that Villiers adopts a lyrical and fantastic tone, a lighter irony and more variety of form, from traditional narrative to digressive sequences or imaginative improvisations on a single theme, whereas Bloy prefers more realistic settings and is at his best with linear narrative on a single subject, reduced to its bare outlines, as in "La Boue". The black humour and sustained irony of the latter are reminiscent of Villiers' style. Direct ironic comment sketches the whore's companion, "ce chevalier de la couperose et de l'eczéma" and her sojourn in the camp - "comme disaient les gens de Lannion, c'était trop beau pour durer". The conclusion is doubly ironic; the comic wholesale suicide after the prostitute is inadvertently smothered in the mud carries with it a sense of real despair for the state of the army: "On s'étripa, quelques-uns se tuèrent de désespoir, la désolation fut à son comble et telle serait, d'après une légende popularisée dans les alentours, la vraie cause ignorée de l'évacuation de ce terrain maudit".

All three writers - Bloy, Villiers and Huysmans - were conscious of a need to renew the language by reinstating meaning within it. Bloy wrote to Montchal, 8th January 1888:

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[1] Mon Journal, 11th September 1898. For a discussion of Bloy's treatment of the short story form, see R. Hagar, Léon Bloy et l'évolution du conte cruel, Paris, 1967.

> Nous sommes deux ou trois chercheurs d'absolu qui voulons faire non pas de la litterature, mais une littérature. Notre chimère est de ressusciter la langue française défunte, putréfiée et de refaire une virginité aux vocables les plus défoncés par l'usage, les plus traînés dans l'égout de la rhétorique.

Both Bloy and Villiers attacked the cliché. Bloy added a more positive note by attributing to it an occult meaning, as in his Exégèse des lieux communs. In this he may also have been encouraged by Jehan Rictus' description of the untapped resources of Parisian patois: ". . . le patois parisien . . . est une source d'images prodigieuse; la plupart de ses expressions, ordinairement concises, renferme un sens ésotérique et éternel que, semble-t-il, personne n'a vu, . . ."[1]

In the search for new ways of restoring meaning, Bloy extended his vocabulary into a wider variety of regions than Villiers, including everday terms as well as high rhetoric. He did not, however, go so far as to accept Rictus' suggestion of turning entirely to popular terms and rhythms to compensate for the Naturalists' having exhausted the vigour of everyday vocabulary.[2] To this end he adopted more elaborate methods. His blason of "Le Mot" set out to show that:

> Les mots ne sont pas seulement des combinaisons alphabétiques ou des aventures de gueuloir, mais les plus vivantes réalités.

He imitated Poe's use of the short story form to explore the meaning of a word, which becomes the climax on which the whole is suddenly made to depend. In "Le Grand Polaque", through his account of the death of the Pole and his company, he reinstates the supernatural sense of fear:

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[1] Letter from Rictus, 20th May 1893 [CLB No. 1 (9th Yr.), Sept-Oct. 1932, p. 6]

[2] Letter from Rictus, 4th October 1900 (ibid., pp. 13-18). For analyses of Bloy's vocabulary, see R. Brady, Thought and style in the works of Léon Bloy, Washington, 1945; G. Vigini, "Il linguaggio popolare di Léon Bloy", Studi Francesi, No. 38, May-August 1969.

> Quelque incroyable que cela puisse paraître, il ne fallut pas moins d'une heure pour les tuer, ces tueurs effrayants qui ne s'arrêtaient pas d'égorger et, lorsque tous les autres étant morts, le grand Polaque n'ayant plus de bras, plus de visage, plus de voix et percé de cinquante coups dut expirer à son tour, les Prussiens, inimaginablement déchirés, eurent peur!

His acquaintance with Huysmans and Villiers encouraged Bloy's sympathy for a wider range of aesthetic attitudes. His second volume of critical articles, Belluaires et Porchers, made the progression clear.[1]

The introduction to the book acknowledged that Bloy's earlier literary criticism suffered from an excess of religious prejudice and a lack of literary experience. The new volume was to remedy this. Bloy still wrote as an engaged critic, but on different principles; he aimed at encouraging an intellectual, or Catholic, renewal through Art. In the temporary eclipse of dogmatic Christianity, the artist was assimilated to the Christian cause, sharing the Church's task of maintaining the ideal and imitating her rôle of martyr and holocaust. The epilogue implied that he was better equipped for this than the traditional priest: "On demande des Prêtres. On en demande d'autres. On en veut qui soient fraternels aux Intelligences, qui aiment la Beauté

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[1]The idea of a second collection of critical pieces, Belluaires et Bouviers, was first mooted by Bloy in 1887, to be offered to Quantin (Lettres aux Montchal, 14th October 1887; letter to Georges Khnoppf, 2nd November 1887). The preface and the article "Un Brelan d'excommuniés" were written by the end of 1888. The book was also offered to Lemerre in 1896, to Ollendorf in 1897, and to the "Editions de la Maison d'Art" in 1900, before being accepted by Stock for publication in 1905 (without the article attacking Huysmans, which Stock refused to print).

et la Grandeur jusqu'à en mourir, qui n'acceptent pas d'abdications comme il s'en est tant vu depuis deux cent ans".[1]

Bloy's guiding prejudice had become the heroism of art, and his book, "une tentative de revendication pour l'Art - simplement". The aspiration to an ideal was his only standard of judgement, for, given the natural anarchy of artistic imagination, there could be no single criterion of formal artistic beauty. He excluded from the "healthiness" of Art only "les improbes", the imitators, devoid of original inspiration, and those who deliberately pandered to public taste.

The collection picks out the more startling and original of the modern artists - Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Barbey, Hello and Verlaine. It tempers earlier dismissals of the formalists - the Goncourts and Flaubert - by an appreciation of the stylistic beauty and the diabolical inspiration of La Faustin and the unexpected spirituality of La Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier.

The article on Verlaine illustrates Bloy's new attitude.[2] More literary than most of Bloy's studies, it nevertheless observes a strict

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[1] Belluaires et Porchers, OC II, 378.

[2] "Le Lépreux", in "Un Brelan d'excommuniés", 1889. In "On demande des malédictions", Le Chat Noir, 3rd May 1884, Bloy had dismissed Verlaine as a hypocrite; corrected by Huysmans in a letter of June 1884 (Boll. II, 90-92), he deleted the reference from later reproductions of the article. Huysmans arranged a meeting in 1887 [letter from Verlaine to Huysmans, 29th May 1887 (Boll. II, 280)]. Bloy took Verlaine as the subject of one of his lectures in Copenhagen; and in 1896, defended him against Zola: ". . . cet indigent qui avait crié merci dans les plus beaux vers du monde" (Mon journal, 1st February 1896). Verlaine mentions Bloy in the dedication to "Le Saint-Graal", in Amour, 1888; in Dédicaces IX, "A Léon Bloy"; and in Invectives XXII, "A Cain Marchenoir". See also R. Martineau, "Bloy et Verlaine", Les Marges, XXV, No. 101, 19th Yr., 15th November 1922, pp. 163-68.

order of priorities in its presentation. Bloy takes first the artist's penitent attitude before Christ and the dogmatic form of his poetry, and last of all, the way in which he applies profane techniques to the presentation of doctrine. He adds in conclusion that the last point is far less important than the intangible ascent of faith in Verlaine's work.

Verlaine, humble and repentant, admits his destitution before God, with no reparation to offer but the foulness of art - "les typhus et les syphilis de la poésie". His destitution is confirmed by the judgement on him of modern society, repelled by the sum of contemporary evils which it is his vocation to represent in his person and to offer to the Church for transformation.[1] Poetry provides him and his fellow-artists with a Marian mediation, being: "leur refuge, leur Tour d'Ivoire, leur Notre-Dame de douleurs de recouvrance. Quelques-uns, sans doute, la suivront jusque dans la Plaie salutaire de votre Côté". It offers up for renewal areas of sinful human nature hitherto unacknowledged and maintains in rigorous dogmatic forms and images the doctrines that can effect such redemption. It bridges personal inspiration and Catholic dogma by its re-directed secular techniques. Verlaine addresses Christ: "Je l'ai conquise [la Poésie] et je l'ai domptée pour vous seul, ayant réussi à m'emparer de son attirail d'ensorcellement, de ses rythmes, de ses images, de ses philtres, de ses grimoires, et la voici, ma parfaite esclave, dans la posture d'admiration que ma volonté lui imposa".

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[1] Bloy presents the poet's moral degradation as the necessary concomitant of his poetry, and argues his innocence from his physical inability to resist temptation (L'Invendable, 9th, 10th May 1907).

His Catholic work offers poems rejecting the world and its temptations, and poems of prayer, which Bloy prefers. The subtly suggestive tones of Verlaine's poetry, as characterised by Huysmans in A rebours, are there prolonged to create a sense of mystery and of imminent illumination, and of nostalgic appeal to the lost innocence of childhood. (This "Eucharistic gentleness" in Verlaine is not a type of religious attitude much appreciated in other of Bloy's critical passages. It is interesting to compare Verlaine's sonnet on the Middle Ages referred to in La Femme pauvre with the darker and heavier version which Gacougnol claims is a paraphrase.[1])

In his literary criticism, Bloy's main concern is to annex to the Catholic religion a new source of heroism and idealism which coincides with the principles he would see stressed within this religion - anguished aspiration to an ideal, sense of inadequacy of immediate circumstances, and need for penitence and suffering. These three are considered points of mediation which justify the adoption of a particular artist as a vehicle for apologetic. The peculiar aesthetic of the individual is considered in so far as it can usefully carry the doctrinal points and only occasionally for its intrinsic value.

He draws to some extent on the formal innovations of certain contemporaries to develop the artistic quality of his own work, but within limitations. As in the other spheres of experience which have been considered, he seems sensitive to those aspects which offer particularly vexed problems, or most potential for new development; but this is always contradicted by equal sensitivity to points of his Catholic doctrine which these might call into question. A final critical assess-

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[1] La Femme pauvre, OC VII, 118; Verlaine, Sagesse X.

ment must recognise that the latter - although, as he often claimed, the basis of his literary originality - ultimately debars him from exploring those regions which could have provided the double renewal he professed to seek.

## Conclusion

The proper conclusion to this study would be a detailed review of Bloy's literary succession within his own context of the Catholic Revival which would establish the precise nature of his doctrinal and literary importance, testing Maurras' assertion that the whole of neo-Catholic literature owes him a great and unacknowledged debt,[1] or the even more generous suggestion in Rivarol: "Drieu la Rochelle: Sans Léon Bloy, ni Claudel, ni Céline, ni Bernanos sont imaginables".[2] At this stage, it is only possible to make a few summary remarks on the basis of the evidence collected in the preceding sections, assessed also in the light of the documents in the Bollery collection covering press reviews of Bloy's work from 1876-1967.

Bloy can be said to have achieved his main aim of making Catholicism an intellectual force, in that his polemic and decadent extravagances acquired respect in the avant-garde intellectual circles until then untouched by Catholic apologetic:

> Cette insignifiante Plume où j'écris et dont je suis en train de faire un journal vivant comme autrefois Le Chat Noir est très lue depuis que j'y écris et la masse des jeunes est avide chaque fois de savoir ce que peut avoir à dire le seul écrivain qui n'a jamais pactisé avec rien ni avec personne et qui s'est fait redouter de tant de superbes. Je prépare ainsi la sûre clientèle de mon très prochain avenir.[3]

An early article by Jules Destrée draws attention to Bloy's belief in the supremacy of art, and to the artistry and intelligence of his polemic, in which he excels even Rochefort and Drumont.[4] The Saint-

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[1] Charles Maurras, La Revue Encyclopédique, 1896, p. 383.

[2] Rivarol, 11th October 1951 (interview with Drieu la Rochelle).

[3] Lettres aux Montchal, 25th October 1890.

[4] Jules Destrée, "Notes et Silhouettes: Jules Vallès et Léon Bloy", La Société Nouvelle, 30th April 1890.

Graal, the short-lived Symbolist revue founded by Signoret, LeCardonnel and Jean Lanugère in 1892, to which Bloy contributed two articles, dedicated three others to him[1] and borrowed his themes for formal exploitation:

> L'outrance de son entiérisme, son irréductibilité féroce, ses injustices énormes de sincérité, les prodigieuses cabales de son esprit, ses recriminations de révolutionnaire mystique, toutes choses qu'on ne saurait supporter d'un autre, sont chez Léon Bloy d'ineffables fleurs qui croissent en le Paradou de sa foi géante. Son intransigeance hautaine est l'induvie nécessaire de ses croyances inébranlables. Il faut accepter Léon Bloy comme une gemme précieuse, avec ses défauts, qui sont ici comme des veines de sang zébrant une agathe de la plus candide lactescence.[2]

His dogmatic intransigence fulfilled the need at the time to recover the peculiar resonance of Catholic art and, in a sense, of Catholicism itself, given the abstruse or inept philosophical compromises into which many contemporaries were drifting. The orthodoxy of his doctrine was often called into question at earlier stages, as controversy necessarily arose through the Revival as to the respective terrains of poet and theologian:

> Si le poète . . . touche aux questions religieuses, nous avons le devoir de relever ses inexactitudes ou ses bévues . . . . La critique est encore plus nécessaire pour Le Salut par les Juifs à cause du prestige qu'il exerce sur des lecteurs catholiques.
>
> Voici qui paraît peu cohérent: d'une part, on avoue, pour lui passer quelques erreurs, que cet écrivain n'est pas théologien: d'autre part, on proclame que "l'ordre de grandeur de Léon Bloy est celui . . . de la foi théologale". En fait, pas moyen de séparer le poète du théologien. Notre tort fut-il peut-être de le prendre au sérieux, de l'avoir rattaché à l'ordre de grandeur de la foi catholique?[3]

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[1] "L'Immaculée Conception"; "La Glaise du Verbe"; "Apologie".

[2] Yvanhoé Rambosson, "L'Eternel Révolté", Saint-Graal, No. 9, Aug.-Sept. 1892.

[3] Paul Halflants, "La Doctrine de Léon Bloy", La Libre Belgique, 3rd January 1931.

But as the precise resonance and the context of the images he uses has become more familiar, Bloy's orthodoxy has been less frequently challenged:

> Il n'est pas douteux que Bloy, en avance sur son époque, ne soit exactement le prophète de nos temps apocalyptiques. Il risque beaucoup moins qu'il y a quarante ans de choquer, disons plus: de scandaliser.
>
> Après Bernanos, après Simone Weil et Giovanni Papini, nous apprécions mieux cette voix du témoignage chrétien.[1]

The Dutch integrists have used him as a rallying point since 1890;[2] Julien Green's Journal regularly invokes him, with Péguy and Bernanos, to challenge the liturgical and doctrinal reformers.

Most important is his attempt to show dogma and devotion as relevant to ordinary human activity. Verhaeren admired his re-assertion of the place of Providence in history:

> Ainsi transformée en une exégèse supérieure et presque en une divination magique, l'histoire, délivrée des apparences, sortie du contingent, prend un caractère d'éternité, comme un haut poème s'élargit en symbole. La Providence, la grâce, la chute, la prière, la vertu du sacrifice, la communion, sont les substances élémentaires d'un monde dont les événements matériels les plus éclatants ne sont que les reflets accidentels, selon la parole profonde de Saint Paul.[3]

With the publication of Bloy's diaries and letters, the link is demonstrated between devotion and everyday personal experience:

> Léon Bloy offre le spectacle prodigieux en notre siècle d'un laïque qui communie chaque matin, qui

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[1] Y.-M. Rudel, "Pages choisies de Léon Bloy, par J. Maritain", Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 4th October 1951.

[2] Jos. J. Gielen, "Léon Bloy aux Pays-Bas", Revue de Littérature Comparée, No. 1 (19th Yr.), Jan.-March 1939.

[3] Emile Verhaeren, "Léon Bloy: Christophe Colomb devant les taureaux", L'Art Moderne, No. 44 (10th Yr.), 2nd November 1890.

> mêle Dieu à tous les instants de sa vie, dont chaque parole, chaque pensée est une aspiration vers Dieu. Léon Bloy vit littéralement en Dieu. Il est le Pauvre, il est le Mendiant orgueilleux et insolent, mais néanmoins cher à Jésus, parce qu'il est le mendiant pitoyable. C'est le type du Pécheur avec toutes les pauvres faiblesses de pécheur humain, mais avec des effusions et des larmes de pécheur mystique qui "se tord en pleurant aux pieds des Saints".[1]

It would, however, be misleading to end on Léon Bellé's description of Bloy without introducing a qualification which is important for the sense of this thesis. The rôle of Mendicant is not one in which Bloy is subsumed and hidden; it is one which he chooses and adapts to present his particular personality to best advantage, or rather, one chosen for him by his peculiar personal and historical circumstances, as were all the doctrinal and formal options in which he cast his Catholicism. On both literary and dogmatic planes, his contribution is best assessed in historical terms. Neither the particular dogmas nor the particular literary forms he developed have survived their historical context; but replaced within this they regain their sense and originality:

> Après avoir essuyé bien des grimaces, un Huysmans finit par trouver grâce; mais on ignore encore la puissance apologétique de Léon Bloy. A l'heure qu'il est le lyrisme catholique qui fermente partout rencontre de fervents enthousiasmes qui nous réconfortent, mais combien raillent encore ou rient lourdement aux seuls noms de Claudel, de Jammes, de Péguy, comme s'il était aisé de retrouver une tradition, une inspiration perdue depuis tant de siècles, étouffée sous un amas de fictions et de préjugés![2]

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[1] Léon Bellé, "Léon Bloy", Le Briard, 1st July 1905.

[2] Robert Vallery-Radot, "La Littérature et nos responsabilités", Cours de doctrine et de pratique sociales, X^e session, Versailles, Gabalda, 1914; cit. L. Maugendre, La Renaissance catholique au début du XX^e siècle, Beauchesne, 1963, p. 221.

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